

Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

Innovation

Robeson, Sullivan, Lindblom high schools break teaching molds

Disintegration

New York closing two big schools to create 12 smaller ones

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Merger paving way for creation of new schools?

by Michael Klonsky

When the Corporate Community School of America became a Chicago public school in July, Supt. Argie Johnson called it "an historic moment," and her chief assistant speculated that other innovative, new schools could follow.

"Great idea. Why not?" Patricia Harvey, Johnson's executive assistant, said about the possibility of other additions to the public school roster.

And outside the school system's headquarters, several small groups of parents and teachers saw new hope for their dreams of creating new schools. Margy McClain, the parent of a 7th-grader, has been working with other parents and teachers to establish the Maxwell Street Heritage High School, which would provide a smaller, more student-centered

See **MERGER** page 30

Getting kids high on high school

by Dan Weissmann

To understand how the Coalition of Essential Schools approaches school reform, it's important to understand how they see the problem.

The problem, to put it bluntly, is that high school sucks.

Kids know this, they say, and so do adults. It's boring to sit in classrooms all day, and textbooks are full of trivial and useless information. The point of the day—for most everyone—is to get through it as painlessly as possible. Students can help by showing up on time and talking only when adults ask them to say something; adults can do their part by showing a sense of humor and understanding.

However, if schools would give each teacher fewer students to deal with, if they would create time for students to do active, hands-on work, if they would pare down the curriculum to a few intellectual goals, they might be able to address the problem. Maybe more students would choose to come to school each day; maybe those who came would find something worth staying for; maybe fewer would drop out.

That's the message of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a nationwide network of high schools dedicated to over-



Students Allan Brown, Joni Reynolds and Tanisha Lee are in a Peer Leadership Program at Robeson High. (See story on page 12.)

hauling high schools. Eleven Chicago high schools have been putting the Coalition's ideas into practice for the last few years. With grants from the Illinois State Board of Education, these schools have been encouraging their teachers to learn the new ways of teaching that the Coalition's vision of schooling requires. The Coalition encourages high-school teachers to

See **HIGH SCHOOL** page 4

We should feel good, but we don't

This is one of those rare Septembers when Chicago schools are opening without a hitch. We *should* feel good, but we don't—because we can't help thinking about *next* September. By then, the hundreds of millions of dollars that the School Board had to borrow to keep schools open last year and this year will have been used up. No matter how responsive—and responsible—the Legislature might be, budget cuts undoubtedly will be on the board's agenda.

So what else is new? Plenty, actually, as Contributing Editor Dan Weissmann, with an assist from writer Laura Doyle, so vividly shows in his articles about members of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The stories these two writers tell are heartening ones about schools that are struggling against enormous odds to capture kids' attention and nurture their minds. They're not there yet, but they're working on it. Cast against the specter of next September, the stories become poignant as well. Politicians may be forced to save the system next September, but what about these schools?

As Weissmann notes in his lead article, Coalition schools already have had fistfuls of bureaucratic sand thrown in their gears. Like last-minute schedule changes and the transfer of key teachers, both of which stemmed from last year's teacher contract talks. Such disruptions should not be allowed to happen again. The Board of Education and the Chicago Teachers Union should vow—publicly—to settle their differences early next year or put off any changes affecting school programs until the second semester. And every school should be granted transfer protection for a core group of teachers. If the union is serious about overhauling schools—as its creation of the Quest Center suggests—it can't help but see the necessity of maintaining such continuity.

Joseph Kellman is a visionary who rolled up his sleeves to try to make his grand ideas work. He founded the

Better Boys Foundation and then the Corporate Community School of America, the latter as a model aimed at transforming American education. Despite Kellman's track record with the Foundation, his vision for the school always struck us as a noble pipe dream; indeed, we couldn't imagine corporations funding the school forever. And they haven't.

However, now that the Corporate school has been forced to join the public school system, it may well prompt some beneficial changes, in ways unintended by Kellman. As Contributing Editor Michael Klonsky reports, the merger may have paved the way for creation of other small schools—which a whole pile of research has shown are the way to go.



BEST NEWSLETTER There is only one national contest for education publications, the EdPress Distinguished Achievement Awards Contest, sponsored by the Educational Press Association of American. This year, *CATALYST* walked away with top honors, winning the Best Newsletter award.

In addition, photographer **John Booz** and writers **Dan Weissmann** and **Michael Selinker** won Distinguished Achievement Awards—the latter for the series “The New Extended Family: Collaborating for Kids' Sake.” Bravo! Of course, we've known all along that they do exceptional work.

NEW EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS The *CATALYST* Editorial Board seated five distinguished new members in August: **Jessica Clarke**, education researcher at the Chicago Urban League; **Anne Hallett**, director of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform; **Betty J. Miller**, English teacher at Lindblom High School; **Lynn Stinnette**, director of urban education at the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory; and **Janis Todd**, principal of Lincoln Park High School.

They succeed **Raymond Lau** and four members who had served on the board since its inception in 1990: **Nelvia Brady**, **Wilbur Brookover**, **Leon Finney** and **Anne Lewis**. We'd like to thank these departing members for their great ideas and their constructive criticism. They truly made a difference.

Linda Berg Lorraine Forte

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Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

VOLUME VI NUMBER 1
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COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

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1994, Best Newsletter
Educational Press Association of America.



1993 Peter Lisagor Award, Best Newsletter.
1993, 1994 Distinguished Achievement Award,
Educational Press Association of America.

HIGH SCHOOL

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think of themselves as intellectual coaches—as experts in teaching and learning, rather than in a particular academic discipline.

“The training I’ve had has changed my teaching method, totally,” says Anna West, a 27-year veteran who teaches science at DuSable High School. “I couldn’t go back to the other way. I could *not* go back. The other way, I was doing my best, but I wasn’t reaching as many children.”

So far, West is more the exception than the rule among teachers at the 11 Coalition schools in Chicago.

The biggest problem, say administrators at these schools, is that it has been hard to hang onto teachers who are most enthusiastic about the Coalition’s goals. Those teachers tend to be the newer ones; and when teaching positions are cut, it’s the newer teachers who go. Under both state law and the Chicago Teachers Union contract, seniority prevails.

“Every time we invested thousands of dollars in training, we were crippled by the cuts,” says Tam B. Hill, principal of Calumet High in Auburn Gresham,

one of the 11 Coalition schools. “Often, newer teachers are the ones who jump at something like this. Now, less than 50 percent of the teachers who were originally interested in this program are here.” Principals and teachers at other schools had similar stories to tell.

Some principals have managed to get their young enthusiasts back, but the disruption cast a cloud over their efforts to change. The experience of Steinmetz High in Belmont Cragin is a case in point. Four teachers spent the summer of 1993 planning an integrated curriculum that weaved together math, science, social studies and English. By September, they were ready to team-teach 100 or so 9th-graders. But then the board cut 500 positions in high schools, sending three of the four Steinmetz teachers to other schools that had vacancies. All three returned within a few weeks, but the damage had been done.

“By the time they got back, they were understandably wary of starting anything new,” says Maribeth Murphy, Steinmetz’s teacher-coordinator for its Essential Schools efforts. “And then the person who was wary of this from the start will say, ‘See, I told you this would never work.’ And that becomes a hard argument to refute.”

Englewood Tech-Prep Academy (formerly Englewood High) has found a way to protect itself from the future loss of core teachers, but only after making a difficult trade-off that meant losing teacher training money.

In the spring of 1993, Englewood applied to the Chicago Board of Education to become a specialty school under the board’s desegregation program. Unlike many desegregation programs, specialty schools don’t get extra money, but they do get to protect specially trained teachers from cuts, regardless of their seniority. But there was a catch: No school could be both a specialty school and a Coalition school. The reason was that the specialty school program was intended to help schools that didn’t have the benefit of outside help.

So Englewood decided to quit the Coalition, but that meant it had to forfeit its final year of Coalition training money from the state. Flower Vocational, which also had applied to become a specialty school, opted to stay in the Coalition instead. Both schools asked state and local officials to see if there was a way to do both.

Early this year, Englewood’s predicament caught the eye of Alvin Peterson, director of desegregation programs.

The Coalition’s ‘Nine Common Principles’

No two schools in the Coalition of Essential Schools are pursuing change in the same way, but all schools have pledged to start with nine common principles. The principles were developed by Theodore Sizer, the Brown University professor who launched the Coalition after he wrote *Horace’s Compromise* in 1984.

The principles are:

1 INTELLECTUAL FOCUS “The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well”—rather than on exposing students to a comprehensive body of knowledge.

2 SIMPLE GOALS (Less is more) “The school’s goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.” Students will get more

out of an attempt to learn a few things really well than out of a rushed attempt to “cover the book.”

3 UNIVERSAL GOALS “The school’s goals should apply to all students,” with no exceptions. Schools may need to use different methods to help students with different needs reach those goals.

4 PERSONAL APPROACH No teacher should be responsible for more than 80 students, so that teaching and learning can be more personal. Dividing students and teachers into “houses” or minischools is one approach schools have taken to create a more personal environment.

5 STUDENT-AS-WORKER (Teacher-as-coach) Teachers should coach students as they work, not simply lecture

to them. “Cooperative learning” follows this principle. In cooperative learning, students work in groups on an assignment instead of listening to lectures or working individually on ditto sheets.

6 DIPLOMA-BY-EXHIBITION Students should get their diplomas when they can make a formal exhibition of their work to the faculty and, sometimes, “higher authorities”; the exhibition should show a student’s “grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school’s program.”

This may be the most radical of the principles: It calls for a “program . . . with no strict age grading and with no system of ‘credits earned’ for ‘time spent’ in class.” No school in Chicago has gone this far. Instead, to carry out this principle, schools often adopt “project learning,” followed by

Peterson took the matter to Deputy Supt. Marjorie Branch, his boss, and they decided to change the rules so that Englewood could be a specialty school *and* be part of the Coalition. By June, Englewood had rejoined the state program. However, the money for staff training already had been handed out. (Flower, for its part, got its Coalition money and then, under the new rule, became a specialty school.)

Broadening the eligibility for specialty schools is fine, says Jacqueline Simmons, principal of Robeson High, "But this does not resolve the basic issue. The basic issue is, are they going to support the Essential Schools? We shouldn't have to seek out programs like the specialty schools. They should be looking for ways to support us. Aren't we at least making an effort to change these schools?"

Simmons says that she and other Coalition school principals have been lobbying the Board of Education for several rule changes, including:

- A kind of specialty-school status for all 11 Coalition schools, so they can protect trained teachers from staffing cuts.

- A change in teacher certification,

See **HIGH SCHOOL** page 6

A word of caution

Socratic seminars, coaching and other progressive teaching techniques won't do much good if students don't know how to read and write, warns Barbara Sizemore, dean of DePaul University's School of Education.

"You've got to establish a prior knowledge base," she says, "so they can do what you want them to do."

Since many Chicago teens enter high school with substandard reading and writing skills, she says, Coalition schools need to work intensively with them to shore up those skills before doing anything else. She notes that the Coalition's principles themselves call for intensive catch-up work for students who are behind.

Sizemore and her staff are working this year with four high schools to bring all students up to grade level in reading and math. Two of the four, Flower Vocational and Phillips, are Coalition schools.

In general, Sizemore objects to the Coalition's preference for portfolios and exhibitions over standardized tests. Since "standardized tests are not going to disappear," she says, kids have to learn to do well on them. If you want to

go to college, she points out, you have to take standardized tests like the ACT. If you want to go to medical school, there's the MCAT. To work for the government, there's the civil service exam. And then there's the Chicago police sergeant's exam, she notes, referring to the recent controversy over a test that resulted in remarkably few promotions for minority officers.

Dan Weissmann

Conference to be in Chicago

The Coalition of Essential Schools is holding its national conference in Chicago this year. The conference will feature an opening address by Coalition founder Ted Sizer and two days of workshops, presentations and discussions. Here are the details.

WHERE Hyatt Regency Chicago, 151 E. Wacker.

WHEN Nov. 3, 4 and 5.

HOW MUCH Registration costs \$250 and must be postmarked by Oct. 1.

FOR MORE INFO Call Christie Kilgus, the conference coordinator, at Coalition offices in Rhode Island: (401) 863-3384.

"authentic assessment" as a way of awarding class credit. For example, a student might create a business plan; she then might be asked to make a presentation on the plan, which would be the basis for her grade. Other forms of authentic assessment are demonstrations and portfolios of students' best work.

7 VALUES "The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you, but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance)."

8 STAFF ARE GENERALISTS Teachers should view themselves as experts on education, not on a particular subject; their first alle-

giance should be to the school as a whole, not to their discipline or department. "Interdisciplinary teaching" promotes this principle. In interdisciplinary teaching, a history teacher might pair up with an English teacher for a course on the history, culture and literature of a particular time and place.

9 AVERAGE BUDGET For schools that have attained the 80-to-1 student-teacher ratio, there are several other "ultimate administrative and budget targets": lots of common planning time for teachers, competitive salaries and a total cost per-pupil that is no more than 10 percent higher than the district average, in order to keep the project from being too expensive to spread widely.

The Coalition's nine common princi-

ples are not necessarily new, but they are tied up in an attractive new package, notes Principal Warner Birts of Englewood Tech-Prep Academy. "The Coalition of Essential Schools certainly was like a breath of fresh air," he says, "because there was funding connected to it, and because Ted Sizer had done a good job of repackaging some old progressive ideas."

The new practices Coalition schools are adopting are not unique to the Coalition, either. But Coalition boosters contend that their efforts amount to more than an experiment with fashionable approaches because the efforts are based on a coherent philosophy about what makes a good school. In other words, the idea isn't just to try cooperative learning or some other progressive technique but to transform the whole school.

Dan Weissmann

so that people with skills schools need—but without degrees in teaching—could be hired at a decent wage. Simmons tells the story of a capable video teacher who left Robeson because the school could pay her only at the rate of a day-to-day substitute teacher (\$63.72 a day). Finally, Simmons bent a rule to get her a \$100-a-week raise, but that still left her pay lower than a janitor's; she left.

■ A change in the board's procedure for recording grades every semester. Part of the Coalition's philosophy is that children should get credit for showing that they've mastered a certain body of learning—not just for showing up in class. If a student isn't ready at the end of a grading period to demonstrate what he or she has learned, Simmons wants to withhold a grade. Right now, though, the board requires that a grade be recorded for every student in every class every 10 weeks.

Also, Coalition schools are among those that suffer most from centralized

decision making, like the board-union agreement last fall to switch from 40-minute periods to 50-minute periods in high schools, a move aimed at helping the board trim costs to help balance its budget.

Before the change, DuSable had a common planning period for teachers and had planned to divide itself into 11 smaller schools, each with 125 students and nine or ten teachers. Chicago Vocational High already had created eight minischools. Sullivan High had scheduled English and history classes back to back, so that teachers could team up. Robeson High had begun a number of scheduling innovations: creating double-period classes, keeping groups of students together throughout the day and providing a common planning period for all teachers.

The 50-minute mandate tore through these plans. DuSable put its minischool plan in mothballs for a year, and teachers wound up meeting for 10 minutes a day instead of a whole class

period. Sullivan saw some of its English-history pairings fall apart. Robeson kept its double periods and kept many of its student groups together but lost its common planning period. Chicago Vocational held onto its minischools, but Principal Betty Dispenza-Green says last year was "down time" for change at the school.

Stan Thompson, an official with the national Coalition of Essential Schools, says the Chicago bureaucracy has put schools at a disadvantage in their attempts to "essentialize" themselves. "They're definitely at a different place than most schools" that the Coalition has been working with for several years, he says. "Had the bureaucracy in Chicago not been there, these schools would have been off and running."

In contrast, New York City's chapter of the Coalition recently negotiated directly with that district's top officials to set conditions under which they will create a dozen new Coalition schools. (See story on page 20.) ■

Coalition strives to end 'conspiracy'

The story of the Coalition of Essential Schools starts about 10 years ago, during a boom time for doomsday reports and jarring books on the sorry state of American education. One such book, published in 1984, was *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*. TheodoreSizer, a former private-school headmaster, wrote the book after spending years scrutinizing high schools across the country.

Sizer wound up taking pity on the teachers. "Most jobs in the real world have a gap between what would be nice and what is possible," he wrote. "One adjusts. The tragedy for many high school teachers is that the gap is a chasm, not crossed by reasonable and judicious adjustment." What goes on in American high schools, Sizer said, amounts to "a conspiracy, a toleration of [that] chasm . . . and acceptance of big rhetoric and little reality."

The rhetoric calls for high schools to be places that nurture teenagers' minds, Sizer said, but the reality is one of bureaucratic institutions, obsessed with getting kids to the right place at the right time. (Second period. Room

232. Row three, second seat from the right. Page 186. Question 2. Pick A, B, C or D.) Sizer figured that by crowding out intellectual pursuits, bureaucratic concerns were alienating students and encouraging them to drop out.

However, exposing a conspiracy wasn't enough for Sizer, who then embarked on a new career as full-time education guru, high-school division. He took the helm of Brown University's School of Education, developed a list of "Nine Common Principles" that a reform-minded high school might follow, and organized a network of schools that would strive to follow them—the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Since 1989, the Illinois State Board of Education has sponsored an Illinois branch of the Coalition, called the Illinois Alliance of Essential Schools. Two Chicago schools joined that year, and nine more came on board in 1990. (Another nine schools outside the city also are Alliance members.) For signing on, each school got about \$25,000 a year to spend on staff development, for several years; that financial support ended last June. The schools are still members of the Alliance, which will

soon be soliciting new members.

Now, new help is on the way for most Chicago members. In February, the national Coalition launched the Fifty Schools Project, a network of schools that will serve as examples for other schools hoping to join the Coalition. Eight of Chicago's 11 schools were chosen—Chicago Vocational, DuSable, Flower, Lindblom, Mather, Phillips, Robeson and Sullivan.

So far, the Coalition has lined up some foundation support for the schools. The Joyce Foundation has awarded \$10,000 to each of the eight Chicago schools for staff training. Also, the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund granted \$75,000 for a series of three-day teacher forums that will be held at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The schools that weren't chosen for the Project (Calumet, Englewood and Steinmetz) all say they plan to continue working with the Coalition, even if there is no outside money to support them.

Dan Weissmann

For information on joining the Alliance, call Holly Bartunek at the Illinois State Board of Education, (312) 814-1487.



Longer classes make it easier for students to work independently on projects during class time. Here, math teacher Margaretha Smit coaches Lamont Johnson on a project involving maps and measuring distance.

Robeson High School

100-minute classes make new things happen

by Dan Weissmann

Paul Robeson High School sits in the middle of Englewood—a neighborhood notorious for gang violence and economic blight.

Like most inner-city high schools, Robeson's numbers are awful. About half as many kids graduate as enter each year; among the graduates, only a minority are said to be reading, writing or doing math at grade level on standardized tests.

Yet, behind this dismal facade stands a school that is a hotbed of innovation and what experts call "best practice." Since Robeson opened in 1977, Principal Jacqueline Simmons has pushed a progressive agenda and continually introduced new ideas and programs.

James Breashears, the math teacher who coordinates Robeson's Coalition of Essential Schools efforts, says he wouldn't want to work anyplace else. He says he hasn't been this excited about his job since he started teaching 20 years ago.

"I am very energetic about education

and Paul Robeson High School," says Breashears. "Yep, I really dig this stuff."

Robeson's neat stuff ranges from a Russian-language program to rooms full of computers for science and drafting classes. But its central innovation is double-period classes. At Robeson, the school day consists of three 100-minute classes. For students, that means that at any given time, they have only three courses and three teachers. For teachers, that means that they have only about 90 students—instead of the standard 150—which is a key principle of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

Robeson takes the principle one step further by assigning English and math teachers to the same group of students for both their freshmen and sophomore years.

"You really get to know the students," notes Breashears, "And they really get to know *you*."

That, of course, was one of the objectives. Students are less likely to drop out, Breashears explains, when their school is not "some big impersonal place where a student is just 'Hey, you!'"

Robeson's unusual schedule has had

other beneficial effects as well. For example, it has all but forced teachers to experiment with progressive teaching methods, like having kids work in groups on long-term projects instead of lecturing to them. "What would happen if we had the 100-minute period and we still had the old chalk/talk, drill/kill?" Breashears asks. "Well, I don't know about anybody else, but I know my voice would give out before 100 minutes were up."

When students work in groups, he continues, they learn they have to look out for each other. "I'll have students say to me, 'What's up with Johnny? He's been out for three days, and it's messing us up!'"

With fewer groups of students, teachers can relate work in one class to work in another one. And they can put their heads together when a student has a problem—or causes one. If a student has trouble in one class but not in another, notes Simmons, teachers can advise each other. If a student has a problem in all three classes, she says, the teachers know they have to call parents to help solve it.

Robeson High School

THE STUDENT BODY

After shrinking, it's holding steady.

Although enrollment declined during the 1980s, from around 2,000 to about 1,300, it's stayed roughly the same since 1990.

It's homogeneous.

99.9% African-American, 0.1% white. 62.4 percent low income. Average test scores are far below city and state averages.

	10th-grade reading, IGAP	10th-grade math, IGAP
Robeson	125	138
Chicago	182	177
Illinois	250	250

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

"I've lived here for 15 years. The neighborhood used to be kind of quiet and peaceful, but it's gotten pretty rowdy in the last six or seven years. The type of people changed, the friendliness. It became almost like the Wild Wild West. But there's still a good backbone to the neighborhood—a lot of good people; we have block clubs and things, and we're trying to make things better.

—Daryl Dildy, assistant basketball coach at Kennedy-King College, which is just down 68th Street from Robeson.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Key objective:

Pulling together the many progressive programs the school has been developing over the past 17 years.

Main changes:

- ✓ Most classes meet for 100 minutes, not 50, at a time.
- ✓ Freshmen and sophomores have only three or four different teachers and one set of classmates in major subjects.
- ✓ Teaching techniques like project-based, cooperative learning are emphasized—especially since longer classes make lecturing more difficult.
- ✓ All teachers have the same period free for planning, meeting.



Peer leader Keisha Bishop points an accusing finger at a panelist during a mock talk-show discussion on relationships. At Robeson, upper-class leaders are matched with up to five freshmen, so that they "feel like someone cares about them," says leader Dion Jones.

JOHN BOOZ

To encourage those kinds of conversations, the school had scheduled a common planning period for teachers, first thing in the morning. But last fall's abrupt change in scheduling—from 40-minute classes to 50-minute classes—wiped it out.

Simmons calls that loss "devastating." Teachers had used the period to confer with each other about students they had in common; departments had used it to hold meetings and plan new courses; the administration had been able to schedule all-staff meetings and workshops pretty much at will; everybody had known when and where to find each other.

After a year of having to line up substitute teachers just to create time to get together, the faculty said it would "do anything" to get the common planning period back, says Simmons, who has worked it back into Robeson's schedule for this school year.

Mapping change

Despite the setbacks, though, Coalition of Essential Schools principles are alive and well in many Robeson classrooms. Margaretha Smit's 10th-grade math class is a good example.

One day near the end of last school year, her students are starting the last part of a semester-long project on maps and geography. For the rest of the week, they'll use maps to figure out the shortest distance from Chicago to various cities around the world—first in an arc "as the crow flies" and then through the earth itself.

To do that, they have to figure out the scale of the maps, measure the distances on the maps and then convert map distances into real distances, using the maps' scales. For practice, Smit hands out a sample map and walks students through the process of making a scale and using it.

Then the students are on their own. Some head over to a corner, where several large atlases sit on a table. Others crowd around a globe. Others stay at their desks—which are arranged in groups of four—take out rulers, borrow calculators from each other and start figuring. The kids are intent but unhurried. Some chat while they measure, figure and double-check. Meanwhile, Smit moves from group to group, looking over some kids' shoulders, asking

others what they're up to, giving advice when she's asked.

What makes this a Coalition classroom is that geometry and algebra are viewed as tools students can use to solve concrete problems, not as separate, abstract subjects. Also, the class starts with a challenge—measuring distances—and explores whatever math is needed to meet that challenge; in a traditional classroom, students would tackle mathematical principles in textbook order. Further, students learn by working under Smit's supervision rather than through lectures or plowing through uniform sets of problems. Instead of presenting herself as the room's main source of information, Smit has cast herself as a coach.

'Creating havoc'

Coaching is a principle that Simmons encourages through both word and deed, as could be seen at a weekend retreat last April.

A few dozen teachers, parents and students are gathered at a suburban conference center to work on Robeson's School Improvement Plan. On Saturday morning, each department, seated at its own table, is mapping out new courses or refining old ones. From the front of the room, Simmons gives a few words of advice and announces,

Other initiatives

In addition to working with the Coalition of Essential Schools, Robeson has brought in other programs, including:

- An on-site, alternative-school program, called Outpost, for students on the verge of dropping out.

- Writing Across the Curriculum—a requirement that students write at least one paper per semester in every class they take, from social studies to Spanish to math.

- A Russian language program.

- Artists-in-residence running workshops in visual arts, theater, dance, and music through Urban Gateways.

- Science and drafting classes featuring up-to-date computer programs.

D.W.

"Now, I'm going to go from table to table, creating havoc as I go. . . ."

At the social studies table, teachers are putting finishing touches on a couple of new courses they're planning to offer next year. But they have another objective as well: getting some teaching time with freshmen. Under Robeson's unique scheduling, students don't have social studies courses until they are juniors, so the social studies teachers are angling to work with one of the departments that teaches freshmen—English, math or science.

Listening in on the conversation, Simmons seems to like the idea. "I know what you want," she says. "What do you have to offer? Let me see if I can get someone from science to come to sit at this table. They're talking earth science, and you're talking geography. . . . Now, don't talk people. Don't talk social studies teachers *per se*. Talk social studies concepts."

A representative from the science department does come over to negotiate. Both sides are interested, but no deals get made.

Even though that plan is on hold, Robeson's staff continues to pursue other innovations. Back at the school a few weeks later, at a social studies department meeting, teachers are concluding work on a new course on Chicago history. The books include syndicated columnist Mike Royko's classic *Boss*, a scathing portrait of the first Mayor Daley; optional research topics include former West Side Congressman William Dawson and the Black Panthers. The course also includes 10 hours of community service over 20 weeks. The kids will work in churches, hospitals, whatever. "We can have them clean our rooms if they're really desperate," jokes one teacher.

Robeson's progressive atmosphere is unusual for a public high school, says math teacher James Eggleston. The experience of teaching there has been "very profound," he says. "Some of the ideas I learned while teaching in an alternative school in the early '70s have come into practice at a public high school—which seemed to me kind of unlikely."

Whether or not they agree with Simmons's philosophy, teachers, administrators and students acknowledge her commitment and effectiveness.

Assistant Principal Wilfred Bonner started teaching at Robeson's predecessor school, Frances Parker High, in the



Teacher Margaretha Smit advises sophomore Jeneene Brown. As students work independently on projects, Smit "floats" through her class, coaching.

'50s. Now, he's known as "the chief"—a mentor to younger male teachers. Students say he makes himself known and respected among them, too. Bonner describes himself as a traditionalist who hates long meetings and discussions about educational philosophy. He concentrates, instead, he says, on mechanical things—like opening the building at 6:45 every morning and putting the metal detectors in place.

Simmons, he says, "has always been progressive in her ideas—always. Sometimes to the point where, if you're a traditionalist, you'd think they were unreal. Say, the teaching of Russian. I thought that was unreal at first. But with the way the world is moving—with the distance between nations shortening—it's not so unreal. The clustering of students in a class that stays together for four years—that's real."

Coalition ideas are taken seriously at Robeson, says Bonner, "because Dr. Simmons and Mr. Breashears have really rolled up their sleeves and gone to work."

So why the bad numbers?

Breashears believes the next step is consolidation. "I would like to see a more formal structure for our various programs. Sometimes I feel like we're not making sure everything's working together.

"We have absolutely passed the point where we're out looking for new developments," he adds. "Not that if something fabulous came along

tomorrow we wouldn't be interested, but we're more interested in concentrating on what we have."

So with all this enthusiasm and dedication to "best practice," why are Robeson's numbers still so bad? Breashears and Simmons offer, essentially, three explanations.

■ First, students who come to Robeson are not well prepared for standardized tests. "The media do not look at where the students are coming from and how they grow—just where they are at now," says Breashears. "Nobody says, 'Look! Students come into Robeson reading at a 4th-grade level and they leave reading at a 10th-grade level. That's some achievement!' No, they say, 'Look at these Robeson students graduating, only reading at a 10th-grade level!'"

Breashears adds that many Robeson students consider standardized tests dull and, since scores don't affect their grades, irrelevant. As a consequence, he says, many don't exert much effort to do well on them.

■ Second, not all Robeson teachers are ready to respond to the special challenges of teaching at an inner-city school. Simmons is the first to admit that those challenges can be daunting. "People call and say, 'I'd like to volunteer at the school. Is there something I can do?'" she says. "I say, 'Fine, here's the names of three kids. Call them every morning and wake 'em up. That'd be cool.' Or I say, 'Pick up some tokens for us. We need tokens. Especially around the 26th, the 27th, 28th of the month, because that's when mama's check starts running out.'"

Even so, Simmons believes that it's up to the school staff, ultimately, to meet those challenges. "We have a counselor who comes in at 7 in the morning and calls kids to wake them up," she relates. "And some people say, 'Well that's not my job. . . .' But lots of kids say, 'I would never have made it through high school if not for Mr. MacKenzie.' It has to do with how you define your job. Who do you think you are? Are you just a purveyor of English literature, or are you really a teacher?"

This question of definition extends into the academic arena as well. An English teacher may stick to literature when what the kids need is instruction in reading, says Simmons. "There's only one or two teachers in this building who really know how to teach reading,"

Simmons says. "These are high-school teachers. They teach English. There's a difference."

Breashears acknowledges, too, that some teachers don't expect very much from ghetto kids to begin with. "You know that if you don't expect anything," he says, "you aren't going to get anything."

■ A third reason the staff's efforts haven't had much effect on official statistics is that the school puts a heavy emphasis on making a difference in other, equally important ways. Learning to score well on standardized tests shouldn't be the only goal of schooling, says Simmons, who has pushed for extra programs like the arts workshops run by Urban Gateways at the school. "I don't think a lot of kids recognize that they even have a talent that has to do with art or with drama or with music or video. And I don't think it has to lead to college. You also want kids to say, 'I really like. . . .' and finish that sentence. I don't care how, so long as they recognize some of their own interests and potential."

Kids learn when teachers care

One frustration for Simmons is the short time kids are at Robeson, considering all they have to learn. "You spend a great deal of time in their first couple of years convincing them that they can learn—and that it takes a lot of discipline. And once you get them there, the time is over. Some kids can go on their own after that. Others feel after graduation that they need another year or two."

Still, Simmons sees evidence that the school is getting through to kids, even if they don't stay long. "Kids tend to learn when they feel that there's somebody—somebody at the school—who cares about them. Our kids come back a lot. Kids come back here not just to show themselves, but to re-establish bonds they've made here."

Simmons recalls a former student named Terrence, whose story reminds her of the school's successes and its failures. Terrence had dropped out, but years later he returned to the school with his son in tow; he said he wanted to introduce his son to his mentors in life. "I said, 'Terrence, how could I have mentored you? I couldn't even see you graduate,'" she recalls. "But people swear that staff here have changed their lives." ■

Peer leaders help keep kids learning

'A lot of freshmen think, 'School's just a bugout for me,'" says Dion Jones, a senior at Robeson High. Dion understands; he's been there.

As a freshman, Dion was having problems in math and English and even considered quitting the football team.

"My mother said, 'You're too old to be going to school and not learning nothing.' She kept me home for a couple of days."

However, Dion credits fellow students, upperclassmen involved in Robeson's Peer Leadership Program, with bringing him around. "My peer leaders said, 'We're gonna help you out, help you get your grades up. Your mom will be proud of you.'"

Dion says his peer leaders were like best friends. "They'd call me at home, and they were on the football team, so I'd see them after school."

All the attention worked. "My last report card, I had all A's and B's," Dion reports. "My mom was real proud of me, and she gave me a hug. She hadn't given me a hug for a long time."

Dion is a peer leader now, one of a few dozen juniors and seniors who work every day with about half the freshmen class. The leaders oversee workshops, games, role-playing exercises and informal discussions; the idea is to give the younger students a link to the school, through role models who are young enough to be friends.

The program, which started three years ago, targets kids who are considered at risk of dropping out, but school officials make sure to recruit a mix of honor students, athletes, gang leaders and special education students. Robeson Principal Jacqueline Simmons says she believes that leaders can emerge from all of those groups.

The program aims to create a sense of community among the students, with older kids having the authority of group elders. "Most of the older students take more charge of the school than security does," says Dion. "Juniors and seniors will tell freshmen, 'You got



In a session on male-female relationships, peer leaders Donald Graham (left) and Zakiyyah Omar play the roles of a troubled married couple. In character, they explain the problems in their relationship to the group: He's not home enough, she wants more attention.

to calm down.' We'll step in when security or the principal isn't available to be there. And there's no disagreement. We tell them to take their hat off, they take it off. It's no problem."

Each peer leader is responsible for about five freshmen, making sure they "feel like someone cares about them," Dion explains. Leaders check on the grades of their charges, sometimes call them at home and sometimes take them out on weekends, he says, because, "School can't be all work and no fun."

Last year, freshmen got school credit for attending Peer Leadership sessions, which were held during regular class hours. This year, sessions will be held after school, when they will have to compete with other activities, sports and jobs for students' free time. No credit will be offered. Even so, school officials say they hope to attract a crowd.

(When making this year's schedule, the staff sacrificed Peer Leadership's daytime, credit-bearing time slot to accommodate their top priority, which was a common planning period for teachers.)

Late last spring, program director Marion Fields wasn't having any trouble attracting older students, who streamed into her office to sign up for a three-day retreat that she calls "boot camp." Then, over the summer, peer leaders were trained in a wide range of skills, including peer mediation, violence prevention, public speaking, time management, group facilitation and dealing with sexual assault, date rape and domestic violence.

"They have to have a lot of training

to deal with issues here and once they leave," Fields says.

When school starts, the leaders will be in charge. Fields, who works for an independent social service agency, is the only staffer for the four Peer Leadership classrooms, and she's not in the building every day. A couple of teachers and parents fill the gap with loose supervision.

Gang members confronted

The classes are intended to give kids a safe, structured place where they can talk among themselves about issues that affect their lives.

That's what was going on in a session late in May, where a females-only group was running a simulation of "The Ricki Lake Show." The day's topic: gangbanging. A panel of eight or nine experts, all gang members, sat in the front of the room.

"Why would you do a drive-by in your own neighborhood?" asked one audience member, noting the danger of accidentally shooting someone they cared about. The panel members conceded the possibility, but insisted they would look before they shot.

Another girl in the audience bore down, trying to get the experts to admit that gang life is too dangerous to pursue for very long. "Everybody's got to make their mistakes!" protested one of the gang members, adding pointedly, "You were in a gang yourself!"

"My sister's six feet deep," the questioner shot back. "My brother's para-

lyzed from the waist down. It's not cool. Everybody's lost somebody—right or wrong? You should have learned from that. You're a woman before you're anything. Let the boys be out there, hurting themselves.

"I'm just saying this because y'all my buddies," the former gang member continued. "I see y'all every day. I don't want to see you in a casket made of wood and going six feet deep. . . . Over something stupid."

The room got quiet.

One of the peer leaders then took the discussion in another direction, asking "What do you get from it—from being in a gang?" The replies: Money. Status. Respect. "When you see someone with those things, don't you wish you had them?" one of the panelists asked.

Dion says peer leaders often encourage younger students to get involved with sports as an alternative to gangs, but neither the program nor the school puts youngsters down for being in a gang.

Principal Simmons tells the story of a student who was one of the school's top gang leaders and a gifted cartoonist. One day, on a school retreat, the young man spent an afternoon with Simmons, drawing cartoons that would explain the school's new schedule.

"He said he kind of liked doing it because he felt it was important," she recalls. When the cartoon was done, "We distributed that to everybody. I'm not trying to say that we took this gang kid and turned him around, but I am saying that the problems he had were not in the school. They were outside." ■

Dan Weissmann

Sullivan High

Socrates helps school deal with diversity, learning issues

by Dan Weissmann

As the school year comes to a close, nine Sullivan High School seniors, not normally members of the same class, sit down with a counselor and a teacher, neither of whom they usually see, for a debate on writings by Plato, Henry D. Thoreau, Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.

Counselor Mose Vines gets the discussion going by drawing attention to a passage from Plato's *Apology*, in which the philosopher Socrates is on trial for stirring up trouble in ancient Athens. In this passage, Socrates tells the jury that "one who really and truly fights for the right, if he is to survive even for a short time, [must] act as a private man, not a public man." Vines then asks: Would Thoreau, Gandhi and King agree with Socrates on this point?

The question never gets a whole answer. Gandhi, King and Thoreau hardly come up again. Instead, students and teachers spend the next 90 minutes arguing over the difference between a public man and a private man—and which kind Socrates really was.

This kind of discussion is called a Socratic seminar, not because it's about Socrates but because its method of rigorous argument is inspired by him. And although seminars are a weekly feature of English and history classes at Sullivan, this particular one is different. It's a graduation requirement for the nine students, one that was being replicated in 15 other classrooms throughout the school that day.

Socratic seminars have been a part of life at Sullivan since 1984—but not for everyone. Initially, weekly seminars largely were reserved for students in the school's Paideia Options program, an intellectually challenging magnet program based on the teachings of



TONY GETSIC

Counselor Mose Vines and English teacher Eileen Barton distribute papers before Sullivan seniors begin a seminar in which they must show, in order to graduate, that they have mastered reading and discussion skills.

philosopher Mortimer Adler. Students in regular classes only occasionally got to participate.

The faculty had "doubted our ability to sustain such discussions with all our students," explains teacher Eileen Barton, Vines's partner in leading the discussion on Socrates.

But then the school joined the Coalition of Essential Schools, whose principles challenged the faculty to put their doubts aside. One Coalition principle says that students should get diplomas only after they have *demonstrated* that they've mastered what their school is trying to teach. Participating in Socratic seminars is one way to do that, the Sullivan faculty quickly recognized.

Another Coalition principle says that a school's goals should apply to *all* its students. The faculty believed that making a final seminar a requirement

for all seniors would advance that principle, and they agreed to give it a try. That experiment was successful enough that they tried a bolder one the next year: expanding the weekly seminar regimen to include all students, not just those in the Paideia magnet program.

Besides, says Vines, Sullivan's Coalition coordinator, "How can you argue with the proposition that a kid should read certain [classic] material and should be able to talk and to listen to what other people have to say?"

However, the principle that all students should have the same goals may be especially challenging for a school as diverse as Sullivan, where students not only hail from dozens of different countries, but also enroll for substantially different reasons. As a neighborhood high school that houses a magnet program, Sullivan attracts both teenagers

who thrive on the intellectual challenge of seminars and teenagers who aren't at home in a classroom. Moreover, Principal Patricia Anderson and others say that gang activity and influence is mounting. "That pervades the school more than any national merit scholar," says Anderson, adding, "We've had a few of those, too."

Music teacher Rosagitta Podrovsky, a Chicago Teachers Union delegate, relates that former Sullivan Principal Robert Brazil crammed the Paideia Program and its emphasis on seminars "down everybody's throats." But the program was worth swallowing, she says.

"I have nothing bad to say about it. It's a low-cost kind of thing; you buy the books, and that's about it. It's not gimmicky; it's just reading, thinking and talking."

An attitude problem

If there's a weakness in the program, says English teacher Sandy Pardys, it's that "there's not time to do everything." With two of five classes each week devoted to seminars, she says, the rest of the curriculum must be squeezed into three days.

English teacher Elizabeth Solomon adds that some students don't read well enough to participate in the seminars. "The seminars are great," she says, "but overall, I think we need more remedial work." Solomon says that some of her 9th-grade students come in reading at the 4th-grade level. "A lot of the time, we give them the seminar readings, and they're not ready to read, much less discuss them." For now, Solomon says, she's choosing her readings more carefully.

Discussions with students and staff indicate that the seminar program has been a big plus for building bridges among the school's various racial, ethnic and cultural groups. But the discussions also suggest that Sullivan has a ways to go in setting high standards for all students, regardless of the interests and skills they bring to the school.

The teachers and students agree that there's a different attitude toward the school's "regular" students than there is toward the students enrolled in the Paideia magnet program. "They expect more of you," says Maria Garcia, a Paideia student who graduated in June.

Tameka Anderson, a "regular" student who graduated in June, agrees,

Sullivan High School

THE STUDENT BODY

At 1,251, it fills the building.

Hit a low of around 800 in early-80's. Since then, an Options for Knowledge Paideia program has attracted more students. More families have moved into the neighborhood.

It's a rainbow.

55.5% black, 25% Hispanic, 11% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7% white, 0.6% Native American. Hails from 20+ countries. 78% low-income.

Average test scores are average for Chicago, low for Illinois.

	10th-grade reading, IGAP	10th-grade math, IGAP
Sullivan	189	178
Chicago	182	177
Illinois	250	250

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Rogers Park, at the city's northeast corner.

"The people who live in Rogers Park are basically middle-class in their outlook, even if they're low- or moderate-income. And when you're middle-class, it doesn't matter too much what your skin color is. Not that there aren't teenagers out here with babies, who haven't got the first idea how to take care of them."

—Dorothy Gregory, resident since 1968.

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Key objective

Continue to develop seminar program and build relationships with the surrounding community.

Main changes

- ✓ All students participate in at least one Socratic seminar a week, where they debate the ideas in a given text.
- ✓ To graduate, seniors must demonstrate in small-size seminars that they have mastered the seminar's reading-and-discussion skills.
- ✓ English and history teachers team up to teach their subjects.



Sullivan sits in a quiet, residential area, but school staff and local residents say that gang activity around the school is on the rise. Students come to the school from all over Chicago.

but she isn't pleased about the difference: "I don't think just because I'm not in the Paideia program there should be things that the teacher doesn't teach me. And I've been in Paideia classes. There's really nothing different, nothing that we couldn't do."

Teachers do have different expectations for kids from the Paideia Options program, acknowledges Coalition coordinator Vines. The problem "goes back to the history of the program, the way it was implemented"—by giving frequent seminars to just the Options students at the beginning. Even though the programs are similar now, Vines says that teacher expectations haven't made the adjustment, which he believes can influence student performance. He cites a Heartland Institute study in which one group of workers out-produced another group; the only difference between the groups was what they were told was expected of them.

"That's what's happening here," Vines says. "The program is the same now, but expectations—that's going to vary."

Principal Anderson thinks there may be other variables. "Students come to a situation with different amounts of

interest. That's just a given. . . . But in the Paideia Options program, you have parents and students who have chosen to be here—there's some support at home for that activity—and I would venture to guess that makes a difference."

There is tension, too, among students over the perceived difference in how the two groups are treated, says Tameka. "There's a problem between the Paideia and non-Paideia students," she says. "There are students who don't like Paideia students because they think they're 'all *that*.'"

But several of those in the Options program saw it differently. "People think it's like, 'You're neglecting the non-Paideia kids,'" says David Murcio, another June graduate. But, he believes, it's only fair to allow those who can learn more quickly to do so. "It's just not fair for somebody who learns twice as fast as you to be held back because you're not ready," he says.

While the school's dual personality as a magnet and neighborhood school may be the source of tensions, no one doubts the value of the seminar program as a tool for both educational and personal growth—and not just for students.

The seminar program also encourages teachers to re-evaluate their expectations when dealing with the questions and arguments students present. The seminar on Socrates was an example of teachers finding their expectations confounded by the direction the discussion took.

No black-or-white answer

Counselor Vines and teacher Barton had expected the question of public and private roles to be a simple starting point for a discussion about activists and intellectuals. But the group never got past the first question: Was Socrates a public or a private person?

Socrates didn't hold office, some students reasoned, and he didn't charge money or advertise for any services, including teaching—so maybe Socrates was, as he said, a private man. But other argued that what he did—cross-examining people who claimed to be wise and showing them up for fools—he did in public. He even says that this was his special service to the city, which God had sent him to perform.

'You can't help but be enriched by the experience'

Sullivan's cultural diversity is one thing that both teachers and students say they like best about the school. "This is almost heaven," says counselor Craig Hahn. "I think it's exciting, all the different kids we have contact with. You can't help but be enriched by the experience."

Students seem to agree. Last spring, *CATALYST* invited members of two senior English classes to discuss their school with a reporter. The seven students who showed up included European immigrants, Latinos, African-Americans and Asian-Americans. All agreed that the school's United Nations atmosphere was a plus.

"I think it's very helpful," said Martin Sokalski, who graduated in June. You're much more open, more comfortable talking to people."

"Especially people of different cultures," added Tameka Anderson, another June graduate. "Before I came here, the only white people I saw were on TV. And I moved over here, and I'm meet-

ing people from Belize, places I'd never heard of."

"It eliminates racism too," said Martin—and everybody nodded.

"It takes away the uneasiness," Tameka explained, and more nods followed.

Sullivan's Socratic seminars may well have contributed to these attitudes. For one, the staff deliberately chooses texts that deal with issues like race and cultural differences, says Principal Patricia Anderson. And the fact that students have to talk to each other in seminars may make it easier for them to recognize and accept differences.

The students who talked with *CATALYST* said the seminars were *the* best thing about the school.

Farhan Sabzaalli, another 1994 graduate, credited the seminar program, and the teachers' approach, with helping him deal with his uneasiness over his accent. English isn't his first language, and when he first came to Sullivan, "People would laugh at me,"

he said. "But the best thing was that the teachers supported me. They'd say, 'Don't listen to them. They're foolish.' And even if you're shy, they're going to make you speak."

"Seminars helped me get out of my shell, I guess," said Meera Lakhani. "When I met people, I used to wonder, 'Should I talk to this person?'" But because of the seminar program, she says, "I had to talk to people to get a grade. I was able to experiment. And now I just go up and talk to anybody."

Lakhani is heading to Loyola University and plans to major in psychology. "So my profession—my major—is also related to talking," she noted. "I realized I'm a good talker and a good listener."

"I think we really develop kids who can talk," concurred English teacher Sandy Pardys. "And our students seem to be very self-assured. They have confidence that what they have to say is valuable. That's a strength."

Dan Weissmann



In Socratic seminars, like the one pictured at left, students are graded not on whether their ideas are "right" or "wrong" but on how well they follow and add to the discussion, and on how directly they link their comments to the text being discussed.

Isn't that a public role? And so it went for 90 minutes.

In an interview a few weeks later, Vines seemed disappointed that the discussion had gotten hung up on what he saw as a minor issue. "The question of a public or a private person shouldn't have been so important," he said. "It told me that the kids didn't have a handle on the relationship of citizens to government"; that is, the students understood citizenship itself to be a public role, whereas Vines believed that only a public official was a public person.

In Barton's view, that confusion was basically OK; if the group had been a class that met regularly, she says, she would have taken the discussion as a signal that the class needed to go back and deal with that more basic issue.

As it stands, students in seminars aren't graded on whether they make the "right" arguments; instead, teachers measure how much a student participates, how well he or she seems to follow and advance the discussion, and how much his or her comments draw on the text.

In fact, the idea that there is a "right" argument runs counter to Paideia's approach. The point is for teachers to let a "line of inquiry" evolve, not to impose their ideas on a class.

"Well, you say you don't have an answer," Vines says, "but of course you do. The question is, can you be swayed? Some seminar leaders cannot be swayed. The argument forces you to say, there is no black or white answer. And that's really important." ■

A Socratic seminar on *The Color Purple*

We're getting extra credit for this, right?" asks Eric Murff, as a class of juniors settles down for the week's Socratic seminar in their English course.

Eric is one of two students who will lead a discussion on Alice Walker's novel *The Color Purple*, and he's "just checking" that he'll get extra credit for the extra work.

Then he tosses out the opening question: "Do you think Celie and Shug are closer now that they live together?"

In this section of the novel, two women, Celie and Shug, have become friends and lovers; they have left the house where they met—the house of the man who was Celie's mean, abusive husband and Shug's submissive, worshipful lover. It doesn't take long for the discussion to get going. "In my opinion," says Jen, "they already got together when they were at Albert's house, so what they're doing now is just getting on with their lives."

From there, the students go directly to vital, tricky questions about Shug and Celie's relationship: Are they primarily friends? Lovers? What are the differences between these two kinds of relationships?

"I don't see them as just being friends," says LaToya. "I think they're more like lovers, which it's evident

they are."

Lynda disagrees, "You're going to do more with your best friend than with other people."

"Friends don't do *that*," argues a third student, "but sometimes I think, as a friend, maybe Shug is showing Celie what the physical body is all about."

"I think it's both," a fourth student chimes in. "I know I don't do things with people of the same sex, but I also think of my boyfriend as my friend."

The seminar leaders keep coming back with questions to encourage the others to look at different sides of the relationship: What is the power dynamic? Is Shug motivated more by desire for Celie or by friendship? Is pity a factor? Does Celie have other friends? What makes someone a friend? Would Celie be able to make it if Shug left her?

Near the end of the discussion, the teacher has to remind Murff that as a seminar leader, he's just supposed to be asking questions, not chiming in with answers. "Oh, right," he says, smiling—a little embarrassed, but enjoying himself. "It's hard!"

After class, he says, "I don't like leading the seminars, because you're not supposed to express your own opinion—and I have a lot I want to say. It's extra credit, though, and I'll do anything for extra credit."

Dan Weissmann

Portfolio review: sweating out a 'real-life' test of knowledge

by Laura Doyle

At 8 in the morning last May 18, a skinny freshman—call him Duane—walked quickly to the front of a room at Lindblom Technical High School. A fellow student pinned a microphone on his shirt, and another announced his name. Sweat began to bead on Duane's forehead.

Seated at a table before him were Lindblom's former principal, two teachers and an upperclassman. Behind them were several other teachers, administrators and students.

It was time for Duane to demonstrate some of what he had learned during the previous year. And the marks that his evaluators—those seated at the table—gave him would count for a quarter of his final grade in each subject.

Announcing the first part of the evaluation, a teacher read: "Report in which student utilizes data to propose a solution to an environmental issue." Looking at Duane, she said, "Please identify your issue."

Seemingly oblivious to the sweat trickling down his face, Duane pushed the words from this throat, his voice cracking and bouncing an octave. "The negative effect of acid rain," he responded.

Duane then explained what causes acid rain and its harmful effects and reported how acid rain has decreased as the use of plant-based fuels has increased. He showed the group a piece of poster board with graphs and charts that illustrated his data.

"Please deliver a one-minute presentation about yourself in the foreign language in which you are enrolled," another evaluator instructed.

In French, Duane told the panel his name, his school and his age, all of which took considerably less than a minute. Then he paused and looked

around the room—and at the ceiling and at the floor. Finally, he said, "That's all I can remember so far."

Duane wasn't the only one on pins and needles that day. The evaluators and spectators dropped their eyes when presenters stumbled. Some tensed when questions were asked, and relaxed when students answered correctly.

In educational jargon, what they were all going through is called authentic assessment—that is, assessment by real-life activities rather than paper-and-pencil tests. And for Lindblom, the assessment was as much a measure of the school's progress in the Coalition of Essential Schools as it was of students' individual progress.

Lindblom had been working to transform itself for four years, but the Class of 1997, last year's freshmen, were the first to go through authentic assessment and have it count. Betty Miller, the Coalition coordinator at Lindblom, refers to this class as the "Coalition babies."

Students were bored

Since the 1960s, Lindblom had been "the jewel of the South Side"—a place where students, primarily African Americans, excelled and went on to the best colleges. By the late 1980s, however, the jewel had lost a little bit of its luster; test scores remained above city-wide averages but had begun to slide. The falling scores were one signal to the school's new principal, Lynn St. James, and other school leaders that Lindblom had to take some action.

St. James and her teachers first went to the students to find out what they thought was wrong; the adults discovered that most students were bored with traditional classes, ones that demanded only rote memorization. "We were not teaching them to be inde-

pendent, lifelong learners," said St. James, who, after six years at Lindblom, took early retirement in 1993.

A significant asset for Lindblom leaders was the student body itself: Lindblom enrolls only students who score at or above the 9th-grade level in reading. With a history of attracting some of the highest-achieving students on the South Side, the Lindblom community has high expectations for students. And the fact that students *choose* to go to Lindblom indicates strong parental support.

Further, the needs of Lindblom's students are generally clear and uniform; they all want a college-preparatory curriculum that will qualify them for admission to top colleges.

So, when school reform gave schools new freedoms, Lindblom was well situated to take full advantage of them. And the first local school council election gave it an aggressive council. "The first council was elected in a time of crisis and concern," recalls St. James. "It wanted to make its mark."

The chair was William Roberts, who was retired and had a lot of time to devote to the school.

"Whenever you have an LSC president who is genuinely interested in the day-to-day running of the school, it has a tremendous impact," says Betty Miller. "He had influence on other parents, and he helped to educate them."

Roberts encouraged St. James to revitalize the school by introducing innovative teaching methods. After learning about the Coalition at a conference, St. James introduced its ideas to the council and faculty, winning their support. Together, they then developed a plan to reform what students were taught, how they were taught and how they were evaluated. In general, the goal was to find ways to motivate students to take more responsibility for their own education.

First, departments were reconfigured into four broad areas—humanities, math and science, technology and fine arts. This encourages interdisciplinary teaching and learning; that is, teachers show how knowledge from several different subject areas comes together in the real world.

For example, an English teacher and a history teacher combine their classes to explore *Antigone* and Greek civilization. The English teacher takes the literary perspective, and the history teacher takes the historical perspective.

Students teach, too

Teamwork is encouraged among students, too. Social studies teacher John McCulley assigns his 10th-graders to groups of three or four to prepare for an exam on federal and state government. The success of each student depends on how well they work together to find answers on a study guide and to quiz each other on the principles of government. Further, students' grades are based on both their individual test scores and the group's average score.

When students interact with each other, they learn more, says McCulley, who used to be a traditional teacher, relying on lectures.

Students do some teaching, too, making presentations and working with faculty members to plan lessons. One student brought in a tape of music he liked and identified examples of metaphor and simile, Miller recalls. "When a student teaches, he learns more from sharing his experience and learns how to relate what he has learned," she explains.

Teachers also strive to relate class topics to their students' lives. In a senior-level humanities class, Richard Lufrano tells his students, "The section of *Antigone* that we're going to read today is about greed and jealousy." He then asks them to write about a time in their lives when they acted selfishly because they wanted to be in the spotlight.

One student writes about outings with her father, who lives in Wisconsin. She relates that she asks him to come at night, when her mother is home from work and can watch over her sister, who has another father. "That way I don't have to take my sister with me, and I get my father all to myself," she explains.

Lindblom Technical High School

THE STUDENT BODY

At 773, it fills less than half the building.

Enrollment has been declining over the last 10 years as parents choose to send their children to other magnet programs in neighborhoods perceived as less dangerous than West Englewood. Only 1.7% of students drop out.

Almost entirely African American. Mixed income.

99.6% black, 0.3% Hispanic, 0.1% white. 50% low-income. Test scores are high for Chicago, below average for Illinois. Students admitted by test scores.

	10th-grade reading, IGAP	10th-grade math, IGAP
Lindblom	226	224
Chicago	182	177
Illinois	250	250

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

"Despite the fact that Lindblom was classified as one of the safest schools in the city, parents don't like the neighborhood where Lindblom is located, and they choose to send their children to a school they see as safer. Englewood was all over the news. Every time you turned on the TV, there was another killing in Englewood."

—Betty Miller, Lindblom's Coalition of Essential Schools coordinator

THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

Key objective:

Attract more students to stem enrollment slide.

Main changes:

- ✓ Eliminated tracking. All classes now taught at "honors" level.
- ✓ Portfolio assessments are a quarter of students' final grades.
- ✓ Created a core curriculum of interdisciplinary courses.
- ✓ Restructured faculty into four departments—humanities, math and science, technology, fine arts.
- ✓ Team teaching and cooperative learning are encouraged.



Freshman Rikki Pellman explains her diorama, part of a "portfolio" that represents her best work for the year, to a panel that includes teachers, a student and a community member.

ZOOM IN

Lindblom has spent more than 90 percent of its Coalition of Essential Schools grants on staff development aimed at changing teaching. Getting teachers to change, says Miller, is harder than getting students to change.

The school first focused on team teaching and cooperative learning and then on authentic assessment, which is a process as much as an event. During the year, students develop projects in each of the school's four general disciplines for presentation at year's end. Students have wide latitude in selecting projects, but they all are expected to demonstrate mastery of certain skills and concepts.

For example, in the humanities, last year's freshmen could focus on the Industrial Revolution, the Renaissance, the Reformation or ancient and classical civilizations, nations and empires. The one directive was to show focus, organization, support for their thesis, documentation of their research and a conclusion.

Miller was impressed by the creativity students used in their projects. One girl wrote a report about Egyptian tombs and constructed a replica of a tomb, which she adorned with her mother's jewelry. In her report, she described what typically would be found in a tomb and the cultural signif-

icance of each item.

While students had flexibility in developing their portfolios (collections of work) and presentations, their evaluators followed a rigid format. In an attempt to ensure equal treatment, evaluators asked identical questions and refrained from rephrasing questions or asking follow-up questions. However, one evaluator was troubled by that after sensing that one student might have answered a question if it had been asked differently. After the student's presentation, she asked a colleague: "Are we giving students an advantage if we use a question to elicit information we can see they know?"

Despite the uniformity of the questioning, portfolio assessments are different from standardized tests because "each student interprets the question in their own sphere of knowledge," Miller explains. "There are no right or wrong answers. We are looking for articulation, critical thinking skills and the student's ability to bring together all that he or she has learned. Each student has a knowledge base, and we want to know how they can apply it to a non-classroom environment."

Overall, says Cheryl Rutherford, who succeeded St. James as principal, "The students met [or] exceeded expectations." Miller adds that the school will

have to help those who didn't do well, including some who failed to show up. Further, planning and organizing the portfolio reviews are so time-consuming, says Miller, that additional help will be needed as the requirement spreads to all grade levels.

Now that Lindblom is moving along a new path, it wants to let the city know about it. Through the Mayor's Partners Program, the school has been working with BBDO, a national advertising firm, to boost enrollment, which has declined steadily over the past 10 years. Built for 2,000 students, Lindblom enrolls only about 800 and has been targeted for closing from time to time.

The emergence of magnet schools and other programs in the late 1970s, gave Lindblom competition for high-achieving, college-bound kids, notes Arthur Mruminski, the school's recruiter and college coordinator. Previously, smart students on the North Side tended to go to Lane Technical High, and smart students on the South Side tended to go to Lindblom.

Mruminski's recruiting efforts also have been hampered by the reputation of Lindblom's high-crime, West Englewood neighborhood.

"Parents are apprehensive about sending students here," says Rutherford. "But the students, once they're here, are

Chicago's other Coalition schools

CHICAGO VOCATIONAL students are enrolled in one of eight "mini-schools," each of which includes several related shop areas. The school juggled its schedule to allow many shop classes to run for hours at a stretch. In academic classes, students often work on projects in groups, and assessment is "authentic"—e.g., students are as likely to be asked to create a dramatic presentation based on class readings as they are to be given a pencil-and-paper test on those readings.

FLOWER VOCATIONAL Coalition principles are wrapped up in a schoolwide entrepreneurship training program. All students, in their last two years, work in one of five student-run businesses.

DuSABLE Last year's switch to 50-minute classes kept the school from subdividing into 11 "houses" and



JOHN BOOZ

Last summer, Rachman Lamar (center) and 13 other students from Flower Vocational earned money and school credit for their work rehabbing a building around the corner from the school.

blocked a common planning period for teachers. Teachers are experimenting with interdisciplinary projects. For instance, during a unit on the 1960s, English classes dealt with literature

from that time, history classes studied the political movements, and gym classes featured the era's dances.

PHILLIPS Coalition principles are pursued in a number of programs: an

on [a] closed campus. We have the lowest [in-school] crime rate, according to the board."

Mrumlinski complains about the news media's coverage of crime committed near schools, saying it's unfair to bring a school into the story, especially when no students are involved.

Between the increased competition for good students and the crime problem, Lindblom has seen a decrease, too, in the test scores of students choosing to come there. So far, the school hasn't been able to compensate. In 1993, the last year for which scores are available, Lindblom's scores on the Illinois Goal Assessment Program tests were lower (in all areas except science) than they were in 1992. Scores remained above citywide averages but below state averages.

Yet, Cathy Murphy of the BBDO ad agency sees lots at Lindblom to sell in the recruiting video and brochures she is developing. "There is a real camaraderie that I have not witnessed in other schools," she says. Students are excited to be at Lindblom and want to succeed, she continues. "And they receive constant encouragement from the faculty." ■

Laura Doyle is a recent graduate of the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University.

Afrocentric curriculum; the Comer Process, which focuses on relationships among faculty, students and parents; DePaul University Dean Barbara Sizemore's School Achievement System, which seeks to prepare students to succeed on standardized tests; a "service learning" project, in which students get credit for volunteer work in the community.

ENGLEWOOD Different teachers picked up different pieces of the Coalition's philosophy, says Principal Warner Birts, but none of those pieces has spread schoolwide. In 1993, Englewood became a "tech-prep" (vocational) academy with four career tracks.

MATHER Teachers don't lecture as much, and there's more cooperative learning, but change at Mather "wasn't dramatic," says Geraldine

New York City

12 small schools replace 2 big ones

by Dan Weissmann

Last year, Julia Richman High School, a large neighborhood school in Manhattan, had no freshman class. This year, it doesn't have any freshmen or sophomores. By June 1996, the school will be gone. Close behind it will be James Monroe High School in the Bronx.

Both schools, which had enrolled a total of around 6,000 students, are being phased out and replaced with a dozen smaller schools, most of them run by the local branch of the Coalition of Essential Schools.

"We said, 'This is how we'd like to do it,'" explains Coalition leader Deborah Meier, who negotiated the deal with the chancellor's office of the New York City

Public Schools. "We'd like to open some new schools, but only if it can be done in connection with the phasing out of an unsuccessful high school."

That was spring 1992, and the time was right, since then-Chancellor Joseph Fernandez had just authorized the creation of dozens of other small high schools.

Also, Meier had a successful track record in the small-schools business. In 1974, Meier launched Central Park East Elementary School in East Harlem, which became nationally prominent. In 1985, she opened Central Park East High School as a model Coalition school. A few years later, she helped found the Center for Collaborative Education, the Coalition's New York branch office.

A fast ride

Fernandez bought the center's phase-out idea, and the center then went to work recruiting and coaching directors for the six small schools that would replace Julia Richman. Considering the pace bureaucracies typically set, it was a fast ride. "In March 1993, this school didn't even have a name," says Bill Ling, director of Manhattan International High School, which opened six months later.

Ling, who previously taught at International High School in Queens, was a reluctant recruit; he says his former boss had to nudge him into accepting the challenge. "I was perfectly happy with my job, and I had tremendous apprehension," he recalls. "But now, I feel very good about it. We have an actual school, which has problems, but this is to be expected."

Last September, each of the small schools opened with 80 to 100 freshmen. Adding one class at a time, the schools expect to have a full complement of 300

Rizzik, Mather's Coalition coordinator.

CALUMET Staff cuts and retirements decimated the teachers who were most enthusiastic, but some structural changes remain. Students now join one of four "strands" that weave academic and vocational courses around common themes. For instance, there is a strand dealing with the hospitality, tourism and food service industries, and one dealing with math and science.

STEINMETZ A few enthusiastic teachers weren't able to rally enough support to launch more than a few scattered efforts; many of those teachers retired or were pulled from the school. "We find ourselves in something of a holding pattern," Coalition Coordinator Maribeth Murphy said last June. She has since retired.

Dan Weissmann

Students at two of New York's new Coalition schools wait for classes to start. The schools moved into new quarters on West 58th Street late last spring, while the building was still undergoing rehabilitation.



(C) 1994 H. L. DELGADO

students apiece by September 1996. The six successors to Monroe High in the Bronx open this fall, with Meier's center in charge of four of them.

No one expected the first year to go smoothly. But two tumultuous events made it rougher than expected. In mid-1993, the New York City Board of Education ousted Fernandez, leaving unsettled such crucial issues as where the new schools would be located. Negotiations dragged well into the summer of 1993.

Kicked out

Then, late in the summer, investigators found that inspections for asbestos hazards in the city's 1,000-plus schools had been inadequate. Every building had to be re-inspected and declared safe before classes could begin. School opened more than a week late; even so, classrooms in almost 200 buildings still were not ready.

Half of the six new Coalition schools were kicked out of their quarters, pending inspection or cleanup. Some found temporary space in other school buildings; some moved from place to place. One of them, Vanguard High School, went from a theater to an armory and, finally, around Thanksgiving, to a school building.

"To start a new school—even with the furniture, the parents, the students, the equipment already in place—that

would have been difficult enough," notes Vanguard director Louis Delgado. "When we finally arrived, we weren't coming into a whole school. There was no furniture, and there were no phone lines for us. Phone lines didn't get installed until mid-May. It's an insult. And I felt isolated."

As the emerging schools add a new class each year, location will continue to be a problem. Three of the six had to find new homes for this school year.

According to Meier, the headaches are endless, and, under a new chancellor, the future more uncertain. "Fernandez and [Deputy Chancellor Stanley] Litow were sort of clear that this project was a priority, and that anything that got in the way of this project would have to go," she says. "Now it's a little less clear."

Objective: Breaking Rules

The original idea, Meier explains, was to make a point of breaking School Board rules that get in the way of good schools. Meier and Fernandez figured that existing procedures for hiring staff, for budgeting and for planning encouraged schools to be bureaucratic. Smaller, innovative schools would require a new set of rules, and Fernandez apparently intended to find out what they should be.

"Now, maybe big schools aren't so bad after all," Meier speculates. "Who

knows?" She says that Ramon Cortines, the new chancellor, has supported the project but also has other priorities.

While Meier may feel frustrated, the faculty of Julia Richman is downright depressed. "It's demoralizing, very demoralizing" to work in a school that officially has been declared a failure, observes Assistant Principal Jerry Raab.

"We're talking about people with long careers, who have dedicated their lives to teaching," he says. "There are people here who have been doing a good job all along." When Meier and her colleagues condemn Julia Richman, those teachers wonder, "What's she really saying? Is she saying the institution has failed? Or is she saying that I've failed personally?"

In the view of Mary Butz, director of the Coalition's Manhattan Village High School, the failure is a function of size. "There are some fabulous big schools in this city," she says, but there are a lot of kids who don't stand a chance in them.

She points to the record of one Manhattan Village student whose standardized test scores are in the basement. "In another school, that kid would be dead meat," she says. At Manhattan Village, though, teachers give him more attention, and students are more supportive, Butz explains. "Here, he has an opportunity to focus on his work and not be called a nerd. He comes in early every day." At Manhattan Village, the young man is a B+ student. ■

No cookie-cutter schools here

From the outset, the six new schools in Manhattan have challenged their students in distinctly different ways. Here is a glimpse of three of them, as they wrapped up the school year last June.

MANHATTAN VILLAGE HIGH SCHOOL Students spent part of each day writing autobiographies in a computer lab. When the writing was done, they sat before panels of teachers, “defending” their work, much as a graduate student would defend a dissertation.

MANHATTAN INTERNATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL Here, English is a second language for all students. Groups of students were creating multilingual children’s books: One student wrote a story in English, two others translated it into their native languages, a fourth illustrated the text, and a fifth captured the finished product on videotape. In a social studies class, pairs of students were boiling down descriptions of historical events and people into English that a young child would understand. The theory was that the students would have to learn the material well before they could translate it into simple language.

VANGUARD HIGH SCHOOL Six students

and an instructor were gathered around a rope ladder big enough for a giant. Suspended from the ceiling of the gym, the ladder consisted of 12-foot wooden beams suspended, four feet apart, on strong cables. The assignment was for pairs of students to climb the ladder together, with one student on each end of the 12-foot expanse.

To succeed, students had to trust and support each other and be a little bold, which was precisely the point. “These are things I want kids to take away from Vanguard High School,” explained the school’s director, Louis Delgado.

After a few giddy, nervous, careful minutes, the first two students reached the top, and then faced the really scary part: coming down. (There was no mat on the floor.)

With the help of some special equipment and spotters, the two climbers had to fall straight down from their perches. Each climber was hooked up to two spotters by a length of nylon rope called a bolet (buh-LAY). The bolet ran from a harness worn by the climber, up through a pulley on the gym ceiling, down through a harness worn by the first spotter, and into the

hands of the backup spotter.

After the instructor pulled the bottom rung of the ladder out of the way of their fall, the climbers gave the signal: “Ready to fall.” The spotters braced themselves and called back: “Fall away.”

“Oh my God!” came from both the top and bottom of the ladder. The lead spotters actually were lifted a couple feet off the ground for a few seconds. The number-two spotters held the bolets and pulled at the lead spotters as if they were helium balloons.

“Any of that macho sh— you got on you, it’s all down there on the ground,” said Delgado, who has been on those ropes himself. “You’re naked up there. But I’ll tell you—the rush, the thrill. . . . You walk out of there with your chin up!”

The giant ladder is one of a number of climbing exercises that, together with retreats at a camp in Long Island, make up Vanguard’s Project Adventure. Delgado paid for the project with most of a \$20,000 grant the school received from private funders that are supporting the new Coalition schools. He worries about being able to continue the project as the school’s enrollment grows to 300. “I love to get the kids away from the city and all the craziness that’s going on here,” he said.

Vanguard promotes risk-taking in academic work, as well. Delgado pointed to a final project, a book, submitted by a student who is “a very minimal writer.” “For a student like him, writing something like this is a major risk,” he said. “It means sharing a lot of his weak points.”

Dan Weissmann



In Vanguard High School’s Project Adventure, Daddie Moses Garcia (above) and Matt Gadling (right) climb a wall to learn about trust and risk.



Welcome back!

A YEAR OF PROMISE IS WAITING BACK AT SCHOOL

ARGIE K. JOHNSON

General Superintendent, Chicago Public Schools

Welcome back to school! Exciting things are waiting for you. Students, teachers, principals, Local School Council members, parents, and everyone can look forward to an academic environment that concentrates on schools, classrooms and youngsters.

The beginning of the year is normally a time for making resolutions in anticipation of new starts. The start of the school year is also a time for new beginnings and resolutions. For the 1994-1995 school year, I am committed to elevating the Chicago community's expectations for its schools and students.

This begins a year of promise for the city, its schools and its students. My expectation for each student attending a Chicago Public School is that they will work to fulfill his or her potential. We must expect more from our students. It has been demonstrated many times, that young people will rise or descend to the level of the expectations placed upon them.

If we as a community expect dropouts, delinquents, early parenthood and other societal negatives, then that is what we will receive. However, if we expect our children to attend school with a purpose, to shun destructive behaviors and avoid sexual experimentation, then our young people will rise to meet our increased expectations provided that adults support these aspirations with tangible support and rewards.

This school year, the Chicago Public School system will do its part to support improved academic achievement and positive student behaviors. The entire Chicago community must actively participate in supporting, rewarding and pushing all of our youngsters to see and reach beyond their personal challenges.

My expectations for teachers, principals, and other school staff are that they will view every student under their care as their personal promise to the future. These young promises must receive the appropriate nurturing, caring, and devotion required to come to full flower.

For each Local School Council, I expect them to be effective and compassionate leaders for their schools, working on behalf of all of the children within their community. They must lead in partnership with the school principals and teachers. Working toward a common goal for students, school leadership can transform a school building into a school family.

My expectations for the central administration are an efficient, effective operation that supports the critical relationship between teachers and students. All administrative efforts must be measured and held accountable by their impact on youngsters and classrooms.

For myself, I expect to provide the necessary leadership to keep the school reform effort working toward issues of classroom improvement and student achievement. Educational issues and student improvement will be attained by concentrating on three major areas:

- operational and administrative efficiencies and effectiveness,
- measuring and holding everyone accountable for student achievement, and
- continuous improvement of the educational process.

The start of the school year is a time of celebration. As a young child, I looked forward to returning to school in September. The quest for education was an important value in my family. My parents nurtured and sustained the love of learning for all of my siblings and me throughout my childhood. It is a lasting legacy of love that I treasure deeply.

This legacy is something that I wish to pass on to the children in Chicago's public schools. As I begin my second year as the general superintendent of Chicago schools, I wish to bestow this gift to all 409,000 students. I believe that the Chicago community, including its politicians, parents, teachers, business people and others, must raise its expectations of public school students and employees.

Through the prism of heightened expectations, I see a school year full of promise and rewards. Welcome back to school!

Letters

City, School Board ignoring lead-paint hazards

In your May 1993 article about lead paint hazards in the public schools, Deputy Mayor for Education Leonard Dominguez said he would establish a "comprehensive plan for lead issues to help the Public Building Commission, the Department of Health and the Board of Education coordinate their efforts." I wrote Mr. Dominguez in June of this year asking for a copy of his plan. In response, he had the building commission send me a list of 55 schools in which they are conducting lead and asbestos abatement programs. Mr. Dominguez apparently does not have the plan as promised.

Now, due to Mr. Dominguez's failure to develop a plan, the Board of Education has embarked on a lead abatement program that falls far short of adequately addressing the problem of lead hazards in our schools.

For a year, the board has refused to release information on lead hazards and their plans for abatement. We met with the board's Department of Operations Support in July; from this meeting, we were able to discern that 161 schools have been inspected, at least three-quarters of these schools have been cited for lead hazards, and 47 schools have had some form of lead abatement.

We were told the Department of Health has granted the board five years to complete the abatement needed in these schools. In addition, no inspections of the remaining 400-plus schools will be made until after this five-year period. Under this plan, it would be at least 15 years before all schools

receive some form of abatement. A child entering our school system this year could spend his or her whole school career exposed to lead hazards.

Despite the slow pace of the project, the overwhelming number of schools are only partially inspected and abated. Pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and first-grade classrooms are given priority. We do not know, however, if these rooms are being totally or partially abated. It appears that little or no attention is paid to lunch rooms, halls and washrooms.

Strangely enough, the Board of Education has not prioritized schools by the seriousness of the lead hazards, but care has been taken to insure that schools in all parts of the city get equitable treatment. Prioritizing by the degree of danger would seem to make more sense. In some cases, schools were given priority when the Department of Health identified a lead-poisoned child within that school. Inasmuch as there are almost 45,000 lead-poisoned children in Chicago—more than enough to go around to each school—this policy seems flawed.

Had Mr. Dominguez presented a plan that could have been available for public comment, the city might have avoided another "closed-door" policy developed by the Board of Education. The Board of Education needs to hold public hearings to get input from parents and others to develop the best plan possible. Lead abatement is very expensive, and it is clear that financial

limitations will make prioritizing of schools necessary. Nevertheless, 15 years is too long to wait. The Chicago Public Schools certainly cannot afford to condemn another generation of children to classrooms with dangerous lead levels.

*Bernie Noven
Director of Community Outreach
Lead Elimination Action Drive*

Personal approach best way to combat truancy

Thank you for the article on the Curie High School Attendance Office (May 1994), especially the photos of three of our students, which thrilled them. My compliments to Debra Williams, who was able to synthesize a great deal of information into a concise, well-written and comprehensive article.

I am writing to re-emphasize one point: We were successful in dealing with our truants (and indeed, with our class cutters and tardy students) because we used the old-fashioned, inefficient, non-computer approach in communicating with students and their parents. In the time it takes me to contact 10 parents, a computer equipped with an automatic dialer can probably reach 150-200 numbers, but I assure you—and statistics bear me out—my way works better.

Unfortunately, the move toward greater efficiency, which seems to work in the business world, does not work in the world of education. Indeed, the ideal education situation is a one-on-one, mentor-to-student relationship. Nothing could be more inefficient, and yet nothing could be more beneficial to the student. This is what my colleagues and I try to do at Curie. While we are a long way from running a "successful" attendance operation, I believe our approach is working and, in the case of many "at risk" students, making a significant dent in their academic/attendance deficiencies.

Let me add that my anti-computer bias does not originate from "computerphobia" or computer illiteracy. I am fully certified in computer science by the Board of Education, and regularly update and maintain the Attendance Office computer systems as part of my day-to-day duties.

Keep up the good work!

*Arthur Gerson
Attendance Office
Curie Metro High School*



Under court order, walls like this one at Laundale Academy were repaired last year to halt lead exposure.

Eight-year Harvard study to probe causes, cures for violence

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods, a research project of the Harvard (University) School of Public Health, is an eight-year study that will address many of the concerns that local school council members, parents and teachers have about the prevalence of violence in our society. During the course of the study, project researchers will examine the life experiences of 11,000 city residents in family, school and community settings. As the study results become available, valuable information about risk factors, pathways to positive behavior and promising interventions will be available to local school councils, teachers, service providers and families.

Some of the research questions addressed by the project include: Why do some communities experience high rates of crime, violence and substance abuse, while most are relatively safe and lawful? Why do some individuals across a wide range of communities become "career criminals" while their neighbors develop into law-abiding and productive citizens? What resources and "protective factors" enable some people to lead successful, productive lives even in what seem to be high-risk environments? Are there key junctures or crucial periods in life where these factors come into play?

11,000 subjects

While previous research has focused on antisocial behavior, this study looks at the whole picture to offer a comprehensive understanding of human social behavior and the environments in which it plays out over the life course. Chicago was chosen as the study site because of its relative population stability, historical significance, size and socioeconomic and cultural diversity.

Over 120,000 Chicagoans between the ages of 0 (newborn) and 24 will be screened in order to select the 11,000 who will become participants in the study. They will be randomly selected from the city's entire population. Once residents have agreed to participate, face-to-face interviews will be conducted with the participants and their caregivers at regular intervals over the next eight years. Interviews will also be conducted with community leaders, school teachers, peers and others. Records from various city, state and local agencies will be used to document study participants' contact with various institutions. Community physical environments will be documented to record changes over time in living environments. With the authorization of students' parents/guardians,

school records will be examined.

The Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods promises both conceptual and practical benefits. The study will expand our base of knowledge concerning some of the nation's most serious public health problems: delinquency, criminality, violence and substance abuse.

At the same time, the Project will assemble a substantial database with important new information about Chicago in the 1990s—its people, institutions and resources, and their relationships within communities—along with a detailed description of everyday life in the city's neighborhoods. This database will be extremely valuable to researchers, policy planners, schools and community agencies and leaders.

The Project, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the National Institute of Justice, brings together, from across the country, scientists from a wide range of disciplines. Felton "Tony" Earls, professor of human behavior and development and child psychiatry at Harvard, and Al Reiss, professor-emeritus of sociology at Yale University, are co-directors. John Holton, former Chicago director of the National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, is the Chicago site director.

For more information about the Project, please write: PHDCN, 651 W. Washington, Chicago, IL 60661 or call (312) 559-3574.

*Trisha McElwain, research analyst
The Project on Human Development in
Chicago Neighborhoods*

State may study schools cited by CATALYST

Your March issue was both instructive and constructive with regard to the performance of Chicago public schools as measured by the Illinois Goals Assessment Program (IGAP).

Lorraine Forte's use of IGAP data to identify improving schools is a laudable and responsible use of the assessment information. We found much that was useful in the remarks of educators at these schools about efforts they perceive as making a difference in student performance.

Professor Anthony Bryk has a point when he cautions that student mobility and other demographic shifts can create problems for comparing test scores from one year to the next. However, this external "noise" is not sufficient to render comparisons meaningless.

Ms. Forte's article uses a comparison of data over three years, from 1990 to 1993, to construct a list of schools that are "making progress." In this case, there is greater danger that the external "noise" might have an impact. However, as schools develop the variety of local assessments required by the Illinois School Improvement Plan, they will accumulate data that can corroborate IGAP data. Frequently administered, multiple measures are the best way to reduce the "noise" that shifting demographics create.

Currently, the Illinois State Board of Education is working with IGAP data to identify schools with an overall positive trend in reading, so that we can explore promising instructional practices. We will look at both demographic changes and local assessments. Once schools are identified, we will ask to visit the schools and interview staff to determine what they might be doing that is innovative and effective. The schools noted by *CATALYST* in its engaging case studies may well be among the first to be researched.

Elsewhere in your issue, questions are raised about supposedly "confusing" instructions on the 1993 reading test. None of our studies of student results on this test indicate that the new instructions contributed to the decline in 3rd-grade reading scores, as was alleged. Also, your article failed to mention that at both grades 6 and 8, reading scores improved statewide.

Our decision to change the wording in future reading tests should not be taken as a validation of the allegation. Rather, it reflects the state's commitment to entertain all criticisms and enhance clarity whenever possible for more effective test administration. If the 1994 scores improve, it is unlikely that gains will be attributed to a minor change in instructions or to test equating procedures.

Finally, I would like to correct a few factual errors. In your bar graphs, the performance of 11th-graders statewide was misrepresented: 77 percent (not more than 90 percent) met or exceeded state goals in science, and 90 percent (not about 80 percent) met or exceeded state goals in social studies. Also, the bar for 6th-grade mathematical performance statewide was incorrect; in fact, 65 percent of students (not about 48 percent) met state goals, and 17 percent (not more than 25 percent) exceeded them.

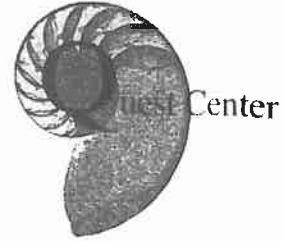
*Mervin M. Brennan, Manager
School and Student Assessment
Illinois State Board of Education*

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.



Chicago School Children Deserve A World-Class Education

Questions To Ask Ourselves



by John Kotsakis and Deborah Walsh

The world has changed, but our schools have not. Our children deserve the best education to meet the challenges of today's world. The "old basics" are being replaced with new basics, which include the 3R's and also critical and abstract thinking, problem solving, flexibility and resourcefulness to respond to the new needs of our

ever-changing information age. Today's educators are redefining what it means to be an educated person and rebuilding our schools and school system accordingly.

As we move the Chicago reform agenda into the classroom, we are forced to ask, "What exactly does an educated person need to know and be able to do?"

The newly adopted Chicago Learning Outcomes represent an effort to synthesize the best national and international thinking about what students should know and be able to do in order to be scientifically, mathematically, and historically literate at various levels in their education.

A colorful poster of expectations, a joint effort of the Chicago Board of Education and The Chicago Teachers Union, is both a political and an educational statement, saying to parents and educators that we are dedicated to helping all children achieve the highest standards. The poster is a dynamic document which was revised from community and educator input. It shifts the reform from governance to teaching and learning and recommits us all to an education of quality and meaning for every child.

The Chicago Learning Outcomes provide the first common set of understandings of the goals of educa-

tors to guide the unique and individual decisions of local schools. Without this essential understanding, especially in a district with high student mobility, our experiment in decentralization will never work.

After a common understanding of the goals has been achieved, the next question is, "How will we know if students have achieved these expectations?" Questioning the traditional model of schooling leads to questioning of the traditional

model of assessing.

Deep understanding and the ability to communicate that understanding is not tested by standardized assessments, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. To answer this question, we must find a way to teach and test what is important for children to know and do. This testing must take place at the classroom level, with creativity and professional judgement, to help students attain the outcomes, and at the system level to maintain accountability to the public.

If we are serious about the Chicago Learning Outcome, then our instruction and assessments must be aligned with them. The outcomes reflect a need for performance-based assessment that is focused on understanding and applying knowledge, ideas and skills.

This raises another question. If our expectations for students and school-wide assessments are radically different, what will teachers need to know and be able to do to help all students achieve these expectations?

Many teachers are already applying research on performance-based instruction and assessment, and on teaching

for understanding in different subject areas. Many more are looking for meaningful professional development opportunities to access this knowledge and share their own experience.

How should schools support teachers, students and parents in helping students achieve these expectations? Leadership — local school council leadership, administrative leadership, teacher leadership. Schools need to support teaching and learning on every level. Schools need informed leaders committed to working together for the sake of student learning.

The system is responsible for supporting schools to aid student learning. The efforts to restructure the central office into a true support center and the three-tiered plan for self assessment and improvement are promising initiatives. The system is now committed to revamping the system-wide assessment, to aligning with the learning outcomes and appointing a new assistant superintendent for professional development. These are encouraging signs.

A coherent vision of how these initiatives collectively support teaching and learning is essential. If teaching and

learning are not the primary aim of every single decision throughout the entire system, then we will have failed the children who depend on us for an education of meaning and value to serve them in their lives. During this school year, this column will focus on the quest for a world-class education for our children — children who deserve the best we can offer.

John Kotsakis is assistant to the Chicago Teachers Union President for Educational Issues. Deborah Walsh is Director of The Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center.

What does an educated person need to know and be able to do?

Deep understanding and the ability to communicate that understanding is not tested by standardized assessments... we must find a way to teach and test what is important for children to know and do...

Scathing chronicle of outrages, but limited solutions

by Mary O'Connell

My father had a saying, whenever the task at hand was proving difficult—when, say, the faucet you were fixing broke off in your hand. He'd give a small smile and say, "You didn't think it'd be easy, did you?"

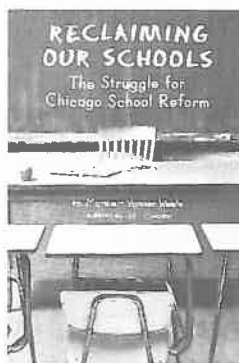
The saying came to mind as I read Maribeth Vander Weele's current account of "the struggle for Chicago school reform." When we parents—and teachers and business leaders and assorted activists—set out to fix what national leaders were labeling the nation's "worst" schools, we didn't think it would be easy, did we?

Still, it's hard to read Vander Weele's book without shaking one's head at just how difficult it's proving to be.

Crumbling schoolbuildings. Revolving leadership. Administrative chaos. No consistency, no accountability, no controls. And no legislative will to do anything about it.

The grim picture Vander Weele paints contains few new revelations: She covers education for the *Chicago Sun Times*, and much of this book grew out of her reporting for the paper, notably the investigations on the poor physical state of the schools and the abysmal controls on school-level funds.

The book's strength is its extremely detailed account of the current state of the schools. Vander Weele explains blow-by-blow how last year's budget



RECLAIMING OUR SCHOOLS:
The Struggle for Chicago School Reform
by Maribeth Vander Weele
Chicago: Loyola University Press,
1994. 366 pages.

crisis developed; how the seemingly innocuous provision in the 1988 Reform Act for job security for "super-numeraries" has reverberated through the succeeding years; how the struggle between engineers and principals played itself out. These and other bureaucratic entanglements she leads us patiently through.

The book offers a chance to relive such hair-raising events as the decision last summer to allow some 2,500 teachers, principals and administrators to take early retirement *three weeks* before school was due to begin—suburban teachers had to make that decision the previous spring. Then, only a week before classes were to begin, the School Board made a budget cut that reduced the number of high school periods from nine to seven, thus overturning every student's program, disrupting language classes, chemistry labs and

theatre programs and throwing teaching staffs into chaos. And the superintendent and School Board president scratched their heads, wondering what all the fuss was about.

What's less satisfying about the book is its relative lack of a broader theory of what's going on here. There's lots of detail, and some passion, about what's wrong, but not a compelling vision of what we can do to make it right.

To her credit, Vander Weele does explore school struggles in other cities, especially ones that have worked and from which Chicago might learn something. She shows, for example, how Kentucky legislators funded the overhaul of their schools with a \$1.4 billion tax increase, a good part of it going for teacher training. Illinois politicians, in contrast, appear to believe the schools run on moonshine, not money. (One of my favorite moments last fall was hearing a news reporter describe the resolution of the budget crisis as a "state bailout"—when, in fact, the state wasn't even considering bailing the schools out, but was merely allowing them to borrow money against baseless hopes of better times to come.)

But, beyond funding, there is another crucial difference between Kentucky and Chicago, Vander Weele argues: Kentucky instituted a system in which schools that improve are rewarded, while schools that fail are held accountable. Chicago's restructuring, in contrast, turned responsibility for the schools over to new school councils, offered them no training, gave them no time to prepare for massive new burdens like choosing a principal or writing a school improvement plan—and then instituted no controls to make sure they did the job.

Mary O'Connell is the author of School Reform Chicago Style: How Citizens Organized to Change Public Policy. Her son attends a Chicago public school; her daughter is a graduate.

"Illinois legislators acted wisely when they adopted Chicago school reform at the behest of a massive parents' movement," she concludes. "But beyond the cameras and the spotlights, the legislature guaranteed the system would fail."

Vander Weele's recommendations are thus centered on the standard management argument for better controls. Strengthen the office of inspector general. Create an investigatory office within the State Board of Education. Conduct criminal background checks of council members, and remove those who violate the law. Make it easier to fire teachers, and make firing automatic for anyone convicted of violence, drug or sex crimes. These and a long list of similar recommendations aim to tighten up administration, facilitate public oversight and make it easier to get rid of incompetents and crooks.

Vision, strategy needed

Yes, but then what? Eliminating waste and fraud, and getting rid of burnt-out teachers would certainly be a step in the right direction. But that's not enough to light up the eyes of the children or give the teachers hope.

For that you need a vision—like the vision that drove all those folks down to Springfield six years ago. Their vision of community control was a powerful vision, and, as Vander Weele acknowledges, it has since created hundreds of "heroes on the front lines" who are making a difference, school by school. But community control was always a *political* vision, concentrating on how

the schools could be run. It now needs to be matched by an *educational* vision that forcefully and creatively develops the vast potential of Chicago's children.

Such a vision is pretty much lacking in the laundry list of secondary recommendations Vander Weele offers—more training for teachers, principals, school councils; early childhood education; lower class size; better libraries; etc. These are all solid recommendations—who can argue with the suggestion that "Teachers should also be provided basic supplies, such as tissues, toilet paper, pens, pencils, and copying paper"? But then again, where else would it be necessary to urge such a step under the heading "reform"?

Unfortunately, Vander Weele doesn't suggest where the money for the toilet paper and the training and the rest is actually going to come from—and she doesn't even attempt to put a price tag on it. To weary parents who have watched state legislators turn their backs on Chicago's children for all these years, it's not much help to read about all the kinds of programs we should have, without a strategy for getting them. And, beyond that, none of this gives us a really compelling vision of schools that would really work for our children.

So, responsibility for coming up with that vision remains where it is right now: with teachers and principals and parents. Judging by last year's research on how reform is working in individual schools, some of those front-line workers clearly have such a vision. But others are groping for it, while still others don't have a clue. I can hear my father saying, "You didn't think it would be easy, did you?" ■



HOW TEACHERS ARE CHANGING SCHOOLS

Ellen Meyers and Paul McIssac, editors.
New York City: IMPACT II—The Teachers Network.
1994. 100 pages.

Mixing case studies with first-person "reports from the field," this book provides how-to information for teachers who are trying to bring about positive change at their schools.

Topics are team-building, school-based management, creating a vision, school restructuring, developing school-community relationships, schools-within-schools and teacher-designed schools.

The book includes sample materials, references and a directory of education reform organizations.

Available for \$13.95 + \$1.05 s&h from IMPACT II, P.O. Box 577, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013-0577. 10% discount for 25 or more copies sent to a single address and paid for with a single check. ■



RETHINKING OUR CLASSROOMS:

Teaching for Equity and Justice

by the editors of *ReThinking Schools*.
Milwaukee: 1994. 366 pages.

R*ethinking Schools* is an independent journal, published quarterly and written by teachers and education activists, that promotes progressive teaching ideas and analyzes education policies.

In this special edition of the journal, five *Rethinking Schools* editors have compiled articles, poems, lesson plans, teaching tips, sample student handouts and lists of books, videos and other resources—all aimed at helping teachers tackle issues such as social justice, sexism and racism.

Some of the material is aimed at helping teachers find or design multicultural, non-biased curricula. Other

readings are designed to help teachers cope with their own, perhaps unrecognized, biases that could hinder their efforts to best serve students of color.

Articles are written by teachers, scholars and researchers; some of the poems are written by students.

Available for \$6.00 + \$3.60 s&h from *Rethinking Schools*, 1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212.

Discounts are available for bulk orders from individual schools, school districts and other institutions; for more information, call (414) 964-9646. To fax an order: (414) 964-7220. Sample copies of *Rethinking Schools* are available for \$3.50. ■

Updates

JOHN BOOZ



Over 2,500 teachers seeking jobs in the Chicago Public Schools showed up in June for the school system's annual two-day teacher fair, where they met with principals whose schools had openings.

Summer news roundup

Inspector general in, surprise gun searches out . . .

BLOWING THE WHISTLE ON FRAUD The school system's new inspector general, former FBI agent Kenneth Holt, announced in mid-June that his office has set up a telephone hotline for reporting fraud and abuse. Holt, who works under the aegis of the School Finance Authority, was hired in April after the Legislature mandated that the post be created.

By late August, the hotline had received an estimated 175 calls, according to investigator Tom Sherry. The hotline number is (312) 939-1090.

BAN ON SOME GUN SEARCHES A Cook County Circuit Court judge ruled in late June that unannounced weapons searches using metal detectors are unconstitutional. The ruling was prompted by two cases, dismissed by the judge, in which students were caught with guns in unannounced searches.

Police and school officials urged the Cook County State's Attorney's Office to appeal the ruling.

RETENTION A HARSH REALITY Board of Education policy says students should not be retained in a grade more than once. But an internal board study showed that 182 students ages 16 and 17—who should be juniors and seniors—will enter high school as freshmen this fall. Supt. Argie Johnson called for more academic and social support for such students, and urged teens who are behind to attend summer school. The report also showed that 4,825 15-year-olds—who have been retained at least once—will also be freshmen this year.

PRINCIPALS LOSE REFORM CHALLENGE A federal judge in July rejected a lawsuit filed by Chicago principals charging that the Reform Act is unconstitutional because it revoked the lifetime tenure

principals had before reform.

The lawsuit was the second major challenge to the Act filed by principals. They won the first suit, which charged that the original local school council election process violated the Constitution's "one-person, one-vote" principle. The Legislature then changed the election process.

THE \$50 MILLION QUESTION The School Board's tentative 1995 budget, unveiled in mid-July, showed a \$50 million surplus—the largest year-end balance since 1990. The savings are due to some 2,600 early retirements and to last fall's late, chaotic start to the school year, which left hundreds of positions unfilled for weeks or months.

Board members at first advocated spending the windfall on new computer equipment, stipends for teachers to buy classroom materials and other "wish list" items. School reform activists argued, though, that the money should be used to help reduce next year's projected shortfall of some \$300 million. The board later agreed to spend half and save half.

At the same time, board figures also showed a \$70 million carryover of state Chapter 1 funds. Board officials cautioned, though, that the real figure is probably half that, because schools' final spending plans had not yet been entered into the board's computer system.

The news created a brief, anti-board flurry in the media, including at least one editorial castigating the board for supposedly failing to keep better track of its budget.

THE GREAT SNOWBLOWER CAPER Over \$400,000 worth of snowblowers, lawn mowers, hedge trimmers and similar equipment was reported stolen from two Chicago schools over a six-year period, according to a July 18 article in the *Chicago Sun-Times*.

The board, which said the case had been referred to the Cook County State's Attorney's Office for investigation, reacted by requiring all equipment purchases to be approved by the Purchasing Department and banning the practice of

"stringing," in which equipment purchases are made in lots of less than \$10,000 to avoid competitive bidding requirements.

IOWA TESTS STAY, FOR NOW Chicago students will continue to take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and their high school counterpart, the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency, for at least another year, school officials reported.

A task force convened by Supt. Argie Johnson had been considering a variety of alternatives, including a different nationally standardized test and a process for granting schools exemptions. (See *CATALYST*, March 1994.)

The co-directors of the Consortium on Chicago School Research, an independent federation of research organizations, will guide efforts by the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning to find new ways to measure achievement and help schools progress. Anthony Bryk is on loan half-time from the University of Chicago, and John Easton, director of monitoring and research for the Chicago Panel on School Policy, is serving as interim director of the board's research department.

Al Bennett, dean of University College at Roosevelt University, and Ruben Carriedo, assistant superintendent for planning, assessment and accountability in San Diego, Calif., will co-chair a team of local and national experts that will offer advice on restructuring the department. Fall 1995 is the target date for restructuring.

Both Easton and Bennett once worked in the board's research department.

CASE OF THE MISSING PAYCHECKS Hundreds of summer-school employees lined up at Pershing Road to complain of missing or shorted paychecks. Some reportedly wait for hours to explain their problem, only to be treated rudely by payroll office employees. Michael Edwards, director of the Bureau of Payroll Services, blamed staff turnover at central office for the problem, and added that many of the system's new principals—inexperienced in Board of Education procedures—failed to provide the all-important position numbers that identify teachers in the budget and allow them to be paid. One teacher, however, told a *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter in August that the problem only encourages good people to leave the system. "I'm the only fool

hanging around," the teacher said. "Five more years, and I'm gone."

SCHOOL BOARD SLOTS STILL UNFILLED Mayor Richard M. Daley again failed to meet the deadline set by law for acceptance or rejection of School Board candidates recommended by the School Board Nominating Commission. At *CATALYST* press time, he had not yet acted.

Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Commissioner Joseph Gardner, a probable challenger to Daley in next year's mayoral race, vowed to take the matter to the Illinois Attorney General's Office if Daley didn't make his choices soon. Last year, Daley waited months before finally rejecting every nominee; he said they lacked sufficient business and financial experience.

Seven seats on the 15-member board must be filled.

SCHOOL CORRUPTION HEARINGS Members of the Senate Education Committee held a one-day hearing in August to investi-

gate claims of corruption in the system. Local school council members told of mishandled funds at their schools, including principals who gave extra pay to favored teachers. Some school reform activists, though, characterized the hearings as a political ploy to blacken the Board of Education's reputation, so that the Legislature could justify not giving the system financial help.

The day before the hearings, Supt. Argie Johnson announced the arrest of a board employee who had allegedly bilked the system out of \$50,000 in computer equipment; Committee member Sen. Frank Watson (R-Greenville) called Johnson's timing "ironic," but Johnson denied she intended to upstage the hearings. At the hearings, Watson renewed his call to split up Chicago into several smaller districts.

The School Board was scheduled to tell its side of the story to the committee on Sept. 1. *Lorraine Forte, Linda Lenz*

New principal contracts

The School Board approved the following principal contracts over the summer.

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS Four-year contracts, expiring in June 1998: **Richard Alexander**, Woodson North; **Sally Acker**, Funston; **John Arneri**, Nightingale; **Diana Azcoitia**, Kanoon; **Hiram Broyles**, Burbank; **Jacqueline Carothers**, Van Vliissingen; **Ronald K. Clayton**, Walsh; **Joan D. Cristler**, Dixon; **Rebeca de los Reyes**, Orozco; **Thomas J. Doyle**, Byrne; **Ana Maria Espinoza**, Pilsen Community; **David Espinoza**, Muñoz Marin; **Leslie L. Fant**, Goodlow; **Cydney Fields**, Ray; **Ruby Ford** (previously a coordinator for Teachers for Chicago), Libby; **Albert E. Foster Jr.**, Metcalfe; **Shayle Gerstein**, Brown; **Robert Gutter**, Wright; **Deborah Hammond**, Poe; **Maurice Haynes**, Copernicus; **Alicia Hill**, Evergreen; **Geraldine F. Johnson**, McClellan; **Frederick Jones**, Grant; **Paul Jordan Jr.**, Mt. Vernon; **Marjorie Joy**, Lee.

Kathryn B. Kemp, Clark; **Charles Kyle** (previously, an administrator at Triton Community College; author of *Kids First*, a book examining the history of reform), Pritzker; **Denise Little**, Hefferan; **Rudy Joan Lubov**, Bateman; **Darlene McClendon**, Northside Learning Center; **Martin J. McGrath**, Hurley; **Amy Weiss Narea**, LaSalle Language Academy; **William H. Meuer** (previously, principal of Carlson

Washburne Junior High in Winnetka), Norwood Park; **David E. Morgan** (previously acting assistant principal at Yale), O'Toole; **Margaret J. O'Keefe**, Louis Armstrong; **Edna B. Perry**, Wacker; **Maria L. Prato**, Clay; **Pernecie Pugh**, Truth; **Rosa H. Ramirez**, Madero; **Delores Rease**, Schmid; **Reynes Reyes**, Brentano; **Gloria J. Rice-Woolfolk**, Farady; **Gloria Roman**, De Duprey; **Carmen Sanchez**, Irving Park; **Elena Savoy**, Wildwood; **Doris M. Scott**, Medill; **Dean W. Thompson**, Dunne; **Muriel K. Von Albade**, Barnard; **Patricia Wells**, Franklin Fine Arts Center; **Lucille W. White**, McDowell; **Lucille A. Willgale** (previously, principal at St. Peters Elementary in Skokie), Haugan.

HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS Four-year contracts, expiring in June 1998: **Floyd Banks**, Dunbar Vocational; **Powhatan Collins**, Whitney Young Magnet; **Faye M. Grays**, Near North; **Laurence Negovan**, Las Casas Occupational; **Eva Nickolich**, Kennedy; **Juanita Tucker**, Phillips; **Dorothy J. Williams**, Flower Vocational.

ONE-YEAR CONTRACTS (expiring in June 1995): **Margo S. Baines** (previously a teacher at Dubois), Warren; **Frances Carroll**, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center; **Cheryl J. Rutherford**, Lindblom High; **Mary A. Williams**, Tesla Alternative High School.

Antione Wright

MERGER

continued from page 1

environment than existing high schools provide.

"We have been considering ways to approach the board and make our school part of the public system," she said. "The Corporate school merger perhaps creates a mechanism for groups like ours."

"We're looking at it [the merger] carefully," said Pat Ford, who helps direct the Small Schools Workshop, based at the University of Illinois at Chicago. The workshop has been helping several groups of teachers that would like to create their own schools within the public school system.

"We will be looking to see if they [the school] can retain their unique qualities," added Ford. "If they can, it could be a model."

CTU welcomes school

The Foundations School, a teacher-run school-within-a-school, has sought from Day 1 to become a separate public school. It has been unsuccessful, in part, because the Board of Education has been under pressure from Mayor Richard M. Daley to close schools. (See *CATALYST*, December 1992.) Foundations opened in September 1992 in Price Elementary and is moving this fall to Phillips High.

McClain and others seeking to open schools had been looking to the Legislature to establish so-called charter schools or to adopt Gov. Jim Edgar's proposed Chicago Learning Zone. Under both proposals, selected new or existing public schools would enjoy new freedom to innovate. However, election-year political wrangling bottled up both ideas.

The Chicago Teachers Union applauded public-school status for the Corporate Community School but opposes bringing other private schools into the public-school fold.

Joseph Kellman, the corporate executive who founded the Corporate Community School, "has put his money where his mouth is," explained CTU Vice President Pamelyn Massarsky. "He has nothing but children's interests at heart. We see a big difference between Kellman and privatizers like [Chris] Whittle, who are out to destroy public education."

Massarsky said she had had separate talks with Kellman about forming a part-



The Corporate Community School features a pre-school program for 2-year-olds.

nership between the Corporate Community School and the union's Quest Center, which is supporting innovation by teachers. "We saw it as a Quest satellite school that could share information with other schools and build bridges," she said, expressing hope that the merger will move that idea forward.

Kellman and Vernon R. Loucks Jr., the head of Baxter International and chair of Corporate Community Schools of America, began talking merger with the public schools two years ago, according to sources inside the Board of Education. But they ran into the same obstacle that Foundations Schools ran into: the pressure to *close* schools.

For decades, Kellman had been an outspoken critic of the public school bureaucracy. "It was, after all, the rigidity of the system, its cookie-cutter approach to the complexities of education, that had prompted us to found our own school in Lawndale," Kellman explained. However, it became increasingly difficult for Kellman and his business colleagues to raise \$2 million a year to cover the school's budget.

"We've always seen the school as a lightning rod," added Walter "Bud" Kraus, Loucks's assistant. "When it became apparent that our ideas about education wouldn't be picked up by osmosis, we realized we had to join the system."

In a sense, the negotiations were tri-lateral because, according to Pat Harvey, school officials had to convince parents in Subdistrict 4 that "we were not bending over backwards for one set of children at the expense of another." The

Corporate Community School will enjoy no special privileges and will have to operate under the same rules as every other school in the system, Harvey said.

For example, the school no longer will be able to expel troublesome students or fire teachers at the discretion of the principal. (According to outgoing Principal Maxine Duster, three teachers were dismissed and three students expelled during her 15 months at the school—out of a faculty of 12 and a student body of 280.) The school also will be required to accept its share of special-education students. Enrollment will continue to be by lottery, with all Subdistrict 4 students eligible to apply.

In exchange for the support of subdistrict parents and officials, the school's corporate backers agreed to raise about \$700,000 a year for at least five years to help the school maintain its special programs, according to Primus J. Mootry, the school's project director. They also will provide consultants to help create a computer network among schools in the district and will pay the costs of a full-time liaison between the school and the subdistrict, Mootry said.

New post for Deanes?

However, controversy has arisen around that post. The Subdistrict 4 council proposed James Deanes, president of the Parent/Community Council and a member of the Subdistrict 4 Council, for the \$60,000-a-year position.

But at an August 17 meeting, Kellman announced that the appointment would have to be delayed 90 to 180 days until school operating costs could be raised—for example, private funds will continue to pay for rent and maintenance. The delay appeared to be "backtracking" to several council members and in Deanes' words, "could throw the whole merger process into question."

Deanes has been a skeptic of corporate involvement in education but believes the merger sets a good precedent. "For one thing, the process went through the subdistrict rather than being strictly top-down through the board," he explained. Asked what Subdistrict 4 schools could learn from the Corporate Community School, Deanes said, "It is more a matter of what they can learn from us," citing decision making by a local school council.

Catherine Moore, the mother of a July graduate of Corporate Community School, agrees that parental participation may increase. "We've had good involvement, but not at the level of an LSC," she said.

The merger was a difficult issue for parents. "We all had reservations because of all the problems happening in public schools. Every parent had to think it out for themselves," Moore said, referring to the decision whether to keep their children there.

Although her son is going to Curie High School this fall, Moore said she will stay connected to Corporate Community School, serving on its interim local school council.

"I chose the Corporate school for my son, not to avoid the public schools, but simply because it offered added resources, which hopefully will remain after the merger process," Moore explained. She said she was especially attracted to the school's non-graded lower grades, which "forced teachers to evaluate the child in a deeper way."

Mootry agrees with Deanes that the Corporate Community School can learn from its neighbors. But he noted that his school offers an especially good model for serving youngsters' varied needs; the school is "the hub" of a network of 75 to 80 social service agencies. "Schools don't need to become social agencies themselves," he said. "Rather, they can serve as facilitators in pulling the various agencies in around them."

Duster, who is voluntarily stepping down, is confident that the school will be able to continue its unusual practices. "The principal will still be able choose the staff within the framework of school reform," she said. "Private donations and Chapter 1 funds should provide plenty of flexibility and allow our school to keep most of its after-school programs."

Massarsky of the CTU said the union would have no problem with Corporate Community School teachers continuing to work 11 months a year instead of 10, so long as they obtain a waiver from the union contract; currently it takes approval by 63.5 percent of a school's union members to obtain a waiver. "Our contract is not an impediment, and we aren't adversaries," the CTU leader stressed.

Duster, a former project director for the Chicago Urban League, is concerned, though, about the possible loss of the school's part-time nurse and of busing for some students. Under board rules,

only children who live more than a mile-and-a-half from school are eligible for busing. Both nursing and transportation could be purchased with discretionary funds, but that, she noted, would be up to the local school council.

Rollie Jones, the special education coordinator in Subdistrict 4, will serve as acting principal until a permanent local school council is elected in 1995 and chooses a principal. The school's parent advisory group will serve as an interim council.

Under the new arrangement, teachers at the Corporate Community School will acquire a pension plan—they have none now—and increased financial benefits. Salaries will remain about the same, Duster said, noting they had been "quite comparable to the Chicago public schools" all along. Teachers will have to get state certificates, but the board is setting up a process to ease the way. Teachers also will win the protection of tenure and seniority rights.

The merger has benefits for the school system as a whole, the negotiators

said. Supt. Johnson noted that the additional students will generate additional state and federal aid. However, Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on School Policy, said that the school's cost to the system will exceed any new revenue by about \$2,000 per pupil. The reason is that most Chicago school funding comes from property taxes, which are not tied to enrollment—that is, rising enrollment will not bring increased property taxes. Hess also notes that both state and federal Chapter 1 dollars are locked in for this year, so the Corporate School's share will have to be drawn from elsewhere in the system.

Mootry, who grew up in North Lawndale, believes the merger could have a positive effect on long-term funding. "The Corporate school experience helped educate its contributors about the needs of public education," he said, speculating that they would be less likely to oppose increased funding for public schools now that *their* school is a public school. ■

Extras are standard at Corporate Community School

When the Corporate Community School opened its doors in South Lawndale in 1988, its sponsors saw it as a "flagship school" for a planned national network that would "help shape American urban public education in the 21st century," according to its own literature.

Joseph Kellman, a corporate executive who founded the Better Boys Foundation, vowed that the Corporate Community School would provide better education than the public schools, at the same per-pupil cost.

Its unique offerings include:

- An 11-month school year. Teachers, who will become union members, may opt to get a waiver and continue to work the extra month.

- Extensive pre-school education; students enroll when they are 2.

- The school is open to the community from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with students spending 7.5 hours a day in classes.

- Teachers hold their jobs at the discretion of the principal; as a public school, teachers will be protected by

tenure and seniority rights.

Other features of the Corporate Community School can be found in some of Chicago's more innovative public schools. They include:

- An "integrated" curriculum that weaves together reading, writing, spelling, math and science from pre-school through 8th grade.

- A strong emphasis on teaching social values and putting basic facts into historical, social and environmental context.

- Letter grades are not given until grades 7 and 8. Instead, teachers write assessments in each area of learning and development. Progress is judged by portfolios of students' work.

- The school serves as the hub for a network of some 75 community-based services and resources, including housing, health care, job training and family counseling.

- There is one teacher and one assistant for each class and one special education teacher. Class sizes are comparable to those in the public schools, with 25 to 30 children per class.

Michael Klonsky

Comings and goings

AT PERSHING ROAD **Carlos Azcoitia**, principal of Spry Elementary, is succeeding **Paul Vega** as assistant superintendent, Office of Reform . . . **Alice Perez Peters**, principal of Moos Elementary, has been appointed assistant superintendent, Department of Language and Cultural Programs. She succeeds **Rodolfo Serna**, who has become director of the department's Dual Language program . . . **Lula M. Ford**, principal of Beethoven Elementary, is now assistant superintendent for funded programs . . . **William McGowan**, principal of Mt. Greenwood Elementary, has been named assistant to the deputy superintendent for academic support . . . **Cozette Buckney**, principal of Jones Metro High School, has become project manager for the T.I.M.E. Project, which seeks to "reengineer" the school system's administrative and support services to serve schools better.

ALSO AT PERSHING ROAD **Marcia E. Turner**, director of research and planning at the Martin Luther King Jr. Center in Atlanta, has joined the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning as an administrator . . . **R. Bruce Murray**, an independent contractor specializing in real estate investments, has been appointed director of the Bureau of Real Estate . . . **Kevin J. Byrne**, chief financial officer for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs, has been appointed director of financial planning and budgeting . . . **Bruce T. Marchiafava**, acting director of research, evaluation and planning, has been appointed special assistant to the chief financial officer . . . **Michael A. Rankins**, president and chief executive officer of Reliance Construction Group Corp. of Oklahoma City, has been appointed director of procurement and contracts.

IN THE FIELD **Julio Cruz**, administrator in Subdistrict 3, has been selected as sub-district superintendent.

MOVING IN/ON **Jill Darrow**, associate director of Prince Charitable Trusts, is now executive director of the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation . . . **Greg Darnieder**, former executive director of the Chicago Cluster Initiative, is now executive director of the Steans Family Foundation . . . Under a Princeton University fellowship program, **Anastasia Crosswhite** will serve for a year as program director for the CityWide Coalition for School Reform, working on projects to increase teacher involvement in reform and help local school council members lobby for more school funding . . . **Yvonne Minor**, executive director of the Chicago Cluster Initiative and former prin-

cipal of Dyett Middle School, has become principal of a new model public high school in Buffalo, N.Y.

NEW NAMES, NEW LOCATIONS Wilson Occupational High has been renamed **Jacqueline Vaughn Occupational High**, in honor of the late president of the Chicago Teachers Union . . . The **Foundations School**, a teacher-designed elementary school that espouses progressive teaching methods, has moved from Price Elementary to a wing of Phillips High . . . **Goldsmith School**, a branch of Burnham Elementary that was closed two years ago as a cost-cutting measure, will reopen this fall to provide additional classrooms for special education students.

TRAINING MANUAL FOR LSCs School reform organizations that have developed training materials for local school councils are invited to share those materials with the Board of Education's Office of Reform, which is compiling a comprehensive training manual. Organizations that participate will be listed in the manual and receive free copies. Materials (preferably camera-ready copies or computer disks) should be submitted by Sept. 30 to **Donna Sumanas**,



Carlos Azcoitia



Alice Perez Peters

Coordinator, Bureau of Training/Office for Reform, 5E(n), 1819 W. Pershing Rd., Chicago, IL 60609 or call (312) 535-7407.

SAVING TIME, MONEY Two University of Chicago faculty members saved the Chicago Public Schools \$300,000 this year by developing a new supply delivery plan, reports the Spring 1994 issue of *GSB Chicago*, a publication of the university's School of Business. The plan cut supply delivery times from as much as eight weeks to only one to two days. The faculty members, who worked on a volunteer basis, are **Assistant Professor Donald D. Eisenstein** and **Associate Professor Ananth V. Iyer**.

PIONEERS IN TECHNOLOGY **Lawndale Community Academy** is one of three schools in Illinois and 24 in the Great Lakes region to receive the Pioneering Partners for Educational Technology award from the Council of Great Lakes Governors. Lawndale won for developing a program that teaches word processing, math and

computer skills by dividing classes into corporate "departments" that manage budgets and develop business proposals. Winners received \$3,000 cash grants, will be linked to each other via an electronic network and are eligible for an additional \$2,000 in matching funds.

AMOCO AWARDS The **Amoco Foundation** has awarded \$10,000 to each of five Chicago public schools for programs to improve student learning in math and/or science. The schools are Healy Elementary, Hitch Elementary, Joplin Elementary, Lawrence Elementary and Schurz High.

TUTORING NETWORK The Cabrini Connections tutoring program has launched the Tutor/Mentor Connection in a first-ever effort to link tutoring programs across the city. The Connection is also updating its comprehensive directory of programs, and is recruiting corporations to provide tutors in communities with the greatest need. For more information, call (312) 467-2889.

LEAVING THE FIELD The following principals have taken early retirement: **Yvonne H. Adams**, Faraday; **Daniel G. Breen**, Ward; **Reginald V. Brown**, Washington High; **Leona Collins**, Parker; **Jacqueline Connolly**, Cameron; **Patricia D. Graham**, Simeon Vocational High; **Donald J. Hill**, Hayt; **Nelda R. Hobbs**, Field; **De Calvin Hughes**, Austin High; **Alma C. Jones**, Carver Primary; **Lonnie Jones**, Hirsch Metro High; **Naomi R. Kilpatrick**, Carver Middle; **Carl D. La Susa**, Everett; **William Levin**, Pilsen; **Donna J. Macey**, Lake View High; **Donald J. Moran**, Grant; **George Pazell**, Aldridge; **Edna B. Perry**, Wacker; **Edward A. Ploog**, McCutcheon; **Regina Rabin**, Jahn; **Philip A. Ragan**, Penn; **Deanna Rattner**, Mitchell; **Dorothy M. Rosch**, Clinton; **Sarah A. Swarcz**, Solomon; **George J. Scripp**, Brenan; **Robert P. Storozuk**, Rogers; **Carl A. Van Kast**, Garvey; **Jean R. Walker**, Goethe; **Thomas G. Walter**, Belding.

LEAVING PERSHING ROAD The following administrators have taken early retirement: **Vaughn Barber**, interim director, Bureau of Real Estate; **Lutaf Dhanidina**, director, Financial Planning and Budgeting; **Billie J. Gray**, assistant superintendent, Special Education and Pupil Support; **Walter Kramer**, coordinator, Office for Reform; **Angela T. Miller**, director, Special Education and Pupil Support; **Richard W. Ronvik**, director, Gifted Programs; **Maurice E. Smith**, facilitator, Department of Instructional Support; **David E. Tate**, administrator, Subdistrict 2; **Paul Vega**, associate superintendent, Office for Reform.

Antione Wright, Lorraine Forte

It's About Time!

Before the end of the last school year, the Chicago Public School system unveiled the Transformation Initiatives. These are several multi-faceted, comprehensive efforts to improve student academic achievement. One of them, called T.I.M.E. (To Improve Management of Education), seeks to "reengineer" administrative and support processes that serve the city's 550 public schools. What follows is the first of a series of monthly articles about T.I.M.E.

**By Cozette Buckney
Project Manager, T.I.M.E.**

I've probably been asked more questions about my participation on the T.I.M.E. project than I have about anything else in my career. This makes sense, of course, because T.I.M.E. is a "big picture" idea whose outcomes will impact virtually every aspect of the Transformation Initiatives.

I thought I'd use this space this month to answer questions my core team members and I are asked about T.I.M.E. most often:

What is the purpose of the T.I.M.E. Project? To develop an efficient, service-oriented administrative system that supports local site decision-making authority focused on student learning and achievement. We're going to do this by "reengineering" key processes throughout the school system. We're initially enlisting participation of all people who make decisions affecting student learning as well as those who are affected by those decisions.

What do you mean by, "reengineering"? It means radically changing the way work gets done so that significant improvements in speed, cost and quality — consistent with the vision of the school system — are achieved.

Who's involved? The core planning team is a cross section of people from the school system's workforce. Both local school and central office functions were considered in the team's makeup. As the project progresses, more people will be added to the team in order to accomplish the mission.

How is T.I.M.E. being funded? The salaries of the core planning team members are supported by foundation grants, the Board of Education and the Chicago Teachers Union. CSC Index, the management consulting firm that pioneered the concept of reengineering, is the lead consulting group on the project. CSC Index is providing its services free. All other expenses will be underwritten by grants and contributions. Approximately \$1.5 million is being sought to support activities related to the project.

So, what does the core planning team do? The members are working to make recommendations for changing key processes to the Board of Education through the General Superintendent, the Chief Financial Officer and the Chair of the Operations Committee. It will focus on actions and results. The project will be directed toward actual implementation rather than merely issuing reports.



Buckney

When will we see change? Soon. Before implementing changes, we need to focus on which processes are the greatest impediments to supporting local schools. Process changes that don't require major technology or redesign will be implemented immediately.

How is reengineering going to affect me? We have to reconfigure all resources and services so student learning is improved. This means everyone must work toward this goal. And, this means everyone is going to be impacted by reengineering in some way or another.

Yes, but does this mean cutting jobs or making do with less? Although savings of overall cost may accrue as a result of T.I.M.E., cutting jobs is not its intent. This project is about redesigning the way the work gets done. It may require learning new skills and will require changes in the way resources and services are allocated.

If you have any questions, write the T.I.M.E. Project, c/o FRAC, 21 South Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60603. Or, call us at 312-541-4068.

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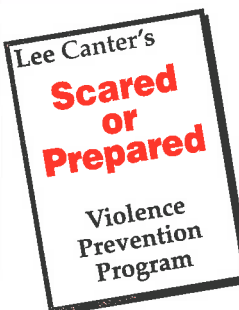
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Bright Ideas

Newberry's report cards tell whole story

Four years ago, faculty at Newberry Math and Science Academy in Lincoln Park decided to tackle the problem of accurately measuring student progress in the early grades.

"We felt traditional report cards were only telling half the story," says Newberry Principal Clifton D. Burgess. "So we started looking for an alternative."

Now, instead of using the standard Chicago Public Schools report cards, Newberry issues its own progress reports for children in kindergarten through 3rd grade.

The oversized, 11 x 17 progress reports require teachers to evaluate students on a variety of skills in each subject area, rather than give only a single letter grade for the whole subject.

In reading, for example, teachers rate students on oral reading, comprehension, attention during class activities and independent reading; in math, they rate students on understanding of concepts, problem solving and basic computation skills. And in kindergarten, teachers evaluate students on basic skills like identifying colors and tying shoes.



Third-grade teacher Susan Grant goes over Newberry's new report card with students. The new card does not use traditional letter grades.

The reports don't use traditional letter grades; instead, they use an "S" to reflect success, a "P" to show progress and an "N" to indicate a need for improvement. If students transfer to other schools, Newberry translates the grades into numerical codes for the school system's computerized reporting system.

The reports also leave space for

teachers to write comments each quarter and for parents to write back—something that teachers say has helped improve home-school relations. "It's nice meeting parents two times a year on report card pick-up days," says Burgess. "Giving parents a place to respond is a way to meet them four times a year."

Because of the number of skills that

are assessed, teachers say they spend about twice the usual time filling out the reports. But they add that the new method makes grading more accurate and fair.

The new reports "have taken away much of the frustration of grading," says 2nd-grade teacher Julie Heger. "We try to make the kids understand they're working for learning, not a grade."

Teachers also say the new system has helped parents become more familiar with their child's progress. "I felt that letter grades didn't actually tell parents how a child is learning," says 2nd-grade teacher Ethlyn Wade. "This helps a parent see exactly what is going on."

Burgess says the school is considering expanding use of the progress reports to additional grades.

For more information, contact Clifton Burgess at (312) 534-8000.

Anastasia Benshoff

If your school has a suggestion for "Bright Ideas," please send it to CATALYST/Bright Ideas, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60604. Include a contact name and phone number.

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