Chicago School Reform: A Beginning
To our readers:

Welcome to CATALYST: Voices of Chicago School Reform. In nine issues each school year we will bring you news and analysis of the innovative ways that Chicagoans are attempting to reform their public schools. We will take you inside classrooms, into neighborhoods throughout the city and into the circles where decisions are made about the direction of reform. We will strive to show what is working, what is not working and what has been overlooked.

As our subtitle suggests, we also will bring you the views of individuals engaged in reform at every level and from across the spectrum of opinion. CATALYST will be a place where a variety of voices can be heard—so that people with the common goal of educating our children can learn from each other and appreciate different points of view.

At times, CATALYST will go outside Chicago to explore the work of reformers in other school districts and solicit opinions and advice from education leaders whose views are not influenced by local involvement.

As with other reform activity here, CATALYST is the result of collaboration—between the Community Renewal Society, a 108-year-old urban service agency, and four foundations, AT&T Foundation, Chicago Community Trust, The Joyce Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Each of these organizations saw an urgent need for a citywide publication that would serve several audiences, from policymakers to parents. Together we created CATALYST as two publications in one.

In February, May and October, CATALYST will take the form of a journal and focus on issues of policy and the broad sweep of events. A special feature will be excerpts from diaries being kept by 20 individuals whom CATALYST recruited to record their experiences with and reflections on reform. The diarists range from students to administrators and hail from all parts of the city.

Six CATALYST issues each year—March, April, August, September, November, and January—will appear as 12-page newsletters and offer stories and information aimed at helping members of local school councils and others working to improve individual schools.

CATALYST is being mailed free to 15,000 people who are in a position to help schools and other institutions better serve the needs of children. Most members of our targeted audience live in Chicago, but some live beyond our borders—for Chicago's unique experiment in school improvement has captured the attention of the country. Already, subscription requests are coming in from across the United States and even Canada. And we expect interest to grow as the details of the Chicago story become known.

You, our readers involved in school reform, have taken on a tremendous challenge. You will face frustration, uncertainty and, no doubt, a mix of failure and success as you search for ways to overcome the obstacles that keep hundreds of thousands of children from growing into healthy, self-assured, educated adults. But you also have a lot going for you. For the first time in memory, virtually all sectors of Chicago are paying attention to schools, learning what it takes to make them work and often pitching in. No other city can boast such involvement. No other city can boast such a unified effort. And no other city has a CATALYST to record and support rejuvenation of its public school system. You can be proud of that as well.

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Most principals, councils get thumbs up

by Julius Menacker, Leslie Herzog, Emanuel Hurwitz, and Ward Weldon

At least two-thirds of Chicago school principals appear headed toward reappointment by their local school councils.

And more than two-thirds of council members report no serious problems in doing their work.

These signs of relatively high satisfaction by the key players in Chicago school reform emerged from a survey of council members conducted in late December and early January.

Through a questionnaire sent to all 5,940 council members

"I expect that my principal will be rehired."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
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<td>65%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>22%</td>
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through council chairpersons, the survey explored the health of council operations, the training needs of council members, the needs of schools and the lives of council members themselves, including their occupations, level of schooling and motivation for seeking election.

Principal selection is the issue of the hour, with half the city's local school councils facing a Feb. 28 deadline for deciding whether to retain their current principals or search for replacements.

Principals, who lost tenure with school reform, should be buoyed by the reaction to this statement: "If I had to guess today, I would expect that my principal will be rehired when his/her contract is up." Sixty-five percent of the respondents agreed with the statement, 22 percent said they were not sure and only 13 percent disagreed. Three of the member groups—parents, community members and teachers—had virtually identical responses. Only principals stood out: 80 percent agreed and only 7 percent disagreed.

Apparently, the dire predictions of council-principal strife have not materialized and the disputes highlighted by the media are exceptions rather than the rule. However, comments written by some respondents point to an extremely dissatisfied minority on some councils. "I am extremely frustrated," wrote one member. "It seems to be the parent members against the principal and the two teachers. Our principal ramrods things through the council and refuses to let us have anything to say about anything." Wrote another: "There is a difference of opinion on our school's needs. There are parents in the principal's back pocket. Everything he thinks or wants is just fine with them."

Community organizers, district council presidents and other reform leaders who are in touch with many schools have cited widespread serious problems in council operations. However, council members themselves see things differently. Only 22 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement: "Right now, my council has serious problems getting work done."

Responses to questions about personal conflicts among council members and members' ability to resolve differences of opinion reinforce the picture of widespread satisfaction with council operations. The troubled minority cannot be
Most urgent school needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents/community</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More parent involvement</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More supplies</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More books</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers**

| More parent involvement    | 51%    | 34%            |
| Small classes              | 41%    | 36%            |
| Better staff morale        | 34%    | 36%            |

**Principals**

| More parent involvement    | 46%    | 40%            |
| More power for principal   | 29%    | 41%            |
| More clerical help         | 29%    | 35%            |

Councils' needs for help

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<tr>
<th>Parents/community</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding budget</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding improvement plan</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating principal</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teachers**

| Understanding budget       | 34%    | 41%            |
| Evaluating principal       | 27%    | 40%            |
| Understanding improvement plan | 24%  | 37%            |

**Principals**

| Understanding budget       | 27%    | 32%            |
| Knowing good teaching      | 22%    | 37%            |
| Evaluating principal       | 22%    | 37%            |

Source: CATALYST survey of LSC members.

overlooked, however, for it includes at least 100 schools.

Again written comments give a feel for the problems. 
"When LSC meetings are held, tension could be cut with a
knife," wrote one member. "We are dragged down by
unimportant details because of feelings and union contracts."
Wrote another: "We need to select another chairperson
because the one we have is not functioning at all." And
another: "Major problem with dominant assistant principal
and union rep teacher. They are stifling our council efforts
behind the scenes."

Councils at largely Hispanic schools appear to have the
most problems. Thirty-one percent of the respondents from
Hispanic majority schools said their councils had serious
problems, compared with 19 of respondents from all other
schools. Similarly, the percentage of members reporting
personal conflicts and inability to resolve differences of
opinion was slightly higher at Hispanic majority schools than
at majority black or majority white schools. And 25 percent
said language barriers were keeping their councils from doing
their work well.

"Right now the meetings are only in English," wrote one
respondent. "[We] need more information in Spanish," said
another. Insisted a third: "All members of the council should
speak Spanish and English."

Despite problems, council members are optimistic that their
efforts will pay major dividends. Three out of four agreed with
this statement: "I believe the work of my council will lead to
major improvements in the education of our children." Parents
are most confident (85 percent), followed by community
members (76 percent), teachers (66 percent) and principals
(52 percent). Of the remainder in each category, most simply
were "not sure." Few were non-believers.
LSC members: who they are

If one individual could be conjured up to typify the mass of parents now in charge of Chicago's public schools, here's how she would describe herself:

A 37-year-old mother with some college education who is not employed outside the home, is a PTA member and ran for the local school council largely at the urging of other parents.

That's the picture painted by responses to a survey of local school council members.

The survey found that 71 percent of all council members, including community members and educators, are female and that their average age is 40. Ages range from 19 to 80, with two-thirds of members between 30 and 46. Parents are the youngest, with an average age of 37, followed by teachers, 45, community members, 47, and principals, 51.

Occupations range just as broadly, including architects and attorneys at the high-income end and laborers and maids at the low-income end. Forty-seven percent of parents and 38 percent of community members listed no employment.

The reported level of schooling was surprisingly high, with 25 percent of parents and 41 percent of community members saying they had bachelor's or graduate degrees. Fifteen percent of parents and 11 percent of community members said they had not graduated from high school.

Responses to the survey indicate that many "old hands" were elected to councils—58 percent had been members of the PTA and 37 percent had been members of local school improvement councils, forerunners to today's LSCs.

About a fourth of the teachers said they are union delegates as well. On average, teachers have 21 years of experience, with an average of 13 in their current schools. On average, principals have 10 years of experience as principals, with 7 in their current schools.

Parents not only hold a majority on councils—6 of 11 seats—but also exerted the most influence in spawning candidacies. Fifty-four percent of parent members, 39 percent of community members and 32 percent of teachers said parents had urged them to run.

Children also played a role: 39 percent of parents and 20 percent of community members noted their encouragement. A boost from a principal was cited by 28 percent of parents, 20 percent of teachers and 15 percent of community members. Seven percent of members said their church had encouraged them to run. Politicians, the Chicago Teachers Union and employers exerted even less influence.

Council members also expressed confidence in their own abilities, though it could be that only the more confident members returned the survey. The statement "I am well prepared to make good decisions about council matters" elicited agreement from, at the low end, 68 percent of community members, and, at the high end, 89 percent of principals.

Although they feel confident, members also expressed a need for help and training. As one parent put it, "I believe our council has done great, but we needed a lot of training...all members together."

Of the 12 areas of possible need listed in the questionnaire, help understanding the school budget came out as most urgent in each council-member group. Thirty-seven percent of all council members said this need is urgent, and another 44 percent said it is very important. Each group also saw a particularly urgent need for help understanding the school improvement plan, evaluating the principal and, significantly, understanding their roles as council members.

One parent, apparently an LSC chairman, wrote: "I have some council members who do not understand what they are supposed to do." Another parent urged training of her school's principal, saying "she doesn't seem to understand what the council's powers are in certain areas." And a third: "Everyone is unoinformed about duties of the council members."

This ranking of needs for help reflects the tasks that immediately confronted the councils. However, calls for help in more general areas, such as understanding what good teaching is, understanding achievement test scores and understanding curriculum development, were made more urgent.

Among principals, help understanding good teaching ranked second. As teachers' evaluators, principals no doubt appreciate better the complexity of the task.

All council-member groups and all kinds of schools—majority black, majority Hispanic and majority white—also agreed on the most urgent need of their schools: more parent involvement. And they did so by large margins—57 percent of all council members saw an urgent need for more parent involvement, compared with 41 percent for the next most urgent need, more supplies. Commented one parent: "In a very brief time we have been able to bring many new and wonderful changes for our children. But we do not have the support and/or help from the parents in the community that we need."

After "more supplies," there was a cluster of needs ranked urgent by 25 percent to 33 percent of members: more books, smaller classes, getting rid of incompetent teachers, better maintained school buildings, better student discipline, better staff morale and help for teachers to improve teaching.

At Hispanic majority schools, the related needs of smaller classes, reducing overcrowding and more teachers clustered in second place.
In three areas, African-American parents saw a substantially more urgent need than did parents of other races and ethnic groups: parent involvement (68 percent), student discipline (44 percent), and a reduction in violence and threats (33 percent).

Not surprisingly, principals listed "more power for the principal" second and "better leadership from our principal" last among 22 possible school needs listed in the questionnaire. "Better principal leadership" came in eighth among teachers, 15th among parents and 19th among community members.

In written remarks, council members focused on the need for physical improvements and better maintenance, better school security and student discipline and ability to hold evening meetings at their schools. "Absolutely must have meeting space and time in the school at night," wrote one member.

On balance, Chicago's first local school councils have forged ahead with enthusiasm for their work and high expectations for their success. Although most feel that harmonious relations exist among council members, serious interpersonal problems exist in some councils.

Members want training, particularly in budget matters and the other areas of major responsibility outlined in the Chicago School Reform Act (approval of school improvement plans and action on principal contracts). Related to this, members are frustrated by delays in receiving training and information. It must also be understood that councils vary in their training needs. For example, while most respondents do not see a pressing need for help in learning to work together, volunteered comments indicate that this need is critical among some schools.

In the eyes of council members, the clearest, most emphatic need for improving education is greater parent involvement. The new role parents are playing in school leadership offers hope that councils can make progress toward that end.

Julius Menacker, Emanuel Hurwitz and Ward Weldon are faculty members in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Leslie Herzog is a doctoral student in education. Also participating in the study were Thomas Weinstein and Mary Zellman, doctoral students in public policy analysis, specializing in education.

How survey was done

This article is based on responses to a five-page questionnaire prepared in collaboration with CATALYST editors. A dozen school reform leaders and researchers were asked to comment on the initial draft, and a revised draft was field tested with 73 council members.

Packet of 11 questionnaires and postage-paid return envelopes were distributed to local school council chairmen through the Board of Education's internal mail system in early December. Schools with an Hispanic enrollment of at least 30 percent received copies in Spanish, too. A cover letter asked LSC presidents to distribute the questionnaires to the 10 other members of their councils.

By Jan. 18, 690 parents, community representatives, teachers, and principals (12 percent of the total) had responded—in numbers proportionate to their council membership.

The racial breakdown of respondents was: parents, 30 percent white, 46 percent African-American, 20 percent Hispanic, 4 percent other; community, 49 percent white, 40 percent black, 8 percent Hispanic, 3 percent other; teachers, 43 percent white, 47 percent black, 8 percent Hispanic, 2 percent other; principals, 60 percent white, 32 percent black, 6 percent Hispanic, 2 percent other. It is impossible to say whether this breakdown is representative because there has been no racial census of members.

However, council members in overwhelmingly black schools are under-represented in the survey—55 percent of all members are in schools whose enrollment is more than 70 percent black, but only 42 percent of the survey's respondents are in such schools.

Separate poll sees school improvement

To local school council members, the Chicago public schools are looking brighter out in the neighborhoods but still pretty gloomy at Board of Education headquarters, a telephone poll has found.

Half of Chicago's local school council members believe their schools are working better since councils came to power last October, according to a poll commissioned by the Alliance for Better Schools, a reform coalition. Most remaining members believe their schools are operating the same.

However, the central administration got the kind of marks "usually seen for public figures like Ed Vrdolyak," said the report by Richard Day Research. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being high, the administration scored no higher than 4.9 for various services.
Rocky start for an LSC

One building, two councils, many problems at Piccolo

by Liane Clorfene Casten

Pamela Price has her work cut out for her. This 27-year-old mother of three is the chair of one of two local school councils at Piccolo School in Humboldt Park.

Like many school council chairpersons in Chicago, she faces the challenge of finding ways to meet the enormous needs of many low-achieving students. But she also has to grapple with the problems the Interim Board of Education created when it declared there would be two schools at Piccolo, one for children in kindergarten through fifth grade and one for children in sixth through eighth.

Price is new to the Piccolo community, and she did not arrive happily. "I dreaded sending my kids to Piccolo when I moved into this neighborhood," she recalled. "When I visited it, I liked nothing I saw. It's been a school everyone's forgotten about."

But Price had little choice. A year ago, she and her mother had found a house on Pulaski that they liked and could afford. Price checked out parochial schools, but discovered they could not meet the needs of one child who is handicapped. She bought the house on Pulaski anyway, and resolved to run for the local school council at Piccolo.

During the campaign, Price displayed an assertiveness that has carried over to council leadership. "I campaigned hard, put up posters, knocked on doors, talked to folks, made myself visible," she recalled. "When the opposition tore my posters down, I'd put them up again. When they wrote obscenities on them, I'd put up clean ones, all out of my own pocket. Eventually, folks began to admire how I got out and talked to everyone. Others got turned off by the negative tactics of my opponents. The old PTA crowd assumed they'd have little opposition. They didn't like it when I won."

Piccolo, at 1030 N. Keeler, has a racially mixed student body—65 percent black, 33 percent Hispanic and a relative handful of Asians and whites. Ninety-five percent of its families are considered low-income. More than 14 percent of its students are not fluent in English, and about two-thirds of its students test well below grade level in reading and math.

The building, once the home of Orr High School, is in desperate need of repairs. Teachers use cardboard posters, a student's bright splash of color, to cover chipping paint and gaping holes in the plaster. The windows in one room cannot be opened. Many windows are broken. There are no screens, and nesting pigeons have occasionally flown in. The girls' washrooms lack doors. The playground in the back needs blacktopping if the children are to use it at all.

Making matters worse, the School Board, in a decision that
confounded everyone, split Piccolo into two schools, each with its own principal and local school council. Thus, in September, Thomas Stewart, principal of the entire student body for six years, found himself “demoted” and in charge of only 600 students, the older ones. No one had told him the split was coming; he learned about it through a personnel report. Meanwhile, Irma Lopez Kaimer, who was a district-level bilingual coordinator, was sent in as interim principal for the 1,000 some younger students.

At first, confusion, anger, suspicion and a territorial mindset engulfed the school. A tug-of-war ensued over money, personnel, space, supplies and desks and chairs. Parents and teachers asked many questions that no one answered. Who reports to whom? Who gets Project CANAL (a specially funded School Board project)? What about the security guards? When a kid needs discipline, who is responsible?

“We needed guidelines from the board and heard nothing from anyone there,” Price said in November. “We had no place for the councils to meet and no supplies to work with. And now we’ve had no cooperation between the two schools.” As Price talked, two engineers removed a desk from Kaimer’s office, without permission. “Dr. Stewart says he wants what’s best for the children, but if he really wants what’s best, he’d go out of his way to communicate,” she added.

**Worst may be over**

Now, however, it appears that the worst may be behind Piccolo. With Price leading the elementary council and the Rev. Lonnie Rucker, full-time machinist and part-time minister, leading the middle-school council, the Piccolo community is slowly addressing the problems created by years of deterioration and neglect, and then by the division.

The breakthrough came when Price succeeded—after repeated phone calls and a trip to School Board headquarters—in getting help from the board’s newly formed office of reform support. Wilfredo Ortiz and Estella Jarrett came out to Piccolo one day in December to open lines of communication between the two Piccolo principals.

Going into the meeting, Stewart was the “heavy,” considered pushy and controlling, while Kaimer was viewed as passive, to the detriment of her school.

“It was one of the very best meetings I’ve ever conducted,” Ortiz recalled. All the anger, confusion and frustration were aired, he said, and that paved the way for the principals to work together for the sake of the whole school. “I felt a great loss, as if I were getting a divorce,” Stewart acknowledged. “We’re trying to make the financial and psychological adjustments here, but frankly, I would have retired or resigned had I had a choice. I’ve served all the kids. I’ve been here since 1973, ever since Orr moved out. And no one consulted me on any of this.”

Said Ortiz: “Dr. Stewart had every right to be hurt. He’s been denied choices. He saw his staff and his students reduced, which means he took a real salary cut. Once Mrs. Kaimer saw this, she became more understanding and open.”

“After four hours, working first with the two principals, and later with Mrs. Price, Rev. Rucker and Dolores Thomas (another LSC member) we came to some very workable conclusions,” said Ortiz.

For example, Stewart will supply substitute teachers out of his budget on occasion, so that Kaimer does not have to spend time as a substitute. And student discipline will be every teacher’s responsibility, regardless of which school’s child is acting out.

“Cabrini Green keeps their schools better than ours”

— Pamela Price

Meanwhile, Price has been at Piccolo virtually every day. With her two-year-old son Chris in tow, she observes, lends a hand, and is getting a feel for the staff and the kids. She’s come to know who’s doing their job. Price also has visited other schools, and come back furious: “Cabrini Green keeps their schools better than ours.” She’s explored libraries, staying for their workshops and returning with colorful learning tools that teachers might want to use in their classes. And she hasn’t missed any of the nearby training sessions sponsored by community or business groups.

The energetic council president also is compiling a list of needed building repairs, which add up to $774,000, and looking for creative ways to get more substitute teachers. Price is working so hard that she’s begun to wonder whether she and other council members shouldn’t get paid.

Price has set ambitious goals: “I want Piccolo to be as good as the best in the system—as good as Newberry Magnet, where I went as a child. I want to see the staff communicating more, sharing more. I want to see faculty morale improve. I want foreign languages and drama in the curriculum and I want a full offering of extended afterschool programs.”

“It all hangs together,” she explained. “When the faculty feels productive and more supported, then we’ll have more discipline and respect from the kids.”

As for getting parents involved, the LSC is planning a contest. “Two parents will be elected from each of the 40 classrooms to serve on school committees. “If this school is to
improve, parents must be involved,” said Price.

The Piccolo elementary council also has imposed its will on
the school budget. At Price’s initiative, Joy Noven, of Parents
United for Responsible Education, briefed members on how to
read the document and what powers they had over it.

**Budget rescinded**

“In September Dr. Stewart and Mrs. Kraimer agreed to hire
a teacher at the ‘designer label’ price of $43,982,” said
Cynthia Carter, a teacher member who has zeroed in on the
budget. “Well, that made no sense to the LSC, especially
when we had so many other pressing needs. We rescinded
the original budget [for discretionary funds] and started over.
We cancelled an assistant principal’s job, too, and $22,000
for spelling books.”

Instead, the LSC, with Kraimer’s okay, decided to use its
$131,109 in discretionary funds to hire five more teacher
aides and one more security guard and to buy five walkie-
talkies, a new intercom system, a new duplicating machine for
the kindergarten and extensive equipment repairs.

Energized by this action, the LSC is demanding more
information about spending and the school. “If’s what we were
elected to do,” said Carter. “We’re here to work for the kids.”

On Dec. 21, a bitterly cold day, both councils, along with a
few older children and community observers, met together for
the first time.

The middle-school council took up its own business first. 
Nearly half of the allotted hour was spent correcting minutes of
the previous meeting, partly because Stewart wanted to be
certain he was quoted accurately.” That meant less time for

Learning together at Piccolo.

the joint agenda, much of which then had to be tabled.

The big issues were security and building improvements.
Price immediately was challenged by a council member from
the middle school: “Did you take a survey of those parents
wanting better security?”

“No,” Price shot back. “I represent all the parents. It doesn’t
matter how many came to me.”

That settled, the councils got down to business. They easily
agreed to keep all doors but the main one locked from the
inside after 9 a.m. However, a suggestion that security guards
wear bright jackets or vests, to readily identify themselves to
children, kicked up some dust.

“We never had to wear uniforms in the past,” argued one
security guard. Cynthia Carter replied: “Well, this is a new
day. This is reform.”

The vests/jackets won the day.

The issue of building repairs generated a host of ideas,
from marching on the Board of Education for more money to
soliciting area businesses. It also elicited the comment: “Let’s
not see this as a lower vs. middle school thing.”

**Commitment to work together**

At last, a public commitment was made to work together, in
some areas at least. Having four council members serve on
both councils helped. Three of the four speak only Spanish, but
a bilingual teacher member interprets.

After the October elections, there was friction between Price
and her council’s Hispanic members. But Price believes that,
too, is history.

After the ground-breaking joint LSC meeting, the elementary
council had its own hour. Members easily agreed to seek a
bilingual tutor for two students who speak only Arabic. Then
Kraimer took the floor to explain her educational goals for the
children.

Though not on the agenda, the issue of Kraimer’s continued
employment is on the minds of many at Piccolo. At this point, a
majority of council members, including Price, is happy and
relieved to see Kraimer asserting herself more.

“Mrs. Kraimer was new to this school and her hands have
been tied as an interim principal,” said Dolores Thomas, a
community representative on the LSC. “She’s hard working
and I believe she wants to be a good leader. I can see the
potential. She’s most cooperative.” In the meantime, Pamela
Price has discovered so much strength in herself that she’s
wondering what else she might do with her young life. She’s
thinking she might go back to college, and major in education.

Liane Clorfene Casten is a Chicago writer who once taught in
Chicago’s public schools.
What role for central office under decentralization?

by Kent D. Peterson

Change in the Chicago Public Schools is now inevitable. The challenge for all is to ensure that change promotes educational quality for all students. And, although much of the responsibility for improvement rests with parents, teachers and administrators in schools, it is clear that the new superintendent and his staff have important roles to play.

Chicago has undertaken one of the most extensive revampings of a school system in the history of American education. Over the past 25 years, education has tried a number of different ways to recast the educational enterprise—one remembers open-space classrooms, the New Math, team teaching, programmed learning and others; but few have lasted and few have attempted to radically reshape the governance and decision making of schools. In Chicago, reform is a dramatically different effort: It reconfigures relationships within schools, among schools, and between schools and the central office.

Board’s reform plan on target

The Interim Board of Education’s Systemwide Educational Reform Plan is an amazingly complex document, with more than 40 goals and more than 160 pages of ideas, data and commentary. It seems to include some of our best guesses on how school improvement should proceed.

In the introductory statement of “guiding principles,” the plan clearly articulates what it is trying to achieve. Stating succinctly this mission of reform as a set of beliefs and guiding principles—and then making them the criteria against which decisions should be measured—sends a focused message to all of Chicago. Wisely, this mission statement focuses attention on the educability of all children, on the importance of local autonomy, and on education of “the whole child.” It values the diversity of Chicago’s children, viewing this diversity as an asset and not a liability. Finally, and most importantly for this discussion, it views the role of non-classroom personnel as supportive of the schools.

Although identifying many goals and objectives, the Reform Plan leaves some of the “how” in the dark:

- What new roles and ways of thinking do central office administrators need to take on to help schools improve?
- What are the difficulties that central office administrators face as they try to change their attitudes, actions, and relationships with schools?
- In what ways can the new superintendent and central administrators act as leaders in building a culture of improvement in a highly decentralized system?
- What specific actions or programs can central office take to encourage, support, facilitate, and motivate change in a decentralized district?

There are few if any formal research studies of this type of radical school decentralization. (New York City’s effort did not decentralize to school-level councils.) Nonetheless, there are numerous studies of leadership in school districts, schools, and the corporate world that suggest ways to think about and, perhaps, act to transform the Chicago central office (Firestone, 1989; Fullan, 1985; Lezotte and Taylor, 1990; Waterman, 1987). These and practical examples from several cities struggling with change suggest nine issues, themes, or actions that the central office might want to consider in the coming months.
VISION ESSENTIAL FIRST STEP  Educators, like others, are motivated by a strong sense of purpose and a clear mission. It is more and more obvious that organizations that are making major changes need leaders who have a vision that communicates the values they hold and the future they seek to put in place. Leaders who have a vision of what the schools and system can achieve—who articulate a strong, clear, value-driven focus that is communicated regularly—can motivate others to extra effort, help others keep the “eye on the prize,” and give co-workers the will to persevere in difficult situations.

■ In Atlanta, Ga., for example, Alonzo Crim, a visionary superintendent, for many years spoke regularly and passionately both inside and outside the district about his vision for quality Atlanta schools. His vision kept community leaders and local educators passionately working to improve schools for the children of the city.

■ In San Diego, Cal., the actions of Supt. Thomas Payzant regularly and powerfully reinforce a vision that supports diversity and quality education. For example, he recently met with school teams and later district groups that included personnel from all job classifications to share and discuss his vision. His approach to leadership helps attract and retain quality personnel.

SHOW COMMITMENT TO CHANGE  Change requires a new set of commitments, a set of commitments to renewal and creative experimentation. Supporting the status quo won’t work. Central office can support improvement by communicating, reinforcing, and actively engaging in renewal. They can, for example, reward and recognize successes, mini-experiments, new ideas, and attempts at improvement—even those efforts that do not succeed. These things build commitment to the cause.

■ In Prince George’s County, Md., one of the largest and most diverse districts in the country, the district started the school year with a massive ceremony that celebrated improving education for all kids. It included students, non-certified staff, teachers, administrators, and board members. Through uplifting music, energizing speeches, and provocative banners proclaiming the district’s mission, leaders “railed the troops,” getting them to commit themselves to a year of dedicated effort to schools.

■ In Springfield, Mo., the district begins each school year with a professional conference where school leaders, teachers, and members of the community listen to speakers, discuss coming plans and talk about their shared mission of educating all children.

PROVIDE INFORMATION  Change requires great quantities of information. Information about team planning, site-based management, student assessment, approaches to instructional improvement, and other practical areas are essential to the improvement effort. Central administrators should be brokers of information and ideas, identifying and creatively disseminating the best that is known about topics of interest to schools and school councils.

Communication can begin with existing avenues. But administrators should experiment with other approaches as well, including electronic bulletin boards, mini-conferences on special topics, “hot topic” newsletters, peer visitation, and the formation of peer networks to problem solve and share ideas. These communications—whether formal or informal—should be as lively, sparkling, and engaging as they are useful and current.

■ The California School Leaders Academy (CSLA) makes its communications sparkle with computer-generated pictures and interesting graphics.

■ In many districts, central office administrators make sure that informal leaders and “gossips” get information early so they will send it rapidly though the grapevine.

PROMOTE PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS  Over the coming months, school teams will be developing plans for improvement. When schools start to implement these plans, principals and teachers will need to have well-developed problem-solving or “coping” skills (Louis and Miles, 1990). There will be conflicts, disagreements, and occasionally amicable consensus. But planning and implementing change is difficult, takes time, and can be improved through training in planning

Guiding principles on school reform

"We, the members of the Interim Board of Education, believe that:

1. All children can learn, given the proper school environment.

2. The purpose of the Chicago Public Schools is the education of the whole child. The schoolhouse is the center of this educational process. Each school is unique and functions as an individual entity.

3. The principal and teachers of a school, in cooperation with the parents and community, know best the potential and needs of their students and are, therefore, the best suited to direct the educational course of their school.

4. The role of all non-classroom personnel of the Chicago Public Schools is one of support to the schoolhouse.

5. The first priority for the allocation of all resources, both financial and human, within the Chicago Public Schools is the education of the whole child.

6. The multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-lingual makeup of the Chicago Public Schools student body is an asset and a resource for enriching the lives of all students.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that all decisions made regarding the Chicago Public Schools shall be measured against these Guiding Principles on School Reform."

Approved June 14, 1989
and problem solving—skills that central office can help develop, support, and refine.

- Many districts using the effective schools research model provide intensive group dynamics training for school improvement teams (Lezotte and Taylor, 1990). These teams cooperatively assess data on student performance and design strategies to refine instruction.
- In Appleton, Wis., a grant has made it possible to provide training in conflict resolution for staff in the system. This lessens the time spent in unnecessary disagreements and increases the quality of planning.
- School leaders across Louisiana receive extensive training in problem finding and problem solving for instructional improvement.

**Provide Staff Development** The school councils and improvement planners will need a wide variety of new skills, abilities, and capacities. Central office could continue to identify the training needs of schools and then design and deliver high-quality programs internally or bring in the highest quality training from outside the system. These programs cannot be of the abysmal quality found in many districts. They must be state-of-the-art in both content and design.

Much is known about effective staff development (Joyce and Showers, 1990). For example, topics should be identified by the participants. Skills should be built cumulatively. Training should be ongoing, not predominately one-shot workshops. Staff development should match the learning styles of the persons involved.

- Staff development is a cornerstone of school improvement in Prince George's County and San Diego, and in Texas, where school improvement is part of state reforms.

- The California leaders program provides several weeks of ongoing, cumulative training, coaching, and follow-up over 18 months. All aspects of school leadership and improvement are covered.

- In Huntsville, Ala., there are school-level staff development coordinators, and training programs are available for teachers and others considering a career in leadership positions.

**Change Roles Carefully** The central office will need to be creative in shaping its new roles, artful in identifying its responsibilities to schools, and diplomatic in building new relations with schools. Research and practical wisdom suggest that central office and subdistrict administrators will need to be more leaders than regulators, more facilitators of success than directors of change. They also will need to learn that persuasion, bargaining, and negotiation are the approaches to take, rather than demanding, directing, and prescribing.

Finally, central administrators may need to develop relationships with schools that are more cooperative, collaborative and professional, marked more by two-way interchange than in the past. Their authority and power to influence the improvement effort will need to be reshaped. It may be based more on expertise and ability to help improve schools than on their position in the bureaucracy.

These changes will not be easy. They will take their toll on many existing administrators who developed skills in different times. But these changes are inevitable and necessary if central office is to help the reform, which it must.

- In San Diego, the superintendent has made it clear that central office exists to serve schools. This has required some unique changes in the ways these administrators interact with schools. For example, central office personnel, who have started to look at the schools as "customers," are increasingly concerned about customer service and satisfaction and are seeking ways to improve their service to local sites.

- In some districts, central office personnel are expected to get into most of the schools during the year to get to know the educators and hear about problems in the schools they can help solve.

- In Appleton, the new superintendent moved his office from school to school during part of the year so he could meet people and see for himself what was going on.

**Model New Behaviors** Throughout this reform, central office can help the renewal by modeling the kind of behavior it wants to see. If it wants more experimentation, it should try new ways of doing things. If it wants local schools to be more analytic, it should analyze its own roles and work. If it wants schools to be more self-critical, it should critique its own work and show it will rapidly change what does not work. In the months ahead, this type of role modeling may communicate more than anything central office will say.

**Strive for Rapid Response** With all large bureaucracies, a common criticism is that things happen too slowly and that people and processes are hard to change. One of the ways to overcome this criticism is for central office to demonstrate it will respond rapidly to requests for help, information, or materials. Similarly, central administrators should learn quickly what schools need and how to reinforce the strength and perseverance of local leaders, whether they are on councils, in classrooms, or in the principal's office. Central office needs to convince the schools that it is there to serve local needs for improvement.

**Cultivate Culture of Change** Much has been written about the importance of a positive, value-driven culture, or ethos, in schools and other organizations (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Deal and Peterson, 1990). A culture is the underlying set of norms, values and beliefs that provide the glue that keeps things together, helps people make sense of their world, and drives them to achieve seemingly impossible missions.

Central office and the superintendent have excellent opportunities to reinforce a culture of renewal and accomplishment for the Chicago schools. Through their vision, their symbolic activity, the ways they reward and recognize...
Money made difference in voter turnout

by Ben Joravsky

Corporations and aggressive community organizing generated big vote tallies in some unlikely places in last October's local school council elections, a Catalyst analysis of returns shows.

The powerful combination thrust some schools in impoverished black and Hispanic neighborhoods ahead of several largely white schools on the Northwest and Southwest sides, reversing traditional voting patterns.

Discounting these schools with high-octane campaigns, parent voting followed standard parent-involvement patterns: It was highest at schools with high student achievement, regardless of race or ethnicity. It was lowest in poor, black neighborhoods that lacked get-out-the-vote drives. Parents turned out in relatively greater numbers in poor, Hispanic neighborhoods, but most of those neighborhoods had well-organized vote campaigns.

"I consider the turnout extraordinary, given the impediments we faced," said Joseph Reed, a member of the Interim Board of Education and president of Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), a coalition of corporate leaders. "The low turnout was in some black schools because these were the areas where skepticism about reform was strongest. As for some of those Northwest and Southwest side schools, I guess we took them for granted. That won't happen again."

Altogether, about 250,000 people voted during two days of balloting for members of 71 high school and 469 elementary school councils. Of those voters, about 115,000 were parents, 97,000 were community residents and 35,000 were school employees.

The parent tally amounts to a 28-percent turnout, by School Board reckoning. And while some reformers dispute the Board's calculations (see accompanying story), no one has
come up with an alternative number.

An average turnout of 35 percent was reached, however, in schools where corporations and community groups pooled their resources.

Only magnet schools, which parents and children choose to attend, surpassed the targeted schools. About 45 percent of magnet school parents went to the polls.

Parent turnout also was high at schools in largely middle-income neighborhoods with high-achieving children. At Ray Elementary in Hyde Park, for example, 50 percent of parents voted.

In contrast, turnout slipped to about 23 percent in low-income, mostly black, inner-city schools. Surprisingly, parent turnout at some largely white schools on the Southwest and Northwest sides was not much better, sinking as low as 22 percent at Grimes Elementary, 6450 W. 64th Pl., and 29 percent at Smyser Elementary, 4310 N. Melvina.

By many accounts the biggest winner to emerge from the election was the United Neighborhood Organization, a Pilsen-based community group with branches in three other largely Hispanic neighborhoods, Wicker Park, Little Village and Southeast Chicago. UNO garnered more corporate support—nearly $200,000—than any other community group. With that money it was able to print flyers, produce radio commercials, hire 100 canvassers and, as a result, generate a turnout of about 35 percent in several Southeast, Near South and Near North side schools.

"What makes the UNO turnout so impressive is that it comes in Hispanic neighborhoods where voter turnout is usually low for even presidential elections," said Tomas Revollo, the board employee who coordinated election day operations. "These are neighborhoods where not all of the parents of school children are citizens. I've worked campaigns in these communities. Believe me, it's hard to get people to vote."

"Politically, this was a major turning point for us"

—Mary Lou Gonzalez

As a result of the higher than expected turnout, UNO sympathizers now control at least two dozen local school councils. Their vote-generating ability apparently was not lost on Mayor Richard M. Daley, who appointed Daniel Solis, UNO's executive director, to a commission that recommends future candidates to the Board of Education. Many Board observers predict that the organization will wind up with a big say on such crucial issues as which schools receive how much money to reduce overcrowding.

"We came out very well," acknowledged Mary Lou Gonzalez, president of UNO. "Politically, this was a major turning point for us. It makes all sorts of things possible in the future."

Parent voting patterns also can be seen as a reflection of the politics of school reform. In the early days, black politicians led by Mayor Harold Washington were leading players in the coalition of activists, business leaders and community organizers calling for change.

Washington died, however, before reform legislation was adopted. His successor, Eugene Sawyer, did not mobilize support around the issue. Meanwhile, UNO joined the corporate-civic coalition that wrote the law establishing elected school councils. Few black leaders were part of that coalition. And it was Mayor Daley who appointed the Interim School Board to carry out the law, and named an Hispanic educator aligned with UNO, Lourdes Monteaqudo, to serve as deputy mayor for education.

"There was a lot of misunderstanding and skepticism in the black community"

—Joan Jeter Slay

When the interim Board pushed Supt. Manford Byrd Jr. aside and slashed central office staff, including many high-ranking black administrators, civil rights activists denounced reform as a thinly disguised effort by Mayor Daley to eliminate black leaders.

"There was a lot of misunderstanding and skepticism about the elections in the black community," said Joan Jeter Slay, an Interim School Board member, and longtime reform advocate. "It set us back."

In addition, most reformers believe their efforts were sabotaged by resentful administrators.

"Not only didn't we get much help from the central administration in terms of the election, but we faced a lot of resistance from them," said Gonzalez. "Why should they care about generating a high turnout? To them reform meant losing a job. It was in their best interest to see that no one voted."

School officials deny this allegation. "Considering that we had never held an election before, I say we did a damn good job," said one veteran administrator. "We had to put it all together in a matter of weeks while adjusting to severe budget cuts." Nevertheless, at the start of the school year, there was no hotline residents could call to learn where to vote. There

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Turnout figures disputed

Calculating parent turnout for the local school elections seems simple enough: Divide the number of parents who voted by the total number of parents. The problem is that no one knows the total number of parents.

"Each local school has a record of parents and guardians," said Mark Paul, a researcher for Designs for Change, a school watchdog group. "But there is no central listing of these names. So the School Board estimates the number of parents based on complicated computer calculations that I think are inaccurate."

The Board of Education said last fall that there were about 400,000 parents and guardians for 420,000 students.

"That can't be," said Paul. "We have many single-parent families, and many families with more than one child. They're over-counting parents and guardians. And if you over-count the number of parents and guardians you automatically under-count the percentage who voted."

"I'm not saying the Board does this on purpose to make the elections look like a failure," he adds. "It's more like they don't know what they're doing."

School officials counter that whatever mistakes they make are made systemwide, which at least allows for school-by-school comparisons to pinpoint high and low turnout.

"A lot of reformers think that school officials intentionally under-counted turnout, but I don't think that's so," said another researcher who asked not to be identified. "You could just as easily accuse the reform groups of hyping the numbers to make themselves look good."

He has a point. Some reformers, for example, have boasted that last fall's elections produced a higher turnout than school board elections in the suburbs—about 16 percent, compared with a suburban average of about 12 percent. To make that claim, they divide the total number of voters—including parents, community members and school staff—by the number of registered voters in Chicago.

However, the pool of potential voters for Chicago's local school councils is much higher than the number of registered voters in the city. It includes, for example, undocumented immigrants, unregistered U.S. citizens and school employees who live in the suburbs.

Further, the Board inflates its own turnout estimate by counting all votes cast in both the elementary and high school elections without doubling the number of eligible voters. (Virtually every eligible voter could vote at both an elementary school and a high school.)

"Trying to figure a precise measurement of turnout is like nailing jelly to a wall," said Paul.

School officials have pledged to pin down the number of parents and guardians in time for the next election, in 1991. In the meantime, they report a parent turnout of 28 percent and a staff turnout of 95 percent. The turnout of community residents defies calculation.

were no election brochures or posters. With six weeks to go before the election, only about 4,000 candidates had filed to run for the 5,400 elected seats. Some Board members worried that they might not have enough candidates to fill all local school councils.

"I had to keep kicking to get them [administrators] to do anything," said Reed. "They'd look me in the face and tell me something was getting done, and then they wouldn't do it. We were going to have an election and the public didn't know it." After intense lobbying, Reed and Slay convinced interim School Supt. Charles Almo to assign Revollo, a mid-level administrator, the task of stirring interest in the elections.

"The first thing we had to do was find candidates," recalled Revollo. "We called up community organizations all over the city and asked them for names of people who would go door to door. That's how we were able to get more than 17,000 candidates."

By mid-September corporate Chicago was involved. Some companies, like First National Bank, sponsored in-house seminars and encouraged employees to run.

Others supported grassroots activities. LQE, whose members include Helene Curtis, Continental Bank and United Airlines, divvied $757,000 among 28 community organizations, including the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, the North River Commission, the Northwest Austin Council, and the Rogers Park Tenants Committee. "You have to understand we had a stake in these elections," said Laurie Glenn, a freelance publicist who assisted First National in its voter turnout efforts. "The bank's efforts hinge on the city's ability to produce an educated work force."

First National committed $300,000 to Little Village and Grand Boulevard, a black community which roughly runs north to south from 35th to 55th streets and east to west from Lake Michigan to the Dan Ryan Expressway.

"We were very careful to build a working partnership with these communities," said David Paulus, senior vice president of First National Bank. "This was not a case where we said, 'Here's $150,000, tell us what to do.' Or, 'Here's the money. We'll tell you what to do with it.' This is part of our ongoing partnership to help develop these communities. It was a joint
effort."

Working with community groups in Grand Boulevard, including Center for New Horizons and the Elliott Donnelley Youth Center, the bank produced a "People Power" campaign.

"We ran the election like a regular campaign," said Marrice Coverson, director of the youth center and campaign manager in Grand Boulevard. "We had 10 organizers knocking on doors to find candidates and get out the vote. We made posters and palm cards and we had house parties. These weren't meet-the-candidate forums, but community get-togethers where people could talk about the potential of reform. We even sent out direct mail, including one targeted to single-woman households."

From the start, the campaign's greatest handicap was apathy, as many influential blacks were hostile to the reform movement as it had developed.

"I never heard grassroots people complain about Byrd's firing," said Coverson. "But without support from the top, it was hard for people to see this as their chance to make change. We had a rally, and Judge Eugene Pincham spoke. He said: 'Reform is here. Now we have to deal with it.' Some people might not have been happy with the way reform got started, but they were determined to see that our community not lose out."

Parent turnout in the 10 targeted Grand Boulevard schools was roughly 30 percent.

In contrast, the average turnout for all-black schools in comparable South Side communities like Roseland, Woodlawn and Englewood was 23 percent. The difference was that these schools received no outside and little community assistance.

"We had a candidates night which was sparsely attended and that was about it," says the principal of one Far South Side high school. "To be honest, the community wasn't energized over this election at all."

Not every Grand Boulevard school had a great turnout either. For instance, at Beethoven Elementary, where student test scores are exceptionally low, parent turnout was only 17 percent. At nearby Pershing Elementary, a relatively high-achieving magnet school, parent turnout was 65 percent. This pattern held citywide. The ten highest scoring non-magnet schools in the city had an average turnout of about 45 percent. And none of these schools had received outside campaign help.

"The thing about some of these better schools is that they have had active parent groups for years," said Coverson. "It's new for some of our parents."

Many observers believe that turnout was relatively high in Little Village — which roughly runs north to south from 21st to 33rd street and east to west from Western to Cicero avenues — because UNO has been organizing in that community for years.

Turnout averaged 35 percent at the 10 targeted schools, reaching as high as 53 percent at Cardenas, 2345 S. Millard.

The turnout was particularly impressive because many residents there are not citizens.

"Many people were scared to vote," says Gonzalez, "We had to convince them they weren't going to be deported."

Despite its success, UNO was also criticized for its efforts.

"I caught hell from the non-UNO Latinos," said Reed. "They chewed me out for a whole morning. LQE hadn't funded them, and they were determined to do something about that situation. They wanted me to know that UNO wasn't the only Hispanic organization in town."

In addition, UNO was criticized for ignoring the black sections of neighborhoods they organized.

"We worked with the constituency we know the best," explained Gonzalez. "We weren't trying to leave anyone out."

The problem was most apparent on the Southeast Side, a working-class area of blacks, Hispanics and whites. By voting as a block, Hispanics took control of several schools, like James N. Thorp, 8914 S. Buffalo, that have a majority of black students. For the most part, Hispanics voted for Hispanic candidates even in communities that UNO didn't organize, many observers say. "We had a lot of Hispanics voting for the candidates with the Hispanic names," says Mike Radzilowski, council chair at Hayt Elementary in Edgewater. "It's only natural when you think about it. The way to avoid it is for blocks, whites and Hispanics to run as a slate."

"I caught hell from the non-UNO Latinos"

— Joseph Reed

Radzilowski was part of a successful slate that included Hispanics, whites, blacks and Asians. School officials are disappointed that other councils didn't follow Hayt's lead.

"As the councils meet and parents get to know each other, I'd hope we'd see more integrated slating," said Reed. "That didn't happen so much the first time around."

The next elections will be in the fall of 1991. School activists and officials hope to hike turnout by beginning that campaign season much earlier. LQE and First National also plan to expand their get-out-the-vote campaigns into other communities.

"A high turnout sends a signal that parents want to get involved in their schools," said Reed. "We have to convince black, white and Hispanic parents that this is a vehicle for taking control of their schools. We had a lot of impediments this time that we won't have next time. We made some mistakes, but we learned a lot. Now we have to get better."

Ben Joravsky is a Chicago writer who regularly writes about Chicago neighborhoods.
Just a start
Hispanic radio, TV went all out for election

By Lynda Gorov

The slogans were meant to motivate and, backed by a well-financed informational campaign, they made it onto radio, television, and T-shirts: De necesitamos. We need you. Si, voy a votar. Yes, I am going to vote.

The goal of the bilingual campaign was to persuade the city’s Latino community to turn out as candidates and voters in last year’s local school council elections. The obstacles were plentiful. School reformers had to reach an audience that relies on non-mainstream media for its information and explain the logistics and importance of voting. It also had to get across the point that undocumented parents were eligible to participate and to persuade immigrants from countries where elections are often predetermined that their vote would count.

“We met with the general managers of Hispanic TV and radio stations and told them this was a real opportunity for Hispanics who are known to be here in larger numbers but who haven’t been able to show their political muscle,” said Daniel Solis, executive director of the United Neighborhood Organization (UNO), which orchestrated the media campaign. “This gave us a chance to throw away all the usual restrictions and show that Hispanics, given the opportunity, can and will exercise their democratic rights.”

The Hispanic media’s advocacy of Hispanic issues is not new. But community leaders and media executives said the alliance was strengthened greatly in the months preceding the elections. About 25 percent of the public school student body is Hispanic, according to the Chicago Board of Education, and many Latinos saw the elections as an essential first step in securing a sound future for their children.

“Education for us is the No. 1 priority. It was like a campaign,” said Jose Lamas, general manager of Channel 44 (WSNS-TV) which UNC credited with being a major help. “There are things that are good for the community and anything that is good for the community has to be good for the media. We put aside our differences and worked together.”

Most Hispanic media outlets whole-heartedly endorsed the plan to raise community awareness, as well as the agenda of school reform itself, and the top three radio stations that broadcast locally in Spanish made election coverage a focus of their regular news programming. Channel 44 aired two forums in which panelists took questions on reform from the audience and, with five weeks to go, began counting down the days until the election with a special segment on the nightly news. Channel 26 (WCIU-TV) and the radio stations did likewise.

But Hispanic media outlets went further than aggressive election coverage. They aired public service announcements
(PSAs) during prime time, free of charge. WOJO Radio (751-AM) donated studio time for production of PSAs and other materials that were then made available to the competition, WTAG (1300-AM) and WIND (560-AM).

Community and other organizations hope the cooperative spirit will continue. Juan Andrade, executive director of the 17-state Midwest Northeast Voter Registration Education Project, said his goal is to register 250,000 people, including as many as 50,000 Hispanics, for the 1990 elections. He said he will need the media’s help. Solis is already talking to media executives about the possibilities for working together on the 1990 Census.

“When it comes to things we know affect the Hispanic community, we try to go out of our way,” said WOJO spokesperson Isabelle Munoz. “We have a responsibility to help out the organizations working on these issues.”

On education reform, UNO was among community groups taking an early lead. Bolstered by a $150,000 grant from First National Bank of Chicago, which has launched a community cooperation project in several African American and Hispanic neighborhoods, UNO set about getting its community involved. Solis said it spent half the money on the media campaign, with an emphasis on broadcast outlets.

Leadership for Quality Education, the Chicago business community’s school reform organization, also funneled substantial financial resources to neighborhood groups such as UNO. Solis, who is on the group’s board, said he lobbied heavily for money to advertise in Spanish-language media.

While the First National money went directly to UNO’s chapter in Little Village, its impact was citywide.

Virginia Martinez, chairperson of the Latino Committee on Media, said the media was most helpful in explaining the when, where, and how of running for election and voting. But she and other prominent Hispanics questioned whether the media can be instrumental in motivating disinterested people.

“In school districts that have high concentrations of Latinos, it would have been a poor commentary on everyone if there had been anything less than 25 percent that came out to vote,” said Linda Coronado, a former member of the Chicago Board of Education. “That vote was going to come out with or without media attention, organizing, whatever. I’ll be honest with you. I don’t know that the media played a real important role in the school where my children go.”

But Solis said he considers the campaign a success. It showed the organizational possibilities when solid field staff and sound media strategy are used in tandem.

“UNO really feels that school reform is an issue that is about changing the quality of education. But we’re no political pollyannas,” he said. “This was also about political empowerment for people who get shortchanged the worst, not just in schools but all over. And it worked. And it’s a start.”

Lynda Gorov is a Spanish-speaking Chicago writer.

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exemplary effort, they can reinforce values, purpose and meaning in the schools. Everything these administrators do symbolizes what they are committed to, what is important, what is valued. By symbolizing in their daily work their support for change and improvement, they will begin to build a culture of renewal in the district.

■ In one district the superintendent has the student achievement scores for the past several years posted on the office wall.

■ In another district central office administrators visit the schools that have improved the most in a number of different areas—attendance, dropout rates, discipline referrals—not just test scores. They provide recognition for those dedicated to children.

■ Some administrators reinforce a culture of renewal by recounting stories of success and giving attention to what they consider important.

Building a culture of renewal is not easy, but it can be done by constant attention to core values and through the symbolism of daily administrative decisions, actions, and interactions.

This reform will be a challenge for everyone involved, especially those in central office positions. Though it will not be easy, central administrators can creatively redefine the ways they think, act, and relate to schools. They are key to supporting, facilitating, and motivating change in the newly decentralized Chicago schools.

Kent D. Peterson is director of the National Center for Effective Schools, University of Wisconsin at Madison.

References


Give school system time, helping hand, a break

by Kenneth B. Smith

I remember that during the Chicago school fiscal crisis in 1980, the Board of Education was debating the notion of building the budget from the local school up instead of from the top down. In the midst of the debate, Carey B. Preston, a long-time board member, challenged the administration and Board members: "Not all knowledge about the education of children is located at 228 N. LaSalle Street" (then the address of board headquarters).

A decade later we are beginning to do a number of things "from the local school up." This is what the reform legislation means. Now each local school council concerns itself with selection, evaluation and retention or dismissal of the principal; how the local school budget and, particularly, the discretionary funds are shaped and spent; and even the final approval of the local school educational program. Chicago is on its way!

In my travels around the country, I have discovered great interest in what is going on with public schools in Chicago. I have discovered both applause and apprehension. After all, our city is undertaking a revolutionary approach to the governance of its public schools.

Let me echo that applause and apprehension. I do indeed celebrate our laudable achievements. However, I also think it important that we be modest in our expectations and that we move with some caution. Why "modest?" Why "caution?"

Chicago has institutionalized a concept that has always been mentioned in determining the effective school, namely, strong educational administrative leadership in a principal, strong instructional leadership in a faculty and meaningful involvement of parents and the community. Chicago was also looking to others for ideas and insights in the education of children.

First, a word or two about time. We should not expect a dramatic change in achievement scores in a year, or three years, or five years. Because this first step in reform emphasizes governance, we must still confront the more compelling task of developing educational programs that work for all children. It will take time. No less an authority than Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation for Excellence in Teaching has counseled that if we are truly committed to educational reform then we must be prepared to "sign on" for the long term, ten years or more. Much of the change will be gradual, or what Manford Byrd Jr., the former general superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, called incremental.

Another caution. The schools cannot do the entire job alone. Education involves more than what happens formally in the classroom. Education takes place within the family structure, in the community, and in the interaction among children at play outside the school. All have an effect upon the ability and the motivation of children to learn.

However, what happens when families are at risk or when entire communities are at risk? Is it fair to expect the schools to accomplish in five, six, or even seven hours per day all that was not accomplished by others?

What happens to the education of children when they live
in substandard housing, are surrounded by joblessness and do not have adequate health care? Is it fair to expect the schools to compensate for inadequate health care? Can sick and malnourished children compete adequately?

What about the motivation of children who live in areas of our city where it is difficult for them to see that education pays off?

What happens to the education of children who live in a culture of violence and instability? Can we expect them to make progress at the same rate as others? Can the schools combat the culture of violence?

Some of the children facing these daunting circumstances and surviving in them will achieve because they are exceptionally strong. Most, unfortunately, will not and will fall through the "cracks" in spite of the best efforts.

It appears to me that in reforming our schools for many of our children, we need as partners those involved in health care, housing, economic development, and value formation.

Some additional words of caution. Because it has been fashionable to "bash" the Chicago school system for at least the last decade, we have rendered the schools and the system most vulnerable. We have all talked with some justification about its top-heavy administration. We have looked for scapegoats, such as the general superintendent, when the truth is that NO one has easy answers to educating the children of the truly disadvantaged.

System trashed

We have highlighted the poor teachers and poor administrators with little regard for those who are hardworking and dedicated. It has been ingrained into the minds of even the most ill informed that the system is the worst in the nation. We should not be surprised when people react with less than enthusiasm about all the plans for reform. We are confronting problems of immense proportions and cannot expect people to automatically embrace a system, even one undergoing reform, that has been so thoroughly trashed in the public arena. The

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seeds of distrust have been sown well.
This distrust can also be directed at all those not connected with “us” at the local school level. Even at the local level, the vulnerability of the weakened system could leave it open to those who would exploit the situation for their own interest. It could also leave it open to peripheral but debilitating battles over “turf” and “us vs. them.”

Governance requires the utmost diplomacy in bringing people together in many of our school attendance areas and in our city. Those who have been shut out and are now “in” may be tempted to rattle the “sabers” of their newfound power. Already we are beginning to hear some disheartening stories. Ongoing training is necessary. However, training alone will not be enough. There must continue to be demonstrations of “caring” on the part of all involved in leadership and governance at every level. We must be careful about dismissing those who may have honest differences.

A final word about the “hardworking” and “dedicated” I alluded to earlier. Let us remember that even in Chicago there have always been people who believed in children and believed that all children can learn, given a fair chance. In my two and a half years on the Board of Education, I found them in the schools and at other levels, working against odds.

These people and the children sustained me during those years of crisis. They want school reform also and we need to empower them. As we rid our schools of those whose performance is woefully below standards, let us make certain that we celebrate the dedicated and competent and strengthen their hands.

Dr. James Comer, in his pioneering work in New Haven, Conn., attests to the fact that one can turn around performance—the performance of students, teachers, administrators and parents. It does not happen overnight, nor does it happen if we pit group against group.

Chicago is a dynamic city. It is multi-ethnic city of great promise. We have an opportunity to create something new in the education of all our children. I trust that we shall avoid the mistakes made by other cities that experimented with decentralization. I sincerely hope we shall develop the kind of partnerships that enhance the learning process of all our children. And let us be certain to make the long-term commitment.

The Rev. Kenneth B. Smith is president of the Chicago Theological Seminary and a past president of the Chicago Board of Education.

School council elections:
invitation to fraud

by Arlene C. Rubin

The local school council elections last Oct. 11 and 12 were relatively uneventful—to the great surprise of the cynics within the election reform community. Prior to the election, Project LEAP (Legal Elections in All Precincts), Chicago’s nonpartisan election watchdog organization since 1971, had identified several areas with potential for massive vote fraud. Ballot box stuffing, chain balloting, “short penciled” ballots (marks that invalidate ballots), assistance voting, ghost voting, and a raft of other illegalities could easily have taken place.

Although voting was serious business, especially in this historic beginning of school reform, the 1989 election was conducted almost as loosely as a poll to decide who bakes the best brownies or should be prom queen. Thankfully, however, Project LEAP’s worst fears were not realized. Not yet anyway.

What was appalling about the election planning was that it was done by educators and community people without any election experience (“A Guide to the Election of Local School Councils”), reiterated into a judges manual (“Election Officials Training Reference Booklet”) by an accounting firm with no in-person voting expertise, and executed by Board of Education personnel who consulted the Chicago Board of Elections Commissioners only five days before the election. Years of work to provide safeguards in Chicago’s fraud-fraught elections were ignored or tossed out. And we returned to the easiest
Council election costs *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cost Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>School engineer overtime pay</td>
<td>$1,300,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other overtime</td>
<td>150,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing procedures and manuals, training judges, certifying election, handling challenges</td>
<td>255,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laventhal &amp; Horwath, accounting</td>
<td>255,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Munoz &amp; Associates, law</td>
<td>125,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murdoch Business Institute, training</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Candidate recruitment, voter turnout activities</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community organizations, canvassers</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone calls to parents</td>
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<td>Defraying costs at schools (25 cents per student)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Newspaper, radio, TV ads and placement</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Chicago Daily Defender</td>
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<td>WGCIFM</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

* Excludes donated services
Source: Chicago Public Schools


It is naive to think that the quiet, honest, and fair atmosphere that for the most part characterized this initial LSC election will be repeated in 1991 when council elections are held again. It’s pretty hard to figure out how to manipulate an election when the rules are being written right up to the last moment. But now that the outlines of the process are clear, wheels must be spinning in the heads of those who see the same pressure points vulnerable to vote fraud that LEAP saw.

The stakes in the school council elections are high and will climb higher as elected council members take on economically loaded decision making such as how to spend State Chapter I money and who should get which job, especially the principal’s position. When the almighty dollar is involved, those who seek it might use any means to hustle the vote. And this is, after all, Chicago.

We must, therefore, be prepared to tighten the election procedures to insure that neither individuals nor groups of individuals can take advantage of the loopholes or lack of safeguards to produce outcomes that are only to their (economic) advantage. At the same time, a delicate balance must be struck to allow new voters—unregistered residents and noncitizens—to experience their first-time voting in a non-threatening environment. The goal should be to maintain the high level of candidacies and to increase participation (voter turnout) even higher, while guaranteeing that every vote is cast in private and without pressure—and counted accurately.

Although the grossest forms of vote fraud did not occur in the last election, there is evidence of problems—primarily in the areas of voter intimidation, heavy-handed electioneering, and denial of pollwatcher rights. The reports come from a variety of sources.

Impartial Project LEAP election judges found placement at many schools. Over 100 attorney monitors/troubleshooters were recruited and trained by LEAP in a program jointly sponsored with Leadership for Quality Education. The School Board’s 1-800 phone number and the LEAP hotline calls on election day, combined with reports from LEAP judges and attorneys, should be thoroughly analyzed. In addition, the 113 election challenges—regardless of their disposition by Laventhal & Horwath, the accounting firm that organized and supervised the election—provide evidence of what voters and candidates feel were improprieties. A rough estimate is that over 75 percent of all complaints fall within the three categories above.

Appearances important

It is vitally important to the progress of school reform that the local school council elections have the appearance of fairness to the public to have confidence in the outcome. And, of course, the best way to assure the appearance of fairness is to have actual fairness and honesty.

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to objectivity, it seems to LEAP, is the very legislative language in P.A. 85-1418, the Chicago School Reform Act, that places the responsibility for the conduct of the election in the hands of the principal and the existing council (LSCs for 1989, LSCs from now on). These two entities have the greatest stake in the outcome of the election and are inappropriately empowered to, perhaps, self-perpetuate.

We should begin by urging immediately to come to consensus on a logical, neutral third party who would better and more objectively administer these elections. One possibility is Citizens Information Service, which conducted elections for the Chicago Housing Authority’s tenant advisory councils with the help of the Chicago League of Women Voters and Project LEAP. Another is the Chicago Board of Elections. Suburban school board elections are conducted by the County
Clerk's office, which is the county's election administrator.

Another major change to investigate in detail is a proposal
to shift to punchcard voting, which the Board of Elections staff
estimates would cost about $77,000 to $97,000.
The following is a list of other ideas for the 1991 local
school council elections. We put them on the table to begin
discussion.

Hold elementary and high school elections on the same
day, with high school voting done at feeder elementary schools.
This would increase turnout for high school elections, decrease
burnout from two election days in a row, and reduce costs.

Clearly spell out a pollwatcher's rights in the manual and
have candidate training sessions to explain these rights.

Allow all candidates to send literature home with students
on one particular day (e.g., the Friday before the election).
This equitable use of the school distribution system would
dampen candidates' quest for home addresses of students,
which can create problems of privacy.

Provide a longer period of time between candidate filing
and the election so parents and community residents can better
inform themselves.

Make clear that nomination statements will be posted
and the failure to fill them out is a failure to campaign.

Make clear to candidates, parents, community members
and the schools themselves (I) which of the city's schools are
multi-area schools.

Use numbered applications to vote (which are not
affidavits; save that term for what it's supposed to be), make a
distinction between assistance and instruction, and provide a
Jane Doe/John Doe sample ballot and other proper forms.

List candidates in order of receipt of self-nomination forms
(to eliminate ballot position advantage to names beginning
with letters at the beginning of the alphabet).

The year 1991 is an important year for Chicago. There
will be a mayoral election in February and April. And there
will be the second local school council election in October.
Let's plan now to make sure we have honest and fairly
conducted elections for the confidence of Chicagoans and the
future of school reform.

Arlene C. Rubin is executive director of Project LEAP.

How to keep schools open, school engineers happy

by Vinton Thompson

Who would have imagined that the first major
problem to confront Chicago's new local
school councils would be finding a place to
meet? Certainly, not I.

The Interim Board of Education recently
announced a temporary solution to the
problem — nearly five months after the LSC
elections — but we LSC members await a much better
permanent solution.

Here's how the problem hit us. At our first meetings, in mid-
October, most councils carefully laid out meeting schedules for
the school year. And most local school councils chose to meet,
ever so logically, in their own schools.

However, in early November all LSCs received from the
Board of Education a memo announcing that schools would be
available free for evening use only four nights during the
school year. If councils wanted to meet after school hours more
than four times, they would have to pay. The memo referred to
municipal law and contractual agreements with school
engineers but cited no specifics.

Pay? With what money? Move to some free location?
Where? Many Local School Councils, such as the one at
Nathan Davis Elementary, 3014 W. 39th, were looking for
meeting places to accommodate 50-80 people. Davis tried a
local field house, but it has serious gang problems; three
parents at one meeting, harassed by punks, ended up with
shaving cream in their hair.

We are not talking here about mere inconvenience for the LSCs. What is basically at stake is whether a system can be created to encourage schools to become centers of reform, such that not only they themselves are renewed but they serve as catalysts for community renewal.

For now, local control of schools ends at 4 p.m. all but two days each month, under a temporary agreement the Board reached last month with the union representing operating engineers. This limit hinges on a single clause in that union’s contract. To understand the significance of the clause, some background on the physical maintenance of Chicago schools is necessary.

**Engineer in charge**

While the principal has been responsible for the educational programs at each school and supervises the teaching staff, building maintenance is the responsibility of the local “engineer custodian in charge.” This head engineer supervises the custodial staff, which at our school consists of the engineer himself, a fireman (school maintenance assistant), and four custodial workers (janitors).

Smaller schools, including most elementary schools, have just one engineer on staff, and therein lies a major part of our story because, according to the current contract between the International Union of Operating Engineers and Board of Education:

“... the [engineer] in-charge or an engineer on his staff shall be present and on duty at any time the building is occupied.”

The Board and the Union have interpreted this clause to mean that school buildings are closed to non-custodial workers when an engineer is not on duty. Since most elementary school engineers have a full work week scheduled during and before ordinary school hours, opening these schools for late afternoons or evenings requires overtime payments.

Engineers are not poorly paid. Last year, at our Murphy Elementary, 3539 W. Grace, the engineer’s yearly salary, excluding overtime, exceeded that of every teacher, including those at the top of the seniority ladder. Consequently, overtime pay for engineers is a major cost whenever buildings are opened off hours. (The “free” nights offered by the Board are nights of Board-paid overtime.)

At first glance the issue is simply money. This year the LSCs have no discretionary money to spend on overtime pay, and the Board, always strapped for cash, does not want to assume the responsibility itself. Next year each LSC will have a lump sum budget and could, in theory, allocate money to pay for as many off-hour openings as it desires. Every penny spent for overtime, however, would come out of money for enriched educational programs at the school. Not a happy tradeoff.

But viewing this as a question of balancing local expenditures between meetings and programs misses the main point. The issue, as indicated earlier, is not whether LSCs can meet four times, or eight times or even weekly in local schools, but whether local schools can be opened to their communities on a regular basis at reasonable cost for a whole range of activities.

With a little courage and imagination on the part of the parties involved, Chicago could open its elementary schools for much longer hours at minimal additional expense. It would require some compromise but no financial loss on the part of the engineers. Here’s how it could be done.

Our schools are already well staffed in the late afternoon and early evening by custodial workers and their assistants. With several custodians assigned to each school, it would be easy to assign one or two until 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. each weekday to oversee the building, maintain the heat, and close up and turn off the lights when people are done using it. Only the engineers’ contract provision and a few significant but tractable practical problems stand in the way of this arrangement.

**Practical problems**

The practical problems fall into two categories: financial compensation for the engineers and safety issues related to the use of custodial workers or fireman when engineers are absent. The financial issue is simple. If the engineers stand to lose customary overtime pay (pay they’ve actually received in recent years) as a result of the proposed change, they should be compensated with higher base salaries or in other ways for the loss. That money is already in the budget. The engineers did not negotiate the current arrangement to sabotage school reform, and neither they nor any other Board union should suffer monetary loss from the implementation of school reform.

More importantly, there are safety issues, particularly regarding the operation of boilers. Engineers are city-licensed professionals who have to pass examinations in safe physical plant operation. Custodial workers have not received this training and certification. Firemen, in effect, are apprentice engineers. Most of them eventually receive certification and become engineers when positions open up.

Some argue that it would be unsafe to open schools in the absence of an engineer. This argument deserves close scrutiny. High-pressure steam systems do have potential for destruction, and boiler explosions, though rare, do occur. However, the school system presently operates boilers with engineers absent, and we presume that custodial workers are...
Council members must join campaign for funding reform

by James W. Compton

Now that local school council members have been elected and installed, we are turning our attention to the next phase of school reform—improving the quality of education for all of our children. This will take ideas and money.

In one sense, we can say that the new school reform process puts the matter of ideas in the hands of the LSCs. They will look for ways to enrich programs at their schools and assure the students' success. But where will the money for all the ideas come from? I propose an answer here. Although much of my discussion is about legislation and statewide concerns, the local school councils are very important. Ultimately, LSCs will be crucial in achieving the funding reform I propose.

Last spring, the Illinois General Assembly passed a temporary tax increase to benefit the state's schools. This move was in the right direction and a much needed boost to many elementary and high school districts. These districts cannot afford to have the money taken away; the tax increase must become permanent. Even then, however, serious problems of both adequacy and equity would remain. It is common knowledge that funding for Illinois schools is insufficient—not just for schools in Chicago, but for schools throughout the state. During the last 10 years, the state budget has provided an ever decreasing portion of schools' operating costs. Traighically, this fall-off in funding has coincided with a decrease in the value of farm property and an increase in other property that is sheltered from taxation. Both trends have weakened school districts' abilities to generate additional revenues, even as costs increase. About 25 percent of Illinois' 958 school districts are on the Illinois State Board of Education's financial wish list.

Chicago schools are particularly hard hit by funding shortfalls. Between the fiscal years 1977 and 1987, state funding for city schools declined by $98.5 million, adjusting for inflation. The city's school funding woes are further exacerbated by its overwhelmingly poor student population. About 70 percent of all students in Chicago schools come from low-income families. This represents 54 percent of all poor students in the state. Poor students require significantly more resources from their school systems to compete successfully with students from wealthier districts. As one of the country's wealthiest states, Illinois is one of the most regressive in its approach to funding education. More than most states, Illinois relies on the property tax. Districts that are rich in real estate such as shopping centers and industry can raise large amounts of money for their schools with minimum tax rates. Districts that are poor in real estate, having mainly modest houses, are forced to exert relatively high property tax efforts to generate only meager amounts of funding.

Gap widening

Several studies have shown that this means Illinois is now a state with two types of school districts—those with funds for education and those without. According to Prof. G. Alan Hickrod at Illinois State University, the disparity for elementary school districts ranges from $2,331 to $6,658 in per-pupil spending (excluding the extremes at either end). Among unit districts, including Chicago, the range is from $2,605 to $4,624, also excluding the extremes. While Chicago's per-pupil spending is only slightly below average on a dollar amount it is significantly below the standards appropriate for the city's high-risk, high-need student population. Additionally, although Illinois' school funding formula is designed to equalize the amount of state money school districts receive, it does not equalize spending for students. This leads to the ever-widening gap between wealthy and poor districts.

The goal for Illinois is to provide each of its school-age students with an equitable and adequate education. Equity must come by reducing the gap in per-pupil spending, in the ratio of students to teachers, and in teacher salaries. Adequate education must include the resources to ensure that students who start out behind in reading, math, thinking, and other cognitive skills have the resources to become academically competitive students and productive adults.
Achieving adequacy and equity in education will require changes in state law. This reform must be based on three principles. First, the costs of educating children in areas that have fewer financial resources will have to be borne more than is presently the case by those areas with greater financial resources. Second, the distribution of these resources must take into account the higher educational costs that prevail in some parts of the state. And, finally, any new system must account for the higher costs of educating the disadvantaged and the handicapped.

To achieve these goals, funding reform advocates must involve representatives of school districts that currently benefit from high tax revenue generated by industrial, commercial and expensive residential property. Ideally, those legislators and their constituents will recognize funding inequities and want to help correct them. A system could be designed that would move revenues from the wealthier districts to the needier ones. Ancillary measures could enhance the accountability of teachers and administrators.

However, if wealthy districts do not cooperate, the City of Chicago could reach out to other urban areas, poor suburban districts and relatively low-income rural areas. These major constituencies could coalesce to motivate the Illinois General Assembly to broaden the school funding base and shift the primary source of funding away from the inequitable local property tax.

The third vehicle for change is legal action. In the past year, judges in Kentucky and Texas have ruled that funding systems based on property taxes, as in Illinois, violate state constitutional requirements for an “efficient” system of public education. Our state constitution includes a similar requirement. Legal scholars disagree on the likelihood of a similar ruling in Illinois. However, even if a lawsuit is filed and won in Illinois, the new funding system would still be designed by the General Assembly.

The choices

By whatever means legislators are moved to action—whether by beneficence or by political pressure or by legal mandate—what choices do they have for implementing equity and adequacy? The simplest solution is to increase the state income tax and use these new revenues to reduce the imbalances. Another option, proposed by the Illinois State Board of Education, would make the county the unit for determining schools’ property tax bases and rates. That way, property-poor districts could tap the resources of nearby districts that are rich in property. Still more equitable would be a uniform, statewide property tax rate or 100-percent state funding of education through the income and sales taxes.

Regardless of the approach, Chicago’s 6,000 local school council members must play a major role in reforming the state’s school funding system. While their primary responsibility is to govern their own schools, they must exert their collective power on behalf of all of the city’s students.

Issues of funding equity and adequacy must be included in every local school council members’ training on school finance. These individuals are the ones struggling with limited resources to implement the needed services and programs at individual schools. They must enlist others in their communities to mount letter-writing campaigns to state legislators; visit their senators and representatives in their local district offices; coalesce and rally in Springfield with other concerned groups from across the state; and work with the many educational advocacy organizations involved in school reform.

Chicago’s 6,000 local school council members, joined by another 6,000 individuals from across the state whose needs are equal to ours, all demanding equitable and adequate funds, are voices that would be hard to ignore by those who make the state’s laws.

James W. Compton is president of the Chicago Urban League and of the Interim Board of Education.

Source: Chicago Urban League
School reform has sparked a thousand points of light across this city. Mothers who once ran only their homes are running school governments. Men and women who spent most of their time and energy in loop office buildings or university classrooms have ventured into the neighborhoods. And the people of the Chicago public schools—students, teachers, principals and other administrators—are, here and there, seizing the moment to break old molds.

What these grassroots reformers encounter as they grapple with change is the subject of Diaries. The authors are 20 individuals who constitute a microcosm of the school system and reform community. CATALYST recruited them to write anonymously about their experiences with and reflections on reform. Excerpts will be published in three issues each year.

In this first issue, CATALYST peeks into the lives of eight adults, from September through November of 1989, and sees a wide range of experience—from defeat, suspicion and disillusionment to success, confidence and elation. Most of the lights were flickering; some were sputtering; one was on the verge of going out.

Diaries

A principal's view

GREG

Sept. 1 We had a principals meeting. Awful lot of strange faces there. We all are kind of grooping our way along. These are uncharted waters.

Would you believe that the Bd. of Ed. expects us to start school without duplicating paper? None was delivered when our key items came two and a half weeks ago. When I called they said they were out of stock, but they guaranteed that it would be here before school started! Well there is no paper to be seen, so it's off to the store with my trusty MasterCard.

Sept. 4 All went smoothly today. We briefly discussed the impact of school reform at our opening faculty meeting, but we're really short on information. We don't even know what questions to ask. I did mention the extra money we got from the State Chapter I, and asked for feedback on the best use of these funds. There was general agreement that science and music teachers would be most beneficial to the over-all instructional program. The deadline for turning in the plans is next Friday. That's ridiculous!

Sept. 8 The deadline for the state Chapter I plan has been extended to Nov. 15th so that the new LSCs can participate in its development. Finally something makes sense.

Sept. 14 Sent home a letter to parents outlining a number of ways that they get the LSC nominating forms. We've also made them available at two community agencies. School was open until 7 p.m. No one came for a form.

Sept. 21 School open until 7 p.m. No one came to get a form.

Sept. 27 School was kept open until 7 p.m. once more, this time to receive completed forms. Several were turned in.

Sept. 28 Set up our candidates forum for next week. I sent letters to all of the candidates inviting them to participate. This whole election process is really taking up a great deal of my time. Thank God it will only take place every other year.

Sept. 29 Sent letter to parents announcing the time and location of both the candidates forum and the election itself. Also included the complete list of 21 candidates (13 parents, 3 teachers, and 5 community residents). This is my third year here, and I never heard of several of these candidates.

Oct. 4 We held our candidates forum, but attendance was sparse. Not only was the audience small, but only 6 of the 13 parent candidates and 1 of the 5 community candidates participated. We took their pictures and put them on a bulletin board along with a copy of their nominating statements.

Oct. 5 Sent home yet another letter giving highlights of election day activities. I have used more paper on this election than anyone can imagine, most of which I've had to buy myself.

Several teachers and parents went to an LSC judges' training session today. They said it was terrible, that the trainers didn't know the answers to their questions, that they gave information that contradicted what was in the election guide, etc.

Late in the day we received word of a change in the schedule for election day, so I'll have to send yet another note home tomorrow. These constant changes are rather frustrating to us. No sooner do we notify staff and/or parents about one schedule than the powers-that-be give us a new one. I asked Dr. Joseph Lee about this last week, and he told me it was mainly due to the fact that no one person was coordinating all election activities, even though he himself was given that exact task.

Oct. 8 More people attended the judges' training session today, and their responses were similar to those of yesterday's attendees. We published a special edition of our school
newspaper today. Most of it was focused on the LSC election. Of course, some information in it is already incorrect.

Oct 11 Election day! We did it, but it was draining. Our turnout was better than anticipated.

There were only a few spoiled ballots, not enough to make a difference in the outcome of the election. One candidate spent nearly all day as a poll watch, but unfortunately she was not elected. Several candidates came around in the evening to hear the result. As I had been asked to do, I also called in the results to both the Trib and the Sun-Times.

Oct 12 When anyone came into the school they were greeted by the official election results, which were posted on all of the doors. We already had letters prepared to send to all of the candidates (victorious & otherwise), so all we had to do was type in the names and drop them in the mail.

Oct 13 Sent home a letter with the results of the LSC election, along with the announcement of the first official LSC meeting.

Oct 14 At the faculty meeting this morning we talked about ways, both formal and informal, for faculty members to provide input to the newly elected local school council. All three teacher candidates were given a warm round of applause for their participation in the election process. In fact, the two winners put up a huge bulletin board in the hall thanking their colleagues for their support and reminding everyone that we’re all in this together. Nice touch.

Had a city-wide principals meeting scheduled for 3 p.m. today; naturally, it didn’t get started until around 3:30 or so. Our new superintendent, Ted Kimbrough, was introduced. We were thanked for all the work we did in making these first LSC elections a success; and then we were told to go to a particular classroom to pick up a check for $250 as a small token of the Bd. of Ed.’s appreciation for all of our efforts. Of course, when we got to the room no one was waiting with checks in hand, so we had to stand in line like children going to the washroom and wait 15 to 20 minutes for the checks to arrive. What professionals we are! You know this will make the news and then everybody else will want a check too (and most will deserve them). This could have been handled in a much more dignified (and less ostentatious) manner.

Oct 18 Our first LSC meeting was a success, but it ran too long. All eleven members showed up, but not one observer.

Every member filled out a registration form for a Citizens Schools Committee conference to be held at Malcolm X College. We’ll pay the $10/person registration fee from our pop machine profits.

Oct 24 The two teacher reps and I gave a brief LSC report at the faculty meeting this morning. Then we scheduled team meetings to provide input to the LSC on our School Improvement Plan, which is our next big job. We can’t even get our hands on more than one copy of the School Reform Law itself. Seems as if it is out of print. Figures.

Oct 25 Went to a principals meeting this morning. Received a form to fill out listing some of the activities that we did that helped promote participation in the LSC election. Seems the Board is going to compile them and give them to us as suggestions for the ’91 elections. Good idea.

Oct 28 Eight of eleven of us made it to the CSC conference at Malcolm X. It was pretty good, except that the presenter at one workshop was giving out inaccurate and potentially damaging information. He works at Pershing Road.

The campaign

RAYMOND

Sept 19 Our PTA is always a trip! Our chairperson has been active for many, many years. She’s a darling old lady, refined, energetic, and a parliamentarian. Every matter is done by the book.

All the parents had expressed concern to participate in building a more viable PTA, one that did not limit its activities to holding fancy apple sales and bake sales and selling T-shirts. All are good but insufficient. There were 37 parents in attendance at this highly charged meeting.

The chairperson stood fast on her view that people must be members of the PTA first before there could be elections and appointments to offices. My concern was that there was a pool of parents outside the current PTA that should be taken advantage of in order to bring new life and energy to fighting for improvements at our school. Other parents shared my sentiments and put forward similar views. We all left frustrated and with a sense that the task was incomplete.

I’ve serious questions about the motives of Downstate Republicans who team up with Upstate Democrats to pass reform legislation and, subsequently, a two-year income tax increase for newly installed Mayor Richard Daley. What about the aggressive support of inner-city school reform by big banks and corporations in Chicago? I don’t believe their motives are pristine. The rationale is legal: unqualified, unprepared entry-level service workers among blacks, Latinos, and a growing number of whites as well.

There are real weaknesses in the legislation, in the structure of the reform itself. Some schools will do well. Some schools will survive. More than a few will not. Then there is the issue of choice; choice within the system will make the better public schools stronger and the weak schools weaker. Then there is choice between systems — public and private. Triaging of schools and students along race and class lines appears to be the order of the day.

Sept 21 I decided today that I would become a serious candidate for our LSC. I knew about the community organizing in our area. I thought I could take advantage of that work. During the summer and early spring of 1989 one
organization identified key parents at several schools. It held forums, workshops, community conferences. It worked intensely with several parent groups. In the late summer and early fall it held weekend training sessions involving parents, community residents, and teachers from over 20 different schools. Organization staff spoke on the radio, at schools, at churches, and at community meetings about the need for parent commitment and to provide information on the meaning of the new school legislation.

A week before my decision to run, the organization, working through a parent group, sponsored a two-day training session. Both sessions were well attended. Topics included the reform law, school improvement planning and needs assessment, responsibilities of local school councils, and how to campaign effectively. We loved it!

Given Chicago history, it was assumed by many that word politicians would organize and overly politicize the LSC election process. The fact of the matter is that many new people came forward, most of whom had no level of political participation higher than voting and assisting with voter registration.

The refreshing discovery was that most of the people who came forward were triggered to run as a result of community organization training sessions. They were not political nor did they express an ambition to become politicians. (I later learned that over half of the persons recruited by this organization ran for LSC seats, and 70 percent of those persons won).

**AMELIA**

**Oct. 5** How does a political novice like me, who has not run for anything since college, get into the fray, running for the local school council? And why on earth did I want to do this?

I was solicited in September by community volunteers. Without thinking twice, I said, "Sure, I'll run." But the solicitations were not targeted to me as an outstanding parent. One was a phone caller going through the school parent list. The other rang my doorbell; she was doing the whole neighborhood.

In early October, I attended a 9-hour candidate training program, sponsored by a community organization. There were many fascinating discussions in those 9 hours. What interested me was that both instructors were very sophisticated organizers who had the ability to speak in a down-to-earth manner about basic campaign details. They also conveyed the idea that the councils would have power if they did not allow the principals to control them. They would have to stand up to principals who would try to co-opt them. We had to read the law—all 123 pages of it.

**Oct. 6** Today I went to a training workshop sponsored by the Board of Education for election monitors. Since I'm running for parent rep, I cannot be a monitor. However, I am allowed to be a pollwatcher. The trainers were outsiders hired by the Board. Most of the information they gave us contradicted the School Reform Act. What made it so bad was that these people did not seem to care. Their charge was that the Board hired them, and that is all that mattered, in spite of arguments from the audience, who consisted of parents and educators. Well let me stop here and say that the Interim Board of Education that was carelessly created this summer has given a new meaning to the word interim.

Most of the things they have done or attempted to do have involved major and drastic decisions. These people will not

**DIANE**

be in this position next year at this time, because in May 1990 the mayor will select a 15-member board that will serve a 4-year term. First, the interim board made Dr. Manford Byrd Jr., the former superintendent, the issue, when in my opinion he was not the issue. The issue is selecting and securing a superintendent who is going to be sensitive to the educational, emotional, and social needs of our children.

**Oct. 7** I went to a candidate forum sponsored by a community organization. It was a blast. The speakers were nervous yet courageous. We spoke of things we did at the school. I've been a parent volunteer for 9 years. I will continue to participate with my children's education, their school and other schools even if I'm not elected to the local school council. Who am I fooling? I have a strong desire to be a part of the decision-making body of my children's school.
Oct. 4 Two weeks or maybe a week before the close of nominations, the Board of Ed., in conjunction with several organizations, hired some 500 people to go door to door to try to raise the candidate turn-out. Several schools in my area didn’t have enough candidates. We were able to make sure every one had 7 to 10 candidates for the 6 parent and 2 community rep slots. For this effort, we paid people $7 per hour. But no one who wanted to be a candidate could work, so at least 10 people dropped out of the race so as to make this money. Several people who never worked received hundreds of dollars by just signing the paper work and turning it in to the Board. The Board was so concerned about candidate turn-out that many organizations were given carte blanche to information, including lists of parents at school, which are supposed to be confidential.

Also, I could see so many people were being called at home to come out and be candidates by principals so as to be in a position to dictate to the councils. Many people that came out had, and many to this date have had, no training in school reform. The real adventure has been watching the principals, how laid back they are because they feel they control the information that will be coming to the councils.

That evening a more focused forum just for the parent reps for our school. Again, two-minute speeches. I emphasized three needs for our school: an end to fights at the school, alternatives to study halls, and greater use of the school by the community and greater involvement of the community in the school.

Oct. 7 I went to an Operation Push meeting for a one-minute talk. I got to thinking, if local control works, it would be another excellent route for leadership training, the way our black churches are a training ground for preaching and political speeches.

Oct. 8 I spent another three hours hitting the shopping centers and more bus stops and the newspaper dispenser on street corners with taped-up flyers.

Oct. 10 I took some more flyers around and discovered that some of mine had been ripped down from some of the bus stops. Everyone’s flyers were ripped down at the shopping center. I put some more up. I also dropped some off at the local grade school, for their PTA meeting.

DIANE

Oct. 7 I got up early to begin a full day of campaigning. My children were just as eager as I was to begin putting my campaign literature in the community. I wanted parents to know who I was and the things I stood for. We went to grocery stores, gas stations, laundromats, etc. talking to people and passing out literature. I have become a true politician. I tried to appeal to people who knew nothing about school reform. My task was to get them involved in their local schools, if they were not involved already.

Oct. 10 Well, tomorrow is the big day for all grammar schools. I went to my children’s school to make sure that the materials for the election were there. Everything checked out except the ballot box. The ballot box was there yesterday. Now what could have happened to it? It was in the vault; it didn’t just walk out of there. The principal had no idea where it was, neither did the assistant principal or the office clerk.

One of the teachers came in the office and asked what we were looking for. We told her the ballot box was in the vault and now it isn’t. Right away she blamed the parents. “Maybe one of the parents needed it for something.” Right away I defended our parents, saying that they can read. If the box said Ballot Box they would have known not to touch it or take it out of the vault, just like any teacher or anyone else with sense. She then turned around and walked out of the office.

We continued to look for the missing ballot box. After we could not find it I suggested we call the School Board to get another ballot box. The principal balked. Her reasoning was that if we called, the Board would think we were being petty. She then suggested we use a plain old box. I said using an old box was fine, but I was trying to be fair.

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Election day

DIANE

Oct. 11  I got up early, and I got to the school at 5:30 a.m. All of the judges and monitors were in place. I cast my vote. For the rest of the day I am back and forth trying to get other parents and community people to the school to cast their votes. The tallying went smoothly; only next time there is an election, the electronic tallying machines should be used. The manual counting seemed to take forever, especially when the judges had to recount. We did not leave the school until 10 p.m. I am a winner. Also, all six of the parents who have been involved in the school all along won. That makes me feel great. The children are happy too.

We parents are now full-fledged decision makers at our schools. This does not make a lot of people happy. Some teachers, some staff, and the principal did not want to see inexperienced, uneducated parents give them advice on how to educate our children. My plea to most is: We are educated, smart, talented, and energetic. Our experience is our children. We know best what their needs are because we love them, we raised them, and we care for them from day to day.

The whole idea behind this new school reform law is communication between teachers, parents, child, and community to bring forth a better child. Working together to educate these children, what can go wrong? Furthermore, I've always felt if teachers disrespect the parents, do not like the parents, then how are they able to teach the children.

MARCIA

Oct. 11  Election day. When I walked in to vote, there was so much hostility. When I came back at noon there were parents outside telling people to vote for them. They were writing their names down on a piece of paper. The community people were in front of the school passing out flyers. I told the principal what was going on. All he did was go down the stairs, stand at the door, and look. It was like that until I left — electioneering too close to the polling place.

It took until 10 p.m. to count votes. When the principal and tally judges finished, they turned the lights out in the office and came and said they didn't finish. It was like a conspiracy. The next morning I went to the school to see if the names were posted. They were not. I asked what time they would be. I was told noon.

Oct. 12  I'm a teacher. As far as I can tell, our principal manipulated the LSC election for her own purpose. I heard that school resources were used to print campaign literature. One candidate mentioned seeing PTSA members stuffing literature into envelopes to be mailed out to parents. Did the money come from PTSA funds? A stack of flyers was given to me at school and I was told to distribute the flyers to my students. These handouts contained parents' pictures and brief biographical sketches, presumably the principal's slate of preferred parents.

It was necessary to count the ballots for teacher reps four times. After the election, feelings ran deep at the school when some people accused others of vote fixing. One candidate for teacher rep complained that the principal walked around in the counting room last night with votes in her hand. At one point this candidate was out in front and about to be declared the winner, when the principal came to the table and announced that she had made two calls to confirm that the ballots previously deemed invalid could be made valid by her, the principal. So the ballots were put back in the stack to be counted. This time, the fourth time, other candidates picked up votes and ended up becoming the winners. Of course they were the two favored by the principal or by the PTSA, which was supported by the principal.

Oct. 20  Teachers at school are still upset. They distrust the election outcome.

AMELIA

Oct. 12  Election day. There was a place for us to campaign
on the front walk by the school. I decided to head up there, at
least until my flyers were gone. It was a good idea. I know I
got a lot of votes just by being there. I began the day by
introducing myself. Later I loosened up and talked to people
about what I wanted to do if I were elected.

Oct. 13 When I learned at the beginning how many people
were running, I never suspected I could win, but somehow in
the process of the campaign I got to believe that I might. I got
to the point where I really wanted to. I had planned a couple
of activities for today so that if I found out I had lost, I would
just go on with a busy day. I wondered how upset I'd be if I
lost. But by 8:30 a.m. I'd learned the good news: I won.
Wow! Now the work begins.

This was nothing compared to what lies ahead.

Oct. 14 I got phone numbers for the rest of the winners, so I
could call, say hello, and congratulate them.

RAYMOND

Oct. 17 I am now an LSC member. Tonight I talked with my
son about the need to be on his best behavior and follow
school rules. "People will see me in you," I said. He said he
understood.

First LSC meeting

DIANE

Oct. 18 Today is the day of the first LSC organizational
meeting. A good name for our meeting would be "A Meeting
of Witches." We did not know what to expect from each
other. Here we were 11 people who thought we knew each
other; we were in for a rude awakening. We elected our
chairperson, secretary, and subdistrict rep, just like the
guidelines stated. We were able to get through some
discussion, but most of our discussion came with contradiction
from all members.

ESTHER

Oct. 18 I went to the first Local School Council meeting
tonight, only to discover that the meeting had been held
privately instead of publicly as the principal had promised.
The newly elected president told me that the officers were
elected two days ago. I am not sure at this point if a violation
of the Open Meetings Act has occurred.

AMELIA

Oct. 19 Tonight was our first meeting. One of our members
pontificates a lot and does seem to be running for alderman.
Another member also seems to be running for alderman, but is
more gracious about it.

The meeting lasted less than three hours with all business
handled, in spite of conflicts in the group. We do need team-
building and group-process training.

The principal was cooperative. She provided each of us
with an information packet that included an order of business,
a copy of the law, the teachers union contract, the school
report card, the pamphlet on school reform from Designs for
Change, the school calendar, the discretionary fund
agreement, a summary of the Open Meetings Act,
recommended criteria to identify training providers, a list of
training organizations, and some sample bylaws.

State Chapter I expenditures came up. One member thinks
the money is such a pittance that we shouldn't bother with
discussing its use — just sign it away to the principal. The
principal wants to spend it for teacher staff development, etc.
We put Chapter I money on the agenda for next meeting, but
we may well go along with the faculty development idea. If
we don't it might seem we were not supporting the teachers.

Fights in the school were discussed. We are talking about
fighting, but we are calling it "security," as if we cannot admit
that some of the thugs are among us.

The thugs must go. There are many children who want to
study. Why not make studiousness the grounds for admission?
Why not have a center for learning for kids from all over the
city who are serious? Why just hope that somehow you can
reform the thugs and you won't ruin the rest of the kids? There
must be a critical mass of thuggishness. If there are too many they
rule. If fewer, they have to fit in. We are past our critical
mass, or close to it.

MARCIA

Oct. 19 Most of the council members do not understand
what school reform is all about. When I suggested that we set
up committees and by-laws, they all had to leave. So we will
have to do it the next meeting. If we don't have a functional
local school council going, they will probably come in and
close the school up. It is just as simple as that. I hope that the
starter kits come in soon so members will have something to
take home and read. I suggested that they go to the local
community organization for some free training and literature.
It has workshops on three days a week. Some wanted to
know where else do they have training, and I told them.
Meeting was adjourned.

The next day one parent told me she would like to resign. I
asked her why, and she told me she did not know it was
supposed to be a lot of meetings and a lot of reading, plus she does not understand what is going on. The starter kits came to the school, two weeks late. I passed them out to everyone and told them to read each day. I let them know that the model by-laws are in the back. We could use them or delete some of them. Each and every day there is just a lot of problems.

Oct. 19 I was elected to two councils. And I must admit that you can’t begin to know how it feels to have the power of two councils behind you — not only to be on them but to be the chairman of both — when you enter a room and announce that you represent some 3,000 people.

The inauguration

Nov. 2 I took my family to the ceremony at the Pavilion. Walking into the Pavilion, the sight of several major rallies for Harold Washington and a memorial was an emotional experience for me.

Aside from the program, which was lengthy and excluded LSC participation, I was struck by the lack of preparation to handle over 6,000 public officials. LSC members were indistinguishable from the rest of the audience. The best part was that all our LSC members were able to find floor seating together near the rear of the floor area.

Ted Kimbrough, the new superintendent, was warmly received, but only because of the stage management of Charles Almo, the interim superintendent, who commanded the audience to stand. I wonder what would have happened if we had not been directed to be so respectful. The audience was quite critical of Kimbrough and the interim Board. Many of us wondered: Why the rush? Why the expense of his salary? Almo was viewed as doing a good job.

The largest swearing-in party in history was completed, but many questions were still unanswered. Why a million dollars for Kimbrough and no assurance of training dollars for the LSCs?

Nov. 2 The LSC inauguration ceremony was tonight. Most people seemed to be honored, but others seemed to be concerned about the newspaper reports that the new superintendent is asking for a million dollars to come to Chicago and straighten it out. He is not even a doctor.

Nov. 2 We have allowed the interim Board to do more damage to our kids' self-esteem. Think about this: We gave up four doctors for a mister. What do I mean? We had Dr. Ruth Love, Dr. Manford Byrd, Jr., Dr. Charles Almo, and we were considering a doctor out of Memphis. But what do we settle for? A mister out of Compton, California. So what kind of message does that send to our kids? I feel it's unthinkable to pay any person one million dollars to run this system.

LSC training

Oct. 21 Training. Everyone agrees we need it. Two kinds mainly: One, group process. Two, law, budgets, and other technical matters. But what about the money to pay for training? We understand that the Board does not have the money allocated yet. Will we ever get it? Much uncertainty.

Oct. 25 One real problem is that many councils don’t know what to do, and that’s giving many people a reason to give up. I foresee as many as 20 percent of all members dropping out before the end of the first year. The Board is not giving leadership.

The next fight is going to be over who will train the black community. One “reform” group is training blacks so they can come to the black community and train it to their way of thinking. They don’t give a damn about the black community. They really wanted decentralization so the school system could later go to vouchers, which is where we’re going anyway.

Nov. 4 Today I was at a training session for LSC members, run by a community organization. It was clear that most council leaders and participants needed basic information on how to run effective meetings, how to chair meetings, how to structure a council's internal organization, how to read budgets, etc. The LSC-principal relationship topped the list of concerns. It appeared that most principals were withholding information and were attempting to dominate the young councils; one had deliberately set up an important meeting of the Professional Personnel Advisory Committee to conflict with the LSC meeting.
ESTHER

Oct. 28 Attended the Citizens Schools Committee leadership conference. Everyone seemed to be positive about the LSC concept. I felt a little depressed that I lost the teacher rep election. But I resolved that I would stick with the councils to do what I could as a non-member. Over all, the spirits and hopes were high.

People are not sure who is in control. I see teachers giving the LSC president the respect previously given to the principal. By respect I mean courteous submission. However, I don’t mean to say this is true of all teachers. I speak only of those who seem to be looking for brownie points, special favors.

Before the election, while I was a candidate, some of my close colleagues related to me in a similar manner. If I walked into a group of teachers conversing they’d stop talking completely. I asked one day, “Why the silence?” One teacher replied, “We don’t know how to act in the presence of a person who is soon to become a member of the LSC.” Now that I lost, I have somewhat become “one of the guys” again, except that many still seem to think I am an authority on things relevant to the LSC. They seem to say, “You lost, but I think you should still be involved.”

AMELIA

Oct. 28 Went to the training program at Malcolm X College set up by the Citizens Schools Committee. Prof. William Ayers stressed, among other things, the importance of respect toward the students. Do kids feel safe, honored, cared for? Or do they feel fearful, humiliated, frightened, put down?

There were some excellent presentations. One provocative sentence: The thing about state guidelines for curriculum is that they urge you to think small, to teach with lists.

But all was not idyllic. There was a very dreary luncheon address by the head of school reform in St. Louis. The problem with the lecture was that it was all totally abstract, no specifics. This St. Louis person had us shout “Chicago!” every time he raised his arms. I suppose that kept us awake.

RAYMOND

Nov. 5 The process of implementing school reform will provide the basis for diverse ideologies to contend about social change on practical terms. But progressive leadership has not clarified the terms of the school/education reform debate. There has been no general call for contending ideologies of school change to go all out to establish themselves with local schools and develop strategies for implementation based upon these respective ideologies. There is limited connection and communication between radical education activists in the black community and across racial-nationality lines. It makes it difficult to maximize the opportunities that school reform can bring. Without these connections, there will be isolated success stories at this or that school but limited widespread gains.

Immediate problems

JIM

Oct. 20 Once the councils were elected, there was a void of energy. No one had the foresight to prepare to deal with council people after the elections. For many people this was the first time they had ever been a part of any organization.

Many people ran to test whether they could rebuild dead political careers. Some ex-politicians ran for more than one school. In one school, about five former politicians ran, and the only reason was to position themselves to run for alderman. Another example is the politician who ran for the LSC in four schools in the same district. If he had won all those schools, the next day he would have announced he was running for alderman. But the people had the foresight to see this.

AMELIA

Oct. 15 I heard that the teachers are somewhat displeased with the election. Many tried to sabotage school reform because of fear. They thus voted for the most notoriously cantankerous teachers.

MARCIA

Oct. 27 Our school has started an after-school program. It pays $6.32 for parents and $5.50 for high school students to help the teachers. I told the principal not to sign me up for it because council members cannot get paid, they can only volunteer. He wanted to know where I got the information. I told him, from the law. He said he is going to check it out.

I went to the council members and told them that the law states you can’t get paid from the Board of Education. They said they didn’t know and they’d rather resign. I said: Don’t do that because you will be letting the children down and the school. You will also be letting down the people who voted for you. One parent said that she needs the money badly. Her grandson is graduating from high school. He needs a suit. His ring costs $300, shoes etc.

I just listened to all of them. They just don’t understand
what the local school council is all about. I suggested again they get some training. The principal is encouraging them to get the pay. I told him they couldn't. I gave him the number to call. He came back and said it was true, they couldn't. He told me that he told the people on the phone that this is a poor area. So big deal.

This is just one big mistake. It should have been certain schools having school reform, not all of them, especially this school. To me it is just a big mess. It just seems to me they just ran for the local school council for a popularity contest, or something. Strange for grown people to act so stupid. Two teachers want to help but they complain about time, and maybe me. I just expect to move on and get something going to improve the school and the children in their education. It is so important.

Parent involvement is the most important part of making changes in the school. I think that in the long term the committees and participation in them from parents, community members, teachers, and those people who ran and lost will be important in building an effective school. Ours is not the worst of the public schools, but there are significant areas where things can be improved.

I thought it was ridiculous for the Board of Education to spend $3,500 for cookies, $3,500 for punch, $37,500 for paperweights.

Oct. 24 During lunch, teachers expressed apathy about the LSC. They laughed that it didn't seem to know what to do. One teacher reported that some parent reps had come into his classroom looking for a young lady who is a member of his class. They mentioned in the young lady's presence that she had wanted to get out of this class because she wasn't able to get along with him. The young lady explained to the parent reps, "Oh no, it is not this class that I want to resign from. It is another teacher's class." The teacher mentioned that he hoped the parents would not make a mistake and put that error in his folder. Is this the parent power that the lawmakers had in mind?

Oct. 28 Teachers are still very apathetic as they talk in their planning rooms and in the lunchroom. One of my colleagues finally became brave enough to say outright, "The LSC will not work here. Maybe it will work at schools like Morgan Park where parents have always been involved. But at schools such as ours, where there are very few sophisticated parents involved, it will never work."

Another teacher chimed in, "Don't mention that Local School Council to me. Every time I hear the expression, I get mad. Mad because they don't intend for it to work. It is designed for failure."

Oct. 26 Our principal tends to be cold and distant. She is experienced and enlightened. She is not, however, an information sharer. She seems to like having control over situations by banking on people's ignorance of their situation. Well, she is in for a rude awakening.

Oct. 20 Our principal told us that there would not be any new ideas brought to the school by the council. All the ideas have been thought of before, but there has not been enough money to implement them. She said her first job would be to present the results of district studies on what needed to be improved and then ask the new council to implement those. I think she has it backward. That is not the way to endear oneself with new council members.

Nov. 4 Half of the teachers say this and the other half say something else. I have thought about resigning.

Nov. 7 I love working for the children.

Nov. 10 I love being on the local school council, but the people are always trying to tell you what to do.

Nov. 39 You really have to think for yourself.
DIANE

Nov. 1 Today our principal decided she would grant us, the council, permission to help her select a counselor. We were honored. We were finally treated as equals.

The morale of the whole school has not been high. We as council members have to work hard to change this. Some of our problems have been people giving us advice when we didn’t ask for it. We have minds. We are capable of making decisions. We will consider their advice and the concerns of others and then we, the council, will come to a conclusion.

Nov. 8 We had our third LSC meeting; things are going more smoothly. There is, however, one problem: poor communication between the principal and council members. It is starting to create problems. The council is confused, and we really don’t know where the principal is coming from.

Nov. 11 One day soon the principal and council members are going to have to sit down and have a candid talk.

Nov. 14 I went to Portland, Ore., for a convention. I learned new ideas on how to educate the black child. It was great.

Nov. 20 I came to the school to find out what changes had been made while I was gone. There were several. Two new teachers, without the recommendation of the LSC. We were outraged.

Dec. 1 Our candid meeting with the principal came today. We wanted the principal to know that she wasn’t an information sharer, which is not helping the morale of the school. This meeting turned out to be very emotional for all of the council members. The principal’s response was that her door is always open to us. She said she is sorry that her style offended us, but that she would try to work with us in the future.

ESTHER

Nov. 8 Not many positive things have come out of the LSC at our school. Parent power doesn’t appear to exist. At the LSC meeting I attended, a teacher, not the president of the LSC, was most vocal and decisive.

RAYMOND

Nov. 30 The use of school facilities after school hours for LSC meetings has arisen as a problem. The problem is paying a maintenance person. Who pays? Where does the money come from? I talked with the chief engineer at our school. We were both very cordial, but very matter of fact, as we discussed the issue. I asked him to volunteer his services. I appealed to him on the basis of doing what’s good for the kids, the school, and the cause of our people. He was most polite but very firm, and put the issue bluntly, “I’ve been an employee of the Board for over 30 years. I’m nearing retirement. I’m cutting back. I’m not volunteering for nothing else if it means staying after 4:30. I’ll do it if I’m directed and paid, but I’ll not volunteer.”

AMELIA

Oct. 30 How should the public be treated at our LSC meetings? Should they continually talk with us? If not, when? What limitations? Should audience speakers have to sign up ahead of time? As they enter the room? Do audience members get to vote on issues? Officially? Unofficially?

There is a clash of attitudes on our LSC: inclusive vs. exclusive. Some see LSC meetings as an opportunity for the community to get together and hammer out a school plan that empowers teachers, meets the concerns of parents, and taps the resources of the neighborhood for extra funding and talent on a volunteer basis. Others say that we were elected to make decisions. We do not want to give that power away. The outsiders are the council members, and irrespective of the Open Meetings Act, they should try to meet quietly and plan ahead of time, so meetings will take place in an organized and efficient manner. The outsiders should only be on task forces and not have votes.

Some of the schools are thinking about uniforms. I said I was opposed to uniforms for all schools but thought individual schools could have them if they chose. Advocates think it will stop the competition for clothes.

We have somehow never been worried about that because we simply won’t pay for bad clothes. If the kids want them, they pay. They don’t have the money, so they go without. One child, more enterprising than her siblings on that score, borrows from friends. Another learned to fix over garage-sale
items to arrive at a unique and quite stunning wardrobe that is
her personal trademark.

Some are opposed to my idea because if different schools
had different colors, they might be like gang outfits. Then we
would have school gangs in addition to the regular gangs,
and the kids would have to undress in phone booths like
Superman to get home safely after school. I know this issue
will preoccupy many councils. I hope we can avoid it.

I was particularly struck by something that has recurred as
a theme in discussion with other parents. That is the idea that
kids in grade schools are treated with disrespect by the faculty
and by the lunchroom staff. The teachers’ lunch trays, for
example, are well arranged with good food. The kids’ trays
are put together like slop. If the kids are treated that way in
grade school, how can they respect themselves and be
confident that they have a future if they avoid drugs and crime

and so on? I must emphasize the pervasiveness of complaints
about teachers treating students almost with contempt. Across
the board: grade schools and high schools, all-black schools
with all-black faculties, mixed schools with mixed faculties.

I have experienced disrespect at school only once, from an
English teacher who blatantly pretended to be doing one thing
when all the kids knew he was doing another. He treated
parents with disrespect at first, and then with a kind of cynical
dishonesty. Actually, this teacher’s treatment of parents was the
least of his disrespect. He did not read the readings, gave
inaccurate tests and was weeks late in assigning term papers.

After one meeting, when we were trying hard to make our
committees balanced — black and white — I thought: Funny
how the kids are so accepting, that race is normally simply not
an issue, while we adults always have to be so careful not to
give the appearance of racism.

Some reflections

AMELIA

Nov. 30 We have all learned immeasurably from this
process, and we are learning more every day. If the LSCs do
not solve the school problems, they will nevertheless have
brought parents and community and teachers together.

I want to try to get some perspective on the past couple of
months. I guess so far the key issues have been:

LEARNING TO TRUST ONE ANOTHER. All of us are intelligent people
of seeming good will, but there are still difficulties and ruffled
feathers. There are some parents who want long, deliberative
sessions and others who want to get the show on the road with
instant decisions — and fewer meetings. There are teachers
who are worried about too much parent control and that jobs
will be cut when we get to lump-sum budgeting. The principal
is frightened about losing her position if she doesn’t please
everyone, and as a result is in danger of pleasing no one.

The are some community reps who have much involvement
with the school but have personal agendas as well.

WHETHER TO BE INCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIVE. Some people have a
vision of exciting community, parent and teacher cooperation
in a process that makes the school a center for the community
and all its children. These people want to open up
committees and chairmanships and voting privileges to citizens
outside the council. Some people want the council to do
everything. Others even want reform to fail or want it to work
as a mini-model of the school board system carried into each
school without the grassroots outreach many are attempting.

ACADEMIC AND DISCIPLINE STANDARDS. Increasing problems of
poor attendance, cutting, loitering in the halls, daily fights
among students, vandalism, and gangs are making the school
much less attractive to the bright, motivated college-bound kids
from the elementary schools. And there is the basic tension
between the need to maintain academic standards to keep
bright and motivated kids in school and the need to meet the
non-motivated students where they are and plan something
that will give them a stake in the school.

RACISM. There is an undercurrent of racial prejudice on the
part of many adults — both black and white — who have jobs
in the school. This is something no one talks about, but it is
clearly there. Matters are complicated by the perception of
some who see racial motives in innocent decisions and acts—
compared with obliviousness to such concerns in the case of
many black-white friendships among students at the school.

HOME PROBLEMS. They are massive and pervasive. As one
counselor said, “Half the kids have horrendous home
problems, the least of which may be divorce.”

If our school fails I wonder if there is hope anywhere. We
have so much going for us, and yet the problems loom large.
Counsel for councils on principals

by Tee Gallay

The deadline for half the city's local school councils to decide whether to keep their current principal or search for a new one is right around the corner, Feb. 28.

This decision may be the most important one we council members make during our term of office. Having served on or advised 10 principal selection committees over the past 15 years, I offer this advice to my colleagues. Following it may spare you from later regrets.

First, reach out to all parents, all staff members and the community. Invite participation and make it easy for all to take part. Involve your school's professional personnel advisory committee in planning. Examine your options for gathering opinions. Will you send out questionnaires, hold a meeting to take oral statements, or invite written comments?

The next step should be a good hard look at the school: What is the status of student achievement, the physical plant, faculty morale and attitudes of parents, students and staff? Then ask yourselves: What has been the principal's role in each area?

If your principal has a track record at your school, what does that record tell you? Has the principal initiated innovative programs that have resulted in measurable improvement of student achievement? Has he or she encouraged staff to be creative and helped them locate the resources necessary to carry out special programs?

If your principal is newly assigned or an interim principal give him or her a fair chance. If your school has a favored staff member who was not selected to be interim, don't automatically reject the replacement. A person can be a wonderful "second banana," following the direction of a strong leader, but may not have the qualities to assume leadership himself.

Other things to consider: Are parents welcome and do they know it? Do the students know the principal and does the principal know the students? How do the teachers and other staff relate to the principal? Are they a part of the education team or are they relegated to the role of following orders?

Do your homework, establish your criteria, and be objective and thorough in your deliberations. Remember, your school will live with the ramifications of your decision for the next four years.

Tee Gallay is a member of the Decatur Local School Council.

Vinton Thompson is chairman of the Murphy Local School Council.
Restructuring America's Schools

Reviewed by Mike Bowler

Everything you wanted to know about American school reform in the 1980s: That might be an accurate subtitle for this useful paperback written by veteran Washington-based education writer Anne Lewis.

The book covers nearly all of the decade's major reports on education, the numerous critics and their numerous pronouncements, and, most important for those in the vineyard of school reform, the major attempts at what Lewis calls "restructuring." (It's an unfortunate choice. "Reforming" gives a better impression that education is a function as well as a building and an organization chart.)

Lewis leaves the impression, no doubt an accurate one, that more happened under the flag of reform in the '80s than in any other decade. No doubt much of this was spurred by "A Nation at Risk," the Reagan administration "crisis of mediocrity" report in 1983. But the movement was given a huge boost by the gradual realization throughout the decade that the United States was losing its competitive edge in the world economy in part because its schools were failing.

Lewin's job here is that of a compiler and reporter. She doesn't deliver an editorial, but clearly she knows what needs to be done: To be effective, education has to be removed from top-down control and placed in bottom-up control — that is, in the hands, minds, and hearts of teachers, students, principals, and parents. That is clearly the message of the 1980s from numerous reports, from the so-called "effective schools movement," and from the very few reform attempts that have been measured for effectiveness.

But much of what has passed for reform, especially at the state level, hasn't done that at all. "So far," says Harold Howe II, former U.S. commissioner of education (now at the Harvard Graduate School of Education), "the wide-ranging school reform movement has been dominated by efforts to legislate excellence by requiring more courses, more tests, more homework, longer school hours, and the like. Somehow, much of this activity seems akin to trying to reduce the growth in the divorce rate by telling ungenial couples they must spend more time together."

Lewis devotes a part of her book — perhaps too small a part — to "the urban agenda." She says that "major restructuring of schools is occurring more often in large, inner-city districts because these are where many of the most difficult problems exist." Occurring more often, perhaps. With greater success, probably not.

Certainly, much attention was lavished on city schools in the 1980s by Carnegie, RAND, and even the federal General Accounting Office. But all indicators support education writer Gene Maeroff's 1988 observation (quoted by Lewis): "A reform movement that was supposed to improve public education has been
largely irrelevant to the needs of urban minority students."

And that is why all eyes are on Chicago, dubbed one of the worst school systems in the country by former U.S. Education Sec. William Bennett, as the city enters the '90s with an experiment in local control that can only be described as radical and daring.

There will be those who want results from Chicago's "school-based management" next year, and some will want results in 1995. Even that is too soon. One of the things that comes through clearly in Restructuring America's Schools is that education reform is a painfully slow process, one taking years, decades to carry out. Journalists, legislators and governors often are entirely too impatient, especially if they attempt to hitch political careers to the star of school restructuring. (Lewis does not note it but one of the reforms she says bears watching in Dade County, Fla., was mandated by the state legislature back in 1971!)

The most intriguing chapter of Restructuring America's Schools is the last one, in which Lewis examines the quality that may have more to do with effective education than anything else: leadership. It's a most difficult quality to define. Lewis takes a crack at it and identifies a few exceptionally strong leaders (such as Pittsburgh's Supt. Richard Wallace) and what they seem to have going for them.

Leadership is important at all levels of education, Lewis notes. Indeed, the most successful efforts to reform schools may owe their success not to great ideas but to the people who shepherd them, who can lead others because they know where they are going.

Because Lewis' book constitutes a "snapshot" of the school reform it chronicles, it needs an index so that readers can look up specific programs and people. It also needs better description of two polls it describes — one of a "small sample" of AASA members, "heavily skewed toward administrators from non-urban districts," the other of the 1988 state "teachers of the year" in the U.S.

The two groups were asked the same set of questions, and the results tell us why school reform is so difficult. Asked whether reform requires additional accountability from teachers, 58 percent of the teachers answered no, while 31 percent said yes. For the administrators, the results were almost exactly reversed.

Mike Bowler, opposite editorial page editor of the Baltimore Evening Sun, has written about education since 1966.

Finding the right resources:

GUIDE TO GOOD BOOKS Adventuring with Books, an annotated list of 1,800 books, can help teachers choose high-quality reading materials for students up to sixth grade.

Published by the National Council of Teachers of English, the most recent edition covers books published between 1985 and 1988.

Adventuring with Books groups books into sections—for example, historical fiction, fantasy, fine arts, sports, games and holidays.

Other features include a section on books to help teachers introduce children to story plot, characterization, setting and literary language; a list of books for babies and toddlers; a list of award-winning books; and a section on professional books for teachers.

Copies can be obtained from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Ill., 61801. The price is $12.95 for NCTE members, $16.50 for nonmembers. Inquiries may be directed to Diane Allen at (217) 328-3870.

GUIDE TO SOFTWARE A research foundation has produced a guide to help parents and teachers select computer software for young children.

The 1989 High/Scope Survey of Early Childhood Software describes and evaluates 355 software programs on ease of use, educational value and instructional design.

Invention convention 
at Hope Academy

At Hope Community Academy, 5515 S. Lowe, one teacher has a particularly inventive approach to teaching reading skills. She turns her students into inventors.

Before the young inventors can work on their own projects, they must read about inventors and their inventions.

"The program works because it teaches reading skills in a fun and exciting way," said Sallie Fladger. "And that helps students retain the knowledge."

Students' inventions are showcased at an annual Invention Convention. At the last convention, "The Tornado Game" and "Black Stars" were judged to have commercial potential.

"The Tornado Game" features a spiral fixture (the tornado) mounted on a game board. Players role a marble (the eye of the tornado) down the spiral and hope it doesn't hit any of their houses.

"Black Stars" is a board game that rewards knowledge of black people, their successes and their roles in history.

For more information, call Fladger at (312) 962-2760.

Surrogate parents help Farragut students

In an attempt to stem the tide of freshmen who fail courses and then drop out, Farragut Career Academy, 2345 S. Christiana, has paired "at-risk" students with surrogate parents.

Teachers and other staff members volunteer to serve as surrogate parents for 100 students who failed to advance in class standing. They identify the students' problems and keep in touch with the students and their real parents.

Harold E. Charles, director of Project Success, says students with poor academic performance typically are absent a lot and lack parental support.

Students tapped for the project and their real parents must sign "contracts" outlining expected academic performance. The surrogate parents evaluate students' progress at the end of each marking period.

Last school year, 27 of the 100 targeted freshmen passed all of their academic subjects and three made the honor roll.

For more information, contact Charles at (312) 542-3000.

African pen pals build pride at Garvey

At Garvey Elementary School, 10309 S. Morgan, a pen pal program has helped build students' self-esteem and spark an interest in geography, an often overlooked subject.

Through the Pan-African Pen Pal Association, students in Esi Threet's classes have made friends in Africa and in the Carribean. In the process, they have learned about foreign lifestyles, recreation and currency.

Some students even learned some phrases in their pen pals' native languages and started international stamp collections.

Pen pals write every other month and exchange pictures and gifts.

In 1986 the Pen Pal Club raised enough money to send a Garvey graduate to Ghana to meet her pen pal of three years. In 1987 a Garvey student went abroad.

"Since that time parents have formed an involvement group, students' attitude about themselves and learning has changed and geography is the most popular subject," Threet said.
For additional information, call Threet at (312) 881-5263.

Dumas students study character

Fighting is down at Dumas Elementary School, 6650 S. Ellis, since the school adopted a character education program that involves role-playing, reading and writing.

The curriculum, supplied by the Chicago Foundation for Education, revolves around 15 values found in virtually every world culture. They include generosity, helpfulness, justice, honor, tolerance, freedom of speech, freedom of choice, and the right to equal opportunity.

By exploring these traits directly, students embrace them as their own, said Dumas Principal Sylvia Peters. Students learn that positive values can make them feel good about themselves and help them achieve things they never thought possible, she said.

In the long run, the program is expected to boost students' academic achievement.
For additional information, contact the Chicago Foundation for Education, 135 S. LaSalle St., Suite 1744, Chicago, Ill., 60602. Phone: (312) 853-8278.

T.G.I.F. at Herzl

Students tend to get rambunctious on Fridays. But that rarely happens at Herzl Elementary School, 3711 W.
Douglas, since the school started wrapping up the week with "enrichment" classes.

These end-of-day, Friday classes are especially effective at capturing students' attention because teachers get to choose their topics, said Eunice Wells, who proposed the program.

One teacher becomes, in effect, a counselor, leading discussions about family relationships. Others have chosen humanities, fine arts, school newspaper production and etiquette.

For more information, call Wells at (312) 542-3480.

Amnesty program keeps McPherson open at night

McPherson Elementary School, 4728 N. Wolcott, has after-school classes for children, thanks to a federal program for adults.

The school is the site of evening classes for undocumented immigrants seeking amnesty. The program, sponsored by the federal government, pays for the school engineer's overtime.

With that substantial cost covered, Principal Camille Chase tapped State Chapter 1 money to pay teachers to conduct after-school classes for children.

Classes have included reading, computers, math, creative writing, performing arts, word processing and chorus. McPherson even has an Al-A-Teen program for youngsters with substance abuse problems.

Next month, a General Educational Development program for adults is scheduled to move in; 43 parents have signed up.

For more information, call Chase at (312) 989-7025.

Bass parents serve as substitutes

Bass Elementary School, 1140 W. 66th, no longer suffers when teacher aides, clerks and other non-teaching personnel are absent.

Parents serve as substitutes. Through an agreement worked out with teachers and parents, Bass Principal Marcella Gillie pays them $30 a day from discretionary funds.

"The program gives some parents an incentive to get training and finish getting their GED [an equivalent to a high school diploma]," said Gillie. "And they learn marketable skills."

Gillie said she has hired some parents to fill career service vacancies, which has prompted more parents to sign up to substitute.

For more information, call Gillie at (312) 962-2875.

Melody pupils, parents read to each other

Michele Keller, a teacher at Melody Elementary School, 412 S. Keeler, has brought parents into her students' reading circle through a simple grab-bag game.

Keller writes the title of a book on two slips of paper and labels one "student" and one "parent." She puts the slips into a bag, and a student pulls out one slip. In either case, the book will go home with the student. If the student gets the "student" label he will read the book to his parent; if he gets the "parent" label, the parent will read to him.

When parents read to their children, research has shown, children are more likely to learn to read well.

For more information, call Keller at (312) 265-7450.

Phillips taps 200 black role models, mentors

One hundred African-American men and 100 African-American women from community, business and other organizations are working to keep students in school at Phillips High, 244 E. Pershing.

Recruited by R. Olomenji O'Connor, the mentors visit the school each year to talk to and listen to groups of students. Each also is paired with at least one student to provide support and encouragement. Community involvement and character development are stressed.

The mentorship program is one component of Project Peace, a comprehensive after-school program sponsored by the school and the Chicago Housing Authority's Department of Resident Services and Programs.

Project Peace also includes a violence prevention course, which is designed to change attitudes through student forums, and a peer mediation group, which attempts to resolve conflict without violence.

For more information, call O'Connor at (312) 791-4768.

Descriptions of bright ideas should be addressed to: CATALYST/Bright Ideas, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, Ill., 60604. Include the name of a contact and a phone number.
LAWYERS VOLUNTEER

More than 100 lawyers are working with local school councils under the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project. They offer interpretations of the Chicago School Reform Act and Board of Education guidelines and help resolve disputes.

Peggy Gordon, the project's director, said that hot topics have been the Illinois Open Meetings Act, proper use of State Chapter 1 funds, council by-laws and relationships between councils and principals.

The project was launched by Business and Professional People for the Public Interest and the Chicago Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights. Its headquarters are at 17 E. Monroe St., Room 212, Chicago, Ill., 60603. Phone: 322-2494.

CORPORATE TRAINERS GO BACK TO SCHOOL

Schools are getting their own corporate trainers under a joint project of the Community & Management Assistance Program (CMAP) and Leadership for Quality Education.

CMAP is a six-year-old, nonprofit organization that arranges in-kind donations of technical assistance and materials from corporations to community-based groups. LQE is the corporate community's school reform organization.

Together, they are recruiting and training corporate volunteers to work one on one with selected local school councils in such areas as group management, personnel administration and budgeting.

Since the program began in December, the accounting firm of Arthur Andersen, AT&T and several other major corporations have committed their top trainers to the project. For more information write CMAP, 166 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill., 60602. Phone: 606-8240.

ADVICE FLOODS SCHOOL COUNCILS

Organizations outside the Board of Education have supplied local school councils with a stack of free guides covering topics from energy conservation to picking a principal. Here's a rundown:

- "Common Questions about School Reform" and "Rating and Selecting a Principal," from the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project.
- "Rethinking Urban Schools: The Chicago Agenda," a videotape and 20 reports on creative approaches to teaching and learning, from Encyclopaedia Britannica, the mayor's office and the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Copies may be ordered by calling 1-800-554-9862.
- "Youth Services Directory," which lists non-school services provided through Chicago schools by 216 community and service agencies, from the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance. Two hundred additional copies are available and priced at $40. To place an order, call 939-2202.

- "Schoolhelp," a 48-page guide to crafting school improvement plans, is scheduled for widespread distribution this month by Designs for Change.

Also, the Institute for Community Empowerment is offering training in the use of its new booklet, "Getting to Know Your School: 100 Questions Local School Council Members Need to Answer."

For more information write Janet M. Hudolin, The Institute for Community Empowerment, 4959 W. Belmont, Chicago, Ill., 60641.
COALITION EYES OPEN SCHOOLHOUSE

Keeping schools open into the evening to serve as centers of neighborhood activity was one of several immediate goals identified by a growing citywide coalition of school reformers.

More than 100 representatives of universities, local school councils and civic, neighborhood, business and school groups agreed on the goal at a two-day retreat that was convened to find common ground.

The Citywide Coalition on School Reform formed task forces on teaching and the learning environment, reducing inequities in the school system and organizing and training. Until a staff person is hired, inquiries may be directed to the Chicago Urban League, 4510 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill., 60653.

STUDENTS ORGANIZE

Student members of local high school councils are organizing under the auspices of the Citizen’s Information Service, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the improvement of governmental process.

CIS is providing the LSC Student Representative Coalition meeting space, information for projects and help with mailing.

Tamell McMorris, coalition chairman and student member at Whitney Young Magnet High School, 211 S. Laffin, said the group hopes to speak with one voice on a single agenda. Committees are being formed to develop a platform, he said.

AT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

At recent meetings, the Interim Chicago Board of Education:

- Gave local school councils a deadline of Feb. 28 to tell their principals whether they will be retained or replaced and a deadline of April 15 for signing principals to four-year contracts. The deadline applies to schools where principal terms expire in June, 1990.
- Created a seven-person office of reform implementation to help local school councils that are in trouble. By late January, the office was working with 43 councils. About half were making progress, with the other half bogged down in personality conflicts, said director Tomas Revollo. The office receives about 60 to 120 inquiries each day.
- Reached an interim agreement with the union representing school engineers for schools to stay open 14 nights for council meetings. Engineers will be granted compensatory time off, at overtime rates. Previously, councils were granted only four free night openings.
- Approved guidelines for the appointment of interim principals to vacancies. At least 7 of 10 local school council members must agree on a candidate. Interim principals will serve until June, 1990, or June, 1991, at which time councils must sign principals to four-year contracts.
- Appointment is subject to central office clearance on a criminal background check, medical examination and verification of state administrative credentials.
- Set aside $800,000, or $1,500 per school, for local school councils to spend on their own training.
- Provided council members up to $5 million in insurance coverage for any legal judgments resulting from errors, misstatements, acts, omissions or breaches of duty.

Meanwhile, many schools that were supposed to lose teachers because of declining enrollment ended up keeping them.

That’s because the administration did not identify some of these so-called supernumeraries until after the 20th day of the school year. Under the School Reform Act, the School Board may not drop teachers from a school after the 20th day.

A school source said that about 50 of some 150 supernumeraries identified after the close of the 1988-89 school year stayed in the schools they were supposed to leave. At some schools, enrollment was still uncertain at the 20th day, the source added.

RETIRED EXECS HELP SCHOOLS

Nearly 100 retired executives and professionals of the Executive Service Corps (ESC) of Chicago have expanded their volunteer work on the Near West Side to include support for local school councils.

The ESC also has joined hands with the education committee of West Side Futures, the Marcy-Newberry Association and the People’s Coalition for Education Reform to open a reform lab, or resource center, for area schools. The lab will respond to requests for information or help. Temporarily housed at the association, 1073 W., Maxwell St. (829-7555),
the lab plans to move into Malcolm X College.

Active since 1985 in efforts to reduce infant mortality on the Near West Side, the ESC embraced schools in 1987. Since then, two members have been assigned to each of 22 schools as advisors to principals, school councils, community residents and teachers.

They now are helping councils prepare school improvement plans and budgets, learn parliamentary procedures, maintain cost controls and engage in strategic planning.

BOARD NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHOSEN

The new School Board Nominating Committee, which will recommend board candidates to the mayor, reflects the racial composition of enrollment in the Chicago public schools.

Of its 28 members, 64 percent are African-American, 21 percent are Hispanic, 11 percent are white and 4 percent are Asian.

The student body, according to a 1988 headcount, is 60 percent black, 25 percent Hispanic, 12 percent white and 3 percent Asian.

Of the 23 delegates elected by district councils, 17 are black, 4 are Hispanic and 2 are white. Mayor Richard M. Daley's appointments added two Hispanics, one Asian, one black, and one white.

The committee was created by state law.*

CITY BOOSTS TEACHER CORPS

The City of Chicago has pledged up to $100,000 a year to help the Foundation for Excellence in Teaching recruit future teachers for Chicago's inner-city schools.

The city grant brings funding for the foundation's Academy of Educators Scholars Program to $250,000.

The program selects seniors from the city's public and private high schools and gives them college scholarships and paid summer internships that include coursework at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Teachers who have won the foundation's Golden Apple teaching awards serve as mentors to the young scholars, who must pledge to teach in Chicago inner-city schools for at least five years following graduation from college.

The program's first 15 recruits are now freshmen at four participating Chicago area universities, Depaul University, National

College of Education, Northwestern University and the University of Illinois at Chicago. In December, 20 more young scholars were announced.

For more information call 407-0006.

RESOURCE CENTER OPENS

After 900 people turned out for its school improvement conference last fall, the Citizens Schools Committee launched a permanent school resource center.

The center will use television, newsletters and conferences to spotlight successful programs in Chicago schools.

To identify the programs, the CSC and its partner, the Chicago Teacher Center at Northeastern Illinois University, will send questionnaires to individuals and agencies, visit selected programs and look for signs of success.

Schools deemed "educationally needy" will be encouraged to participate in Resource Center programs.

CSC's newsletter, "Chicago Education Report," will feature model programs. The newsletter is available only to CSC members.

For more information call 726-4678.

MEASURING SUCCESS OF SCHOOL REFORM

The first step toward a citywide consensus on how to measure the success of school reform was taken at a conference sponsored last fall by two Chicago-based foundations.

More than 100 reform leaders and school and university officials gathered to begin exploring options in addition to scores on standardized tests.

In a briefing paper for the gathering, the Joyce Foundation and the John T. and Catherine D. MacArthur Foundation said: "Establishing appropriate standards and measures is complex in that they often too narrowly define student success and, therefore, the curriculum."

In an earlier critique of school reform plans, Chester E. Finn, former assistant secretary of education for research and improvement, warned that the absence of a consensus on yardsticks "could lead to public disenchantment and an early post-mortem for public schooling in the city."

A report on the conference is available from the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 295 Emory Ave., Elmhurst, Ill., 60126.

Charlotte Smarte-Feal
GRANTS

Money for school projects. Grants up to $2,500 are available to local school councils, neighborhood organizations and other groups working with one or more Chicago public schools.

A consortium of 19 local foundations is providing the money for the Fund for Educational Reform. Most grants are one-time and range from $500 to $1,500. Priority is given to projects involving teamwork and collaboration.

For more information call or write Celene Peurye, Director of corporate contributions, Fel/Pro Mecklenburger Foundation, 7450 N. McCormick Blvd., Skokie, Ill., 60076. Phone: 708-674-7701, ext. 2411.

TELEVISION

TV show endorsed. "CNN Newsroom," a 5-minute daily cable TV newscast aimed at children, has won the endorsement of five of the country's largest educational groups.

Described as "teacher friendly," "CNN Newsroom" was applauded by the National Education Association, the National PTA, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the American Association of School Administrators.

Produced by Turner Broadcasting System, the program is broadcast in Chicago on Channel 6 at 2:45 a.m. Unlike "Channel One," "CNN Newsroom" does not air commercial advertising.

Additional information is available from a toll-free hotline, 1-800-344-6219.

On the air, Chicago Cable Access Channel 21 regularly broadcasts these school-related call-in shows:

- Homework Helper, 5 p.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Sponsor: Northeastern Illinois University.
- Youth Hotline, 6:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. Thursday. Sponsor: Network for Youth Services.
- Child Abuse Prevention Hotline, 5 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Friday. Sponsor: The Committee for Prevention of Child Abuse.
- Education Reform Hotline, 5:30 p.m. to 6 p.m. Friday. Sponsor: Citizens Schools Committee.
- Public Schools Hotline, 6 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday. Sponsor: Chicago Public Schools.

TESTING

Help for Hispanics. TestSkills, a kit to help teachers prepare Hispanic students for college entrance tests, can be obtained from The College Board, a nonprofit school association.

The kit prepares students for the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test, which is the first step in the National Hispanic Scholar Awards Program and the National Merit Scholarship Program. For example, it shows how knowledge of Spanish can help with English. For more information, write Barbara Kram, TestSkills, Dept. 611, The College Board, 45 Columbus Ave., New York City, N.Y., 10023-6992.

TEACHERS

A graying teacher corp. In the year 2000 the percentage of Chicago teachers over age 55 will have almost tripled, rising to 24.5 percent from the current 8.6 percent.


Other forecasts for the year 2000 are:

- Only 64 percent of the teachers now in Chicago's public schools will still be teaching.
- One in four teachers will be younger than 30.

WORKSHOPS

School budget help. Two nonprofit organizations will conduct free forums on school budgets in March.

Parents United for Responsible Education will hold an English-language session from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. March 3, and a Spanish-language session from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. the same day. Both will be in Room 2424 of Truman College, 1145 W. Wilson. For additional information call 764-PURE.

Members of a local school councils as well as outside experts will speak at the budget workshop sponsored by the Community Renewal Society and Roosevelt University from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. March 23 at CRS, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500. For information and reservations, call Nelson Ndove, 427-4830.