Special ed changes face stiff opposition

by Daniel Cattau

The student body at Park Manor Elementary School is nearly 100 percent black and almost 90 percent low-income, yet the school at 7037 S. Rhodes may become a model of integration, a new kind of integration that is sending tremors through the school system.

Along with 21 other Chicago schools, Park Manor recently received a $5,000 grant from the federally funded Inclusive Schools Project, which promotes the integration, or inclusion, of children with disabilities into every aspect of school life. Historically, these students have been treated separately, and, according to integration advocates, often unequally. Students with physical disabilities would be sent to separate schools for students with physical disabilities, students with mental disabilities would be segregated in separate classes, and so on.

In the main office at Park Manor, Principal Diane Dyer-Dawson points to a sign, new this academic year, that states the school's mission is "to encourage all students, including students with disabilities, to reach their fullest potential." Like regular students, children with disabilities need to develop self-esteem and build character, and Dyer-Dawson believes they can best do that in an integrated setting.

Inclusion is not Park Manor's dream alone. The Board of Education envisions it for all public schools. "We believe that kids with disabilities will become adults who will live in their own communities and work in their own communities. They should be educated in their own communities," says Thomas Hehir, (pronounced Hair) an associate superintendent hired in August 1990 to reform special education in the city's schools.

In principle, many teachers and parents of children in "regular" classrooms subscribe to this goal. In reality, the board's efforts to place more students with disabilities in regular schools and regular classrooms, while still providing special help, is running up against a wide array of fears and forces that will make change extremely difficult.

Officials of the Chicago Teachers Union oppose inclusion, contending that, while it may be an admirable goal, many students need the extra attention and smaller classes offered by special education. Some teachers of regular students have expressed concern about having to adapt curricula and about their lack of background in special education; some parents of "regular" students worry that integration will drain already meager resources. "We're already being asked to do more with less," said one local school council chair.

A large portion of the special edu-
inclusion community is opposed as well. Some parents of students with disabilities fear integration will expose their children to unsafe conditions and more teasing. Many special education teachers fear their pupils will be lost in regular classes. Schools with special education classes fear loss of enrollment and perhaps even closure; so do private, non-profit schools that receive school funds to serve students with severe disabilities.

On the other hand, inclusion advocates say it will give students with disabilities a greater chance to be challenged in school, develop friendships and prepare for a meaningful life after school. Regular students also benefit by being exposed to students with different abilities and seeing that they have the same interests and feelings.

The debate over inclusion sometimes is philosophical, but it also is practical and, like most everything else in Chicago, intensely political. The momentum gathered by the special education interests is such that one inclusion advocate likened Hehir's job to taking a 100-car freight train that is barreling down the tracks and turning it another direction.

As a true believer in inclusion, the 42-year-old Hehir readily accepts the challenge. Admirers say the short, broad-shouldered bachelor has almost a monkish devotion to his work. In a notoriously "insider" city, Hehir has tried to tone down his Worcester, Mass., accent. Hehir came to Chicago after receiving a doctorate from Harvard University; before that, he had extensive experience as a special education administrator in Massachusetts.

Despite some fears that Hehir is moving too quickly on integration, the impression he gives in his speeches, writings and in three lengthy interviews with CATALYST is that his speed is more deliberate than hasty. Rather than trying to control special education from afar, Hehir is to working with principals, teachers and local school councils to bring about change from the ground up. A key part of his program is developing models for inclusion—like Park Manor—that will spread the gospel to other schools.

Using this approach, Hehir says that for the next three years, he has set a goal "is to have all schools develop programs for kids with mild and moderate disabilities." Wherever possible, these schools also should develop programs for students with severe disabilities, he adds.

But Hehir is not so naive as to think that all schools will comply willingly. In an article written with two other educators, he says, "Through we believe that most schools, if given appropriate resources and support, are capable of serving their students with disabilities, some may not. In such cases the central office will have to intervene on behalf of the students."

Both Hehir and the School Board believe the law is on their side in pushing such integration: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) states that students with disabilities should have available a free and appropriate public education provided in the least restrictive environment.

Critics of inclusion stress another provision of the act, one that sets forth a continuum of choices ranging from placement in regular classes with special support to private schools solely for students with severe or multiple disabilities. They contend inclusion will limit the choices.

"If you're for inclusion, you can't be for the continuum," says Sharon-Joy A. Jackson, a teacher at Ray Graham Training Center, 2347 S. Wabash, a public school for trainable mentally handicapped students.

"We have no intention of eliminating the continuum," counters Hehir. "But there have been far too many kids placed in the restrictive end and far too few in the integrated end."

Historically, Chicago and, thus, Illinois have had one of the country's most segregated school systems for students with disabilities. In 1987-88, according to a federal study, Illinois ranked 46th among the 50 states and
the District of Columbia on the integration of mentally retarded students with regular students: only 5 percent attended regular classes. Similarly, Illinois ranked 45th on the integration of students with emotional disorders: only 24 percent attended regular classes. With one-fourth of the state's school children, Chicago shoulders most of the blame for the state's poor standing, experts say.

Students with the most severe disabilities have routinely been shipped off to a "disabled gulag," contends Jay J. Rogers, an education professor at Loyola University. She is referring to the independent schools that serve some 3,800 such students at an annual cost of about $46 million.

A strong proponent of inclusion, Rogers believes many of these independent schools "process"—but don't educate—students. She contends that they offer an inferior education and, most of all, violate the children's civil rights to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

Defending the private facilities, Donna Ree, director of quality assurance for Ada S. McKinley Community Services, says: "The vast majority of children [with disabilities] can be handled in public schools with appropriate services in place. But we also need to keep the options open" for children with the most severe disabilities.

**Economic interest**

Hehir says there are some good private schools but notes that they grew out of the public schools' failure to serve severely disabled children. Now, he says, private schools "want to keep things the way they are, ... These kids can easily become property in that they can generate a certain amount of income."

A former state special education official agrees with Hehir that arguments against inclusion are sometimes self-serving. "This is not a philosophical discussion," says Ed Sontag. "People who want the status quo in Illinois play hardball." For example, the private-school sector lobbied last year for state legislation that would make it more difficult to place disabled students in regular classrooms, several sources point out. The bill was tabled.

While Hehir points to the economic interest of private schools, the Chicago Teachers Union questions whether the Board of Education is pursuing inclusion merely to save money; the CTU suspects the board wants to eliminate the need for the system's 3,000 special education teachers and 1,400 special education aides.

Hehir says the union's suspicion is "simply absurd" because inclusion will require more special education staff—not less. Every school would need specialists to provide the extra help that students with disabilities need, he explains. Indeed, the board is "actively recruiting" special education teachers, he adds. According to a December 1991 Board of Education tally, 403 of the system's 3,625 special education positions are filled by teachers lacking appropriate certification; 376 positions are unfilled.

To pay for this additional staff, some inclusion supporters look to savings from private school tuition and from busing students from their neighborhoods to designated special education sites; however, there is disagreement over whether these savings will suffice. (Special education busing now costs $42 million.)

But it is clear that the push toward inclusion will put special education through some convulsive changes.

Many regular classroom teachers are taking a wait-and-see attitude, although some are downright hostile. Both the teachers union and Ree of McKinley contend that Hehir's office has not come up with a workable plan to prepare regular teachers for the range of disabilities they will encounter. "The people who will suffer most are the children," says Ree, who also is president the 3,400-member Illinois Council for Exceptional Children, which is composed largely of special education teachers. The council has taken a stand against inclusion.

Expressing a similar sentiment, CTU President Jacqueline Vaught wrote last year in the union newspaper: "Special education students do not have the right to take away from the educational process of their non-disabled peers."

Even some teachers who are open to inclusion have concerns. "It's almost frightening because I can see that down the road, if there's not a good support team, [inclusion] is not going to make it," says Karen Adams, a fifth-grade teacher at Gladstone Elementary School, 1231 S. Damen, which also won an inclusive schools grant. Adams taught for nearly 20 years at Spalding, a public school for students with physical disabilities.

"I had an advantage over some [teachers] who come in September and were told, 'You've got an EMH kid,'" she points out. Adams favors inclusion but also sees a role for schools like Spalding, which recently began bringing in "regular" students in a reverse integration effort.

Meanwhile, Park Manor is moving cautiously with its integration efforts. This year, Dyer-Dawson had students with moderate learning disabilities attend "regular" classes and receive additional assistance from a special education teacher in such subjects as
math and reading. Those who are mentally handicapped—both the educable (EMH) and the trainable (TMH)—are still segregated for their academic work but join regular students for gym, art, music and other school activities.

"Ultimately," says Dyer-Dawson, "we want most of their instruction to take place in the regular classrooms." Beyond that, Park Manor eventually should serve all students in the community who have disabilities of any kind, she says, noting that currently the school building cannot handle students with more severe disabilities. (Less than 10 percent of the city's some 631 school buildings are fully accessible to people with severe physical disabilities, though Hechir notes there are plans to make 50 more accessible "in the near future.")

There are 620 students at Park Manor, including 42 special education students in three separate TMH and EMH classrooms. Catherine Toomey's upper-level EMH class has 12 students, while most regular classrooms are overcrowded with an average of about 30 students. "I don't think I've talked to one special education teacher who's in favor of inclusion," she says.

On a snowy winter morning, nearly everyone in Toomey's class is working on a writing assignment. One girl is resting after nearly fainting. A broad-shouldered, 6-foot-2-inch youth—more man than boy—is talking and looking out the window. Unlike most Park Manor students, the boy, nearly 15 years old, is not wearing a maroon uniform. Instead, he sports a gray Georgetown University sweatshirt.

Toomey thinks the boy simply could not compete in a regular class: "He's on a first-grade reading level. To put him in an eighth grade classroom would do everyone a disservice," she says.

"As a general rule, I'm against inclusion," says Toomey, who has taught special education for about 20 of her 30 years in Chicago schools. "Our students are so much behind their [same age] class that it would be a humiliating experience."

But Toomey gives Dyer-Dawson high marks for her approach. "I like her idea of having the school well-prepared and making the other teachers aware of the complicated problems involved in this," she says, "It's the only way to succeed."

Dawson has used the school's small Inclusive Schools' grant for teacher workshops, materials and books.

"Everybody has to realize that change is really slow," says Dyer-Dawson. "You want it to be slow. You want it to be meaningful, gradual and evolutionary."

Daniel Catrou is a Chicago-based writer.

Reforms stem from federal, state pressure

Many of the present efforts to reform special education in Chicago's public schools can be traced to a 1989 agreement between the Interim Board of Education and the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education.

Faced with the cutoff of more than $100 million in federal funds, the Interim Board agreed to specific steps to remedy the school system's "shameful" and "disgraceful" mistreatment of special education students. In announcing the agreement, James W. Compton, president of the Interim Board, said: "We will never allow them to be neglected or mistreated again."

Both board officials and critics say the system has made progress, particularly in evaluating children with disabilities in a timely manner. When the federal government began its investigation in 1985, 77 percent of students recommended for testing and evaluation had waited longer than 60 days, the limit set by law. Today, about 30 percent wait longer than 60 days.

The improvement is due in large part to the Interim Board's approval of a cutback in central office positions and reassignment of personnel to work in schools. Today, the special education bureaucracy numbers about 2292 people, compared to about 480 before the agreement, according to school officials.

The Interim Board also agreed to hire a new administrator to reorganize special education services. It chose Thomas Hechir, the former head of special education in Boston's public schools.

Also in 1989, the Interim Board signed an agreement with the Illinois State Board of Education to remedy other problems, including the relatively small proportion of Hispanic students and the relatively large proportion of black students, especially black males, enrolled in special education. The proportions indicated that Hispanics with disabilities were being overlooked while blacks were being wrongly classified as disabled.

Maria Elena Montes, director of the Illinois School for the Deaf, an advocacy and training group, says the board's track record on Hispanics is getting better. But she notes that Hispanic youngsters continue to suffer from serious school overcrowding and a lack of staff who can conduct disability evaluations in Spanish.

Little progress has been made with black students, school officials acknowledge. Last school year, blacks made up 58 percent of total school enrollment but 77 percent of enrollment in classes for children who are educable mentally handicapped (EMH).

In 1989-90, 17 out of every 1,000 black students were diagnosed as EMH, a rate that was about twice that for white students and three times that for Hispanic students, according to Sharon Sotman, an attorney with Designs for Change, which helped document special education abuses.

The board, says Sotman, "has not addressed this problem in a systematic way."

Last July, Hechir hired Richard K. Simmons to coordinate programs on the disproportionate numbers of blacks in EMH. Currently, Simmons is examining 10 schools with a high number of black students in special education. "A lot of training needs to be done," he says. "Many teachers are unaware how to address a diverse student population."

D.C.
Reinberg a ‘mixed-up’ school on a mission of inclusion

A year ago, Timothy Nolde, a fifth-grader at Reinberg Elementary School, was in a small class and received mostly A’s and B’s. This year, he’s in a much larger class and is getting mostly C’s and some B’s. But in the eyes of Timothy’s parents and teachers, that’s a big improvement.

Timothy, 10, was two years old when doctors discovered that he had a profound hearing loss. He cannot hear without a hearing aid. Until this year, he studied in small classes with other hearing-impaired children at Reinberg, 3425 N. Major. His teachers had more time to spend with each student, they talked louder, but, some would say, they also coddled their students. Timothy and his classmates mixed with regular students at recess, lunch, gym and art and music classes. But mainly, they were isolated.

Now Timothy has been “integrated” into a regular fifth-grade class at Reinberg, where he is expected to do the same work that hearing students do.

Emotional growth

The class has 46 students, including six other hearing-impaired students, a few students with learning disabilities and several Polish immigrants just beginning to learn English. There are two teachers, Gary Van Praag and Tod TeckTeil, who shares regular teaching duties with Van Praag and also keeps track of the hearing-impaired students. TeckTeil tries to seat the hearing-impaired children near the front of the class; but he also is trying to get sound equipment, such as an open microphone system.

Of Timothy, TeckTeil says: “Academically, he’s doing OK. Emotionally and socially, he’s doing phenomenally well.” Typically, segregated children are less mature than their peers in regular classes, and they develop social skills more slowly, according to teachers of hearing-impaired students.

As a special education student in a regular classroom, Timothy’s biggest problem by far was his emotional immaturity, particularly his tendency to cry when things don’t go his way. This year, Arlene Nolde, his mother, sees progress: “He is maturing. He’s not apt to cry as much in front of a bunch of other kids.” But she says he also hesitates asking for help, for fear of looking stupid in front of other kids. In general, though, Timothy’s problems now are more like those of any other 10-year-old child: “He’s having trouble doing homework every night.”

Reinberg’s major difference from other schools becomes apparent after talking with faculty and parents, who seem to have almost a missionary zeal about making Reinberg “inclusive” in the fullest sense for disabled students. That spirit was evident at a Board of Education reception in November for 22 schools that won grants from the Inclusive Schools Project, a federally funded program aimed at creating leadership training and support for schools that are “integrating” disabled students into regular classes.

Clad in red-and-white school T-shirts, Reinberg’s chorus marched into Board of Education chambers on Pershing Road and sang, both vocally and through sign language, several songs about diversity. “Our world is a mixing cup,” went one song. “Just look what happens when you stir it up.”

Reinberg is a “mixed-up” school and proud of it. About 55 percent of its 630 students are white, including an increasing number of recent Polish immigrants, many of whom speak little English. The rest of the students are black and Hispanic.

“We’re a racially mixed school. So why not an ability-mixed school?” asks principal Catherine Bushbacher.
"It's not only that it's educationally better, it's morally right."

Bushbacher is a convert to inclusion. She had no special education training before she started teaching in a basic skills program at Burbank Elementary School, 2035 N. Mobile, which provided additional math and reading help for underprivileged children. When Bushbacher arrived at Reinberg for the 1988-89 school year, she found three schools in one building: a program for hearing-impaired students from preschool through the eighth grade, a group of segregated classes for other special education students and classes for regular students. Soon she saw similarities between the needs of Reinberg's special education students and those in the basic skills program at Burbank; in particular, children in both groups sometimes had learning disabilities that were misdiagnosed and mistreated. In addition, the Burbank experience made Bushbacher more sensitive to the peculiar problems of special education—such as the need to work with parents as much as with children and to develop a flexible attitude when assessing a child's needs.

In 1989, Bushbacher had about 20 staff members go through leadership training workshops on inclusion. She provided books and other resources for her teachers and encouraged collaborative efforts and "team teaching" so that those without special education training did not feel overwhelmed. Now, she wants to see more teachers with "cross certification" in special education, such as speech and behavior disorders, to increase the staff's expertise and flexibility.

With the 1990-91 school year, Bushbacher began her first concerted efforts at inclusion and is the first to admit that not every idea works. For example, she wanted to merge separate preschool programs for regular and special education students so that children would have integrated education from the start. However, the number of special education pupils was several times the number of regular students.

Inclusion advocates would prefer that special education students be distributed more broadly, indeed naturally, throughout the system. The "natural proportion" of students with disabilities in any given school attendance area is 8 percent to 12 percent, experts say. Yet in cities like Chicago, the prevalence of overcrowding and buildings that are inaccessible to physically handicapped people makes it difficult for each school to accommodate its natural proportion.

"You can't disrupt the proportion and not disrupt the class," says Bushbacher.

Of Reinberg's 520 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, about 160 have disabilities, including behavior disorders, learning disabilities, impaired hearing, deafness and physical disabilities. But even with the best of intentions, only about 60 of those 160 are in regular classes (they also receive special services). The remaining 100 are in full-time special education classes.

"There will always be special education rooms that are self-contained," says Bushbacher. "But the idea of integration and inclusion is not to arbitrarily say [students] will be sent away where there's a special education need."

While a few Reinberg teachers expressed skepticism about inclusion, most seemed enthusiastic. Elizabeth Shea, a veteran who now teaches fourth grade, reflects the prevailing view: "We have a wider variance [in ability] with inclusion. But you always have a variance."

Tod Tecktell has heard some parents of special education students complain about the lower grades their children have received under mainstreaming. He's not sympathetic: "In order for integration to work, you can't have a situation where you accept mediocrity," he says. "I am putting out a product, a productive, responsible citizen who will need all the skills available to live in a complex world, get a good job, raise a family and have a positive self-image."

Reinberg's commitment to inclusion, close to unique among Chicago public schools, has made the school a bit of a magnet. When families with special education students move from the area, their children tend to stay at Reinberg even if they are supposed to transfer to a new school. "It makes it difficult knowing you're the only game in town," says Bushbacher. She admits it's sometimes difficult to say no to parents who want their children to come to Reinberg, but she encourages them to send their children to their "home schools" whenever possible.

Early results

The arguments for and against inclusion can often be theoretical, but Reinberg is a place where theory and practice meet every day. Bushbacher describes the school as at the "crawling stage" with inclusion. But already some results are beginning to show.

One parent talked about how her son had improved dramatically—both educationally and socially—after transferring from a Catholic school, where his learning disability went undiagnosed. The parent was shocked but extremely heartened when she stopped by Reinberg one day and saw her seventh-grade son walking hand-in-hand with a kindergarten with Down's Syndrome. She knew he was growing up, as well as doing better in school.

Like any 10-year-old, Timothy Noldte has his ups and downs. He reads at the fifth-grade level, but Tecktell feels he could do still better. Arlene Noldte agrees that, overall, the change has been good for her son: "Once he gets used to it, he will do better." She says her only regret is that he wasn't integrated earlier.

Says Bushbacher: "There's no going back once you've committed to inclusion." One reason, she notes, is that you don't see the Timothy Noldtes crying in class anymore. —Daniel Catteau
Joe, 8, blazes trails for disabled students

Martina Lopez's second-grade class at Andrew Jackson Language Academy has just finished watching a cartoon video about a musically inclined cricket who had the attentive class laughing and oohing and ahhing.

Lopez flips on the lights and quickly moves to the next project. "OK, turtles go to art class," she says in a business-like manner. Half the class lines up at the door. "Possums, stay here to work on your journals."

Almost all the possums stay at their desks, take out pencils and notebooks, and wait for the teacher's instructions. But one possum—wearing thick glasses, and dressed in a hooded red sweatshirt, blue jeans and sneakers—plops himself from his chair to the carpeted floor. He then crawls to the back of the room, where a teacher's aide assists him onto another chair.

Watched closely by aide Tina Elmore, the eight-year-old aims unstable fingers at the keyboard, covered with a raised, plastic letter guard that helps him hit his mark. Using one left finger, he slowly taps out "J-o-e F-o-r-d" then a three-line story about a ghost and a castle.

But the real story is not the ghost—it's the pupil. Joseph Ford, who has cerebral palsy, is a pioneer in Chicago's movement to include children with disabilities in regular classrooms. As a result of damage to the motor centers of his brain, Joseph does not have full control of his movements. To get around, he uses a motorized wheelchair when he's not speed crawling; to write, he uses a computer.

"There aren't five Joe Fords in the entire school system," says Joy J. Rogers, a professor of education at Loyola University, referring to the placement of a child with severe disabilities in a regular school. "That's one heck of an accomplishment."

Getting Joe into Andrew Jackson, 1340 W. Harrison, was a heck of an accomplishment too.

Joe's parents, Bill and Penny Ford, take education seriously and have the savvy it takes to fight the system. Their oldest son, Liam, is a recent graduate of Harvard University, and they have similar high expectations for Joseph, the youngest of eight children. "I very much wanted my three youngest children to go to school together," Penny recalls, referring to Joseph and daughters Jane, 11, and Dolores, 10. "I foolishly thought I could send them to the same school."

Friends and neighbors had warned the Fords that this likely wouldn't happen in Chicago—the school system routinely segregated students with severe disabilities and few school buildings that are accessible to people with physical disabilities. "Everyone told me to move out of the city," Penny recalls. "I was told no family in our situation should stay in the city of Chicago."

Intellectually gifted

Even so, the Fords, who live near Oak Park on the western edge of the city, felt confident that Joseph, who seemed like a bright child, wouldn't have a problem getting into a good school. So they stayed in Chicago.

After tests and evaluations by the Board of Education, Joseph at age 4 was found to be "intellectually gifted," Penny Ford says. Then, to the Fords' amazement, the board placed Joseph at Stock Elementary School, at the time a self-contained pre-school and kindergarten for students with physical disabilities. Located at 7507 W. Birchwood, the school was 14 miles away. Joe spent three hours on a bus each day.

Although Ford was not critical of the education her son received at Stock, she felt that he needed to be educated with his peers from the neighborhood, many of whom went to Andrew Jackson. Blessed with an agile mind, Joe needed a bigger challenge, his parents believed.

Penny recalls a telling example. A speech therapist who tested Joe at age 5 asked him what a castle was. His answer: "It's like a house, but it isn't a house. It has lots and lots of rooms. It has lots of knights but only one king. I don't think there are dragons anymore."

In January 1989, Penny tried to get
her son into kindergarten at Andrew Jackson. But the principal at the time refused to accept him. Ford claims it was because of Joseph's disability.

Ford then contacted Chicago attorney Matthew Cohen, who specializes in cases of discrimination against children with disabilities. Ford was willing to go to court, but Cohen told her she first had to exhaust the administrative law procedure; so she filed discrimination complaints with the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights.

In preparing her case, Ford received training and assistance from several advocacy groups. She estimates she spent 1,000 hours on her complaint. School officials finally relented, and Ford withdrew her complaint. Joe joined his sisters at Andrew Jackson in September 1990.

**Ford case pivotal**

"This one case was representative of the system's inability to respond to individual cases," Ford says. "As a result of my complaint, the time that people have to wait has been lessened and the trouble that they have to go through is less."

But Joseph's case points to a larger issue: Every child, regardless of his or her intellectual abilities or physical disabilities, is entitled to an education. In addition, the case gained a certain notoriety for Penny Ford.

Shortly after Thomas Hehir became Chicago's associate superintendent of special education and pupil support services in August 1990, he appointed Ford to start an office of parent training and support. (Ford recently resigned from the position, which is now vacant.)

"The bottom line on this stuff is that you don't have to be able-bodied in order to have a life," Ford says. "It was important for me to make the point that the children who are left behind in a self-contained school or classroom—especially those students with cognitive disabilities—should not be left behind. They should have a life. Some people [in the schools] are setting up artificial criteria for those who can participate in society and those who can't."

At Andrew Jackson, Joe seems to be adjusting well. In addition to getting special help from aide Tina Elmore, who is specially assigned to Joe, he also receives speech, occupational and physical therapy in school. Marta Lopez, who has a master's degree in special education, says he's an "excellent student," gets along well with classmates and is active in class. In fact, he's almost too active.

During an Hispanic heritage day, Lopez demonstrated a dance she termed a "Mexican shuffle" and asked for volunteers to join her. At first, Joseph was the only one who raised his hand. Finally, two others volunteered. After they danced, she asked for more volunteers. Only Joseph raised his hand. "Why not?" Lopez asked herself.

Lopez and Elmore put Joseph on a chair in the middle of the room. He swayed in rhythm with the music while Lopez and Elmore held his hands and danced. Soon the rest of the class joined in.

Joe also plays goalie in hockey games, his favorite part of school.

"We win lots of games," he boasts, adding, "I like a lot of kids on my team, especially Mary Ann and John." Says Lopez: "I totally agree with mainstreaming [meaning inclusion]. It's very good for the handicapped and non-handicapped, who find out that handicapped kids have the same feelings and worry about the same things."

Elmore, a full-time aide who's completing her bachelor's degree in education, has been with Joseph two years. She says he gets a little more frustrated in second grade than he did in first. For example, he wanted to write by hand, the same way other children write. "He'd be exhausted if he had to write all day," Elmore says, adding that Joe has grown accustomed to the computer.

"He's very strong willed," she adds. "He's very sure of himself. He's his own person, and nobody can sway him. I tell him, 'Joe, I can't wait to see you graduate.'"

Daniel Catul

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**Resources**

Access Living: Service and advocacy for people with disabilities. (312) 226-5900; TDD (312) 226-1687.

Board of Education, Department of Special Education and Pupil Support Services: (312) 535-8958.

Designs for Change: Advocacy, information and assistance to parents whose children have disabilities. Ann Robinson, leadership development associate, (312) 922-0317.

Family Resource Center on Disabilities: Information and training for parents and professionals on rights and options of children with disabilities. Referral to appropriate resources. (312) 939-3513.


Illinois/TASH (the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps): Information, workshops, resources and networking for parents of students with disabilities. Rich Rowan, president: (708) 830-0698.


Project Choices (Children Have Opportunities in Integrated Community Environments): Joint project promoting integrated educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Lynda Atherton, parent coordinator, (815) 753-0992.

Illinois State Board of Education, Department of Special Education: Al Smith, (312) 814-5560, TDD (312) 814-5821; and Kathryn Cox, (217) 782-6601, TDD (217) 782-1900.

Northern Illinois University: Sharon Freugan, (815) 753-0656, TDD (815) 753-6983.

Parents for Inclusive Communities: Lynda Atherton, (815) 753-0992, or Barb Chatman, (217) 446-7312.

School Association for Special Education in DuPage County: Ruth Ushilton, (708) 778-4520.

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D.C.
Opinions

What will it be, Chicago: reform or revolution?

by Chester E. Finn Jr. and Stephen K. Clements

For almost three years, Chester E. Finn Jr., professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt University, and Stephen K. Clements, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, have been monitoring Chicago school reform under a grant from The Joyce Foundation. The following analysis is a shortened version of their most recent monitoring report, which appeared in full in the January 1992 issue of Network News and Views, a publication of the Educational Excellence Network. Finn is director of the Network, a Washington, D.C.-based education reform information center. Previously, Clements was associate director. Finn also was a top aide to former U.S. Sec. of Education William Bennett. Now, as a consultant to the Chicago School Finance Authority on the Board of Education’s systemwide reform plan, Finn is helping shape reform locally. Responses to the Finn and Clements’ analysis appear on pages 14-18.

Chicago is at something of a crossroads in terms of its grand school reform experiment. The governor signed the legislation almost three years ago, and the formal structures specified in the reform act have been in place for some time. Yet we have heard numerous individuals from different sectors of the education community express keen discontent with the “reformed” system’s performance to date. Moreover, we ourselves have come to believe there is reason to doubt whether radical improvements in Chicago’s educational performance can be made if the present course continues to be followed.

The current situation reminds us a bit of recent events in the Soviet Union. What looked to many like a radical school reform plan in 1988 was actually more akin to “perestroika,” an important opening up of the old system to new approaches, but not in and of itself a revolution. The school system is now in that antsy, vexatious time that, in the Soviet Union, gave rise first to a conservative reaction—the failed coup attempt in August by devotees of the old system—and then to the Yeltsin revolution, which has paved the way for more painful yet vital changes in the nation’s economy, social structure and political configuration.

Within the framework of this loose analogy, three questions are worth asking. First, what factors prompt us to suspect that reform Chicago-style may not succeed if it remains on its present course? Second, what is the likelihood—and what would be the sources—of a reactionary move back in the direction of the ancien regime? Third, what would be the elements of a bona fide revolution, who might lead it, who might resist it, and what are the odds of it—or something like it—actually occurring?

Social deficits

We recognize as well as anyone that the 1988 school reform act was no panacea, nor has it been portrayed as such by its proponents. But advocates did claim that these changes in structure and governance would provide opportunities for significant and in time dramatic improvement in education at individual schools, and that many schools would take advantage of these opportunities. Indeed, a number of schools have acted decisively, asserting control over things like promotion policies, dress codes and disciplinary procedures. LSCs have often acted prudently in spending their discretionary dollars (mostly state Chapter 1 money), hiring more counselors, teachers and aides, adding supplementary programs and purchasing equipment.

These changes certainly represent moves in the right direction for Chicago’s public schools. But we believe that such changes may not bring more than marginal improvements in student outcomes, primarily because the post-reform system does not yet differ enough from the previous one. What principals, teachers, parents, and community representatives in schools across the city are now realizing is just how difficult overhauling a mammoth urban school sys-
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Iron really is. Some are also realizing that the tools they have to work with in bringing about changes are not sufficient for the task.

In a sense, many of the “problems” now manifesting themselves two-plus years into school reform are not difficulties addressed by the act so much as those not dealt with in it. Chief among these is the self-evident fact that school reform does not address the huge social deficits that many children in Chicago bring with them to school. Youngsters with perfect attendance records from full-day kindergarten through 12th grade spend but 9 percent of their lives in school. Schools have little control over the other 91 percent. So when children spend much of that non-school time trying to survive in a dangerous neighborhood, watching television, eating poorly or failing to do homework or otherwise supplement their academic endeavors, even the best schools find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to boost student achievement.

Still centralized

We visited two such (elementary) schools in mid-October. Both are ably run by dynamic, committed and articulate principals. Both also have competent faculty members dedicated to teaching disadvantaged kids, well-running LSCs and a goodly corps of parents willing to help out. The schools are neat and the students orderly. Teachers and administrators stress the importance of education and strive to instill within the children a sense of worth and heritage. Local businesses and community organizations are also involved in various ways with these schools. In fact, most of the elements of an effective school are in place.

Yet student test scores at both schools remain way below national averages, at about the levels one has come to expect given the socio-economic background of the youngsters. This is especially troubling, because these acutely disadvantaged kids have the greatest needs and stand to benefit the most from improvements in the education system.

The huge difficulties of boosting the achievement levels of severely disadvantaged youngsters are compounded by a host of additional problems associated with the implementation of school reform. Especially vexing to school personnel are the continuing management snags of a system that is still basically centralized. School budgets remain largely in the hands of Pershing Road officials, and the task of even transmitting vital budget information to individual schools leads to delays and glitches that frustrate and constrain principals and other building-level administrators.

The financial problems besetting the entire system, which today seem virtually unsolvable, deepen the management troubles, and lead to greater discord and conflict among those involved in the school system. Especially damaging to morale and efficiency have been cuts in things like supplies, equipment and supplemental programs.

Fortunately, state Chapter 1 dollars have so far been protected from confiscation by the board, which means that many schools have been able to retain most of the additional counselors, teachers, aides and equipment they have procured with the help of such funds. A rise in these discretionary dollars in 1991-92 has even enabled some schools to compensate for cuts elsewhere in their bud-

Teachers are also now beginning to move more frequently, as reform makes it easier for principals to “recruit” staff from other schools.

Unfortunately for the school reform effort, the general superintendent and new board have seriously damaged their credibility through their handling of the budget and other matters. The board bolted the issue of school closings several months ago, and has been viewed with suspicion ever since. The superintendent has also made numerous political missteps with regard to the budget, especially in placing excessive hope in a financial bailout from Springfield long after it was clear to everyone else that this would never happen; by failing to negotiate seriously with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU); and by attempting to use the schools’ limited discretionary funds to fund the teachers’ contract. The board and superintendent are in a sort of double-bind trying to extricate themselves from an impossible budget dilemma not primarily of their own making.

One repeatedly missed opportunity

“But the system as a whole has not been redesigned to help principals accomplish all that is now expected of them.”

gets. But the overall financial situation seems grim, given the perceived needs of the system, and it’s discouraging to nearly every school community. This discouragement is worsened by the fact that no one sees a way out of the morass.

Other problems unabashed by reform involve issues of curriculum and instruction. It’s been said by so many people as to have attained the status of conventional wisdom that “school reform in Chicago thus far has been about governance, not about what happens in the classroom.” Crashing through that limitation may be akin to breaking the sound barrier for the first time, but it’s obviously essential if actual student learning is to benefit. In addition, school officials have trouble dealing with high mobility rates among their students.

for moving forward involves the implementation plan that the board is required to draw up annually and submit to the Chicago School Finance Authority. Though the revised plan for 1991-93 finally received the Authority’s OK in mid-spring 1991, the plan for 1992-94 has already been rejected twice, both times by unanimous vote of the five-member Authority. The version submitted in October and rejected in November did, however, show a significant change in philosophy from earlier plans. For the first time, it appeared as if the board recognized that its main responsibilities are to make resources available to schools, to set standards, to provide information and assistance to individual schools, to monitor progress toward key goals and objectives and to
create accountability mechanisms—and then to get out of the way and encourage LSCs and building level professional teams to determine how best to proceed. For the first time, there was explicit recognition that school reform is chiefly a bottom-up rather than a top-down enterprise.

Despite this progress at the conceptual level, the October edition of the board’s reform plan was sorely lacking when it came to implementation. The “indicators” system for monitoring progress toward statutory objectives was still weak. The training, technical assistance and other support to be provided by Pershing Road were still inadequate. Perhaps most worrisome of all, LSCs and principals were still not ceded enough authority over resources to have a reasonable chance of actually carrying out their homegrown reform plans. In other words, to this point the board has not really put its money where its mouth is.

Scant accountability

We are concerned, as well, that accountability mechanisms built into the reform law have not been working well, nor are they likely to become effective soon. While district superintendents have been working closely with troubled LSCs at some schools, no district council has yet created a serious, workable system for removing LSCs that are either too contentious to operate or whose schools are making no progress at all under reform. This is partly because the district councils, which never had well-defined roles under school reform, have been unwieldy and unable to act decisively in matters of accountability.

Nor does it appear that the new state accountability program will dramatically alter the situation. In theory, it has the potential to place a substantial number of distressed Chicago schools into receivership. But it is not clear that the state possesses the dedication or manpower to assert control over more than a handful of schools in Chicago. There is still talk of exempting Chicago from the statewide scheme.

Perhaps most unfortunately, because parents and children have so few choices to make among schools, there is no market-based mechanism for forcing schools to be accountable for their performances.

The political environment in Chicago is not contributing much to school reform progress, either. The mayor has been more standoffish toward reform than might have been expected, especially given his early and vocal support for the legislation, and given that the potential failure of the reform effort could damage him politically. On other fronts, there seems to be little sentiment within the City Council to get more involved in the process.

Reform drama, though individual aldermen are playing useful roles as school system watchdogs. And while the governor has been vocal in supporting the concept of reform in Chicago, he has made no monetary commitments to the system. It seems to us, therefore, that the impetus—the will—to continue the reform effort must come from within the larger school community in Chicago itself.

This nest of woes—the difficulties of educating severely disadvantaged kids, management glitches, funding troubles, the superintendent’s and board’s credibility gap and an unsupportive political environment—appears to us to be contributing to an ominous development: We are beginning to sense the growth of what might be called a generalized sense of exhaustion and cynicism toward the work of education in Chicago.

This is especially evident among principals, some of whom have worked diligently on behalf of reform. It is possible that they have simply been given too much to do—with their many reform-related tasks added to a list of duties they previously devoted themselves to. The new accountability placed on principals by the four-year LSC contracts is certainly beneficial to schooling in Chicago. But the system as a whole has not been redesigned to help principals accomplish all that is now expected of them. Our impression is that only a relatively small number of today’s principals can meet the full array of these expectations, and that it is exceedingly difficult for many of them simultaneously to play all the roles, handle all the issues and solve all the problems that have been unloaded upon them.

Nor are signs of this weariness coming only from administrators’ offices. The sharp reduction in the number of candidates standing for the second round of LSC elections seems further evidence of this trend. Incumbents may have been worn out and frustrated by their efforts on behalf of reform during the first phase of implementation. Some potential LSC candidates surely opted not to run because they saw how exhausting the work was. Moreover, less money was raised from private sources for this October’s LSC election, which suggests that business and philanthropic organizations may be losing steam.

Mounting fatigue

The net result of this mounting fatigue, if that is what it is, is further to erode the ability of those in each school community to generate a clear, strong, driving vision of how their school could be different—and for better—than it currently is. Instead, a host of cultural and structural factors prompt principals, teachers and parents to construe change in incremental terms, to imply that significant improvement will result from a new computer setup, a better science lab, a couple of additional counselors, an art program and a new paint job. Yet large changes in learning outcomes would be far more likely to come from new curricular and teaching strategies, rearrangements in the school day and school year, higher standards and expectations, greater parental and community involvement and the like.

Catalyst/March 1992
Possibilities of backsliding

The likelihood of a full-fledged reversion to the old, fully centralized approach to educational governance in Chicago is not great. But several things could happen that might prompt a partial reversion, in practice if not in principle. Ironically, the reform-based, "grass roots" School Board itself could move to decentralize control of decisions originally delegated to the schools. So far, it has shown little inclination to entrust LSC members with major roles in decisions about issues of budget or school closings, which suggests that it still sees itself as the primary policy-making body of the system, not as a partner with LSCs in the policy-making process. Alternatively, some seemingly sound measures may be implemented that could have the effect of restoring mechanisms characteristic of the ancien regime. For example, the superintendent could eventually convince the board and the reform community to allow many Pershing Road functions and personnel to be decentralized, and parceled out to the district offices. From an operational standpoint, this is eminently sensible: It would place key staffers closer to schools and (presumably) make them more responsive to school needs, while also strengthening district superintendent offices, now manifestly understaffed. But as reformers pointed out when the superintendent originally suggested such a scheme, this system would also provide fresh opportunities for old bureaucrats to assert greater control over schools.

Potemkin village

In addition, with most personnel funds still centralized and other monies—those controlled by LSCs and principals—much reduced, we can see the effective erosion of building-level decision making. And because the budget problems are projected only to worsen in the next couple of years, we suspect this erosion of decision-making capability may also worsen.

When we look at the overall schooling landscape in Chicago—the worsening budget restrictions, teacher contract disputes, the absence of effective accountability arrangements and the scant supply of vision—we get the impression that school reform, Chicago style, is still a sort of Potemkin village, with the outward appearance of a newly structured governance system, but which nevertheless operates much like the old. Sure, the central office has been somewhat reduced in size and power. No, the system is not quite as "political" as it was when many appointments and promotions were based on connections. Yes, many schools have been able to hire needed new teachers, counselors and administrators, as well as buy new equipment and enter into loose alliances with businesses or local social service institutions. Still and all, these represent rather marginal changes, not the kind of changes envisioned by reformers and the many others who believed the system was getting major reconstructive surgery, not just a face lift, from the reform act.

Reform not enough

Perestroika has come to the Chicago public school system. In Chicago, as in the old Soviet Union, however, perestroika has not been enough. The troubles in Chicago are akin to the bread lines, meat shortages, decrepit housing, bureaucratic gridlock and nationalist rebellions in what is now the Commonwealth of Independent States. The Russians have come to understand that marginal changes in their system will not suffice and that they must instead adopt more decisive measures—abolishing dozens of ministries, creating free markets and fostering other incentives for people to work, own property, invest and be entrepreneurial. They must also allow the growth of alternative political parties if their revolution is to succeed.

The question for Chicago, of course, is whether it really wants a genuine revolution in public education, or is willing to limp along as did the Soviet Union in the perestroika-glasnost era of the late 1980s. If Chicago wants fundamental educational change, then it must be willing to take its reform effort much farther. For starters, there should be a far more thoroughgoing decentralization of key decisions, and much greater site-level management of resources—including personnel—than at present. Little will change in schools, except on the margin, until LSCs are able to make decisions that have the effect of markedly altering the way their schools operate.

This, it seems to us, must include decisions about the school day and year, basic curricular and pedagogical philosophy, what teachers work in the school and the like. Schools, individually or in concert with others, should also be able to contract for repairs, supplies, equipment, food or cleaning services, perhaps even instructional services, thereby placing real control in the hands of each school's staff and LSC.

If and when thoroughgoing decentralization takes place, then the Pershing Road bureaucracy can get out of the business of ordering supplies, distributing books, negotiating contracts with employees and service providers and creating guidelines for implementing mandates, and instead go into the business of establishing goals, standards, indicators and accountability mechanisms, disbursing funds to individual schools, providing training and assistance to schools and fulfilling the basic reporting requirements of state and federal governments. The central office might even arrange various interventions in failing schools, but it will likely act as manager of such activities, not as the direct executor. It might also serve as information clearinghouse, informing the city about the progress (or regress) of its schools, publicizing success stories, pointing principals, teachers and parents to high quality information about education. And it could furnish some central services not easily arranged by individual schools—so long as schools are not forced to utilize those services.

Choice is needed

Such a restructuring effort, we believe, ought also include a full-fledged choice component. As LSCs become relatively autonomous, the schools they control will come to differ more and more in their educational philosophies, schedules, curricula, auxiliary services and the like. There may even be variations within individual schools, as some LSCs embrace the schools-within-schools concept. It is therefore vital that students and parents be allowed to choose the educational environment best suited to their own needs. While such a change could lead to transportation headaches, it could also enhance integration efforts and help build more unified student bodies and faculties and more engaged parents.
Indeed, a broad-based school choice scheme seems to us to be an inevitable corollary of school-site governance and decentralization.

To be successful, the education revolution in Chicago should also be joined to a major effort to integrate children's and community services with the work of the schools. With exclusive jurisdiction over just 8 or 9 percent of children's lives, schools cannot as currently constructed have much influence over the other 91 or 92 percent. By mid-afternoon, many children have been turned out onto the mean streets, into environments that work at cross purposes with schools. Many are unsupervised, poorly nourished, not given adequate health care and hardly encouraged to supplement the school's educational activities.

We believe that schools should work far more closely with community organizations, social service providers, civic groups, businesses, churches and clubs to provide a broad array of activities for youngsters, so that children's overall social support network is stronger and buttresses the work of the schools. James Coleman calls this accumulating social capital. Such arrangements—will and should differ from school to school—are more workable under a decentralized, site-based management system than under what now passes for reform in Chicago.

Who will light fuse?

What is the likelihood of such a revolution taking place? The "reform community" still seems interested in pushing decisions down to the building level, though it currently lacks the political muscle or a concrete strategy for doing this. There is evidence that many in the business community, and even some political leaders, are interested in expanding school choice, though other reform leaders and educators see it either as an evil to be avoided at all costs or as an interesting concept that simply cannot be implemented until years from now when all schools will (supposedly) have been strengthened. There is evidence that some members of the School Finance Authority and other key business leaders would like to see a far more comprehensive decentralization effort. The fact that the new state accountability program emphasizes building-level results may also nudge the system in this direction: The demand for building-level results inevitably brings pressure for greater building-level decision making. Certainly, the budget crisis will bring greater pressure to slash central office expenditures and reduce the size and role of Pershing Road. And there are hints that the teachers union may be willing to accept a

more thorough devolution of decisions to the building level, perhaps even (dare we say it?) building-level contracts.

At the moment, however, there is no consensus among the various actors on the scene to press for the next step in reform. Perhaps a political leader, whether the mayor himself or one of his potential adversaries, could restart the change process. A State Supreme Court ruling in favor of some sort of finance equalization scheme may provide the impetus for change (though it is not clear that such a ruling would have as much of a positive financial impact on Chicago as proponents hope). Or perhaps the themes being emphasized at the national level will begin to stir Chicagoans. There is certainly greater education radicalism abroad in the land these days, as more people become interested in Education Sec. Lamar Alexander's "new American schools" ideas or Chris Whittle's plans for a national chain of independent proprietary schools, and as the possibility grows that we will one day have national education standards—maybe even national exams—and as more states and school districts begin to experiment with choice plans.

Pressure for change may also be rising within the Chicago school system itself, as creative principals and LSCs come up with more radical ideas for effecting change. For example, the Dumas Elementary School LSC wants to expand its school to include a high school component, as a means of providing children with a consistent educational experience all the way through. The council believes that when students leave the salubrious Dumas environment and are channeled into one of the nearby high schools, much of the good work of Dumas is eroded. The odds of their being able to carry off this grand yet sensible plan under the current system are slim. If and when more LSCs run up against the limits of what is possible under "perestroika," they may begin agitating for a more sweeping reform.

One irony is that much radical decentralization could be accomplished without dramatic changes in the law. If the general superintendent and board simply embarked upon a path of reconstituting the central office in the manner specified above, devolving many more decisions to schools, and beginning to address the contractual and budgeting issues this would raise, then the school system could be jump-started toward the next phase of reform. And the revolution could begin.

If we are even partly right about the dim prospects of the current arrangement succeeding, and if Chicagoans do not want to bring back the old system, then they should at least consider the desirability of such a revolution. They were clearly willing to risk uncertainty during the first attempt at reform, and there is no reason to believe they might not be willing to do so again.
Reform or revolution: Response #1

Finn peddles half-truths in pursuit of vouchers

by Donald R. Moore

Checker Finn has never hesitated to shoot from the lip, a skill he has honed over the past 12 years as education advisor to Presidents Reagan and Bush and as an advocate for private school vouchers. The result is typically very bad research but very good propaganda. In fact, Finn has discovered that when he adopts the outward trappings of scientific research (without any of its substance), he can successfully market a grabbag of wild generalizations and breathtaking leaps of illogic to gain public notice and influence public policy.

The latest example of Finn’s handiwork is “Chicago Public Schools: Reform or Revolution?”—part of what the Washington-based Finn calls his “ongoing monitoring project” on Chicago school reform. In analyzing the twists and turns of Finn’s “monitoring report,” I make two major points:

First, a careful reading of Finn’s report reveals outlandish inaccuracies and inconsistencies, which illustrate Finn’s disregard for basic principles of research and simple logic. For example, to assess the school-level progress of reform he visited two low-income Chicago schools, where he found that major changes had already occurred. But he uses these visits to brand school reform a failure, because these schools have not yet made major progress toward national averages on standardized achievement tests. Yet while these schools had only eight months to show testing progress satisfactory to Finn, effective urban schools that are now considered national models typically required three to five years to exceed national norms.

Second, Finn raises some legitimate concerns about the needs of the Chicago school reform movement. The most important of these, eliminating Pershing Road obstruction of local school councils and school staffs, can be addressed in the near future by the Chicago School Finance Authority, which Finn serves as a key paid consultant. In contrast to the revolutionary rhetoric of his article, Finn’s advice to the School Finance Authority to date has been chicken-hearted. He has refused to act decisively and urge the Authority to fulfill its legal responsibilities, turning his back on the pleas of school reform groups and on the urgency of the very problems he identifies in his report. Yet like his hero Boris Yeltsin, Finn can still be redeemed by decisive action.

The world according to Checker

I got my first big taste of the quality of Finn’s monitoring project when he and his colleague, Steve Clements, interviewed me about 18 months ago. “Now the way I see it,” Finn said, “you have basically three types of schools in Chicago in terms of their response to school reform.” He then went on to explain what they were.

“Checker,” I asked him, “How many schools have you visited?”

“Four,” he replied.

Finn’s chutzpah astonished me. Four brief school visits had yielded three school “types.” He was willing to draw conclusions only a few hours after de-planing that I would have hesitated to make without months of structured investigation. Yet in preparing their most recent “monitoring report,” Finn and Clements apparently decided that visiting even four schools was too taxing. The only thing they reveal for sure about their methods in preparing “Reform or Revolution?” is that they visited two of Chicago’s 540 schools. Apparently, they also chatted with some other people, but they never share with us anything about their overall data-gathering plan.

Based on this mysterious process, the authors dash off a wide range of sweeping conclusions. I analyze just one of them for purposes of illustration: Finn’s assertion that Chicago reform “may not bring more than marginal improvements in student outcomes.”

This is research?

Students of Finn’s work must pay careful attention to the little half-truths he uses to lead the reader astray. Finn begins his report by asserting that “the formal structures specified in the reform act have all been in place for some time.” For those school-level structures that were designed to have a direct effect on student achievement, this assertion is simply false. It was only eight months between the time when the first school improvement and school budget plans were in place in September 1990 and the most recent student achievement testing in spring 1991. Further, for the 50 percent of schools that chose a principal in spring 1991, the most recent student testing occurred before the principal actually began his or her contract. However, Finn starts the reform clock shortly after the reform law was passed; thus, he is prepared to make a near-final judgment about the success of Chicago school reform based on student achievement results covering the first eight months of full school-level implementation.

Building on the misimpression that school-level reform has been in full swing for several years, Finn and Clements then describe their visits to two low-income elementary schools. One would think that the progress they found would have left them turning handsprings:

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"Both [school] are ably run by dynamic, committed and articulate principals. Both also have competent faculty members dedicated to teaching disadvantaged kids, well-running LSCs and a goodly corps of parents willing to help out. The schools are neat and the students orderly. Teachers and administrators stress the importance of education, and strive to instill within the children a sense of self-worth and heritage. Local businesses and community organizations are also involved in various ways with these schools. In fact, most of the elements of an effective school are in place."

These results are extremely encouraging for two reasons. First, when Finn headed up educational research for Ronald Reagan, his office produced a handbook called What Works, which reviewed what was generally accepted by researchers about the educational practices that boost student achievement for low-income students. The very types of practices that Finn observed in these two schools were the ones described in What Works.

Takes years, not months

Second, school-based management strategies carried out in other cities, like Miami, have almost never brought about the kinds of comprehensive changes in school practice that Finn observed in these two unnamed Chicago schools. Chicago school reform was deliberately designed to correct for the weaknesses of reform documented in other cities—mainly by making the transfer of authority to the local level both significant and specific and by giving parents a key decision-making role. Apparently, judging from Finn’s school observations, the strategy is working.

But no. Despite the fact that these schools have made major changes, their effectiveness, in Finn’s topsy-turvy logic, actually convinces him that Chicago reform is failing. Why?

Because “the student test scores in both schools remain way below national averages, at about the levels one has come to expect given the socioeconomic background of the youngsters.” As noted above, the (unspecified) scores that Finn is using to judge that Chicago reform is probably a failure reflect, at most, the results of the first eight months of full school-level implementation. In contrast, studies of urban schools that have succeeded in raising achievement scores above national averages show that this process typically takes three to five years from the date that serious school-level implementation begins.

Finn’s sweeping conclusion about Chicago reform, based on a cursory review of achievement scores at two schools, highlights once again the sloppiness of his research methods. He did not bother to test his conclusion by analyzing statewide school-by-school achievement results for even the short time period on which he bases his judgement. We have recently begun to analyze the school-by-school test results for the state’s reading achievement test (the IGAP).

This analysis indicates that 23 K-8 elementary schools have made gains of at least 15 points at both the sixth- and eighth-grade levels in reading achievement over the two-year period from 1989 to 1991. Further, 15 of these 23 schools serve 50 percent to 100 percent low-income students. The median school in this group gained about 30 points at each grade level. These schools have not made the impossible jump that Finn demands in less than a year. But they have made solid consistent progress that would put most above the national average in three to five years, if their current rate is maintained. Schools like these merit further careful study. What are the educational practices of these schools like? Have any posted gains by manipulating results? Will the gains continue when students are tested again this spring? Will additional improving schools emerge when everyone has had a more reasonable length of time to make changes? For any serious researcher, the inquiry process about student achievement in Chicago is just beginning. But this enterprise holds no interest for Finn.

‘Presto chango’

While one could fill many pages with explanations of Finn’s deceptive rhetoric, the issue analyzed above clearly indicates his basic strategy. He begins with a few accurate facts or half-truths (for example, that the Chicago school reform law was passed over three years ago and that low-income schools Finn visited haven’t yet jumped above the national average in achievement). He then constructs a pyramid of conclusions with little relationship to the original facts. These conclusions are not aimed at generalizing accurately from the original data, but at using the aura of data-gathering as a cover for proving what he wants to prove at a given moment. Thus, watch closely for example, as schools that are carrying out an impressive array of effective educational practices become decisive evidence that school reform is failing. Presto change. The world according to Checker. To cite just two additional examples:

- Finn asserts that school discretionary dollars created by Chicago school reform are “limited,” although, in fact, the average school received $350,000 in new totally discretionary dollars this year, as compared with the year the reform law took effect.
- Finn asserts that a real reform program would allow principals to
select the teachers who work in their schools. However, the current law already gives the principal the legal right to select teachers for all vacant positions, and several of the schools with whom we work have already replaced more than half their teachers.

Finance Authority role

Finn’s importance to Chicago school reform extends far beyond whatever media impact he may have through polemics like “Reform or Revolution?” Finn is one of two paid educational consultants to the Finance Authority, which has critical oversight powers under the reform law (a fact that he omits in his report).

Amidst his overblown and hasty conclusions, Finn has fixed on one set of genuine problems that have vexed the implementation of reform: the obstruction that local school councils and school staff encounter from the central Board of Education and from Pershing Road. While basic shifts toward school autonomy have been accomplished, Finn accurately notes the demoralizing impact of Pershing Road’s rearguard action to undermine school reform—the bureaucratic confusion, the delays in receiving materials and processing staff credentials, and the like.

The drafters of the reform law anticipated such obstruction, and thus gave the Finance Authority strong oversight powers to stop it. Each year since the law took effect, the Board of Education has been legally required to submit a systemwide plan, showing how they will restructure Pershing Road. If they do not develop a satisfactory plan, the Finance Authority has the power to draft its own plan, in collaboration with local school councils if they wish. The board is then required to carry out the plan, and the Authority has draconian powers to discipline anyone who obstructs the plan’s implementation.

In fact, the general superintendent has stalled for three years without developing a meaningful plan, and reform groups have repeatedly and unsuccessfully urged the Authority to develop its own plan in collaboration with local school councils. Reformers have pointed out that as long as the Authority simply continues to reject the board’s plan, but is unwilling to develop its own, there is no downside for the board. The board merely continues to develop plan after plan, perfectly content when they are rejected. When Checker Finn became a key consultant to the Authority last summer, reform groups brought their case to him and urged him to recommend some meaningful action.

In “Reform or Revolution?” Finn likens the situation in Chicago to recent events in the Soviet Union: “The Russians have come now to understand that marginal changes in their system will not suffice, and that they must instead adopt more drastic measures. ... The question for Chicago, of course, is whether it really wants a three months of further redrafting by Pershing Road bureaucrats.

The gaps between paragraphs in Finn’s writings are mirrored by the chasm between his words and his deeds. Some believe that his “monitoring project” on Chicago school reform is just a ploy to discredit the most promising public school reform in process in the country, so that he can clear the path for his real priority—a private school voucher program. Say it isn’t so, Checker. Or better yet, show us.

If Finn really identifies with the urgent need to stop Pershing Road obstructionism and wants to help make Chicago school reform work, we will see a changed man in February, when the Board comes

“For those of us who want Pershing Road obstruction to end, a key question is whether Checker Finn wants a real revolution in Chicago.”

back with the umpteenth version of its systemwide plan. We will see a movie version of “Reform or Revolution?”—with Finn battling the Evil Empire. We will see Finn exhort the moneymen and lawyers on the Finance Authority to reject the board’s systemwide plan, make common cause with the people and join in solidarity to restructure Pershing Road once and for all by writing their own plan.

And on that day, a new leader will emerge, and all of his bogus monitoring projects and devious rhetorical tricks will be forgiven. And he will be called tribune of the people: Checker Yeltsin.

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Reform or revolution: Response #2

‘Nest of woes’ springs from racism

by William Ayers

Although they employ the somewhat used metaphor of perestroika and revolution in the old Soviet Union to describe reform efforts in Chicago’s public schools, Chester E. Finn Jr. and Stephen K. Clements, two self-described revolutionaries, ask a good question: “What would be the elements of a bona fide revolution [in Chicago’s schools] ... and what are the odds of it ... actually occurring?” They ask the question because they “suspect that reform Chicagostyle may not succeed if it remains on its present course.” Their pessimism stems from what they call a “nest of woes,” including “the difficulties of educating severely disadvantaged kids, management glitches, funding troubles, the superintendent’s and board’s credibility gap and an unsupportive political environment.” The bona fide revolution they have in mind would attack this nasty nest with “greater educational radicalism”: for example, the New American Schools project of U.S. Sec. of Education Lamar Alexander, Chris Whittle’s plans for a national chain of independent for-profit schools and national educational standards—“maybe even national exams.” What shall we make of their statement of the problem? And what of their solutions? What is to be done?

First among the problems facing reform, according to Finn and Clements, is “the self-evident fact that school reform does not address the huge social deficits that many children in Chicago bring with them to school.” True, as far as it goes; in the minds of many Chicagoans, school reform is only one facet of a larger struggle for social justice and simple fairness. But their assertion does not lead Finn and Clements to a deeper analysis of the social inequities underlying the urban school collapse, nor to an action plan to overcome larger social problems linked to school crises. Not at all.

Justifying failure

Instead we are treated to a long list of cliches used to justify school failure: “When children spend much ... time trying to survive in a dangerous neighborhood, watching television, eating poorly or failing to do homework ... even the best schools find it difficult, perhaps impossible, to boost student achievement.” Finn and Clements describe children by their putative circumstances, carefully avoiding the obvious fact that they are referring to African-American and Hispanic youngsters and families. Simultaneously, the authors manage to lower our expectations for school success. It’s not the schools that need improving, they imply, it’s the kids: Give us a better kid and we’ll give you a better school. It is worth highlighting the oldest, most seductively simple, most often repeated and yet demonstrably incorrect excuse for school failure: With “these kids” even the best schools find it impossible to boost student achievement.

The late Ronald Edmonds, a researcher at Harvard University and a founder of the effective schools movement, long ago asked a question that should be asked of Finn and Clements today: “How many effective schools would you have to see to be persuaded of the educability of poor children?” He went on:

“If your answer is more than one, then I submit that you have reasons of your own for preferring to believe that basic pupil performance derives from family background instead of school response to family background. ... Whether or not we will ever effectively teach the children of the poor is probably far more a matter of politics than of social science, and that is as it should be.”

What Finn and Clements so clearly miss is the fact that these youngsters, whom they define exclusively by their reputed deficits, also bring remarkable strengths, abilities, skills, know-how and assets with them to school. The most exciting projects I see daily in the Chicago schools are those that are based on a belief not only that all children can learn, but also that the most sensible entry point for teaching and learning is the knowledge, interests, aspirations and skills of the learners themselves.

The Algebra Project, for example, offers the city transit system as a takeoff point and opportunity for access to algebra. The Illinois Writing Project builds upon the experiences of children as a step toward a love affair with language. And Albany Park Multicultural Academy taps the cultural knowledge, language and music of its children through the production of an exciting news program for cable television. Each project assumes an intelligence in children; each acknowledges as an asset the experiences and capacities children bring to school; each builds from the known to the unknown, from the immediate to deeper and wider ways of knowing.

Another of Finn and Clements’ woes is “finding troubles,” an interesting euphemism for misdirected funds, bloated bureaucracy, fiscal collapse and the failure of government to fund education fairly. They say the “financial problems ... seem virtually insoluble.” Nonsense. The way out is to drastically change the way we finance education in this city and in this country. One of the root causes of failure in Chicago schools, as elsewhere, is the inequitable distribution of...
resources. Chicago schools actually need more—they serve over half of the poorest youngsters in Illinois and 80 percent of its bilingual children—and yet Chicago receives less. The disadvantages faced by Chicago youngsters are even more acute when you begin to calculate things like the lack of full access to school buildings, the wider community, transportation and complimentary social services, such as libraries and parks. Financing schools through property taxes is a clear way to structure privilege and oppression into the very heart of education, and that will have to change if we are serious about educating all children. The so-called equity funding bills being considered in Illinois and other states are not the answer because they don’t go nearly far enough. Equity implies fairness, not sameness. Chicago’s children need more, and get less.

The link between these two “woes,” the assumption that family background is decisive and the inequitable distribution of resources, is racism—all the structures of privilege and oppression tied to race and backed up by force and violence and power, structures that are the roots of prejudice.

Point of agreement

Finally a word about “management glitches” and “credibility gaps.” Of course, a strategy for basic change must involve shifting power from the self-interested, survivorist bureaucracy that currently controls the system to the people the schools are supposed to serve, youngsters, their families and their communities. The attempt to end a long tradition of failure and a perpetual state of paralysis by bringing school decision making closer to families and communities is the very heart of the current reform effort in Chicago.

It is no surprise, then, that power is being contested, or that each substantive decision of a local school is attacked or undermined by the center, or that the central office continues to dictate policy and to punish those who resist. (Remember the now infamous case at Herbert Elementary School, where the central office fought tooth and nail against the eminently sensible decision of the local school council to close one custodial position in order to free up funds for building repairs.) On this point, Finn, Clements and I can, perhaps, agree.

Finn and Clements seem to embrace decentralization and community control. But look more closely. They claim that a “problem addressed by reform” is teacher mobility—not the old mobility of teachers being bumped and moved anonymously and interchangeably through the system, but a “new problem” of principals recruiting like-minded teachers to create new schools. While they offer no evidence, the impulse to see this supposed trend as a problem rather than an opportunity is to miss a guiding feature of reform.

Centralizers in disguise

Similarly, to raise an alarm over the impression that “no district council has yet created a serious, workable system for removing LSCs that are either too contentious to operate or whose schools are making no progress” belies an avowed interest in local control. And most important of all, to champion decentralization and community control of schools in a few areas while promoting the further centralization of the main features of education—curriculum, instruction and evaluation—is mischievous at best.

A decentralized, radically democratic school system would certainly include an upsurge of site-specific curriculum projects—for example, multi-cultural education in one school and a focus on Afro-centrism or Hispanic heritage in another, which Finn has opposed repeatedly in other settings. Finn and Clements take the side of decentralization and community control as a tactic, but in important ways they remain centralizers. Their gleeful endorsement of national exams is a case in point. Given all the problems and difficulties faced by our schools, and given the expense, intensity and extensiveness of the existing testing programs, what possible explanation is there for pouring even more of our scarce education dollars into a new national test? In a recent article in the New York Times, professor and author Theodore Sizer of Brown University gets right to the point, asking:

“Who sets the standards and by what right? Who in this democracy, elected or appointed, shall be qualified to speak for all parents, students and school people? Can [national] examinations be designed to test what we value most in a student? Can the habits of thoughtful behavior and ability to address new situations be tested in a standardized way? How will a national exam insure fairness and equity?”

It appears to me that Finn and Clements want to decentralize the problems, but centralize the key means to solving those problems.

Larger agenda

“Reform or Revolution?” is a collection of quick impressions and opinions, some insightful, some off the mark, most derivative. Finn and Clements never criticize the recent federal or state policies and spending priorities that have shaped and intensified the current crisis in urban schools, policies Finn had a heavy hand in creating when he served as undersecretary of education. Finn, with his reputed “national perspective” in fact never deals seriously with Washington, D.C. or national policy. Finn and Clements point to some obvious weaknesses in reform, but like their comrade, former Sec. of Education William Bennett, they have a larger agenda involving “full-blown choice” (read vouchers) and the privatization of public schools. Many Chicagoans have feared all along that school reform would be a stalking horse for destroying public schools, and a close reading of Finn and Clements lends credence to that fear.

In Chicago, the task remains to struggle in a principled way for the right of families and communities to control their own institutions, to resist incursions from the central office, to fight attempts to dismantle and destroy the schools. It is to link the struggle for democratic schools to an even larger effort to build a fairer, more just society. And it is to build schools that allow all youngsters access to the complex literacies of our culture in order to become more powerful actors in our society and our world. There is much to be done.
Turnout for the 1991 local school council elections was down compared to 1989. Budget cuts, the specter of a teacher strike and the likelihood of more school closings sapped morale. Despite these problems, CATALYST's diarists see signs of progress. Old and new LSC members began working together, combining experience with a fresh perspective and enthusiasm. More students began taking advantage of after-school tutoring programs. Teachers agreed to waive union rules on work schedules in order to accumulate extra time for staff development. LSCs formed booster clubs to raise money for their schools. These are among the stories in the following excerpts from diaries being kept anonymously by seven principals, teachers, students and others involved in the day-to-day process of school reform.

Looking beyond schoolhouse door

RAYMOND, parent

Oct. 14 State Sen. Alice Palmer sponsored a forum on public school financing at the Chicago Urban League. I think this was very productive. Although I had hoped to see more local school council (LSC) members involved, the breadth of involvement and community interest was most encouraging.

I have been personally impressed by Sen. Palmer's aggressive and stilted support of the public schools and her willingness to listen to LSC members' advice on school improvement legislation, including public school funding.

I have long thought that school funding—matters of funding equity for the public schools—is the priority issue underlying our goal of effective schools.

In this regard I am stimulated by Jonathan Kozol's latest book, Savage Inequalities, which focuses on case studies of the levels of support for inner-city schools relative to the more affluent suburbs. Kozol offers some compelling reasons why society should commit greater levels of monetary support for education in the public schools.

One major criticism of the current Board of Education is its reluctance to support a "no closings, no cuts, no vouchers" position and to press harder for full and adequate funding for the Chicago public schools (CPS).

My council thinks it ridiculous and socially irresponsible to expect school improvement efforts to work while cutting the CPS budget by hundreds of millions of dollars this year, again next year and yet again the third year. The public has a civic obligation to our children to make available to them the best education possible. Further, we cannot expect school reform to work under continued massive budget cuts. It is demoralizing to LSCs, particularly in low-income poor areas, when Pershing Road pulls the rug out from under programs and staffing the councils have carefully planned, budgeted and voted into existence.

This immediate CPS budget deficit problem must be attacked not only in the present ad hoc ways but at the level of fundamental "savage inequalities" as a statewide issue.

Oct. 25 The LSC installation, reception, service recognition and annual report activities were excellent and well-attended by parents, teachers and community residents. It was heart-warming to see the response to the call for renewed dedication to build our school as an effective, viable learning center for our children.

It was refreshing to get candid reports from the Chicago Teachers Union representative, the principal and the LSC chair on the crises facing the public schools and the education program designed for our children. I think our LSC will be responsive, if not effective, in setting policy, over-
Nov. 14 Our principal will be in the building regardless of the strike. The principal has warned the union delegate that no illegal acts will be tolerated. The principal has warned the staff that the police will be called in.

Nov. 15 Everyone believes a strike will happen. Many staff members thought that with the reform initiatives this would never happen again. I am not in agreement with a statement that Mayor Daley is responsible for this latest financial and educational crisis. I put the entire blame on Supt. Kimbrough and on Pres. Bristow of the Board of Education. They have controlled the reins of reform. They have padded their own agendas. They have not worked with reform organizations. They have managed to intimidate teachers. They have lowered morale to the lowest point since the long strike in 1987. Blame should also not be put on the shoulders of the Interim School Board; reform would not have been in place without them.

Nov. 18 Another year of crying wolf. I am glad to be back at work. The teachers are relieved but considerably angry. The settlement was one of merely pennies. The low morale will last a lifetime. The board could have taken care of a 3 percent raise three months ago. The union came out with just about nothing. We'll have to remember this episode when the vote for union president comes up.

LAZARUS, teacher

Nov. 11 The possibility of a strike next week is very real. How do we explain the strike to parents who will come to pick up their children's grades this week? Students in class express an interest in the strike issues. It is difficult to defend our demands for a 7 percent raise when I know that the last of the major industries in our area is expected to go out of business at the beginning of 1992. Where will that leave the parents of these children? Many are already working two jobs at minimum wage, often in suburbs or far distant parts of the city. Meanwhile, relics of the old industries we thought were as enduring as the pyramids have been bulldozed into oblivion and erased from the collective memory, despite the fact that these industries helped win both world wars. The economic effect can be easily measured, but who can determine the psycho-social effect of this loss?

Nov. 14 Parents come to pick up students' grades. Two-thirds of the parents of my division students come for grades. I always look forward to seeing them. In some cases, students translate for parents who do not know English but have a deep concern for their children's achievements at school.

Nov. 15 The last school day before the scheduled strike. An article in the union newspaper reminds us there have been nine strikes since the union won the right of collective bargaining. During one strike, I recall, we served 1% milk with our coffee to highlight the insult of the board's offer of one-half of 1 percent salary increase after we had been out on strike for several days.

A note posted on the counter with the time sheets informs teachers who wish to cross the picket line where to report on Monday.

Suspicions

ELIZABETH, teacher

Dec. 2 The members of our LSC are not able to discuss sums of money like $100,000 without thinking someone is getting rich. They have no idea what salaries cost for 80 people or what it costs to purchase toilet paper for upwards of 800 persons per day. They are incapable of visualizing realistically expenditures of this magnitude. That is, the majority of the LSC simply cannot comprehend what it takes to fund a large urban school. Therefore, some of them are convinced that once you're into such huge money numbers, someone is scamming and profiting. And it must be the principal wheeling and dealing! Give me a break. Our principal doesn't have a larcenous bone in his body.

CARLOS, teacher

Jan. 9 Most parent members of the LSC are also volunteers in the school. This is a mixed blessing. They are apparently aware of every move made during working hours. These parents are supposed to be working, following a schedule given to 'school volunteers. Instead, they are in the hallways, the lunchroom, everywhere-listening and passing around comments about everyone, especially those they don't particularly like. This has, of course, often caused friction with some staff members. These parents also have a good working relationship with the principal. This too is a mixed blessing. It has given them credibility and a certain amount of power over the staff. When they bring complaints about teachers and programs to the principal, the principal is very polite, hears their discon-
tents very sympathetically, clearly feels comfortable with their gossipy and critical style and allows them to continue in this way.

Furthermore, aside from this principal-parent alliance, which creates obvious principal-faculty tension, there was already a principal-faculty rift. The LSC teacher representatives, who are also active members of the professional personnel advisory committee (PPAC), do not like the principal's method of administration. They have been in the school longer than the principal and carry much support from the rest of the faculty. In fact, the school is run by a staff committee working in conjunction with the principal's administrative staff. As a result of this setup, many old-timers feel left out. The biggest problem with the teachers, especially the two teacher reps, is that they seem to be against the principal's proposals simply because the principal proposes them. They fight every administrative move tooth and nail. Actually, the school programs are very successful. Achievement is beginning to grow in the lower grades. Teacher expectations and staff development centering on teaching and learning skills are the priority. A quality school is the final expectation.

Hidden meetings, agendas

ELIZABETH, teacher

Nov. 16 The PPAC chair, who is also one of the teacher representatives on the LSC, “arranged” for a training session for PPAC members after school. I qualify “arranged” because he said he would try and line up a session. No date was mentioned; it was never posted either. When did I find out about it? At lunch on the meeting day when he stuck his head in my door and informed me there would be a session on decision making that evening. I was unable to attend. There were actually only three persons there, the two LSC teacher reps and their good friend.

Maybe it was intended to be a private session.

Nov. 23 The PPAC had another training session, which again was not announced until the day of the meeting. These workshops are allegedly on decision making. The folks who run the PPAC have obviously made a decision to conduct these workshops to the exclusion of most of the members!

CARLOS, teacher

Jan. 13 The PPAC has become the center of controversy between the principal and a group of teachers. The PPAC chair has suggested often that the principal should not be present at PPAC meetings. The principal continues to attend all meetings. There have also been accusations and counteraccusations about the source of certain documents, about expenditures, etc. There are many hidden agendas in place!

Morale low everywhere

OLIVIA, principal

Jan. 13 We received a draft copy of the board guidelines on closings and consolidations and were asked to provide input on the document. Interestingly, the final guidelines approved by the board in December 1991 do not contain any enrollment specifics. However, the cutoff number widely circulated is 350—I.e., if a school has an enrollment less than 350 it is a candidate for closing or consolidation. We have substantially fewer than 350 students.

Perhaps board members and staffers who make decisions assume that if they don't mention their plans to us we will not think about what's coming. Maybe they assume that if they don't mention consolidation to us we will believe the possibility no longer exists. Wrong, very wrong. They insult our intelligence, and they treat us as less than professionals (but, then, don't they always?) when they do not include us in the decision-making process and do not keep us informed.

My staff is hungry for information. Because of our low enrollment, they know consolidation is almost a sure thing. How will this affect them? Will we have a choice about which school to join? Will we maintain control of our budget? Will our building become overcrowded to help ease the overcrowding at the bigger school? Will we be able to maintain our programs? Will our staff be subjected to moves to the bigger building? What will happen to our principal?

We are told (unofficially, of course) that in the event of a consolidation, the attendance boundaries for both schools involved would be merged, both LSCs would be dissolved and both principals would be out of a job. An interim principal would be selected to oversee new LSC elections, and the new LSC would select a new principal. There is, of course, no guarantee that the displaced principal would end up getting the job because it would be opened up to everyone with a Type 75 certificate. Not knowing who the new person might be gives my faculty cause for concern.

Jan. 14 Last summer, when asked what would happen to a principal whose school was closed or consolidated, Supt. Kimbrough blithely responded that the individual would be unemployed. Unlike teachers, principals have lost tenure and all seniority.

Since this most recent budget crisis, the board has made many cuts at central and district offices. Some whose jobs were eliminated were able to find other jobs within the system. Many others were not.

The system has made no effort to keep the best and the brightest. Many good, competent, knowledgeable people have left the school system in the last 16 months. Not everyone who left should have been asked to stay, nor am I suggesting that only the incompetent, politically well-connected remain. What I am suggesting is that too many very capable people have left the school system recently, and their departure leaves the system weaker and less able to deal with the present crisis.

Of those who have left the CPS in the last 36 months, many were voluntary departures. I personally know several people who, fed up and frustrated with the system, were able to find employment in the suburbs. As I write this, several more colleagues are actively looking to get out. Many of these people are top-notch administrators. Their departure is indeed a "brain drain."

A few words about the current
CPS climate. According to a central office staffer who has been around for almost 25 years, “This is the worse I’ve ever seen it.” Morale has never been lower. Many CPS employees are afraid they will be next on the hit list. Rumors are rampant because official information is not forthcoming or it is unreliable. The general feeling among many people I talk to is that the system is cold and uncaring. Consequently, some (who knows how many?) do less than their best because there is no apparent reward for doing one’s best. This is not unique to central office. The morale problem is just as bad in the local schools.

I am convinced our morale problems stem not so much from our budget deficit as from our collective moral deficits. The CPS lacks leadership and moral fiber. Its “leaders” lack the vision to lead and to inspire its work force.

The board’s decision not to extend the same 3 percent salary increase to the principals as it negotiated with the teachers union has also contributed to low morale. Money talks. Board members and the superintendent pay lip service to the importance of the building principal. We are told we are the key to constructive change. They say we make the difference. But … no raise. “If you don’t like it,” we were told, “you can go back to teaching.” Right. For CPS, of course.

Progress

LAZARUS, teacher

Nov. 17 An LSC agenda-planning meeting. The absence of tension between administration and council members is noticeable. We begin to get a sense of direction. There is the faint hint of a pulse in the patient, indicating that health might be regained after a long convalescence. Our ability to act, lost during the previous years, may well be restored.

Dec. 4 An LSC agenda meeting. Although the meeting is scheduled for early on a work-day morning, a quorum is present. Problems are discussed. There is an openness in the tone of the meeting, a sense of a difficult road ahead but confidence that solutions will be found together without the obstructions we experienced earlier. The new administration is willing to put the problems out on the table for discussion. Nothing is taboo. Nothing is hidden or obfuscated. So far, there is no reason to tip toe around anyone. We all appear to be singing from the same song sheet. We can make this school a better place for children to learn.

PUD, student

Nov. 20 In an effort to raise funds for handling some of the school’s minor expenses, our local school council has formed a booster club. Its members are the council members and others who wish to participate. We hope this increases parent involvement at the school. The club meets immediately after each LSC meeting. Its purpose is to raise funds for various needs, especially our incentive programs.

For example, each month every student from each class who has perfect attendance for that month is privileged to place his or her name in a drawing; each student’s name drawn receives a $50 U.S. savings bond.

Jan. 4 In December, the club hosted an all-school dance, which was quite successful.

CARLOS, teacher

Dec. 4 Our LSC met for the third time since its election. It is a very interesting LSC. The parent members are well-known in the school. Most also serve as parent volunteers. They seem to have a very good working relationship with the principal. The LSC chair is the chair from the previous LSC. She works during the day and not as visible as she used to be. One community member is well-connected to the business community, and the other member seems to be politically well-connected. I feel they both can be helpful to the school.

Dec. 9 I sense this will be a very well-informed council. They have been attending training sessions. Many times our school has been the best represented school.

We have been working in teams reviewing the SIP to make sure all objectives are being met or are in the process of being met. It is very gratifying to see a school where staff development is a priority. Our LSC understands this. Many times when the principal meets with staff to discuss pertinent issues, LSC members who happen to be around the school are invited to sit in. They often express important points of view. Most of their comments focus on immediate action. They want things to be taken care of now. It is sometimes difficult to explain a more holistic approach to running the school.

Dec. 12 The fruits of some of the programs implemented by the principal and approved by the LSC are beginning to appear. We have an excellent school band, made up of fourth- and fifth-graders. We still have many students who are reading at low levels, but materials and supplies are plentiful. All of our students have books. The coordination of our reading and math programs is going well, and the principal is monitoring these programs closely.

Now we are concentrating on staff development. Every staff member finished an entire course on teacher expectations.

Dec. 19 Our school and our programs have been noticed in 1991. TV stations have contacted us to take part in specials regarding education. Stories about our school appeared in the newspaper. Other educators have approached our staff for advice. Most of all, the parents and community members have been in touch with us at all times.

It is a feeling that we are doing something to turn around the low levels of achievement of the last 15 years. We are also turning around the low expectations of our staff. We are expecting the best.

Jan. 8 We had a wonderful holiday season thanks to the members of the LSC who donated their time and efforts to gather resources for gifts for every student in the school. It was an experience the children will never forget.

ROBIN, observer

Jan. 18 The principal of School B is very high on the new LSC. A combination of new and old members makes for both continuity and fresh enthusiasm, and there's a good feeling of wanting to work together.
Attendance has been excellent—as a rule no more than one member absent at each meeting. The council values the teachers in the school and wants to work as a team with them. For example, a teacher I talked to the other day applauded a council member who had supplied materials for a unit she was teaching her class. And parent members came up with the idea to plan a Teacher Appreciation Day. Because this is the same school where two years ago a parent said to a university representative, “I hope you’re going to straighten out these teachers,” maybe something has changed!

A persistent problem remains: what to do about translations. At LSC meetings themselves, a positive solution has been found—the bilingual teachers are asked to take turns serving as interpreters, which has the additional benefit of introducing a wider group of teachers to the work of the LSC. However, translating the council minutes and other documents can’t be so easily accomplished, and the group doesn’t want to spend its limited funds to pay translators.

The council is also concerned that not many parents other than its own members are involved in the school, and that very few visitors attend council meetings. Perhaps this is a function of the placid environment that has prevailed this year; the LSC meetings I attended last year where there was a good turnout of visitors were those at which the visitors had bones to pick with either the council itself or the administration of the school.

CARLOS, teacher

Jan. 15 We just completed a major task. We had to translate our school improvement plan into Spanish at the request of our LSC members. This turned out to be quite a job. The words used in the SIP are very technical. Most of us had never written a plan in Spanish. The great thing is that we learned together. Words like goal, objective, timetables, disciplines, etc. are now forever printed in our minds.

ROBIN, observer

Dec. 22 Restructuring the school day (see CATALYST, November 1991, Diary entry page 34). Thanks to a waiver from the union contract—one of the union contributions to school reform—the teachers at School A this year began teaching 10 minutes early each day, to accumulate time for staff development and planning. They have now had three afternoon sessions, and it seems they are almost getting used to the idea.

The first hour of the afternoon is set aside for individual preparation and the rest is planned by a committee. When I asked today what was planned, I was told they had decided to have meetings of the PPAC committee but found that several of the tasks the PPAC had set itself at the beginning of the year had been accomplished; thus, the committees had no work to do. “So we have accomplished something!” one committee member said. They have planned and instituted an after-school homework room (which to their surprise is popular with children as well as teachers) and an after-school “behavior” room, and are studying adaptations to the report card.

Looking at the results of the teacher survey sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (see CATALYST, October 1991), School B’s teachers found that their school was behind other similar schools in its work on curriculum and decided to use restructured-day time for a committee to begin work on the curriculum. The other issue that has been on people’s minds is the question of tracking, especially whether the school’s classes for gifted children are really beneficial. So a committee met on that issue.

I was particularly interested that one of the teachers on the homogeneous grouping committee took the initiative to phone the Chicago Teachers’ Center and ask a staff member, known to the teachers through previous work in the school, if she could come to facilitate the discussion. To people accustomed to managing their own work, this might seem a small matter, but for teachers I believe it’s an encouraging sign. Identifying a problem—in this case the emotionally charged issue of homogeneous groups versus heterogeneous groups—moving to solve it without looking to an authority is a real breakthrough.

Jan. 18 The issue of the year may turn out to be the provision of classes for gifted students. There is dissatisfaction on the part of teachers of regular students with the fact that the best students are taken from their classes, where they could serve as role models, and placed in special classes. Of course, there is also the standard resentment, based on the perception that the teachers of gifted classes have an easier job.

If any change in current policy is to be made it will have to be done through the LSC, and it will be interesting to see how the council deals with such a difficult issue.

RAYMOND, parent

Jan. 26 A clear departure from prior board- and CPS-staff-sponsored training for LSC members was held yesterday and earlier on Jan. 11. One reason participants left with the impression that the sessions were productive is because LSC members and community activists close to the school reform process were involved in the planning and in the facilitation
of the day-long conferences.

The sessions were pragmatic and tailored to the concerns of LSC members, incumbents as well as new members. The sessions also allowed for more interaction by LSC members. Practical experience and lessons were shared.

Those responsible for this new collaborative approach are to be commended.

Fumble

RAYMOND, parent

Oct. 16 Election of our LSC officers was scheduled for tonight. However, the principal received a notice from Pershing Road urging elections and installations be postponed because the board has not yet officially notified the teacher representatives. So, there you have it. Already the method by which teachers were selected has affected the LSCs. We had hoped to get off to a great, early start.

Miles to go

LAZARUS, teacher

Nov. 11 For the past two years our school seriously considered applying to become part of the Coalition of Essential Schools network, but the faculty was divided and, to my disappointment, narrowly voted against participation.

I like the Coalition’s focus on the teacher as the expert in the process of learning. Under these conditions, education becomes a cooperative venture directed more by serendipity and discovery than by specified measurable outcomes. On the other hand, the school system requires specified measurable outcomes shepherded by lesson plans in the content area with what appears to be the goal of developing uniform units with a lockstep character to them. No serendipity.

The state does not help to resolve the problem of diametrically opposed goals. Goals listed in the Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP) materials are general enough, yet teachers are not allowed to teach “off certificates” as they have in the past. To teach English, one must be certified in English, not history or math. Where is the place of the generalist?

Two facts from Breathing Space: Living and Working at a Comfortable Pace in a Speed-up Society by Jeff Davidson: more books and articles are published in a day than could be read in a lifetime; one edition of the Sunday New York Times contains more information items than the typical adult in 1892 was exposed to in an entire life! What are the implications for the way we teach or are required to write lesson plans?

As members of our faculty struggle to meet deadlines for the lesson plans assigned to them at our school, they are faced with the perennial problem that the format is too constraining for the content of their courses. And what value is a text reference when there is no text to teach from?

Because there are no other materials available in a particular topic area for one class, I am reproducing materials with a 1969 copyright date. The materials came to our school when money was plentiful for the schools. Materials were also less expensive then. Now that the need is greater, we have less in the way of funding to provide for those needs.

Nov. 17 The newspaper reports that central office spent $200 for ink for Supt. Kibbrough’s use. (Board Pres. Bristow says it was only $37.) Our high school department, with more than a half dozen teachers, each serving about 140 students, has been allocated less than $90 this school year for materials and supplies. That is for the entire department. An office supply catalog lists a cartridge refill for the most expensive fountain pen at $1.59, if purchased singly and not in bulk. One ream of duplicator paper costs $5.33, if not purchased in bulk. Many reams of paper could easily be bought with the superintendent’s ink money, and that paper could be used to produce those homemade texts our teachers are forced to rely on.

Nov. 22 At both the CTU meeting and our local PPAC meeting, requests are made for teacher training and attendance at national educational conferences. There is a tremendous thirst in this area. Teachers want to be able to keep up with the latest materials and methods. Businesses do this with their employees. While some school districts regularly send teachers to national educational conferences, the sheer size of our district prohibits this.

So, although we desperately need the training, we will not receive it. We fall farther behind. Some of our teachers will pay their own way to attend conferences.

Jan. 2 The mood of the LSC is one of caution. The high expectations of the preceding term have not necessarily been diminished, but they have become more realistic. The scope of the problems is seen more clearly now than it was two years ago. A change in leadership has taken place. Other changes have been initiated. But the promise of reform is far from being implemented at our school. My yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of reform is my involvement in schoolwide changes from the perspective of a classroom teacher aside from my responsibilities as an LSC member. Next to having a bit more equipment to work with, most of the faculty has been little touched by reform. For whatever reason, they have been silent shadows far removed from decision making, indifferent to the winds of change unleashed by the state legislature. We have miles to walk, indeed, to fulfill the promise of reform.
Head Start stumbles between bureaucracies

by Dan Weissmann

Laboring under severe budget constraints, the Board of Education last year began a three-year transfer of its Head Start programs to community locations run by not-for-profit agencies.

So far, the transfer has not gone well. Last September, none of the new Head Starts was ready to open centers for classes, so they began the year by offering a modified program called Home Start. Compounding that disappointment, some of the communities whose schools suffered Head Start closings had not been chosen for the new community-based programs.

In addition, the state funded new pre-kindergarten programs in only 16 of the 43 schools which had lost Head Starts, far fewer than the number the Board of Education had hoped for when it approved the transfer of Head Starts to not-for-profits.

These difficulties, coupled with the concern that the new programs will not be as good as the ones they are replacing, now have prompted the School Board to re-examine its transfer decision, a prospect that has its own set of problems. (Eighty-six Head Start programs still remain in the public schools.)

The city’s Department of Human Services (DHS), the conduit for all Head Start money in Chicago, blames the delayed openings partly on the School Board, which did not decide until last May to go through with the transfer. The process had been initiated in 1989 by the Interim Board of Education, but the new board wanted to retain the programs and attempt to find money for them. (see CATALYST, April 1991).

This delay, in turn, put a deadline crunch on the community centers, which had to meet strict state and city licensing standards for child-care facilities. Further, by refusing to list the Head Starts slated for closure until the transfer’s final vote of approval, the board also contributed to the spotty match-up between neighborhoods where school Head Starts closed and those where agencies opened new ones.

Maria Whelan, director of children’s services for DHS, points to the inherent difficulty of establishing so many new centers in areas where usable buildings are rare: “You cannot expect to pull off a task like this when basic information is withheld.” She considers it “a monumental success” that the new programs now are nearly fully operational.

Lacking guidance from the board on where to place new centers, DHS developed its own criteria to identify “communities with the highest unmet need for Head Start services,” Whelan explains.

By the time the board decided to go ahead with the transfer, DHS had selected the sites for its new centers, which it gave to the board. Whelan says it was the board’s decision whether to close school Head Starts that were near the community centers with new programs.

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<tr>
<td>School Head Starts closed in 1991:</td>
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<td>Children served:</td>
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<td>New Head Start sites created:</td>
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<td>New centers operating January 1992:</td>
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<td>Children served in new centers:</td>
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<td>Children served by Home Start:</td>
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<td>New State Pre-K’s in closed Head Starts:</td>
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<td>Children served:</td>
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Source: Board of Education, Chicago Dept. of Human Services

Kirk Reyes plays an educational game at Villa Pra Head Start, 6014 S. Racine, a new center run by Chicago Youth and Community Services.
As of January, nearly two-thirds of the not-for-profit Head Start programs were under way, with three of the new community centers completing construction and others awaiting final inspection.

The remaining one-third of the programs still were using Home Start, a modified version of Head Start, featuring home visits by Head Start staff. Barbara Bowman, of the Erikson Institute, a child development research center, warns that children in Home Start may be shortchanged because “a lot of what children learn in Head Start is what they learn from each other, not just what the teacher tells them.” In groups, children expand each other’s vocabulary and help each other learn social roles and behavior, she explains.

Fearing that service to children, families and neighborhoods had been further disrupted by the original transfer plans, the School Board voted in January to defer approving the second phase. But keeping the remaining 86 Head Starts in the school system would add more than $2 million to the board’s estimated $278 million deficit for fiscal 1993, at least $2.5 million in 1994 and still more in subsequent years.

The Head Start deficit is the difference between the federal funds allocated by DHS for the School Board’s Head Start programs ($1,800 per child per year) and what the programs actually cost ($2,400 per child per year—and growing).

Almost all the other Chicago agencies that run Head Starts receive more per pupil than the School Board does. The reason, says Whelan, is that the school system already has buildings, administrators and maintenance staffs that were supported by tax dollars. Other agencies were starting from scratch, and all expenses became Head Start expenses.

“Head Start doesn’t have enough money,” says Patricia McMahon, director of a new Head Start program at Easter Seals. “That’s the reality.” Indeed, in this year’s Request for Proposals from DHS, agencies applying to open new Head Starts are advised that one-fourth of the budget for new programs must come from the agency itself.

President Bush recently pledged a $600 million increase in Head Start funding, but Democrats in Congress told Education Week that the program would still be about $5 billion short of what “is considered necessary to serve all eligible children.”

Federal threat

Head Start programs in the Chicago Public Schools had run for many years on increasing deficits, one reason being that teacher salary increases outstripped increases in federal Head Start funding.

The longer the School Board teachers stayed in the Head Start programs, the more expensive they became, especially those who went back to school for early childhood training, which most did. Whelan says the average salary of a Head Start teacher in the public schools is $45,000; although DHS does not report an average teacher salary in community agencies, it does set a minimum of $15,069.

For years, the federal government had come through with extra funds for the School Board’s Head Start deficit, but by the late 1980s, it decided to stop.

Federal officials threatened to shut off funding for all Chicago Head Start programs unless DHS solved the deficit problem permanently. (Federal regulators did shut down Head Start
programs in New Haven, Conn., at one point during the 1980s.) DHS made the Interim School Board choose between committing state or local revenue to fund Head Start’s future deficits or removing the programs from the public schools altogether.

The interim board responded by proposing a three-year transfer of the school system’s 129 Head Start programs, beginning with the first 43 in 1991. DHS promised to cover the full cost of the remaining Head Starts through the end of the transfer.

However, when the current School Board came to power in 1990, it decided to reconsider the agreement. It was concerned that not-for-profit agencies could not offer Head Start service equal to the programs in the schools. (See separate story on page 26.) Agencies that are opening new Head Start programs say that, under the circumstances, the process has gone as well as could be expected.

“It wasn’t easy,” observes Joseph Corrado, executive director of Christopher House, which took over three Head Start programs in September. “Very seldom do you see bureaucracies able to implement change without major problems, but I think we were able to work well with both the school and the Department of Human Services.”

“I think it’s hard to make these switches,” echoes Patricia McMahon, director of a new Head Start program run by Easter Seals. “I think some children lost time in Head Start” because of the transition.

Two of three new Christopher House centers were not licensed until January; the newly-constructed Easter Seals center was awaiting licensing inspection in January. Both agencies had full enrollment under Home Start.

Upcoming events

■ Feb. 29. The first in a series of public forums on the future of school reform. Time: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. Place: Whitney Young Magnet High School, 211 S. Laffin. For more information: LSC member Billy Williams (312) 534-7300.

■ March 12. “Making the Grade: Establishment of a National Testing System,” a lecture by Eva Baker, director of the Center for the Study of Evaluation at the University of California-Los Angeles. Time: noon to 1:30 p.m. Place: 20th floor of Continental Bank, 231 S. LaSalle. Sponsor: Department of Education and the Harris Graduate School of Public Policy Studies at the University of Chicago. For more information: Richard Laine (312) 702-9456.

■ March 26-29. “Cause for Applause: Strategies That Work In Urban Schools,” a conference sponsored by the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and the Chicago Public Schools. Jonathan Kozol, author of Savage Inequalities, will be the keynote speaker. Place: Cityfront Sheraton Hotel, 301 E. North Water. For more information: Robin LaSota (708) 571-4700.

Dear readers,

For the past two years, all 14,000 readers in Illinois have received CATALYST free of charge. Unfortunately, increasing costs compel us now to seek subscription income.

We decided to continue sending CATALYST free to members of local school councils. For other readers, we adopted a sliding price schedule: $10 for students and people who are unemployed, $15 for parents and community members, $20 for professionals, and $25 for organizations and institutions. In the near future, we will mail bills to non-LSC readers.

Many of you will fall into more than one category; we hope you will choose the highest one you can afford.

CATALYST will continue to come out nine times a year, featuring timely, in-depth articles and commentary about school improvement that you won’t find anywhere else. We hope you will choose to continue receiving your own copy.

Linda Lenz
Editor

CATALYST: Voices of Chicago School Reform is an independent publication created to document, analyze and support school improvement efforts in Chicago’s public schools.

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Bright Ideas

Advocates point Steinmetz students in right direction

Chicago Police Officer August Burda smiles proudly at the picture of his friend "Pacho," a graduate of Steinmetz Academic High School, 3030 N. Mobile. On the back, Pacho wrote, "Man, thanks for everything you've done, especially for getting me out of trouble. You see, I'm 'reformed' now and everything is going smooth."

Burda, who is assigned to Steinmetz, was a mentor to Pacho before he graduated in 1990. Pacho had no parents, had been arrested several times and needed positive role models. Burda began counseling him, and his behavior improved.

Students like Pacho prompted Steinmetz to launch its student advocate program to help troubled teens stay in school. The program matches students with adults who "keep track of the kids, make sure they're OK, and if they have any problems, ensure they have someone to talk to," says psychology and English teacher Chris Ruffolo, who heads the program.

Advocates also act as guardians and fill out the paperwork needed to reinstate a student after a suspension. School policy requires parents to accompany suspended students back to school. But some parents are apathetic and unwilling to take the time, while others cannot take time off from work, Burda says.

Most of the 20 students in the program were recruited by counselors and have criminal records or serious discipline problems. Advocates are LSC members, police officers, counselors and parents of students not in the program. Relationships depend on the students' needs; some advocates devote several hours a month to their students, others are needed only for reinstatement.

Roger Rialmo, 16, says his advocate, counselor Dennis Curtin, acts as a father figure because he doesn't have a good relationship with his own father. "There aren't too many nuclear families in the city," Rialmo adds. "If you know you're father, you're lucky." He is now more conscious of his behavior because "it's really important to me not to disappoint him."

Curtin has noticed Rialmo's improvement since their relationship began last September. "He seems to be moving in control of his life now. He deals with problems instead of avoiding them."

The program doesn't succeed with every student, though. One girl whom Ruffolo worked with for a time was later arrested for selling drugs and was expelled from Steinmetz. "She was a very intelligent girl, but she had emotional problems and couldn't handle it. We can't fix those things," Ruffolo says.

To keep better track of students' whereabouts, Steinmetz is revising the program so that only school staff will be advocates. Says Ruffolo: "As the program grows and develops, I'm sure we'll look for outside help. But for now, we're going to work on quality rather than quantity. Then we'll expand."

Sally O'Dowd

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