School Choice: Bane or Benefit?
The toughest job of all

Almost everyone in our society shares a huge misconception about teaching.... What almost all [people] fail to understand is that being an effective teacher may be the most difficult job of all in our society....

An effective teacher is one who is able to convince not half or three quarters but essentially all of his or her students to do quality work in school. This means to work up to their capacity, not "to lean on their shovels" as so many are doing now....

I think it is safe to say that almost all work falls into one or two major categories: managing things or managing people. When we manage things, the essence of the job is to perform an operation on a thing or even on a person (who may be acting as passively as a thing) that improves its value. What is characteristic of a thing (or a person behaving like a thing) is that, hard as the operation may be, the thing never actively resists the person managing it....

Regardless of the skill and creativity of the manager, managing people depends for its ultimate success on the cooperation of the people being managed. The less the people being managed are willing to do as the manager says, the harder the job of managing them is. Teachers are people managers, and most everyone will agree that students as workers seem to be most resistant of all to being managed....

For workers, including students, to do quality work, they must be managed in a way that convinces them that the work they are asked to do satisfies their needs. The more it does, the harder they will work.

Dr. William Glasser
The Quality School
(1990) Harper & Row

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Chicago reform activists say ‘no’ to school choice

by Alex Poinsett

Should Chicago parents have a bigger say in where their children attend school?
YES! answers the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, which mandates an expanded public-school choice plan for the 1991-92 school year.

NO! replies a rising chorus of blacks who see the law as a ruse for ushering in vouchers and ignoring public-school needs.

YES! says the venerable City Club of Chicago, which says vouchers would usher low-income children out of substandard public schools.

NO! says Designs for Change (DFC) and Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), school reform groups concerned with inequities in existing choice plans.

NO! echoes the Chicago Urban League, which says the reform law’s guidelines would benefit middle-income schools at the expense of low-income schools.

“The thought of opening up the whole Chicago school system to choice is appalling,” says Joseph Reed, president of LQE, the corporate-backed activists who have invested more than $3 million in reform.

“The range in quality between various schools is great,” continues Reed, also a member of the Interim Board of Education. “Until I’m satisfied that choice will benefit the very children who are suffering as a result of isolation, poor administration, poor teaching and poor parental support, I’m not about to address the question of choice.”

These local voices reflect a heated and often disjointed national debate over parental choice as a strategy to reform a public-education establishment seemingly unable to reform itself. No recent reform issue, except perhaps the related one of local control, has stirred greater controversy. Yet choice is spreading like wildfire. Eight states and at least one school district in 43 states have some kind of choice plan.

Choice comes in many forms, from Chicago’s own voluntary desegregation program, which centers around magnet schools, to a pilot program in Milwaukee allowing low-income parents to use state money for private-school tuition.

With such variations, choice has attracted strange bedfellows. Supporters include Republican presidents Ronald Reagan and George Bush and Democratic governors Rudy Perpich of Minnesota and Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts. Endorsements also have come from two Washington-based think tanks that often are at odds—the conservative Heritage Foundation and the liberal Brookings Institution.

Magnet schools resented

According to a 1989 Gallup Poll, the concept also enjoys broad public support: 60 percent of all respondents nationwide and 67 percent of nonwhite respondents favored it.

Yet few Chicagoans are clamoring for increased authority to send their children to schools outside their neighborhoods.

High-school students already are criss-crossing the city in great numbers. Last year, half of the 102,000 students in Chicago’s public high schools were enrolled outside their home attendance areas, according to a study by the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance.

Most were lured away by some 30 magnet, vocational and technical schools and dozens of magnet programs in
What 'choice' proponents say:

- Choice is a way to achieve equal educational opportunity for poor and minority youngsters.
- Choice can rescue children from bad schools.
- Competition for students and money will force schools to improve.
- Children have different learning needs and, therefore, need different teaching options.
- By choosing a school, parents will be more involved in their child's education.
- Choice can promote voluntary desegregation.
- Choice that involves the breakup of school systems will save money now spent on bureaucracies.

What 'choice' opponents say:

- There is no convincing evidence that competition will improve schools or pupil achievement.
- The children most in need—those without supportive, capable parents—likely will be left with the worst choices.
- Choice will work against low-income families unless transportation is provided; money spent on buses could be better used in classrooms.
- Choice that involves private schools will drain money from already needy public schools.
- Choice is a red herring that will divert the public's attention from the need to put more money into public schools.
- Encouraging student transfers will undercut efforts to increase school-community ties.
- Magnet schools and programs deprive neighborhood schools of their most motivated students and best role models.

neighborhood schools. Beyond bidding for these special programs, however, students also may attend any school, space permitting, where their presence would not upset racial-mix requirements. And only 13 high schools have such requirements, reflecting the scant opportunity for desegregation in a system whose white enrollment is only 12 percent.

At the elementary-school level, about a fifth of the system's students were enrolled in voluntary desegregation programs that took them away from their neighborhood schools. Busing alone cost $31 million.

Parents of the remaining children, as well as educators in neighborhood schools, generally resent the magnets for taking typically the best students. More magnets would draw off even more good students, leaving fewer role models in neighborhood schools, they fear.

Research by Designs for Change in Chicago and three other cities—Boston, New York and Philadelphia—confirms that magnet schools, at the high-school level, have largely "become a new, improved method of student sorting in which schools pick and choose among students."

Not surprisingly, schools tended to pick higher-achieving, middle-class students, in part to enhance their reputations. Students "who don't work out" are sent back to neighborhood schools with extremely high concentrations of students with learning problems, reports Donald Moore, co-author of the study with Suzanne Davenport.

There is little evidence, the study concludes, that choice produces higher levels of achievement, particularly among at-risk students.

Further, while desegregation is aimed at redressing injury done to blacks and Hispanics, it is whites and Asians who take most advantage of Chicago's magnet-school offerings. This is especially true in magnet schools that have race-mixing requirements and boast the highest test scores. In these schools, white and Asian participation is about double their proportion of systemwide enrollment.

Boon to middle class

Whites and Asians continue to be overrepresented—and Hispanics and blacks underrepresented—even when magnet schools that do not have race-mixing requirements are included. These magnet schools include all-black Marshall and Hirsch high schools.

Under the choice guidelines adopted by the Illinois Legislature, schools serving the most at-risk students likely would suffer even more, according to research by the Chicago Urban League.

The key guidelines are that (1) schools must reserve seats for all neighborhood children, (2) the racial-mix requirements of the desegregation plan must be upheld and (3) low-income children who transfer must receive free transportation.

The first guideline means that only about 14,500 seats will be available for choosing, the league says. Of those, only about 5,000 are in schools with test scores high enough to
A ‘choice’ glossary

CHOICE—A term used to describe a wide variety of programs that give parents some say in where their children may attend school.

COMMUNITY ACADEMIES—In Chicago, schools with special programs similar to those in magnet schools. They accept students from outside their attendance areas if they have extra space. No racial mix is required.

CONTROLLED CHOICE—A system that makes all schools in a district available to all children in the district. Parents and children rank their preferences. The district makes assignments, typically assuring an appropriate racial mix and sometimes a range of family income and a balance between boys and girls.

INTERDISTRICT CHOICE—A system that permits students to attend school in districts other than the ones in which they live. Typically, a city district creates magnet schools and is linked with suburban districts for two-way transfers aimed at racial integration.

INRADISTRICT CHOICE—A system that permits students to attend other schools in the district but outside their neighborhoods. The choices may range from a few magnet schools to every school in the district.

MAGNET PROGRAMS—Special programs, inside neighborhoods, that accept students from other schools. Typically, they are designed to achieve racial integration in a school while permitting all neighborhood children to attend that school.

MAGNET SCHOOLS—Schools with special programs that accept students from throughout a district. Typically, they are designed to achieve a racial mix.

OPEN ENROLLMENT—A system that permits students to enroll in any school in their home school district, or sometimes their state. Typically, limits involving space and race apply.

POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS—A program launched in Minnesota that permits high-school students to go to college to take courses that can be counted toward high-school graduation requirements.

SCHOLASTIC ACADEMIES—In Chicago, academically challenging magnet schools that stress traditional educational, social and personal values. Five of the eight schools have racial-mix requirements.

VOLUNTARY TRANSFER SCHOOLS—In Chicago, 18 largely white schools that accept students from overcrowded, largely minority schools.

VOUCHER—A scholarship or other form of payment from the state that students may use at a public or private school.
Annually it will grant up to $2,500 to 930 low-income students in Milwaukee to attend private nonsectarian schools. (See separate story on page 6.)

The Milwaukee and City Club plans turn the concept of public education around by redirecting tax dollars from “education producers” to “education consumers,” explains Patrick J. Keleher Jr., City Club vice president and a faculty member at Loyola.

A blueprint for this reversal appears in a 1983 manifesto, We Can Rescue Our Children, written by University of Illinois Professor Herbert J. Walberg, former Loyola Education Dean Michael J. Bakalis, researcher Joseph L. Bast and education writer Steven Baer. The book lays out the main argument for choice: Market competition will reward good schools and weed out bad ones—much as the marketplace drives out bad businesses.

Competing for students

In other words, faced with prospects of losing students, funding and talented staff to better schools, lesser schools would work to improve themselves. Marciniak, Keleher, et al. bring private schools into the marketplace to give parents more choice and school administrators more incentive to be innovative.

Their plan also would be a boon to the city’s financially strapped Roman Catholic schools, which last year enrolled 90,000 students, half of them black or Hispanic. The city’s public schools enrolled 408,000 students, 85 percent of them black or Hispanic.

Critics of such voucher plans cite the results of a five-year, $7 million experiment conducted in the 1970s in Alum Rock Unified School District near San Jose, Calif. There the federal government distributed vouchers for parents to spend at public schools of their choice. But the program did not raise test scores, according to the Rand Corporation, and most parents rated factors like a school’s location as more important than its educational programs. Furthermore, lower-income and less-educated parents had fewer sources of accurate information about school-choice options, and tended to feel more alienated and powerless than other parents evaluating schools.

“School choice was designed to maximize consumer satisfaction,” says Jeffry Schiller of the U.S. Department of Education, and one of the federal directors of the Alum Rock experiment. “There is an assumption that if you maximize consumer satisfaction you will maximize student learning, and that is a connection that has not yet been proven.”

Meanwhile, the latest theoretical case for choice is spelled out in Politics, Markets and American Schools, a hotly debated book by John Chubb of the Brookings Institution and Terry Moe, a Stanford University political scientist. Arguing that politics and bureaucracy prevent public schools from focusing on academic achievement, they propose abolishing the public education system and allowing schools to be run as autonomous units competing for students.

Instead of giving vouchers to parents, Chubb and Moe would give money directly to schools in the form of state-financed scholarships. To encourage schools to choose lower-income students, lower-income students would get larger scholarships. States would “charter” schools meeting minimum standards—having properly certified teachers, for example. States no longer would issue directives on what schools must teach. Parents, not the state, would hold schools accountable.

Chubb and Moe predict that, based on their research, pupil performance would increase by a full grade level under this setup.

Of the plan’s many critics, Bill Honig, California’s superintendent of public instruction, is perhaps the most vehement. Calling the plan “dangerous claptrap,” he asserts it would:

- Violate the U.S. Constitution’s prohibition against state support of religion.
- Encourage the creation of “cult” schools that might teach astrology or creationism instead of science and racism instead of racial tolerance.
- Saddle taxpayers with a substantial portion of the some $17 billion parents now pay in private-school tuition.
- Create “elite academies for the few and second-rate schools for the many,” further dividing the country along racial and income lines.

Honig adds that the research Chubb and Moe used to predict academic gains was conducted before school reforms began to pay off.

Moe counters that education establishments in every state oppose any restructuring that would diminish their power and authority. “Choice is a real threat to their interests,” he says. “They are far and away the most powerful participants in the politics of education.”

LQE’s Joe Reed, a retired AT&T vice president, agrees with Moe that the education establishment is not going to reform itself in the interests of parents and students. “The administrators are part of the problem, not part of the solution,” he contends. “But working through the Chicago reform plan is a better solution than the Chubb/Moe proposal.”

Further, recent scandals in the savings and loan industry
and in private trade schools raise serious questions about radical deregulation as a route to high quality.

To most critics, choice is a red herring that will divert public attention from the need to put more money into schools, especially those serving poor and disabled children.

Inner-city schools in particular need more money to repair dilapidated buildings, recruit a talented and racially representative teaching corps, increase preschool programs, lower class size, modernize curricula and pedagogy and expand youth support systems. Choice, no matter how cleverly orchestrated, cannot solve any of these problems.

Nothing like the Chubb/Moe plan is on the horizon in Illinois. But even the limited choice requirement of the school reform law worries public-school activists.

Like Designs for Change, Leadership for Quality Education and the Urban League, Harold Charles, a veteran Chicago high-school teacher and Chicago Defender columnist, calls for a moratorium on any expansion of choice. Local school councils should be given time to carry out their school improvement plans without disruption, he says.

"We must encourage and maintain positive relations with parents and community residents," says Charles. "Competition is a procedure by which we separate winners from losers. Our challenge should be to avoid producing winners at the expense of losers. We should try to develop a win-win scenario."

Alex Poinsett is a contributing editor at Ebony magazine.

Choice spreads coast to coast

The cities of Milwaukee and St. Louis and the states of Minnesota and Massachusetts are pioneers in a growing movement to give parents some degree of choice over where their children go to school. And Oregon is considering a plan that would thrust it into the lead. Here is a rundown.

Milwaukee

Over the next five school years, the state will grant 930 low-income Milwaukee students up to $2,500 a year to help them attend any one of 13 private, nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee. The state will dock the Milwaukee public schools, which spend about $5,000 per pupil, for the total.

This experiment in vouchers was promoted chiefly by State Rep. Annette "Polly" Williams of Milwaukee, a black Democrat who was fed up with the poor performance of inner-city public schools and a desegregation program that mainly bused blacks to the suburbs. Williams, a former welfare mother, found a ready ally in Gov. Tommy G. Thompson, a white Republican.

But, of course, the plan has its critics. "It's typical of many plans in that it's changing education on the cheap," says Richard Collins, president of the Wisconsin Education Association Council. "If Milwaukee badly needs to be changed, then the legislature should provide resources to improve education for 100 percent of the kids."

The teachers union, administrators and the NAACP filed suit against the plan. A lower-court judge ruled that the plan is constitutional. The plaintiffs appealed, and the matter is before a state appellate judge.

St. Louis

In St. Louis, a desegregation court order resulted in an interdistrict enrollment plan that opened 24 city magnet schools to white students from the suburbs and permitted black students from the city to attend largely white suburban schools.

In practice, the street has been virtually one way—from the city to the suburbs. When the program was launched in...
1983, its planners were aiming to enroll 6,000 suburban children in the city magnet schools. By fall 1988, only 600 students had signed up. Meanwhile, 11,131 city students were attending suburban schools.

The state pays all transportation costs. Further, both the city and suburban district receive state aid for each transfer student, meaning the state pays twice.

**Minnesota**

In 1985, the Minnesota Legislature adopted the Postsecondary Options Act allowing high-school juniors and seniors to enroll in college to take courses that would help them satisfy high-school graduation requirements. The state pays tuition and lab and book fees by charging the students' home school districts.

The law was aimed at helping students who could not get advanced courses in their high schools. Since its passage, Minnesota high schools have increased their participation in the national Advanced Placement Program, under which high-school teachers teach college-level courses and students may earn college credit by passing tough, national exams.

Critics contend the new law is depriving high schools of top role models. Backers counter with a study indicating that 60 percent of the participants had already dropped out of school.

Five to six percent of eligible students have participated each year.

In 1988, the legislature began to phase in a modified, statewide open-enrollment program permitting students to attend schools in other districts that have space for them. Only students whose departure would interfere with desegregation efforts can be prevented from moving out of their home districts.

Districts that agree to receive students may not pick and choose among applicants, but they may designate the programs, schools and grade levels that will take transfer students. State money follows the child.

Last year, the legislature added requirements to promote stability: Parents must decide on transfers by February of each school year and must keep their children in their chosen schools for at least a year.

About five percent of the state's students attend school outside their home districts. In addition, parents have transferred several thousand children from private to public schools.

Elements of Minnesota's programs have been adopted in Utah, Iowa, Arkansas, Nebraska and Ohio, and are being considered in 20 other states.

**Massachusetts**

The state of Massachusetts promotes "controlled choice" as a vehicle for program improvement and racial integration.

Under controlled choice, parents may apply to send their children to any school in a district. The district then makes assignments that take into account where brothers and sisters attend school, the distance between home and school and racial integration. Some districts also strive for a balance between boys and girls and a range of family income in each school.

The state supports the program with grants to involve staff in designing different programs for different schools and to provide information and counseling to parents so that they can make informed choices.

The Cambridge district, for example, runs a parent-information campaign each spring that includes a bilingual hotline, visits to welfare families and promotional messages printed on grocery bags.

About 65 percent of Cambridge families choose schools outside their neighborhoods, and about 90 percent get their first choice. Educators say the program has contributed to an overall increase in achievement and a narrowing of the achievement gap between minority students and white students.

Further, the city's public schools have lured students away from private schools. In 1981, before choice went into effect, 70 percent of the city's children attended public schools; in 1988, 85 percent attended public schools. Fall River, Lowell and Lawrence use variations of this plan, all designed to reduce racial and ethnic isolation.

**Oregon**

The state of Oregon is considering a proposal to allow students to attend public schools in other districts and to provide a tax credit of up to $2,500 a year toward the cost of private school or educating a child at home. Parents with no taxable income would receive vouchers of up to $2,500 to send a child to a private school or teach him at home.

Critics say the plan spells ruin for public schools because it would syphon off $67 million. That sum is based on the number of children now in private schools or home schooling. Others contend it discriminates against low- and moderate-income families by failing to provide free transportation.

Alex Poinsett

CATALYST/NOVEMBER 1990
Education flowers in New York ghetto

by Alex Poinsett

Community School District Four in the East Harlem section of New York City covers two square miles of urban decay. Jam-packed high rises alternate with abandoned buildings and glass-strewn vacant lots.

More than three-fourths of the area's families live below the poverty line. Almost a third of the adults, many of them war refugees from Central and South America, have not graduated from high school.

Yet their school district, one of 32 for New York's elementary and junior high schools, boasts such a good reputation that it attracts both students and teachers from outside its poverty-ravaged boundaries.

District Four has another, related distinction: Its junior highs do not have neighborhood attendance boundaries. Parents and children choose their junior highs. And their choice is quite broad, for many school buildings house more than one school.

Good schools came first

Nationally, choice often is promoted as a way to achieve good schools. In District Four, good schools came first.

"District Four happened in a context similar to Chicago school reform today," recalls William Ayers, an education professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "New York went through the late 1960s with parents demanding more community control of schools."

The revolt against central control led to the creation of 32 community school districts, each with an elected board empowered to select a superintendent. This shift in authority "allowed initiative at the district level," said Ayers, whose children attended a District Four school when his family lived in New York.

One of the first districts to acquire a unified, stable school board, East Harlem seized that opportunity. The board minded policy and ran interference for its dynamic, young superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, who had lived in East Harlem and taught in local schools. At the time, District Four ranked last among the community districts in children's reading scores.

Alvarado invited his principals and teachers to propose changes in programs and curricula. After receiving disappointing results, he recruited two teachers to design innovative schools.

Deborah W. Meier, who had taught kindergarten and Head Start in Chicago and Philadelphia before moving to New York, was one of those teachers. An "open classroom" disciple, Meier recoiled at the typical classroom, where teachers did all the talking and the goal was "to cover" a prescribed body of knowledge.

Instead, Meier proposed classrooms where teachers would provide children with stimulating materials, observe them working and playing with those materials and, guided by those observations, help them extend their skills and interests.

Further, each teacher would have wide latitude in designing her program, and each student would have a say in what activities he would pursue. Classrooms would strive for diversity in the race, ethnicity and ability level of its children. Thus, Meier offered not just an alternative school, but an alternative educational philosophy.

Smaller is better

Meier's Central Park East (CPE) was founded in the style of a good private school: slowly, with fewer than 100 youngsters in kindergarten, first and second grades. Alvarado authorized her to hire a staff, which, in turn, developed its own curriculum. CPE was small enough for teachers, parents...
Open classrooms foster independence

NEW YORK—Walk into Central Park East Secondary School and you’ll know at once that it truly is an alternative school.

Students rarely sit at desks, silently listening to lectures. Instead, they work on individual projects or in small groups. One child may be involved in a science project, another in a math assignment, while nearby a group builds a model. The aim is to create independent learners who also know how to work with each other.

Learning materials are everywhere. Paintings, drawings, charts, books, models, murals and maps hang from classroom ceilings, climb walls and cover tabletops.

And learning takes many forms. Students read books, tell stories, visit museums, interview "experts" and survey fellow students and adults. All the while, they are encouraged to think up questions and probe for answers. Observations of ants, worms, crickets and cockroaches—fascinating in themselves—lead to deeper questions about life’s origins, cycles, continuity and growth. CPE students try out ideas. They make things. They do things. In the process, they see how the language arts, math, science, social studies and other subjects relate to one another.

Multicultural education is a top priority. As students study Native Americans or the peoples of Africa, they learn to see themselves as part of one large, human family. As they study the ancient peoples of Central and South America, Africa and the Middle East, Europe and Asia, they come to see the connections between past and present in art, music, politics, religion, drama, myth and other areas of life.

In one junior-high unit, "The Peopling of America," students might explore the roots of immigration or read about Congo culture to find answers to "essential questions." Whose country is this? How do we know? Does the nation change the group, or does the group change the nation? What is an American?

"When history books refer to the 'we' and the 'they,' who is the 'we' and who is the 'they'?” asks Deborah Meier, CPE founder and the first public-school teacher to receive a "genius award" from the Chicago-based MacArthur Foundation. "If the [nonwhite] kids reading history books are always the 'they,' not the 'we,' what impact does that have on their understanding of history? It's important for [white] Americans to understand that they weren't the 'we's' either."

At Central Park East, bringing out such unstated assumptions and biases is routine and exemplifies a rigor that is among the schools’ guiding principles. CPE goes for depth of understanding rather than breadth of coverage. "To graduate from our high school, you have to demonstrate something much more rigorous than the fact that you attended for a certain number of years," Meier explains.

Students in CPE Secondary and its sister elementary schools are largely poor and display a wide range of intelligence. Yet the first two classes to move up through high school racked up an impressive 83 percent graduation rate, which tops all but two of Chicago's public high schools. And 60 percent of those CPE graduates enrolled in college.

"We're always changing, exploring new things, new issues of governance and pedagogy," Meier concludes. "We focus on the different ways kids learn and are taught. A lot of what we're doing is on the agenda of school reform [across the country]."

Deborah Meier: "We're always changing."

Alex Poinsett
and students to know each other well, small enough for a sense of community to develop. To draw the teacher-pupil bonds still tighter, students remained with the same teacher or group of teachers two years in a row.

CPE stayed small, too, creating a model for the junior high schools of choice that followed. When enrollment hit 250, the district opened Central Park East II. Then came River East and, finally, Central Park East Secondary, which now spans 7th through 12th grades.

"Success has to be nurtured, and nurturing requires a certain smallness," said John Falco, director of alternative schools in District Four. "Smallness also makes it possible to prevent children from falling through the cracks. The school becomes the oasis away from the streets."

Teachers in charge

Each alternative school in District Four has its own staff and a director, usually a teacher who accepts the extra responsibility in exchange for a reduced teaching load. Directors independently oversee curriculum and instruction but report to their building principal in matters involving safety, security and building use. Meier now is principal of the CPE schools.

While Meier was creating CPE in 1974, another teacher was creating a performing arts middle school. Seeing their success and the support of the district superintendent, other teachers came forward with other proposals for new minischools—schools they had always dreamed of teaching in. Three to five were opened annually, most at the junior-high level. Only when alternative schools outnumbered regular schools did District Four wipe out attendance boundaries for junior highs and require parents and students to choose.

"There are choice guidance systems built into the elementary schools," said Falco. "Identifying the various thematic options gives the students a feel for upward mobility, a personal sense of direction."

To protect the choices of its own students, the district has limited the enrollment of out-of-district students to 20 percent at each school. And in-district students who live more than a mile from school get passes to ride free on city buses.

District Four now has 50 schools in 20 buildings. Twenty-three are alternative schools centering on themes that include human services, math and science, communication arts and computer science, career development, humanities and bilingual education. One alternative school even seeks to place its graduates in private high schools, offering tours to parents to build their understanding and support.

Falco said the alternative schools cost about $50 per pupil more than regular schools do, largely because the director receives a full-time teacher's salary but does not have a full teaching load.

As new schools were born, rules got broken. Falco noted, for example, that teachers violated provisions of their union contract. "After a while, the union got on the bandwagon, seeing itself as part of the solution rather than part of the problem," he recalls. "The union embraced school-based management, and our teachers became involved in curriculum development and implementation."

Teachers also came to school more often. Average daily attendance rose from 80 percent in the early 1970s to 92 percent today, said Falco.

Although District Four has boosted student achievement scores from last place in 1974 to 16th place today, among 32 districts, a comprehensive report card of its educational effectiveness awaits completion. Preliminary data indicate, however, that between 1978 and 1989 the district's score on standardized reading tests increased by more than 14 percentage points, compared to about 2 percentage points for the city as a whole. Also since 1978, District Four made the second highest improvement among the 32 districts.

Skeptics question results

But skeptics question whether the district would come out as well in an independent assessment that used tests with which the district is unfamiliar.

And Donald R. Moore and Suzanne Davenport of Chicago-based Designs for Change have cited extreme variations in reading and math scores among District Four's various schools. They say the variation suggests selective admissions practices and a failure to educate students in some nonselective options schools.

In a recent interview, Falco acknowledged that signs of "creaming" have appeared. "It is necessary to build in safeguards if the system is to succeed in maximizing services to every youngster," he said.

Seymour Fliegel, the district's first alternative schools director, argues, however, that District Four has led the way in creating a system that fits schools to children's needs. "No one gets left out," he concludes. "No one gets left."}

Mary James, a researcher for Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, contributed to this report.
Bonnie Cottrell, a teacher at Gregory Elementary School, 3715 W. Polk, has been working nonstop for the past year and feels great. When the school year came to a close last June, she switched to summer school. When summer school ended in August, she stepped right into a teacher workshop. When the workshop was over, Cottrell couldn’t wait to get back to Gregory.

“I’ve been a teacher for 20 years and I’ve never really been involved in workshops before now,” said Cottrell. “But I’m really excited about this. I learned so much, and it’s going to make me a better teacher. It’s gotten me refreshed.”

Cottrell is one of hundreds of Chicago public school teachers who—along with the principals, clerks, engineers and food-service managers at their schools—are getting refreshed through a five-year project called CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning). Through workshops and guidance, CANAL is helping entire school communities identify, plan and make changes that are most likely to increase pupil learning.

Catalyst slipped into operation just as the battle over school reform legislation came to a head in Springfield. And CANAL schools launched improvement plans a full year before local school councils were elected.

Now in its third year, this low-profile program is part of the Board of Education’s desegregation effort, which seeks not only to create and maintain as many racially mixed schools as possible but also to upgrade education in schools that remain segregated. All CANAL schools are overwhelmingly black or Hispanic and have especially low test scores.

The money—$83 million in federal funds—came from a settlement of a dispute over the federal government’s obligation, under a 1980 consent decree, to help pay for the city’s desegregation program.

So far, 37 elementary and 5 high schools have participated. At least another 23 schools will be added this year and in each of the two remaining years.

Not surprisingly, there is a wide range of progress at the initial 42 schools, with some “blossoming” and others just “budding,” said James Lewis Jr., director of the National Clearinghouse for School-Based Management. “Some schools I would rank top in the nation in terms of what they are doing with school-based management,” he said.

Lewis, who conducted an evaluation for CANAL, said he was particularly impressed by the amount of new activity in the schools: 211 design teams working to resolve school problems, 93 new services and activities for students and 15 pilot projects initiated by teachers.

**Traveling school staff**

One encouraging trend, he added, is that students have begun to show affection toward their teachers and principals and say they see them as caring and concerned adults.

In CANAL, change begins with training. One day a month for seven months, each school sends staff members and interested parents and community members to the CANAL training center, housed in the old Oakenwald South Elementary School, 4071 S. Lake Park.

There they are greeted by banners proclaiming the motto of CANAL schools and by up-to-date, functioning computers,
copying machines and other equipment. They also are served by some of the best trainers in education, who conduct workshops on just about every aspect of schooling. The menu includes building consensus, assertive discipline, early childhood education, multicultural education, the Paideia program Martin Luther King Jr.'s principles of nonviolence, male responsibility, writing in all subjects, hands-on science, whole language reading and math problem solving. Also, department chairpersons from high schools meet monthly to build leadership skills, occasionally visiting suburban high schools or videotaping themselves.

It's like going on a retreat. Release time for the teachers and staff in CANAL schools is made possible by an unusual band of school workers called, modestly, the Instructional Cadre. The cadre is a carefully selected, specially trained school staff that travels from one CANAL school to another, filling in on training days. These substitutes have performed so well that a number of community members reportedly have asked them to take over their schools.

Debra Ford left a job in business to become the cadre's computer specialist. "This has been the most rewarding job I have ever had," she said. "The kids get to know you and welcome you back. And we see that the schools are trying the techniques they learn in CANAL. I believe this is going to work."

Pittsburgh, Hammond were models

In creating CANAL, Chicago borrowed from and expanded on a number of staff development efforts across the country. First, it looked to the "effective schools" research pinpointing the elements of effective schools. It got the Instructional Cadre idea from Pittsburgh, Pa., where teachers are required to spend blocks of time at training centers that operate as part of regular schools. It turned to nearby Hammond, Ind., for a model involving entire faculties and parents. But it went beyond Hammond to include clerks, cafeteria workers and building engineers.

When a school community arrives at CANAL headquarters, it works first on acquiring the know-how to forge consensus, so that every member feels part of decisions and plans and wants to help carry them out.

"By empowering others, Project CANAL has motivated everyone in the school to assume leadership roles," said John J. McCormick, principal of Bennett/Shedd Elementary School, 10115 S. Prairie. "It has definitely been a change for the better."

CANAL also offers a structure for getting everyone involved. First comes the "core planning team," which is responsible for developing a school improvement plan. This team includes the principal, building engineer and food service manager, teachers from different departments or grade levels, support workers such as clerks and aides and at least five parents and two community members. The team makes decisions by consensus, not majority vote, which means that every member signs on. As a result, CANAL teams have avoided the divisions that have plagued a number of local school councils.

"We want them to think about how their school could look at its very best."

—Phedonia J. Johnson

Each member of the core planning team lines up two or three other members of the broader school community as "buddies." Through this process, the team distributes information, collects ideas and reactions and, in the process, avoids becoming an elite, isolated group. Further, "design teams" are formed to tackle different projects, such as student discipline or curriculum innovation. These teams have the same membership mix as core planning teams, only different people.

Before any team starts planning anything, however, members are encouraged to dream, to bounce ideas off each other, to "blue sky."

"Our approach is vision creation, rather than problem solving," explained CANAL director Phedonia J. Johnson, former principal at Goldblatt Elementary School, 4257 W. Adams. "We want them to think about how their school could look at its very best. We tell them to think about their ideal teacher, their ideal principal, their ideal parent, so they can get into the mindset of creating the best. They create a vision of the excellent school, then look at where they are in relation to that vision and devise the steps they need to take to get to that dream, solving some problems along the way."

After a year of dreaming and planning, schools began making changes last school year. Frazier Elementary, 4027 W. Grenshaw, has reconstituted itself as the E. Franklin Frazier Humanities Center with a new Junior Great Books CATALYST/NOVEMBER 1990

12
Sumner helps self, Hispanic neighbors

Sumner Elementary School, an underused school in a black neighborhood, is experiencing a rebirth that is reaching to overcrowded Hispanic schools several miles away.

In Chicago, it is not unusual for Latino youngsters to suffer overcrowding in close proximity to empty classrooms. Sumner, 4320 W. Fifth, broke the mold with the help of Project CANAL.

The first step came when CANAL simply brought the black and Hispanic communities together. "It has given us the opportunity to learn from each other and share ideas," said Delores Robinson, chair of the core planning team at Sumner. "We came to this consensus: We want the best education possible for children in both communities."

CANAL training was essential for reaching consensus along the way and for involving parents and community members, said Robinson.

When the Sumner staff and parents sat back to dream, their thoughts gravitated toward math and science. They would become a math and science academy, they thought. But, no, they didn't have the right teachers for that. Well, then their teachers could study up on math and science. Soon Sumner was planning a staff-development program that eventually encompassed workshops, a schoolwide conference and partnerships with nearby universities.

"Their dreams began to grow and grow," recalled Phedonia J. Johnson, director of Project CANAL.

Eyesing its empty space, Sumner developed a marketing plan to attract more students. With Hispanic students a target group, it began to create a Spanish-language program, open to all students. Next came attention to Hispanic and African-American cultures. And then a preschool and art and music programs.

"CANAL helped them on each step," said Johnson. "We see ourselves as facilitators. We are here to help them accomplish what they dream about doing." Help came in the form of workshops, advice and tips on writing proposals for outside funding of new projects.

Airetta Ramey, a Sumner parent, said CANAL changed not only her school, but also her life. By attending CANAL workshops, she has learned how to use a computer. "I have enough confidence to help my son use a computer," she said. "But also, I can go to the school and volunteer in the computer class and assist teachers. It's opened up my mind to endless possibilities."

Seminar and an artistic partnership with Urban Gateways. To raise the sights of its youngsters, DuBois Elementary, 330 E. 133rd, takes them on visits to ranking high schools and universities, including small Knox College in western Illinois. To relieve overcrowding, Gale Community Academy, 1631 W. Jonquil, has gone to year-round schooling with overlapping mini-schools that are in session for 60 days, off for 20 days, in session for 60 days, and so on.

Cooper Elementary, 1624 W. 19th, has jumped on the national bandwagon by adopting literature as the foundation of its reading program. Woodson North Elementary, 4414 S. Evans, has developed a peer leadership program. And Hammond Elementary, 2819 W. 21st, conducts parent workshops twice a week; last summer parents worked with their children in the computer lab at CANAL.

"CANAL has permitted us to realize a vision that we were able to create," said Margo S. Baines, chair of the core planning team at DuBois. "We had no limits as to where we could go."

CANAL has some hard numbers to realize, as well. One of its goals is that by August 1993, at least half its schools will reach national norms in reading and math. The Board of Education is scheduled to begin looking later this fall at numbers collected during CANAL's first two years. There will be plenty to look at. In addition to collecting test scores, school staffs and CANAL evaluators are taking notes on every activity they undertake: what it is, its goal, who participated, the amount of money spent and the results.

These notes also are intended to extend the impact of CANAL past its scheduled 1993 close out. "We want to build reform models," explained Johnson.

James Lewis Jr., of the National Clearinghouse for School-Based Management, adds that his evaluation is intended to pinpoint what kind of training local school communities need to carry out school improvement.

Rumblings of criticism

CANAL is not without critics. Some question the slow pace of change; some ask whether the $83 million—$109 per child—could have been better spent; some suggest CANAL has not brought the equity intended under desegregation.

CANAL training was even interrupted last year while a Board of Education task force conducted hearings to determine whether CANAL was usurping the power of newly formed local school councils. "We weren't antagonistic," said Gwendolyn Laroche, task force chair and education director at the Chicago Urban League. "We wanted to make sure
CANAL was keenly aware that it needed to incorporate local school councils into its organization and to create models that could be replicated when the money from the federal government was not forthcoming. The task force concluded that in most cases CANAL teams and LSCs had merged their agendas. In many cases, the same people sit on both bodies. CANAL administrators describe the situation this way: LSCs govern, and CANAL teams plan.

Responding to the rumblings of criticism, CANAL administrators argue that a school cannot get down to the real business of reform until a new, open climate emerges in it. Establishing that climate, they say, requires workshops on the latest in teaching and class management, "release time" for teachers to attend the workshops and then planning time for teachers to figure out how to use new techniques with their own students. And time, of course, means money.

"People say you can tell a CANAL school as soon as you walk into it, the climate is so charged with excitement," said Johnson. "Teachers are talking about teaching strategies or organizational issues instead of complaining. The kids are involved. That wasn't happening before. We've received a lot of criticism from those who want to see higher test scores immediately. But I say, give CANAL time to work and don't make quick judgments. I think they will see the difference, too. We are creating a resource for the entire Chicago school system."

Sally Reed and R. Craig Sautter are Chicago-based education writers and editors.
Central-office confusion perils school reform

by Michael W. Kirst

No component of the Chicago public schools has been more debated and criticized than the central office. Many reformers see there only bumbling bureaucracy, inefficiency and excess overhead.

The Chicago School Reform Act took aim at the central office, seeking to reduce its size and reorder its work in many ways. Indeed, the reform law envisioned a pared-down operation with a new role: to serve individual schools’ needs and requests rather than dictate how schools would be run.

Personnel cutbacks came quickly, and Supt. Ted Kimbrough promises even more. Entire divisions, such as staff development and curriculum, have been decimated. Some workers retired, others were scattered among schools. Reform’s goal of reducing the size of the central office has been largely reached.

‘Demoralized people in cubicles’

The twin goal of a refocused central office appears to be a long way off, however. One reason is that the debate and personnel moves have centered on what central office should not be doing rather than its essential role under reform. While there is general consensus among leading reform participants that its proper role is providing support, resources and services to schools, there is little consensus about what this means or how to go about it.

Currently, the central office itself is confused. Staff has no unity or sense of purpose. It cannot respond quickly or uniformly to requests from schools. It is not a tightly linked bureaucracy, but rather, as one principal put it, a “scattered bunch of demoralized people in cubicles.”

To some extent, such confusion is to be expected, given that a new superintendent arrived in January 1990 and found no system or timetable in place for making important administrative decisions. The superintendent has also been distracted by everything from teacher contract negotiations to squabbles about the size of his salary. He has a difficult job because restructuring a school system is neither predictable nor orderly, as attempts elsewhere have shown.

While the heart of reform is in local school councils (LSCs), a healthy, properly functioning central office is crucial for the success of councils and reform in general. Indeed, quickly settling questions about the size and role of the school bureaucracy could make the difference between a Chicago with many school success stories and one with only a handful of stellar performances.

In what follows, I address some of the issues involved in putting the central office on firmer footing, beginning with recent proposals to decentralize services, then expanding to larger concerns about coherent and effective central administration.

Michael Kirst is a professor of education policy at Stanford University and a former president of the California State Board of Education. Early this year the Educational Excellence Network, a national group examining Chicago school reform, asked Kirst to study the changing relationships among schools, district offices and the central office. As part of that study, he spent several days in Chicago, interviewing a variety of people involved in school reform.
Measuring progress...

To help measure the progress of school reform and the school system, the Board of Education plans to track the following “performance indicators” from year to year. Statistics with an asterisk (*) are from the 1989-90 school year. Others are from 1988-89. NA means not available.

**Student outcomes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-school four-year graduation rate</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school students failing courses taken</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates in college</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates employed</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates in armed services</td>
<td>NA</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary students at or above norm in reading</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary students at or above norm in mathematics</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school students at or above norm in reading</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school students at or above norm in mathematics</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary schools at or above norm in reading</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary schools at or above norm in mathematics</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools at or above norm in reading</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High schools at or above norm in mathematics</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools improving their above-norm reading scores</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools improving their above-norm math scores</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average ACT score</td>
<td>13.6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary-school attendance rate</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-school attendance rate</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined attendance rate</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools improving attendance by at least one percentage point</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dropping Out</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools with chronic student mobility</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual dropout rate</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overaged ninth-graders (indicating previous retention)</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen’s last elementary ITBS reading scores</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshmen’s last elementary ITBS mathematics scores</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kimbrough’s first major attempt to redefine the bureaucracy was his proposal to provide central services through 11 district service centers (DSCs) that would be operated under the wings of district superintendents. Some 200 Pershing Road staff members would be moved to DSCs.

**Leadership needed**

This proposal provoked a firestorm of criticism from some reform advocates and LSC members, many of whom feared that the plan would merely create almost a dozen more offices where staff members could abuse power and build bureaucratic fiefdoms. Supporters of the DSC idea countered that such offices would improve services to schools by bringing them closer and that central office had many top-notch educators to send to the centers.

The Interim Board of Education decided to set up DSCs in two districts to experiment with various service concepts and structures. Such experimentation should certainly be encouraged and even expanded. It would be a big mistake to assume there is a “one best system” of operation that should be imposed on all DSCs, or even that the DSC concept itself is a good one.

Some advocacy groups, for example, have proposed instead that 10 or 11 schools be drawn into clusters for staff development, technical assistance and other services. In contrast, each DSC would serve some 60 schools on average. Another idea would be to put employees of DSCs or clusters on a moderate pay scale and then offer commissions for each day that LSCs used their expertise.

But the success of any DSC or cluster scheme—indeed, the success of individual schools—will depend heavily on whether the city can move forward on improving a host of central-office functions. Local school councils want better communication and more responsiveness. But beyond these basics lie the higher-order issues of budgeting, measuring school system performance, establishing a systemwide curricular framework and testing program, involving teachers in restructuring and redesigning compensatory, or “remedial,” education. Only a central office can provide systemwide leadership in these crucial areas.

**SCHOOL BUDGETS.** At present, school budgets are not in a form that allows LSCs to make informed policy choices. For example, money is lumped into broad categories, such as instruction, fixed charges and equipment, rather than divided among programs, such as history, chemistry or physical education. The budgets offer LSCs little help in deciding whether programs should be maintained, expanded or eliminated.

Chicago needs to revise the way it distributes money to schools and perhaps scrap some of the formulas it has long used to determine local funding levels. In the area of instruction, money is distributed largely on a per-pupil basis. Maybe
Measuring progress...

Retention

Elementary retention, overall 4%
First-grade retention 9%
Schools decreasing retention rate by at least 2% 56%

School community

Description
Elementary students per instructional staff member 23
Elementary students (grades 1-8) per classroom teacher 27
High-school students per instructional staff member 18
High-school students per classroom teacher 22
Percent of teachers with MA degree 55% *
Percent of teachers with at least 5 years experience 92% *
Teachers attendance rate 94%

Professional Growth

Teachers earning graduate credit for lane change 1,061 *
Teacher shortage 424 *

Principals' ratings of changed teaching performance NA

Staff Performance

Subdistrict superintendents' ratings of principal performance NA
Teacher performance rated superior 74%
Staff disciplinary actions 167 *

Governance

Principal contracts renewed 88% *
Parents standing for LSC election 9,683 *
Community representatives standing for LSC election 4,977 *
Teachers standing for LSC election 2,549 *
Ballots cast in LSC elections 313,255 *
Subdistrict superintendents' ratings of LSC performance NA

Parental and Community Involvement

Volunteers 13,752
Parents' time spent on homework and lesson discussion NA
Schools adopted 226
Businesses and organizations adopting schools 263

It would be better to consider the specific educational program initiatives that LSCs propose to emphasize. Another approach would be to reward schools for improvements on a wide variety of performance measures. Unfortunately, there are few models of budgets that cater to school-level decision making.

**PERFORMANCE MEASURES.** The central office in nearly every school system is expected to keep track of what is happening in individual schools and the system as a whole. It compiles statistics on attendance, class cuts, dropouts and the like.

Chicago's performance indicator system is sorely lacking. It has too few measures, and some data it does collect are not reliable. For example, attendance and class-cut rates reported at the end of the school year are lower than those revealed in periodic checks during the year. Principals are usually asked to reconcile these differences, and often pick the lower number. In this and other information-gathering activities, the central office relies on people with a vested interest in making themselves look good. As a result, the picture that emerges cannot be trusted.

Pershing Road's latest plans for performance indicators still fall short. Absent, for example, are course enrollment trends, the number of students satisfying University of Illinois entrance requirements and the performance of Chicago graduates at postsecondary institutions, which is readily available from state schools.

The design and implementation of an expanded indicator system should be a top and urgent priority for the central office, the reform community and everyone else in the city. Unlike the budget situation, good models do exist. They can be found in San Diego, Calif.; Dade County, Fla., and Dallas, Tex.

**INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP, CURRICULUM AND TESTING.** In a school system where many decisions are made at the school level, accountability requires a common standard of what students should know and be able to do. If a good curricular framework is not developed, questions on nationally standardized tests will drive instruction and LSCs won't know what to look for in selecting textbooks.

Chicago's current curricular guidelines are so general that they provide scant guidance for LSC members or educators. Consider, for example, these items for 10th-grade social studies:

- Identify the historical events which have influenced foreign policy and have established the United States as a world power.
- Identify specific legislative contributions made by special interest groups (women, ethnic, disabled, and others) to the governments of Illinois and the United States.
- Describe governmental policies relating to national and international environmental problems impacting upon the United States.

Schools need clearer targets to shoot for. While learning goals should be more specific, they should not merely list facts and “basic skills.” They should instead stress analysis.
Measuring progress . . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Educational Program</th>
<th>Regular Programs and Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PPAC performance</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>High school course registrations:</td>
<td>1,524 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restructuring initiatives</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>journalism</td>
<td>697 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waivers requested from board or union</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>drama</td>
<td>1,970 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>art</td>
<td>23,287 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union grievances</td>
<td>425</td>
<td>music</td>
<td>30,550 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of volunteers with assignments</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>dance</td>
<td>289 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of LSC members with training, quantity and quality</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>visual arts</td>
<td>1,765 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of teaching and career service staff with training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>foreign languages</td>
<td>20,669 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of parents and public with teacher performance</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>social studies</td>
<td>80,710 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of principals with school organization, environment and training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>vocational education</td>
<td>108,259 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of teachers with school organization, environment and training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>High schools not offering courses required for college</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of community with school organization, environment and training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>High school students per counselor</td>
<td>235 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of students with school organization, environment and training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Elementary school students per counselor</td>
<td>616 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates pursuing higher education</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and synthesis of both pivotal historical events, in the case of social studies, and real-life problems.

Central curricular frameworks should also provide a structure for preservice and in-service training. Teacher staff development, for example, should focus on how to adapt content to emphasize problem solving rather than just memorization of facts.

Moreover, tests that Pershing Road now uses to gauge student progress do not tie in neatly with the curriculum. At this point, only the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and its high-school counterpart, the Tests of Academic Proficiency (TAP), contain much specificity.

However, questions in these tests do not reflect textbooks currently used in the district. Nor is the TAP accepted by most experts as an adequate representation of a complex and challenging curriculum. The Iowa and TAP should not be jettisoned immediately, but a new testing program should be developed to match a new curricular framework.

Local schools need many things to upgrade instruction, including more time and probably more staff. But they also must have enlightened central-office guidance and an array of assessments that truly help them make decisions about what, how and when to teach certain things.

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT. Perhaps the most worrisome part of the Chicago scene is the relative lack of involvement of teachers in reform activities. The Chicago Teachers Union has maintained a low profile with regard to reform. For example, a review of its recent publications reveals little priority space given to the reform program. In addition, many professional personnel advisory committees (PPACs) are not well linked to either LSCs or the union and, consequently, are unlikely to help implement reform.

School revitalization requires that people at the school become a team working toward common goals in a collegial, or collective, manner. That isn't happening in Chicago. Either the PPAC concept itself must be revised or teachers on LSCs must become key players in schoolwide team building. I'm inclined to go with making teacher members of LSCs the key link to other teachers in schools and to the union.

REDESIGNED COMPENSATORY EDUCATION. The loosening of central-office control over state and federal Chapter I money coincides with a national movement to change the nature of the special instruction that this money provides for low-income children who lag behind academically.

Experts are now recommending that teachers concentrate less on discrete skills and rote work. A recent SRI International report captures what is being recommended instead:

- In mathematics. More work on understanding applications, with broader coverage of mathematics topics; less work on computation and less repetition across grades.
- In reading. More reading for meaning from the earliest grades and less attention to discrete skills taught out of context; exposure to a wide variety of text, including material
that connects with students' backgrounds and experiences.

In writing. More meaningful written communication and less attention to mastery of writing "mechanics" in isolation; introduction to various genres and the process of writing from the earliest years in school.

Chicago's central office should translate these general concepts into working documents for LSCs and help LSCs rethink their current compensatory education approaches. Intensive staff development must be stimulated by the central office to help teachers present upgraded content in their compensatory education classes.

Reform institute proposed

During my interviews with key reform players in Chicago, I found agreement among virtually all parties that all of the central-office tasks listed above are not likely to be completed well or quickly by either a revamped central office, district service centers or other service unit. Put bluntly, Chicago does not trust the Pershing Road establishment, which has long been associated with red tape, patronage, turf protection, insensitivity and botched education policy.

An aggressive plan to resolve these issues would automatically be viewed with suspicion and resentment by many others in the city. Kimbrough has begun to build a service-oriented "culture" in central office, but regaining trust will be a slow, difficult process.

Yet movement on these important issues cannot wait. Perhaps the best alternative for Chicago might be to create a reform "institute," an idea suggested by a number of local players, from Kimbrough to critic Donald Moore of Designs for Change.

The institute would be attached to but not wholly a part of the school system. As such, it could attract motivated, skilled, open-minded people who would like to devote 5 to 10 years to renovating an urban school system but who do not want life-time careers in that system. The institute also could contract with local universities and national policy and curricular organizations to design new systems and provide services.

The institute could be responsible for designing new initiatives such as tests, program budgets and staff development techniques. It also could document reform and conduct needed research projects. Meanwhile, the central office would continue the day-to-day work of operating the system.

The institute idea has enough promise that some mechanism should be initiated to explore it. Without such an entity, it is doubtful that reform will get the citywide leadership it needs for success. The first task, however, is for Chicagoans to agree on the specific roles and tasks of a revamped central office and then decide how many people and how much money it will take to get the job done.
Opinions

Board, union bury hatchet, advance reform

by Jacqueline B. Vaughn

Under a new era of cooperation and consensus, the Board of Education and the Chicago Teachers Union have begun to use contract negotiations as a way to improve the delivery of educational services to children.

Our unprecedented three-year contract brings to life programs the CTU had struggled for years to obtain from previous Boards of Education. And it launches some major new initiatives to improve student achievement. As a whole, the contract represents a significant investment in updating and rejuvenating the faculty of Chicago's public schools.

The contract commits the CTU and the board to work with the Foundation for Excellence in Teaching to develop a teacher intern program that will attract new talent to the teaching profession. Teacher interns will receive job security guarantees and tuition waivers while they pursue education degrees and other graduate work. In exchange, they will begin their work in classrooms at reduced salaries.

Experienced professionals from other fields who have an interest in teaching now have incentives to try it. Taking additional college courses will be affordable because interns will be earning a salary. At the same time, they will gain valuable experience working in school settings with children. Under the CTU proposal, people with a college degree who lack education training could teach in specific subject areas as interns, under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

The experience and tuition waivers will attract top education students from universities to teach in the inner city and, thereby, provide role models for youth.

Teacher assistants are another source of potential teachers to alleviate the teacher shortage. These paraprofessionals are already working in the schools with children and have demonstrated they have the skills to do so. What they lack is a college degree or formal training in education. The contract establishes a career ladder for them with incentives to pursue degrees and become fully certified teachers.

Experienced educators will help newcomers make the transition from student to teacher. Many valuable teachers are lost because they receive no help putting their own book learning into practice. Often the newest staff member is assigned the most difficult classes. Under this program, new teachers will receive additional peer support and guidance. A peer professional advisor program will match first-year teachers with highly regarded veterans, who will serve outside the regular classroom for up to one year.

Professional salaries

The contract commits the union and board to working out the details of this program in time for the 1991-92 school year. It will continue if it is judged successful.

Salaries in this contract recognize teacher's training and experience. Some 80 percent of Chicago's teachers have more than 15 years of experience in the classroom. About the same proportion have master's degrees or postgraduate work in their subject areas. Chicago's children are taught by a well-educated, experienced workforce. Now these teachers have professional salaries.

In each year of the contract, teachers and career service...
employees will receive a 7 percent raise. A beginning teacher with a bachelor’s degree who started in September 1989 was earning $21,400 last school year. Two years from now that same teacher will be earning $33,556. Beginning teachers starting in September 1992 will earn $30,280. These high salaries will certainly be attractive to college students.

Teachers with a master’s degree and 15 or more years of experience were earning $40,446 last year. By 1992, they will be earning $49,679. By getting additional training, a teacher with a master’s degree can earn as much as $52,825.

Increased salaries will enable Chicago to compete with suburban school districts for the best young teachers. They also make teaching a more attractive career for young people still in school. Teachers who have been obliged in the past to hold second jobs to make ends meet or pay their children’s college tuition may now find they can devote themselves fully to their first career, teaching children.

"Teachers now have added incentives to go back to school and improve their skills."

Substitute teachers, perennially in short supply, also will receive raises. Substitutes will earn $73.13 per day at first and $76.62 after 100 days of service. These higher salaries should attract more substitute teachers, which will mean that fewer classrooms will be left without professional attention when regular teachers are absent.

Teachers now have added incentives to go back to school and improve their skills. The union has always negotiated a modest salary increase for teachers when they reach certain levels of additional training. This contract adds a bonus of $6,000, paid over five years, whenever they earn enough additional graduate-level training to move to the next highest salary lane.

The union has already received anecdotal evidence of many teachers planning to take advantage of this incentive and return to college classrooms. That means Chicago’s children will continue to be taught by professionals armed with the most up-to-date training.

Another provision of our new contract will give entire school staffs incentives to try new ideas and work together. The contract encourages teamwork by offering a performance bonus to all employees in a local school. Beginning in 1991-92, the board will review the achievement goals each school sets. When schools achieve their goals, each worker—from principal to lunchroom attendant—will receive a personal bonus. [Amounts have not been determined.] If a local school council proposes a radically different educational plan, the entire school has an incentive to put forth the extra effort required by change.

Not the least of our accomplishments in negotiations this year is that schools opened on time for the second consecutive year without acrimony and conflict between the board and the union. This is perhaps the most tangible evidence of the board’s new attitude toward the union and collective bargaining. No union ever wants to strike. However, when the CTU approached previous boards with requests for moderate salary increases, the boards countered with pay cuts. What other professionals are asked to do the same amount of work every year and accept less pay?

Cooperation, not conflict

Previous boards have started contract negotiations from ground zero and tried to wear down the union with efforts to take back every improvement in teaching and school conditions gained over the past 20 years. This board started negotiations with the existing contract, and we worked together from there—without take-backs, without ridiculous demands, without pay cuts.

This contract proves the union and the board can work together as partners, not as adversaries, as they have in other reform districts like Rochester, N.Y.; Hammond, Ind., and Dade County (Miami), Fla. We are truly excited about the prospects for local control under school reform and for improved student achievement. We see what the future heralds.

The CTU reaches out in many ways to the community to form partnerships for educational excellence. Now, we invite local school councils, communities and legislators, business leaders and foundations to join our partnership. Let’s work together to guarantee full funding for education and to provide training for local school councils and teachers who wish greater involvement in decision making at their schools.

We hope local school councils will follow the lead of the CTU and School Board and extend a hand of cooperation where there has before been conflict. We hope councils will listen to the voice of the professional personnel advisory committees established in school reform legislation.

The School Board and CTU have shown their willingness to work together to improve schools. This development may well become the most far-reaching of any ushered in by school reform.

Jacqueline B. Vaughn is president of the Chicago Teachers Union and the Illinois Federation of Teachers.
Cut back on testing to save money, time, kids

by Cynthia Dougal

For the sake of children, it is time to cut back on the time, energy and money devoted to citywide testing. It is time for Chicago to take heed of mounting criticism of standardized achievement tests from both educators and scholars.

Every spring, almost 300,000 Chicago elementary-school children and their teachers undergo intense preparations for and anxiety over administration of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills. The Iowa is one of about a half dozen batteries of multiple-choice tests that schools throughout the country have long used to measure academic progress against each other and themselves.

Test preparation and anxiety are intense because test scores are used to make important decisions affecting the lives of both the children and adults in schools. The Board of Education uses test results to set goals for schools, subdistricts and the system as a whole. In the past, the general superintendent used district scores to evaluate district superintendents, and district superintendents used school scores to evaluate principals. Many principals, in turn, rely on class scores in evaluating teachers.

More harm than good

Test scores also are used to determine which schools and which students may participate in certain federally funded programs. The general public reads scores in the newspapers to find out which schools are "good" and which ones are "bad." The Illinois General Assembly set enormous increases in test scores as a goal for Chicago school reform.

And a student's performance on this one test each year can have a profound impact on his education. It can get him into or keep him out of a special program or school. It can determine which class or reading group he will be assigned to. It can be the start of an evaluation that could lead to the label "handicapped."

Ideally, test data can be used to improve the form and content of a child's education. In practice, this rarely happens. In May or June, when the school year is nearly over, Chicago teachers receive the scores of their students on the various Iowa subtests, as well as data indicating where each student stands in relationship to children nationwide. In September, the students' new teachers see these scores but receive no real analysis of students' strengths and weaknesses.

According to recent research, however, the problem with standardized testing is not so much what it doesn't do—aid instruction—as what it does do—determine the course of a child's schooling. Tests are not foolproof. Conditions during the administration of the test—a child's emotional or physical condition, lighting, room temperature, desk height, etc.—can affect a child's performance.

And a child's family background, race or ethnic origins may keep him from overcoming the cultural biases of tests, according to a report issued last May by the Ford Foundation and the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy.

Entitled From Gatekeeper to Gateway: Transforming Testing in America, the report stops just short of recommend-
ing elimination of standardized testing from elementary school. It strongly urges that more effective and equitable means of evaluation be found.

Given even the slightest possibility that the Iowa results are inaccurate, any use of them that directly affects a child's current educational program or future opportunities is unfair.

Another insidious thing that standardized tests do is help shape the content and direction of instruction. This may occur because teachers feel that children's futures depend on their test success or because teachers are concerned about their own evaluations. In either case, teaching to standardized tests takes time from the curriculum. That might not be a problem if the tests were worth teaching to. But standardized tests typically cover only the most basic of skills and knowledge rather than the critical thinking and problem solving we should be striving to develop in our students.

A better way

It is unlikely standardized tests will be eliminated. Teachers, principals and the Board of Education would be accused of trying to avoid accountability. The publishers of the tests would lose a great deal of money. The bureaucracy itself would react against the reduction of staff.

But the Board of Education should see the wisdom of restricting the tests to certain grades, a practice used in other school systems. Third, sixth and eighth grades are logical. Those are the grades, too, in which the state administers the Illinois Goals Assessment Program tests. Indeed, many experts in early childhood education contend that standardized tests should not be used before third grade.

The school system would still have scores for year-to-year and school-to-school comparisons. If testing is required for children in other than the designated grades—for placement in government-funded programs or special education classes—let this testing be administered only to those children and let the test be carefully selected to insure that each child is treated fairly. Some high schools use seventh-grade reading scores to select students. Let them use the sixth-grade scores. A child who subsequently shows a spurt in reading comprehension could petition for special admission.

Reducing the amount of testing would save a great deal of time and money. Teachers would gain teaching time. Counselors, who typically manage school testing programs, would gain time to work with children who need counseling.

Principals could evaluate teaching by observing teachers teach. Teachers could evaluate children by observing them in class and through tests that accompany the reading and math textbooks they use in class. In both cases, evaluation would be done by people close to those being evaluated, not some distant test maker. ■

Cynthia Dougall is a teacher member of the local school council at Beauchien Elementary School.

News media: problem, solution

by Stephen Sewall

What do Chicagoans know about the progress of school reform? Not much, even though everyone agrees that an informed citizenry is essential to the success of Chicago's 540 local school councils and to school improvement in general.

The story of this city's unique, complex approach to school revitalization has attracted journalists from across the country but is getting scant media attention at home. Television news has highlighted student strikes, protests over principal selection, the deputy mayor's ill-advised comments, the sit-in at the mayor's office and "violence at the Board of Education," another macfor-TV demonstration. The city's newspapers haven't been much better, adding short feature stories from time to time.

This media addiction to controversy and the harm it causes kids are familiar: For over two decades now microphones and minicams have visibly dramatized and thereby fueled the ongoing oppression of Chicago schools by Chicago politics.

OK, so the schools have lots of problems, and the media are obliged to report them. But the media have other obligations as well, and there are other ways to cover education. Again and again the media say that rebuilding the schools is one of the city's top needs and everyone must get involved. If so, it's reasonable to suggest that they do their part by balancing their negative coverage of education with the same attractive, in-depth, supportive coverage given every week to business, sports, entertainment, travel, cooking and real estate.

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Schools everywhere need hard-working volunteers, supportive parents and a public that understands something about what they do. An unrelieved focus on conflict frightens people and promotes instability. It's one reason why so many Chicagoans long ago gave up on their schools. Today, it is still a major cause of the apathy that blocks real progress.

Writing in CATALYST, one teacher lamented the "almost daily bombardment by the press, which instead of enlightening us serves to fuel the fires of dissension and distrust between the general public and school employees." This says it all. School reform must find an alternative to such constant emphasis on things gone wrong.

Media overwhelmed

The New York Times and Boston Globe offer an education page every week. In Chicago, education is homeless. Coin collectors, weekend joggers and soap opera fans know where to look for regular major-media coverage of their interests. But some five million Chicago-area parents, teachers and students have no scheduled education program on radio or commercial TV, no general-circulation education magazine, no newspaper education page, not even an education column or calendar of events.

Historically, the media have ranked the schools down with charity balls and civic awards for news value. Since the 1987 month-long teachers strike, however, there's been an abundance of education news. But it has remained overwhelmingly negative and unfocused. Two reasons stand out: One, the story of unprecedented educational crisis and change has simply overwhelmed the media. Two, our information-age society is only beginning to question the age-old misconception that learning is boring.

Consider, for example, the case of the Chicago Tribune, the dominant newspaper presence in the six-county Chicago area. In 1987, the Tribune helped spur school reform with its pioneering book-length account of Chicago schools as "America's Worst." One might have expected that the Tribune would bolster its education coverage to help cure the problem it had ably diagnosed. But it didn't.

Instead, it introduced four new features aimed, ironically enough, at kids and teens. The most impressive is "Preps Plus": 12 beautifully edited pages each week devoted to high-school sports reports. The Trib simply assumed that its largely suburban readership is bored by education. It could have surveyed students and parents for their preferences regarding sports and education, but it didn't. As a result, its heavily staffed coverage of high school sports completely outclasses its education coverage.

Both the Tribune and Sun-Times produce five "school guides" each year. However, in content and appearance they don't come anywhere near other sections of the newspapers, let alone the special school sections of the New York Times. The Trib and Sun-Times could better serve their readers and their community by redirecting the advertising behind these ho-hum sections to a regular, high-profile education page. They could build on that ad base with appeals to other advertisers to put their money where their mouths are on education.

Call this new education page "Learning Times." Just as "Preps Plus" creates a community of readers by recognizing teams and athletes, "Learning Times" would create an even larger community of readers by recognizing learners, educators and schools of all kinds.

Mirroring the emphasis on participation that we all know is the key to better schools, "Learning Times" would invite reader participation. Much of it, that is, would be written by readers. It might look like a cross between USA Today and comic books. It would expand on the new reader-participatory features of the Sun-Times and Trib, and it would provide lots of useful information and would be aimed at entire families.

Who would read and participate in "Learning Times?" and how would the section raise reading scores and sell newspapers? From a news standpoint, a comprehensive newspaper education page would balance problem stories with success stories from schools and colleges, both public and private. It would mix news with features, graphics, photos, capsule stories and insider columns (like INC, Kup and Sneed).

Television teaches

Readers could contribute in four ways. First, students could take part in art and writing contests and in debate and opinion forums that link them with each other and their communities. Second, families could use at-home learning features to strengthen the parent-student bond that is so crucial to success at school. Third, educators and volunteers could use problem-solving bulletin boards to network with each other and education groups. Finally, businesses could sponsor contests and awards to attract readers and sell newspapers.

In 1970, Lawrence Cremin, America's leading education historian until his recent death, pointed out that television teaches. Cremin had an essential insight: In some ways schools are helpless to compete with TV. Only the media can demonstrate to young and old alike that America values education as much as politics, academe as much as athletics, and learning as much as commerce. Presently, the media may be fairly charged with giving the reverse message on all three counts. If the print media tapped the widespread interest in education quality, electronic media likely would follow.

Stephen Sewall is chair of the media task force of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform.
In this installment of Diaries, Helen, a student member of a local school council, diagnoses what's wrong with her council and writes a prescription for its success. Without knowing it, she has captured a number of themes that weave in and out of diaries written for CATALYST by parents, teachers and principals.

"As a student," writes Helen, "I see four things that hinder my council from truly helping the students: first, the students’ lack of interest in school; second, the community’s unwillingness to help the students in their neighborhood; third, the conflict between parents and teachers; fourth, the principal’s reluctance to relinquish control over the school.”

Helen is now in college, so these are her parting words to Chicago school reform. Her fellow diarists—who include a subdistrict superintendent, an academic and community activists, as well as parents, teachers and principals—offer chapters in a continuing story. Few are uplifting.

The new principal also set out to get the teachers involved and inspired the union leaders to get the professional personnel advisory committee (PPAC) off and running. She encouraged and sorted out teacher leadership and put together a school improvement planning team that produced one of the most impressive plans in the city.

We are developing excellent relations with elementary schools in our area—expansion of cooperative learning models, summer enrichment programs for incoming students, etc. In almost two decades with the Chicago public schools, I have not seen such fruitful communication among elementary and high school teachers and administrators.

Our high school has sent more students to colleges this year than we have in the past 10 years. The real issue is how this all will affect the children we teach. Will scores rise, will interest and excitement for learning increase, will more of our young people choose post-high school education as a means to better their aspirations and their lives? What about our national crises with drugs, gangs, crime and poverty? What about our local crises with drugs, gangs, crime and poverty? Will our graduates be able to overcome these demons?

VALESKA

April 19 Today was High School Report Card Day, and I was representing a community agency at a high school open house. I was very excited as I observed how school reform has begun to make a difference in some schools. I could feel that difference as I saw the faces of students, parents, teachers and administrators. I think teachers and administrators are making parents and students feel more welcome at the school.

There was a good attendance of parents and students. I also noticed improved communication and confidence among parents, students and teachers. I consider this improvement a payoff for all the time, energy and love used in implementing this new process in our schools.

Rules and reality

ROBIN

April 1 A principal told me this week, “I'm sure I'm not obeying the law,” referring to a 1985 ruling to the effect that principals should spend 51 percent of their time on instructional leadership. She was actually talking about the amount of time being put into the politics of getting along with the local school council; she says she's all for local control, but
the way it's going now it's keeping her from doing what she sees as her job.

Politics aside, reform has increased the workload of principals and teachers without giving them much sense of benefits. Another principal, referring to the task of putting together the budget, said, “Oh, I could do it without too much trouble if I just had a room I could go into and work for a week. The problem is figuring out how to do it and run the school too.”

He was particularly annoyed that the actual physical task of putting the budget on the computer had been given to the schools, where clerks lacked appropriate training and nothing positive was to be gained by this local action. “We could make the decisions locally and then send the budget to Pershing Road to be entered. That would make sense.”

As to teachers, one university task force phoned the chair of a PPAC to propose help with staff development. The response was, “Do you know anything about lump sum budgeting? Do you know anything about writing a school improvement plan? If not, we're not interested.”

In schools where there was a degree of shared decision making before reform, the process is proceeding productively; but in too many schools teachers don’t feel it has much to do with their real lives—they’re just going through a required exercise that doesn’t call on their professional knowledge and skills.

May 11 We passed the school improvement plan and budget. It was put together largely with PPAC input and other departmental contributions. The parents wanted the principal to take more time to put her personal stamp on the plan, but she deferred to others.

What seem to be the major concerns at our school? Security and safety of the children, a tough academic program that stimulates instead of boring the kids but that is not so difficult that the hard-working but not gifted cannot succeed. If there were direction and a strong focus, I do believe councils would be happy to work hand-in-hand with and take guidance from the principals.

It is still the first year of reform. We are all—including the principals—feeling our way. Why don’t some principals with new four-year contracts snatch the opportunity and go to bat against Pershing Road, preferably with a council behind them? We could, as councils, lend so much power and impetus. We could eliminate the old problem that nothing can be done "because of downtown." Instead, we sit back and take orders. Somewhere in the next year there will need to be a major confrontation with Pershing Road, or school reform is dead.

Which brings me to principal evaluation. Our committee seems to be headed into a byway of busywork. Doing surveys of public opinion is the key here, our chairperson thinks. I think we should simply decide what we want the principal to accomplish and see if she does it. If so, hooray. If not, back to the drawing board. We already know she is a nice person. These vague generalities of lists of qualities are so silly.

Does the principal hire good people? Can she get the paperwork done to fire the incompetents? Is she creative in her budgeting? Does she spend the allocated funds? (Last year she failed to do so; therefore, our planned expenditures were never made useful to the school.) Can she handle shaping up the discipline in classes and study halls? Does she support the teachers? Or does she cave in to parent pressure and thus undercut a teacher’s ability to control the classroom?

Can she talk tough to parents about what is expected of their kids? Or is she basically afraid of parents? Is she trying to please everyone? Can she see through the sob stories of kids who are expert liars? Or is she continually fooled into mollycoddling the most cynical student behavior? Is she fair when a kid is really being unfairly treated, and can she work out some way for the teacher to save face and keep control?

Are there useful inservice staff training programs? Or is it all talk of future training? Is the principal able to get things fixed, handle the custodial staff, attack the safety problems that are pending and unresolved? Is she willing to delegate and then follow up to check on accomplishments? Or does she run in 10 different directions unable to let anyone else do a thing? When she promises to do something, does she do it? Or does she forget about it?

SCARLET

March 26 This is my first day at school #2. Today I met the council members. They are very different, in terms of vision, from the council I interacted with. This council has serious concerns for the school. They are looking for someone to really provide direction and to work hard for their children.

The school is not without personality problems, however. There are factions of parents who feel the council has been closed to them because there has been only public time for them to talk; they want to interact with the council throughout the meeting. It is a very difficult process for them to understand.

There are teacher factions operating within the school. Teachers who were not elected to the council as representatives are against almost everything the council does. They feel the current teacher reps are manipulating everyone else.
March 28 This is a nice but forgotten school. Truly it is virgin territory for positive change. Very little staff development has been implemented here over the years. Some teachers are more positive than others, but I think eventually all of them will open up.

April 9 PTA meeting. Parents in this association both resent and fear what they perceive as power held by the LSC. This is an eye opener for me. Another bridge to cross.

April 23-27 Spring vacation week. The first three days are spent completing the SIP, Federal and State Chapter 1 proposals and summer school proposal. It’s nice having the funds to build programs to improve the lot for children. We have built into the plans, however, some contractual services we are not sure will be allowed. The services are desperately needed, but some think the Board of Education will not let us hire our own. Instead, we might have to go through the Board, and that will introduce great delay. Our needs are immediate.

April 30 These proposals do make for a huge typing assignment for the clerk. I agree with those who propose that each school needs a freed assistant principal and another clerk.

May 8 Teacher Appreciation Day. It is pleasing to recognize teachers. So many work hard for little recognition. This school has a good supply of hard-working teachers looking for ways to improve. I wish all the teachers on the staff were this way.

May 12 LSC meeting. The committees are really doing a great job in bringing useful reports to the meetings and making the meetings run much smoother. We are planning for more night meetings next year so as to involve more people.

June 4 Our school has a good LSC, but even then there can be real problems. Today one of the members told me I could not hire the person I wanted to serve as security guard because she wants her daughter to have the job.

June 26 This is the first week of summer school. All the summer school materials are not in. Principals meeting today. I could not buy a clerk for the summer program, which is funded by two different sources. One source says that the clerk’s salary must be prorated with any other funding source; the other funding source says it will not pay for a clerk at all. Therefore, I’m the only adult around outside the classroom. Because of this, I asked a teacher to sub for me during the principal’s meeting.

July 9 A disgruntled teacher today, angry that he did not get a summer job at the school. While staying within union-board guidelines, I gave jobs to persons I thought were deserving, namely, those who had done a creditable job of teaching during the regular school year. He should not have been surprised; I laid out my summer school standards earlier in the year.

April 3 Today I interviewed two young, certified, bilingual teachers. They wanted to transfer out of their present school; they said they were unable to function there because of the parents who feel they know better than the teachers how things should be done. Parents often visit classrooms. They sometimes request their children be moved from one classroom to another. They question teachers’ methodology or programmatic decisions. The parents apparently have taken their reform empowerment to mean parents can run the school. These two teachers say they can no longer operate effectively in that environment. They want out.

Yesterday I interviewed a teacher from a school where the LSC did not renew the principal’s contract. It was handled so badly that the faculty is split. There is much hostility and animosity among the teachers and between teachers and parents. This teacher feels she can no longer work in that environment. She wants out. Several teachers from that faculty are also looking for positions elsewhere. Even the school clerk wants out. Another teacher from that school is coming to interview with me tomorrow.

I’ve learned these are not isolated situations. When an LSC considers the principal’s contract, they are not making a decision that affects just one person. Schools are mini-communities. A change in administration affects everyone. Unless the principal is a real ogre, even if he or she is not everyone’s favorite uncle or aunt, a dismissal will cause a stir.

April 16-20 I was called an “ignorant racist” by the parent of a child I transferred out of my school because she lived outside our attendance area.

I called the police when several young men who do not attend our school came in and created a disturbance, then continued the yelling and chanting outside, frightening the students and neighbors alike. The next day I had to contend with the mothers of two of these young men who came to ask why I had their boys arrested.

I counseled a young mother who resigned from a parent committee because life is closing in around her and she can’t handle it all.

I took a report from a teacher about an abused child and then, before calling the child abuse hotline, spoke with the child’s mother in an effort to reduce the hell this child is going through.

I gave a pep talk to a principal friend who was going to an interview that represents her last chance for a principaship next year.

I soothed a couple of teachers who want an administrative transfer to my school and learned that all administrative transfers are frozen until after July 1.

I interviewed a mother whose child is probably retarded but has been labeled learning disabled, perhaps due to some
confusion about his birth date. He transferred in as a fifth-grader this year; his records indicate he is 12 years old, but he is really 15. The discrepancy in age invalidates the results of the child study. We will have to start again. His mother is desperate. What will he do? she asks. How can he take care of himself after she no longer can?

I talked to the teacher who proctored the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in our first-grade classroom. I suspect the first-grade teacher has not followed the teacher guide carefully. I am supposed to be the educational supervisor. Why am I just now becoming aware that all is not as it should be in that classroom?

This is indicative of what most principals do for a week on a daily basis. What we do day to day has not changed as a result of school reform. The job remains fairly stable. What has changed is that now we have more people we have to report to.

It is my responsibility to write the school improvement plan. I must do so with the input of faculty, parents, community and anyone else who has anything to contribute. We conducted a needs assessment of the parents, but the most significant finding is that they know very little about the instructional program and don't have suggestions on how things could be better.

The LSC is of little more help; they require much prodding and coaching from me before we can come up with the problems to be addressed. The PPAC identified several problem areas, and then some of the members wonder if they are being “too hard on the principal” by being honest.

I continue to cajole, encourage, suggest and push to get SIP input from all. In the meantime, the due date keeps changing.

May 17 Students at Pickard School stage a sit-in because they do not want to be transferred to a new school. The principal is accused of not being in control of her building and is suspended for 25 days.

The Spry LSC does not renew the principal’s contract. Students, parents and teachers protest. The principal is suspended.

Protesters disrupt a meeting of the Chicago Board of Education. They literally drive out the Board members, a brawl ensues and they take over the Board chambers. Why wasn’t Supt. Kimbrough or Pres. Compton suspended because they could not maintain control in the Board chambers?

May 22 There is much unhappiness, mistrust, frustration, confusion and low morale among many of my colleagues and others who work for the Chicago public schools these days. Many of us feel battered and angry, defensive, hostile and downright belligerent, not to mention over-extended and stretched too thin to give full attention to any one thing.

These feelings are not entirely the result of the new school reform; they stem primarily from the manner in which we have been treated by members of the Board and their staff. From the infamous deputy mayor for education right down to those district superintendents who see principals as so many errant children who must be brought into line, we have been subjected to mental and often verbal abuse. What a way to run a ship!

Doesn’t anyone remember all that self-fulfilling prophecy business drummed into our heads as undergraduate education majors? Have we forgotten that we get what we give, that what goes around comes around?

Why has the leadership of our public schools now decided that the way to reform the schools is to browbeat the principal? Principals are supposed to be the instructional leaders in their buildings. The principal sets the tone for the entire building. Instead of tearing us down publicly, the leadership should be finding ways to make us part of the reform process. We are currently being done to, instead of being the movers and shakers who will make this reform thing happen.

A prime example is the lump sum budget business. We were led to believe that we would have more control over our budgets, but actually all that really changed this year was who would feed the data into the computer.

The latest insult to our local-level intelligence is the freeze
of our 210 [general instructional] funds. Supposedly Supt. Kimbrough feels that those who have waited this long to order supplies and instructional materials do not know what they're doing. But it makes sense to use this year's money to purchase materials for next year. Why? Because of the cumbersome purchasing procedures at the central office. If we order at the beginning of the school year in the fall, we are lucky to get it by mid-winter. We know what we're doing. Kimbrough doesn't. He hasn't been here long enough.

July 9 A teacher informs me that my assistant principal position, which is vacant but for which I have nominated my acting assistant, effective September 1990, has been closed out. "Why?" I ask. She doesn't know. "Who?" "Sampieri's office." I call Robert Sampieri's office but am referred to Dr. Margaret Harrigan's office. When I inquire why this position was closed out, I am asked to put my request in writing and to include my rationale for why this position should not be closed. What is going on? Mind you, I have not been officially informed of this closing; I got the word on the q.t. How can I be expected to effectively operate my school if I am not taken into account when staffing decisions are being made?

July 17 It is common knowledge that we have a janitor in our building who cannot be trusted. This man does very little work, and things have been known to disappear when he is in the building. In the past, he has entered the building at all hours of the night and entertained his friends here. The building engineer has even limited this man, by special keys, to certain areas of the building.

With the other two maintenance men on vacation, I am stuck with the nonworking one. For the last two weeks he has done nothing but sweep up the three classrooms being used for the summer program. When I told him the corridors had to be swept, he indicated he had not yet started the summer cleanup. No, I insisted, we must have the corridors swept on a daily basis. The children use them daily, and they must be clean daily.

July 18 One of my teachers tells me we have a large bag of garbage in one of the first-floor classrooms; the bag has been there since June 22. I go down to the boiler room to ask the janitor to get rid of the garbage. "That's not my section," he responds. I tell him to empty out the garbage before it grows legs.

Then I inquire what he does all day. He tells me he sits in the boiler room. None of the classrooms has been cleaned yet this summer. He assures me everything will get done by September. I suggest he wash walls, vacuum the carpeted floor in the library and dust the window sills. "There's no sense in dusting the window sills now; they'll just get dusty again before September." "We live here!" I tell him, "and we need to have some of this filth cleaned up now. Please get to it."

Then I call the district supervising engineer. He tells me nothing can be done. Evidently the union's strength is so strong that nobody ever gets fired, no matter how incompetently. I can't believe this nonsense. Is there no recourse? Well, I'm told, we can write him up, but when the case gets to career service personnel, they will do nothing. So why bother? I can ask this janitor to do whatever simple, reasonable thing needs doing, but I have no authority over him. I'm the CEO of this school, but I am impotent to do anything about the way the building is kept up. Great.

A subdistrict superintendent's views

JOE

Take it as it comes! If there was a pervasive rallying cry for district superintendents during the 1989-90 school year, it was that. Stunned by ranks decimated through reduction of districts from 23 to 11, thoroughly confused by the intent of double-sized districts with almost no staff, and bewildered by removal from line positions, the district superintendents nevertheless strove to determine and fill their proper roles within the reform movement.

There was considerable bitterness as district superintendents were identified with the infamous "bloated bureaucracy"—in spite of the fact that each person on district payrolls fulfilled an important function and in spite of the fact that with the exception of 24 clerks, all personnel previously on the district payrolls are still employed by the Board of Education.

Ironically, the district instructional coordinator, who was usually among the most skilled of all district personnel, was the person most likely returned to the classroom. Thus, a hugeount of skills was lost to teachers; because continuing education is not a requirement for Chicago teachers, this loss heavily dented staff development programs.

Without staff, district superintendents found it impossible to continue coordinating such activities as district-wide spelling bees, academic olympics, Math Counts, etc. As a result, most requested the aid of principals who, with their staffs, responded enthusiastically. Although cooperation was evident throughout the system, most activities suffered a bit for lack of fine coordination, because principals in this first year of reform found themselves grappling with a plethora of new and unfamiliar tasks.

Throughout the system, the single most difficult issue during the year was relationships, or uses of authority—that is, who was supposed to be doing what, who was responsible for this or that, where the proper line was between policy making and implementation. Nowhere was the issue more perplexing or frustrating than at the local school level.

My personal summary of the year truly surprises me. There were missteps by some LSCs, there was much anxiety at all administrative levels, and much remains to be improved orga-
nizationally and otherwise. Further, we must take account of the words of one activist who was later nominated to the new School Board, "Nobody had any idea how much work being a council member would be. This is a full-time job. We've been placed in involuntary servitude." Nevertheless, a tremendous amount of good has resulted from what I view as a seriously flawed beginning.

Letters from the boss

ELIZABETH

May 5 A letter from Supt. Kimbrough this week. It is his vision statement for the Chicago public schools. It is for parents. I am told that the letter was to go with the report card for the parents. We gave report cards out two weeks ago! What we have here is simply another example of the breakdown in communication between Pershing Road and the local staffs.

More mail from Mr. Kimbrough. This letter solicits recommendations from all employees for more effective methods to cut corners in the everyday workings of the Board. He is calling upon his people to help him streamline operations. One way costs could be contained is by cutting down on letters sent to principals, teachers and LSC members. They are not helpful or inspirational, merely costly. There is no money left over after Kimbrough's million-dollar budget for PR with employees. That money would be better spent on the LSCs.

Politics and the new Board of Education

RAYMOND

April 2 About the new Board of Education yet to be appointed by the mayor. Politics is always the primary factor whenever the politicians have appointive power. They want you to be nonpartisan and apolitical, but they always use political considerations in making selections.

I didn't believe the mayor would rush to make appointments. Why should he rush the appointments of 15 people—most of whom he could not influence—to replace his Interim Board of Education, over which he has complete control? Moreover, Mayor Daley was in no way in a favorable disposition in a pre-election year to relinquish major influence over almost a $3 billion budget and 40,000 people to forces outside his circle of power.

What with the state legislature getting ready to go into session and a school teachers contract to be concluded, I too, were I mayor, would be hesitant to appoint persons of questionable political loyalties regardless of how qualified they may be.

May 11 The mayor announced seven selections to the new Board of Education. As we had assumed, he did not appoint an entire 15-member Board.

Some people close to the LSCs have argued that the nominating commission should take their time in selecting the next slate because then the Interim Board, now in place, will have to face the difficult decisions of budget for the Chicago public schools, the teachers' contract, approving the statewide goals and objectives on school reform, etc.

Plugging away

ELIZABETH

March 22 A regular LSC meeting. Here we are well into March and we still have a phantom parent rep; she hasn't attended a single meeting this school year. One of the community reps has attended only part of one meeting all year. Yet both are still LSC members. This is a serious flaw in the law.

We finally had bylaws presented for consideration. Although the proposed bylaws had been distributed to all council members weeks earlier, tonight it was clear that the parent and community reps had not even read them yet. We tried to read them together at the meeting but got so bogged down in questions and dissension that we tabled the matter until next meeting. We were not helped by one member who contentiously couldn't understand why we needed any bylaws at all.

Next, the long-awaited budget was revealed by the principal. A few sheets of paper spit out of a computer never generated so much hostility anywhere, anytime. And then, to make matters worse, the chairperson presented a list of Requests for Programs in 1990-91 Budget, which it turned out had been compiled by the chair and three other members without the knowledge of the rest of the council.

AMELIA

April 7 Six months of LSC meetings. I can see why so few really good people go into politics. It is endlessly frustrating to people who like to get something done and then be on with it. Instead, we are all forced to sit and listen to incessant babbling with very little communication happening.

Our principal, for all the complaints about her being
weak, is certainly concerned about control. In a way I cannot blame her. The PPAC is in the hands of the union; Mr. Union himself controls the PPAC. If the PPAC is to be effective it cannot be such an obvious tool of the union. The departments are in the hands of a few old-guard chairs who simply refuse to share power and decision making with their members. What we need is teachers talking among teachers in a positive way—not just complaints but with some sense that something they suggest has power to change the way things are done.

The union is worried that it will lose power through reform. Therefore, the PPAC and the union reps on the councils are playing political hardball to keep their power, and most parents are babes in the woods when it comes to school-system politics, union methods and budgets. So, apparently, is our principal.

I am not anti-union per se. It is the time-punch mentality among teachers that I find so bothersome. I personally remember how terrible teacher pay was in the days before unions and how exploitive the administrations could be. There was good reason for unions. Now there is good reason to get on with better education and move beyond unions if necessary.

And it is not that I am against a strong union leader. The trouble with our Mr. Union is not just that he controls the teachers like sheep; it is that he is so completely uncreative and negative. He has no vision. This is not just my opinion. Everyone agrees, but the apathy among teachers and their ability to be confused and harded down Mr. Union's path is quite astounding to all of us. One council member suggested we work with Mr. Union. We have. He hasn't paid attention. Everything we have sent through him to the PPAC has been decided by him alone, and the other teachers have not even heard of it.

April 14 Our teachers are not willing to attend night meetings. They will stay after school but not return. However, the non-teachers have trouble with daytime meetings because so many are working. Therefore, there is basic incompatibility in timing and cooperation between parents who work and teachers. This has, of course, created a problem scheduling LSC meetings and committee meetings. As a matter of fact, one LSC teacher committee chair purposely scheduled her meetings after school to discourage attendance by parents.

April 21 I read the Board's booklet on budgeting. The sample school, first through sixth grade, was not that relevant to us. And the booklet did not explain all the ins and outs of how things are done and where little tricks are used to get funds for this or that. It is simply pro forma. We are to do an extra layer of make-work, not real work.

We really do not, apparently, have any control of the budget except for the Chapter I funds. The whole idea that parents could and would actually control the budget process is a tremendous lie. The teachers' salaries are locked in, so are the aides', all protected by union contract. We can close positions and open others, but no one wants to do that; and even if we did want to cut a couple of duds, we cannot because we would have to close out the last hired instead of the incompetents. Our principal cannot seem to fire anyone, and "control" of the budget does not mean we can fire anyone either.

Make-work, not real work. That is what all of this council work appears to me to be. The tough issues are sidestepped or outside our control. The tiddly details are insignificant, just another layer of red tape and paper work on top of the same old thing, and nothing is changed.

Maybe if we had a really clever principal who knows how to get what she wants. We do not have a really clever principal. We have a nice one who tries her best. We need one who can get things done and who also has a thought for what needs to be done.

April 26 The end of education came with the introduction of the 300-minute rule three years ago. [The state requires 300 minutes of classes each day.] At that time students lost their right to early dismissal and exemption from study halls to get out into the community and get jobs and experience in the working world. This is definitely what they all need if we are to raise a generation of workers for our institutions and corporations.

We had a chance for improvement this spring. Our principal proposed to change the length of the class periods to ful-
fill the 300-minute requirement, giving the students more education and less study-hall time. The union rep worked very hard against it and confused enough teachers so that it was voted down. Yet schools where this has been done are all happy with it and have not gone back to the old scheduling.

One of the teachers who voted against it said she did so because she totalled up the extra minutes each day, which came to quite a few extra teaching hours per year that were not paid for. Even though teachers would have fewer duties and earlier quitting times, she wanted that few minutes a day of extra pay.

Corporations and social services would fail with that attitude. So for that, which must have been the union line, we have to let kids rot in study halls that are sheer bedlam. Someone needs to go to Springfield and make it clear that Chicago is a special case. We have no ability to provide 300 minutes of education for most kids. We have to keep them in holding pens where they are bored and plot teen mischief and share, in teen gab fests and fights, their impoverished values.

A student said something recently that made me see the crucial need for as much education as possible at the school. She said the problem with many of the kids is they have such poor vocabularies that they use predominantly limited slang or swear words with vague meanings and therefore “cannot think about anything complicated.” (I was doubly impressed with this student’s insight when later at our May training session one of the points brought out was precisely that people with limited language skills often use profanity to fill in the gaps of their thought processes.)

RAYMOND

April 21 Our LSC worked on the SIP this week. The key issues raised by the teachers had to do with the thrust of the SIP toward extending the school week by approximately 21/2 hours and other proposals aimed at putting nonquota [extra] teachers or other personnel into the classrooms. Some teachers who had been most supportive of the LSC during the winter months now began to raise criticisms: “The LSC is trying to do too much too fast,” “Don’t make too many changes too quickly,” etc.

VALESKA

May 12 Our LSC discussed uniforms as a dress code for the school. We had done a survey among parents and found them very positive. However, over three-fourths of the teachers, we learned, were opposed. Why the opposition? Constitutional grounds, they said. They thought a dress code would violate the children’s rights.

I myself wondered if many of these same teachers haven’t been violating our children’s rights already by creating a classroom learning environment that tells the students they shouldn’t be here and cannot succeed. Whether the teachers actually say these words, many teachers nonetheless communicate their meaning:

- “You should look for a job because school is not for you.”
- “You do not have the ability to get any academic preparation.”
- “You cannot function in school.”
- “You will not make it to a junior college, much less to a university.”

Low self-esteem of students and expectation of failure are prevalent at our school. That is a violation of the children’s rights.

ELIZABETH

May 5 The LSC Curriculum and Education Committee, which is primarily responsible for our SIP, held its initial meeting this week, only days before the SIP is due; two persons showed up. The Finance Committee, responsible for budget considerations, also held its initial meeting; one person showed up.

What is the ultimate punishment for missing a deadline at the central office? It is, according to our principal, a series of threatening form letters followed by a succession of phone calls by persons ever higher up in authority. We are so far behind in decision making and paper work that it may require the physical presence of Supt. Kimbrough himself to get it done.

LAZARUS

May 17 LSC meeting. The second draft of our bylaws is in our hands for review. Other matters are also discussed. Resolutions are passed. A long-time community resident who serves on another area LSC is in the audience; he volunteers for committee work with us. The meeting is long. Our translator looks exhausted. The strain is telling on all of us. The minutes of the meeting fill five pages, typed single-spaced.

Some schools have black-white ethnic conflicts. We have blacks and whites vs. Hispanics. Why? All the normal and inexplicable reasons. But also resentment over a perception, whether true or not. As one teacher put it, “Hispanics are the favored children of the Board and the state today. Extra funding reaches them. The rest of us must now realize how the game is played.”

Further, the problem is exacerbated by our having an all-Hispanic LSC. One of our own council members translates each entire meeting. Most faculty members do not attend
council meetings. When they do, few have patience for the time it takes to translate. Some express their displeasure that the chairperson speaks Spanish during the meetings. She does indeed know a lot of English but is uncomfortable speaking in public in a second language. On the other hand, another member of our council, who has been taking English lessons, delivered her first report in English to the council and a fairly full house; she wanted to practice her English. We have reason to be proud of her efforts, but how do we convey to casual onlookers what her presentation means?

Yes, our meetings are quite lengthy. Yet, I recall meetings of similar length when I served on a community board where Spanish was not the problem. We move slowly because the council does not wish to leave anyone behind. No member should not understand. No member should feel railroaded into a decision. The pace is slow and cumbersome, but no other way will get us to the goal. We must all reach it together.

June 12 The bylaws committee meets with council members for a final vote on the document. There is much discussion over the difference between parliamentary procedure, as defined in Roberts’ Rules of Order, and consensus, which has been a vital part of the training for LSCs. The give-and-take at the meeting is remarkable as each word, carefully weighed for its nuances, is hammered into place.

June 14 At our LSC meeting, we learn that 13 teacher positions will be closed out at the end of the school year. Not only is student enrollment down but a new student-teacher ratio is being used. Substance, the teacher-written news monthly, reports that Chicago’s student-teacher ratio is one of the highest in the area; the new formula puts us in a worse position.

Many other schools will be hit far worse than we on position closings. No one knows the answer to the question of supernumeraries who, according to reform legislation, are guaranteed a job, if not a position at their schools, if there are no other places for them in the system. Where is the saving then? Or will the general superintendent disregard the law?

The council chairperson suggests meetings over the summer to discuss budget and the school improvement plan. The principal says Board employees are entitled to a vacation. No meetings are scheduled.

June 21 The LSC members are at school before 7:30 a.m. to provide coffee and chocolate and sweet rolls for the faculty on Teacher Institute Day. The atmosphere is relaxed. No one talks business.

June 22 A special LSC meeting to consider appeals on the 13 position closings. The council votes to endorse the appeals. The council chair uses the moment to discuss other positions. She has become a hard and seasoned negotiator over this school year.

RAYMOND

July 12 I attended a principal’s candidate forum at a neighboring school. There were 15 well-qualified candidates. The forum and reception were well-attended, and the quality of the questions posed by the community to the candidates were excellent. Frankly, this school will have a tough time selecting a final candidate because so many of them were superior in their presentations and responses to questions. There were LSC chairpersons from two other schools present—to identify potential candidates for their own schools.

An LSC tackles the budget monster

LAZARUS

April 12 A lump sum budgeting session at our school, led by a trainer from the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance.

April 17 A special evening budget information meeting. A principal at an April 7 training session had disclosed that State Chapter I funding has considerable limitations and may be used by the Board to cover items such as summer school programs. That means very little may be left over at the local school for other expenditures.

Now we learn that the Board has charged all teacher aide positions formerly under a general education fund to the State Chapter I fund on which we had pinned our hopes for new monies to pay for equipment and material necessary to implement reform. We will be lucky to have half of what we had last year. Teacher aide salaries take up to two-thirds of the State Chapter I money. How do you tell a teacher aide assigned to the school for the last 20 years that a copying machine is more important than her livelihood? So much for equipment and materials.

On the other hand, how do you tell teachers who are finally beginning to warm up to the idea of reform that they will have to continue to struggle along with inadequate materials and equipment, thus jeopardizing the attainment of the goals they have recently set for themselves?

The union delegate told us this week that negotiations were coming along nicely on the next three-year contract, and a salary increase would make us smile. How much of that increase will go for out-of-pocket expenses to privately fund classroom activities? Teaching in our system carries with it “fringe deficits” rather than “fringe benefits.” But the price for not paying those costs is too expensive for many of us to swallow, so we purchase supplementary materials for classroom use with our own money whether or not we are reimbursed.

April 20 At a hastily called PPAC meeting, we try to deter-
mine a fair system of allocating scant State Chapter I funds not spoken for by salaries. We hope first choice will be given to departments that received little or nothing under last year's funding.

May 5 A budget meeting (Saturday) from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. Unresolved issues get in our way. Administration discloses some of the long-requested information. Learning combines with decision making. The deadline is breathing down our necks. Numbers alone do not answer all of the questions. With every answer a new question. The LSC wants to talk programs. Are we getting our money's worth? The principal says he is in charge of personnel. Deadlock.

May 7 Special LSC open meeting on budget. After a three-hour meeting, no decision is made because critical information is lacking. The May 8 Board deadline will not be met.

May 14 An early-morning budget information meeting ends abruptly when the administration realizes projected figures it calculated for teacher aide salaries are in error.

Yet another lump sum budgeting booklet from the Board is distributed. This one contains some useful information on program requirements. I feel as if we have embarked on a trans-oceanic race while still assembling our ship. No amount of corrective action will compensate. To paraphrase William T. Sherman, those who launched us in this condition deserve all the maldictions a people can inflict on them.

May 26 The budget begins to take shape. The council with diligence and perseverance peels back layer after layer of the budget as if it were an onion reluctant to surrender its heart to their scrutiny. On their own, the council finds resource people who can guide us toward the understanding we need to make wise decisions. Slowly the mysteries of another "lump" in lump sum budgeting unfold.

For early June the council's calendar is filled with more meetings on budget, bylaws, SIP, security.

June 27 A special budget meeting does not come off. We do not have a quorum.

Buck passing, mistrust, other ills

ELIZABETH

March 20 While at a professional meeting out of town this month, I had a conversation with a Southern Illinois University professor whose research area is staff development; he has become particularly interested in the isolation of the rural teacher. I suggested the isolation of the urban teacher is of equal importance, and I shared with him the double isolation I've experienced as part of Chicago school reform.

Aside from a few close friends on staff whom I also see socially, my communication with peers has diminished. Perhaps they feel that as an elected teacher rep to the LSC I have crossed over to the "other side." They seem reluctant to share problems with me. People used to come freely to me for advice. Do they feel isolated, or are they attempting to isolate me? I try to remain optimistic about school reform, but more often than not I feel victimized by the very beast I was elected to serve. Colleagues feel I am privy to "inside" information and ought to share all my data with them.

Not only do I not know anything that is privileged, but as a council member I am not even invited to the secret and illegal meetings the chairperson holds with her cronies. I am truly in the dark.

LAZARUS

June 9 As I think back on experiences this spring, Catch 22 comes to mind more than once.

We did not have enough training beforehand, but early training would not have done much good if the Board with its vested interests had provided it.

The Board would not provide security at one elementary school because there were too few incidents to warrant it. The parents replied that they did not want any further incidents and that was why they were asking for security now.

A team of college students requested permission from our LSC to do a documentary on truancy at the school. Our principal said nothing could be done until the Board sends a letter to the school; protocol must be followed. The student team leader said the Board was waiting for our LSC's approval before they will send a letter.

I asked one teacher at our school if she has been able to order the books she wanted. She said they were ordered but the publishing company wouldn't honor the order until the Board paid all it owes for previous orders. Shaky credit on which to build reform.

Because of the freeze placed on spending by the general superintendent's office, teachers who attended district office inservices have not been paid their promised stipends. Textbooks ordered through the Home Economics Department arrived. For some reason, possibly the freeze, the books were sent back. Unfortunately, they had already been stamped with our school's name.

The LSC chairperson suggests closing a teaching position for which we do not have very many students. The principal urges her to let the Board take care of that; he sees his role to keep everyone who has been assigned to his school. The chairperson says the teacher could be teaching students elsewhere: children are children.

Political patronage—or what? You cannot trade a custodian for the equivalent in supplies of toilet paper.
VALESKA

April 12 At a meeting of members from various LSCs, one parent said her council told her she does not have the right to say anything about their school without the council’s approval. And if she does, they can sue her.

Another parent said that at her school the principal has his own committee of parents; this committee is attempting to subvert the LSC. Further, the LSC parent claimed to have been the victim of insults, even in front of the principal, from members of this counterfeited committee, but the principal never intervenes during these put downs.

ELIZABETH

April 21 I know a teacher at another school who is quite outspoken and is very negative about the reform movement. Her principal told her she was not allowed to attend any LSC meetings because she was not elected to the council. Meanwhile her principal makes and dines his council and has them in his pocket. She is so disgusted with the situation that next year she will be at another school. If this does not work, she says she will abandon the system after 23 years.

A student’s prescription

HELEN

As a student, I see four things that hinder my council from truly helping the students: first, the students’ lack of interest in school; second, the community’s unwillingness to help the students in their neighborhood; third, the conflict between the parents and teachers; fourth, the principal’s reluctance to relinquish control over the school.

If the students don’t care about their high school, how is the student rep really going to do something? This is a big problem at my school. I did a survey. Most of the kids filled it out as a joke. I find it hard, without the support of the student body, to know what to do to improve the school.

I think the community, especially local businesses, has to play a large role in schools today. High school students need to know that if they stay in school they can do something with their education. If people in local businesses took time out to work with students, those students might have a whole different outlook on school. People in the community even have to be willing to work on an on with a student. At my school, IBM worked with some of the classes. It was a valuable experience. They taught us about job skills we will need when we go out into the real world. It was not one on one, but they took time out to teach us something that will be useful to us in the future.

Parents and teachers have to stop fighting. If it keeps up, the council will never work. They have to realize that the councils were not set up for them; the councils are to benefit the children of Chicago. The councils have to work cooperatively in order to work.

Our principal seems to think the people on the council are incapable of handling things. As I see it, the principal does not want to have the LSC. He does not want to give up the power he had. He has been in charge so long he may feel that if he does not have control he will be out of a job. He may also feel afraid that because we are all so new at this process, we will mess everything up for him. My LSC has some great people on it. They just have to realize they are in control now, not the principal.

LSC power a joke

AMELIA

April 28 We learned recently that our school will be required to have a remedial summer school whether we like it or not. We cannot make the decision as a council. Not until 1991. There are so many of these directives coming down from on high that keep the councils going in circles. We are not the governing bodies for the schools. That was a myth, pure and simple. We are an extra layer of bureaucracy, an extra set of people to consider or avoid for teachers and administrators. This is a huge social experiment, but it is not local governance of the schools.

We have also been advised that gun-toting students whom we try to expel have a right to assume that we as a school owe them an education. If we cannot expel students for even the most serious offenses against the safety of other children, and if we are too timid that we will not buck the Board on that for fear of being sued by parents whose children carry guns, then where goes our school? Where is our local control? And if we do not make a stand for safety, then who will be suing us when their child is hurt or killed in our school? There was an actual shooting in a nearby school, but it was hushed up.

If Supt. Kimbrough cannot bring himself to stand against guns and allow expulsion, then someone ought to go to court and sue for safety. The trouble is that the gun-toting kids are “emotionally disturbed” or “behaviorally disordered” by definition and therefore by law have a right to a free public education. There is something wrong with the law. It needs to be tested in court. I hope it can be done before there is another shooting.
May 19 Our LSC was considering the Channel One option. This has been in the national news the past year: a commercial company is offering free TV and video equipment to schools that agree to use its news shows several minutes each day—these viewings by the students to be used as bases for class discussion, research and writing projects, etc. It is a controversial issue because there are a few advertisements broadcast along with the “good stuff.”

Now we are told by Supt. Kimbrough that Channel One is off limits for Chicago schools. Period. So much for local control of schools. Our principal urged an LSC vote in favor of Channel One anyway, just in case Kimbrough changed his mind. She wants the hardware for the school.

I later learned that as far as anyone can determine, the LSC teacher rep who took the Channel One issue to the faculty for their group evaluation and came back to the council reporting their approval never took it to the faculty at all. It was his personal opinion only that he reported to the council. So much for genuine representation. This arrogance would be humorous if it were not such an outrage—and if it were not symptomatic of the disarray that characterizes our LSC.

All this raises the question: What good are councils anyway? If we cannot solve a basic problem like providing 300 minutes of education for our children, then we have no power at all to improve the schools. If we have no choice about Channel One or what kind of program we run during the summer or what kind of student we permit in the classroom, then we have no local control at all.

A friend of mine on the faculty says she believes the state ultimately will realize that parent councils cannot run the schools, and they must be run by the faculty themselves. Surely the administration cannot run them. She fails to see the reason the parents were called in: the unions representing the teachers have made improvement in the schools quite impossible, and the Chicago Teachers Union has no educational values it is working for.

June 1 Additional directive from Pershing Road about Channel One. Schools presumably have been defying Kimbrough and signing up for the program. He has, therefore, issued an order that not one wire can be used, not one brick of any school building can be touched or moved or drilled without his written permission, or the principal will be in big trouble. Our principal seems sufficiently mad and sufficiently interested in all the free equipment that she is willing to buck downtown for a change, and she wants the council to support her.

I just hate to think what the parents of the children at our school five years from now will say when they hear that we could have had all this equipment for in-school video taping and team teaching and filming of special programs and so on, and we as a council could not manage to acquire it even though it was offered us free.

July 14 The Channel One thing came up again at our LSC meeting. All the principals who have signed up for the program have gotten letters from Kimbrough stating that their salaries will be withheld if they install Channel One.

As a council we essentially have no power except to rehire a principal or go for a new one every four years. We have no power to get rid of teachers if our principal is unwilling to evaluate them. We have no power to change the budget except for Chapter 1 discretionary funds. If our power seems limited to “locker assignments and the use of milk money,” to use a favorite metaphor, then to counter LSC frustration and despair we need a different kind of general superintendent.

We need a superintendent who, instead of setting up regional bureaucracies to ensnare councils in more and more red tape, would say, “Hey, how can we help you remedy bad teaching? How can we help you facilitate effective evaluations of teachers? How can we help you get as much extra equipment and money for your local schools as you have the presence of mind to go after? How can we make sure your supply requisitions are filled on time?”

“How can we send specialists to your side to help work out ways to deal with the problems of scheduling and keeping order and stimulating students to learn? How can we help you evaluate your curriculum to be sure it meets the needs of education for the 21st century? How can we help you keep your schools open for community activities and reach out to the community to pull more of the students away from private schools? How can we help you keep your school clean and

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in good repair? How can we give special awards to teachers who go beyond the call of duty and don’t punch time clocks but actually roll up their sleeves and help make your school better?”

Those are the questions that need to be asked. Those are the questions Kimbrough should be addressing, instead of sending out decrees that we can’t do this and we’ll be losing our principal if we try to do that.

**LSC training gets mixed reviews**

**LAZARUS**

March 7 CTU training again. Three schools represented, each different. All were anxious to get to the school improvement plan and lump sum budgeting. Although everyone was edgy about it, we had a good introduction to group process.

One group was made up primarily of PPAC members who used the second half of their session to outline goals for themselves. How neat they were—not young by any means but facing the problem of defining their roles with the enthusiasm and energy younger teachers might well envy. The largest of the three groups worked at defining aspects of their SIP, despite an undertone of tension within the group based on more than meeting deadlines. The third group seemed to feel neither the energy nor the tension of the other two. The reality of reform may not have touched them yet.

March 17 CTU training. Mixed reviews. While one group wanted to know how soon the union would refund them their training money, another wanted me to come to their school to train their LSC. This was a content session: SIP, lump sum budgeting, PPACs and waivers. At the mere mention of SIP, a pall settled over the group; its presence was palpable. Members felt the pressure of Board deadlines. One member was surprised to find that the process of planning was cyclical, and that during Year Three the process started all over again. If nothing else, I hoped they left with the idea that the SIP should work for them and not be a burden or source of frustration paralyzing them with unrealistic deadlines.

March 21 CTU Leadership Workshop for trainers. There is clearly a desperate need for the kind of training we are doing. More than a hundred schools have already received our training, and our reputation is none the worse. The union hopes to continue and possibly expand the program next year.

We discuss pay for the trainers. They might receive $12.50 or $25, depending on whether they work with another trainer or alone. For every hour of presentation, we spend hours in preparation. Outside consultants hired by the Board are paid far more. We limp along running off materials—stacks of them—at our own expense, or often behaving like conspirators when we use the school or department copying machines. The union wants volunteers from the group to develop a handbook for trainers over the summer.

March 30 The final round of CTU training. Participants feel guilty admitting they’ve had no training to speak of to date. I assure them such lack of training is not uncommon. I try to draw out feelings on reform from the group. Their concern is that it is a setup, that the plan was never designed to succeed.

I set one group to working on its SIP. Perhaps the reform program is doomed to fail, but while it is in effect, we can make it work for us. With the other two groups, we talk and try to develop a strategy for change—some small steps that might be realistically taken. The disheartened group begins to get ideas from the third group. They leave the meeting feeling a little better than when they arrived.

I discover why some members of my March 17 group asked when the money for training would be refunded. Members have been putting in their own money rather than taking it out of LSC training funds.

April 4 LSC training on the SIP. LSC members from other schools in our area joined us. The group was small, not more than 15; one male. The meeting was conducted in Spanish, with translation for me. What I felt most was the intensity with which the participants listened, took notes and asked questions. There was an excitement in the room.

We have become accustomed to having small children, often under school age, at the training sessions. They have become a natural part of the process, a reminder of what we are about.

April 7 The last CTU training session of the year. One of the most thoughtful groups I’ve worked with. Their conversation at the beginning indicates, too, that some are facing serious family problems: illness, separation, etc. The principal in the group says he hasn’t had a Saturday free in a long time. We practice brainstorming by looking for ways to involve parents. Above all, the participants want parents to have positive experiences with their schools. One group member thought unemployment would take away one excuse parents had for not coming to school, but what I know of the unemployed suggests they are often too depressed to be involved in anything.

**AMELIA**

May 28 Training at last—a session with council members from a number of schools. While it was stimulating, it was not very useful on any specific issues. What it did do was make us realize that our problems are like everyone else’s, and we are all going through the same kind of hassles with the downtown directives and with the unions. The key issues bothering all the councils in attendance were discipline, security and parent involvement.

One of the shrewder principals there talked to us about
dickering with the budget regulations. For example, how to close positions and open new ones. He would never let his union rep control the budget, that is for certain. He also briefed us on the different types of funds in the budget and what they can be used for—that is, furniture money, book money, engineers’ mechanical equipment money, instructional supplies (which can also be bought with book money; this would include something like a trumpet, but pianos come under furniture money).

A former Board of Education member present said it was terribly important that the councils oversee the evaluation of teachers by the principal. He sees the councils as policy boards and not detailed administrators, but they must make sure the policy is carried out and must push the principal to develop leadership skills. Now that the principal has more power and responsibility, we have to see that he or she uses it, he said; otherwise a power vacuum will develop. And in our school Mr. Union has already filled it.

The former Board member further suggested, regarding our LSC meetings, that we limit public input to three minutes per person and never argue or discuss with the audience speaker or allow him or her to become involved in the council discussions, which we have, unfortunately, done.

‘Horse follows the cart’

LAZARUS

May 18-19 Somewhere in May’s mail is a letter from the general superintendent inviting LSC members to a boardsmanship meeting to answer all their questions and offer advice on how to do things. The horse follows the cart. Some of our council members attend and bring back material for the rest of us. The guidebook is well done but long overdue; it sets forth essentials that would have been useful in October. It is May. We are ready for War and Peace, not Dick and Jane.

SCARLET

May 18-19 Boardsmanship training. Both days are exceptionally good. The guest speaker at the Friday meeting shared many ideas that needed to be heard by many more people who work for the school system. Each of the trainers in the Saturday session shared much good information and stimulated a lot of food for thought. At least six of our LSC members were in attendance on both days.

RAYMOND

May 18-19 About 2,000 people attended; only about 60 percent were LSC members. LSC input was minimal in the planning, and no major issues (curriculum design, school safety, role of the districts in providing service, choice vs. vouchers, legislative funding, etc.) were dealt with. It was not a very useful conference in terms of providing education and organizational development.

Second day of the conference held in the 11 districts. The inservice persons and facilitators spent most of their time learning from us what the law is, what school reform implementation is, and what school reform politics is—Chicago style.

I think the $300,000 spent to bring the National Association of School Board members into Chicago was not well spent.

The big issues were not addressed, and little assessment of the past year was made.

ELIZABETH

May 18-19 The Chicago Board of Education strikes again! Contract negotiations between the Board and the various unions are not going well because of the money problem, and yet the Board can spend thousands and thousands of dollars on two of the most useless days they have ever offered me.

On Friday we were treated to a succession of politicos who praised the reform movement and praised their own roles in its success. Yes, they admitted, a few kinks might still exist, but these pale in the light of the highly successful reform. These were typical rah-rah political speeches. Are we on the eve of an election?

The speaker imported to be the out-of-state cheerleader for reform got my vote. He emphasized that the teachers were the professionals and their expertise ought to be deferred to. Without this keynote speaker, the afternoon would have been wasted. Little did I know they were saving the worst for the next day.

Saturday we had four training sessions. The first, on effective meetings, was led by a gentleman from Iowa. This was a good session, and the presenter fielded questions well, drew responses from the group and generally involved everyone in activities. The second session quickly dampened my spirits. It dealt with communication and was led by a woman from Arizona. She did not understand our Chicago situation. The session bombed. The afternoon sessions were more of the same. A presenter from Colorado addressed LSC self-evaluation. Not for us yet.

Our final session was used to write recommendations to Mr. Kimbrough.
Reform in other forums

ELIZABETH

March 1 At today’s meeting of the CTU House of Delegates, a proposal made in January regarding school reform was rejected. This motion would have established a committee to recommend amendments to the current reform legislation. The reasons for rejecting were basically twofold. (1) The vehicle for receiving feedback on school reform is already in place through union field reps. (2) The original motion called for a “task force” of teachers and other LSC reps. The union contends that only the union can represent teachers. For my money, the union does not seem very outspoken, given that “vehicle” already in place. I feel the CTU should be using its considerable power to strengthen and enhance the reform initiative.

March 10 Certain of our more aggressive LSC members threatened a faculty member with dismissal. There are also reports of incidents at other schools of groups of community people and parents meeting in each other’s homes to plot the unscheduled departures of target faculty members. Today we had a union meeting and were assured that jobs could not be touched. Our union rep assured all present that it was not the intention of the legislation to make teachers fearful for their jobs; the Reform Act cannot violate existing agreements among staff, the union and the administration.

There was a lot of conversation about drop-in visitors. There seems to be a pervasive feeling that reform has given individuals with elementary-school diplomas the OK to roam the school at will, criticizing the performances of professional staff. The advice from the teachers’ union was to allow visitors to sit in and take notes, but make clear to them that you are entitled to a copy of those notes. But listen, if Mrs. X entered my classroom and took notes, do you honestly believe she’d give me a copy of anything derogatory?

RAYMOND

April 30 Tonight I attended a CPS curriculum hearing at Kelly High School regarding the proposed Systemwide Instructional Goals and Objectives. Most LSC people agreed that the draft did not allow enough flexibility for LSCs to exercise choice in respect to curriculum. A major critique of the emphasis on multi-ethnic, multi-cultural education was that it was far too abstract. It took for granted the affirmation of one’s own culture and ethnic heritage, whereas in fact this validation needs to be more explicit and more solidly grounded as a foundation for respect and appreciation of other people — their heritage and cultures.

May 8 Attended a meeting of the Local School Councils Chairpersons’ Association. Attendance up to now has been a bit disappointing, but members have been too busy with SIP and budget development. However, the association continues to be a mechanism for LSC leadership development and a voice on school policy.

June 20 Attended a meeting of persons from LSCs across the city who were interested in starting a network of LSC members.

July 11 Attended a district reception for LSC chairpersons. We agreed that the district council had not functioned adequately to this point.

LAZARUS

April 2 The state legislator in our district sponsors a community meeting on education. Most of the discussion is about what the group identifies as shortcomings in the school reform legislation: lack of sufficient training, lack of funding, inability to remove an LSC member who never attends.

SCARLET

March 22-23 Chicago Principals Association Conference.

What principals want known is that there are difficulties that make a hard job even harder. Principals are not against reform, but there are overtones that make the principal the scapegoat in the whole process, that make the principal the reason for all the educational ills of this school system.

The panel on the first day allowed the principals to see the attitudes of several Board members. The attitudes exhibited did not do a lot to make the principals feel better.

Many people, including the press, refused to believe or admit that politics would play a major role in the reform process. Now that it is evident, their cavalier attitude is that principals should become more political. I really resent this. The reform legislation makes the principal’s major responsibility to provide instructional leadership. Time for providing instructional leadership is seriously compromised when playing politics is encouraged.

March 29 District principals meeting. Many questions arise about writing the school improvement plan. Some principals have even been to training workshops. But everyone has a different interpretation of how it is to be written.

March 31 Attended a reform conference. Some suburban superintendents were present. They were left shaking their heads when they found that within the structure of the Chicago LSCs a teacher during the school day is supervised by the principal, at council meetings is a colleague of the principal, and in times of contract deliberations becomes the principal’s boss, so to speak.

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We then attended a meeting of the School Reform Implementation Committee of the Interim School Board. The big issue was the proposal by Supt. Kimbrough to set up district service centers by assigning Pershing Road administrative personnel to the districts. The LSC chairpersons present criticized:

- The district chairs for supporting the plan without any input from the LSCs.
- Kimbrough for not consulting the LSCs.
- The fact that the assignment of these personnel without district superintendents' right to pass on their qualifications for district service would undermine the accountability of this staff to the district superintendents and the district councils.

The LSC chairpersons further stated that:

- A district needed to do a needs assessment of local schools.
- Such an assessment would be the basis for determining the service needs in the district.
- A district should have the authority to decide on any staff hired to provide these locally determined services.
- A position-by-position audit of the central administration would best determine if there is waste in the system.

**DANDI**

July 11 Observed a Board of Education committee meeting. Agenda item #8 was Supt. Kimbrough’s proposal to shift some of the central office staff to the district level. The superintendent gave a short speech supporting his plan. Then 25 persons were given 1/2 minutes each to speak about the district plan.

Four spoke in favor of the Kimbrough plan. Seven said maybe, if... “I want to see the specifics before I agree.” “Will resources at the district level get needed services to the LSC level?” “Will district personnel be qualified? Who selects them? Who monitors them? Will LSCs control policy and action at the district?” The other speakers opposed the Kimbrough plan, urging such points as: Reform was to eliminate bureaucracy, not shift it around. Decisions and dollars need to be controlled at LSC level. LSCs not consulted. Pershing Road has not been helpful, but UNO [United Neighborhood Organization] has been, as have Designs for Change and the Urban League.

During the entire presentation, it was clear where the audience’s support was. Whenever someone endorsed the district plan, silence; whenever criticism, wild applause.

**Reflections on Year 1**

**ROBIN**

June 17 This week I visited two LSC meetings—the last of the year. The make-up of the first council is fairly representative of the school population. Among the parents there are two African-American, two Hispanic and two white members; the school and community members are white, as were all of the seven visitors.

Most of the meeting was concerned with setting up subcommittees, something they had put off all year because they had more pressing things to do. (This is a school where the principal was retained, but not without considerable discussion on the part of the council.) The Curriculum and Program Committee was the last for which members volunteered; the two black parents indicated an interest in it. One of the teachers expressed reservations about parents’ expertise in this area, but someone pointed out that the committee’s job would...
be just to review proposals put forward by the PPAC and then come to the LSC with them. The principal took exception to this minimal role and said she hoped parents would become more involved than that, upon which another teacher described favorably LSC parents’ contributions at her children’s school.

At the end of the meeting, the chairperson asked if there were any comments from visitors. I said this was my third visit to their council and this, their last meeting of the year, seemed to me a historic occasion (they hadn’t made anything of it). It seemed to me they were doing very well, but I would like to know how they felt about their work over the year. The principal led off by saying they were doing 125 percent better than at the start.

I think some of this is that she feels more secure with them now that they’ve extended her contract, but it also seems to me they all have more confidence in themselves and have gained a sense of themselves as a functioning group. A teacher spoke up to say that the parents and community people have been learning about how a school actually works. A parent said, “At least we know what we’re here for—the education of the children.” Another parent wondered why more parents don’t get involved, and the principal responded that the council indeed needs to be concerned because the LSC is “dangerously close to being an elitist group.” She urged an effort to revive the Parent Teacher Council that used to be active at the school.

The second LSC I had visited just once before. (The school has had a series of short-term principals in the last two years, including an interim principal this year.) There were nine members present, including two Hispanics, one Asian and one African American. The “retiring” principal did not attend.

The business of the evening began with a review of the SIP and budget. After going through it in detail, the teacher-presenter pointed out that what it amounted to was “the same things teachers have been doing all along,” just put on paper. I couldn’t help noticing that prominent among the goals was “homogeneous grouping,” a practice currently criticized in most educational circles; there is even federal grant money available to individual schools that want to try alternatives to tracking. [See CATALYST, October 1990.] Perhaps through our university work with the school we can inform teachers of what’s going on elsewhere in this regard.

The final LSC task for the evening was to allot responsibilities for completing an application for an award sponsored by Illinois Bell for the best LSCs in each district. It was a massive document, but preliminary work was begun on the spot, which provided for a kind of summary of the LSC’s sense of progress during the year. They felt their biggest accomplishment was having worked well together and successfully achieved consensus on major issues—especially choosing a new principal. Their biggest hurdle was the “impossible” deadlines imposed by the central office. They were extremely conscientious about training; all of them attended the training offered by PURE, and groups of two or three attended many other training sessions.

Overall, these two councils are to be commended for surviving a challenging year not only intact but with a strong esprit de corps. It’s interesting to think of these elementary schools in the context of the Finn & Clements article in the May issue of CATALYST. I’d place both in the “Beta” category. They’d like to improve test scores, increase parent participation and generally get the bugs out of working of the school, but they don’t have any thoughts of a “complete overhaul.” They feel justifiably satisfied with themselves for having risen to the enormously difficult tasks they’ve undertaken this year.

Whether they’ll be able to learn enough about alternatives to the educational status quo and, further, have the confidence to agitate for change strikes me as somewhat unlikely. To do that they’d certainly need outside help. Either my university or others in the Chicago area may be able to supply that. Other similar schools without such support probably won’t change much.

Still, I think that even if they don’t attempt a complete overhaul, the project will have been positive—if parents do indeed become more involved and if teachers and administrators are thereby more inclined to treat students with respect and to envision the possibility of growth in themselves as well as in parents and children.
LANETTE

May 26 Beginning in September, the new school improvement plans and budgets will be put to the test. We will see then if the LSCs begin to make a difference in the Chicago public schools.

I have actually had nightmares lately resulting from the anticipation of failure. Can you imagine what wrath would come down on LSCs if...?

I awoke recently from just such a nightmare. I was being chased by a group who at first seemed friendly. But then they were carrying picket signs and bullhorns, and I was alone. I ran for dear life because the crowd rapidly grew larger, louder and more aggressive. I awoke just as I was being pulled into the crowd. My husband swears he woke me up because I was beating him while repeatedly yelling, "It's not my fault." All I know for sure is that I was drenched in sweat, and perspiration was pouring down my face as if I had been running. I also found breathing difficult.

If I became that agitated during a dream, I would hate to face a similar situation in reality. Of course, I am sure no one really expects miracles in such a short time, even as a result of school reform. Or do they?

JORDAN

As the year has run its course, being an LSC member has become more interesting. Personalities and tunnel vision are playing bigger roles. But members of LSCs must remember they represent a constituency, not a personal agenda. Each LSC member needs to look at the big picture and not just at how a program affects his or her child.

Working on the LSC has been informative, time consuming, exciting, trying and challenging. One of our major problems has been staying on task. Our LSC likes to digest and talk on and on about issues—the deterioration of the physical plant, the Board of Education or the lack of support from staff, the engineer, parents. Madam chairperson gets involved in these discussions as well and forgets it is her responsibility to keep the group on target.

One of our members is known for throwing in topics that we have no control over. When we were discussing strengths and weaknesses of our school's educational program, he wanted to discuss TV time for students outside of school. Someone usually takes a few minutes to explain to him what our purpose is and that we cannot plan improvements for homes and society.

One aspect of the SIP that really excited our LSC is commitment statements for each group in the school family. I felt that as principal should not be the only person held accountable for growth and improvement in the school; therefore, every administrator, teacher, parent, student, career service and engineer/custodial staff person is asked to sign a pledge committing himself or herself to the improvement of this school. The LSC in its mission statement has made its pledge. This is accountability from all.

AMELIA

July 7 School reform is dead or dying. It is clear to anyone who has tried to do anything to facilitate it. It is only a matter of time until it is buried. Unless... unless the councils can make a stand. Unless we, too, can decree our power and influence just as Supt. Kimbrough decrees his. Do we have the courage to do it? I don't know if we do as a group. Individuals do. The next year will tell the story.

LAZARUS

June 30 At its final meeting of Year One of reform, our LSC distributed a list of its accomplishments. Nowhere is there indicated the number of hours and meetings that went into these accomplishments. (One member counted 40 special meetings, beyond the regular ones, over the year.) While the final budget and SIP are still pending, a thorough needs assessment was done, and some educational innovations are underway.

Problems still exist. Too many faculty are cool to the LSC. Administration has often distanced itself from the LSC. Negative attitudes and long-standing antagonisms, especially between black and Hispanic teachers, need to be addressed. The council itself needs to be more positively visible in the building in relation to teachers and students.

LSC members themselves are numb, drained of energy. Many of the hours put in at special meetings could have been avoided had adequate and early training been provided. For too long members stumbled in the dark trying to find their way in roles they insisted on performing conscientiously.

Over the year the Board of Education itself undermined LSCs' efforts, especially with forms that they revised and revised again, with firm deadlines that were changed, with inadequate or incorrect information provided in answers to questions, with the freeze on spending and with the cuts in positions. These were blows that waylaid SIPs, fouled up budget considerations and devastated teacher morale across the system.

On the brighter side, at our school teachers were able to participate in school improvement at the classroom level. The Coalition for Essential Schools program may well permit us to provide state-of-the-art education. Despite themselves, some members of the administration are endorsing, at least outwardly, the LSC's efforts toward reform.

May the warmth and diversion of summer heal frayed nerves and replenish our souls with the courage needed for what is yet to come.
Recognition bittersweet

AN AWARD WINNER

In June the Chicago-based Whitman Corp. awarded 20 Chicago principals their annual Whitman Award for "excellence in educational management." Winners were chosen by a panel of educators, community and business leaders and U.S. Department of Education officials. Each principal was given $5,000 to be used for a school project. One of the Whitman Award winners reflects on the experience:

When my faculty nominated me for the Whitman Award, I was very gratified because it was a group decision on their part. I told them that as far as I was concerned, I was already a winner, no matter what the final result. Having their approval meant I was doing the right educational thing. We have seen, especially since Chicago school reform began, so much negative press, so much hostility, so much disrespect directed at the principals of the Chicago public schools. Some has been specifically targeted to a few. Most of it has been generally directed at all of us who hold the position. Without exception, principals I talk to feel the hostility and the anger is directed at them. So do I.

Along comes the Whitman Corp. with an award to recognize excellence in educational management, and those of us who were fortunate to win one of these awards got a taste of what real appreciation can be.

We were treated as professionals, with respect. We were given information on a timely basis. Our hectic schedules were taken into account when Whitman staff needed to talk to us or to make a site visit or to schedule the photographer who took our pictures that later appeared in the newspaper. Every person connected with the Whitman Award process was polite, accommodating, courteous and very positive. I felt valued and appreciated, and I was told on several occasions how deserving we were and how happy the Whitman staff were to recognize us.

We all felt very fortunate to be singled out, but by no means unique. "We each know at least five other principals who easily deserve this type of recognition," was the way one of my colleagues expressed it. We felt a certain sadness that more principals could not have the Whitman experience.

Some of us were resentful that it took an outside organization to recognize and honor us as educators. Where is the Board of Education in all of this? Why don't they or the general superintendent find ways to recognize their middle managers? They wouldn't have to give us a fabulous reception and a delicious dinner or publish our photographs and names in the newspaper. All they'd have to do is treat us as professionals, take us into account when making decisions that affect what we do and how we do it, and give us an opportunity to exercise our expertise.

Shortly after pictures of the Whitman Award winners were published in the newspaper, I began receiving letters of congratulations from prominent public figures. A state senator, several elected state officials, a judge, some heads of education-related organizations, and private individuals wrote and wished me continued success. I received a very nice note from one of the elementary district superintendents, but not from my own district superintendent.

The general superintendent was one of the last to write, but given his usual disregard for us as a group, I dismissed his brief note. Not a single member of the Board of Education took the time to write or call. I did not hear from the mayor or his deputy for education. So much for being appreciated or acknowledged by those we serve.

In undergraduate classes, future teachers are encouraged to use praise as a motivator when working with students. In seminars and countless books and articles on the art of management, we are reminded that a little praise goes a long way toward enhancing workers' self-esteem and boosting production. "You can catch more flies with honey...." But the organization I work for has missed all this. People in the Board room and the central office either do not know how to manage staff effectively, especially middle management, or do not care about us as individuals or about what we do. Sad and discouraging and demoralizing. I at least have the Whitman Award and the memories associated with it to carry me through the dark days.
Gompers elementary ‘annexes’ area libraries

Gompers Fine Arts Option School, 12302 S. State, has “annexed” four area libraries so that some 500 fourth-through eighth-graders can conduct research projects.

Once a month, students spend a half day in a public library doing research on topics assigned by their teachers, who supervise and help out. The activity is part of a program designed by Principal Blondean Davis to develop library know-how and to introduce students to a wider range of information than schools can provide.

“We want our kids to be more than ready to walk into the 21st century with competent skills,” said teacher E.J. Nesbitt. “If a person does not know how to use the library for information, then he’s in trouble.”

E.J. Nesbitt (312) 821-2875.

Tilden team-teaches bilingual students

At Tilden High School, 4747 S. Union, regular and bilingual teachers have teamed up to bring Spanish-speaking students immediately into the school’s mainstream.

Particularly in math and science, Spanish-speaking teachers are paired with English-speaking teachers to teach classes that include both regular and bilingual students.

“We don’t want our bilingual students to be isolated,” said Principal Hazel Steward, adding that the student mix itself has helped them learn. Some Tilden students arrive straight from Mexico and do not understand any English. “The team-teaching method gives them a sense of belonging,” she said.

Hazel Steward (312) 262-2300.

Harper field trips go off to college

Harper High School, 6520 S. Wood, has nearly doubled the number of its graduates going to college by taking students on college field trips before they graduate.

Interested juniors and seniors spend a day visiting local and out-of-state colleges. They sit in on classes and talk to faculty members, financial aid counselors and students.

Last school year, 55 Harper graduates enrolled in Midwestern colleges, compared to 29 the previous year. More than 200 students had taken one of 10 trips to colleges.

“We wanted to take the mystique out of the prospects of going to college,” Principal Barbara Pulliam said. “A lot of our kids think you have to have lots of money or be super smart to go.”

“Fridays on Campus” is part of the Adopt-a-School program sponsored at Harper by Sara Lee Corporation.

Barbara Pulliam (312) 471-8550.

Prescott teams beat gang membership

The local school council at Prescott Elementary, 1632 W. Wrightwood, is keeping students out of gangs by signing them up for baseball and basketball teams instead.

The school is conducting the afterschool program with the help of the New City YMCA, the Chicago Park District and Christopher House, a social service agency. Together they provided coaches, courts, diamonds, equipment and matching T-shirts and caps for six baseball and six basketball teams.

Hendricks visits ‘sister’ in Winnetka

Hendricks Community Academy, a predominately black inner-city school, has initiated an exchange program with a predominately white “sister” school in Winnetka, a North Shore suburb.

Periodically, teachers and parents from Hendricks, 4316 S. Princeton, visit Hubbard Woods School, and teachers and parents from Hubbard Woods visit Hendricks.

The goals are to share teaching ideas and resources and to build a stronger sense of community through cultural exchange and to share teachi
LaSalle students live heroes’ lives

In the course of one school year, students at LaSalle Language Academy, 1734 N. Orleans, stepped into the lives of Charlie Chaplin, Bill Cosby and Michael Jordan, to name a few of their heroes. In the process, they worked on their reading, writing and other language-arts skills.

Under the school’s “living biography” program, students choose names of famous people or characters, research their lives, write biographical reports and then act out the people they have been studying—in costume, of course. One challenge is to sum up their characters in three sentences, an exercise in choosing words well.

Language arts teacher Marie Dora said the program teaches many skills, including listening, speaking, memorizing and using references.

“I have found that students learn through experience as well as from printed information,” she said. “They are excited about their presentations and retain the information long after the lesson.”

Sometimes the “actors” and their audience get so involved in the characters, that the performance develops a life of its own. Once when students portrayed Anne Frank and Adolph Hitler, said Dora, “the class was so intrigued with the dialogue that the presentation took up the whole period.”

Marie Dora (312) 260-4040.
SCHOOL BOARD FACES STIFF CHALLENGE PAYING FOR CONTRACTS

Chicago's school-employee unions have won their longest-running contracts, but the Board of Education faces enormous obstacles to paying for the three-year pacts.

First, the board must clear the legislative roadblock thrown up by Gov. Thompson's amendments to key funding legislation. The "vetoed" bill would allow the board to temporarily divert local pension taxes to salaries.

Thompson objected to—and struck—added provisions lowering the teacher retirement age statewide and providing a state guarantee of Chicago teacher pensions. That action created a timing problem: The funding shift can't go into effect until July 1 unless three-fifths of each house in the legislature gives it another OK or overrides the veto.

The board will face a much greater challenge next spring, when it must line up money for routine cost increases and Year 2 of the contracts. School officials have predicted a shortfall of more than $300 million if the state income tax surcharge is not extended. The shortfall would drop to about $150 million if all goes well, including the general economy.

If the board can't cover the gap, the contracts terminate. School officials are hoping the November elections produce legislators willing to increase school funding.

The contracts provide for 7-percent raises each year and financial incentives for teachers to return to college. In all, first-year costs are about $100 million.

Increases in medical-insurance deductibles enabled the board to negotiate better rates with medical providers, for a savings of about $30 million. All employees face higher deductibles, but those who bypass the "preferred providers" will pay substantially more. A deductible is the amount a patient pays before insurance kicks in.

Meanwhile, Bruce Berndt, president of the Chicago Principals Association, said the new teacher pay levels likely will leave some principals earning less per day than some of their teachers. Principal pay is based on faculty size and years of service. Teacher pay is based on graduate-course credits and years of service. Further, teachers get paid for after-school duties; principals don't. And principals have more responsibility and less job security, Berndt added.

ENGINEERS' PACT ALLOWS MORE NIGHT MEETINGS

Local school councils will be able to hold as many as 32 "free" evening meetings each school year—more than double last year's number—under the new contract between the operating engineers' union and the Board of Education.

In recent years, the board paid engineers overtime for four evenings a year. To hold more evening events, schools had to pay the overtime. Last year, newly elected local school councils protested the limit, prompting the union and board to agree to a temporary plan allowing 12 "free" evenings. Under the new, three-year agreement, engineers will be able to earn overtime for up to six evenings and get compensatory time off for up to 26.

"It's a lot better, but things still haven't changed in principle," said Vinton Thompson, chair of the Murphy Local School Council. "We still can't have regular evening programs."

SCHOOL BOARD MEETS 'ADMINISTRATIVE CAP'

The Board of Education appears to have met state requirements to hold down spending on overhead, according to the Chicago School Finance Authority. But some school reformers contend that is not good enough.

The Chicago School Reform Act included an "administrative cap" limiting spending in designated noninstructional areas, including staff development, financial services, building maintenance, security, transportation, food services, research and purchasing.

Under the cap, Chicago may spend no more, proportionately, in these areas than do other school systems in the state. For 1989-90, that meant limiting overhead to about 28.9 percent of operating expenditures. Preliminary figures indicate the board met this requirement. For 1990-91, the proportion is about 27.9 percent.

"The cap is not doing its job," said Diana Lauber of Leadership for Quality Education. "It is capping some things that should not be capped and missing others that should be."

As written, the cap permitted the board to make spending cuts in schools rather than in the central administration to balance its 1990-91 budget, she said. For example, the board cut summer school and substitute teacher pay while adding 32 positions to central and district offices, according to Lauber.
DALEY FAVORS
FAR SOUTH SIDE
IN BOARD PICKS

The Far South Side won heavy representation on the 15-member Board of Education chosen by Mayor Daley. Five members hail from District 9, which runs from State Street east to Lake Michigan between roughly 65th and 111th.

District 2 on the North Side, also along Lake Michigan, came in second, with four members. Two members are from District 6, located centrally along the lake, and one each from districts 1, 3, 7 and 10.

The racial mix on the new board reflects that of the city more than the school system, though the Chicago School Reform Act stressed the latter. It includes seven blacks, three whites, three Hispanics, one Asian Indian and one Arab American.

The mayor’s second and final group of nominees included: For a four-year term, the Rev. Darryl F. James, 36, minister of the Messiah-St. Bartholomew Episcopal Church; for three-year terms, Sandra J. Bishop, 49, a former Chicago Department of Aging and Disability administrator, and Juan S. Cres., 65, retired school administrator.

For two-year terms, Brady Bailey Jr., 32, a manager of marketing relations for Illinois Bell, and Bertha Magana, 34, citywide education coordinator for the United Neighborhood Organization; for one-year terms, Pamela A. Lenane, 45, a lawyer; Anna Mustafa, 41, youth coordinator for the Chicago Area Project; and Ashish K. Sen, 48, professor of urban planning at the University of Illinois.

PROFESSIONAL GROUPS
LOOK TO INNER-CITY

Four organizations that lined up lawyers, accountants and other professionals to help local school councils are regrouping to figure out how to reach inner-city councils that may not know how to get help.

“We may have to work through community organizations, with local people who are trusted,” said Peggy Gordon, executive director of the Lawyers’ School Reform Advisory Project. “Under the School Reform Act, subdistrict councils should be coordinating this, but they’re not.”

The other organizations are the Community Management Assistance Program, CPAs for the Public Interest and the Executive Service Corps. Along with the lawyers group, they recruited 275 volunteers from 120 firms last year, as well as 81 unaffiliated individuals. About two-thirds of the city’s councils received training, information or assistance. The Publicity Club of Chicago is joining the effort this year.

BOARD TRANSFERS
HEAD START

With teacher salaries rising, the Board of Education looked to serve fewer and fewer children with the federal money it receives for Head Start preschool classes.

Rather than cut back, it decided to transfer its program to the city. The city runs its program through community organizations, which typically pay less.

The transfer will be made over three years, beginning next year.

Meanwhile, Voices for Illinois Children, an advocacy group, urged the board to use state money to contract with community groups to provide preschool in areas where schools are overcrowded and, thus, do not offer preschool.

NO MORE TESTING
FOR TEACHERS

To save money and streamline teacher hiring, Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough has scrapped the basic-skills test it had required teachers new to the school system to pass. As a result, principals are free to hire anyone with proper state certification, which until recently did not include any testing.

Kimbrough also set a one-week deadline for the Police Department to make required background checks on new hires.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
TO GO ACADEMIC

City Colleges of Chicago will work with the Board of Education and local industries to develop a combined academic and vocational curriculum that will lead students to both jobs and higher education.

“We want to meet the needs of industry for hiring as well as the academic achievement necessary for continued education,” said Sandy Foster, head of City Colleges’ Productive Chicago program.

The joint venture is part of the federal and state “Tech Prep” initiative aimed at preparing students for advanced technical careers.

“Anyone who wants to work in manufacturing has got to think trigonometry,” said Foster. The initial focus in Illinois will be on the metal working industry, where jobs go begging for want of qualified workers.
Test scores vary by race, income

White and Asian students in Chicago's public schools score far higher on reading and math tests than do blacks and Hispanics, but poverty could be the reason, according to a new study by the Chicago Urban League.

"Chicago's Two Public School Systems," by research associate James H. Lewis, looks at scores by race and ethnic group in each grade. Eighth-grade is representative: In reading, the proportion scoring above average was 65 percent among Asians, 59 percent among whites, 39 percent among Hispanics and 33 percent among blacks. In math, the proportion scoring above average was 63 percent among Asians, 65 percent among whites, 48 percent among Hispanics and 40 percent among blacks. Scores are from the 1988-89 administration of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

To get at the role of poverty, the study looks at test scores by race in neighborhood schools with no more than 5 percent low-income students and in neighborhood schools with at least 99 percent low-income students. In both sets of schools, the achievement gap nearly disappeared, with all groups scoring very high in low-poverty schools and all groups scoring very low in high-poverty schools.

The league study also found that:

- The kind of school students attend makes a difference. Blacks and Hispanics in magnet schools and academically oriented high schools scored well above average, but still trailed whites and Asians. White, black and Hispanic students all performed at "inadequate" levels in vocational and general high schools and in elementary schools without special programs.

- "Something in the educational process between grades one and four" seems to cause blacks and Hispanics to lose ground. Regardless of the kind of school attended, blacks and Hispanics scored closest to whites in first grade and then slipped farther and farther behind through third grade.

- The percentage of blacks and Hispanics with scores in the broad middle range was, itself, average. "However," said Lewis, "there is a serious failure to produce high-achieving black and Hispanic students, and many more are found at the very bottom than should be." It is this scant minority presence in the top group and overwhelming minority presence in the bottom group that produced the overall achievement gap.

Lewis said his study raises these questions:

- Why do race differences persist in magnet and other competitive schools?
- Are students of different racial/ethnic groups within the same school taught differently?
- Do different racial/ethnic cultures equip children to learn in different ways?
- Are characteristics of low-income families responsible for differences in achievement test scores?
- Do differences in scores stem from racial/ethnic bias in the testing program?
CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS

Dinosaurs and living things. Teachers in kindergarten through third grade can bone up on one of their children’s favorite subjects, dinosaurs, at an upcoming workshop at the Chicago Academy of Sciences, 2001 N. Clark. “Dinoscholars,” scheduled for Dec. 8, will include activities and materials for incorporating dinosaurs into science, math, art and creative writing lessons. Reservations are required. Call (312) 549-0775.

Learning about Lake Michigan ecology and pollution through experiments, games, music and dramatics is the topic of a Nov. 17 workshop open to all elementary-school teachers. The fee—$10 for members, $13 for nonmembers—covers the cost of a curriculum guide. Reservations are required. Call (312) 549-0775.

The academy will host a camp-out in Lincoln Park Nov. 30 and Dec. 1. It introduces teachers to the ways that the park and its museums can help teach science. Reservations are required. Call the North Cook Education Service Center, (708) 958-5065.

Presenting Paideia. Teachers, principals and parents from across the country will gather in Chicago Nov. 16 and 17 to learn more about Paideia, a program of instruction that casts the teacher as coach.

Attendance is limited to 100 people. The fee is $175 with registration before Nov. 1, $200 after Nov. 1. For more information contact Linda Dunn at the National Center for the Paideia Program, University of North Carolina, CB# 8040, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27599, (919) 962-7379.

RESOURCES

Children’s booklist. The 1990 edition of Children’s Books of the Year lists more than 3,000 books by such topics as growing up, humor, biography and sports.

The price is $4 plus $1 for postage. Write or call Child Study Children’s Book Committee, Bank Street College of Education, 610 W. 112th St., New York, N.Y. 10025, (212) 222-6700, ext. 503.

Minority report. A report on how to get minorities into the American mainstream through education, corporate involvement and public policy is available from the Business Higher Education Forum, a group of university presidents and Fortune 500 chief executives.

To order Three Realities, Minority Life in the United States, write the forum at One Duuont Circle, Suite 800, Washington D.C. 20036, (202) 939-9345. The price is $15, prepaid.

Child safety kit. Advice for keeping children safe from fire, stress and domestic violence, as well as safety pointers on child care, buses and sports are available from The National PTA, 700 N. Rush St., Chicago, Ill. 60611-2571, (312) 787-0977. The price is $5 for PTA members, $20 for others, plus shipping costs.

Contests and learning. Warning that some essays and other school contests detract from quality education, the National Association of Secondary School Principals has produced the “National Advisory List of Contests and Activities.” The 1990-91 edition reviews 120 activities and 53 regional programs.

The price is $4. To order, contact NASSP Publication Sales, 1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091. Requests must include the code number 2109091.

RECOGNITION PROGRAMS

Money for risk takers. The RJR Nabisco Foundation is awarding public schools with innovative program proposals up to $750,000 in “venture capital” under a five-year, $30 million program called Next Century Schools. Oct. 31 is the application deadline for grants to be given in 1991.

For more information contact the Next Century Schools Fund, RJR Nabisco Foundation, Suite 550, 1455 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W., Washington D.C. 20004.

Golden Apple Award. This year, teachers of preschool through fifth grade are eligible for the Golden Apple Award of the Foundation for Excellence In Teaching.

Winners receive $2,500 and a paid fall-term sabbatical to study tuition-free at Northwestern University. Ten teachers from Cook, DuPage and Lake counties will be chosen.

The nomination deadline is Dec. 7. For nomination forms write or call The Foundation for Excellence in Teaching, 8 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 2310, Chicago, Ill., 60603-3318, (312) 407-0006.