Few schools looking for new principals

by Debra Williams

As Chicago's first principal contracts under school reform come to an end, the overwhelming majority of local school councils (LSCs) have decided to keep their principals for another four years.

Of the 179 councils that had voted on their principals by mid-March, 164, or 91 percent, decided to keep the incumbent, according to a CATALYST analysis of records from the Department of Human Resources and reports from subdistrict offices and schools. Another 15, or 8 percent, decided to seek other candidates. An additional 56 either had not yet voted or had not reported their vote. In all, roughly half the city's principals have contracts expiring June 30.

The high retention rate reflects council action in 1990 and 1991, when councils first chose their own principals. Before, principals had lifetime tenure, and the Board of Education appointed them to schools. But the 1988 School Reform Act changed all that, ending tenure and giving councils the right to select and sign principals to four-year contracts. Half the schools chose in 1990; the other half, in 1991.

In 1990, 87 percent of LSCs kept the principal they already had, according to the Board of Education. In 1991, 73 percent retained the incumbent, while another 8 percent saw their principals retire or resign.

Viewed another way, in 1990, only 12 percent of local school councils decided to look around for a new leader. In 1991, the figure was close to 19 percent.

While this year's numbers suggest reformers hit Johnson plan to help schools

by Michael Klonsky

Under heavy pressure from School Board members and the business community to "do something" to raise test scores, Supt. Argie Johnson in February hoisted a school improvement plan up the flag pole. But few members of Chicago's school community are saluting.

Testimony at a March 11 Board of Education hearing on the plan was overwhelmingly in opposition. The chief complaint was that the proposal constitutes a retreat from locally driven school change. At issue, too, were the related questions of how to measure...
In This Issue:
Learning experiences

There's a lot of turmoil in this issue.

- The Board of Education publicly beats up on its promising new superintendent only four months after they all emerged from all-consuming financial and union negotiations. No matter that superintendents during the first five years of reform did virtually nothing to help make it work—the School Board wants action NOW to raise test scores.

- The superintendent hurriedly releases a plan to boost school performance, but it suffers from many of the failings of her predecessors: It doesn't give local initiative and the School Reform Act a fighting chance to prove (or disprove) their worth. And the rhetoric of what's to be done seems to run far ahead of resources available to do it. But, the plan does provide a decent starting place. And again, we ask, why not provide for a variety of approaches instead of insisting on a citywide solution?

- On the Near Northwest Side, a school loses a hardworking, innovative principal to what appears to be a relationship problem with the local school council. The council raised a legitimate issue, which was whether the school had become a “Christmas tree” school with lots of programs and no focus. Too bad it didn’t pursue it with the principal.

- On the South Side, a new principal angling for a full four-year contract continues his predecessor’s highly suspicious practice of transferring independent-minded teachers who run for the local school council. In the most recent case, the transferred teacher joined four other council members in abstaining or voting no on a motion to retain the principal, thus denying him the six votes he needed. Meanwhile, some school reform groups are backing the transferred teacher in his bid to return to the school.

- Finally, the city agency honchos who make up the Chicago Cluster Initiative are on the verge of giving up their listless, disorganized effort to collaborate and, thereby, improve overall service for schools and neighborhoods. The top-down approach was dubious to begin with. However, if the participants learned enough to make it easier for their front-line troops to work together, the initiative will not have been a loss.

In light of all this “bad” news, we commend to you Grant Pick’s story on page 8 about principal selection at Morgan Park High School, which, four years ago, was marked by racial turmoil and scuffles between students and police. “Our eyes are open about the kind of decisions we make, and how we make them,” says Jean Swanson, an LSC member then and now. It’s not a sexy story, but it gives reason to hope, which is something just about everyone involved in the sticky business of school reform could use right now. What the Morgan Park story says is: People can learn from past mistakes.

ABOUT US With this issue, CATALYST dips its toe into the world of advertising, an attempt to become a bit more self-sufficient. We hope you find it useful. If you have ideas for making CATALYST serve your advertising needs better, please call our advertising manager, Holly Bell, at (708) 920-9475. We welcome any and all suggestions. Of course, we welcome ads, too.

Hot times for Supt. Argie Johnson (left); hot words from School Board President D. Sharon Grant.
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1993 Peter Langner Award, Best Newsletter.
1993 Distinguished Achievement Award.
Educational Press Association of America.
performance, some reform leaders worry that councils may not know how to handle this all-important task.

"I tend to think that one of the reasons so many schools are retaining is because they do not have a good evaluation process," says Bernie Noven of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE), which offers council training. "Some councils are retaining principals on a personal basis; he is seemingly cooperative and friendly, so they keep him."

PURE is one of the city's more active training groups. Since November, it has received more than 100 requests for workshops on budgets, school improvement plans and principal evaluation.

"The people who attend our workshops have attended others, and we always hear that the training they received before, particularly from the board, was not very helpful," says Noven.

"Who's doing the other training out there?" he asks. "What are their backgrounds? What kind of training is it? Who's monitoring it? Is it being evaluated? That's important to know. The degree of information that these people are receiving can vary greatly."

Choosing a principal is the most important decision a local school council makes, most observers agree. For example, in a study of six Chicago schools making major changes to improve achievement, the Consortium on Chicago School Research found that the selection of a good principal was pivotal.

In "A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago," the Consortium reported that the principals at these schools had developed good working relationships with their local school councils, were sensitive to their school's needs and kept an open line of communication in the school community.

**LSGs more organized**

"Principals play a key role, and there should be much more organized training available to councils," says Anthony Bryk, co-director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research and a University of Chicago professor. "Money should be set aside in the school budget to assist councils. I don't see the school system giving this any priority."

Still, despite the lack of training, there are signs of progress.

"These people [recently elected local school councils] are more experienced. They have lived through school reform one way or another," says Marilyn Epps of the Urban Leadership Center, a Far South Side training and support effort sponsored by the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Services office. "They are looking for educational leaders and managers."

Joy Noven of PURE concurs, saying that today's local school council members are more focused and organized than members were four years ago. "Today, they are telling us, 'We need information on principal evaluations' instead of [asking] 'What should we be doing'?"
New council in, prize-winning principal out

by Dan Weissmann

Since her selection as principal of Prescott Elementary in 1990, Karen Carlson has opened the West DePaul area school to the community and flooded it with new programs, grant money, awards and media attention.

A packed trophy case on the second floor offers testimony to the new day at this small school. So does parent Edith Martinez, who takes two buses to bring her daughter to Prescott. “I’ve had two other daughters in school elsewhere, and we didn’t get that individual attention,” she says. “I was alienated. Here, I feel like everyone is family.”

While Martinez’s daughter had troubles at other schools, she’s an “A” student at Prescott.

But on Jan. 11, after a tumultuous five-hour meeting, Prescott’s local school council, in effect, kicked Carlson out of the family. The council voted 8-2 to seek additional candidates for her job. Two months later, Carlson announced that she would not reapply but, rather, would go to work for Leadership for Quality Education, a business-backed school reform group.

Battle for authority

Meanwhile, the school itself has been torn apart, with teachers finding themselves on one or another side. “It’s sad,” says teacher Kate Roach. “People are saying they hate to come to work, and they’re at their wits’ ends. And I think it’s passed on to the children.”

The dispute at Prescott has been more than a family feud. It has become a reform battlefield, a fight for authority in a decentralized system. Prominent members of the school reform community weighed in on Carlson’s side. For example, John Simmons, an adjunct professor at Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management who has been coaching Prescott staff and parents in Total Quality Management, testified at the Jan. 11 meeting. So did Coretta McFerren, who runs the West Side school reform group WSCORP.

“You will become losers if you lose Karen,” McFerren thundered. “Don’t throw away your crown for thirty pieces of silver.”

Council members say they can’t believe that anyone from outside their community would have the effrontery to tell them how to run their school. It seemed to LSC Secretary Ann Cline that outsiders had come to intimidate, not advise, the council. LSC Chair Carolina Garcia later issued a statement accusing McFerren of conspiring with the Kellogg School to “turn our neighborhood school into a magnet school or even a private school for their own profit.”

Backing the LSC’s anti-Carlson majority was Centro Sin Fronteras (Center Without Boundaries), an often controversial community group founded by activists Emma Lozano and Walter “Slim” Coleman. (See CATALYST, November 1993.) Cline has worked with Centro for years. Carlson allies charge that Centro deliberately set out to get rid of Carlson, a charge Cline emphatically denies.

Each side contends that the other operated out of self-interest. For instance, several council members who voted against Carlson are paid employees of Centro Sin Fronteras and related organizations. Garcia, for one, says she’s proud to work for Centro, and points out that Carlson’s outside allies have economic interests of their own. “So-called reform groups,” she says, “make money through foundation contracts.”

Given Carlson’s prominence, it was not surprising that Crain’s Chicago Business ran a page-one story on her ouster; it was headlined “Reform’s ugly side: axing a star principal.”

Jim Gruber, a third-term community representative on the Prescott LSC, is one of the few people involved in the controversy who does not work for Centro, a reform group or the school. He grew up in the neighborhood, attended Prescott in the ’60s and now runs Ashland Lock and Key, just down the street. Since 1989, he’s run an internship program there for Prescott students and other neighborhood kids. (See CATALYST, March 1991.) Gruber also has worked with the community organizers now active with Centro Sin Fronteras.

Gruber, who voted to hire Carlson in the first place, doesn’t like the way her contract was handled.

“I think the whole thing is disgusting,” he says. “There were seven people on the council who had the plan to get rid of Karen. We didn’t even discuss it. By the time the council met for the first time [after the October LSC elections], those seven people already had their deal made. There was no discus-

“IT's sad. People are saying they hate
to come to work. . . . And I think it’s
passed on to the children.”

— Kate Roach, Prescott teacher
tion of criteria, no discussion with Karen of our evaluation process. It was a joke, and it still is.”

In some ways, Carlson, a bilingual principal of a mostly-Latino school, was an unlikely target for a community group. Not only did she establish partnerships with social service agencies, YMCAs and churches, she also opened the school for a variety of adult-education classes. For a time (until funds ran out), Prescott employed a community organizer as “community liaison.” Before she became LSC chair, Garcia briefly filled the slot. This year, Cline has been teaching English-as-a-second-language classes at Prescott.

Indeed, both Cline and Garcia are quick to say that Carlson and Centro Sin Fronteras have always been very supportive of each other.

‘Christmas tree’ school?

So what happened? One teacher who has vowed to leave the school with Carlson contends, “Karen said ‘no’ one too many times to the council, and they’ve shafted her with her four-year contract.”

The flip side of that assessment is that Carlson, in the council’s view, too often said “yes” to people outside the school, raising questions about her loyalties. For example, the current council is not impressed by all the awards in the trophy case.

“The significance of those prizes are individual, very individual,” says Garcia. “Everybody who works in the school—all of the children—they want to see a prize of their own up there. A medallion, a piece of paper, a certificate. Recognition is everything.”

Cline sees the trophy case as evidence that the school lacks an educational focus. She suggests Prescott amounts to what the Consortium on Chicago School Research calls a “Christmas tree” school, one that has lots of programs but no clear direction.

If the school were clearly focused on achievement, she maintains, test scores would be higher. In response, Carlson and her allies point to research showing that it takes more time to raise scores. Cline and her allies counter that they believe schools can improve more speedily.

Gruber, for one, doesn’t believe that replacing Carlson will turn around scores. “You should come back here a year from now, when they say all the reading and math levels should be up. I want to see what they say when the reading and math levels don’t go up.”

Reflecting on her work at Prescott, Carlson says she was doing what she was hired to do. “The dream of the original council was for the school to be the hub of the community,” she says. “The school was isolated, and it was resource-poor.” Changing its educational philosophy was important, she says, but it wasn’t the whole job.

“The original [LSC] president was a woman who had never gotten a high school diploma, but she knew more than anybody I’d ever met,” Carlson continues. “And when she decided to move, it created a leadership vacuum. And some other people came in. And the relationship changed. They [the new council members] hadn’t hired me; I wasn’t their person.”

None of the council members who work for or with Centro Sin Fronteras was on the original council. Cline came on after the second LSC election, and this is the first term for Garcia and two other parent members.

One hint of a rift between Carlson and Cline came a year ago, when Mayor Richard M. Daley staged a press conference at Prescott on the day that Centro Sin Fronteras had planned a march on Daley Plaza to protest the mayor’s public health policies. Carlson didn’t notify Cline of the mayor’s plans to appear at the school that day; as a result, the activists missed a chance to take on the mayor on their own turf.

Cline dismisses the idea that such an episode could lead her or her colleagues to hatch a plot against Carlson. “Oh yeah, I was really upset about that!” she says. “But I didn’t say, ‘OK, this is it. She’s had it.’ So that’s what people are saying, that’s really ridiculous.”

Gruber acknowledges the council’s complaints about test scores and programs, but he doesn’t think that removing Carlson was the best solution. “Basically, the problems with Karen are all problems that can be worked out,” says Gruber. “But it’s too late now. It’s all history now.”

“Right now, we’re going through the interview process,” he says. “I’m going through with it, going to the meetings, but the person we pick ultimately is going to be the person that those seven people want. And I hope that they pick
a good person."

Some teachers at the school don't know what to make of the council's decision. Sheila Conley, who has been at Prescott for eight years, says Carlson's administration hasn't been perfect, but, "as far as the programs, the money that's been here, we have knocked our socks off. We have worked very hard. . . . So now, what happens to all these things that have been started?"

Teacher after teacher also complain about the bitterness that marks the split between Carlson supporters and opponents, even among colleagues who otherwise respect each other.

Perhaps the only person who doesn't see a serious division is Janis Lederman, Chicago Teachers Union delegate and a teacher rep on the LSC; Lederman cast the eighth vote against renewing Carlson's contract. Asked about divisiveness among the faculty, she replied, "Who said we were apart? I think the expectation that we should all be as one [is unrealistic]. People are always going to have their own opinions. Otherwise, we'd be like robots."

Mary Westphall, the school's other teacher LSC rep and a Carlson supporter, says the faculty split is a question of priorities. "Some [teachers] are committed to change," she says, "and for others, that commitment is overshadowed by the union contract."

Next battle with teachers?

Carlson has very publicly expressed her frustration with union contracts; a year ago, the Chicago Sun-Times ran a story about Carlson under the headline "Union Rules Don't Stop Principal."

Lederma: has nothing negative to say about Carlson but acknowledges their differences. "As a union delegate, I strongly believe in following the union contract. We are a Chicago Board of Education school, and there is a Uniform Discipline Code and a teachers union contract. I follow the rules," she says.

Lederman's mention of the Uniform Discipline Code is apt, since discipline may be the ground for the next fight at Prescott. Only this time, the fight may be between the LSC and the school's more traditional teachers.

A recent LSC meeting showed battle lines forming. In an informal teachers poll presented to the council, discipline was cited as staff members' biggest con-
cern. Cline issued a subtle warning. "I think that we have focused so far on discipline in the sense of misbehaviors on the part of children. That's really important, but I also think we need to look at discipline in a positive sense and that we need to look at the question of what is expected of adults."

"Until relationships are built and trust is established, it will be difficult to build the kind of school that I think everybody wants," says Loseth. Parents, and staff "have to be ready to do the hard work, to work together. . . . By working together, they can have a very successful school. This is what has to happen."

"We have worked very hard. . . . So now, what happens to all these things that have been started?"

—Sheila Conley, teacher

Meanwhile, teachers, LSC members and others talk about coming together for the sake of the children. One teacher, however, follows her statement of hope with one of resignation: "I think no one believes anymore what's being said about cohesion."

"There's a lot of distrust at the school," says Vivian Loseth, a facilitator at Prescott for the Comer Process, a school-improvement program developed by Yale University child psychologist James Comer that emphasizes relationships between and among staff, parents and children. Ironically, until this year, Prescott was the Comer Process's star school in the city.

At Prescott's March 8 LSC meeting, Loseth and Comer Process colleague Sergio Grajeda asked the council to consider anew their commitment to the program—since several members weren't on the council when Loseth and Grajeda started working there in 1992.

A third-term LSC member who had voted against renewing Carlson's contract floated the idea that Loseth and Grajeda might lead human relations workshops with parents, teachers and other staff. The proposal got a somewhat chilly reception from Garcia and Cline. "I think we may have better communication at this school now than we had a year ago," said Cline.

FRANKLIN FINE ARTS CENTER

Pressure to pick scuttles selection process

At Franklin Fine Arts Center on the Near North Side, two council members put together a comprehensive, 90-day process for selecting a principal. The Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project was so impressed by the plan that it is considering including it in revised training material.

But the full council at Franklin balked at implementing the idea.

"We wanted to do background checks, interviews, site visits, everything," says LSC Chair Horace Fox. "But six members of the council felt we might lose good people who wouldn't want to sweat through a 90-day process. So we didn't do it."

The process involved questionnaires for parents, teachers and community members, a public forum and matching candidates' traits to the school's needs.

The council did place ads in educational magazines and newspapers and send out letters to 45 universities and other educational institutions around the country.

However, in what one critic called a haphazard finale, the council decided to retain the teacher who was serving as acting principal. "They voted to keep Patricia Wells, a former teacher from Disney Magnet," the critic observes. "She's good; they got lucky."

Debra Williams
LSC learns from ’90 uproar

by Grant Pick

The case of Walter Pilditch, principal of Morgan Park High School, became a lightning rod during the first blush of school reform.

When the local school council (LSC) voted in February 1990 not to retain Pilditch, an award-winning principal, the Southwest Side community of Beverly-Morgan Park was thrown into turmoil. There were packed LSC meetings and a student walkout, prompted by a false fire alarm, that erupted into scuffles with police.

The following May, Pilditch sued five council members who had opposed him. Charging he'd been fired because he is white, and had been given no reason for his non-retention, Pilditch seemed to speak for other unhappy principals who found themselves in similar straits.

‘Eyes open’

Now, as a third-generation Morgan Park LSC prepares to select a new principal, members say they are proceeding carefully, especially mindful not even to appear to discriminate. “Our eyes are open about the kind of decisions we make, and how we make them,” says council member Jean Swanson.

After Pilditch was let go, the original LSC, at a deadlock, presented the names of three finalists to Subdistrict 11 Supt. Grady Jordan, who chose Earl Bryant, the outgoing Kennedy High School principal, to head Morgan Park. When Bryant took early retirement last August, LSC attention focused on Charles Alexander, the assistant principal in charge of administration, as his successor. While the council could have offered Alexander a contract, it would have run less than a year. (Under state law, a “replacement” principal fills only the unexpired portion of his predecessor’s contract.)

“We were uncomfortable asking Mr. Alexander to take an interim position,” relates Capers Funnely, the LSC chairman. “Elections were coming up, and if he wasn’t retained he couldn’t return to his old position at the school. He’d be left out in the cold.”

Alexander, who accepted the job of acting principal instead, had a bracing autumn in the wake of the Board of Education’s financial crisis. Like other city high schools, Morgan Park weathered the change from 40- to 50-minute periods; it lost some 25 teachers at a time when the school, a neighborhood facility with magnet programs in language and international studies and for gifted students, could have used a boost in morale. Since Pilditch’s day, enrollment has stayed steady at about 2,100, but the percentage of white students has declined by more than half, to 10 percent, and the number of disadvantaged students has climbed.

“The image of Morgan Park is more bad-ish than good-ish,” says Yvonne Griswold, a community LSC member. “The dumping of Pilditch had a paralyzing effect on the neighborhood. Confidence is building, but it’s not where it once was.”

Neither, however, is the LSC. Before the October 1991 elections, locals distressed over Pilditch’s firing organized to elect a slate of five candidates, including Funnely and Griswold, to the LSC. The anti-Pilditch forces were turned out of office, except for Calvin Pearce, the first chairman, who lasted one more term before deciding not to seek re-election last October.

Today, the Morgan Park LSC is

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LUELLA ELEMENTARY

School’s new vision drives intensive search

With a new focus on math and science, Luella Elementary in South Deering plans to change its name to the Robert Henry Lawrence School of Math and Science, after the first black astronaut.

So when its principal took early retirement last fall, the local school council tapped a teacher to serve as acting principal while it searched. High up on the council’s list was finding a good communicator and motivator who could inspire or light a fire under its teachers to change, too.

“We wanted our teachers to do hands-on math and team teach,” explains LSC Chair Jeanella Kern. “Our teachers are not used to teaching like that. We have some who have master’s degrees and remind you all the time they have master’s degrees, and still our students are scoring below average. We wanted a principal who could motivate them to try different ways of teaching and make them feel good about it.”

So, she says, the council sought “someone with leadership, organizational and interpersonal skills. We also wanted someone who had experience in administration and a background in math and science.”

In its search, the council conducted interviews, visited schools where candidates worked and held an open forum so parents, teachers and the community could assess the contenders.

From 101 candidates, the Luella council chose William Harris, an assistant principal at Julian High School for nine years. In December, the council asked Harris to complete the unexpired term of the previous principal and then to sign a four-year contract.

“We knew the vision for the school, which is to prepare our children for the 21st century through math and science,” says Kern. “We think Harris is the person to push that vision forward.”

Debra Williams
about as diverse a bunch as you could find. The panel is led by Funnye, an African-American rabbi who is administrative director for the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs. His colleagues include Loop lawyer Duane Feurer, Beverly-area school activist Griswold, Chicago region PTA leader Jean Swanson, science teacher Roy Coleman (known for staging balsa-wood "bridge breaks" among his students) and P.V. Chandy, a Quaker minister of Indian descent.

"It's all very workable," says member Larry Nowlin, an outspoken former Subdistrict 10 council chairman. "Our biggest problem is that various members talk too damn long, including me."

The LSC has elected to act as a "committee of the whole" in its principal search; in other words, the selection will be conducted by the full council, excepting student representative Amado Vega, legally barred from participating in school personnel matters.

Each council member has received training in principal selection. Drummed home, says Swanson, has been the notion of not considering age, race, sex, national origin or other personal matters when weighing candidates. "Those kinds of things will not be in our vernacular," promises Funnye. "If someone slips, I will say, 'Sir or ma'am, that is not what this is all about.'"

**Thirst for excellence**

The student body and the professional personnel advisory committee are being quizzed as to their wishes. The council also has laid out certain criteria it wants in a principal, such as an ability to involve the neighborhood, a "firm but fair" demeanor and a thirst for high performance among students and faculty.

The LSC has placed a notice seeking applicants in the Chicago Public School Bulletin, electing, for lack of funds, not to advertise more widely. Funnye, for one, feels comfortable with a limited search. "We have many qualified people in the system. You tend to look into the soup and think all the vegetables are the same, but there is actually a wide variety."

One prominent vegetable, acting principal Alexander, is applying. "Morgan Park has had a tradition of academic excellence, and in spite of the unfortunate events of recent times we have maintained a large degree of that excellence," says Alexander, 50, who started out as a Morgan Park history teacher a quarter-century ago. "Education is taking place here—we just haven't communicated that it's happening."

Several LSC members say they are inclined toward Alexander, and so is Pearce, still a Morgan Park parent. Pointing to the powerful Beverly Area Planning Association (BAPA), he suggests that "outside forces" in the neighborhood want someone other than the acting administrator.

"I'm a firm believer that you look at everybody," says Gretchen McDowell, chair of BAPA's public education committee. Yet, McDowell shares Alexander's recognition that Morgan Park needs to burnish its image; her committee is readying a recruitment folder to help lure students.

Not throwing his hat in the ring this time is Pilditch, selected two years ago as principal of Curie High School. "I was fired from one school, and I got a larger one, which pays more money," he says. "I must be doing something right." Pilditch is heartened over a subsequent change in the School Reform Act that requires a council, if requested, to lay out for an ousted principal the reasons for termination.

The new principal will be asked not only to fill out Bryant's unexpired contract, which runs through June 30, but to sign an agreement for a new four-year term, says Funnye.

The Morgan Park deliberations come just as Pilditch's legal case has wound up. In May 1992, a jury in U.S. District Court awarded Pilditch $62,000 in compensatory damages and assessed punitive damages of between $1,000 and $3,000 against Pearce and three other defendants.

A U.S. Appellate Court decision later threw out the lower court verdict, and on Feb. 22, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the appellate finding. Now, Pearce and the rest of the defendants are suing to recover $75,000 in court costs.

Grant Pick is a Chicago writer who has served both on a local school council and a subdistrict council.
At a local school council meeting, Principal Thomas Stewart (left) and LSC member Pamela Price sit side-by-side but are worlds apart in their views of how Piccolo Middle should be run.

Piccolo Middle School

Arguments, threats mark surprise vote

by Debra Williams

Four years ago, the two schools that occupy one building at 1040 N. Keeler were awash with bickering. At the start of the school year, the Interim Board of Education had divided Piccolo Elementary School (K-8) into two schools, Piccolo Elementary (K-5) and Piccolo Middle (6-8). With no clear direction from the board on who was entitled to what, the two new schools fought over money, personnel, space and supplies.

Pamela Price, the aggressive chair of the Piccolo Elementary local school council, was particularly critical of Middle School Principal Thomas Stewart, who had been principal of the whole K-8 school for the previous 16 years. “If he really wants what’s best, he’d go out of his way to communicate,” she said at the time. (See CATALYST, February 1990.)

Since then, the two schools have worked out the technicalities of budgets, supplies and space. But the old fires were rekindled this winter after Price and four like-minded parents and community members were elected to the local school council (LSC) at Piccolo Middle School—just in time to vote on the renewal of Stewart’s contract.

At one LSC meeting, things got so acrimonious that a teacher started taking an LSC member’s child to task for being a troublemaker. The LSC member then jumped out of his chair and, offering his backside, told the teacher to kiss his a—-a—, according to several accounts. “It really got down and dirty,” reports one insider. “You’d have thought you were in the streets.”

The exchange came in the midst of a noisy meeting that saw the Price contingent move—unsuccessfully—to disband the middle school’s parent group over alleged irregularities in spending.

A vendetta?

Price came on the council wanting Stewart out. “Parents are not getting what they are supposed to, which is a quality education for their children,” Price maintains. “Eighth-graders leave that school reading at 3rd-grade level.”

Stewart’s supporters counter by accusing the elementary school of failing to do its job. “Eighty-five percent of their students come to us below grade level,” asserts teacher Leonard Hayes. “I have a class where my 7th-graders are reading at a 2.5 grade level [middle of second grade]. Sure, we can pull them up one or two grade levels, but what good is reading at a 4th- or 5th-grade level in high school?”

Records of current 6th-graders who came from the elementary school show that only 13 of 148 students scored at grade level in reading on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills last year.

Price’s response: “Don’t forget that we inherited Stewart’s students when he was principal of the whole school. We’ve been working to bring these students up to par. This is the first year that we’ve had a clean slate of students—children who were not here under Stewart.”

“Last year the board honored 101 schools whose math scores had improved,” she adds. “We were one of them.”

Stewart’s backers contend that Price and her allies are simply pursuing a vendetta.

“They are not interested in this school or our kids,” says John Dotson, a teacher representative on the middle school LSC. “I consider this one school, and they haven’t come over and helped one student. They don’t volunteer over here. They want to destroy rather than build. They only want to know where the money is going.”

Indeed, Price does want to know where the money is going. Soon after her election to the middle school council, she asked for audits of the federal Chapter 1 and bilingual programs and of internal accounts, suspecting mismanagement of funds.
"They have a parent organization, the CPTA, that has the kids sell candy," Price explains. "One hundred percent of the sales are to go back to the children. Well, 50 percent goes to the CPTA and 50 percent to Stewart. We don’t know what they are doing with this money. We’re still trying to find out."

Lavedia Barrow, chair of the middle school’s LSC and the CPTA, maintains that all the money has been used for the kids, in the form of gym uniforms, transportation for trips, refreshments for major meetings and performance incentives, such as trophies.

Teachers threaten to quit

Meanwhile, a number of middle school teachers threatened to quit if Stewart weren’t retained.

"I drive from 116th Street to get here," says Leonard Hayes. "If I have to fight the traffic to get here and then fight the administration to do my job, I’ll go somewhere else first. I know five other teachers that feel the same way."

The day of the decision was scheduled for 10 a.m. Jan. 25 in a small lounge area at Piccolo Middle. The room was packed with more than 10 parents and teachers (most of whom seemed to support Stewart) and representatives from the Subdistrict 3 office, the Lawyers’ School Reform Advisory Project and Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE).

Stewart’s supporters had rounded up petitions from teachers and letters from the school’s professional personnel advisory committee. Parents had written letters praising Stewart.

Even so, Price had reason for optimism. With one vacancy on the council, her five-person slate held a majority.

As the meeting got underway, both groups switched on tape recorders. There would be no mistake about what was said. The council spent the first half hour correcting minutes from the previous, raucous meeting, as several members insisted their statements had been taken out of context.

When the vote finally came, Price saw her majority drop unexpectedly to a minority; five members voted to keep Stewart, and four voted not to keep him.

"I had heard all these bad things about Dr. Stewart," explains parent Vadalia Garcia, who cast the unexpected vote in Stewart’s favor. "But after I got on the council, I found out that he’s not the monster some people portray him to be. I saw what he did with my own eyes and decided to vote to retain him, which I think surprised the people who helped get me elected."

Following the vote, however, there was dispute over whether it was valid. Were five votes out of nine enough to retain a principal? Or were six votes needed? Acting on the advice of the School Board’s reform office, the council later decided to fill its parent vacancy and take another vote.

The day before that vote, Garcia says, she got a threatening phone call: "B - - - - , I know where you live, and I know where you’re supposed to be tomorrow. If you show up, you’ll be sorry." Garcia says the call has been traced and is being handled by police.

Garcia went to the meeting, where the council newcomer gave Stewart a sixth, conclusive vote.

Estelle Jarrett, a reform office facilitator, maintains the Piccolo situation is unique. "When it comes to two heads in the same household, especially two dominant, strong personalities, you’re going to have a problem."

Unfortunately, she says, the conflict filters down to the children. "Parents go home and talk about the situation. Students overhear their teachers talking about it. They then take a position, 'My mother must be right. My teacher must be right.' It’s not a good situation."

"We can make both sides adhere to the law, but we can’t tell them you must love your brother or sister. That is beyond what we can do."

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SHERIDAN ACADEMY

A contract to improve

The local school council at Mark Sheridan Math and Science Academy in Bridgeport evaluated its principal and then decided to renew his contract. But it also attached a list of changes it wanted him to make.

"Our principal does what he’s supposed to do, and, on paper, he looks pretty good. That’s why we decided to retain him," explains LSC Chair Suzanne Callinan. "Still, there were some things, some personality issues, that we thought he could improve on a little."

To his credit, Callinan says, the principal agreed to accept the council’s list.

Debra Williams
Teacher LSC rep gets abrupt transfer

by Grant Pick

For more than a decade, controversy has swirled around the principal of South Shore High School, which became South Shore Community Academy in 1987. First, it was long-time Principal William Marshall who drew the ire of many teachers and community members who believed the school was poorly run.

Now, Eddie Washington, the assistant principal who stepped up after Marshall took early retirement last August, is under attack—for removing two teachers, including a local school council (LSC) member, allegedly because they spoke out against him as he sought a full four-year contract.

"That's his way of administering the school," says teacher Edwin Brown, the transferred LSC representative. "If you disagree with him, he ships you out."

Washington did not return CATALYST phone calls or respond to written questions delivered to his school office.

Brown, a physical education teacher at South Shore for 27 years, won a seat on the school's local school council last October. The next day, he says, Washington summoned him to his office and told him he was going to advertise Brown's job. (When a school is designated a community academy, it may seek new teachers but must give preference to current staff, all qualifications being equal.)

Brown says he didn't reapply for his own job because he assumed, on the basis of a 1990 letter from Marshall, the former principal, that his position was secure.

On Feb. 24, Brown joined four other LSC members in denying Washington the six votes he needed for a full four-year contract. Brown and three other members abstained, while community representative Herbert Hedgeman voted "no," leaving Washington with only five "yes" votes.

Brown maintains Washington isn't a good leader and that he is funnelling too much state Chapter 1 money into security while giving short shrift to academics.

When Brown reported for work March 8, he was startled to receive a transfer notice. At press time, Brown was teaching at Near North Career Metro High School but seeking reinstatement at South Shore.

Ann Rainey, a social studies teacher at South Shore, ran for the LSC in October and lost. Even so, Washington advertised her position immediately, she says. "I didn't reapply because I didn't want to give him the pleasure of saying 'no' to me," she claims.

On Feb. 21, says Rainey, an assistant principal interrupted her class to hand her a dismissal slip and tell her to report to Board of Education headquarters on Pershing Road for reassignment.

"Everyone who runs for the council is transferred unless they agree with the administration," says Rainey, who now teaches at Calumet High School.

Having taken fourth place in the LSC election, Rainey would have been second in line to fill Brown's vacancy on the council. (Under state law, a council must abide by the faculty's preference in filling a teacher vacancy.)

Other former South Shore teachers claim they met a fate similar to that of Brown and Rainey under the administration of William Marshall.

William Hutchinson, an industrial arts teacher, ran for the school's first LSC in 1989; he said he had a good chance of winning. That prospect of emerging victorious, he says, troubled Marshall and Williams, then the assistant principal for operations. "They wanted only their own people on the LSC," Hutchinson maintains. After being exiled to hall duty, he says, he concluded his prospects at South Shore were dim and requested to leave. He now teaches at Roosevelt High.

"Everyone who runs for the council is transferred unless they agree with the administration."

—Ann Rainey, former South Shore teacher

Lucinda McClendon, an English teacher and South Shore's delegate to the Chicago Teachers Union, vied for a slot on the LSC in 1991. She reports she was transferred the day before the election. When she sought an explanation from Marshall, she says, "he was not available."

Johnny L. Turner, chair of the physical education department, ran for the council in 1991 on a platform of "listening to teachers," but he lost. Subsequently, insists Turner, Marshall spurned all his suggestions; the next September, he, too, was transferred.

"Marshall told me it had to do with a drop in enrollment," Turner says, "although there was no drop in enrollment."

Marshall could not be reached for comment, but, then, teachers transferred during his tenure fault Washington as much as Marshall. "Marshall was just a figurehead," maintains Turner. "Washington ran things."

See SOUTH SHORE page 17
15 councils took on ordeal of trying to fire principal

by Chuck Shubart

Hiring principals is a local school council's right. But try to fire one for serious performance failings, a handful of up-in-arms councils say, and you're firing blanks.

Councils that have exercised their statutory power to begin mid-contract dismissal proceedings almost invariably have wound up in an extended siege, with children's learning the first casualty.

By law, the general superintendent has 45 days to respond to the council's request for dismissal of a principal—either by asking the Board of Education to approve the firing or by rejecting the request with a written explanation.

Yet months typically pass, as discontent at the school festers, faculties grow divided and educational progress stalls.

"What often happens is witnesses aren't available, material isn't brought forth," explains board attorney Michael Hernandez. "We'll tell the LSCs, please wait, we're trying."

To date, 15 councils have cast the seven votes necessary to begin dismissal proceedings. Just one, the council at Julian High School on the Far South Side, has been successful. Currently, four elementary schools—Penn, Disney Magnet, Schiller and Parkside Community Academy—await central office action; however, at three of them, council turnover has brought new attitudes.

In the 10 other cases where dismissals were sought, standoffs commonly ended only when the principal resigned.

Typically, councils have turned first to volunteer attorneys provided by the Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project. But then they've spent months working and waiting.

At Sauganash Elementary School on the Northwest Side, "The 45 days went right out the window," recalls LSC Chair Linda Schar.

In spring 1992, the council voted 10-0 to seek dismissal of Principal Denis Curran. Members spent "hundreds of hours" documenting charges against him, alleging, in part, that funds were missing and school improvement plans were never implemented.

"It was about Christmas before we heard anything," Schar says. "We were in touch with the [board's] legal department constantly, wondering where our answer was. They were just saying we haven't gotten to it yet."

Meanwhile, she says, there was "no discipline" at the school. "The kids would be running wild. Teachers were bickering."

Curran averted a longer wait by resigning at Christmas. Today, he remains in the system, teaching for a North Side elementary school. LSC members say "a few thousands" in state Chapter 1 dollars are still unaccounted for. Curran declined to comment.

Board of Education officials would answer no questions about any specific principal removal investigation, citing state law protecting privacy of personnel records.

Dismissal strictly regulated

In 1991, changes in the School Reform Act gave LSCs the power to begin this process, which, unlike non-renewal of a contract, is strictly regulated by standards set in Illinois law.

The revision also specified that cause for dismissal may involve repeated failure to implement provisions of the school improvement plan or to abide by the principal contract, including stipulations added by the LSC. Other grounds for dismissal are failure to attend LSC meetings, to provide accurate information on request or to administer a budget consistent with the
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improvement plan.

Principals' obligations also include a range of state and board policies, including the board's Uniform Discipline Code, professional conduct standards and enforcement of supervisory and emergency procedures such as fire drills.

Dismissal rights go to the heart of reform's principle of school-based management, asserts Zarina O'Hagin, director of the Lawyers' Project. "If the principal is not working with the LSC, they can get rid of him."

O'Hagin emphasizes that a dismissal request is a serious step requiring "massive" LSC effort, extensive documentation and sober consensus by seven council members. "The fact you don't like the way the principal dresses is not enough," she notes.

'Junior Napoleons'

Some council members act like "junior Napoleons," overlooking the fact that principals properly have broad day-to-day powers and that disagreement is normal, report attorneys who have advised councils seeking their principals' ouster.

High emotions are another obstacle. A Lawyers' Project attorney who volunteered at Sauganash met with "name-calling" members three or four times before he was convinced they had a case, "I turned them into fact gatherers," he reports.

Though charges and countercharges vary from school to school, all schools apparently suffered lingering turmoil.

'A circus'

At Penn Elementary on the West Side, frustration with a "rubber-stamp council" led to the election in 1991 of a far more vocal LSC, according to the winners. Rising friction led to a 20-0 vote for dismissal last May.

Weeks after the dismissal vote, the 2nd-grade son of LSC Chair Loretta Webber was transferred out of the school. After Webber protested that Principal Philip Ragan had singled her out, 62 other children were transferred in July. School officials later ordered that all must be allowed to return.

The council's complaints center on charges that Ragan repeatedly withheld information and chronically refused to fill positions and orders. With most students coming from single-parent homes and dangerous environments, the LSC allotted state Chapter 1 funds to hire a counselor. The position remains empty more than two years later.

Unhappy members also cite a drug program that was approved but never purchased, aides intended for classrooms but assigned to the office and $139,000 worth of textbooks that they say were never ordered. "Everything we want, he doesn't want," contends LSC parent Webber.

"Whatever Ragan requested, they denied," counters teacher Jeannette Boyd. "It was a circus." Boyd says no counselor has been hired because only two persons applied. Ragan declined to comment.

Unanswered questions about internal accounts led to three certified-letter requests for an audit, which council members say central office also ignored. Amid last year's arguing, $230,000 in state Chapter 1 money went unspent, they say. "That means the kids are being cheated," says Webber.

Before last October's LSC election, flyers labeled "Deform Letter" and attacking Ragan's critics were sent home with students. The critics subsequently lost their majority on the council.

In December, seven months after the dismissal vote, the School Board finally issued a warning resolution ordering Ragan to correct undisclosed deficiencies. Remaining council members say they were never notified. "I was calling the Law Department lawyer four, five times a day," recalls Webber, a Penn graduate. "She never returns your call."
FIRING
continued from page 14

Disney Magnet on the North Side has been one of the system's best-regarded elementary schools for years. Today, by several accounts, tension following last June's 9-0 dismissal vote has split the faculty and seeped into classrooms.

"I just don't understand why the board or someone hasn't intervened," says a veteran teacher who has stood outside the fray. "They've let it drag on, and the kids are the victims."

"We'd hoped to have [Principal Ralph] Guajardo out by the start of the school year," says LSC member John Aguina.

Instead, central office issued a warning resolution Dec. 22 but didn't disclose it to the LSC until mid-February.

A 4-inch-thick binder contains the council's charges, reportedly including unfilled school improvement plans, abusiveness with staff and failure to share data with the council. Parents and teachers also have complained about unspent discretionary money, idle computers and kindergarten aides never hired.

But Stan Hollenbeck, an LSC community representative who backs Guajardo, contends issues of race and personality were key.

Some black teachers have been displaced by whites, and some well-liked teachers have been removed, according to numerous reports. More than a dozen educators have quit, and LSC meetings have become shouting matches.

Guajardo declined comment on the charges, but notes that reading and math scores have risen. "If people just concentrated on improvement instead of personal issues, we'd have a better operation," he says.

Last October, Hollenbeck ferried voters in vans from nearby high-rises to sweep most of the critical LSC members from office. But the June dismissal request remains in force; a new council cannot cancel a previous LSC's request. Whether the central office will act before Guajardo's contract expires in June is an open question. Meanwhile, current LSC members say they may choose to rehire him this spring.

The principal at Parkside Community Academy in South Shore, is in a similar position. While a previous council sought his dismissal, according to a Board of Education spokeserson, the current council renewed his contract. Informed sources say there appears to be little substance to the charges.

Meanwhile, the council at Schiller Elementary, near Cabrini-Green, voted in October to dismiss Principal Marshall Taylor.

LSC chair Wanda Hopkins maintains that a promised math/science program never arrived and that internal accounts are mismanaged. A former teacher representative says staff were harassed, noting specifically that a teacher was dismissed after displaying a poster congratulating LSC winners.

Taylor rejects the charges, saying the math program awaits development, certification of the dismissed teacher had lapsed and an audit has found no wrong. (Board officials would not discuss audit results.)

He contends Hopkins tries to manage the school. "Wanda's a good speaker. She stands on the tables and gets the council emotionally charged, just like a minister in a Baptist church."

Firing upheld

The one LSC request that led to a principal's actual firing occurred with relative speed. George Eddings' removal from Julian High was accomplished seven months after the council voted Dec. 16, 1991.

The steps in firing a principal

Lawyers recommend the following steps when considering dismissal of a principal.

■ Determine that serious performance failures may exist. If seven members are likely to agree, seek legal guidance. The Lawyers' School Reform Advisory Project (312) 332-2494, and the Board of Education's Law Department are sources.

■ Inform the principal about concerns and give him or her a chance to change.

■ Maintain a professional relationship with the principal throughout the process.

■ Gather evidence. "Lawyers and councils need to make the best case they can and present it very clearly in detail so the Board of Education has a leg up in beginning its investigation," says Lynn Hiestand, a private attorney who has aided council members.

Make a list of every performance failure of the principal, including the dates of each incident and people who were involved. Incidents must be documented in records or by signed statements. Attorneys agree cumulative evidence is important.

■ Discuss your concerns in executive, or private, council sessions, but take your vote at a public meeting.

■ If the required seven votes are obtained, notify in writing the district superintendent, deputy superintendent for school operations and the Department of Human Resources. The written notice should identify the principal's failings, list persons with knowledge of those failings and present documented evidence.

■ Stay in touch with the central office. Although state law says the general superintendent must respond to an LSC within 45 days, there is no penalty for non-compliance.

■ The board might choose to issue a warning resolution, giving the principal 60 to 90 days to correct deficiencies. If this occurs, the LSC should monitor the principal's compliance with the resolution.

■ If the general superintendent recommends dismissal and a majority of the School Board agrees, the principal may be suspended without pay pending any appeal to a state hearing officer.

If the fired principal appeals, School Board attorneys must present the case against him or her before a state hearing officer, a trial-like process that can take months. The losing side then can take the matter to Cook County Circuit Court.

■ If the principal ultimately prevails, he or she has a right to back pay and reinstatement.

Chuck Shubart

CATALYST/APRIL 1994
Council members declined to talk about the firing. But records show Eddings exercised his right to appeal to a state hearing officer after the board's dismissal notice and that the firing was upheld. Even so, Eddings continues to seek reinstatement and more than $250,000 in damages through lawsuits charging the Board of Education with procedural violations.

Speaking recently, Eddings relates that he began his contract at Julian in July 1991, only to see a new council elected in October 1991 that "simply wanted someone else."

"Someone advised them the way to remove is to find cause. And if you didn't have cause, then you made cause," Eddings contends.

**Political connections?**

The LSC contacted School Board members in November, he says, and board attorneys quizzed him even before the LSC took a formal vote. "Was this political?" Eddings asks, hinting that his critics had high-level connections. "Is the Pope Catholic?"

Court documents list dozens of board charges against Eddings. Among them are failure to explain use of a $13,000 certificate of deposit, harassment of staff and LSC members, failure to evacuate the school when fire alarms sounded and improperly kept inventory.

Eddings says the $13,000 paid for an overdue football equipment bill and that a spate of false fire alarms was orchestrated by his critics. The charge about inventory, he says, involved "boxes upon boxes of gym suits that had been there for years."

Records also show that two of Eddings's most vocal LSC critics later were removed because they lived outside the school's attendance area.

Looking back, Eddings asks, "How did I get through that whole year without cracking up?"

An LSC parent, who asked not to be identified, recalls the year as one when "the students rebelled" and failures were high. During that time, she says, the council "had to document, document, document" to support its charges.

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What makes a good principal?

'**Focus on instruction, share power**'

As roughly half Chicago's public schools go through the process of choosing principals for new four-year contracts, CATALYST asked three prominent Chicago educators to share their reflections on what good principals do. We also offer a brief excerpt from Improving Schools from Within by Roland Barth, founder of the Principals Center at Harvard University. Running throughout is the theme of shared leadership.

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'**Leap tall buildings...**'

What do good principals do? A typical list of attributes and behaviors of good principals gives rise to the adage, Can leap tall buildings in a single bound.

But a close examination of principals who are leading their schools to extraordinary accomplishments shows good principals excel in at least three areas: (1) as an instructional leader committed to implementing strategic learning, (2) as a community leader who accesses community resources for learning and (3) as an advocate for all children, especially those most at risk.

Every decision a principal makes impacts the learning process. The principal may not be a subject-area expert but, nevertheless, must build a culture that focuses on teaching and learning. Yes, bus schedules, budget and safety and a host of other needs must be met, but the emphasis must be on building the capacity of teachers and students for teaching and learning, and on raising expectations of achievement.

That goes for the principal, too. One of the hardest lessons for a first-year principal to learn is that she needs to take time for her own professional development and reflective learning.

Research that crosses racial, ethnic and socioeconomic lines continues to show that a faculty's perception of their principal as a strong instructional leader is the most powerful, positive influence on student achievement. So delegate, dear principal, practice collaborative leadership, and remember always to manage things, and lead people.

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Jeanne Baxter

Professor, Northeastern Illinois University

Director, Project Co-Lead, an organization of principals promoting cooperative leadership

'**Everyone deserves a chance**'

As principal, I used to think I shared leadership. I did. Or I should say I went as far as I could go or felt the school could go. But reflecting a decade later on my leadership, I see that I stopped well short of a community of leaders.

Leadership for me was delegating, giving away or sharing participation in important decisions [with] others so long as the curriculum, pupil achievement, staff development and, of course, stability were not much altered.

Now I see it differently. Rather, my vision for a school is a place whose very mission is to ensure that students, parents, teachers and principals all become school leaders in some ways and at

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Chuck Shubart is a Chicago writer who was education editor for Pulitzer-Lerner newspapers on the North Side. He also serves on a local school council.
some times.

Leadership is making the things happen that you believe in or envision. Everyone deserves a chance. Schools can help all adults and youngsters who reside there learn how to lead and enjoy the recognition, satisfaction and influence that come from serving the common interest as well as one’s self-interest.

Roland S. Barth
in Improving Schools from Within, 1990,
Founder, Principals Center,
Harvard University

‘Accept need for change’

Everyone resists change. We all know this; it’s in all the textbooks. One of my hardest but most important tasks as a principal of 10 years has been accepting changes in myself and helping teachers do the same.

The resistance comes from human nature, from the traditional roles of teacher, principal and parent, from the challenge of re-evaluating our thinking about the educability of all children, from the need to accept new responsibilities.

I have been most successful in initiating and sustaining change when I have first fully understood and accepted the need for the change, when I have communicated its urgency, when teachers have realized the benefits to them and their students, and when I provide the leadership to overcome resistance and make the necessary changes.

Alice Perez Peters
Principal, Moos Elementary School

‘Extraordinary must become common’

Schools constitute an environment of firmly entrenched, authoritative practices, of sanctioned methods, codified roles and historical turf conflicts. To reshape this environment for success, a principal must be a leader-scholar-resource colleague who defines her role as cultivating organizational behaviors that will serve the best interest of all children.

The principal as resource colleague will value teachers as respected peers. She will attempt to stimulate their leadership efforts in guiding the entire school organization. She will communicate, collaborate, cooperate, participate and assist teachers in developing curriculum and instructional methods that serve the social growth and educational development of all children individually.

As scholar, the principal will encourage all school constituents (adults and children) to envision the school as a learning organization where all are seeking effective solutions to satisfy the developmental and educational needs of the total school community.

As leader, the principal’s role will be reconfigured as power sharer. Her concerns will be to stimulate the leadership behavior of all in the school community, including parents and children. Participatory decision making will be established as standard practice.

All constituents will be held responsible for working to improve the organizational culture and quality of school life. The principal’s focus will drastically shift from managerial functions to that of educational scientist seeking major improvements in curriculum, instruction, learning, child development, adult education, organizational effectiveness and group dynamics.

If public schools are ever going to adequately serve the preparatory needs of all children, some organizational concepts that may now appear to us as extraordinary must become as common as rain.

Charles D. Almo
Director, Doctoral Program in Education Administration, Roosevelt University.
Former principal, district superintendent, associate superintendent and interim general superintendent, Chicago Public Schools

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Hutchinson claims Washington was responsible for the treatment that prompted him to leave: “Washington didn’t want me on the LSC. He had the plan of becoming principal when Marshall retired, and he knew I wasn’t going to tolerate any nonsense.”

When asked about the most recent transfers, LSC Chair Darlene Campbell said, “I would not have jurisdiction to speak about this.”

A spokesperson for the Board of Education said the issue of transferring an LSC member who voted against the principal “is a local matter.”

Free speech violation?

But Zarin O’Hagin, director of the Lawyer’s School Reform Advisory Project, says Brown’s transfer may have violated his First Amendment right to free speech.

“When someone votes against reten tion and the next week is transferred, it raises great concern about whether the reason for the transfer might have been the vote,” O’Hagin says. “I’m also not sure whether the rules for opening and closing positions were followed there.”

Marie Cobb, president of the reform group Committee for Improved Education in South Shore, fired off a telegram to Board of Education members, labeling Brown’s transfer “an outrage to the community.”

Cobb’s group grew out of an unsuccessful campaign to get William Marshall, the former principal, out of the school.

 “[Our] offices are being flooded with calls from South Shore teachers who are afraid and unhappy,” Cobb says, adding, “How long will teachers and other staff members be intimidated in speaking out on some issues which are not acceptable to the principal’s standards?”

Meanwhile, Edwin Brown still considers himself a member of the South Shore local school council and was planning to attend its March 24 meeting. The first order of business that night: The process of selecting a new principal.

Grant Pick is a Chicago writer who has served both on a local school council and a subdistrict council.
Cultural diversity sparks curriculum

by Lorraine Forte

"League of Nations" is how one teacher aptly describes Peirce School, a microcosm of its Edgewater neighborhood: 60 percent of its 1,050 students are Hispanic, with the remaining 40 percent a mix of white, African, African-American, Asian, Middle Eastern and Native American.

Nineteen languages are spoken here, and the school has bilingual programs in Spanish and Chinese as well as English-as-a-second-language classes for other non-English speakers.

Reflecting its diversity, Peirce last year revamped its curriculum and adopted a new name, Peirce School of International Studies. Its new thrust came as part of joining the Board of Education's specialty schools program, under which schools develop a specific curriculum focus.

Since teachers had already been incorporating multicultural education into the classroom, honing in on international studies came naturally. "It fits right in with the nature of our school, helped us bring together and make better what we were doing anyway," says nine-year Principal Janice Rosales.

Teaching children about their own and other cultures, and trying to instill respect for differences, is as important as raising test scores, one teacher notes. "More and more, parents are looking to schools for answers, to help be the nurturer of children. We are meeting that particular need—a cultural, psychological need," says 1st-grade teacher Roberta Cortesi. "We're trying to create an environment of what we want society to look like in the 21st century."

To rewrite the curriculum and give it "a strong intellectual foundation," 10 teachers went through twice-a-week staff development sessions last summer at Education for Global Involvement, a Chicago-based institute that provides teacher training in international and global studies. Teachers now center lessons around a new theme each month—for instance, European immigrants or women—with the goal of exploring that theme in different cultures and subjects.

Each month, different teachers conduct research and develop school and classroom activities reflecting the new theme. "Because teachers are producing the material themselves, it's much more meaningful to them," Rosales says.

While becoming a specialty school gave teachers the chance to remodel Peirce's curriculum, many staffers were apprehensive about the move; principals at specialty schools are given the power to select staff, and teachers who want to stay at the school must reapply.

"Some had to apply after being here all their professional lives," Rosales recalls. "Everybody was scared. Everything new is scary at first," says 2nd-grade teacher Delia Gonzalez.

But, Rosales emphasizes, "I don't like to think of it as a way to get rid of teachers. It's a way of selecting them." In fact, given two candidates with similar qualifications, the principal must choose a current teacher over an outsider.

About 85 teachers from Peirce and elsewhere applied and went through interviews; in the end, five Peirce teachers were not selected and took jobs elsewhere.

Rosales believes the process was invigorating for the school. Teachers who were selected "felt very enthusiastic about being in the school [and] having the new curriculum," she says.

Becoming bilingual

On a recent Friday morning, Marlene Falcon's 3rd-graders are writing in their journals, a daily ritual during language arts period. Some write in English, others in Spanish. Children who have finished talk softly to classmates in one language or the other.

"They write in whatever language they want," Falcon says to a visitor. "Whichever one they choose, I'll write back to them in the same language."

Turning to the class, she directs children in Spanish to prepare for a new lesson. "I try to speak only in Spanish," she says. "When we do hands-on activities, the Spanish-speakers help translate my explanations if kids need it."

Translating is easier because of the room's seating arrangement: Children are grouped in fours, with two English-speakers and two Spanish-speakers per group. The arrangement also promotes cooperative learning, Falcon notes.

Meanwhile, another class of 3rd-
graders—also a mix of English- and Spanish-speakers—is down the hall in Shelly Handschuh’s room, where instruction is in English. Later, when it’s time for reading, Falcon’s English-speaking students will go to Handschuh’s class, and the Spanish-speakers in Handschuh’s classroom will move to Falcon’s class.

That’s a typical morning for students and teachers in the dual-language program, a centerpiece of Peirce’s international approach that aims to teach English- and Spanish-speaking students both languages. The school is one of five in Chicago taking part in a federally funded dual-language pilot project.

At Peirce, children are separated for reading and math instruction, which they receive only in their native language. For science, social studies and language arts, students are intermingled and are taught in both languages by teaching “partners”—such as Handschuh and Falcon—one English-speaking, one Spanish-speaking.

Other schools teach all subjects in both languages, but Peirce chose not to. “Students need to be with a teacher in their dominant language for their most important subjects,” asserts Rosales. “We wanted to make sure their skills weren’t jeopardized.”

About half of all kindergartners through 3rd grade students are in dual language, now in its fourth year. So far, Spanish-speaking students have made the most progress, teachers say, learning to speak English quicker than in traditional bilingual classes and making friends with English-speaking children more readily. “We were in our own world,” says Falcon of her previous three years teaching bilingual classes. “The [bilingual] kids didn’t talk to other kids. Now, they’re mixing more.”

The benefits to English-speaking students are, as yet, less apparent. “They don’t acquire Spanish as quickly, partly because of the culture around them,” coordinator Kathryn Myers points out. “When they watch TV, it’s in English; their friends are mostly speaking English, and so on.”

However, three English-speaking girls in 2nd-grade teacher Arlyne Cohan’s class recently came to her, “begging” to learn reading with the Spanish-speaking students taught by Cohan’s partner, Delia Gonzalez. “They said, ‘We already know how to read in English, we want to learn how to read in Spanish,’” Cohan relates. The teachers worked out a system that allows the students to spend time in both classes. The three aren’t very fluent yet, but they’re learning,” Gonzalez says.

At first, Rosales found it difficult to recruit teachers for the program. “I had to be very encouraging, very supportive,” she recalls. Asked why they signed up, Cohan and Gonzalez both laugh. “We were volunteered,” they say, then explain that Rosales persuaded them to join by taking time to explain the program in detail.

Handschuh says she “recognized it would be a growing experience for me, a chance to do something challenging, to be the kind of teacher I want to be. I believe children should have a second language.”

Now, as other teachers have seen the program in action, more volunteers come forward; already, Rosales has four—“twice what we need”—for next year’s expansion to 4th grade.

Teachers stress that dual language is more work, but that it’s also more rewarding to teach with a partner. “You have to work on lesson plans together, make sure you’re on the same track. But I definitely think it’s worth it,” Falcon says.

For more information about Peirce’s change efforts, contact Principal Janice Rosales at (312) 534-2440.

‘Specialty school’ program

Unlike many schools, Peirce has both art and music teachers on staff full time, paid for with discretionary funds. “Teachers really felt it was important to have both,” to enhance the school’s multicultural approach, says Rosales. “What culture doesn’t express itself in art and music?”

Art plays a particularly prominent role. The front hallway is dominated by a large mosaic mural created by students. Other hallways are hung with posters depicting African sculpture and South American artifacts, lanterns made by students to celebrate the recent Chinese Lunar New Year and framed reproductions of works by French Impressionists and African-American and Hispanic painters.

Art teacher Jo Sennett uses each month’s theme as a starting point for her lessons, covering history, geography and culture of a particular country, as well as how its art developed.

Sennett’s son and daughter, now grown, both attended Peirce; under the principal at the time, the school “was not a friendly, lively learning experience,” she says. Even though she had “written the school off,” a neighbor persuaded her to volunteer as an art instructor several years ago. To her surprise, Sennett enjoyed volunteering so much she enrolled at the School of the Art Institute to earn a certificate to teach. “Ten years ago, if you’d told me I’d be teaching art in a public school, I would have said ‘No way.’”

To increase the number of neighborhood schools with special programs similar to those at magnet schools, the Board of Education two years ago launched a specialty schools initiative. Currently, 30 schools are participating.

Schools don’t receive extra money, but principals get the freedom to advertise for and select teachers. Current teachers who want to stay must reapply, but are given preference over outsiders.

To qualify, a school must be at least 85 percent minority and cannot be a participant in any other school improvement initiative, such as Project CANAL. Schools must write a proposal outlining a specific curriculum focus and how that focus will increase student achievement.

For more information, contact Alvin Peterson, acting director of equal educational opportunity programs, at (312) 535-7790.
New strategy signals advance, not retreat, by business

by John Ayers

T he recent changes at Leadership for Quality Education (LQE), the business-backed school reform organization, have raised concerns that the city’s corporate leadership is pulling back from its aggressive change agenda for the public schools. The business press, people in reform circles and CATALYST have speculated that once-faithful LQE has “thrown in the towel” and gone retro. I half expect to open Crain’s Chicago Business and read that LQE is running bake sales and soft adopt-a-school programs.

As the organization’s acting president, let me report that not one LQE board member has indicated to me that the fundamental stance of the organization toward Chicago’s experiment in school reform should be changed. LQE’s board understands that this city embarked upon this bold effort five years ago with the full support of business; it would be folly to undermine the important strides we have made by lessening that support. However, LQE’s board also sees that the Chicago Public Schools have run into some serious problems this year and is suggesting that it may be time we all take stock and adjust strategies.

This is reform’s most vulnerable year. The union-legislative stalemate in the fall was disheartening. The finger-pointing and posturing on all sides created a pathetic circus, with Chicago’s vulnerable young people unfairly roughed up in the process. The decimation of high school schedules and the loss of 1,000 teaching positions sent shock waves through the system, as did the 5+5 early retirements. As a result, morale at the schools is low.

The financial fix worked out in Springfield created a massive debt arrangement, and essentially placed the system in receivership. (Unfortunately, the receiver, the State of Illinois, is not exactly the kind of concerned, caring overseer an objective bankruptcy judge might seek.)

Into all this turmoil came new Supt. Argie K. Johnson, an amiable and earnest reformer who has done the hard work of reviving schools in Brooklyn, N.Y. Professor Bruce McPherson of the University of Illinois at Chicago points out that Johnson is the city’s “first superintendent who is not dug into the past.” However, her first steps to refocus Pershing Road were tentative. And her hard-working Board of Education, while remaining remarkably steadfast in seeking needed change, began to show frustration. LQE’s planning committee looked at this situation in late November and asked itself whether the organization might want to respond to the challenges ahead somewhat differently.

An altered mission statement for LQE was adopted in January with the stated intent of getting business people more involved on a number of levels. Most importantly, LQE recognized the two major obstacles holding back the schools—lack of resources and a dysfunctional central office—and made them top priorities.

Central office a target

We have just over a year to develop our campaign for the base funding our schools need. We will work closely with our sponsoring organizations, Chicago United and the Civic Committee, to get our business leaders to help Illinois politicians understand that supporting human infrastructure is not rhetoric, but dollars and cents to employers in this state.

It is doubtful those dollars will reach Chicago if the administration of the schools is not vastly improved. The central office will have every function examined and realigned to fit the decentralized environment under a major restructuring effort being developed by Chief Financial Officer Charley Gillispie with the assistance of aggressive business consultants, the Financial Research and Advisory Committee (FRAC). FRAC is also a sub-unit of the Civic Committee.
This $1.5 million proposal now before philanthropic foundations will finally deliver on the system's long-standing promise to turn Pershing Road into a "central service center" focused on school needs and student learning. LQE will have a major role bringing school people, reform groups, LSC members and universities together for this essential civic undertaking.

The third major priority of LQE will be the development of new school-based training and/or assistance. LQE has never worked directly in the schools, maintaining a citywide concentration over its five years. The new mandate urges LQE staff to find ways to help at the school sites that will strengthen systemic change. While we are not locked into the form or focus such support might take, we will talk with LSC leaders, principals and a number of the city's most effective training organizations to determine the niches with the highest leverage for change.

Business people have a growing level of experience in change management and reviving ailng cultures, thanks to the relentless challenges of the global economy. We must figure out how to better tap that knowledge for the hard work ahead for our schools.

Much of the genuine concern about the changes at LQE was centered not around these new goals, which most observers agree are laudable, but on the things LQE has traditionally done and reportedly will no longer do. Specifically, our friends in the reform community say we are mistaken to de-emphasize advocacy and budget monitoring.

'We will pick our battles'

Advocacy will always be in LQE's work. Working for better funding next year in Springfield will not be a cakewalk. That will be advocacy. Yet, admittedly, I have a different approach than the two preceding presidents of LQE. Mine might be called a consensus-building style, and some find that incongruous with LQE's historical role. We will not be afraid to stand up on important issues, but we will pick our battles.

Budget monitoring will have a lesser role. With staff changes, LQE has lost some of its capacity to do budget work. However, we expect that the new mandate for the School Finance Authority to more carefully monitor the system's finances will keep an honest oversight in place. While the system has no money, we might be more effective seeking the equitable funding we need.

And we remain hopeful that, if the system's restructuring takes hold, the budget process will be improved by the time the new state revenue is in place.

The challenges before all of us are enormous. We must not doubt each other's resolve to work in good faith at such a fragile time for school reform. I, too, was concerned by the enmity that accompanied the changes in LQE. The trust of LQE in the broader community was harmed by several missteps in the process of modifying the organization. However, with your help, LQE will move forward positively in the coming months. I think if people watch what we do, today's fears about LQE's resolve will prove unjustified. My promises are to listen carefully to school people making courageous changes for kids, to work closely with the resourceful reform coalition and to keep business leadership in this work for the long haul.

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.

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**Letters**

Iowa scores misleading, hinder good teaching

The March 1994 issue of CATALYST on testing in the Chicago schools revealed a lot of the problems which arise from the use of standardized achievement tests to evaluate the progress of public school children.

Attempting to identify schools which are showing improvement by reviewing test scores can be misleading. Comparing the achievement of the 1993 4th-graders in a school with that of the 4th-graders from the year before is, in fact, trying to draw conclusions from scores earned by two different groups of children who took two different forms of the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS). If the groups are large enough, or the differences in the scores exceptionally great, you might be able to make some broad generalizations about the progress or lack thereof. But in most schools, the groups compared are relatively small, and the score differentials a matter of two or three months.

Whatever test is used sets limitations on what will be taught. If schools are to be evaluated on their scores, the primary instructional goals will be guided by what is to be tested, not what should be taught. Standardized tests do not measure higher-level thinking abilities or the capacity of a child to apply his knowledge to new situations. They do not take into account a child's particular way of learning or any form of achievement that is not based on verbal or mathematical intelligence.

The tragedy is that we are damned if we do and damned if we don't. If the test instrument is changed or standardized testing is eliminated, we will be damned by our critics who will charge us with evading of our continuing failure. If we continue to use the ITBS, we are damned to a hell of test-based instruction.

Perhaps a middle road (purgatory?) of limiting systemwide standardized testing to two or three grades in elementary schools and one or two in high school is the best option. Individual schools could develop or purchase assessments to use for the improvement of instruction. The pressures of the testing process would be less for teachers and for children, and the scores could still be used for public and political purposes.

Perhaps the system could apply its ability to track individual children and present systemwide data on the gains which children make over time, no matter what school they attend. If a child gained at least three years between 4th and 7th grades, she could be seen to have learned three years worth of whatever is measured by the test. If she was "behind" in 4th grade, and then shows a year's growth for each year in school, there would be definite evidence of progress, even if she is not at grade level.

We must not keep to our old ways out of habit or fear of criticism.

Cynthia B. Douglas, principal
Keller Elementary School
City leaders drop big plans, consider boarding schools

by Dan Weissmann

The power brokers who oversee the Chicago Cluster Initiative may be throwing in the towel in their effort to bring together major government and non-profit groups for wide-ranging collaboration.

At the end of February, the Cluster shut down operations as an interim executive director began mapping out a plan for a more limited endeavor: Creating boarding schools around three city high schools. If a plan isn’t ready by mid-May that provides for at least two years of new funding, the Cluster will close its doors for good.

“The Cluster to date has not been a success,” acknowledges Martin “Mike” Koldyke, chairman of the Chicago School Finance Authority and a founding member of the Cluster’s board of directors. “It’s been a nice idea, but it hasn’t been implemented.” The board of directors, he says, has not managed to pull together enough to pursue its initial, ambitious goals.

Until March 1, Cluster staff were working with four high schools (Austin, Bowen, DuSable and Farragut), their “feeder” elementary schools and a variety of local agencies on projects ranging from organizing neighborhood youth leadership councils to running summer job programs to planning larger projects like the boarding schools. Koldyke says that although the staff had done some good work, the focus and, therefore, the results were scattered.

If the re-tooled Cluster gets off the ground, each of three high schools (Austin, Bowen and DuSable) will be paired with two or three of its feeder schools. Each group would get beefed-up extracurricular arts and sports programs and new school-to-work and school-to-college programs—as well as a boarding school for students in 4th through 12th grades, says Interim Executive Director Yvonne Minor.

Farragut, where the local school council clashed with the Cluster, likely would be dropped. (See CATALYST, October 1993.)

Minor, principal of Dyett Middle School in Washington Park, is “on loan” to the Cluster for the spring; the Board of Education continues to pay her salary. Among principals and community leaders in the DuSable cluster’s Grand Boulevard area, Minor was one of several enthusiastic boarding school proponents. However, if the DuSable boarding school becomes a reality, Dyett won’t be part of it.

Funding cut

When it started in 1991, the Cluster had a sketchy goal of making Chicago’s government agencies work together to improve overall service for city residents. Initially, it sought to send a well-coordinated infusion of resources to four neighborhoods from the agencies headed by the Cluster’s board members; agencies include the schools, police department, park district, Chicago Housing Authority, City Colleges and independent non-profits like the powerful, predominantly Latino United Neighborhood Organization (UNO).

Last October, CATALYST reported that the Cluster’s efforts seemed stalled in low gear, due largely to a distracted and shifting set of board members; since the group’s inception, the schools, parks, police and City Colleges have all seen their top administrators replaced; mainstays Koldyke and CHA Chairman Vincent Lane were consistently busy with other concerns.

Since October, two different consultants have been tapped to advise the board on how to put the organization back on track. In early February, the board announced that Minor would replace Greg Darnieder. On Minor’s first day, she gave the staff a week to clean out their desks.

By then, the Cluster’s biggest funder, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, had said that, after several years and almost a half a million dollars of support, it was time for the agencies involved to pick up the tab. The foundation did provide some “bridge funding” to get the Cluster through its fiscal year and allow it to plan for the future. Koldyke says it’s anybody’s guess where new funds may come from, and it’s part of Minor’s job to solve that problem.

“I still think it [the Cluster] has a lot of potential,” says Leonard Dominguez, deputy mayor for education and a member of the Cluster’s board. “I just hope we get more focused and don’t lose some of the energy that we have in the schools and the communities. That’s the risk you take when you shut down operations.”

As the Cluster’s former site director for Bowen High and the South Chicago area, Jerry Bell echoes and amplifies that fear. In retrospect, Bell wonders whether the Cluster was a positive force after all. It could be seen by some, he says, as part of a pattern in urban ghettos—just “another scheme created by white folks to raise expectations and then take the resources away. [That’s why] when these organizations come into the community, there’s a lot of skepticism, a lot of mistrust. I hope that’s not the case here—especially since I was on the payroll and one of the perpetrators.”

Although Bell’s activities have been halted, the Cluster at least intends to
return to South Chicago, where he worked. The same isn't true for North Lawndale and Little Village, where Farragut High School sits.

Farragut, the site of some sharp racial and political divisions, was a sore spot for the Cluster board. The school's local school council never officially approved the Cluster's involvement at the school, and as early as last June, some Cluster board members were talking openly of withdrawing from the area.

Farragut out

To date, the Cluster board has taken no official action to withdraw from Farragut and the surrounding neighborhoods; however, Minor says that, judging by the comments at the board meeting where she was hired, dumping the troubled school seemed like a "done deal."

That is not quite how Madeleine Philbin sees it. Philbin, the Cluster's site director for Little Village and North Lawndale, recently sent a letter to the principals and community leaders she has been working with for the past year, updating them on the Cluster's recent changes and asking them for a response.

In her letter, Philbin points out that many board members have opposed jettisoning Farragut in the past. Two members of the Cluster board who have a significant stake in Little Village—Daniel Solis of the United Neighborhood Organization and Deputy Mayor Dominguez—say that while they know the possibility is being discussed, they're not aware of any official plans to drop Farragut. Neither says he would be opposed to the idea.

Local leaders might continue to work together, Philbin suggests, whether they look to the Cluster board for support or decide to work on their own. After all, she writes, "The Chicago Cluster Initiative may choose to walk away from the challenge, but those who live and work in this neighborhood don't really have that option."

For her part, Philbin hasn't gone anywhere. "I just see this as a change from getting paid for what I do to not getting paid for it," she says. She recently accompanied a group of 14 7th- and 8th-graders from the two neighborhoods to a "Service Learning" conference in New Mexico, where the youth (who raised most of the trip costs themselves) presented a workshop on "Appreciating Diversity."

The young people found the experience so rewarding that they have decided to try to continue working together next year, even though they will be dispersed among several different high schools, says participant Luap Morgan, an 8th-grader from Herzl Elementary in North Lawndale.

The group grew out of a Youth Leadership Development Council Philbin started in the Farragut Cluster about a year ago.

Darnieder says his major contribution was planting the idea that programs for young people ought to treat them as resources to be cultivated, not as collections of problems (i.e., pregnancy, school failure) to be solved. The approach goes by the name youth development.

"A year ago, in this city, the whole idea of youth development didn't exist," he says. "We held the first meetings on it about six months after Dantrell Davis [a boy living in Cabrini-Green public housing] was killed." Now, city and neighborhood leaders sit on a dizzying array of task forces and committees centered on the notion, and Minor says that youth development will continue to be one of the group's most important goals.

The Cluster's ragged history seems like a "textbook case" of poor communication, says Janet Hively, who left the Cluster board when she left the helm of the Golden Apple Foundation at the end of January. "Certainly there has been a lack of clarity about who has wanted what out of the Cluster Initiative."

Not just boarding schools

Indeed, some members of the Cluster's board of directors, like Dominguez, seem surprised by the abrupt shift in plans.

"Well, maybe you can tell me what's going on," Dominguez tells CATALYST, half-joking. "This thing seems totally up in the air." Most other board members were unavailable for comment, or else declined to be interviewed for this article; some said they didn't feel well-informed enough to make public statements.

Hively says the remaining question is, "Has the time been wasted? I don't know the answer to that question. . . . The idea of the Cluster is even more current today than when the organization was founded. . . . The most important thing is that they get on with it—and not just with boarding schools at these three sites."
Reformers ignoring achievement, says AFT's Shanker

In a recent column in the New York Times, Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), accuses Chicago school reformers of fudging the issue of student achievement.

Specifically, Shanker took issue with the report issued last summer by the Consortium on Chicago School Research that found reform is working in many schools. The report, Shanker wrote in his March 13 “Where We Stand” column, dodged the question of whether the changes were beginning to achieve what the reform intended—raise the achievement of Chicago’s students out of the cellar.

The Consortium report was based on teacher and principal surveys conducted in 1991 and 1992, when school-level reform was only one and two years old. Consortium officials say it was too early to expect achievement gains.

Shanker says he came to Chicago and asked key players in school reform how kids were doing on tests.

“When I got from those people—those who were leaders in this revolution—was a variation of what I used to hear from principals and superintendents: ‘No,’ they said, ‘the test scores haven’t gone up, but you should see the children smiling—how active and happy they are—and how the school councils are working together to make some very exciting changes.”

While acknowledging that reform is difficult and that across-the-board achievement gains should not be expected so soon, Shanker says, “It is ridiculous and dangerous for a report on the status of the reform to omit what should be its centerpiece—an attempt to measure progress toward the goal of improved student achievement and an analysis of what seems to be working and what seems to be failing.”

In his column, Shanker offers no suggestions for how to measure reform. The “jury is still out” on school decentralization, Shanker says, but he warns, “We need to be careful that the new ‘owners’ of the school system don’t change the rules. The whole point of school reform is to have students learn more. If this doesn’t happen, the experiment is a failure, no matter how happy the children, the parents and the teachers—and the reformers—are.”

PLAN

continued from page 1

reform and whether reform is failing or succeeding.

Called the Three-Tiered Model for School Improvement, Johnson’s plan would use hard data—mainly, test scores—to divide schools into three groups: those doing “extremely well” or “displaying consistent progress” (an estimated 62); “schools in need of moderate support” (an estimated 211); and “schools in need of intensive support” (an estimated 266).

“Once the schools have been grouped into the three categories, the central administration, with support from the district and local levels, will identify the areas of greatest need and develop appropriate intervention strategies,” according to a draft of the plan stamped “for review and discussion and subject to change.”

Johnson says the “intent is to concentrate school and community resources on helping schools develop and effectively implement their school improvement plans. It says [to schools], we will work with you to help you find a way to examine the issues facing your specific school and, through your own efforts, to turn this situation around.”

However, Sheila Castillo, coordinator of the Chicago Association of Local School Councils, maintains “The plan was written from a hierarchical point of view. It really didn’t include us.”

Castillo says that schools will be turned around only with the involvement of the LSCs, and that LSCs need training to do that. Central office should have assessed schools at the outset of reform and given that information to LSCs, “so they could lead the remediation process,” she says.

The plan calls for creation of School Improvement Teams at each bottom-tier school; the teams would include central- and district-level staff as well as LSC chairs and designated school staff.

“Why create another entity?” asks Karen Birolami Barrett, senior advocate of the Latino Institute. “Why not simply marshall all possible resources in support of our local school councils?”

What central office should do, she insists, is provide “user-friendly data to each school, pointing out which numbers might indicate problems. Schools can be given a list of suggested questions to ask themselves during their self-assessment, as well as a list of consultants, trained in organizational development, that are available to facilitate the process.”

Under Johnson’s plan, schools that fail to show progress would be subject to a range of mandates, from imposition of a new school improvement plan to closing the school.

The School Reform Act already provides such penalties for schools that fail to fulfill their school improvement plans. However, the act leaves it up to subdistrict councils, not the superintendent, to get the ball rolling. So far, no district council has taken such action. District councils have had a hard time even mustering quorum; a CATALYST review of council minutes from 1992-93 showed that attendance at more than half the meetings was too low to conduct official business. (See CATALYST, June 1993.)

Lawsuit threatened

Johnson’s plan “violates the intent of the School Reform Act by re-imposing the superintendent’s line authority over the schools,” says Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change. Similar top-down plans have failed in other big-city school systems like Kansas City, Kan., and Minneapolis, Minn., he says.

Schools making exemplary progress should be used as learning sites for other schools, Moore recommends. “Only if schools fail to respond to the opportunity to improve should they be taken under direct oversight through the remediation and probation procedures established in the law.”

Moore threatened to file suit if Johnson tries to put the plan in effect.

Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on School Policy, offers
one of the more charitable views, saying reform groups should work to improve the plan rather than scuttle it. Under former Supt. Ted Kimbrough, central office "did nothing to help failing schools," he notes. In contrast, Johnson is moving in the right direction by looking at schools "on the basis of their performance, which is central to reform" and by focusing on support and assistance.

Focusing on test scores, Johnson's proposal finds "little evidence that children are learning more, except in isolated instances."

In contrast, focusing on what schools are doing, the Consortium on Chicago School Research has found that roughly a third of elementary schools are pursuing systemic restructuring that eventually should pay off in higher student achievement. Says Consortium co-director Anthony Bryk of the University of Chicago, "Short-term profitability [meaning higher test scores] is not an adequate criterion against which to assess progress. In fact, short-term profits might plummet."

This theme was sounded over and over at the March 11 hearing.

'Board to blame'

For example, Neil Bosanko, chair of the local school council at Bowen High School, said "reform was in its infancy stage" during the years under scrutiny. At the same time, he said, Bowen had to grapple with selecting a new principal, building rehab work that disrupted classes and losing its truant officers to board-imposed budget cuts, and a large number of experienced teachers to early retirement. "Will these factors be considered in the designation process before the school and its students are once again sent the message that they are less than capable?" he asked.

Bosanko also spoke for many when he suggested that the School Board is more to blame for school shortcomings than are the schools themselves. Noting that Bowen has begun to establish schools-within-a-school, he said, "All in all, we are confident that Bowen is on the rebound. [It] has accomplished this in spite of the Board of Education, not because of it."

Measuring different things

Eric Outten, chair of the local school council at Hirsch High School, raised another common concern: conflicts between the Johnson plan and the state's school accountability process, which steers schools away from standardized tests such as those used in Chicago. "Just when the state and the board are looking at alternatives to the Iowa tests, [the Iowas] become the main focus for this plan. Now we have a situation where different things are being measured by the state and the superintendent." (See CATALYST, March 1993.)

In an interview, Thomas Reese, president of the Chicago Teachers Union, told CATALYST the plan should focus on the learning outcome standards the board developed in cooperation with the union. (See CATALYST, December 1993.) Johnson's plan doesn't even mention those standards.

"The superintendent's plan is PR-driven," Reese charges, "Since the newspapers put so much emphasis on test scores, she felt like she had to do the same."

However, Professor Herbert Walberg...
of the University of Illinois at Chicago praises Johnson’s “frank and honest assessment” that only about 11 percent of the schools were showing steady progress. Walberg is a school-choice advocate who has been at odds with those who claim progress is being made under reform.

While a number of activists have expressed fears that money and resources will be shifted from schools that are performing well to those that aren’t, Johnson told those at the hearing, “We’re not taking away funds. We’re seeking to identify more and write more proposals for grants.”

Later, Johnson told CATALYST, “Schools may choose to use their current funding differently as a result of taking a closer look at their school improvement plans and the desired outcomes they which to achieve for their children.”

Johnson’s plan emerged against a backdrop of renewed skepticism about the commitment of the board and central office to local school control. While former Supt. Kimbrough was seen as an antagonist, Johnson was believed to be a supporter. Yet, since her arrival last August, schools have been shaken by a number of top-down orders.

‘Plan worked in New York’

In September, the board, with Johnson’s support and the agreement of the teachers union, mandated that high schools switch from 40-minute periods to 50-minute periods, a move aimed at saving money. In February, central office threatened local school council members with removal if they failed to submit state-required financial disclosure forms on time; the administration backed off only after the reform organization Schools First, affiliated with Designs for Change, filed suit, charging the board had no standing to take such action.

Further, Reece questions how the board could organize such a “large and complex effort” at a time when it can’t get its payroll straight. The union is suing the board over failure to pay some 700 staffers.

However, such administrative issues are receiving School Board attention; with help from the business community, the board is putting together a restructuring initiative aimed at transforming central office into a “service unit” that helps and supports schools.

Johnson’s three-tiered plan, which she said she used successfully as a district superintendent in New York City, was meant to be part of that larger effort.

Though the school system’s financial crisis occupied Johnson and the board into November, Johnson has come under fire for not acting sooner to move school improvement along. Some of the business leaders who championed her selection have complained quietly, while School Board members have delivered a public do-it-or-else message.

In February, four key central office staffers, including Jo Ann Wooden Roberts, Johnson’s choice for operations chief, were fired or forced out.

Regulations shaping up for Learning Zone

The Learning Zone Advisory Committee is rushing to finish its recommendations for an act to create a Learning Zone that would include about 10 percent of Chicago’s schools. (See CATALYST, February 1994.)

Schools in the Learning Zone would be freed from most state and School Board regulations and most state laws. Civil rights laws and the Open Meetings Act are examples of laws that schools would still have to follow.

Here are some of the key proposals in a preliminary draft.

Schools would apply to be part of the Learning Zone by writing proposals outlining what they want to do. Next year would be for applications and planning; operations would begin in September 1995.

Application would require a majority vote of a school’s local school council and approval from staff by the same percentage required to obtain a waiver of union rules—63.5 percent next year, but only 51 percent after September 1995.

Schools would still be subject to financial audits and an outside performance review, and they would still have to take the state IGAP tests and adhere to the new Chicago Learning Outcomes Standards.

Schools would get their budgets in a lump sum that would account for total enrollment and the number of kids who qualify for specially-funded programs. The lump sum would include maintenance, repairs and other operations costs.

Each school would have to pay an “assessment” to central office, in exchange for services like payroll and access to the central computer system and emergency funds. Schools might be able to use outside vendors, too.

Schools would not be permitted to replace current staff.

Committee chair Diana Nelson says suggestions are still welcome. Nelson can be reached at Designs for Change: (312) 857-9292.

Smaller school board, new taxes?

Mayor Richard M. Daley rejected all the names forwarded to him last year by the School Board Nominating Commission to fill four School Board seats that became available last May 31. Two of the members whose terms expired have resigned, and two continue to serve. Three more terms expire this May 31.

Under the Reform Act, the Nominating Commission must now come up with 21 candidates, three for each of the seven vacancies. By mid-March, it had received only 12 applications.

State Sen. Emil Jones (D-Chicago) has introduced legislation cutting the board from 15 members to 9 members and permitting the mayor to handpick an interim board that would serve until May 15, 1995. Senate Republicans have talked about eliminating the Nominating Commission altogether.

Senate Republicans nudged School Board leaders to hold what would be their first property tax referendum in a quarter of a century.

Republicans warned that it would be difficult politically to produce more state money if the board doesn’t pursue local sources first. The school system faces a projected revenue shortfall of some $325 million for the 1995-96 school year.

Debra Williams
Comings and goings


FUTURE TEACHERS Twenty-two seniors from 14 Chicago public high schools are among 60 chosen statewide for the Golden Apple Scholars Program, which provides financial and moral support for students seeking to become teachers in low-income communities. More than 700 students applied for the program.

GOLDEN APPLE TEACHERS Four Chicago public school teachers are among 10 winners of the 1994 Golden Apple Teaching Award; recipients receive a $2,500 grant, a paid, tuition-free sabbatical at Northwestern University and a personal computer. Chicago winners are: Lillian Degand, Peterson; Rosa P. Brown, McDade Classical; Susan Kajiwara-Ansai, Norwood Park; and Lois La Galle, Inter-American Magnet.

STUDENT, TEACHER SURVEYS The Consortium on Chicago School Research will conduct two surveys in Chicago public schools this spring: one of students in 6th, 8th and 10th grades, and another of all elementary and high school teachers. (Previous surveys were of principals and elementary teachers.) Schools that participate and have a 50 percent or higher response rate will be given reports of their own results.

AT PERSHING ROAD Norma Tsuhako has been appointed secretary for the School Board, succeeding Thomas Corcoran. Tsuhako was assistant secretary for 12 years; prior to that, she was a library aide and clerk at Stockton Elementary. Rosita Marcano, former coordinator for Subdistrict 1, has moved up to director in the Office of Reform.

3rd place!

This year's third-place winner of the Illinois Academic Decathlon was Kenwood Academy. (Left to right) Jennifer Broberg, Tayasir Gobbour, Leland Cross, Aaron Bloom, Parni Allen, Lance Fout, Chris Kaoel, Yempo Dan, Jesus Valdez and Coach John Hähn.

CHICAGOANS Many Chicagoans are among 14 members appointed by Gov. Jim Edgar to the new Task Force on School To Work Transition. The appointees are Milton Davis, chairman of South Shore Bank; Ron Giwitz, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor; Henny Mendoza, president of the Chicago Federation of Labor; John Gielamino, Kelly High; Edward Guerra, Farnam High; William H. Lavin, Pilsen Academy; Mira L. Strasburg, Hamilton; Charles R. Vietsen, Hubbard High. The following interim or acting principals have received contracts expiring in June 1995: Leon Hudnal Jr., Morse; Barbara J. Martin, Holmes; Frank Blatnick, Yates; Barbara J. Edwards, Harlan Community Academy; Maria L. Howell, Tonti; Mary Ellen Mengovan, Peabody; Margaret Niedermayer, Chappell; Debra Pittman-Banks, Tilton (formerly teacher, Gray); Larry Thomas, Coles.

MORE PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS The following interim or acting principals have received contracts expiring in June 1994: Herman Escobar, Nixon; William Harris, Luella (formerly acting assistant, Tilden High); Richard J. Hart, Halmine; Marcia Lee Hartnell, Suder; Darlene McClellon, Northside Learning Center; Patricia Taylor, Marcus Garvey; Karen Wilson, Nansen (formerly teacher, Hilliard Adult Education Center).

OOPS In our March issue, we mistakenly identified Earhart Elementary as a branch of the Hovey, something it ceased to be with the school-to-work task force. Our apologies.

Lorraine Forte, Linda Lenz
Marshall helps freshmen pass courses, stay in school

Five years ago, Marshall High teacher Barry Little had a student who fell prey to a common freshman trap: He flunked English and math.

According to education research and conventional wisdom, Little's student was a prime candidate for a path of continued failure. Eventually, he was likely either to drop out or be "pushed out" by the school.

But four years later, thanks in large part to Marshall's dropout prevention program, the young man graduated third in his class.

"The key to keeping potential dropouts in school is identifying them in the 9th grade," says Little, director of the program, called Cooperative Learning. "Children who pass all of their classes as freshmen are 80 percent more likely to graduate than those who fail a subject."

Funded through the Board of Education's Bureau of Student Support Services, Little says the seven-year-old program works by combining early intervention, student responsibility, tutoring and teacher involvement. Last year, 78 percent of the program's students passed all of their courses. Currently, 63 students are participating.

Students enter the program through referrals, primarily from 9th-grade teachers who have agreed to help identify students who need extra help. Little, however, notes that students are also led to Cooperative Learning through other sources: A friend may mention the program at lunch, or a student may simply walk in one day and say he needs some help.

Little meets with students individually to map out a service plan, identifying specific tutoring goals and ways to measure success. "It's crucial for the student to make his or her own commitment to the program," Little contends. "We have both the student and a parent sign the service plan before tutoring begins."

Tutoring is conducted before and after school; both adult and student tutors work with the students. Little, a tutor himself, points out that peer tutoring has typically proven more effective.

"Often, children who have the most difficulty in the 9th grade are loners," he says. "Peer tutoring gives them an opportunity to develop many of the social skills they need to succeed in school."

Ninth-grade English teacher Shaina Brown is another enthusiastic advocate of peer tutoring. "It's an important support system for the children. The usual pressure to perform is off, and students can get instant feedback."

The program also offers incentives for improvement. Recently, participants whose grades improved the most received $50 gift certificates for Walgreen's, supplied by the Chicago Youth Success Foundation. The foundation has supplied other incentives, including basketballs autographed by former Chicago Bulls superstar Michael Jordan.

One 9th-grader (Little asked that students' names not be published) tells how the program helped him: "My sister told me about the program and I felt like I needed some help. My grades have gone up in geography, typing and algebra."

John Toman