Are achievement tests (a) the problem (b) the solution (c) both?

Alternatives to tests, page 2.
A high school's rite of passage, page 5.

It's testing time. Throughout Illinois, schools are sharpening No. 2 pencils for the annual administration of state reading, math and language arts tests. In Chicago, elementary schools are getting ready, too, for the Iowa Tests of Basic Skill, high schools for the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency.

In Springfield, the state superintendent of education is promoting a new school regulatory system that would put test scores front and center. Breathing down his neck is a business community that has gotten so serious about school accountability that it's hustling donations to fund research and advocacy.

And across the nation, a number of education-business-government coalitions are beginning to develop national tests to push schools toward international standards, which they fear grassroots reformers haven't even glimpsed.

To be sure, accountability movements are not new. Compared to earlier ones, however, the 1990s version is a grownup. First, it is not satisfied with nationally standardized, multiple-choice tests, viewing them as, at best, too narrow or, at worst, destructive.

Second, it acknowledges there is more to schooling than test scores. Acting on the recommendation of a committee of educators and business leaders, Illinois Education Supt. Robert Leininger is urging a yardstick that would include such school characteristics as graduation and attendance rates. Schools would be judged by their progress, a method embracing high-performing and low-performing schools alike.

Similarly, today's accountability movement sounds serious about giving help to schools that do not immediately succeed. It would, of course, reward schools that make superior progress, though there is debate over whether the reward should be paid in money or recognition.

Testing and accountability are minefield issues. For example, a South Carolina business leader recently told Illinois colleagues that his state's pioneering accountability program had been "too successful" because it forced schools to teach to tests that were not worth teaching to. South Carolina is now looking for new tests, he said.

In the following pages, CATALYST also explores testing. One article critiques what we have and proposes alternatives. Another describes an alternative in action in Racine, Wis. Another poses questions and answers about testing in Chicago.

Linda Lenz, editor
Tests’ for 21st century: portfolios, projects

Today’s tests are driving instruction in the wrong direction, according to a growing number of education and business leaders. The following article, an excerpt from the report America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages, points to some shortcomings of typical school tests and offers alternatives.

Late last year, two foundations—the Chicago-based John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the Philadelphia-based Pew Charitable Trusts—awarded grants totalling $2.45 million to begin development of a national examination system using these alternatives, already in use at some progressive schools across the country.

America’s Choice was written by the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce of the National Center on Education and the Economy, Rochester, N.Y.

Other sections of the report call for business reform that puts more responsibility in the hands of front-line workers, thereby creating a real demand for high-quality schooling for all students. Both business reform and school reform are essential for closing the widening gap between the country’s “haves” and “have nots,” the report stresses.

The United States is the most over-tested and under-examined nation in the world.

Most of the tests that American students take—standardized achievement tests and college entrance tests—are deliberately decoupled from the school curriculum. Teachers are not supposed to prepare students directly for these tests, and students are not supposed to study for them (except in “cram courses” that few believe have lasting value).

As a result of this testing system, American education does not clearly reward academic effort on the part of either teachers or students.

Properly designed, an assessment system should function both to motivate and organize students’ work during the school years and set a benchmark to which educational institutions could target their efforts. To meet these objectives, the system we at the Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce recommend should:

- Reward effort and organized work.
- Demand thinking and reasoning skills, preparing students for more complex work environments.
- Directly assess achievement [involving thinking and reasoning].

- Allow students to accumulate evidence of achievement and accomplishment, rather than relying on a single [graduation examination] to determine performance.
- Be administered and directed by an independent certification agency.

This commission proposes an educational system that provides clear incentives and goals for students, measures educational attainment and skills and rewards a student for effort and performance. The current educational structure in the United States does not adequately measure nor reward a student’s effort or academic performance. Due to the way they are
examined and graded, students are not held to a clear standard of achievement toward which they can work.

For students who do not plan to go to college, high school grades often have little meaning. Since very few employers pay attention to high school transcripts when making hiring decisions, what compels students to do more than the minimum required to obtain a passing grade?

Grades have more meaning for college-bound students, but grades alone do not determine a student's acceptance or rejection from the college of choice. Admissions officers look at performance on standardized national tests like the ACT and the SAT. However, school curricula are not directly tied to these tests. Students have no way of adequately preparing for them, save the cram courses that teach shortcuts but not subject content. Compounding this, teachers are often advised not to deliberately prepare their students for these exams so as to avoid being accused of giving them an "unfair" advantage.

No accountability

For either type of student, effort is not tied to results. Currently, no one can be held accountable for how students perform in school. If students who barely make it through the system receive the same reception in the workplace as those who really put forth an effort, is it surprising that some students do not take their education seriously?

An examination-based certification system can fundamentally change this. At the heart of such a system must be a series of examinations for which students can explicitly prepare, with teachers serving as their coaches, mentors, and allies.

Like other industrialized countries in the 19th century, the United States developed two different levels of educational expectation—one for an academic elite, the other for the rest of the population. The majority of students was expected to learn routine skills, simple computation, reading of predictable texts and reciting civic or religious codes. They were not expected to learn higher-order functions of thinking and reasoning.

These goals were reserved for the elite, originally in separate high schools and more recently in college preparatory programs in our comprehensive schools. The curriculum most Americans are exposed to gives them little chance to learn to construct convincing arguments and to understand complex systems.

A thinking-oriented curriculum for all constitutes a significant new educational agenda. While it is not new to include thinking, problem solving and reasoning in some students' school curriculum, it is new to include it in everyone's curriculum. It is new to aspire seriously to make thinking and problem solving regular aspects of the school program for the entire population, including minorities, non-English speakers and children of the poor. To meet the challenge, we must have an achievement certification system in which the examinations assess the kinds of high-level competencies to which we aspire. Current forms of testing do this very poorly.

The system of [achievement that focuses on routines rather than thinking] forms the basis for testing theory and practice even today. Multiple-choice tests reflect a view of learning which is based on the proposition that knowledge and skills can be broken into discrete parts.

Standardized tests used for secondary school students favor superficial answers not based on real understanding over those requiring thoughtful analysis. For example, reading sections require students to absorb a 300-word passage and then answer five or eight content-related questions in the space of six minutes. In math sections, students are faced with a string of unrelated math problems, which they must solve at a rate of about one per minute. As with all multiple-choice exams, the only way for a student to receive full points for an answer is to shade in the appropriate circle. There is no possibility for partial credit, even if the student's flow of logic was correct up until the last step in solving the problem.

'Grade level' means little

As it exists, the testing system this country uses to measure its students discourages the development of higher-order thinking. The result is that the system puts out people well-suited to the online work environments in which many will find themselves. But we see work organization heading in another direction, a direction that will necessitate continual learning on the job.

We need a different kind of examination to assess the abilities we view as necessary. Indicators of competence, tests that predict how well someone might do on a direct achievement assessment, cannot motivate an effort-oriented educational system. Nor can "grade-level" standards help.

Scoring at grade level means only that at least half of the people in your grade who took the same test scored worse than you did. The tests provide a distribution of scores so that students can be ranked in comparison with one another. But they do not establish a standard of competence. They say nothing about what a student knows or is able to do.

To establish an achievement certification system that can organize academic effort and communicate clearly to the public what students have accomplished, we need to determine what students ought to know and be able to do when they
leave school and then arrange to directly examine students’ command of that knowledge or skill.

The three Ps

Three kinds of examinations can be used:

- **PERFORMANCE EXAMINATIONS.** The Olympics and the performing arts use this type of examination to determine an individual’s qualifications. It is equally well-suited to assess academic ability and effort. This exam differs fundamentally from the multiple-choice kind of test in that it measures process as well as end product and it has no elements of surprise. Students taking these exams are aware of the type of performance expected of them, and they are able to take the necessary steps in preparation. Teachers can prepare students for the exams, acting as coaches and mentors, rather than adversaries.

  In the system we envision, both traditional academic and more practical performance would be assessed. For example, practical literacy might be assessed by asking [students] to assemble equipment following the written instructions and diagrams; and ability to work with others in making decisions might be assessed by rating candidates’ performance in an economic simulation game.

  Performance examinations could be carried out either in a live setting, with a team of judges grading specific features and overall quality of the performance or the product of the performance.

- **PORTFOLIO EXAMINATIONS.** This form of examination is modeled on methods of assessment used in the visual arts in which a team of judges rates students’ products on several different criteria. Certain academic skills, especially writing, are well-suited to this type of assessment, as timed exams impose unnatural constraints and do not accurately capture a students’ true ability. Current experiments show that this type of test can have direct educational value: By working with their teachers in selecting work for inclusion in the portfolio, students build explicit understanding of standards.

- **PROJECT EXAMINATIONS.** The third form of examination evaluates extended participation in learning. These examinations are the best way of assessing motivation and social skills because judges evaluate a record of candidates’ extended participation in a task with real meaning and consequence in the world. For example, students might undertake an extended applied science project such as designing a bridge, conducting an investigation of an aspect of community life or planning and carrying out a construction project. Students would be required to document the major steps taken, tasks would sign off and rate the project at designated stages and a final grade would be determined, taking into account a whole range of criteria.

  Any of these examinations taken alone would serve to provide a clear link between effort and assessment, measurable by the student, the teacher and the community at large. A combination of the exams, depending upon the skills or knowledge to be measured, would provide an even better picture of a student’s achievement.

  These examinations should be viewed as building blocks rather than high-stakes moments of possible failure. The achievement certification system we propose should permit students to assemble certification credentials over a period of years, perhaps beginning as early as entrance into middle school. This kind of cumulative certification has several advantages over a single point-of-exit (or graduation) examination:

  - It helps to organize and motivate students over a period of years. Rather than preparing for a distant examination whose form and demands can be only dimly imagined by the 11- or 12-year-old, students can begin to collect specific certifications.

  - It provides multiple opportunities for success. Cumulative certificates are our best shot at drawing in the presently undereducated and undermotivated.

  - A cumulative credentialing system, because of its transferable nature, permits students who are not being well-taught in the mainstream educational system to earn their credentials under other institutional auspices.

  - This system avoids the problem of minimum credentialing standards becoming functionally the maximum. Students who complete the base certifications early in their schooling can start working on advanced certificates—either in schools and colleges or in workplace training sites.

  - A cumulative system will avoid the phenomenon of “examination hell”—a year or two of high-tension devotion to nothing but exam study—that plagues several countries (such as Japan and France) that have single point-of-school-exit examinations.

  Credentials and certification should be determined by an organization independent of school systems and free from political influence. The governing board of this organization should be broadly representative of educators, employers and the citizenry at large. Under the board’s general oversight, working commissions in several knowledge and skill areas should determine appropriate skills and knowledge for certification standards, establish the performance, portfolio and project examinations procedures and oversee the professional and objective nature of the judging of these exams.

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**On the other hand**

Multiple-choice tests came in for a verbal beating at a recent conference on Chicago school reform. While acknowledging their shortcomings, Lloyd Bond, a University of North Carolina professor and 1960 graduate of Carver High School, noted they have some strengths, too.

“Thier uniformity in content and administration allow comparisons that teachermade tests do not,” he said. “They can tell us more efficiently and inexpensively than virtuarily, any other alternative the extent of students’ vocabulary, their knowledge of good English usage, their ability to comprehend texts, their skill in solving well-structured mathematical and scientific problems and their ability to compute accurately.”

Bond also addressed long-standing allegations of test “bias” against minorities. He said he is not a fan of that word “because it suggests minority children are being taught as well as white children but that the ‘lousy tests don’t show it.’”

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4 CATALYST/APRIL 1991
Rite of passage puts teens to test

by Lorraine V. Forte

Graduating from Walden Ill, an alternative public high school in Racine, Wis., takes more than passing final exams and accumulating course credits. Earning a diploma might mean showing off skill at juggling, writing a research paper on the Manhattan Project or igniting a flamethrower to demonstrate the theory of combustion.

These are examples of what Walden graduates have done to fulfill requirements of the Rite of Passage Experience, a demanding, yearlong program through which seniors must demonstrate—both in writing and through presentations—knowledge and proficiency in 16 subject areas.

The program, called ROPE for short, has gained Walden national recognition. Theodore Sizer, a Brown University education professor, named Walden to his nationwide “Coalition of Essential Schools” network in 1986—partly because it requires “exhibitions of mastery” in various subject areas.

Bulging portfolio

ROPE is aimed in part at teaching children that education is a lifelong process, “not just to get a grade and then be done with it,” said Judy Doherty, one of three teachers who teach the ROPE preparatory course. “Our kids will walk out of here with the experience of explaining what they know. It improves their ability to get across their ideas and prove themselves, makes them set more goals for themselves.”

ROPE grew from a program Walden offered 20 years ago, when the school opened, to help students who were not earning enough credits to graduate on time. Two former principals expanded the program to its present form, which requires students to prepare a portfolio that includes an autobiography, a bibliography of the books the student has read during high school, two book reports, letters of recommendation, and essays and reports on work, ethics, art and mass media. The portfolio’s science section must include a summary of the student’s coursework, a written description of an experiment and essays on the social impact of science and technology and on the nature and use of computers. A major research paper on some aspect of American history also is required.

Students make oral presentations on their portfolios and submit their research papers to review panels that include two teachers, an adult from the community and another student, who cannot be a fellow senior. Additional presentations also must be made in math, American government and geography. In the nonacademic arena, students must demonstrate a personal skill such as playing the piano or juggling and make a presentation about social and practical skills for everyday life.

Students prepare their portfolios and presentations during the ROPE class, which meets for the first half of the year. Punctuality in finishing work is stressed, Doherty said, as an antidote to the school’s relaxed attitude toward rules and regulations, which is immediately evident by the lack of bells and first-name basis between students and teachers.

While the review panel gives a final grade and a written evaluation, its goal, too, is to help students learn and think, said Principal Charles Kent. “If they find a student really doesn’t have a handle on something, they’ll give an assignment or a reading to try and teach him to think about it.”

Size a problem

Walden doesn’t concern itself with test scores, but students have gotten good ones anyway. In the 1989-90 school year, college-bound Walden seniors achieved an average ACT score of 23.4 (out of 36), compared to 21.3 for Racine’s other high schools and 21.8 for Wisconsin as a whole.

Between 40 percent and 80 percent of each graduating class goes on to college.

The methods of instruction at Walden are standard, say Kent and others, but marked by heavy doses of personal attention to students and a positive attitude toward learning. “I like to think it’s the teachers we have and the way we do things,” said Al Clausen, a music teacher who also teaches ROPE. “It’s not so much the content [of what we teach], it’s the atmosphere.”

Racine Schools Supt. Don Woods would like to see the city’s three other high schools incorporate some form of ROPE into their own curricula. But he and others concede that size—Walden has 360 students, compared to about 2,000 for each of the other schools—is a significant barrier.

Still, Woods said, “I do believe our schools should do something along these lines, whether it’s with community service, independent research, or working with mentors in some field.”

Lorraine V. Forte is a Chicago writer.

What tests are students in the Chicago Public Schools required to take each year?

- Students in third, sixth, eighth and 11th grades—except some in bilingual and special education programs—must take a set of multiple-choice achievement tests being developed by the state. Called IGAP, for Illinois Goal Assessment Program, the tests are designed to measure progress toward state learning goals, which grew out of 1985 statewide education reform legislation.

- So far, students in the three elementary grades have taken tests of reading, math and language arts, including a writing sample. Eleventh-graders have taken a reading test this year, for the first time, will take a math test. Beginning next year, they will take a language arts test, including a writing sample.

- Science tests will come on line next year; they will include questions that require students to know how to solve scientific problems. Social science tests will begin in 1993, fine arts tests in 1994 and physical development and health tests in 1995. These four tests will rotate so that no two will be given each year.

- The Chicago Board of Education requires all students, except some in bilingual and special education programs, to take a set of nationally standardized, multiple-choice achievement tests—the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in elementary schools and the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency in high schools.

- The ITBS includes tests of reading comprehension, vocabulary and math concepts, computation and problem solving. The TAP includes tests of reading comprehension, math, written expression, using sources of information, science and social studies.

- Fifth- and seventh-graders take ITBS science, social studies and language arts tests, too.

- Eighth-graders are given a Minimum Proficiency Skills Test—a School Board test with questions involving simple tax forms, job applications, train schedules, medicine labels and the like. Students eventually must pass the test in order to graduate from high school.

- Students in third, sixth and eighth grade must take a writing test developed by the school system. Schools grade their own students’ writing samples, using citywide criteria, which is cheaper than outside scoring.

- Beginning next year—if money is available—students in third, sixth and eighth grades will take a “hands-on” science test requiring them to conduct an experiment and perhaps use measuring devices such as thermometers. The School Board would have to buy the equipment because most schools don’t have it, says Carole Perlman, director of citywide testing.

Isn’t this too much testing?

- Teachers and principals generally say “yes.” Testing specialists say “no.” In third grade, for example, locally required testing takes 155 minutes in Chicago, 185 in Evanston, 420 in Oak Park and 725 in Flossmoor, according to Perlman. The state average is 305. When the state testing program is complete, it will add five hours, or another 300 minutes.

- “The problem is not the time devoted to testing, but all the stuff that goes on before the testing,” said Lloyd Bond, a University of North Carolina professor who has examined Chicago’s testing program.

- Perlman agreed: “Schools spend all this time on test preparation when there is no clear relationship between that and how well kids do on tests.”

- She adds that there is more testing at third, sixth and eighth grades because the state requires each school district to have its own assessment program at these grades to measure attainment of locally adopted learning objectives. Districts may use any combination of the following: nationally standardized tests, locally developed tests, teacher observation or checklists.

Is one set of tests better than the other?

- The IGAP is generally considered superior in content because it reflects the kind of teaching advocated by experts in reading, math and the like. The IGAP reading tests, for example, require students to read entire stories rather than short passages. For some questions, it provides more than one correct answer, a technique aimed at requiring students to think harder. The math tests pay more attention to estimation, geometry, problem solving and other areas that math experts now recommend for elementary as well as high school. And the language arts test requires students to write an expository, persuasive or narrative essay, not simply answer questions about writing.

- Michael Kirst, a Stanford University professor who also has studied Chicago school reform, calls IGAP “’80s technology” and the ITBS “’60s technology.”

If the IGAP is so good, why are students required to take the ITBS and TAP?

- There are several reasons. The Chicago School Reform Act includes the goal that by the end of the 1993-94 school year, half the students in all schools should score above average on a nationally standardized test. IGAP cannot be that test because it is given at only four grade levels.

- Further, while the ITBS and TAP are aimed at measuring school and school system progress, they are used—some would say misused—to
make decisions about individual students. For example, high schools that enroll higher-achieving students look at students’ seventh-grade reading and math scores. Some schools use test scores to assign students to classes and reading groups, a practice that research has shown to be damaging to lower scoring children. Until recently, test scores figured prominently in the Board of Education’s promotion policy.

Testing specialists say an important decision about a student should never be made on the basis of a single test score. Observed Perlman: Using a single test score to judge a student’s knowledge and ability is like “going to the doctor and all he does is listen to your heart and uses that to say whether or not you are healthy.”

Similarly, Bond of the University of North Carolina said: “Superior performance on a multiple-choice history test is clearly desirable, but it is not a substitute for a genuine appreciation of human history. Only by seeing a student attempt an analysis of historical information, or build an argument based on such material, can we learn whether he or she possesses such an appreciation.”

Well then, why not give the ITBS and TAP perhaps every other year?

Perlman says federal regulations rule out that option. Most federally funded programs, such as Chapter I, require school districts to administer “pre-tests” and “post-tests” using a nationally standardized test. That is, children must be tested at the beginning and end of their participation in the program each year, so that the school system can report to the government whether the program has made a difference. With roughly two-thirds of Chicago students eligible for Chapter I, the most efficient way to meet this requirement is to give everyone the ITBS and TAP, says Perlman.

What does “nationally standardized” mean, anyway?

A test is nationally standardized when it has been given to a sample of students that reflects the student population nationwide on such characteristics as race, gender and geographic location. The average score for this group becomes the standard—or “norm” or average—against which students, schools and school systems are measured. By definition half the students in the norm group score above average and half score below.

During most of the 1980’s, Chicago used ITBS and TAP norms that were established in 1978. At some grade levels and on some tests, citywide scores rose slightly over the years—though overall performance remained well below average. Last year, however, Chicago switched to a 1988 norm and scores plummeted.

Does that mean Chicago students learned less?

No. It means that between 1978 and 1988 the performance of students nationwide gained more than did the performance of Chicago students. As a result, the average

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**Illinois Goal Assessment Program: Some sample questions**

**Reading strategies, Grade 6**

You have just read “Cheating Mr. Diskin,” but some of your classmates have not read it. Imagine that they ask you to tell them what the story is mainly about. Which of these would help you to tell your classmates what the story is mainly about?

A. It is about two boys who run through the gate of Mr. Diskin’s junkyard.
B. It is about an old man who attacks two boys. One boy is trying to weigh things on the red scales. The boys feel like dirt when they go to the movies.
C. It is about two boys who cheat a man out of some money so they can go to the movies. The man discovers that they are trying to cheat him, but he gives them the money anyway. The boys feel bad.
D. It is about two boys who go to the movies. They visit Mr. Diskin. Mr. Diskin puts a blindfold over his eyes.
E. It is about how you feel when you take advantage of someone. You can’t enjoy anything you get when you get it by cheating someone who trusts you.

**Math, Grade 3**

Shira and Donna are going to ride their bikes to school. They can ride their bikes 3 miles in one hour. What other information is needed to determine the time that it takes to get to school?

A. The name of the school.
B. The time they left home.
C. The kind of bikes they were riding.
D. The distance to the school.

**Writing, Grade 6**

Your newspaper is offering a prize for the Best Relative of the Year. Think about which one of your relatives should win this prize. This relative could be a parent, grandparent, sister, brother, uncle, aunt, cousin or anyone in your family. Think about reasons your relative is the best. Think about how you will persuade the judges to give your relative the prize.

Write a paper doing the following:

- Decide which relative should win the prize.

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**Science, Grade 8**

Aphids are tiny organisms that eat pea plants. Beetles eat aphids, spiders eat beetles, and birds eat spiders. What would you do to increase your pea harvest?

A. Introduce more spiders into your garden.
B. Introduce more aphids into your garden.
C. Reduce the number of spiders.
D. Reduce the number of beetles.

Answers: C and E, Math 1, C.
Chicago student slipped farther behind the average student nationwide.

What does IGAP say about student achievement in Chicago?

Chicago has schools that rank among the top-scoring and bottom-scoring schools statewide. As a whole, city schools are well below average, though not at the very bottom. For example, on last year's reading test, 51.6 percent of Illinois eighth-graders but only 32.1 percent of Chicago eighth-graders scored above the national average. (The state determined a national average for IGAP by giving a sample of Illinois students both the IGAP and a nationally standardized test and then comparing their scores. This is called an equating study.)

What about IGAP progress at individual schools?

The state issues reports to each school saying whether significant progress has been made. The reports include a variety of information to help schools pinpoint strengths and weaknesses.

The school system's Bureau of Student Testing offers workshops to help parents and school staff understand and make use of both IGAP and ITBS test scores.

How can parents find out how their children do on the IGAP?

They can't. Reacting in part to educators' fears that scores would be used to judge teachers, the Illinois Board of Education decided not to report scores for individual students. Some school districts now are pressing for individual score reports—in part, so they can drop other standardized tests. This would cost about $1 million a year.

How does Chicago compare with New York, Los Angeles and other big cities?

There is no way of knowing because few other big cities use the ITBS and TAP. Beginning this year, however, state-to-state comparisons will be available on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a set of federally funded tests that annually are given to a sample of students in each state. Previously, there was a congressional ban on state comparisons. Meanwhile, a number of efforts are underway to develop national tests that would be given to all students.

Schools serve enormously different pupil populations. How can you compare them?

Bond, the testing expert (and a 1960 graduate of Carver High School), recommends that school scores be reported in three ways: (1) against an absolute standard, such as a national norm, (2) against scores of other schools with similar student populations and (3) as "value added," meaning the difference from one year to the next. Such reporting, he said, "recognizes those schools doing a superior job of educating students under different circumstances, but does not foster the notion that superior relative performance is the end in view."

With all this emphasis on testing, isn't cheating a problem?

It's difficult to cheat on the IGAP because various "forms," or versions, of the test are used each year, even within a given classroom. And only 10 percent to 40 percent of the items are carried over to another year.

In the mid-1980s, the Chicago Public Schools began a number of practices to guard against cheating on the ITBS and TAP. They include re-testing some classes with a different form of the test, follow-up inquiries at randomly selected schools and a ban on teachers administering tests to their own classes, above third grade. Bond said, "The security measures in place now are quite reasonable."

How much money are we spending on testing?

The ITBS and TAP annually cost $1 per student, according to Perlman. Next year, the IGAP will cost about $4 per student, following initial development costs of about $400,000 for each of the four subject areas.

In the view of one strong accountability advocate, state spending on IGAP is not nearly enough. M. Blouke Carus, chair of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association's Education Committee, would double or triple spending on IGAP—"one of the best assessment programs in America"—so that it would include more measures of actual student performance, along the lines of the writing sample, in addition to multiple-choice questions.

Group bids for multicultural test

Members of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform are asking the Illinois Board of Education to include questions on the contributions of various ethnic and racial groups in its statewide testing program.

Teacher Bliss Hunter said the group's goal is to make sure that all students are taught about the impact of African-Americans, Mexicans, Asians and other groups on American culture and history. "If it's not tested, it won't get taught," she said.

The state board's education goals say students should be able to "recognize and understand contributions of different ethnic groups." But Tom Kerins, state assessment director, said the tests in the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP), which cover such broad areas as reading, math and science, are too short to get into detail about racial and ethnic groups. (Each IGAP test is an hour long.) It makes "better sense," he suggested, for schools and school districts to cover such material in their own testing programs.

However, Kerins did say the state board takes steps to guard against racial and ethnic bias in the tests by trying to include people from various groups on the teams that devise and evaluate test questions. "If we get an item where whites, blacks and Asians do well, but Hispanics don't," he said, "we pull it and get someone with an Hispanic background and ask them: What's the problem?"

Lorraine V. Forte
Multiple Intelligences and Multidimensional Assessments is a forbidding title. But the message of this two-hour videotape encourages all of us—parents, teachers, principals—to believe in our minds what we knew all along in our hearts: Many, many children are talented, even gifted, in ways that never show up on the standardized achievement tests we are forced to give year after year.

Produced by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory in Oak Brook in cooperation with the Public Broadcasting Service, the videotape features discussions about different forms of intelligence and alternatives to fill-in-the-blank testing. It also takes viewers inside classrooms that are pursuing new ways of teaching and testing.

Dr. Howard Gardner of Harvard University and the Boston School of Medicine leads off with a description of the seven kinds of intelligence he has identified during 20 years of research: linguistic, musical, spatial, logical/mathematical, bodily kinesthetic (e.g., athletes and dancers), interpersonal (e.g., salesmen, teachers, managers) and intrapersonal, or knowing your own strengths and weaknesses.

“Most intelligences can’t be measured by a paper-and-pencil test,” says Gardner. “If I want to know if you can work with and understand other people, I have to watch you in a group when you are trying to lead the discussion or solve a problem together.”

That kind of measurement, he notes, reflects “real” life. Schools should borrow more from real life, Gardner says, and engage children in projects that allow them to develop their own unique sets of intelligences and preferred ways of learning and sharing their discoveries.

A new show and tell

For example, this video shows how children at Key School in Indianapolis plan and carry out projects in which they demonstrate their understanding of some aspect of a theme they are studying. They might stage a play, choreograph a dance or produce a work of art. Each project involves research, discussions and group decision making. Themes change every 10 weeks. While this approach may seem less than rigorous, the video shows otherwise.

Gardner also sets forth guidelines for assessing projects so that teachers, students and parents can see what students have learned—something that standardized achievement tests don’t tell us. Students themselves explain what they have learned and suggest ways to develop this knowledge further.

Grant Wiggins, founder of Consultants for Learning Assessments and School Standards (CLASS), and Protase “Woody” Woodford of the Educational Testing Service, developer of the SAT college entrance exam, follow Gardner with a discussion of performance assessment. Also called authentic assessment, this, too, requires students to engage in meaningful, real-life activities such as writing a poem or conducting a scientific experiment.

Wiggins asks whether schools are testing students for achievements that are valuable. Quoting Lauren Resnick, another leading scholar, he says: “What you test is what you get, and if you don’t test it, you don’t get it.”

Considering the narrowness of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, Wiggins’ statement is cause for all of us in Chicago to worry. Under pressure from the state legislature and media to raise scores on the Iowa, many schools will spend a lot of valuable time “teaching to” this test, coaching children on how to take the test, giving them many practice tests, etc. As a result, children will see learning as the accumulation of fragmented bits of knowledge, unconnected to anything, especially the real world.

And schools that are trying progressive instructional programs and techniques such as whole language and cooperative learning may well find that the Iowa is a deterrent.

My wife, Kathy, a learning disabilities teacher, has been promoting the ideas of Howard Gardner for years because they stress building on children’s strengths rather than trying to overcome their weaknesses.

But it was not until I viewed the NCREL videotape, which shows how

Continued on page 15
Opinions

New Chicago teachers forced to sink or swim

by “Barbara”

I walked into my elementary classroom Sept. 5, 1990, my first day teaching in the Chicago Public Schools, armed with fresh idealism and great expectations. As I write this in December, I have to admit that threefourths of the time I am a referee in a war zone of nine-year-olds, and the rest of the time merely an assignment giver.

I chose to teach in the Chicago Public Schools largely because of the reform movement. I was excited by the possibility of being a part of a historic change I felt was long overdue. But since I was hired in late August—after several long delays caused by the central bureaucracy—I have had no connection to school reform and have received no information about what is happening, except what I read in the newspapers. I am aware that our local school council, with teacher representation, meets periodically, but I do not know any details or hear about meetings until after they have happened.

During these first months, I have discovered that teaching is a lonely profession. In late August, I was assigned a classroom. On the first day of school I came to my classroom and began. That was it. There was no orientation. I received no curriculum guidelines or even friendly suggestions from other staff. I have learned from making mistakes, from being corrected by impatient staff and through improvising.

I was given no information about the special problems my students confront in their lives outside school and how that might affect their behavior in class. Supplies and equipment are often lacking. At the beginning, there were pencils, chalk, photocopy paper, etc. Now these are gone and not replenished. I pay out of my own pocket for lined paper, crayons, folders, staplers and other items essential for any ele-

“Jane” lives in a shelter where the older kids and adults verbally abuse her; she takes her anger out at school by striking back, usually by throwing chairs and books at other children. “John’s” father is in jail for dealing drugs; John comes into class almost every morning crying and refusing to work. “Denise’s” apartment building burnt down recently; she now feels she has to steal from other students and

“I can’t help but think of teaching in suburban schools, where the problems are fewer and support greater.”

I also use part of my salary for other materials that make teaching and learning fun and fruitful, such as tapes of stories, colorful bulletin board decorations and creative workbooks on topics dryly written about in the school’s textbooks.

In contrast, a friend who got her master’s degree with me and teaches in Wilmette got to order $800 worth of material for her class during her first week on the job.

For emotional support, I have had few people to talk to. As a first-year teacher in an inner-city school, I have many questions, especially about discipline. I often feel overwhelmed with what seems to be the enormous scope of my students’ problems.

from the school, which often leads to pushing and shouting matches. These are just a few examples of the complex problems the kids in my class face everyday, and how they affect their behavior in class. I have asked teachers, the principal and parents for assistance and have finally received some this month.

I came into my teaching with a lot of energy and ambition. Only four months into the school year, I am tired and defeated. I can’t help but think of teaching in suburban schools, where the problems are fewer and the support and materials are greater. I have not given up yet. Two other first-year teachers in my school have — one quit after a week, the other after a month.

“Barbara” is a first-year teacher in an inner-city school. She asked that her real name not be published.
Reform rivalries sap energy, shortchange kids

by Sharon Jenkins-Brown

Nov. 30, 1990: An infamous day that will live in the annals of Chicago school reform. When the Illinois State Supreme Court ruled that day that the Chicago School Reform Act was unconstitutional, little did I know that I would join hundreds of other parents and community activists in a 40-day campaign that would become a microcosm of the best and worst of school reform in Chicago.

I remember thinking at the time that the court’s decision presented the opportunity for a still greater cross-section of Chicagoans to add their seal of approval to a revolutionary reform act that was beginning to amass an enviable track record. At the same time, I recognized that the rhetoric of reform—the labeling, positioning and divisiveness of various factions—would erupt and foment contention.

What follows is an account of what key groups did and how their rhetoric played out, by someone who has heard just about all of it. (I am communications director of Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), a corporate-backed reform group, and a founder of the African American Education Reform Institute.)

Within hours of the Supreme Court’s ruling, we at LQE had talked to scores of anxious LSC members and reform activists and knew we had to put out the word that “reform was in tact.” Several radio reports had already broadcast the message that the reform act had been “thrown out.” Working with two LQE public relations consultants, Laurie Glenn and Mario Aranda, we quickly arranged a 4 p.m. press conference with LSC members, parents, business leaders, Board of Education members, Supt. Ted Kimbrough and Mayor Richard M. Daley. By the end of the day, we had turned the tide of panic.

The next step was pretty obvious: petition the General Assembly to reenact the law with a technical correction to address the high court’s finding that the LSC elections violated the principle of one person, one vote. (Parents could vote for six LSC members while other community members could vote only for two.) Jan. 8, the last day of the 86th General Assembly, was our target date. Several members of the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools (ABCs) coalition, which includes LQE, are intervenors in the lawsuit that spawned the high court’s decision. So ABCs had immediate access to the best thinking of well-informed lawyers—from Sidley & Austin, which had been handling the case pro bono.

Reform’s two sides

Several other groups, however, had major reservations about a Jan. 8 solution. First, a number of key African-American leaders, including several members of the legislature’s Black Caucus, viewed the court’s decision as an opportunity to address what they saw as the shortcomings of the reform act. There also was unease stemming from the history of American racism and the ill effects of
other "quick fixes" supposedly designed to solve Black problems.

Further, leaders from Chicago's Hispanic community hesitated to speak out until they had received legal and political assurances that overcoming the law's constitutional defect would not require voter registration for the LSC elections. These leaders feared that a registration requirement would be the death knell for Hispanic voting power at the school level.

These legitimate concerns, plus the longstanding frustrations of some principals, subdistrict superintendents and central-office administrators, created enough opposition or inertia regarding the Jan. 8 target for old battle lines to reappear. As a result, ABCs, with its early statement of a clear position, became an easy target and the vortex of the rhetoric of reform.

The rhetoric goes something like this. There are two sides of reform: those who wrote the act ("pro-reformers") and those who didn't or who were, in their view, shut out of the process ("everybody else").

According to everybody else, what constitutes school improvement. Oh yes, many among everybody else like to describe pro-reformers as "racists, Uncle Toms and contras" who can be identified by the use of such buzz words as decentralization, accountability, administrative caps and parental power.

Many of the pro-reformers describe everybody else as "anti-child, job hungry, protectionistic, selfish, arrogant and paternalistic." They also contend that everybody else wants only parental "involvement"—that is, bake sales—not parent and community power and control. Despite the racial diversity of everybody else, most pro-reformers view them as overwhelmingly black.

If this language shocks or offends you, understand that I hear it all the time. And it makes me sick. I've been involved in many heated arguments with representatives from both sides, trying to get them to understand each other's viewpoint. I seldom succeed.

Ultimately, most elements of the ABCs' "School Reform Restoration Act" were adopted. The Black Caucus position of holding off on fixing the LSC election process won the backing of state and local political leaders. Reform was saved; more people became involved. A big victory for our city and its children.

What's unfortunate, though, is that so many people, all of whom I view as reformers, continue to view each other as the enemy. And that eats up energy that should be directed at the real problem: an inert school system that needs a jump start to begin effectively educating all of the children it is supposed to serve.

That's right, I indeed consider virtually everyone involved in this process, even a frequently uninterested media, to be an essential part of the school reform equation. Why? Because all of us have too much to lose if we process fails, and everyone conceives that change must take place if our children are to succeed.

It's too bad that the politics of race, class and stubbornness prevent so many people with good intentions from being receptive to the ideas of those who come from different walks of life. With few exceptions, despite the offensive rhetoric, I have rarely viewed the diverse people and groups involved in school reform as anything less than well intentioned.

Trivial concerns

So what if someone likes to get his name in the paper? What does it matter who was or was not involved in writing the original act? Who cares where someone lives? What matters is what each of us brings to the children in the classroom and to the local schoolhouse.

As one who grew up inspired by the observation of abolitionist Frederick Douglass that "knowledge is power," the realities of the 1990s have caused me to expand the definition of power to include resources. Both pro-reformers and everybody
else bring unique gifts—knowledge, talent and resources, both financial and human—to the school-reform equation. Combined, these gifts would go a very long way toward achieving the empowerment of local communities, a renewed interest in the value of education and, ultimately, increased student performance.

How dare anyone, especially those who have already received their educations, get in the way of people who are trying to elevate the quality of learning for our children? What’s needed is a sobering dose of respect for the diversity of opinion and experience that different groups bring to the table. We should also hold one another accountable for our actions and its impact on students. Perhaps if we could respect each other more and attack each other less, school reform in Chicago could become a reality much sooner.

Project LEAP right on election problems

I heartily support the courageous and controversial stand taken by Project LEAP (CATALYST February 1991): to remove control of local school council elections from the Chicago Board of Education and LSCs themselves and put it in the hands of proven, competent election professionals, such as the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners.

From June 1989 through February 1991, I was affiliated with Leadership for Quality Education, on loan from Centel Corp. For the first seven months of this assignment I spent the bulk of my working hours on the LSC elections, first coordinat-ing LQE’s role in them and then analyzing and critiquing the role of both LQE and the Board of Education. Among the many people of integrity and good will with whom I worked, Arlene Rubin, executive director of Project LEAP, was one of the most selfless and rational in her dedication to the LSC elections.

It was only by the grace of God and the bumbling of the Board of Education’s election consultants, the now defunct accounting firm of Lavenholth & Horwath, that major fraud was avoided. With the election rules changing from day to day, no one could have figured out which rule to violate. Even the diligence of those of us close to the process could not have prevented a concerted effort at vote fraud.

The School Board, LSCs and the reform movement have been given a rare opportunity to take advantage of what we learned from the 1989 elections and rewrite the rules in an atmosphere of calm. If we’re going to expend effort defending the authority of the LSCs, let’s defend their right to control the curriculum at their schoolhouses; let’s come to consensus on the constitutional issues threatening the nation’s boldest experiment in school-based management.

Let’s not saddle the LSCs with the responsibility for running their own elections—as the existing Chicago School Reform Act provides. That only distracts from their responsibility for leading the educational renaissance in Chicago.

Robert W. Erdr, former staff member, Leadership for Quality Education

Business, parents have identical interests

Alex Poinsett’s article on corporate Chicago’s participation in public school reform was a fair treatment of an interesting new phenomenon in Chicago.

However, I would like to take issue with our good friend Bill Ayers, who is quoted as saying that school parents want their children to have “an education that opens up worlds and horizons for them and also allows them entry into the mainstream of economic life” while, in comparison, big business is only interested in “survival and profit, etc.” Ayers says that these interests are not at all identical.

Ayers’ views reflect the illusion that the enthusiasm of business for public school reform is essentially a selfish one.

The real interest of business is in doing its work in a community that thrives. This means that business wants to see a city with good housing, good health care, good transportation, a high level of employment, efficient and honest government, and a competent workforce. An essential part of that kind of community is a public school system that provides children with an education “that opens up worlds and horizons for them” and “allows them entry into the mainstream of economic life.”

The interests of parents and business in a better public school system are identical. I have yet to hear of any issue within the school reform movement on which parents and business have taken significantly differing views.

Lawrence Howe, executive director, Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago

Remember Wells High when fixing reform

When state legislators fine-tune the Chicago School Reform Act this year, they should remember the outrage that occurred last year at Wells High School.

The principal there expelled teacher Olga Sulbaran from the local school council and replaced her with a teacher who then provided the pivotal vote giving him a four-year contract.

He justified this outrageous maneuver by saying that the meeting where Sulbaran was appointed to fill an council vacancy violated the Open Meetings Act.

Not so, said former Cook County State’s Atty. Cecil Partee. In an October letter to the Wells LSC, Partee said there was no evidence that the act had been violated but that there was nothing his office could do about Sulbaran’s ouster either.

Four LSC members had filed suit, winning a ruling that the case could be heard. But they couldn’t pursue it because they ran out of money.

So now we have this horrible precedent: If a principal doesn’t have the necessary votes for getting his/her contract renewed, he or she can appoint new members and call for a fixed vote.

The Board of Education and the Illinois General Assembly have a responsibility to guard against such injustice and redress it when it happens. Most LSC members are not rich people. They cannot afford to hire lawyers to protect their rights. I hope the revisions of the Reform Act being drawn up in Springfield will protect against the recurrence of such a violation.

Charles Kyle, assistant to the president, Triton Community College
REORUM UPDATES

Principal retention. For the second year in a row, about 80 percent of local school councils choosing principals have decided to keep the one they have, according to Bruce Berndt, president of the Chicago Principals' Association.

Of the 260 councils that had voted by the beginning of March, 50 declined to retain the incumbent, which in six cases is an interim principal.

City Council-bound? Two of the 28 LSC members who ran for alderman will vie in run-off elections April 2. Another, incumbent Ald. Patrick O'Connor (40th), was re-elected outright.

One of the two, Johnny J. O'Neal, LSC chair at Nansen Elementary, is challenging an incumbent, Ald. Robert Shaw (9th).

Gloria Chevere, an appointed community member on the Whitney Young High School LSC and a one-time candidate for city clerk, will face Ricardo Negron in the 31st Ward.

Six LSC members had received endorsements from either the Chicago Sun-Times or Chicago Tribune; one had won the nod from both papers.

Comer model arrives. A highly regarded school-improvement program developed by psychiatrist Dr. James P. Comer of Yale University is being launched at four Chicago elementary schools.

The program strives to create positive, nurturing relationships among teachers, parents and children. Coordinator Vivian Loseth described the program as "convincing teachers that poor minority children can learn and convincing poor kids that they can learn too."

Participating schools are Brown, Dodge, Jefferson and Riis, all of which feed into Crane High School, where a similar approach is being tried.

Reforming reform. The Board of Education has invited a delegate from each school to bring recommendations for improvements in the School Reform Act and board policy to an assembly scheduled for April 6 at Lane High School.

To help schools prepare, the board distributed flyers to notify the community and discussion workbooks that listed some early recommendations.

LSC power. About 70 LSC members from 46 schools attended a meeting called to draft a unified LSC position on changes in the School Reform Act. Organizers blamed the poor turnout on competing events.

Those present drew up recommendations anyway, including provision of $3,000 per school for annual LSC training and operations and permission to remove a member who is absent three meetings in a row or five times during the year.

The group was scheduled to meet March 16 to decide its next step. For more information, contact Rod Smith at Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (312) 663-3603.

Teacher recruitment. The School Board has created a Teacher Recruitment and Certification Unit; a top priority will be to find bilingual and special education teachers.

Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough said the unit will serve the needs not only of students but also of the School Board's budget. Chicago schools have "lost" millions of dollars in state reimbursement because some bilingual and special education teaching positions were not filled by fully certified teachers.

RESOURCES

Bill of Rights. A packet of materials celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights is available free from Philip Morris Companies Inc.

The packet includes a teacher's guide, games, student activities, posters, a videotape for grades seven through twelve and a phonograph record for lower grades.

Packets may be obtained by writing The Bill of Rights Education Program, 5000 Park Street North, St. Petersburg, Fla. 33709.

WORKSHOPS

Lump-sum budgeting. CPAs for the Public Interest will conduct free workshops on lump-sum budgeting from 9 a.m. to noon April 6. They will be held at Truman College, 1145 W. Wilson, Malcolm X College, 1900 W. Van Buren, and Kennedy-King College, 6800 S. Wentworth.

Workshops will be offered in Spanish at Malcolm X. For more information, call (312) 715-0666.

GRANTS, SCHOLARSHIPS

Home-grown teachers. The Golden Apple Foundation (formerly the Foundation for Excellence in Teaching) is accepting nominations for its Golden Apple Academy Scholars program, which provides scholarships for students who agree to teach in area schools for five years after graduation.

The deadline is May 1. For more information, call (312) 407-0006.
a project-centered curriculum is tied to performance assessments, that it all made sense to me. Now I am working with teachers here at Whitney Elementary School to develop our own assessments, our own standards of what children should be able to do and demonstrate at every grade level. It's not easy, but it sure is exciting.

Filmed in four segments, “Multiple Intelligences and Multidimensional Assessments” makes a good series of programs for local school councils, professional personnel advisory committees and groups of teachers. I have shown it to a large group of teachers and other staff members, who then formed smaller groups to discuss the implications of the ideas presented.

Multiple intelligences and multidimensional assessments, including performance assessments, are ideas whose time has come. I sincerely hope that we in Chicago don't miss this instructional train.

Leonard J. Dominguez is principal of Whitney Elementary School, 2815 S. Komensky.

For more reading


Dumas tape records reading progress

Parents of third-graders at Dumas Elementary School, 6650 S. Ellis, can judge how well their children are doing in reading not only by test scores but also by tape recordings.

Twice a month, teachers record their pupils' reading and invite parents to listen and compare.

"Sometimes parents are surprised about the mistakes their child makes," said teacher Grace Matthews. "This gives parents some guideline on what their child needs to work on."

Matthews adds that children feel good about themselves when they hear how they are doing.

Grace Matthews (312) 535-0750.

McDowell puts math to work

Parents at McDowell Elementary School, 1419 E. 89th, wanted their school to do a better job of teaching their children real-life skills. The school responded with a program that shows students how to write checks, make bank deposits, balance checkbooks and perform other personal-finance operations.

Students also learn the benefits of saving and investing money. Teacher Wilhelmina LeRoy uses their allowances as an example.

"We're trying to get them to understand that they're not just learning math for math's sake, that math is used in real life," she said.

Wilhelmina LeRoy (312) 535-6404.

Public library houses LSC news

Palmer Elementary School, 5051 N. Kenneth, has made it convenient for parents and community residents to keep up to date on local school council activity by putting minutes, guidelines and other documents on file at the neighborhood library.

Keeping them only at the school was not good enough because the school is not open evenings or on weekends, said Cheryl Linker, the council's secretary.

"Before, the minutes and reference materials for our LSC were housed at our chairman's home, and we had to set up a time to view them if we needed information," said Linker.

Cheryl Linker (312) 534-3705.