Council Members: Will You Run Again?
Thank you, readers

In late March and early April, 644 CATALYST readers took time to respond to a telephone poll dealing with sources of information on school reform. CATALYST sponsored that poll, and we thank you.

Having completed our first nine-issue cycle, we wanted to learn what you think of our publication. We were very gratified to learn that you think very highly of us.

More than half of you rated the main articles, Updates, Bright Ideas and Bulletins as "very" valuable. Seventy percent of LSC readers and 86 percent of non-LSC readers said CATALYST brings them information they do not get anywhere else. More than 80 percent of LSC readers and non-LSC readers who requested subscriptions keep back issues. And the worst that LSC readers could say is that CATALYST doesn't come out often enough.

Responses to the poll have given us some ideas for making CATALYST even more useful. We will be working on those.

With so many enormous school issues now on the front burner, it is with some regret that we sign off for the 1990-91 school year. CATALYST will return in late August. Language arts, science and overcrowding are among the topics we will tackle first. If you have ideas about these or other topics, please drop us line.

Sincerely,

Linda Lenz, editor

WHAT DO YOU THINK? CATALYST welcomes guest editorials and letters to the editor. Send them to CATALYST/Opinions, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, Ill., 60604. They may be edited for clarity and space. Include your name, address and phone number.
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2 out of 3 council members likely to run again

by Linda Lenz and Alex Poinsett

Despite it all—the confusion, the conflict, the long hours—close to two-thirds of Chicago’s 5,420 elected local school council members say they likely will seek another term, a CATALYST telephone poll has found. Indeed, a third say they “definitely” will run again. But another third say they “definitely” won’t.

“I find that very encouraging,” said Lafayette Ford, chair of the School Board Nominating Commission. “We’re talking about people who have just been through two years of hell.”

“After what all we’ve been through, I think that’s pretty good,” agreed James Deanes, chair of the Parent/Community Council. “People are starting to see results, and it feels good because they helped craft it.”

“To me, the poll means people want to make school reform work, not necessarily in its present form but to reform the reform,” said longtime social activist Timuel Black, an LSC trainer with the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance. Council members are angry, he said, about a number of conditions—e.g. four-year contracts for principals but only two-year terms for council members—and want to work to change them.

Parents most enthusiastic

The poll of 358 randomly selected council members was conducted by Richard Day Research for CATALYST in late March, a time when many councils were in the throes of selecting a principal. The margin of error is plus or minus 5 percentage points; for the teacher and community representative subgroups, 9 points; and for parents, 8 points.

Among the three elected council groups—parents, teachers and community representatives—parents are the most likely to bid for another term in next October’s election. Sixty-five percent said they probably or definitely would run again; 30 percent said they definitely would not.

Among parents, white parents are most likely to run again; 81 percent said probably or definitely yes, compared with 62 percent for Hispanic parents and 60 percent for African-American parents.

“It isn’t surprising that more white parents, versus minority parents, are interested in running again,” said Migdalia “Millie” Rivera, executive director of the Latino Institute. “The white community historically has participated more in civic
LSC members: Will you run again?

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Doug Gills, parent, Reavis Elementary
Running again? Yes

As chair of the LSC at Hyde Park’s Reavis School, as deputy executive director of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization, as a doctoral candidate in political science at Northwestern University, as a shoo-in for re-election, Doug Gills speaks with authority.

"Many of us on councils were lulled into thinking we had more authority than we actually have," he says. "One, we don’t really hire the principal. We only select him or her. The Board of Education does the actual hiring. Two, we don’t really have as much control over budgeting as we thought we would have. In many schools, it gets down to less than five or six percent of the overall school budget. These things have served to mitigate against the enthusiasm many of us brought to the council."

Even so, Gills seeks re-election partially because of the emerging political potential of LSCs. Networking with fellow LSC chairs over such issues as the $315 million school shortfall, an estimated $100 million cost of removing asbestos from school buildings, an urgent need for smaller class sizes, etc., he helps spearhead a growing, multiracial, citywide coalition.

Gills argues that LSC members must be invited to sit at the table as players with the Chicago Teachers Union and the Board of Education. "By virtue of being elected, we do have a constituency," he insists. "We have no resources other than our commitment to our kids and our schools. But we are 6,000 new entities who are in a position to send shock waves through the system."

-- Alex Painsett

Affairs due to educational attainment and language proficiency, which probably makes it a less frustrating experience for them."

"Those who are not running feel very strongly they were not oriented enough about the budget, the curriculum, so that they would have made intelligent decisions," said Nancy Jefferson, executive director of Midwest Community Council.

"They felt they were just 'used' to fill the bill. They're not going to run again because they don't want the frustration of not feeling good about themselves."

Teachers are the least likely to run again; only 46 percent said probably or definitely yes, while 36 percent said definitely no. Their reasons, as told to Richard Doy interviewers, suggest serious problems in a goodly number of councils:

"Too much time is involved and we are not treated well." West Side elementary school.

"It's a lot of work. I do not need harassment." Far Northwest Side elementary school.

"It wasn't a good two years. It was a dictatorial council and you had no say." Far South Side elementary school.

"Reform has become a political thing. It was a good thing." Far Northwest Side elementary school.

"As a teacher, I do not want to be part of the destruction." High school teacher.

Observes Geraldine Brownlee of DePaul University: "I think most teachers are frustrated about the way things are going in school reform. Many of them do not believe there have been improvements that would make a difference in their students' academic performance."

Teachers may be bowing out in greater numbers because
Antonio Beltran, parent, Clemente High
Running again? Maybe

Antonio Beltran, 67, chairman of the Roberto Clemente High School LSC, gives himself until July to decide whether he will run for re-election. His son’s graduation from the school in June may factor into the Mexican-born father’s decision.

No such decision confronted Beltran in 1989 when he first ran for the LSC of a school which draws from Humboldt Park, Logan Square and Wicker Park. “If I have a son,” he thought, “I have all the children. If he gets a better education, the other kids will get a better education. If we fix Clemente High School, we also fix the community.”

Hence, Beltran sees his LSC work contributing to positive changes in Clemente’s students and teachers and a boost for the future of a community troubled by 20 different juvenile gangs—none of which claims his son as a member. The concerned father is trying to persuade gang members to wear the same colors and thus sidetrack sometimes bloody conflicts.

But another part of Beltran’s vision is the Mexican fast food restaurant that he would like to open with a $25,000, Small Business Administration loan. Meanwhile, Clemente has had three principals since the last LSC election. First, the council rejected Jesus Sosa’s bid for four more years. Then, his successor, Jose Rodriguez, unsuccess fully seeking the powers that principals once held. “The acting principal is doing a pretty good job,” Beltran reports, “but we’re looking around the country for another principal.”

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Parents: Will you run again?

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“Teacher representatives are under special pressure when they make recommendations that go against those of their principals, who are their bosses as well as fellow council members,” added Laura Downey, a teacher at Dumas Elementary and co-convenor of the Teachers’ Task Force of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform.

Whatever the reason, Deanes and Ford both find the lower teacher numbers distressing.

“If they’re not happy, as the numbers indicate, we’re in trouble,” said Deanes. Ford said he was worried about the extent to which the numbers might reflect teachers’ attitudes toward serving on professional personnel advisory committees. “To me, that involvement is going to be the whole ball of wax,” he said.

Among teachers, those who are African American are least likely to run again. Forty-three percent of black teachers said definitely no, compared with 18 percent of white teachers.

“It’s important we find out why and fix it,” said Deanes. “Schools must be extensions of their communities.” Black teachers not only are the main link between inner-city black communities and schools, but also provide the role models and “personal touch” that children in those schools need, he explained.

Deciding not to seek re-election does not necessarily signal lack of commitment, said several teachers. “Such a decision [may] simply reflect the teacher’s belief that it’s time to focus those energies on the classroom and let another teacher assume the leadership role,” said Karen Grover, a teacher at
Libay School and a co-convenor of the Teachers’ Task Force. Added Christine Ramos of Darwin Elementary, another co-convenor of the Teachers’ Task Force: “The fact that teachers have an ongoing working relationship with each other is a strong argument for shared leadership in the LSC teacher rep role.”

By a large margin, council members who said they would not run again cited the main reason was that it “takes too much time.” Serving on a local school council takes at least 20 hours a month and can take 20 hours per week, said Ford.

Gwendolyn Laroche, education director of the Urban League, said organizations helping councils should add “time management” to their agendas. “A lot of meetings were an exercise in futility,” she said. “People need to learn how to be better prepared before they go to meetings.”

Among teachers not running again, “nothing gets done” was cited after “takes too much time.” For parents, “child leaving school” came in second.

While reform leaders find responses to the CATALYST poll encouraging, they caution against simply letting the next LSC take its course.

“People are not just going to come out—because they already know what the story is,” said Doug Gillis, deputy executive director of the Kenwood-Oakland Community Organization. “Without a recommitment and re-energizing, you’re going to have a fall off similar to when Harold Washington ran the second time.”

### Teachers: Will you run again?

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*Fewer than 10 responses

Similarly, Laroche said that unlike in 1989, the reform movement now will have to contend with negative attitudes based on experience. “Before, people entered this without a feeling it would be good, bad or indifferent,” she said. “Now they have definite ideas. Forty percent of black parents had a troubled experience, and they’re going to tell their friends and neighbors.”

In 1989, there were 17,000 candidates, or about three for each seat. “The CATALYST poll shows we now have a half person for every seat,” observed Ford. “Now we have to get

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Catherine Boyd, teacher, Dumas Elementary
Running again? Yes

Although Catherine Boyd only spent about $112 for campaign buttons and other electioneering bric-à-brac in a friendly bid for office with three other teachers at Woodlawn’s Dumas School, she feels she has already invested too much time and energy in her LSC not to continue serving.

“It would be a mistake to install a totally new group of people in the LSCs,” she says. “It would be like starting from scratch again. The on-the-job training was rough. We had three big books full of information that we had to digest. It was like taking a college course.” It was difficult for a person not already accustomed to extensive reading. The fact that most people simply cannot learn so much in such a short time sometimes makes me suspect that school reform was not designed to succeed.”

Even so, LSC members learned quite a bit, Boyd concedes: how to work together, how to communicate with each other with a sort of walk-in-your-shoes sensitivity that allowed them to reach consensus on thorny issues. “We had to understand our principal much better,” the teacher reports. “She sees a lot of things from a long view rather than in terms of immediate impact.”

Boyd applauds the pride of ownership, the sense that “this is our school” that most of the participating parents display. “Dumas School is home for our students,” she adds, “a haven away from the outside turmoil that often troubles their lives. Because of their nurturing by caring teachers, they are highly motivated and have developed high self-esteem.”

A. P.
Irene Kneeland, parent, Beecher Elementary

Running again? Yes

Irene Kneeland's nearly two years on the LSC at Harriet Beecher Stowe Elementary School on the Northwest Side have been both "nerve-wracking" and "satisfying," but she is singular in her determination to run for re-election next October.

"I plan to be a continuous nuisance," laughs the Polish mother of two Stowe pupils. "It's better to be on the council winning points instead of sitting in the audience being a pasty."

With more than 30 hours of training in school reform law and LSC responsibilities, Kneeland has agitated for mandatory training for her council colleagues. "Not all of them like to be enlightened about reform law," she complains. "They don't care too much about learning how to function properly, monitor the school improvement plan or evaluate the principal. They think, 'let's all get together and chitchat.' I don't mind chitchatting, but let's get down to business."

"We can't function properly because we don't have enough executive sessions," she adds. "We cannot speak freely because we're afraid of hurting somebody's feelings."

The LSC highlighted its seriousness last year when it ousted Stowe's Hispanic principal. (Stowe's enrollment is 87 percent Hispanic.) This triggered a fire in the LSC chairperson's car and a fracas between council members and teachers, which police had to end.

"We get along better with our new principal [also Hispanic]," Kneeland reports, "because she listens to us and doesn't treat us like imbeciles. Also, we've bought more equipment, and the school has been painted for the first time in 20 years. Our building used to be noisy like a zoo. Now it's quiet, and the kids seem happier. We have more adults outdoors watching the kids and more parents coming in to volunteer because they're treated with courtesy."

2.5 more." Ford added that he intends to recruit candidates for his own post as a community representative at Lucy Flower Vocational School—"I'll be at the school regardless."

"If we increase the numbers every election," said Deanes, "it will give us more weight when we go to the Legislature."

In 1989, Leadership for Quality Education and Designs for Change spearheaded the drive for candidates and voters—LQE by raising nearly $2 million from corporations for a media campaign and grass-roots organizing, Designs by producing a training kit and training 150 volunteer trainers who spread out through the city.

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<th>Community reps: Will you run again?</th>
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* Fewer than 10 responses

Community organizations and individual corporations beat the bushes and, judging from a dozen interviews conducted by CATALYST, intend a repeat performance.

In 1989, Harris Bank, for example, offered interested employees training, time off and help with their campaigns (e.g. translating a brochure into Spanish). "We plan to have a similar strategy this time around," said Diana Nelson, vice president for community affairs. "We anticipate that those people who have been on LSCs will be the leaders of the effort to explain what's involved, how their lives have changed and what sort of expectations candidates should have."

Nelson added that some bank employees who lost in 1989 have expressed an interest in running again.

"We're expecting newcomers to this election and we promise that," said Dan Solis, executive director of United Neighborhood Organization. "We're going to be promoting as much participation in this election as possible. We think that incumbents should be challenged."

Joan Jeter-Slay, acting executive director of Designs for Change, said the group is considering offering a weekend seminar for would-be candidates.

And Leadership for Quality Education is talking to companies about forming coalitions with community groups in each of the school system's subdistricts. "The companies would
then work with the community groups, with LQE support, to provide materials, etc.,” said LQE president Joseph Reed.

LQE also is considering editing its six-part video training library to a 30-minute tape to explain in a nutshell “what it means to be a member of a local school council.”

“My guess is that when it gets right up to the time, more will decide to run because it has been a kind of splendid agony,” said Reed. “What I want to see is an LSC group in the city who are confident of themselves, who take the lead in this whole school effort so that the so-called reformers can begin to fade into the background. Not get out all the way, not stop working at it, but the LSCs need to be encouraged to take the lead.”

Sarada-Amani, manager of community relations at CNA Insurance Co., also predicted that many members who are reluctant about running again will change their minds as election day draws near. “They want to be sure that whoever comes along next knows why they made the decisions they made and how they need to take their work forward rather than reinvent the wheel.”

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**Reform has improved my school**

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Note: 1990 results are from a poll sponsored by Leadership for Quality Education; 1991 results, from the CATALYST poll.

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While reform leaders want to see a big turnout of both candidates and voters, they are indeed wary about council turnover. To help ensure continuity at the 35 West Side schools where it works, the Executive Service Corps plans to help develop a transition report at each school to explain what the original council did and why. It also plans to ask schools if its members can lead pre-election transition classes.

“New people must be able to understand how the school functions and what direction it is going,” said Ford, the corp’s education director. “They may totally erase what the council has done, but we want to make sure they understand what they’re doing.”

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Linda Lenz is editor of CATALYST. Alex Poinsett is a contributing editor of Ebony magazine.

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Anita Jackson, parent, DuSable High
Running again? No

Anita Jackson was such a fixture at DuSable High School during her LSC tenure that her fifth son missed being born in the building by only two hours. While she will be returning for her third oldest son’s graduation in June, she is obliged to backburner her once-busy LSC career.

“It’s a full-time job with overtime, working for the council,” Jackson declares. “I really can’t give the time that it deserves. I wouldn’t want to take up the space of someone who would be more able to participate.”

Because of LSC drive and the creative leadership of DuSable’s principal, Charles “Big Daddy” Mingo, the school features computers, reading, music and science labs, a GED program for parents who do not have high school diplomas and an Associate of Arts degree program for parents who do.

“In fact, I’m going to check into that [degree program] myself,” Jackson promises. Reeling off other positives at what she calls “a new Du Sable”—hunkered in the sometimes grim shadows of the Robert Taylor Homes—she reports student test scores improving, one-time illiterate kids now reading, behavior and attendance problems abating, guaranteed admission of Du Sable grads to Olive Harvey, Kennedy-King or Harold Washington colleges.

“We see about our children when they’re in grade school,” Jackson says. “When they get to high school, most people forget about them. But I was up to the school so much, people thought I worked there.”

A. P.
Subdistricts field complaints, do little else

by Lorraine V. Forte

Nearly two years ago, the Interim Board of Education took an axe to subdistrict offices, cutting the number in half, closing out 169 mainly high-level positions and saving almost $8 million.

Some school activists cried foul. "Many of us felt the cuts were in some ways political. Some people who were retained had a lot of clout," said James Deanes, head of the Parent/Community Council, which advocated beefing up the remaining 11 subdistricts.

But most leading reform groups applauded the move for deflating what they saw as a bloated bureaucracy.

The argument has abated, but there is still a wide range of opinion over how the offices should look and what they should be doing.

The Chicago School Reform Act set high expectations. It gave the subdistricts a broad but vague mandate: promote communication between local school councils and school staff, disseminate research on innovative educational techniques, coordinate training of local school councils, promote joint operation of programs and services and resolve school disputes.

Many schools, small staff

But with only two administrators, an office manager and a couple clerical workers to serve an average of 53 schools each, superintendents of the system's 10 elementary subdistricts have done little more than solve day-to-day problems. With 78 schools, the high school subdistrict has been even more hard-pressed.

Dolores Engelskirchen, superintendent of Subdistrict 5 on the Near Southwest Side, says she spends most of her time mediating disputes, either between local school councils and principals or between parents and schools, chiefly over discipline and enrollment problems.

Grady Jordan, superintendent of Subdistrict 11, which includes all 78 high schools, says he is "inundated" by calls from parents with complaints: about a school's discipline policy, about a principal who won't enroll a so-called "problem" student, about difficulties proving residency in a school's attendance area after a recent move.

Fear of bureaucracy

And in Subdistrict 2, along the north lake shore, James Maloney says he is "functioning with great difficulty," visiting schools and attending meetings until late in the evening on most days.

"It's very hard to do what you want to do when there's only two of you," Engelskirchen said. As a result, plans to bring more staff development and curriculum workshops to the district fall by the wayside.

Many schools want help renewing curricula, revitalizing instruction, reorganizing budgets and winning grants. But there is reluctance to increase subdistrict staffs to offer that help.

"I'm concerned that it could lead to recreating the bastions of bureaucracy," said Jeanne Baxter, a Northeastern Illinois University professor who runs leadership workshops for principals. "It's too easy to fall back on the old ways. Some prin-
Volunteers ‘staff’ subdistricts

In Subdistrict 2, along the north lake shore, parent volunteers have stepped in where school system employees used to tread. Eight committees of the subdistrict council deal with such issues as overcrowding, busing, special and bilingual education and personnel. Last September, for example, the overcrowding committee successfully lobbied central office for $1.2 million to set up temporary classrooms at four schools.

When central office earlier this year released $40,000 to each subdistrict for teacher training, Subdistrict 2’s interschool committee polled schools’ professional personnel advisory committees to see what type of training they wanted most. The poll results set the agenda for a series of 10 workshops. Teachers who attend will be encouraged to “go back to their schools and become trainers themselves,” said David Tate, the subdistrict’s administrator. The funds will pay for stipends for 25 teachers at each workshop, instructional materials and other supplies and workshop presenters.

Meanwhile, the community relations committee polled about 100 parents to find out what topics interested them. Parent-child relationships was one of the top concerns, and the subdistrict applied for and won a $1,500 grant from the Fund for Education Reform for four workshops on parenting and another on science education.

“This is our first stab at doing something districtwide,” said council chair Grant Pick. “We don’t have the staff to do it, but that’s our role. This is the kind of thing we should be doing.”

Subdistrict Supt. James Maloney said he “couldn’t possibly do all these things without them [the committees]. They believe that if anyone has a problem, if I can’t solve it, they can.”

“Some of our most participatory members are from less affluent areas,” Pick said. “At some of the more affluent schools, parents come to meetings, but they’re not the movers and shakers [within the district].”

In Subdistrict 9, on the South Side, the volunteer ethic also plays a role. Supt. Richard Stephenson relies on principals and teachers to organize districtwide academic competitions in their free time. The competitions play a key role in fostering student motivation and achievement, and used to be organized by district staff, Stephenson said.

Catalyst/June 1991

Clips from left, Joy Harpos and Martha and J. Rafael Ramirez role-play a mother-teen dialogue at a Subdistrict 2 workshop.

Principals feel the structure is still authoritative, not service-oriented. They know the districts are understaffed but don’t feel this is the time to rebuild.

For example, Alice Villa, principal of Barry Elementary School, 2828 N. Kilbourn, said, “I wouldn’t want them to have so many staff they just start checking on what we’re doing. When you have too many people, you just start floating a lot of paper.”

But Deanes stresses the needs of schools that are struggling with reform. “There’s just not enough resources [staff] to give clear, concise directions,” he said. “Some councils don’t know how to make the best decisions.” For reform to be more than “survival of the fittest,” LSCs need to be able to turn to subdistricts for information and advice on following reform law, choosing the right principals and implementing the best programs, he said.

However, Deanes, Villa and others stress that schools must play the lead role in selecting any new district staff.

“It must be clear that people are there for service, not authority,” Villa said. “Anything that’s just going to add another layer, I’m opposed to.”

On a per-student basis, Chicago’s corps of administrators is among the smallest in the state, said Richard Stephenson,
Little Village schools set up own system

In Little Village on the Near Southwest Side, 10 elementary schools banded together last year to tackle overcrowding problems.

Now, seven of those schools have formed the city's first active school "cluster," launching educational programs— for children, parents and teachers—on their own, without relying on help from an overworked, understaffed subdistrict office.

"We came out of [the overcrowding work] seeing schools working together and thought, imagine how much more resources we could get as a group [rather] than by ourselves," said Elena Duran, chair of the Subdistrict 5 Council.

The cluster—comprised of the predominately Hispanic Whitney, Gary, Spry, McCormick, McCormick Branch and Saucedo Magnet schools—took the name "SUBE." Schools United for a Better Education.

During a planning retreat, the cluster decided to offer activities on Saturdays "as a way to bring parents, teachers and students together," said Madeleine Philbin, special projects director for the United Neighborhood Organization.

Through a partnership with First National Bank, UNO is providing $15,000 for cluster activities. The grant pays for opening one of the schools one Saturday a month, workshop presenters, small stipends for teachers who attend and buses to bring the families.

"Cluster Saturdays" start promptly at 9 a.m. with coffee and rolls. Workshops, run by community groups or members of the school community, cover topics such as classroom management (for teachers), arts and crafts and computer games (for students) and family math and reading activities (for parents).

The main goal is to "get parents involved in their kids' education," said Saucedo principal Karen Morris. To participate, children must bring their parents, she explained.

"Kids are going to their parents saying you have to come to this," Philbin said. "Many parents have said they came because it's so unusual to have their kids say 'Come with me, I really want to do this.'"

So far, between 250 and 400 children and adults have showed up.

Organizers are working with City Colleges of Chicago and other area universities to offer courses for credit to parents and teachers. Next year's goal is to have activities every week at every school, in addition to once-a-month "Cluster Saturdays."

For more information, contact Elena Duran at (312) 277-9068 or Madeleine Philbin at (312) 666-4445.

Lorraine V. Forte

superintendent of Subdistrict 9. (It ranks 933rd out of 955 districts, the state says.) "And in an urban setting, it's always harder to get the job done." There is more need for guidance counselors, instructional coordinators and others to help run inner-city schools whose students face more complex problems, he explained.

Some take initiative

Despite the lack of helping hands, some districts are coping fairly well. Some have set up mentoring programs, pairing experienced principals with colleagues new to the game.

The Subdistrict 9 office on the South Side promotes multicultural and African-centered education by scheduling speakers for school assemblies and serves as a liaison between the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America and schools that want to set up troops. And Subdistricts 2 and 3 have solved severe overcrowding problems by lobbying the board for funds to purchase mobile classrooms or rent space in churches or other buildings.

However, a few voices still call for the elimination of the offices. For example, Wendy Harmsen, educational coordinator for the North River Association, says many parents in her organization believe they should be abolished "or at the very least, not expanded."

"A lot of schools want to decide [on their own] what to do, use the money from districts themselves," she explained. School councils want to "pick and choose what they want, how much they want, who they want" in terms of staff.

Designs for Change, at one time a leading proponent of scrapping the subdistricts, has backed off that stand. Many parents said staff such as reading and math coordinators were needed at the subdistrict level, explained Joan Jeter Slay, acting executive director.

The role of mediator is also crucial, says Maggie Hoover, a member of the Subdistrict 1 Council and LSC chair at Hay Elementary School, 1018 N. Laramie. "If there was not someone who could step in and mediate (between principals and LSCs), you'd be at a loss. What do you do when you know a teacher's no good, but they're a friend of the principal?... You can't always put the day-to-day operations of a school into one person's hands." Some chairs of subdistrict councils also
say superintendents' long-term experience in the system is crucial for navigating the bureaucracy.

The concept of voluntary school "clusters," in which like-minded schools band together to provide services and programs, is also gaining ground.

"Schools need some sort of grouping, but that's better based on interests or other needs, not an arbitrary [district] line somebody drew," said Slay of Designs for Change, which wants to have clusters officially recognized under the reform law.

The United Neighborhood Organization helped put together a cluster of seven predominantly Hispanic schools in the Little Village neighborhood. The schools are offering educational programs on Saturdays for parents, teachers and students.

UNO wants to take the cluster concept a step further, however. It would abolish the subdistrict councils, composed of one member from each local school council in the district, and have the offices serve solely as neighborhood counterparts of the central office, performing administrative tasks such as handling payroll or finding substitute teachers.

'Cluster' councils proposed

Those tasks "don't need a district council," said Madeleine Philbin, special projects director for UNO. Instead, each cluster would elect its own council, and would take on the jobs that schools with similar goals should control: developing and coordinating workshops and interschool activities, for example, or developing partnerships with universities and other outside resources.

The cluster councils would take over the subdistrict council's role in forming the School Board Nominating Commission. Now, each subdistrict sends two members to the commission (the high school district sends three), which recommends board candidates to the mayor.

Meanwhile, Supt. Ted Kimbrough's plan to test two different approaches to providing more localized service units on the drawing board. Kimbrough had proposed transferring more than 200 administrators from central office to the subdistricts in an effort to "get some of the services that are here [in central office] close to the students."

The centers were to help schools with problems such as budgeting, curriculum decisions and security plans. But reformers objected, saying the subdistricts should choose their own staff members.

Kimbrough then revised the proposal to allow subdistricts to select services that would be offered, choose their own staff and take part in evaluating the service centers' performance. The plan would be tried in two subdistricts. In another two, a comparable amount of money would be distributed among the schools, a plan favored by Designs for Change.

High school subdistrict 'unwieldy'

High school subdistrict Supt. Grady Jordan once had a five-person professional staff to help coordinate programs in 25 high schools. Now, Jordan makes do with an administrator and two professionals—for 78 schools.

When the Interim Board of Education slashed the number of school subdistricts in half, it created a single, citywide high school subdistrict that Jordan and others say is too large and unwieldy to manage.

In addition, the need for professional staff with expertise in various subject areas is greater in the high schools, Jordan said, because high school curricula are departmentalized.

The Board of Education's reform committee is now looking at proposals to restructure the high school subdistrict, says committee chair Florence Cox. A task force of members of the board, the high school subdistrict council, Supt. Ted Kimbrough's office and the Chicago Principals Association has been charged with making recommendations on the restructuring.

Under one proposal, the subdistrict would be split into an as-yet-undetermined number of new districts. Jordan favors such a split, but only if the new subdistricts are "properly staffed," he stressed, with curriculum, counseling and other coordinators.

"I would rather see one district that is properly staffed than multidistricts that are not," Jordan said. "If there's two or more that are just clones of the one we have now, it won't work."

Another proposal, championed by elementary Subdistrict 2 staff, would unite the high schools and elementary schools. The merger would enable schools to "follow kids through the system, help us do more for them," said James Maloney, Subdistrict 2 superintendent.

He argues that elementary and high school staff need some kind of linkage so that, for example, children with learning disorders or behavioral problems that call for special attention don't get lost in the shuffle.

Robert Saddler, chief of district operations, says the Board of Education still wants to try out the service centers and the comparison proposal, and stressed that subdistricts would have a say in staffing decisions.

Kimbrough has included the experiment in next year's tentative spending plans. Given the board's dire financial straits, however, it's likely to stay on the drawing board a while longer.

Lorraine V. Forte is a Chicago writer.

CATALYST/JUNE 1991
3 votes or 10?

LSC election defect still a flashpoint

by Michael and Susan Klonsky

As the Illinois General Assembly headed into the final month of its spring session, school reform factions were still at odds over how to fix the School Reform Act, which was declared unconstitutional last winter. But there was an ongoing struggle for unity, both to avoid a free-for-all in Springfield and to dampen divisiveness at home.

"It's our hope that they [school reform groups] will be coming together themselves," said Sen. Earlean Collins (D-Chicago), leader of the Black Caucus. "It would certainly help the process work better."

"If the reform groups are agreed on an approach, it will pass," said Sen. Arthur L. Berman (D-Chicago), the act's chief sponsor.

At issue is the method of putting six parents, two community representatives and two teachers on each local school council. The original reform act allowed parents to vote for six parents, community residents to vote for two community representatives and school staff to vote for two teachers. At the city's 73 magnet, vocational and other "multiarea" schools, parents and staff elected the community representatives.

Last November, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that that setup violated the constitutional provision of one person, one vote. There are two leading proposals for a new voting system. Both would allow voters to vote for candidates in any of the three council subgroups—parents, teachers or community representatives. Under one proposal, voters would get 10 votes; under the other, 3. Backers of each argue that theirs would give parents more power.

The debate began in January, when the Alliance for Better Chicago Schools (ABCs), a coalition formed in 1988 to lobby for the Chicago School Reform Act, proposed the 10-vote plan and the newly formed African American Education Reform Institute (AAERI) raised strong objections.

With community residents potentially outnumbering parents and school staff at the polls, a 10-vote plan could easily shut out parents who are the racial minority at a school, argued AAERI. This might be the parents of black children bused to Northwest Side schools or the parents of white children who attend magnet schools in the inner city or the parents of Hispanic children bused to white or black neighborhoods.

"Under any plan, the majority is going to have the advantage," said Ken McNeil of AAERI. "The real issue is whether or not that majority can take every seat on the council."

Ensuring minority representation

The Latino Institute, which prefers three votes or possibly four or five, has the same concern. "Given their proximity to the school, local community members have greater access to the electoral process than parents of Latino students who are being bused in," said executive director Migdalia "Millie" Rivera. State Sen. Miguel del Valle (D-Chicago) warned that bloc voting that excludes a racial or ethnic group could produce a legal challenge under Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act, which prohibits dilution of the voting power of any particular group.

Although it proposed the 10-vote model, ABCs had not, as of early May, ruled out alternatives. Speaking of the three-vote model, Malcolm Bush, senior vice president of Voices for Illinois Children, said: "The question is, will it restrict parent representation?"

Dan Solis, executive director of United Neighborhood
Organization (UNO), believes it would, by "adding 50 percent" to the voting power of teachers and community residents while cutting parents' voting power in half. Endorsing the 10-vote model, he downplays the danger of "some kind of conspiracy" by the community to control councils. "Because LSC elections are not connected to municipal or state elections, parents are the main ones voting."

Computer simulations conducted by several organizations, including the Chicago Urban League, the Latino Institute and Designs for Change, show that, theoretically, 93 schools with multiracial enrollments could wind up with one-race councils. In last year's election, that happened at only 13 of those schools. The simulations also show that, based on the results of the 1989 election, teachers could, under the three-vote model, control three parent seats at 122 schools.

While the groups agree on the numbers, they draw vastly different conclusions. For example, Designs for Change contends that limited a voting system "will encourage conflicts and separation based on race, income and residence in all 550 schools." But strong voices within AAERI disagree.

'Unappetizing' options

One powerful group, the Chicago Teachers Union, prefers yet another model. Under theirs, the Board of Education would appoint two teacher members to each council following advisory elections by school staff. This proposal drew opposition from the Teachers' Task Force of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform, which fears that the board might not pick the winners of the advisory elections.

The election issue gets more complicated at magnet, vocational and other multiarea schools, where community residents will now be permitted to vote. "All the options are pretty unappetizing," said Grant Pick, a member of the LSC at LaSalle Language Academy and chair of the Subdistrict 2 Council.

The options are: (1) Grant the mayor authority to appoint council members at multiarea schools, following advisory elections by parents and staff at the schools. (2) Create special community boundaries—for example, the area within a mile of the school—for the purpose of the elections, and permit residents inside those boundaries to run and vote. (3) Define "community" as the area from which students may attend the school, which in most cases is the entire city, and permit residents in those areas to run and vote.

Solis offered two suggestions for bolstering parent power under the third option: "Issue absentee ballots to those who request them who live far from the school or hold elections at the school on report card pickup day, when most parents come to school anyway."

Where will the debate end?

McNeil of the African American Education Reform Institute hopes for agreement on a voting system of fewer than 10 votes. "In that case," he said, "the AAERI would endorse other proposals being put forth by the other reform organizations." (See separate story on page 14.) "If that happens, we could go down to Springfield as one united Chicago community and get this all over and done with."

Leaders inside ABCs and the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform, the largest reform coalition, say they are open to whichever model is constitutional and would best unify reform forces. McNeil said AAERI is not bent on forging a path along racial lines. "The process that we are currently engaged in is one that we would not prefer," he said. "But if our interests are going to be ignored, we are comfortable proceeding by ourselves."

Michael and Susan Klonsky are writers with children in the Chicago public schools.

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Ken McNeil argues against the 10-vote proposal at a School Board hearing.
Groups to push for more local power

by Michael and Susan Klonsky

Reform groups are united on a variety of proposals to change sections of the Chicago School Reform Act that do not deal with council elections. In these cases, however, unity apparently will not guarantee passage.

Sen. Earleen Collins (D-Chicago), leader of the Black Caucus, said she will fight to remove the stipulation that the state does not have to pay for any of the reform act's mandates. "But it may become something I have to trade off in order to pass the [election part]," she said. "The Supreme Court has mandated us to do that. Other issues may get put on the back burner. We Chicago Democrats don't have enough votes to pass anything by ourselves."

To help ensure that the law's constitutional defect gets cured, two bills will be introduced, one to deal only with voting procedures (the constitutional defect), the other to address "secondary issues," said Sen. Arthur L. Berman (D-Chicago). Does this mean that the non-election issues are up for grabs? "No," said Berman. "I intend to work hard on the other issues as well and get them passed. But the elections are the critical factor."

Here are 10 secondary issues—not the "top 10" recommendations that came out of the Board of Education's controversial LSC Summit on April 6 (see Opinion article on page 16), though there is some overlap.

✓ Removal of LSC members. There is at present no procedure to remove members who don't show up for meetings or who become ineligible to hold a council seat (for example, they no longer have a child in the school). Absenteeism has crippled some LSCs, depriving them of the six-member quorum needed for voting.

A new proposal provides for automatic removal of ineligible or non-attending members (carefully defining "nonattending"); proper warning and due-process procedures are included.

Nonetheless, some fear that such a provision would be used against political mavericks, boycotters or unpopular council members. "What protects the minority?" asked Rep. Ellis Levin (D-Chicago), a co-sponsor of the original School Reform Act. "What if one group on an LSC decides to get rid of somebody? They could set up meetings at 8 o'clock in the morning when he has to be at work."

Then there is the matter of how to choose a replacement LSC member: appointment by the council, most likely. Berman raises a concerned question: "Someone has proposed that one of the losers of the election be appointed, but should a candidate who has been rejected by the electorate get the seat on the LSC?"

✓ Principal control over all staff. Currently, the law doesn't give the principal full control over the operation of his or her physical plant. The principal has to negotiate with engineering, maintenance and food service staff. Under one proposal, the principal would be the chief executive officer in each school. Support for this change has come from such diverse groups as Operation PUSH, the Chicago Urban League, the PTA, Chicago United, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Chicago Tribune, the League of Women Voters and the Board of Education itself.

As Sen. Miguel del Valle (D-Chicago) put it, "How can we hold the principals accountable when they don't have authority to run the schools?"

Vocal opposition has come from the engineer and lunchroom worker unions, which blocked a similar proposal when the reform act was first written. The unions' alternative is that the Board of Education handle "administratively" any conflict that cannot be resolved between the principal and a union or a union member at the school.

Political insiders say, however, that plans by Supt. Ted Kimbrough to try out private building maintenance contractors may push the unions into giving in on the control issue, in return for job guarantees.

✓ Principal dismissal. Currently, principals can be removed only "for cause," and "cause" has generally been interpreted in such drastic terms—for instance, being convicted of a felony—it is next to impossible to dismiss a principal. The new amendment would define "cause" to include repeated failures of the principal to comply with the performance contract or implement the school improvement plan, thus providing an LSC the possibility for mid-contract removal of its principal. The amendment further provides that an LSC could initiate formal dismissal proceedings, which are conducted before a state hearing officer. Currently, only the School Board can initiate proceedings.

Bruce Berndt, president of the Chicago Principals Association, said "failure to perform" already constitutes
grounds for dismissal of principals and teachers. Granting LSCs the authority to initiate dismissal proceedings could create "serious legal problems" if LSCs act without "ongoing, competent, legal advice," he added. School districts sometimes lose dismissal cases over legal technicalities.

LSC powers. Under the current law, it is not clear where central-office authority leaves off and LSC authority begins. A proposed "reservation clause," supported by the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform and the Lawyers School Reform Advisory Project, would reserve for the LSCs all powers not specifically assigned by law to the central administration or expressly prohibited to the LSCs.

For example, the unpopular decision this past year by Supt. Kimbrough barring Channel One TV from the Chicago public schools is a power not specifically assigned by law to central office; the same with the picket but no less unpopular paint-color announcement by Robert Sampieri, chief operating officer—that a school could paint a room only with a color approved by central office. Under the new proposal, these would be LSC decisions, proponents argue.

Terms for LSC members. LSCs want staggered terms to promote council stability and continuity. The Chicago Principals Association, the ABCs coalition and several subdistrict councils have proposed different ways to accomplish this. At the April 6 LSC Summit, the Subdistrict 6 Council advanced a plan to hold an immediate lottery of LSC members to designate a group that would remain in office for one more year. The remainder would go out in office in October 1991, as the law now provides, and be replaced by the October election. The down side of staggered terms is that they would double election costs.

Choice. The reform act mandates that the Chicago Public Schools expand school choice beginning in the 1991-92 school year with a limited, phased-in "open enrollment" program—that is, permitting students to choose the public school they want to attend (CATALYST, November 1990). Advocates argue that competition for students will encourage schools to improve.

But many reform organizations view this feature of the law with skepticism or outright hostility. James Deanes, chair of the Parent/Community Council, maintains that "no meaningful educational marketplace would exist under this policy. Open enrollment should be implemented; if at all, to reap the benefits of an improved school system after school reform has been given a chance to work in all schools."

Estimates that it will take reform five years "to work" have led most reformers to agree on a moratorium on greater school choice until 1995-96.

Money: LSC operating expenses. Reformers want a guarantee of an annual allocation from the School Board of $1,500 per school for LSC training and/or operating expenses. After all, the LSCs in 1989 had no money—not even a few dollars for paper and postage to send out announcements about their own meetings. An additional $500 allocation per school is being sought as a special-needs fund, to be released by the board upon request by an LSC for unusual or particular needs such as translations for a bilingual council or community.

Money: School budgets. Other proposals seek varying degrees of authority for the LSCs to control educational budgeting and monies.

Energy conservation. A change proposed by the Center for Neighborhood Technology would offer a financial incentive for LSCs to conserve energy. The center's Lew Kreinberg points out that some schools are spending up to $900,000 just to pay the electric bill. The change would place all energy costs under the control of the school councils and allow them to keep 50 percent of the savings that any conservation effort produced.

LSC elections. The 1989 LSC elections were run at each school by a committee that was the forerunner to the LSC itself. This year they are to be run by the LSCs themselves. While the 1989 elections were virtually scandal free, the potential for manipulation has led to calls for the Chicago Board of Election Commissioners to run the show.

"The LSCs and the principals are the least appropriate people to run the elections because they have the most self-interest in the outcome," warned Arlene Rubin, executive director of Project LEAP. Rubin believes that having the city elections board in charge would not only provide honesty, uniformity and accuracy in the election process, but also "elevate the elections in their perceived importance."

Many school reformers fear that turning the elections over to the elections board would "politicize" them, or that potential voters from low-voting populations would be scared off. Would unregistered voters or non-citizens be able to vote? Could candidates nominate themselves, rather than gather signatures on petitions? "Yes," says Rubin.

Insiders differ on the prospects for any or all of the new legislative proposals getting adopted. With the Legislature's focus now turning to budgetary and redistricting matters, many trade-offs are likely. All seem to agree, however, that the amendments that have the support of the main reform coalitions have the best chance of making it into law.

Corrections

There were several errors in the May 1991 issue. We offer these corrections and apologies:

Victoria Weston is the name of the featured Nobel School teacher using the Math at Work program. She teaches seventh- and eighth-graders. The Black Churches in Education project is funded by the National Science Foundation through the Midwest Comprehensive Regional Center Consortium for Minorities. The answer to math problem 5 on page 2 is D.
It has been 20 years since high school. I was a “good” student, I suppose. I performed. But the experience was not particularly enjoyable. The social aspects of high school predominate my memories. Those friends and building those relationships were important and worthwhile. But the academic portion, with a few exceptions, was controlling, irrelevant and boring. We would roll our eyes every day at the dullness of it all, the stifling rules, the repetition, the unimaginative assignments, the cold indifference of most teachers. We came alive after school at the pizza parlor on Roosevelt Road. School itself was “a drag.”

This all came back to me on Saturday, April 6, in a rush of high school deja vu. I was at Lane Tech attending an event sponsored by the Chicago Public Schools, Reform Summit ’91. This was purportedly a representative assembly of the city’s local school councils, the bodies elected 18 months ago to steward Chicago’s school reform at each of the system’s 540 schools. Because in November 1990 the Illinois Supreme Court found fault with the election process for the councils, the legislation is set to be “opened up” this spring, and the Reform Summit ’91 was to give LSC members a voice in the legislative process.

Well, it was a fiasco of poor planning by the CPS central office. The procedure they offered to the 400 delegates at Lane Tech that morning was some kind of Rube Goldberg notion of how decisions are made in a democracy. In our first “caucus,” 30 adult LSC members sat in three straight rows facing our three “facilitators”—one a university professor, the other two top school administrators. We were told to pass in our assignment. Each council had been asked to list, and rank in terms of priority, its top 10 concerns from among a hundred coded recommendations for changes in the law contained in a bizarre, poorly written 12-page workbook which had been mailed to the LSCs.

So, we passed in our assignment, and the three professionals at the front began computing and reading numbers off to one another at a furious pace. The class sat quietly and watched this for five minutes. I asked if we should start our discussion. No, I was told, we’d have to wait until the calculations were done. Wait a minute! We have only an hour, let’s get started, said another LSC delegate. So, reluctantly our facilitator abandoned the two others to their number crunching and read us the rules of the debate: each LSC member can talk for only one minute and can talk about only the top two priorities on the list just turned in.’

‘Students’ chastised

“What?” “This is a farce!” “Get serious.” The class was getting restless and our teacher could see it. So she loosened up on the rules a bit, and an animated 35-minute discussion took place, with a good deal of give and take, and some disagreement. But a lot of shared opinion was evident. Probably a dozen new ideas were generated, which did not quite fit the coded categories in our workbook; but as everyone knows, the strength of holding a discussion is that something new and better comes out of collective deliberation.

That is, of course, what we naively thought professional educators would also know. Not so. The feverish calculators finished their job and proudly announced our group’s top 10
from the assignments we turned in at the beginning. "Yeah, but we have all these new things," we pointed out. No, we were now to vote on these 10 and these 10 only. "Why, then, did we hold the discussion? We could have just done this by mail!" said one participant.

Our facilitator was angry now. A coordinator came in and nervously conferred with the three for a moment. We could not hear, but apparently he insisted that the computer was waiting for our votes, and that we should stick to the established rules to stay on schedule. We replaced a few of our earlier top 10, but the facilitator would allow only other coded recommendations to be added, not our homemade ones. "Otherwise, the computer can't count them," she pleaded. Her anger at our uncooperative attitude made her attack us. At one point she said, "Do you people really know how these recommendations affect education?" Her contempt for parents in the reform process was clear.

Well, it went on like this all day, from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.—a kind of Catch-22 psychological hell. Suddenly, it hit me halfway through the day: This is school. This whole process mirrored the school day that our children endure.

I began to think about the painful procedures we were going through. The pledge of allegiance and obligatory platitudes dryly read by the superintendent at our first plenary get-together in the dark, dreary assembly hall, followed by this nutty process in the morning, then horrid grey meat and beets for lunch, a surreal aria from "Rigoletto" sweetly sung by a Lane graduate at our second plenary session, more

John Ayers is a community representative on the Darwin Elementary School Local School Council.

A "class" goes through the drill at Reform Summit '91.
New school is lemonade from central-office lemon

by Cathy Yates

Many frustrations have issued from Chicago’s recent efforts at school reform, but here is one story of hope, vision and success. It begins with the Board of Education doing what it has always done—making decisions and handing them down to the community. It ends by fulfilling the spirit of the school reform law with a plan to create a school never envisioned by the board.

In 1990 the board suddenly announced it was going to purchase from the Sisters of St. Francis the former Alvernia School at Irving Park and Lawndale on the Northwest Side. The area has many overcrowded schools; the board announced, without explanation, five schools that would transfer students to the new school.

There were many questions and problems for which the board provided no answers or information. First, Alvernia was not vacant. A variety of community service organizations were renting space in the building, including Northeastern Illinois University’s Chicago Teachers’ Center; Kidwatch, the only day-care center in the area for pre- and after-school care; a Korean church group; and the private Upward School Unit, which teaches ecological science to elementary schools on a contract basis.

Community was wary

What grades would comprise the school? What curriculum programs would be at this new school? What is the total enrollment projected? How would the children who go there be chosen? What about transportation? The Alvernia site would require students walking to school to cross several major intersections.

Community individuals and groups were upset; they didn’t want a new public school at Alvernia. They were accustomed to the present tenants and feared the school would be a dumping ground for a thousand students who would wander unsupervised through the neighborhood.

The local school councils in the area were not happy. Here was yet another top-down board decision foisted off on them. Central office never addressed the LSCs or the Alvernia neighbors directly.

The board’s motive was laudable: alleviate overcrowding at five schools. The board’s method was lamentable.

The community rallied against the board’s announcements, officially notifying Supt. Ted Kimbrough that they wanted their voices heard. Kimbrough responded, assuring the protesters that the Alvernia site would be used only with the unanimous agreement of all the schools designated for participation. This was a problematic assurance; who knew what booby traps lurked within it? But we ran with it nonetheless, helped considerably by the fact that the board did nothing for months. We filled the vacuum.

The best of reform

The next five months demonstrated the best of school reform in action; this is what it is supposed to be all about. No string of sentences on paper can convey the richness of working together, the turmoil of endless debates, the excitement of new ideas, the exhaustion and frustration, the joy of consensus.

Suffice it to write that numerous groups united to brave the challenge: design a curriculum that would genuinely benefit the students, create a new educational opportunity. Meetings, meetings and more meetings were held. This was the first time some adult groups had communicated with each other and taken the time to define community goals and expectations. The meetings had representatives from the five designated schools, from other area schools, including high schools, from Alvernia’s tenants, from the alderman, from the district superintendent, from community organizations, such as the Greater Albany Park Parents Association, the North River Commission, the Park View Civic Association—and more.

Now for the bumpy part. The community had spoken with one voice against the board’s high-handed action, but there were many voices fashioning the substance beyond the protest. For instance, opposition to any school at all was an initial obstacle; as I already indicated, the immediate neighborhood was satis-
fied with the present arrangement. But it was pointed out that Alvernia was a large building; what else other than a school could it be fully used for on a long-term basis? Besides, it had always been a school until recently. And the board would likely succeed in buying the building and designating it a school. Let us make it a good school; that would be its best use.

Next, what kind of school? A model school—modeled on successful schools elsewhere and a model for others to pattern after. Step by step we wrung consensus from the disparate views we all had. Step by step we wrung concessions from the Board of Education. We engendered such a cooperative spirit among our groups that we surprised even ourselves. It has been a thrill to experience. And the plans the school have become a focus for a new vision for the entire community.

The new school, currently referred to as District 1 Middle School, will be officially named by its students when it opens this fall. Now without a name but not without a philosophy, a mission and a curriculum—and a principal. The board permitted our planning committee, a de facto LSC, to choose a principal, who in turn has full authority to hire a faculty and administrative staff. Equal attention and emphasis will be given to the academic, social and emotional development of our seventh- and eighth-graders. The new multicultural, interdisciplinary curriculum will involve team teaching, in-house peer tutoring and community outreach projects.

The building will retain two tenants: Kidwatch and the Teachers’ Center. Plans call for student involvement with the daycare center; and cooperation with the Teachers’ Center, which will offer inservice opportunities for the school’s faculty.

While Illinois legislators and the Illinois Supreme Court worked on the ifs and hows of school reform, our group made it a reality. Good things are happening; surely even better things are to come.

Cathy Vates is a community member of the Patrick Henry LSC and chair of the planning committee for the new middle school.

Teachers should bargain with their LSCs

by Gerald Adler

The November 1990 Illinois Supreme Court decision invalidating the election process by which Chicago’s local school councils were chosen set school reformers and legislators to scratching their heads for solutions. A new mechanism was needed to fit the one-person, one-vote requirement. How to choose those six parents, two community residents and two teachers? The Illinois Legislature is wrestling with that question at this moment.

My idea solves a third of the problem instantly: Remove teachers from the LSC and have them sit on the other side of the table in a collective bargaining mode.

Critics will cry, "You are resorting to a confrontational negotiating stance that has no place in school reform." But LSCs already have internal tripartite bargaining; my plan simply transforms the framework into bilateral bargaining between teachers and LSC representatives.

My proposal is definitely at odds with the one from the Chicago Teachers Union’s John Kotsakis—to have principals on the professional personnel advisory committees. To me this smacks of “company unionism.” Kotsakis says a principal’s membership in the PPAC will guarantee that material gets to an LSC. But it may be material filtered through the principal. And a PPAC with a principal present may well be a place where teachers “chill up” and do not express their real feelings. Under my proposal, PPAC items would have to get to an LSC because they would be discussable and bargainable issues. My role for the principal is on the LSC side of the table, as resource person, and, we would hope, as mediator and conciliator.

By the way, both teachers and principals might welcome teacher removal from the LSC because it would eliminate two teacher votes in principal selection and thus avoid the polarization that has occurred in some faculties. As a teacher, I do not wish to choose management’s representative; I want to
negotiate with him or her to achieve consensus.

Many school reformers lament that teachers represent a special interest mainly focused on working conditions. But there is nothing wrong with special interests. If you give people free speech, free press, free petition and freedom of association, they will sort themselves into special interests. What you have to do is harmonize the special interests to achieve consensus or negotiated arrangements. After all, the drafters of school reform are well aware of this; they operated that way themselves: School Reform I was an attempt to coalesce the various special interests of school reform.

Furthermore, you cannot fault teachers for their concern with working conditions. Indeed, working conditions, including morale, are going to affect their performance. School policies invariably affect working conditions, and vice-versa.

Put about everything on table

The Illinois Education Labor Relations Law takes account of this reality and requires negotiations over school policies where these affect working conditions. We already have in place the potential bargaining representatives of the teachers in the form of the PPACs and the CTU’s professional problems committees, whose functions actually overlap; again, you cannot separate school policies from working conditions, and the personnel of both PPAC and PPC are overwhelmingly union.

Local bargaining with the LSC is the only way the CTU will ever effectively address local school policies and local working conditions. If we must decentralize the Board of Education/Central Office, we must also decentralize the CTU.

The present notion of teachers, parents and community working together at a school as one big, happy family through an LSC is patently unrealistic, and one needn’t be labeled Machiavellian for saying it. Further, there is no advantage to teachers on an LSC where they are a permanent minority. They should simply move to the other side of the table.

In the bargaining plan I suggest, all issues would become negotiable except those precluded by law. One bargaining issue, for instance, would be the organization of the school week, including preparation and planning time, instructional time, contact hours with students, the length and number of classes taught, lunch time and the number of times teachers are required to meet with parents.

How would all this work? There could still be a master union contract, but also local agreements locally arrived at through bargaining. The LSC and the local teachers committees are not as distant from each other as the Board of Education is from principals or the downtown union is from its local school delegates. LSCs and teachers have to live with one another day to day; the downtown CTU bureaucrats who negotiate teacher contracts don’t have to live or work locally.

Many large industrial unions have long written master agreements supplemented by local plant agreements on local work rules. We should not reject this model with the dogma that schools are not factories (although they have long been run like factories) because in this case the union-factory model may be a good one. These changes could be achieved by amendment in the teachers bargaining law and in phase two of school reform legislation.

Under my arrangement, could the faculty at a single school go out on strike against the local school council? Yes. The argument is made, even by teachers, that my proposal would produce numerous strikes. On the contrary, most labor negotiations do not end in strikes; and, in fact, teachers may be less strike-happy in a local situation where the issues are more narrowly defined, and perhaps more easily addressed, than in many citywide strikes. Indeed, local negotiations would permit the bargainers to experiment with “win-win” type settlements, which have had some success in Evanston and Maine Township high schools and in recent negotiations in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Teachers not obstacles

Further, if bargaining is decentralized, reporting back to one’s constituents would be far better today where most CTU members get their information largely from the same sources as the public—the media. Contract ratification meetings today are basically a “selling job” by the negotiating team on many issues the members were unaware had been under consideration; this could readily be avoided in local settings.

Finally, contrary to some predictions, I think union busting would be minimized. Recruiting strike-breakers would not be easy (unless there were a serious recession). Besides, strike breaking pushed by an LSC would be counterproductive in building the kind of faculty collegiality necessary for the success of school reform and school-based management. Faculties, often divided into cliques, would be divided even more between those who crossed the line and those who didn’t.

Teachers must not be seen as an obstacles to overcome in the race for school reform. A teacher should be perceived as a player in a string quartet, one among equals, all equally contributing to a harmonious sound—though occasional disharmonies can be expected from a group playing experimental music or confronting a score for the first time.

Gerald Adler is a member of the CTU’s professional problems committee at Kelly High School.
LSC plans disappointing, but not bad for a start

by Susan E. Klonsky

The following opinion article is based on the author's work as a member of the research and writing group for a report on first-year school improvement plans. The report, "What the Schools Will Do," is a publication of the Department of Research, Evaluation and Planning of the Chicago Public Schools.

One of the major tasks for each local school council during its first year—1989-90—was to develop a three-year school improvement plan (SIP). In studying the first round of SIPs, what can be learned about what parents actually did in this important exercise of new powers? (In this piece, I use "parent" as a shorthand term for the lay members of an LSC. Not only are the six parents a clear majority on each council, but the two community reps are often also parents, even if their children are not now in any school or in their LSC school.)

Were the inexperienced LSC members up to the challenge? Our research group which reviewed the school improvement plans was a relatively inclusive one. Teachers and parent representatives were among the reviewers. We dug through piles of SIPs, eagerly looking for new images and new ideas to fuel our imaginations and our work in revamping our own schools, as well as in providing guidance to others.

Some applied rubber stamp

We were initially disappointed. There simply was not much in the way of changes, particularly in the areas dealing with substantive educational issues and knotty social problems. Our expectations far exceeded our findings.

The SIPs could be roughly divided into a few basic categories. A tiny minority contained significant restructuring plans, such as Gale School's plan for year-round school. But this was a modification aimed mainly at relieving overcrowding, and it left the internal structure of the school, its size and its curriculum fundamentally unchanged. A handful of plans contained major curricular additions, such as the one at Tilton School which adopted an Afrocentric curriculum.

Numerous schools appeared to stand fast on their past practice, and their plans looked as if they had been stencilled page after page, repeating the same plans three years in a row with no alterations.

Notable exceptions were those schools that objected to the mandated goals or to the timetables for producing the three-year plans. The plan of Franklin Fine Arts, a magnet elementary school, stands out as one where excellent planning and rethinking of the school's mission was painstakingly done. They simply ran out of time and could not complete the process by the assigned date, and so submitted an incomplete plan—unapologetically—explaining that they were going to take their time and do it right the first time.

Most LSCs, however, were quite intimidated by rumors that if a school plan didn't get in on time their money would be cut off from next year's budget. Some schools, we knew, submitted obviously rubber-stamped plans with the intention of just getting a minimal thing in by the deadline date, intending to go back and make a "real" plan during the summer and following year.

We suspected, too, that some SIPs did not reflect the actual changes under consideration or underway. For instance, we knew of a couple of schools that had decided to eliminate standardized testing in their primary classrooms, but they opted not to submit this decision for official scrutiny in their plans. Fear of judgment or punishment from central office led to a certain clandestine atmosphere, coupled with a determined spirit that "we're going to do it anyway," no matter what the authorities say.

Time pressures and political pressures—whether real or perceived—were only two of the factors impeding planning at the local level. Another and sometimes quite devastating factor was a basic lack of self-confidence on the part of new LSC members.
And yet, many individuals—even from educated backgrounds—still feel unarmed and ill-prepared to evaluate the various options before us to change the schools—or various options we can create to change the schools. The legacy of years of disrespect for parental opinions and suggestions has taken its toll. Even among the most outspoken parents there is a hesitancy to question the pedagogic philosophy of a principal or teacher, or to evaluate critically a text or curricular module. This pattern appears to be changing as LSC members gain in experience and confidence and as a collective spirit develops within many councils, but the change will come slowly.

Central office ‘interference’

This problem is compounded by the rapid turnover of LSC members. As established by law, the entire LSC stands for re-election at the end of a two-year term (the first LSCs began in October 1989 and will end in October 1991). There are no staggered terms. There is no guarantee that any “veterans” of the first two-year cycle will be re-elected to the second batch of councils. Some will, some won’t. The learning process is not only continuous but will have to begin anew next fall. In this context, it is easy to understand why so many of the plans appear to have been generated almost singlehandedly by the principal.

Yet another impediment to site-based planning has been the continued interference of central office in the planning process. Cases in point: A crowded elementary school agonizes over plans to consolidate a couple of classes in order to open up a needed extra classroom. They file all the right papers with the right officials. But the week before school opens in September, without warning, an extra 25 students with severe learning disabilities are transferred to the school, papers in hard, and the LSC is told that to refuse to accept these additional students would constitute a “civil rights violation.” Hours and months of careful planning are laid to waste. A high school council devises an elaborate, improved security plan, allocating part of its State Chapter I monies to pay parents to work as monitors in the building. Over the heads of the LSC, two uniformed policemen are instead assigned to the school. The LSC is not asked; it is told.

These are not isolated incidents. They occurred at literally dozens of schools. Whatever other problems the people on the local school councils may have, their biggest problem is the force of old habits of those at the top—their institutional inability to let go of the management of the schoolhouse.

Finally, the councils are facing a set of lofty goals mandated by the state Legislature, and we are expected to design our three-year plans in conformity with them. For example, “Students,” says Goal I in the Reform Act, “will achieve proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, science and higher-order thinking so that their averages equal or surpass national norms.” Does the mandate mean that three years down the road, your students will have become, like the children of Lake Wobegon, “all above average”?

The harsh reality for most Chicago schools is that as many as 77% of the students are at least two years below grade level. It will take years, new kinds of schools and new kinds of teaching to do the job.

Anne Lieberman of Columbia Teachers’ College stresses that real reform begins with small, visible changes. In our Chicago schools, small and visible changes have begun. Sometimes these early changes have not gone the way educational professionals believe they should go. In this respect, democracy is a crapshoot. As reform develops, it will be uneven, and it will not always result in what might be defined as academically progressive change. But whatever we parents do as we blunder along, it is still a thousand times superior to what existed before.

Rather than view with disappointment the apparently superficial changes in the first round of three-year plans, I would suggest a deeper look. Look at the surrounding conditions and obstacles, the social struggle that produced the reform initiative in the first place. I am convinced that as the councils gain experience and collective wisdom, and more models of change are born, the long-term plans will reflect this. There is among Chicago’s parents an iron determination to learn and to make whole the schools that should serve our children.

Susan Klonsky is a parent member of the Sayre Language Academy LSC and editor of Reform Watch, published by the Donors Forum of Chicago.
Chicago off to great start, a standout nationally

by Michael B. Katz, Michelle Fine and Elaine Simon

Chicago school reform is a hot topic among professional educators—in journals, at conferences, etc. But national newspapers and magazines seldom mention it, and what they write is sometimes not very accurate or fair. When school administrators and teacher unions discuss school reform, they often point to Chicago as a “disaster” they might face if public dissatisfaction with schools continues to grow. Even some liberal academics dismiss Chicago school reform because they think “machine politics” will absorb it and that “parents won’t be able to manage schools.”

Chicago is proving these alarmists and critics wrong. The national media are missing a great domestic story. This is the conclusion reached by the three of us, periodic visitors to Chicago school reform, all from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

Intrigued by what we’d heard, we wanted to see Chicago school reform in action for ourselves. Each of us had a professional interest and relevant experience. As a team, we hoped to interpret Chicago school reform for an audience outside the city. And we later came to think our outsiders’ perspective also might be useful for the Chicago reform community.

Problems can be overcome

Over the past several months, we have visited schools and interviewed principals, teachers, parents and community members. What we’ve seen excites us. School reform has mobilized a segment of this city around education. Whereas pessimism and depression pervade discussions of public education in most big cities, in Chicago, school reform has rekindled optimism, unleashed energy and activated coalitions across race, class, gender and politics.

We’re not pretending Chicago school reform lacks problems. Nor do we want to minimize them. We’ve seen and heard a long list, and lots of them are serious. But none is insurmountable. Given the continued commitment of its participants and a few good breaks, the reform will grow stronger and more effective.

Surprising integration

In Chicago, school reform is more than educational change. Here it’s a social movement that embraces and reflects the city’s diversity. Nowhere have we encountered gatherings as integrated—by race, gender, age, occupation and relation to the school system—as the events we attended during these past months.

The energy and time invested by participants in school reform overwhelm us. Your collective and individual commitment has carried reform triumphantly over its inescapably rocky first year. We use “triumph” advisedly. This radical reform passed from legislation to implementation with remarkably few misadventures. Chicago created more than 500 new community-based units of government with, as far as we can tell, virtually no whiff of corruption and no interruption of service. At worst, some schools seem to be working about the same as before, and we’ve heard many tales of success.

Reform not only survived its first constitutional crisis, it emerged politically stronger with a nearly unanimous endorsement in the state Legislature. The question now is how to keep the momentum up, how to keep all constituents engaged and how to make it better—not whether to dismantle it. In little more than a year, all effective opposition to the core principles of reform has vanished.

It would be naive to expect overnight transformations in large urban schools. Nor do test scores adequately measure the early successes of school reform. It is a major achievement in itself that the creation and operation of LSCs in most schools are successful.

We’re impressed, too, by the stories of small victories we have heard over and over again: a new roof, a refurbished gym, an adequate copy machine for teachers, safe school cor-
ridors. We’re encouraged by discussions of multicultural curricula, innovations in teaching methods, and teachers and parents exchanging views about education. All these not only bring an immediate, energizing sense of accomplishment, they create conditions for effective teaching and learning, they establish contexts for the public to be back in public schools.

Even more, Chicago school reform is one of the great adult education movements in American history. At what other times have so many people had to master the complex combinations of legislative, financial, administrative, educational and parliamentary issues that confront each LSC?

We'll never forget the grandmother who met us at one school with questions about whole language learning, or the discussions of constitutional matters by LSC members on the bus to Springfield on the day in January that the state Legislature was to legitimize school reform.

In fact, much of the conflict in Chicago around school reform is appropriate and healthy. Indeed, we admire the openness of the debate. People are arguing publicly about the relations between race and education and other issues often disputed elsewhere only in private. In a democracy, there's much to contest about the content and structure of schooling, and the debate should be open, continuing and accessible to everyone.

Whatever the difficulties, Chicago, persist! What you’re doing is historic. For more than a century most urban school reform has been about moving the furniture around in a room without refashioning its walls. That’s one reason reform hasn’t worked very well. You’re the first to start with the walls. You have to show it can be done, and why it’s important. You’re off to a great start.

Michelle Fine is a social psychologist. Elaine Simon is an urban anthropologist. Michael Katz is a social historian. This opinion article is reprinted with adaptations from the March 7, 1991 issue of the Chicago Tribune.

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Letters

Community backs Wells High principal

After reading the letter by Charles Kyle on the controversy over retention of the principal at Wells High School (CATALYST, April 1991), I felt the need to respond.

I was present at the majority of the Wells LSC meetings. I also spoke with LSC members on both sides of the issue on numerous occasions. There never was any significant community support to remove the current principal at Wells. There was a small, vocal group that attempted to grab power. This group undertook a vicious campaign to slander the principal, staff, students and others in an attempt to gain control of the school. I believe any effort by the small group to bring a suit to trial would result in a dismissal, recognizing that the council and community acted properly. Further, a trial would expose unfounded accusations that were designed to inflame the community.

If lack of funds to pursue a suit is really the reason for inaction by the small group, I would like to offer assistance in organizing a fund-raising campaign. I and others in the community would do this so that complete and accurate information about the group’s behavior and motives could be made public.

During the election for the first LSC, our community may have been too passive. When the new elections are held this fall, I am sure that the community will turn out to assure that council members who represent the views of the community are elected.

Ron Munderschied, executive director
Northwestern University Settlement

Jenkins-Brown piece backfires

The article by Sharon Jenkins-Brown titled "Reform Rivalries Sap Energy, Shortchange Kids" (CATALYST April 1991) could have been a very positive statement. Unfortunately, in an attempt to help various groups put aside their differences and encourage them to work together, Brown ascribed words and position statements to organizations which are not theirs.

For example, the Chicago Principals Association has never called pro-reformers "myopic leeches" or said that reform groups were going to get "millions of training dollars." Nor have we ever called pro-reformers "exclusionary, proprietary and having a narrow view of what constitutes school improvement."

I would agree with Brown that everyone needs to put aside differences and work to make our schools better. One way that we could do that is to stop calling each other names.

Bruce Berndt, president
Chicago Principals Association

Misplaced credit

Your articles on business involvement in education (CATALYST, March 1991) were interesting, but one point was inaccurate. Leadership for Quality Education has played an important role representing major corporations in the reform effort, and I personally have enjoyed my contact with them.

However, it was John Madigan, chairman and chief executive office of the Chicago Tribune, who put together the business coalition that is helping my involvement with the business side of the Board of Education.

Barnett W. Doroko
Consultant to the general superintendent

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The newspapers recently brought us the story about the resignation of the Board of Education’s communications director, Marj Halperin, who lamented the misplaced interests of some administrators. For instance, it took a “monumental effort,” she complained, to list names alphabetically in the school directory instead of by the importance of their titles. Too many of my bosses, she concluded, “had their own agenda to promote.”

One of our diarists captures this same motif with his question, “Why can’t we just plan for the children instead of wasting time on who should have what kind of power and status?”

Yes, the diarists are still at work. This is the second and last year of the first local school councils. But none of our diarists shows any signs of sensing “the end.” They continue to reflect their own active involvement in the reform process, and they chronicle the still-vigorous pursuit of reform by the LSCs—sometimes troubled but yet engaged (most of them).

A usual, the excerpts below from our anonymous writers represent a cross-section of perspectives—parents, teachers, a principal, an academic, community activists, a student, a central administrator; most are LSC members.

**Diaries**

**LSC peace shattered**

**CARLOS**

Jan. 12 The peaceful, cooperative local school council meetings we were having suddenly turned nasty.

A group of very vocal parents came to this month’s meeting and spoke during the public-participation part of the meeting. Their issue was a personnel matter—a teacher change the principal had made. The parents were dissatisfied with the move. Two council members suddenly started taking issue with the principal. Quiet expressions of opinion turned into shouting and personal accusations. This interrupted the entire meeting. No business was officially accomplished. The meeting was adjourned.

The next two weeks were full of personal attacks, teachers taking sides, parents not speaking to other parents and teach-

ers and council members not working together.

Jan. 23 Local school members met at different times to review the situation. Apparently one of the members, an old timer, has the trust of the parent group. I met with him to see how we could start building bridges. Some of the recommendations included having the principal meet with the parents privately, making sure all notifications to the community are readily available and directly inviting parents to all local school council meetings. I have observed that on an individual basis most of the disgruntled individuals are very charming and easy to talk to. Once they have an audience, they become like a mob.

Feb. 9 We held our monthly scheduled council meeting. We expected a follow up of parental distractions. We surely got them. This time they did not wait until the public-participation section. They interrupted every part of the meeting. The two council members continued to side with them and became like ringleaders. Every business item became an issue. This time, though, the LSC was able to transact business. The meeting ended with continued shouting matches, accusations and distortion of facts. It seemed that the original personnel issue had died down, but other issues flourished.

Feb. 18 I spent this week trying to sort out the parental problem with our LSC chair. It was determined that it consists of a handful of parents and two community members. I met with some of them, and it seems to me there are two real issues. The first is that their involvement in the school’s now minimal because of the new LSC structure. The other is that much of the information being bandied about comes from disgruntled staff. An underlying issue goes back to last year’s principal selection process. This group was not supportive of the LSC and felt the council refused to hear their concerns.

The principal and LSC members will be meeting with interested parents and community members on a weekly basis or as necessary. Professional development meetings with staff will, we hope, diffuse the rhetoric.

‘Very little has changed’

**OLIVIA**

Jan. 14 My LSC has decided to keep me. Good. This is where I want to be.

March 13 I attend an evening meeting which is supposed to tell me how to do the school improvement plan and how the budget process (loading the money into the computer) is supposed to work. Three members of my LSC attend also. The presentation is patronizing. The presenter compares the process of conducting a needs assessment to that of buying groceries. “For this I went to graduate school?” laments one of
my colleagues. I can’t take it. My LSC members can’t take it either. We leave before the budget presentation.

March 22 I finally “bring up” on the computer our fiscal ’92 ESEA allocation, and the amount is less than last year’s. No way. This can’t be. Someone somewhere has made a mistake. I run down to central office to talk to whoever knows the score so we can get our funding restored. Sorry. Our reading scores have gone up just enough to reduce the number of students eligible for ESEA dollars. Success does not pay, at least not in dollars.

Oh well, I can live with the reduction. When I first took this assignment, I told my ESEA teacher that I wanted to eventually eliminate the need for her job. If we could get all our students to read at or above grade level, we would no longer need to provide remediation services, and we would no longer be in need of ESEA dollars. However, we have not achieved our goal yet, and I hope the reduction in funding does not cause any regression in achievement scores.

March 30 I recently attended a conference out East—educators getting together to discuss the latest theories and compare notes on current practices. It seems that everyone has heard of Chicago school reform and wants to know what’s going on. How have things changed? How have things remained the same? More work for school administrators? Less work? How about student achievement? Has all this parental involvement in the schools resulted in higher student achievement? How about the teachers? Are their voices being heard?

Sorry to disappoint you, but from my perspective very little has changed. I used to have to report to a district superintendent (D.S.), a “line officer.” I still have to deal with the D.S. He gives me an annual evaluation and “invites” me to monthly meetings which are a pain in the you know what. I still get directives and meaningless paperwork from the district office, but very little else. In the spirit of “reform,” the district staff was slashed, reduced to the district superintendent, an administrative assistant and a secretary. One does not need a doctorate in educational administration to know that two professionals and a career service person cannot provide meaningful services to 45 or 50 schools in the district. It’s a wonder they can keep up with who’s on first.

Instead of having to get the okay from my D.S. for every little move I make, I now have to get it from my council chair. My secretary has joked that we need to get his signature on an unrestricted “P” pass, so I can have permission to go to the washroom at my own discretion. In all seriousness, my council is involved to a very minimal degree in the operation of this school. However, almost every decision has to be okayed by the council and/or the council chair. This is reform?

I used to have to make sure that my faculty was adequately informed of directives from on high, that they knew what was expected of us, that they were up to date on the whims of the state and the federal government. Now, in addition to them, I have another group I must keep informed: my local school council. They have taken a very minimalist approach to this reform business; they haven’t even bothered to get training. The LSC mailbox is always crammed with the letters and flyers they get from central office and every public and private organization dedicated to “reform.” The chair steps by periodically and takes the mail. I’m not sure what he does with it, but I see very little direct action as a result of this paper onslaught. Now central office has added the “pink pages” to the weekly General Superintendent’s Bulletin, and I have to make sure that a copy is crammed into the LSC mailbox.

How about student achievement? Surely all this pain and heartache has been worth the effort because more students are achieving at higher levels, right? Again, no. Increased student achievement does not happen overnight. After all, we are not talking about increased yield as a result of a new fertilizer. School reform did not address the classroom or the variables that affect student achievement. School reform dealt solely with governance: who’s in charge.

What about teacher involvement in the governance process? For those schools where teacher involvement was a fact of life before reform, teacher involvement continues to play an important role. Where it is something new, it is difficult for both teachers and administrators. Most teachers are not prepared for the amount of time and effort required to provide meaningful input. Some administrators are reluctant to share the decision-making role. We go around and around.
Students’ lives: highs, lows

AMELIA

Dec. 28 During the holiday break I talk to my daughter’s friends as they pop in and out of our house. The basic feeling of the kids is that the school is not run well. The rules are not being followed by the students and they are getting away with being rude to teachers and rude to each other, fighting, causing all kinds of disruptions and giving the school a bad name.

They feel the responses of the administration have concentrated on the picky things and been lenient on the serious problems, which these kids want to see toughness on. There are many comments that boil down to the fact that just getting through a day is very stressful—for the wrong reasons.

One of the kids, who is near the top academically in her class, is applying to a private school just because she does not feel there is any mutual respect between teachers and students and that it is not a friendly, secure place to be. She wants to be where she will be in an atmosphere of learning and the stress level will be reduced.

LAZARUS

Feb. 6 The entire student body is reassigned lockers. The reason for the action is never publicly disclosed. Students, arms filled with books and papers, scurry about like refugees carrying their most prized possessions in the face of some unknown terror. The halls are chaotic, with notebook papers layering the floor, a book occasionally being carelessly—sometimes deliberately—tossed about.

Locks on lockers not vacated are cut off by the end of the day and all contents removed to some place. A good student of mine who had been absent on the day of the reassignment arrives for class the next day. He is dismayed. His locker had been cut off and his $24 textbook and notes taken out of his locker. I could only refer him to the lost and found.

Feb. 16 Recently, our Music Department took students to the opera with State Chapter I funds. By all accounts, the trip was a great success.

PUD

April 2 I’ve gained a rather “in” relationship with all the right people. Ya’ know, the administration and many teachers and of course the LSC. However, I find that being the student part of the LSC puts me in an uncomfortable position.

Becoming close friends with the principal has damaged my ties with some teachers, especially those not highly favored. It seems as if some teachers feel I am spying on them.

I’ve gained a special respect from teachers. People listen to me. They acknowledge what I have to say.

I believe it all started when I installed the Student Suggestion Box. This is a service for students who have suggestions, criticisms, complaints or compliments, which I must represent without bias. Most of the notes received are complaints about teachers. Two copies of the note are always made, one for the principal (council) and one for the teacher. So, I always make sure that the teacher is informed of the complaint, whatever is said. Sometimes representing complaints puts me in the “bad guy” position.

The administration (here) is so strict and serious about improvement that a full investigation of a complaint is made. Some teachers thank me, or praise me for “putting in a good word”; others resent me for doing my job. No matter what the situation, everyday I’m wearing 300-pound shoes, and will continue to walk boldly whether my reputation is accepted or rejected. I will stand for principles until every life form has risen to its intended state.

April 27 I’m tired and worn—but satisfied. Ripping and running here and there. Meeting to meeting, seminar to lecture, school to downtown, I’m doing my duty and making my contribution to reform. Being a student rep calls for the very best one has to offer.

Being student representative changes your whole lifestyle. Wow! I’ve never felt so important in my whole life. I can remember when I used to pray that something would come for me in the mail. Now I get so much mail, I pray for it to stop.

Today I looked around my bedroom and saw that it’s practically an office. I don’t carry a book bag to school; I’m known for my leather brief case. It seems that I’m being patterned by those I keep company with. Instead of wearing sweat shirts and casuals, I’m wearing nicely pressed shirts and fine, interesting ties.

Reform has given me a chance to stand “toe to toe” with the educational and political giants in Chicago. Meeting the mayor or sipping tea at the governor’s mansion probably would seem like something really exciting for the average person. Yes, it can be. But once you realize that these guys are either going to work with you or against you, it becomes challenging and rather stressful. Like me, you’ll soon realize that for educational advancement, it’s all in a day’s work.
Phantom councils

AMELIA

Jan. 7 Everyone realizes, I think, that school reform and the council are not going to be the powerful forces for change—at least not in the way we had all thought. So, interest is lost. One of the more difficult members of our council has quietly dropped off. The obstreperous teachers have backed off a bit because the teachers in general do not feel threatened by the council any more. The parents who thought they were going to fire teachers and demand a special curriculum and raise everybody’s grade point have decided that is not going to be possible.

Those who got excited about school reform and wanted a new principal were disappointed, those who wanted the council to solve the administrative problems were disappointed and those who thought teachers would have a say in the running of the school were disappointed—in spite of the fact the council turned back the curriculum into the teachers’ hands.

The hardest workers all along are the ones who want to keep the school from “degenerating,” as my daughter puts it. She said recently, “Mom, no one cares what the council does. Why do you work so hard on it? It really makes no difference to anything at school.”

So different from last year when there were fervent battles over even the bylaws, and the budget committee planned meetings so that council members could not attend.

In the early months it seemed one could go into the school and feel one had a right to be there, to be concerned. Now, doing the same questioning and raising issues, one begins to feel that too much of it is making oneself a pest. And yet there is still much the councils can do behind the scenes. I am concluding that what happens in our council is not what happens at the meetings but what individuals do on committees or on their own to put forth ideas, exert pressure or organize groups of parents for one purpose or another.

OLIVIA

March 7 We did not have a quorum at our monthly LSC meeting, so it was cancelled. The chair and secretary were absent. Maybe members figure now that the issue of my principal’s contract has been decided, the game is over. Nothing could be further from the truth. We still have more than three months left in this school year. The school-improvement plan has to be submitted, the 1991-92 budget must be discussed and approved and next year’s LSC elections have to be planned. The game is not over; the task is not completed. Reform means seeing this through to the end. At this late date, I am convinced that most parents and community members of our LSC still do not fully understand reform and their role in this process.
Legal again

AMELIA

Jan. 18 This week my certificate and letter of appointment from the mayor came to ratify that my services are still wanted as an LSC member. Somehow there was a gushy, patronizing tone to the certificate and letter, and I think the money could have been spent better elsewhere and a simple letter sent instead. Something more businesslike and matter of fact, such as: "Because of the current legislative work on mending the flaws in the school reform act, the councils will be appointed until the reformed reform law passes. Thank you for your continuing efforts on behalf of your school." That would have been perfectly acceptable, without all the fanfare and expense.

ELIZABETH

Jan. 19 A very official envelope arrived from the Office of the Mayor this week. It contained my certificate of appointment (suitable for framing) to my LSC.

Along with my certificate came the accompanying public relations attempt. The letter began neutrally enough. Mayor Daley assures me he is pleased to be taking this step. Then the politician unmasks himself, letting his office take credit, at least in part, for preserving "the gains we have made here in Chicago toward reform of our public schools."

A parent's challenge to teachers

AMELIA

April 20 I have a four-point agenda for the union, an agenda that addresses working conditions for the teachers. Please consider (1) how to get rid of guns in the schools, (2) how to insure that schools are kept up as decent and clean places, (3) how to set up management models for democratic collegial departmental decisions and (4) how to get rid of teachers who repeatedly get poor reports and unsuccessful remediation.

These are not abstract concerns. They are real issues that face the schools and the councils, but because of current rules and habitual behaviors they cannot effectively be dealt with. We need your help.

(1) In our school we have had children carrying loaded pistols—ammunition in the chambers. These students have been caught toting their guns, but the kids are returned to school. Surely no teachers union could sanction such a working condition; it flies so in the face of keeping the workplace safe for teachers and those whom they teach.

Kids with guns should be permanently expelled and should have to find some other school that will take them and give them a second chance.

In February I observed another school's LSC meeting. It was a stunner. It made me sense what school reform is meant to be. There was a terrific feeling of excitement and expectancy. There were dozens of community participants, visitors from another school, two members from the Board of Education, the district superintendent and the head of the board's transportation department. The latter four were there to hear concerns of the LSC parents regarding a number of pressing issues that had not been resolved in spite of many, many letters and phone calls and protests over months and months.

One concern was guns. What is the board's policy? Is the board trying to be "fair" to all and saying that all children have an equal right to carry guns in school? Can emotionally disturbed children carry guns? Don't we deserve a policy that protects the majority of good students and provides a sanctuary of safety for learning? The school's principal pressed the board to get back to their LSC in writing, spelling out clearly the board's policy. (By mid-April the board had not responded to this request.)

(2) Basic cleanliness should be a priority for a school; the workplace should be somewhat of a pleasant environment in which to teach and learn.

Our school is filthy and poorly kept up in spite of a full staff of engineers and maintenance people. It is regularly robbed in spite of night watchmen. There are unsafe conditions not rectified, leaks not repaired, toilets that do not work, graffiti not removed, broken seats and broken desks, sinks that do not work, burned-out lights not replaced, and so on. And shall we even mention the proverbial broken and boarded-up windows?

Such conditions would not be permitted in a factory or a business. Why do teachers, who are on the whole more highly educated than assembly-line workers and secretaries, not insist on equal conditions at work as members of other unions?

We have had the chief engineer to council meetings time and again to ask about various needed repairs and cleaning. Each time nothing improves. Our LSC even got the supervisor from downtown to come to the school and see the dirt. No change.

A couple major parts of our SIP include cleanliness and student involvement. In February one of our LSC committees decided to try and implement these. They convened a group of student leaders after school and had teachers, parents and the principal meet with them to get their ideas. What came out
of the meeting was that the students hated the filth and graffiti of the school and the littering behavior of many of the kids, and they thought there was a terrible lack of school spirit.

They brainstormed a bit and felt very positive that the graffiti should be removed immediately and that the janitorial staff should do its job on cleanup and fixup and at least provide toilet paper and sanitary napkin disposals in the restrooms. They also wanted the broken sinks and toilets repaired. Excuse-making on the part of principal and engineering staff was typical.

The kids praised one of the departments for cleaning off the graffiti and painting the restrooms near their area of classrooms and felt someone should do it for the rest of the school. They decided to meet again and form a school spirit committee. They proposed a cleanup week and wanted to get each club to adopt a hallway and see if they couldn't get things done.

The adults are also working on this project through the school management committee. We are trying to put extraordinary pressure on a lazy engineering staff. Not everyone is lazy, but the chief is particularly uncooperative, and has refused to do what the principal asks. He seems to have no pride in his job or his school. I would think he would want it to be radiating cleanliness to show to the world what a good chief he is. Why is there no pride in work, no sense of responsibility to do one's best?

(3) A democratic department structure would help individual teachers grow and meet the needs of the students.

There was a very interesting curriculum reform move this year in one of our departments, with almost unanimous approval by the faculty, but it was squashed by the principal, the assistant principal and the department chair. It was something the students had particularly wanted, but of course it never got any public discussion—it just got killed.

A more collegial atmosphere would give teachers a stake in their school life. These teachers are now demoralized, and their initiative and work is felt to be wasted. What worse working condition could one find?

(4) The union could elevate the standards of its profession by providing helpful ways to recycle teachers who have either "had it" and are burned out or who "never had it"—never had what it takes to teach. We need, for instance, an employment service with training for alternative careers.

We had a teacher last year who never showed for months because she was starting her own business—but still wanted to keep her school job. She was finally told to do reeducation for 40 days; as soon as that time was up, she was gone again. Not easy for a principal to insist on quality when the teacher does not have to come to work. Not easy for fellow teachers to keep up their morale in such a situation. No other enterprise would tolerate this workplace behavior.

Central office! Augghh!

OLIVIA

Dec. 14 We've gotten more ESEA dollars, and we have to come up with a spending plan by December 31. Who thinks up these ridiculous deadlines? We have one week of classes left before holiday break, and we don't come back until January 7. Of course, these spending plans require LSC approval and signatures. Granted, large sums of money allocated to a given school should not be spent without input from staff and parents. But, please, give us a more realistic timeline.

Jan. 7 We missed the ESEA deadline, but a call to central office makes everything all right. Although the letter clearly stated that the December 31 deadline would not be extended, it is.

Feb. 28 Another missed deadline. The ESEA improvement plan was due January 31. It's a simple two-page form (requiring the signatures of the LSC president and the ESEA advisory committee chair), but it's not done. The instructions that accompany this form clearly state that failure to meet the deadline may jeopardize future funding. Now what? I call the ESEA staff and am told not to worry. "Just get it in when you can."
ELIZABETH

Jan. 26 When does central office reform begin? Does local school reform extend to Pershing Road? For example, who made the decision to spend thousands of dollars on mailings to our homes about the new CPS Centrex system? (Who, for that matter, decided to convert to this new phone network? I hope it is cost effective.) Could there not have been a note in our mailbox at work telling us of the phone changes? That would have been cost effective. Besides, each board employee learned about the new phone numbers at work as it was.

Feb. 26 I read in the Board Reporter that the state has mandated certain changes in the special education program. This will require, according to the board, hiring six administrators. Is this the same Supt. Kimbrough who was going to weed out the bureaucrats? The changes will also result in the loss of 18 professional positions; full-time teachers will be chopped. Eighteen fewer employees need six new bosses?

ROBIN

Feb. 23 Last year one school LSC requested a number of building repairs, including fixing the roof, which is leaking badly, causing damage to paint and plaster on the top floor. The roof request was sent back with the indication "no funds." However, the painting and plastering job, which had been scheduled to follow the roof fixing, went ahead this year anyway, with the result that the leaks quickly wrecked the new paint and plaster!

Open house ‘for teachers’

AMELIA

Feb. 6 Last week we had an open house. The council wanted parents to be able to meet with teachers and hear about the classes. It was originally planned for the fall but did not get done, partly because of strong resistance from the teachers. We wanted it in the evening, to accommodate parents, but it was held during school hours, to accommodate teachers.

Evidently the union has strict rules about teachers being asked to come to school of an evening to talk about their classes to parents. In the old days teachers were expected to do that as part of their jobs, and it was exciting for parents to follow their child’s progress and learn what the classes were all about and what the teachers expected. Teachers were prepared, articulate, friendly and usually had mimeographed handouts for the parents.

Most kids cut school during our open house, even though we scheduled for two half days so the kids and parents could all fit together. A couple of teachers just went ahead and had classes. One of them held a clearly organized class, another had a lab that was poorly explained so that neither the kids nor the parents knew what was going on; another did have a talk about the semester, but there were no syllabi. Another teacher shuffled the few kids over in the corner to have a gossip fest while she sat with the few parents and just talked in a very general way about goals for the course. Presumably the teachers were friendly but few were articulate, and there were no handouts for the parents.

I spoke with the principal from one of the elementary schools; she has evening open houses, and all her teachers come. They would not dream of not coming, nor do they question the importance of open houses for their teaching.

Awards for what?

ELIZABETH

Jan. 18 I received the Illinois Bell booklet, “Local School Councils, Ideas and Successes,” naming the 26 winners of the LSC awards program sponsored by Illinois Bell, Ameritech Foundation and the Chicago Public Schools Alumni Association. I was not impressed. Reading the salient facts about the first winner listed, I found an erroneous statement.

Most of the things considered key matters for LSCs to work on are things already in place at my school: all-day kindergarten, after-school programs, staff development, music and art teachers. Perhaps we should investigate what is required to qualify for a $10,000 award.

LAZARUS

Jan. 22 A copy of the booklet about the schools winning grants from Illinois Bell arrives. In it are ideas taken from the schools. Unfortunately, the goals set by most of the schools reflect the pressure of board and state deadlines rather than clear, solid thinking about changing our way of teaching and learning. At best, they reflect only modest gains. Nowhere is the core of the problem addressed. Many goals have apparently been set without teacher input—a dangerous course if the desire is to see the goals implemented.
No takers for teacher conference

ELIZABETH

Feb. 16 The Citizens Schools Committee is sponsoring a special conference for teachers, "Celebrating Teachers As Leaders," March 1-16, at the Palmer House. It sounds good. Who is paying my registration fee? There are no provisions for that type of funding in the reform law. I am even tempted to pay and go; but they encourage teams from schools to attend, and everyone I asked almost laughed in my face.

Keeping parents involved

ROBIN

Feb. 22 I had an interesting conversation with the principal of School A about parent participation with the LSC. So many LSCs I visit worry about the fact that not many parents come to sit in on the meetings. I asked this principal what her LSC did about this. She said, "Oh, the members are very faithful, but the meetings are not really very interesting unless you're a member and want to be involved in management. We have other ways parents can participate. Every parent should have the chance to do the PTA kinds of things, so we encourage that; we have sessions when they can make things they can teach their children to do, and opportunities to go on trips with classrooms. You need a variety."

On the one hand, I thought this approach might reassure other LSCs that feel they're failing in some way because they don't have good visitor attendance. On the other hand, maybe they should be thinking about various activities that parents would like to do, including an occasional special LSC gathering when the agenda wasn't filled with budget and maintenance planning.

At one school, for instance, the LSC sponsored a "cultural" evening with a potluck meal, a Latin American dance troupe and a special recognition program for children who had been involved in extracurricular sports. The children who were getting awards got their parents there, and quite a few people were attracted by the entertainment; the good turnout of both adults and children gave those present a nice sense of community. Such an event from time to time, though a fair amount of work, creates a welcoming atmosphere for parents in the school and might make them feel more inclined to come to more "serious" gatherings.

That is, one would hope that a context would be created to attract parents to the special LSC meetings I mentioned.

Every few months, for example, an LSC evening could be designated for curriculum discussion, and parents would come to know what to expect—finding out and contributing something that had to do directly with their own children.

Feb. 26 Last night I attended the LSC meeting at School C. I had visited there a number of times before, but not recently, and was surprised to find a new chair—surprised because the previous one had been very knowledgeable and clearly committed to the process. After the meeting, I asked the principal about the change, and she said that person was now a teacher aide in the school—she "went for money instead of glory," laughing a bit about the "glory." I found this an interesting transition and wonder if it happens with other parents. Certainly being a teacher aide is not a very august (or well-paid) position, but it is a good job, and could be seen as certainly direct involvement in the classroom and also as a stepping stone (along with more education) to becoming a full-fledged teacher.

Aside from the new chair (who by the way was very effective) at School C, there had been one resignation, and the principal proposed as a replacement a parent who was present, the co-chair of the bilingual committee. She was voted in at once. It seems this school is blessed with a backlog of interested parents who are doing other jobs around the school and are ready to get into the LSC. The new chair, for instance, had run a school book fair the previous year.

Cry the beloved children

THEO

Feb. 21 The children need our help. They are crying for our help without using the word help. They want some identity and they want to be proud of it. They want to be accepted for who they are and not for where they live, not where their heritage lies. They want love, caring, attention, understanding, trust. Without these, children live, it can truthfully be said, in a hell. Especially those we label as in the poverty-stricken areas. In reality, it's death after life.

We must have really committed people. I'm not talking simply about schools. We in the community and the homes must make a huge investment of time and love. We must be those caring, attentive, understanding, trustful people. We have to take the time to hear the cry of all the children.

In one sense, there's nothing wrong with the teachers, principals, books, computers, lunches. The problem is us; we don't take the time to listen and to respond. There's a lot of distance between school and the home; we have to fill that distance with love.
Jan. 15 Citywide achievement test results were released this week. For the first time this year, the breakdown by gender and racial groups was made public. "In no way do we mean to suggest that these scores are a function of race or gender," the press release took pains to point out. What the release did not do, however, was attempt to explain the differences.

I was interested to note that the Asian students scored significantly higher than the others. Why is it that this group manages to get a certain level of education in a system that is, by most accounts, failing? And gets sufficient education to gain admittance to some of the finest universities in the country. These students attend the same schools that their black, white and Hispanic counterparts do. They have the same teachers, the same curriculum, the same facilities. The difference, it is believed, is in the home environment, in the upbringing—the discipline and the respect for authority that these kids have, for example—and in the heavy emphasis the Asian communities place on education.

In implementing school reform in Chicago, the "bloated bureaucracy" has been singled out as the root cause of the failed system. Yes, the bureaucracy has made its fair-share contribution and must take some responsibility. But only some responsibility. At least a part of the responsibility falls on the family. We have had a radical shift in governance, and school reform may indeed be finding its way into the classroom. But we will not have educational excellence until the family environment and family values change. Unfortunately, there is not much of an advocacy for that, and not much hope for reform anytime soon.

Tensions over special ed

RAYMOND

April 10 Our LSC met tonight. We addressed key issues of school improvement planning. Yes, it is that time again. How do we refine our SIP, and how do we focus in on the implications? Tonight we highlighted:
- Use of discretionary funds
- Reduction of class size by purchase of more teachers at the primary grades
- Use of extended day
- Strengthening of our math and science program; use of advanced math, using inquiry-based approaches
- Focus upon reading and math enhancement versus the arts; reading, math and critical thinking are primary needs now
- Expanded staff development and teacher inservice

Moreover, we gave considerable time to discussing two issues that have emerged during the past year as critical—affecting student performance and discipline in the classroom: (1) Head Start and (2) mainstreaming of special ed students.

The CPS wants to privatize early childhood education; a budget-saving matter, it is said. (CATALYST, May 1990)

About special ed. What an irony! There has always been the problem of proper classification of a student—learning disabled, emotionally disabled, behaviorally disabled, etc. Some have been misclassified and therefore tracked into a special ed program unsuited for the students. Critics argue that some misclassification occurred, willingly or unwillingly, under the pressure of getting more money into the system—special ed programs had special funding.

Now, in order to save money, presumably, special ed students are to be integrated into the regular classrooms. Unfortunately, most schools are simply not prepared for this mainstreaming. There is the question whether special ed students can be genuinely served educationally in regular classes. There is also the problem that some special ed students are a source of disruption in regular classrooms. A class of 30-34 students is already a control problem. It only takes one kid to change a class.

At our school we have teachers who have never had discipline problems but are now experiencing major disruption problems in class. It is not necessarily the special ed kid's fault; it is just that he or she has now lost the special support previously present.

HARRY

April 15 Concern is high among teachers and the public about the new Regular Education Initiative, which requires the placing of moderately disabled students (or the differently abled, as some call them) into classes with so-called regular students. The Urban Leadership Center of the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service sponsored a town meeting tonight in Chicago to address these concerns, as they apply to our Chicago schools. The following is a rough summary of the evening's exchanges.

Thomas Hehir and his staff, of the Department of Special Education, CPS, emphasized that:
- The purpose of the Regular Education Initiative is to provide more options for disabled students as close to home as possible.
- Disabled students need to attend good integrated programs to fully develop and be able to function in the larger community.
Not all disabled students will be mainstreamed, just those determined to be ready for such a move; severely disabled students will always need a separate, protective setting.

Local schools will be consulted before students are placed in regular classrooms. The classroom teacher receiving disabled students will be provided with inservice training on how to work with these students and will receive supplemental services to support the education of the special ed students in his or her class. The classroom teacher’s fear that disabled students would suddenly appear, in the name of mainstreaming, in his or her class with no prior notice, training or assistance is unfounded.

Disabled students have already been and are currently being served successfully with regular students in several schools in Chicago.

The department is concerned by the over-representation of African-American students as educably mentally handicapped (EMH) and the under-representation of Hispanics as EMH.

The Initiative was not designed to save money.

The CTU representative raised these concerns:

• A major inservice training will be needed to prepare regular teachers.
• Categorical funding for disabled students might be cut or lost if special ed students are mainstreamed.
• Class-size change. On the one hand, careful planning will be critical to provide a smooth transition into a larger regular class for the student who has been taught in his or her own smaller classroom by a specially trained teacher. On the other hand, the class size of regular classes will likely increase with the addition of these new students, in which case the regular students might suffer.

Pertinent but unanswered questions:

• Where will the money come from to guarantee that disabled students will receive the support they need in the regular classroom? Don’t count on receiving the promised help, given the current financial state of the board.
• Who will pay for the major retraining job to prepare the regular teachers for their new responsibilities?
• Who is available to do this training, given the current cutbacks in staff?
• When will there be time for teachers to come together to discuss the needs of their new charges, given their already crowded schedules?
• When, how and by whom will all the evaluations be made to assure appropriate placements?

Feb. 11 I am faced with a new challenge. A Braille student is enrolled in one of my social studies classes, which already has a 2:1 ratio of regular students to special ed students. (Another one of my classes has the same constellation. A Braille student is in that class also, but because she has a young child at home she rarely attends.) My frustration limits have been pushed to the breaking point. This new Braille student has a sweet disposition and is not the problem per se. When I ask what particular skills the student needs to work on, the student’s response is, “Reading.” Now I am charged with teaching reading to a blind child?

Reform Summit ’91

Feb. 5 I get a letter from the Board of Education announcing Reform Summit ’91, April 6, to develop recommendations for the state Legislature that would improve the Chicago Reform Law.

Feb. 8 A meeting on school reform, to develop our own recommendations to take to Summit ’91. Our main topic was about principals having the full power they need to run an effective school: control over the engineers, food service personnel, teachers and janitors. Hey, you can’t do that! The union won’t let you tell them how to set the heat controls in school. “We dare you to tell us that children are cold.” “You can’t tell me the floor is dirty.”

Another issue: The LSCs need money to run their schools. You got us running around with no funds, and you want us to turn a perfectly unsafe, unclean and undesirable building into a school?

Finally, there’s this deal about getting rid of council members who don’t attend meetings.

Raymond

March 13 Our LSC reviewed the board’s Summit ’91 survey for its April 6 conference. Our assessment found that it:

• Did not focus on the key issues—that is, funding for education, the board’s fiscal crisis, the issue of choice, etc.
• In its 12 pages and more than 100 items, lumped legislative, administrative and board policy matters together as if they were all equivalent.
• Was, despite these criticisms, an effort to get input from LSC members on what we thought.

April 11 I met with a group of LSC members today. There is
deep dissatisfaction about the April 6 Summit ’91. It appeared “engineered.” It did not adequately reflect the priorities of LSCs. We feel the LSCs need to come together to set their own agenda—a Children’s Agenda.

The thrust for a kind of citywide LSC consensus has roots. In 1990, Subdistrict 6 initiated an LSC Chairpersons Association; though limited to chairs, and with a parent perspective, it was part of an earlier effort toward some sort of LSC organization. The latter was the focus of discussions during the summer of 1990 by reform leaders who were also LSC members. The same is true of a retreat held the end of this past January by the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform.

A February 7 press conference announced an LSC summit for February 23, at the University of Illinois. The turnout for this conference was low but perhaps good considering the short notice. The speakers and workshops were excellent. LSC members citywide got a chance to talk with one another. Ideas were exchanged, and a high degree of consensus was built around matters we thought important to us. There was no rush to create a new organization, but several models of such an organization were presented, and a planning committee for a follow-up meeting was formed.

Our April 11 meeting, evaluating the April 6 Summit ‘91, found the conference fine in theory but flawed in practice. Few LSC members, for instance, would disagree with any of the top 10 priorities selected at the summit; they are important, but many LSC members would place other issues ahead of some of those 10—but there was no provision at the summit for this. Therefore, the 10 priorities the board presents in Springfield do not necessarily represent true LSC consensus.

Looking for real educational change

March 30 This week I attended a PPAC meeting at one school and an LSC meeting at another. At both, committee reports focused on budget—what people wanted to spend in various categories out of Chapter 1 money. It concerns me that there isn’t more discussion of the educational goals that are to be served by spending the money in this or that way. There is no mention of an organizing theme for improving the schools or of how such a theme might be served by particular activities. Of course, as usual there’s terrific time pressure, but fairly hasty decisions about where the money is to be spent often don’t look much like educational reform. Money is to be spent on maps and globes, for instance, because “every classroom should have them,” not because there will be any new way of using them that will lead to better understanding of or curiosity about geography and diverse culture.

April 7 This week the American Educational Research Association met in Chicago; there were several sessions on Chicago school reform. One comment, by Larry Cuban, the outgoing president of AERA, struck me as relevant to what I’d been thinking and writing about just the week before. It was really expecting too much of LSCs, Cuban said, that they come up with daring new ideas about curriculum at this point. During what is essentially the first year in which they had time to even consider such questions, it’s impressive if they’ve come up with even minor improvements to what’s already in place. Real change takes much more time than that.

The consensus among the scholars was that this is the best show in town to watch, but they disagreed on its chances of success. On the plus side are those who see it as a bold effort and are heartened by the accomplishments of the LSCs in organizing themselves and carrying on business to this point. On the minus side are those who look at the history of attempted past reform and at the mess that’s resulted in New York and Detroit when decentralization was tried. Both groups are concerned about the dangers of ethnic and racial divisiveness and about the lack of support from the Legislature.

April 11 On the subject of changes between last year and

Children forgotten in power plays

April 27 One of the teachers came to me and asked if there was something she could do to help out the situation at our school. I am not satisfied with the things I see going on here, she told me. Is this council in the pocket of the principal? Yes, I replied. Can we recruit a new council? Yes, but we have to get them together by October—election time. It can be done. Then I will get back to you, she concluded. Thank you for your concern and support.

It seems that reform has taken a back seat, students have been forgotten, teachers have been neglected and, most of all, education has been put on the back burners. Why can’t we just plan for the children instead of wasting time on who should have what kind of power and status? Who’s in charge seems to be the very issue that will destroy our children.
this year, one school reports an encouraging difference. Last year, when asked how reading and math scores might be improved, all teachers could think of was, "Stop busing in children," "Stop accepting those kids." In response to the question how parents might be involved more actively, "Get different families." This year teachers are saying things like, "Let’s ignore standardized test scores and worry about whether children are learning from what we’re doing in our classrooms." They want to throw out the basal readers and get more literature, have more math and science labs for hands-on activities, find more time to collaborate and learn how to use research-based methods. The change clearly has been a result of change in leadership—and the leadership changed because of the choice made by the LSC.

Schools without communities

AMELIA

March 15 Because of the November 1990 Illinois Supreme Court decision, the state legislature is at work rewriting the reform law to take account of the one-person, one-vote principle. How to handle election of the community members on the councils is one of the difficult problems. However, there is an additional non-election problem with respect to LSC community reps. Here is the paradox. On the one hand, a basic feature of school reform is an emphasis on the local school, on neighborhood integrity, on community involvement. On the other hand, there are many schools that have students from outside the community. In our district, for example, in some of the elementary schools half or more of the students are “outside” students. It is difficult to get out-of-area parents into the school—to meet faculty, to get involved, to help build community; there are some who are active, but not many.

Who, then, is the community if half or more of the kids are out of the area? This skewed distribution ultimately breaks down the sense of community gathered around a local school, a sense of community that was once such as powerful and fruitful force.

Has power really shifted?

ROBIN

March 30 I’ve just been reading The Predictable Failure of School Reform by Seymour Sarason. His ideas are a useful framework for looking at the schools I’ve been observing. Take one of his major theses. Sarason argues that all the various waves of school reform that have come and gone since World War II have failed because they didn’t take into account power relationships in the system and in the classroom. He says, "Any effort to deal with or prevent a significant problem in a school system that is not based on a reallocation of power—a discernible change in power relationships—is doomed." He goes on to say that changing power relationships is not sufficient to solve problems, but is nonetheless necessary. Further, he points out that all complex organizations, including school systems, adapt to new situations in ways that require the least possible amount of change.

I wonder which power relationships have actually changed in the Chicago system. Have some appeared to change but because of internal pressure actually remained the same? Presumably the idea of reform legislation was to put more power in the hands of parents, taking it away from the bureaucrats. (This leaves aside the question of whether such a power shift would in fact have any effect upon educational problems.) What about the handful of schools I’m observing? What is the situation with regard to power?

The principals are a node where much connects. In two schools new principals were hired by the LSCs. In another the old principal was retained last year. In three others the old principals were retained this year.

So, what is happening with the principals? They believe they have borne the brunt of change, and it certainly would seem that power has shifted to the parents in the decision of who should be principal and to the parents in the sense that principals must now function in a way that takes parents more into account. The power of deciding on a principal does represent a victory for the people against the bureaucracy; the central administration does seem clearly to have lost the power to impose a principal on a community that unites against that person.

The other facet is muddier. For one thing, a principal’s power, although awesome to children and many parents, is limited by many factors within the system; many principals felt before reform that their ability to accomplish what they wanted with their schools was frustratingly limited by system and state requirements. Still, they had power over children and teachers within their buildings, power that now can be challenged. The question is: Has it been challenged?

I have observed one clear case where the principal’s power was challenged by teachers, who were then backed up by the LSC, which felt it could not go against the wishes of the teachers on an educational issue. Nothing quite like this has happened at the other schools on my circuit. (See Diary entry on page 38.)

What seems to be going on is that the principals are accommodating to the new situation in such a way as to carry on essentially as they did before. They have more work
to do, in that they have to attend LSC meetings and keep abreast of the activities of the PPAC, and they have more people to placate—vocal members of their council, for instance. And they aren't happy about all this. But I don't think it has substantially changed their mode of operation.

Here is what one principal said this week when I asked her how reform is going for her. On the favorable side, the LSC means there are some more people concerned about the school. Her LSC has been very positive and makes "a great administrative team" (she is strongly committed to group decision making), but this makes more work for her because it's one more group to relate to. On the negative side, she's concerned about continuity on the LSC: you may have to "re-educate" parents every two years, teaching them about the system and about where the school and the LSC has been. You may "get lucky," she says, and find parents of freshmen who get involved and stay with you for four years, but that can't be counted on. (Interesting to note that elementary schools have the possibility of twice that long.)

The major problem as far as this principal is concerned is that "school reform isn't educational reform." She sees herself as the "conduit through which services flow to children" and is strongly committed to change that will have an impact on her students, but reform hasn't helped her do that. Because of state-mandated goals, schools aren't really independent. "We need to do something drastic to improve education. But suppose we decided just to teach reading and math with freshmen? We couldn't do it." Not only are there legal restrictions, but there's no money for experimentation. She's very excited about a new approach to math that a couple of her teachers are trying, based on a program sponsored by the University of Illinois at Chicago, but there's no money to train other teachers. The districts used to be helpful for staff development and had a little extra money—where did that go?

The school has State Chapter 1 money, but most of that goes for aides, whom she feels are absolutely necessary for the sake of supervision of students. When they do want to spend money, for example, for a new copier (which they ordered last year), it takes months before you get what you've asked for, and still more months before you get the necessary backup—in this case new wiring. This school (which has 1,600 students) has $5,000 this year for furniture and equipment. The principal has concluded that reform means you're "trading off resources, not getting new ones."

The most frustrating aspect of reform is that it's created more clerical work (moving budgeting to the schools is a sore point) without providing the support needed to do it. This means extra work for the administrative staff as well as for the principal. And the principal is dealing with "minutiae, minutiae, minutiae."

In sum, this principal says, "Reform was needed, but it didn't take the right shape because the legislation was written too hastily."

I have to add that this is an optimistic, hard-working, dedicated principal, who was described by one of the teachers in the school as "the best high school principal in the city—I mean it."

Good news on PPAC, bad on union

LAZARUS

Jan. 22 Good news. Some of our LSC members meet with the PPAC at its request. Relationships, partnerships begin to form. While old grievances are addressed, so, too, new structures are established to get on with the business of change. By the end of the meeting, the LSC members are soliciting the PPAC's opinions on issues which have been troubling them for a considerable time, such as the number and functions of teacher aides supported by State Chapter 1 funds in our school, and the problem of getting substitute teachers.

Some of the most skeptical of our PPAC members describe the meeting as productive.

Jan. 24 A majority of the LSC meets with interested faculty to take the first steps toward principal selection.

As the meeting begins, our student rep joins us, having rushed from a downtown curriculum committee meeting with other student representatives. Reform is a full-time job.

Much of the time is spent obtaining the input of teachers
there on the characteristics they would like to see in a principal. All the teachers present are freely encouraged to make their contributions. Ideas flow and build one on the other. There are even a few laughs along the way.

The teachers seem satisfied with their participation. With a sense of a job completed, at least for the time being, the teachers begin to depart. One makes a point of shaking the hands of all council members before leaving.

The council members who stay to clean up are pleased with the outcome of the meeting. One of their goals for the year—to make fruitful contact with the teachers—has come eight years closer to reality this evening than at any time in the council's brief history.

Feb. 8 A PPAC meeting. When I despair over the snail's pace at which we move, my spouse, who is much wiser than I about such matters, counsels patience. Let the group work at its own speed. Taking responsibility, ownership, is a gradual process. The point is that it is moving and taking far more interest in reform than it has before. Muscles, long unused, begin to contract and expand. In my more objective moments, I can see that eventually they will work fine. Members are already reaching out to obtain more training.

The former union delegate does not attend the meeting. His term up, he no longer sees himself as a member of the group. He has made several attempts to hold a new election to fill the union position, but there is no interest on the part of the faculty. Ours was once a very strong union school. Gradually, we have lost our professional problems committee and, now, union delegate and associate delegate positions. That means we have no one at the school to file grievances, nor do we have a voice in union decisions. Monthly PPC-administration meetings are part of the board-union contract, but their disappearance goes unchallenged at our school.

How many miles have we collectively walked on the picket lines to win these contractual rights? A wornout "Strike" sign hanging silent on a peg in my garage bears testimony to those miles, to the indignity of having the board negotiators offer a half of one percent raise after we had been on strike for several days. How can we so easily give up what was won so dearly?

Finding time for family

Many LSC members have commented during the past year that being a responsible council member is a full-time job. One diarist sat down early one morning and listed for us all the dozens of meetings he had been to during the recent few months—including the meetings to plan other meetings—and ends with a wry and poignant entry.

RAYMOND

April 12 Meeting with my wife about all the school-related meetings. Meeting with my son about his homework and how much I really want to check it but don’t have the time—so, “Leave it on my night stand,” I tell him.

Inertia

LAZARUS

April 13 What I sense most is inertia. The apparatus, the mechanics of reform, of change, are in place, but the actors have not come forward to carry it out. Legislative mandates in and of themselves cannot make the change. An essential ingredient—not easily defined—is missing. Until it is found, we cannot expect improvement in student achievement.

Long road to decision

ROBIN

Jan. 16 Developmental bilingualism has been an idea at School B since last June. An LSC community member pushed for the program. There were discussion meetings last fall with parents. Many parents and the school’s bilingual teacher were apprehensive about making changes. This January the principal is holding meetings with small groups of the faculty about the matter. With federal money, central office will sponsor eight schools throughout the city to have developmental bilingualism programs, or to become dual language schools, as some call them.

The faculty seem deeply divided on the issue. I talked with the principal and asked about the teacher opposition. Why? She said some of it comes from fear for their jobs if they aren’t bilingual, though she herself doesn’t see that happening because there would be teams, and different subjects would be taught in the different languages. Also, she said,
some teachers see the English-dominant students as not being really strong in English and feel that adding another language to what they're now dealing with would just make things harder for those students.

School B's bilingual committee has been at work on this issue for over six months, so they have carefully shepherded discussions and plans. For example, Janet Nolan, from central office Bilingual Education Department, had been to School B a number of times to explain and promote the dual language idea. She was present tonight.

Besides the dual language program, the committee had also agreed upon an additional plan: simply to provide more Spanish for middle-grade children by extending the present bilingual program of the school through the fourth grade (it now stops after third grade) so that students would have a better grounding in Spanish before being placed in the regular program of the school. As it turned out, this was so much less controversial than dual language that it came to be seen as an alternative to it.

It was the dual language proposal that attracted attention at tonight's meeting, particularly because a number of teachers are either opposed to it outright or would like to take more time to consider it. Five teachers, none LSC members, came to the meeting and distributed flyers outlining their concerns; the flyer was signed by 34 teachers, practically the entire faculty.

Objections and responses

Their concerns rooted basically in two reservations: (1) They had not seen any research that demonstrated the success of this kind of program at a school like theirs. (2) The schools they had heard about where this was successful are schools where parents prepared their children to learn to read; whereas at School B, according to these teachers, many parents have not prepared their children, and kindergarten teachers have to spend a lot of time on readiness. Because teaching reading in the child's first language is the main activity in the primary grades, it seems to these teachers that teaching in a second language will take time away from the goal that is most urgent.

A first-grade teacher from the audience echoed the reservation about readiness; that was her classroom experience. She thinks the school has the best bilingual program she has seen, and notes that teachers are trying to expand and improve it. She would like to see that continued rather than see a new program.

Another teacher worried that a program like this hasn't been proven yet.

The principal said she had visited a school with a similar program, and it appeared successful. Also, she noted some six-year studies on programs like this in California, funded by the state. Then she called on Janet Nolan, from central office, to comment.

Nolan said she has research results of other program and will send copies to the school. She explained that the program would not be selective; that is, it was not geared to

How it would work

Jan. 26 Open meeting on beginning a dual language program at the school. Here is the way two-way language immersion would work. In one kindergarten of 26-28 students, half would be Spanish-dominant children and half English-dominant. Half of the instruction would be in English and half in Spanish. There would be a half-time resource teacher to help the regular teachers use new methods of instruction—for example, cooperative learning or a whole language approach. The federal grant runs for three years, so the same group of children would continue in this program through second grade, while each year another entering class would be added.

She thinks the parents will be in favor of the new plan, though I know some Hispanic parents are sold on their children concentrating on English. There's a general meeting next week to which the community is invited, and the LSC will make its decision soon afterward. If they vote yes, it will be the first instance I've observed of the reform process actually resulting in a curricular change in a school.
exclude “problem” children and cater only to those well-prepared at home. Rather, what was wanted was a random sample of children, from those whose parents chose the program; and there would be careful evaluation with comparison groups. She made an eloquent plea for bilingualism as a goal, noting that she had worked with bilinguates in Guatemala and Mexico as well as in the U.S., and it is not something that can be achieved only by an elite.

Then exchanges ran something like this:

**Audience parent:** He understood the teachers’ point of view but wanted to know if teachers would support the program if the council approved it.

**Nolan:** If the teachers don’t want it in the school, it won’t work.

**Audience teacher:** She resented Nolan’s remark. The teachers are professionals, and if the parents want the program, the teachers will commit themselves to it.

**Audience teacher:** Do the parents understand that it might flop even though teachers tried their best?

**Audience teacher:** She doesn’t want to be blamed for failure and thinks teachers will be blamed if the program doesn’t work.

**Principal:** Knows parents and teachers will work together.

**Nolan:** There would be ongoing evaluation for this program. Tests will be given at the beginning and end of the year. There will be staff development this summer for teachers who want to be involved.

**LSC parent:** Asked the principal her opinion.

**Principal:** Believes the program could work at School B.

**LSC parent:** Can a parent go to the teacher training?

**Nolan:** Yes.

**Audience parent:** Pointed out that not many parents were present (six) and wondered whether they were representative.

**LSC parent:** There had been a meeting with 23 parents last week; a vote was 23-0 for this program.

**Audience parent:** Then the parents are for it and the teachers against it.

**LSC chair:** The teachers are not against it; they just have professional concerns.

**LSC parent:** What’s the opinion of the parents here tonight? (All were for it.)

**Principal:** She will be getting a recommendation from the PPAC before the next meeting, when the council will have to make a decision.

Throughout the meeting, the tone was polite and restrained. The parents were all Spanish-speaking, and translation was conducted by Nolan, an LSC community rep or the LSC chair. It looks very much as though the council will vote for the program over the objections of the teachers.

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**The principal**

This whole process has been fascinating because it’s the first case I’ve seen of an LSC taking action on an educational program, instead of just being concerned with management. Of course, there’s a history, and I’m afraid a cynical teacher might say that what happened was just that the principal got the council to support her in a project she wanted anyway and would have put through with or without the council.

This principal herself admits that she “can’t say no” to programs that bring money into the school. Although I believe she is generally respected by the teachers, she hasn’t always had their unanimous support in her ventures. At the same time, there is a new element here, in that the initiative for this program clearly came from a council member who has been remarkably persistent (with the active assistance of Nolan) in pursuit of his goal, and has taken the time to meet repeatedly with parents.

I asked the principal about this LSC community rep, who happens to be Anglo. She said that as far as she can tell he has no hidden agenda, but simply feels that being bilingual has enriched his life (he learned Spanish as an adult) and it would be positive for the children at School B. And I myself am not aware of his doing any politicking with teachers. Maybe he should have been!

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**The vote**

Jan. 29 LSC meeting. Ten members present, one parent member absent. Eight in the audience: three teachers, the school security guard and four parents.

The crucial item on the agenda was a report by the developmental bilingua committee, which recommended “a major expansion of the transitional bilingual program with the important option of transforming it into a full-maintenance program.” In addition, the committee recommended adoption of a pilot dual language program, as previously considered.

A vital response to the dual language recommendation was a position paper presented by the PPAC, which stated that the PPAC was not “at this time” in favor of such a program because the teachers believe they and the parents have not been fully informed about it.

The principal asked what the PPAC vote had been (all members of the faculty are members of the PPAC, though fewer than half typically attend meetings) and was visibly shocked to learn that all had supported the position paper.

The council chair, whose handling of his job throughout has been thoughtful and judicious, remarked, “How can we go against the judgment of the teachers?”

A teacher member of the council pointed out that the PPAC was unhappy that this issue had come to the public before the teachers had a chance to become informed about it. She made an eloquent, forceful speech about the role of the PPAC.
as advisor to the LSC on curriculum, and pointed out that it had not been allowed to do that in this case.

The LSC community rep advocate of dual language countered that information about the program began before the LSC early on. It was the LSC teacher members' responsibility to bring this to the PPAC; there was no good reason the PPAC shouldn't have known about the proposal and the discussions that had been going on for more than half a year.

An LSC teacher member claimed that the teachers thought the whole thing was in the research stage, not that a decision was about to be made. She felt the teachers should have considered the plan first, then the parents and then the LSC.

The community rep had assumed the plan was being discussed by all groups at once rather than there being a linear process.

A teacher rep, referring to articles supplied by Janet Nolan since the last meeting, pointed out that one says it would take at least five years for students in a dual language program to get to the 50th percentile in reading. She adds that the real concern of the teachers is that if students aren't at least on grade level by the time they take the test in the seventh grade, they don't have a chance at the best high schools, such as Lane.

The community rep disagreed with her reading of the article, arguing that his careful reading of it showed him that the study was actually referring to regular bilingual rather than dual language programs. As to teachers not being informed, he reiterated his contention that ample opportunity had existed. For example, teachers who attended the developmental bilingual committee meetings should have passed on to the whole faculty those articles—the same ones that have only now been made available to them. Furthermore, he asked, "How many of our children from the bilingual program go to Lane as it is? They are doing so badly now that anything would be an improvement."

Reply: "Just because a program isn't working well isn't any reason to try just anything.

The principal suggested that the council begin by recommending the extension of the transitional bilingual program. She notes that the bilingual teachers favor this recommendation. She moves to expand the transitional bilingual program through the fourth grade with the option of a maintenance program. (It's worth mentioning here that although this recommendation affects many more children than the dual language plan and has the potential for affecting a number of monolingual teachers in the school, it for some reason became the "compromise" position.)

The motion passed unanimously.

A community rep moved that consideration of the dual language program be tabled for further study. The motion passed 6-3, with one abstention. This means that the deadline for participation in the Board of Education program can't be met. But as soon as the vote was taken, members affirmed that they indeed wanted to study the matter further. The principal also made clear that there was nothing to stop the school from going ahead with such a program without federal help if the council wanted it.

When I talked to the principal the next day, she expressed discomfort about taking the opposite side from the teachers. She had gone to Washington, D.C., to a conference on dual language schools, she had visited a dual language school, she had read up on the research and she honestly felt it could work at their school, so she felt she must vote her conscience.

She also commented on the LSC parents who had voted to table the issue and later indicated to her their guilt at going against the parents' wishes. She thought it was to their credit that they listened to the teachers. And the strongly favored "further study" was already underway: A teacher from a Chicago school which has the program been invited to talk to the teachers next week.
Boys get fatherly advice

by Rollie Hudson

Johnny Watkins, 26, and some other young men from Englewood wanted to use the gym at Guggenheim Elementary School, 7141 S. Morgan, on Saturdays to play basketball.

Michael Alexander, the principal of Guggenheim, wanted some fatherly counseling for the boys in his school, most of whom don't have fathers living at home.

Both got what they wanted. Watkins and the guys shoot hoops on Saturday and spend two hours each week talking with their younger “brothers” about male responsibility. Talking, as Alexander puts it, “about things they need to know in order to grow up as responsible people.” Talking about the streets, sex, drugs (why some people use them and others don't) and the physical and emotional differences between boys and girls. Talking, too, about sharing, nonviolence and compassion.

“The kids are learning unity,” said Watkins. “They show me that they're learning to work together every day.”

Guggenheim’s male responsibility program is one of those one-thing-leads-to-another developments. When Watkins and the guys first asked Alexander two years ago about using the gym, they were told No; they were told the school can't afford to open the building for extra hours.

Then, a year later, the “20/20” television program broadcast a story about Michael Cross of the Detroit Urban League. Cross had developed a successful technique for school counselors to use with boys who had chronic discipline problems.

Basketball the payoff

Called the “circle of trust,” the technique consists of building a reciprocal trust relationship between the counselor and the student whereby little by little, step by step certain agreements are made and kept. Each learns to trust the other through simple, practical acts such as the student getting to school day after day, and then getting to each class on time; and the counselor being available regularly, talking a lot, being straightforward about all subjects. In short, a continuing man-to-man discussion about all the problems of growing up.

Alerted to the “20/20” show by an enthusiastic teacher, Alexander sent away for a tape to show to his local school council and the staff of Project CANAL, a Board of Education program for low-achieving, racially segregated schools. “We were very
impressed," said Vanessa Harris, LSC chair.

However, two obstacles stood in the way of bringing the male responsibility program to Guggenheim: (1) The school had only a part-time counselor, who was overburdened already. (2) The school didn't have the money to pay for the training.

In thinking about the first obstacle, Alexander recalled the basketball petitioners. He called them in and offered them this deal: If they would undergo the training and spend two hours each week counseling, he would open the gym on Saturdays and sponsor them in a community league.

Females next?

He also appealed to their sense of responsibility. "The professional staff goes home at 3 o'clock," he reminded them. "If anyone is going to stop a youngster from buying drugs, it's going to be someone from the community."

Alexander dipped into several pots to fund the program. Project CANAL money covered the $5,000 it cost to bring Cross to Chicago for a series of training sessions, which included counselors from CANAL's cadre of substitute teachers (CATALYST, November 1990).

"Social center" money from the Board of Education helps pay the $18,000 annual tab for opening the school for two extra hours on Mondays and Wednesdays and four hours on Saturdays—two of which are devoted to basketball and two to rap sessions among the school's new counselors.

Twenty-eight other schools in Project CANAL have invited CANAL counselors to conduct male responsibility counseling with some of their pupils. And Guggenheim and CANAL are looking into starting a female responsibility network.

Meanwhile, Guggenheim's cadre of counselors has expanded beyond the basketball set to include several grandfathers in their late 60s. "The outpouring of support has been tremendous," said Alexander. Sixty men from the community have been trained; about 20 work regularly with about 30 boys from first through sixth grade.

At the end of a recent session, Watkins asked two boys who earlier had gotten into a fight over a snatched hat to shake hands. He then led them in chanting the lyrics to "Self Destruction":

Back in the 60s our brothers and sisters were hung
How could you gang-bang?
I've never had to run from the Ku Klux Klan
I shouldn't have to run from a black man.
Cause that's self-destruction.
Self-destruction.
We're headed for self destruction.

Alexander said the school already is seeing results. "In most cases now, when a kid is acting up, all a teacher needs to ask is if the student is acting responsibly. Most kids will reflect on what has been shared in the discussions and work to change their behavior immediately."

Added Watkins: "I've learned as much dedication and responsibility from them as they have from me."

Rollie Hudson is a Chicago writer.

Tardiness, class cuts plunge

by Charlotte Smarte-Faal

A year ago, Amundsken High School, 5110 N. Damen, suffered from rampant absenteeism and tardiness. "It was almost as if the bells didn't mean anything," recalled teacher John Zemaer. "Students would wander into class 5 to 10 minutes late with all kinds of excuses."

"There were hundreds of class cuts," added Assistant Principal Pauline Tarvardian, who is in charge of the attendance office. "There were so many cut slips in our box, that there was no way we could begin to follow up on them."

"Now the halls are virtually clear when the bell rings," she said. And average daily attendance has increased 8 percentage points, to 82 percent.

What made the difference was a new attendance program that puts students who are tardy or cut class at risk of being banned from class unless they bring their parents to school.

Here's how it works:

Staff members conduct daily "hall sweeps" after the tardy bell rings. Students who aren't in class cannot return the next day unless their parent contacts or comes to the attendance office.

Every day Principal Edward
Klunk identifies several class periods for which he will collect teachers’ lists of students who had cut class. From those lists he randomly selects 20 students who will not be permitted to return to class the next week without bringing their parents in.

“It keeps students on the spot because they never know if their name is going to appear on the list,” said Tarvardian.

**Court is last resort**

If parents do not cooperate, Amundsen will take them to court. That’s what happened to the parents of Dyone Dorsey, who was absent 80 days during the 1988-89 school year and 17 1/2 days during the 1989-90 school year.

“We sent a letter of intent to prosecute and an option to work out their child’s problem,” said Klunk, a 20-year Amundsen veteran who was named principal last year. “Then we sent a certified letter and finally a letter hand delivered by a Chicago police officer. Dyone’s parents did not respond to any of our attempts to contact them.”

The school filed a complaint with the Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, which prosecuted the parents under a 1961 state law that says that parents can be prosecuted for knowingly permitting their child to be chronically truant. It provides for penalties of up to $500 and 30 days in jail.

A Cook County Circuit Court judge found Dyone’s parents guilty and ordered them to attend two parent-teacher meetings and three local school council meetings. The parents obeyed. Dyone’s attendance now is nearly perfect, said Klunk.

Amundsen also participates in the state-funded Truants Alternative and Optional Education Program (TAP). Under this program, a coordinator closely monitors the attendance of students who are chronically absent and counsels both them and their parents.

**Peer tutoring too**

“I really didn’t think it would go this far,” said Peter Chappa, a TAP student. “My parents threatened to kick me out of the house. They said that I needed an education so that I could get a good job and support myself.”

Amundsen takes TAP one step further by monitoring the grades of students who resume regular attendance and referring those with faltering grades to peer tutoring sessions. “We found that these kids are intimidated by teachers,” said Tarvardian, “so they are paired with a brighter student who helps them with homework.”

“We needed a comprehensive program. There was a status quo [here] and no one wanted to make a change in procedure,” said Klunk. “When a school like this falls to a 74 percent attendance rate, then it is obvious that something is wrong—and it wasn’t the students. Fortunately, school reform came along.”

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Charlotte Smarte-Foal is managing editor of CATALYST.
When Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough disclosed the Board of Education’s projected $315.8 million revenue shortfall for next school year, he offered an enormous grab bag of ways to close the gap. They are listed below with details and explanations compiled by CATALYST from school finance sources.

Cuts board can make on its own: $150 million

- Reduce central and subdistrict offices again. No amount specified. Two years ago, 800 positions were cut or transferred to schools, which, along with nonpersonnel cuts, saved $40 million. Currently, 2,300 employees, including some 500 operations and maintenance workers, are assigned to central and district offices.
- Again cut back on school maintenance. Last year, the board cut $1.5 million. That amount has been tentatively restored for 1991-92.
- Eliminate funding for items in the Systemwide Reform Plan except expansion of the system for measuring progress under reform. Plans include spending $6.6 million to increase counselors in elementary and high schools so that the system moves closer to having one counselor for every 250 students in high schools and one for every 500 students in elementary schools. Another $2.7 million is to be spent to pay school staff for a week of planning work before school opens.
- Reduce special education costs through increased efficiencies and by eliminating medical services for children that are not required. Robert Sampieri, chief operating officer, said that the system has employed medical consultants in some areas where the Chicago Department of Health also offers service. He cited asthma and epilepsy consultants as examples. Children now served by the school system would be referred to city clinics, he said.
- Eliminate the board’s subsidy of medical insurance for retired employees.
- Freeze spending on transportation, equipment, printing and other nonpersonnel costs, which are projected to rise $13.8 million next year.
- Reduce the use of outside vendors.
- Close up to 30 schools and merge former branches with their parent schools. In 1989, 28 branches became full-fledged schools. One result was that the number of principal jobs increased as other administrators were losing theirs.
- Staff high schools on the basis of pupil enrollment rather than the number of classes for which students register. Under this policy, school staff typically would be limited to the number of teachers it would take to allow each student to take four major courses—English, math, science and social studies—and one minor course, such as physical education.
- Such a staffing pattern would cut back on the number of students taking a fifth major course, sources said. Current policy provides for fifth majors only when a class has spaces available, but that policy is often overstepped, sources said.
- Require high school students who fail courses to retake them in classes that are not funded by general operating funds. Students would have to pay tuition or schools would have to use State or Federal Chapter I money to provide makeup classes. Kimbrough estimated this move would reap $62 million in savings.
- Eliminate extracurricular activities, including sports, drama and clubs.
- Retain more of the severely handicapped children who typically are sent to specialized private schools and for whom the board pays tuition.
- Cut from elementary schools assistant principals who don’t teacher and reduce the number of assistant principals in high schools.
- Change the formula for assigning custodial staff so that buildings have fewer custodians. Also, pilot the use of private custodial services.
- Eliminate postsecondary vocational training programs such as Washburne Trade School and, in some cases, encourage City Colleges of Chicago to take them on.

Cuts needing unions’ approval: $120 million

- Eliminate recently negotiated provisions for art and music teachers in elementary schools and for extra teachers in schools that are overcrowded or have low achievement records.
- Revise recently negotiated contract “lane” changes that increase the financial incentives for teachers to take more college courses. Also revise the schedule, or “steps,” by which most employees receive extra pay for additional years of service. Spending in this area is projected to increase $12 million next year.
Revise the recently negotiated $6,000 bonus for teachers who obtain enough extra college credit to advance on the pay scale. Estimated cost next year is $16 million.

Require employees to share increased medical insurance costs, projected to rise by $19.9 million for 1991-92.

Reduce the number of building trades workers on staff.

"Convert" the position of school maintenance assistant, or, as it used to be called, school fireman. Sampieri said the intent is to increase the tasks that these workers perform. Another source said the aim is to reduce the number of these workers, who once tended high-pressure boilers but now serve as assistants to operating engineers. Each group has its own union. Schools also have custodial workers, who belong to yet another union.

Establish larger class sizes. The board said it saves $6 million for each additional student in an elementary classroom and $3 million for each additional student in a high school classroom.

Reduce the school year by some number of days, which would save $4 million per day, assuming the state would not penalize the district for going below the required 181 days.

Relief from other governments: $175 million

Ask the General Assembly to eliminate the requirement that the Board of Education continue to employ supernumeraries—teachers who are cut from their schools because of declining enrollment or program changes—who are not subsequently chosen by principals to fill vacancies in other schools.

Ask the General Assembly to consolidate the playground fund, which has its own earmarked tax rate, into the education fund. Savings could then be made by cutting back on after-school recreational programs now financed by the playground tax.

Ask the General Assembly to consolidate the textbook fund, which has its own earmarked tax rate, into the education fund. Sources said the board then might be able to spend fewer tax dollars on textbooks and make up the difference with student fees, possibly on a sliding scale. Other school districts in the state charge textbook fees but they also have fewer poor students.

Ask the General Assembly to provide full funding even if the school year is cut below the required 181 days.

Ask permission from the federal courts to reduce spending on desegregation programs by about $12 million. The board had used State Chapter 1 money to meet the funding requirement. However, the School Reform Act put a limit on that practice, forcing the board to dip into regular funds as well.

Ask the Cook County Board to take over the Juvenile Detention Center, which conducts classes for jailed youths.

New local and state revenue: $350 million

Generate additional state aid by reducing student absenteeism by 1 percent.

Increase special education reimbursement from the state by ensuring that more special education teachers have proper certification.

Ask the General Assembly to increase the property tax rate ceilings for the education and building maintenance funds. The board says every added penny would generate $2.8 million and cost the average Chicago homeowner that is, the owner of a $75,000 home) $1 a year. The board also could raise the ceilings by winning approval in a referendum. However, a referendum could not be held in time to benefit the 1991-92 school year.

Ask the General Assembly to increase the special education property tax rate to cover transportation costs not reimbursed by the state.

Ask the General Assembly to subject “junk food” (e.g. soda pop and potato chips) sold in Chicago to the full sales tax rather than to the lower sales tax on food. Set aside the extra revenue for schools.

Require the state to pay for the election, training and insurance costs of local school councils, projected at $4.5 million for next school year.

Ask the state to increase funding for the Chicago Teachers Pension Fund to eliminate any deficiencies in 1991-92. This proposal deals with a state law requiring the Board of Education at least to match teachers’ contributions each year. With a portion of its pension tax rate temporarily being used to help fund employee raises, the board expects a deficiency next year. Without at least $14 million from the state, the board will have to dip into funds normally used to pay the pension pickup. (In the mid-80s, the board agreed to pay teachers’ share of pension contributions, instead of granting them raises.)

Ask the General Assembly to increase state aid statewide by $200 million, which would bring about $58 million to Chicago. Current state revenues are stretched so thin—for example, the state’s cash balance is at an all-time low—that a tax increase would be necessary.

Items Kimbrough did not list

Ask the General Assembly to revise the provision in the School Reform Act that requires the board to free up State Chapter 1 money from regular programs to supplementary programs over a five-year period.

Next year, the third year of the phase-in, 60 percent of some $288 million in State Chapter 1 money, or about $173
Initiatives drowned out

Lost in the gloom of the School Board’s financial picture was a series of announcements made by president Clinton Bristow:

- **Five-year capital development plan.** The board and Public Building Commission (PBC) will take a “project-management team approach” to building rehabilitation and inform schools of scheduled startup and completion dates.

- The remaining $136 million in authorized rehab bonds will be sold. Once that money is exhausted, additional bonding authority will be sought “to put the schools on a pre-set rehab schedule.”

- **Instructional support.** A Chicago Public School System Foundation will be established to solicit money from the business community for grants to reward school creativity and initiative. A $1 million goal has been set. In conjunction with City Colleges of Chicago and area universities, the board will offer “Saturday academies” for students. LSCs will be given more authority to modify Board of Education programs.

- **LSC support.** A Local School Council Education Institute will be established at board headquarters to provide uniform training and possible academic credit to LSC members. The board will ask the General Assembly to grant LSCs more authority to transfer State Chapter 1 funds between line items. Currently, any changes in State Chapter 1 plans must be approved by the state. The board also will move to increase schools’ discretion in use of money from general funds.
LSC CAN'T CHANGE MIND ON PRINCIPAL HIRING

If an LSC changes its mind about hiring a principal, will the School Board back it up? For Harlan Community Academy High School, the answer was no. The reason was bad timing.

The board had set Feb. 1 as the deadline for LSCs to decide whether they would retain their current principals. Harlan's LSC voted in January to retain the incumbent. In April, some members wanted to change their vote, which would have resulted in the principal's ouster. The principal threatened to sue. The LSC members who were against the principal went to the board's legal department to ask for help. They were turned down.

"The Feb. 1 date is to allow mobility to another school," explained William Quinlan, the board's first assistant attorney. "They were reconsidering after it was impossible for the principal to apply for another job."

Quinlan said the principal could sue on the grounds of "detrimental reliance," which means that the principal relied on the LSC's vote of promise. To reverse that vote would be a "breach of promise."

"The issue could have been avoided if the LSC had made the principal one of several candidates instead of voting a definite decision early on in the game," Quinlan said.

Harlan's LSC has turned its attention to writing performance criteria into the principal's contract to address its concerns.

AT THE BOARD

Through a joint effort with the state, the board's new Teacher Recruitment and Certification unit hopes to hire 100 Spanish-speaking teachers from Puerto Rico for its bilingual education program, which now needs about 125 to 135 teachers.

The state gave certification exams in early May to more than 300 Puerto Rican applicants.

Unit director Maurice Bullett said that the effort will not only fill vacancies but also save the board money. Chicago schools have "lost" millions of dollars in state reimbursement because some bilingual and special education positions were not filled by fully certified teachers.

The board has received a $125,000 communications grant from Chicago Community Trust to publish a monthly newsletter and host a series of weekly breakfast meetings with community representatives.

The breakfast meetings will include such groups as education organizations, clergy and businesspersons.

The newsletter will include a message from the superintendent, reform progress reports, school success stories and a section where LSCs can share advice on solving problems. The newsletter also will solicit opinions on major school issues.

Foster parents can serve as parent LSC members so long as they have a foster child under their care who is enrolled at the school. The School Board reaffirmed this policy in response to the case of Wadsworth Elementary School, where the council was immobilized because a foster parent refused to resign after losing custody of her foster child.

CRUMBING SCHOOLS MAKE THE NEWS

More than two-thirds of the city's 601 public schools are in serious need of repair, according to a weeklong "School in Ruins" series published by the Chicago Sun-Times. Problems range from broken boilers and electrical failures to peeling paint and broken windows.

The series quoted facilities director James P. Harney as saying the system needs $1.075 billion to repair and replace old schools and ease overcrowding. Over the years, the board has repeatedly cut back on maintenance to help pay for employee raises without raising taxes.

School upkeep is a national problem, the series noted. Los Angeles, for example, needs $1 billion to repair more than 650 schools and build new ones. Only $18.8 million is available this year. Detroit has only enough money to meet a tenth of its need.

PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF REFORM

In interviews with 11 randomly selected principals, the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance took an early reading on principals' perception of reform. Here are some key findings:

Six of the 11 agreed that school reform has taken excessive amounts of time, which has come at the cost of "professional thinking time," supervisory duties and personal contact with staff and students.

Four of the 11 agreed that bringing school and community together was the most positive aspect of reform.

Three of the 11 said school reform has increased their flexibility and discretion in such issues as filling teaching positions and spending State Chapter I funds.

Six of the 11 view their role changes as positive. Two principals again cited increased flexibility as a plus. Several said getting help from LSCs is an asset.

ALMOST ALDERMAN

One of two LSC members who made it to the aldermanic finals nearly won. Johnny J. O'Neal, chair of the Nansen Elementary School LSC, lost to two-term incumbent Ald. Robert Shaw (9th) by only 40 votes. In the 31st Ward, LSC member Gloria Chevere lost by more than 2 to 1 to Ray Suarez.
TELEVISION

Students sound off. Twenty Chicago high school students say what they think about school reform through student-produced videotapes scheduled for broadcast at 10 p.m. June 1 on WTTW-TV Channel 11.

This presentation of the program "Image Union" will feature tapes by students from Clemente, Curie, Hirsch and Whitney Young high schools. For more information, call Jamie Seaver (312) 509-5594.

RESOURCES

Fairness in funding video. "Equity and Excellence: The Call for Fair Funding for Illinois School Children," a video that examines the state's method of funding its public schools, is available from the Chicago Urban League.

The 30-minute video cites the disparity in funding between school districts in affluent and poor communities. It also offers alternatives to the current reliance on a school district's property tax base.

Educators and community organizations may borrow the video. For more information, call Gwendolyn Laroche (312) 285-5800.

LSC primer. "Investing in Chicago's Future," a resource guide and organizer for LSCs, is available from the Urban Leadership Center of the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service.

Topics in the 28-page hardcover notebook include: conflict resolution, selection and evaluation of personnel, school law and budgeting. It also includes a guide to books and literature on education issues.

The center will distribute copies to all LSC members in the area it serves, which is south of 87th Street. Schools outside the area may request copies by calling (312) 923-7970.

Dry, drug-free proms. Stipends of $200 are available to 10 schools that agree to make their proms drug- and alcohol-free.

Fulfilling Our Responsibility Unto Mankind (FORUM), which provides substance abuse prevention and gang prevention programs on the South Side, targets high schools but is seeking one elementary school for this year's prom program.

In addition to providing $200 to defray prom costs, FORUM will help schools plan their drug-free proms. The program is funded by the Illinois Departments of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse and Transportation.

For more information, call Johnny Banks (312) 933-5703.

Grassroots Chicago. Felipa Farmilant, a member of the Field Elementary School Local School Council, is featured in a segment of "Grassroots Chicago," a documentary on community organizing.

In the program, viewers see the once-shy mother emerge as a local activist.

The video tape, produced by Kartemquin Films and sponsored by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, takes viewers on a tour of organizing projects in Roseland, Uptown, the West Side, Pilsen, Rogers Park and Marquette Park.

To obtain a free copy, contact the foundation's public information office (312) 728-6996.

CONFERENCES

Drug-free schools. The Midwest Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities will conduct a conference for LSCs, educators and community organizations June 6-8.

Workshops include information on successful school-based prevention programs and working with children born addicted to drugs. The $90 fee includes one lunch.

For more information, call Sheila Thomas (708) 571-4710.

Using data. How to share, analyze and interpret data that schools receive from different sources will be the topic of a forum scheduled for 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. June 28 at the Community Renewal Society, 332 S. Michigan, Suite 500.

For more information, call Nelson Ndove (312) 427-4830 Ext. 258.

Principal retreat. The principal as a pro-active leader will be the topic of a principals' retreat sponsored by the Community Renewal Society and Roosevelt University July 19 and 20.

The retreat will be held at the Hickory Ridge Conference Center in Lisle. The fee is $105. The registration deadline is May 30.

For more information, call Nelson Ndove (312) 427-4830 Ext. 258.