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Classroom shortage up, new remedies sought

by Lorraine V. Forte

The shortage of classrooms in Chicago public schools has more than doubled in the last four years, leaving more than a third of elementary schools overcrowded.

Last school year, the shortage stood at 3,618 rooms, compared to 1,621 in 1987-88, according to Board of Education calculations.

Meanwhile, the number of empty classrooms in schools that are not overcrowded has dwindled to 422, down 60 percent from 1987-88, the board reports. Even if students from overcrowded schools filled the empty classrooms, the net shortage would still be a whopping 3,168 classrooms.

Stealthily rising Hispanic enrollment, concentrated in a few neighborhoods, has been a cause of overcrowding since the 1970s. Of late, total enrollment also has been inching up. But a major new factor is more teachers, hired since schools took control of state Chapter 1 funds. In the past three years, using their new discretionary money, schools have added some 1,500 new teachers for art, music and other special programs. (See CATALYST, November 1991.) More teachers have also been hired for state-funded preschool programs. And these teachers need classrooms.

"What the state has done is say, 'Here's this extra money,' and what schools are doing is hiring teachers," observes Ashraf Manji, planning coordinator in the School Board's Department of Facilities. "But who's going to pay for the classrooms?"

Overcrowding has forced many principals to set up makeshift classes in auditoriums and basements. Teachers are struggling with larger classes, sometimes over 40 students. Children in several communities are bused to schools outside their neighborhoods under a policy, called controlled enrollment, that lets severely overcrowded schools close their doors to new pupils. (See story on page 9.) And some principals have had to forego new programs even though they have money to hire teachers.

Soaring enrollment at Seward Elementary School, 4600 S. Hermitage, forced it to give up its parent room, a bilingual preschool, a gifted class, one full-day kindergarten and two extra classes for children who are eligible for federal Chapter 1 programs. The school has only one room—a computer lab—that does not serve as a regular classroom. Built for 700 pupils, Seward serves close to 1,500 in its main building, a branch facility, five mobile units and rented space in a shuttered parochial school and rectory.

"What you're forced to do when you lose space is think of other things..."
instead that don’t take up so much room,” says Principal Christine Speiser. For example, children who are eligible for federal Chapter 1 programs now are tutored in small groups in a former cloakroom.

Hispanics suffer most

According to the latest School Board tally, published in a March 1990 report, 93 of 457 elementary schools are overcrowded; another 75 are severely overcrowded. For the most part, overcrowding is not a problem in high schools, which can easily add more class periods to accommodate more students.

Schools in Hispanic communities suffer the most. Forty-five of the 75 severely overcrowded schools are in Pilsen and Little Village on the Southwest Side, Humboldt Park on the Northwest Side and other largely Hispanic areas. Hispanic enrollment has climbed steadily since the 1970s and increased 31 percent in the last decade, from 84,226 in 1980 to 110,707 in 1990. Hispanic enroll-

ment will continue to climb, some say, largely because of continued immigration. Another factor is larger families; a special 1990 Census Bureau survey showed that the average Hispanic family included 3.83 children, compared to 3.11 children in white families and 3.47 children in black families.

“All you have to do is come and see the mothers picking up their children in the afternoon. They’ve got three or four others [younger children] with them,” observes Chrsiel Herrera, a member of the local school council at Ruiz Elementary School, 2410 S. Leavitt, which went on controlled enrollment this September, only two years after opening in 1989.

Overcrowding is not just an Hispanic problem, however. The “severely overcrowded” list also includes 17 predominantly black schools, 9 schools that are predominantly minority with no dominant racial group, 3 integrated schools and 1 predominantly white school.

In the Austin neighborhood on the Far West Side, for example, a cluster of five predominantly black schools are on controlled enrollment. Over-

crowding became a problem as whites moved out and were replaced by blacks, who generally had larger families, says Leola Spann, director of the Northwest Austin Council.

“I came in March 1985,” recalls Brenda Schneider, principal of Lovett Elementary School, 6333 W. Bloomingdale. “We had 500 stu-
dents. In September we had 800. We had no space.”

For Schneider, overcrowding in Austin is an old story. As a teacher at Dodge Elementary School in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she endured double shifts, which were adopted to accommodate a growing, predominantly black enrollment.

“We do need some new schools in this area,” Schneider says. “They should have been built long ago.”

Just as local control of state Chapter 1 money has increased the need for classrooms in already over-
crowded schools, it has diminished the supply of empty classes in areas without overcrowding.

Last year, Dvorak Elementary

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Public Building Commission boon to School Board

When the Board of Education decided to raise nearly $400 million in 1989 and 1990 to build and rehabilitate schools, it asked the Cook County Public Building Commission (PBC) to sell the bonds.

Working through the PBC has two major advantages for the board. One, the board does not have to win approval of the sales from the General Assembly or from voters in a referendum. The PBC is free to issue bonds any time and for any amount, within broad limits, that a local government requests.

Second, a PBC sale generates more money for the School Board to use on school maintenance. Whenever the PBC builds or rehabilitates a school, the board may levy a special property tax for the operation and maintenance of that school, e.g., heat and custodial services.

Operations and maintenance costs of non-PBC buildings come out of the board’s own building fund, which has a property tax rate that is capped by state law. (The PBC O & M tax rate has no cap.) The board’s building fund has long been inadequate for the school system’s needs. As recently as a few years ago, some janitors and other building costs were paid from the board’s education fund, school officials say.

Here are the legal underpinnings of the PBC tax arrangement. When the PBC issues a bond, the School Board gives the PBC title to all properties built or rehabilitated with the proceeds. The board then pays rent to the PBC, which the PBC uses to pay off the bond. The terms of the rental agreement require that the school be adequately operated and maintained. This legal obligation empowers the board to levy a tax to pay the costs of maintenance and operation, the courts have ruled.

Dan Weissman

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Overcrowding facts

The problem
- Severely overcrowded schools ('90): 75
- Overcrowded schools ('90): 93
- Classroom shortage, gross ('91): 3,618
- Empty classrooms ('91): 422
- Classroom shortage, net ('91): 3,196

Solutions: Adding space
- Leasing space: 255+ rooms $1.3 million
- Buying/rehabbing schools: 8
  $15 million
- Building schools: 14
  $115 million
- Building additions: 5
  $16 million
- Reopening schools: 13
  $1.3 million
- Reconfiguring classrooms: 3 schools
  $1 million
- Buying demountable units: 4
  $1.2 million

Solutions: Using empty space
- Holding classes year-round: 6 schools
- Controlled enrollment: 25 schools
  Over 2,500 students bused
School, 3615 W. 15th, had three empty classrooms, says Principal Leonard Moore. This year, it has none. A computer lab, music classes and other programs have taken up the space. "I wish I had more space," Moore adds.

But over the years, relatively few parents have opted to transfer their children from an overcrowded neighborhood school to an underused school outside the neighborhood—even when special programs offered an incentive. The School Board’s desegregation office helped set up magnet programs in 33 underused schools to beckon children from overcrowded schools. However, only 14 of those programs managed to attract more than 20 students each, according to the office’s 1991 report.

With most overcrowded schools in Hispanic neighborhoods and most underused schools in African-American neighborhoods, racial fears are one obstacle to more efficient use of space.

Prejudice plays a role, but a school’s programs are key, says Dolores Gonzalez-Engelskirchen, superintendent of subdistrict 5 on the Near Southwest Side, which includes both black and Hispanic schools.

"Hispanic parents don’t mind sending their children to a school that has better programs," she contends. "But simply to send them to another school because theirs is overcrowded, they’re not willing to do that."

Sumner Elementary School, 4320 W. Fifth, presents a test case. This virtually all-black school is actively courting Hispanic students. (See story on page 8.) Once it got a bilingual teacher, it signed up a whole class of 32 Hispanic pupils.

**Building program costly**

At all overcrowded schools, the solution of choice remains more space close to home, a costly proposition. In 1990, the Public Building Commission sold $240 million in building bonds for the Chicago Public Schools. The year before, it sold $146 million. About 45 percent of these two sales, or $169 million, has been earmarked for projects to relieve severe overcrowding, including the construction of 14 new schools and 5 school additions. (See chart on page 2.) Groundbreakings are tentatively scheduled for next March, April, May, August and September.

The board also plans to experiment with reconfiguring classrooms at three schools by, say, creating four classrooms in the space now occupied by three. Smaller rooms could satisfy certain needs, school officials say.

The School Board is expected to ask the PBC to raise about another $156 million in the next few years and funnel $94 million of that amount to overcrowding projects. Along with the recent sales, this sale is intended to solve the problem of severe over-

crowding as it was identified in March 1990. Board officials know, however, that the problem has gotten worse since then. A formal update of the March 1990 report is in the works.

**Keeping taxes level**

Judging by past practice, another bond sale beyond the $156 million is unlikely. That’s because it would raise property taxes. The 1989 and 1990 sales did not raise taxes because, in effect, they took the place of bonds sold in the early 1970s that were recently paid off. And the planned $156 million sale would replace other old bonds that soon will be retired. The situation is like a homeowner taking out a mortgage to build a second home as soon as he pays off the mortgage on his first home, with the payments for the second equaling the payments for the first.

The school system’s current capital development program, initiated by the Interim Board of Education, was structured so that bond payments—and thus tax rates—would not rise.

While pleading for new schools, some two dozen overcrowded schools have persuaded the board to rent space in nearby buildings, mainly shuttered parochial schools. Four schools have received prefabricated, “demountable” units with four classrooms. Another 11 schools have received two-room demountables to house preschool programs. And 18 schools are using 86 mobile units left over from the 1960s. (Under the board’s 1980 desegregation consent degree, these units, which had been used to contain black enrollment, were supposed to have been eliminated 10 years ago.)

Like mobile units, rentals and demountables are supposed to be temporary solutions to overcrowding. Even at that, they’re insufficient. “Even the [rented] Catholic schools are running out of space,” says Engelskirchen.

Meanwhile, a board task force of school and central office representatives has been grappling with the complex problem of overcrowding since September. It presented a draft

Continued on page 19
Overcrowding across the city

The following is the most recent Board of Education list of severely overcrowded elementary schools. It was published in March 1990. An update is in the works. These schools are marked on the map with a star.

**District 1:** Barry, Bateman, Byford, Hay Branch, Henry, Hibbard, Lewis, Lloyd, Lovett, Valta, Young.

**District 2:** Armstrong, Chappell, Clinton, Field, Gale, Hayt, Kilmer, McPherson, Peirce, Swift.

**District 3:** Avondale, Burr, Cameron, Chase, Columbus, Funston, Kosciuszko, Linne, Lowell Branch, Mitchell, Monroe, Mozart, Nixon, Nobel.

**District 5:** Burns, Cardenas, Cooper, Corkery, Davis, Gary, Hammond, Hedges & Hedges West, Hedges Central & East, Jungman & Castillo, McCormick & Branch, Orozco, Pickard, Pilsen, Salazar, Shields, Spry, Walsh, Whitney.

**District 6:** Armour, Healy.

**District 7:** Bunche, Carroll & Rosenwald, Eberhart, Fulton Branch, Hancock Branch, Marquette, McKay, Morrill, Nightingale, Sherman, Tonti.

**District 8:** Hamline & Branch, Oglesby, Seward & Branch.

**District 9:** Powell, Sullivan.

**District 10:** Barnard, Hughes.
Kids, parents, teachers applaud year-round school

by Achy Obejas

A year ago, Gale Community Academy, 1631 W. Jonquil, crossed the traditional summer vacation off its calendar and scheduled classes year round to relieve its severe overcrowding.

Everybody at the East Rogers Park school—students, teachers, parents and especially Principal Edis Snyder—seems overjoyed that they did.

“It’s nice because after three months we get a whole month off,” says eighth-grader Elio Benitez. His one reservation is that he can’t play as much with friends who are on different vacation schedules.

For Victoria Adeniji, mother of two Gale students, the new program means her children are too busy to get in trouble. “Even during the breaks, there’s something going on,” she notes.

By dividing the school’s students and faculty into four groups with overlapping schedules of 60 days on and 20 days off, Gale has reduced average class size from more than 40 to about 27. (The overlapping schedule means that although Gale is open the entire calendar year, the 180-day school year is not extended for students or teachers.) One immediate result of the change is that behavior problems decreased; student suspensions dropped from 67 in 1989-90 to 22 last year.

“Teachers are teaching,” says Roslyn Scott, coordinator of Gale’s Parent-Teacher Resource Center. “They’re not wasting their time dealing with discipline problems.”

“The frequent breaks give teachers a chance to stay fresh,” adds Snyder. “It also gives them a chance to earn more money.” During their breaks, teachers can work as substitutes, she explains. “It’s a real boon for us as administrators. We get highly qualified substitutes who know the system, know the school, even the kids.”

Only a handful of teachers left Gale when it went year-round, most because of family reasons. “They needed to be on the same schedule with their kids,” Snyder explains.

Thanks to year-round schooling, Gale students enjoy not only smaller classes but more extensive use of the school library, computer labs, gym and support services. They did lose their cafeteria, however; it was sacrificed to create four additional classrooms and the Parent-Teacher Resource Center.

Less expensive

Gale adopted a year-round schedule at the suggestion of Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough, who advocates it as a less expensive solution to overcrowding than building more schools. Holding classes year round increases a school’s capacity 20 to 25 percent, school officials say.

Designed to serve 750 students, Gale has a current enrollment of more than 1,000—about 59 percent African-American, 34 percent Latino, 5 percent white and less than 1 percent Asian.

“We were at the end of our rope trying to figure out what to do,” recalls Snyder. “So we went to Kimbrough, kind of threatening to go to split shifts. He said, ‘Why not try year-round school?’”

Muñoz Marin, an elementary school at 3320 W. Evergreen that has only kindergarten and first grade, also adopted year-round schooling last year. And four other overcrowded elementary schools began the program this year—Curtis, 32 E. 115th; DuBois, 330 E. 133rd; Funston, 2010 N. Central Park; and Van Vliissingen, 137 W. 108th.

At Gale it took eight weeks of 12-hour days for Snyder and her staff to put their program together. In the process, Gale representatives talked to every Gale parent. “As a result, we got no resistance and, I think, increased communication,” declares Snyder.

Parent volunteers are up to more than 20 now, a marked improvement from before. Some work in classrooms, others as security monitors at the start and end of the day and still others on special projects.

“What year-round has done is enable us to better use our resources—not just our physical resources but our teachers and parent volunteers,” says Snyder.

In order to implement year-round schooling, Gale staff mapped out four “magnet” programs, or tracks: humanities, math and science, arts and environmental education, and multicultural education. Each program was assigned an attendance schedule—with everybody getting time off for the December holidays. Students were assigned to programs after discussion among Snyder, parents and teachers.

In many ways, Snyder sees the program’s implementation as a minor miracle. “We worked non-stop,” she says. “We really didn’t have any time to do it—but somehow we pulled together and did it anyway.”

One of the busiest Gale representatives during that time was Beth Joffe, the school’s year-round schooling coordinator, who sought out neighborhood organizations, institutions and businesses to sponsor activities to fill the students’ break time. Since then, these “intersession” offerings—most of them free—have included mask making with local craftspersons, drama classes at Wisdom Bridge Theatre, movement classes with dancers from the Abiogenesis company, even cos-
metology classes at nearby Pivot Point Beauty School. Joffe also helped establish reading support programs at the Rogers Park branch of the Chicago Public Library.

"About the only [intersession] things that haven't worked are parent/child exercise classes and swimming," she says.

"Our greatest need is day care," says Snyder. With students off every two months, she recognizes that parents are faced with the daunting task of finding suitable supervision during non-traditional vacation time. "There's also no Head Start and no preschool program within a mile of Gale," Snyder notes.

Classes move at Muñoz Marin

At Muñoz Marin, where there are only eight classroom spaces, Principal David Espinosa and the local school council reconfigured the building so that each room serves as a resource center for a particular subject or program.

"The kids and their teachers travel from room to room depending on what they're studying," he explains. "There's a math center, a language arts center and a computer lab. For us, this solved the problem of limited resources. This way, we buy only one set of instructional materials and can leave it in the room. Everything belongs to everyone."

Muñoz Marin is also the only school in the city and one of only three in the country to pilot a Reading Recovery program (See CATALYST, October 1991) in Spanish.

Like Gale, Muñoz Marin has no Head Start or preschool programs in its vicinity. The issue of day care during the breaks is something Espinosa is still grappling with.

They may be only a handful, but Chicago's year-round programs, the only ones in Illinois, are part of a budding national trend.

"During the 1990-91 school year, we located 872 year-round schools with a total of 736,000 students," reports Charles Ballinger, executive director of the California-based National Association for Year-Round Education. "This year, we already know about 1,629 schools with 1,301,000 students."

Although this country's first year-round school, founded in 1904, was in Bluffton, Ind., today most are in the western United States, where there seems to be less attachment to the fall-to-spring schedule.

"That September-to-May calendar is agrarian in nature," Ballinger explains. "It was designed to release young people to work on the farm during the summer months. But as we have moved away from an agrarian society, the only reason to keep the calendar has been tradition."

He concedes, however, that climate is a factor. "Twenty days off in Maine [in winter] may not seem like much of a vacation," he observes.

In California, where more than 20 percent of all schools are on some form of year-round schedule, the state provides a variety of incentives, including a one-time $150-per-student payment.

In Chicago, the Board of Education has paid start-up costs—at Gale, more than $250,000 for installing air conditioning to make summer classes tolerable—as well as increased operating costs, mainly for custodians, security and utilities. Gale's annual budget rose 2 percent—from $2.96 million to $3.56 million—upon implementing year-round school.

Boosts learning?

Ballinger argues that year-round schooling provides not only an efficient use of resources but also a better education. Children, he says, "become interested in school. They become better students."

A statewide evaluation of year-round schools conducted by the Utah State Board of Education in 1989 showed that student scores rose significantly over a five-year period once their schools went year-round.

"Of course, you can't absolutely prove [year-round school made the difference] because there are too many variables," Ballinger says, "but you can certainly make a case that year-round school reduces summer learning loss. And that can really make a difference."

Espinosa, who campaigned ardently for a year-round schedule at Muñoz Marin, believes that's particularly important for disadvantaged children. "One thing year-round does is keep kids stimulated longer, so they don't forget or get bored," he contends.

At Gale, however, test scores dropped dramatically last year. "It's really inexplicable," says Snyder, who knows a challenge when she sees one. "Bottom line, I don't think it has anything to do with year-round school. I'll bank on my kids; I'll bank on my programs and my teachers." She pauses and adds: "I'm sure they'll be better next year. I'm sure of it."

Achy Obejas is a Chicago writer.
Sumner's recruiting begins to pay off

by Scott Schruff

For more than two years, Donna Williams, principal of Sumner Community Academy, has been trying to attract Hispanic students at overcrowded schools to her underused, virtually all-black school at 4320 W. Fifth.

Not until last month, however, did her efforts begin to pay off: 32 students enrolled in Sumner's first bilingual education classroom. Before then, school system shortages, bureaucratic obstacles and, according to some, the fear and distrust with which some Hispanics view African Americans had stood in the way.

Williams confronted racial/ethnic prejudice at the outset by bringing together representatives of both communities, including parents and members of local school councils and community organizations.

"We had really open, honest and sincere discussions about the concerns, the stereotypes and the prejudices," she recalls. Parents also heard each other express the same desire to raise productive citizens, she adds.

But the promising new relationship was undermined when, to save money, the Board of Education dropped busing for preschoolers. That decision dashed Williams' plans to bring in Hispanic preschoolers and their parents, who live some four miles away.

Williams dipped into desegregation and federal Chapter 1 funds to hire a Spanish-speaking teacher aide and a Spanish-speaking security guard. But her greatest need was for a bilingual teacher. Initially, her search ran into a Catch-22.

To get on the board's list of schools needing bilingual teachers, Sumner needed at least 20 English-deficient students. The 20-student requirement stems from the practice of the state to reimburse schools for the salary of a bilingual teacher only if there are at least 20 English-deficient students in the class. But Sumner couldn't hang onto the required 20 students because it didn't have a bilingual teacher, says Williams. To break the impasse, Williams finally told the board to put her on the list anyway because Sumner would forego state reimbursement. But a computer error intervened, keeping Sumner off the list until September.

Finally, in late October, Sumner welcomed bilingual teacher Luv Rosado, who recently moved here from Milwaukee. Assisting her is aide Maria Hernandez, who tutors children and serves as a liaison between parents and school officials. The school also has a "buddy system" that pairs every English-deficient student with one who speaks English.

Good program enough?

As a participant in Project CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning), Sumner has been working for three years to upgrade its educational program. It reduced class size, added depth to math and science, created a band and hired a Spanish teacher to teach the language and culture to its block students.

Integrating the student body is part of its plan. "The community felt it needed to know Spanish and know about the Hispanic culture," Williams explains. "They have to know how to deal with each other in the real world, and we want to start the development."

Sumner now has a solid foundation for attracting Hispanic students and could accommodate several hundred. The remaining hurdle is fear.

"The issue is busing," says Maria Mendoza-Myers, principal of Gary Elementary School, 3740 W. 31st. "Parents are afraid to put their children on a bus and take them out of the neighborhood. Parents are worried about security."

But Diana Azcoitia, principal of Kanoon Magnet School, 2233 S. Kedzie, disagrees: "Hispanics are busing their kids to magnet schools all over the city." Acknowledging that "part of it could be race," Azcoitia attributes the initial lack of Hispanic interest in Sumner to the lack of a bilingual program.

Maria Vernon, a mother who moved to Pilsen last year points to race. "Most of the people around here are racial," she says. "They are afraid of other people [non-Hispanics]. They think that blacks are mean, and [they] are afraid to have their children around them." 

Vernon's children attended Sumner last year. "I was very happy with them going over there even though I was told there were mostly black kids at Sumner," she says. "They got to know the other kids and, little by little, they liked it. They wanted to go back this year." They didn't, however, because of bus problems and their acceptance by Kanoon.

"It's the parents, not the kids," Williams agrees. "Once the [Hispanic] kids are here, they get along fine with the African-American kids."

Scott Schruff is a graduate student at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University. He is covering the education beat.
Controlled enrollment: solution of last resort

by Lorraine V. Forte

Ruiz Elementary School, 2410 S. Leavitt, was built to relieve overcrowding in other schools in Pilsen. But now, two years after it opened in November 1989, Ruiz itself is severely overcrowded and has adopted a controlled enrollment policy.

Ruiz is one of 25 Chicago schools on controlled enrollment, a policy that parents, principals and Board of Education officials dislike and accept only as a last resort. Under the practice, new students from overcrowded school’s attendance area are bused to nearby schools with space; over 2,500 such students are being bused this year, according to board figures. (Preschool and kindergarten students, as well as students who are siblings of children already enrolled, are exempt from being transferred.)

“It’s a terrible remedy. We don’t recommend it anywhere,” says Phyllis Aron, head of the desegregation office, which must approve requests for controlled enrollment because of the board’s 1980 desegregation consent decree with the federal government, which severely limits any but voluntary transfers to other schools. Desegregation coordinators try to discourage schools that apply by showing them how to rearrange space or promoting year-round schedules. But teachers and parents usually turn down year-round schooling, Aron admits, and rearranging space is sometimes impossible.

Ruiz, for example, was designed for 750 students, with art and music rooms, a science lab and a computer lab. But enrollment is now 1,010, and those “extra” rooms, as well as half the gym and lunchroom, serve as regular classrooms. And Ruiz was built without a basement or large closets and cloakrooms, “all the nooks and crannies older schools have to put students,” says Principal Ascension Juarez. Ruiz would need four more classrooms to accommodate its 120 bused children.

Parents objected to year-round school, Juarez explains, because many Hispanics take extended summer vacations to their home countries, and some parents feared their children would “be on the street too often [during breaks] throughout the year, in a neighborhood where we’re trying to keep kids off the street.” Surrounding schools objected to boundary changes they believed would aggravate their own overcrowding. And the board turned down the school’s request for demountable units because of the high price tag.

‘A sad day’

“We hung our heads [after the decision]. It was a sad day. But our kids weren’t getting the education they deserve. We had to do something,” says Christel Herrera, a member of Ruiz’s local school council.

In the Austin neighborhood, where five schools are on controlled enrollment, parent and community support for schools has dwindled, says Leola Spann, director of the Northwest Austin Council. “So many of our kids are bused out, it leaves us less community base...If you live in the community, but your child is in [a school in] Portage Park, you’re certainly going to try and work there, not at your neighborhood school.”

At Austin’s Lovett Elementary School, 6333 W. Bloomington, Principal Brenda Schneider says the policy has kept enrollment low enough so that three smaller rooms can be used for special programs, such as speech therapy, rather than as regular classrooms. Parents decid-
Clissold eases overcrowding’s pain

by Sally O’Dowd

Clissold Elementary School, 2350 W. 110th Pl., is just as overcrowded this year as it was last year. But a reorganization of its classes has improved the learning environment for most of its 690 students.

Clissold’s biggest change was to relocate a dozen classes, grouping primary grades on the first floor, middle grades on the second floor and upper grades on the third floor.

“Small kids don’t feel like it’s crowded anymore because they don’t have big kids towering over them,” says teacher assistant Karen Petraitis. And older children seem to enjoy the recognition of their seniority, even though they contend with more “body volume” around their classrooms, she says.

Other steps that lightened the burden of overcrowding at Clissold include:

- Adding students to the school’s magnet Montessori classes so that they roughly equal the size of regular classes and adding a Montessori class. The average size of primary Montessori classes rose to 28, from 25, while the average size of middle-grade Montessori classes rose to 31. The average size of regular classes also is 31.

This move, notes Montessori teacher Carole Kayton, “was helpful to the school, but not to me personally. Montessori programs are supposed to use the floor and allow children to work in groups, but there’s no space to walk.” Montessori guidelines call for a maximum of 25.

- Creating extended math/science and language arts/social studies classes for eighth-graders—to reduce the number of times these students move from class to class.

- Moving the assistant principal, counselors and other support staff out of a classroom they shared with one learning disabilities teacher. Now, two learning disabilities teachers share the classroom, which is divided by shelving.

“The two LD teachers feel like they’ve died and gone to heaven, because the room is dedicated to LD students,” says Clissold Principal Carmen Marcy. “Last year, the staff would hold meetings and it would be so noisy the teacher couldn’t run her program.”

Meanwhile, the assistant principal set up shop in an old storeroom, and the support workers moved to the room the second learning disabilities teacher vacated.

This complex series of actions, which forced a number of teachers into less favorable situations, was the result of a 12-month study by Clissold’s faculty and community residents. The overcrowding committee of the local school council launched the project by hiring a consultant from the Illinois Renewal Institute to help them organize their work and analyze the data. A $7,000 grant from The Joyce Foundation paid for the consultant. The project climaxd last March in a day-long brainstorming session dubbed “The Big Squeeze.”

Consensus “always provides better solutions than a single administrator could ever come up with,” observes Marcy. Another benefit, she notes, is the school management team that developed during the project. The team includes five regular teachers, two Montessori teachers, three parents and the assistant principal.

The school still is seeking to reduce overcrowding. Some members of the school community would like to curtail busing, others are urging Ald. Virginia Rugai (19th) to help them reopen a nearby shuttered school, and Marcy is seeking grant money to rent space for Montessori classes at the Evergreen Plaza Shopping Center.

Sally O’Dowd is a graduate student at the Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University. She is covering the education beat.
Support school newspapers, give kids reason for writing

by Neal E. Robbins

As any writer knows, writing for no good reason is like trying to open a frozen lock. Forcing the key is likely to break it off. Yet much of the writing students do in school breaks the key off; instead of opening possibilities, it instills a lifelong dread of writing.

Schools need to give students good reasons to write. Much has been written about ways to encourage writing in the classroom, such as the promising “process” approach, which casts the teacher as a nurturing mentor. Possibilities outside the classroom, however, offer even richer sources of motivation.

Such sources are publication of school newspapers, magazines and, to the extent they contain writing, yearbooks. Writing for publication gives more satisfaction than almost anything that can be done in a compulsory class situation. When writing is published, it matters. The audience and the responsibility are real; writing is not just a response to a teacher’s demands.

The school newspaper in particular offers a special place for students. Newspapers exist at 60 of 67 Chicago public high schools. That’s not bad, but quality lags behind quantity. Many school newspapers are good. Many more are very weak: They come out irregularly, have rudimentary design and contain little substantial writing and much filler. They fall short of creating lively forums for expression, squandering the potential to motivate writing and thought on issues of concern to students.

We cannot afford this waste. A study of student writing at Chicago area high schools conducted in the early 1980s found that the average student grew not at all as a writer during his four years in high school. National studies also have found stagnation: Students tested on writing in 1988 did no better than those tested in 1976.

Two paragraphs a week

Writing is learned by writing, yet more than a third of eighth- and twelfth-graders reported in a 1988 national survey that they were not required to write even two paragraphs a week. In recent decades, schools, pressed to do better, merely increased testing, devoting inordinate amounts of attention to multiple-choice exams. Writing has suffered, especially, studies show, among minorities.

But school reform provides an opportunity to remove practices undermining the health of school news media, boost opportunities for writing, engage students in the democratic process and encourage the kind of abstract thinking they need.

The following suggestions, based on four years of work with school journalism in Chicago, outline the most needed reforms:

- Recognize strong school newspapers—and other school publications involving writing—as powerful educational tools. A 1987 national study of ACT scores commissioned by the Journalism Education Association compared college students of matched academic abilities. Those with high school publications experience were found to have scored significantly higher on standardized writing tests. These results suggest that publications experience promotes language arts competence.

- Consider journalism a serious activity for the college-bound. High school counselors are notorious among journalism teachers for telling good students not to take journalism.

- Raise journalism’s academic status by offering Advanced Placement journalism writing courses. One educational foundation has developed journalism course curricula to prepare high school students for Advanced Placement writing tests. Students who took the course in 1989-90 fared as well on the national AP exams as did their counterparts in traditional English composition.

- Give advisers status and seniority. Adviser turnover is too high. A competent adviser should not be replaced whenever a more senior teacher wants to serve or when the newspaper ruffles a principal’s feathers.

- Insist on training for journalism teachers and newspaper advisers. Training opportunities abound.

- Appreciate good newspapers and advisers. Praise student journalists with awards, banquets, T-shirts emblazoned with their newspaper’s name and the announcement of the names of reporters covering sports events. Share newspapers with the community.

- Seek advertising and other outside sources of support. Low newspaper sub-
sidies, $4,000 a year at best in Chicago, are unlikely to increase. Advisers should receive training in how to exploit neighborhood advertising potential. Forge alliances among school departments and with nearby schools and colleges to share equipment.

- Encourage school newspapers to raise real issues. Messages from principals, school public relations blurs, sports scores, classified ads and reports on awards and achievements fill many school papers. Such puffery ignores what really concerns Chicago students. They should feel free to write about any issue.

- Help students understand responsible journalism. When this support is forthcoming in strong journalism courses and close contact with well-trained advisers, the newspaper will flower. It will nurture a healthy discourse on school and community issues.

- Condemn censorship of school newspapers. Censorship contradicts the lessons of democracy. It takes away from students' feeling of control and ownership of what should be their publication. When students realize they have no real freedom, they stop thinking for themselves and lose motivation.

- Support efforts to outlaw censorship legalized by the 1988 Hazelwood decision. In that decision, the U.S. Supreme Court gave broad powers to public school administrators to censor some school publications. Colorado, California, Massachusetts and Iowa have adopted laws protecting school press freedoms.

- Consider journalism courses essential to building school newspapers' quality and strength. Fewer than three-fourths of Chicago high schools offer journalism. Every school should teach journalism.

- Open up the newspaper to students outside the journalism class or separate it from the class entirely. A newspaper produced and written exclusively by a class ends up as another graded exercise. Allow all students to work on the newspaper. Even better, make it entirely voluntary and give students time to work on the paper during the school day. This encourages self-motivated learning.

- Give students real ownership and responsibility for the newspaper. Real reasons to write require real freedom. Giving a school paper to the students means giving students unstructured time to work on the newspaper, free choices about what to print and responsibility for getting a newspaper out on time. Easing school authority is key.

- Provide time and a place for students and the adviser to work together. Chicago advisers normally get a class period to advise, but often have inadequate space for newspaper layout or staff meetings and no time when all staff members can assemble. This forces advisers to do much of what students should do.

- Recognize that training future journalists, especially from minorities, is an important goal. Studies show high schools to be especially important for generating interest in journalism among minorities, who tend not to choose the field if they have not had early positive exposure in school. Better programs will help end the scarcity of minorities in America's newsrooms, where they are less than 9 percent of the journalists.

Create schools within schools

by William Ayers

In October 1991, CATALYST published the results of a survey of 13,000 Chicago elementary school teachers conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. The report, "Charting Reform: The Teachers' Turn," describes what teachers think about school reform, their school communities and instructional change. In November, we published commentaries on the report by five individuals from different school constituencies, and we asked readers to respond further about what findings they considered most important and what action those findings suggest. Here is one such response.

Perhaps the most interesting result reported is that teachers from small schools are significantly more positive about the prospects of reform than teachers from large schools. This finding offers one entry point for breathing life back into the school reform movement.

Chicago's "small schools"—under 350 children—are larger than the average Illinois elementary school. And yet smaller schools are widely known to be more effective for both students and teachers. For example, Herb Walberg, a researcher at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and William Fowler analyzed data for 293 public secondary schools, and found that smaller schools are significantly more effective at enhancing educational outcomes. While it is not likely that Chicago will build another 600 schools in the foreseeable future, there is another step that could help us create small schools here.

The watchword in big schools is control; simply moving large numbers of youngsters through the hallways, cafeterias and classrooms becomes the goal. In big, anonymous schools, teachers cannot collaborate adequately, parents cannot participate fully, and many youngsters simply fall through the cracks.

While big schools are procedure-centered, small schools can become learner-centered. In small schools, teachers are not forced to "cover the curriculum" or "deliver instruction" regardless of the real needs of actual
children. Teachers can adjust and modify their efforts, ensuring that every child is seen as a whole human being and provided multiple opportunities to connect with deeper and wider ways of knowing.

Upon hearing the results of the consortium survey, Supt. Ted Kimbrough said, "There will not be small schools in Chicago—we can't afford it." The truth is we can't afford not to do it. Kimbrough's comment reflects outdated thinking. Big, consolidated school buildings, which make good economic sense, make absolutely no educational sense. This is why the reform in New York City a decade ago was premised on breaking big schools into smaller units. Fifteen years ago there were 17 schools in 17 school buildings in Spanish Harlem. Today those 17 big school buildings house more than 50 individual schools—each the result of the vision, entrepreneurial spirit, initiative and hard work of communities of teachers, parents and principals. (See CATALYST, November 1990.)

It could happen here. To take this step we have to break the stranglehold of a very strong assumption by educators, namely, that a school building and a school community must be identical.

Schools as administrative units can be broken down to something manageable; schools-within-schools could begin to grow and a sense of energy and ownership could again be ignited. This change would cost virtually nothing. To begin, the school system could simply encourage teachers and parents with a new vision of a non-selective, small school to occupy one floor or two floors of an existing, underutilized space, and guarantee them administrative integrity. If they attracted a population, they would be in business; if not, then no new school. This kind of initiative might not only save specific schools, it also could unleash the kind of courage, energy and imagination (all sadly lacking) that would save the school system.

Most of the commentary to date on "Charting Reform" has been selective and predictably self-serving. Union leaders claim that the study proves teachers are the good guys and ought to get their raises; central administrators can demonstrate that their latest reorganization is in perfect alignment with the new findings; university people are swollen with new pride because, as always, they knew it all along. Everyone claims to be in it "for the children," and yet all the posturing and maneuvering is nothing more than business as usual.

It is past time that we break with all the failed practices and launch something new and energizing. Creating small schools will not in itself solve all the educational problems confronting us, but it is a necessary condition for the changes we desperately need.

Williams Ayers is an assistant professor of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Letters

Don't blame state Chapter 1 for financial mess

Thanks for your informative set of articles on state Chapter 1 in the November issue. As they point out, under the School Reform Act, these funds are even more explicitly targeted to assist low-income students overcome their educational disadvantages and to help level the playing field of educational opportunity.

Unfortunately, the comments of some "insiders" appear unchallenged. For example, an unnamed School Finance Authority consultant is allowed to assert that, in 1988, reformers believed that "somehow they'd cut $300 million of bloat" to fund the shift of state Chapter 1 to supplementary programs. As one of the three "reformers" who helped design the reallocation schedule and provided the revenue projections to support it, I can say that statement is simply false.

The reform act assumes that only $42 million of the administrative bloat would be used to fund the reallocation of state Chapter 1. The act's administrative cap was designed to force a corresponding reduction in non-instructional costs.

We projected the total five-year additional costs at about $250 million. Deducting the $42 million, some $210 million would be required, not counting growth in total state revenues. During the first three years alone, local property tax revenues increased by $272 million, with more to come next year when reassessment again comes to Chicago.

In fact, the total five-year revenue requirements have already been exceeded. Thus, the Board of Education's current and future budget problems do not derive from its legal mandate to restore funds it had illegally diverted for a decade. Rather, they stem from the board's subsequent decisions to make other expenditure increases (primarily pay raises) for which it did not have adequate, uncommitted revenues.

Second, an official of the State Board of Education is quoted in response to a suggestion that the intent in rewriting the Chapter 1 law is to give schools control of how Chapter 1 funds are used. He says petulantly, "In that case, why have Chapter 1 at all?" As he well knows, the reason Chapter 1 exists is to provide schools with many low-income students more resources than those with few such needy kids. It is the same philosophy that underlies federal support to disadvantaged kids, but without constraining restrictions, restrictions which the feds are only now moving to ease.

State lax on Pershing Rd.

The irony is that the state board is being tougher on individual schools than it is on the central administration. Such statements as this official's should not be allowed to stand unchallenged in an objective report. The same criticism applies to the comment in the story about Lake View High, when state officials claim that discretionary "state Chapter 1 has always been the board's funding source for [high school] teacher aides." That statement is patently false.

Finally, the central office bureaucrat who doesn't understand how adequate supplies and copied materials can contribute to increased learning in schools is a symbol of the bureaucratic intransigence and self-centeredness which led to school
reform in Chicago in the first place. These comments are not meant to indicate that all schools have made the wisest choices about how to spend their new discretionary funds. They are intended to remind your readers that local discretion and school-based management were adopted for Chicago because the old system of centralized decision making had failed so completely.

I want to commend you for your coverage of how schools are using these funds and the difficulties they are having as a result of the fiscal irresponsibility of the current Board of Education, the interim board (which created the current fiscal impasse) and the administration that served both. It is a tragedy that school opened this year amid chaos as a result of such disappointing leadership.

G. Alfred Hess Jr., executive director Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance

Shop classes build strong minds

So, Michael Fehey thinks that shop classes are less relevant now than when I attended Lane Technical High School in 1957? (See CATALYST/Opinions, October 1991.) Well, shop, drafting and other such vocational-related classes are important. Of course, the technology has changed and the instruction should change accordingly. And certainly the equipment and materials used in these classes should reflect the real-life work these experiences are supposed to replicate for students.

But the basic purpose of these classes, just as in standard college-prep courses, is to provide opportunities for students to learn how to think, apply what they know to concrete life situations and gain the intellectual discipline needed to be successful citizens.

There are probably lots of things at Lane that need to be changed. That's true of most schools in our city, but that doesn't mean you throw out shop classes. I had a helluva woodshop teacher in my freshman year at Lane (Mr. Robinson). We learned about the use of tools, respect their purpose, to plane and square a surface, to understand the strengths of various joints and how to finish a surface. I got only a "C" in the course; but to this day, because of that experience, I know the difference between quality workmanship and junk, whether I'm looking at furniture or ordinary carpentry (and yes, there are things still made of wood).

But flutulence such as Fehey's "the curriculum is more appropriate for 1940 than for the 21st century" adds not one iota of sense to the discourse on how to improve our schools.

There is no curriculum which can be designed that is appropriate for the next century except a curriculum which engages the students in their own learning, helps them to develop the discipline necessary to work independently and provides them with the thinking skills to apply what they have learned to everyday life.

John G. Katziekis, graduate
Class of '57, Lane Technical High School

‘Reading’ issue reflects our optimism

I am writing to compliment you on the excellent recent issue focusing on "teaching that makes reading come alive" in Chicago schools. (CATALYST, October 1991) Besides being informative, the articles reflected the optimism that many of us involved in the projects described feel about the potential for growth and change.

Thanks to you and your staff for your continuing good work in CATALYST.

Camille L. Blachowicz, professor of reading
National-Louis University

Personnel office plays important role

An Opinion piece in our November 1991 issue proposed reducing the Board of Education’s personnel office because "personnel responsibilities have declined in recent years." The following is a response to that proposal, made by the Citywide Coalition for School Reform.

As educational reform evolves nationally and locally, the debates and experiments center on school-based management, instructional restructuring and other strategies backed by research and worthy of the attention they are receiving.

But also crucial are a number of personnel issues that undergird the day-to-day functioning of school systems. We at the Department of Human Resources are examining them, including how we can:

■ Meet present and future teacher shortages especially in specialty areas such as special and bilingual education.
■ Maintain a racially and ethnically diverse staff who can serve as role models for students.
■ Streamline the monumental processing and recording functions that relate to the employment of more than 27,000 teacher-certificated personnel and 17,000 career service personnel.

Further, the scope and volume of the department’s responsibilities are probably not fully understood. Some examples are:

■ Over the summer, coordinators recruited at 120 colleges, universities, corporations and educational associations and organized a job fair attended by 220 principals and 1,700 teacher candidates. Between June 30 and Oct. 31, they counseled more than 6,233 teachers and other professionals who came to us as applicants or as current employees updating certificates. As a result, 3,400 employment identification eligibility cards were issued to new candidates.

■ The office of Substitute Teacher Assignment fills an average of 1,100 absence calls a day.

■ In an average month, the office of Employee Relations handles three arbitration hearings, eight due process hearings, 50 extended pay hardship hearings, 200 grievances, 400 step salary adjustments, 600 bonus and lane salary adjustments and 25 meetings with union representatives to informally resolve contract issues.

These examples of the flow of our activities only begin to describe the multifaceted issues this department is exploring and the initiatives it is implementing.

Various collaborative relationships with a variety of institutions have resulted in the support of high school and college programs to encourage future teachers. An example is a unique consortium with our department, the Chicago Teachers Union, the Council of Chicago Area Deans of Education and the Golden Apple Foundation; this consortium recently received a $462,000 grant from Chicago Community Trust to implement Teachers for Chicago. This program will enable college graduates to meet certification requirements and work toward master’s degrees while honing their skills in Chicago classrooms.

In line with reform, the department is also providing principals with resources for screening and selecting staff, developing plans to transfer more staff selection resources and powers to the schools, and analyzing all services to strengthen those that are required and eliminate those that are not.

The most important reform goal, however, is the improvement of student achievement. Meeting that goal begins with the recruitment, employment and compliance responsibilities of the Department of Human Resources.

Margaret M. Harrigan, associate superintendent
Department of Human Resources, Chicago Public Schools

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40 schools 'breaking' contract with CTU okay

by Rob Paral

The Chicago School Reform Act sets the stage for schools to "break" union and Board of Education rules that hamper local initiative. And 40 schools are doing just that under contract waivers granted by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU).

Most of these schools have changed their schedules—to consolidate staff development time, to increase instruction time, to reduce study halls or, in one case, to prevent between-school gang conflicts.

While the reform act gives local school councils the right to request waivers from the board and all employee unions, only the CTU has set up a formal procedure: The CTU's executive committee will consider a waiver request if it has been approved by the school's LSC, principal and union delegate and by 70 percent of its faculty. To date, the committee has approved all requests, says union official Tom Feeley.

But some principals say the 70 percent requirement is too high. Principal Charles Mingo of DuSable High School, 4934 S. Wabash, wanted to shave a few minutes from each class period and passing period to give teachers staff development time at the end of the day, but only slightly more than 50 percent of his teachers approved. "I shouldn't need an extraordinary measure," Mingo says. "It should be a simple majority."

Other employee unions don't have formal waiver procedures, but "there would be nothing to prevent [schools] from requesting a waiver," says Richard Tygelski, assistant superintendent for employee relations.

To request a waiver from the board, says board secretary Thomas Corcoran, a school's principal and LSC president should write a letter to the board president. So far, no board waivers have been requested, he says.

John Kotokis, the CTU's point man on educational issues, speculates that the School Board has not set up formal waiver procedures because "they don't want anybody to use them." If waivers had a high profile, schools might seek to adopt such extraordinary measures as dropping the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, he contends.

Board requests waivers

While the School Board has not invited waiver requests, it has urged a number of schools to ask the CTU for permission to start classes earlier so that school buses can make more runs, which saves money. Nineteen of the 40 CTU waivers were granted for that purpose. Of the remaining 21, 10 were filed by high schools and 11 by elementary schools. Here are some examples:

■ To reduce contact between its students and gang members in neighboring schools, Casals Elementary School, 3501 W. Potomac, begins and ends school 10 minutes early. "To control the turf, we changed the time of the turf," explains Principal John Mazurek.

■ Ryerson Elementary School, 646 N. Lawndale, cut 15 minutes off teachers' morning preparation time and repackaged those quarter hours into 2 ½-hour staff development sessions that are held twice a month. That means students start classes 15 minutes early each day but go home 2 ½ hours early every other Friday.

■ Corliss High School, 821 E. 103rd, increased instruction time for its students by switching to 50-minute classes. (The standard in Chicago high schools is 40 minutes.) Before, Corliss teachers had five 40-minute teaching periods, one 40-minute duty (e.g., serving as hall monitor) and a 10-minute "division" (home room). Now, they have five 50-minute teaching periods, no duties and no division. Administrators have taken up the slack in duties, and division chores have been shifted to regular classes.

What this means for students is that they are in regular classes for a full 300 minutes, with no study halls. In most Chicago high schools, students must take at least one study hall to meet the state requirement of at least 300 minutes of daily educational activity. Further, both students and teachers at Corliss go home a half hour early.

■ Taft High School, 6545 W. Hurlbut, also dismisses students a half hour early, in effect sparing them a study hall that everyone considered useless. Teachers stay until the regular dismissal hour, using the time for class preparation or staff development.

To meet the state's 300-minute educational activity requirement, Taft added 10 minutes to division.

Principal William Watts says that the longer division enables teachers to talk more with students about attendance and other problems. In the CTU's newspaper, an article on this waiver was headlined "Taft contract waiver lightens teachers' workload."

Contract waivers are not unique to Chicago. Teachers unions in Hammond, Ind., Miami, Fla., and New York City have been granting them as part of school-based management initiatives.

Feeley, of the CTU, estimates that by the end of the school year as many as 50 Chicago schools may be operating under CTU contract waivers. Last year, the number was 30.

Rob Paral is a Chicago writer.
Reformers were 2 and 2 as strike deadline approached

by Michael Klonsky

One week before the Nov. 18 strike deadline for Chicago teachers—and as CATALYST went to press—school reform leaders had chalked up two victories and two losses in their bid to keep schools open and spare schools from more budget cuts.

Reformers' first victory was to force the Board of Education to abandon an anticipated drive to win legislative approval to dip into state Chapter 1 funds to help pay for teacher pay raises.

AN ANALYSIS

Their second victory was to thwart the board's substitute initiative—getting the Legislature to expand the use of property taxes in its textbook and playground funds to include, for example, librarians' salaries and playground maintenance.

Board President Clinton Bristow had insisted that the move would not "change the amount of dollars now going for classroom textbooks." But that is because the board's budget did not allocate all the textbook fund money for textbooks; some money was left undesignated.

"We've got science books that don't have pictures of men on the moon ye," protested James Deanes, president of the Parent/Community Council.

Reformers' first loss was the contract settlement the board reached with its 19 non-teaching unions. School engineers, engineer assistants, custodians and lunchroom workers accepted a pay freeze this year but won guaranteed 7-percent raises next school year. Trades workers, who historically have been paid at the rates prevailing in private industry, accepted a six-month delay in the effective date of their raises.

From reformers' standpoint, however, the worst part of the deal was that trades workers, engineers and engineer assistants locked in their jobs. Reformers had been pressing for cutbacks in these highly paid jobs to help pay for teacher raises. The settlement, noted Joan Jeter Slay of Designs for Change, "blocked potential cuts that could have been made outside the classroom so that teachers could have gotten their increase."

Custodians and lunchroom workers, who are paid less and have more minorities in their ranks, did not win job protection and, indeed, lost some jobs.

The agreement with the non-teaching unions was announced just before the Chicago Tribune disclosed union contributions to legislators immediately preceding the spring session, where many important school matters were discussed. The contributions appeared to violate lobbyists' pledge to boycott legislative fundraisers in the state capital during the final months of the session.

Correspondent Rick Pearson reported that 16 lawmakers who sit on education-related committees or in the House Democratic leadership received money from Local 143 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. This union, whose members work for the school system, has successfully fought reformers' attempts to give school principals control over their maintenance staffs.

When reformers returned to Springfield for the fall veto session, they were ambushed. What they wanted was legislation to force the Chicago School Finance Authority to let the board tap a reserve fund that holds money for bills coming due. Specifically, they wanted $35 million from the reserve, which would yield a pay raise of close to 4 percent. (The Interim Board of Education had promised teachers 7 percent if the money was available.)

What reformers got was a proposal by Mayor Richard M. Daley and Gov. James Edgar that would have freed up a total of $35 million in reserves for this year and next year. Still worse, from the standpoint of many reformers, was that the proposal reinstated the strict financial oversight powers the Authority had when it was created in 1980 to rescue the school system from a financial collapse. That measure, in effect, would have strengthened the hands of Daley and Edgar because the mayor and the governor appoint members to the Authority.

"Our fight has to be with the mayor of Chicago because he's the only one responsible to us."

—Bernie Noven
Parents United for Responsible Education

Charging "power grab," the legislature's Black Caucus, joined by some dissenting Republicans, scuttled the proposal. Everyone went home empty handed, fearing the worst about a teacher strike.

Meanwhile, Jacqueline Vaughn, president of the Chicago Teachers Union, was trying to curry favor with reformer leaders. On Oct. 26 and Nov. 5, Vaughn convened meetings to lay out the union's case: The union
had refused to join the board in seeking use of the state Chapter 1 funds, she maintained. And the board’s negotiating team, “sorely outnumbered by the union,” wasn’t any good. When it came to barking up the leaders to lambaste a politically safe target, bureaucrat Richard Tygielski, assistant superintendent for employee relations, Tygielski, she maintained, was the “point man” in an old-style, anti-union approach to negotiations.

Her proposals to break the impasse included: (1) a buy-out of contracts of teachers aged 55 to 60, which would be costly in the short run but save money down the road, (2) relaxing restrictions on pension fund pay-outs to encourage early retirements, (3) use of the reserve money, (4) a shorter work year for administrators above the school level and (5) deferral of some teacher bonuses. After hearing reformers’ objections to use of textbook and playground funds, Vaughn said the union would reconsider its initial support for that measure.

While reformers appeared to be sympathetic to most of Vaughn’s criticisms of the board, they responded by demanding that both sides “get their acts together and avoid a strike at all costs.”

Lending weight to Vaughn’s complaints about the board was one member of the board itself. On Oct. 10, member Patricia A. Daley (no relation to the mayor) sent a letter to her colleagues attacking Bristow and Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough for their handling of negotiations.

“A superintendent who leads the school system into a strike is not a competent superintendent. And a president who allows the superintendent to do so must also be considered incompetent,” charged Daley, who made her letter public. She accused the board of ignoring teachers and reform groups that had made money-saving recommendations.

The same day, Daley and three other members objected to a board decision to hold an election for board president. Bristow’s term officially expired at the end of May, but the board had decided to delay an election until Mayor Daley filled some vacancies. With Patricia Daley’s attack, the board re-elected Bristow, who will now serve through next May.

Daley paid for her public criticism; Bristow removed her as chair of the Instruction Committee, replacing her with Saundra Bishop, and as a member of the Desegregation Committee, where she was the only white member. Reform groups protested but to no avail.

Taking advantage of the rift within the board, Vaughn called for a meeting with all 15 members. Members “were not being informed of the union’s true position,” she maintained. The board did not oblige her.

In general, the board has kept its own counsel, refraining even from generating bad publicity about the union.

As negotiations headed into their final days, reformers stood by their initial proposal for heading off a strike: The Finance Authority should ease its restrictions by “releasing” reserve funds or permitting the board to reduce its budget to account for the fact that every job won’t be filled the entire year. And the board should trim administrative expenses. Money that could be obtained through Finance Authority action far outstripped money that could come from administrative cutbacks.


New political tack

Politically, a number of these groups turned to a new direction. At a Nov. 11 press conference, they said they would hold Mayor Daley responsible for a strike.

“Our fight has to be with the mayor of Chicago because he’s the only one responsible to us,” said Bernie Noven, director of Parents United for Responsible Education. “We don’t vote in those School Finance Authority members; they’re appointed by him and the governor. We don’t vote in the board members... We don’t vote in Kimbrough.”

The group also announced plans for marches on City Hall if a peaceful contract settlement were not reached. Only four years ago, many of these people were on the streets protesting a 19-day teacher strike, which provided the steam for passage of the Chicago School Reform Act.

Michael Klonsky is a Chicago writer with children in the Chicago Public Schools.
Newcomers dominate new local school councils

by Sally O'Dowd

Sixty percent of local school council members elected in October are newcomers and 40 percent are incumbents, according to Board of Education calculations.

Forty-five percent of the city's first group of local school council members ran for a second term; voters re-elected 85 percent of them, giving councils 2,109 carry-over members.

A CATALYST telephone poll taken last March indicated that about a third of incumbents definitely would seek re-election and another third probably would seek re-election.

Contrary to the poll's results, teachers outpaced parents and community members in bidding for another term: 49 percent of teachers, 46 percent of community members and 44 percent of parents sought re-election.

However, relatively more parent incumbents won re-election: 87 percent of parents, 84 percent of community members and 80 percent of teachers were re-elected.

All numbers down

Over all, the number of candidates in the 1991 election was down about 52 percent; the number of voters was down about 45 percent. School reform leaders cited a number of reasons: The newness was gone, the difficulty of the work was known and less money was spent on publicity, candidate recruitment and get-out-the-vote activities.

In 1989, the School Board spent $736,000 on radio and television ads, canvassing, telemarketing and other promotion activities, according to an analysis by Bruce Cecil of Leadership for Quality Education. This year, it spent no money on outreach.

In 1989, LQE funneled $700,000 from businesses into outreach activities. This year, businesses donated $450,000 to $500,000 over a three-month period for such campaign-related expenses as billboards, posters, brochures, printing, paper and advertising, Cecil says.

In 1989, community organizations received about $208,000 from LQE for get-out-the-vote activities and another $624,000 for follow-up support during the school year. This year, foundations distributed $325,000 to community organizations for election activities.

"A lot of [private] money funneled to the campaign in 1989 found other homes in 1990 for other school reform initiatives," says Cecil.

Pre-election coverage by the city's two major daily newspapers also decreased. In 1989, the Chicago Sun-Times devoted 10.3 pages to campaign news the two weeks prior to the election; it also published a 20-page special supplement. In 1990, it devoted 9.1 pages, including 4.5 for a list of candidates. In 1989, the Chicago Tribune devoted 6.15 pages to campaign news the two weeks prior to the election; in 1990, it devoted 2.4 pages.

The cost of conducting the election was down, too. In 1989, the School Board spent about $2.7 million, according to Cecil, principally for consultants to design, organize and oversee the election process. This year, it relied on volunteer experts and the non-profit group Project LEAP, keeping expenses to about $1.2 million.

Formal complaints about improper election activity also decreased, from 132 in 1989 to 44 this year. Arlene Rubin, executive director of Project LEAP, attributes the decrease to more confidence in the election process and better-trained judges.

In 1989, six schools were required to hold elections a second time; this year, only South Loop Elementary will hold a second election. A hearing officer declared the first one invalid because a chemical spill in a public housing project kept a number of voters from the polls. Middle-income and low-income parents at South Loop have had major differences over school policies.

The following are schools with the highest and lowest voter turnouts:

Most parent voters

- Cuffe Elementary, 384 students: 545 voters. "I've been openly receptive to parents," says Cuffe Principal Betty Sibley, who was hired in July. "I've heard that before, parents didn't feel welcome."

- Lane Tech High, 3,978 students:
382 voters. Lane Tech is the city’s largest school but also had heated, high-profile contests for the LSC.

Most community voters
- South Loop Elementary, 499 students: 445 voters.
- Morgan Park High, 1,856 students: 1,236 voters. Yvonne Griswold, Morgan Park’s top vote-getter (1,200 votes), says people are “still smarting about the things that have happened during the last two years.” The old LSC ousted the principal “without giving people a reason why,” she explains. Griswold is one of seven newcomers on the council.

Most staff voters
- Mason Elementary, 1,553 students: 257 voters.
- Lane Tech High, 3,978 students: 240 voters.

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OVERCROWDING continued from page 3

A report in late October; a final report is due in December.

Proposals it is considering include:
- Leasing more facilities, purchasing more demountable units and viewing both as permanent rather than temporary solutions.
- Advocates note that this approach is less costly than new construction and would better accommodate shifts in population, which can be unpredictable.

“The question is, do we need to purchase or construct a new school, or can we live with what we have?” says Giacomino Mancuso, director of facilities planning for the board.

- Requiring local schools to pay for renting additional space if it is used to accommodate special programs.

“Since we’ve not been able to keep up with the need now, I don’t know how we’re going to keep up in the future,” says facilities coordinator Ashraf Manji. “Programs are going to expand, and there doesn’t seem to be any real hope for more resources.”

But spending regulations for federal and state Chapter 1 present an obstacle.

- Forcing overcrowded schools to adopt a year-round schedule, which board officials say increases capacity 20 to 25 percent. Under this proposal, the board would not spend money on leases, demountables or new schools until a school had switched to a year-round schedule.

“May not be popular, but given the situation I think it should be included in new policies,” argues task force member Richard Stephenson, superintendent of subdistrict 9 on the South Side. So far, only six schools have adopted year-round schedules. (See story on page 6.)

- Redefining building capacity. Currently, the board calculates capacity by multiplying the number of classrooms in a school by 30 students. For this calculation, science labs, computer labs and other special-purpose rooms are considered regular classrooms. Principals argue, however, that these special rooms need to be set aside to maintain high-quality programs.

Without science labs, computer labs, tutoring rooms and the like, says Engelskirchen, “underachievers stay underachievers and overachievers become your average student. Everyone is hurt.”

Lorraine V. Forte is managing editor of CATALYST. Interns Dan Weissmann and Scott Schraff contributed to this article.
At Irving Elementary School, 749 S. Oakley, the report card for fourth through eighth grade carries only three letter grades; yet it’s so large it doesn’t fit into any standard envelope. Principal Madeleine Maraldi calls the card a “bedsheet.”

The card needs extra space for two special sections. In one, students record their accomplishments and rate their progress in reading and language arts. In the other, parents report their children’s behavior at home.

The new report card, in place since fall of 1990, is part of Irving’s thrust to give students a larger stake in their own schooling and to keep parents active in their children’s education.

Typically, Chicago elementary students receive traditional letter grades—A, B, C, D, F—in at least nine curriculum areas, including music, library science, handwriting, reading, math and social studies. The staff at Irving decided to give letter grades in only the subjects they consider most important: science, math and social studies.

Assigning only three grades removes what Maraldi calls the “camouflage” of achievement in less central areas. Irving eighth-grader Diana Salinas explains: “I used to be able to say, ‘Look! I got an A in gym! I got an A in library!’”

Irving staff consider reading and language arts skills crucial as “building blocks” for the core subjects, and students use report card journals to keep careful track of their achievements as readers, writers, speakers and listeners.

For example, students choose their own books to read, enter the name of each book in their journals and verify each journal entry in conferences with staff. Relying on their journals, students record in their section of the report card the work they’ve done in reading, writing, listening and speaking. Students also rate themselves in those four areas, using a scale from 1 to 10. Specifically, they rate their effort, their improvement and the quality of their best work.

The last section of the report card asks parents to report how often children do certain things at home: talk about the school day, spend time reading, etc. “We’re hoping that if parents don’t see these behaviors, they’ll initiate some of them,” Maraldi explains.

Starting this year, a modified version of Irving’s new report card will go home with first-, second- and third-graders. The student- and parent-written sections are similar to those for older children. But there are no letter grades. Instead, teachers will mark whether children have achieved specified goals for their grade levels, e.g., in third grade, 30 minutes of silent reading.