Some schools excel at others’ expense

by Michael Selinker and Michelle Martin

For the 18 children at McCutcheon Elementary School who speak Cantonese but not English, bilingual teacher Wilson May is a lifeline tossed by school reform.

Moy has worked full time at McCutcheon for the last 25 years, but last year the Uptown school saw central-office funding for his position cut in half. The reason was a decrease in the number of Cantonese-speaking students. Full-time positions at other schools beckoned the veteran teacher. But McCutcheon was able to keep him because reform had put $431,000 in local discretionary funds (state Chapter 1) into the school’s budget and stripped central office of the right to assign him to another school half time. McCutcheon dipped into its local funds to pick up the other half of Moy’s salary.

“There wasn’t any way we would deny those children an education,” Moy says.

McCutcheon is one of 41 schools that are spending their state Chapter 1 money or getting outside grants to beef up their staffs in bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL), a CATALYST analysis of Board of Education staff reports shows. These schools have hired at least 70 teachers in addition to those funded centrally by the board and state.

But this new hiring has a downside. Chicago is short more than 100 bilingual teachers for its nearly 50,000 students who speak 100 languages other than English. In an era of shortage, free enterprise means that one school’s success at attracting “extra” teachers—typically by offering professional freedom, respect or jobs close to home—can come at the expense of another school.

Further, since central office has lost the power to assign teachers, there is more opportunity for schools to violate state staffing requirements, knowingly or unknowingly.

The downside

Garvy Elementary School on the Northwest Side is an example of the downside of the new competition for bilingual teachers. With 46 children who could not cope in English, the school last year was entitled to state funding for a half-time Spanish bilingual teacher and a half-time ESL teacher. Initially, it had both teachers. But when the Spanish bilingual teacher left to take a full-time position at nearby Reinberg Elementary, Garvy couldn’t find a replacement.

“We advertised in the district mail, in the citywide computer, at the board office,” says Principal Carl Van Kast.

“We tried any way we could, but we could get no one.”
So all 46 kids were cycled through Irene Miller's ESL class on the two or three days a week she was at Garvy. A few teachers who knew some Spanish and a Latino security guard translated in emergencies, but generally the kids were on their own in all-English classes.

"The children would have all benefited from my being there all the time," Miller says. "They need to see their teacher every day, or everything you teach them will be lost by the next time you see them. But you do the best you can."

In all, about 80 of Chicago's 300 schools with children needing bilingual services have at least one bilingual teaching position vacant or staffed by a teacher who does not have bilingual certification. Since many of the vacant positions are paid for by the state, the board loses about $1 million in state reimbursement for these vacancies.

While Chicago has reduced its shortage of bilingual teachers—three years ago it was 300 teachers short—bilingual education is being squeezed in another way. Last year, the $60 million in teacher salaries and other costs was split about evenly between the board and the state, both providing one teacher each for every 60 children. But because of a state spending freeze and Chicago teacher raises, the state will pay for about 100 fewer bilingual teachers this year.

That meant the board had to find an additional $5 million to maintain required staffing, says Rodolfo Serna, assistant superintendent for language and cultural education. "The only things left in the [bilingual] budget are teachers and teacher aides," he says. "Teacher training, support for smaller programs, materials—I've had to take drastic cuts across the board."

**Hardest challenge**

Spanish is the dominant language among "limited-English proficient" students, those whose fluency in English is not good enough for English-only classes. About 85 percent of Chicago's LEP students speak Spanish. And two-thirds of the bilingual teacher shortage is for Spanish-speaking teachers.

But the hardest challenge is finding teachers who are fluent in Assyrian, Cambodian, Hmong and other languages. "Often we provide aides where we cannot find a bilingual teacher," Serna says. "In some instances there just is no teacher.

Serna guesses that beyond current bilingual teachers, the system has 1,500 teachers fluent in other languages, far more than enough to fill all bilingual positions. But most do not have certification to teach bilingually, and many simply do not want to.

"You would think we would have enough graduates from our own colleges to teach in our schools, but we don't," says Mara Medina Seidner, the state's manager of bilingual education. "We have a lot of competition from prettier places and other professions. So we have to go to other countries and get their professionals."

Board staff recruits teachers from Mexico and Puerto Rico, and goes to local colleges to encourage Spanish-speaking students to consider bilingual instead of traditional teaching. Last year, the board also paid for about 700 current teachers to take classes for bilingual certification, but the program was dropped this year to help balance

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**Trumbull loses funds for skirtng regulations**

By giving principals the authority to hire their own teachers, reform has allowed them to expand bilingual programs. But it also has made it easier for schools to shirk their duty to children who don't speak English. At only one school, though, has neglect gotten so bad that the state stepped in and refused funding.

Last October, the state caught Trumbull Elementary School in Andersonville violating more than a dozen state bilingual regulations: Students needing bilingual services were denied them; teachers lacking bilingual certification were hired with bilingual funds to teach general classes; state bilingual funds were used illegally for other purposes; and parents were misled into withdrawing children from bilingual classes.

One by one, community groups say, Trumbull had cut its bilingual programs in Spanish, Assyrian, Vietnamese and Khmer. Last year, two-thirds of the 250 children for whom English is not their native language were in all-English classes. While some of these children knew enough English to survive in English classes, the overall number was so high that it suggested many children were mislabeled.

Accounts vary on how the Trumbull situation came about. When the violations became public, Principal Peggy Little complained, "I have these teachers who aren't certified so I get rid of them, but there are no certified bilingual teachers in the system."

LSC chair Cynthia Stoops said, "I believe strongly in pull-out programs but not in everyday bilingual programs. Whatever happened to teaching [kids] in English? They are only being taught in their own language. That's not educating them."

Regardless, the state denied Trumbull's state bilingual funds for two years. Under pressure from parents, community groups, the city and the state, Trumbull subsequently managed to find 10 more certified bilingual teachers. All its bilingual positions are filled, and Trumbull's funds have been restored. But officials are watching the school closely.

The board's student advocacy unit cites about a half dozen other schools with violations similar to those at Trumbull. Central office is investigating and will seek voluntary correction.

"We have schools that use reform to do great things, but we have others that went the other direction," says the state's Maria Medina Seidner, who made the final decision to remove Trumbull's funding. "In Chicago, people are still used to an 'iron hand' approach, and if they let the iron hand go, all the bad things happen."

Michael Selinker and Scott Schnauff
A bilingual student at Whittier Elementary listens to bilingual tapes.

the board's budget.

These efforts will take years to eliminate the shortage. To obtain a bilingual certificate, a teacher needs to acquire at least 18 credit hours (a full year of full-time college attendance). So far, no teachers have reported transferring from regular classes to bilingual programs, says Margaret Harrigan, associate superintendent for human resources.

But 27 teachers have dropped out of bilingual programs to go to regular classes.

Kanoon biggest winner

With six "extra" bilingually certified teachers, Kanoon Magnet School in Little Village has been the best at attracting such teachers. It used magnet school funds to pay for three extra bilingually certified teachers, other desegregation money to pay for another, and its own state Chapter 1 money to pay for two more.

Actually, almost Kanoon's entire faculty speaks Spanish—even though only half its pupils come in needing bilingual education. Kanoon is one of 10 Chicago schools with a "developmental" bilingual program, which seeks to make English- and Spanish-speaking children fluent in both languages. It attempts this by putting them together in the same classes with a teacher who speaks English and Spanish but who is not necessarily certified to teach bilingually.

"Any school can do whatever it wants to," says Principal Diana Azcoitia. "They just have to hire teachers who can do it."

Other schools that have used their own money to hire at least two extra bilingual teachers are Pierce, Lafayette, Burrs, Gary, Thorp and Cardenas.

Some spend up to a third of their Chapter 1 funds on such teachers. To ease this financial crunch, a score of schools have successfully applied for federal grants to bolster their bilingual staffs.

Quality attracts teachers

Most schools find that quality programs help attract and keep bilingual teachers. At Linne Elementary in Avondale, four Spanish-speaking teachers were added last year because of a growing Spanish-speaking population. Nancy Mendoza came from Trumbull Elementary, whose bilingual education program was so plagued with irregularities that the state stopped funding it. (Trumbull has since started a new bilingual program; see story on page 2.) Mendoza, now Linne's bilingual kindergarten teacher, says she transferred because Linne offered more support.

Humboldt Park's Pulaski Academy had no trouble finding teachers for a new program for gifted Spanish speakers. "People like the idea of teaching gifted students," Principal Rob Alexander explains. "But the people who apply have other options. We're competing for bilingual teachers."

The program, which is starting with only three classes, is only the city's second for gifted students who speak little English; the other opened last year at Orozco Academy in Lawndale. The city's regular gifted programs generally don't enroll non-English speakers because entrance tests are in English, says Richard Ronvik, who coordinates the board's gifted programs.

High schools tend to have more difficulty finding bilingual teachers, especially if the needed language is not Spanish. When Principal John Garvey arrived at Foreman High five years ago, the Northwest Side school had just two certified Polish-speaking teachers for 100 Polish-speaking students. And its Polish enrollment was growing.

By the end of last school year, the number of Polish-speaking students had ballooned to 300, and board documents say the school had the city's biggest shortage of bilingual teachers. Nine positions were filled by teachers who lacked bilingual certification.

Despite Chicago's large Polish population, Garvey could not find bilingual teachers locally, so he went international. Working with the Polish American
Council and the Polish National Alliance, he recruited three teachers and two aides from Poland who wanted to teach in America. Some needed help with English but could teach the Polish-speaking kids better than those who couldn't speak their language, Garvey says. As Foreman's reputation has spread in Chicago's Polish community, Garvey has learned about Polish-speaking teachers elsewhere in the school system.

Garvey now has applications from 15 bilingual teachers, including some at other Chicago schools. "Five years ago I would have had none," he says. "The two good things that came out of school reform were the state Chapter 1 funds and the ability to hire."

Patrick Durkin, principal of Goudy Elementary in Edgewater, concurs. Goudy has filled all 10 of its bilingual positions under a three-year staffing program urged by the community; some recruits came from other Chicago schools. And after the board cut summer school, Goudy tapped its state Chapter 1 funds to offer seven bilingual classes during the summer.

"Reform has allowed us to keep the good programs even when they've been cut," says Durkin.

Violations at 60 schools

Though Chicago schools now have considerable freedom in hiring, they are under the watchful eye of a student advocacy unit in the Department of Language and Cultural Education. The unit seeks to ensure that schools identify all students who need bilingual education and that principals then hire teachers with the proper certification to teach them. The student count is key, for it determines the number of faculty members who should have bilingual certification. Principals at some schools with rising enrollments of non-English speakers have been suspected of undercounting bilingual students so they do not have to dismiss veteran English-speaking staffers to make room for bilingual teachers.

Before reform, central office simply assigned bilingual teachers to schools that undercounted students. Now it has to rely on persuasion to correct this and other violations of state regulations. Most schools cooperate when the board asks for changes, says Carmen Rivera, who heads the student advocacy unit. When they don't, Rivera calls for state assistance.

But the only penalty the state can impose is a harsh one: cancelling state bilingual funds for schools with violations. So Language and Cultural Education is seeking some sort of lesser penalty it can impose.

Last year, Rivera's unit found evidence that 60 schools were in violation of state and board bilingual rules; work with these schools continues.

Most violations were in one of three areas: failure to identify children who needed bilingual services, moving such children out of bilingual classes before they were ready, and not hiring enough teachers to serve them. A few schools apparently had violations in all three areas.

Other violations include not purcha-

CPS heads south for bilingual teachers

With 18 years of teaching and administrative experience, Ivelisse Rosas is one of the most experienced bilingual teachers in the Chicago public schools. Lead bilingual teacher at Piccolo Elementary School, she has been recruited hard by other school districts. But she's staying right here.

That's good not only for Piccolo but also for the board's bilingual teacher recruitment program. The board went a long way to get Rosas and her husband, also a bilingual teacher. More than 2,000 miles, in fact. The board signed her up last year in Puerto Rico, as part of an ongoing recruitment effort in that island and in Mexico.

"They said, 'We need you,'" Rosas recalls. "Our population is growing and we need you."

This is the board's short-term strategy against a bilingual teacher shortage. Hundreds of teachers have been recruited from Latin America since 1985 to meet a growing need for teachers who speak both Spanish and English. More recently, the board has begun actively encouraging Chicago teachers to get bilingual certification, and college students to go into bilingual education. But those efforts won't bear fruit for years, so the southern strategy continues.

Since Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, the board concentrates on Puerto Rico, which has a surplus of teachers, says Margaret Harrigan, associate superintendent for human resources. Last year, school officials went to Puerto Rico hoping to find 100 teachers; they returned with 65. Now the board is working with the Puerto Rican government to align its university graduation requirements with those for an Illinois bilingual certificate.

Meanwhile, the Mexican Ministry of Education has provided teachers who work here on two-year visas. In 1990, 24 teachers came; only two have returned home. CPS is seeking two-year visa extensions for those who stayed.

While clearly fluent in Spanish, it's unclear whether all these teachers are fluent in English as well. One Puerto Rican teacher called by
Schools innovate as CPS relaxes control

by Michelle Martin and Michael Selinker

At Linne Elementary, most Spanish-speaking students are taught separately from English speakers, starting with lessons mostly in Spanish and gradually shifting to English. Three years after their first day of bilingual education, all but a handful move to regular classes full time.

The Avondale school exemplifies transitional bilingual education, which the state mandates for every school with 20 or more students who speak any given language other than English. A few years ago, almost every Chicago school with a bilingual program looked much like Linne.

With the onset of reform in Chicago, however, the Chicago Board of Education, with the state’s approval, is permitting variations on this standard model of transitional bilingual education. Without state permission, Chicago would not receive state bilingual money for schools veering from the standard.

Time the key variation

At Kanoon Magnet School, Spanish-speaking children study alongside their English-speaking peers, as each group is given lessons in the other’s native language. At McCutcheon Elementary, kids of all levels of English fluency take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes so that all can grasp the language better. At Juarez High, students in the bilingual program get most lessons primarily in Spanish. (For details, see stories on pages 8-11.)

Rodolfo Serna, assistant superintendent for language and cultural education, acknowledges that central office cannot micromanage classroom decisions. “We know that the students are in the teachers’ rooms, and we are pretty far away from that.”

Most of the variations involve time: how much of the day students learn in their native languages, how many years they spend in bilingual programs, how much time they spend away from English speakers. The approaches include:

- Emphasizing native languages. Some schools with a majority of Latinos teach bilingual classes mostly in Spanish, which may allow more subject comprehension for students who have not mastered English.
- Stressing ESL. Some schools believe students benefit more from learning English first through ESL classes, often backed by instruction in
Bilingual education glossary

Bilingual education: a program of instruction used to teach English and other subjects to students not fluent in English. As commonly used, an instructional program in which both English and a student's native language are used.

Developmental bilingual education: a program where English speakers and students who speak another language attend class together. Each is taught the other's language to make both groups bilingual.

English as a Second Language (ESL): a program taught predominantly in English aimed at teaching English to non-native speakers.

Immersion: a method of bilingual education in which students who do not speak English are taught completely in English, sometimes with ESL classes.

Limited-English proficient (LEP) student: a student whose English is insufficient for regular classes.

Native language: the language spoken most comfortably by a student, generally the dominant language spoken in the home.

Non-native speaker of English: one whose primary language is not English, regardless of how fluent the person is in English.

Sheltered English: a simplified version of English used to teach math, science, and other subjects before a student is functional in English.

Supported immersion: a program in which students are taught in English but receive ESL classes and native-language support services.

Transitional bilingual education: a program in which students are taught in both their native language and English, with the amount of English gradually increased until they are ready to "transition" into all-English classes. TBE is used for larger groups of non-native speakers.

Transitional program of instruction: a program that provides ESL classes and limited educational support in a non-English speaker's native language. Aides are often used to provide tutoring in the native language. TPI is usually used for smaller groups of non-English speakers.

their native language. Entire classes of non-native speakers may take ESL lessons with English speakers so that both groups gain greater comprehension of English.

- Using supported immersion. "Immersion" suggests a "sink or swim" approach, not allowed in Illinois. But adding support—aides who speak a student's native language—can help students catch up to English speakers.

- Using developmental bilingualism. This approach mixes speakers of English and speakers of another language, in hopes they will acquire each other's languages while maintaining their own.

"We have allowed for a great deal of flexibility in how the children are taught both in their native language and in the English language," says Maria Medina Seidner, who manages bilingual programs for the state Board of Education. "We want to encourage excitement and innovation, but at the same time we don't want to let the rules slide so far that education is impaired. The bottom line is how students are progressing."

However, it is hard to determine that progress because the board does little monitoring of students after they leave the bilingual program.

Research in conflict

Research on bilingual education has had conflicting results. Seemingly, for every study endorsing native-language teaching over immersion, another claims to prove the opposite.

A recent major study split the difference. This federally funded study of 4,000 California students found that transitional bilingual education lasting fewer than four years may have no more lasting value than supported immersion, which requires fewer bilingual teachers. But transitional bilingual education lasting four to six years reaps the greatest long-term benefits. Students learn English, reading and math under all three models, the study claimed, but those in longer transitional programs catch up in subject matter to English speakers more quickly.

"It's very clear from the research that it takes four to five years for a minority-language child to catch up," says Merrill Swain of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, an advisor to the study. "If you give him help in his native language, he will catch up much faster."

Goudy Elementary School is one of several in Chicago that will keep a child in bilingual classes longer than the prescribed three years if the student can't cope in English.

"Teaching English isn't the total answer for these children," says Principal Patrick Durkin. "Since we live in an English-speaking society, they will have to learn English. But it doesn't matter what language the next Einstein learns math in."

Another variation, developmental bilingual education, veers from the state standard by helping non-English speakers retain their native language, while teaching that language to English speakers.

At Kanoon, English and Spanish speakers spend most of the day in separate classes, but every grade has one mixed class. Activities like gym, art and music are combined, allowing students to practice their new languages and break down prejudice.

"When they are together, they don't stay in language groups," says Principal Diana Azcoitia. "All the naughty boys stay together, and all the honor students stay together. They really divide themselves by personality."

But outside school, English rules. This gives Spanish speakers strong incentive to speak English but English speakers little opportunity to speak Spanish. As a result, Kanoon meets its goal of dual language proficiency more often with its Spanish speakers than with English speakers, Azcoitia acknowledges. (To keep her own daughter from losing her Spanish, Azcoitia placed her in a Spanish-speaking classroom even though she could function in English.) Research suggests that the developmental approach works only if a child has an incentive to learn a language.

Opponents favor immersion

Opponents of bilingual education generally say non-English speakers should be immersed in English from the start, on the commonly held assumption that children learn languages faster at younger ages. But
Swain says "that is just false."

"They learn surface-level skills very easily; they can pronounce very well," she explains. "But that doesn't mean they have the cognitive language skills to comprehend what they hear. The kids who start [English] later, who have already laid the foundation in their own language, pick up the language much faster."

Another recent study chalked up another point against immersion at an early age. Writing in Education Week, Lily Wong Fillmore, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, said, "English-immersion preschool programs frequently lead to children losing their primary language and, with that, the ability to communicate with their parents."

Immersion is illegal in Illinois public schools. "We cannot allow a school to put education on hold while they're teaching the students English," explains Medina Seidner of the state board.

Whole-staff approach

While not embracing immersion, some Illinois districts outside Chicago have abandoned separate bilingual programs and are retooling schools so that entire faculties participate in the education of non-native speakers. Library materials, counseling services, lesson plans and so on are being redesigned to meet the needs of linguistically diverse students.

For these schools, training is crucial, says Ron Perlman of the Illinois Resource Center, a state-funded agency that helps these districts build bilingual programs. "There's not the approach that you hire a specialist and everyone else abdicates their responsibility."

But whatever the method, a school must be confident it can teach its non-native speakers or failure is assured, he says.

"To talk about education solely in terms of years or minutes of a particular program is very naive," says Perlman. "There's too much that depends on the execution and the commitment of those who implement it. If there's an esprit de corps, everybody working toward the same goal, then the method will work no matter what it is."

Goudy School students Carlos Fernandez (left) and Pedro Fernandez work at a computer as teacher's aide Tito Kann stands by.

Ins and outs of bilingual education

Learning the ropes of bilingual education isn't easy, especially if you don't speak English. To illustrate, we follow Maria, a hypothetical 8-year-old who has just arrived from Mexico, through a traditional bilingual program.

At the neighborhood school, Maria and her mother are given a Home Language Survey in Spanish, which elicits whether English is spoken in their home. Maria then is given an oral English test called a Functional Language Assessment, which evaluates her fluency in English.

Since Maria speaks no English, she is put in "category A." Labeled A, B and C, bilingual categories represent increasing degrees of English fluency, which are matched by increasing amounts of instruction in English. Students in category A receive 25 percent of their instruction in English; those in category B, 50 percent; and those in category C, 75 percent. In general, students are expected to move up one category per year, transferring to regular, all-English classes in three years. This approach is called transitional bilingual education.

Since Maria's school has more than 20 Spanish speakers, it must, under state law, enroll these students in transitional bilingual education. Most of Maria's day is spent with a Spanish-speaking bilingual teacher. But the girl also spends time in English as a Second Language classes. Here, Maria receives intensive training in English.

In ESL classes, Maria meets the school's few Arabic students. Since they number fewer than 20, the school provides a transitional program of instruction, mostly ESL with whatever Arabic support can be found.

In her second and third year, Maria also spends time in a few regular classes with native speakers of English as she progresses to category B and category C. After three years, a teacher gives Maria a battery of tests designed to determine if she has made sufficient progress in English to go into regular classes full time. Maria's teacher makes her own recommendation and asks Maria's mother if she feels Maria needs to spend more time in bilingual classes. All agree she doesn't, so Maria enters classes taught entirely in English.

M.M., M.S.
Different kids, different staffs make for different programs

Volta Elementary follows tradition

Chisan Patel and his new friend Sanjiv Patel, recently arrived from India, are seated in front of a computer studying geography. A map of New York appears. “Aa New York chhe,” Chisan says in Gujarati, repeating in English, “This is New York.”

Chisan touches the screen, eliciting a chirp of acknowledgement from the machine. A map of the United States appears; Sanjiv studies it for a moment before stabbing at New York. “Good morning class,” the computer responds, acknowledging Sanjiv’s correct answer.

On only his second day of school ever, the 14-year-old native of rural India has had his first lesson in how to use a computer. And he has learned it in his native language.

At Volta Elementary School on the Northwest Side, computers are an integral part of what otherwise is a traditional bilingual education program. In their first year, students who don’t speak English are taught 75 percent in their native languages and 25 percent in English. The second year splits 50-50, and the third year has only 25 percent of native-language instruction. They then “transition” into regular English classes.

Principal Nancy Wallace says that in her three decades at Volta, this has been the best approach for her diverse student body. Volta has 850 students speaking 24 languages, with classes in Gujarati, Spanish, Arabic, Korean and Romanian. Only three prekindergartners come from homes that don’t speak another language.

“By being at a school with wide diversity, they don’t feel so different,” says Delores Nagel, who teaches English as a Second Language. “It’s the norm here to be different.”

Arabic teacher Jamil Qandah says diversity helps students cope with an alien system. “I had a child from Yemen, 14 years old, who had never been to school in her life. The first time she came she was like a puppy, scared into a corner. Within a few months, she had overcome her fear.”

Volta works to overcome parents’ fears, too. “They have complete trust in us to tend to their children,” says Wallace. “Back home they feel they have no business being involved in the school. But now we want them to learn to be involved.”

And even if these parents can do no more than provide encouragement, that is enough for a start. “It is amazing that these children are motivated by their parents, when their parents are illiterate themselves,” Qandah says. “Parents would be so proud to say that their child is a success in school. Like we would prize a Cadillac, they prize education.”

McCutcheon stresses ESL

Uptown’s McCutcheon Elementary School sounds like a miniature United Nations. The children speak a half dozen African languages, seven Southeast Asian tongues, a smattering of Eastern European languages, four variations of Indian, several dialects of Spanish, and, yes, English. Especially English.
With half its 600 students speaking 18 languages, communication at McCutcheon depends on rapid acquisition of English. So, many students get English as a Second Language in classes that mix students from different language groups.

“When you keep the Vietnamese kids and the Spanish kids separate all day long, they tend to be homogeneous in their development and retarded in their learning of English,” explains Principal Ed Ploog. “When you’re in an ESL class, you’ve got to communicate in English. That’s all you’ve got.”

In McCutcheon’s ESL classes, children are taught English, whether their native language is Hmong from Cambodia’s rice paddies or non-standard English from Chicago’s streets. Such classes have some resemblance to foreign language classes for English speakers, but stress quick acquisition of survival English over the nuances of grammar.

“Every kid in this whole school needs help with English,” says Manja Narrett, a Golden Apple winning ESL teacher. In a recent class, students stumbled on the word “culvert.” The foreign-born students didn’t know what it was, but a lot of American-born kids didn’t either.

Teachers like Narrett coordinate students’ education. “I have them more hours a day, so it falls to me to make sure my students learn,” she says. “The bilingual teacher has them for an hour and a half a day, and is expected to teach them social studies, math, science and so on. They cannot cover an entire day of learning in 90 minutes.”

Stressing English recently helped a group of young English speakers, who were taught in a Reading is Fundamental program by older students in the bilingual program. This interaction helps both groups learn English, Narrett says.

Also, the faster non-native speakers learn English, the sooner they will see textbooks, which in most languages other than Spanish do not exist. In the meantime, teachers rely on materials of their own making.

For McCutcheon’s more than 100 refugees from Southeast Asia, needs stretch far beyond communication. Children from repressive societies often suffer psychological disorders and fear figures of authority. Those who have spent time in refugee camps may have physical problems as well.

Whenever Ploog stops to chat with children, he asks: “Did you drink your milk today?” Some children crow affirmatively, one claiming to have had a double serving. That’s two sips, not two glasses. Some refugee camp children never drank milk and suffer terrible bone deformities; they must be coaxed onto the nourishing liquid.

Another small example of the culture shock these youngsters undergo occurred when footprints were discovered on toilet seats; as it turned out, some newcomers had never seen toilets and were standing on the seats. This cultural gap must be bridged if the students are to survive in the U.S., Ploog says.

“We want our children to be able to live, work and play in their native language or in the broader Anglo culture,” he says. “The choice should be theirs. But if we don’t give them the skills, the choice is going to be made for them.”

Juarez High relies on Spanish

The halls of Juarez High School on the Near Southwest Side echo the surrounding community. Both “speak” Spanish, which poses special challenges for bilingual education at this virtually all-Hispanic school.

In Pilsen and Little Village, students who don’t know English can speak Spanish with friends, with neighbors, with merchants. They can read Spanish papers and Spanish signs in store windows. Socially, they can get along just fine without English.

Further, the school assigns students who cannot speak English—some 400 out of 2,200—to bilingual classes on the basis of their knowledge of the subject, be it math or science, rather than on the basis of their fluency in English. This leaves most bilingual classes with a wide range of English proficiency among its students. To make sure that those least able to communicate in English don’t miss out, teachers end up teaching mainly in Spanish, says Peter Almanza, the school’s bilingual coordinator.

“One of the drawbacks is that bilingual students really don’t get a chance to practice English,” outside of ESL classes, says Almanza. Whenever he stops to speak with students, the first
words out of his mouth almost always are, “In English, please.”

To prepare for classes in English, first-year students in the bilingual program take two class periods a day of ESL. Students who have been in the bilingual program longer take one period a day of ESL.

As students in the bilingual program learn more English, they are encouraged to take more academic classes in English, too.

One incentive to learn English is that only core academic classes are taught in Spanish. Those who want vocational classes or other electives must take them in English. Further, students know they need to learn English to go to college or to get a good job, Almanza says, and so most work their way through the bilingual program.

Newcomers quickly pick up on the need for English. ESL teacher Marlene Magon spends two periods a day with 20 students who arrived from Central America just after Christmas. Despite beautiful June weather, they pay fairly close attention to Magon as she explains the English past tense. She reads children’s stories because the language is simple and usually in the past tense.

On deck is what these students know as Los Tres Cerditos. Says Magon: “They’re all looking forward to The Three Little Pigs.”

Two-way teaching at Inter-American

Teacher Howard Emmer’s third-graders squirm with anticipation as he leads them through a play they will perform for an assembly at Inter-American Magnet School in Lake View. The play takes a decidedly non-Eurocentric tack, showing how Spanish conquistadors killed off the Incas because the Indians had neither gold nor desire to convert to Christianity.

Mohammed, a black 8-year-old whose native language is English, recites his lines in Spanish. Switching to English, he explains them to a classmate who did not understand.

Bicultural, bilingual education for all. That’s the premise of Inter-American, founded by parents and teachers in 1975 as the city’s first developmental bilingual program. Here and in at least nine other schools, Spanish- and English-speaking children study in each other’s languages as they explore the cultures of the Western hemisphere.

Each class at Inter-American has students with varying proficiency in English. In preschool, kindergarten and the primary grades, most instruction is in Spanish. In later grades, classes are conducted partly in English and partly in Spanish, again with an emphasis on Spanish. Native speakers of English and native speakers of Spanish separate only for breakout sessions in Spanish or English as a Second Language.

Stressing Spanish helps both Spanish-speaking students, who learn content more quickly than they would in English, and English-speaking students, who otherwise would get little chance to speak Spanish, says bilingual program coordinator Kathy Peño. The students are then prepared to learn in both languages throughout their education, Peño says.

But it is unclear whether the methods work for all children; most studies on developmental education show it only works for those who have strong incentive to learn another language, and support at home is critical.

Living in an English-speaking world, the Spanish speakers have little trouble learning English, says Peño. But since the younger students are immersed in Spanish, many of the English-speakers learn to read in Spanish before they learn to read in English, she says. With their parents reading to them in English at home, they quickly transfer the skill.

“Programs like this give kids the chance to be bilingual,” Peño says. “But they also give them the chance to experience another group of people they never would have experienced.”
Haines has kids do the walking

If you looked into the classrooms on the first floor of Chinatown's Haines Elementary School a few years back, you might have thought you were in one of Chicago's many all-black schools. But if you walked up a few flights of stairs, you might have thought you were in Shanghai.

"All of the Chinese students were in one set of classrooms, and the regular students were in another set," recalls Principal Gandy Heaston. "We've tried to mainstream as many [Chinese] students as possible."

To do that, Heaston had to address the wide range of English proficiency among her Chinese students. Her response was a "walking" bilingual program, modeled after the commonly used "walking" reading programs that group students by skill level rather than age.

At Haines, children are assigned to classes, taught in English, on the basis of their skill level in the subject matter. (Haines resurrected Chicago's controversial and recently abandoned Criterion Reference Tests to assess skill level.)

Thus, a 10-year-old might attend a fifth-grade science class and a second-grade social studies class, and children aged 7 and 12 might be in the same math class.

"Older children and younger children are always helping each other," Heaston says. "They don't look at themselves as different, even though they might be of different ages."

Chinese children walk from class to class throughout the day, mixing with English speakers and getting help in Cantonese from aides and bilingual teachers.

The school's 100 Chinese students needing help with English all have 40 minutes per day of catch-up classes in Cantonese, where subject matter covered earlier is reviewed. Newcomers to America get an additional 80 minutes per day. Much of the extra time is spent teaching social skills, such as using spoons and forks.

This socialization may have gotten a boost when the school recently took a little walk itself, moving into a building two miles south of Chinatown while Haines undergoes renovation. This got some Chinese students out of Chinatown for the first time.

At a bilingual conference last year, Heaston described her approach to great skepticism. "Most people feel this can't work, it's too strange," she says. "But when people come into my school and see my kids speaking English and actually learning, they don't think that for long."

Senn branch tried immersion

Last year, an old idea, immersion, got some new attention in a back room of Uptown's Institute for Cultural Affairs, home to an offshoot of Senn High School that served Southeast Asians.

Classic immersion drops a student into a class where few speak his language, an approach forbidden by the state. But add support—help in the native language—and it might be O.K.

At the Senn Branch, the native language was used as a fallback. The teacher spoke in English, but a student or assistant helped students in their native languages.

"We went with the notion that if you totally immerse a kid in English, he will learn fairly quickly," says Judith Cohen, principal of the branch. "And we found that they did learn a fair amount of English. Whether they learned the other subjects was harder to assess. All I know is the students came in here and they couldn't speak [English], and by the end of the year we were having conversations."

Most of Cohen's students are now at Senn High, where 40 languages are spoken. However, Cohen's branch no longer serves Asian immigrants. Now called the Senn CARE Center, it serves dropout-prone students of any race or ethnic group; currently, no Asians are enrolled.

The transformation is a disappointment for Uptown's Asian community. For two years, Chinese, Vietnamese and Cambodian agencies had rallied for a school for Southeast Asian refugees, who face language barriers, poor nutrition and emotional trauma. In March 1990, they got what they wanted: a school, a principal, teachers, computers.

The school had room for more than 100 students, but no more than 50 Asians ever came. So, only a year after the school opened, the Board of Education told Cohen the branch would be closed if she did not raise enrollment. Changing the branch's focus did the trick, but community groups believe the branch was not given enough time to attract enough Asians to be a success. ■

Michael Selinker, Michelle Martin

Haines School students Pete Fang and Crystal Edwards work in a newly integrated class.
Teaching parents helps kids

In thousands of Chicago homes, bilingual education is a matter of survival for adults and children alike. In these homes, the child is the only one who speaks any English. He may have to be the liaison between the family and the outside world, yet he gets little help at home with his own schooling.

Some Chicago schools have responded to this problem by using outside grants or tight discretionary funds to teach parents as well as students.

Six elementary schools—Chopin, Lafayette and McAuliffe in Logan Square, and Jungman, Perez and Ruiz in Pilsen—participate in Project FLAME ("Family Literacy: Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando," or "learning, improving, educating"). The project, run by the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, conducts English as a Second Language classes for parents of preschoolers, teaching the adults to speak, read and write English. It also teaches parents practical strategies and techniques for helping their children acquire language skills.

"The parents in our program truly want to learn English," says Prof. Flora Rodriguez-Brown, a project founder. "They want to be literate, and they want to help their children to be literate, too."

The project, funded by grants from Kraft General Foods and the federal government, already has helped 120 families in Pilsen and is expanding into Logan Square in October. Co-director Timothy Shanahan says children of families in the project score as much as 30 percent higher on standardized tests.

This summer, the project trained 20 adults from the community to teach literacy. Bilingual undergraduate and graduate students at UIC are among the teachers.

Some schools have home-grown programs for teaching English to parents. Volta Elementary is using its state Chapter 1 funds to pay for a bilingual coordinator who does that.

"The bilingual teachers have told me there's a real need out there," says Principal Nancy Wallace. "The parents feel they're missing out on their children's educations."

The Northwest Side school has hundreds of parents with limited English fluency, Wallace says. Teaching them English should quell a reluctance to participate in school, and in turn help the students.

"Children who get encouragement at home do better," Wallace says. "If you can't read your child's homework, it's going to be a lot harder to give that encouragement."

Bilingual education resources
See page 27.

30 years of bilingual education: a chronology

1963: Miami's Coral Way School starts the first developmental bilingual program, attempting to teach English speakers Spanish and vice versa. The first push for a federal bilingual policy follows.

1967: Responding to pressure from civil rights leaders, Congress passes the first American Bilingual Education Act, authorizing funds to teach non-English speakers in their native languages until English fluency is attained.

1968: The administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson holds that Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibiting discrimination in education applies to bilingual education. As a result, schools must provide some form of special treatment for all non-English-speaking students.

1973: Illinois requires a program of transitional bilingual education in schools with more than 20 students from one language group who speak limited English. This means that these schools must use native languages to teach children until they can learn in English. The requirement takes effect in 1976.

1974: The U.S. Supreme Court decides Lau v. Nichols, requiring school systems to provide equal opportunities for all limited-English students. This confirms that all schools must bring students up to fluency in English before teaching them entirely in English.

1980: Following a federal investigation that found Chicago's bilingual programs wanting, CPS signs a consent decree requiring improved service.

1984: The administration of President Ronald Reagan attempts to eliminate the federal bilingual mandate. The Democratic Congress reacts by strengthening it, amending it to establish the goal of developing a student's native language as well as knowledge of English.

1985: Illinois mandates transitional programs of instruction (predominantly English as a Second Language) for schools with fewer than 20 students of any particular language group.

1985: CPS officials make their first recruiting trip to Puerto Rico, hiring 108 bilingual teachers.

1988: Over the opposition of bilingual advocates, Congress bows to administration pressure and allows up to 25 percent of federal bilingual funding to go to immersion programs, which keep non-English speakers in English-only classrooms for quick acquisition of English.

1988: The Chicago School Reform Act is passed. It recognizes the existence of bilingual advisory committees at many schools by making them standing committees of local school councils.

1993: The Chicago Board of Education forms the Department of Language and Cultural Education, linking bilingual education, multicultural education and foreign language instruction.

1991: A major, federally funded study shows five or more years of bilingual education provide greater English fluency and comprehension of subject matter than do shorter programs.
Tell legislators loud, clear: ‘Give schools more money’

by James H. Lewis

In the Nov. 3 election, Illinois citizens will be asked to vote on a proposed revision of the Education Article of the Illinois Constitution. The revised amendment would read: “A fundamental right of the People of the State is the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities. It is the paramount duty of the State to provide for a thorough and efficient system of high quality public educational institutions and services to guarantee equality of educational opportunity as a fundamental right of each citizen. Education in public schools through the secondary level shall be free. The State has the preponderant responsibility for financing the system of public education. There may be other free education as the General Assembly provides by law.”

The following essay argues for the amendment; the next essay argues against it. Both were solicited by CATALYST.

The Illinois State Constitution provides the legal foundation for public education in Illinois. Lately, it has become clear that with respect to two fundamental issues—adequacy of resources and equality of opportunity—the constitution’s education article falls short of what is needed. The proposed amendment that will appear on the November ballot would correct these serious shortcomings and force the Legislature to address the state’s pressing educational needs.

There is no shortage of evidence of the financial crisis facing school districts all over Illinois and of the impact this crisis is having on schools’ ability to educate our next generation.

The state’s contribution to school budgets has declined from almost half in 1975 to only a third this year. Nationwide, Illinois has fallen to 47th among the 50 states in per capita state spending on public elementary and secondary education. Each year, about 10 percent of Illinois school districts appear on a state financial watch list, indicating near-insolvency.

This year alone, state cuts forced more than 30 percent of school districts to lay off staff and about 24 percent to borrow money, according to a survey by the Illinois State Board of Education. Nearly half the districts reported they had to reduce or eliminate purchases of textbooks and other instructional materials.

Despite extraordinary cuts in administration that leave overhead costs far below the state average, Chicago’s schools face a near-catastrophic funding shortage. A comprehensive financial and management study conducted earlier this year by the consulting firm Booz Allen & Hamilton concludes that even with its best efforts, the Chicago Board of Education will see its financial hole deepen in the next two years.

Adjusted for inflation, education revenues in Illinois have barely increased over the last decade. And they certainly have not kept up with the pressures we have put on almost all schools to prepare youth better for the complex and difficult world we expect them to thrive in.

We know, too, that spending more money in certain areas can produce higher achievement. Research has clearly documented the positive impact of prekindergarten programs; yet, statewide, fewer than half of “at risk” preschoolers are served, according to a recent report by Voices for Illinois Children. We also know the value of small class sizes.

Important investment

Further, graduates of a number of high schools around the state can forget about applying to the nation’s finest colleges—they lack the foreign language and advanced science and math courses necessary for admission because their high schools couldn’t provide them.

In an economy that now offers far more job opportunities to women (the mainstay of the teaching force), it is essential that teaching salaries be competitive with salaries in other professions.
Given the increasing levels of foreign economic competition and the increasingly technical nature of the American workplace, it is hard to imagine a more important place than education to invest our resources.

Throughout our history, local, public schools have been the local points of our neighborhoods. In these times more than ever, we must maintain this social and cultural anchor, particularly in troubled urban neighborhoods. Neither parents nor schools alone can save our youth. But the cycle of inner-city poverty certainly will not be broken without the foundation of a strong school system.

The proposed constitutional amendment offers us an opportunity to develop the financial resources necessary to fix our schools. It places in the Illinois Constitution language that probably should have been there all along. Indeed, it reflects legal principles found in the constitutions of many states around the country.

First, the amendment makes education to the limits of one's capacity a "fundamental right" for all Illinois residents, placing the legal burden for ensuring quality education on the state. It also makes high-quality public education a "paramount duty" of the state, meaning the state must allocate its first dollars, rather than its last, to public education. By requiring "equality of educational opportunity" for each citizen, the amendment attempts to ensure that the quality of a child's education will not be determined by the accident of where he or she lives. Finally, the amendment gives the state "preponderant" responsibility for financing public education. This means the state must provide at least half the resources for each child's basic, quality education.

Much of the debate over the amendment has centered on how much these provisions might cost. Opponents have tried to frighten away supporters with exaggerated estimates of its cost. It is important to remember, however, that funding decisions will remain in the hands of the same fiscally conservative legislators who have so ably protected us from a fully-funded education system to this point.

It is also important to know that most people in the Chicago metropolitan area have no problem with higher taxes if they are earmarked for education. In a recent survey of Chicago-area residents, the Metropolitan Chicago Information Center asked two critical questions: Would you be willing to pay more taxes to improve school buildings in low-income areas? Would you be willing to pay more taxes to increase teacher salaries in low-income areas? The results showed that concern for the growth of children in our inner cities extends to every corner of the metropolitan area.

Widespread concern

Seventy-seven percent of Chicagoans were willing to pay more for better school buildings, and 70 percent were willing to pay more for increased teacher salaries in low-income areas. Two-thirds of all taxpayers in the five collar counties said they would be willing to make this same investment, as did two-thirds of taxpayers in Cook County suburbs.

This support for increased resources targeted at clear educational needs extended to all types of persons in all of these different places. People with household incomes over $50,000 want to help inner-city schools as much as do those with incomes below $25,000. Two-thirds of all white taxpayers were willing to pay more taxes to better support inner-city schools, which serve primarily minority youngsters. This willingness exists in people whether they have children in public or private schools and whether they call themselves Republicans or Democrats.

Few public-policy initiatives enjoy such broad-based support.

The proposed amendment is about educational resources and how to help our elected officials in Springfield give us what we want. Could a state legislator win an election with a platform calling for increased taxes? Probably not. In general, most voters don't want to spend any more on taxes than they have to.

However, most citizens are also deeply troubled over the problems in our society that have led to poverty and so much waste of human potential. Education is clearly seen as the best, and perhaps only, way to improve these conditions. As the survey results above so clearly show, most people are willing to spend a little more of their money if they are satisfied that the money will be targeted to specific priorities that they feel strongly about.

In general, elected officials have found that protesting taxes is almost required campaign rhetoric. If one candidate promises to give us everything we need for less money, then his or her opponent has to offer the same promise. Elected officials trap themselves into offering better government for less, then find it almost impossible to support any tax increase, even for things their constituents clearly support. The amendment provides an opportunity for the people of Illinois to let their legislators off the hook. By voting for it, we are communicating our concern for children and education to the Legislature, and freeing it to act.
Defeat blank-check amendment

by Donald C. Ames

E ducation reformers beware! The proposed education spending amendment that will be on the November ballot will not improve Illinois' education system. A more suitable name for this proposal is the "blank-check amendment."

The amendment is full of holes and dangerously vague. Its proponents do not tell us that it would take away citizens' ability to have their elected representatives respond to yearly priorities, would force financial problems to be solved by the courts rather than the Legislature, and, most likely, would impose more taxes on already heavily burdened property owners. It also could result in a substantial state income tax increase.

But the most devastating impact of the proposed amendment is what it would do to the future of the young people of this state. It would stifle and undo reform efforts only partially underway and encourage perpetuation of inefficient and discredited existing systems. The children of Illinois need and deserve better schools, not a poorly drafted measure that very likely would inhibit meaningful reform.

For all the above reasons, voters should reject this proposal. At the same time, we should actively support initiatives that would have a tangible effect on raising educational standards and performance. Examples of such positive approaches are the Illinois student-outcomes-based school accountability law and Chicago school reform.

The school accountability law goes into effect this year. If the education establishment allows the law to work, it will require each school to prove to parents, voters and taxpayers that students are learning what they should learn and, thus, that the substantial dollars spent on schools are producing positive results. This could reverse 50 years of neglect where, unbelievably, all that state officials monitored was whether school districts were in compliance with laws that had little or nothing to do with student learning.

With respect to Chicago school reform, a bitter struggle is still ensuing, with reformers struggling against entrenched interests to empower locally elected school councils to operate in the interest of their students.

In the four years since passage of the reform law, Chicago has not seen the degree of decentralization of power that was initially contemplated. Nor has Chicago seen the anticipated expense reductions and efficiency improvements. A current study indicates that significant savings in money and efficiency can be obtained if unions, administrators and the Board of Education cooperate to eliminate duplication and waste and enter into more student-centered contractual agreements.

Both the school accountability law and Chicago school reform are highly promising efforts, but they require vigorous implementation if they are to succeed. Showering additional money on unreformed educational establishments would remove a major incentive for putting these reforms into operation.

An additional grave concern is that Illinois has an unwieldy number (950) of school districts—more than virtually any other state—each with a superintendent, board of education, various administrative officials and other expensive overhead. A considerably smaller number would be more efficient and productive, particularly at the high school level, where schools with few students cannot possibly provide the variety of courses needed. Mandatory, systematic school consolidation is required to serve students better at the most economical cost to taxpayers. The "blank-check amendment" would perpetuate this sprawling structure.

Another cause for concern is the fact that the proposed "blank-check amendment" was hurriedly pushed through the General Assembly without public hearings. This hasty action did not adequately respect the interests of taxpayers and students in a proposal of such magnitude. Indeed, the amendment's sponsors did not present their proposal in advance to the state Task Force on School Finance, even though the sponsors are officers of the Task Force.

The amendment's sponsors argue that it could result in property tax
relief. However, their proposal does not even mention that issue, nor does it say anything to encourage property tax relief. In fact, the sponsors themselves proposed to the state Task Force that the state be empowered to levy a new state property tax in some school districts—in addition to the local property tax—and thereby set in motion a way for the state ultimately to take local money away from the tax base of local districts, hampering their ability to pay for both operations and debt service. The fact that this taxing authority has been pursued by the sponsors of the school funding amendment certainly calls into question their commitment to property tax relief.

Unnecessary

The proposed amendment is not only severely flawed but also wholly unnecessary. The present language in the Illinois Constitution does not limit the General Assembly in any way from reforming the existing school funding system, either by putting more money into it or by correcting funding inequities. The General Assembly now has all the authority it needs.

The amendment’s sponsors maintain that even though existing constitutional language contains sufficient authority to reform school funding, the proposed amendment is necessary to give legislators the “backbone” to use their authority. Stiffening the “backbone” of the state’s legislators is not a substantial reason for taking a serious, binding step like amending the constitution of the state of Illinois.

The amendment represents an abdication by its sponsors of legislative responsibility. Through its excessively broad wording, it takes decision-making power away from legislators, who are accountable to an electorate, and gives it to judges, who do not have anywhere near the same degree of accountability to the voters. There would be years of protracted litigation, regardless of what the General Assembly might do.

Proponents of the amendment have said little about the additional taxes it would generate. We all have learned to be skeptical when legislators are hazy about the tax implications of their proposals. The “blank-check amendment” is ominously silent on how much money will be needed, where it will come from and how it will be spent.

Proponents of the amendment liken it to “motherhood and apple pie.” However, a close examination of the specific language reveals that it would create enormous problems. Here are a number of them.

- Currently, the constitution says “the educational development of all persons to the limits of their capacities” is a “fundamental goal” of the state. The amendment would make it a court-enforceable “fundamental right.” This “right” would extend to “all persons,” not just elementary and secondary school children. This extremely broad language demands that a court interpret it in a virtually unlimited way, at unnecessarily high cost both to taxpayers and to the economic health of the state.
- The “blank-check amendment” creates a clear “paramount duty” for the state to “guarantee equality of educational opportunity as a fundamental right of each citizen.” Making education funding “paramount” year after year would be a budget buster with the potential to create a state budget crisis of enormous proportions.
- The “equality” standard would open the way for any judge to mandate (without conditions) much more than is reasonably necessary. All the frills of the top-spending district in the state would become the standard that the state has the “paramount duty” to fund.
- What happens, for example, when we next have a crisis in pensions or mental health or welfare? Will there be any money left after education has received its “paramount” allocation of limited state revenues? Do we really want to lock in an annual priority? Shouldn’t the popularly elected General Assembly set the annual funding priorities of state government according to the year’s needs?
- If “preponderant financial responsibility” is to be interpreted as more than half, what would it be more than half of? The proposed amendment says it is “for financing the system of public education.” That seems to mean half of the total state, local and federal dollars spent on public education in Illinois. The Legislative Research Unit says that would cost about $3 billion for elementary and secondary education alone. But does “public education” include two-year public colleges, universities and graduate schools?

The amendment’s sponsors rejected a proposal to change the language to require the state to pay the “preponderant” cost for each school district. What about those Illinois school districts whose tax efforts are dismal? Would they be helped by this proposal in spite of their past refusal to support education in their districts?

Reform first

Many would support an increase in school funding but only after sufficient educational reforms have been put into operation. This would require the major groups involved, especially teachers’ unions and administrators, to work together to assure (1) that children are properly served and (2) that an accountability system confirms to parents and taxpayers that they are receiving full value for their tax dollars.

Other needed reforms are reasonable local tax effort (some districts now do not pull their own weight), statewide consistency in real estate valuation, consolidation of small school districts and an operating student-outcomes-based school accountability system. In Chicago, the needed reforms are decentralization of educational authority in accordance with the law, institution of efficiencies and fiscal responsibility and entry into new or revised union-school board contracts that remove barriers to improved student learning.

When these reforms are accomplished—and work on them should be advanced without delay—any income tax increase should be dedicated to education in such a way that it cannot be diverted. Such a tax increase also should provide for property tax relief. All of these things can be achieved without the “blank-check amendment.”
In Diaries this month, a teacher tells of the long, arduous process of applying and interviewing for a principalship. Meanwhile, a principal complains of the added burdens and lack of support she and colleagues face since reform. Another teacher describes the violation and uncertainty in her students' lives: several compare gunshot and stab wounds from gang fights, a Yugoslavian girl contemplates the dangers of returning to her war-torn homeland for a visit, while Haitian students fear for relatives living under an oppressive regime. On a brighter note, two schools hold Teacher Appreciation Day, and a homeless student receives a standing ovation as he graduates. As always, our diarists write under pen names.

Battling for a principalship

CARLOS, teacher

July 2 I have been applying for principal positions for the last 24 months. I was not able to get a single interview. Sometimes when it rains it pours. Near the end of the school year, I applied for the principalship in five schools, whose vacancies were posted in the CPS general bulletin.

I have had my first interview. School A is an elementary school of about 1,200 students. I spent 20 minutes with the local school council, although it was the departing principal who dominated and managed the interview. I was asked questions regarding staff development, gangs and my administrative experience. I felt I did well, but who knows. I had the impression they already knew who they wanted, and it wasn't me.

When I got home, I received a call from School B. The LSC chair invited me for an interview the next day.

July 3 I arrived at School B, a K-8 school of about 1,000 students. There were six other candidates waiting. The district superintendent was there, along with staff from the Pershing Road reform office.

After a two-hour wait, I met with the council members, who were cold and did not smile at all. The LSC had been interviewing all day. The weather was hot and muggy. I felt the council members were just plain tired out. Their questions were about gangs, school resources, discipline, multiculturalism, staff development and problems. I am concerned about an open-forum style of interviewing.

In the meantime, I received a call from the LSC chair of School B, and was to appear for another interview.

July 15 At School C, I spoke about my vision and plan for the school. I was asked to respond to one question from the public and was then excused. The general public had hardly a chance to ask any of us anything. Everything was controlled and seemed previously orchestrated. Staff from the reform office and the district office were present; they were very much involved in the proceedings.

July 30 School B: I am not a finalist. School C: I was called for a second interview. The chair of the selection committee was a teacher. I was grilled regarding programs, my plan for the school and my experience. I am not a finalist.

School D: I was phoned at home by an LSC member and questioned at length regarding items on my resume. He had attended the public forum at School C to get to know me better. I was called in for an interview. It lasted almost three hours and was videotaped. The LSC members were very kind, very well prepared and very professional. I felt very comfortable and relaxed. They questioned me about my vision for the school, curriculum matters and my relationships with the teachers, staff and the LSC. I knew I did a good job.

I was called for a second interview. I was made to wait 45 minutes, supposedly while the LSC was trying to iron out a battle with teachers who came to sit in on my interview. At the interview, I definitely noticed that something was going on. The LSC members were less prepared and more combative. Staff from the reform office were there. The questions were more personal in nature. My ideas regarding the future of the school were challenged.

I answered everything and continued to feel successful. When I left, I
was sure I had a real chance.

I was a finalist, but in the LSC vote I fell short by two votes. It is my understanding that right before the meeting, there was major campaigning against me.

As a result of the lack of a consensus, the interviewing process has been reopened to other candidates. I called the LSC chair and requested a final interview to try to get the seven votes needed.

School E. A very successful interview. This LSC was also very well prepared. They knew their process. Their questions were hard and to the point.

I was called for a second interview. It was long and involved more specific questions regarding my administrative experience, my ideas on discipline, my handling of certain teacher situations and my knowledge of the school itself. Again, I felt I did very well.

Upon returning from my vacation, I learned that the LSC had made inquiries about me at my present school and turned up what they considered some negatives. Therefore, instead of voting on me, they discarded my candidacy and opened up the process again.

Aug. 4 Surprise! The LSC chair of School E wants me to come in for an additional interview. I tell her that an interview is fine but not an interrogation.

Aug. 27 I have two more interviews, at School D and School E. It is only several days until school begins, and I don’t know where I’ll be working. In the meantime...

Some summary comments about my experiences:

The principals from schools A, B and D are retiring voluntarily; as is the principal of School E, after being challenged by the LSC on very technical issues. However, the principals of D and E have not officially retired yet. The principal of School C was forced to resign by the board.

The assistant principals were not considered or were not finalists in any of the five schools.

LSC teacher members were very much involved in the principal selection process, influencing some or most of the other council members.

Central and/or district office staff were involved in four of the five interviews. Their presence changed the ambience of the situation.

Somehow, central office staff were aware of who was applying where and who was a finalist where. Interviews are very personal moments that somehow quickly become very public.

There seemed to be one person in every LSC who disrupted the process. This member was very feisty or negative or tried to control the proceed-

ings. In one case, his presence changed the whole process; I was unlucky to get on his bad side, and he went after me in a negative way.

LSCs took their time checking out all sources and references and talking to everyone regarding the candidates.

My recommendations for principal candidates:

Apply only to schools you have a genuine interest in. Don’t apply just to become principal somewhere.

Get copies of the school’s profile, the school’s state report card and the latest school improvement plan. Use this information in the interview; it lets them know you have taken time to prepare and are really interested in their school.

Present yourself with your vision and plan for the school. A four-year plan is best. Don’t just tell LSCs that you like this or that.

Personnel management, curriculum, human relations with parents and the community and knowledge of budgets are the issues most LSCs are interested in.

An LSC is looking for someone with a positive working reputation, knowledge of significant issues that affect that particular school, ability to converse freely and convey trust and, most of all, a willingness to create quality, effectiveness and leadership.

Be ready to open up both your personal and professional life in public. LSCs don’t trust anyone right now. Be ready to sell yourself.

My most important advice: Be positive about yourself. If you are positive about your work, your goals and your ideas, it will show. Be open also about your own trials and tribulations. Remember, you are the best candidate.

Sept. 2 Yesterday another interview with School E. I am not a finalist. Today School D’s LSC voted unanimously to have me as their principal.

Counting the days ...

LAZARUS, teacher

April 18 Reform has little excitement for our faculty. What has excited them more than anything else in recent years is the proposed legislation for buying out early retirees. The buyout would benefit a handful of teachers who have been looking forward to retirement for quite some
time, whether or not their age or years of service warrants it.

May 28 As the school year wanes and clusters of teachers in the faculty lounges devise their own system of counting the remaining days—"...so many actual days but so many real days left since the last two days of the school year don't count..."—I am painfully aware of a host of things left undone.

We began this year under new leadership, full of hope, with students ready and willing to work. Somewhere along the way, the spirit died. The turning point is not easily identified. It hardly matters. The end result is that this year, which began so favorably, is ending as so many before it, with most of us counting time rather than achievement.

June 16 I am grieved to hear of setbacks in another school where reform seemed to be working very well. Steps in the right direction have been subverted by an outlguard unwilling to relinquish its power. Reactionaries from the faculty have challenged measures taken by the principal and won the support of the LSC in cutting funds critical to carrying out the principal's reform agenda.

Budget woes

LAZARUS, teacher

May 8 A particularly frustrating LSC evening meeting. With the school improvement plan and budget deadline fast approaching, we are getting a mixed message about the consolidation of a smaller school into our building.

How do we handle our budget? Shall the two schools combine their budgets for 1992-93 in anticipation of the change? What if consolidation fails to happen?

In addition, not until today were we informed of the amount of federal Chapter 1 money for computers and related expenditures. The difficulty is finding someone who can analyze our needs and advise us on the best equipment to invest in—for immediate and long-term needs. We could use a group of computer experts to volunteer like the accountants did to help LSCs.

Another problem is that some of the teachers who are expected to make extensive use of the machines are novices in their knowledge of computers.

A lot of funds are allocated for teacher conferences—and for subs so teachers will be free to attend those conferences. Our inservice and staff development needs are great. The hope is that this funding will begin to help us upgrade teachers' skills and ultimately show improved test scores, a critical factor in school evaluation. With this kind of intensive support, teachers may begin to see themselves as professionals.

The school engineer pops in to ask us how much longer we will be in the building. We pay him no heed.

Drawing its strength from the ever-present pot of coffee and from a box of goodies contributed by one member, a weary council comes to the end of the stack of budget pages at just short of 11:00 p.m. There is a sincere attempt to deal with members' concerns and reach consensus on the document. Members seem willing to go along with the budget recommendations.

As one member says partly in jest, "I'll agree to anything! Just let me go home!"

(This same member stated earlier in the evening that she will probably be going into the hospital for routine tests before the week is out. Under the circumstances, she has been remarkably good-natured in performing this grueling task of tackling the budget.)

A nearly incoherent motion to accept comes from another member who has been up since 4:30 a.m. Despite a few frivolous moments during the evening, our school council has taken its responsibilities very seriously.

Unhappy campers

OLIVIA, principal

Aug. 26 An observer who attended the Administrators Academy reports that the participants—principals and assistant principals—did not look like happy campers. "The worn-out faces, their attitudes, the way they walked—it was all so pathetic."

Attendance at this year's academy, unlike in the past, was required because participation counts toward maintaining the Type 75 certificate. Participants had to sign in and out and could not leave before 4:30 because an early departure meant one hadn't put in the necessary clock hours to satisfy the state.

Organizers of the academy were described as "inflexible"; for example, a participant must attend the day scheduled for his/her district, not on any alternate day.

One principal who had scheduled a major parent/teacher workshop on the date his district was later scheduled was simply told he would have to leave someone else in charge at his school. Local control seems to have gotten lost in the translation.
Violence and fear

LAZARUS, teacher

April 16 Grade pickup day. A long afternoon. One very successful students introduces her little brother whom she claims is even smarter than she. His career goals are in an area that is not a specialty at our school. How can I tell him he would be better off attending a magnet school than our school? My fear is that he will lose his dreams here.

May 11 Students in a late-afternoon class spin off from a discussion of hospitalization benefits to compare street-war wounds. One wears the evidence of shotgun pellets in his arm, another evidence of stabbing in a fight. What a terrifying world they inhabit!

May 22 A student refugee from Yugoslavia shares a dilemma with the class: her mother, living in a Serbian village, wants her to return for the summer; her father, living here, has told her that if she goes for the summer she very likely cannot come back to the U.S. The country she left a few months ago no longer exists. It is Sophie’s Choice in reverse: the child choosing between parents. No one should have to make such a decision. Her classmates, who come from varied backgrounds, show concern and caring.

Our Haitian students are also very politically minded. They know a great deal of what is happening in their homeland. With relatives left behind, everyone seems to have an uncle or a cousin or someone close to whom they are worried about. Our President’s policy in regard to Haitian refugees has been abominable, a bitter pill for our students to swallow.

June 3 Our Serbian student tells us that her mother, who is still in her small village, is happy the daughter is staying in the U.S., out of harm’s way.

June 5 The last day of classes for our seniors this school year. I have watched many of them grow into wonderful human beings over the past four years. I am already experiencing the “empty nest” syndrome. No constellation of students will be quite like this class. May the world be kind to them.

June 9 A first at the Senior Awards assembly at our school. In a community that is far from affluent, a homeless student is honored for perseverance against overwhelming odds in completing the requirements for graduation. The student receives a standing ovation.

June 16 Graduation Day. The valedictorian commends the class not only for receiving diplomas but for surviving the streets of the neighborhood.

June 20 Our Chicago Union Teacher newspaper carries an article this month on school violence, citing a study by Dr. James Garbarino: “By the time they are five years old, virtually all of the children in Chicago’s largest public housing projects have first-hand knowledge of shootings, stabblings, rape and homicide.”

Teacher appreciation

LAZARUS, teacher

May 15 The LSC sponsors Teacher Appreciation Day with a luncheon prepared by the parents and members of the community. The student lunchroom is dressed up with small pots of flowers on each table. Certificates are distributed to all teachers.

Although faculty response to the council appears to be more cordial than in recent years, there is still a gap to be bridged between the two groups. Reform is not yet a reality for most of the faculty.

ROBIN, observer

May 16 This week the LSC at School B held a Teacher Appreciation breakfast. All teachers and career service people were invited to come to the lunchroom, which was set up with bright tablecloths and an attractive buffet. A troupe of girls in floral skirts did a well-rehearsed dance to salsa music, the LSC members and mothers who assisted with the preparations were introduced, and the principal presented each teacher with a plaque from the LSC.

The teachers’ reactions to the plaques were interesting. One of the teacher members of the council had been opposed to the idea of spending the money on plaques, thinking the teachers would not value them; but the parents were adamant about giving them. The teachers sitting near me were impressed by the quality of the plaques and, I believe, touched by the council’s desire to give them. One remarked, “I never had a real plaque before!” Another said something wry about preferring a trip to Jamaica. But the rest seemed genuinely pleased.

At School B, as at many others, interpreters are needed for LSC meetings, and the solution the principal uses is to ask bilingual teachers to take turns translating. These teachers were identified at the recognition breakfast and applauded for their work. They have found the task a challenging one but have gained an understanding of the work of the council and an appreciation for the dedication of its members.

Living hand-to-mouth

ROBIN, observer

June 6 What a blessing it would be if schools and teachers knew from one year to the next that their schedules, budgets and salaries were assured! That kind of security is taken for granted, at least for fairly long stretches of time, in other districts. But in Chicago this is the time of year for saying, “We’ll do that in September—if we reopen in September,” or “We’ll use
Chapter 1 money for that next year—if we have Chapter 1 money." This hand-to-mouth life makes it hard to plan and contributes to a "one day at a time" bare-survival state of mind.

Lonely at the top

OLIVIA, principal

Aug. 22 Every time the Chicago Public Schools gets into a fiscal jam (almost a yearly occurrence), the Chicago Teachers Union offers the same tired remedy: "Chop the top." Cut the bureaucracy. Eliminate at central office. Do it to them (those unfortunates not represented by some union); don't do it to us (union-aligned, hard-working, deserving employees). This creates an "us and them" situation that leads to low morale among those under attack.

Not all who work on Pershing Road or at the district offices deserve to keep their jobs, but there are many valuable, competent professionals on their payrolls. Many of these good people have been repeatedly attacked and threatened with the loss of their jobs. Morale is understandably low. An example:

Two years ago, in late August, after weeks of rumors about possible cuts, an employee at central office lost his job. The job had been threatened many times before, but this time the position was indeed closed, and he was told to report to the Bureau of Teacher Personnel for reassignment to a school. Before he could clean out his desk and say his goodbyes, the position was reinstated. Tired of the almost annual uncertainty, he decided to take the school assignment. However, he was denied this privilege. He is a creative, self-directed, highly professional individual, and the unit administrator knew the loss of his services would be detrimental to the department. Therefore, he was forced to stay.

This month his job was again threatened. Rumors of job cuts have dominated the work day this year. "It's hard to concentrate on your work when you don't know how much longer you'll be here" is the most common sentiment expressed this summer at central office. It is late August, and this board employee still does not know where he'll be working in September. This sort of atmosphere undermines not only employee morale but also efficiency and competence throughout the system.

Principals are also affected by job insecurity and system inadequacy. Since the fall of 1988, roughly 50 percent of the Chicago public schools have selected new principals. Some of those displaced from one school have become principals at other schools, but many—a record number actually—have left the system. And many of the newly selected principals have no prior administrative experience. When a large number of principals depart CPS, and when almost half of the principals are new or inexperienced, the implications for the system are significant.

The principalship has always been a lonely job. Teachers and paraprofessionals have each other to talk to and commiserate with; principals have no one in the building who does the same job.

A new principal must turn to colleagues for answers to a multitude of questions: What do I include on the opening bulletin? What about a dress code for the staff? How do I relate to the local school council? How do I work with the professional personnel advisory committee and with the Chicago Teachers Union representative? What can I do about borderline teachers? How do I effectively introduce and implement new programs? How do I find my way through the central office maze for special education, bilingual education and the various government-funded programs? When only one out of two principals is an experienced veteran, answers are harder to come by.

Prior to reform, when subdistricts were smaller in size and district superintendents had real supervisory responsibilities, principals had regular (usually monthly) opportunities to meet with their colleagues, share information and questions and ideas, talk and learn from each other. Because of the size of districts (25-30 schools then, 55-60 schools now), district superintendents had time to coach or help out a new principal. The turnover rate was low. The needs of new principals for "how-to" information were manageable. Also, there were some efforts to provide incoming principals with direct assistance through various inservice programs.

Since reform, neither the districts nor central office has set up any support/inservice program for new principals. Perhaps no one dreamed the turnover would be so high. Perhaps because principal evaluation and selection is in the hands of the LSCs (unless someone really messes up), principal support/inservice is no longer perceived as a central or district office function. Whatever the reason, today's new principals are left pretty much to their own devices.

One elementary school principal I know, who was just assigned this summer, was never contacted by central or district staff prior to her appointment or after she assumed the position. No one called to welcome her, to inquire if she might need some assistance or if she knew how to access the computer or to consult regarding her specific responsibilities prior to the beginning of the school year. In this particular case, the outgoing principal spent considerable time reviewing the school budget and SIP, familiarizing her with the various computer functions and answering her questions. This is, however, clearly the exception.
DETROIT

Strike over local control. Angered by Board of Education plans to give schools more control, including the power to break union regulations, Detroit’s 7,500 teachers went on strike Sept. 2, along with 3,000 other school employees.

While salary increases and health insurance benefits also are at issue, the main target of the Detroit Federation of Teachers is a series of “empowerment” moves shifting money, purchasing power and teachers’ selection to schools that want the added responsibility. (See CATALYST, June 1992 and September 1992.)

The district has been working for four years to develop ways of giving schools more freedom, reporter Ann Bradley wrote in the Sept. 9 issue of Education Week. But it was the board’s proposal to allow empowered schools to waive teacher contract provisions without union approval that prompted the strike. (In Chicago, contract waivers require union approval.)

“In our opinion that would gut our contract in those schools,” said DFT President John Elliot. “We will not even allow that possibility.”

Board member David Olmstead stressed that the program is voluntary, with empowerment requiring approval of 75 percent of a school’s teachers, as well as the principal and 55 percent of parents. Further, he said, it is aimed at taking advantage of the professional knowledge of a school’s faculty.

“I truly believe this board is more strongly in favor of teachers than the union is,” said Olmstead. “This [dispute] is about whether the union or the teachers will be in control.”

Elliot said members prefer a centralized school system with the same work rules and procedures for everyone. If there are problems with purchasing or personnel, he said, they should be addressed, not passed on to the schools.

“The staff we’ve talked to said they don’t even want that authority,” Elliot said. “The way our board wants to set it up would definitely take the entire school away from its primary mission, which is education.”

“If nobody wants to do it,” asked board President Lawrence C. Patrick, “then what is he afraid of?” Patrick stressed that contract provisions would remain in force at empowered schools, unless the majority of teachers voted to waive them. “It’s not like they would start out with a blank contract and fill in the lines.”

So far, 15 of the district’s 247 schools have voted for empowerment since the board approved the plan March 31; 10 of them voted before the teachers union launched a campaign against it.

The union also opposes a proposal to create “lead teachers,” whose pay would be increased as much as 25 percent more than regular classroom teachers for taking on special duties. Elliot said the union is “philosophically opposed” to paying some teachers more than others.

The union also is seeking an 8 percent pay raise, while the board proposes paying teachers 3 percent salary “bonuses” for attending 50 workshops a year.

The strike could violate Michigan’s law against strikes by public employees. The school district and a group of residents have filed separate lawsuits seeking to end the strike.

NEW JERSEY

Public boarding school. School officials in Paterson are planning a district-run boarding school they hope will give underachieving high school students a shot at academic success.

“We would like to change the lives of our students by providing a total environment conducive to academic success,” said Laval Wilson, the state-appointed district superintendent. The state took control of the district last year, under New Jersey’s academic-bankruptcy law.

The district, which is 47 percent Hispanic and 42 percent African American, plans to open the voluntary, tuition-free residential program in 1993. High school students whose academic performance is at or below grade level will be eligible, according to an article in the September issue of Teacher magazine. A pilot program this past summer enrolled about 75 high school juniors, who lived and studied for four weeks at Upsala College in East Orange.

About 75 of the district’s 1,000 juniors could begin the program in the 1993-94 school year. The district plans to enroll 300 students in all four grades by 1995.

However, the district has yet to find a location for the school, and start-up costs are estimated at about $2.5 million. The district is seeking federal, corporate and foundation grants to help pay for the program.

FLORIDA

Less paperwork. Florida’s state education department announced recently it is stemming the flow of paper between schools by more than 4 million pieces, according to an article in the June issue of The School Administrator. Among the changes:

    ■ Reducing the teacher certificate application from 11 pages to 5.
    ■ Eliminating submission of formal plans for construction projects costing less than $200,000.
    ■ Reducing the number of federal and state grant application forms for adult and vocational programs from 3,000 to 300.

Michael Klonsky
Amendment referendum first, last chance for voters

by Dan Weissmann

The Nov. 3 referendum on the "education amendment" to the state constitution likely will be the last chance Illinois citizens will get to vote directly on school funding.

The amendment, which would require the state to take a larger role in funding education, barely received enough votes in the General Assembly to get on the ballot; there were no votes to spare in the House and only two in the Senate.

A handful of Republicans provided crucial support to the Democratic proposal. Those Republicans, says chief sponsor Sen. Arthur L. Berman (D-Chicago), are in tight re-election races and didn't want to appear to be anti-education.

However, the post-census reapportionment of legislative districts likely will give Illinois a more Republican and more conservative General Assembly for the next 10 years.

"This amendment is the most important question on the ballot," says Berman. "If it doesn't pass the referendum this year, it'll never see the light of day again."

The amendment would make education a "fundamental right" of Illinois residents, give public education first claim on state tax dollars and require the state to pay at least half the costs. Greater funding equity among districts also would be required.

The Legislature would decide how to do all this, devising funding formulas and, possibly, changing the size and mix of taxes in the state. Fierce battles could be expected between legislators representing currently wealthy districts, largely in the Chicago suburbs, and those representing poor rural and urban districts.

Opposing the amendment are a coalition of business groups named CARE (Coalition for Accountability and Responsibility in Education). The group's directors include officers of state and local chambers of commerce, the Illinois Business Roundtable and the Illinois Manufacturers Association. CARE expects to spend a half million dollars to sway voters.

A key argument is that the amendment is unnecessary because the Legislature already has the right to reform school funding "whenever it wants to."

Berman counters that the Legislature hasn't made any major changes in the last 20 years and is unlikely to do so without a constitutional mandate. "History tells us," he says, "that without an amendment, legislators don't have the guts to reform education spending."

The amendment's backers are a more diverse and less well-funded group, including the Illinois Farm Bureau, the League of Women Voters and the State Council of Senior Citizens, as well as education-oriented groups like Voices for Illinois Children. "Our coalition is not wealthy," says organizer Julie Hamos. "Those groups ... probably couldn't raise $200."

High-level endorsements have come from Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and state Treasurer Pat Quinn, who is actively campaigning for the education amendment.

Gov. Jim Edgar is officially neutral, but his estimate of the amendment's eventual cost, $3 billion, has been a rallying point for opponents. The figure comes from a Legislative Research Unit report that makes estimates based on differing sets of assumptions—$3 billion is the highest of four estimates; $1.1 billion was the lowest.

A legislative task force, headed by Berman, has made recommendations with a price tag of around $1.8 billion. The senator contends that natural revenue growth could provide the cash, meaning that tax rates would not have to be increased. However, natural revenue growth is hard to predict. The increase from 1991 to 1992 was over $900 million, but the projected 1993 increase is much lower, about $110 million.

Red herring

The upcoming referendum stems in part from unsuccessful attempts to use the state's courts to force more equitable funding of the state's public elementary and secondary schools. (See CATALYST, March and June 1992.)

But judges have ruled that the constitution's current language only encourages equitable and adequate funding without requiring it.

Opponents of the proposed amendment contend it could go too far. By making the education of "all persons to the limits of their capacities" a fundamental right, they reason, the amendment could force the state to pay at least half the costs not only of elementary and secondary schools, but also of colleges and universities.

Such arguments are a "red herring," counters DePaul University Law Prof. Jeffery Shaman, a constitutional law expert. "Clauses about educating people to the best of their ability have never been interpreted to mean anything beyond elementary and sec-
secondary education, either in Illinois or in any other state," says Shaman, who helped represent the plaintiffs in this year’s unsuccessful funding equity lawsuit.

Further, Berman read several pages of explanation into the legislative record to help guide any judge that may be asked to interpret the amendment. Berman says he made clear that legislators intend for the amendment to apply only to elementary and secondary schools.

Since Illinois’ current constitution was adopted in 1970, voters have approved six amendments. Only one was as far-reaching as the proposed education amendment; it reduced members of the House of Representatives by a third, from 177 to 118. Other amendments have strengthened property tax penalties, lifted minor voting restrictions, and denied bail to certain criminal defendants.

Voters have rejected four proposed amendments, including ones to repeal the abolition of the personal property tax, to limit the governor’s veto power, and to exempt veterans’ organizations from property taxes.

To pass, an amendment must receive "yes” votes either from 60 percent of the people who vote on the issue itself or from a simple majority of the people who vote in the general election. The amendment will appear first on the ballot.

Board’s new reform plan shifts more authority to schools

by Michael Klonsky

The Board of Education’s new systemwide reform plan, adopted under pressure from the Chicago School Finance Authority, is being hailed by many reformers as the first significant step the board has taken towards decentralization.

The plan lays out a path for transferring authority and money from central office to schools over the next three years.

"It will certainly represent a step forward, if it is implemented," says Joan Jeter Slav of Designs for Change, noting that previous plans did little more than gather dust. "Schools are finally getting things like control over their curriculum, which they should have had three years ago.”

But not every school reform faction is pleased with the plan.

In a stinging commentary published in the Chicago Sun-Times, James W. Compton, president of the Chicago Urban League and president of the Interim Board of Education during its brief tenure, said he “could never have imagined the present plans to decentralize governance to the detriment of instruction….”

Counters Joy Noven of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), "I don’t see what the opponents are so worried about. The actual changes in the plan are so minimal, they’re hardly noticeable at the local school level. It’s a baby step forward at a time when giant steps are needed.”

Specifically, she points to the shift of $500,000 in teacher-training funds to local schools. "While it’s a start,” says Noven, "it comes out to barely $21 per teacher. There’s not much training you can do for $21."

But the SFA’s new executive director, Barbara Holt, thinks the shift will prompt schools to pool resources and "carry out staff development cooperatively."

"All of the uproar against the plan isn’t really about the plan,” Holt contends. "I heard very little about the substance of the systemwide plan during board hearings.”

Much of the plan is vague, leaving readers to guess what the eventual outcome might be. That may be one reason for the widely varying reactions to it. And there are continuing objections, in some quarters, to the SFA’s role in school reform.

Here are some highlights of the board’s Systemwide Educational Reform Goals and Objectives Plan, 1993-1995.

Immediate action:

- Shift $500,000 in state funds earmarked for teacher development to local schools on a per-teacher basis. Pershing Road will still define staff development and establish spending guidelines. But it won’t have the power to cut off funding if it doesn’t approve of a school’s plans for the money. However, the state could cut back next year’s funds if schools violate state regulations.

- Shift $1.7 million in curriculum and staff training grants for poor and underachieving schools to those schools.

- Permit schools to spend their state Chapter 1 dollars without getting central-office approval. Again, if schools violate state regulations, the state could scale back next year’s allocation.

- Allocate $16 million in minor repair money to subdistricts, a move aimed at speeding school repairs.

In coming years:

- Make the central and subdistrict staff “demand-based” over a two-year period. Eventually, central office is to perform only those functions “mandated by state or federal statute” or those directly requested by schools.

The plan calls for the board to conduct surveys of schools to find out what they need and want. By the end of this year, central office is supposed to publish a catalog of its services and what they cost.

Schools will still be required to buy services from either the board catalog or other “qualified agencies;” it’s not clear how an agency would...
become qualified. Unless union contracts are changed, schools would still have to buy school repair services from the board's glaziers, shademakers and so on.

This section falls short of the vision of the SFA's focus groups on decentralization, which called for all spending during the school year to be "strictly the province of the schools." (See CATALYST, September 1992.)

- "To the extent possible," transfer more than $91 million in additional resources to local schools for commodities like food, testing services and instructional supplies. No timeline is given. A previous version of the board's plan called for the transfer of $430 million, with 83 percent coming under local control by 1994.

Next steps

The main task now, says Holt, is getting the plan into the hands of local school council members. To that end, SFA chairman Martin "Mike" Koldyke is trying to rally support from foundations.

Earlier this year, Koldyke used foundation support to organize focus groups of teachers, principals and LSC members to sketch a vision of school decentralization. Some of the foundations that participated then, such as The Joyce Foundation and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, likely will be asked to help fund and organize LSC and teacher workshops on the systemwide plan.

Says Joel Getzendanner, vice president for programs at Joyce, "We are very deeply committed to school reform and to helping promote the reform plan, but we haven't formally committed to any specific activity as yet."

The School Board itself has not shown much enthusiasm for the plan. Following its adoption on Aug. 26, board President Florence Cox and several other members suggested that the plan might not be carried out.

"It's better to be safe than sorry," said Cox, referring to the need for a plan what would get SFA approval. "We don't have to implement this."

Then, when presenting the plan to the SFA on Aug. 31, Cox said it "definitely" would be put into practice. CATALYST sought reaction from several principals. They were uneasy over more work being heaped on their shoulders, especially since they have not received raises for the past two years. But generally they supported greater decentralization.

"Calling the lack of raises "abominable," Lula Ford, principal of Beethoven Elementary School in Grand Boulevard, said she fears the money situation will deter talented people from taking principal jobs and that the commitment of current principals "will go down."

However, she praised the reform plan, especially its provision for lump-sum budgeting and shifting purchasing power to schools. "We ordered new chairs for our classrooms back in 1989 and only got them a few weeks ago," said Ford. "It took so long because the board was so late paying its vendors, they refused to ship. Now I should be able to make purchases directly from the vendor and avoid these kind of problems."

Ford wasn't concerned that repair funds were going to the subdistrict, rather than directly to schools. "I have a great relationship with my supervising engineer," she explained.

Patricia Zamba, principal of Courtenay School in Uptown, called the shift of repair money "a godsend. We've had requisitions in for three years with no results." Zamba said she would have preferred getting the money directly but added, "At least I've got a better chance now."

Zamba participated in the SFA's focus groups, which had recommend-
180 schools get training, other assistance

More than 180 Chicago schools are getting intensive help in curriculum, instruction, parent involvement and other areas, according to the June 1992 issue of "Closer Look," a newsletter published by Designs for Change.

The assistance comes from more than 70 independent organizations, such as lawyers' and accountants' groups, universities and national school renewal projects. About half provide long-term training and other assistance. Most focus on one of three areas: training teachers in the latest teaching methods, developing schoolwide restructuring plans and building better links among schools, parents and the community.

"Most of these helping networks didn't exist before school reform," the newsletter says.

In addition, 70 schools are participating in the Board of Education's Project CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning), which helps schools with especially low test scores.

How the board closed $156 million gap

On July 15, the Board of Education had a $156 million hole in its proposed 1992-93 budget. By Sept. 1, the board, along with the governor, the mayor and the Chicago School Finance Authority, had plugged the hole with about $76 million in additional revenue (some of it generated by accountants), about $68 million in budget cuts and about $12 million on account transfers that switched programs from general, budget-balancing funds to categorical funds.

Once the SFA had signed off on the budget, though, the Chicago Teachers Union raised objections to cuts in union jobs, which the board then put on hold. At press time, the board and union were still discussing the issue.

Figures below, supplied by the board's budget office, are millions of dollars.

**REVENUE CHANGES**

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**SPENDING CHANGES**

**School-level**

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<td>Stretch out teacher bonuses</td>
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<td>Locally determined</td>
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<td>Reduce &quot;free&quot; night meetings to 14</td>
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<td>Reduce high school overtime</td>
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**Central Office**

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<td>Other reductions</td>
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<td>Trim travel, subscriptions, supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total central office</strong></td>
<td><strong>-$16.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Systemwide**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cut special ed contingency</td>
<td>$5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy conservation</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation savings</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonpublic special ed tuition savings</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing efficiencies</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone savings</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical insurance savings</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut LSC election contingency</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase facility repairs</td>
<td>(3.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total systemwide</strong></td>
<td><strong>-$14.2</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Shift to categorical funds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pension costs</td>
<td>$3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 &quot;effective schools&quot; jobs</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant girls' schools</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Youth School</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school broadcast programs</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central office jobs</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials, repairs</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shift total</strong></td>
<td><strong>-$11.9</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL CHANGES, NET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount (in millions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$155.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pilditch case sends warning

Local school council members should not take a judge's recent ruling in the Walter Pilditch case as a green light for using race as a criterion in principal selection, warns Peggy Gordon of the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project.

"She urges LSCs to be fair and thorough in evaluating principals and be sure standards they set are related to performance, not to personal characteristics."

In early September, U.S. District Court Judge William T. Hart upheld a jury's decision that four black LSC members at Morgan Park High School were guilty of racial discrimination in the ouster of Pilditch, the school's principal. Pilditch is white.

However, Hart reversed the jury's decision to impose punitive damages on the four. Punitive damages are imposed only when there is evidence that actions are "malicious, wanton, or motivated by ill will," Gordon points out.

Hart said the defendants "were apparently motivated by a desire to see a black role model as principal of a school where the majority of students are black. This desire does not warrant the imposition of punitive damages."

Because of the discrimination, the School Board must pay Pilditch over $154,000 in compensatory damages and lost pension benefits. It also had to pay the defendants' legal fees. However, had the punitive damages been upheld, the money would have come out of the defendants' pockets. Pilditch is now principal of Curie High School.

Linda Lenz, Lorraine Forte
**CATALYST conducts survey of local school leaders**

On Oct. 12 CATALYST will mail questionnaires to chairs of local school councils, chairs of professional personnel advisory committees and teacher delegates to the Chicago Teachers Union.

The questionnaires seek to discover how schools have changed under school reform. They also inquire about ways to make schools more effective.

The questionnaires were written with the help of the CTU, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, Roosevelt University College of Education, the Teachers Task Force of the CityWide Coalition on School Reform and representatives of LSCs.

Combined with the Consortium's survey of principals, due out later this year, the CATALYST surveys will form a complete set of opinion from key leaders at local schools throughout the city. The LSC questionnaire will be printed in both English and Spanish, with chairs at schools with large Latino populations receiving both.

Results of the surveys will be published in a future issue.

Any LSC chair, PPAC chair, or CTU teacher delegate who does not receive a questionnaire, should call Debra Williams at (312) 427-4830, extension 320.

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**Resource roundup, bilingual education**

**CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The Department of Language and Cultural Education coordinates bilingual education, foreign languages and multicultural education for Chicago's schools. It will also help schools pursue federal and other grants for bilingual education.

*Rodolfo Serna*, assistant superintendent
Language and Cultural Education
1819 W. Pershing Rd., 6w
Chicago, IL 60609
(312) 955-8060

**ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

The State Transitional Bilingual Education Department coordinates state funding of bilingual education.

*Mario Medina Seidner*, manager
Bilingual Education
100 W. Randolph St.
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 814-3850

**ILLINOIS RESOURCE CENTER**

The center, a state-funded agency, advises school districts in setting up bilingual programs.

*Ron Perlman*, executive director
Illinois Resource Center
1855 Mt. Prospect Rd.
Des Plaines, IL 60018
(708) 803-3535

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**MULTIFUNCTIONAL RESOURCE CENTER**

The federally-funded center trains teachers to teach English as a Second Language. It serves the Midwest.

*Ninove Coin*, director
Multifunctional Resource Center
2360 E. Devon Ave.
Des Plaines, IL 60018
(708) 296-6070

**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

The primary organization of bilingual educators and publisher of the journal NABE News.

*James Lyons*, executive director
NABE
1220 L St. NW, Suite 605
Washington, D.C. 20005
(202) 898-1829

**TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES**

The major organization of English as a Second Language educators; publishes journals on both theoretical and practical ESL research.

*Susan Bayley*, executive director
TESOL Central Office
1600 Cameron St., Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 836-0774

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Bilingual education is a focus of hundreds of Chicago community agencies for ethnic groups who speak languages other than English. Many are listed in the Yellow Pages under "Social Service Organizations."
Research suggests that "kids who have a chance to write for a variety of different audiences develop into better writers," says Harvey Daniels, director of the Illinois Writing Project. "It gives them a natural reason to take pride in their work, to make it the best it can be."

In programs at Piccolo Elementary School on the West Side and at Edgewater's Senn High School, writing for real audiences constitutes community service, too.

At Piccolo, "Intergenerational Connection" has linked 180 students with senior citizens at two nearby adult day care centers. The youngsters and seniors write letters to each other. The students also visit the centers periodically to perform stories and read poems they have written.

Teacher Joanetta Copeland began the program two years ago to give her fourth-graders "something in their own community to feel good about." Last year, Piccolo won a $20,000 Urban Education Partnership Grant from the state to expand the program into six more classrooms. The money paid for books, for the students and seniors to take trips together (to see a movie, for example) and for special events at Piccolo involving both groups (such as a multicultural fair).

The program is paying off both socially and academically. For example, fourth-grade teacher Dee Smith says her students made bigger gains on last year's standardized tests than did any of her previous classes. And one of Copeland's students was a finalist in a districtwide writing contest—a first for Piccolo. For the senior citizens, the trips supplement an anemic recreation budget at their centers.

At Senn, students in teacher Barbara Parsons' English literature class are paired with Paula Hudson's fourth-graders at nearby Swift Elementary School. After several weekly visits to Swift, each 12th-grader wrote, illustrated, and produced a book for his or her young partner that was tailored to that child's interests and taste.

Senn students studied children's books in class and learned book-binding at a Chicago Art Institute workshop. A $750 grant from the Oppenheimer Foundation paid for workshop tuition and materials.

Hudson says the experience was beneficial for the fourth-graders as well: "My students bonded with the 12th-graders almost immediately, which told me they needed something."

"The teacher is always kind of a pretend audience," says Daniels. "The student knows the teacher doesn't really care about 'The three things I did on my vacation.' But when you're writing to a particular kid or a particular senior citizen ... you really care what you have to say, so it becomes important to be clear."

As Senn student Kendra McLendon says: 'It's work you do because you want to, not because you have to.'

Dan Wissmann