New programs tackle student prejudices

by Michael Selinker

At Farragut Career Academy High School, black and Latino students repeatedly attacked each other over three days. At Bogan High School, the clash was between whites and blacks. At Saucedo Magnet School, Hispanics fluent in English cast slurs at those who weren’t. And at Arai Middle School and the Southeast Asian branch of Senn High School, dozens of black and Asian students have been injured in repeated confrontations.

Many of the young victims have been innocent bystanders, reports former Senn teacher John Ahlgrim, whose head was gashed by a brick thrown during one fight. “They’re more vulnerable,” he says. “They come to school scared to death and they don’t want to come back. They wouldn’t show up for days.”

Racial tension, punctuated by occasional confrontation, has long permeated the Chicago public schools (CPS). But unlike Boston and Milwaukee, Chicago has been slow to counterattack.

Take for example the violence at Farragut, 2345 S. Christiana. Thirteen students were injured and 60 were arrested when tensions between black and Latino gangs exploded in the school last November. It was the second time in two years that race-based fighting got so fierce that classes were cancelled and police summoned.

“They don’t tell us anything about [racism] until people start fighting in there,” says Ricky, a black junior at Farragut. Fearing for his safety, Ricky asked that his last name not be published. (See related story on page 5.)

Hard hitting

In fact, however, some teachers at Farragut and an increasing number of teachers throughout the city are indeed “telling” students about racism. Typically, they do it through one of several new programs, developed elsewhere, that take a hard-hitting approach to prejudice. In these programs, the focus is on slavery, the Holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans and other atrocities born of prejudice. By dealing only with conflicts, these programs differ from multicultural curricula, which stress the contributions of various racial and ethnic groups. (see CATALYST, December 1990).

At the high school level, students might report on lynchings of African Americans in the South, debate U.S. policy toward South Africa or delve into the legal and social issues of a Nazi plan to rally in north suburban Skokie, where many Holocaust sur-
Kennedy students examine their assumptions

The students in Sue Ackerman's social studies class at Kennedy High School, 6325 W. 56th, fidget as a visitor eyes them briefly and then makes a snap judgment of their personalities.

"This is a pushy person," the visitor says to a Latina student, handing her a label marked "pushy." "This one's self-centered, and I know this one's a loudmouth."

The students chuckle, frequently nodding in agreement, as Gwen Rattliff of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations works her way through the class.

This exercise is Rattliff's icebreaker for a workshop on prejudice, which was organized by the commission at Ackerman's request.

With the students more at ease, Rattliff turns serious. "But what do these words mean? What does self-centered mean?"

"It's someone who thinks only of themselves," says a white student labeled "phony."

"Okay, but is it fair for me to just label this person self-centered because he looks like this?" responds Rattliff. "Isn't that what we do all the time?"

Rattliff then leads the group through a discussion of examples of racial stereotyping and prejudice. She asks the students to consider, for example, the case of a black student who wants to try out for a tennis team while the coach assumes the boy would prefer basketball.

A few students make the same assumption as the coach, but a Latino student sympathizes with the hypothetical black athlete: "Yeah, they just think blacks jump out of the cradle playing basketball."

There was no disagreement, however, on the hypothetical case of a Latina who was thought to eat only spicy food. No one in Ackerman's class bought that assumption. Indeed, one Latina student volunteered that she couldn't stand the stuff.

"Too negative?

Amy Weiss Narea, the principal of LaSalle Language Academy, says she tends to steer away from confrontation. "I'm told that people need to gripe and let off steam, but whenever you focus on the negative, you can get lost in the conflict and never get to the resolution phase."

Or worse, contends some critics, prejudice-reduction programs actually promote rebellion among students.

Karen Morris, principal of Saucedo Magnet School in Pilsen, 2850 W. 24th, says there will always be some resistance to confrontational programs. "But as the situation improves, even the naysayers jump on board, and sometimes they're your biggest backers," she adds.

At Saucedo, all faculty and staff go through bias-reduction programs, which anti-bias educators strongly recommend as a first step. Adults who display prejudice cannot effectively teach tolerance to their students, they reason. Further, confrontation can be difficult to handle.

CPS' Schroack says some teachers are crying out for help. From teachers struggling with bias among students, "the biggest objection we hear is, "Nobody prepared me for this."

Francesca Alcozer, multicultural coordinator in the CPS Department of Early Childhood Education, specifically encourages local school councils to look first at teacher needs when considering bias-reduction programs. "If you don't get the teachers at a critical point," she explains, "then all the money you put in for everything else goes down the drain."

"You can't change everyone right away," Alcozer cautions. "It's a slow process."

Saucedo a model

Saucedo's program is a model. All faculty and staff are trained through programs such as Project REACH and A World of Difference, developed by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'Nai B'rith, an international Jewish service organization. Teachers at each grade level meet frequently to discuss antibias strategies, especially ways to encourage students to assess their own biases. In some cases, the biases have nothing to do with race. For example, some Hispanic students fluent in English were calling those who weren't "wetbacks."

Morris is pleased with the results of the school's efforts. "Many of the upper-graders said to me, 'I never realized I was doing that, that name calling can hurt people.' I've seen happier children because the conflicts are put at least partially to rest."

Some states—but not Illinois—require anti-bias training for teachers. Minnesota, which has only a 1.5 percent minority population, is a leader. Since 1972, Minnesota teachers have had to take course work in prejudice and diversity.

"No set of learning materials is
going to change someone completely," says Kenneth Peatross, executive secretary of the Minnesota Board of Teaching. "But we [aim to provide] a vehicle for the person to be attentive to these issues and a framework of reference in dealing with crises."

Once teachers are convinced of the need for educating students about prejudice and are prepared to do it, principals and LSCs often must grapple with the concerns of frightened or hostile parents.

"It's such an immense project," says Saucedo's Morris. "We're dealing with forces outside the school that are negative. Some of our students come from racially intolerant backgrounds, and there's nothing we can do about that."

Money is another issue. A few programs are supported by grants that make them free for Chicago teachers. Among these is the Boston-based Facing History and Ourselves, which uses case studies of the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide. But most programs require LSCs to pay for materials and training.

A World of Difference was unveiled by the ADL in October 1990. It is a three-ring binder featuring a broad selection of historical vignettes of bias, from colonial slavery to recent neo-Nazi outrages. Last school year, the Arthur Rubloff Charitable Trust paid for the program for CPS teachers, but that money has run out. "My concern this year is that we may be losing the public schools," says ADL education coordinator Lindsay Green. "Our hope is that we can do as much as we can to make certain the costs will not be prohibitive."

Growing competition for resources has sparked some debate between the advocates of prejudice-reduction programs and those of multicultural education. The debate often is cast as the "hard" approach versus the "soft" approach to diversity.

Says CPS' Schroed: "I wouldn't go one way or the other; you really have to have both. A lot of people realize that a lot of these issues are confrontational, but they have to confront this from a base of knowledge that can come from a multicultural education."

Project REACH, which has separate books on various minority groups, appears to be the only program that deals with both prejudice reduction and multicultural education. "We're not afraid to deal with the hard stuff, but we have to work with the soft stuff," says Jeanne Baxter, a Northeastern Illinois University professor who oversees Project REACH in Chicago.

Educators who have used the "hard" materials say they work best when the racial situation is calm. Schools in crisis, however, first should call in a governmental authority to help restore peace, experts say. From
1969 to 1975, the Board of Education had a human relations department that performed that role. Now, the Chicago Commission on Human Relations sends educators into schools to quell tensions, as well as teach tolerance. (Budget cuts this year reduced the educational staff by half.) The Chicago Police Department’s Civil Rights Division also sends officers into schools.

To avoid such crises, schools must sufluse their environments with anti-bias messages, say proponents of prejudice-reduction programs. “We have to work on follow-up,” Baxter says. “We worry about the schools that might have ‘Cultural Bingo’ in the fall and ‘Fiesta Day’ in the spring and that’s it.”

Where there has been follow-through, bias reduction has enhanced students’ self-esteem, improved school morale and reduced violent behavior, advocates say. All this, in turn, has helped increase students’ interest in education.

“The reason kids drop out is not because they can’t read or write but because school doesn’t do anything for them as a person,” Schroock says. “We’re not just sending a kid’s head to school to be filled up with knowledge. We’re sending a head and a spirit to school, and both need to be attended to. If a student is comfortable with the people around him, then the ABCs come a lot easier.”

Michael Selinker is the former research director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations.

**Hate crime tally at schools**

In Chicago, persons 18 and under commit about half of the hate crimes in cases where the offender’s age is known, and they are victims in about a quarter of all hate crimes.

The following are hate crimes that occurred in or near schools and were reported to the Civil Rights Division of the Chicago Police Department in 1990 and 1991:

**February 1990**

At least three interracial assaults are reported over the firing of the principal at Morgan Park High School, 1744 W. Pryor, who subsequently files a race discrimination lawsuit against the local school council. Following a false fire alarm, police and students scuffle.

**March 1990**

Asian students at Von Steuben High School, 5039 N. Kimball, are charged with yelling slurs at blacks and assaulting a police officer; three plead guilty and are given a year’s supervision.

**April 1990**

In a fight between black and white students at Carroll Elementary School, 2929 W. 83rd, a white teacher is allegedly the target of a racial slur and is pushed by a black student.

In the ongoing hostility between blacks and Asians at Senn High School, 5900 N. Glenwood, and Arali Middle School, 900 W. Wilson, a white Senn teacher is hit with a brick allegedly thrown by a black youth at an Asian youth.

**May 1990**

A Cambodian student reports being attacked by black students at Von Steuben in retaliation for an earlier attack by Asian students angry over being excluded from a basketball game.

**September 1990**

Racist notes aiming at blacks are left on lockers at Luther High School North, 5700 W. Berteau; a black student is found to be the culprit.

**October 1990**

Gang activity mixes with racial violence at Farragut Career Academy High School, 2345 S. Christiana, where Hispanics attack blacks and vice versa in at least three racial incidents reported to police.

**November 1990**

A black student at Sawyer Elementary School, 5248 S. Sawyer, reports being threatened by a Latino youth who claimed he wanted to kill a “nigger.”

**April 1991**

A fight, punctuated by racial slurs, occurs between a black youth and a white youth at Marie Curie High School, 4959 S. Archer; charges are filed against both students.

A school bus carrying two black students from Gumsaulus Elementary School, 4420 S. Sacramento, is rocked by four white and Hispanic men in their 30s; a side window is broken as the offenders shout slurs at the black students.

**May 1991**

A person calls the Chicago Sun-Times, saying “The Skinheads are going to blow up Daniel Boone School” at 6710 N. Washtenaw. The threat is never carried out.

**June 1991**

A white student from Graham Elementary School, 4436 S. Union, reports being repeatedly harassed and threatened with racial slurs by black students on his school bus.

**November 1991**

Farragut High School again explodes in gang warfare between blacks and Latinos, leaving 13 students and one teacher injured, and resulting in 60 arrests.

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**Teaching Tolerance**

“The disturbing fact is that most hate crimes are not committed by organized hate groups, but by young people acting on their own,” according to The Southern Poverty Law Center.

To help teachers combat students’ prejudices, the center has launched Teaching Tolerance, a free magazine for educators. The first issue features anti-bias programs in New York City, Connecticut and Miami. To subscribe, write Teaching Tolerance, 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, Ala. 36104.

For more resources to combat prejudice, see page 9.
Farragut students take racial clashes in stride

When racial animosity at Farragut Career Academy High School exploded into violence last November—for the second time in two years—the city was shocked. "A terrifying outbreak of gang violence," exclaimed the Chicago Tribune.

But students at the West Side school, for the most part, took the disturbance in stride. "This happens so much we don't think about it," says Tony, a Hispanic junior who did not want his last name published. "We get through, you know?"

The pattern is always the same: A few black and Hispanic gang members mix it up. Violence spreads, dividing the whole school along racial lines. Police impose order. Things cool off.

On Nov. 6, the day violence erupted, 84 percent of Farragut's 2,300 students were in school. The next day, only 69 percent showed up. But by Nov. 15, five school days later, attendance was back at 84 percent.

During three days of fighting, 96 students were arrested, and 13 students and 1 teacher were injured. For several weeks thereafter, police stood guard inside and outside the school at 2345 S. Christiana, which is about a third African American and two-thirds Latino.

"Most of the year we do provide a semblance of civilization," says Principal Steve Newton Jr., whose school won a city soccer championship amid the recent violence. "But during those periods of unrest, the kids probably naturally seek out their own. The polarization occurs for group identification and safety reasons."

When similar violence disrupted Farragut in October and November 1990, Newton cancelled intramural events and called the students together for assemblies. With the help of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, fragile alliances were formed among black and Hispanic students and among staff. But differences between Newton, who is black, and Farragut's local school council, which was about half black and half Hispanic, sapped efforts to dispel tensions.

According to Newton, Farragut's racial problems are a manifestation of its location on a boundary between Hispanic and black gangs. In 1986, Newton himself was attacked by three gang members, who fractured his skull.

The stark racial divisions tend to undermine disciplinary efforts: Latino students suspect Newton of being harsher on them, while blacks consider him a traitor if he doesn't side with them. Says Newton: "I tell the students, 'You're all the same. You all put grey hairs on my head.'"

But others at Farragut, like history teacher Charles Kuner, lay some of the blame on the school itself. "Other than what a few teachers are doing, there is no real schoolwide effort to get the staff or the two groups of students together for some human relations training," says Kuner, adding, "More work needs to be done with the staff than the students."

Last spring, Kuner taught a class on prejudice with teacher Linda Roberts. It started on the day of a serious racial gang incident, but both Hispanic and black students warmed to a discussion of their shared history of discrimination, he recalls.

"If stereotypes or rumors come up I try to deal with them in as rational a way as I can," Kuner says. "But when students are afraid for their physical safety, it does make it difficult to get the students to concentrate on their education, so that they can get out of this environment and make themselves happy."

— Michael Selinker

Students comfort each other during racial conflict at Farragut Career Academy High School.
For students, teachers

Holocaust teaching raises troubling questions

“It was so frightening I wanted to scream, but no words came out of my mouth. What could I possibly say that would express what these poor people had gone through?”

Jody Miller, junior
Good Counsel High School

Thousands of Chicago area school children glimpsed the 20th century’s most lethal display of prejudice through an exhibit at the Field Museum two years ago.

Called Remember the Children, the exhibit described, through the eyes of a child, how the Nazis murdered up to 1.5 million Jewish children in the Holocaust. Before viewing the exhibit, many of the Chicago youngsters had never even heard of this massacre of an estimated six million Jews and six million non-Jews only some 50 years ago, museum officials reported.

“In most high school history texts, there might be a paragraph which might suggest that Jews were among Hitler’s victims,” notes Lilian Polus Gerstner, executive director of the Skokie-based Holocaust Memorial Foundation. But many students graduate without learning the real nature of the Holocaust, and without challenging any anti-Semitic beliefs, she says.

Lessons are 'dynamite'

Illinois is beginning to address this void. Pressed by groups concerned with the Holocaust, including Gerstner’s foundation, the Illinois General Assembly passed a law requiring all public school districts, beginning in 1991, to provide instruction about the Holocaust.

To some extent, the new state law is a paper tiger, for it provides no money, no guidelines and no penalties for failure to comply. But curricula are changing, nonetheless. Last year, two new programs came to the Chicago public schools. The Holocaust: A Turning Point in Our Time, sponsored by the Holocaust Memorial Foundation, is a five-day course for sixth- to twelfth-graders. Facing History and Ourselves, developed in Boston by a private foundation, is a much broader look at the Holocaust and other acts of genocide.

Both programs offer courses for teachers. Those for Facing History are backed by local and national grants.

Both programs plunge into the graphic details of the Holocaust. Photos and text show how Jews and other Nazi victims were forced from their homes, packed into box cars and deported to concentration camps and death camps. The materials are no rote lesson on dates and body counts, however. They challenge students to discuss the social circumstances that led to the Nazi actions and points at which they might have been averted.

Given these troubling questions, educators differ over the appropriate grade level for teaching the Holocaust.

“I think if you’re going to go into depth, you save it until they’re older, 16, 17, 18,” says Barbara Lebda, a teacher at Morgan Park High School who taught the Holocaust last year. “Earlier, you do prejudice, you do discrimination, but you don’t do Holocaust. It’s dynamite.”

Counters Lisa Derman, a Holocaust survivor who has taught children as young as seven about this genocide: “There is no fear exposing children to shooting and death. Look what they see on TV. There’s no need to shy away from this.”

Indeed, many Chicago children live in virtual war zones. And groups promoting Holocaust education note
that many of those who survived to tell about it were young children when it was happening.

Derman is one of hundreds of survivors that the Holocaust Memorial Foundation and the "Facing History" Foundation can summon to provide eyewitness accounts.

"Six million is incomprehensible," Gerstner says. "When you encounter one person's story, that makes it hit home."

Minorities most attentive

Teaching minority students about the Holocaust may be more of a challenge. "You take a black child from the inner city, he doesn't know anything about the Holocaust," says Carrie Hageman, who coordinated the exhibit for the Field Museum. "He may never have come in contact with a Jew or a Pole whose life was affected by the Holocaust. He might need more help understanding it than a Hasidic child who has grown up with it."

But minority children offer the most attentive students, says Judith Wise, Chicago chair of Facing History. "A lot of these kids, especially the black kids, say, 'I didn't know anybody else was discriminated against. I thought only black people were discriminated against.'"

Charles Kuner brought a survivor into his history class at Farragut Career Academy High School last spring. His class, like all at the West Side high school, was composed of blacks and Latinos.

Teacher training vital

"What she was saying was so powerful that some of the students stopped writing down what she was saying and just wanted to listen," Kuner recalls. "After it was over, one of our kids from Mexico embraced her. They bridged time, they bridged age, they bridged ethnicity, they bridged religion. It was just one of those moments that told us we were succeeding."

But those moments of success come only after ignorance is overcome. One couple in north suburban Winnetka pulled their daughter out of school in 1990, contending the Holocaust instruction she received was "false, with gross exaggerations and distortions."

Morgan Park's Lebda recalls a freshman who said Hitler was unjustly treated because the people he killed deserved it. To illustrate, the student displayed a photo of a bald, gaunt man, whom she identified as a Skinhead. What she was looking at was a malnourished Jew in a death camp.

Lebda's example underscores the need for solid teacher preparation. "Can you see this freshman child in the hands of someone who one day just says, 'Okay, now we're going to teach the Holocaust!'" asks Lebda.

"This is a very difficult subject, and you have to be sensitive," says Stephen Goodell, who directs education programs for the National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. "Who are we to be playing around with the loss of innocence?"

Michael Selinker

Groups lay out facts on homosexuality

Homosexual: Related to or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex.

Homophobia: Irrational fear of homosexuality or homosexuals.

Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

Ignorance about homosexuality is so widespread that in many circles in this society homosexuals are the one group it is safe to hate. Children catch on early, say educators of young children.

"For young people, homophobia is one of the most difficult things to talk about," says Lindsay Green, education coordinator of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) in Chicago. "It's not talked about in school so they get no candid discussion about it."

"When we think about education as developing the whole student—not only on an academic level but on a social level—this is very much a part of education," Green says. "Discussing [homosexuality] can make it a lot easier for students to deal with sexuality, both for the homosexuals and the heterosexuals, without being ashamed of it."

The ADL seeks to get discussions going through a supplement to its A World of Difference program that addresses homophobia, sexism, ageism and other frequently overlooked forms of discrimination.

The supplement, which is aimed at high school students, suggests that students research famous gay persons, such as artist Andy Warhol and authors Willa Cather and James Baldwin. And it offers first-person accounts of what it is like to be a gay teenager.

Horizons Community Services, a gay-oriented non-profit agency, offers lessons on homophobia for students and teachers, as well as crisis intervention for gay teens. A fact sheet that demystifies gays and lesbians, which gay groups estimate at about 10 percent of the population, is included. It notes, for example, that homosexuality is not a choice that can be changed if a gay student works at it and that gay youth have high suicide and runaway rates.

As with other prejudice-reduction programs, teachers may need the education first, says Stacey Long, Horizons' youth health educator. Long says she tells teachers and administrators: "These are the facts about [gay students'] lives. As a professional, you have an obligation to point a gay or lesbian youth in the right direction for help. If you can't do it, you need to send them to someone who can."

M.S.
Nipping prejudice in the bud

At two years old, children understand differences in race and gender. At 2½, they develop discomfort with differences. At three, they learn societal biases based on race and sex. At four, they start discriminating on their own.

By the first day of kindergarten, say early childhood experts, children have acquired many of the biases they will harbor for a lifetime.

The Anti-Bias Curriculum, in use in some Chicago preschools, aims to dry up those seeds of prejudice by showing early childhood teachers how to address diversity and prejudice in their classrooms.

The curriculum was developed by educators at California’s Pacific Oaks College and is published by the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

The book advises teachers to monitor their own speaking styles—to avoid, for example, using words like “disabled” and “redskins.” It suggests ways to create a bias-free environment, such as mixing children of different races in classroom groups.

And it offers activities aimed at developing an appreciation for differences. For example, children play with dolls of various races and physical attributes and act out stories that teach the value of diversity and other critical social issues.

Regena Booze, a Pacific Oaks educator who has taught Chicago preschool teachers about these issues, recalls her surprise at the sophistication of one three-year-old. The child was playing with a doll house but kept putting the dolls outside the house. “I asked her, ‘Why can’t these people be inside the house?’” Booze relates. “She said, ‘Because they’re homeless.’”

Anti-prejudice work should be done at a very early age, says Francesca Alcozer, multicultural coordinator in the Board of Education’s early childhood department.

“By the time a child is four or five years old, he’s formulated a lot of his conceptions about the world around him,” says Alcozer. “He’s been told, ‘You can’t talk to these kids because they’re black; you can’t talk to these children because they’re Hispanic.’”

Anti-prejudice work also is easier at the prekindergarten level, because children under six are more open to new ideas, says Booze.

“At this level, helping children to understand that different does not equal bad is easy,” she says. It’s the reactions of people around them that teaches them value judgments.”

The curriculum admonishes teachers not to ignore or dismiss prejudicial words or behavior, especially when children use slurs from the adult world. “It isn’t easy to confront a child,” Booze says. “[Some teachers] say, ‘Oh, isn’t that cute! Well, no, it’s not.’”

Denita Jo Farmer, a teacher at the State Pre-Kindergarten Development Center at 4019 S. Lake Park, notes, however, that young children sometimes use slurs they do not understand. “If children are saying ‘nigger’ all the time, they might be doing that just to feel the ‘gg-gg’ sound on their throats because it tickles,” she explains. “So I’ll substitute the word ‘giggle.’”

Generally, young children have only a vague understanding of the meanings of racial slurs, Farmer says, and may use the words to test people’s reactions or to express anger. “I’ve seen a black child call another black child ‘honky,’” she recalls. “If they understood the word, they wouldn’t use it in that context.”

But because young students are so malleable, programs dealing with prejudice in preschool have their detractors. “There are definitely teachers and parents who believe you shouldn’t bring racism up at such a young age,” Alcozer says. “The problem is that we can’t make any changes in their attitudes unless we reach them before their ideas can’t be changed.”

Michael Selinker
Facing History and Ourselves


Facing History and Ourselves
Judith Wise, Chicago Chairperson
35 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1300
Chicago, IL 60601-2199
(312) 726-0083

Holocaust Memorial Foundation

Five-day introductory Holocaust course for sixth- to twelfth-graders, for inclusion in existing courses. Fourteen-week course for teachers for "lane" credit. Vast library of eyewitness testimony on videotape. Visitations by survivors arranged.

Holocaust Memorial Foundation
Lillian Palus Gertner, Executive Director
4255 W. Main Street
Skokie, IL 60076-2063
(708) 677-4640

Horizons Community Services

Gay professionals can be called in to teach about homophobia. Fact sheet examines myths about gays. Other help for gay youth available.

Horizons Community Services
Stacey Long, Youth Health Educator
961 W. Montana
Chicago, IL 60614
(312) 472-6469 or 929-HELP

Minnesota Board of Teaching

Materials on human relations training for teachers. Three-day course on sexual harassment for junior and high school students, using data gathered in a survey of Illinois students.

State of Minnesota Board of Teaching
Kenneth Featrick, Executive Secretary
608 Capitol Square Building
St. Paul, MN 55101
(612) 296-2415

National Conference of Christians and Jews

Teacher training materials on reducing prejudice on racial, religious and other bases.

National Conference of Christians and Jews
Nisan Chavin, Assistant Program Director
360 N. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 236-9272

National Public Radio: Class of 2000

Two audiotape specials, "The Prejudice Puzzle" and "Family Stories," examine prejudice in young persons' lives. "The Prejudice Puzzle" features a 45-minute look at inter racial interaction at Lincoln Park High School. For all grade levels.

National Public Radio Specials Project
Sallie Bode, Outreach Coordinator
2025 M Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 822-2844

Project REACH: Respecting Ethnic and Cultural Heritage

Prejudice-reduction program focusing on groups who have been victims of discrimination. Separate units on Latinos, Asians, blacks and Native Americans. Training recommended. For middle and high school students.

Project REACH
c/o Jeannie Baxter
Northeastern Illinois University
5550 N. St. Louis Avenue
Chicago, IL 60625
(312) 794-2786

A World of Difference

Broad-based historical look at prejudice using short readings and sources. Section on Chicago history and demographics. Training available. For kindergarten through twelfth grade. Other resources on anti-Semitism, racism, homophobia and sexism available. Three one-day teacher workshops planned in March.

Anti-Defamation League of Chicago
Lindsey McLean, Education Coordinator
309 W. Washington Street, Suite 750
Chicago, IL 60606
(312) 782-5080

Materials listed in CATALYST's December 1990 issue on multicultural education may also be helpful.
I am sitting in our local school council meeting, listening to an articulate and persuasive report by the dedicated library teachers. They are properly excited by all the glitzy multimedia tools for searching for information. The library is pleasant and well-tended, and there are plenty of books, videotapes and magazines around. (I idly wonder to myself where the equivalent of Lady Chatterley's Lover is hidden. In my high school library a paperback version was appropriately stuffed behind the novels of the Bronte sisters.)

The library teachers are making a well-thought-out plea for a security system for the books, and for an on-line computer information retrieval system. My colleague, who heads the finance committee of the LSC, makes an inquiry about the price of such a system, and we all nod our heads wisely at the informed reply. I stop my daydreaming and try a sensible question.

Fortunately, the questioning of the library teachers is in far better hands than mine. An intrepid senior raises her hand. "But what's the use of all this stuff if we can't use it? I mean, the library is open when we are all in class and closed the minute we get out."

Polite nervous coughs from the LSC members who wonder how the administration is going to get around this burst of honesty. "Well, dear, as you know the library closes at 3 p.m.," he says. Undaunted, the student responds, "So why can't you keep it open till at least 4:30 p.m.?" thus cutting through tradition and union contracts with one sharp blow.

The library teacher asks whether there are any other questions, and another student demands to know why textbooks are not kept on reserve so that if you have lost or forgotten yours, you can check it out for a short period. It appears that some textbooks are kept on reserve, but that some teachers refuse to release a copy to the library. A parent representative asks why the school doesn't require that a copy of every textbook is put on the reserve shelves. The principal says he will make sure it happens. (I breathe a selfish sigh of relief for my son who is keeping the textbook industry in clover by all the books he is losing.)

Energizing presence

The library teachers aren't out of the woods yet. The principal, in an honorable attempt to reassert the original mood of quiet, professional competence, reminds the LSC that the teachers constantly refer the students to the library for particular projects. "(Expletive deleted)" says another female student, "I've been in the school for four years, and no teacher has ever told me to find anything in this library. They tell you to use your local library, a university library and now there's Harold Washington Library downtown, but never this one." (I make a mental bet to myself that as a result of this revelation, the principal will send a memo to the teachers to tell their students to use the library.)

The students have been at our LSC meetings since September. It is always the same 30, who have been "persuaded" to attend by their English teacher, who sits on the council. Not only does their grade depend on their presence, there are extra credit points for saying something; democracy at the gun point of your grade-point average! And every meeting they attend has been energized by their presence. The council's groping for what is really going on has been transformed by these lively, unabashed students who actually know what is going on. Of course, they have their own particular point of view, and sometimes they ask for the impossible, but for the first time we are getting the straight dope from the people who are the reason for this $2.3 billion educational operation, the students.

We have had good student representatives on the council each year, and the present student representative is particularly thoughtful and forthright. But there is no substitute for a critical mass of students who are not going to be intimidated by anyone, who correct and challenge each other in public and generally tell you where it's really at.

The lesson to our LSC is clear. If we want to be effective as a council, we have to figure out how to entice a large group of students to every meeting of the council. If no other teacher is prepared to use friendly persuasion perhaps we could ask Domino's for an in-kind contribution and appeal to the students' stomachs. One thing's for sure, we have to keep them coming.

Malcolm Bush is a parent member of the Whitney Young High School LSC, and is executive vice president of Voices for Illinois Children.
Closings hit poor, minorities

by Bernie Noven

The Board of Education's apparent resolve to close more schools is shortsighted, is anti-reform and discriminates against poor and minority children. In a system with a shortage of 3,618 rooms (see CATALYST, December 1991), it also is irresponsible.

The board contends that its decision last August to vacate five school buildings and consolidate nine special schools into regular schools saved $2 million, a sum some budget watchdogs dispute.

Savings from the five shuttered schools, according to board figures, ranged from a meager $59,768 to $432,727. That amounts to an average of $283,000 per school. Building a new school would cost $5 million. Therefore, the board would have to close at least 17 schools to pay for one new school. If there is a shift in population in any of the neighborhoods with closed schools, we would have closed 17 schools for nothing.

However, one must question whether closings save any money. Most of a school's budget goes for salaries. The ratio of teachers to students will remain the same whether teachers are spread around or squished into fewer buildings.

Demolishing a school costs about $100,000, according to one facilities administrator, who cites stringent asbestos removal requirements. If the closed school is not torn down, the board must continue to heat and monitor the building, which could cost $50,000 a year per school. Further, the empty school contributes to blight and danger.

Bernie Noven is a Chicago public school parent and social worker. He is co-founder of Parents United for Responsible Education.

The closing of schools also means increasing enrollment and possibly class size in adjoining schools. The creative, innovative programs that schools are trying to initiate with their state Chapter 1 funds will be impossible to carry out because of crowding resulting from new school closings.

The proposed guidelines for closing schools (see Updates, page 22) will insure that the neediest students will be the most likely victims. Targeted for closing are schools with poor attendance, retention and graduation rates and schools where few parents pick up report cards. This is a direct assault on children from impoverished families. Magnet schools, which have always gotten preferential treatment, are exempt.

Education disrupted

A close look at the first round of school closings tells us the real story.

Contrary to the board's contention, low enrollment was not the reason for closing schools. Of the four regular schools closed, only one had fewer than 200 students. Enrollments at the others were 311, 324 and 447. Yet in Subdistrict 1 on the Far Northwest Side, six schools had enrollments lower than 300 and one had fewer than 200 pupils (1989-90 figures).

Further, white children were spared. White enrollment at the four regular schools that were closed ranged from zero to 4.2 percent. Of the Subdistrict 1 schools referred to above, the percentage of white enrollment ranged from 30.9 percent to 62.8 percent.

Schools with fewer poor children also were spared. Of the three elementary schools and seven Educational Vocational Guidance Centers (EVGCs) closed, eight had low-income populations close to 100 percent. The other two were 76.3 percent and 56 percent low income. In comparison, among the low-enrollment schools in Subdistrict 1, the percentage of low-income children ranged from 10.7 percent to 53.5 percent.

The closing of seven EVGCs also was an attack on parents and students least able to defend themselves. The EVGCs were created to serve students who were significantly behind academically and not eligible for special education services. While I am not in favor of segregating low-achieving students, returning them to regular programs without sufficient special help is condemning them to failure.

The closing of two occupational centers for handicapped children may have similar consequences. Although these special education students should not be segregated, safeguards must be taken so that they are truly integrated and not just dumped into a new situation.

Almost 3,000 students have been adversely affected by the closing and consolidation of their schools, not counting students at the receiving schools, whose education also was disrupted.

Politics, profit real motives?

At the same time the board announced the need to disrupt the lives of all of these students to save $2 million, it was spending $2 million to open a new middle school in Subdistrict 1 to serve 600 students from four overcrowded elementary schools. The new school is located in the old parochial Alvernia High School, which is about a mile from the newly shuttered Irving Park Elementary School, which also had been used to relieve overcrowding. Clearly, saving money was not the motive behind these school closings.

What, then, were the real motives behind the closings? Parents at
Mulligan Elementary School initially were told that their school was to be closed because 95 percent of the children were bused in. Yet these students are still bused, only now to different schools. Mulligan, 1855 N. Sheffield, is a well-constructed old building that just happened to be located in the wrong area, west Lincoln Park. Property values in the area have risen dramatically in the last few years. The school's low-income parents could not compete with the real estate interest's intent on grabbing some prime property.

The same is true of the Chicago High School for Metropolitan Studies. Metro had occupied a fine old, renovated building at 160 W. Wendell on the Near North Side that briefly housed the superintendent's office in the early 1980s. The school offered the kind of creative, innovative programs that school reform should bring to all our schools. Parent involvement and dedication was an example for other city high schools. In spite of all these advantages, real estate interests once again won out over the education of low-income students.

Irving Park, 3815 N. Kedvale, had been under attack ever since it was reopened some years ago to relieve overcrowding in other parts of the city. The school was predominantly minority and 100 percent low income. Some members of its mostly white neighborhood did not want these kids around. If the board had been interested in saving money, it could have opened the middle school at Irving Park rather than buy a former Catholic school only a mile down the road.

The message is clear: if you are a low-income minority child, your school is more likely to be closed, regardless of its enrollment. Political clout, not educational concerns, dictated which schools were closed.

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Noven analysis flawed

by Ted D. Kimbrough

Contrary to Mr. Noven's assertion, the closing last fall of 13 Chicago public schools (including seven Educational and Vocational Guidance Centers) was based on several legitimate factors, including student educational performance and cost savings.

However, Mr. Noven's assertion that low enrollment was not the sole criterion in closing schools is incorrect. The primary considerations were the effectiveness of educational programs, reduction of administrative units and efficient utilization of space.

The decision to close the seven EVGCs was based on data that indicated low student performance and on findings that the EVGCs were unsuccessful. We have monitored the progress of former EVGC students who have been mainstreamed and integrated into regular classroom programs; reports show that 97 percent have remained in school.

McLaren Occupational Center, another of the closed schools, continues to serve the same students at the same location (Lucy Flower Vocational High School) with the same staff. The only change is that the McLaren students are now part of the Flower enrollment, under one administration. Las Casas Occupational Center is scheduled to move from an unsatisfactory rented facility to Bowen High School. Again, the program is only affected by a change in the administration. Benefits at McLaren and Las Casas are both educational and financial. Students are mainstreamed and have a greater access to educational programs while the number of administrative units is reduced.

Irving Park Elementary was closed because its students, bused from overcrowded schools in Subdistrict Three, could be accommodated at other schools. Availability of relocation space was also the basis for closing Mulligan Elementary. Goldsmith branch was closed because its parent school, Lurie, had experienced a drop in enrollment such that a branch was no longer required.

The Metro High School program, which was transferred to Crane High School last fall, remains viable, cohesive and intact, with 76 students currently enrolled and ongoing recruitment.

The closing of the six schools and seven EVGCs last fall generated a $2 million savings in operating costs for a system that has limited fiscal resources.

Mr. Noven's contention that the $2 million was offset by the purchase of the former Alvernia Catholic High School is based on a limited understanding of the board's budget. The savings from school closings are in the board's operating budget. The purchase of Alvernia was funded from the proceeds of a 1990 bond sale by the Public Building Commission. As such, it is neither an operating expenditure nor is it contained in the board's budget.

Alvernia was purchased to relieve overcrowding at several nearby schools. The suggestion that Irving Park could have served the same purpose is unacceptable both on the basis of distance (more than 1.5 mile walking distance from the overcrowded areas) and of space (Alvernia can accommodate more than twice the number of students).

Other factors in the closing decisions included compliance with consent decrees and federal desegregation.

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Ted D. Kimbrough is superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools.
mandates, which preclude the closing of participating schools if they would be adversely affected. Mr. Noven's assumption that schools with a minority enrollment were targeted for closing is moot, since the entire school system has an 88 percent minority composition. No matter where or which schools are chosen for consolidation or closing, minority students are probably enrolled there, with a lower percentage of white students affected.

Also, Mr. Noven's contention that board decisions to close Mulligan and Metro were predicated on real estate interests is totally false. There are more than 600 schools in the system, with locations scattered throughout the city. The notion that real estate interests dictated which schools to close does not explain why only two, and not all 13, schools were selected in areas of high real estate value.

The autumn of 1991 marked the beginning of what is to become a continuing cycle of school closings. Financial realities dictate the need to constantly monitor our attendance site needs and to consolidate our facilities. There is no single criterion that applies to all schools, but rather a myriad of factors. We look at the total picture, not isolated factors.

This year, the Board of Education approved a policy on the closing and consolidation of schools that clearly defines the criteria. This new policy was disseminated to the news media and to the public in November, and two public hearings were held prior to adoption in December.

Given the racial/ethnic and economic composition of Chicago's student population, it is very probable that the majority of school closings will take place in minority and poor economic areas of the city. That is where most of the system's surplus space, a prime criterion for school closing, is to be found. It is also very unlikely that any school which has become desegregated as a result of the 1980 Desegregation Consent Decree, as many have in Subdistrict One, will be closed. The policy on school closings requires adherence to the Consent Decree and to other legal requirements.

LQE backed Finance Authority in contract dispute

"While I greatly enjoyed reading Michael Klonsky's analysis of various positions and actions taken by Chicago's school reform coalition to prevent a teachers strike [CATALYST, December 1991], I must point out one misstatement of fact with respect to the position of Leadership for Quality Education.

While it is true that a broad coalition of reform groups and activists joined with the Board of Education in calling for the Chicago School Finance Authority to "ease its restriction calculation" to "free up" about $35 million to provide a modest salary increase for teachers, Leadership for Quality Education did not support this position.

We sided with the Latino Institute in dissenting from the coalition on this issue primarily because of the misrepresentations as to the nature of the "reserve" funds, of which there are none, and because of our concern for what the shift would do to the overall financial state of the school system when even conservative estimates project a minimum $178 million deficit in the 1992-93 school year.

LQE joins with other elected officials, Board of Education members, school reform activists and others in its willingness to participate in a public process that will help to determine (1) the legitimate financial needs of the school system as it relates to direct funding of school-based services and (2) permanent, stable sources of funding that will prevent this perennial 'chiffon' approach to school budgeting. The time for this thoughtful analysis is long overdue.

Joseph D. Reed
President
Leadership for Quality Education

Central office: send chairs, not booklets

More money has to be allocated to education in this state, but no legislator in his or her right mind is going to give the Chicago Public School bureaucracy another penny to waste. The Board of Education must show strong leadership in redirecting the priorities of this school system to put the emphasis back on local schools.

Here are just a few suggestions. All of the personnel from the subdistrict offices and several departments at Pershing Road would better serve our students if they were reassigned to the schools.

For instance, we at Ray are very interested in further developing our multicultural programs and curriculums, but this does not mean we want the central administration to be developing multicultural materials. Wonderful materials and programs already exist. Further, my school will not necessarily want the same things as other schools. What we need instead is a curriculum coordinator on staff at our school and an assistant librarian. We want the board to empower us to access what most fits our need, not to churn out Chicago Public School booklets.

Our school also needs to be better connected to alternative funding sources, but this does not mean that we want the board to set up a central development department that brings these funds into the system. We want a fixed assistant principal and additional clerical staff to develop our own outreach into our immediate community and the wider donor community.

Then, some small things. We have PTA meetings, LSC meetings and monthly Special Ed Parents Network meetings—to mention a few of the many meetings that take place at school. One of our goals is to increase the level of parent involvement. Unfortunately, we have no money in our budget to purchase any decent, adult-size chairs. Meanwhile, Pershing Road seems to be overflowing with new conference tables and folding chairs. We need at least 50 chairs and 10 tables and would be happy to pick them up from Pershing Road ourselves.

The board has difficult decisions to make. It must stop throwing money away and start looking at things from the school level first. Nothing that happens at Pershing Road is more important than what goes on in the schools. Nothing!

In general, the board needs to listen more to people whose jobs do not depend on its decisions.

Marcy D. Schlessinger, chair
Ray Elementary Local School Council
With this issue, CATALYST begins its third year of Diaries and a new format. During the past two years, Diaries has appeared every third month. Even attentive readers were hard put to remember what our various diarists said in previous entries, and we asked you to read a lot of material. From now on, Diaries will appear each month—and run fewer total pages each issue. We expect this to make Diaries more timely and more digestable.

Our diarists continue to tell the grassroots story of school reform—the way the experiment is playing out in diverse schools in different parts of the city. They include a student, a principal, parents, teachers and observer/activists. And as anonymous writers, free of possible intimidation, they bring you the unvarnished truth—as they see it—flying colors, warts and all.

Kimbrough delivers ‘downer’ as year begins

OLIVIA, principal

Sept. 16 We had a meeting with the general superintendent today. Originally scheduled for Sept. 9 (Rosh Hashanah), it was rescheduled for the 16th at 3 p.m. but later rescheduled again for 9:30 a.m. Guess Supt. Kimbrough thinks we have nothing better to do than adjust our schedules.

Kimbrough’s message was definitely gloomy. Things are bad, but they are going to get worse. This year will see school closings, consolidations and restructurings in an attempt to meet the austerity budget.

The superintendent talked about our need to deliver high-quality service, stressed reliability and insisted upon accountability, while at the same time telling us not to spend any money, general or categorical funds, “unless it is absolutely essential.” Right—we’re supposed to deliver a high-quality program and be held accountable for student learning while not spending any money. Where did they get this guy?

Kimbrough also spent some time telling us how great we are—we are the fine people who make it work. He wants our best thinking, insights, wisdom, ideas, intuition. He intends to meet with a representative principal from each subdistrict on a quarterly basis to get our input. (I couldn’t help but think that he wants our wisdom and our knowledge because he himself doesn’t have any.) Mercifully, he did not refer to us as the CEOs of our buildings.

I walked out of that meeting disgusted and distressed. It’s the beginning of the school year. I want some optimism, some hope. All I got was more doom and gloom. Kimbrough is such a downer.

Sept. 18 District principals meeting today. The only item on the agenda was the October 9 LSC elections. We’re supposed to have an LSC committee select election judges who will be trained by Project LEAP to ensure fair and honest elections.

My LSC is not functioning at this time. I managed to get a quorum to review the state Chapter 1 revision at the very beginning of the school year, but I can’t get them to meet again. They consider their two-year term over.

After the district meeting, I talked to several colleagues about their reaction to the Monday meeting with Kimbrough. They all shared my disappointment at his inability to give us more than bad news. At the beginning of the year we all need a lift, an inspirational message we can take back to our faculties, an old-fashioned pep rally. Many of us feel defeated and flattered. What a way to start the school year. And we’re supposed to get all enthused about these LSC elections?

LSC elections: Round 2

CARLOS, teacher

Sept. 7 An unbelievable opening of the school year. The strike situation, the financial troubles, the use of LSC funds for other things—all have left us mentally paralyzed. The first problem has reached our school. Our reading improvement lead teacher position has been cut, and we hear we will also lose a half-time learning disabilities teacher position.

In the meantime, we have begun to promote the upcoming LSC elections. Many of us are upset at the law revision regarding the teacher advisory poll. It is especially bad that the teachers union agreed that teachers be appointed by the Board of Education. There are many of us who would have preferred to be voted in or out by the parents and community members.

I am definitely running in my school. There is a negative faction of teachers who are trying to undo everything the principal has done.

Sept. 24 I held a workshop on the LSC elections for parents and community members. The turnout was small, but interest among those present was positive.

Sept. 25 I am proud of our entire school and community. We have six teacher candidates, five community candidates and 16 parent candidates. Already some are planning to run as a ticket.

In other schools many do not want to run because of the meddling they see has occurred. They feel Supt. Kimbrough has killed the reform movement by trying to close schools, by devastating budgets and by closing positions. I’ve convinced some others to run. Let’s see what happens!

Sept. 30 I am campaigning on my record as an incumbent LSC member. I am meeting with teachers to discuss policy development, but I find that teachers are more into themselves. They ask what I will do for them, and
what about this or that in the nitty-gritty running of the school. I remind staff that the LSC is involved in policy, not the day-to-day operation of the school. Apparently, the other teacher candidates are running on promises they cannot possibly keep. We have a forum later in the week. I hope to use that time to clear things up. I think I need at least 31 votes to win.

Oct. 3 Candidates forum. The parent and community candidates were interesting but had no audience. It rained all night. I suspect that kept most from coming to the forum. The regulars (parents) were there, and the candidates answered various questions well.

The teachers forum was excellent. Controversy arose when one candidate declared that only classroom teachers should get elected to the LSC. There were also many references to day-to-day operations of the school.

I tried to focus my speech toward policy. I claimed our school needed to focus on issues beyond the day-to-day issues. We need solutions to overcrowding. We need grants to pay for special programs such as literacy for students and parents. Etc. I did not get a positive reaction.

Oct. 8 Some after-election thoughts. This election will be won in terms of the popularity of the principal. Some candidates and I work closely with the principal; others have been part of the anti-principal faction. I think I need at least 35 votes to win. My opponents have been campaigning heavily, especially with career service staff.

Oct. 9 I lost by three votes. The winners were two teachers who oppose the principal's policies. It will make for an interesting two years.

OLIVIA, principal

Sept. 18 Our LSC incumbents are not running for re-election. Only one person who ran in 1989 is running this year. Of the other two candidates, one served a year as a replacement on the LSC, and the other is a parent who volunteered last year and wants to get more involved. That’s it—we have only three candidates. The lack of interest in these LSC elections among members of my school community is overwhelming.

LAZARUS, teacher

Sept. 25 With considerable misgiving that my investment of time and effort will have any positive effect, I file for candidacy as an LSC teacher representative. The other teacher rep has also applied. I understand no other teachers have filed. As I recall, a dozen ran last time.

For parent and community reps, we have at least twice as many candidates as positions. Many are incumbents.

Our PPAC does not have as many candidates running for it as there are positions on it. Can it be that the community takes reform more seriously than do the professionals in the building?

ELIZABETH, teacher

Sept. 25 I inquired as to where and when the candidates forum would be held so I could get some information. I was told it was held—two days earlier, in the school during school time.

"Can it be that the community takes reform more seriously than do the professionals in the building?"

Lazarus, teacher

Oct. 9 The LSC election. Turnout was fair. More than 200 persons from the community vote. At least 40 teachers vote in an uncontested election. The student turnout is disappointingly small.

Half of the LSC members are carryovers from the first term. All incumbents who ran were re-elected. For the few who were eligible but did not run again, family commitment was acknowledged as the reason for not running. LSC business is all-consuming.

THEO, parent

Oct. 9 My wife and I went to vote for our LSC. There were only a few concerned people who took the time to vote, so there was no crowd waiting to vote; it took only three minutes to get in and out.

There were only three new names on the list. Well, I thought, maybe there’s a chance of some change, a little involvement besides myself.

Oct. 20 I won. Electing officers at our first LSC meeting was very interesting. First, the chair. I was praised to the highest for my outstanding job—by the principal, the assistant principal and all the council members. There were two other nominees: one a holdover LSC member from the previous two years, who seldom attended council meetings or meetings of any sort; the other an involved worker, who didn’t know what was doing at any turn. I lost.

That was the quietest “meet the candidates” in history!

Can somebody tell me why the teachers on the LSC this year have to be officially appointed by the Board of Education following an advisory election by staff? Will not that entail money spent by the board—for paperwork, and undoubtedly a “handsome certificate suitable for framing”?. Such expenditures are a disgrace as employees of this system hover on the brink of a strike.

At our school, we have two teachers running for the two positions. I guess the outcome is inevitable unless the board decides to appoint someone else. Such a strange manner of placing teachers on the council! Unlike candidates running for community or parent seats, the teachers do not have to fill out a background form in order to run.

Many of my colleagues do not even plan to vote. Some confided to me that they will sign the roster, take
a ballot but not mark it before placing it in the ballot box. Why?

The two teachers running at our school are minority teachers who are quite militant. They seldom speak to white staff members; and at meetings, particularly meetings chaired by either of these two teachers, if white teachers speak about anything, their remarks are quickly dismissed or their opinions ridiculed. This is why some teachers do not want to vote for them even though their positions on the council are assured.

Oct. 10 So it happened. A number of teachers went in and “spoiled” ballots rather than not go to the polls at all—for fear of further mistreatment. Such is the atmosphere in which I teach!

There was only one community person running, so he was elected—Mr. Jackson, an incumbent who attended a total of two meetings last year. (At least there is now a provision for persons who fail to attend five meetings.)

Oct. 12 The results of the election were never announced or posted. How did I find out the results? I walked into the office and asked the clerk. She directed me to a box that contained extra ballots, sign-in sheets, etc. In among the “election debris” was a tally sheet indicating the winners and their total number of votes. This is how the new LSC was “announced” to my staff—you got the information if you took the time to hunt through the box.

LOU, community

Sept. 30 LSC elections are fast approaching. There was a lot of publicity earlier about corporate support for community organization activity in behalf of the elections, but we are not seeing much in our area. In the previous election, there was a great deal of activity in the community to recruit candidates, to assist them with campaign know-how and to facilitate their production of simple campaign literature. Except for the incumbents who are running, candidates this year are still novices, and all of the candidates still need campaign advice and assistance. These are not elections supported by political parties for the most part, and most candidates are not people with money or a crew of campaign workers. Continued community and corporate support seems essential to successful elections. Such support was missing this time around.

The only report I heard about corporate support this year was a negative one: a meeting was held for community groups, and some representatives who attended were not made welcome by the (funded) convener. Turf battles are such a waste of effort. We have so few workers and priority to return some incumbents. Were any of the candidates sponsored or supported by aldermen or ward organizations? Democratic process depends on a voter who can read and be informed; that’s part of why we have free public education in this country. Shouldn’t the press support that for this most local elections?

Forums held at the schools are helpful for those who can attend, but if there are a lot of candidates (not a problem at our school this year!) their speaking time is very brief. A few distribute literature, and their applications (which sometimes contain written statements of their aims for the school) are posted in the schools. However, there is no handicap access at many of the schools, the community forums and the election places. Further, for many voters, their hours of employment or travel limit access to information.

Oct. 14 Voter turnout was much lower this year than two years ago. It was heavier at the elementary school than at the high school, in spite of the fact that the high school has more students and perhaps more impact on the community. Many believe that having both elections on the same day (and in different locations) contributed greatly to the lower number of voters. If it is important to have all the voting done on one day, it might help to have all the voting in one place; districts could be given the option of voting either in the high schools or in the elements. Then people could go to one location and vote for candidates in both schools. Many voters even have no idea they are entitled to vote in their elementary school and in their high school.

These elections are potentially a great benefit to a school. Unlike the annual open house and report card pickup days, the election offers an opportunity to get not only parents but also community members inside the school. Anything that helps the community identify the school as its own should be seen as an asset—an opportunity to build support for school funding and school improvement.
In the aftermath of the election, questions grow. For example, does anyone know whether or to what extent ethnic voting groups are developing? In the last election, some schools reported heavy voting by ethnic groups for their candidates. Was this followed by greater involvement of parents of those ethnic groups in the school?

And what is happening to parental involvement generally? The LSC function is governance, not parent involvement. Schools still need an active PTA or other parent organization—perhaps more now than before, since there are now so many decisions that are being made locally about staffing, budgets, discretionary funds and school improvement plans.

No power where it counts

Sept. 12 One teacher aide who had been paid out of educational funds has been transferred to our state Chapter 1 funds this year, and the Board of Education is asking for reimbursement for last year's funding! Why she alone was placed under the educational fund (210) is a mystery to us. We are aghast at the board's insistence that we pay for something that was not our error.

LAZARUS, teacher

Sept. 28 “After 4 Weeks, 22 Classes Still Without Teachers,” the Sun-Times headline exclaimed yesterday. I bring this up to demonstrate the helplessness of the LSCs. Any halfway responsible LSC would by now have solved the problem at its school; the council simply would not stand for such staffing shortages—if they had any power in that area. The LSCs are basically advisory and have very little real power to change things.

Oct. 5 Strike! Strike! Where do the soon-to-be-elected members of the new LSC stand on this issue, and does it make a difference? Does the reform law make a difference when the union and the board go at each other as they have done so often in the past?

Our own current LSC chair said, “The teachers here had better not strike!” What does that mean? Are you threatening us with your “power,” Mrs. Adams?

Good news

LAZARUS, teacher

Sept. 14 Our enrollment at Inner City Elementary is low this year. We are 300 under what we had at the close of school last year. It's not that the children have gone away but rather that they have not arrived at school yet for the 1991-92 school year.

The problem with such a low enrollment at this stage in the game is that on the 20th day, teachers begin to cut based on enrollment figures. The board snatches any positions that are not warranted according to The Formula. What happens if the enrollment jumps a few days after staff has been pulled? It takes forever for new teachers to be assigned; it is as though the teachers cut from the school just days earlier have vanished, and there is suddenly no one to fill a position! That means, at best, overcrowding.

ROBIN, observer

Oct. 6 I attended the first PPAC meeting of the year at School B. Out of a faculty of 44, 26 were present, many more than at any PPAC meeting last year. Committees were established. I was impressed by the number of teachers who volunteered to serve on all these committees.

A citywide half-day inservice is scheduled for Oct. 16, and the principal here wants to have the staff see a tape of the TV program about the Washington Irving School [“Teach Me,” Channel 11, September 1991] because she believes her teachers are just as dedicated and able as the Irving teachers; therefore, the school ought to be able to accomplish just as much. Aside from showing the tape, she isn't proposing anything for the inservice time and asked the PPAC to complete the agenda.

LAZARUS, teacher

Oct. 1 The faculty watched the TV documentary about Irving School. One of the leaders on the faculty introduced it and led a discussion afterward. She confided to me when it was over that she had dreaded facing the faculty because she's done a lot of inservice with them and is familiar with the turned-off expressions they often display on such occasions. However, this time she was thrilled to find them excited and eager.

Next on the agenda came meetings of the committees formed at the previous PPAC meeting, and I attended the one on the restructured day. There was a lot of enthusiasm for using the time in ways suggested by the videotape, and a decision was made to have teachers share their ideas on methods of teaching reading.

Oct. 17 The PPAC met again, and again there was a turnover of more than half the faculty. Afterward, when I discussed this with two old-timers who were as surprised by it as I, one remarked, “I think they're getting the idea.” The “idea” is that teachers really do have power under reform, at least if they have a principal willing to share it with them; and if they want to be in on what happens at the school, they'd better participate in the PPAC.

If the PPAC can encourage this “idea,” reform will have had an impact at the curriculum level after all.

LAZARUS, teacher

Oct. 8 When I despair of any progress being made in the traditional school setting, I look to the off-site gifted program for high school students at our local historical museum. Three CPS teachers work with students to bring order out of chaos, sorting and organizing items in two museum collections. We are working now on some 90 boxes of family history materials donated to the museum. Because most of our work is assigning categories for items in the collection, students are asked to find items in the museum that fit under the first of several categories listed on a worksheet. “Demographics” and “commerce,” for instance, become clearer during the search, which generates its own questions. When was
that bridge built? What happened to the local bank?

One session finds us classifying an assortment of items from Box 14. Students define and refine their definitions. "It's a booklet....No, a pamphlet." "It's about the Ward Democratic Club....No, it's about a church's centennial with an ad in it from the Ward Democratic Club." The students take pride in the quality of their work and rewrite their worksheets to make them legible.

There is an infinite wealth of materials to be explored. We all learn from each other. Information is shared when appropriate, never in lecture form. The students are deeply involved, and learning takes its own direction. The time flies although each session is three hours long.

What other community resources might be tapped and explored to provide similar settings for learning?

Continuing struggle

LOU, community

Sept. 14 How can state Chapter 1 money be used to replace assistant principal positions lost in the latest round of budget cuts? Several high schools have made this decision. Some have changed the name of the position, some have not. The guidelines we use for Chapter 1 money indicate it should supplement, not supplant, regular operating expense. We are told that since it was a city-wide cut, these assistant principal positions are no longer part of the basic program (although last year they were) and so this year it is a supplemental use of the funds. It still smells like a scam to me—an administrative way to use Chapter 1 dollars for regular programs after the state Legislature denied the board's request to use the money to balance the budget. The children will still not get the supplemental programs for which staff have been preparing proposals since last spring.

OLIVIA, principal

Sept. 20 Our school was among several targeted for consolidation this past summer, but the board shelved the idea until later. It is now later. I am told, unofficially of course, that our school is again being considered for consolidation. Our district superintendent is pretending not to know what is going on. The people who make decisions at Pershing Road aren't talking to us. Those of us most directly concerned are apparently not to be involved in the decision-making process. Why? The uncertainty, the rumors, the not knowing just add to our collective frustrations. What kind of an organization has such little respect for its employees that it does not keep them informed of situations that will affect them directly and seriously?

the school. One has been offered a job with a higher salary at a school in his home community; the other has been working part-time for a chemical company and might find similar full-time employment.

Sept. 11 Tucked away in a secret room in the building are a few copying machines whose whereabouts the thieves do not yet know. The tiny room has a conspiratorial air to it as though its occupants were involved in some kind of underground activity. Unfortunately, the effort will be short-lived. Two of the machines limping along beside each other flash

LAZARUS, teacher

Sept. 9 The shut-down of our security system because of rehab work being done at the school proved to be costly. A weekend break-in netted thieves valuable video equipment and left the teachers demoralized. One monitor and one VCR were purchased with funds raised by the students.

Sept. 10 The door to the back office, which had been broken into over the weekend, was not repaired immediately. The thieves returned last night and left with a copying machine; it was later recovered, although the culprits fled and were not apprehended.

It is impossible to assess the psychological toll theft has on the teaching staff. Two of our science teachers are seriously rethinking their stay at

"Maintenance Time" to their weary operators. Where will we find the funds to meet these needs? Even if the board sends someone to take care of labor, we must provide parts and supplies.

Sept. 19 LSC meeting. The athletic coach asks the council for assistance to purchase from suburban schools used equipment for which regular board funds cannot be used. The state says the team cannot play unless each player has a certified helmet. At present only one out of seven players has one. The principal and coach have paid for the team's practice pants, bought used, out of their own pockets.

Sept. 20 The Goodman Theatre's season opener is "Miss Evers' Boys," a factual horror tale of 6,000 syphilitic black men from the American South
who, in the 1930s, were involved in a federally funded program which result-
ed in their being denied treatment.

Perhaps someday a similar drama will be presented on the effects of the lack of a decent education on gener-
ations of the poor and the real costs to the larger society.

Sept. 22 In his recent book, Savage Inequalities, Jonathan Kozol, the voice of conscience in the educational-
community, piles layer upon layer of evidence about the abuses against children in school districts throughout the country. His message is loud and clear: We are destroying our children. We are reverting to a caste sys-
tem as we seek advantages for “our” children over “theirs” by maintaining our provincial limits. We do not see that all children belong to us. We cannot let them falter without crip-
pling ourselves.

Oct. 26 A recent newspaper article on low standardized test scores for Chicago Public School students quotes a principal who says he has hired an assistant to make sure teachers are following the curriculum. But who will make sure the curriculum will lead us to better test scores? And whatever became of participatory decision making, that critical element in reform?

Strike threat

PUD, student

Oct. 12 The threat of a teachers strike has upset seniors at our school in a major way. Students have openly shown their disapproval by writing letters, hoisting banners and carrying signs opposing the strike.

I don’t understand why people can’t see the severity of a strike. Education is a process. To disturb that process is to decrease the students’ motivation. It’s like sending their minds on vacation, with no real return date.

Reflections on reform

OLIVIA, principal

Sept. 19 An article in today’s Tribune reports that “only 498 candi-
dates have applied to fill the 4,288” LSC seats in this year’s election. We’re told by both city hall and the board’s Office of Reform Implementation not to worry. We’re just getting a late start. Most incumbents are expecting to run. They just “need encouragement.” They’re “deciding.” Sure!

The message I get from this very low number of LSC candidates is that perhaps I should re-evaluate my commit-
ment to public education. If parents and community members don’t care enough about the education of their children to run for the councils, what am I doing here?

LAZARUS, teacher

Oct. 4 The LSC election is only a few days away. Where will we be a year or two from now? Will I feel as defeated then as I do now after these first two years? On the larger canvas is painted the fate of the public schools of this nation. Against indif-
ference and ever-increasing deficits, how will we find the strength to begin again?

ELIZABETH, teacher

Oct. 19 This diary I have been keep-
ing for two years has forced me to continually analyze my feelings about reform and changes in the CPS.

In the findings of a survey of teach-
ers by the Consortium on Chicago School Research [CATALYST, October 1991], the majority of teachers thought their schools were getting bet-
ter as a result of reform; they felt bet-
ter about working in their schools and more optimistic that their schools would improve. Only a small percent-
age felt there was more conflict in their schools and more disruptions in their teaching and that school-community relations had gotten worse. I am with this minority.

I feel that reform has served to polarize our staff along racial lines. The chair of our first local school council incited the community over things not within the council’s control—e.g., closed campus, police officers in the school, etc. It was as though she enjoyed this instigation, and then stood back and watched folks at each others’ throats.

I also notice now that I am no longer an LSC rep, I seem to have lost my fair-haired status with the prin-
cipal. His door was always open to me; now he is always in conference.

Although the survey reflected that PPACs were very successful in representing the teachers, I feel just the opposite. Our PPAC concerns itself with trivia and spins its wheels, and the chair is self-serving. It makes com-
mitments to “look into” discipline, cur-
iculum, staff development, etc. but never gets past that step. Nothing changes....everything remains the same.

The survey did point out that in small schools teachers are more posi-
tive about reform. And weak reports came from schools that are very low achieving. Am I negative about reform because I am in a large, law-
achieving school?

I have been at Inner City Elementary for 20 years. We have always been large and underachieving. We have had very little parent/community partic-
ipation. School reform has not changed anything for the better—but, for that matter, has it significantly wors-
ened our school.

Looking over the whole survey, I am in the minority with everything from teacher expectations to parents’ respect of teachers. That is of less importance. What is important is how I feel about my youngsters. Am I allowing my negativity about school leadership, colleagues, parents and the community to affect my feelings about my children? How can I not? But as long as I can keep things in perspective, I will continue to believe my kids can learn in spite of reform.

I’d like parental and collegial support at my school but won’t get it. I’ll look for collegial support outside my own faculty—and find it. I am convinced there is a core group of teach-
ers in this city who share my belief in our kids and in their futures. That keeps me alive as a teacher—not sur-
veys, parents or local colleagues.

CARLOS, teacher

Oct. 28 Our school is concentrating on staff development for the entire staff. We will soon begin our after-
school programs. The focus of our school improvement plan is on quali-
ity. School reform has given us the opportunity to dream big and to make things happen. We are doing both.

CATALYST/FEBRUARY 1992 19
Reform groups challenge board on school closing issue

by Scott Schraff and Lorraine V. Forte

In December, the Board of Education, for the first time, set guidelines for deciding which schools to close, but most reform leaders continue to oppose any closings, contending they would hurt education and provide only scant savings.

The board’s new policy protects about 150 schools that are part of its desegregation program: magnet schools, integrated or stably desegregated schools and community academies. Community academies are “racially isolated” schools granted special programs to compensate for past racial discrimination. Year-round schools, as well as schools with “historical value,” also are exempt.

But even these protected schools could be merged with other schools, says Stephen Ballis, chair of the board’s management committee, which developed the policy.

In the past, the board has merged two schools into one to save the salaries of one principal and some clerical personnel. Now that principals have four-year contracts, however, the board may not be able to dismiss them, says Diana Lauber of Leadership for Quality Education.

Empty space down

Board members who advocate closings acknowledge that many schools need more space. But they say that many schools with excess space are too distant to help relieve overcrowding and, therefore, should be closed.

Empty space has been dwindling in recent years, however, as schools use their increasing share of state Chapter 1 money to hire new teachers and mount new programs. The number of empty classrooms citywide has shrunk 60 percent over the last four years and stands at 422, according to a board survey conducted last spring (see CATALYST, December 1991).

When it considers schools to close, the board will count classrooms used as offices, as parent rooms or for similar non-teaching purposes as “available,” Ballis says. Rooms used by full-time teachers, or as science and computer labs, will not be counted.

Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, predicts that if the board proceeds with closings, small schools will be shuttered and big schools will get bigger.

And two studies by the Illinois Board of Education show that smaller is better, according to Tony Monfiletto, a Chicago Panel analyst. “Inner-city students in large schools do not do as well as similar students in smaller schools, unless the student body is selectively chosen,” he testified at public hearings.

Opponents of closings also cite a recent survey of teachers by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (see CATALYST, October 1991): Teachers in small schools—those with fewer than 350 students—gave their own schools higher ratings than did teachers in medium and large schools.

The Chicago Urban League, however, remains open on school closings. “We may have to close some schools in order to save money. We’ve got to be more efficient,” says education director Gwendolyn Laroche.

Yet Lauber says that experience in other cities has shown that closings reap substantial savings only when buildings are large, old and immediately sold, rented or demolished. (The five schools closed by the board at the start of the school year are not up for sale but are on the rental market.) If the board simply closes the doors, it must pay heating costs and, in some cases, custodial costs to guard against vandalism, she notes.

Closings could reduce building rehabilitation needs, which would save money in the long run but not necessarily help balance next year’s school budget. Some 400 of the system’s 601 schools are in dire need of repair, according to the board. At 94 schools, the rehab price tag is more than $1 million.

To avoid a repeat of last summer’s last-minute decision on closings, Supt. Ted Kimbrough is to present his proposals by the end of March. The full board is to decide on closings by June, after public hearings and visits by board members to targeted schools.
Instructional Services reorganized in wake of two studies

The Office of Instructional Services has long been a target of some reformers, who want it scaled back and refocused to provide support for local schools.

Now, taking the lead from two studies that also urge an overhaul, Deputy Supt. Adrienne Bailey has moved to reorganize the office's departments.

The Board of Education's instruction committee supports the changes, but continuing financial problems led some members to question Bailey's plan to fill about 50 vacant positions. The positions are included in the office's budget; some are new, while others need to be filled to meet staffing requirements set by funding agencies for categorical programs, Bailey says. The office lost 120 positions in budget cuts at the start of the school year and is now down to 422, including 204 who work in the field, according to office reports.

Referring to changes in job titles and duties made throughout the office, member Rev. Nathaniel Jarrett said, "Changes are one thing, hiring additional personnel is another."

Staff transferred

Member Juan Cruz questioned whether the changes will prove more than cosmetic: "The bottom line is, how will this help delivery of services to the schools?"

In line with recommendations from one study, by management consulting firm Arthur Andersen, Bailey has:

- Merged the departments of curriculum and vocational education into a new Department of Academic and Vocational Instructional Support, thus bringing all curriculum development activities together. With this move and Supt. Ted Kimbrough's transfer of the Department of Equal Educational Opportunity to the Office of School Operations, Instructional Services now has seven departments. In addition to instructional support, they are Language and Cultural Development, Project CANAL, Early Childhood Education, Grants and Technical Assistance, External Resources and Education Service Center Six, a state-funded training center for administrators.

- Reorganized staff in the Department of Grants and Technical Assistance into four clusters of five to six members each. Each cluster administers all categorical programs for designated subdistricts. Under the old structure, staff handled only one specific program (e.g., state Chapter 1) in all the schools, forcing virtually every school to work with several staff members to coordinate all its programs. "Now, schools can contact one person," says Preston Bryant, associate superintendent for the department.

- Transferred five bilingual coordinators and six vocational education coordinators from Pershing Road to various local schools and subdistrict offices.

- Transferred coordinators for driver's education, ROTC and interscholastic sports programs to Subdistrict 11, which oversees high schools.

- Transferred to the Department of External Resources all staff working to help schools find outside resources.

- The second study, by professors Arthur Hyde of National-Louis University and Mari Koerner and Mary Daly Lewis of Roosevelt University, made more radical recommendations: Eliminate all departments and replace them with two new ones, a department of advocacy and a department of local resources.

- The advocacy department would include about 30 field staff, each serving 15 to 20 schools, who would "link their schools with resources, information and the like." The resources department would help schools find outside funding, volunteers and similar resources; it would also administer categorical programs.

Lorraine V. Forte

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Hendricks mailings keep parents informed

Parents know more about what their children are learning and how they are doing at Hendricks Community Academy, 4316 S. Princeton, since the school started sending out two extra mailings every 10 weeks. "Before, many parents didn't know until report card time that their child wasn't doing well," says Principal Mahalia Hines.

At the beginning of each marking period, Principal Hines sends parents a form letter outlining students' upcoming work in each subject. Midterm, teachers send an individual Fifth-week Report, to each student's parents, noting subjects in which their child is doing well or needs to improve performance. The interim reports carry no letter grades and leave space for comments or conference requests from parents or teachers. Graded report cards still come out every 10 weeks.

Language arts teacher Howard Hendrix notes that the ungraded reports promote a different mindset than letter grades. "When a child gets an F, that says, 'I failed.' And that's a very final statement. These five-week reports say that you can improve." With more frequent reports to parents, adds Hendrix, "You've got more time when kids are knocking down for grades."

Eighth-grader Zanice Robertson reports that the new system has worked for him. "I was doing terrible in some subjects, and then I pulled it up. My mother told me that I had to bring this up, because that wasn't acceptable."

"We've had a lot of really good response from the parents," says Hines, "and the LSC is really pleased. Not just about the reports but about the information telling them what their children will be studying."

Byford's BUG Roll lauds improvement

Most schools have honor rolls to recognize top student performance. But Byford Elementary School, 5600 W. Iowa, has BUG Roll, too—to recognize student improvement, even if it falls short of honors level. BUG stands for Bringing Up Grades.

Not every child will make the honor roll, says Principal Barbara Wade, but every student will make some contribution to the school.

BUG Rolls are displayed on clipboards that hang next to the door of every classroom. Some week to week, some daily.

One day, room 203 boasted a BUG Roll listing students with perfect attendance for November. Next to room 104, a Polaroid photo showed four children and bore the handwritten caption, "Great Improvement in Reading." And eight children from room 106 knew the alphabet A-Q.

More flexible than an honor roll, the BUG Roll lets teachers draw attention to each student's triumphs as they happen. "I have a little boy in my class who did all his work this week," says first-grade teacher Angela Dillard. She adds that another of her students has just begun reading.

Pride in academic accomplishment is spreading, too. "They want to show their friends," primary teacher Frances Gray says of BUG Roll students. "They'll say, 'This is my second time on the BUG Roll.'" Dan Weissmann