Business Pitches In —
Is It Enough?
Taking risks

My vision of a good school is one where students and adults are encouraged to take risks, and where a safety net protects those who risk. The "nation" may be at risk, and many students are described "at risk," but this certainly does not describe the cautious culture of our schools.

The lives of teachers and principals are more closely akin to one definition of a mushroom: "You're kept in the dark most of the time, periodically you're covered with manure, and when you stick your head out it gets chopped off."

Yet if we want students to be less docile and more inventive and adventuresome in their thinking, then adults must model risk taking as well as learning. If we want to improve schools, we must risk doing things differently next September than we did them last September. New, unusual ideas must be viewed not as a nuisance or embarrassment, but as a sign of life.

Roland S. Barth
Improving Schools from Within

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Corporate Chicago weighs in with clout, money, time

by Alex Poinsett

Big business is on a roll in Chicago school reform—funding schools and programs, training local school council members, providing management support to the school system and generally cheerleading the process.

So says William Sampson, former Northwestern University sociologist and recently-installed president of Chicago United, a 100-business civic group spanning corporate giants and small, minority-owned firms.

"The commitment of business to school reform is unequivocal and total," declares Sampson. "It does not attempt to control the process. It not only wants school reform, but understands that change in governance is necessary but not sufficient."

Adds retired AT&T vice president Joseph Reed, president of Leadership for Quality Education (LQE):

"My conservative estimate is that the business community has spent about $17 million to $19 million for school reform during the last three years. Much of LQE's $5 million went for the successful first local school council (LSC) election of 5,420 members at 542 schools, with 313,000 voters. Also we spent heavily for radio and television publicity, and for a six-part video-training library for council members to learn more about how to perform their duties."

Created by Chicago United and the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club, LQE has quarterbacked the business community's school reform efforts since 1989, working as an advocate to keep reform on track. Its own 28-member board is multicultural and includes several community representatives.

Business involvement even wins applause from Parent/Community Council President James Deanes, who recently shook hands with Reed to end a tense, 18-month "misunderstanding": "We now have more business people coming to the Chicago public schools than ever before. They're consulting and training all over the place. That's a tremendous boost."

Corporate efforts at school reform echo a work world that is rapidly purging picks, shovels and blue collar jobs in general, while seeking computer-literate, creative problem-solving workers who are able to adapt to ever-changing situations. In short, workers who have learned how to learn.

Many new labor market entrants lack the education and skills required for the jobs of this decade and the next century, experts report. Without drastic changes in today's schools, tomorrow's workers are unlikely to receive the kind of education they need.
That alarm sounded in Chicago before and after Mayor Harold Washington's 1986 closed-door Education Summit, which convened corporate, school and university leaders. Their task was to develop a Learn/Earn Program modeled after the Boston Compact, wherein the business community put up jobs for high school graduates and the school system pledged reforms. The Chicago negotiations were going nowhere, with business leaders and then-Supt. Manford Byrd Jr. accusing each other of intransigence, when the Chicago Teachers Union went on strike for the ninth time in 18 years. The strike lasted an unprecedented 19 days.

"Community groups and mainline advocacy groups spontaneously combusted," recalls Patrick J. Keleher, then director of public policy for Chicago United and now president of TEACH America, a group promoting school vouchers.

Following a tumultuous, post-strike rally at the University of Illinois Pavilion, Mayor Washington expanded both the membership and scope of his Education Summit. The chief executive officers of Amoco, Helene Curtis, the Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry and other big-business interests participated throughout, sitting with parents and community activists for long hours of public debate.

Business not naive

In the end, the summit produced too tame a document for business leaders; they broke off with several vocal school and community groups to push for a new school structure that shifted power from the central administration to parent-dominated school councils.

"You didn't have a naive business community coming to the table with an independent and not-very-well-thought-out agenda," observes William Ayers, an education professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "It came in many ways conceding leadership to parent organizations, thus playing a more progressive role in Chicago than had been typical."

In the ensuing legislative battle, at least 24 chief executives of Chicago's largest corporations flew to Springfield on four different occasions to buttonhole the governor and key leaders in the Illinois House and Senate about the urgent need for school reform. Lobbyists and public relations firms had paved the way. And busloads of parents and community activists amplified the plea. The business-financed campaign was organized and coordinated by Chicago United, then presided over by former Board of Education member Warren H. Bacon.

Business leaders became involved in school reform because of their dismay over low-achieving Chicago public school students, explains Bacon. For example, some companies had complained of interviewing 30 to 40 high school graduates to get one clerical worker.

Previously, business involvement in schools rarely went beyond adopt-a-school, which pairs schools with businesses and other organizations willing to share their knowledge, experience and resources. While Director Al Sterling estimates business invests more than $3 million annually in their adopted schools, reformers dismiss it as at best episodic rather than the systemic thrust that the school crisis demands. More appealing, for example, was Illinois Bell's training of 250 employees, interested in running for LSCs, on budgeting, principal selection, policy making, school improvement, the mechanics of running orderly meetings, etc. Among 36 Bell employees elected to LSCs—the most from any Chicago business—were senior order clerk Maria Vargas and marketing specialist Grady Bailey, both later appointed by Mayor Daley to the School Board.

"I see too many companies that believe that giving money or a speech now and then is sufficient."

—Gene Cartwright

Reed estimates that about 700 corporate employees were elected to LSCs.

"When local councils are doing good things, they deserve to be not only recognized but encouraged," says Helen D. Shumate, Illinois Bell's director of educational relations. Last year, Illinois Bell and the Ameritech Foundation, in partnership with the Chicago Public Schools Alumni Association, launched a three-year, $1.2 million recognition program by awarding $10,000 to each of 26 LSCs working on innovative school programs. The companies then gathered the schools' ideas into a 66-page booklet, which was distributed throughout the school system. (See Bright Ideas, page 44.)

Similarly, the Whitman Corp. recognizes 20 stellar Chicago public school principals annually, taking out newspaper ads to sing their praises and awarding them $5,000 grants to be used for worthwhile school projects.

Like Illinois Bell, Amoco Corp. prepared employees for LSC elections. Those who won—11 out of 35—have formed The Amoco Educators Club. "We meet with them monthly and they brief us on what's happening in their schools," said Gene E. Cartwright, Amoco's community and urban affairs manager and a national school reform activist.

The club has been quite an education. Last winter, one Amoco LSC member discovered a broken window in the
Good schools: A U.S. corporate view

The Business Roundtable, composed of 200 chief executive officers of major U.S.-based corporations, has committed to a 10-year effort to transform the U.S. educational system. Its Education Task Force, chaired by IBM Chairman John Akers, has concluded that a successful system would include these elements:

- The system reflects four underlying assumptions: All students in a culturally diverse society can learn both basics and higher-order skills; we know how to teach all students successfully; curricula reflect high expectations; every child needs an audience.
- The system is judged by the results it achieves.
- Standards for assessing the system are strong, and there are effective ways to measure against those standards.
- Schools receive rewards for success, assistance to improve and penalties for failure.
- Each school’s staff has a strong voice in running that school, including selecting its personnel, setting its curricula and writing its budget.
- A major emphasis is placed on staff development.
- A high-quality prekindergarten program is in place, at least for all disadvantaged students. This includes full funding of Head Start.
- Health and other social services are sufficient to reduce significant barriers to learning.
- The system makes constructive use of technology to raise the productivity of both teachers and students.

Avondale LSC with principal evaluation.

Though 60 percent of Chicago public school enrollment is black, relatively few black-owned businesses are pitching in. “They tend to identify with higher education through contributions to the United Negro College Fund rather than with public school education,” explained Consuela Pape, executive director of the Cosmopolitan Chamber of Commerce.

In the realm of policy, downsizing and reorganizing the school bureaucracy has been a major corporate goal. LQE has been especially vocal in this area, at times accusing Supt. Kimbrough of being anti-reform. (Kimbrough was brought in from Compton, Calif., by an interim school board that included LQE’s Reed.) However, LQE has arranged for help, as well, lining up five companies to share most of the costs of hiring Burnett W. Donoho. The former president and chief operating officer at Marshall Field’s comes to the school system as a consultant on finance and management.

Few critics

After decades on the sidelines of school struggles, corporations generally are applauded for their new involvement. However, some education activists—both inside and outside the business community—question whether corporations are doing all that they can and whether they are doing the “right” things, that is, advocating and supporting those changes that will yield the most improvement in pupil achievement.

“Businessmen suffer from the problem of survival,” says M. Blouke Carus, president of Carus Corp. and chair of the recently-formed education committee of the Illinois Manufacturers Association. “They’re so heavily involved in making sure their businesses survive that they really don’t have the time to understand the big issues in education. In fact, there is so much going on in educational reform today that it’s almost impossible for anybody to keep up.”

The IMA is developing a statewide reform package for submission this spring to the General Assembly. (See Opinions, page 21.)

“I’m not sure that corporations have had internal discussions to decide how they’re going to support school reform,” agrees Amoco’s Gene Cartwright. “I see too many companies that believe that giving money or a speech now and then is sufficient for their involvement in school reform. What are their goals and objectives? Is reform of the school structure [most important]? Is it early childhood education? Amoco is strongly committed to early childhood education.”

Patrick Keleher of TEACH America accuses businesspeople of tending not to evaluate the education establishment “by the tough, bottom-line standards of performance and accountability by which it would evaluate all other goal-oriented operations.” Thus, says Keleher, “business is failing to pro-
provide the economic reality check that education in this country so desperately needs."

While community activist James Deanes welcomes the business community's increased presence in the schools, he notes that there are still many unmet needs. "You may have three people trained on a council and seven or eight untrained," he says. "That's not good."

Deanes also is uneasy about the corporate mindset. "Corporate techniques sometimes will help you do things more efficiently," he explains. "But to look at a kid as a product—which is what many businessmen do—that's just not applicable. The school is not a marketplace and children are not commodities, so the analogy breaks down."

Similarly, William Ayers of the University of Illinois notes that while school and business interests overlap significantly, they're not identical. "Parents are interested in their children having an education that opens up worlds and horizons for them and also allows them entry into the mainstream of economic life," he explains. "Business is interested in survival and profit, etc. Those aren't identical interests at all."

So far, so good, says Gwendolyn Laroche, head of the Chicago Urban League's Education Department, who sees signs that corporations are here to stay in school reform. "It's one thing to give your resources," she says. "It's another thing to give your time. At the 7:30 a.m., 8 o'clock, 3 o'clock meetings that I attend, I see the same business people. They offer not only their financial resources but also their expertise, in-kind services, etc. I'm encouraged."

Laroche believes business leaders have a firmer grasp than heretofore of the serious problems confronting schools. Some once dismissed educators as uncommitted, undedicated and lacking the skills to deal with these problems. "But now they understand that there are problems that we never had enough resources to address," Laroche continues. "I think earlier on people believed that we were just throwing money away. But now they understand that social services, feeding kids breakfast and lunch, doing any kind of remediation or adding the enriching experiences that young people need—all cost an awful lot of money."

Indeed, for the Rev. Kenneth Smith, chair of Mayor Washington's Education Summit and a former School Board president, the acid test for business will be whether it will fight "at the appropriate time" for desperately needed, additional school funding.

Alex Poinsett is a Chicago writer.

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**Good schools: A British corporate view**

"The tragedy in my country is that by age 16 so many young people are totally turned off by learning."

In this case, "my country" is England. And the speaker is the director of a corporate-backed project seeking rebirth of British secondary schools, which serve students age 11 through 16. John Abbott of The Education 2000 Trust was in Chicago recently at the invitation of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

Were it not for his accent, Abbott could have been mistaken for an American business executive as he described education's shortcomings. But he stood apart when he talked about the work of the trust.

Recognizing that "schools are only part of the total system that impacts on a child's life," the trust is providing money and leadership for several groups of secondary schools and their surrounding communities to fashion living models of education for the 21st century.

As envisioned by the trust, schools of the future would abide by four key principles, illustrated here by examples from the school group in the community of Letchworth:

- **Schools would relate continuously with the expectations of their communities.** To begin this process, biweekly breakfast meetings were held for 10 teachers and 10 other members of the community. Widely representative study groups were formed to craft statements on the goals of education and how each interest group could help meet those goals.

- **Schools would change their teaching techniques to place a greater emphasis on young people managing their own learning.** Staffing at project schools was increased by 10 percent for three years to enable teachers to pursue new methods.

- **Schools would help young people manage their own learning by increasing the use of information technology.** In project schools, there is one computer for every six or seven students.

- **Schools would provide continuous retraining facilities for their teachers, whose development therefore becomes part of the organic life of the school.**

Abbott said that after four years, the Letchworth group had attained "startling results." Sixty percent of the teachers had new confidence to try things they would not have tried before, he said. There was good community support for education as well, he said.

The most difficult challenge, he said, had been educating parents about what their children will be required to know and be able to do in today's fast changing society. Parents need to understand, he said, "that their kids can move faster than they have been moving."

Linda Lenz
We can improve only if our feeder elementary schools improve, and not only those schools, but the whole community needs to be involved," says Orr High School principal Kenneth Van Spankeren.

Those words sum up the philosophy that propelled a standard adopt-a-school program between Continental Bank and Orr into a ground-breaking network that includes Orr's 13 feeder elementary schools and a wide range of nonprofit institutions in West Humboldt Park and the larger city.

"In order to help the high school we had to help the elementary schools," says Nancy Brandt, manager of education programs for Continental. "In order to help the schools we could not stay within those four walls."

Continental's role as network sponsor is two-fold: to provide direct support, such as grants for projects and volunteer tutors, and to act as a broker between the schools and outside institutions, including museums, community organizations, social service agencies and universities.

"We want to replace isolation with connection," says Brandt. "These connections are a goal in themselves."

Over the past 18 months, Brandt's brokering and, in some cases, Continental's money have helped establish these and other new programs:

- Math at Work and the Community History Project, instructional programs designed to improve elementary students' math and research skills. DePaul University's Center for Urban Education provides teacher training and assistance.
- Building Blocks, a program for parents, with training from DePaul, to design small-scale school-improvement projects. At Ryerson Elementary, for example, parents used a minigrant to purchase pens, pencils and candy for a fundraising venture.
- Project Bridge, a two-year dropout prevention program for 50 eighth-grade students. DePaul has trained 20 Continental Bank volunteers as tutors and provides tutoring materials. The Youth Service Project provides counseling.
- Safe Passage/Safe Schools, a program designed to decrease gang activity and other crimes near elementary schools by setting up regular patrols by parent volunteers. The community group BUILD (Broader Urban Involvement Leadership Development) organizes the patrols and holds regular meetings for volunteers.
- A science council linking teachers who participated in a summer hands-on science workshop. The Golden Apple Foundation for Excellence in Teaching coordinates the program.
- A program with Shedd Aquarium that includes films and lectures by Shedd employees, student field trips with hands-

Eric Taylor conducts a science experiment his teacher learned at a workshop sponsored by Continental Bank.
on activities and staff development workshops for teachers. Students, parents, other family members and teachers will get a free tour at an upcoming Community Night.

An annual book drive, organized by Continental employees. Last year’s drive collected over 13,000 books; this year’s, about 14,000.

Several principals say the bank’s brokering is just as valuable as its funding, if not more. The role comes naturally, explains Brandt, because many bank executives serve on the boards of institutions and community groups.

The school-community network has some intangible benefits as well, say Brandt and others. For example, it provides a mechanism for staff from different schools to share ideas, fosters a community-based approach to education and helps give elementary students a sense of confidence and continuity as they tackle the unfamiliar rigors of high school.

The long-term goals of raising achievement test scores, reducing the dropout rate and sending more students on to post-secondary education are still years down the line, Brandt and others admit. But there are signs of progress.

For example, children at Nobel Elementary School have told Principal Mirna Hernandez that “they definitely feel safer knowing more parents are out there” as part of Safe Passage/Safe Schools. And gang problems around Pablo Casals School have disappeared since parents began their patrols, Principal John Mazurek says.

Through Orr’s Lighthouse Academic Program, an evening school, 75 former dropouts took make-up classes and then re-enrolled in regular daytime classes last year. And seven students who had fallen far behind in their classes made up enough credits to graduate on time.

Still, Cameron Elementary School teacher Dave Edelman points out that no matter how ambitious or innovative, programs will prove impotent if teachers don’t buy into them. “Teachers don’t always take advantage of them,” he says. “If they don’t, it won’t work.”

Lorraine V. Forte is a Chicago writer.

Mentors key to adopt-a-class

by Lorraine V. Forte

Ten years ago, New York businessman Eugene Lang blazed a new trail for business involvement in schools when he “adopted” the seventh grade at his old grammar school in East Harlem.

Midway through a graduation speech at Public School 121, Lang put down his text and challenged his young listeners: If you graduate from high school, I will make sure you have a scholarship to go to college. At the time, three out of four of those students were considered likely dropouts.

Lang went on to hire a social worker to help the students and their families negotiate the way. And he stayed on the scene to offer personal encouragement.

Since then, 9,000 students, including some 225 in Chicago, have been adopted under Lang’s I Have a Dream Program, named after the Martin Luther King Jr. speech and Lang’s topic in that 1981 commencement address.

Last month, another 50 seventh-graders joined the ranks under a similar program organized by Chicago United, a multicultural civic group composed of 100 Chicago businesses. The offshoot is called CHESS, for Chicago Educational Support and Scholarship.

“We were looking at programs that focused on children in a one-on-one situation,” said Diane Smith, vice president of corporate and community affairs at First National Bank of Chicago, which adopted a class at Mayo Elementary School, 249 E. 37th. “I Have a Dream was a perfect example.”

Six-year commitment

Under I Have a Dream, the wealthy individuals who give the money also give of their time. Under CHESS, corporations are recruiting employees to play the key role of student mentor. Further, students who graduate but do not want to go to college will be helped to find jobs with their corporate adopters.

Joining First National in CHESS, are Inland Steel Industries and Arrow Lumber Co., which together adopted a class at Plamondon Elementary School, 1525 S. Washtenaw. Each company has pledged $180,000 over six years to hire social workers; Chicago United is seeking matching funds from foundations for enrichment programs and college scholarships.

But just about everyone associated with I Have a Dream says it’s the mentoring that counts.
Corporations build school of their dreams

by Alex Poinsett

Like Chicago school reform, the Corporate/Community Schools of America—to date, a single school in impoverished Lawndale—was born of despair that the public schools would ever reform themselves.

By spending the same amount of money as Chicago public schools spend (now $5,200 per pupil) but spending it in innovative ways, C/CSA would serve as a model of what urban public schools could and should be, reasoned mastermind Joseph Kellman, president of Globe Glass & Mirror Co.

After three or four years of experimentation, C/CSA would take its record to the general public and Illinois Legislature and press for widespread replication, Kellman said shortly after the tuition-free, private school opened in 1988.

Then came the Chicago School Reform Act and outpouring of support for the public schools. While those developments cast a shadow over Kellman’s grand design, C/CSA nevertheless is emerging as a model of progressive education and is reaching out to its neighbors.

Open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. 11 months of the year, C/CSA serves 250 neighborhood youngsters who are
selected randomly by computer. The children are assigned to classes by skill level rather than age. As in the public schools, classes have an average of 28 children. But each teacher has an assistant who is an aspiring teacher. Total enrollment will be limited to 300, which the school expects to reach next year.

"We have a year-round reading program for students and parents. We have all our children writing every day and the oldest ones keeping journals," said Principal Elaine Mosley. "We use the Math Their Way program because it incorporates language, science and social studies into meaningful math concepts and teaches students problem solving."

Mosley meets weekly with teachers and parents to fine-tune the school's multicultural curriculum.

Research on the long-term benefits of high-quality, early childhood programs for inner-city minorities prompted C/CSA's full-day preschool to enroll children as young as two.

School as community hub

Serving students whose learning often is hampered by family disputes, inadequate housing, gang pressures and other fears and worries, the school supplements its educational menu with "the Hub." This C/CSA-directed program serves students and their families through 50 different community agencies and institutions.

Despite the school's extended-family orientation, two parents left C/CSA last year, not wanting their children to remain in school during summer.

A few other parents have been uneasy over the school's way of reporting student progress. Shunning traditional grades, teachers write comprehensive narratives about their students' social, emotional and physical development and their language, math and computer skills. Failing grades can devastate young psyches, Mosley explained.

Branching out, C/CSA conducted four workshops last spring for teachers in surrounding Subdistrict 4 of the Chicago Public Schools. "One of my teachers attended the math workshop," said Mary M. Goosby, principal of Armstrong Elementary School. "It changed her teaching of math from computational to a more problem-solving approach."

Goosby also applauded a Great Books workshop that stressed higher-level thinking skills. "We plan a reciprocal relationship where their teachers can come here and participate in staff development activities," she added.

Major Armstead, Subdistrict 4 superintendent, said he intends to borrow some of C/CSA's school-based management techniques. "We welcome the collaboration," he said.

Corporate/Community Schools of America draws its name from the makeup of its governing board, which includes corporate officials and community residents. A public school official, a community college president and a university president also serve.

The school draws its financial support from dozens of corporations, corporate foundations and wealthy individuals. Pledges of $6.4 million since March 1987 are expected to carry the school through 1991. Of the 26 main corporate donors, only one, the object of a takeover, is not expected to renew for another three years, according to school officials.
Locksmith opens opportunities

by Rollie Hudson

Jim Gruber, 37, dropped out of St. Michaels High School his freshman year and went to work for his father at Ashland Lock Co. He learned the trade and now owns the shop, which employs seven full-time workers at 2510 N. Ashland.

Knowing he was lucky, Gruber also is working to keep some neighborhood youths from making the bad decisions he made 20 years ago. He hopes that, in the process, he will boost the supply of skilled workers for his and other businesses in the Lakeview/Wrightwood area.

Five hours a week, six students from Prescott Elementary School, 2510 N. Ashland, and Lakeview High School, 4015 N. Ashland, work under his tutelage at Ashland. They do some manual labor, cleaning up and hanging stock. But they also learn the skills of locksmithing, measuring and cutting keys to within a thousandth of an inch.

“I try to teach them the concepts and disciplines of a job—being on time, being neat,” said Gruber, a community representative on the Prescott Local School Council. “I’m also showing them the value of education, why it’s important to learn math and reading skills.”

Gruber pays his interns. Perhaps as important, he gives them an opportunity to “create something.”

Gruber’s program grew out of an emergency meeting the Prescott LSC convened last summer to deal with escalating gang violence at the school and in the community. Those who attended—LSC members and representatives of several neighborhood businesses, the local YMCA, Christopher House and the Chicago Park District—concluded that youth violence was the result, not the source, of community problems.

“The reasons kids get into gangs is because they don’t have other opportunities,” said Delia Barajas, chair of the Prescott LSC.

The LSC is now working to enlist other area businesses. “We are trying to show that giving these kids a chance is not just giving something away,” said Prescott Principal Karen Carlson. “They are going to give something back.”

The school also is seeking to give its neighbors some business. “The schools in the community should be buying from the community, not through the Board of Education from companies in Texas,” said Juliet Wilson, Prescott’s community liaison.

A half dozen business owners attended a recent meeting to learn about Gruber’s program; all agreed to accept student interns.

Homaco, a telecommunications manufacturer, will host the next meeting, which will deal with parent consent, student safety and liability insurance.

Meanwhile, Northwestern University’s Neighborhood Innovations Network has contacted Gruber with plans to include his program in the Robert Moses Algebra Project (Catalyst, October 1990) now under way in six schools.

Gruber would like to see the intern program spread throughout the city. “These kids are great,” he said. “They’re inspiring.”

Rollie Hudson is a Chicago writer.

For more information

Publications

Programs
- Chicago Educational Support and Scholarship (CHESS). Contact Carolyn Norstrom, Chicago United vice president for educational programs (312) 236-3769.
- Community Management Assistance Program, which matches business volunteers and local school councils (312) 606-8240.
- Continental Bank’s school-community network. Contact Nancy Brandt, manager of education programs (312) 923-5193.
- Corporate/Community Schools of America. Contact Primus Moneley, project director (312) 427-4434, or Walter Kraus, assistant to the chairman, Baxter Healthcare Corp. (708) 948-3207.
- I Have a Dream. Contact Greg Darnieder, Chicago executive director (312) 664-0895.
PPACs an afterthought, still struggling to be heard

by Liane Clorfene Casten

Volta Elementary School, 4950 N. Avers, is aglow with $40,000 worth of new science kits, maps, globes, critical thinking games and other learning materials. And Principal Nancy Wallace couldn’t be happier—not only for the bounty, but also for what the new possessions say about how her school operates.

When the Volta Local School Council took up the issue of State Chapter 1 funds, it asked the school’s Professional Personnel Advisory Committee to come up with a wish list. The PPAC’s curriculum committee was pleased to oblige, and the LSC voted 11 to 0 to make the recommended purchases.

“This is just one example of how well we cooperate,” said Rosemary Kayne, first-grade teacher and PPAC chair. “The PPAC [which includes all 37 faculty members] formed committees and brought in the LSC members early on. Everyone asked questions and explored options. We knew the kids needed all this material so we found a way to agree. But that’s not new for Volta; the parents and this school were never strangers.”

Such an arrangement is probably what the Illinois General Assembly had in mind when it created PPACs “for the purpose of advising the principal and the local school council on matters of educational program.” Only teachers, nurses, counselors and other teacher-certified staff members may serve on PPACs. They are elected by their colleagues.

PPACs were a school reform afterthought. “They weren’t in the original bill and were not even mentioned in Mayor Washington’s Education Summit,” said Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance. The panel had proposed a Teacher Advancement Committee in its own bill and eventually developed a coalition with the Chicago Teachers Union and the United Neighborhood Organization to win legislative acceptance of PPACs, he said.

A bare majority of LSCs and principals appear to have accepted the PPACs, and Hess and other observers contend that teacher involvement in school reform is nowhere near what it must be for reform to succeed.

LSC and PPAC relationships got relatively high marks in an LSC poll conducted last fall by Leadership for Quality Education, a business group. Roughly half the teacher members said they were “very satisfied” that their principals and LSCs had “solicited and accepted recommendations” from PPACs and teachers in such areas as school improvement plans, State Chapter 1 programs, curriculum and budgets. The other half was split about two to one between “somewhat satisfied” and “not very satisfied.”

All want training

Similarly, about two-thirds of teachers polled by the Teachers Task Force of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform said their PPACs had a positive, cooperative relationship with their principals. The poll involved 178 teachers from 92 schools who had participated in task force activities. The results cannot be generalized to the whole city because the teachers were not a random sample. But Mary Lewis, a Roosevelt University faculty member and task force advisor, said the results are gratifying nonetheless.

Only 15 percent of the respondents said that the relation-
ship between their PPAC and principal was such that they were fearful and staff morale was low. “Our principal is manipulative,” said one respondent. “Our PPAC will not deal with the principal,” said another. “There are reprisals for not being cooperative with the principal,” said a third.

At these 92 schools, PPAC membership ranged from entire faculties to four or five teachers. About 70 percent of members were elected, with the rest volunteering. Almost half the PPACs met monthly; the rest, less often. Almost all had open meetings. About 70 percent shared their agenda with the entire faculty; about 50 percent, with the LSC.

In at least one of the city’s 11 subdistricts, the district superintendent took steps to get the various school leaders off to an amiable start. Ora McConner, superintendent in Subdistrict 6 on the South Side, organized lunch meetings for the principal, LSC chair, subdistrict council representative and PPAC chair at each school.

“At first I found the PPACs were confused about their roles,” she recalled. “The first year they were mainly the union delegates, and they believed that they were supposed to work on professional problems and working conditions. Now each school understands the major thrust of the PPAC. They feel they are empowered to work on instructional programs and materials.

“When people get involved in power, the reform process doesn’t work,” McConner added. “If teachers focus only on working conditions and if principals are not open to suggestions, then the situation becomes adversarial.”

Echoing virtually every observer, McConner said PPAC members need training in how to operate. About 70 percent of the respondents in the Teacher Task Force poll said they had received no training; all said they wanted it.

Continued on page 28

A sampler of PPAC progress

■ Tilton Elementary School, 223 N. Keeler. “Our policies are set by much the same people,” said Principal Jesse Moore. “The chair of the PPAC is Patricia Johnson. She also sits on the LSC, as does the secretary of the PTA. We’ve made major school decisions together just by saying, ‘Hey, let’s do it.’”

That cooperative spirit got Tilton off to a fast start with such initiatives as a uniform dress code for students, an Afrocentric curriculum and a male mentor program called The Afro-American Male Empowerment Network.

■ Saucedo Magnet School, 2850 W. 24th. Teacher Pam Samulis credits Principal Karen Morris and a history of staff cooperation for a PPAC that works well together. While the LSC decided how to spend textbook and furniture money, the PPAC decided how to spend State Chapter I money. One teacher sits on both the LSC and PPAC, easing communication.

■ Kohn Elementary School, 10414 S. State. “We wrote the school improvement plan, which was happily adopted by the LSC, as was the budget,” said teacher Connee Fitch-Blanks. “We showed the leadership. In fact, teachers here do not yet understand how empowered we are.”

■ Kennedy High School, 6325 W. 56th. The PPAC didn’t get off the ground until the LSC needed a school improvement plan, said teacher Larry Laughlin, but then they “worked the hardest. The teachers have no authority, are still mostly advisory, yet they saved the day.”

■ Skinner Classical School, 111 S. Throop. “The PPACs do not function the way they should,” said teacher Erica Marshall. “There isn’t much time; we’ve got so many other things to do. This is a multilayered school with very different programs. The PPAC is not the body that the LSC listens to. Teachers may sit on LSC committees where they do have input, but it’s not formally through the PPAC.”

■ Clemente High School, 1147 N. Western. “For the first year of reform, the PPAC was never on the LSC agenda,” said Judith Gearor, a 20-year veteran at Clemente and PPAC chair. “No one sought our advice on anything and finding a working relationship with anyone was difficult. [The school had three principals in a year’s time.] We felt left out.”

Nevertheless, Gearor maintained that the group is “enthusiastic and willing to work. We want involvement.”

At a meeting last December, 16 members from 16 departments first talked about themselves— “Are we wasting our time? If we don’t do something now, what kind of school will we have next year? Have we really built our network to the faculty yet?”

Getting that out of their system, they moved on to talk about the school’s problems—poor student attendance, insufficient professional accountability, lack of PPAC recognition by the LSC and a lack of time for the faculty to meet and share concerns. Committees on curriculum, freshman orientation and attendance were set up.

At the PPAC meeting was winding down, Antonio Betran, chair of the LSC, walked into the room and announced that the LSC had put the PPAC on its agenda for the next meeting. “What do you want to say?” he asked. “Who wants to belong to what committees? When is the best time to get some communication?”
Getting down to business: Councils chalk up small gains

At Spry Elementary: New principal taps community

by Achy Obejas

One of the parent members of Spry Elementary School’s local school council passes out the group’s agenda for the night, then leans down to offer some news to a stranger. “We’ve started bombing Iraq,” he says. “We heard it on the car radio on the way over.”

But here, in Spry’s brightly lit, spanking clean assembly hall, peace reigns. For most Chicago primary schools, that might be normal, but at Spry, where near riots broke out last spring over the firing of the school’s principal of 12 years, anything resembling calm is deeply appreciated.

“We all get along now,” says Serafin Pacheco, the LSC chair. “At least we respect each other.”

Indeed, the evening’s LSC meeting runs like clockwork. The council members present committee reports, add to each other’s ideas and clap a lot. The star of the show is Carlos Azcoitia, the school’s dynamic but neophyte principal. Avoiding the word “I,” he says, “All of these are programs for our school, for all of us.”

Later, Azcoitia will ask parents to consider the message their own behavior sends. This is Azcoitia’s creed: Teaching by example. And he treats this, his first experience as principal, as a coda. His presence has made for an acknowledged difference, but Spry’s problems are many, and many of Azcoitia’s challenges are still ahead.

Set in the heart of Little Village, a working-class, mostly Latino neighborhood on the city’s Near Southwest Side, Spry’s Marshall Boulevard address is the battle line between two vicious local street gangs. In 1980, it was the battle site between school officials and parents, who threatened to storm the Board of Education and City Hall unless the school was immediately renovated.

Source: 1990 School Report Card
In 1990, Spry was the site of more parental protest. The LSC opted not to retain principal Benedict Natzke Jr., who subsequently landed in another principalship. The two LSC teacher representatives were among the six votes against him, even though a staff survey indicated that only 19 of some 80 teachers opposed Natzke. Protests erupted from teachers and parents. Friends and colleagues stopped talking to each other. Threats were made. Eventually, seven teachers would transfer.

"The previous principal would hide from parents," says Maria Avila, a parent member of the LSC. "He'd send interpreters to meetings. He'd say, 'This is the way things are going to be, period.'"

Tensions remain

That's the situation Azcoitia, 40, walked into when he took the job in July, after he was selected from a pool of 66 applicants. Azcoitia's most recent post had been director of the Bureau of Vocational Student Services in central office. His lack of experience as a principal was a concern, but LSC members were impressed with his knowledge of school reform and federal and state funding. He was energetic and young. And he was bilingual, something that Spry parents were clamoring for.

"For me, that I can talk directly to the principal, that's a big, big advantage," says parent Hortencia Rocha. "Before, if I had a problem with a teacher, there was nowhere to go."

"We didn't care if the new principal was Latino," says Avila, "but whoever it was had to be bilingual. One of the best things about this school is its bilingual program—how could the principal not be bilingual?"

Azcoitia, a native of Cuba who spent part of his formative years in Puerto Rico, is as comfortable in English as in Spanish. He switches without thinking, joking and punning in both languages. His wife Diana, who is principal at Kanoon Magnet School, is Puerto Rican.

"There's a vision here now," says Carl Wanzung, Spry's art teacher and the husband of LSC teacher representative Mildred Arroyo. Wanzung requested a transfer to Spry after Azcoitia's hiring, even though he had his own art room at his old school. Spry doesn't have an art room, a music room or a science lab—all of which are on Azcoitia's list of things to do. Because Wanzung had taught at Spry before, he can gauge the change in attitude with the new principal. "He's open to ideas," he says.

But not everybody supports Azcoitia. Some teachers are still hurting from last spring's events. Most won't talk about it, and those who do will only do so anonymously.

"What's happened is that now a small cadre of people run the school," says one disillusioned teacher. "I was one of the 19 teachers that voted against Natzke, and I like Azcoitia, but the tensions are very high, even if they're not out in the open."

Arroyo acknowledges that there are still people on staff who won't talk to her because of her stance last spring. The other LSC teacher representative, Mary Cavey, concurs. But even among those who are unhappy, the consensus seems to be that Azcoitia's office is at least open. And Flora Mortell-Eckert, the teacher's union delegate, says she's never had better relations with a principal, or other teachers.
Spry has the second highest failure rate in Subdistrict 5, and half its pupils score in the bottom quarter nationwide on tests of reading and math. Ninety percent come from low-income families. 95 percent are Latino and 59 percent have limited English proficiency. "It's overwhelming," says Azcoitia, quickly adding, "Nothing is insurmountable."

Spry's faculty includes teachers from Mexico, Uruguay, Jamaica, Colombia, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Peru and Cuba. Cultural traditions are now being woven into the school's programs.

Speaking the language

This year, the students have formed a student council, and they have a new newspaper to chronicle their activities. Bulletin boards display student writings and drawings. More than 400 students ordered Spry sweatshirts and T-shirts. Now, Spry blue beats out gang colors in the halls.

The faculty has weekly meetings and is encouraged to go to professional workshops and conferences. "That had never happened before," says Arroyo.

A variety of programs within the school address professional development. Currently, a new discipline approach is being explored. Next month, the entire staff will begin learning conflict resolution. "Can you imagine?" asks Azcoitia. "It's tailor made for this school."

Many programs—such as the computer classes for parents, the Family Study Institute and the nutrition program—were part of the School Improvement Plan prepared under Natzke. But Azcoitia has gone well beyond them. "The school is part of the community," says the new principal. "It has an impact on the community."

For the first time, a Spry principal is sitting on the board of directors of the neighboring Boys & Girls Club. He also attends meetings of the local neighborhood associations, another first. Azcoitia has initiated contacts with the local library branch as well as the Chicago Intervention Network.

Parent attendance at the LSC meetings, which are technically bilingual, but where English is just a formality, hovers between 60 and 100 a session. Each meeting features a guest who addresses family and community issues, whether alcoholism or gangs. Compliance with state immunization laws is 95 percent, up by 25 percent from last year. Even overcrowding—Spry's nemesis for more than 15 years—is finally being addressed concretely.

At Spry, overcrowding has meant more than 40 kids to a room, no resource rooms, closets used as offices and no storage space. When he arrived, Azcoitia received notice that four rooms sought by Spry at Saint Ludmilla, a nearby shuttered Catholic school, had been denied. "He put forth some effort, called meetings, called the priest at Saint Ludmilla, and we got four classrooms over there," says Arroyo.

The result is that average class size has been reduced to 32. Tutoring can now occur within classrooms. The hallways are no longer cluttered with teachers and pupils, no longer a fire hazard.

"The problem is still there," Azcoitia says. "We can't have students all over the place, and our enrollment will continue to grow. So we need some long-term solutions."

Azcoitia knows he needs a long-term plan to improve lunchroom facilities, institute all-day kindergarten and preschool programs and improve test scores. He warned the LSC that test score improvements won't be evident for at least two years. Pacheco, for one, appreciates the principal's honesty.

"At least now, we don't have to fight each other," Pacheco says. "Instead, we can concentrate on the children's education, on improving their test scores, on really communicating with each other about our children's future."

Achy Obejas is a Chicago writer who is bilingual. Quotations in this article are translations from Spanish.

Return of council wars

In an echo of the early 1980s, "council wars" are raging in a number of schools where factions on local school councils would rather fight than compromise.

At Wadsworth Elementary, for example, the council was stymied for nine months by a dispute over the continuing council eligibility of its chairperson, a foster parent whose foster children had moved out of the school. The woman refused to resign, the interim School Board refused to act, but the new School Board finally declared a vacancy.

At Collins High School, the local school council has four vacancies and two council members who don't attend, thus leaving the council without a quorum. LSC chair Gloria Harris contends the no-shows are boycotting to prevent the current principal from being ousted. (A principal needs six votes to be retained.)

At another school, a principal resigned because he and his council could not work together, according to an administrator who asked not to be identified. At still another, council factions change the rules when they can to lock the other side out, he added.

How many councils are in trouble? No one seems to know, or at least no one is saying. Few principals will speak publicly, said Bruce Berndt, president of the Chicago Principals Association, because "they are looking to land a teaching job [if they are dismissed] and don't want to have an aura of controversy about them."

Charlotte Smarte-Faul
At Fenger High: Order returns, parents tune in

by Lorraine V. Forte

Two years ago, students at Christian Fenger High School often lingered in the halls between classes and ducked out of school "without regard for any rules," says one parent. Now, students need a tardy slip to enter a class after the bell, must stay after school if they're tardy more than 10 times and are not permitted to leave the school until the end of the day.

Further, an automated phone-dialing system, purchased from a $10,000 school improvement award from Illinois Bell Telephone, informs parents of their children's absences and tardiness.

This new atmosphere of order and discipline is one measure of the headway that reform and a dedicated, new principal are making at this once unruly high school on the Far South Side.

"One thing that has worked in our favor is that we get along with our principal," says LSC member Charles Gage. "We may not agree with everything she does, but she does know how to administrate."

In 1988, a local principal selection committee tapped Linda Layne, then interim principal, over a dozen other candidates to succeed a principal who had retired.

New student attitude

Layne's style and goals coincided at major points with what parents had said they wanted: better discipline, less tardiness, less truancy. Even as interim principal, Layne had discussed putting the school on closed campus, which meant students could not leave, even during lunchtime, until the end of the day.

"That's one of the things that clinched it for her, that she was for it," recalls Karen Green, then a member of the selection committee and now LSC chair.

At first, some students rebelled, setting false fire alarms. "As time went on, it worked out," says LSC student representative Chastity Martin. "There's a total difference in attitude. More [students] are making an effort to get to school and to class on time."

Parents also wanted a principal who would be available to students. Layne had initiated an open-door policy as soon as she arrived. Most days, she's at the main entrance to greet students in the morning. She regularly walks the halls and talks to students and staff. When she runs into a student who has been cutting class, she is apt to stop and admonish him, asking how he expects to graduate if he doesn't go to class.

Layne sees her relationship with the LSC in the same positive light. "They have a clear understanding that I am in charge of the day-to-day operation of the school," she says. "But I think things work better when all constituencies are involved. I do believe in communication and not just the principal running the show."

Both Layne and the LSC are willing to listen to teachers' suggestions for workshops and different teaching techniques, says Williamethia Davenport, head of the Professional Personnel Advisory Council.

"The way I felt before was that I was just in the school—it was just come to school, do as you're told, and that's it," Davenport says. "I personally didn't have any input into things....The old principal had his favorite few and that's who he listened to."

All these good relationships weren't instant, however. At first there was tension between the LSC and faculty, which they now dismiss as a normal reaction to an unfamiliar situation.
Teachers didn’t know what new policies the LSC would adopt or what power members might have over their jobs; LSC members were unsure how to carry out their responsibilities.

Green and others say their biggest hurdle the first year of reform was the lack of training for LSCs. Because she was unemployed for several months, Green was able to make frequent trips to Board of Education headquarters to gather materials and attend training sessions there. In addition, LSC members Al Williams and Charles Gage work for firms—Illinois Bell and Harris Bank, respectively—that had set up special programs for employees interested in running for LSCs.

"Between the two of them, and what I could do, we got what we needed," Green says. "That’s been one of the biggest reasons we’ve been successful."

The faculty and LSC also credit a planning retreat at the end of last school year for igniting enthusiasm and commitment among the 55 people who attended—students, parents and community residents as well as staff. The retreat, funded by a Joyce Foundation grant, focused on ways to implement school-based management and was so successful that the LSC is working to raise money for a second one at the end of the current school year.

"The way we ran the retreat was: This is a joint effort, and what can we all do to make Fenger better?" Green explains. "What would be the best way to create a vision? If you want to create a vision, you bring all the stakeholders together. The stakeholders learned that they are all accountable for doing their part."

As for specific programs, Fenger chalks up these initiatives:

- Using State Chapter I money, it hired a full-time curriculum coordinator, Janice Ollarvia, to compile a course catalog, critique teachers’ lesson plans, suggest ways to improve instruction, organize staff development activities and guide development of an Afrocentric curriculum.
- Using Federal Chapter I money, it hired a full-time school-community liaison, Cleetta Ryals, principally to work with parents of students enrolled in the school’s new computer learning lab.
- Students who have failed two or more courses are encouraged to attend new group counseling sessions, where the emphasis is on self-esteem and positive attitudes.
- Separate Parent Nights were held for each grade level, with college issues discussed on senior night and school rules the focus of freshman night.

Parent involvement has improved but has a long way to go, faculty members say.

Five parent volunteers now work in the school. The Parent Nights drew more parents than expected. LSC parent member Rudolphus Pryor, head of the school’s security committee, makes sure gang graffiti is immediately washed off the school’s outside walls and often helps patrol the area.

Volunteer Linda Berrien says having more parents in the school sends an important message to children. "When kids know you are concerned and see the rules put in place, they tend to respond better," she says. "The kids feel good when they see you in school. Some of them now call me Mom. Based on my own experience in high school, it’s better when more adults are involved, not just your own parent."

Fenger students line up for tardy slips.
At Clark Middle: Weekend retreat the turning point

by Rollie Hudson

The Michele Clark Local School Council took off with high expectations, very high expectations. It wanted its principal to obtain “100 percent parent involvement.” And the first draft of its school improvement plan called for perfect attendance by students and teachers alike.

“I didn’t know what I was doing,” Robert Johnson, a parent member, now concedes. Before his election, Johnson’s school involvement amounted to no more than a couple PTA meetings.

The Michele Clark LSC got real rather quickly, however, and now presides over a school that is taking some small steps toward overcoming what it recognizes are enormous, complex problems.

“We have 11-year-olds who can’t add 10 and 10,” said Johnson. “We have kids who can’t even put a sentence together.”

Suspicious at first

Michele Clark Middle School, 5101 W. Harrison, serves almost 600 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders from a community that is overwhelmingly low income. By reading test scores, Clark ranks last among 21 schools in the Austin community, according to a 1990 report by the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance. Last school year, for example, more than half of Clark’s sixth-graders had scores on reading, math and language arts tests that put them in the bottom quarter statewide.

Chronically low test scores, combined with near daily fights, drove increasing numbers of area parents to send their children to other schools even though Clark boasts such special facilities as an indoor swimming pool.

When school reform appeared on the horizon, Michele Clark had a principal who was viewed as old guard. “There was no respect for parents,” said Brenda Robinson, a parent member on the LSC. “Parents could not get their voices heard at Michele Clark.” The principal did the LSC the favor of resigning, even before the LSC was elected.

In February 1989, Clark’s Local School Improvement Council, forerunner to the LSC, selected Marietta Beverly from 60 applicants for principal, and the superintendent and School Board ratified the choice. Beverly, a counselor at a South Side elementary school, “came in not only with concrete plans for teaching students, but also with the kind of enthusiasm we had been looking for,” said James Deanes, a community member on the LSC.

The LSC was elected eight months later. “During our first meeting, we were suspicious of each other,” Johnson recalled. “But after our second meeting with each other, there was a moment when we realized that this was going to work. The level of energy and knowledge in the room made us a very committed group.”

Project CANAL

Deanes brought much of the knowledge. As chair of the Parent/Community Council, he had participated in the drafting of the Chicago School Reform Act and could explain the reasoning behind the words in the law.

“A lot of parents in the city came in and thought they would be the hands-on boss, that they would just walk in and tell the principal what to do,” said Carl Brinsson, the other community representative on the council. “Our council understood that policy, not daily activities, should be our main focus.”

Although they argued a lot in their early meetings, LSC members say that consensus has been their watchword. They
also say they have been mindful of the concerns of all in their school—parents, teachers, janitors and students alike.

In this regard, school reform at Michele Clark no doubt got a boost from the school’s participation in Project CANAL, a Board of Education program aimed at building schoolwide involvement in school improvement. For example, a core planning team created under CANAL meets every two weeks to monitor Clark’s school improvement plan. The team includes parents, teachers, LSC members and members of the maintenance, lunchroom and clerical staffs and serves as a de facto Professional Personnel Advisory Committee, a body created by the Reform Act.

School for adults

LSC members point to a CANAL-sponsored retreat as their ignition. “We went from a Friday afternoon to late Sunday night at a corporate training facility in the suburbs,” recalled Brinson.

Thirty members of the school community socialized and participated in workshops dealing with all aspects of school-based management, including consensus building, running a meeting, defining roles, parliamentary procedure and the meaning of education itself. “That’s where we learned to work with each other and to understand our various roles,” said Deanes, noting that an out-of-town site was important for creating “a captive audience.”

“From then on, we’ve simply had a good time,” said Margaret Malabla, a teacher member. There is laughing at LSC meetings now, and lots of teasing and joking.

“We’ve been working on being a support group for the school community,” said Beverly. “We felt that if we could change the climate [of the school] the rest would follow. Half of the problem with children not doing well on tests is climate, both at home and at school.”

Using State Chapter 1 funds, Clark established a parent lounge and resource room. It also pays small stipends to parents who help teachers in their classrooms. The building welcomes 300 to 400 adults enrolled in the Department of Public Aid’s Project Chance classes, taught by Clark teachers. Community groups may meet at Clark as well.

“Now that parents are coming through the school regularly, the kids are on better behavior generally,” said Deanes.

“The students have had an attitudinal change of a kind that can’t be legislated. The activity going on around school reform has created a different kind of excitement.”

“It seems like teachers care about what’s going on now.”

—Student

“The students know what’s going on,” agreed Beverly, adding that they’re getting into the act. The student council has been reactivated, and student leaders invited Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough to join them for a breakfast discussion of how reform is progressing.

“It seems like teachers care about what’s going on now,” said one sixth-grader.

With more control over its budget, Clark has been able to obtain more special grant money from the state, added Beverly.

Michele Clark also is benefitting from the impact school reform has had in other arenas. Deanes is convinced, for example, the prereform School Board and administration would not have responded as quickly as the current crew did to Clark’s demands for asbestos removal. Deanes made his plea at the first of a series of “town meetings” the new, grassroots-nominated Board of Education is holding throughout the city.

Michele Clark also is taking advantage of the Robert Moses Algebra Project, an innovative instructional program being tried in six schools. The project, based in Cambridge, Mass., came to Chicago as a result of negotiations among a wide range of individuals—from the central administration, universities and community groups—that rarely talked to each other before reform.
Principal contracts
Few venture into new territory
by Michael Klonsky

While contract negotiations between local school councils and their principals offer a vehicle for reaching some bedrock agreements, few councils have taken that ride.

And the desirability of contract negotiations—that is, making additions to the bare-bones document supplied by the Board of Education—remains in dispute.

Of the 274 schools that selected principals last school year, only 39 negotiated additions, according to board attorney Joyce Price. The board’s law office rejected one or more provisions in about half of these contracts because they were illegal or “inappropriate,” she said.

A number of rejected provisions called for staff hires on the basis of race. The law department rejected these because affirmative action programs cannot be established without documentation of systematic past discrimination.

Others would have increased compensation for principals, for example, paying overtime for running after-school programs. These additions were rejected because the Board of Education reserves the right to set salaries and benefits.

Also rejected was an addition that would have required the principal to “resign if there were six votes on the LSC for his or her dismissal.” This provision conflicted with the four-year term provided by law.

Additions that won law-office approval include:

■ Requiring the principal at a school with a large majority of Spanish-speaking students to hire a bilingual assistant principal. This differs from race-based hiring because bilingual skills are not the property of any one racial or ethnic group.

■ Requiring the principal to develop an African-centered curriculum beginning with social studies, accepted because the School Reform Act gives LSCs and principals a major voice in curriculum decisions.

The board’s law department had to sign off on changes in the basic principal contract because principals are employed by the School Board, not local school councils.

“Some people think the Reform Act gave LSCs the power to hire and fire principals,” said Peggy Gordon, director of the Lawyers’ School Reform Advisory Project, “but the fact is that the LSCs can only ‘select.’ The hiring is done by the Board of Education.”

The board’s Uniform Principal Performance Contract establishes the LSC as a partner with the principal in developing a local school improvement plan and a budget. Beyond that, it permits the LSC to “refer comments, suggestions, criticisms or complaints...to the Principal for study, recommendations or resolutions.” It also requires the LSC to evaluate the principal’s performance annually.

Bolster council power

As for the principal, the contract spells out his or her general duties and salary, as determined by the board’s administrative salary scale.

No one knows what might happen if a contract provision is violated, and opinion is divided over the value of even negotiating additions.

Gordon said that most of the additions she has seen dealt with policies that councils may want to change as circumstances change. As such, she said, they would have been better placed in school improvement plans.

“Information sharing” is one area that is appropriate for a contract, she added. “Principals often have access to information that is vital in making a real needs assessment and without which LSCs cannot really make decisions,” she explained.

Bruce Berndt, president of the Chicago Principals Association, objects to contract additions on the grounds that they

Continued on page 28
Plenty of jobs, too few skilled workers

by M. Blouke Carus

There is no shortage of jobs. Rather, there is and will be for a long time a shortage of workers with sufficient skills to fill those jobs. Why do we have this problem? What is the solution?

Much public discussion, from popular magazine articles to government reports to TV programs, has focused on the problem. We all know the statistics. For example, since 1965 productivity growth has been only about half of what it was after World War II, and it is less than half the productivity growth among our economic competitors in Europe and Japan, with no sign of recovery.

We must significantly increase our productivity and provide quality and flexibility in our system or we in America will gradually slide into poverty with increasing social tensions and a shrinking economic pie.

We know how to increase productivity. It is urgent that we get on with the job. The Industrial Age is transforming itself into a new kind of world—much more productive, with higher-quality products, lower costs and requiring a lot of new kinds of services. We are now entering the Information Age. Label it what you will, a new and different work environment is here, and we have to deal with it now.

The constant changes and demands for improvements in today's products and services require an entirely different system of doing business. Successful businesses here and abroad are finding that they can compete in the global market only by reducing the size of middle management and giving much more responsibility to production and service workers.

However, our country is not prepared for this. The jobs we are talking about require much higher skills than most of our workers have. Therefore, we must immediately upgrade the education and training of current and prospective employees. Some businesses are already investing heavily in training for their employees, but we cannot rely upon a business-by-business approach. Some schools are restructuring their programs, but this, too, by itself is inadequate.

The country's education problem is bigger than the business community; it is bigger than the education community. Therefore, the answer lies in a powerful cooperative effort among business, industry, education, government—everyone; and in a radical rethinking of our education enterprise. The stakes are enormous, and we don't have time to fool around while the American economy rusts into irrelevance.

Legislation sought

The Illinois Manufacturers' Association is one organization making a run at the problem. Its Education Committee, which I chair, and other business associations are working with the Illinois State Board of Education toward recommendations for systemic changes in education. The IMA doesn't pretend to have all the answers, but we do have some ideas. Our goal is to make Illinois the leader among all the states, to develop the strongest education system in America, which would be an irresistible magnet to keep existing business and industry here and attract new companies to Illinois from around the world.

M. Blouke Carus is president of Carus Corp. and chair of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association's Education Committee.
First of all, we need a strong accountability system, with clear standards of performance for each school building, with rewards and sanctions for meeting or failing to meet these standards. Our proposed standards would include student learning as measured by the Illinois Goal Assessment Program, one of the best assessment programs in America, and a few other performance measures, such as drop-out rates and the percentage of graduates continuing their education.

We will need new legislation, so we will attempt to work with all groups who are interested in developing a new system of accountability and submitting it to this session of the General Assembly. Education is really the only large segment of our society in which those in charge are not held accountable for results. That must change.

Secondly, we need to prepare all students better for challenging employment. America is the only modern nation that does not have a formal school-to-work transition system. We must develop one now. Fortunately, there are a number of efforts underway supporting this thrust—for example, the 1990 report, America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages, which creates a breathtaking vision for a school-to-work transition system; the new federal Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act, which provides significant new money for forward-thinking programs; the new Illinois Tech Prep program; and our own local City Colleges of Chicago Career Prep Initiative (see following commentary).

One of the most important needs in schools is to integrate the teaching of reading, math, science—indeed, all subjects so that children develop real-world, problem-solving capabilities. One way to do this is to use the workplace as a classroom. Work-based learning, one of the missing ingredients of much of American vocational education and industrial training, will be a major feature of the Illinois Tech Prep program. It can be carried out in a variety of ways, including cooperative education, internships and youth apprenticeships.

Another feature of Tech Prep will be world-class standards. That is, students will have to perform similarly to those in Europe who pass examinations that require them to perform as required by their vocations. Tech Prep will not be a dead-end track but rather a stepping stone for as much continuing education as is needed or desired by the students or their employers.

The message “plenty of jobs” available is good news, of course, for those underrepresented in the current workforce—namely minorities and women. But it is a real challenge for our educational system. The difficulty will be to prepare those from “the forgotten half,” those not planning on earning a baccalaureate degree, those not traditionally prepared for higher-level jobs.

We will have to revolutionize secondary education and attract a substantial number of students from general education in order to make Tech Prep a reality. We will also have to provide a lot more information to students in middle school and earlier about their career options so they can take the much more challenging programs throughout their secondary school years. The Chicago Careers for Youth Program provides a good model.

Graduate warranty

Another contribution to creating competent employees is to develop more risk takers among educators—leaders who will take responsibility for their students, who will guarantee their students’ success to employers. Take note of the State of Colorado, New York City and, in Illinois, Rock Island School District 41 and Harlem School District 122 in the Loves Park area. They all are putting in place programs to assure employers that their high school graduates are employable and that the schools will provide, at no cost to the employer, additional training and education if the students need it.

There is no single answer, no silver bullet; there is no simple solution to our education and training problem. But with contributions and cooperation from all, we feel strongly that the fact of “plenty of jobs” available can turn out to be good news all around for job seekers and employers alike.

References


New career program borrows from abroad

by Sandra Foster

No longer does a high school education suffice for a lifetime of employment. Many jobs of yesterday no longer exist; many have changed beyond recognition. Most jobs today—from those in manufacturing and machine tooling to those in banking and food service—require extensive preparation and advanced skills. Even the least-skilled jobs require a significant command of reading, computing and analytical skills.

Chicago's labor pool includes some 600,000 functional illiterates, another 900,000 without high school diplomas and an even greater number who lack specific training for the jobs of today and tomorrow. There is no shortage of workers, but future economic development in this region depends upon our ability to train these people for the jobs available. Metalworking, tool and die making and financial services are examples of industries in search of qualified workers.

The Career Prep Initiative is the City Colleges of Chicago's contribution toward addressing the problem. CPI will take students in their junior and senior years of high school and move them through a two-year associate's degree program that combines classroom and workplace-based learning. The goal is to equip young people with both job-related skills and the general education needed for flexibility in a changing economy.

Germany, Denmark show the way

The seeds for Career Prep were planted in 1989 when City Colleges launched Productive Chicago, a partnership of business, industry, labor, government, education and the community. Productive Chicago seeks to develop a more effective transition from school to work for the citizens of Chicago.

In June 1990, City Colleges officials and other community leaders from the Productive Chicago initiative visited West Germany and Denmark to observe their work/education systems. Over a seven-day period, we visited 14 sites, including ministries, schools, companies and trade unions.

The European approach to employment training is different from that of the United States. Education in the workplace is a central component of postsecondary education. Typically, European students completing the American equivalent of high school enroll in a career education program, leading to a career in the manufacturing or service industry. In contrast to American society, Danish and West German career education programs are the preferred choice for the majority of citizens.

Rather than being narrowly skill-related, European vocational education programs provide students not only with the skills to complete specific job-related tasks but also with the cognitive skills necessary to enable them to think through their work. The result is an enlightened workforce and informed and thinking citizens.

Shared responsibility

Companies do not create these programs individually; rather, the programs result from and are supported by a partnership of government, business education and labor—all of which see the education of the workforce as central to the health of the nation. These programs create a holistic view of social responsibility. In Denmark, the common view is that when education fails for the least of society, the society cannot succeed. For example, partnership members follow through with each youth, offering a range of education and training options, available whenever the individual is ready and able to participate.

In Denmark, 85 percent of job training costs is paid for by the government. The remaining 15 percent is paid for by individual companies, even if they do not participate in the program. The training period lasts for an average of 26 months, during which students alternate between periods of in-class instruction and work-based training, all of which is free to most students.

In West Germany, we saw a comprehensive approach to the development of its workforce: national and state regulations

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cover training, curricula and criteria for examination. The student, of course, bears the ultimate responsibility for passing final exams and proving satisfactory performance of required tasks. All exams are nationally recognized, providing a valid and transportable credential. In addition, further exams are both available and required if an individual wishes to progress within his or her field or pursue advanced education.

This combination of theory and practice, complemented by opportunities for skill enhancement, ensures that all employees, at all levels, are kept abreast of technological and theoretical changes.

The City Colleges' Career Prep Initiative is the result of the lessons learned during the European study tour and is built on the solid partnerships already forged by Productive Chicago. CPI will institute new initiatives aimed at transforming the way City Colleges, industry and labor currently prepare students for the workforce. It will push the focus of vocational training from the short term to the long term. Programs created to prepare students for one job are too often dead ends. Certificates and diplomas earned are rarely applicable toward continuing education or career development programs.

Without their integration into educational or professional advancement systems, vocational training programs will not prepare the workforce of tomorrow. They offer no future for graduates. Envisioned differently, the training itself becomes the first step in gainful employment and advancement opportunities. By working in conjunction with and in response to the needs of business and labor, workers will be better prepared for the current job market and more broadly trained to facilitate progressions in their careers and within the company at which they are employed.

In five years' time, we expect to see CPI programs operating in major career clusters throughout the city, the region and the state. Students will have transferable skills, portable credentials and experience in the workplace.

Reform misses boat by snubbing students

by Gary Goldman

It appears as though parents, teachers and administrators in Chicago are beginning to see that they need to listen to each other and work together to change schools in ways that matter. When are these adults going to see that they need to listen to and involve students as well? If collaboration among adults is good, how could collaboration involving students, the ultimate workers in a school, not be better? As Willis J. Furtwengler insists, "For effective change to occur, the involvement of students in the change process is essential."

Furtwengler was, during the 1980s, a consultant to more than 120 schools for school improvement projects. He developed a strategy for change that worked in school after school. A number of factors made up each success, but one key was always the students.

"The strategy works, because students are defined and treated as members of the school organization, not simply as 'clients,'" Furtwengler wrote in the December 1985 issue of Phi Delta Kappan. "Both formal and informal student leaders [take] part in the schoolwide change efforts."

At the high school level, our own Chicago School Reform Act promised some of this student involvement: each local school council has a student member. However, the student is a nonvoting member and, unfortunately in too many councils, is also an invisible member. As one student wrote last year: "At first I was really excited about having a local school council. I wanted to try and make a difference in education. This would be a great chance to change the Chicago Public Schools." "Now I am asking: What really is my position as the student on our LSC? At today's meeting the assistant principal was passing out information. She made the comment that the information was for the people on the LSC. I did not get anything."

Chicago students are trying to change their role in school change. The council students last year formed The Student
LSC Representative Coalition. The first group received leadership training from my organization, Quality Improvement Associates, and supplementary assistance from Citizens Information Service. One student said after the training, “Now I will be heard at the LSC meetings.” Let us hope so.

Further, the coalition created seven student action teams: Teachers United with Students, Good News, Security, Student Leadership, School Policy, Curriculum and Materials, Lobbying. The students are now, for example, lobbying the state Legislature for a new provision in the Reform Act: voting privileges for student LSC reps.

Reform adults’ attitudes

I was involved earlier in another student empowerment project—at Chicago Vocational High School on the South Side, the second largest school in Chicago, with more than 3,000 students and more than 200 teachers.

A few years ago the principal, Roosevelt Burnett, had a vision of change. A hundred students were invited to discuss the needs of the school. “You have a responsibility to make CVS a little better because you’re here,” Principal Burnett told them. “You have the power to transform the school.”

They identified key issues. Teams of students conducted community surveys, schoolwide assemblies, parent involvement meetings, elementary school motivation visits, fund raising, school beautification projects and peer helping. The teams also removed graffiti, painted bathrooms and posted student volunteers at strategic points in the halls to monitor security. They called themselves U.S., for United Students. They came to realize they had to take responsibility if change was to occur.

Parents were stunned at the turnaround. Betty Porter, PTA president at the time, stated, “Students are trying to upgrade the school. It’s important for parents to roll up their sleeves and help out.”

We are expanding the student leadership idea at CVS. This year the emphasis is on outreach into the local community: to heighten student awareness of businesses in the community, to make employment opportunity contacts and to heighten business awareness of resources and needs at CVS.

It is also important for students at the elementary school level to be involved in leadership training and school improvement. We cannot begin too early giving students opportunities for thinking critically and solving problems in their own environments. Such experience will serve them and their schools well throughout their entire school years.

I consulted with Ora B. McConner, Subdistrict 6 superintendent, for a seven-week pilot leadership program in elementary schools. The students identified goals for their own home schools and outlined plans for attaining these goals. They also interviewed staff and administrators at District 6 and Project CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning) to explore what makes a good leader. McConner concluded that these students were now much more ready “to assume a role consistent with the student empowerment intent of the Chicago Reform Act.”

For school reform to truly work, we adults need to reform our own beliefs and attitudes about the abilities of our students. From my experiences with Chicago students, I know they are able and ready to commit time and energy to working for change with parents, teachers, administrators and community. Finding ways to bring them in as partners will help us move much more quickly and intelligently toward schools that serve students well.

Gary Goldman is senior associate at Quality Improvement Associates, a consulting firm.
For determined students
U.S. schools beat Japanese

by Nora Carrera

From reading newspapers and magazines the last several years, you'd think that Japan has all, or at least a lot of, the answers to our problems.

Last summer I spent three months in Onomichi, Japan as a representative from the American Field Services. I got a good look at the Japanese school system and returned home with a much greater appreciation of ours here in Chicago.

In Japan, students go to school punctually from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., except on Saturday, when the school day ends at 12:45 p.m. Parents are very strict about their children's attendance and homework.

Total respect is shown toward the teacher. During class the teacher presents the lesson through a lecture, then returns the homework or test from the previous day. The teachers rather than the students move from class to class, and the subjects rotate through the week. In the class there is no discussion. Students' questions or confusions are addressed by a hired tutor or in an after-school study group.

Students clean school

At the end of the day the students clean the school. Each student is assigned to a section of the school: classroom, stairs, teachers' offices, bathroom or outside. Almost every student participates in a club that starts at 6 p.m. Their clubs are organized around math, science, English, art, band, Kendo (Japanese fencing), judo, tea ceremony, flower arrangement and sports. Evenings are devoted to homework.

Every student has to go to summer school. Students cannot have a job until college because it interrupts their schoolwork; they cannot drive until they are the college because it would distract them from school. High school and testing into a good college are paramount. College itself seems almost secondary. That is, if you test into a good college you're pretty much assured of getting a good job when you graduate from college, which is the ultimate goal. So it is of utmost importance to get into a good college.

Therefore, Japanese students are pressured from an early age to study. They must constantly pass tests to be promoted from elementary school to high school to college. Promotion to a less prestigious school will likely be an embarrassment to one's family. Parents are so obsessed that their children do well that they sometimes go to tutoring school with them. Students are used to going to school and studying because they have to succeed. To not "make it"—to not attain a highly paid position—is very disappointing and may lead to emotional problems. Therein lies a major problem. Students are so pressured that sometimes they cannot cope with failure. Japan has a high rate of suicide among teenagers.

Diversity a plus

Ability grouping does not exist inside Japanese schools. Students are all at their one level—that is, no advanced placement classes, no honors, no regular, no essential. For the student who studies well, it's not too hard. For many students, it's difficult, and parents have to pay a tutor.

In this country we could well use more student respect for teachers, more strict parental discipline and concern and a greater value placed on school and knowledge by the student. But there is certain something stimulating about our Chicago schools, even with their flaws.

Here we have a variety of classes from which to choose. In those classes we are encouraged to challenge, to discuss, to ask questions. When we need help, we can talk with our teacher on a one-to-one basis, or ask for a tutor provided by the school at no charge to student or parent. Various learning styles within

Nora Carrera is an honors student at Senn High School. She is president of Key Club and of Aspira Club.
each school are often addressed imaginatively. We share our
time and our knowledge with a range of ethnic groups.
As students we can choose among many clubs, or choose
to be in no club. We can hold after-school jobs; certain
school work programs even help us obtain jobs. Our summer
vacation may be long, but it helps us release stress, partici-
pate in special programs and enjoy being young.

All of this helps us learn, I believe, more about the subject
matter, about ourselves, about others, about the world. It
expands our horizons, our interests, our knowledge. It teach-
es us independence and responsibility. We mature. We are
better ready for our future in a diverse and democratic soci-
ety. For students with desire and determination, Chicago is
the place to be.

Letters

Need better sales job
for alternative schools

I read with much interest “Education
Flowers in New York Ghetto” (CATALYST,
November 1990). For the last 10 years I
have been in close touch with the schools in
New York District 4.
Its alternative schools are outstanding—
on a par with a high quality private school.
Sadly, however, little of their philosophy and
practices have influenced the other schools in District 4. There are only three
alternative elementary schools in the dis-
trict, Central Park East 1 & 2 and River
East. All the remaining elementary schools
use basal reading texts, workbooks and tra-
ditional methods. Some of these schools
are very poor indeed. It follows that some
of the junior highs are, too.
The saddest thing of all is that many of
the parents whose children must need the
quality of education they could get in the
alternative schools are fearful of them. I
used to plead with parents to send their
children to Central Park East, and they
would say, “You don’t understand. Hispanic
children (or African-American children)
ned structure,” or “I want my child to have
discipline and respect his teacher.”
If we are to change education in the
direction of Central Park East, we must do a
better job of explaining why that kind of edu-
cation is right for all children. And we must
adapt to and respect the fears of these par-
ents who so desperately want their children
to be part of the American mainstream.
One thing that means a great deal to
minority parents is that their child’s teacher
should be a good role model in dress and
department. It is not in the least necessary
for quality education for the teacher to
dress in blue jeans or for the children to call
him/her by a first name instead of Mr. or
Ms. Yet many progressive teachers seem to
insist on a kind of romanticism about life
styles that alienates the families who most
need them.
I want to add how very much I admire
the job CATALYST is doing. Its excellent arti-
cles have relevance for the whole country.
Julia R. Palmer, president
American Reading Council

Vouchers needed
for monetary, moral reasons

A new study by the Rand Corp. praised
Catholic schools as models of good educa-
tion that point the way to improving the
quality of education provided by this
nation’s public schools. The study said
Catholic schools are able to create a moral
and educational climate conducive to
teaching and learning.
“People say that Catholic and public
magnet schools work because they select
students who fit them,” but, said the report,
“the truth is just the opposite, that they
influence students’ attitudes and behavior
so effectively that most students ultimately
fit in.”
According to William Bentley Ball, an
eminent First Amendment scholar and attor-
ney in Harrisburg, Pa., many parents would
like to send their children to Catholic
schools but simply cannot afford it; he
would like to see states adopt a voucher
system that would promote freedom of
choice and competition.
Ultimately, though, the argument for
vouchers must be made on moral and
philosophical grounds. We cannot and
must not consider education strictly from an
economic perspective; we also must consid-
er whether our schools are helping young
people develop those moral and spiritual
qualities of mind and character that will
help them become virtuous members of
society. In this regard, public education has
been a glaring failure.

Business as Lady Bountiful

Much of school reform founders on the
matter of money. “You can’t throw money
at the problem,” we are told. But it is okay
to throw money at the Pentagon. I would
suggest that schools are more cost effective
than the military.
We turn older people off on supporting
schools by relying much too heavily on the
property tax to fund schools. We should
look instead to a users’ fee on stock market
transactions or an income tax on all who
work in the city.
But it is much easier to give Golden
Apple awards to outstanding teachers than
to confront the need for money. If the busi-
ness community wants to help the schools,
then let them work to change the tax struc-
ture and pay their fair share—instead of
acting the part of Lady Bountifuls who
adopt a school.

Gerald Adler, teacher
Kelly High School

Haven Bradford Gow
Arlington Heights

CATALYST/MARCH 1991
Recognizing the need for PPAC support, The Fund for Education Reform, which pools small amounts of money from some 20 foundations, is expanding its grant program this year to include PPACs. Last year, grants, which average $1,000, were restricted to LSCs.

And the Chicago Teachers Union has drawn up a three-year, $2 million proposal for teacher training and help in shared decision making and educational leadership. The CTU plan, crafted by a group of teachers, parents, administrators and university faculty members, puts the principal on the PPAC to increase the likelihood of its recommendations being carried out. The proposal is languishing before the Board of Education and a major Chicago foundation.

Top school officials “have been unresponsive,” said John Kotsakis, CTU President Jacqueline Vaughn’s assistant for educational issues. Olivia Watkins, assistant to Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough, acknowledged that the proposal “is on the back burner.” The school system doesn’t have the money now, she said.

A CTU poll of union delegates found that most teacher LSC members are satisfied with their LSCs, Kotsakis said. “But the union staff feels that most PPACs meet infrequently, with only occasional communication. There’s little time to meet and less time to share professionally. And even if the PPACs did meet, what’s the use of giving advice if no one listens or implements their suggestions?”

**Teachers are key**

“Thanks to reform,” said Kotsakis, “they’ve changed the place where decisions are made, but they haven’t changed the vision of how changes can be made. Do teachers lead their faculties? Are they the spark on the team? No.”

Hess of the Chicago Panel agreed: “Across the system, teachers have not been significantly involved in the reform process. In some schools, teachers are still seen as the enemy, the reason children are not learning.... [Yet] classroom behavior will change only as we involve teachers in decision making. Teachers are key to shaping proposals for dramatic change, for they will be the primary implementers of these plans.”

Writing in the November 1990 issue of CATALYST, Michael Kirst, a Stanford University professor specializing in school administration, said: “Perhaps the most worrisome part of the Chicago scene is the relative lack of involvement of teachers in reform activities.... Many PPACs are not well linked to either LSCs or the union and, consequently, are unlikely to help implement reform.”

Michael Kloonsky is a Chicago writer with two children in the Chicago public schools.
In their first reports on the second year of school reform, CATALYST’S diarists display new optimism. Note how many times the notion of “excitement” crops up.

Problems still, yes. But local school councils are running more smoothly now. Even after the Big One. The much-talked-about southern Illinois earthquake did not occur last fall, but the Illinois Supreme Court earthquake did. Without warning, the court decreed the Chicago School Reform Act unconstitutional.

What did the LSCs do? Typical is this LSC, at work after the court’s decision: “We decided to stick in there, if nothing else as a self-appointed council. We...decided to proceed with all our activities as if nothing has changed.”

Below you will find excerpts from half of our anonymous writers—parents, teachers, a principal, an academic, a central office “bureaucrat,” a community activist; most are local school council members.

Enthusiastic start, nagging problems

RAYMOND

Sept. 5 Back to school. I was delighted! The enthusiasm, the effort and spirit within the staff and faculty were at a high level. So high that I got excited. It was exhilarating to observe the intervention of staff with the children.

I could not help but think that 1990-91 would be a very good year.

In August, our local school council had decided that the focus of the year would be on the children (vs. governance).

ELIZABETH

Sept. 4 We have a new preschool program this year. Preregistration leads us to believe we will end up turning people away. I’m really excited about this reaching out to the neighborhood. It grabs parents and demands involvement with the school and their child’s education. It gets parents accustomed to and comfortable with coming into the school.

AMELIA

Aug. 7 Three of us LSC members have decided to have tea together once a month to plan how to get important things done on the council. With four it would be a public meeting; with three we can just be friends working on a project. We are concerned that there is a vacuum of leadership that will be filled by the loudest naysayers unless something positive is put into play.

Each of us decided to take on the leadership of one particular area and do the legwork to see that key people are involved beforehand. We will each vote our conscience as events develop. If we can get our agendas passed by the council, we should have some effective changes.

Aug. 20 The August LSC meeting went so well I could not believe it. A couple of disruptive persons were evidently on vacation, both from the council and the audience. And the “tea party” group had its efforts pay off.

The real problem now will be to translate council action into actual policy change. Our principal, Ms. Adams, is not very organized and does not basically like to do what the council says even if she votes in favor of the resolution. She talks a good story, but on the day-to-day firing line it is business as usual, with her own agenda uppermost in her mind. Ms. Adams tends to forget about what we decide to do, and the PPAC tends to ignore it.

We need someone to take the time to go through all the past minutes and see what was decided and never done and ask her about them. This is crucial. We have no one on the council doing it. If we cannot do some follow up on specifics, we cannot nail Ms. Adams on the particulars.

At our school we seem to have a legislature but no executive, or maybe it is that the executive is not a willing one, or the PPAC is a competing legislature run by a separate prime minister in the person of Mr. Union; and the council is hoping to have Ms. Adams, the figurehead queen, “rule” instead. It is clear to me that schools are not suitable arenas for political processes. The principals essentially can do as they always have, and the teachers will remain apathetic until it is truly their own plan.

In assessing the efficacy of school councils I would say that there really is no power to command change. There is only a forum for making ideas heard and considered and a slight bit of protection for the principal should she or he decide to do anything very creative for a change. There is also a supporting body for individual members who want to work for a particular issue and carry out the implementation themselves.

However, if it is true that all good things first begin as
ideas, the school councils are serving a good purpose. I can count at least 10 things that began as ideas in the school improvement committee that are not in the plan but that are being done, and the year will be barely begun when there are more.

Last spring, one of the departments worked long and hard on the school improvement plan, and we put all their suggestions into the draft. The principal cut out many of them. Therefore, our SIP is extremely watered down, but interestingly enough the issues being talked about this year as needs are those that came up last year in draft plans and were tossed out by either the council or the principal.

One problem with the school's departmental setup, as I see it, is that departments are tied up by strong chairpersons who kill innovative ideas. There is no democratic collegiality among most of the department members. The chairpersons, some of them good, rule the roost, and they stay in power for decades. The principal could change this, but she has not, probably because now all she has to do is work with the chairs and not bother to get to know anyone else. There is a kind of paradox here, however, because our principal does have some good ideas about meeting the children's needs, and she does want to get creativity into the teaching. But she has no clue about what the structure would have to be to give her control (or more control) of the curriculum, and she does not spend nearly enough time evaluating teachers.

We had reports from the LSC chairperson and from the principal and some excellent discussion about future areas of focus: school safety, fund raising, parent volunteers and SIP monitoring. [A joint PTA/LSC fund raising project later raised more than $1,000.]

Nov. 11 Today I turned in our school's annual report. Although it was prepared and presented in early October, our LSC decided to give time to members of the school community to peruse the report and add responses. No one did.

I think the annual report process is healthy. It provides a method for LSCs to review their practice and to assess their activity.

ROBIN

Sept. 29 At School A, the LSC voted last spring to spend some of this year's Chapter I money to pay teachers to attend staff development activities. I was curious to see how the decisions would be made this year about spending the money; here is how it worked out.

A group of teachers at the school expressed interest in a series of sessions with a university professor on how to teach listening skills to their students. So the professor went to a faculty meeting at the school to present a plan for this series. The topic was a popular one, and a number of teachers were interested in attending the staff development series. The idea of paying the teachers to attend the sessions was brought up after the meeting by a teacher member of the LSC, it was then immediately proposed to the principal, who concurred, and it was put in place without further ado. This struck me, certainly, as rapid action—but a bit informal and ad hoc. I wonder how the LSC, or possibly the PPAC, will react.

LAZARUS

Oct. 9 The Chamber of Commerce in my community sponsors an LSC night on what is happening at local elementary schools and the high school. Representatives of the various councils agree that decisions are being made and things are moving forward. Where principals have vision, the going has been easier.

The sad realization is that no big money will come from the Board of Education. Schools and their councils are on their own. One elementary school was raising funds to provide prizes for teachers who come up with the best projects.

Building repairs are needed. The ceiling in the high school swimming pool is in desperate need of repair. Students cannot take swimming classes although the course is required. On the first floor of our own school building, we have a serious flooding problem when it rains. One wag suggested that if it keeps up, it might be deep enough to accommodate the
students at the high school who need a pool.

Most of those reporting at the community meeting seemed awed by their own accomplishments. One school got a waiver to extend the day to teach reading more intensively. Next they got a science lab, then a science cart that can be moved from classroom to classroom.

At one school, teachers both new and experienced complained of being stale. A council member compared them to accountants and other professionals who always have to take classes to keep up with the competition, but he complained about teachers who would not stay after school for in-service unless they were paid the going rate.

I do hear some—not much—teacher bashing. Would that the council could give to their teachers the same kind of nurturing they want for their children? Parents and other council members should know that many teachers have bled for a long time for the school system, working under adverse conditions for years without reward or recognition.

With last year’s State Chapter I money, one council bought student furniture long overdue. The teachers needed desks but were willing to wait in favor of the needs of the children. This year the teachers are getting their new desks.

Another council seemed to need translation in Spanish and Polish, but fortunately next to no one comes to meetings, so they have not had to translate yet.

At one school the council has made it clear that union contracts and other considerations make no difference. The game is power coupled with ethnic solidarity. Radical changes have taken place.

Oct. 10 My spouse and I attend an open house at our local elementary school. The atmosphere is warm and friendly. You can feel the excitement here. Children of all ages are welcome. There are no chiefs here. The principal and the council members blend in with parents and other visitors. One council member says it took her a year to discover, but she learned that the principal knew about every child’s strengths and weaknesses. It shows. The children feel good about being here.

ELIZABETH

July 14 LSC meeting to approve budget. Previous council meeting, in June, could not muster a quorum. Seven members attended tonight; but, typically, it took 24 minutes after the designated beginning time for everyone to drift in.

I toy with the idea of amending the bylaws to read something about how long folks who come on time have to wait for others to form a quorum.

Sept. 22 Our regular September meeting began late as usual. Last year we waited as long as an hour for a quorum. Why can’t people value time like I do? This is a lament in my personal life as well. If something starts at 5 p.m.—be there!

Fortunately, a couple of other council members feel the same way. One introduced a motion to amend our LSC bylaws: If a quorum is not gathered in 15 minutes after the scheduled meeting time, all present are free to leave. The motion passed unanimously except for one No vote by our habitual naysayer. People around the table voiced thanks for this new rule; they believe a deadline would hurry them along. I guess these people don’t have enough on the ball to impose their own deadlines.

(Our naysayer does not always vote No, although when he does one senses it may be出于 habit if not out of thoughtless contentiousness. When not voting No, he is usually abstaining. His attentiveness and his attitude is summed up in one incident I recall. A vote was called on a motion. When his name was called, he replied, “Oh, abstain, on whatever you’re talking about.”)

Oct. 20 A quorum for our October meeting did not assemble during the 15-minute grace period; therefore, the meeting was cancelled, even though we had an audience and a scheduled speaker present from the Office of Reform Implementation.

LAZARUS

Oct. 15 In the evening, seven candidates for two parent positions and two candidates for two community positions on our LSC are interviewed by the full council. The degree of understanding among the candidates about school reform and related issues varies greatly. The disparity of skills and experience is also great. Still, we are humbled at the realization that so many fine people wish to become part of our council. As one candidate searches for a response to our question on what special talents she might have to use in the service of the council, one council member prompts, “How about mothering? That is a highly respected talent here.” The candidate smiles. She is among friends. Another includes in her special talents the gift of gab. Our council chairperson adds, “Me too.”

Somewhere as we pause between candidates and it becomes clear that we have spent hours where we expected only minutes would do, the principal excuses himself to call his wife and wish her a Happy Anniversary. One of our council members is also celebrating an anniversary that night. Dedication.

AMELIA

Oct. 15 Council meetings are going more smoothly than last year. It is all business and very little organization of structure and not as much out-of-control babbling on the part of members or the audience.
What we really need now is a program to help parents participate in the school in useful ways: hall duty, teacher aides, study hall monitors, tutoring, presenting talks on special topics in classes, and so on. Private schools require service of their parents. There is no reason public schools cannot at least ask for it. And ask hard, and make it a special requirement to get in if one is not in the district. Enforcement would likely be impossible, but surely some parents out of conscience would agree to a few hours a semester. If nearly everyone did, that would be several thousand hours of helpers. And better yet, it would be parents in the schools finding out what is going on.

One of the reasons, as I see it, that parents do not volunteer is their feeling that teachers have gotten so tight with their own volunteering. Also, I think if we had a nice open house where parents could meet the teachers before the report cards are there to make them angry, they might feel more a part of the school—instead of people who go with hat in hand to hear the bad news, or in some cases to look for the crumbs of positive news.

Could we get such a parent volunteer program off the ground? I think so. It would require a volunteer “incentive stipend” to someone who would organize and run it.

A head of volunteers could pull together some of the needs of the teachers and the contributions of the parents and channel efforts in the right directions. It would have to be a parent who is not working full time. But a stipend, I think, is absolutely necessary to get anyone to take on such a huge task. Not a salary, but something like $500 or even $1,000 for someone to take on a major amount of volunteer work and actually deliver a program.

**VALESKA**

**Nov. 10** During the first year working with my LSC, I sometimes felt frustrated because of the indifference of the rest of the members. Now, 13 months later, I come to realize that my fight was not in vain. With a lot of satisfaction I can see how some members have taken their positions with firmness and determination to accept the challenge, which means improving the education for a better future.

**LAZARUS**

**Nov. 20** Representatives of various organizations, in a panel discussion on Principal Evaluation and Selection, provide our LSC with a wealth of information and resources. Included are the Community & Management Assistance Program, which can provide volunteers who are experts in personnel hiring and evaluation; the Lawyers’ School Advisory Project, which provides information on what the law says; Leadership for Quality Education, which presents a collection of videotapes and handbooks to be used in training. We are encouraged to begin very soon to undertake the task of principal evaluation. We are told that the February 1 date is for the convenience of the general superintendent but is not the date required by law.

**ELIZABETH**

**Nov. 24** It was a festive week at Inner City Elementary School. Colleagues were cheerful and cooperative, children brimming with various degrees of holiday excitement and no LSC members around school grousing about anything. It was a rare week at our place.

**LAZARUS**

**Nov. 30** I attend an LSC evaluation session for an elementary school in our community. During the meeting, two facilitators work with the group. One is from the Board of Education, the other a professional change agent who lives in the school community. The Board facilitator chats amicably, detailing his long teaching past. When members turn to the serious business of the meeting, the Board facilitator buys into a rigid format for processing the group’s input and rushes to provide solutions not necessarily appropriate for the group. On the other hand, the community facilitator suggests an alternative format to the group which allows members to vent their feelings and to listen to each other. This format allows the group to reinforce the positive communication patterns developed among members over this past year and to formulate steps they would feel comfortable taking to improve the functioning of the group.

**AMELIA**

**Dec. 8** I think there are enough good people to man LSC committees to follow up on the crucial areas of concern. I am optimistic that things will continue to happen this year, as they appear to have begun to happen already. It seems that everyone is now agreed on the problems that need to be solved. Last year, most everyone was not sure what the proper issues were. They seem obvious to everyone now.
New board... new day?

RAYMOND

Aug. It was so unreal...like a dream. Here I am again arguing before the Board of Education (Interim Board) for greater input into the allocation of budgetary resources and greater share of resources going into the classrooms of poor kids.

The guardians of school reform have continued to politicize the education process and subordinate our children's (and community's) futures to City Hall politics. Shamefully, this is a hoax and hypocrisy masquerading as school reform. Who's really talking about school improvement based upon addressing the needs of our children, their development?

LEE

Nov. 21 The Board of Education hosted a holiday party for the workers at the Central Service Center. Everybody was invited—the top brass, the secretaries, the clerks and those of us in middle management. I have worked here over a decade now, and I can't recall a time when the Board extended us a similar invitation. Considering that the bureaucracy has been the central target of sharp and persistent public criticism, this was a bit of a surprise. Was this recognition that bureaucrats are people too? Can the recognition that we are not all actively sabotaging reform be far behind? Has enough blood been shed, and can the emphasis now turn to team building?

The party itself was a pleasure. I was warmly greeted at the door of the Board committee room. Inside, while munching on cookies, I met Dr. Clinton Bristow, the Board president. "You've got a tough job ahead of you..." I started to say, a little ill at ease. Giving me his full attention, he put me at ease and proceeded to tell me about the commitment he and the rest of the Board members have to the education of children and how school reform has got to work. His commitment and resolve came through loud and clear.

I was introduced to Dr. Ashish Sen, the Asian member of the Board. Soft-spoken and mild-mannered by comparison, Dr. Sen came across as the professor he is. "Public education must be turned around, not just in Chicago, but in the whole country...Without good education we cannot expect to be competitive in a global market place," he said. I could see that his heart was in the right place and that he had the intellect to grasp the issues. But I wondered how he would fare in what seems to me a very political environment.

I also met Mrs. Anna Mustafa, the Arab member. Our conversation did not get beyond the pleasantries. Looking around I could see that the mayor had indeed put together a "rainbow" Board. I felt this was a group of well-meaning, dedicated individuals sincerely geared up to do some good. They seemed to get along with each other and conveyed the impression that they worked well as a team.

I wondered, however, if the larger size of the Board would be a handicap in reaching agreements and whether it would become polarized along racial lines as other boards in the past. It would certainly help to have a Board that is more fluid and issue-oriented than previous boards.

I also got a chance to see the work space of the Board members. It made me feel I was in some exotic space. The offices themselves, while rather uniformly decorated and not too big, are nice and pleasant. I couldn't help but note how quickly the staff had managed to build, furnish and decorate the additional offices. I know Board members work hard and deserve decent offices, but I can also see why news commentators love to point out the roof leaks and broken windows at schools that seem to go unattended for so long.

I met Rev. Darryl James as I was about to leave. I thanked him for the invitation, pointing out that this was the first time any Board had invited us to meet them. "This is the Board that's supposed to do the firsts," he replied as he turned to talk to someone else. Well, Rev. James, I'll be watching.

As I walked back to my office, I wondered if this was the beginning of the new culture that is presumed to evolve when organizations go through a radical change. I also wondered if the top administration, much of which is new and from outside the system, will pick up on this and begin to build the team that is needed to help the schools.
Supernumerary High?

AMELIA

Aug. 13 This week I visited Pershing Road, and I am radicalized. The place is enormous. It has empty floors.

It occurred to me as I trudged blocks through a hot, dusty parking lot that one of these buildings with its empty floors and all the supernumerary teachers with guaranteed salaries in the school system should be used to set up a pilot school with volunteers from the university campuses to figure out model programs to educate the city kids.

Children could attend the school in various programs—one for the hard-to-reach behavior problems, one for the bright but learning disabled, one for the educably mentally retarded, one for training student leaders from across the city to go into their high schools and set up peer service programs, several for various learning styles, and so on. Each school could have a whole floor. The city could be as creative as it wanted to be—or should be—and teachers would not have to float around with union contracts doing nothing because no one school wanted them or could afford them.

There is space, there are needs, the staff is already being paid and the program could be monitored right under the eye of the superintendent. It could be called Supernumerary High—or, seriously, the Kimbrough Center for Educational Experimentation or, simply, Pershing Pilot Program.

Six guiding principles

ELIZABETH

Sept. 8 A memo from Pershing Road about AIDS education had an interesting enclosure with it: the mission statement of school reform and the Guiding Principles of School Reform. As I read each of these principles, I was forced to confront my real responses to each.

- All children can learn, given the proper school environment.
  Does this principle have implications for each LSC? Can the LSC guarantee a proper school environment? Not with the powers spelled out in the law. The LSC has no control over filling teacher vacancies, staffing special ed positions or screening youngsters for possible extra services. These are the areas in which our school falls short, and I am sure we are not alone.

- The purpose of the Chicago Public Schools is the education of the whole child. The school house is the center of this educational process. Each school is unique and functions as an individual entity.
  All schools are bound by mandates of the state and the Board of Education to the point where the control each local school can exercise is almost laughably small. Uniqueeness is impossible, individuality only minimal.

- The principal and teachers of a school, in cooperation with the parents and community, know best the potential and needs of their students and are, therefore, the best suited to direct the educational course of their school.
  How much are the parents and community equipped to determine the potential and needs of their youngsters? We all want the students to be more successful, but we have a hard time defining what this means. How best achieve success? The average parent at our school could not answer that question. The average parent on our LSC does not even have a GED (high school equivalency) certificate.

- The role of all nonclassroom personnel of the CPS is one of support to the school house.
  The LSC has no control over lunchroom, maintenance or civil service positions.

- The first priority for the allocation of all resources, both financial and human, within the CPS is the education of the whole child.
  Implications of this principle are frequently debated at LSC meetings. The lay members of the council often need a lesson in how putting a person in, say, a coordinator position instead of one-on-one with the children will enhance the children's education. On the other hand, a virtue: if this principle leads the administrator to have to justify a nonclassroom appointment, then it's a good thing; it inhibits padding of the payroll.

- The multicultural, multiethnic makeup of the CPS student body is an asset and a resource for enriching the lives of all students.
  The school system in Chicago is multicultural and multiethnic. All schools are not. For those schools that are, it provides a marvelous opportunity to capitalize on those differences and plan programs and affairs around the various races and cultures.
Red-tape factory

ELIZABETH

Sept. 14 We have a new computer lab this year—well, we thought we were to have one. The computers, ordered last spring, arrived. But the furniture, ordered also last spring, hasn't arrived. And the electrical network to run the computers is inadequate. The problem here lies with vendors, whom the Board of Education insists we use, who do not understand deadlines. Further, our vendor neither accepts nor returns phone calls. And the electricians seem not to care.

Much of what was ordered for our new preschool has also not arrived.

LSCs can't hire from the neighborhood. We've tried that. Pershing Road won't allow it. LSCs can't set aside union rules. It seems like every meeting last year some fruitful proposal was made that, it turned out, violated a contract. LSCs can't invest school funds. We've tried that. Local control? Hal

Nov. 10 Here it is almost mid-November, and the computer lab furniture hasn't arrived yet.

AMELIA

Oct. 10 Another delightfully ridiculous item from Pershing Road—a memo from Robert A. Sampieri. If community groups, he writes, want to paint rooms in their schools, they can do so only from a selection of colors approved by the Board, and they have to 1) get permission for particular scheduled dates, 2) purchase insurance, 3) be supervised by a staff member sent out by the Board, 4) fill in affidavits, 5) and so on. That should kill volunteerism in a flash.

In another city I was among parents who painted a school. All we had to do was one trial room for the principal, and then everyone was begging us to finish the entire school. The board of education never heard a word of it, and the teachers in newly painted rooms were happy and grateful to the parents.

This ruling can only serve to further alienate the Board from all the people it desperately needs to do many volunteer things for the schools that it cannot afford to do. I would think Pershing Road would have better things to think about than harassing parents who are volunteering time to make the schools more attractive for their children. The Board should simply be ignored.

OLIVIA

Sept. 28 One of my teachers brings me a form for the Great Books program she is doing this year with some of our upper-grade students. This teacher actively and voluntarily pursued the matter. It was her idea to bring this program into our school, and she took the training on her own time during the summer. All I did was give my authorization for her to receive the training and agree that we would implement the program with our students.

Now the people at the central office want specific information about our general student population and about the students who will be involved in the program. In addition, they want the signature of the LSC chairperson on this form; we are told our application will not be considered without it. The form is due October 1. This is all too much. Asking for LSC signatures on something like this just adds another layer we at the local level have to go through. I wonder if it's worth all this hassle. My teacher wonders the same thing.

Oct. 1 We received the preprinted class roster today and the attendance sheets which are to be kept together in a binder. No binders, of course. (They finally arrive October 22.) In the meantime, we are advised to use paper fasteners to keep the attendance sheets together. None are supplied by those who sent the attendance sheets.

Why not just print the attendance sheets in booklet form as has been done in the past, and save the money spent on producing the class rosters and save the money spent on purchasing the vinyl binders? No, that would have been doing it the old way, and all reformers know the old way does not work. None of the old ways work. Reform means never doing it the old way. Reform means change.

Oct. 27 I don't think anyone listens when we at the local level say we cannot meet absurd deadlines. They say they listen. They say they are concerned about our concerns. And then we get another outrageous deadline.

Nov. 21 There is a letter to the editor in today's Tribune from a CPS parent; it reads in part:

As of Nov. 8, half the students at my daughter's school still did not have their work books or readers. The summer school students received their books one week before summer school ended.

The parent suggests that Supt. Kimbrough straighten out the mess by getting textbooks into the hands of students before he addresses the issue of a longer school day or a longer school year.

I could not agree more, but the superintendent seems to be going in the opposite direction.

In the fall of 1989, there appeared a short blurb in the General Superintendent's Bulletin advising us that we principals could withdraw funds from line items in our budget by requesting that those funds be sent to us directly. We simply had to indicate our school as the vendor, plug in the correct budget classification numbers and indicate what these funds were for—such as 'purchase of instructional materials' or 'stamps' or 'admissions and bus fares.' Simple, but not to
be believed. These control people were actually going to let us have our funds? Well, it turned out to be true. I and many of my colleagues were able to pull out all of our funds for books and materials from the various funding sources. It was a godsend. For the first time since I became a principal, I was able to take full advantage of every dollar allocated to my school for textbooks, library books, books for recreational reading, equipment and other materials.

I spent 98% of my allocation for textual materials in mid-July. This was done by phone, using several 800 numbers. By the first day of classes we had all our materials. Every teacher started the year with sufficient texts, etc. All in place by day one, and all directly a result of having complete control of the funds.

Fast forward to the fall of 1990. I submit my request for instructional materials funds to be transferred to my school. Request denied. Why? We have gone back to business before reform. Kimbrough and company have decided that individual schools can no longer handle more than small sums for postage and the like. My instructional materials money must be accessed through the Purchasing Department.

Here's the procedure. I prepare a IO3C requisition, after verifying prices with the vendor. Purchasing requires that I add 8-10% for shipping, even though the vendor assures me it takes less than that for shipping and handling. Purchasing then sends the requisition to the vendor to verify prices. Wait, guys, I already did that! No matter. When the prices are verified (again), Purchasing issues a purchase order to the vendor who is now free to fill the order.

Unfortunately, sometimes this process takes so long that by the time the p.o. is issued, the vendor is out of stock. But we can't go to another vendor. Because we have a p.o., the money is now tied up with this particular vendor, who may take months to fill the order. We can't do anything about it. Meanwhile, the school waits and waits for its materials.

Please, Mr. Kimbrough, let us handle the funds as we see fit. If you fear they will be mismanaged, then simply ferret out those who do, prosecute them and have them put in jail. Do not assume we are all incapable of managing our own affairs. After all, that is what reform is supposed to be about—managing our own affairs. Isn't it?

ROBIN

Nov. 17 I hear a lot about the headaches the bureaucracy gives schools when they try to do things on their own.

At one school the LSC decided to hire a community organizer and several parent aides, using State Chapter I funds. However, when it came to getting these employees paid, they found the process immensely complicated and no rules written down anywhere. Different bureaucrats had different information about what procedures to follow.

To make matters worse, some of the bureaucrats concerned attempted to cover for their general ineptitude by denying they had said things they had in fact said and asserting they had said things they in fact had not, and by blaming school personnel for mistakes which had actually been made by themselves or their own staff. On one occasion, when confronted on these very issues by frustrated school staff and council members, a department head ended up shouting and waving his finger at those who had come to see him, rather than acknowledging or trying to resolve the original problem.

The parent aides were finally paid but only after having worked for six weeks, and then only by way of an appeal to members of the Board of Education and many hours of school staff time spent at Pershing Road endeavoring to make the bureaucratic system work. The community organizer is still working on a temporary salary, substantially smaller than the one agreed to when she was hired.

Part of the problem roots in incompetent personnel at Pershing. Part of the problem roots in an incompetent system. There is a cumbersome process of decision making at Pershing, whereby to approve a new staff position, numerous forms and letters must make their way up a lengthy chain of command and then back down again the same chain. Some kind of action or approval is required at each point, but there

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seems to be nobody whose responsibility it is to keep track of where on the chain the paperwork is at any given moment and ensure that there is actually a result.

In this situation, local control becomes almost meaningless. The local decisions are in fact carried out only with the cost of a great deal of extra effort on the part of council members and principal, and at the expense of the employees, who in this case happened to be loyal enough to the school to put up with this treatment.

**AMELIA**

*Oct.* Parents are mad at Pershing Road. How dare they cut our teachers when they know darned well we will be overcrowded in the fall and it will cause chaos to have supernumeraries there bidding their time, waiting for transfers, incompetent to teach the courses to which they are assigned. How dare they refuse to allow Channel One if schools want it. How dare they delay repairs, snarl us in red tape, hurt out-of-district trouble makers at us, cut off our buses, refuse to answer our principal’s letters. How dare they exist as a fat bureaucracy demanding that we come to them and present our grievances and then not even remember the scheduled meeting. How dare they refuse to go to bat with the state over the 300-minutes rule. How dare they do all these things and more and then ask us to rubber stamp their “need” for more people in their regional offices.

A parent LSC member gave a piece of advice to our principal. If she cannot get anyone at Pershing to pay attention to her polite communications, then call in the health department and call in the fire department. That would get Pershing’s attention; that would raise a terrific fuss. At least she should threaten to do do, if not actually do it.

We are tired of business as usual. We want action. Principals all over the city could begin demanding action with councils behind them. And things would begin to change. Principals need the councils to help them see that they should not take it any more. And they need the councils to back them up when they don’t take it any more. Perhaps this is the key to school reform. Rather than an adversarial relationship with the principals, there needs to be a united effort by the councils to prop up the principals and prod them into adversarial relationships with the central office.

**CARLOS**

*Dec. 10* The number of directives that continue to come from Pershing Road disturbs the professional flow inside our school. Just when we are working as a team (the LSC and the staff), another YOU MUST DO THIS BY SUCH AND SUCH DATE appears in the form of a letter or in the school computer.

The district office continues to call our school demanding information they themselves could gather as easily as we.

*Dec. 12* We received a memo asking for information regarding our principal’s vacation plans; it contained the words “to be approved by the district.” We constantly must remind district and central office personnel that the principal is accountable to the LSC.

*Dec. 17* Today I found out that moneys for our bilingual program have been frozen because of technicalities and disagreements with central office staff. These moneys were approved by the LSC, and the implementation of the program is critical for the benefit of our large bilingual population. Everytime we question staff in central office we get a lecture rather than help.

**A protest for busing**

**AMELIA**

*Aug. 31* I have been at a sit-in in front of the mayor’s office. We wanted to make a point about the buses. Under the new arrangement, only seventh- and eighth-graders will be permitted on the buses. These now half-empty buses are supposed to be saving enough money to pay the salary increases for the teachers. The parents committee to win back the buses included Hispanic parents, Asian parents, Afro-American parents and white parents. We were arguing that our cultural integration is being destroyed if busing is stopped, because many of these parents could not afford to send their children on city transportation through gang-ridden neighborhoods. They would have to drive them to school, and this was very likely impossible.

I was impressed with the group of parents there. We had lots of time to get to know each other because we had to wait for hours. No reporters would speak with us, and it took a long time for the mayor’s office to decide to let us speak with an aide.

The parents were devoted fans of our high school. They rapsodized about how it was “heaven” compared to the schools in their neighborhoods. As much as our neighborhood parents complain about security and safety and academic deterioration of the school, these parents thanked God that their children were safe, challenged and happy there.

I can understand our principal’s Statue of Liberty outlook when she hears from parents like these every day of the week. They were so different from the surly ones I have seen in her office demanding that their children be let in even though they cannot prove their residential address and even though their children cannot qualify for the special academic programs.
The parents at the sit-in had taken off work. They earnestly cared about their children's education and the school. They were emotional and articulate. After several hours, some of us were ushered into the mayor's aide's office; the others could not fit in, and their day seemed wasted. The aide was a bright, personable woman who had been a school principal. Too bad she left that post.

At first she was just being polite as the parents told their stories with many accents from across the Atlantic and across the Pacific and from south of the border. They talked about how their children were good friends with the black kids in the school, and they were so happy they were making friends with other races rather than thinking of them as rival gang members. The black parents echoed the feeling of positive benefit from the integration of the school.

As she listened to the eloquent parents talk about why they loved the school and what their children were escaping, the aide's politeness turned to genuine interest. She got a superintendent's aide on the phone and got him to promise to have a meeting with our committee for buses.

Monitoring plans fizzle

LAZARUS

Aug. 22 We voted in favor of our school improvement plan with the understanding that it was a work in progress. The LSC insisted on a provision to guarantee that we could monitor and revise the plan continuously. Our SIP is too long to be practical and too closely follows the suggested format set by the Board. It does need revision. At the same time, sections submitted by various departments show that serious reflection has taken place.

SIPs are not the old action plans that collected dust on some shelf; they are the living, breathing pulse of change. They demand to be heard. "Who will do what by when?" is the battle cry.

Oct. 19 The joint LSC/department chairpersons meeting convened. Unfortunately, none of the parent or community council members attended. Department chairs express their displeasure and urge that parents assume responsibility for organizing volunteers to help patrol the school, etc. What I hear beyond the words is self-righteous blaming.

Earlier that day our own department meeting reflected the same kind of disability. It degenerated into a gripe session.

Oct. 25 A poorly attended PPAC meeting. Not unusual. We meet on free periods, but not all members elected to the PPAC are free at the same time. It's a catch-as-catch-can process. At the meeting today we do very little that falls within the range of the possible for the PPAC. We represent a structure perceived to be in competition with the department chairpersons. "Who can do what?" is a valid question. Meanwhile, little or nothing is being done.

The monitoring of the SIP has fallen by the wayside.

Do-it-yourself summit

RAYMOND

Oct. 21 Groups such as the Local School Council Chairpersons Association, City-Wide Coalition for School Reform and the Parent/Community Council have held meetings toward developing a consensus for the next phase of school reform.

Today a group of 175-200 parents, LSC members and community leaders met at Malcolm X College to review progress made toward school reform and education transformation since the late Mayor Harold Washington called an Education Summit on Chicago's public schools three years earlier. Today's meeting was sponsored by the Parent/Community Council, a mechanism established by Washington to receive input about education policy and school reform.

The consensus today was that the most important components missing in the current School Reform Act and school reform process are: 1) money for the classrooms to equalize education access and opportunity for inner-city schools, and 2) consistent, legitimate involvement in school policy by parents and community organizations in order to link effective schools to community development efforts.

Key demands of the new summit:
- A bottom-up approach to school policy development by the Board.
- Fair and equitable distribution of state financial support for public education.
- Better police coordination to insure safe, secure schools; more health nurses in the schools.
- Rejection of Mayor Daley's plan to hire additional police for high schools and the Board's action to fire security personnel in the elementary schools.
- Respect for the roles, responsibilities and genuine concerns of LSCs and their individual members.
- No more privatization of Head Start programs.
- Bilingual education throughout the public schools as mandated.
- Emphasis on awareness curriculum that teaches and affirms the history of ordinary citizens, families and people from diverse national, cultural and economic backgrounds.
- Consideration (by the Board of Education) of terminating the superintendent for subverting reform and undermining
the authority of the local school councils.

- Reconsideration (by the Board) of teacher contract negotiations—to provide higher salaries for teachers and extension of instructional time from 300 to 360 minutes per day.

Gangs, violence

RAYMOND

Oct. 1 Today my nine-year-old told me that he had to learn the gang signs in order to avoid getting in trouble. Of all the things to be preoccupied with in school!

Beginning last spring, our school directed significant energy to issues of school safety. We believed then that every child has a right to a safe, secure learning environment. Weapons, drugs, gangs, unsafe facilities must not be part of the schools.

We established a joint LSC/PTA/Staff School Safety Committee. The LSC had already established a Safety, Health and Discipline Committee. However, we found fertile ground for cooperation between the LSC and the PTA and around issues of drug prevention/education, safe school zone enforcement, pre-employment training for students and alternative activities.

Our school was one of the first to have Safe School Zone signs erected. The process of building support for the effort involved outreach work with other agencies: city government and police department, local aldermen, Chicago Intervention Network of the Department of Human Services, Chicago Park District, CPS’s Drug-free Program, and a local community-based organization outreach staff.

Inside the school, the principal, the PTA and some faculty worked with the LSC. Our experience, like that of other schools using a similar approach, is that school improvement, effective school innovation, may be better facilitated by working to improve the learning environment before innovation.

We worked with the Chicago Intervention Network and eleven area schools to sponsor several activities: a safe school rally, a parents and neighbors social hour, etc. In June, the rally drew more than a thousand students and parents.

In addition, the LSC worked with the PTA to form a committee to plan the remodeling of a nearby Park District playlot during the summer and early fall.

We have used local external resources to establish an after-school cultural enrichment program, after-school sports, pre-employment skills development and auxiliary projects that support the classroom efforts while continuing to involve parents at our school.

AMELIA

Nov. 15 Our LSC agreed to sponsor a community conference on school security.

Dec. 18 A lot of questioning about the security conference. The problem is, do you address the issues and make the people in the neighborhood more scared and more worried about sending their kids, or do you simply pretend the problem doesn’t exist? Perhaps in less advantaged communities the issues would be directly addressed. They have nothing to lose. Everyone is stuck there, and they need to hang together. In this community, with people having options, we could lose. There is a committee to oversee this thing. We’ll see if we can allay fears or if we drive out the middle class and make more room for the tired and poor.

A couple of community leaders are quite upset about this proposed conference. What is the worst that could happen? We scare the middle class away faster than we already have? But we could gain some, too, by people saying, “At last they are doing something about the mess at the high school.” We’ll see. Perhaps it all depends on the tone.

LAZARUS

Oct. 9 A major fighting incident at our school. The students involved threw everything into it, including a fire extinguisher. It took the police to stop them.

Oct. 10 In the building early in the day a black girl’s face is slashed down to the bone on both cheeks. Her assailant, another black girl, is apprehended.

The administration announces that arrests have been made and the difficulties may have been due to a variety of factors—the weather, some trouble in the community, etc. Except for such vague references, the teachers are kept in the dark about what is happening. No meetings are called. No bulletins sent. Our students’ lives and ours are on the line for reasons never made clear to us.

This afternoon I compare notes on school violence with a former colleague. The year at his school has already been marked by violence—“24 stitches.” A killing occurred there last year. One occurred at our school a few years ago.

Oct. 12 A student is jumped at one end of the building while a critical stabbing, possibly gang-related, takes place at the other.

Yesterday, one of my students had a fresh bandage over one eyebrow. Today he’s being expelled: “found in the building with a gun.”

A knot of unruly students lingers too long at the lockers across from my classroom. I tell one his father had been in my class years ago. He tests me. “What’s his first name?” I give the right answer. He smiles. “This is his class ring,” he announces proudly as he points to it on his finger. I note he is
wearing at least one other ring on that hand. Ersatz brass knuckles? I don’t know.

His buddy returns to his locker long after the bell. “I was only two minutes late, but she won’t let me in,” he moans. “Will you write me a pass?” I compromise. “You write it. I’ll sign it.” He struggles forming his words carefully. I would have thought he was stalling had he given any indication he was a little brighter. While he writes, I ask, “Was your father in my class, too?” The name is not familiar. “How about my mother? She went here.” Her name rings a bell. He hands me the pass. “Is this all right?” He has written: “Please excuse because he was messing around in the halls.” His condor is amusing and disarming. I rely on a long-standing relationship with his no-nonsense teacher to respect my signature on the pass. I add in parentheses: “I’ll explain later.”

Toward the end of the day, a teacher stops me to ask if we can get gang-intervention people assigned to the building. She describes a fight she felt helpless to deal with outside her classroom earlier that day. Her anguish is deep. Some years before, her brother was killed by gang members in the community. The repercussions of his death turned her life into one nightmare after another. It is a wonder she can speak of the present crisis with such control.

That night the council chairperson calls. Since she returned home from work, she has been besieged with phone calls and home visits by parents and community residents disturbed by the series of incidents at school.

I think the stabbing is potentially the most explosive. The victim is in the hospital. He is Hispanic. The aggressor is black.

Oct. 16 The council meeting has attracted a large number of parents concerned about the school violence. The chairperson opens the meeting with deep regrets regarding what has happened and questions the value of what the council has done to date in light of its apparent inability to prevent the violence.

One citizen takes issue with the council over its despair at controlling the violence. He states that while it would be irresponsible of the council not to feel such deep concern, it would be tragic for the council not to realize the importance of work it has already done to lay a foundation for reform in the school. He reminds us not to lose sight of the vision we have set for ourselves and the school.

Oct. 18 The chairperson asks the LSC to consider the installation of metal detectors at the school entrance. I abstain from voting on the grounds that school is not a prison. The majority of the council wants metal detectors, and steps will be taken to request them.

Later, the juvenile officer in the building raises some important questions. Who will monitor the metal detectors? What are the legal implications of follow-up searches? Who will be responsible for them? Sticky issues.

Oct. 22 A fight outside my classroom.

Oct. 26 Another fight. Two girls this time.

The student stabbed earlier has returned to school. He has the look of death about him. Most of his time seems spent roaming the halls signaling commands to his associates.

Oct. 31 The metal detector was in operation today. Students funneled through one entrance, only trickling into the building. The tardy procedure was suspended to accommodate the delay. Attendance for the first two class periods was minuscule. Those who made it through the hurdles entered the classroom traumatized. One student had been detained when the clip on his ID triggered the metal detector.

Was this a fruitful learning environment? No matter. By 4th period the equipment had been removed, and any student could enter with ease.

School too big

AMELIA

Sept. 7 The council wants to start evaluating the curriculum this year. And parents are encouraging the council to do so. I basically think that if the size of the school could be cut, the curriculum would take care of itself.

Last spring we lost teachers because our enrollment dropped. I am willing to see it stay dropped, but I suspect our principal has a point to prove—with the central office and with herself—and compelling reasons for limiting out-of-district enrollment will be for naught. I think she wants to be the
torch bearer, the gateperson for the heavenly city of good education in the midst of chaos. She sees all the out-of-district kids as "the tired, the poor, the huddled masses yearning" for such education. The trouble is, we cannot deliver that education if the gates are opened and there is no discipline or control and no money to provide 300 minutes a day of education to the school’s population. If Ms. Adams, our principal, can get more than 2,000 students, she can have more staff and a higher salary.

As I understand it, each principal has a percentage of out-of-district students whom he or she can accept regardless of anyone else’s desires. So does the superintendent. And there are additional possibilities for letting more kids in by simply putting them on the list for special programs after the other applicants have been selected. Therefore, there is tremendous discretion on part of people who are not teachers or parents or even the programmers to load and load the school. With her Statue of Liberty complex, Ms. Adams cannot bear to turn away a child, and complains that even if she does, the district office will order her to take the child because the parents go there and complain.

For our September enrollment, we had a total close to the magic number, but not quite. So no extra goodies Ms. Adams wanted. Now, almost large enough to qualify for more administrative staff, we are very large but without the staff we need. However, we are also losing numbers, as parents decide to find another option in the face of the overcrowding.

At some point the values of the institution have to take precedence over the good heart of an individual administrator or the needs of a few more kids applying to be students there.

Teaching two languages

ROBIN

Sept. 29 At School B, an active community member of the LSC (an Anglo male) is much interested in promoting the idea of "developmental bilingualism" at the school— that is, all the children would be taught both in Spanish and in English. English speakers as well as Spanish speakers would become bilingual.

This idea was first presented last June, and a meeting of the bilingual committee is continuing the discussion today. Present were three parents, two of whom spoke no English; two teachers, one bilingual and one black; two community members of the LSC, both white, one of whom is bilingual; and a representative from Pershing Road. The meeting was conducted mostly in Spanish, with English translation.

It gradually became clear to me that the parents and the bilingual teacher were apprehensive about making changes at the school that could possibly alter its status as a neighborhood school. The Pershing rep tried to reassure them by saying they could begin on a small scale, for example, with a kindergarten in which children learned in both Spanish and English, and with a program for transitional students that would continue Spanish longer than is the case at present. The bilingual teacher was particularly concerned with the fact that a lot of children founder at that point, and finally said, "We should try to fix up the way things are going here already rather than try to put in something new."

About a school that would in effect teach two languages, I was struck by the comment of a colleague whose children have attended Hebrew day schools where there is a substantial amount of instruction in Hebrew. She pointed out that an extended day is actually necessary for this and wondered whether developmental bilingual promoters were taking this into account.

VALESKA

Dec. 10 At our LSC meeting we discussed developmental bilingualism. This seems to me a marvelous program, but many of the teachers opposed it. They do not have vision for our children’s future. Two of the reasons they opposed the program are: too much work for teachers, and not for our kids.

What they mean by this last excuse is what one teacher said: "This kind of program is only for middle-class or upper class or brilliant children." No. As a parent I am convinced that every child can learn, once they have parents and teachers who really motivate them to succeed.

Class visits, right or privilege?

VALESKA

Sept. 15 At our LSC meeting this week, our principal proposed a school policy that would limit a parent to two visits per quarter to their child’s classroom. I opposed this. I believe neither the principal nor the council has the right to make such a decision. Fortunately, this policy was not approved by the council, at least at this moment. I am sure this is not the way school reform is supposed to work; the school reform process should, instead, open the school’s doors to parents and community.
Oct. 13 A similar issue came up this week at an LSC committee meeting. Teachers want LSC members to get a teacher’s permission before the member visits a classroom. I disagree; as a council member I shouldn’t need permission. The discussion was dropped and the issue left unresolved.

Some of us parents are not at all popular with the teachers. We have been asking for better education for our children. The answer we get is that at schools teachers are professionals, and they know what they are doing. Our question, then, is: If what they say is true, how come our children are failing the school? How come our children are being emotionally abused at school? And you know what? They don’t have an answer for these questions.

North Central in different world

LAZARUS

Oct. 12 A faculty meeting was held to hear an overview of the North Central accreditation process we are beginning, a process we go through every seven years.

A guest speaker presented a video of the North Central process. The video showed a broad range of teachers by age. None was black. None Hispanic. The students shown looked attentive. The buildings were spotless. Everything worked in them. It was difficult to see the small video screen with the large audience, but I think I saw one minority student in this promotional video. I think he was black.

No doubt such schools have their problems. But is this a video for our school?

The Illinois Supreme Court stunner

AMELIA

Nov. 30 Today in the supermarket I bumped into one of the also-rans in the 1989 LSC elections. He asked, chuckling, how the council was and then laughed and said, “What council? Is there a council?”

LEE

Nov. 30 The court ruling. What a bomb! And the timing—just as the councils were all beginning to work and the emphasis was turning to the classroom. At central office, I got a call from a parent LSC member. She wanted to know what the implications were. Since I didn’t have the foggiest idea, I suggested she call the Law Department. “I did; they are all in a meeting,” she said. I suggested the Office of Reform Implementation. “I did; they are all in a meeting,” she repeated. Here was another instance where we at Pershing had no answers to a parent’s question—even though, as with a number of other aspects of reform, there are no simple or clear answers.

“Is there jubilation there, now that the reform law has been struck down?” Mrs. Lawson asked as I tried to explain that we too had just heard the news. No, I didn’t sense any jubilation. The place was abuzz with the news, but there was concern that the reform experiment may get derailed, that the hard work of the past year may have been wasted, that much more work will have to be done just to deal with the consequences of this court decision. But there was no jubilation.

ROBIN

Dec. 1 The topic of the week has been, of course, the Supreme Court’s ruling on school reform. I called a principal on a routine matter about noon on the day it came out, and before I could say anything, he said, “The news is good!”

ELIZABETH

Dec. 8 The recent court decision regarding LSCs was laughed at on Monday morning. There was a lot of good-natured chiding by teacher colleagues about now having the opportunity to steal my seat. Believe me, at our school no one wants the teachers’ seats.

I saw a member of our LSC as I crossed the parking lot this morning and asked him about this latest court action. He not only had no opinion but didn’t even know what I was talking about. He and others like him are responsible for running our school.

RAYMOND

Dec. 2 The court decision. I was annoyed initially. Then I thought about it. This challenge, if well responded to, will make the School Reform Act more solid—by improving the law and galvanizing parent-community support for effective schools and quality education for our children.

Then, I was annoyed again. Quality education in Illinois requires money. The impact of the court ruling at this point may well deflect our energies away from the question of fully funding education.
The downtown school reformers are all coming out of the woodwork—those reformers with more interest in the structure of governance than in holding teachers responsible for teaching, than in providing the teachers the resources they need to teach and children the facilities/environment they need to learn.

AMELIA

Dec. 6 It seemed unbelievable at first. And yet it was not altogether unpleasant to think of being finished with my duties on the council. I called another member, and we agreed we would never run again if they decided to hold another election. Everyone I’ve talked to since feels the same way.

It’s all up to the Legislature now, and there certainly are flaws in the law. The one-person, one-vote ruling should not be applied to councils. When I think about it, that was probably one of the major flaws in the legislation—that is, the idea that only teachers can vote for teachers, only parents for parents, only nonparent community residents for community members. If, for example, one-person, one-vote had been in place in 1989, we might never have had the teachers voting in the most cantankerous teachers; or the parents overpowering teachers and voting in the loudest, most vindictive parent-power advocates.

And if parents could have voted for community reps, they would have represented the neighborhood more widely. This is not to say that those on the council have not done their best and learned to work together. But the whole enterprise was flawed by starting off with adversarial groups on the council instead of those who best represented everyone’s interest.

Everyone is now cheering that it’s business as usual or crying that it’s back to business as usual. I think the decision may very well have been hoped for by an administration that is feeling the effects of stronger local voices.

It may just be that the decision will help produce in the future what we need: to have that strong voice be a group of those highly respected by teachers, community and parents alike, who could work together better for common goals rather than go through what we went through our first year in office with the incredibly adversarial setup.

Dec. 7 We are going to go ahead and meet in December anyway. We need to decide as a group whether to disband or continue as we await the final word about our fate.

Dec. 15 We met. We decided to stick in there, if nothing else as a self-appointed council. We reasoned:

■ The one-person, one-vote criterion is debatable. Who is eligible, for example? What about the non-neighborhood population? The majority of our school is out of district.

■ On January 8 the Legislature may do something about the voting. If it is tied to geographics, there will surely be a legal challenge immediately.

■ What will happen to all our decisions made before November 30? The state will have to “grandfather” them in or there will be chaos.

■ If questions of other parts of the law are included, the unions and the Board will be illegal too. I don’t think anyone wants to open that can of worms.

Wading through these murky waters, our council and our principal decided to proceed with all our activities as if nothing has changed.

LAZARUS

Jan. 2 In response to the recent Illinois Supreme Court decision, state legislative hearings are held in the State of Illinois Building in a tiny room inadequate to contain the scores of people who have come to testify on the issue of LSCs and proposed revisions to the legislation.

There appear to be two sources of tension at the hearings. The legislators want those testifying to provide the solution to the one-person, one-vote problem. Everyone testifies about something else. No one can cut the Gordian knot. The legislators are not happy.

The second source of tension is largely among those who testify. One rift appears to be between Designs for Change and some members of the black community. Another rift is between blacks and Hispanics.

Hostile references are also made to “special interest groups” who developed the original legislation and to “back-room deals.” The tone is unhealthy.

Most people in the overcrowded hearing room represent various LSCs throughout the city. Yet, after three hours of hearings, the only ones of the 60-some people who signed up to speak have been those representing the Board of Education, the mayor’s office and a variety of established organizations related to reform.

The hearings will continue over a three-day period. Ethnic and ideological rifts must be mended before any meaningful changes in legislation can be made. New legislation needs the cooperation of those who felt shut out of the first reform measure.

School reform legislation has moved Chicago light years ahead, but disgruntled voices must be heard lest the voyage be undone.
‘Murphy Matters’ goes door to door

The local school council at Murphy Elementary School, 3539 W. Grace, is building community support by distributing a newsletter in conjunction with the neighborhood public park.

Every three months, LSC members and volunteers from the community go door to door in Parkview, dropping off 2,000 copies of Murphy Matters, a two-page report on school and park programs and LSC activities.

"It lets the public know that good things are going on in public schools...those things that lead some parents to choose private schools," said Judy Gregory, director of Kidwatch, a neighborhood day care center.

Principal Harold Zimmerman said the school created Murphy Matters because the neighborhood doesn’t have a local newspaper to do the job.

Hitch LSC goes on the road

The parents of black and Hispanic children who are bused to Hitch Elementary School, 5625 N. McVicker, could not get to local school council meetings, so the LSC took its meetings to them.

Several meetings were held in Park District buildings in the neighborhoods from which students are bused.

“The people who came were very pleased that we had made the effort,” said LSC chairman John Stocchetti.

Principal Phyllis Charles said the council hopes to expand the outreach program and add special meetings for Hispanic parents who don’t speak English.

Phyllis Charles (312) 763-3736.

Fast start for Jones newcomers

Learning got off to a fast start this school year for juniors at Jones Metropolitan High School, 606 S. State, a business magnet school serving juniors and seniors. Incoming juniors attended a weeklong orientation this past summer.

In a sneak preview of life at Jones, students dressed in business attire and attended school for a half day, learning about their prospective jobs to see if they made the right career choice.

“The kids are used to wearing jeans and sneakers,” said Richard Tryba, the school’s Options for Knowledge coordinator. “Here the girls wear dresses and heels. They have nine class periods and are in school from 8:30 until 3:20. When they go home they have two and a half hours of homework.

“When you’re 15 you can get discouraged very easily,” he added.

Principal Cozette Epps Buckney said the orientation program also keeps students from getting locked into wrong career choices.

“The year started out much better because students knew where they were going and what they were doing,” she said.

The program was funded by the Chicago Public Schools Office of Equal Educational Opportunity.

Cozette Epps Buckney (312) 534-8600.

Foreman dispatches student ambassadors

To ease the transition from elementary school to high school, Foreman High School, 3235 N. Leclaire, sends student ambassadors to six nearby elementary schools.

Once or twice a week, 24 Foreman students visit seventh- and eighth-grade classes to answer students’ questions about high school life.

The outreach is an extension of Peer Helpers, a Board of Education peer advisory program for high school students.

“Coming students are sometimes told horror stories about life at high school,” said Principal John Garvey. “If peer influence can help them get a good start, it’s more likely they won’t drop out.”

John Garvey (312) 354-3400.

Gompers LSC members learn about learning

At Gompers Fine Arts Options School, 12302 S. State, local school council members are getting on-the-job training in curriculum planning and textbook adoption.

One or more parent or community member is assigned to each of five grade-level teacher teams that meet weekly to discuss curriculum. Over the summer, the teams wrote 50-page curriculum guides for each grade level to ensure uniform grading throughout the school.

“When we get to textbook adoption, the LSC members will be [ready]
because they’re in on the ground-work,” said Principal Blondean Davis.

Davis noted that the teams fulfill a number of goals, including planning for increased pupil achievement, educating LSC members about education and forging school-community partnerships. Teachers learn, too, she said.

Blondean Davis (312) 535-5475.

**Carver taps retired teachers**

Carver Primary School, 901 E. 133rd Pl., has overcome the shortage of substitute teachers by lining up retired teachers.

“Four former teachers are on call. They know the school and the teachers,” said Principal Alma Jones. “They have confidence in the school and students. We know that our lessons will be carried out.”

Jones said retirees can work only 100 days per school year, but most love teaching so much that they volunteer when they’ve used up that time.

Alma Jones (312) 535-5674.

**Fenger supports its young mothers**

Fenger High School, 11220 S. Wallace, offers a helping hand to pregnant teens and young mothers to help them stay in school.

Math teacher Carolyn Baskin keeps track of 65 girls, visiting with them during study halls.

Baskin tries to make sure they are eating properly and seeing their doctors regularly. She paves the way to social service agencies and psychologists who can help them take care of their problems. And she often helps the mothers find free or low-cost babysitting services.

“I use anything I can find to help them stay in school,” said Baskin. “Often these girls come from dysfunctional families. They need to know that there is someone they can turn to for help.”

Fenger’s Mothers Too Soon program is an outgrowth of two teachers’ concern about pregnant teens’ medical care and parenting skills.

Carolyn Baskin (312) 535-5430.

**Sabin adults take field trips**

At Sabin Magnet Elementary School, 2216 W. Hirsch, parents and teachers take field trips, too. They identify programs they might want to adopt and then visit schools to observe the programs in action.

For example, at Murray Language Academy, they looked into teaching Spanish as a second language. “We hope to develop a dual language program at our school,” said Principal Edward Peacock. The goal is for all students—those dominant in English as well as those dominant in Spanish—to become bilingual.

After their visits, the Sabin contingents write reports on how to incorporate what they saw into their school’s educational vision for the year 2000.

“It is the beginning of teacher empowerment, making decisions for themselves and determining what they need,” said Peacock.

Forty parents have joined the teachers on curriculum committees.

Edward Peacock (312) 292-5491.

**Ryerson grooms future teachers**

Ryerson Elementary School, 646 N. Lawndale, is working to meet a teacher shortage by encouraging its career service personnel to go back to school to become teachers.

The school gathered college brochures and financial aid information, and Principal Donald Schmitt contacted college admissions offices to help get advice for returning students.

“It’s very hard to get good teachers these days,” he said. “And it is important that black children have role models.”

Through the school’s encouragement, four staff members and one LSC member have returned to school to become teachers.

“I had done teacher’s work for 16 years,” said teachers aide Mattie Dillard. “So I figured, why not go back to school and earn a teacher’s pay?”

For four years, Dillard combined work and school and will graduate later this year.

“I am proud of all that I have accomplished,” she said. “I have encouraged everyone here to go back to school. If I can do it, anybody can do it.”

Donald Schmitt (312) 534-6700.

The schools appearing in Bright Ideas this issue were winners of or were considered for an Illinois Bell Local School Council Award (312) 727-3093.

CATALYST/MARCH 1991

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Updates

Reform leaders bid for alderman

by Tanya Bonner

Two leaders in the school reform movement—James Deanes and Ronald Sistrunk—are among 28 local school council members who filed to run in the city's aldermanic elections. Deanes, chair of the Parent/Community Council, has been a school leader for years. He was a district advisory council chair when Mayor Harold Washington tapped him in 1987 to head the citywide parent-community group. He also ran for Cook County Board last year on the Harold Washington Party ticket. Sistrunk, on leave as executive director of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform, was active at the schools of his eight children before he joined the reform movement.

Both Deanes and Sistrunk serve on two councils, Sistrunk as a parent member and chair at both and Deanes as a parent member at one and a community member at the other. One of Sistrunk's fellow council members has accused him of using their school as a campaign headquarters. Sistrunk denied the charge but conceded that he and some friends folded campaign brochures in the parents lounge.

The 28 LSC members who filed for alderman amount to only 8 percent of the candidate pool and about half a percent of the 4,336 parent and community members on local school councils. Even so, the sight of LSC members jumping into traditional politics has made some school activists uneasy. But others say fundamental school problems will be solved only through politics. And still others say that the city needs new leadership and local school councils are a good source.

Edna Pardo, president of the League of Women Voters, is among those who are uneasy: "We are not happy that they are intertwining," she said. "We don't want education to mix with politics."

"It's already political," said Barbara Holt, executive director of the Citizens Schools Committee. "The LSC was built from an electoral process. Members running a campaign and being voted in is all part of the political process."

Along with teachers unions and the PTA, the Citizens Schools Committee grew out of the progressive, turn-of-the-century movement to reform city governments, including schools. It was founded in 1933 to rid Chicago of patronage politics. "In order to get a position in the schools, whether it be a teaching or principal position, one had to be connected politically," said Holt.

But now, she continued, the problems of schools are so complex that a broader forum could prove beneficial. "Education is a priority to the LSC members, and they would bring this to the City Council, putting the issues into a forum where they could get help for schools," she said.

"One thing we do is talk about education," said Joan Jeter Slay, acting executive director of Designs for Change, which played a key role in drafting the Chicago School Reform Act. "But that's not how the dollars get spent. [Elected officials] hold the rope which controls the dollars."

LSCs get political

"Alderman can help the schools," agreed Johnny Johnson, an LSC member in his second bid for 37th Ward alderman. "They can lobby in Springfield for money." A former ward committeeman and community member on his council, Johnson said his previous political involvement "helped me help my LSC avoid pitfalls." He downplayed the stepping-stone potential of local school councils: "The LSC is concentrated in one particular school. Members don't get press coverage."

While some LSC members had the backing of their ward committeemen in the 1989 election, school reform leaders said that professional politicians generally stayed on the sidelines. One LSC member already serves in the City Council. Ald. Patrick O'Connor, chair of the City Council Education Committee, was a successful parent candidate in the 1989 LSC elections.

Meanwhile, a number of school reform leaders are promoting formation of a citywide association of LSC chairs or members to increase their standing in the eyes of professional politicians and other top policymakers.

Nationally, at least one prominent politician got his start on a school board. Former Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich, a leader in the campaign for school choice, served on the Hibbing Board of Education from 1956 to 1962, when he was elected to the State Senate.

Tanya Bonner is CATALYST's intern.
STATE CHAPTER 1
Paves Way
To Staff Increases

The number of teaching assistants, clerks and other nonteaching personnel in schools rose by 2,376, or 41 percent, this school year as schools used increased State Chapter 1 funds to augment their staffs.

In addition, the number of elementary school teachers rose by 888, or 5 percent, also due largely to State Chapter 1. However, the number of high school teachers dropped by 248, or 4 percent, largely because of a central-office crackdown on excess staffing. Enrollment was down 3 percent, too.

Staffing in subdistrict offices was virtually unchanged at 279, with 167 lunchroom workers comprising the largest group. Central office staff was down slightly, to 2,003, with 542 operations and maintenance workers comprising the largest group.

Total Board of Education employees rose by 3,504, or 8 percent, to 45,399. The staff is 52.6 percent black, 37 percent white, 8.9 percent Hispanic, 1.4 percent Asian and 0.1 percent American Indian. It is 70 percent female and 30 percent male.

The racial breakdown of district and central office staff was virtually unchanged—45 percent black, 40 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian. Indeed, it is virtually unchanged from 1987, when school reform had just appeared on the horizon.

The percentage of black principals rose slightly, from 37 percent in 1989—just before the first round of principal selection by local school boards—to 41 percent in 1990. The white percentage dropped from 56 percent to 52 percent. Hispanics continued with 7 percent. The teaching staff is 48 percent black, 44 percent white, 6 percent Hispanic and 2 percent Asian.

Figures in this update were derived from racial/ethnic surveys taken annually on Oct. 31.

SABBATICAL FREEZE LIFTED,
FEW TEACHERS SIGN UP

Frozen since 1977, sabbatical leaves of absence are now available to teachers for work on graduate degrees, educational travel or other skill-enhancing activities.

During the 14-year freeze, sabbaticals were granted only to individuals who had to fulfill campus residency requirements to obtain their doctoral degrees. Since the recent thaw—decreed by the new Chicago Teachers Union contract—11 teachers have requested and been granted sabbaticals.

Full-time teachers with six years experience are eligible. They receive regular pay, minus the cost of a substitute.

SUBDISTRICT COUNCILS
KEEPING SUPERINTENDENTS

Ten of 11 subdistrict councils have retained their superintendents for another four years. Subdistrict 1 on the Far Northwest Side was scheduled to vote Feb. 21.

One observer speculated that the council votes are a sign of caution rather than satisfaction. “My conclusion is that people are rather cautious because they probably don’t have the full grasp of just what the responsibilities are for that superintendent,” said Arlene Zielke, longtime Chicago school activist and now the National PTA’s vice president for legislation.

That was not the case in District 4 on the West Side, according to council co-chair Darthula Young. “We based our decision on Dr. [Major] Armstead’s performance, what he brought to the district and how accessi-

ble he is.” She noted, for example, he has arranged instructional fairs for teachers and parents each year.

IN THE COURTS:

- In a lawsuit charging racial discrimination, former Morgan Park High School Principal Walter Pilditch is seeking to recover financial losses stemming from his ouster by a local school council that voted along racial lines.

Pilditch said his salary dropped $25,000 a year when he subsequently became an assistant principal at Curie High School and, as a result, he stands to lose $20,000 a year in pension benefits.

Pilditch, who is white, filed suit against the Board of Education, Subdistrict Supt. Grady Jordan and the five black LSC members who voted against him or abstained, thus denying him the six votes he needed for retention. Pilditch’s ouster was marked by a student walkout and clash with police that left six students injured.

LSC chair Calvin Pearce declined to comment.

- The mother of a student who was shot at Orr High School, 730 N. Pulaski, is seeking $300,000 in damages in a lawsuit accusing the School Board and Supt. Ted D.
Kimbrough of “deliberate indifference” to the “wanton presence” of guns.

Roshawn Thames, 16, was shot in the lower back on Oct. 16 when a gun inside a student's bag fired accidentally. The incident happened a month after the city and board put more policemen in schools. The suit contends that school officials have not informed parents about weapons violations in schools, which numbered 652 between 1987 and 1990.

Citing a technicality, a U.S. Appellate Court struck down Milwaukee’s school voucher program. Proponents of the program, the nation’s first to provide state-funded vouchers for private-school education, are appealing.

The court ruled the program unconstitutional because the Wisconsin Legislature established it as part of an omnibus budget bill instead of by a separate piece of legislation.

MAYOR APPOINTS 6,000 TO KEEP REFORM GOING

Jan. 16 was a busy day for Mayor Richard M. Daley. With new authority granted him by the General Assembly, Daley made 6,000 school appointments, naming members to the Board of Education, School Board Nominating Committee, subdistrict councils and local school councils.

The legality of these officials was thrown into question Nov. 30 when the Illinois Supreme Court declared the Chicago School Reform Act unconstitutional. On Jan. 8, the Legislature passed a bill providing for mayoral appointment, pending new local school council elections.

BOARD EXPANDS SPEECH THERAPY

Under pressure from the federal government, the Board of Education has hired assistants for its speech therapists and contracted with therapists from private agencies to help cover long unmet speech therapy needs.

New to the board’s speech therapy service are 47 assistants (college graduates with degrees in speech therapy or pathology), 40 aides and 18 outside therapists.

The hirings were made under pressure from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights, which had found that the board provided inadequate language services to students with speech and language handicaps, to students who are deaf or hearing impaired and to students with limited English ability.

SCHOOL BOARD PUBLICATION REVIEWS IMPROVEMENT PLANS

In 69 well-crafted pages, “The School Improvement Plans of 1990: What the Schools Will Do” provides a narrative overview of the first round of school improvement planning by local school councils.

The Board of Education publication gives examples, both good and bad, of how schools say they will meet each of the 20 goals in their plans. For example: “Combining writing with public relations, students at Franklin will write to local businesses and community organizations to invite them to school events.”

On the other hand: “One school’s plan lists a 22-point program for raising test scores. However, many of the 22 points are so general (such as ‘eliminate student learning skill deficits’) that it is hard to see what will really happen in the classroom.”

The publication also provides roundups, noting, for example, that “about 30 percent of the high school plans express the intention to review or revise the curriculum in the future, but usually fail to give details.”

For copies, write the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning, Chicago Public Schools, 1819 W. Pershing Rd. 4W(n), Chicago, Ill. 60609.

REFORM GROUP SPREADS THE NEWS

Designs for Change, a research and advocacy group, is publishing Closer Look, an occasional newsletter on research and analysis of school reform progress. Issues will be two to six pages and go to some 2,500 journalists and policymakers across the country.

In a mockup issue, Closer Look reports, for example, that Chicago school reform nearly doubled the number of African Americans and Hispanics making educational policy decisions in the United States.

Nationwide, there are 4,500 African-American and 1,400 Hispanic school board members, the newsletter reports. In Chicago, there are 3,200 African-American and 1,000 Hispanic local school council members.

For more information, contact Abha Pandya, Designs for Change, 220 S. State St., Suite 1900, Chicago, Ill. 60604 (312) 922-0317.
Resources

Minority education watchdog. The Quality Education for Minorities Project, which conducted a major study on improving education for minorities, is now the QEM Network, an advocacy group.

The network has two functions: (1) collecting and distributing information on issues, policies, programs and resources related to the education of minorities and (2) assisting communities across the country in building state and local alliances to meet the educational needs of minorities.


Judging textbooks. Guidelines for Judging and Selecting Elementary Language Arts Textbooks is available from the National Council of Teachers of English.

The guidelines are based on the theory that instruction should center on children's own language, emphasize activities that focus on social uses of language and reflect the interrelationships among listening, speaking, writing and reading.

To receive a single copy free, send a request and a business-sized, stamped, self-addressed envelope to Membership Service Representative, National Council of Teachers of English, 111 Kenyon Rd., Urbana, Ill. 61801. Additional copies of the guide are available at a cost of $7 per 100.


The handbook is $5 per copy, $3 when 20 or more are ordered. Group training also is available.

For more information, contact Ani Russell, Chicago Alliance for Neighborhood Safety, 28 E. Jackson St., Suite 600, Chicago, Ill. 60604 (312) 461-0444.

Young children. A free catalog of books, kits, brochures, posters and videos on child care is available from the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

To order, write NAEYC at 1834 Connecticut Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, or phone (800) 424-2460.

Workshops, conferences

Reform Act amendments. Amendments to the Chicago School Reform Act will be the topic of a forum scheduled for 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. March 15 at the Community Renewal Society, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500. Roosevelt University is co-sponsor.

For principals only. A principals retreat is scheduled for March 2 and 3 in Lake Geneva, Wis., to explore such topics as reconciling the roles of educational leader and local school council member and balancing responsibilities to the LSC and the central administration.

Using community-based organizations as resources for schools will be the topic of a "principal fellowship" scheduled for 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. March 27 at the Community Renewal Society, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500.

For more information on the retreat and fellowship, contact Nelson Nove (312) 427-4830.

Student journalism. A conference on student newspapers at urban high schools will be held March 6 at the Quality Inn, 1 S. Halsted, and March 7 at Roosevelt University, 430 S. Michigan.

Topics include freedom, censorship and ownership of the school newspaper.

Costs are $30 for March 6, including dinner, and $25 for March 7, including lunch. The conference is sponsored by the Multicultural Journalism Resource Center of Roosevelt University. For more information, call (312) 341-3609.

African-American education. Two university professors and a public school teacher have formed School Tech Services to provide training to parents and teachers on African-American curriculum.

Workshops and mini-courses also are available on parent as school policy makers, evaluating schools and building and maintaining effective schools.

For more information, call Harold Charles (312) 548-0125 or 568-1243.

Heart health. Feb. 28 is the registration deadline for free teacher workshops being offered in March by the American Heart Association. Workshops will focus on heart health education materials for kindergarten through sixth grade. For more information, call Tammy Smoby (312) 345-4675.