

Catalyst CHICAGO

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TESTING TYKES



**AS CONTROVERSIAL
HEAD START TESTING
COMES UNDER FIRE
IN CONGRESS, CPS
SEARCHES FOR A
BETTER WAY TO
MEASURE PROGRESS**

**SWITCH TO HALF-DAY
STATE PRE-K HURTS
WORKING PARENTS**

In Updates: No recess, few gym classes are the norm *PAGE 20*

Charting a course to create preschool for all in Illinois



Veronica Anderson

The results are in and sitting on the governor's desk. For two years, members of the Illinois Early Learning Council deliberated the best strategies for creating a statewide system of high-quality preschools for 3- and 4-year-olds. What they came up with is a list of recommendations that lay the foundation for a two-year program to serve poor families and children who are otherwise at-risk of failure in school.

Now, early childhood advocates and educators are keeping their fingers crossed that Gov. Rod Blagojevich will publicly endorse all of these recommendations and make a financial investment to move them forward. "It is just a matter of what makes sense to do first," says Sessy Nyman, who heads government relations for Action for Children, an advocacy group.

Meanwhile, the Rand Corporation released a study this summer that examined eight states' nascent efforts to make preschool programs universally available. In the report—"Going to Scale with High-Quality Early Education: Choices and Consequences in Universal Pre-kindergarten Efforts"—researchers explain some of the challenges state policymakers are facing.

Not the least of these concerns is how cash-strapped states pay for it, particularly when many of those studied are relying on the federal government's tightfisted domestic spending program. Two other concerns are finding enough teachers and administrators who have the background and credentials to operate top-notch preschools, and making sure that efforts to integrate pre-K with other social supports do not conflict with those agencies' child welfare goals.

Besides funding, the most difficult terrain, however, in the unchart-

ed world of universal preschool is in the realm of access and accountability. The term "universal" is itself a bit of a misnomer, say Rand researchers, because most states target their pre-K programs for certain groups of children, often defined by family income or other criteria. Even then, not every child in those designated groups is served.

Further complicating access are eligibility formulas, often with strict income guidelines, that exclude some working poor families who cannot afford to pay for high-caliber preschool programs. Instead, those families are likely to tap friends or relatives who can care for their children.

And fear is a factor, too. As preschool is swept into the public education accountability movement, some worry that academic skills will get more attention than equally important social and emotional development. Case in point: A two-year-old nationwide test for Head Start pre-K students only assesses literacy and math skills. Only now are federal officials considering adding another section that would measure non-academic areas.

Only two states—Georgia and Oklahoma—have traveled the full distance to universal pre-K. Illinois, by most counts in the Rand report, has been adept so far at steering clear

or planning ahead for obstacles. It ranked favorably last year in a national listing of state preschool programs.

But with only 75,000 children enrolled in state pre-K, we're less than halfway toward reaching the ultimate target of serving 188,000 3- and 4-year-olds. A hefty price tag of \$415 million is attached to this project, but its one that can win rebates down the road through reductions in special education, high school dropout rates and social problems that boost costs to society.

There's a long road ahead, and the next move for Illinois will come out of the governor's office. Let's hope he's quick on his feet.

ABOUT US I am pleased to introduce our new Springfield correspondent **Patrick J. Guinane**, who has been covering the statehouse for three years. His predecessor, **Daniel C. Vock**, has moved to Washington, D.C., to become a writer for Stateline.org.

I would also like to extend a warm welcome to *Catalyst Chicago's* newest editorial board members. They are **Carlos Azcoitia**, principal, Spry elementary and high schools; **Ray Boyer**, public relations consultant; **Joan Crisler**, principal, Dixon Elementary; and **Sara Spurlark**, retired director of leadership development, Center for Urban School Improvement. Beginning this year, **Dion Miller Perez** of the Telpochcalli Community Education Project will serve as board chair and **Vivian Loseth** of Youth Guidance will be vice-chair. Also, fond farewells to departing board members **Hazel B. Steward** and **Tony Wilkins**, whose insights will be greatly missed.

Veronica Anderson

PRESCHOOL QUALITY

Taking pre-K up a notch

The push for more academic content in preschool already has led to questionable testing of Head Start pre-kindergarteners. Chicago is taking a closer look at its own preschool programs with an eye for improvement. Another test to measure what youngsters learn over time may be next. **COVER STORY: PAGE 6**

HALF-DAY TAKES ITS TOLL AT MAYS

Englewood preschool loses students when district eliminates full-day format. **PAGE 8**

PRE-K GOAL: 'FUN AND ENGAGING'

A Q&A with Chief Early Childhood Education Officer Barbara Bowman. **PAGE 9**

TOO SOON FOR NATIONAL HEAD START TEST TO BEGIN DRIVING DECISIONS

A new study finds problems with the two-year-old test for preschoolers. **PAGE 10**

NEXT UP: TOUGHER STANDARDS TO ACCREDIT PRESCHOOLS

Highlights of what's to come and how one local Head Start stacks up. **PAGE 12**



JOHN BOOZ

Children make homemade Play-Doh with their teacher at Midway Head Start.

ON THE COVER: Preschool teacher Audrey Simmons hugs a new student in the district's only preschool program for low- and middle-income children. PHOTO BY JOHN BOOZ

DEPARTMENTS

UP CLOSE Page 14

- Abstinence-only curricula comes under fire

UPDATES Page 18

- Renaissance Watch: applicants face new review process
- Survey: recess, gym classes shortchanged
- CPS tells schools to find 15 minutes for exercise

Notebook	4
Viewpoints	16
Comings & Goings	24

SEE OUR NEW WEB SITE

Go to the *Catalyst* web site, www.catalyst-chicago.org, for news and resources on Chicago school reform, including:

- Spanish translations
- Citywide data from the 1980s
- Reform history news highlights

15 years
of reporting
excellence

In review

1990: To help the Interim Board grant raises, the Illinois Legislature OKs diverting, for three years, some property taxes earmarked for teacher pensions. Eventually, the diversion becomes permanent, but the pension fund remains healthy.

1995: The School Board unanimously agrees to increase, in phases, the number of science and math courses required for graduation. The plan will require 1,200 new classrooms and 240 new teachers; it will cost up to \$20 million.

2000: CPS announces its plans to launch a fee-based preschool program in February 2001. Parents will pay \$5,800 for 48 weeks of service, a relative bargain. Board officials say they hope that the program will motivate middle-class parents to give Chicago's public school system a try. Some existing providers and other advocates complain that the price will not cover the program's costs; as a result, they fear that the board will end up subsidizing preschool service for middle-class children, while needy children miss out on under-funded free programs.

For a school reform timeline stretching back to 1985, go to www.catalyst-chicago.org and click on "reform history."

Notebook

Q&A with...

Charles Kuner

Social studies teacher, Farragut High

TIMELINE

Sept. 7: First day

Although enrollment has declined by about 5,000 students since last year, attendance on the first day of school reaches 92 percent, one percentage point higher than a year ago. Businesses announce prizes that schools, students and families can earn—including groceries, rent or mortgage payments and movie tickets—for high attendance. CEO Arne Duncan admits he may face criticism for offering incentives, but says “not everyone has the mentality” that school is important.

Sept. 12: Dropouts

The district announces that its current one-year dropout rate of 10.4 percent is the lowest in a decade, and credits a new Department of Dropout Prevention. But it’s unclear how accurate the figure is, since the district calculates it by simply dividing the number of students who left school by total enrollment and excludes alternative high schools. The Consortium on Chicago School Research tracked individual freshmen and found a four-year dropout rate of 30 percent in 2004.

Sept. 19 High schools

CEO Arne Duncan announces a 10-year, \$50 million to \$100 million plan to jumpstart academic achievement in neighborhood high schools. The district and a management consulting firm spent six months analyzing data and gathering advice for improvement from teachers, students, parents and dropouts. Among the elements of the plan are new three-year curriculum sequences in math, science and English; and creating schools to serve average and lower-performing students.

ELSEWHERE

Arizona: Charter scrutiny

Nearly one in 10 charter schools could face sanctions starting next year, as the state board that oversees charters begins to develop guidelines for dealing with schools that consistently fail to make academic progress, according to the Sept. 13 *Arizona Republic*. Board members estimate that 46 charters—about 9 percent of some 500 charters statewide—could face closure under the tougher guidelines. Arizona has more charter schools per capita than any other state.

New York: Incentive pay

A longtime congressman and the head of the city’s most prestigious school of education have urged the city and the teachers union to create pay incentives for teachers to work in low-performing schools, according to the Sept. 7 *New York Times*. Rep. Charles Rangel and Arthur Levine, presi-

dent of Teachers College at Columbia University, want to give a 25 percent bonus to teachers who agree to work an 11-month academic year in the worst-performing schools. Veteran educators designated as master teachers would get a 10 percent bonus, raising top pay to about \$90,000 per year. Starting pay for new teachers would be \$48,750, up from \$39,000 now.

Dallas: Bilingual principals

Principals at schools where at least half the enrollment is limited-English-proficient will have to become bilingual, according to the Aug. 26 *Dallas Morning News*. The new policy sparked racial controversy when the board’s three black trustees, and one white trustee, voted against the plan. The district is 65 percent Latino. ProEnglish, a national group that advocates making English the official language of the U.S., is considering a legal challenge to the policy.

IN SHORT

“The magnet program is one of the crown jewels in public education. But it’s not big enough or broad enough to get enough children into it. That’s the major shortcoming.”

U.S. District Judge Charles Kocoras at a Sept. 22 court hearing on the progress of the district’s efforts to meet requirements of its federal desegregation consent decree.

Two years ago, Farragut High social studies teacher Charles Kuner and former colleague Matthew Katz, a lawyer who taught in the school’s legal careers program, began working on a project that would serve the community as well as educate their students. The end result was the David Cerda Legal Clinic, named after a Farragut graduate who was the state’s first Latino judge and Latino appellate court justice. Students in Kuner’s class help volunteer lawyers with legal research and also learn about public policy-making and government. Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher talked with Kuner about the clinic’s work.

Tell me about the genesis of the legal clinic.

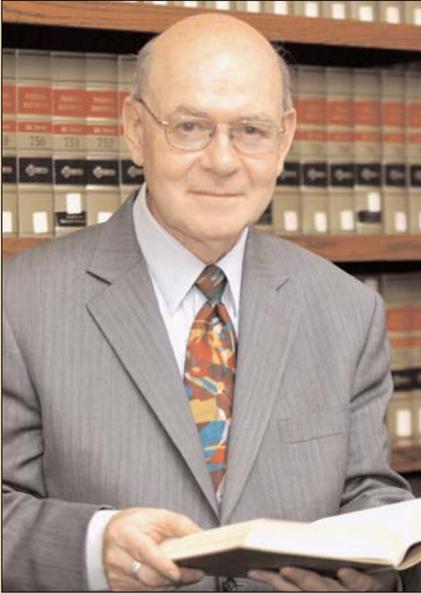
We wanted a project that would be practical and not only benefit the school and its students but the two communities, La Villita [Little Village] and North Lawndale. A lot of students and adults have legal problems or concerns. We decided to have the students take a general survey to see what people in the community felt were serious problems. A lot of the problems, such as lack of police response and illegal guns and gangs, had legal aspects.

So you came up with the idea for a legal clinic to help people address these issues.

That’s right. We thought it would fit in nicely with our U.S. history and law classes. We had students go through a list of agencies and do research and interviews to find out what legal services were already being offered in the city. They made presentations on what they found. We discovered people in both communities were not familiar at all with any of these organizations. They felt it was important to have a legal clinic here in the community.

Some administrators feel that if schools offer legal advice to students they could be sued if the case doesn’t go well.

A lot of other principals would say “No” to this because they could see the ramifications. But our principal, Edward Guerra, felt that this would be good for both communities. We do have a disclaimer that clients sign so the school won’t be sued for malfeasance or misrepresentation.



JOHN BOOZ

What legal problems do you typically encounter?

A good many cases deal with immigration. We had lawyers talk to our bilingual division classes about immigration and what students can do if they want to go to college even though their parents' status may be illegal. But sometimes it may not be legal help people need. Instead, it might be a welfare agency or something of that sort that they need to be referred to.

Tell me a success story.

I had a young lady in my class last year who was a victim of a drive-by shooting. As a result [of her injuries], she drags her legs when she walks. To some extent, her cognitive abilities are also affected. Her mother did not know the process to get her daughter on permanent disability from Social Security. We had a lawyer who specialized in physical disability cases. The girl went in, met the lawyer, and when I saw her later she had a great big smile on her face. The lawyer explained the process her mother would have to go through to get disability. Now, rather than her mother having to worry about coping economically, she'll be able to get some money for her.

What about the law class?

Last year, I had some [law students] who were finishing out their third year. I used them as paralegals in the office and some of them taught the class, which I supervised. That helped a great deal because I'm not a lawyer myself. We did mock trials in the classroom, so I brought some lawyers in to work with them on how to prepare. Some of my students went out and did court observations and wrote legal briefs. Some of them may want to become paralegals or lawyers themselves, but that's not necessarily the goal. As citizens, understanding how the law works, how the court system works, how the government works and so on, is important for them. ■

ASK CATALYST

What happened to administrators who were cited for violating district rules in a 2004 Inspector General's report?

Anonymous

The report cited nine administrators, none of whom were identified by CPS. However, two names were leaked to the press, most notably Principal Pamela Dyson of Gwendolyn Brooks High, who created 34 fake classes to gain four extra teaching positions. Dyson was issued a warning resolution, which carries the threat of dismissal.

Only one principal was fired. He had purchased more than \$133,000 in educational materials from his curriculum coordinator's company, but was dismissed for additional, unspecified "academic and financial" reasons. An assistant principal resigned and was designated ineligible for re-hire after he was found with pornographic images downloaded onto his computer. An assistant principal at Gallistel was suspended for 15 days. She had used a co-worker's address to enroll her son at Gallistel and understated her income so he would qualify for a free lunch. Two principals received letters of reprimand. One had hired his wife to redecorate his school's teacher's lounge. The second, Principal Dushon Brown of Curtis Elementary, held a wake in the school gym without LSC approval. Two administrators left CPS before being disciplined for failing to notify the board of their secondary employment, one as an adjunct professor, another as a CTA bus driver. One assistant principal found guilty of battery was not sanctioned because the incident was not school-related.

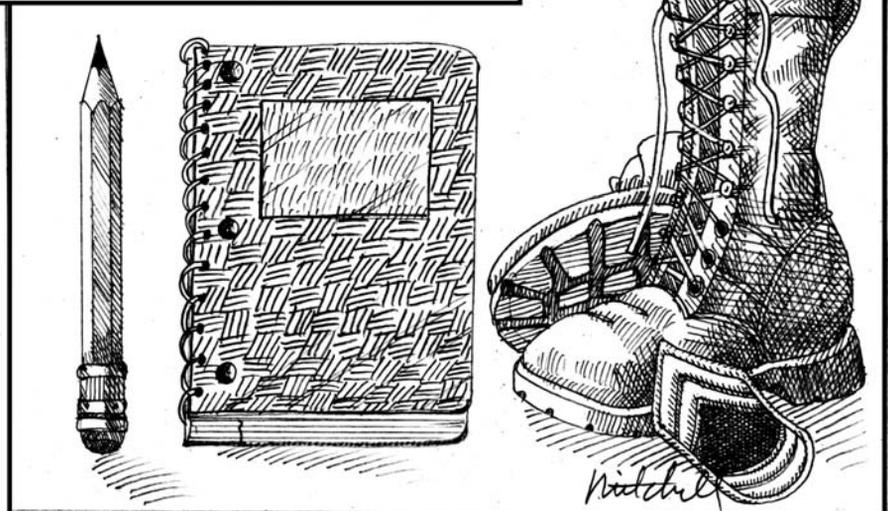
E-mail your question to askcat@catalyst-chicago.org or send it to Ask Catalyst, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60604.

MATH CLASS

While the Prairie State Achievement Exam is intended to measure academic performance, researchers at the University of Chicago found that the majority of Chicago Public Schools students who performed poorly on the PSAE were still likely to graduate. According to a September 2005 report, 75% of the students who failed all five sections of the PSAE in 2001 graduated by fall 2002. By comparison, 92% of students who passed the entire test graduated that year.

FOOTNOTE

HIGH SCHOOL SUPPLIES?



KURT MITCHELL

Taking pre-K up a notch

By Debra Williams

Testing young children is a dicey proposition. On one hand, educators and policy-makers agree that

finding out what preschoolers know and building on those skills is important. It is also essential, they say, to determine whether preschool programs are delivering the goods and sufficiently preparing youngsters for grade school.

Yet, early childhood experts warn that much is unknown about how best to teach reading and early math to 3- and 4-year-olds, and that too much emphasis on these academic skills could be detrimental.

"We know that young children can learn a lot if you give them opportunities, but we have to be very careful that we don't push children to make them unhappy about learning," says Deborah Stipek, dean of the Stanford University School of Education.

"We need accountability, we need rich data, but how do we do this in a cost-efficient way that informs teachers

about practices, centers about programs and policy-makers about [funding] allocations?" asks Paula Bloom, director of the Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University.

Proving the point is a contentious debate over the value and validity of nationwide Head Start testing. Even before the National Reporting System (NRS) was first administered two years ago, those charged with creating the test disagreed about what should be included. Since then, the test has drawn fire from educators, researchers and politicians alike, and was criticized in a Congressional study for not being up to the task of providing data that could help improve instruction. (See related story on page 10.)

Just last month, U.S. House representatives tacked on an amendment to suspend the

NRS to a bill to reauthorize Head Start.

Here, beginning this year, Chicago Public Schools will be taking stock of its own preschool programs. The district oversees some 600 preschool classrooms—342 state pre-K, 234 Head Start and 24 tuition-based. (Through community partnerships, the district funds and helps run another 400 classrooms based in child care centers in the city.)

Consultants have been hired to figure out the best way to evaluate district preschool programs, and, for the first time this year, CPS will conduct two formal observations in every preschool class to gauge program quality. The information will be used to help teachers develop plans to improve their classrooms.

The process may eventually lead to yet another assessment, one that would measure what

Pressure to raise performance and ensure that children are proficient readers by 3rd grade has shone a light on preschool. But is testing youngsters best way to measure quality?

preschool children are learning over time, says Chief Early Childhood Education Officer Barbara Bowman. "We'll look at the outcomes and what children have learned over the year," she says. "Eventually, we might want to test a sample of children."

Many blame the federal No Child Left Behind law for escalating the pressure to test and assess. Under the law, formal accountability begins in 3rd grade, when districts are required to begin testing students and report detailed results. To ensure every child is literate and armed with basic academic skills by the time they reach 3rd grade, schools have already turned up the heat in primary grades and kindergarten. Now the fire has reached preschool.

"There is a lot of pressure in preschool because of No Child Left Behind," says



CEO Arne Duncan talks with two students enrolled in the district's only combined Head Start, state pre-K and tuition-based program at South Loop Elementary.

JOHN BOOZ

Stipek, who is also a researcher in early childhood development and education. "It is being pushed down. Kindergarten is more academic because of [the law]. It looks like 1st grade. Kindergarten teachers are worried that kids aren't coming to school with certain skills, which is not something they worried about before."

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STEPS IN

The clarion call for Head Start testing came from the top. In a speech announcing the early childhood initiative Good Start, Grow Smart in 2002, President George W. Bush directed Head Start officials to come up with an accountability system to make sure every program site would assess children's skills and progress.

The president's words gave birth, a year later, to the National Reporting System (NRS), a twice-a-year assessment for Head Start children who are eligible for kindergarten. The oral exam was developed to measure young children's knowledge and

skills in literacy, spoken language and math.

Problems with the test arose immediately. Some were easily addressed: providing more detailed guidance to help those giving the test deal with fidgety children and unexpected situations; testing Spanish-speaking children in their native language before giving them the test in English; and making it easier to electronically track which children were tested and the results.

But other flaws—the most serious ones, say early childhood experts—remain. Is the test accurate? Are the questions appropriate for young children? Can NRS produce data that can measure program quality?

According to Samuel Meisels, president of the renowned Erikson Institute, the answer to all of these questions is no. "This test is not the way to go," says Meisels, who along with a team of other experts, provided advice on test design.

High stakes testing causes

many problems, he adds, and it's difficult to pinpoint what young children actually know. "One day, a child knows something, but the next day they don't. Little kids are different in the way they respond to testing than kids in 3rd through 8th grades."

Recently, some Democrats in Washington, D.C., have grown more uncomfortable with the NRS. Earlier this year, Sens. Edward Kennedy and Christopher Dodd asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to look into the validity of the test. Then, in September, Rep. Ron Kind of Wisconsin sponsored an amendment to put an immediate halt to the NRS while the National Academy of Sciences conducts a full review of the test and provides guidance on appropriate standards and ways to assess young children.

(In 2000, the National Academy of Sciences published a report, "Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers," that detailed best practices for testing.)

In Chicago, several Head Start directors comment privately that the NRS results they receive are not useful. However, few will say so publicly. "We are afraid that the test could be used against us," says one Head Start administrator. "Data could be used by funders who evaluate our programs."

Meanwhile, officials at both entities that oversee all of Chicago's Head Start programs—the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services and Ounce of Prevention Fund—say they will consider NRS results along with those from other assessments conducted at their sites to measure program quality and children's progress.

"The NRS will be a supporting document for us," says Claire Dunham of Ounce of Prevention Fund, which has hired a researcher to assess its Head Start children and its teacher support strategies.

Likewise, the city plans to use NRS data to help plan teacher training and boost literacy instruction. A team of

Continued on page 22

Half-day takes its toll at Mays

Englewood elementary serves fewer preschoolers for less time since the district cut services and staff

By Debra Williams

This summer, Principal Patricia McCann was in a quandary over the state pre-kindergarten program at Mays Elementary.

In June, Chicago Public Schools sent principals a memo announcing that full-day state pre-kindergarten programs would be converted to half-day in the fall. The move would serve more children and save money, district officials said at the time. Back then, Mays operated two full-day classrooms that served 40 low-income children, and had a waiting list of another 30 parents clamoring to get in.

Now the Englewood school enrolls only 30 preschoolers—17 4-year-olds in the morning; 13 3-year-olds in the afternoon—in two half-day classes. McCann's attempts to cobble together enough money to restore the full-day option fell flat, and looking ahead, she wonders whether preschoolers are being shortchanged.

"I want a full-day program," McCann says. "I can't understand how a child can get in a half day what we've been trying to do in a full day."

Indeed, while experts agree that a half-day program is better than no program at all, studies show that a full-day program is more beneficial, especially for low-income children. Done correctly, full-day programs can offer more opportunities for field trips and projects to children who have had limited exposure to activities outside their homes.

Before CPS wiped out most of its full-day state pre-kindergarten classrooms, 982 children were enrolled in 55 classrooms.

This fall, only four schools will have full-day programs. Salazar on the Near North Side and Lozano and Talcott, both in West Town, figured out how to pay half the tab for preschool teachers' and aides' salaries out of their discretionary funds.

"Our parents are working class and this meets the needs of our parents," says Talcott Principal Craig Benes, who easily signed up 20 children, the maximum for a full-day program.



JOHN BOOZ

A little girl checks out the toys at South Loop Elementary's new blended preschool, one of only four full-day programs run by the district.

Before this year, Talcott had two half-day programs, but enrollment steadily dropped because parents needed a full day, says Benes. This year, the school retained a half-day program for 3-year-olds and created a full-day for 4-year-olds. Children in the half-day program have been guaranteed a spot in the full-day for next year.

"The results have been that our half-day has built up because parents want their children in the full-day next year," says Benes. "Plus, this is all beneficial for our kids. I looked at our kids in 3rd grade and they are too far behind."

All told, the district is serving an additional 158 children in CPS classrooms by converting state pre-K to half day, but not saving money, says Barbara Bowman, who heads CPS' early childhood education department.

Meanwhile, the district is paying for full-day programs at two sites and subsidizing 24 full-day tuition-based preschool classrooms. One classroom serves children whose mothers are clients of a

city-run women's substance abuse treatment center housed in a shuttered school facility. The other full-day program is at South Loop Elementary, which is being touted as the district's premier site for "enhanced" early childhood programs.

It is here that, for the first time, CPS has blended a tuition-based program, where parents pay \$185 a week, with Head Start and state pre-kindergarten, programs for children who are either low-income or at a higher risk for academic failure. The number of children in the school's tuition-based program increased from 40 to 65; only 16 children are from the Head Start and the state pre-K program.

Still, one early childhood expert is dismayed with the board's decision to cut back.

"The evidence doesn't support it. A full-day program is more successful than a half-day," says Samuel Meisels, who heads the Erikson Institute. "But I know [CPS] made a financial decision. I think it is a shame. And I know everyone at CPS probably agrees with me."

WORKING PARENTS CAN'T SWING HALF-DAY

At Mays, the switch to half-day preschool was a change that many parents could not accommodate because it conflicted with their work schedules. Like families at Talcott, parents needed a full-day program.

"Sixty-five percent of my parents work," says state pre-K teacher Tiffany Jones. "So they can't send their children because they have no way to pick them up. I have one little boy who comes one or two days a week. His mom works a flex schedule."

Working parents whose children are enrolled now have to pay for a half day of child care, a big expense in a community where the median household income is \$18,955, which is below the city average.

When McCann learned last spring that the school's 2006 budget would cover only one preschool teacher and an aide, she immediately tried to figure out how to keep the second preschool teacher and

Continued on page 11

Pre-K goal: 'fun and engaging'

This fall, CPS unveiled at South Loop Elementary a new all-day preschool program for poor and middle-class children—a three-part mix of Head Start, state pre-kindergarten and the district's own tuition-based preschool. Before the opening, however, CPS Early Childhood Education Officer Barbara Bowman had eliminated all full-day state pre-K programs, a move that affected some 900 children. *Catalyst* Associate Editor Debra Williams sat down with Bowman to discuss the thinking behind that decision, and her thoughts on how preschool is evolving and the challenges of preparing young children for kindergarten and reading.



How do you see preschool changing?

We are more aware of the discrepancy between what middle-class kids know and can do when they get to kindergarten as opposed to low-income kids and minority kids. Often early childhood teachers have felt that academics were outside of the range of what little children ought to have to learn. There's no question that preschool children are going to have to get more academic content. The question is how to give it to them in such a way that they want to learn it, enjoy learning it, and use it in their daily life.

How do you plan to do that?

We're talking to teachers about structured play versus free play, about quality relationships with their children, so that the children want to please them and want to learn. Using more small groups, reading more chapter books. We're focusing teachers' attention on how to raise quality, raise content knowledge without treating children like they are 3rd-graders. We want it active, fun and engaging. The challenge is teachers have to do it with children with different skills, particularly children who don't speak English.

Doesn't pushing kids academically earlier create pressure on teachers, students and schools?

No question. Whatever society decides children ought to know and be able to do, it creates pressure on teachers. Is it too much pressure for young children? It's hard to say. Some children are going to be pressured

more than they want to be. And that's going to be something that teachers and parents need to watch out for. A lot depends on what kids are taught to expect. Kids who go to school six days a week from nine to five don't feel that it's an imposition. But if you've only gone through three hours a week, then to seven or eight, you might say that it's an imposition.

Early childhood experts say full-day preschool programs are better than half-day. This year, you closed all CPS full-day state pre-K programs. Why?

Full-day programs became full-day because they were underenrolled and children used both [morning and afternoon] slots. I couldn't justify children having two slots, when there were some children who were not in programs at all. It was also not a good use of teacher time. It just didn't make sense that we'd have all these certified teachers watching children take naps [in the afternoon]. So I felt comfortable saying, 'Kids need to go home.' They go to a sitter or to a childcare center for their nap rather than being with teachers who have been trained to provide a curriculum.

Maybe we need to rethink our structure, particularly in schools where there is extra space. You could hire parents or people who weren't teacher-trained to help children have their lunch and a nap. That would be perfectly acceptable. If schools stayed opened until 5 p.m., it would be a perfectly good way for schools to meet the needs of parents. And the cost to parents would be much less than if we were charging them for a certified teacher.

How much does preschool cost?

We figure the average cost of just mediocre childcare is about \$7,000 a year because we have to have such small numbers of kids with an adult. (Note: Best practices for preschool programs suggest student-teacher ratios be 10 to 1.) In France, they have somewhat larger groups, other countries invest more money. England and Canada are very much like the United States, parents have to pay for full daycare. And even if we have universal pre-K, all that's going to provide is half-day coverage. The parents are still going to have to provide funding or the government or somebody is going to have to provide the rest. It's expensive. On the other hand, all of the research seems to show that despite [early childhood program] costs, when done well, it more than pays for itself.

So it seems like there's a disconnect. Early childhood education reaps benefits, but no one wants to pay for it.

The taxpayer doesn't want to pay any more. We obviously have to make choices. Full-day kindergarten is more important than full-day pre-K because the kids are more able to sustain a five or five-and-a-half-hour day without getting overtired. Given my druthers, I would rather have all 3- and 4-year-olds in half-day and full-day kindergarten than to have full-day pre-K.

Is CPS looking at providing more full-day kindergarten?

Oh yeah, they've been looking at adding full-day kindergarten for a long time. ■

Too soon for national Head Start test to begin driving decisions

A study by the Government Accountability Office finds flaws with the National Reporting System and how it is currently being used

By Debra Williams

Nationwide testing of pre-kindergarteners is intended to gauge how well Head Start agencies are preparing youngsters to begin school, but the tool currently being used is far from being ready for such a high-stakes purpose, according to a recent Government Accountability Office (GAO) report.

Developed two years ago, the National Reporting System (NRS) aims to measure literacy, language and early math skills of 4- and 5-year-old children who are headed into kindergarten. It is administered in English and Spanish.

Federal officials also expect to use the test results to improve individual programs and target training and technical assistance. But a comprehensive study of the testing initiative by GAO—the federal agency charged with evaluating federal programs, policy and spending—noted several shortcomings of the test that would preclude it from being used to achieve these goals. Those limitations include:

UNCLEAR HOW RESULTS WILL BE USED

According to the report, which was released in May, the Head Start Bureau has not announced what level of progress it expects agencies to meet, how it will use test results to decide who needs training or how it will hold agencies accountable.

“As far as I know, they are not using this in any definitive way,” says Erikson Institute President Samuel Meisels, a critic of the NRS who also

belongs to a team of experts who provided advice on test design and rollout. Twice a year the children take the test and twice a year the Head Start Bureau reports back to organizations that oversee Head Start programs, he explains.

SPANISH VERSION MAY NOT BE RELIABLE

The report questions whether the Spanish version of the test produces reliable results. For one, the test may not adequately measure what Spanish-speaking children really know. The Spanish version has not been standardized to account for language differences among Spanish-speaking populations, and children from Puerto Rico, for instance, may recognize and use words that differ from those used by children from Mexico.

Also, the report notes that it is unclear whether results on the English version are comparable to those in Spanish. The tests are scored differently; some English answers are acceptable on the Spanish version, but not vice versa.

“Children may only know the Spanish name for something like knife,” says Leticia Martinez, a Head Start teacher at the Erie Neighborhood House site. “On the English test, they may pick up some English words, but not all of them.”

NO ONE IS MONITORING CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

In a survey of staff who had administered the test, GAO found 18 percent had changed what they were teaching children during the first year the NRS was given. Federal officials are not checking into

whether such adjustments to instruction and curriculum put too much focus on developing cognitive skills at the expense of equally important social and emotional development.

“Teachers, administrators and parents are responsive to test scores,” says Shari Frost, the co-director of Literary Partners at National-Louis University. “If a preschool program has children with low scores, there will be pressure to improve those scores. Preschools will become more academic. The result will be the same thing that happened to kindergarten, and academic kindergartens have not improved literacy rates.”

NRS HAS NOT BEEN PROVEN RELIABLE OR VALID

The federal assessment tests children twice a year in four areas: spoken English, vocabulary, letter recognition and early math. The 20-minute test is administered one-on-one by trained Head Start staff who use a script. However, experts who advised the Head Start Bureau during the test development warned that some pictures were confusing, some vocabulary words were inappropriate and asking children to name letters of the alphabet is not a valid way to measure how many letters children know.

“A ‘P’ doesn’t mean a thing to them at this age, unless the letter is in their name,” says Pamela Costakis, who oversees the state pre-kindergarten program at the Erie Neighborhood House. “They are concrete thinkers. You point to a ‘P’ and a child may say Paulo.”

FINE-TUNING BASED ON FEEDBACK

The study notes that the Head Start Bureau already has made some changes based on feedback

from sites, and is considering the feasibility of other adjustments.

Spanish-speaking children, who must take both versions of the test, are given the more familiar Spanish version first to keep frustration to a minimum. Scripted test materials have been updated to help testers respond to a child's behavior during the test. During the first year, when teachers were told to rigidly follow the script, they didn't know what to do when children fidgeted, had to go to the bathroom or asked for a drink of water.

Under consideration for the future is testing a sample of children rather than every one. Centers have complained that the amount of time it takes to give the NRS takes away from other classroom activities. Peggy Riehl, director of Head Start programs at Boys and Girls Clubs in Chicago, documented how long it took to administer the test and document results for 149 children. "In the fall, it was 151 hours," she says.

Also in the works: piloting a new section of the test that would assess a child's social and emotional development.

In the meantime, Head Start Bureau officials say they will not use NRS data alone to measure program quality. Local organizations are following suit.

"We will use the data from the NRS as one of many variables; the test will not be used as a high stakes assessment," says Mary Ellen Caron, commissioner of the Department of Children and Youth Services, which oversees some 16,500 Head Start slots in Chicago. "We will not put all our eggs in the NRS basket. We need many strategies." ■

HALF-DAY *Continued from page 8*

aide that were already on staff. But the two salaries would have taken a 35 percent bite out of the school's \$250,000 discretionary budget.

The urgency for keeping full-day state pre-K was a precipitous drop in 3rd-grade reading scores last year. "Three and three go together," McCann notes. "If we don't start teaching them when they are as young as three, they

What's on the test?

The NRS tests Head Start pre-kindergarteners in four skill areas. Questions for each section were excerpted from existing early childhood assessments. Yet, only one of those tests was developed to measure skills of children from low-income and poorly educated families.

"One of the problems with [NRS] is it does not take into account children's backgrounds and cultures," says Erikson Institute President Sam Meisels, who also served as an advisor for NRS.

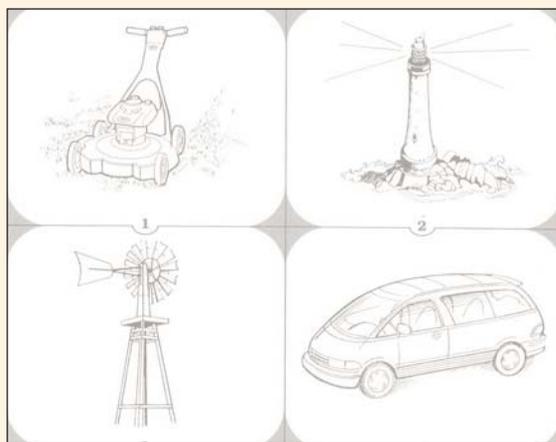
Another problem with the test, says Sandra Schaefer of Erie Neighborhood House, which serves 104 Head Start students, is that it captures what children know at one moment in time—when the test is administered. "At that age, what they know changes from day to day," she says. "The test is too narrow."

Here are critiques of two sample questions.

VOCABULARY:

This portion of the test asks children to identify by pointing out which one of four pictures illustrates a given word. However, experts note that some vocabulary words are inappropriate for young children. For example, "the test asks kids to point to a vehicle, but that's not common language," says Lynda Hazen, the former president of the Illinois Head Start Association, who operates a Head Start program in DuPage County. "How many people tell their child to go get in the vehicle?"

"Point to vehicle."



MATH:

In the math portion, children are asked to answer questions by pointing to items on a page. A more appropriate way to measure math skills in 4 and 5 year olds would involve handling physical items like blocks, say early childhood experts. One question displays a picture of five nickels and asks children to say how much money that is. "It is not common to practice money value at this age," says Kimberly Cothran, the director of the Chicago Commons New City Center.

"Bobby has four nickels. His father gives him one more. ... How much money does Bobby have now? How many cents is that?"



SOURCES: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Head Start Bureau

won't be successful in 3rd grade."

Without it, Mays is making do. Jones says she keeps an eye on the clock to fit in everything that needs to be covered: group reading, computer time, art class, Spanish, lessons on letter and number recognition. Instead of getting time every day to play outside, use the water and sand table and do exercises on the computer, children now alternate those activities throughout the week.

"Now, 15 minutes is critical," says

Jones. "A full day was so much more beneficial for our kids because at home, no one is reinforcing what they are learning."

Indeed, on one morning in September, a group of 4-year-olds gathered on the floor begin reading in unison from a book they share, "I see a yellow duck looking at me. Yellow duck. Yellow duck. What do you see?"

"See, those children were in the full-day program last year," McCann observes. "That is why they are so bright." ■

Next up: tougher standards to accredit

South Side center with credential anchors its lessons in play

By Jody Temkin

Four-year-olds at Midway Head Start are sitting in a circle singing a song about five green, speckled frogs that are disappearing one by one. Following the teacher's lead, the children use hand motions and their fingers to count down until no speckled frogs are left.

Flashcards and worksheets are nowhere in sight. "That's not developmentally appropriate," says Ruth Prescott, who oversees Head Start programs for Metropolitan Family Services.

Integrating math and literacy skills into children's play activities is one reason why Midway Head Start earned accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which administers a voluntary accreditation system and works to set professional standards in early child education. Also taken into consideration for programs seeking to earn the credential, which must be renewed every five years, are facilities, health and safety and teacher interactions with children.

But beginning next year, NAEYC is launching more rigorous standards that will make it tougher for Head Start and other preschool programs to get accredited.

"The new standards are much higher and more specific," says Jamilah R. Jor'dan, president and founder of Partnership for Quality Child Care, a Chicago nonprofit that helps programs get accredited. "They needed to be changed to address areas of ambiguity. Some programs weren't clear about what was acceptable. This [new process] will take longer, but it really helps programs take a close look at what they're doing."

The new accreditation process will evaluate how programs measure up to 400 standards within 10 areas: assessment, curriculum, teaching, relationships, health, teachers, families, community relationships, physical environment and leadership. Some standards apply across the board; others are detailed by age group.

The new accreditation standards

reflect the growing need for "a reliable and accountable" system of early childhood education that stakeholders can trust as a mark of quality, says NAEYC spokesman Alan Simpson.

Take reading, for instance. The old standards suggest that preschool teachers write down children's dictated stories, label objects in the room and encourage children's emerging interest in writing, including scribbling, drawing, copying and using invented spelling. There is no mention of phonics for preschoolers.

The new standards direct teachers to help children "identify letters and the sounds they represent" and help children "to recognize and produce words that have the same beginning or ending sounds."

Jor'dan notes that the new standards are more focused on accountability, but are still compatible with best practices in early childhood education, as long as instruction is appropriate. Having children sit for long periods of time or giving lessons on a chalkboard are inappropriate; teaching math and reading concepts through play, songs and activities are fine, she says.

MORE THAN JUST ABCS

Midway Head Start has had to pay more attention to its academic content since the late 1990s, when the federal government reorganized the program and set skill benchmarks. Pre-kindergarteners in Head Start, for example, are supposed to know at least nine letters of the alphabet.

Such directives, however, only begin to scratch the surface when evaluating early childhood centers, says Jor'dan, who looks for books and other evidence of a "print-rich" environment. "I'm not going to take a couple children into a room and see if they know the nine letters."

Besides, research shows that social-emotional development—not learning letters of the alphabet—is what leads to kindergarten success, Prescott explains. "If [a child] can develop relationships with the kids and adults in the classroom, if they can attend to tasks, if they can listen, if they have self-help skills," then they will



do well in kindergarten, she adds.

Midway Head Start's accreditation is up for renewal in 2007, but Prescott expects the program won't have to do much to meet the new standards. The program already balances the needs of young children with the increasing demand for more accountability, says Jor'dan.

Accreditation can take up to a year to complete. It begins with a self-study, with information gathered through observations and surveys. Programs identify strengths and weaknesses, and then develop an improvement plan. Then, a "validator" visits the program to verify the accuracy of the program description.

Roughly 8 percent of all early childhood programs—close to 11,000 sites nationwide—are accredited. About 80 percent of those that go through the process earn the credential, says Simpson.

Jody Temkin is a Catalyst contributing editor. E-mail her at editor@catalyst-chicago.org.

preschools



PHOTOS BY JOHN BOOZ

During a visit to Midway Head Start, which serves 102 children ages 3 to 5, Jamilah Jor'dan, founder of an organization that helps preschools earn accreditation, pointed out some features of a high-quality center.

Clockwise from left:

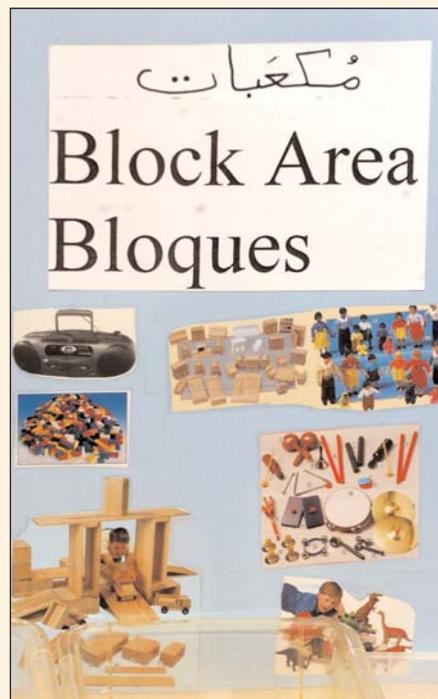
- Teachers in each classroom get down to the child's level when they talk to them and ask open-ended questions that force longer answers to build the child's verbal skills. Here, Director Bernadine McCullough uses a puppet to talk with a youngster.
- The classroom environment is what Jor'dan calls "print rich." Everything is labeled, from children's names on their cubbies to

colors on objects in the room.

- During free play time in the 5-year-old classroom, one boy works on a jigsaw puzzle with teacher Laura Ruiz while two others are playing with trucks. Other children in the same class are following directions on a computer game. Jor'dan says she looks for a variety of activities and for opportunities for group and individual play.
- Signs that greet visitors and identify the block area in the classroom are written in three languages: English, Spanish and Arabic. "It shows sensitivity to all children and families," says Jor'dan. Students in the program are 80% Latino, 15% African-American and 5% Arab.

Not shown:

- The day's schedule hangs on the wall by each classroom door, providing structure for the children and information for parents, who can relax in a coffee area down the hall after signing their children in.
- Every child has a portfolio that charts their social-emotional development and progress with gross and fine motor skills. Two girls in the 3-year-olds class are working on all of those skills as they set tables for lunch, which will be served family style.
- The outdoor play area needs improvement, Jor'dan notes. There is no grass or shade. However, these deficiencies will not prevent accreditation.



Abstinence-only curricula comes under fire

Federal funding is on the rise, but abstinence message leaves students with questions about birth control and pregnancy

By Cassandra Gaddo

Three phrases stand out in large, white letters on the long blackboard: “To abstain,” “sexual activity” and “subliminal seduction.” Close to 50 freshmen shift in their desks, watching the teacher or talking to their peers in the crowded, windowless classroom at Kenwood Academy.

Elaine Jones blows on a whistle around her neck to gain the students’ attention and launches into her lesson on subliminal seduction—how teens are bombarded with images of sex every day, and how they can resist those seductions and abstain from sexual activity. Not just now or in the near future, she says, but until marriage.

“What is a sex act?” Jones asks the class, pointing to the “sexual activity” portion of the blackboard. One student, who has been tossing out jokes throughout the class, raises his hand from the corner. “Say, if I was a virgin,” he asks. “If I had oral sex, I’m not a virgin?”

The students look expectantly at Jones. The guidelines of the abstinence-only curriculum certainly do not consider oral sex acceptable behavior for unmarried persons, but it is an act Jones says the teens are curious about.

Jones explains that technically, if a girl engages in oral sex, “she is still a virgin. But, in her sexual abstinence, she is not a virgin anymore.”

Along with other sources, Jones teach-

es from an abstinence-only curriculum called Project Reality, created by an independent organization of the same name and used in 525 middle schools and high schools in Illinois, including 130 in Chicago Public Schools.

But abstinence-only curricula like Project Reality are coming under increasing fire. The American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois recently sent a letter to some 1,300 school superintendents across the state, warning that abstinence-only programs often include false or misleading information about preventing pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases—for instance, that condoms are not effective in preventing the spread of STDs. According to the ACLU, recent studies show that abstinence-only programs do not prevent teens from engaging in premarital sex and may deter young people from using condoms or from getting tested and treated for STDs.

Yet under policies put in place by the Bush Administration, schools that want federal funds for sex education can only receive grants if they agree to teach solely from abstinence-only curricula, says Lorie Chaiten, director of the reproductive rights program at the ACLU of Illinois.

Jobi Peterson, executive director of the Illinois Caucus for Adolescent Health and a former CPS administrator, says very few students receive adequate information in health classes because schools lack the resources to pay for comprehensive sex

TEEN BIRTHS STILL HIGH IN CHICAGO

Chicago’s teen birth rate is higher than those for suburban Cook County and Illinois as a whole, but has fallen more dramatically in recent years. In 2003, the city’s teen birth rate was 13 percent, down from 18 percent in 1998. In comparison, suburban Cook County’s rate declined from 8 to 7 percent; and the statewide rate fell from 12 percent to 10 percent, during the same time period. These Chicago communities have the highest rates.

NEIGHBORHOOD	TEEN BIRTH RATE, 2002*
Englewood	30%
West Garfield Park	28
East Garfield Park	28
Riverdale	28
West Englewood	27
West Pullman	26
Grand Boulevard	26
Washington Park	25
North Lawndale	25
Humboldt Park	24

*Latest available for city neighborhoods
Source: Illinois Dept. of Human Services, Division of Community Health and Prevention

education programs. The caucus is lobbying legislators to provide federal funds for comprehensive sex education curricula, which the group notes would include a strong message in favor of abstinence but also medically accurate information on reproductive health, STDs and pregnancy prevention.

“Teachers really do want to give more information to young people but they just don’t have the curriculum or materials,” Petersen says.



MARY HANLON

Elaine Jones says students in her health education class at Kenwood Academy have “very detailed” questions about sex.

The issue is particularly critical in Chicago, where teen birth rates have declined in recent years but remain higher than the averages—in some communities, more than double—for the state and surrounding Cook County suburbs.

REALITY FAR FROM ‘ABSTINENCE ONLY’

In the classroom, however, sticking to a strict outline of “abstinence only” is not always practical. Teens bring questions and experiences that fall outside of these rigid parameters. And while students recognize the wisdom behind abstinence-focused teachings, they are also the first to point out the irony of such instruction in schools filled with pregnant students and teen parents.

“Every time you look up, someone’s pregnant,” says Kiyona Jackson, a soft-spoken senior at Hyde Park Academy in Woodlawn, which has a teen birth rate of 19 percent. “I don’t think they get pregnant on purpose. They listen to [sex education], but they go against it or whatever.”

Even though she knows not all students will listen to the sex-can-wait message, Kendra Thomas, another Hyde Park student, says she believes that it’s an important viewpoint for students to receive. “They tell you that [sex] can cause you to do things you don’t want to do, and emotional stress,” she says.

According to Denise Everhart, one of Hyde Park Academy’s physical education teachers, the school supplements its health education program with lesson plans from

ABJ Community Services Inc., an agency that trains instructors to teach abstinence-only materials, and Project VIDA, a group founded in 1992 to address the rising number of HIV and AIDS cases in Chicago’s black and Latino communities.

Everhart supports this combination. “[Students are] getting the facts now,” she says. “Oftentimes, they misunderstand the whole reproductive process—for example, some think that they can’t get pregnant standing up. They don’t understand conception, and that’s something they definitely understand by the end [of the course].”

Najamusahar Muneeruddin, a sophomore at Lane Tech High in North Center, says some students might rebel against the Project Reality curriculum taught there. “Some kids that take the sex ed class get angry, thinking ‘Why are they telling me what to do?’” she says.

Classmate Rex Libunao agreed. “If we are going to have sex, we might as well have choices,” he says. “At least you’d know about condoms, but they never told us about that.”

FEDERAL FUNDING UP

Abstinence-only supporters believe Project Reality and other such lessons arm students with information they need to refuse sexual activity until marriage. But detractors claim that message is realistic only to a handful of students in today’s classrooms.

The debate has gained momentum

over the years. The Bush Administration increased funding for abstinence-only curricula to \$206 million for fiscal year 2006, from \$170 million for fiscal year 2005. Most recently in Illinois, some lawmakers have proposed a measure to guarantee state funding for “abstinence-based” sex education, which would promote abstinence as the best way to prevent sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies but would also provide age-appropriate information about condoms and birth control. The Illinois School Code specifies only that health education curricula should include instruction on “family life, including sexual abstinence until marriage.”

Caught in between are students left with valid questions and no answers to be found in their workbooks, like “The Navigator,” a text that supplements the Project Reality curriculum. “What if a girl was reading that, and was pregnant?” questions Lane Tech student Halla Karaman. “What if she wanted an abortion? Where would she go? How much would it cost? Do you need parental permission?”

“That’s the problem,” continues classmate Quetzalli Castro. “They tell you how you get pregnant, but not what to do. They tell you about abstinence, but they stop there.”

For her students, Jones has helped supply some of the answers. It was Rahkeisha Teagues’ favorite part of the class. “She gave us little cards to write questions down on. It’s fun,” Teagues says.

In aging metal file cabinets near the door of her classroom, Jones keeps several stacks of note cards bound with rubber bands. On each note card is a single health-related question written on the first day of class by a student; Jones proceeds through them as the semester progresses, answering each and every one of the students’ anonymous questions in class.

“I’m an advocate of abstinence, but I’m also realistic,” Jones says. “I try to teach to the whole class.” Usually the cards cover a range of topics, but this past year the cards shared an obvious theme, Jones says. “Every question was on sex, and they’re very detailed.”

A version of this article was first published in the July/August issue of The Chicago Reporter. Intern Leah Banks contributed to this report.

Cassandra Gaddo is a Chicago writer.

Viewpoints

GUEST COLUMN/MARA TAPP

With inclusion, best intentions often go awry

Mainstreaming special education students started out as a good idea.

But in reality, the practice is not always beneficial.

Mara Tapp is a Chicago journalist whose work has appeared in local publications as well as on National Public Radio and its Chicago affiliate, WBEZ-FM. She teaches in the Chicago Public Schools and at Columbia College.

When my oldest daughter started in the Chicago Public Schools some 14 years ago, I was thrilled that our school system celebrated diversity by including physically disabled children in regular classrooms. When I returned to the public schools as a substitute teacher last year, it didn't take long for me to observe that mainstreaming, which had started out as such a good idea, had become a serious problem, endangering not only special education children but those in regular education as well—producing disastrously unequal and ineffective results.

As I chatted with teachers, administrators and parents, I learned I wasn't alone in this view. Worse, few people wanted to talk about the issue out of fear of retaliation by a well-organized lobby of special education advocates. When I mentioned that I wanted to write an opinion piece on the topic, those with School Board experience asked me, "Why would you want to bring that kind of trouble to yourself?" Yet, they concurred that children were being hurt and the story needed out-ing. So, as a parent and a substitute teacher, I ask you to suspend your preconceptions and think about how all our children can best be served in a cash-strapped system that has failed to prepare and equip classroom teachers with the resources needed to properly carry out the task of full inclusion.

In 1998, CPS and the Illinois State Board of Education settled a federal class-action lawsuit—known as "Corey H."—that had charged the district with illegally segregating dis-

abled children. The settlement led to widespread expansion of inclusion. With more mainstreaming, disabled students were to be given equal access to magnet, vocational, charter and gifted programs and educated with non-disabled peers in what the settlement termed the "least-restrictive environment" possible.

But some say inclusion then went too far.

"It was kind of overkill," says one member of a CPS special education team, who nevertheless was quick to reject the past practices of segregation that led to the 1992 lawsuit. "Instead of looking at that child and saying, 'What is the least-restrictive environment?' many people thought it meant just putting every kid back in the [regular] classroom."

"The good in mainstreaming was that these kids were allowed in the public schools, and they deserve a good and a fair education," the team member adds. "But does that mean you have to put them in every classroom?"

BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS NEED EXTRA ATTENTION

When disabled children are in every classroom, what happens? I am hardly alone in having had to manage classes that included children whose disabilities really require full-time, one-on-one attention. I—and others who spend every day in elementary classrooms—regularly see children who are unable to pay attention because of low IQs resulting from lead poisoning or exposure to drugs in

utero or children with autism or some other disability.

Now think about how that child functions in a classroom.

"These kids would sit and concentrate on pulling the threads out of the carpet by color instead of focusing on the lesson I was teaching," recalls one retired reading teacher. "They would tie and untie their shoes repetitively. They would crawl. They would try to get into and under things. I sometimes felt they wanted to get into a box and shut it. ... I sometimes wondered, 'Does [this] child need me to teach him reading, or does my child need a neurologist to teach him reading?'"

Teaching under such circumstances is nearly impossible. Not only is the child in special education learning little or nothing, but classmates often are completely distracted by such behavior or choose to mimic it. Clearly, students who exhibit such behavior are disruptive and require teachers to take time away from other students to manage them.

When teachers must take extra time to control a situation involving problem behavior, the class suffers from the loss of learning time. Disruptive behavior isolates and stigmatizes a child, and the stigmatization of a disabled child only deepens misconceptions and prejudices about all disabled children. It continues to be amazing to me that even at the youngest ages, children readily label others—"He's bad, he never listens"—and so on.

MANY EDUCATORS FAVOR TRACKING

Without exception, the teachers and administrators I have spoken with praise the practice of grouping children by need and ability so their needs can be fully addressed.

"As a teacher who taught [part of] the day in a mainstreaming situation,

and during reading time in a tracked situation, my life was far better, and my sense of success was greater, when I had the children in a tracked situation in which they were grouped according to ability," says one veteran.

Compounding the problem is the increase in class sizes, which means that teachers must now teach larger groups with more diverse abilities.

"There are so many irresolvable conflicts because of the range of needs these kids have, and you deprive the more advantaged students of challenge," says the retired reading teacher. "You deprive the slower students of [the chance to reach] mastery. You drive down the morale of the faculty. De-tracking creates a situation where teachers cannot use the entire class time to meet the needs of faster- or slower-achieving students, and cannot give individual attention to the middle students.

"Teachers frequently respond by grading faster students on achievement, slower students on effort," the teacher continues. "Parents are confused by this and become belligerent."

Then there is the emotional cost.

One administrator tells a story of a 1st-grade child with cerebral palsy who was in a regular classroom. The toll on others in the class was great. The teacher was wracked with guilt, believing no one was being well-served. The 6-year-old classmate assigned to be the student's helper developed an ulcer. The emotional costs to students, teachers, parents and administrators of efforts to expose students to a child with disabilities are infrequently discussed and almost never quantified.

STUDENT NEEDS REQUIRE 'TAILORING'

The diversity of need in a large urban school system that serves large numbers of low-income, immigrant

and other children who need additional resources adds to the complexity of implementing inclusion.

"We've got to give these kids a fair chance to address their weaknesses and become strong in life later," one retired teacher points out. "You have to give them an opportunity to succeed. Projects and after-school activities are wonderful opportunities for [disabled] kids to mingle, but when you have to teach academic skills, individualization becomes important."

That is the key: assessing and then addressing individual needs. "You have to be the dressmaker. You have to tailor," says the retired reading teacher.

The issue should be, "What really helps children?"

At the core of this question is another one: "What is the best interest?" one administrator points out. "Sometimes parents with children with disabilities feel if the child is put in regular education then they will be 'regular.' There's a reality that the parents have to accept."

In our efforts to achieve equity for children, special education advocates have persuaded us that mainstreaming is the answer for virtually all special kids. Special schools, let alone special classes, are not the fashion right now. And, as most educators I've interviewed over the years acknowledge, education is usually driven by the fads and fashions of the field.

"When is the pendulum going to swing? When are the regular ed parents going to say, 'You are hurting us.?' " one administrator asks.

Educators and parents need to think seriously about who is being served by inclusion, and how well they are being served. Why aren't we figuring out a way to keep the best interests of all our children at the forefront? ■

COLUMN / DEREK JORDAN

Keep tests focused on student learning

The Chicago Public Schools are required by federal and state law to improve student performance on standardized tests, which are used to make crucially important decisions about the future of schools. Consequently, these tests have created a high level of undue stress among educators and students alike.

Standardized testing has become an integral part of the educational system, with sweeping implications for the future of our schools. School Board officials utilize test scores to label our institutions of learning as schools of distinction, excellence, merit, and opportunity, but they fail to clearly define the differences. As a result, many parents, students and educators often become discombobulated.

Schools that experience higher levels of poverty, violence, gangs, pregnancy and drugs are more likely to be negatively affected by the use of test scores as a school measure. Societal ills may hinder a school's ability to adequately prepare students for tests, yet these schools are expected to maintain the same standards and scores as schools that have selective student enrollment and are located in affluent neighborhoods.

There are positive aspects of standardized testing. The information from tests helps to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and assist teachers and administrators in planning their educational program. Tests also serve as a tool for measuring how well a school is meeting state standards. Standardized tests help college officials in the student selection process. And a program that gives students an opportunity to prepare for standardized tests will better assist them as they prepare to experience test-taking in college.

Conversely, there are some limitations to standardized tests. Major problems occur when people believe that overall learning can be measured by a single test. Some would argue that when schools submit to the pressures of teaching to tests, students are deprived of a well-rounded education. Teachers are strongly encouraged to teach content and skills based on standardized testing, but schools in more impoverished areas are spending too much instructional time and limited funds on test preparation.

Continued on page 22

CORRECTION

In September, *Catalyst* mistakenly affiliated Victoria Chou with the University of Chicago. She is dean of the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

See our new look: www.catalyst-chicago.org

Updates

RENAISSANCE WATCH/MAUREEN KELLEHER

Applicants face new review process

District sets up public forums to get community input. Business group hires consultant to help meet fundraising goal.

Last year, applicants for Renaissance 2010 schools ran a three-tiered gauntlet to win approval.

First, they faced a team of experts from inside and outside the system. Next, some schools had to sell themselves to a Transition Advisory Council made up of community representatives. Finally, schools competed for startup funds from New Schools for Chicago, the business-backed nonprofit group that is fun-

neling private support for Renaissance 2010 schools.

But the setup was cumbersome and, in one case, led to friction between CPS and the transition council for Lucy Flower Campus when the *Chicago Tribune* reported that the district was planning to approve a second school for Flower—before the council had weighed in with its recommendation.

This year, Chicago Public Schools sought to improve the selection process by bringing together all the stakeholder groups to review applications from the start. In addition, the district will hold public forums to give communities a chance to meet and question some prospective school operators before the School Board makes its final selection.

Overall, those who served on the new teams praised the new process. “Chicago is pushing to be at the edge of innovation,” says Elizabeth Evans, executive director of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools. She says she spent about four hours reading each of the eight proposals her team reviewed, and that her team spent two hours on each interview, including preparation and debriefing. “This group was extremely respectful. Everyone had value to add.”

But some activists say the forum setup still falls short of giving the community a real voice in choosing new schools. And some schools will be left out in the cold without grants. New Schools for Chicago has yet to meet its \$50 million fundraising

goal, and the group recently hired the Alford Group, a consulting firm that works with non-profit organizations, to help raise money. New Schools declined to say how much cash it has raised so far.

COMMUNITY FORUMS JUST WINDOW DRESSING?

The public forums were instituted as a result of focus groups held by the district with school applicants, transition council members and district staff after the first round of Renaissance selection last year.

The district will begin hosting the forums later this fall, in an effort to give communities a chance to meet and talk with groups that submitted applications for schools in non-CPS facilities.

Since independent applications did not face a transition council review, “there was a feeling that individual sites did not have to show a high burden of proof that communities desired to work with them,” says Jeanne Nowaczewski, director of the office of small schools for CPS. Community forums “would provide a more thorough vetting of their proposals, in public and in neighborhoods. That’s why we’re going to try it.” District officials will be watching to see how applicants are received, she adds.

“We hope that there will be a perception emerging whether the community likes the school group and the group likes the community,” says Nowaczewski.

One neighborhood leader says the district needs to do more to make the forums a real opportunity for community input.

“If it was a genuine process, they would partner [ahead of time] with a



JOHN BOOZ

On the first day of school, Stephanie Wheatley, a teacher at Chicago International Charter Schools's Avalon/South Shore campus, coaches one of her 4th graders in the class motivational chant, “Work hard, get smart.”



JOHN BOOZ

The first students cross the threshold at Chicago International Charter School's Avalon/South Shore campus, one of 10 Renaissance schools that opened this fall. The charter enrolled about 200 students in grades K-4 and plans to expand to 8th grade.

group that has roots in the community, to bring out the people," says Jitu Brown, president of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization. "There would be a survey in the community to see what people want."

GUIDELINES HELP ELIMINATE BIAS IN SELECTION

The forums will be part of the second phase of the new review process. In the first phase, Comprehensive Evaluation Teams—made up of district officials, outside experts and transition council representatives—read proposals and interviewed representatives from the institutions that submitted them. The new teams worked this summer on proposals submitted in August for the 2006-07 school year.

Each CPS facility slated to be part of Renaissance was assigned one team to evaluate all the applications for schools seeking to open in the building. Other teams evaluated the proposals that did not have a site yet.

After the interviews, the teams work together to decide which applications should move to the second round.

To help teams rate the interviews and proposals, New Schools for Chicago and the district created a rubric to guide the process. Applicants are rated in five areas: school mission and pedagogy, community involvement, leadership and governance, educational plan, and operations and finance.

The rubric gave teams common ground for ranking the applications, says Phyllis Lockett, executive director of New Schools for Chicago. "You've got to have some kind of measure," she says. "We have a much better benchmark for that this year. It takes away the subjectivity and bias that anyone would have coming into a process like this."

The evaluation teams will narrow the pile of applications presented to the full transition councils in the

second phase of the process.

Meanwhile, board members from New Schools for Chicago will review the narrowed pool and determine grant awards. The group provided guidelines to this year's applicants, saying they are more likely to fund small schools in neighborhoods where existing schools have failed for long periods. Schools of choice that demonstrate innovation in some way—such as a specialized curriculum, non-traditional school calendar, or a new way of teacher evaluation—will be favored.

"We're happy to look at charter, contract or performance schools," says Sandy Guthman, president of the Polk Bros. Foundation and a New Schools board member. "We want schools that really are going to make their own decisions in the best interest of the kids. We want to have the best proposals, and the ones with the team that has the capacity to pull them off." ■

Renaissance Watch is an occasional feature that casts an analytical, behind-the-headlines eye on the ambitious yet controversial Renaissance 2010 plan.

Survey: recess, gym class shortchanged

Majority of students get little or no daily physical activity, and parents are speaking out

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Instead of the daily physical education classes mandated by the state, a *Catalyst Chicago* telephone survey found that one to two days of gym class per week is the norm in elementary schools.

No recess is also the norm. Fewer than one in five schools—18 percent—provide daily scheduled recess for all kids, and only about one in 16—6 percent—provide for a recess of at least 20 minutes, the survey found.

For the survey, Catalyst contacted 487 schools to ask about their policies on recess and physical education. The state's requirement for daily gym class has long been flouted in Chicago and other districts (see accompanying story).

Schools can count recess toward the physical education requirement if it is supervised by a reasonable number of certified teachers and involves a structured activity rather than free play, according to Donna Luallen, the head of the Accountability Division at the Illinois State Board of Education.

Most elementary schools provided a recess period 30 years ago, when schools had a 45-minute lunch period. It went by the wayside as schools began to opt instead for a 20-minute lunch and shorter school day. Now, switching back to the 45-minute lunch requires approval of the faculty, under the Chicago Teachers Union contract.

Some principals interviewed for the survey said they favored the 45-minute lunch with recess, but their teachers had rejected it in favor of the shorter day. Others thought they had too few teacher aides on staff to supervise a recess period, or wondered what to do with students during inclement weather. Some mistakenly believed it was a School



JASON REBLANDO

Ayanna Plummer (in back), Karen Plummer and Nicholas Goodwin of Nicholson Elementary in Englewood were among more than 150 students protesting the lack of recess in schools at an event staged last June at Douglas Park Field House by Power-Pac, a parent advocacy group.

Board decision, and others said they had simply never considered it.

ACADEMIC, DISCIPLINARY BENEFITS

But at schools that have adopted the longer day with recess, staff members say they wouldn't give it up. "Kids get to work off their energy and form friends," reports teacher Janet Caluris at Peterson Elementary in North Park. "It gets the brain cells going again. Discipline problems go down."

At Nettelhorst Elementary in Lake View, Principal Susan Kurland rearranged the school day to allow students about 15 minutes of recess in addition to their 20-minute lunch, but she did it in an unconventional way: Instead of extending the school day, an option that teachers generally reject, she got their permission to lengthen the lunch break for students and teachers by taking 20 minutes from their morning preparation time.

The recess period is supervised by auxiliary staff, including the gym teacher, music teacher and counselors, who take their break for lunch at a separate time

from classroom teachers.

Kurland pushed for recess because research demonstrates the link between health, exercise and academic achievement. "If they're not having their needs met, it doesn't matter what you're teaching," she insists.

Some parents are becoming increasingly concerned, and vocal, about the lack of physical activity in schools.

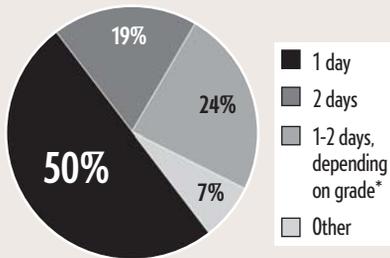
In June, a parent advocacy group called Power-Pac staged an event at Douglas Park field house, at which 50 children were symbolically freed from a jail cell for the summer vacation. "Our children ... spend six hours in their classrooms without a break," says a press release from Power-Pac, which is trained and supported by the non-profit group Community Organizing and Family Issues.

With 30 active parent members mainly from the Englewood, Austin, West Town and Humboldt Park neighborhoods, Power-Pac is working to reinstitute recess as a way to curb student discipline problems and rising suspension rates in elementary schools. Typically,

GYM, RECESS LIMITED

Catalyst's survey of 487 elementaries found that 93 percent have only one or two gym classes each week.

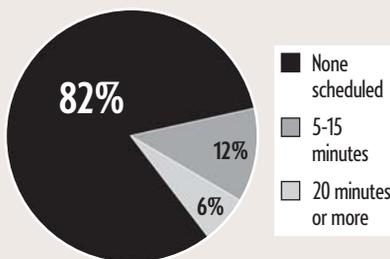
DAYS OF GYM CLASS



*Six schools offer no gym, seven schools offer gym 3-5 days, 19 schools offer gym 2-3 days depending on grade.

More than 80 percent do not provide a regular recess for all students.

DAILY RECESS



Source: Catalyst telephone survey

schools with more low-income students are less likely to offer recess, yet are more likely to have high suspension rates.

The lack of recess is aggravated by another concern: This year, for the first time, small elementary schools were permitted to drop gym class altogether.

Under the district's staffing formula, schools with 15 or fewer classroom teachers—which typically enroll about 400 or fewer students—are allocated one part-time gym teacher and one part-time librarian. Budget Director Pedro Martinez allowed those schools, as a convenience, to simply choose to staff one of those positions full-time and drop the other, according to the Office of Communications.

According to the CPS Budget Office, as of the end of September, 19 elementary schools did not have board-funded gym teachers.

Interns Tariq Ahmad, Leah Banks and Nekita Thomas contributed to this report.

To contact Elizabeth Duffrin, call (312) 673-3879 or e-mail duffrin@catalyst-chicago.org.

Under fire, CPS tells schools to find 15 minutes for exercise

By Elizabeth Duffrin

After *Catalyst Chicago* requested an interview with the Illinois State Board of Education to ask why the state's daily physical education requirement was being neglected in the city's public schools, Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins swiftly sent an e-mail directive instructing top staff to make sure schools comply with the law.

The e-mail, which mentioned *Catalyst's* conversation with state officials, stated that "All elementary schools are required to have daily P.E. Classroom teachers can conduct structured activities (15 minutes or more) and the school/district will be in compliance. ... Please advise AIOs," Eason-Watkins wrote. *Catalyst* obtained a copy of the e-mail from a principal.

"In general, people in CPS don't understand the need to have daily physical education for all students and they don't have the budget to do that," says David Thomas, an exercise science professor at Illinois State University in Normal, who recently co-authored a study on Chicago's P.E. program. In many schools, physical education programs suffer from too few teaching positions and inadequate facilities and equipment, he says.

Chicago is not the only district to flout the law. At least 20 percent of schools are also ignoring it, Thomas says. In 1997, Chicago was granted a 10-year waiver, but only for 11th- and 12th graders; the district argued that students needed more time in their schedules to meet higher graduation requirements.

Some local health experts say that 15 minutes of daily activity is an improvement, but still violates the intent of the law, which states only that children should engage in physical activity "for such periods as are compatible with [their] optimum growth and developmental needs."

Scientists recommend at least half an

hour of strenuous physical activity each day, according to Mark Peysakhovich, senior advocacy director for the American Heart Association. "Fifteen minutes is certainly not science-based."

STRETCHING, DANCING, ACTING OUT STORIES

Many principals say they agree with the new mandate—"It's what's right for kids," says Paula Rossino, principal of Peirce Elementary in Edgewater; "They don't exercise enough," agrees Lori Lennix, principal of Doolittle East in Douglas—but wonder how to fit yet another requirement into the school day. However, research has shown that exercise can help boost test scores.

By the end of the first week of school, some principals had hit the ground running to implement the new directive.

At Doolittle East, teachers are leading exercises on the playground for 15 minutes after lunch. Lennix says that most of her faculty are young and don't mind the assignment, and she plans to pair them with less-enthusiastic veterans.

Arai Middle teachers in Uptown are brainstorming ideas for activities with each other and the gym teacher, says Principal Barbara Hayes. Some already use stretching or other physical activity to revive students between lessons, she adds. At Barnard Elementary in Beverly, kids are stretching and dancing to music or rhythms, says Principal Alan Molesky.

At Schubert Elementary in Belmont Cragin, the P.E. teacher shared a website (ncpe4me.com/energizers.html) with classroom teachers with activities that could be incorporated into academic lessons, such as acting out stories or vocabulary words. When the gym is free, teachers can also bring kids down to play with jump ropes and hula hoops. The music teacher even had kids do jumping jacks to music during a lesson on rhythm, reports Principal Elba Maisonet.

"It is a mandate," she says with a laugh, "So you try to do the best you can." ■

PRE-K *Continued from page 7*

education experts will be assigned to work with each Head Start agency. “I’d like to see more vocabulary, more use of nouns and descriptors,” says Commissioner Mary Ellen Caron. “We want parents and teachers to use these kinds of words with children.”

WEIGHING PRESCHOOL QUALITY

Currently, CPS tests children in all its preschool programs. Head Start kids take a commercially developed test called Creative Curriculum three times a year; those in state pre-K are given a home-grown assessment developed by Chicago educators called CAP (Child Assessment Profile) twice a year. Children in the tuition-based program take the Early Screening Inventory just once, six to eight weeks after they enter the program.

(Preschool programs based in outside centers that receive

some funding from the district may choose among three commercial tests: Creative Curriculum, High Scopes or Work Sampling, which was developed by Meisels of the Erikson Institute.)

While these tests help teachers determine what children know, they do not provide much insight on classroom instruction and what needs to be done to improve it. So for the first time this year, every CPS preschool classroom will undergo two formal observations that will follow protocols established by two nationally recognized assessment tools.

One of them is the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, which was developed by researchers from the University of North Carolina’s Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute. The other is called Early Language Literary Classroom Observation, which was developed by

the Education Development Center, a Boston-based school improvement group. Both observations examine literary and language practices and the classroom environment.

Bonnie Roelle, who heads the district’s state pre-K programs, explains that the visits should not be viewed negatively. “Kids are not tested and teachers will not be evaluated,” she says. The district will be looking to determine whether classrooms have enough books, whether those books are in children’s home language, and whether children are being read to in large and small groups, Roelle adds.

If classrooms are found lacking, a coach will work with the teacher to devise an improvement plan, she notes.

CPS Early Childhood Officer Bowman, who is co-founder and former president of Erikson Institute, has hired a retired district researcher to align the results of both pre-

school assessments. “About two-thirds of our programs use CAP and a third use Creative Curriculum,” Bowman explains. “They are not the same instrument. We want to know how to put [both tests] in a single measure.”

She’s also hired Meisels to create a road map for evaluating the district’s early childhood programs. Bowman says the evaluation protocols will lay out areas that need to be examined, how best to examine them, and when to do it. A working version is expected to be ready by January.

The goal is to come up with a master plan for yearly program evaluation, then figure out how much it will cost, Bowman says. “We’ll have to see how much of it we can afford and how much we can implement.”

To contact Debra Williams, call (312) 673-3873 or e-mail williams@catalyst-chicago.org.

GUEST COLUMN *Continued from page 17*

True academic progress and success cannot be measured in one week of testing. Rather, critically measuring progress and success throughout the school year is true achievement.

Increased test scores sometimes reflect intense preparation that is focused on specific sections of the test, but higher test scores do not necessarily mean increased mastery of a subject or a higher level of overall knowledge and skill.

In any case, many teachers do not feel that test preparation will significantly improve a student’s scores, especially if the student is below grade level. And teachers admittedly are afraid of losing their jobs if a majority of their students do not pass these mandated tests.

Principals also fear losing their jobs, and they are under extreme pressure to raise test scores. The unspoken truth is that many principals are transferred from one under-performing school to another. These types of transfers sometimes cause a principal to be labeled as an “ineffective

leader.” Principals understand that high test scores increase their chances of being recognized as effective leaders.

Standardized tests also function as a way for state and local boards of education, educational vendors and politicians to work together to ensure mutual co-existence.

Boards of education contract with standardized testing corporations to test their entire school district. Educational vendors, usually a subsidiary of the testing corporation, sell test preparation materials to schools. This is profitable for the testing corporations regardless of students’ testing performance. If students pass, then it is because of their preparation material, which schools will continue to buy. If students fail, schools will need to increase their purchase of preparation materials.

Meanwhile, politicians use standardized test scores to reach voters by making campaign promises to improve education if scores are low. In the same way, they sometimes use low scores to justify raising taxes, to promote initiatives such as gambling or to reduce budgets with the

rationale that schools are wasting money.

Politicians also experience a win-win situation if test scores are high, by taking the credit and highlighting it in their speeches.

Standardized tests should be primarily used to assess students’ performance. These examinations should not be used to classify students, teachers, principals, schools and parents. The Board of Education should neither utilize test scores to increase educational vendors’ profits nor to provide a platform for politicians. All of these groups have a major investment in standardized test results. However, our focus should remain solely on student learning and students’ ability to achieve.

Finally, what do standardized test scores really mean? Absolutely nothing. Testing is a way to justify a multibillion-dollar nationwide testing industry that is running out of systematic ways to escape accountability for those students who do not meet standardized testing mandates.

Derek Jordan is an assistant principal at Percy Julian High School.

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We have worked carefully to make this list complete and accurate. If there are any omissions or errors, please accept our apologies. If you discover changes that are needed, please let us know by calling Gail Nickerson at (312) 427-4830 so we can correct our records.

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"CITY VOICES" Consulting Editor Lorraine Forte hosts this public affairs program at 6:30 a.m. the second Sunday of the month on WNUA-FM, 95.5.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Include the writer's full name, title and contact information for verification. Letters should be limited to 200 words and may be edited for space and clarity. Send them to the attention of the Editor.

MOVING IN/ON **STEPHEN W. RAUDENBUSH**, an expert on education research methods from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, joins the University of Chicago faculty as chair of the new interdisciplinary Committee on Education, which will focus on improving urban schools. ... **BARBARA HOLT** has resigned as a member of the Steering Committee of the Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago. Holt was recently named vice president of external affairs at the Chicago Urban League. ... **JANA FLEMING**, executive director of child development studies at City Colleges of Chicago, has been retained by The Joyce Foundation as a consultant in early childhood education grant-making. Fleming has also served as a researcher at the Erikson Institute and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS Interim principals **ARNOLD BICKHAM** at Lavizzo, **SUSAN J. KUKIELKA** at Decatur Classical, **MICHELLE MILLER** at Garvey, and **MINNIE WATSON** at DePriest have been awarded contracts. ... **PHILISTINE TWEEDLE** at Beasley Academic Center has had her contract renewed.

TEACHER AWARDS Twenty-four teachers are recipients of the district's new honor for outstanding teachers and will serve on the newly created Teacher Leadership Advisory Board, which will meet regularly with CEO Arne Duncan: **TRACY SINGER**, Farnsworth; **SARWAR BAIG**, Hayt; **PATRICIA PENA**, Lyon; **KENNETH VOORHEES**,

Piccolo; **NANCY GELDERMANN**, Hawthorne; **JESCH REYES**, Sumner; **HEATHER HALL**, Jensen; **VALERIE GUE**, National Teachers Academy; **PATRICIA GONZALEZ**, Burroughs; **PAMELA KISALA**, Blair; **GINA ALICEA**, Talman; **ANNE REIMAN**, Hendricks; **BERNICE HALL**, Nicholson; **MARYPAT ROBERTSON**, Ray; **KRISTEN SCHROEDER**, Keller; **SANDRA BROOKINS**, Powell; **ADREA DELANEY**, Carver Primary; **JAMES DOYIAKOS**, Amundsen High; **JUANITA DOUGLAS-THURMAN**, Lincoln Park High; **CHERI MONIK**, Austin High; **EVELYN CHANDLER**, York High; **CHRISTINE SALSTRAND-SMITH**, Hubbard High; and **MICHELLE MCGILLIVRAY**, Morgan Park High. Each teacher received \$2,000 award and \$1,000 for their school.

HELPING DROPOUTS A new guide, "How to Retain or Reenroll Your Student in a Chicago Public School," is available from the Community Coalition on the Dropout Crisis, a local education advocacy network of community-based organizations and activists. The guide informs parents on how to advocate on behalf of their student and gives steps for keeping students in school or reenrolling former dropouts. The guide also outlines attendance and truancy policies. To download a copy of the guide or a sample letter to request a due process hearing from a school, go to www.gwtp.org.

TOP SCORING STUDENTS The following students have been named National Merit Semifinalists based on their PSAT scores: **SARAH**

BAYER, KATHERINE HAYDEN, MICHELLE HOCHBERG, PETRA J. KELLY, STEPHANIE KELLY, GIDEON E. KLIONSKY, NORA E. LAMBRECHT, JOSEPH B. MATUCH, RYAN A. MCELHANEY, SOPHIE T. ROSENBERG, ELIZABETH G. SCHOLOM, BENNETT L. SMITH, ABRAHAM SOHN, BENJAMIN N. TUPPER, and ROGER G. WAITE from Lincoln Park High School. ... **ILYA CHALIK**, MITCHELL Y. ISODA, MICHAEL A. KENNEDY, REBEKAH G. KIM, MATTHEW K. LAW, SIMON G. SWARTZMAN, MAXIMILIAN SWIATLowski, JOSEPH Z. TERDIK and MONICA L. WOJCIK from Northside College Preparatory High School. ... **SAMSON A. FELSHMAN**, AIDAN A. O'DOWDY-RYAN, BENJAMIN M. SCHOLOM, NICOLE C. SMITH and RICHARD C. WATTERSON from Walter Payton College Preparatory School. ... **ELENA M. LOSEY** and **KAJ C. PETERSON** from Von Steuben Metropolitan Science Center. ... **ADAM E. AMMAR**, RACHEL K. BERNARD, MARIA C. BOND, LINDSAY N. BOWE, MARK CHEN, WENNA JIA, RICHARD G. OTAP, RIA L. ROBERTS, MAXWELL G. SHUFTAN, JARED E. TWISS-BROOKS, DAVID B. WONG and BEILIN YE from Whitney M. Young Magnet High School.

NEW BOOK The Annie E. Casey Foundation has released the 2005 Kids Count Data Book. The publication features state profiles of child well-being, as measured by 10 key indicators such as infant mortality, teen birthrates and children living in poverty. The new report may be viewed or ordered online at www.kidscount.org.

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