Reform leaders worried

Business leaders switching sides?

by Michael Klonsky

Six years ago, Chicago's corporate leaders entered into an historic partnership with grass-roots organizations to topple the school bureaucracy. Having given up hope that the Board of Education would ever reform itself, they led the charge for a School Reform Act that put parent-dominated, locally elected school councils in charge of change.

Today these same business leaders are offering the board and its new superintendent, Argie K. Johnson, not just an olive branch but a big helping hand. That has its original reform partners worried about big business' commitment to local control and democratic school reform. And since the corporate community and private foundations are intertwined, grass-roots activists also worry that the dollars that have fueled community-based participation will flow elsewhere.

The corporate change of direction is being played out in Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), a non-profit organization created in 1989 by two business groups—Chicago United and the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club—to promote sound implementation of the legislation they helped write.

For the most part, the Civic Committee funded LQE's research and advocacy as it struggled with former Supt. Ted D. Kimbrough over the school system's budget priorities and issues of decentralization. This past November, the Civic Committee put its mouth where its money was—in effect, taking over LQE.

"I don't know whether learning zones will work... Every time we go to the Legislature—as Knute Rockne said about the forward pass—three things can happen and two of them are bad."

John Kotsaklis, Chicago Teachers Union

See story on page 24.

First, it engineered a new mission for LQE, replacing critical advocacy with assistance for the School Board and Supt. Johnson, who is viewed as more supportive of local control than Kimbrough was. Second, it put one of its own executives, John Ayers, in charge of carrying out the new mission. The intention was to make him president, but, as CATALYST goes to press Jan. 14, his official status is unclear.
Deputy Mayor for Education Leonard Dominguez sums up this issue of CATALYST when he says (on page 6), "There is no consensus about what approach should be taken toward fixing our schools."

That's nothing new. But that's not necessarily bad either. No large, urban school system has turned itself around completely—indeed, we'd venture that no small suburban school system has either—so there are no sure bets on what to do. Fortunately, in Chicago, there are lots of ideas, and those ideas are being debated seriously by a wide variety of constituencies.

There's no question that decentralization, accompanied by additional discretionary money for schools, has been good for Chicago's schools. More important than the recent increase in test scores, the Consortium on Chicago School Research has found persuasive evidence that about a third of the elementary schools are taking a systemic approach to redefining what they do. These schools, the researchers say, also are the ones with the broadest participation in decision making, which is one of the tenets of Chicago school reform.

The obvious question, then, is: What do you do about the other two-thirds of elementary schools and the still-suffering high schools?

Supt. Argie K. Johnson's immediate response is to send teams of top administrators to the lowest-performing schools. Marjorie Branch, her deputy for academic support, wants to beef up subdistrict offices, especially with staff development specialists—a longstanding and hotly debated proposal. Those who fear bureaucratic buildup would, instead, use the city's most progressive schools as teaching centers for other schools, including their local school councils.

In a school system as large as Chicago's, there's room for all these approaches. Indeed, competition among them probably would make each work better.

Diversity is important in the political realm, too. In our lead article, Contributing Editor Michael Klonsky describes a growing rift between the corporate community and reform groups. Big business argues that with a reform-minded superintendent, it's time to throw its support behind the administration. The grass-roots folks believe Supt. Johnson merits support, too, but they worry that their erstwhile partner is bowing out of the political boxing ring (which it bravely entered some six years ago) or, worse, that it has given up on bottom-up reform.

Both remain to be seen. However, the drive for school improvement, whatever the approach, will suffer if grass-roots school activists can't muster an independent political force to, at a minimum, keep tabs on established interest groups, from the school administration and unions to the professional politicians, elected and otherwise.

Founders of the Chicago Association of Local School Councils had hoped CALSC would play that role, but the organization seems to have made no headway. The CityWide Coalition for School Reform fell apart more than a year ago when it couldn't handle diversity. However, there is talk of reviving CityWide—just in time.

WORTH PONDERING "The value of charter schools is that [they allow] for innovation within the control of the elected public school board. If people believe in public schools and they want to maintain a public school system, then they better understand that the old ways of doing things are not enough."

Supt. Howard L. Fuller, Milwaukee Public Schools, in "Charter Schools: A New Breed of Public Schools," a policy brief of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.

ABOUT US The John Kotsakis quote printed on page 1 caused quite a stir at CATALYST—but not for educational reasons. Did Knute Rockne really say that, asked Timothy Prentiss, our desktop publishing master, as we rushed to deadline. The writers of this column didn't have a clue. Dan Weissmann, who heard Kotsakis, called him to see if he knew what he was talking about, in regard to sports, that is; Kotsakis stood by his words. "No way," said colleagues at our sister publication, The Chicago Reporter, offering a variety of suspects. Finally, Carolyn Mulac of the Chicago Public Library's Information Center ended the debate: It was Duffy Daugherty of Michigan State. Sorry, John.

Lorraine Forte
NEW DIRECTIONS

1 Business leaders switching sides? Reform groups worry that they're pulling out.

7 'I just show up in schools . . . . It's very telling' New superintendent acts on what she sees and hears.

14 Johnson wows teachers, has others worried Reform advocates still withholding judgment.

15 Johnson's team knows ropes, off to fast start Who they are, where they're headed, how they work.

22 Updates Schedule changes hurt security, schools craft novel solutions. . . Double shifts bring headaches at overcrowded high schools. . . Year-round schools lose staff, perks. . . Principal says Learning Zone panel looking for union label. . . Turnaround Commission getting tossed around. . . LSC training still limps along. . . Mayor Daley boxes in Nominating Commission.

18 Letters
19 Grants
21 Elsewhere
28 Bright Ideas
As a member of the steering committee of the education group of the Donors Forum of Chicago, Ayers also is in a position to influence school reform's leading funders in the corporate and foundation communities.

"We aren't against advocacy," insists Ayers. "But we do believe LQE's mission has changed and that we shouldn't be generating our own advocacy. Rather it should come from the grass roots, and we should play a role in translating those ideas into policy. This is the kind of leadership that is needed in the new era of reform."

But LQE's erstwhile partners contend that advocacy will suffer. "There were constant pressures during the recent [budget and union] negotiations to weaken the autonomy of local schools," notes Donald Moore, executive director of the reform group Designs for Change. "With help from LQE, we were able to beat back efforts to take $90 million in state Chapter 1 funds [away from schools] and other measures which would weaken the role of parents in reform."

**Pressure on superintendent**

Moore and his colleagues contend that strong advocacy is essential even with a sympathetic superintendent who is sympathetic to reform. In a study of reform efforts across the country, Designs for Change reports that "advocacy works best with a sympathetic leadership at the top of the school system, because advocates and progressive leaders can complement each other's efforts in changing the institution."

Adds Anne Hallett, who recently left the Wieboldt Foundation to head the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, "Even good people need external pressures."

Coretta McFerren, director of West Side Schools and Communities Organizing for Restructuring and Planning (WSCORP), puts the issue in practical terms. "In the past," she says, "the local school activists knew they could count on LQE and the business community for some support, whether that meant paying for a bus down to Springfield or getting some accurate information or leadership training. With a takeover of LQE [by the Civic Committee], they will not be sure that support is forthcoming."

One thing is clear: LQE will no longer monitor the School Board's budget, a service that many reform groups had come to rely on as they lobbied for new spending priorities. According to Joy Noven of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), there were crucial occasions when LQE "brought issues to the attention of the Board of Education and the press, in which specific budget figures were being manipulated or misrepresented."

But Ayers assures, "LQE's watchdog role can easily be taken up by the Chicago Panel on School Policy, the Civic Federation and the School Finance Authority, which has new powers and an inspector general at its disposal."

Marilou von Ferstel, chair of LQE's board, adds, "A shift in LQE's priorities in no way diminishes the [board's] budget issues. But, presently, about half of the LQE budget is spent on monitoring the board's budget. That money could be better spent in training LSC and PPAC [professional personnel advisory committee] members, for example." (For related story on LSC training, see Updates, page 26.)

**Impatient with reform?**

The decision to drop budget monitoring was motivated also by the findings of a $1 million study of the school system's finances that the Civic Committee helped underwrite. According to the 1992 report by the consulting firm of Booz, Allen & Hamilton, further cuts in the bureaucracy, long a target of most grass-roots reformers, cannot solve the board's enormous money problems, which the report concludes is the biggest problem facing Chicago schools.

Under its new mission, says Ayers, LQE will set out first to help restructure the school system's central office "into a modern service organization," which he contends is "key to winning new funding in Springfield."

In taking this approach, LQE becomes more like another Civic Committee arm, the Financial Research and Advisory Committee (FRAC), which already is working with central office to find efficiencies.

Reformers outside the corporate community are concerned that the new strategy will reverse the trend toward decentralization.

"If reform is going to emanate from the center or top of the system, then we're in trouble for trying to encourage teachers to take risks and initiate restructuring," says William Ayers, an education professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago (and brother of John Ayers); Ayers heads the Small Schools Workshop, an alliance headquartered at UIC that promotes schools-within-schools as a way to change the relationships between teachers and students.

Fundamentally, though, reformers worry that the corporate community has grown impatient with grass-roots school reform. In a Nov 30 letter to B. Kenneth West, chair of the Civic Committee board and a former chair of the LQE board, 17 reformers said that the Civic Committee's actions were "being perceived as a retreat by the corporate community from reform."
"Why are they trying to fix something that's not broken?" asks Hallett, one of the initiators of the protest letter. While the school reform movement has made important gains, says Hallett, "the last six months show that we are not there yet."

"We're not retreating from reform," insists John Ayers. "Decentralization is still the right way to go."

Richard Morrow, another former LQE board chair, also denies that business is backing away from school reform. "It's just more important now to de-emphasize board budgetary matters and to focus on the arena of tax policy and legislative matters," he says.

West, chairman of Harris Bankcorp, and Morrow, retired chairman of Amoco Corp., were among the corporate chief executive officers who, in a first, lobbied personally in Springfield for the School Reform Act.

Morrow concedes, however, that corporate funding of reform activities may drop. "Business will continue to do what it can," he says.

As for LQE's own $573,000 budget, both John Ayers and von Ferstel deny a report published Nov. 29 in Crane's Chicago Business that it will be scaled back substantially.

The changes at LQE have not come without a fight. The reformers' Nov. 30 letter—which praised LQE's past role in engaging the corporate community as an independent advocate for reform—led to a series of meetings between the Civic Committee and reform leaders. Still, the Civic Committee stuck by its plan. With no other source of funding, the LQE board lacked the will to say "no," contends one member who is sympathetic to the reformers.

The reformers then stepped up their protest, making their pitch in person to the LQE board on Dec. 14, the day the board was scheduled to ratify the changes. "We weren't trying to tell the Civic Committee what to do," maintains Moore of Designs for Change. "We were asking for a continuation of the partnership that has been forged with the business community over the years."

Reformers succeeded in garnering support from three of the four community-based members of the LQE board: Sokoni Karanja, president of Centers for New Horizons; Migdalia Rivera, executive director of The Latino Institute; and McFerren of WSCORP. Noting that no community-based board member had been on the committee that developed the new LQE mission, McFerren argued that more information was needed before the committee's plan could be adopted.

Faced with open confrontation, the LQE board backed off and deferred a formal vote. LQE President Diana Nelson, who earlier resigned rather than accept the new mission, withdrew her resignation, saying the board would have to fire her instead.

Without formal approval by the LQE board, McFerren argues, the Civic Committee-inspired changes are illegal. "When the board decides to replace LQE's president, that's a legal decision," she says. "But when the Civic Committee wants to do it, that's only a recommendation."

Even so, by late December, John Ayers reportedly was selecting new staff members, with the fate of old ones still in question.

"Reform will be hurt if political squabbling is not ended," he says. "Fresh faces and new strategies will help get more people involved."

Pressure for a change in direction at LQE has been building gradually for a long time. In the organization's first year, the non-corporate members of the LQE board persuaded their colleagues to funnel money through community organizations to recruit and train candidates for the first LSC election and to get out the vote.

An assessment of the first election by writer Ben Joravsky, published in the February 1990 issue of CATALYST,

"We're not retreating from reform. Decentralization is still the right way to go."

- John Ayers, Civic Committee

found, as the headline says, "Money made difference in voter turnout." Community organizing, funded by major corporations, generated high voter turnout in many poor black and Latino neighborhoods, where voter turnout is traditionally low.

By its second year, LQE was retreating from this kind of activism, confining itself more and more to organizational support for some citywide reform projects and specific efforts of the Board of Education.

Community organizers got no money from LQE for the second LSC election, in 1991, which saw a significant decline in participation. Some critics speculated that big business was worried more about what the community-based movement might unleash than about the Pershing Road bureaucracy.

In 1992, the Booz, Allen & Hamilton
Reformers 'shocked'

"As the past couple of months have made unmistakably clear, the need for advocacy has not abated," 11 school reform leaders wrote in a Dec. 14 letter urging the board of Leadership for Quality Education to continue as an advocate.

"LQE worked daily with other reform groups to defend against the strong pressure to gut Chapter 1 and to eliminate a series of anti-reform features from the final legislative package. Therefore, the sudden move on the part of the Civic Committee to bring LQE in-house and trim its activities significantly is a shock. This action will affect the entire reform community."

The letter was signed by Jahara Armstrong, Rogers Park Community Action Network; William Ayers, Small Schools Workshop; Malcolm Bush, Woodstock Institute; Sheila Castillo, Chicago Association of Local School Councils; Joseph Cicero, North River Commission; Anne Hallett, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform; Donald Moore, Designs for Change; Joy Noven, Parents United for Responsible Education; Joan Jeter Slay, Designs For Change; Marilyn Stephens, Citizens Schools Committee; and Kelvin Strong, Near North Development Corporation.

Money 'drying up'

Reaction from reformers not directly involved in the dispute follow predictable lines.

LQE's policy and hiring practices "are an internal matter," says Deputy Mayor for Education Leonard Dominguez. "I think people are wringing their hands too soon. There is no consensus about what approach should be taken toward fixing our schools. If some groups think LQE should be doing something they're not, they can do it themselves."

Julie Woesthoff of PURE disagrees. "Of course we could do many of the things LQE is doing ourselves," she says. "But there is also a question of what the corporations owe us [as consumers]. We are where their money comes from."

James Deanes, chair of the Parent/Community Council and a frequent critic of LQE and its reform partners, welcomes big business's change in attitude about central office. "We have argued for a long time that the board has been cut to bare bones, beyond the point where it can operate efficiently," he says. "If business finally agrees with that, all well and good."

However, he is leery of direct corporate involvement at central office. "They should be funding grass-roots organizations to do that work." One ramification of the involvement, he contends, is that black central office staffers are being dismissed and their jobs taken over by whites.

Charley Gillispie, the board's chief financial officer, declined to comment on the allegation, saying only that he was "too new to the job to say one way or the other." He directed inquiries to Robert Johnson, special assistant to the superintendent, who did not return phone calls.

School reform backers in the independent funding community are distancing themselves from the turmoil at LQE. "I don't see the donor community pulling back on its commitment to school reform or from advocacy," concludes Peter Martinez, a former community organizer who is a senior program officer at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. In 1990, MacArthur pledged $40 million for a 10-year Chicago Education Initiative.

"Business and the foundations have all but abandoned reform."
—James Deanes, Parent/Community Council

That sentiment is echoed by Warren Chapman, education program officer at The Joyce Foundation, another major reform funder. Chapman encourages the school community to "look at our grant making" to see that a large portion of Joyce's funding goes toward advocacy and grass-roots school change efforts.

Nevertheless, McFerren of WSCorp contends money for community-based work "is beginning to dry up." Deanes agrees but is more emphatic, "Business and the foundations have all but abandoned reform." Noting that his group has suffered severe funding cuts in the past year, he asserts, "They seem to have concluded that the struggle for reform is too long and too hard and are pulling back."
'I just show up in schools . . . it's very telling'

In an interview in her conference room, Supt. Argie K. Johnson tells CATALYST Editor Linda Lenz (right) and Managing Editor Lorraine Forte that she will push for increased course requirements in science and foreign language. "We have to . . . look at what is best for students in the 21st century."

Q Mandating the 50-minute period was widely viewed as being contrary to reform, both because it was an instructional mandate and because it really hit hard those schools that were trying to change. What's your reaction to that?

A While I understand people's concerns about its effect on reform, I was also concerned about the number of instructional minutes that the students in Chicago public schools were receiving, compared to students in other school districts, both large and small. Prior to the implementation of the 50-minute period, high school students were being taught a total of 200 minutes a day, five 40-minute periods. And research shows that time on task certainly does improve students' performance.

I think the real issue was that there had not been a change in the basic scheduling in about 30 years. And that was said to me by a member of a group I put together to talk about the 50-minute period.

Also, as I visit high schools, I get many compliments for having done that, from the teaching staff. It enables them to do things that they weren't able to do before. I also want to say that the Chicago Teachers Union applauded the increase in time.

For the most part, the criticism has been from the music department, the art department, because, with the increase of 50-minute periods and the increase of two students per class in the fall, fewer teaching positions were needed.

Q Was that the point?

A Part of it was financial; we had a budget to balance. We realized a savings of about $18 million. Where the furor came in was not so much in opposition to the 50-minute period, but to the timing; we had to reschedule schools in, like, two weeks. And that was a mess.

Q Why didn't you let schools know sooner that they were going to have to do this?

A I wasn't here sooner. This was done about two weeks after I came here. Why wasn't it done sooner than that? I can't answer that. As you know, the board and the union had been negotiating since March of '93, I'm told. One of the items on the table was to increase the number of minutes that students were instructed during the day. The original proposal was to go from five 40-minute periods to seven 40-minute periods. But that would have given teachers above the maximum number of students they could, under the contract, teach each day. So the compromise was five 50-minute periods.
Q Part of the compromise was that high school teachers no longer have a duty period. And that seems to have caused some of the biggest problems in the schools that were trying to change, because they used the duty periods to get teachers together and so on. Is a duty period something you might want to buy back at the next contract negotiation?

A I would like to consider that, depending on what the financial picture looks like. But what I would not want to see is for students to have two periods of study hall. The students themselves told me that they would go home, because there was nothing meaningful happening. And I just don’t think that a system can afford to waste the only resource that the students have, and that’s time.

Q Are there any other things that you believe this system needs to change systemwide?

A Yes. We need to look at the offerings in the high schools. For example, the requirement for science is one year. That’s not to say that many schools do not give more, but the basic requirement is one year. I don’t think that is sufficient. We have to sit down with this task force of principals that is now in existence—we meet monthly or bimonthly—to look at what is best for students in the 21st century.

We also have to look at electives because many times students take so many electives that they have to take many requirements in their junior and senior years. Another thing I would like to discuss and come to agreement on is a second language for students in high school.

Last year in New York, I was able to get approved, by the board and the community, increased science offerings at the high schools, from two to three years. Two of the three years had to be a laboratory science. We also increased mathematics from two to three years. And we had the same arguments: What about the electives? And I said then, we have to teach students to make choices because, going through life, you make choices all of the time. Those are discussions that are underway with the task force, and we’ll discuss them with the LSCs and the parents and the community.

Q Vocational education has often been criticized as a dead-end track, for students of color in particular. But increasingly, school reformers say that vocational education, if it’s done right, can provide the kind of hands-on experience that students need. Given their viewpoint and what’s happened to vocational education with the scheduling change—many of the shops were shut down—what would you plan to do with those students?

A I am an advocate of voc-ed, contrary to what somebody put in the paper. If I was fired, I could make a living because of what I learned in vocational education. I can sew, I can tailor, and I can cook. I could open up a restaurant. Or I could open up a tailoring shop. And I learned it in voc-ed in high school and middle school. But I didn’t learn it by taking vocational education seven to 10 periods a week in a comprehensive high school. I learned it by taking vocational education two to three times a week in a comprehensive high school.

Why should students take seven to 10 periods of vocational education a week for four years and one year of science? I said to the comprehensive high schools, let’s cut down to five periods a week. Now, in the vocational high schools, they were taking voc-ed for 20 periods out of their allotted school time. So I said, cut that back to 15. I thought that the offerings for voc-ed were disproportionate to the academic content areas.

And when you talk to some of the students, they say they were standing around the walls half the time. They were
programmed for 80 minutes of auto mechanics, let's say, and were really not getting the practice that they should have been receiving. It was like a waste of time, and many times they walked out. And this comes directly from students I talked to in the schools.

Q Early reaction to your top-level appointments is that you have selected people who are competent and know the system well. But there is some disappointment that you didn’t reach out for people that have really outstanding reputations in their fields and track records of innovation. What are you looking for in your administrative team, and why?

“A curriculum department should set standards . . . but it should not dictate how it should be done.”

A I am looking for people with outstanding records, and I did reach out for this. One of my top appointments, Marjorie Branch, has been in this system for years and is highly respected. I checked her references—very, very commendable references. Dr. Jo Ann Wooden Roberts, whom I selected for Operations, came from outside of the system. She had been here some years ago, was superintendent of the school district in Muskegon Heights, Michigan, had also been in Rock Island, Illinois. She has a wonderful reputation as well.

Dr. Belkis Santos was recommended to me by the former superintendent in Detroit, Deborah McGriff, who had hired Dr. Santos. She is a former area superintendent in Milwaukee and had been a principal here at the Kanono School. She has the reputation of being a highly innovative person. And so I feel that the appointments I’ve made have been people who can help me move my vision.

The other thing is, people will promise to come to Chicago, and then when you say, “Come and let’s talk about it,” they say, “Oh, I don’t think I want to come.” There are not a lot of people knocking down the doors to come to the Chicago public school system. We are working hard to change the image of the Chicago public school system, and when that image changes, I think you will have more of the quote, unquote “outstanding reputations in their fields.”

Q It seems as though you have different ideas than the traditional one about what a curriculum department should be.

A A curriculum department should set standards and expose staff to the various curriculum methodologies, but it should not dictate how it should be done. I think educators are professionals. They should make the judgments about how they are going to teach a particular skill or concept to their particular class. But it has to be aligned to the standards, the goals, the objectives that you want.

Q In June, you said that you would choose a second-in-command who is a “recognized expert on the successful management of large, decentralized organizations.” Have you done that? Who do you consider your second-in-command?

A On decentralized organizations, from all aspects, Dr. Jo Ann Roberts. She understands teamwork. She understands the interconnectedness between, for instance, operations, the instructional division and the business and finance division. You have to understand how operations, facilities, food, purchasing, all business and finance, payroll and human resources all impact on the instructional improvement process, which is the heart of the system.

Now I have both deputies [Branch and Roberts] going out to visit schools that rank in the bottom third academically. They go out as a team—the chief engineer, the director of operations and the director of academic support services—to visit a school for a day with the principal and the LSC, to look at all of these operations and how we can help them improve their schools.

Q Is this to help them understand how to improve central operations, or is this part of your helping the bottom third of schools?

A Part is helping the bottom third, and part is looking at what needs to be done from the operations standpoint. For instance, we are looking at schools that we feel are not clean. We bring the engineer so we can say, “How can we help you do it? What are the roadblocks that are keeping this from happening?” And Marge Branch talks with the principal and the LSC about performance, and how you look at data to organize your program or a staff development program. And they may say they need additional assistance in the area of math, and we are able to offer them some suggestions, or refer people to them.

Q Do you plan to try to visit every school eventually—either you or your deputies?

A Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I just show up in schools. I want to see what happens in schools on a normal day, when nobody knows that I’m coming. And I do that. And I’m telling you, it’s very telling.
Can you give an example of something you’ve learned or something you’ve done?

I have visited several high schools. I visited one a couple weeks ago; I was very displeased with the cleanliness. I was displeased with the lack of pride, in terms of making the school an attractive place for students; for example, bulletin boards were not decorated, some of the classrooms were not decorated. It wasn’t clean. I also visited almost every classroom that was in session in that school. I saw some wonderful teaching, and I saw some terrible teaching. And at the end of that, I had a discussion with the principal and with the assistant principal, and had an opportunity to talk to some of the teachers. And I think the expectations in that school are too low.

I’d like to go back to your work with the bottom third of schools. Is this how that will proceed, by sending out your team to give individual advice to these schools, or is there a larger plan?

Oh, there are numerous approaches. One other thing that we have done is identify two people in each district office who will be advocates for the schools in that district. They are to get the answers that the schools need in reply to any problems. That way, schools can talk to one person, instead of talking to 10 people here. It’s not the best use of school staff time to stay on the phone trying to get problems solved.

How, specifically, do you plan to work with the schools in the bottom third, to bring them up?

We plan to work with them to help them better define what they would like for their schools: Let’s look at the data from your school. Let’s analyze it. If there is a problem with reading comprehension, does your reading program teach comprehension? Those kinds of things—just to get people to think and say, “Well, maybe we ought to try this differently in a particular grade.” Sometimes it just helps people crystallize their thoughts. I do that with principals—sit down and talk education as often as I can, and some wonderful things come out of it. Educators are really, really isolated and don’t have a chance to talk about their profession as many other professionals do.

Do you see any conflict with local control in doing this?

As you heard me say when I came here, I think the way to change the ethos of schools is to create partnerships between parents (the local school councils in this instance), teachers and administrators, as well as the greater community. I think that if schools are going to change, parents are going to have to view themselves as partners. And staff will have to see parents as supportive of what they are trying to do, rather than as adversarial.

How do you do that?

You do that by being patient and getting people to talk to each other. And I think the local school councils can play a critical role in that, in bringing the PTAs into the schools and working with them and involving them in some of the decision making.
Q So, what do you as a superintendent do to make that happen?

A Try to create an atmosphere of trust, by setting an example where I talk to LSCs, where I talk to principals. About two weeks ago, we were talking about restructuring the system and improving the management information system. We put together a group of people; there were business leaders, LSC members, administrators—all sitting around and giving suggestions. I ask schools to do the same thing.

I would like to add that the board and I have agreed on a set of accountability standards for each of us. I am requesting that the district superintendents, along with their councils, set accountability standards for themselves. And that principals do the same thing for their schools. And that teachers do the same thing for their classes. What are you willing to be held accountable for? We have to set accountability standards. I mean, we cannot just go around and collect paychecks, as we do, and not be accountable for anything.

Q There’s been talk forever about making the Central Service Center a true service center, and nothing seems to happen.

A We refer to everything that we do as services. You’re seeing now that we have advocates out in the district to better serve schools. I insist that my staff visit schools, not to spy but to assist people. I try to set that model as I go out. I encourage people to come in. I had a group of parents in here yesterday, talking about some problems with their principal selection.

I have an open-door policy, which, I think, makes a statement about being of service to schools. There will be an expansion of services, using the staff that we have because we simply do not have any additional monies to bring on any extra staff. We’ll better define the roles and functions of existing staff, to better serve the schools.

We have a funding proposal to assist us with the reorganization. We are looking at the human resources unit right now. If we are successful in getting funding through the corporate community, then, for example, our human resources [computer] system will be able to talk to our payroll system. Right now, those two systems do not communicate. So, that will be an efficiency which will free up some dollars maybe to add some staff developers in the district, for example. Those are the kinds of things that we are looking at.

Q There seems to be a consensus that schools need to be tied together in relatively small networks to provide support and staff development, and work on common problems. Some people want to have the districts beefed up. Some want schools to go out and pick partners. And then there’s the notion of a high school with its feeder elementary schools. What do you see as the best way to provide these small working networks of schools?

A That’s part of my Phase Two thinking. First of all, I would like to have all the schools networked into a mainframe computer, not only for operation purposes, but for instructional purposes as well. For example, once the management information system is up, we will have, as I envision, many curriculum areas that schools can log into.

And if the schools are networked, they could form the kinds of networks you are talking about. Say, for example, we have a group of schools that are interested in working on cooperative learning, thematic units or peer tutoring. They could work together through technology. They could set up common periods where they could get together.

Also, we have about 900 cadre substitute teachers in this system. These teachers come in every day to fill in for teachers who are absent. I just want about 20 or 30 of these teachers so if, let’s say, four elementary schools want to improve science instruction, I could send cadre teachers to cover their classes while they go out for a week of training in science methodology.

The teachers will feel that the system has a commitment to improve them as professionals without their having to give up their own personal time. We also want to say, “We are going to meet you halfway, because we know that in order to improve student achievement and to make our students competitive with the rest of the world, we have to invest in the service providers, and the teachers are the service providers.”

Q Under recent legislation, you acquired the power to evaluate district superintendents, and their retention is dependent upon a positive evaluation from you. Again, some reform leaders saw that as a diminution of local power, because in the past district councils were solely responsible for hiring these district superintendents. Do you see this as anti-reform?

A No, I don’t see it as anti-reform. I see it as an accountability measure, holding people accountable for the jobs that we are paid to do.
Q But critics would say that district superintendents had been accountable to district councils. You don't think that was sufficient?

A They will still be accountable to the councils, because my way of evaluating is to sit with the council and the superintendent to talk about the evaluation, not for me just to hand it down from here. Part of the evaluation is to point out where you need to improve. And, certainly, the input of the council would be very valuable to me.

Q In appearing before the Learning Zone Advisory Committee, Marjorie Branch, your deputy, recommended that councils at learning zone schools be equally divided between educators and non-educators and that the School Board appoint principals, based on the recommendations of the non-educators. These proposals suggest that you do not support decentralized, parent-driven reform.

A we're still discussing the learning zone initiative. But my philosophy is that parents should be in the majority in councils. The major attraction to the Chicago Public Schools for me was the empowerment of parents. I contend that the education of a child is too important to leave solely to the educators. However, our proposal is that the appointment of principals would be the responsibility of the Board of Education, based on the recommendations of the councils.

Q One of the other strengths that you've mentioned is your ability to bring diverse groups together to tackle problems. We'd like to ask you about a number of groups here in Chicago. First, do you think you can engage the teachers' union to be a larger force for school improvement?

A I have met with President Jacqueline Vaughn, and we talked about how we could improve the system together. We did not have any disagreements about where the system is and where it needs to go. Neither one of us is pleased with performance now, as measured through student achievement in many of the schools. We have agreed to meet on a monthly basis so we can continue to get the message out that we are going to provide the leadership to involve teachers in making improvements. That's the path I want to take, to involve and talk to the service providers, to listen to them, both in their own setting and here if they choose, and to involve them in forums where educators are talking—or anyone's talking—about education.

Q Do you think that the teachers union contract is in any way an impediment to improving schools? Are there provisions there that you think are bad for kids?

A I think we made a lot of gains in this last contract, just to [be able to make changes when] 63.5 percent of a school's staff agrees. . . . I'm just trying to think of an impediment. I'd have to think about that.

Q There's a lot in there. Nothing pops into mind?

A Nothing that I think, with some talking through, couldn't be done. You must understand that the role of the Chicago Teachers Union is to protect its members, and this often causes constraints on the programs. However, the board and the union have made great inroads in working together to improve the teaching/learning process. For example, the ability of schools to get waivers for programs that are not consistent with the collective bargaining agreement can be done if 63.5 percent of staff votes in favor of a program change. Principals will, in the future, be able to select top administrative staff such as assistant principals and head teachers.

Principals have increased discretion in selection of staff although seniority rights of teachers are protected. That's why we set up a variety of board and union committees to solve very difficult issues on a more collegial, rather than a confrontational, manner.

You know, what surprises me about education—and it may happen in other professions—is that adversarial relationships are set up the minute a teacher moves to a management position. It even develops among friends, within a day, and I don't understand it. I worked for a principal once
who didn’t talk to teachers; he talked to the assistant principals, and the assistant principals talked to the teachers. And God bless the kids, you know.

That’s the kind of thing I want to work on, break down. We are all in this together. I want to go from an organizational structure where it’s line reporting to a circular structure where no one is more important than the other, with the students being the center.

Q And adjust salaries to reflect that?

A You have to do something about salaries. That’s something we have to deal with, too. Presently, budgeting constraints prevent this. On my first appointments I was criticized for moving some administrators to higher salaries, but that was not true. The deputies that I appointed received the same or less salary than their predecessors. In one case, there was only a title change, and in another the salary was decreased by $30,000.

I’m sure there are neighborhood schools who have shown significant improvement with kids who are not selected. And I think the mark of an educational system is to improve just regular schools. I think that the teachers and administrators in those schools who move students should be highlighted. Those schools that, in a year, move from 20 percent of the students performing at or above the national norm to 30 percent. That’s hard.

Last year, as deputy chancellor in New York, I recognized federal Chapter 1 schools that had done tremendous jobs with educating children but didn’t show up on the New York Times list of top schools. And it was like you had given the teachers a million dollars, because nobody had ever said, “You’ve done a wonderful job.”

Q But your research department has to generate that data for people.

A That’s exactly what we are doing. And it will be published this year, and those teachers will be recognized. That’s how you move systems, to recognize those unsung heroes and heroines out there who are really working to improve student achievement.

Getting back to diverse groups, there are leaders in the business community who are now talking about working more with the administration than acting as watchdogs. What would you like to see business leaders do?

A Business leaders have been very supportive of the system since I’ve been here—not only financially but with pro bono services. For example, FRAC [Financial Research and Advisory Committee] and the foundation community have provided pro bono services. If I call and say, “Hey, we have to get this proposal out” and I don’t have a good proposal writer, they would loan me somebody to work six weeks or so on that.

They also will assist us in writing letters of support about initiatives we are trying. We were just awarded a $100,000 planning grant from the National Science Foundation to put together a proposal to improve instruction in math, science and technology. One of my staff members just said one of the foundations has called to say they would match that amount of money.

That’s encouraging and says that there’s faith in the system. If we are successful in getting our proposal funded, we stand to bring $15 million into the system over the next five years. And we’ll be working closely with the business community, the local school councils, the community-based organizations and higher education in this whole initiative.
Johnson wows teachers, has others worried

by Lorraine Forte

In early December, Supt. Argie Johnson spoke to about 50 teachers at a Saturday reception sponsored by the reform-minded Teachers Task Force. "Whatever agenda she had in terms of building bridges with teachers, she accomplished it," reports Karen Guberman, interim director. "She definitely displayed herself as someone who understands the critical role of teachers [and] clearly presented herself as in favor of reform, as 'superintendent as educator.'"

The audience was a natural for Johnson, who gained a reputation as a curriculum and instruction expert during her 26 years in New York City schools; when she left New York, she was deputy chancellor for instruction. Since arriving in Chicago last summer, Johnson has talked more about teaching and learning than anything else.

Johnson agreed to attend two more teacher receptions this school year, which Guberman calls "a major accomplishment" that never would have happened with former Supt. Ted Kimbrough. "Let us say, I don't think there was any need to even suggest" such a meeting with Kimbrough, she remarks.

Johnson also has won admirers with her unannounced visits to schools. "I want to see what happens in schools on a normal day," she told CATALYST in an interview. "Everyone has said to me how wonderful it is to have a superintendent visit."

Generally, though, school activists, even those troubled by some things Johnson has said and done or not said and not done, are withholding judgment. "Her strong suit is instruction. The big question is how well she will deal with the other stuff," one school system insider says. "She does less schmoozing [than previous superintendents]," the insider observes. "Some may describe this as politically naive, [but] I think that deep down she feels it shouldn't be necessary. She's not as concerned with image, sometimes to her detriment."

One West Side activist who sees politics as an integral part of the job believes Johnson "is in over her head" in Chicago's political waters. "It doesn't help that she's an outsider, another 'import' with no responsibility for or accountability to Chicago," says the activist, who asked to remain anonymous. "She said she didn't come here to be a manager, a politician; she came to be an educator. Now, for you to say you didn't come here to be a politician—come on! This is Chicago."

Johnson needs to do more to get to know legislators, particularly members of the Black Caucus, and must build more bridges to grass-roots activists and organizations, says James Deanes of the Parent/Community Council.

Groups feel slighted

Some community activists feel slighted, adds Mark Allen of the School Board Nominating Commission, who had backed former Interim Supt. Richard Stephenson for the permanent post. So far, Johnson has neglected grass-roots input—something Stephenson wouldn't have done, Allen contends.

"If you come from outside, go meet first with the people who didn't want you in the first place and let them know you're OK," Allen adds. "That's the politically astute thing to do."

Asked about her relationship with grass-roots activists, Johnson told CATALYST she has begun what will be regular gatherings of diverse groups to address key issues, such as violence.

Saying that Johnson should have opposed the School Board's use of state Chapter 1 funds to help balance its budget, some skeptics also question whether Johnson will do enough to empower local schools.

"Is she using her office to bring more resources to the local level?" Allen questions. "If she couldn't stand up and say it's wrong to take Chapter 1 funds, then she's not looking out for the local level."

Lafayette Ford, chair of the School Board Nominating Commission, believes Johnson should focus on improving the day-to-day operations of the school system so that local schools can concentrate on improving instruction.

"Everyone says the ultimate thing is the child, and that's true. But the customer of central office is not the child; it's the teacher and the school," Ford explains. "If one sees the principal's main role as an educational leader, then the system has to make the business side easier for them."

Johnson also took some heat for supporting the mandate that high schools adopt 50-minute periods. But at least she was willing to listen to critics, says Joy Noven of PURE (Parents United for Responsible Education). "Kimbrough would have just walked out of the room."

"Unlike some former superintendents," agrees the board insider, "she does listen to most everyone. She doesn't seem to insulate herself."

Mission Statement

The Chicago Public Schools shall ensure a challenging educational program with equity of opportunity and access to excellence, so that each student may fulfill his or her potential and become a productive, contributing member of society.

—Argie K. Johnson, General Superintendent
August 1993
Johnson’s team knows ropes, off to a fast start

by Debra Williams

So far, Supt. Argie Johnson is the only member of her administration who is brand-new to the Chicago public schools (CPS); critics say that could hinder substantive change in the system. Her special assistant and one deputy were promoted from within; the other deputy is a former CPS employee. Her choice for the important office of Human Resources also is a former CPS employee.

About a third of top-level administrative posts are vacant or are filled by acting or interim directors. They are the departments of Law, Student Transportation, Safety and Security, Instruction Support, Categorical Program Support, Management Information Systems, Accounting and Control, Real Estate, Professional Development, and Research, Evaluation and Planning.

Following are thumbnail sketches of Johnson’s recently appointed team members.

Marjorie Branch

Deputy Superintendent of Academic Support Services. Took office October 1993. Formerly a subdistrict superintendent for 11 years, most recently in Subdistrict 10 on the Far South Side. Before that, principal of Ericson Elementary School in East Garfield Park for eight years. Has worked in Chicago public schools for over 36 years.

Her GOALS “My goal is to be a support for the district offices academically. I want to work with local school councils, principals and universities and change the way district offices operate,” says Branch. “In the past, district offices have received a bad rap for being ineffective, and that’s because there were not enough people in the office to be effective. When I was a DS, I had a district administrator and a clerk.”

Subdistrict offices have been a point of controversy in school reform. Many reform groups applauded when the Interim Board of Education cut them in half and slashed their staffs as part of its drive to reduce the school system’s bureaucracy. But others advocated stronger subdistrict offices as a way to help schools that didn’t know what to do to improve.

Branch says she wants schools to be able to look to subdistrict offices for help and for schools to be supervised and evaluated at the district level.

Branch’s office is developing a new department of professional develop-
When students and staff at Donoghue Elementary School in the Oakland community returned to school after Christmas vacation, a big surprise was waiting for them. The school's floors had been cleaned and polished, exposed wires had been covered, holes in ceilings had been repaired, and classroom walls had been painted, some for the first time in 15 years.

The makeovers followed a visit by deputy superintendents Marjorie Branch (academic support) and Jo Ann Wooden Roberts (operations support), who also brought the superintendent of Subdistrict 3 and several department heads from central office. On Dec. 8, the group toured the building and met with the principal, her support staff and the local school council.

"We showed very low test scores," says Principal Margaret Tolson. "So they came to find out why and what could be done." (Supt. Argie Johnson has singled out low-scoring schools for special treatment.)

Tolson says the top-level visitors talked to her at length about her expectations, what the school was trying to achieve and why she felt students were not progressing. Tolson also visited each classroom to observe teachers in action.

"Not once did they do any finger pointing or place the blame anywhere," says Tolson. "They really tried to put us at ease and just wanted to know what our obstacles were so they could be fixed."

One very noticeable obstacle was that the building was dirty and unsafe. Floors hadn't been mopped, the roof leaked, barnsisters were broken, doors needed repair, drapes were old and falling apart, and rusted windows were held together with chicken wire. Only one window in each classroom could be opened. In winter, the children had to wear coats; in hot weather, they had to take breaks.

"We gave everybody's code," says Tolson. "I have been principal here for three years, and I came in asking for help, but nobody listened."

As for academics, Tolson and her assistant principal were impressed that, in a short period of time, Branch was able to accurately assess what was going on in each classroom and how teachers were teaching.

"She would look at lesson plans, take note of what was being taught, what was on the blackboard and ask questions like, 'Is this class this far behind, is the teacher not teaching the appropriate concepts?'" Tolson recalls. In the end, Tolson says the visit was a boost for her.

"We were told that we had a good school improvement plan, but it needed to be put into action," she says. "We stand that children learn by what they see. I look to see if classroom bulletin boards relate to what is being taught and are not just used to decorate a room.

"I look at how seats are arranged: Are they in clusters to promote cooperative learning? Are they in straight rows? What is the climate of the room? Are the children so engaged that they look up to see who has come into their classroom and go back to what they were doing? These are all ways to tell what is being taught and how. I also ask a lot of questions. You can't get well until you know what hurts."

Inez C. Walton, principal of Morgan School in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood, says Branch is "strong, gentle and intelligent and believes all black children can learn if given the right teaching strategies.

"She does not believe in half-stepping on the part of parents or teachers when it comes to the education of children," adds Walton. "For instance, she believes parents have a responsibility to send their children to school on time and prepared to work. She's a teacher in every sense of the word."

Jo Ann Wooden Roberts


Roberts resigned from her Muskegon Heights post after a troubled 2½ years, during which she uncovered fraud and corruption in the system. She was instrumental in the removal of the district's business manager and assistant superintendent, who was also the mayor of Muskegon Heights.

Following an investigation by the state police, law officials said that former school officials approved undocumented travel expenses, used school employees for city work and knew about unreported thefts of equipment. However, they said there wasn't enough evidence to file charges against anyone.

HER GOALS "To be the best at what we do," says Roberts. "And when this goal is reached, it will be seen and can be touched and measured. In each of my departments, staff are out in the field to see what's going on and working on ways to make things better."

"I have also been in the field visiting schools. When I walk in a kitchen and see a mixer broken, it gets fixed. I go in and flush toilets to see if they work. I tell the staff I can get on my knees right along with you if that's what has to be done. That's my job. Farren School had been trying to get window shades for several years, unsuccessfully. As we speak, they have been ordered."

"We recently met with unions who greeted us warmly about working together to help make our schools better. We are looking at a team approach and a collaborative effort between units. I want people to have a say in making our school system better."

HER STYLE In Muskegon Heights, some found her abrasive and maintained that she tried to do too much too fast. But one well-informed school system outsider says, "I think she was trying to do what was best for the children, and peo-
have good concepts and ideas, but we really hadn’t implemented them. Also some staff were told that they had to make changes if the school was to improve.” Now, Tolson is to keep Branch and Roberts up to date on the school’s activities and progress.

“I was really thrilled with Roberts. She knows her stuff, and Branch, well, she knows her job and everybody else’s,” says Tolson.

When Roberts was asked how she implemented the repairs so quickly, she says, “We just did it. We have not hired any new staff. We have not taken any resources away from other schools. We’re just lighting fires under our staff and utilizing to the fullest the resources that we have.”

For schools who have not been visited yet, Roberts says, “If they need services, repairs, they can call their district offices. They will be serviced.”

Debra Williams

Robert Johnson

Special Assistant to the General Superintendent, a newly created post. Formerly, director of transportation services. Under his direction, all bus routes were computerized, enabling the office to make better use of buses, saving time and money. Was also a teacher and administrator at Phillips High. Has worked in the central administration for 25 years and in the school system for 36 years.

HIS GOALS “My job is to assist the administration in providing for every child. We want them all to reach their potential regardless of what school they are in. We hope to do that by taking a close look at academics and our children’s learning environment. Specifically, to reach this goal the superintendent has asked all of us to look at where schools are. The schools that are going great, we want them to continue. The ones that aren’t, we want to assist. We have limited dollars, but we want to make sure we are using the money for crucial areas and to the fullest.”

Belkis Santos

Associate Superintendent of Human Resources. Took office November 1993. Previously, regional marketing manager for Jostens Learning Corp. Before that, area superintendent of Milwaukee’s largest and most multicultural school subdistrict and principal of Chicago’s Kanoon Magnet School for five years. She has held several positions in the central office.

HER GOALS “My goal is to restructure the Human Resources Department so that it can better serve schools,” says Santos. “My main thrust now is making sure schools are staffed with enough teachers and that children are being served.”

The task was aggravated by a “huge” loss of experienced personnel after the early retirement package (5+5) was offered last summer, she says. “We are in the process of trying to hire new people and train new people,” she says.

Projects being tackled include a training session for principals in January (“We have about 200 new principals this year”), a fair where reserve teachers (formerly called supernumeraries) and principals can meet each other (“We have never had that before”) and an employee assistance program for workers who want help with substance abuse and similar problems.

“I have a lot of work cut out for me, but I know the system, and my experience in managing staff and in business will help me do my job. I have made several contacts and have a network of people that I can count on.”

HER STYLE “She delegated, but she made sure she oversaw and kept on top of everything that was going on,” says Dennis Moroni, an art teacher at Kanoon Magnet School since 1980. “She was also very innovative and creative. She was responsible for the school being adopted by the law firm of Sidley & Austin, and with intense fundraising (the school raised $75,000) she took around 20 students to the Soviet Union in 1988. Back then that was not an easy thing to do.”

Charley Gillispie

Chief Financial Officer, a post he has held since March 1992. Previously, a partner in the accounting firm of Deloitte & Touche for five years.

HER GOALS “My immediate goal is to be able to demonstrate to the Legislature that we are running an efficient organization. The borrowing that was agreed upon for this recently approved budget is only for two years. We will be looking at funding again in the spring of ’95. To meet this goal, we will be working with all departments to help them improve operations and to see that money is spent effectively.

“In the past, money has driven the goals that people have set. I don’t want the budget to run the system. I’d like to see the system goal-driven.”

“We face a $300 to $400 million shortfall in 1996. I want to say to the Legislature: ‘Here is where our money is going. This is what we’ve done. Here is what we want to do. This is why we need more money.’ That will be a lot easier to do if they see we are efficient.”

HER STYLE “We think very highly of him,” says Larry Howe, executive director of the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club. “He has certainly made an improvement to the school system. He’s upgraded the credibility of the numbers that are coming out of the board. No question about it, he has made a strong contribution in the short time he’s been there.”

Catalyst February 1994
Carson School reaps benefits from Park District partner

I am writing after reading Parts 1 and 2 of your series “The New Extended Family: Collaborating for Kids’ Sake” (September, October, November 1993). I would like to add that our school, Rachel Carson Elementary, is fortunate to have some public partners.

Carson was opened in 1991 to relieve overcrowding at Nightingale and Morrill schools. Soon our school, too, became very crowded. We needed to use our auditorium as a classroom, which meant that parents who were taking ESL (English as a Second Language) classes there (through Kennedy College) had to look for another space. They ended up moving to the nearby Gage Park fieldhouse. This proved to be the beginning of a collaborative relationship with the Chicago Park District.

Indeed, the first day of school this year was conducted in the park because our fire alarm system was not working. The park district also is providing alternative classes, many sports programs and even regular classroom space for our children. As part of our state Chapter 1 program, we opened a preschool program there. Following the afternoon session, the park district offers gym and tumbling for the youngsters.

In addition to continuing ESL classes for our parents, the park plans to add sewing, carpentry and GED (General Educational Development) classes.

We believe that this is the start of a complementary relationship. So, although I agree with Sheila Radford-Hill’s statement, “It could be your whole life’s work just to get one collaborative link solidified,” I know that positive persistence pays.

Kathleen Mayer, principal
Rachel Carson Elementary School

We are proud of the work we do as a part of BAPA, just as we are proud of being a part of Chicago. We invite everyone to visit Beverly/Morgan Park and learn more about our “Village in the City.”

Beverly Area Planning Association
Gretchen McDowell, chair
Public Education Committee
Robert Berghoff, president
Adeline Ray, education staff
Sis Costello, executive director

Students should learn science by doing science

In Chicago and elsewhere, the educational crisis has less to do with the quantity of knowledge that children are learning and more to do with the type of knowledge they are being taught, especially in science. Cutting-edge science has found that the traditional “mechanistic” view of our universe, a universe of objects, does not adequately explain what is observed. A new view has emerged in which events and relationships dominate. In short, the emphasis is shifting from nouns to verbs.

Obviously, education should mirror this radical change. And now the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the world’s largest science federation, has produced some valuable materials that should be “must reading” by local school council members and reformers.

Nearly a decade ago, AAAS undertook a long-range educational reform program called Project 2061, after the year in which Haley’s comet will return. For four years, hundreds of educators, writers and scientists worked together to examine the causes of the decline in science literacy. In 1989, they published the results of their exhaustive study in Science for All Americans. The book, available from Oxford University Press, outlines what all high school graduates ought to know to be scientifically literate.

“Our fundamental premise,” say the authors, “is that the schools do not need to be asked to teach more and more content, but rather to focus on what is essential to scientific literacy, and to teach it more effectively. Teach less in order to teach it better.”

See LETTERS page 27
Schools spruce up to teach kids

The Chicago Community Trust has awarded about $25,000 each to 20 elementary schools and five high schools for beautification projects that also promote learning. These are the winners:

Beethoven, for developing a garden in the shape of the seven continents and four oceans, and to integrate the study of geography to the curriculum;
Bell, for a greenhouse and a miniature golf course;
Caldwell, for Schoolyard Space Adventure, a program based on new space exploration curriculum.

Cardenas and Paderewski, to support a joint, culture-based mural painting and gardening project; Carter, for development of an African Cultural Center and an African-centered curriculum; Hefferan, for construction of a greenhouse through the school's applied science program; Kinzie, for landscaping the grounds adjacent to the main entrance and renovating the multipurpose room with new lighting, murals and bulletin boards.

Manierre, to restore the school's performing arts facility; McCosh, for artistic activities related to African-American heritage and values; Monroe, for a career-awareness program, to employ students and parents to combat graffiti by whitewashing and creating murals in the school and community, and to build a school greenhouse and landscape school entrances.

Mt. Greenwood, for constructing a fitness trail for the school and community; Oriole Park ($19,875), to create an Illinois prairie, including a log cabin, a woodlands Indian lodge, a pioneer garden and an outdoor mural; Otis, for research on various cultures in the neighborhood and painting of a mural depicting these cultures, for converting a courtyard into an enclosed outdoor lesson area and for various plant experiments; Sayre, for a rooftop greenhouse project; Smyth, for a horticultural center.

Sutherland, for construction of a fitness trail and prairie/wildflower garden; Tanner, for a project that includes a new playlot, a mural and an arts education program.

Whittier, for developing a museum, creating murals in the lunchroom, building community garden boxes and expanding the existing school garden; Wirth, to create murals reflecting various countries of origin represented in the student body.

Carver, for a collaborative project with five area schools that will create a community vegetable garden, landscape all member schools and the Altgeld-Murray housing development and create murals at each school; Prosser Vocational, to design, produce and install stained-glass windows in the school corridor.

Kelly, to paint murals reflecting different academic areas, such as the periodic table of elements; to build mounting frames and shelves to display artwork; and to make banners to decorate the school's exterior.

Gage Park, for interdisciplinary environmental education; Chicago Vocational ($20,900), to renovate and beautify the courtyards and school corridors.

Amoco awards

Through its 1994 Leadership Awards Program, the Amoco Foundation will award $10,000 to each of five non-profit Chicago organizations that develop innovative pre-college programs to improve science and math instruction.

The foundation also will award $25,000 for programs to combat youth violence. Winners may also receive technical assistance and low-interest loans for their projects. Amoco will distribute applications through Feb. 1; the deadline for applying is April 1, 1994.

Technology grants

Grants of up to $5,000 are available for teams of educators who have developed innovative ways of using technology to improve teaching.

The grants are being awarded by Pioneering Partners for Educational Technology, a program created by the Council of Great Lakes Governors and telecommunications company GTE East. Awards will be given to three teams of educators in each of eight Great Lakes states. Winning teams will receive a $3,000 flat grant and up to $2,000 in matching funds, and will participate in a summer conference with other winners. For applications and more information, contact Pioneering Partners, Mail Code INAAJZ, 19845 U.S. 31 North, Westfield, Ind. 46074. The deadline for application is April 12, 1994.
Grant Briefs

Northern Trust Bank
- $10,000 to Chicago Panel on School Policy for training programs.
- $10,000 to Designs For Change for operating support.
- $7,500 to Parents United For Responsible Education for operating support.
- $5,000 to El Valor Corporation for capital support for early education centers.
- $5,000 to Arts Resources In Teaching for a program in Wells Academy High feeder elementary schools.
- $5,000 to Chicago City Schools for operating support.
- $5,000 to Chicago Neighborhood Organizing Project for Working Together to Succeed in School.
- $5,000 to Project Education Plus for operating support.
- $5,000 to Scholarship and Guidance Association for support of dropout prevention programs.
- $5,000 to the Erikson Institute for family literacy centers.
- $3,500 to The Rachelle Lee Fund, which promotes children's literacy through reading of real literature.
- $3,500 to the Institute of Cultural Affairs for technical assistance to Chicago public schools.
- $3,000 to CYCLE (Community Youth Creative Learning Experience) for four scholarships for Wells Academy High students.

$2,500 to the Coalition For Improved Education In South Shore for operating support.
$2,500 to Kohl Children's Museum for the City Connections School Outreach Program.
$2,500 to the Good News Reading Program for operating support.
$2,500 to LEARN for an inter-session program at Gale Elementary, a year-round school.
$2,500 to Youth Guidance for Project Prepare at Wells Academy High.
$2,500 for Working in the Schools for operating support.
$2,500 to Young Chicago Authors for operating support.
$2,500 to the Chicago Foundation for Education for Small Grants for Teachers.
$1,700 to Northwestern University Settlement House for a retreat for Wells Academy High students.
$1,600 to Close Up Foundation for sponsorship of Wells Students/New Immigrants Program.
$1,000 to Chicago Public Schools Student Science Fair.
$1,000 to the Chicago Metro History Fair for operating support.

New Prospect Foundation
- $5,000 to Designs For Change for operating support.
- $5,000 to the Special Fund for 1993 LSC Elections.
- $5,000 to the Small Schools Workshop for a video to familiarize teachers and the public with the small schools concept.
- $4,500 to Chicago Panel on School Policy for operating support.
- $2,500 to the Community Renewal Society for CATALYST.

Polk Brothers Foundation
- $180,000 over three years to the Illinois Institute of Technology, to support three pre-college programs to attract women and minorities into science and engineering.
- $175,000 over three years to the Kellogg Graduate School of Management at Northwestern University for the Total Quality Schools program.
- $70,000 over two years to Youth Guidance for the Corner School Development Program.
- $20,000 to Community Renewal Society for continued support of a full-time staff writer for CATALYST.

U.S. Department of Education
- $236,080 for a three-year collaborative program between Hidden, Cabaret, Hirsch and Phillips high schools and three area universities to identify gifted students. The program will include Advanced Placement classes, training in critical thinking and problem-solving, development of self-esteem and career-awareness training.

The Joyce Foundation
- $555,000 over three years to the Chicago Panel on School Policy for programs to advocate for more equitable state financing of public schools; monitor the progress of Chicago school reform and assist schools that are undertaking reform activities.
- $200,000 for two years to Community Renewal Society for CATALYST.
- $165,000 over two years to the Center for the Study of Educational Finance at Illinois State University to support the Coalition for Educational Rights, a statewide organization that is lobbying for more equitable funding for education.
- $110,000 over two years to the National Center for Fair and Open Testing in Cambridge, Mass., to assist the National Forum on Assessment in developing criteria and guidelines for better performance assessment.
- $25,000 to the Illinois Alliance for Arts Education for a project to integrate the arts into the curriculum in Chicago public schools.
- $20,000 to the Network of Progressive Educators in Evanston, Ill., to support a regional conference on successful urban school restructuring efforts.
- $20,000 to the Whirlwind Performance Company for arts education program for teachers.
- $15,000 to the Greater Grand Crossing Organizing Committee for various school reform projects, including working with other community-based organizations on local school council training programs and finance issues.

Illinois State Board of Education
- $15,000 each to Or, Austin, Marshall, Robeson, Chicago Vocational, Prosser Vocational, and Collins high schools to plan Partnership Academies that will integrate workplace competencies and vocational technical training with core academic subjects.
- Englewood Tech Prep Academy will receive a grant (amount to be determined) to plan a Tech Prep/Youth Apprenticeship Program in health and marketing.

Grants is a cooperative project of CATALYST and the Donors Forum of Chicago. It was compiled by Tonya McLarin.
NEW YORK CITY

Private money for choice. The head of an organization promoting school choice has pledged $1 million to help create up to 75 small schools of choice over the next three years.

The Manhattan Institute Center for Educational Innovation will use the grant from chairman Richard Gilder, a stockbroker, to develop theme-based alternative schools in five of the city's 32 community school districts, according to a Nov. 19 article in *New York Newsday*. Since 1989, the center has been working with education reformers to redefine public schools, one community at a time.

To steer more private-sector dollars toward that effort, the center will require grant recipients to raise matching funds for books and materials.

The theory behind the program is that increased competition and momentum will spur other school districts to produce quality programs, explains spokesman Ray Domanico.

Under the Board of Education's choice policy, which went into effect this school year, parents can seek transfers to schools outside of their districts if they have space. But critics say that, given overcrowding in many of the city's schools, choice is limited. Also, the board does not pay for student transportation.

"We need better schools to choose from," says Sy Fliegel, a fellow at the center and one of the architects of the high-profile choice program in East Harlem's District 4. "It's not simply choice. We are creating small schools that have themes and high expectations."

That might mean breaking a school of more than 1,000 students into four, smaller schools, according to *Newsday* reporter Edna Negron.

The five districts will be selected early in 1994 on the basis of their commitment to smaller schools.

In Chicago, a movement is building to curtail spending on busing, which helps make choice possible for lower-income students. Meanwhile, under the Chicago School Reform Act, the Board of Education next year is supposed to begin increasing choices for Chicago schoolchildren. However, that could include more schools-within-schools as well as magnet schools.

Engler's funding plan guarantees that $4,500 would follow each student to the public school of his or her choice. Any money left over would go into a "student bank account" that parents could tap for summer school or college. The grant could not be used at private schools because Michigan's constitution prohibits state spending on private or religious training.

The charter-school provision calls for 100 alternative schools operated by teachers, parents, businesses or other private groups interested in educating the state's children.

Engler's plan is being lauded by business and religious leaders, but Julius Maddox, president of the Michigan Education Association, calls it "a back-door way for religious and private schools to get public funds."

The plan has become a lightning rod in the national debate over school choice. "What John Engler is doing in Michigan undoubtedly makes him a pivotal player in the national education reform debate," says Bennett. "He's walking a tightrope to be sure, but has shown what an activist governor can do."

Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), says, according to a Nov. 4 article in the *Detroit News*, that choice and charter schools are unproven and Engler should copy the successes of other countries. "Other countries have greater centralization of the system; that's what makes them work." By "leaving it more and more up to local schools and individual parents," Shanker says, Engler is lowering standards.

Charter schools are a poor way of getting around rules and contractual constraints, argues Shanker. "If the regulations are no good, get rid of them," says the union leader, rather than using charter schools to get around them.

The Chicago Teachers Union is an affiliate of the AFT.

*Michael Klonsky*
Schedule changes hurt security, schools try novel solutions

by Dan Weissmann

Security is a newly urgent problem in high schools this year since the new teachers' contract all but eliminated lunchroom and hall monitor duties—in exchange for longer class periods.

"If I had to pick my No. 1 problem," says Joseph Rega, principal of Bogan High School in Ashburn, "it's security. Teacher duty periods are gone, but we still have hallways, and we still have kids walking through those hallways without passes. Security is a nightmare."

"We've had more fights," says Tam Hill, principal of Calumet High in Auburn Gresham, "and students have a tendency to linger in the halls more. Where I used to have at least three people on hall-guard duty every period, now I have only one. And with all the corners and crevices in this building, a kid can get jumped and you won't even know it."

New funds will let high schools hire some part-time security aides, but for several months, schools have gotten by on make-shift adaptations, hoping for the best.

Last semester saw schools divert other, already-tight time and money to bolster security. Teacher aides, teachers on prep period, counselors, disciplinarians and clerks left their usual places in classrooms and offices to patrol hallways, doors and lunchrooms.

So did principals. "There's no time to do your paperwork," says Charles Mingo, principal of DuSable High in Grand Boulevard. "I'm out there doing duties. I ought to be out there being an instructional leader."

Several schools, including Sullivan High in Rogers Park, plan to use state Chapter 1 money to hire new security staff. But that means cutting into staff development, computer labs and other supplemental programs that the state Chapter 1 program was created to fund. "We've got metal detectors, but we've got to have someone to man them," says Sullivan Principal Patricia Anderson.

At Gage Park High, Principal Audrey Donaldson implemented "security sweeps." At the beginning of each period, every staff member not in a classroom—including teachers on prep periods and Donaldson herself—takes a station at the periphery of the school; they then move toward a detention center located in the center of the building, bringing with them any kids who are still in the halls.

Students who get caught spend that period and an hour after school in the detention center, "so when the tardy bell rings, you can see kids just flying into those classrooms," says Donaldson.

Last fall, Steinmetz High in Belmont-Cragin mounted a highly complex response to the new situation; in fact, the school recently decided its new plan was more trouble than it was worth. It revolved around division, the brief daily attendance check-in that serves as home-room in Chicago high schools. Under the new contract, teachers who don't supervise division make up for it by serving one duty period a week.

Steinmetz eliminated regular divisions and replaced them with an electronically assisted event called superdivision. At lunchtimes, before students headed to the cafeteria, they would gather in the auditorium and get out their ID cards, which, like products in a supermarket, had bar codes. While one staff member read the day's announcements, others used hand-held scanners to check students in electronically.

Besides freeing teachers for duty periods, the superdivision shortened students' lunch period by 13 minutes, which the school's administration considered a plus. "50 minutes is too long for lunch," says Steinmetz Principal Constantine Kiamos. "You go to the lunchroom and eat in say, 20 minutes. Then what are you going to do?"

Bored students are more likely rowdier, Kiamos reasons, so shorter lunch periods might well be safer lunch periods.

Relief on the way

Once the school came up with this plan, it "cut a deal with the teachers," says Assistant Principal Arthur Tarvardian. "Instead of doing one duty per week, each teacher has a daily duty period for a 13-day cycle, and then they're off for the rest of the year." The new deal made it easier for teachers, administrators and students to keep track of who's supposed to be where, and when.

But by February, superdivision will be history. "We found that taking attendance just works better with small groups of kids," says Tarvardian.

For 1994, some relief is on the way: the money mentioned above for new part-time security aides at high schools. Central office will soon be releasing these funds, says Robert Johnson, special assistant to the superintendent. In addition, some of the security staff already funded by the Board of Education may be redeployed.

The amount of help an individual school will receive will depend on a central office assessment of its needs, considering such factors as its size, number of exits, length of the school day and number of security aides already assigned to the school. Security aides hired through state Chapter 1 will not be counted, so that schools that have spent their own money on security won't lose out.
Double shifts bring headaches at overcrowded high schools

Overcrowded high schools traded one set of problems for another this year, when board-union negotiations produced fewer and longer class periods and virtually eliminated study halls.

Now, kids and teachers often arrive and leave when it's dark outside, most extracurricular activities have been axed, and non-teaching staff (from counselors and clerks to security guards and librarians) are stretched even thinner than before.

The basic problem is the same: The schools don't have enough classrooms for all of their students. What has changed is what the schools are doing about that problem.

Until this year, jam-packed schools used study halls, as one principal put it, "to warehouse" students who had no place to go. For example, reports Principal John Garvey of Foreman High in Belmont-Cragin—which now has about 1,900 students in a building that "comfortably" holds about 1,300—some 500 kids were assigned to one study hall last year.

"That I don't miss," says Garvey. "Every period of the day, we had large studies, and I had my best [staff] people in there. We insisted that kids study, so somebody had to keep it from becoming a madhouse."

Now, with study halls gone, Foreman and other overcrowded high schools have shifted to a "staggered start." Students come and go in two or more shifts, which overlap at lunchtime; some schools are open as many as 11 hours a day.

Mather High in West Ridge—packed to 150 percent of its official capacity—operates for 11 periods a day, compared to 6 ½ for most of the city's high schools. The first shift of students and teachers arrives at 7 a.m. and leaves by early afternoon; the last shift starts at 11 a.m. and doesn't get out until after 5:15 p.m.

That means only about half of the non-teaching staff are on duty at any given time, points out Principal Art Cervinka. Mather still has the same number of teacher aides, security guards, librarians, assistant principals, counselors and clerks as before, but their standard work day falls several hours short of the new, marathon-length Mather school day. They, too, now work in shifts.

The new schedule also rules out extracurricular activities because no classrooms are available until after 5 p.m.

"And God forbid a teacher gets sick," says Cervinka. Substitute teachers sent by the Board of Education's substitute center work only from 8 a.m. until 2:46 p.m., even though the absent teachers for whom they are subbing may be on a different schedule. And since teachers don't have duty periods anymore, hardly anyone is available to cover a class in an emergency, says Cervinka.

Dan Weismann

Year-round schools lose staff, perks

To improve security, Steinmetz High abandoned division, or homeroom, last fall and started checking in hundreds of students at a time, using electronic scanners to read "bar codes" on student IDs.

Dated by the Board of Education as a cost-effective remedy for overcrowding, year-round schools took an extra-heavy hit in this year's financial crisis.

The city's six year-round schools lost their "freed" assistant principals—who had no classroom duties—and other extra staff the board had supplied to entice schools to adopt year-round schedules. Freed assistant principals allowed principals to take vacation days and delegate some of their administrative duties. "There is an enormous amount of paperwork," says Principal David Espinoza of Munoz Marin Primary Center in Humboldt Park, "and there is no down time."

Five of the six year-round schools have used their own discretionary funds to keep their assistant principals on staff and out of the classroom.

In addition, teachers lost the privilege of earning regular pay for substitute teaching while their "track" is on break. (Teachers and students at year-round schools are assigned to staggered tracks that meet for 60 days and then take a 20-day break.)

Paying teachers at their regular rate for substitute teaching had been "a big selling point among the staff," says Assistant Principal Patricia Tamburino of Punson Elementary in Logan Square. Administrators liked the arrangement, too; at Van Vlisingen Elementary in Roseland, Principal Jacqueline Carothers says the school's own teachers are better able to keep programs moving forward than are substitutes.

This year, however, teachers who teach during their off sessions can earn only $10 an hour, the pay rate for day-to-day substitutes. As a result, teachers are no longer opting to fill in, which "hurts continuity," says Tamburino.

Finally, year-round schools have to add three days to most tracks to make up for time lost when the school system shut down in September. On those days, their schools will become overcrowded again, with four tracks using spaces that normally hold three. Dan Weismann
Principal says Learning Zone panel looking for union label

by Dan Weissmann

The Learning Zone Advisory Committee—created to craft guidelines for legislation to give selected Chicago schools relief from red tape—faces one overarching challenge, according to member William Watts, principal of Taft High School.

And that is to come up with a plan that unions will swallow. Otherwise, he says, the learning zone won’t get past House Speaker Michael Madigan (D-Chicago) and other Democrats who depend on union support.

Until Gov. Jim Edgar called for the creation of charter schools in his 1994 State of the State address, the Learning Zone idea was his main school reform initiative. Legislators created the committee last year at Edgar’s request, and the panel held its first meeting last November.

The committee’s membership backs up Watts’s assessment. Unions have four officials on the 16-member panel: John Code, head of the Coalition of Chicago Board of Education Unions; Don McCue, the coalition’s secretary and chief of the engineers’ union; John Harper, a Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) delegate-at-large; and Deborah Walsh, head of the CTU’s Quest Center.

The only other group with as many members is the Legislature itself; and one of its four members is a long-time CTU ally, Sen. Arthur Berman (D-Chicago), minority spokesman on the Senate Education Committee.

Watts is the only principal on the committee, and Kathy Kuranda, a local school council member at Kelly High and Shields Elementary, is the only parent. The committee has no teacher who is currently working in a school.

(Watts says the committee is “too white,” too; 75 percent of members, including Watts, are white, compared to 12 percent of Chicago public school students.)

Deliberations at the committee’s second meeting, Dec. 17, also reinforced Watts’ assessment of the committee’s real work. Members listened without much comment to presentations by Chicago Deputy Supt. Marjorie Branch, Sheila Castillo of the Chicago Association of Local School Councils and several Chicago principals. It was not until the CTU’s John Kotsakis spoke that the committee perked up.

Kotsakis warned the panel early on, “I do not know whether learning zones will work . . . Right now, there are

Turnaround Commission getting tossed around

As the Learning Zone Advisory Committee came to life, another legislative panel, the Chicago Schools Turnaround Commission, was gasping for breath.

For over a year, the Turnaround panel has been a political football, kicked between Republican and Democratic leaders of the Illinois Senate and, most recently, ridiculed by some leading Chicago school reformers.

The commission was created in late 1992 by a resolution sponsored by then-sen. William Marovitz (D-Chicago). The Senate president and minority leader each were to appoint nine members.

President Philip J. Rock, a Democrat, did his part, but Minority Leader James “Pate” Phillip, a Republican, made no appointments before the legislative session—and the commission’s mandate ended.

So, in spring 1993, the Senate re-created the commission. Phillip, who had replaced Rock as Senate president, finally made his appointments. But the new minority leader, Sen. Emil Jones (D-Chicago), tarried.

With no appointments coming from Jones, Phillip decided to forge ahead with the appointments that he and Rock had made. Notices were sent to the members and the press, and the commission began meeting last September.

Jones protested the inclusion of Rock’s appointees, and Phillip finally acknowledged the point, disbANDING the group.

But by then, two Chicago school reformers appointed to the commission had decided the panel wasn’t worth having in the first place. In a joint letter of resignation, Diana Nelson of Leadership for Quality Education and Coretta McFerren of the reform group WSCORP maintained they were “being used to further a personal agenda which is not shared by the majority of the group.”

They were referring to the pet school reform idea of Joseph Kellman, who, all agree, had gotten Marovitz to file the commission resolution in the first place. Kellman, a businessman who founded the Corporate/Community School in South Lawndale, for years has been promoting the idea of a professional, paid Chicago Board of Education.

“We are reluctant, indeed embarrassed, to have our names attached to an effort which is so obviously a sham,” wrote Nelson and McFerren, who quickly found new work on the governor’s Learning Zone Advisory Committee.

Phillip responded by winning passage of a resolution that gave the Senate president (i.e., himself) the right to appoint a majority, not just half, of the members of a reconstituted commission. That means that if and when Phillip makes new appointments, those individuals would constitute a quorum and be able to meet even if Jones continues his apparent boycott.

The score so far: Phillip 2, Jones 1, School Reform 0. --Dan Weissmann
rules and regulations that some people say impede progress. So why should we create whole new legislation to change them? It seems that every time we go to the Legislature—as Knute Rockne said about the forward pass—three things can happen, and two of them are bad."

Letting teachers and principals make their own decisions about change, he said, would be more effective than trying to pass new laws. "The more people have to be involved in advocating for a change, the less change you’re going to get."

"No successful restructuring has taken place in the business world without a vast infusion of capital," Kotsakis continued. "There's been a massive infusion of personal capital already, from teachers, parents, principals and staff." If anything is missing from current local attempts at reform, he added, it is backup from the state in the form of monetary rewards for success.

Welcome risk?

Finally, he said he feared that schools would "be jerked around by policy changes. It isn’t always necessary to break new ground to show progress. I read recently that the No. 2 pencil has been pretty much constant since the 14th century. No one has found a way, or felt a need, to improve on that."

One panel member, Rep. Maureen Murphy (R-Oak Lawn) began to spar with Kotsakis. "I understand, John, the principle, ‘If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it,’" she said. "But that doesn’t apply to public education in this city. It’s broken, John, and we need to fix it." After a couple of short rounds, she asked, "Would you welcome this risk, even if it doesn’t work?"

Kotsakis bit. "Let’s use an example and talk turkey. You want to eliminate teacher tenure? Then how are you going to attract the best teachers?"

By the time the discussion was in full swing, McCue of the engineers’ union had slipped out of the room.

As the session concluded, committee chair Diana Nelson smiled, thanked Kotsakis and noted that he would be asked to return. "Should I wear my bulletproof vest?" he replied.

The committee was scheduled to hear Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers at a meeting on Jan. 18.

Some suggestions

The following proposals were among those made to the committee for discussion.

Deputy Supt. Marjorie Branch
The learning zone should:
- Consist of a school and its feeder elementary schools.
- Be under the superintendent’s jurisdiction.
- Have a parent council.

Schools in the zone should:
- Be neighborhood schools serving neighborhood kids.
- Be funded according to School Board formulas.
- Get little, if any, additional state money.
- Have governing councils that are evenly split between educational staff and the parents/community.
- Have principals who are appointed by the Board of Education (following the recommendations of the non-staff members of the [school’s] governing council.)

Sheila Castillo, Chicago Association of Local School Councils
The learning zone should:
- Be 20 "laboratory" schools—one elementary school and one high school in each elementary subdistrict.

Schools in the zone should:
- Get an assurance of adequate resources—enough equipment to create a science lab, enough teachers to insure an optimum student-teacher ratio, enough duplicating paper.
- Be new schools created with new state money (to make sure they don’t draw current resources away from existing schools).
- Have students who are selected through a systemwide lottery.
- Have staff assigned for a limited number of years.
- Have standard local school councils.

John Kotsakis, Chicago Teachers Union
The learning zone should:
- Require schools to submit a proposal to be part of the zone; teachers could propose to start their own learning zone schools.
- Keep teacher tenure intact.

Schools in the zone should:
- Get monetary rewards from the state if they succeed in improving the school.

William Watts, Taft High School
The learning zone should:
- Have a policy board—elected from LSCs in the zone—that would meet three times a year to review budget and policy.

Schools in the zone should:
- Have reconfigured LSCs (six teachers, four parents and two community members) with expanded powers. Principals would never vote, and high school councils would have two student members.
- Retain teacher tenure/seniority.
- Be able to make purchases either through central office or on their own.
- Get money for “significant” staff bonuses if the school does well on state quality reviews.

Chicago Urban League:
The learning zone should:
- Get any extra resources it needs from new state monies, not funds diverted from CPS operating revenue.

Schools in the zone should:
- Be tuition-free public schools.
- Select students randomly.
- Follow existing desegregation policies.
- Not “discriminate on the basis of race, religion, or disability.”
- To join, obtain a majority vote by the LSC and as many staff votes as it takes, under existing law, to approve a contract waiver.
- Get their budget in a lump sum and be able to make purchases from whomever they choose.

Committee chair Diana Nelson says she welcomes input from any and all quarters. Anyone interested in submitting ideas and proposals to the committee should contact her at Leadership for Quality Education, 29 S. LaSalle St., Suite 200, Chicago, Illinois 60603. The committee is scheduled to report to the Legislature by May 1.
Almost 4 1/2 years after the first local school council elections, training for LSC members remains a troubling issue.

The Office of Reform Implementation, which lost 13 positions last year, is shifting the responsibility to subdistrict offices, with two sessions scheduled in each of the 10 elementary subdistricts on either Feb. 12 or 19.

The advantage, says Associate Supt. Paul Vega, is that "councils will have a better opportunity to network with schools in their districts and will find it easier for members of the same council to get training together." After the 1991 elections, the reform office held two citywide training sessions. District offices are short-staffed, but Vega says independent organizations again will be part of the presentations. However, at least one organization that does extensive training says connections are not being made. "We get a run around, and some district offices have said they don't need us," reports Zarina O'Hagin, director of the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project.

Some training groups are expanding their own reach by working with community-based organizations. For example, the Near Northwest Neighborhood Organization is organizing sessions and finding space for trainers from Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE). In December, PURE trained LSC members from 35 schools but had to turn down members from another 15 schools for lack of space.

A CATALYST survey of community and reform organizations indicates that the amount of training this year is less than it was in 1989-90 and about the same as in 1991-92. The survey was mailed to 70 organizations; 23 responded. Comparing this year to 1991-92, 10 groups reported providing "about the same" amount of training, seven reported less, and six reported more. Those providing less generally sighted insufficient funding.

Asked to rate the level of training, 14 said there isn't enough for a substantial majority of LSCs in their area to do a good job, six said there is, and three didn't comment.

"It seemed to us that fewer people would be interested in training because there are council veterans now, but many were never trained adequately in the first place," says Julie Woestehoff of PURE.

Rick Asa

Mayor Daley boxes in Nominating Commission

One of the surprises of the new year is the survival of the School Board Nominating Commission, which many observers believed would fall victim to the give-and-take in Springfield last fall.

Mayor Richard M. Daley was expected to insist on getting more control over the process.

"We didn't push that hard this time around because of the crisis," explains Deputy Mayor for Education Leonard Dominguez. "We didn't want to divert things away from the funding issues."

Under the School Reform Act, each subdistrict council selects two of its members to serve on the commission, and the mayor selects five members, for a total of 27. The commission recommends three individuals for each board vacancy; the mayor is supposed to select from or reject the slates within 30 days. If he rejects an entire slate, the commission must present a new slate.

On May 25, 1993, the commission forwarded slates for three of four positions that became officially vacant May 31; the mayor has taken no action on the slates.

Initially, Dominguez blamed the delay on the city's inspector general, saying he had failed to conduct timely background checks on the slated candidates. Now, he says, "The financial crisis took precedence over everything else."

As CATALYST goes to press in mid-January, Dominguez says that the mayor's office soon will begin interviewing slated candidates. "I can't say there won't be other interviews to follow or when any selections or rejections will be made, but we will proceed cautiously."

None of the slates include incumbents Stephen Ballis, Saundra Bishop, or Juan Cruz, all of whom sought reappointment. Ballis and Cruz continue to serve, pending their replacement. Bishop resigned in December. The Rev. Nathaniel Jarrett resigned after his term expired last May but subsequently offered to withdraw his resignation to keep the board at full strength during the financial crisis; the mayor refused, keeping the seat vacant. Meanwhile, three more seats will become vacant on May 31, those of Florence Cox, Rev. Darryl James and Maria Vargas.

Commission members have met with Ron Greer of the attorney general's office for guidance on whether to pick new slates, letting the three from last year stand, or to pick seven new slates. According to commission Chair Lafayette Ford, Greer, who was unavailable for comment, is gathering more information.

Ford, who has tried to keep the commission politically neutral despite the membership of mayoral appointees as well as some outspoken mayoral critics, is expected to step down as chair.

The commission has held two meetings since it was reconstituted following the October local school council elections; none of the mayor's appointees attended the second meeting, Jan. 5.

The next meeting will be a public forum, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. Feb. 15 at Whitney Young Magnet High School, 211 S. Laflin. —Michael Klonsky
MOVING IN/ON Dawne Y. Simmons has been appointed public relations director for the Board of Education, succeeding David Rudd. Formerly, Simmons was public relations manager for the National PTA; prior to that, she was media coordinator for the Chicago Urban League. Simmons officially assumes office at the end of January...

Francine L. Pope has been named director of the Teachers Task Force, succeeding Ann Porter. Formerly, Pope was a promotion/outreach coordinator for Kartemquin Films in Chicago and program associate for Facing History and Ourselves, a national education organization. Alyson Coole has joined Chicago Community Trust as senior staff associate for education, succeeding Mari Christopherson, who is working with the Trust as an outside consultant. Previously, Coole was the education program officer at the Abell Foundation, a family foundation in Baltimore. Before that, she was on the staff of U.S. Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.), overseeing education, health, housing and senior citizens issues.

Kenneth Gill, a librarian at Portage Park Elementary, has been appointed by Gov. Jim Edgar to the state’s Children and Family Services Advisory Council. Lilian Amaya, former member of the School Board Nominating Commission and former local school council chair at Pierce Elementary in Edgewater, has joined the staff of PURE (Parents United for Responsible Education). Amaya is developing an outreach program for Latino LSC members and parents; she succeeds Laura Leon, now director of the Humboldt Park Habitat for Humanity. Valentine Judge is the new executive director of the Chicago Youth Success Foundation, a non-profit organization that works with 14 high schools to improve achievement and lower the drop-out rate. Judge was formerly marketing director for Facing History and Ourselves, a national education organization.

RUSSIAN CONNECTION During an eight-day trip to Moscow, six Chicago public school principals established sister-school partnerships as part of the Metropolis Project, an experiment in global education co-sponsored by Northeastern Illinois University and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. The sister schools will be linked via electronic mail. Making the trip were Irene Damota of Whittier Elementary, Katherine Flanagan of Manley High, Ascencion Juarez of Ruiz Elementary, Jacqueline Simmons of Robeson High, William Watts of Tall High and Gary Morielo of Gladstone Elementary.

COMPUTERS DONATED After upgrading its computer systems, CNA Insurance Co. donated 1,275 used computers to 30 Chicago public schools (16 adopted school and 36 non-profit groups working on education.

GIFT FROM MEXICO Twenty-five Chicago public schools will receive bilingual textbooks and encyclopedias on Mexican culture, worth $1 million, from the Government of Mexico, Mexico’s secretary of education, Ernesto Zedillo, and the Consul General of Mexico in Chicago.

AWARDS Charles Thomason, coordinator of Clemente High’s law program, has been named Law-Related Education Teacher of the Year by the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago. Charles Mingo, principal of DuSable High School, is one of six Illinois educators to win the Milken National Educator Award, co-sponsored by the Illinois State Board of Education and the Milken Family Foundation of California. Mingo receives a $25,000 no-strings-attached cash prize.

1994 JOYCE LECTURES The pros and cons of national education standards will be presented in this year’s Joyce Lecture Series, sponsored by the Joyce Foundation and the University of Chicago. Speakers will include Lorrie Shepard of the University of Colorado-Boulder, Andrew Porter of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Lorraine McDonnell of the University of California-Santa Barbara, Ian Westbury of the University of Illinois-Urbana and Edmond Gordon of Yale University. Lectures will be held on Feb. 18, April 15, April 29, May 13 and June 3. For details, call Kim Riddick at (312)702-8675.

RESTRUCTURING URBAN SCHOOLS Building “learner-centered” schools is the focus of a three-day conference that will include workshops and a day of school visits. Participants will choose one of 11 topics on which to focus during workshops. The conference is scheduled for March 3-5 and is sponsored by the Network of Progressive Educators and The Joyce Foundation. For more information, call Betty Achinstein at (708) 869-1794.

ABLE to do in grades 2, 5, 8 and 12. This book includes curriculum models and tools for educators and policymakers to use. Among their recommendations: Reduce the quantity of detail; emphasize high-quality learning; engage students in relevant experiences; encourage questions rather than predetermined answers; reward creativity; embrace all science; reshape the entire school and be concerned with all students.

A century ago at the University of Chicago, educator and philosopher John Dewey started his Chicago School Experiment, of which he said “The emphasis is upon placing the pupil in the midst of those things which are like what we desire him to become.” His was this country’s first learning-through-doing experiment. Reform now gives Chicago the opportunity to come full circle, with the help of Project 2061 and others like it. Project 2061 can be reached at (202) 326-6666.

Tom Mandel
LaGrange

CATALYST welcomes guest editorials and letters to the editor. Send them to CATALYST/Opinions, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, Ill. 60604. They may be edited for clarity and space.

LETTERS continued from page 18

Project 2061’s director of implementation, Jim Oglesby, explains, “The students are not to blame. We used to pick the cream of the crop, the elite, and let the rest go to trade school. Obviously, it didn’t work. Now we want to change science teaching so that it reaches all Americans. ‘All Americans’ was used in the title of our book by des gn. The fundamental change that we are advocating is learning science by doing science.’

In November 1993, Project 2061 introduced its second product in a series, Benchmarks for Science Literacy, which specifies what children should know and be
A few years ago, while Jay Rehak was teaching upper-level students at Webster Elementary School on the West Side, one of his students greeted him with "What's up, homie?" Thinking the boy had called him a homosexual, Rehak responded by saying he was fine but that he had a wife. The boy laughed and explained that "homie" was simply another way of saying friend. The more Rehak thought about the incident, the more he realized that his students had a language of their own.

Rehak decided to learn that language—both to establish better rapport with his students and to teach them a lesson about language. He had his students compile a dictionary of expressions used by teenagers. Through words and pictures, the students explained the idioms they use in everyday speech. The result was a series of one-panel cartoons called "Slangthangs."

The lesson, Rehak explains, was that any language is valid if people understand it. "Dialects should be respected," insists Rehak. "They have a place. In schooling we often filter that out, and that's destructive."

Rehak saw his students' enthusiasm and self-esteem rise as they all became authors and developed the understanding that language comes from the need to communicate. As students turned to their moms and dads for help with ideas and illustrations, Rehak also saw an increase in parental involvement.

This year, Rehak moved to Whitney Young Magnet High School and is continuing the project with his junior and senior English students. In addition to creating "Slangthangs," students also are writing one-page plays that incorporate some of the idioms. The meanings of the terms become evident through the context of the story. Rehak says this exercise has helped students understand that difficult phrases from Hamlet are simply 16th-century idioms.

"This activity helps us relate to Mr. Rehak better, and him to relate to us better," says Reggie Swarigan. Adds Bryan Mullaney, "It made you think a lot; some words were really hard to put into ideas." Marissa Sanders says the project showed her that "literature can be based on everyday life; it just depends how you word it."

In an upcoming assignment, students will be asked to write cover letters to magazines as they submit their work for possible publication. Rehak also hopes to make a video of his students' plays, with still shots of their cartoons.

Rehak would like to talk to other teachers who are doing similar projects. He can be reached at Whitney Young Magnet High School, 211 S. Laffin St., Chicago, Ill. 60607, or by phone at (312) 594-7500.

Molly Dunn