Dropout prevention falling through cracks

by Michael Selinker and Michelle Martin

School reform seeks to solve problems by giving schools the tools to craft their own solutions. But there are troubling signs that on the critical issue of dropouts, increased local control may be aggravating the problem.

Before reform, when there was a strong chain of command from the general superintendent to district superintendents to principals, the central office generally decided which children attended which schools. But reform has brought a shift of authority to individual schools and the slashing of the high school subdistrict staff that placed students in schools. It is now easier for students to leave the system and much harder for them to get back in.

Now Grady Jordan, superintendent of the citywide high school subdistrict, spends most of his time struggling to get students into schools.

"I still don't have an answer to the question, who has the authority to decide that a student should be in a particular school?" says Jordan. "If the principal says no, and they go to another school and that principal says no, who the hell says yes?"

There is no way yet of measuring how many kids may have been hurt by this new power arrangement. But CATALYST readily came across students who described quick removal for offenses, difficulty in finding schools to accept them after they dropped out or were pushed out, and even banishment at an age when the law says they must be in school.

"Most principals believe that all children should be in school," Jordan says. "The question is, what school?"

In 1989, the board transferred...
School dropout rates: some surprises

Test scores for reading are good predictors of whether CPS students will drop out. In 1990, for example, a CPS student with a reading level of 1 on a scale of 10 was three times as likely to drop out as one with a level of 6 or higher. Thus, it could be expected that the lower a school's reading test scores, the higher its dropout rate would be.

To find out, CATALYST asked Brigitte Erbe, a researcher at Roosevelt University, to calculate an "expected" dropout rate for each high school, based on the Class of '90 dropout rates for students at each reading level. What she found was that some schools are doing much worse or much better than their reading scores would predict. Indeed, some schools with good reputations were found to do worse by their students than some schools with lesser reputations.

For example, Lincoln Park High School's high reading scores suggest the school would have a dropout rate of less than 20 percent; in fact, the rate is almost 50 percent. On the other hand, the lower test scores at Richards High School point toward a dropout rate of more than 50 percent; the actual rate is less than 30 percent.

The chart below shows each school's "expected" dropout rate (given its reading scores), its actual 1990 dropout rate and the difference between the two. A high positive difference means the school did significantly worse than would be expected; a high negative difference means the school did significantly better than would be expected.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCHOOL</th>
<th>EXPECTED RATE</th>
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<td>Kennedy</td>
<td>45.3</td>
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SOURCES: CPS and Roosevelt University

responsibility for dropout prevention—from the central office to local schools. Accordingly, it stopped funding its own Division of Dropout Prevention, which before attempted a coordinated citywide strategy but is now largely a middleman for pilot-program grants. Under this new system, schools are generally responsible for designing their own programs and finding ways to pay for them.

In Chicago, the dropout rate—the number of dropouts divided by the total o' dropouts and graduates in a given class—generally has been on the rise. For the classes of '88, '89 and '90, it averaged 44.6 percent, up from 41.2 percent for the classes of '82, '83 and '84. The rate is virtually the same for blacks, Latinos and whites.

Of the 33,264 children who enrolled in high school in 1986, 11,078 dropped out and only 13,890 graduated on time in June 1990. Half of the dropouts were freshmen or sophomores. These numbers actually underestimate the problem. They don’t include about 2,000 students who drop out of elementary school each year. They don’t include kids who spend more than four years in high school, a group at high risk to drop out. And they don’t include students who transfer to alternative programs but don’t complete them.

Some get lost

"There’s not a standard way of tracking the movement of kids out of the alternative schools," says Jenny Knauss of the Illinois Caucus on Teenage Pregnancy. "They may be listed as transfers when in fact they leave the system. There are so many breaks in the system that they're not captured."

And for many students, all it takes is one rebuff or bureaucratic hassle, and they’re gone.

"Some of them get lost," Jordan says. "You’re dealing with kids who are at risk in the first place. Their motivation is not high to begin with, and it doesn’t take a lot to discourage them."

Behind the numbing statistics are individual lives that, once derailed, are very difficult to get back on track. Almost three-quarters of prison inmates surveyed by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority had dropped out
of school. Two-thirds of household heads in Cook County who are on Aid to Families with Dependent Children have no diploma. Those with jobs typically struggle with wages under $15,000 and no mobility.

Sammy Burks doesn’t want to end up like that. At age 15, Sammy was dropped from Chicago Vocational High School because he had missed too many days of school. “I was avoiding fights,” he says. “There were a lot of gangs, and they would pick on anyone who wasn’t with them.”

Sammy got a letter informing him he was no longer enrolled, and a list of alternative schools and programs for dropouts. But the programs are supposed to be for dropouts over 16, and the law says Sammy was too young to be a dropout, even though he was.

“How could you send a parent a list of alternative schools that their child can’t even go to?” asks Debra Beach-Craig, who heads the High School Re-Entry Center run by Dropout Prevention.

Beach-Craig says she called CVS to remind the school that Sammy was too young to be a dropout. Faced with its mistake, CVS offered to take him back, but he stayed at the center, and hopes to attend a different school next year. Sammy says he didn’t feel welcome at CVS after being kicked out.

“That should not have happened,” says CVS Principal Roosevelt Burnett, referring to Sammy’s predicament.

“Our policy is that when we have a student trying to get back in, we let him in.”

Tahesha Covenston was put out of Carlin Hall High School at age 15. Two weeks before her 16th birthday, she was told to leave. “I was on probation and I got into another fight, so they put me out at the end of February.” After she finishes at the Re-Entry Center, she doesn’t want to go back to Carlin Hall because she feels “they didn’t like me there.”

Just as some students push through the barriers, some schools lend a hand. These schools say the linchpin of dropout prevention is providing hope in a world of uncertainty. Motivating students, they say, means dealing with concerns from teen pregnancy to gangs to poverty to boredom.

Matthew Beck, 19, hopes to graduate from Orr Community Academy in June after five years in high school. He spent his freshman year goofing off, and he’s paying for it now. To earn enough credits, he carries a full slate of eight day classes and two after-school classes in Orr’s Lighthouse Program.

Principal Kenneth Van Spankeren started Lighthouse in response to Orr’s calamitous 67 percent dropout rate.

The privately funded program serves students who have failed classes, seem likely to drop out or have dropped out. It’s the centerpiece of Orr’s anti-dropout efforts, which include counseling, entrepreneurial skills courses and child care for students’ children.

Beck was a problem student, says coordinator Dean Savoy, and likely would have dropped out of school had he not attended the Re-Entry Center. Beck pulled himself together, only to miss several weeks last fall after being shot while walking near his home. Despite the setback, he wants to graduate so he can go away to college and then maybe to law school. “I just want to get out of here,” he says.

About 250 kids participate in the program, out of a school enrollment of 1,600. Two hundred wait to get in. About two-thirds of Lighthouse students return to day school, Savoy says.

Lighthouse stresses competency rather than time; no test dates or marking periods disrupt a student’s chosen pace. “Let’s say we have a student who needs an algebra credit,” Van Spankeren says. “She signs a contract saying she’ll come two evenings a week. It doesn’t matter if it takes her five weeks, five months or five years to get that credit. We’re not going to let her go.”

The five-year-old program, funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and Continental Bank, costs $120,000 a year. Van Spankeren knows the private sector won’t fund it forever, so he has applied for public grants.

The board can do nothing this expensive for any school. The Division of Dropout Prevention, headed by Grace Dawson, oversees $7 million worth of programs, but none of that money comes from the board.

Few students reached

“We were expected to serve 600 schools with almost no resources,” Dawson says. “My salary is paid by the board, as is my secretary’s salary. All the other folks here are from grants. If we didn’t get that money, we would have no money.”

Because these grants are small, the division can run each pilot program in only a handful of schools. The scope of school-based programs range from truancy prevention to self-esteem building to job training. Dawson focuses on the 20 high schools with the highest dropout rates and their 200 feeder schools.

Those high schools bubbling under the Top 20 get advice but few dollars. Only its computer-based Re-Entry Center and a job program called Employability Plus (see pages 5 and 6) are not based in the targeted schools. Few programs reach more than a few
2,000 drop out before high school

Every year, 11,000 youths drop out of Chicago's high schools, but 2,000 more don't enroll in the first place, according to the board's Division of Dropout Prevention.

Hundreds of these high school non-shows drop out before finishing eighth grade, and hundreds more drop out in the gap between elementary school and high school. The school system has little ability to track kids after they leave elementary school, making it likely that the system will not know if a child disappears.

A lack of truant officers, overcrowded classes and parents who cannot or will not demand attendance combine to allow children to leave school before they learn how important it is.

Dropout Prevention aims at half of its programs at elementary schools: they include pregnancy, truancy and drug-abuse prevention. Some schools have adopted similar programs on their own.

Some efforts try to ensure children are not held back a grade, since those who enter high school a year late—that is, after their 15th birthday—have much higher dropout rates. Slightly more than half of Chicago high school students are 15 when they start high school.

Monique Williams, 14, left Andersen Elementary School this spring. "I didn't really drop out of school," says Monique, who was an eighth-grader. "I just stopped going.

"I didn't really like the school, so instead of going, I would just stay at home and sleep all day. I wanted to stay in school, but the school I went to was boring. There was a lot of gangbanging, and I didn't like the teachers."

No truant officer came after Monique, so she stayed home until the neighbor told her mother about Dropout Prevention's Re-Entry Center, which helps dropouts catch up on academics so they can return to school.

In early May, Monique was searching for a school that will take her. "Hopefully, I'm prepared for high school," she says.

M.M., M.S.

Slashing the system's dropout rate from its current 45 percent to 15 percent would mean an extra 15,000 students—7,500 each in the junior and senior classes—would have to be served every year. This would cost at least another $25 million each year in teacher salaries and benefits alone. (Currently, the board is projecting for next school year a $175 million revenue shortfall in a budget of more than $2.3 billion.)

Providing classrooms also would be a problem. With a 15 percent dropout rate, 20 of the 63 high schools would overflow, some by as much as 50 percent, according to an analysis by Brigitte Erbe of Roosevelt University College of Education.

"Very quickly it became apparent that if they did any kind of dropout prevention, they would be overcrowded in a very short time," Erbe says. "I don't see how they could avoid it."

Other schools, however, would remain under capacity, so a shift in attendance patterns could accommodate the crowd, with 10 percent of systemwide capacity to spare.

State inaction

Some downstate and suburban lawmakers contend the dropout rate shows that Chicago wastes its education dollars. "They say, 'The kids are going to drop out of school anyway so why pour more money into that sinkhole?',' says Sen. Earlene Collins (D-Chicago).

Yet the state has repeatedly rejected proposals that almost assuredly would keep kids in school longer. Under state law, children are required to attend school only until they are 16. As motivational speaker Drew Brown puts it, children at "the dumbest point in their lives" must choose between the hard work of being a student and the supposedly easier life of a dropout.

"These students decide early on that what they're learning is not benefitting them now and will never benefit them," says state Rep. Monique Davis (D-Chicago). "They think it's a waste of time. Some of them are right, but most of them are dead wrong."

Davis is acting chair of the House Elementary and Secondary Education Committee, which in late April sent to the full House a bill raising the dropout
age to 18 but letting 16- and 17-year-olds drop out with the approval of their parents and the school system. An identical bill was defeated by a 7-9 vote in the Senate Education Committee.

The measure, sponsored by Sen. Beverly Fawell (R-Glen Ellyn) and Reps. Jay Hoffman (D-Collinsville) and Michael Curran (D-Springfield), is supported by Davis and Collins, but they consider it a band-aid at best.

"It's a desperate cry for attention from someone trying to solve a complicated problem with a solution that's too simple," says Collins. "It's a policy statement that we believe at 16 a person has not gotten an adequate education to survive in the world on his or her own, and we would prefer they stay in school. That's all."

It would cost more if they stayed, but it's a necessary expense, says Rep. Hoffman. "Simply because we're saving money, we shouldn't be encouraging people to drop out. Maybe it will cost a little more to keep these kids in school, but in the long run it will have a positive financial impact."

Parochial attitudes on this subject will cripple the state, these legislators say.

"If we have 50 percent or more of our citizens uneducated and unable to get jobs, our streets will never be safe and we'll never have economic growth," says Collins. "This is about the vitality not only of Chicago but of Illinois as a whole. Right now, public aid eats up more money than education; it costs more to expand our prisons and courts than to educate our children. We're being penny wise and dollar foolish."

Michael Selinker is the former research director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations. Michelle Martin covers education and municipal issues for the Daily Herald.

**GED not an easy way out**

For students who drop out of high school, there's always the GED. At least that's what many students and even some school officials believe, but it's not that easy.

"When they do drop out, my experience has been that saying that more of a rationalization than a real plan," says James Hawking, who directs the General Educational Development test program at Roosevelt University.

Using that rationalization for dropping out ignores the reality that getting a GED is neither a piece of cake nor a guarantee of success in the real world, says Jean Lowe, director of the national GED Testing Service. "It's an especially big problem when high school counselors tell that to students who might be having trouble in school."

In Cook County, less than 60 percent of test-takers pass, compared to more than 70 percent nationally.

"When they started the testing service 50 years ago, they wanted to make the test difficult enough that it would mean something," Lowe says. "We still want the GED to be something students can be very, very proud of."

Yet a recent University of Chicago study cast doubt on the GED's value. Prof. James Heckman and Stephen Cameron showed that attaining a GED had not helped 25- to 28-year-old males improve their economic status.

The national testing center disputes the study's negative conclusions, as does Hawking. Lowe says the center received many calls from GED takers, family members and employers who didn't agree with the Chicago study.

"We got calls from employers who said they had been hiring GED graduates for 25 years and they were some of their best employees."

Nevertheless, Lowe emphasizes there is no substitute for a high school education. "I would be happy if there never was another high school dropout. I'll be employed for the rest of my life just with the millions of adults who are already out there with no high school diplomas."

Michelle Martin and Helena Sundman

**Work-study programs short of jobs**

Some kids drop out of school because they need to make money for their families or want to make money for themselves. Two Board of Education programs try to capitalize on that priority by arranging jobs for former dropouts who also attend classes.

One is Double E (Employment and Education), a 30-year-old joint venture between the board and Urban Youth, a nonprofit group. The program runs for 40 weeks, during which students take two 80-minute classes, during which they can get a full year of credit. "They don't feel as stretched out as if they had four or five classes," says counselor Myrtle Jordan.

The other program is Employability Plus, which prepares students for such low-level jobs as fast-food worker. Students in the Able and Wells housing projects also attend classes for high school credit or study for GEDs.

But both programs are suffering from the recession. Employability Plus has "found jobs for only 55 percent of its 90 students; Double E, which has lost such partners as Carson Pirie Scott and Marshall Field's, has only 30 percent of its 350 students employed."

For students with jobs, the programs require a commitment that former dropouts already failed to make once.

For example, Barry Howard, 17, attends Double E classes from 8:20 a.m. to 11 a.m. and then works at McDonald's from 3 p.m. to midnight. "After a hard day's work, I come home and get myself situated for the next day—well, later that same day," Howard says. "When I have to work overtime and then come to school a couple hours later, it can be very rough."

Even though Barry and his "lackadaisical attitude" dropped out of Lindblom Technical High School last year, Double E has kept him on schedule to graduate.

Barry says his minimum-wage job is only temporary, since he hopes to get into college after Double E. "People around me say you can't get ahead if you don't have an education. It's hard enough to get ahead if you do have an education."

M. S., M. M.
Re-Entry Center offers second chance

by Michelle Martin

In the Chicago Public School system, you don't get three strikes before you're out. Leave once, on your own or with a push, and it might be tough to get a principal to take you back in. You'll likely have to prove yourself first.

One way is to attend the School Board's computer-oriented High School Re-Entry Center, housed in an annex of board headquarters at 1819 W. Pershing. Dropouts come here to show principals—and themselves—that they can and want to return to school.

That's what Christine Meal did. Last summer, Christine, 17, joined a Job Corps culinary arts program that stretched into the beginning of October. When she got back to South Shore High School, she was kicked out because she had missed too many class days.

Christine now is one of 110 students enrolled at the Re-Entry Center. She likes the program because the computers allow students to work at their own pace. "You get a better understanding of the work," says Christine, who had accumulated only a year's worth of credits during two years at South Shore.

Higher standards

Students, usually 16 to 18 years old, attend two hours each day for about a semester. They work for two things: credits toward graduation and proof they can buckle down enough to go back to high school.

Typically, an outreach specialist has to persuade them to attend. Once the center succeeds on that score, it faces another tough sales job: persuading high schools to accept center students.

Since school reform started, no one can force a principal to enroll a dropout who is at least 16, says Grace Dawson, director of Dropout Prevention. "Now we can't make anybody do anything. Nobody wanted their own back, and nobody wanted anybody else's."

One-time dropouts are more likely than almost any other group to drop out of school for good. But the program tries to screen out uncommitted students by rigidly enforcing attendance and promptness. To stay in the program, students must maintain a 90-percent attendance rate on their way to completing a credit or more worth of coursework.

"The high school attendance rate is 83.6, so we're demanding more," notes Dawson. "We started getting schools to say they would take our kids once they had gone through this program with 90 percent attendance. They perked up: '90 percent attendance—this is better than the kids at our schools.'"

Many center students will go to King, Juarez or DuSable high schools. Those schools agreed to accept any student who completes the center's program, explains Director Debra Beach-Craig, who was negotiating with Austin High School. To date, the year-old program has one high school graduate to its credit.

Center students spend most of their time working at computers under the guidance of a teacher. The software was designed by Computer Curriculum Corp., a Texas subsidiary of book publishers Simon and Schuster. CCC began the program with an $80,000 grant for the first six months; the state has funded it since.

CCC's Doreen Barrett, who set up the center's system, says the curriculum is especially helpful for students who have failed because in each subject area it adjusts the work to each student's level. If a student is better at subtraction than fractions, for example, the computer eases into fractions.

The curriculum focuses on English.
teach dropout-prone students is not unique to the Re-Entry Center. A similar program is run by Ombudsman Educational Services, a Libertyville firm that contracts with school districts in three states. Thirteen school districts from Cook, Lake and DuPage counties use Ombudsman’s service; in Chicago, only Steinmetz High School does.

“We use a lot of computers and technology because we do individualized instruction in all areas,” says President Jim Boyle. “You can’t do that with a traditional classroom setting. This way, our teachers are available to help students individually.”

Students in the 17-year-old program can return to their home schools if they show ability to succeed in traditional settings. Or they can stay at Ombudsman and use those credits to obtain a diploma from their home school.

Unlike in most high schools, there is no gang activity at Chicago’s Re-Entry Center. While some of the center’s students are gang members, all students are prohibited from wearing hats, earrings and other gang signs. (Students leaving the center can be seen cocking baseball caps to the side, donning earrings, re-tying shoelaces and sauntering off, gang signs restored.)

Not surprisingly, the center’s insistence on discipline chafes some students. Harr-Ron Lumpkins, 16, looks forward to his return to school, if only to see his friends. He quickly and methodically works quadratic equations on a computer as he talks about leaving the Re-Entry Center for King High School.

“There’s no social life or anything here,” observes Harr-Ron. “I want to go back to school.”

Financial incentive no guarantee

In 1987, all 38 of the then-seventh graders at Schneider Elementary School were told that if they graduated from high school, the Steans Family Foundation would give them at least $1,200 a year for college or trade school.

But five years later, when all should be looking toward their senior year, eight students have already dropped out. Only half seem likely to get high school diplomas. Even with counseling, tutoring and the promise of scholarships, some kids aren’t making it.

“The goals are a lot tougher to attain than we originally thought,” acknowledges coordinator Evelyn DeJesus. “I don’t think the sponsors’ original expectations were realistic, that if you throw this money at the students it will magically turn them around.”

The sponsors are retired U.S. Ameribanks chairman Harrison Steans and his wife Lois, who copied millionaire Eugene Lang’s gift to a school in the East Harlem section of New York City. The Steans Foundation was the first of nine such area projects in Lang’s I Have a Dream Foundation.

“The kids didn’t trust us in the beginning,” Lois Steans recalls. “Here come these strangers with a bunch of promises. They’ve heard lots of promises before that haven’t been followed through on.”

The Steanses pay DeJesus to address the students’ problems and motivate them for school. They chose Schneider for its racial mix, but soon found it had another distinction; only two of its 1982 graduates had finished high school four years later, the worst record in Chicago.

Few collegebound

“If we do better than two, it’s a success,” says Steans. “We’d probably have a better record if we just focused on the bright ones, but it’s whole classfuls that need help. You’d be throwing away an awful lot of kids.”

Here’s the record so far: 22 are still in school (18 in Chicago schools and 4 in school elsewhere), 8 have dropped out, 4 have vanished, 3 are working toward GEDs (with mixed results), and 1 is believed to have been abducted.

Of those still in school, only 10 are on the college track, DeJesus estimates. You wouldn’t know it by his record, but Scott Henderson is one of those 10. After missing many classes, at 17 he had barely enough credits to be a sophomore at Schurz High School, let alone the junior he thought he was.

“Not a truant officer came for him, he said, so he drifted out of school. But after ruling out working—’I knew that if I got a job this would be all I’d make for the rest of my life’—he tried to get back into Schurz. He met a cool response.

“They said that I would have to prove to them that I wanted to work,” Scott recalls. “I would have to go night school and get one credit before they’d let me back in. I wasn’t sure I could do it since I already had failed once.”

But Scott flourished in night school, pulling three As and a B in his April marks. He isn’t returning to day school, he says, because the intense night classes push him to succeed. He plans someday to cash in that promise for college money. “I know that if I don’t go, I have no excuse.”

Michael Selltzer
Keeping girls in school means dealing with pregnancy

by Michelle Martin and Michael Selinker

Two portraits of a crisis:
In 1987, Evelyn Booker became one of 11,000 school-age girls in Chicago to have a baby that year. She left Flower Vocational High School for Simpson Alternative School for pregnant girls, had her baby Kierra and then was visited at home by a Simpson teacher until she was able to return to school. But when it was time to go back, she didn’t.

“I was feeling kind of depressed,” Booker recalls. “I really didn’t have anyone to talk to. If I did, maybe it would have helped.”

But then, 2 1/2 years later, Booker did go back, first to the Division of Dropout Prevention’s Re-Entry Center and later to Robeson High School. At 20, she graduated. “I had determined to go back and make a better life for me and my babies.”

Yvette Rogers, 19, also left school after having her son DeAndre, but she never finished. Between 1989 and 1991, Rogers went to Tesla Alternative School, Simeon High School and Mays Academy, an alternative school at Kennedy-King College.

No. 1 reason
She spent last summer working at a children’s clothing store. But the store closed, and her unemployment benefits ran out in June. Her mother used to watch DeAndre, but she can’t now because she must care for her ill father. Rogers wants to attend GED classes and secretarial school, but there’s no one to watch the baby. She has hope, but the odds are against her.

Despite Booker’s hard-earned success, most Chicago children who have children lead lives more like that of Rogers. Motherhood is the No. 1 reason girls drop out of school, the Illinois Caucus on Teenage Pregnancy reports. Nationally, 40 percent of girls who get pregnant never finish school.

Children bring to these girls’ lives a whirlwind of stresses that eclipses school: a lack of babysitters, sleepless nights, mountains of laundry and general hopelessness. Experts recommend a continuum of care, but most schools cannot provide one. Most schools that address pregnancy instead provide help at selected points, either before, during or after.

Two programs run by the board’s Division of Dropout Prevention focus on the “before” in seven elementary schools, down from a high of 18. They are Peer Power for girls and ADAM for boys. Funded by the Ounce of Prevention Fund, the programs serve 20 male and 20 female fifth-through-eighth-graders at each school. In addition to discussing ways to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease—the emphasis is on abstinence—students visit cultural events and workplaces to see more of the world than their own neighborhoods.

“When they get into high school, they’re prey for the older kids,” says Ethel Burgest, the division’s pregnancy prevention director. “We have to get to them before they get there, so they’ll know that they don’t have to do what this boy wants just to be popular.”

ADAM is one of the few pregnancy programs to focus on boys. “The male piece was an effort to realize that it takes two” to impregnate a girl, explains Doris Williams, Burgest’s predecessor and now principal of Simpson. “The boys help us keep them from coming here.”

Homegrown programs at DuSable High School focus on the before, too. Counseling and peer-group sessions aim to keep girls from becoming pregnant, but if they do, a support group for teen mothers exists. “We really hope that the mothers will talk to the other girls about what’s involved” in motherhood, says Principal Charles Mingo.

Some high schools have set up care centers for the children of students, but not DuSable. “It’s not possible for them to attend at a time; hundreds more want to get in but can’t.”
Girls may enroll when they notify the school system they are pregnant; they may stay until the semester break following a postpartum "homebound" period when teachers visit them.

In addition to providing academic classes, these schools offer health care, counseling and parenting classes that teach about labor and delivery, drugs, nutrition, diapers, doctors, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control and basic anatomy. They also link students with state-funded babysitters if no family members or friends can care for their newborns.

"It is just imperative for them to stay connected to school, or we'll lose them," says Williams. "Especially if they've had poor attendance prior to pregnancy, they're not likely to be successful during the homebound period."

She attempts to provide a core education, but the girls are so likely to drop out that a special approach is needed.

**Birth weight becomes math**

"I say to my staff, 'You may be a teacher of Elizabethan English, but if a child is bringing her problems to class or not even making it to class, whatever you're teaching is not going to reach that student,'" explains Williams. "Our focus is to try to integrate pregnancy into the curriculum. If you're in biology, you talk about the fetus. If you're in math, you talk about birth weight."

Patricia Canessa, director of Arts of Living, says that simply the structure of her school makes a difference. "Our classes are relatively small here. And everyone is in the same situation. There are no boys here to push them around or laugh at them, and it is in a very safe neighborhood. It really is a very safe school."

Senior DeShong Perry, 17, was more than five months pregnant before she told her parents, following a track meet where she finished last. "I usually finish in the top three places, so my mom asked why I was running so slow," she recalls. "And I said I didn't know, it was just a bad day or something. Then she said it looked like I was getting fat, and how come. And I told her that I was just a big girl, and I tried to walk away. And then she asked if I was pregnant, and I started crying, and I said 'Yes, Mommy, I am.'"

DeShong left a private school that didn't accept teen mothers to enroll at Arts of Living last fall. She is finishing her second semester there, with a 7-month-old daughter named Codi.

Despite help from her mother and Codi's father, she finds it tough to care for a baby and simultaneously work toward becoming the fastest woman alive. "You get home from school and you have to do your homework and everything, but you still have to be this little baby's mama. Without going to a school like that it would be even harder. It's like a big support group."

But the alternative schools can't help their students much after they leave. "Our recidivism rate — girls coming back with their second or third child — is terrible," says Simpson's Williams. "We need to work on keeping track of these girls, because when their kids get to [school] five, six, seven years later, it's only going to strain our resources more."

Knowing the alternative schools can't do everything, some schools have tackled the crisis themselves. But theirs is an expensive endeavor, done only with help from business or community groups.

Orr Community Academy has built its own program. A Head Start program for 40 kids has been serving students' children since Orr opened in 1972. A Lekotek toy lab trains parents to help children develop through play. An Infant and Family Development Center was scheduled to open by the end of May.

The 24 girls whose children are enrolled in the center attend parenting classes with Betty Sandifer. Orr's health clinic, which serves all students in the school, will also serve the center's infants and toddlers.

Teen moms also are referred to Orr's Building Opportunities program, in which students can leave children with licensed home-care babysitters at no charge. Harper, Englewood, Clemente, Gage Park and Robeson high schools also have the program.

Orr's programs help keep mothers in school, but they also seek to prepare their young children for school, stresses Principal Kenneth Van Spankeren. "The educational problems we have in elementary school and high school are not solely because of poor teaching, lack of enthusiasm, no books and all the things they usually are blamed on. The educational problems come from an array of problems that we're up against, primarily a breakdown in the family structure. What we have to do is give all the support services we can to those families and infants."

But Orr's comprehensive program has taken a lot of work — and money. The infant center is funded by the Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois Department of Public Aid, the Harris Foundation, Continental Bank and the Chicago Community Trust.

Continued on page 15

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**Pregnancy prevention aimed at boys**

After classes let out at Pablo Casals Elementary, teacher Andrew Lucas decides to test his boys: "Okay, what ways can you get AIDS?"

The answers come in a barrage: "Sex." "Drugs, using a needle." "Blood transfusions." "Through the birth canal."

Through the birth canal? That's hardly an answer you'd expect from a seventh-grader. But when it comes to sex, these boys know a lot more than they'd get from a girlie magazine.

The boys at Casals are part of a board-sponsored program named ADAM: Boys for a Better Tomorrow, which serves 20 boys in each of seven schools. The youngsters may not have learned that ADAM stands for Awareness and Development for Adolescent Males, but in their Friday meetings they've learned lessons that are a lot more important.

"They teach me not to get girls pregnant," says lawyer Foster. "I'm only in eighth grade, and I don't need to have no baby."

ADAM's rap sessions often veer from such weighty matters. The boys boast about basketball, sass their teachers and throw paper into each other's hair. Boys, even those for a better tomorrow, will be boys.

But amid the rambunctiousness, ADAM tries to build self-esteem, decision-making skills and responsibility, especially about staying in school and avoiding fatherhood before they can even drive.

"This program teaches them not only about sexual activities, but makes them better young men," says Principal John Mazurek. "We need more like them."

M.S.
Straight talk from `Dark Gable`

In the inexact science of dropout prevention, there are no sure solutions. But sometimes, a good first step is to get a student’s attention. That’s what Naval Reserve Lt. Cmdr. Drew T. Brown III—“Dark Gable” to his fellow pilots—does every time he speaks to an auditorium full of students. A pilot for Federal Express, the East Harlem-born Brown hits several high schools every time he flies into a city, including Chicago. In the past four years, he has delivered a no-nonsense message about staying in school to four million students. Writer Michael Selinker spoke with Brown from his office in Memphis.

Q. Our kids grapple with gangs, drugs, pregnancy and a hundred other barriers. How do you tell them to stay in school?
   A. I don’t give them a choice. I don’t ask them to stay in school. I tell them that if you don’t stay in school, you need to get up and get out of school today. McDonald’s needs you.

   These children are going to grow up, and either they’re going to suck taxes from this country or they’re going to pay taxes. They are the future of this country. The reason we’re having a problem now is we’re paying for what we didn’t do ten or twenty years ago, and that’s what makes education No. 1.

Q. Are kids getting the message that education isn’t this country’s highest priority?
   A. That’s the whole point. I haven’t forgotten what it was like to be young, to always want to take the easy way out and have fun. That’s why I talk to kids on their level.

But why do we give these children at the dumbest point in their lives the biggest decision they’ll ever make, and that’s whether to continue their education. We have Congress making laws about smoking on airplanes, and yet it is still legal to drop out of high school at the very dumbest point of your life.

Q. Our legislators are considering raising the dropout age to 18. Do you favor that idea?
   A. No. I’d make dropping out illegal, period. Not 18. You do not get a job unless you have a high school diploma, a GED or a report card. No ifs, ands or buts. You don’t raise the age; you make it mandatory to complete high school.

In America today, we’re losing. Japan is kicking our butt because they expect a lot out of their children, and those children are producing. We don’t expect anything out of our children, and they’re not letting us down.

Q. When you go into a school, what do you offer these kids so that they stay in school?
   A. The first thing I do is demand respect, and when you demand

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Job pickings slim for dropouts

“In today’s society,” Drew Brown says, “if you don’t get an education, you’re not going to make it.” Here are some careers and average salaries open to:

**COLLEGE GRADUATES**
- Accountant $30,000
- Advertising Manager $36,000
- Air Traffic Controller $38,000
- Airline Pilot $80,000
- Architect $60,000
- Chemist $33,000
- College Professor $36,000
- Doctor $100,000
- Engineer $43,000
- Judge $30,000
- Lawyer $80,000
- Military Officer $22,500
- Registered Nurse $35,000
- Teacher $24,000
- Veterinarian $60,000

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES**
- Auto Mechanic $17,000
- Bank Teller $13,000
- Brick Layer $14,000
- Butcher $16,000
- Construction Worker $27,000
- Electrician $18,000
- Firefighter $21,500
- Flight Attendant $11,500
- Military Enlisted $11,000
- Park Ranger $24,000
- Plumber $16,000
- Police Officer $22,000

**HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS**
- Bartender $13,000
- Carpenter $11,000
- Fast Food $7,500
- Maid $9,000
- Porter $10,000
- Waiter/Waitress $10,500

Source: The American Dream
respect and discipline from kids, you get it. The kids look up to me because they know I’ve accomplished something and I’m a real role model.

In Chicago, god bless Michael Jordan, but he’s not a role model. He’s a great superstar and a great person, but to be a true role model, you must be attainable. I’m just a college educated man, and every kid I’ve ever spoken to can be just what I am.

Q. Does every student need not only a diploma but also a college degree?

A. Without a doubt. These are the 1990s. College today is just like high school was 10 years ago. I’m not asking him to finish high school; I’m telling him to go to college.

George Bush, Jesse Jackson, David Duke, Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas, they have one thing in common: an education. What do 90 percent of the homeless, 90 percent of the people who are on welfare, and 95 percent of the people in the penitentiary have in common? They don’t have an education.

In today’s society, if you don’t get an education, you’re not going to make it. The military is not taking high school dropouts any more. The standards are going up. If people who have college degrees can’t find jobs, what do you think a high school-educated person’s going to get? Nothing.

Q. Many students think it’s cool to fail. How do we reach these kids?

A. There’s a very simple reason why they think that. Mike Tyson, would you fight him?

Q. Never.

A. Because you don’t think you can win. These kids don’t think they can be anything so why try? These kids are scared to succeed. They’re scared to dream about being something they’ve never seen before.

I’m a jet pilot. They can’t believe you can be a jet pilot through education. So if you don’t think you can be an architect or an engineer, why go to college? We need to show these kids real role models. It is incumbent upon every American who is successful to go find one of these kids and show them that a doctor is not only attainable, but these doctors have had troubles too.

Every kid dreams of an apartment,

Funston School students Yesenia Arroyo (left) and Idica Mactezuma watch Board of Trade action on a field trip arranged by a mentor.

Mentors show success is possible

Providing motivation can be as simple as convincing a student that a high school diploma gives him a shot at success.

“Kids can’t see the relationship between [school] and going to work,” says Grace Dawson, the School Board’s dropout prevention director. “When your brother graduates from high school and still the only place he can get a job is McDonald’s, how is that inspiring you to go to school? You can get a job at McDonald’s without graduating.”

Mentorship programs allow students to meet persons who teach them achievement is possible, even in the humblest of environs. “The children have a chance to hear a person who has made it, who has been successful and graduated from school and is working a good job,” explains Dawson, adding that the program “costs no money.”

But schools must commit time and space, and find partners who can make room in often hectic schedules to reach out to students.

“If you can stay on them, it would work,” says Dean Savoy, a counselor at Orr Community Academy. “If you could have one person who really likes kids for every 10 kids, who could stay with them and keep on them, it would make an incredible difference.”

Along with 12 other schools, Orr is in partnership with Chicago Cities in Schools, a nonprofit group that links typically bright but unmotivated teens with adults who share their interests. If a student enjoys architecture, CCIS finds an architect to meet with him every week.

Field trips let students see people working. In early May, Funston Elementary School students visited the Chicago Board of Trade, in a partnership with IDS-American Express.

CCIS’ work in the Chicago public schools began in 1988 at Collins High School. Of the CCIS students in that North Lawndale school, 60 percent improved in their coursework, reports Executive Director Sheila Radford-Hill.

“It’s very important that [teens] make a connection to a caring, positive adult,” she says. “This is the time we should be surrounding kids, rather than abandoning them to the youth subculture of materialism.”

M.S., M.M.
a car, pizza, beer, and a boyfriend or girlfriend. I tell them, "Your dream's going to come true, except it's going to be your living nightmare. Because that car is going to break down; you work at a minimum-wage job to keep the apartment; you drank so much beer, you're now a fat alcoholic from eating pizza; and you can't keep your boyfriend or girlfriend. If you're going to dream for something, dream for a Ph.D. because a BMW comes along with it."

Q. What can teachers do to keep these kids in school?

A. Motivate them. That's what I do. You're going to have a kid who comes out of the worst school in Chicago go on to be a great doctor or lawyer or electrician. You're also going to have a kid who comes out of the best school in Chicago turn out to be a total bum. If you can motivate a child to get what he can out of the situation he has, you've accomplished something.

Wouldn't it be a shame if a kid in Chicago could come up with the cure for AIDs, and we let him slip through our fingers and don't educate him? We'd better start taking care of these kids. We're going to pay now or we're going to pay later.
Can teacher professionalism, parent control co-exist?

by Nancy Green

"Professionalism" is a loaded term. Teachers associate it with higher pay, more respect and more control over their work. Critics of the notion point out that it implies exclusive rights to a body of knowledge others can't understand and, therefore, superiority and a right to deference. "The doctor knows best" sums up this view.

Where does the balance lie? What does "teacher know best?" What do parents and the community know better?

With parent-dominated local school councils, the structure of Chicago school reform implies "parents know best." The architects of reform lumped teachers with the bad guys of Pershing Road instead of recognizing that teachers as well as students had been disadvantaged by top-heavy bureaucracy.

Historically, central offices have viewed schools as factories where assembly-line workers under close supervision were to produce a standardized product. In an attempt to improve the factory, central office ordered up detailed (and demeaning) record-keeping and "teacher-proof" curricula. The idea of teachers as professionals was a foreign one.

Chicago school reform has weakened central office, but the textbook, educational workshop and standardized testing industries still have vested interests in keeping teachers passive consumers of products rather than thinking, judging creators of the curriculum most appropriate for their students.

However, reform has given teachers—if they want it and can handle it—the opportunity to achieve a new level of professionalism in their work, if not in their salaries. They can work through professional personnel advisory committees to influence local school councils and principals to join them in making the school a place of learning for teachers and parents as well as children. But this requires a level of collective action for which teachers have not been trained and for which there is insufficient time. Some schools had carved out time for teacher planning by starting classes 10 to 15 minutes early and then dismissing youngsters a half day early once or twice a month. But this practice was found to violate state law. (See CATALYST, May 1992.)

One encouraging sign may be the kind of assistance some colleges of education are providing school teachers who wish to "professionalize" their work. I say may because another troublesome aspect of "professionalism" becomes an issue here.

Historically, professors of education, through both their focus on research and a bias in favor of training experts and administrators over practitioners, have tried to build up their own status as professionals and distinguish themselves from "mere" teachers. This college of education bias, like the factory model of schooling, has rested on the division of labor between the sexes, with men doing the research, planning and administration, and women doing the work.

A measure of the difference in the professional status between teachers and professors is the structure of reform itself. Imagine this: Suppose in a college of education there were a board composed of six parents (or, given the maturity of students, a mixture of parents and students), two community members, two professors and the dean. The first task of this body would be to decide whether to rehire the dean, the next to figure out the budget, and the last to write a college improvement plan.

Probably only people who work in universities can fully see the humor in this scenario. To others it may well sound just as logical as what's happening in

The architects of reform lumped teachers with the bad guys of Pershing Road.

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Nancy Green is on the faculty of the College of Education at Northeastern Illinois University, where she is a professor in the Educational Foundations Department and a faculty advisor to the Chicago Teachers' Center.
the schools, and it is just as logical. (To appreciate the reaction of Chicago teachers and principals to LSCs, people who work in other bureaucracies—business, welfare, hospitals, etc.—should imagine having a comparable board with comparable duties.)

At a university—and likely elsewhere—outrage over this arrangement would have to do with expertise. A professor would say, "I am a professional in my field; I know more about it than almost anyone. How can you suggest that the people who come to me to learn what I have to offer should control the institution in which the learning goes on?"

This attitude is present in schools also, though teachers as a rule don't have as much confidence (dare I say, self-importance?) as professors; it is bound to provide an underlying tension in the reform process.

The trick is to find a balance under which members of each group can come to assert their own expertise while maintaining respect for the expertise of the others.

If parents and community can articulate their goals for their children and hold schools to pursuing those goals; if teachers can listen to parents and community, and believe in the children and in their own practical expertise while accepting a measure of assistance from outside experts; and if professors can respect the values of the community and the expertise of teachers while introducing a broader view to both, then reform can move beyond structural tinkering to a better education for the children of Chicago.

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Letters

School system needs management plan

In your article "Tug of war continues over power, systemwide plan" (Catalyst, May 1992), there are a number of points worth discussing, some of which incorrectly characterized my activities as a member of the Board of Education. Had your writer taken the time to contact me, I would have been glad to provide you with the following information.

As part of our recent efforts to evaluate Supt. Ted Kimbrough, the board asked Mr. Kimbrough for a draft document outlining his vision for the school system. The document would then be used as the basis for discussion throughout the schools. Hopefully, these efforts would lead to a consensus on a plan that would permanently redefine the structure of the school system.

With the help of a strategic planner, the superintendent, along with CPS staff and the board, refined the ideas outlined in his initial document. Every board member received copies of the document, as well as subsequent revisions. Board members fully participated in two of the three planning sessions.

Rather than "an attempt to make an end-run around [School Finance Authority] oversight," this process was intended to identify changes that would best serve the needs of schools and help foster much-needed improvement in student achievement.

Philosophy of service

An impression the article certainly did get right was my dedication to setting up a five-year management plan that will definitively restructure the public school administration. If reform is to be driven by local schools, then broad, systemic change—not just a change in the number of positions at Pershing Road—is needed. We must establish a new philosophy of service to the classroom and the schools.

Award-winning school decries possible closing

I was interested and pleased to see the space devoted to special education in your March 1992 issue. It fairly reflected the prevailing philosophy of inclusion and
gave an intelligent summary of the debate it has generated.

Something left out, however, was an indication of the outstanding quality of Chicago's remaining special education schools. Each one serves a special clientele with personnel and techniques not normally available in neighborhood schools. The three TMH-oriented schools—Northside Learning, Ray Graham and the Southside Center—are small gems within the system, perfectly designed and built for their purpose.

Our own school, Wilson Occupational High, has worked for more than two years to create the same kind of atmosphere for low-functioning EMH students. Unfortunately, as we are on the point of success, Wilson's name appeared on the list of schools that might closed in September.

Wilson High School is the least likely place I know to appear on a short list of school closings. (A final decision was due by the end of May.) In two and a half years, we have gotten a new building and designed a new program. We established a partnership with McDonald's, brought in more than $150,000 in grants, created a revolutionary computer system for managing special education documents and conducted any number of special activities for our students. Wilson was one of those schools granted the Bell-Ameritech award in the first year it was offered.

The rationale given for Wilson's inclusion is "availability of relocation space at Taft High School." Taft denies this and has made its case to the Board of Education. Wilson cannot carry out the program it has designed and financed if it moves to Taft. Taft cannot carry out its innovative plan for "schools within schools" if Wilson takes its space.

The reason implied by the rationale is that classrooms are needed in the elementary school district around us. And they are. But getting elementary school classrooms is not something to achieve at the expense of high schools which have been models of school reform. Wilson has been all that the reformers dreamed of when they wrote the new laws: innovative, industrious and successful—and all through local school initiative.

Jay F. Mulberry, principal
Wilson Occupational High School

Kinzie School offers lessons for special ed inclusion

CATALYST staff is to be congratulated on producing a truly exceptional publication. I especially enjoyed the March issue that featured Chester "Checker" Finn's report on the progress of school reform and the excellent analyses by Donald Moore and William Ayers. I don't know of any other comparable source for getting information so vital to Chicago educators.

Also of special interest to me was the look at special education and inclusion. I only wish you had included an article developed at Kinzie Elementary School, 5625 S. Mobile, where we have been integrating children with disabilities for a decade. We are well beyond "the crawling stage."

In a total school population of 470 children, there are approximately 135 students with hearing impairments, communication disorders and learning disabilities. Currently, more than a third are integrated with regular students for academics either full time or part time. For example, several deaf children are brought into a class of hearing children, where they are instructed by a deaf teacher.

Almost all students are brought together for gym. Lunch is integrated, and there is a Friday afternoon activities program that allows every student in the school to participate in the activity of his choice. Participation of special education students is widespread, including basketball, cheerleading, piano, dance, drama, sewing and woodworking.

To enhance the mainstreamed program, Kinzie has established ongoing American Sign Language classes for special education staff and beginning sign language for parents, hearing teachers and hearing children—a program that includes nearly 390 persons.

Inservice is a regular part of the educational program with most offerings crossing the regular-special education barrier and organized instead around instructional levels: preschool, primary, intermediate and upper.

Kinzie also recruited four deaf adults for its staff: three teacher aides and one teacher. All of these personnel are involved directly with students and are wonderful models for deaf identity.

A new position was created during this school year, that of the mainstream coordinator. She has direct responsibility for coordinating interpreter services, team teaching opportunities, reverse mainstreaming options and other activities fostering integration. The coordinator cooperatively monitors programs with the staff.

Visitors to Kinzie School see an education environment where commitment and creativity in program development have resulted in real communication between very diverse populations.

Joni Banks, special education teacher
Kinzie Elementary School

PREGNANCY continued from page 9

others. Jane Addams Hull House provides staff. Van Spankeren expects it to cost $200,000 a year, after $170,000 in construction.

"It's a big investment for 24 children," he acknowledges. "But if this is going to touch the lives of hundreds of children through the years, it will touch thousands of people. And if they spring up in other schools, we'll find longrange solutions to poverty and crime."

For now, pregnant girls often face hostility and institutional discrimination, say Cathy Calip and Karen Culberg of the Illinois Caucus on Teenage Pregnancy. Many school officials are unaware that federal law demands mothers be given the same opportunities as other students.

Some schools have advocates who track teen mothers, compile resources and help when they can. "There is a person in the school who is identified for them," explains Culberg. "At the other schools, there is just a bureaucratic maze."

With the despair many teen mothers feel, it's no wonder so many quit, says Simpson's Jeanine Hill.

At 16, with a six-month-old son, Jeanine knows the pressure on many girls her age to drop out. "Half of the girls feel like since they don't have to be in school, they might as well not come. They feel they're going to fail anyway, so why should they care?"

"If you don't want to go to school for you, at least go for your child," she reasons. "They say your child's first teacher is you. If you can't teach your child the alphabet or how to read, who's going to teach them?"

CATALYST/JUNE 1992
This month, we welcome back diarist "Elizabeth," who writes of the renewed enthusiasm for teaching she has found since transferring to a new school. And surprise! Even central office receives a couple of compliments from two of our diarists this month. But there are still problems—at Pershing Road and elsewhere. Our anonymous diarists tell us about them as they experience them.

New school gives teacher new life

ELIZABETH, teacher
Jan. 14 After 20 years at Inner City Elementary, I left and found a new home at South Elementary. CATALYST and my association with it as a diarist was partly responsible for my move. These past two years have been painful as I plunged down into a negativity, but I emerged last month as a "born again" teacher.

April 18 My years at Inner City Elementary taught me a lot. The coming of reform a few years ago increased my personal knowledge base—and my frustration. The conclusion I drew last fall was simply this: Because cooperation is essential to reform success and cooperation was lacking at my school, I could not be an agent for change. Therefore, I had to make a change. There is nothing noble or glorious about going down with the ship. This was one of the most insightful decisions I’ve ever made.

And so it happened that on January 6, I found myself standing in a new room before a class of eager faces. Of course, I began to make comparisons. The minority composition of the two schools is identical, although the socioeconomic level is slightly higher at my new school. The faculty integration is quite similar. End of similarities.

My new school is clean, is decorated by and for children and rings with children’s laughter all day long. It is a school where an educational leader is obvious. Her presence is not just felt but seen. She stops in the lunchroom on a regular basis and chats with students and staff. She speaks kindly and softly—or a bit louder and more sternly when the occasion warrants. She strolls in and out of classrooms, always encouraging teachers and students. She feigns earnest interest in yet another baking soda-and-vinegar volcano! She is always asking what we as teachers need to do our job better—and she follows through when we tell her.

There is a well-constructed series of committees and subcommittees that involve a good majority of the faculty and staff. There are primary-, intermediate- and upper-grade committees, subject-area committees, social committees, a PPC and a PPAC committee. All of these committees function. These groups constantly communicate with one another and with the principal and the LSC. Everyone works very hard for the larger group: the students, the reason we’re all here.

The LSC chair came to my classroom the first week of school. [I was on the LSC at my other school, and no LSC member ever visited me.] The purpose of his call was to welcome me into the "family" at South Elementary. He gave me the dates and times of the LSC meetings and invited me to get involved. He indicated that everyone’s voice was important; and although I was new to the school, he showed an awareness of my background and assured me my input would be valuable. I was impressed and gloved the rest of the day.

The very next day, I was paid a visit by the president and the secretary of the school PTA. They welcomed me and indicated they were pleased at my having chosen their school—and then presented me with a fresh-cut yellow rose in florist wrap! For the first time in a long time I felt valued as an educator. I had been totally demoralized a few short weeks before.

My next encounter with the LSC was on a Thursday morning at 8:30. They invited the teachers to come and meet with them about a couple of issues they wanted feedback on. When it became clear that we would not all be able to voice our opinions in the allotted time, another meeting was scheduled at an hour convenient for the faculty. An LSC soliciting teachers’ opinions on educational matters? This was new to me! "Why ask the teachers?" was the rule at my old school. Here a concerned LSC had learned to go to the experts.

Death and violence

LAZARUS, teacher
March 6 The science teacher at our school, who had been strongly tempted to seek employment in private industry after being disheartened by the theft of vital teaching equipment from the building last fall (see Diaries, February 1991), died suddenly this weekend four months short of retirement.

Alf, student
March 16 The school is mourning the loss of one of its seniors. He was killed apparently when two men tried, unsuccessfully, to steal his car after he left a neighborhood restaurant. Our student had enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was to leave in mid-July.

LAZARUS, teacher
March 20 The news around school is that one of our students is in critical condition after being shot the night before in front of his own house. Coincidentally, a Safe Schools assembly is scheduled for today.
LSCs at work—sometimes

OLIVIA, principal
March 7 LSC meeting scheduled this week. Only two parents showed up.

LAZARUS, teacher
March 11 LSC meeting. An excellent turnout of members. To date, we have lost none of those elected in October. Our audience includes one parent with a specific problem and a few representatives of local businesses and agencies, part of the Anti-Crime Task Force assisting our school in developing a security program.

Agenda for the evening: fill out a survey for the school improvement plan (SIP), endorse a school fundraising program, approve the purchase of metal detectors and arrange for community meetings with prospective funding agencies for our cluster plan with feeder elementary schools (a plan which has yet to materialize). The consolidation of our school with another may warrant a new LSC election, a disheartening prospect.

Despite efforts to streamline procedures, the meeting lasts three hours.

March 18 An LSC budget meeting. Only four members show up. After waiting for more than an hour, we reschedule.

March 25 Another LSC budget meeting. Again, no quorum. This time we are just short of the requisite number of members. We have an informal meeting. We scan the computer printout for state Chapter 1 figures and are delighted to find that our share has increased substantially since the preceding year, thanks to the LSC’s insistence that students fill out request-for-lunch forms. The next step is to match our funds with the SIP.

Our principal shares a request for a $30,000 proposal from the state obtained from the Teachers’ Task Force conference over the weekend. The challenge is before us.

April 8 A volatile LSC meeting. In discussions over the SIP, an LSC member and the principal lock horns. By meeting’s end, they are ostensibly on an amicable basis, but the breakdown points out some areas of critical need. This present council has had no training in ways to deal with such difficulties, or to develop an SIP or a budget. Worse yet, we are planning in virtual isolation from the staff, who is expected to implement the SIP. Minimal input has been made by the staff. For some reason, not entirely clear to me, the inroads made at the end of the last school year toward bringing the LSC and the PPAC into close working relationship have not been followed up this school year. The PPAC chair occasionally attends the LSC meetings, but no other PPAC members do.

A report on our parent survey indicates that our mailing brought only a handful of responses. On the other hand, pounds of student feedback forms have been analyzed by our student rep.

We are bogging down. Our SIP development is going nowhere. I am feeling fragmented. Even the possibility of the Illinois Bell-Ameritech award is not enticement enough to get us thinking creatively. We need to raise our sights. We have no unifying vision. We seem to have lost the will to dream.

Again, the meeting lasts entirely too long, but most stay until the end.

April 11 Results of a faculty-staff survey for our SIP reveal that we have very basic unmet needs in the areas of improving student attendance and discipline. We are not ready to address broader issues of how we teach.

Racism

RACHEL, student
March 11 Today I found out that our school refuses to hire racist teachers. One such case is teacher P. On numerous occasions he has told black students to “go back to Africa.” Why hasn’t he been fired? I’ll tell you why: because, rumor has it, he donates large amounts of money to the school. The principal and the security guards know about how he treats black and Hispanic students. He’s not the only teacher who has used racial slurs, but all the racist are still teaching at our school.

LAZARUS, teacher
March 16 A first. An obscene word is written on my car window while it sits in the school parking lot. It is difficult not to take it personally, but I am hard pressed to think of any student with whom I’ve had an encounter warranting such an epithet—at least this year. One never knows. The marker ink comes off relatively easily, but there is an imprint of the word that lasts longer, one more link in the chain of random indignities that raise the question: What’s a nice person like you doing in a place like this?

March 24 On the day after the evening news highlighted the growth
of neo-Nazism in Western Europe, a swastika and related message are scrawled on the wall outside my classroom. Because the school population is practically all minority, I find it difficult to envision the source. A few years ago we were plagued with signs of the devil worshippers. Gang signs, like the poor, we seem to have with us always. Now come the skinheads.

Frustration with central office

CARLOS, teacher

March 11 Supt. Kimbrough was asked by reporters about his receiving low marks regarding school reform implementation. He replied, “These reformers are still arguing about governance rather than student achievement.” But, Mr. Kimbrough, governance is the issue.

The School Reform Act of 1989 gave the legal right to local school councils to govern their respective schools. Since the first LSC elections in October 1989, the councils have been fighting with the school superintendent and the Board of Education for the actual right to govern the schools. Central office has usurped power, and its leaders and its staff continue to interfere with the principals and with the LSCs.

So what is the general superintendent talking about? Of course it is an issue of governance. That is what school reform is all about. Student achievement? Higher levels of student achievement will be the result of restructured governance—that is, a combination of creative policies and day-to-day local administration inspired and invigorated by the reformed governance.

OLIVIA, principal

March 13 This week we received our ESEA summer school forms to complete and submit by the 20th of the month. ESEA dollars are discretionary funds, to be spent at the discretion of the local school. Why, then, is the Department of Grants and Technical Assistance dictating to us? We are told to allocate part of our ESEA funds for one-half an engineer and, where there are five or more classrooms, one-half a janitor also. The forms came with the cost of each ($3,000 for the .5 engineer) already printed in!

Yes, ESEA funds are supposed to be discretionary. They are also supposed to be for supplementary programs. Are engineers and janitors supplementary? Why is central office telling us we have to include the cost of maintenance in our ESEA summer budget?

March 14 The Office of School Operations sent us a 10-day schedule of suggested activities to implement prior to the beginning of the Iowa by ourselves?

This reflects, I fear, a basic attitude of the higher ups at Pershing Road and the board members they feed information to: They think very little of principals. Apparently, principals are incapable of any original thought; they must be spoon-fed even the most basic information and they must be constantly monitored on aspects of their jobs.

LAZARUS, teacher

March 16 A teacher at our school has been invited to consult for a major textbook publisher in her field.

Tests of Basic Skills. This, as usual, is late; five of the 10 had already expired. These activities include meeting with teachers, reviewing with students the areas to be tested, informing parents how they can best prepare their children for the test and a motivational rally to get the students all fired up about taking the test.

I can’t believe someone actually went to all the trouble of putting this material together. Does the deputy for school operations really think a 10-day program is going to have any significant effect on our scores? More importantly, does he actually believe his principals are so incompetent and unfocused that he has to spell out what we should do to prepare the students and teachers for the Iowa testing? Is it possible he has concluded we are unable to address this issue

The company proposes to pay for a substitute while the teacher attends a seminar at the company. But arrangements are snarled because our school office has been unable to connect the publisher with the appropriate personnel at central office.

OLIVIA, principal

March 20 I attended the 13th annual luncheon for school social workers today, and was struck by the discrepancies between the perceptions in the field and what central office specialists perceive. The special ed hot shots poured praise on one another (one was referred to as “the wind beneath our wings!”) and told the audience how great things were. Never mind that caseloads are outrageous and facilities are usually inadequate.
In the audience (at our table at least) we didn’t see the situation quite the same way. One intern insisted she would not work for the CPS, even if she was not moving out of town; she didn’t think the CPS would be a good employer. Another said she would work for the CPS. When questioned, it was clear that the school where she was interning and the principal (a Whitman award winner) made the difference.

A veteran social worker observed that there is something wrong with a system that cannot even assure a social worker a place to work in a given building. The issue of trust and me sheets also came up. Social workers, as well as other support services personnel, must move from work site to work site—and carry with them time sheets to be signed by the administrator of the building that person happens to be working in on a given day.

Rumor has it that soon time clocks will be installed at all schools so employees can punch in and out. The idea of time clocks for professionals leaves me dumbstruck. I have an image of the factory worker punching in at a GM plant or a chicken processing plant. But time clocks in schools?

LAZARUS, teacher

March 26 Many critics, including the general superintendent, are down on the schools for lack of significant progress in educational reform. Reform began all of three years ago, and the bean-counters are demanding results.

Yet, who but the veterans of the first LSCs remember how difficult it was to get assistance from central office during the first year of reform? Who reads the newsletters from the Principals Association to see the organization’s resistance to change? Who looks back at board budgets to see the 85-90 percent cuts in supplies and materials for the schools during this last year? Who sees the countless numbers of brave attempts at various schools to beat the odds and risk trying something different in spite of the fact that such efforts will probably not be acknowledged or rewarded by the larger system? Who sees through this charade?

CARLOS, teacher

April 18 I applied for a principalship at another elementary school. My credentials were sent where required at central office. The LSC at this elementary school was interviewing only candidates with their papers in order. I was informed that my principal certificate was missing. I knew I had sent it. In any case, I sent it again; actually, I hand delivered it to the LSC chair. Then I discovered my resume was missing. I contacted central office. I was told by more than four staffers that yes indeed all the resumes had been reviewed. My resume had disappeared in the process.

I was never interviewed. Let me be honest. Not getting interviewed is not the major problem with me. The real issue is the meddling or incompetence of central office staff.

Choice

LAZARUS, teacher

March 13 Milton Friedman is on the MacNeil-Lehrer Public TV news hour talking about school vouchers again. I could scream. It is a simplistic solution to a problem that no one wants to face—the criminal neglect of urban public school systems. Free enterprise and competition assume equal opportunity at the start. Burdened with the most difficult children to teach and care for, the public schools will never catch up under a voucher framework.

PPACs

LAZARUS, teacher

Feb. 22 The CTU class for PPACs consists of teachers from two different schools. Both groups pick up eagerly on the content of the course designed to build teams capable of handling decision making on reform and restructuring for their respective schools. The diligence and energy with which they apply themselves to the tasks of the class bode well for the future of reform.

March 14 The CTU PPAC class is largely an information-giving session on developing a needs assessment instrument, on generating an SIP and on understanding the lump-sum budget. The complexity of the latter is evidenced in the long train of computer printout sheets tumbling to the floor as one of the instructors helps the class decipher various code numbers.

During one of our session discussions, a participant indicates that over the years she has learned to dissuade more quietly than she did in earlier years, when she was branded a “troublemaker” for merely asking that the board-union contract be respected. Who can measure all the silence the system has imposed?

After the session, we plan for the CTU’s Restructuring Conference seminar and for subsequent PPAC classes to the end of the term. This takes two hours. Par for the course.

Class will end two sessions after the Restructuring Conference, to enable our participants to incorporate the material learned into their proposals for SIPs.

April 4 The CTU PPAC class meets. Members share their SIPs. The session is pure delight. The highest standards of professionalism are evident. Step by step the teachers provide the details for fleshing out their vision of restructured schools. For one school, implementation means involving the rest of the faculty in the process, and the details of their plan are directed toward that goal.

For the other, which has already had an opportunity to involve other faculty members, the plan focuses on a reading program detailed down to the furniture and equipment for the reading center. The plans call for participatory decision making, an inclusive approach. The focus of improving teachers’ diagnostic skills will be on helping the students, not chastising the teacher as deficient in any way. The collaborative approach will be used. We can reward these efforts, which are giant steps toward the goals of reform, only with our sincere congratulations. Would that we could wave a magic wand to eliminate any opposition and make smooth the road to implementation. These professionals deserve no less.

April 8 PPAC meeting to discuss use of staff development funds. My colleagues no doubt see me as obstreperous when, as they skip from one suggestion to another for spend-
ing the money, I ask to what end they wish to put the funds. What is their plan? Where are they going with the money? How does this piece fit into the whole of their plan for where we hope to be by this time next year? I feel like an alien asking these questions, but I know none of the teachers there would teach bits and pieces to their students without an overall plan.

Professional growth

LAZARUS, teacher

March 20 The CU conference on restructuring was initially planned for 200 participants. It was then expanded to accommodate 300, but still many were turned away.

March 21 Day Two of the CU conference. The morning begins with a general session where Debbie Walsh, director of the CU's new Quest Center, demonstrates the Socratic method with a group of 12 volunteers from the audience. The 30-minute discussion, based on "A Cub Pilot's Experience" from Mark Twain's Life on the Mississippi, twists and turns like the river itself. The author's change in attitude about the river was like that of a driver who knows too well the route to work but has a passenger with him who points out the beauty along the way that the driver has long since tuned out—a bit like being in love versus falling in love.

Was the Mississippi riverboat pilot a good teacher? The student was empowered. The lessons were incremental. The student was provided with hands-on experience. The river changed daily; so had the riverboat student to change daily. So must we. The children are constantly changing; we too have to adapt continually.

Questions at the session. An English teacher asks if we destroy the wonder of learning for the student when we analyze a work to death. For another the challenge is in trying to make the same old thing look beautiful. Again, like the river, learning is new every day. Muses another teacher, How, in turn, would Twain himself teach the river? One teacher finds the method through which Twain was taught—"I'll learn a man the river or kill him"—analogous to how he was taught.

Director Walsh ended her session by summarizing what the profession knows, from research and experience, about the learning process—that is, how do students really learn? Learning builds on previous knowledge; it is a social process; it invites collaborative dialogue. Thus she concluded: "It is unconscionable not to teach from what we know is true." Such action in another profession would be grounds for malpractice.

ROBIN, observer

April 11 Conference on April 3 and 4 by and for teachers, sponsored by the Citizens Schools' Committee and the Teachers' Task Force of the City-Wide Coalition for School Reform. It was a model of how Chicago teachers can use their professional commitment and talent in the context of school reform to reach out to one another and learn from one another.

The first step in planning was a great idea and set the tone for the grassroots nature of the conference right at the start: send out a questionnaire asking teachers how they want to learn about their colleagues' successful teaching practices. The favored way (35 percent of respondents) was direct observation. Money was secured to pay for substitutes to cover teachers' classes while they visited other schools on Friday. The response far exceeded the available 100 slots. I overheard teachers telling one another incredulously about this unprecedented opportunity. The planning committee hopes to expand this popular project next year to include more teachers.

The conference on Saturday was attended by more than 200 teachers, and more than 60 teachers presented workshops. As so happens at conferences, the contacts people made were as important as the organized activities. A lot more teachers now know who to call for ideas and support for innovation.

Closings, consolidations

ALF, student

March 30 For the second year in a row, my school has been on Supt. Kimbrough's school-closing list. But this year we were shocked to learn they were thinking of consolidating us with one of our rival schools.

"How can they possibly put our schools together?" asked one student.

"We'll tear each other apart," warned another.

Many students insisted they would transfer before they would attend such a consolidated school.

Teachers, although not saying much, were also angry at the thought of closing or consolidating.

March 31 The principal distributed letters to the student body explaining the school closing/consolidation issue. She urged parents to call the Board of Education and protest.

April 1 We were taken off the list because of our academic standing.

Students were relieved to hear the news. Many teachers discussed what our students should do for next year so that we don't end up on the list a third time.

OLIVIA, principal

March 31 The consolidation hit list is out and we're not on it! Faculty and LSC members are breathing easier.

Applause for central office

OLIVIA, principal

March 26 I took my LSC chair to the "Cause for Applause" conference, cosponsored in part by CPS and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. We both agreed it was an excellent conference. Most of the workshops were interesting and thought-provoking. I wished all my LSC members and key staff members could have attended.

LAZARUS, teacher

March 28 One of my colleagues recently shared with a group of us a Board of Education 140-page publication entitled Systemic Restructuring: Transforming Teaching and Learning, A Five-Year Plan, marked "Working Draft: Not for circulation, distribution or publication." It is replete with the language of innovation, which leads me to believe that someone at central office has been doing some home-
work. Dates are included for public hearings.

OLIVIA, principal

April 10 We received today the guidelines and forms to use when submitting our federal and state Chapter 1 plans. I was pleased to see that the forms this year appear to be rather comprehensive and well-organized. We have a good idea of how we want to spend these funds. The revised, improved forms will serve to remind us of specific line items we want to include and will help us keep better track of the dollars.

Vanishing jobs

LAZARUS, teacher

March 27 At the off-site gifted program (see Diaries, February 1992), students and teachers are witnesses to history as a small group of men from the local industry soon to close its doors tell their stories on video. Strong, wiry men used to hard work, they tell of camaraderie, of concessions made to management, of the demise of the labor movement (although its mortgage is not yet paid, their local's headquarters is closing), of the emasculation of the labor force, of landmarks obliterated from the landscape of an America whose face we will soon not recognize. The few hundred workers displaced by the company's closing will join the tens of thousands of "aliens" in their own land.

In the past, our students could leave school and find employment in the local company. No more.

Gambling: Reality and metaphor

LAZARUS, teacher

April 6 In study halls, merely being able to contain the dozens of students is a formidable if not futile task. And enforcing our school policy against card and dice playing during study hall is even more formidable.

In light of the city's new interest in promoting casino gambling, perhaps we should now justify the students' activities as "career development."

This casino proposal is surely an indication of the desperate measures forced upon cities by this most peculiar of economic depressions. Is the casino the "soma" of 1984?

High school restructuring

ALF, student

April 21 Next year classes at my school will be longer, but there won't be as many class periods. The classes will also be taught by two teachers instead of one. It is supposed to show the students how two different subjects are related to each other—for instance, how you need the basic concept of one subject to do the other. It sounds pretty good to me. I wonder if I'll change my mind when the two teachers disagree on grades for their combined students!

April 24 There are rumors about a new hall sweep method. Our history teacher explained it for us:

"An announcement will be made between each period letting students know they have one minute left to get to class. After the announcement, each teacher will go to his or her door and at the sound of the bell close the door. Any students left in the hall will then be escorted to the auditorium where appropriate disciplinary actions will be taken."

Security

RACHEL, student

April 23 My school was closed today because of a generator problem. At 7:55 a.m., the security guards told the students to leave the building. The students stood around in front of the school for at least five minutes and then slowly, too slowly, started leaving the school lawn. At 8:05, security guards again told the students to go home.

Fifteen minutes later a gang fight erupted in front of the school. Security guards were in the building while the fight was going on. No one came out to break up the fight, which lasted for at least five minutes. Where were the guards? Probably in the building sitting around drinking coffee.

Time-clock mentality

OLIVIA, principal

April 24 We put the 1991-92 SLP into the computer to make updating it easier. I've shared copies with PPAC members and asked for their input. Unfortunately, there is no time during the school day that faculty members can get together to work on this. After school is also a problem. Some of my teachers take classes then or have family responsibilities.

There is much talk about teacher involvement in the process of reforming our schools, and certainly teacher involvement is necessary. But when? If teachers are to be active participants in school reform, they must release themselves from the time constraints of the 8:30 to 2:30 day. Overhauling the schools; planning, implementing and evaluating change; developing and expanding one's knowledge base; and experimenting with new ideas and processes cannot be done while one is also trying to teach students.

Reform in Chicago is doomed unless we can lengthen the school day for teachers and other staff so we can tap into the knowledge and experience of those who work directly with students. All of us—teachers, principals, central and district office administrators, and union officials—have to rethink the time-clock mentality that currently dictates the teacher's work day.

In the meantime, getting staff to contribute on their "own" time is difficult at best and leaves the task of developing school improvement plans in the hands of a very few. A teacher who has not contributed to his or her school's improvement plan, one who has no investment, has little concern for the outcome. Success or failure is not a personal matter for that teacher. If reform is to work, it must become a personal matter.

CATALYST/JUNE 1992
NEW YORK

Master teacher proposal. The head of the teachers union in New York City has proposed a new category of "master teachers" who would receive extra pay.

Sandra Feldman, president of the United Federation of Teachers, sees the program as a way to reward experienced teachers and provide an incentive for them to continue teaching, according to an article in the April 15 issue of Education Week.

New York City schools face a projected shortage of 15,000 teachers over the next eight years.

Feldman's proposal calls for creation of a commission that would establish criteria, including teaching standards, for master teachers. She says that unlike the "wholly discredited concept of merit pay," such a system would be "objective." Unions typically complain that merit pay plans have no standards.

The New York proposal comes amid negotiations for a new teacher contract; teachers there have been working without a contract since September.

PHILADELPHIA

Senior teacher plan hit. A $16-million-a-year "career teacher" program in Philadelphia has come under fire from community leaders who believe the money could be better spent, according to an article in the April 22 issue of Education Week.

The program, added to the teacher contract in 1988, rewards teachers who have a master's degree, an additional 60 hours of graduate course credits, 10 years of teaching experience and certification in more than one field. Meeting these criteria brings a pay raise of about $5,000.

Critics complain that teachers are rewarded even if courses do not relate to their teaching duties. Richard de Leone, executive director of the corporate-based Committee to Support the Philadelphia Public Schools, questioned the wisdom of the program now that the financially strapped district is moving toward reforms, such as site-based school management, that could benefit from focused teacher training.

"If I had $15 million to spend on teacher development, I don't think I would use it to pay them for going from 30 to 60 credits," said de Leone.

Typically, pay increases for additional courses stop at 30 credits beyond a master's degree, according to a survey by the National Education Association. In Chicago, which two years ago substantially increased the financial incentives for taking additional courses, teachers with a master's degree and 30 credits get a raise of $916 for logging an additional 15 credits and another raise of about $916 for obtaining a doctoral degree. In addition, each such "lane" change nets a $6,000 bonus.

In Philadelphia, both school administrators and union leaders defend teachers' right to choose their own courses. "I think it's important to understand that a math teacher taking a course in history is not wrong," said Herbert Kaughman, the district's director of school staffing. "We expect teachers to be knowledgeable not just about their subject, but about the world around them."

"No one questions if [teachers] take courses, such as school finance, that can lead to administrative certification and out of the classroom," said Jamie Horwitz of the American Federation of Teachers in Washington, D.C. "Yet teachers are criticized for pursuing academic interests that might increase their value in the classroom."

Philadelphia's teacher contract expires this summer; the union has said that tampering with the senior teacher reward program would be a strike issue.

WISCONSIN

Choice program upheld. A Wisconsin program that uses state tax dollars to pay private-school tuition for children from low-income families in Milwaukee has been upheld by the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

"The country has been watching Wisconsin for a signal; now they've got it," Wisconsin's Republican governor, Tommy G. Thompson, told the Associated Press following the court's 4-3 decision.

The pilot program, touted by Thompson and President George Bush as a national model, is paying partial tuition for some 500 low-income students, chosen by lottery, to attend six private, non-religious schools. Religious schools cannot participate in the program. The tuition money, about $2,500 per child, is subtracted from Milwaukee's public school budget.

Ruling on technical grounds, an appeals court found in 1990 that the program was unconstitutionally enacted. The Supreme Court overturned that ruling and went on to declare that the program represents an attempt to "determine if it is possible to improve, through parental choice, the quality of education in Wisconsin for children of low-income families."

Meanwhile, a random-sample survey of 1,000 Wisconsin residents has found growing support for school vouchers, especially among African Americans. Between 1989 and 1992, the percentage of Wisconsin residents favoring vouchers for use in public and private schools rose from 46 percent to 59 percent, according to the 1992 Wisconsin Citizen Survey. Among blacks, 83 percent favor vouchers, more blacks than the strongest supporters. The poll also found that 81 percent of residents favor choice among public schools in the same district and 72 percent favor between-district choice.

Michael Klonsky
New business-backed study sounds old alarm

by Michael Klonsky

An independent, corporate-financed study of the Board of Education's financial situation paints an alarming picture of a system with a virtually unmanageable budget crisis.

Without permanent new sources of revenue or major reductions in service, the system faces a projected revenue shortfall of over $500 million by 1996, according to management consultants Booz Allen & Hamilton.

The study recommends such controversial steps as tapping the private sector for school maintenance and obtaining union concessions. But it concedes that even these would have only a minor impact on the looming deficit.

The study "sounds the alarm," says Larry Howe, executive director of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, which picked up half the tab for the $1 million study. What's new in the findings, says Booz Allen Vice President Andrew A. Stern, "is the magnitude of the long-term problem and the degree to which that problem is structural."

Half the problem is attributable to such structural factors as the city's increasing birth rate, which likely will boost public school enrollment from the current 409,700 to 427,000 in 1997. Further, health care costs are outpacing inflation.

The other half of the shortfall stems from political and policy decisions, such as the shift of state Chapter 1 funds out of the board's central budget and into schools' discretionary accounts. Some reformers, like Donald Moore of Designs for Change, fear the board may "use the study to go after state Chapter 1 again."

Also inflating the short fall is the decision made during teacher contract negotiations two years ago to help pay for raises by temporarily diverting taxes levied for the pension fund. Under state law, the authority to make that tax diversion expires when the current teacher contract expires.

"Our take from this," says Stern, "is that it's time to stop trying to solve the problem with short-term budgeting expediencies and accounting slipshod. We really need to address the kind of deep structural problems that are causing expenditures to rise faster than resources."

Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, says it's time for the business community to say what new taxes it will back. "You acknowledge the problem. You acknowledge that cuts can only take care of part of the problem. Therefore, what revenue stream are you willing to improve?"

The study projects that over the next five years, school spending will increase by 6.8 percent annually while resources will increase by only 2.7 percent, leaving the board with a $540 million deficit in 1996.

However, next year's shortfall is forecast at "only" $175 million, not the $300 million the board estimated last fall. The main difference between the numbers is that Booz Allen's estimate of this year's increase in the city's property tax base is double what the board had forecast. Both budget calculations include $100 million for the 7 percent pay hikes the board negotiated with all its employee unions for 1992-93 and $29 million for pay raises tied to longevity and additional course credits.

"We hope we have brought a level of credibility to the numbers that seems to have been lacking in public debate," observes Stern.

To begin bridging the financial chasm, the study suggests:

- More efficient use of custodians and engineers could reduce costs by up to $26 million. These savings could be achieved either through staff reductions or by tapping the private sector for these services.
- Roving maintenance crews, drawn from central and school staffs, could handle emergencies while engineer-custodians would perform or contract for other repairs. Savings would be used to reduce the school maintenance backlog.
- Elimination of board warehousing operations. Projected savings: $5 million.
- New purchasing practices, which the board already is beginning to implement with help from the nonprofit Financial Research Advisory Committee. Projected savings: $24 million.
- Ensuring that to the extent possible, class sizes and assignments for high school teachers are as large as the teacher contract permits. Projected savings: $8 to $10 million.
- Various changes in energy conservation, food service and transportation. Projected savings: $18 to $27 million.

The study concludes that between $78 million and $107 million can be saved each year by streamlining centralized functions. But only about half of the savings could be used to offset the deficit in general operating funds, says Stern. The other half would be channeled into such earmarked funds as the federal school lunch program.

"The bottom line," Stern stresses, "is that by 1996, even if we substantially improve the operations of the school system, we're still going to have about a half-billion-dollar deficit."

Eliminating this shortfall through fringes alone would require a 20-percent reduction in staff. Eliminating it through property taxes alone would...
LEGISLATORS OPEN NEW FRONT IN SCHOOL FUNDING BATTLE

The battle over education funding in Illinois will shift to the ballot box this fall. In the Nov. 3 general election, citizens will be asked to vote on a proposed amendment to the state constitution that could trigger additional spending of $1 billion to $3 billion on public elementary and secondary schools.

The “Education Amendment” will ask voters to make education “a fundamental right,” to make a “thorough and efficient” system of education a “paramount duty” of the state, and to require the state to shoulder “the preponderant financial responsibility” for school funding.

To date, Illinois courts have repeatedly ruled that the constitution’s current education article merely sets “primary” state funding as a “goal.”

The proposed amendment, approved by the Legislature April 30, creates a third front for advocates of both increased and more equitable funding of public schools.

Several dozen school districts set up the first front a year ago when they filed a lawsuit contending that the vast differences in per-pupil spending among districts in the state violates the state constitution as currently written. But the past court rulings are a concern.

A second front was formed when the Legislature created a task force to devise a plan for more equitable funding. The task force has embraced the concepts of equitable and increased funding but remains divided over how to implement them. On May 12, members adopted the equity formula advanced by reform advocates—a ratio of 1.5 to 1 between the highest spending and lowest spending districts, compared to the current 6 to 1. But it tabled the portion of its report that would have established some redistribution of local real estate taxes from the wealthiest 1 percent of schools.

HOW MANY BILLIONS?

It was task force leaders—Sens. Arthur Berman (D-Chicago) and John Maitland (R-Bloomington)—who drafted the proposed constitutional amendment, seemingly as a push for the Legislature itself.

“By requiring the state to support 51 percent of spending for adequate education,” says Berman, “the Education Amendment offers voters the opportunity to tell their legislators that they must exert the political will necessary to turn this situation around.”

Although technically the amendment does not mandate any increase in revenues, its passage in all likelihood would result in an increase in the state income tax rate (currently the third lowest in the country), thus guaranteeing fierce debate over the issue.

Another point of controversy is the amendment’s demand that Illinois “guarantee equality of educational opportunity” to all school children. Conservative legislators and business spokesmen fear that this guarantee will place all education bills under court supervision and that the amendment will open up a Pandora’s box of future tax increases and the creation of new taxes.

Business interests and legislators from wealthier suburban areas have vowed to oppose the amendment. And even if it should pass, the measure does not spell out how the funds will be collected or distributed. That will be up to the Legislature and, ultimately, the courts.

If the state guarantees spending of $4,000 per pupil, according to Berman, the state would have to spend an additional $1.85 billion. (Currently, the state guarantees $2,530 per pupil for districts that meet a local tax threshold.) Berman says that a reordering of state priorities can free up the bulk of this money, but he hopes the task force can fashion legislation that will balance any state tax increases with local property tax relief in heavily levied areas and increases in local tax efforts in others.

Gov. Jim Edgar pegs the required increased spending at $3 billion, the bulk of which would have to come from an income tax increase.

“People need to recognize that we only got into this position of looking for revenues because education has been our last priority for so long,” says Berman. “We take care of ‘hot’ items and ignore the fundamentals, and citizens can hardly exercise their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness if they don’t receive an adequate education.”

The task force was scheduled to meet again on May 26.

Andrew Patner
Suburban teachers work longer

Teachers in suburban Cook County are required to spend substantially more time in school than are their Chicago counterparts, a CATALYST survey has found.

Students in suburban elementary schools also spend more time in class than Chicago students do. However, the school day for high school students is the same in the city and suburbs.

The 45 districts responding to the survey enroll 40 percent of the students in suburban Cook County public schools.

### Required teacher work day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools</th>
<th>High schools</th>
<th>Elementary schools</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>366 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cook suburbs</td>
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### Students’ school day

<table>
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<th>Elementary schools</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Cook suburbs</td>
<td>366 minutes</td>
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Source: CATALYST survey

The suburban high school teachers spend, on average, one and a half hours more in school each day than do Chicago's secondary teachers.

Spokespersons for the suburban districts said the extra time is spent on preparation, curriculum meetings, helping individual students and, in a few cases, extracurricular activities.

Suburban elementary teachers spend nearly 45 minutes more on the job than do Chicago elementary teachers.

Suburban elementary school students spend an extra 26 minutes in school—a total of 341 minutes, compared to 315 in the city.

At the high school level, both suburban students and Chicago students are required to be in school 366 minutes. However, none of the suburban high schools permits students to take more than one study hall a day, while some Chicago high schools permit up to three study halls a day.

In Chicago, both Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough and the African American Education Reform Institute have made a longer school day and school year a top priority, though they concede neither is likely next school year because of the board's financial situation. The institute has said teachers should not be granted higher salaries unless they agree to work longer.

"When we give, we're going to ask for something in exchange, until we get true professionalism in terms of the way teachers approach their work," says Gwendolyn Laroche, the institute's acting chair. The extra time, she says, should be used for curriculum and staff development.

Robert Sampierl, the School Board's chief operating officer, says more staff development time is just as important as more class time for students. "We want to help teachers be more productive, and that means better teaching through staff development," he explains.

Elementary school districts responding to the CATALYST survey generally pay their teachers less than Chicago does; at the high school level, the results were mixed.

### Elementary teacher pay

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Chicago</th>
<th>Cook suburbs</th>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning, BA</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 years, BA</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 years, MA</td>
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### High school teacher pay

<table>
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Source: CATALYST survey

Last year, one Chicago school, Orozco Community Academy, used its discretionary money to add an hour of class time, starting school at 8 a.m. instead of 9 a.m. It discontinued the practice because of teacher and student dissatisfaction.

"Just about every day we had a long line of student tardies," said Principal Mary Mikros. "Everyone had a hard time getting used to it."   

Deborah Hinton

More flexibility for state Chapter 1

A pending change in state regulations governing Chicago’s state Chapter 1 funds would give schools more flexibility in using them, but some reformers contend the change would make it easier for the Board of Education to cut school level programs.

The change has to do with the definition of basic programs, those the board pays for out of its regular budget and provides citywide. Currently, once the board pays for a citywide program, it is considered basic forever. If the board cuts the program, schools cannot replace it with state Chapter 1 money, which can be used only for supplemental programs.

The proposed regulation would permit the board to decide each year which programs are basic. Under this setup, schools could use state Chapter 1 funds to replace a program the board drops from its “basic” list, for example, the assistant principals who were cut this school year.

"In the name of giving principals extra flexibility, it may result in less [regular] funding being made available," says Diana Nelson, president of Leadership for Quality Education.

Dan Dixon, head of reform oversight for the Illinois State Board of Education, sees it differently. "They'll end up cutting the stuff they've been cutting away," he says. "The point is, do you want to keep [requirements] flexible so that schools can at least keep up?"

Dixon notes that the Illinois School Code serves as a backstop by requiring such basics as teachers for every grade level and counselors. And the teacher contract sets class size.

Other new regulations would:

- Allow schools more freedom to change their Chapter 1 budgets, but the School Board the authority to approve any change that amounts to either $500 or 1 percent of a line item, whichever amount is larger.

- Move up board reporting dates so that schools can get their funds before the school year begins.

Lorraine Forte

CATALYST/JUNE 1992
New Finance Authority chief reaches out to schools

Newly appointed School Finance Authority (SFA) Chairman Martin "Mike" Koldyke didn’t waste any time in living up to his reputation as a man of action. He used his first SFA meeting to launch a series of meetings with local school groups, meetings he hopes will define a new, decentralized role for the Board of Education.

Koldyke, who, along with Ameritech attorney Raymond Romero, was appointed to the SFA April 6 by Mayor Richard M. Daley and Gov. Jim Edgar, set a plan in motion to get the stalled reform process back on track following earlier SFA rejection of the board’s systemswide reform plan.

The new appointments, together with the reappointment of incumbent Joyce Moran, are significant for several reasons. First, the addition of Romero, a Hispanic, gives the five-member authority three minority members—an SFA first. The appointment of Koldyke to replace Phillip D. Block III gives the SFA a chair who is both a "schools person" and a business leader. Most importantly, the new faces could offer an opportunity for the authority to get beyond its festering internal conflicts and its contentious relationship with the School Board.

By initiating the community outreach plan at the April 23 SFA meeting, Koldyke quickly set a new tone. The SFA had never attempted direct contact with the school community. Rather, it has exercised its oversight authority by rejecting or accepting already-prepared budgets and plans, leaving the board to deal directly with the school community.

The new initiative calls for convening up to 90 representatives from 24 to 30 schools—high schools and non-magnet elementary schools—in what Koldyke calls "focus groups."

"We are going to ask the local schools to evaluate the role of the board," Koldyke explains. "They will tell us what kind of services they have received from the board in the past and what kind of services they would like to have in the future."

Based on this assessment, he says, the SFA, along with the board, will develop a plan for decentralizing authority. The board’s role will then be restructured based upon the perceived needs of the local schools.

Koldyke is the founder and chair of Frontenac Capital Corp., a venture-capital firm. In a recent Wall Street Journal article, Koldyke was compared to the late community organizer Saul Alinsky, "albeit an Alinsky in a Dobbs hat and tasseled loafers." He is chair of the Golden Apple Foundation, which helps support students who make a commitment to teach in inner-city schools. He got involved in inner-city school reform about seven years ago; with $50,000 of his own money and another $250,000 from friends, he started the foundation.

'Intelligent prodding'

Romero replaced David Heller, who had become openly demoralized over internal SFA differences on issues defining the authority’s role. Romero is the first Latino member of the SFA. He is general counsel for Ameritech International, prior to which he spent seven years handling civil rights cases for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the largest Hispanic civil rights organization in the country.

That post plunged him into such issues as desegregation, overcrowding and bilingual education.

Moran, an African American, has been a member since 1985. She is a senior counsel for Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Koldyke and Romero spent their first SFA meeting listening to recommendations from the North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL), which conducted a three-month, $300,000 evaluation of the school-level impact of the board’s 1990-91 systemswide reform plan.

The plan was supposed to serve as a blueprint for reforming and decentralizing Chicago’s schools; NCREL gave it very low grades.

"The conflict between the School Finance Authority and the Chicago Board of Education resulted in a plan no one wanted or believed in," the study said. "The plan seems to be a motherless child—no one outside of the Superintendent’s Office, even individuals involved in developing the plan, expressed ownership of the plan or enthusiasm for its implementation."

The report saw little hope for the board to give leadership to the reform process, saying the decentralization process "appears to be beyond the reach of the Chicago Board of Education." It called on the SFA to "reconfigure its mission" and take charge of the reform process by expanding its visibility and authority. More detailed recommendations were due by the end of May.

Koldyke sees the need to heal the SFA’s rift with the board; he stresses the necessity of building a partnership with Supt. Ted Kimbrough and board President Clinton Bristow. He foresees an "intelligent prodding" relationship with the board.

But the SFA is bound to run into conflict as it tries to expand its authority, especially if it goes around the board to direct contact with the local schools. Previous efforts by the mayor and governor to expand the power of the SFA met with sharp resistance, not only from the board but from the legislative Black Caucus and others in the African-American community. To its critics, the SFA is an outside force trying to control the largely African-American school system.

Koldyke and Romero are both hopeful, if not confident, that the newly constituted SFA can build a good working relationship with African-American and other minority members of the school community. "I have worked well with members of the minority community in the past around the cluster plans," notes Koldyke, "and I will try and be as sensitive as I can to their input."

Michael Klonsky
For the record:

- **LAW SUIT HITS REFORM** In an effort to win compensation for principals who were forced out of their jobs under reform, the Chicago Principals Association has, for the second time, filed a lawsuit challenging the reform act.

  The association’s first suit forced the Legislature last year to revise the way local school councils were elected. The second suit contends the revision is unconstitutional, too.

  Specifically, it charges that the law dilutes the rights of community members by giving them only two of eight elected seats on councils. Parents hold the other six elected seats. The School Board appoints two teachers following advisory elections at each school, a procedure the suit also challenges.

  The association’s chief concern, however, is principals’ loss of tenure under reform. Nearly 100 principals have been fired and another 150 forced into retirement since local school councils were first elected in 1989, according to association president Bruce Berndt.

- **PRINCIPAL WINS RACE SUIT** A federal jury has ruled that former Morgan Park High School Principal Walter Pilditch, who is white, was the victim of race discrimination by four black local school council members who voted not to rehire him and a fifth who abstained.

  The jury, which included only one African American, awarded Pilditch nearly $70,000 in damages, including a total of $7,000 in punitive damages from the five council members. U.S. District Judge William Hart dropped the Board of Education as a defendant, but the board may still be required to pay the $62,000 in compensatory damages.

  Pilditch lost his job in 1990 when he failed to obtain the required six votes. The council subsequently could not agree on a replacement; it sent three names to Subdistrict Supt. Grady Jordan, listing Pilditch last.

  Jordan chose former Kennedy High School Principal Earl Bryant, who is black. Jordan and a Hispanic LSC member who voted against Pilditch member who voted against Pilditch were found innocent of discrimination.

  Pilditch, now director of performing arts at Curie High School, has said his salary dropped $25,000.

  Two other white former principals have filed federal discrimination suits over their firings. Last year, 18 other ousted principals filed complaints with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, typically a formality preceding personal lawsuits. (See CATALYST, September 1991.)

- **TEACHERS CENTER OPENS** Launched with a $1.1 million, three-year grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Teachers Union’s new Quest Center has enrolled 165 teachers in courses on innovative teaching and school restructuring.

  Teachers can sign up for classes individually, but the center’s goal is to have groups from the same schools attend together and develop schoolwide restructuring plans. Schools have to pay for substitutes or stipends.

Upcoming events:

- **JUNE 6** “Small Grants Workshop By and For Teachers,” a free workshop featuring Chicago elementary school teachers who have won small grants for classroom and school projects. Time: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Place: Whitney M. Young High School, 211 S. Laffin. Sponsor: Chicago Foundation for Education. Reservations required. Forms available through principals or call the foundation at (312) 853-8278.

- **JUNE 15-19** Chicago elementary and high school principals will be asked to participate in a citywide survey on the progress of school reform. Entitled “School reform: the principals’ turn,” the survey is sponsored by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which includes the Chicago Public Schools, area universities and other education organizations. Last year, the consortium surveyed elementary school teachers. For additional information, contact Al Bennett, chair, Principals’ Survey Work Group, (312) 341-3864.

Lorraine Forte

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PUBLISHER
Roy Larson

EDITOR
Linda Lenz

MANAGING EDITOR
Lorraine Forte

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR
DiAnne Walsh

OFFICE STAFF
Carolyn Palmer, manager
Tiffany Drinkwater, intern

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
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Dumas teachers keep each other going

"A lot of tears" is how fifth-grade teacher Connie Amon describes her first year of teaching at Dumas Elementary School, 6650 S. Ellis. If not for Teachers' Talking Together, a professional support group at Dumas, "my students wouldn't have had a teacher," says Amon.

Members of the group offered not just encouragement and empathy, but also practical advice. Teacher Talk's facilitator, veteran teacher Lynn Cherkasky-Davis, spent several days observing in Amon's classroom, offering pointers. "A lot of it helped me," says Amon. "Without that support, I would have left."

The group began in September of 1990, when a core of 15 teachers, most of them new to teaching, met informally after school on Wednesdays to discuss new research, methods they were using in their classrooms, and problems they were having. By October, they were posting their meeting times and places in the school office, and other teachers joined them. This year, each meeting has a specific focus; there have been sessions on writing grant proposals, on portfolio assessment and on recent and upcoming teacher workshops.

In contrast to a strong tendency among teachers, members of the group share materials, ideas and resources. They loan each other equipment and make copies of new curriculum materials. At meetings, members report on recent professional conferences and workshops; they inform each other about upcoming events, including scholarships and grants.

Each meeting takes place at a different classroom and begins with a tour of the room conducted by the "host" teacher, who shows off the work students are doing, emphasizing new methods and materials.

Teachers influence each other directly through the group. Last year, kindergarten teacher Brenda Dukas picked up two ideas for her class—a journal-writing program and an African story-quilt—after observing them at Teacher Talk meetings.

Members emphasize the emotional support they receive from each other. "I really feel a sense of trust here," says first-grade teacher Ann Smith. "I can say, 'I don't feel like I'm living up to snuff on this one part,' or 'What do you think I should do about that?' or 'What do you think I should do about the other?' And I don't think people are going to run out and tell everybody, 'Oh, Ann can't do this,' or 'Ann can't do that.'"

Doris Clark, who has taught at Dumas for 28 years, says that involvement with Teacher Talk has been "a renewal for me. They've gotten me enthusiastic about teaching again. At my stage it's easy to just let things go along."

"I have not needed the type of emotional support that the younger teachers have gotten," says Clark, "but I have desperately needed the type of sharing of ideas, of new things to read, new names to learn."

Dan Weissmann

332 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60604

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