More math, science mean something's gotta give

by Dan Weissmann

To workers in the field, the Board of Education's decision to add two years of science and a year of math to high school graduation requirements is like a magician saying he'll pull an elephant out of his hat.

"I'm in favor of science education, but it's not clear to me or to anybody how it's gonna be paid for," says Wade Freeman, a University of Illinois chemistry professor who helped put a "chemistry van" on the road to serve Chicago's often ill-equipped high schools. The cost of extra teachers alone is an estimated $12 million.

When asked where the money will come from for extra math and science teachers, extra science labs and equipment and staff training, Charley Gillispie, the board's chief financial officer, says only that the system will "have to become efficient" and "find innovative ways of using technology."

Currently, the School Board is looking for upwards of $150 million to get schools open next September and provide employees with what would be their first raises in two years.

And even if the School Board does find the money for more math and science courses, schools will have a hard time finding the teachers. As it is, the board's recruiting staff considers math and science "areas of systemic need," where new teachers may be hired without state certification.

Since the new requirements will put a squeeze on vocational, art and other courses, the School Board also faces some sticky negotiations with the Chicago Teachers Union. In the April issue of the Chicago Union Teacher, President Thomas Reese waves a caution flag.

"It's admirable that the board wishes to increase the academic preparedness of our students," he says. "I just hope they realize what the long-term implications will be."

The squeeze will get tighter if Supt. Argie Johnson also gets board approval to require two years of a foreign language; she recently appointed a task force to study the issue and promised to bring a proposal to the board soon.

Board officials are fully aware of these problems, but their attitude is: You've got to start somewhere. "If we said, 'We have to wait until we have all the teachers, we have to wait until we have all the infrastructure, we'd never get anywhere,' says Adrian Beverly, assistant superintendent for instructional support. "That really lets people off the hook. Saying, 'We've got to wait until we get the income tax raised,' that really lets people off the hook."

Should other requirements—like

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'Reconstitution' . . .

■ Supt. Argie Johnson (right) wants it for Austin High.
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■ It's happening in other cities, too.
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■ Proposed legislation would make it easier.
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Higher grad requirements a smart move

The School Board's numbers may not add up, but it definitely knows the score. When school officials added two years of science and one year of math to high school graduation requirements, they acknowledged that they didn’t know where they’d get the extra teachers or the extra money to pay for them. But as Assistant Supt. Adrian Beverly points out, “If we said, ‘We have to wait until we have all the teachers, we have to wait until we have all the infrastructure,’ we’d never get anywhere.”

By approving the higher requirements and phasing them in over four years, Supt. Argie Johnson and the board are helping to generate the resources they’ll need. First, the promise that jobs lie ahead may well encourage current and prospective teachers to work toward teaching certificates in math and science. Second, school officials are laying claim to the money that will be needed to pay for additional teachers; Charley Gillispie, the board’s chief financial officer, reports that he’s already figured $1 million into the proposed 1996-97 budget for the first year of the phase-in. Given all the competing demands for School Board revenue, extra math and science courses wouldn’t have a chance if the money were not earmarked in advance.

Some parents and educators have a different concern: Since many Chicago students don’t go to college, they ask, wouldn’t they be better off taking job-skills courses instead? We agree with the board that the answer is an emphatic “NO,” for several reasons.

For one, if students are interested in a job with a real future, especially in a world increasingly driven by technology, they need a solid grounding in math and science. Second, a student can’t choose whether or not to go to college if he or she doesn’t have the courses required for admission. In those cases, it’s the high school and college that are doing the choosing. Third, students who do go on to college often are forced to take remedial courses during their first year, learning concepts they should have been taught in high school and wasting time and money in the process. Fourth, employer surveys have shown, time after time, that what businesses really look for in potential employees are the kinds of skills developed in well-taught academic courses, such as thinking clearly and understanding and applying concepts. We emphasize well taught; again, as school officials acknowledge, instruction must improve, too. Otherwise, the extra courses won’t mean much for thousands of students. Finally, other requirements, such as physical education and a year each of art and music, potentially could be eased so students could still take job-skills courses.

Meanwhile, Illinois’ new state superintendent of education is proposing that high school students be required to demonstrate that they have acquired a certain level of knowledge and skills. Illinois has laid some of the groundwork for this high-stakes show-and-tell by setting learning standards and developing the IGAP tests to match. But in its legislative debut, the superintendent’s idea got hooted down. The State of Oregon, however, is forging ahead with a similar plan.

AWARD WINNER Managing Editor Lorraine Forte has won a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Educational Press Association of America for her article on the impact of the School Board’s 1993 decision to lay off all its truant officers. Published in the May 1994 issue, the article highlighted repercussions ranging from the predictable—chronic truancy rose—to the unexpected—requests for clothing supplied by a child welfare group, typically made by truant officers, plunged.

CATALYST ON THE AIR Chicago’s increased math and science requirements will be the topic of discussion on the May 7 edition of “City Voices,” which is broadcast every Sunday from 8 a.m. to 8:30 a.m. on Radio WNUR-FM, 95.5. CATALYST Editor and Publisher Linda Lenz is the host of “City Voices” the first Sunday of every month.
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Chicago's phase-in

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<td>Fall 1999</td>
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Chicago's need for teachers

![Bar chart showing need for teachers in Chicago](chart.png)

NOTE: CATALYST estimates of projected need are based on the assumptions that (1) three-fourths of all students would be enrolled in math and science classes and (2) course failure and dropout rates would not change, meaning that makeup classes would be required at the same rate.

Newly certified teachers

1990-1994, statewide

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<td>Science</td>
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<td>Biology</td>
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<td>Computer science</td>
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Source: Illinois State Teacher Certification Board

Cook County suburbs

Districts requiring:
- 3 math, 3 science: 7%
- 2 math, 2 science: 68%
- 2 math, 1 science: 25%

Source: CATALYST interviews
those mandating a minimum of art, music and gym courses—be reconsidered? How should schools be staffed? Should there be a tax increase? By moving ahead with the new requirements, says Beverly, the board forces itself, taxpayers, the union and state legislators to examine their priorities: "We need to look at everything," says Beverly. "Everything has to be on the table—and that's what 3+3 has done."

By phasing in the new requirements, the board also is allowing some time for solutions to emerge. Not until September 1999 will schools have to be fully staffed and equipped to handle three years of math and three of science for all their students.

'Good posturing'

"This is good posturing for the General Assembly," says Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on School Policy. And because the phase-in doesn't even begin for a year and a half, the board is in the "advantageous position of sounding like they're being tough and asking more of students, but not having to spend any new money yet."

Further, Hess notes, by the time the costs actually hit, they already will have been figured into spending projections and won't stand out as a separate, add-on program. "It will be considered just another part of the budget that determines what the deficit will be," he says. In fact, Gillispie says he already has factored in a million dollars toward the new requirements in his 1996-97 spending forecast.

Even though Hess sees how the strategy can benefit the board, he is outraged by the mandate. "Mandating that schools add three more courses is contradictory to basic reform strategy," says Hess, "and that's why I oppose it. It's not because I don't think the kids could use the classes. It's because I don't think the board should be mandating inputs. If that strategy had worked, we wouldn't have needed a school reform movement. I mean, are these people unaware that this is not a centralized, mandate-from-the-top kind of system?"

The whole issue came as a surprise to members of the high school subdistrict council, who went to their February meeting expecting only to vote on the subdistrict superintendent's contract. In addition, "they sprang this on us, about increasing math and science requirements," says Donna Ruiz, a delegate from the Juarez High Local School Council. "They told us they'd have a public meeting to see how the public felt about it, and they said they'd get back to us."

Surprise decision?

However, Ruiz and many other parents were unable to attend the hearing scheduled in their area because it was held at 10 a.m., when they were at work. And she didn't hear anything from the subdistrict office until the next subdistrict council meeting, when officials announced that the new requirements had been approved.

"The idea was a surprise to me," agrees Juarez LSC Chair Imelda Mora, who feels that the board didn't try hard enough to involve LSCs in the decision making.

But Betty Porter, chair of the Chicago Vocational High School LSC, is taking the development in stride. "We're used to surprises," she says. "Remember the 50-minute period? We had 3,000 children show up at school, and nobody knew where they were supposed to go. We were in the auditorium, and parents were screaming at us, 'How could you do this?' And I said, 'We did not do this. We'd like to scream at someone too.'"

Unlike that nightmare, this surprise doesn't faze her. "It's okay," she says with a chuckle. "We're up for the job. We're sort of tough-skinned now, and I do see some positive things coming out of this."

In any event, the law is on the School Board's side. Last November, the board got the Legislature to amend the School Reform Act to make clear that the School Board has the authority to set citywide graduation requirements.

The push for the higher requirements came in large part from the Chicago Systemic Initiative, a five-year, $15 million project funded by the National Science Foundation to improve math and science teaching across the city. In applying for the NSF grant, Board of Education staff promised to lobby for the change. The Initiative's plan also calls for revising the K-8 math curriculum so that all students learn algebra by the end of 8th grade.

CSIT Project Director Eric Hamilton calls the program "a unified assault for good on all fronts," which includes training teachers, involving parents, changing curriculum and expanding and publicizing resources that already exist at local universities and museums. He predicts that by the time the new requirements are fully in place (in fall 1999), half of all 8th-graders will be learning algebra.
The challenges of making 3+3 work

Finding qualified teachers

"We're already short of math and science teachers," says Kathy Ruffalo, a counselor at Sullivan High.

Jay Swanson, assistant principal at Juarez High, notes three of his school's eight science teachers are still working toward their state credentials.

A CATALYST analysis of course-taking and course-failure rates of students indicates the school system will need as many as 280 additional science teachers, mainly in chemistry and physics. Yet, statewide, only 343 people received chemistry or physics teaching certificates from 1990 through 1994—not even enough to keep up with statewide demand, according to Sue Bentz, secretary to the state's teacher certification board. The total number of science certificates awarded was 1,631.

The supply-and-demand picture is brighter in math. According to the CATALYST analysis, Chicago schools will need about an additional 120 math teachers; currently they have 612. statewide, about 1,760 people got math certificates from 1990 through 1994.

Adrian Beverly, assistant superintendent for instructional support, says the board has three strategies for increasing the teacher supply: Hiring recently retired teachers to work part time, working with universities to steer more students into math and science education and expanding programs like Teachers for Chicago, which enable college graduates to work toward certificates while teaching in the schools.

Paying for extra teachers

Although the school system may need about 400 new math and science teachers, it's planning for a net increase of only 240 in the total high school teaching force. That's because many of the new math and science teachers, in effect, will take the place of teachers currently teaching non-required courses.

To leave time for students to take a few electives and make-up courses, the board plans to add enough teachers so that students at non-vocational schools will get to take one more course sometime during their high school years. Vocational schools, where time for electives already is eaten up by shop classes, will get enough extra teachers so that students can take three more courses.

The board estimates that these staffing changes will cost an extra $12 million in salary and benefits each year. Chief Financial Officer Charley Gillispie says that about $1 million already has been added to the proposed 1996-97 budget to pay for new teachers needed during the first year of the phase-in of the new requirements.

Paying for new science labs

A survey conducted in the late 1980s by the board's science director found that requiring three years of science would leave 14 schools short of biology labs, 42 schools short of chemistry labs and 48 schools short of physics labs. And that's not counting the four schools that had no chemistry labs and the eight schools that had no physics labs.

Also, many labs were in bad shape. Finally, in 1993, the Public Building Commission upgraded labs at 19 high schools, installing new floors, cabinets, counters, plumbing and electrical wiring. The project cost $3 million.

And once labs are built or rehabbed, that's not the end of expenses. "When you cover electrical, plumbing and things like that, it doesn't mean that you've got the equipment you need," notes Linda Pierczalski, principal of Bogan High School in the Ashburn community. Textbooks alone cost $60 to $80 apiece, she says, adding that the $270,000 the PBC spent on Bogan's labs "wasn't nearly enough to do the labs the way we would want them—though it's better than it was."

Board officials say that schools simply will have to get creative—and may have to dip into their state Chapter 1 money—to make science teaching effective. Many scientific experiments can be simulated by computers, they note. Also, the board plans to encourage new ways of teaching science, ways that may not require as many labs as the survey suggested.
Computer simulations already are part of the science curriculum at Paul Robeson High in Englewood. Although computer equipment and software may be less costly than science labs, there are still additional costs. Equipping a room with eight to ten suitable computers might take $20,000, estimates Tim Colburn, Robeson’s programmer, and software ranges from $200 to $10,000 a program. Many older buildings, he adds, would need new wiring.

And some schools, like Juarez in Pilsen and Bogan in Ashburn, are so overcrowded that there’s not much room for extra courses of any kind.

**Upgrading instruction**

Last school year, 29 percent of high school students failed a math course, and 25 percent failed a science course, suggesting that the way these courses are taught must change, too. “The observation that you have to teach math and science differently is wholly correct,” says Eric Hamilton, director of the Chicago Systemic Initiative and one of the biggest proponents of the new requirements. The Initiative is pursuing this goal by providing grants and guidance to schools. At the high school level, Initiative staff are working with “design teams” from 10 schools.

So far, the prospects are not encouraging. Although teachers on the teams give high marks to some of the training the Initiative has sponsored, they say that substantial change is unlikely without an infusion of resources—like planning time, computer equipment and other materials.

“We can’t use what we’re learning at these training sessions because we don’t have computers to work on,” says Carl Crowe, chair of the science department at Steinmetz High in Belmont-Cragin.

“It’s not just whether the math lab is there, or the computer lab. There just is not the time to plan a lesson that will use them effectively, or to go to the lab to set it up,” adds Willimethra Davenport, a biology teacher at Fenger High in Roseland.

Hamilton also points to a couple of programs, the College Preparatory Math Program (CPMP) and the Chemistry Van (both developed and run by the University of Illinois at Chicago),

What it takes to graduate

The following chart shows high school graduation requirements in the 10 cities that received grants under the National Science Foundation’s Urban Systemic Initiative. Each city also requires a half-year of health education.

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**Baltimore**

- 1 fine arts
- 1 technology
- 3 to 5 semesters of electives
- At least 2 in foreign language or advanced technology, or, alternatively, 4 in a career-tech program
- 75 hours of community service
- Passing score on a district test

**Chicago**

- 1 art or drafting
- 1 music
- 12 semesters of electives

**Cincinnati**

- 1 fine arts
- Students who complete a 2-year, 3-hours-a-day block of vocational education are excused from a year of science and half a year of fine arts.

**Dallas**

- Regular track: 7 electives
- Advanced track: 1 computer science, 1 fine arts or speech, 3 electives
- Honors track: Same requirements as advanced, including at least 5 honors or Advanced Placement courses

**Detroit**

- .5 computer science
- 4 semesters vocational ed, foreign language, performing arts, home economics
- 200 hours of work experience, which can include volunteer work

**El Paso**

- Regular diploma: 8 electives, .5 economics
- Advanced diploma: 1 computer science, 2 foreign language, 1 fine arts, 3 electives

**Los Angeles**

- 1 fine arts or foreign language
- 1 semester of life management
- 12 semesters of electives
- Passing scores on district tests in reading, math, composition

**Miami**

- .5 life management skills
- .5 practical arts
- .5 fine arts
- 9 electives
- Community service project
- Passing score on state test

**New York**

- 2 humanities (art, music or foreign language)
- 3 to 5 of sequential courses in a subject
- 1 semester of electives

**Phoenix**

- 1 humanities, fine arts or foreign language
- 1 practical arts

*Students enrolled in the regular track must take two years of science; those in the advanced track must take three.**

After 2 years, students may seek waivers for certain reasons, such as needing other courses to graduate.

Source: CATALYST interviews with school officials.
Raising requirements: The pros and cons

For some, the question raised by the board's decision to up science and math requirements is not "Can they do it?" but "Should they?" Skeptics raise several related questions:

■ Won't higher graduation requirements cause more kids to drop out?

"When you think about making that a requirement for all students, you have to realize that all students are not going to college," says Barbara Edwards, principal of Harlan High in Roseland. "Are we programming our children for failure? I think that these are questions that have to be raised."

In fact, higher requirements don't lead to higher dropout rates, says School Board officials, pointing to research by Jeffrey Mirel, an education policy professor at Northern Illinois University, and David Angus, an education professor at the University of Michigan.

Mirel and Angus compared records of student course-taking with graduation rates throughout the country from 1928 to the present. As academic requirements increased over the last 20 years, they found, dropout rates generally stayed the same or, in the case of African Americans, decreased.

Writing in the summer 1994 issue of American Educator, a publication of the American Federation of Teachers, the researchers report, "In the past decade, minority students have increased their amount of academic course-taking at a faster rate than white students. At the same time, the high school dropout rate has fallen, particularly among black students."

Locally, the question of setting students up for failure has come up before. "Eight or more years ago, the state decided to require students to take two years of math, and we all thought, 'Oh my God, how can we ask them to take geometry?'" recalls Daniel Patronilli, a programmer at Gage Park High. "We thought it would be difficult because generally our teachers say it's difficult to teach geometry."

As it turned out, the staff were in for a surprise. "Now," he says, "it seems that the failure rate in geometry isn't any different from the failure rate in any other math subject, and it seems that requirement did fine."

Fred Hess, executive director of the Chicago Panel on School Policy, notes there are two ways to look at increased course requirements. "One way of thinking says that if you increase the number of 'gatekeeper' courses, you narrow the 'gate' and make it more difficult for students to graduate," he says. "The other way of thinking says that the first course in any sequence is really the gatekeeper, and anyone who gets past that one is probably going to do fine."

Also, school officials point out that they have a multimillion dollar, city-wide program funded by the National Science Foundation that is designed to improve math and science education. Called the Chicago Systemic Initiative, the program aims to better prepare 8th-graders for high school courses and improve math and science teaching in high schools.

■ Even if students are ready for the additional courses, don't some kids need other courses more?

"Eighty percent of our kids don't go to post-secondary education," says Juarez Assistant Principal Jay Swanson. "Job skills are an absolute necessity to our kids. Students are curious to know things like, 'How do we begin a career in data processing?' We have a great computer department, but this looks like it'll reduce access to that."

And schools do tend to staff for what the board requires. "When our social studies classes went from one year to three years," says Gage Park programmer Patronilli, "we immediately saw a drop in the number of business teachers and home ec teachers."

School Board officials place a higher

Dan Weissmann
priority on preparing students for college, although they say that the new requirements won’t shortchange students who don’t go on to college. “We’re looking at a very technology-, math- and science-oriented workplace,” says Adrian Beverly, assistant superintendent for instructional support. “How do we prepare our students for that workforce without offering additional math, science and technology opportunities?” He cites a survey of employers that lists a number of skills, like critical thinking, that he says math and science courses help develop.

School Board officials also say that more students would go to college if they had the required courses. Since 1990, Illinois’ public universities, including Chicago State and Northeastern Illinois, have required entering students to have three years each of science and math. According to School Board records, only a third of Chicago’s 1994 graduates met those requirements.

At vocational schools, student schedules are so filled up with vocational requirements that students who want to go to college often have to take extra courses—sometimes in summer school or after regular school hours—to meet admission requirements. At Prosser Vocational High, for example, about 120 of the school’s 1,090 students choose a longer school day to fit in college admissions requirements, according to programmer Dennis Divoky; another 20 to 25 take the extra courses in summer school.

Universities sometimes accept students who fall short on admissions requirements, but they then enroll these students in remedial classes, which don’t count toward their college diplomas.

“The point is, our students have basically one resource, and that’s time,” Supt. Argie Johnson, herself a former science teacher, told the board’s instruction committee when she formally proposed the new requirements in February. “And if we don’t prepare them to go to college, [they’ll] waste time being remediated.”

“The other thing they are wasting is grants,” Johnson noted. If students spend one or two years taking remedial courses, she explained, their economic assistance grants will run out before they can graduate.

For students who don’t go on to college, Beverly raises the possibility that some vocational courses could count toward the new graduation requirements. “An electronics teacher is teaching physics,” he points out. “A home economics teacher is teaching physics.”

While there is a nationwide push to infuse more academic content into vocational courses, Beverly’s suggestions face some obstacles. For one, home economics teachers and electronics teachers may not be certified to teach physics. Current state guidelines require that teachers be certified in the subjects they teach, especially those required for graduation.

Also, colleges might resist counting vocational courses toward science and math admissions requirements. John Everett, principal of Simeon Vocational High School in Chatham, offers a case in point. He notes that the National College Athletic Association’s academic clearinghouse requires students to take 11 “core courses” in high school to qualify for sports scholarships. Vocational courses—even cerebral ones like architectural drafting—don’t count. One recent Simeon graduate was nearly denied the chance to play for the University of Illinois because the clearinghouse refused to count his drafting course as a “core,” the principal reports. Everett eventually managed to get the clearinghouse to accept an advanced science course the student had taken in 8th grade.

However, the four-year phase-in of the new requirements does leave time for vocational curricula to be revised, and even for teachers to get new certification.

■ Even if kids need to know more math and science, is raising course requirements the best way to go?

“It is really important for a really high-quality math program to be available to all students,” says Margaret Small, a math teacher at Lake View High who works with the highly regarded College Preparatory Math Program (CPMP). But to Small, a longer program is not always a better one.

“A few years ago, I proposed to our local school council that Lake View require three years of math for all students,” she recalls. “Some teachers disagreed with me . . . and I’ve been won over to their point of view.”

Small says she recognized that one reason CPMP has been so successful at teaching more kids higher math is that students choose to enroll in it. “For the kids who do decide to take three or four or five years of math, it’s a real empowering choice for them,” she says. “It’s a sign of their intellectual growth and commitment.”

Second, says Small, if students are to truly benefit from additional math courses, more teachers need to learn and use better teaching techniques. “But we’re talking about starting with the requirement first—with the dropout rates we have?” she notes. “I think everybody should have three years of math, but I don’t think everybody should just take [traditional] algebra, geometry and trigonometry. Should we do that, so the kids who are not real successful in a totally abstract, algebraic environment have to struggle with it for one more year?”

Dan Weissmann
Pullman Elementary aims to get kids ready

by Lynnette Richardson

One of the first things you notice about Pullman Elementary School on the Far South Side is that it’s NOISY. Kids talk a lot to each other in class.

But that’s the way it’s supposed to be under a different form of teaching the Pullman faculty has embraced as it works to increase students’ understanding of math and science and better prepare them for high school. Called cooperative learning, the form makes teachers out of the children themselves.

Before, the adult teachers lectured about math concepts and used the blackboard to demonstrate how to solve math problems; the students followed along in their textbooks. If students had questions, they raised their hands. And sometimes they too worked out problems on the blackboard. Then, at the end of each chapter, they answered questions from the book or completed problems on mimeographed worksheets, relying basically on what they had committed to memory. It was all very orderly—and quiet.

Now, instruction is more active. Working in small groups, students use objects, such as blocks, sticks and geometric shapes, to figure out the answers to problems. If they get stumped, they consult a textbook or video or the teacher, who circulates through the room, acting as a coach. Although students arrive at the same answer as they did under the old style of teaching, says kindergarten teacher Pat McNab, “They respond quicker and learn faster with hands-on.”

“I can take a cone and ask, ‘What’s the base of the cone?’ and right away they will be able to say ‘circle,’” says Karen Brennan, who teaches 2nd- and 3rd-graders. “They can see it instead of me just telling them.”

The use of hands-on, cooperative learning is one of several initiatives that have made Pullman a leader in the Chicago Systemic Initiative (CSI), a citywide effort to upgrade the teaching of math and science.

CSI itself, which gives grants and guidance to schools, provided the spark, according to Principal Mary Goosby.

**Starts with staff buy-in**

After winning 100 percent backing from her staff, Goosby assembled a “design team,” composed of administrators, teachers and parents, to evaluate the school’s math and science programs and determine what needed to change. Then, with $147,000 in assorted grants and state Chapter 1 funds, Pullman set out to revise its curriculum, tap into technology and, most important, teach its teachers how to teach in new and better ways.

Last fall, the school signed on with the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science, which is housed at the Illinois Institute of Technology. Two days a month, 11 to 13 Pullman teachers spend the entire school day at the academy, learning about math and science and ways to teach them. Back home, substitute teachers cover their classes. By June 1997, all of Pullman’s 35 teachers are expected to have completed the training.

McNab says the academy taught her “what to do with the materials I already had. [It] gave me ideas to build on. I never thought that [kindergartners] could use calculators.”

“They started with the basics of what a child needed to know first in order to learn another skill and get to those higher-level thinking skills,” says Brennan.

The typical elementary school teacher has had no more than six college credit hours each in math and science, notes Joseph Frattaroli, the academy’s chief operating officer. “Teachers can’t teach what they don’t know,” he points out.

In addition to the on-campus class-

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**The cost of making change**

- **$80,000**  
National Science Foundation  
Computers and laser disks, conferences, substitute teachers, teacher stipends for classroom supplies, consultants, resource development, equipment, supplies for math and science labs.

- **$50,000**  
State Chapter 1  
Mostly rewiring the building to accommodate new technology.

- **$10,000**  
Illinois State Board of Education, Change Grant  
Stipends for teachers to work this summer on new math and science assessments for 4th- and 8th-graders.

- **$7,000**  
Chicago Systemic Initiative  
Train design team to evaluate the school and write a new school improvement plan.

Notes: (1) Pullman received $80,000 from NSF after President Clinton was forced to cancel an NSF-planned visit to the school last year. (2) The Teachers Academy charges $25 per pupil; Pullman will pay $15,750 for three years of training.
Parents need to understand

Frattaroli says that while good teaching and good materials are the key to improving students' achievement in math and science, parents can contribute. "Parents need to understand or at least appreciate the role math and science play and will play in their children's lives," he says.

In addition to receiving academy training, Pullman teachers also have attended workshops on the use of calculators, computers, laser disks and the Internet, as well as workshops on efficacy and school improvement.

Brennan especially likes laser disks, which are, in effect, an advanced form of a video cassette recorder. Teachers can "call up" lessons to introduce a new subject, reinforce what they're teaching or answer children's questions.

"The laser disk is a real visual way to build a basis for what we're going to teach," adds Brennan. "We can always refer to something they saw on the disk."

"It's better learning from the laser disk because we have more examples of how things are," concurs 6th-grader Betty Loera.

Further, the school's five 7th- and 8th-grade teachers are being encouraged to take courses that will qualify them for state math and science teaching certificates. Goosby and other administrators in Subdistrict 10 are working with Chicago State University to have the required courses taught at the subdistrict office.

Change has taken hold quickly at Pullman. Until recently, only primary teachers were attending the teachers academy; already some intermediate and upper-grade teachers have begun to use cooperative learning.

And teachers from each grade level plunged into rewriting the science curriculum—prematurely. Goosby says the teachers academy advised them to wait until they had completed the science half of the training—math comes first because it forms a basis for science.

Once teacher training is complete, Pullman plans to integrate math and science throughout its curriculum. Goosby also plans to invite math and science professionals to speak with students about careers in math and science.

Results already

Though Pullman has just begun its math and science push, it is seeing results already. Parents Ponce and Sharp both say their children are doing better. "Before I transferred my son back to Pullman he was getting D's. Now he's getting A's and B's," says Sharp. And Betty Loera says she's getting better grades, too: "I get A's in science; I used to get B's."

Brennan says her children "love science and like math a lot. I'm going to assume that if they're enjoying the class, then they're learning more than if they were totally bored and totally tuning me out." She adds that they catch on quicker, too.

Asked what it takes to transform a whole school, Goosby answers not so simply. What it takes, she says, is planning, teacher training, parental involvement, money and patience. "If you leave out anything, then you have an imbalance," says Goosby. "I can't say which one is more important than the other."
Not just passing courses

Oregon tells high school kids: ‘Show what you know’

by William Graves

As an 8th-grader in Oregon, Kevin M. Cunningham is looking at far different high school graduation requirements than did the kids who came before him.

Kevin, who attends Hosford Middle School in southeast Portland, is among the first class of Oregon students who will be expected to meet new, rigorous academic achievement standards. The standards are at the heart of this state’s school reform effort.

At Hosford, Kevin already is experiencing changes stemming from reform, including classes with mixed grade levels, blended subjects and three-hour periods. In high school, Kevin will see many more changes. By the end of his sophomore year, he will have to show he can write a well-organized essay, interpret literature, use algebra and meet other academic goals required to earn what the state is calling a ‘Certificate of Initial Mastery.’ This will require not only that he pass paper-and-pencil tests, but also that he build a portfolio of work that meets predefined levels of proficiency.

Once Kevin earns his initial certificate, he will choose a career major and devote his final years of high school to meeting a second set of standards, which will earn him a Certificate of Advanced Mastery. For this work, he will be able to choose from a variety of settings, including traditional high schools, technical centers, community colleges, even youth apprenticeships.

Like his peers and parents, the bright, lanky 13-year-old harbors some doubts about Oregon’s brave new plan to upgrade the education of its 552,000 students. He is not sure whether he is joining the vanguard of successful school reform or becoming a guinea pig in a less-than-fruitful experiment.

“They are trying to make people more involved in their learning,” he says. “I think this could be a step in the right direction, but I’m still not sure.”

Many students, parents and teachers share Cunningham’s skepticism. Some oppose reform out of fear it will damage a system that may not work for everyone but works well for them. Others see it as more government intrusion. But most, as a recent survey shows, do not even know Oregon has a school reform plan.

If there is anything they had to do over in carrying out the 1991 Oregon Educational Act for the 21st Century, state education officials say, it would be to work harder at describing and selling the ambitious reform plan to teachers, parents and students. As it was, administrators were consumed with filling in the details of the Legislature’s broad outline, laments a frustrated Norma Paulus, state school superintendent.

“We worked with more than 1,000 teachers and others in 14 committees on school reform,” she says. “We couldn’t get out in the state and say what this is about because we were required to spend two years planning it. We didn’t have the money, time or people to go out and tell folks what was coming down the pike.”

An economic initiative

Oregon’s school reform plan is primarily an economic initiative aimed at producing a better educated work force. It focuses on giving higher skills and knowledge to the so-called “forgotten half”—those students, many from poorer homes, who often struggle in school and stumble into adulthood ill-equipped for college or work. The plan is based on a report called America’s Choice: High Skills or Low Wages, as are many other state and national reform plans. A special commission of the National Center on Education and the Economy in Rochester, N.Y., produced the America’s Choice report after studying the educational systems of industrial powerhouses such as Germany and Japan.

The commission recommended U.S. schools make two big changes to prepare students for high-wage jobs. First, they should set high academic standards for all students, not just some, at about the end of their sophomore year. Secondly, educators should build smooth paths from high school to work training for the large number of students who do not go on to college. This would give students the option of beginning training and youth apprenticeship programs as early as their junior year, a practice common in Europe.

Rocky start in Illinois

Illinois’ new superintendent of education has proposed a plan, similar to Oregon’s, that would require students to demonstrate during their sophomore year that they had acquired certain skills and knowledge.

Supt. Joseph Spagnolo’s proposal would require all students to undergo the “Illinois Assessment of Critical Knowledge and Skills” before their final two years of schooling. Included would be a multiple-choice exam covering math and reading skills, and “alternative assessments” aimed at measuring “higher-order skills,” Spagnolo says.

Details of the plan are not yet ironed out, for example, what types of alternative assessments would be included.

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Oregon’s plan embraced both recommendations in the law pushed through the Legislature by state Rep. Vera Katz (D-Portland), a board member of the National Center on Education and the Economy and now mayor of Portland.

The sweeping legislation called on Oregon to:

■ Expand public preschools to serve all disadvantaged children by 1998.
■ Lengthen the school year to 220 days (from 175 days) by the year 2010.

■ Create alternative learning centers where students who are having trouble meeting the certificate requirements can go for extra help.
■ Put social services near or on school campuses.
■ Establish school-based teacher and parent committees, or site councils, to help carry out reform in every school in the state.

So far, the state has expanded preschool but still serves less than half the eligible children, some schools have formed partnerships with social service agencies, and nearly all schools have site councils.

But at the heart of the reform plan is the creation of the two certificates of mastery: new credentials based on academic performance standards rather than course credits or time in class.

State education task forces composed of education, business and community leaders set 11 learning goals for the initial certificate, basing them on skills that industry is seeking in workers for the next century. Students must, for example, show they can think, communicate, apply science and math, work in groups, learn on their own and deliberate on public issues—all skills employers say they want workers to have.

Students will have to meet a similar set of skills but at higher proficiency levels for their advanced certificates. In addition, they must get practical on-the-job experience in one of six career areas: arts and communication, business and management, health services, human resources, industrial and engineering systems and natural resource systems.

Schools will continue to offer course credits and diplomas while they phase in standards that define the required level of proficiency for each learning goal. Schools will begin using stan-

Students who pass the Illinois Assessment would receive a Certificate of Initial Mastery and would be encouraged to follow a college-preparatory curriculum for their final two years. Students who don’t pass, though, would be directed into technical education and youth apprenticeship programs.

Asked if this is just a new version of tracking, Spagnolo maintains that it’s “absolutely the antithesis of a tracking system.” He views the technical program as a way to deter potential dropouts from leaving school; rather than dropping out, they would receive structured, work-based learning.

“The point is to get as many students as possible to pass,” says Lynne Haefele, a member of Spagnolo’s staff. “It is not punitive. The theory is that this would provide the motivation [for students] because they know that this is a ticket to their future success.”

Originally, the plan was included as part of a bill to set up Project Jumpstart, which would have given extra dollars to schools that fail the state’s Quality Review process—most of which are in Chicago.

However, State Rep. Mary Lou Cowlishaw (R-Naperville) says she persuaded Spagnolo, just before the vote, to withdraw the section of the bill dealing with his plan. Many legislators, she says, as well as the Illinois Education Association and the Illinois Federation of Teachers, are opposed to the certificate plan.

However, most House members had already caught the buzz that the certificate plan would be in the bill, Cowlishaw says; as a result, it got only 19 votes. The bill probably would not have passed anyway, Cowlishaw and others point out, but it might have gotten more votes had legislators not mistakenly believed that the certificate plan was included.

Edward Harmeyer, director of policy for the Illinois Manufacturers’ Association, says the IMA favors the plan’s work-study and apprenticeship components; he predicts the plan will resurface again.

“Currently, if you are a bright kid, you take college preparatory courses and if you’re not such a bright kid, you take technical courses,” he says. “We feel that is totally false. We think it is pretty sad that kids get tracked that way. We want to see work as part of the educational experience.”

Felicia Morton is a Chicago writer.

Felicia Morton is a Chicago writer.
From school to work

A variety of partnerships among businesses, community colleges and high schools have emerged to try to tie schooling to work and prepare for the advanced-mastery programs. The reform plan requires all students, even the college-bound, to choose career paths. These paths are to be broad, general and, in most cases, exploratory, say state officials, stressing that students can change them at will.

The Oregon Business Council has committed its resources to helping David Douglas School in southeast Portland become a state model for advanced certificate training, which all schools must offer by 1999.

Meanwhile across the state, hundreds of high school students are spending time with adult workers, in what schools call job shadowing, doing internships with businesses or, in a few cases, entering youth apprenticeships.

North Portland's Roosevelt High, which draws a high proportion of poor and minority students, is seeing encouraging results with a job shadowing and internship program involving scores of businesses and hundreds of students. Early results show it has helped teenagers focus and see the importance of school, and it already has curbed the school's dropout rate.

Still, from the time it was passed, Oregon's advanced certificate plan has stirred debate. Many people argue 16-year-olds are too young to be choosing careers—though they do so in most of the industrialized world—and that the career programs will lead to two-tiered tracking.

Despite state assurances to the contrary, the Oregon Education Association (the state's largest teachers' union), minority leaders and others worry that schools will use the career programs as a way to steer poor and minority students into vocational cul-de-sacs.

"We need to have standards . . . . Now they are setting some real concrete things you are expected to accomplish."

—Galen Brannon, Urban League of Portland

Lessons for Illinois

There are attributes of Oregon's plan that even many supporters would advise Illinois leaders to avoid. One is the heavy—some would argue lopsided—emphasis that the standards put on skills over knowledge or content. Students, for example, conceivably could meet the reading standard without ever having read Shakespeare, poetry or American literature.

Recognizing this problem, the Oregon Board of Education adopted a curriculum framework specifying what content high schools should cover. They also tied portions of that content to the standards. Still, critics argue there is too little content. This was the chief criticism of the certificate program at Cottage Grove High School, a small rural school that, in a pilot program, issued certificates of initial mastery last year. (See accompanying story.)

If Illinois sets standards, it should make them academic, gear them to content and leave the work skills as general outcomes, says Vickie Totten, a lobbyist for the Oregon School Boards Association. She also recommends scrapping the "glitzy career strands" and letting local districts decide what career programs they want.

"If I were starting from scratch," she says, "I would give as much to the local community, while giving some integrity to the statewide standard, as I could."

Illinois also ought to consider creating standards for the end of 8th grade rather than the end of 10th grade, says David Conley, a University of Oregon education professor who is developing performance-based admissions standards for the State System of Higher Education. Then, he says, the second stage of reform could be carried out through the final four years, preserving high school as a unified program instead of dividing it into two segments, one for the initial certificate and the other for the advanced certificate.

"Basically, you reform the high school diploma, get it performance-based and give it a career emphasis," he says.
Many educators also believe Oregon has tried to carry out school change too quickly with too little money. Much more should be invested in teacher training, they say.

Oregon initially embarked on its plan with hardly a peep of protest, probably because its new plan was so abstract and distant. But now, as deadlines approach for putting the plan into effect, opposition has mounted in a cloud of false claims. Wary conservatives have tried to link Oregon’s plan to controversial outcome-based education initiatives in other states, arguing it is aimed at molding student values and attitudes.

Critics also claim the reforms are not working, though they have not even been started in most places. Some people use the plan as a scapegoat, blaming it for everything from a dearth of phonics to an excess of sex education. The state education department has not had the influence to calm the political upheaval.

GOR challenge

The Republican-dominated Oregon House passed a bill in March that would eliminate the certificates of mastery and replace them with a certificate of accomplishment based on traditional tests. But political observers predict the reform act will survive political hacking from lawmakers, most of whom were not in office when it was adopted. Senate leaders have vowed to repair damage done in the House, and Gov. John Kitzhaber, a Democrat, says he will veto any legislation to eliminate certificates of mastery.

Much of this conflict could have been avoided with better communication from the start, a lesson Illinois should heed, advises Joyce Reinke, an educator who helped design Oregon’s plan.

That said, educators also must recognize that shifting to a system based on high standards for all students is the most fundamental change schools have attempted in 75 years. However it is done, Reinke says, it will create controversy.

“At some point,” she says, “you have to stand for what you believe is best for your students and your state.”

William Graves covers education for The Oregonian, the largest daily newspaper in the State of Oregon.

Small school makes big changes

Dressed in her Sunday best, sophomore Heidi K. Hansen steps to the front of the classroom and takes her position behind a desk adorned with a pink rose. Before her is an equally dressed-up audience that includes her parents and four teachers.

The scene has the appearance of a recital and, in a way, it is, for Heidi is about to present a portfolio of evidence that she’s met standards for the certificate of initial mastery at Cottage Grove High School, which serves a rural logging community about 15 miles south of Eugene, Ore.

In a 30-minute presentation on this June evening in 1994, Heidi shows a video clip of herself delivering a speech against the use of animals in laboratory testing. She shows essays she’s written, describes a booklet on Elizabethan culture she and some classmates wrote, and displays samples of math story problems she solved and wrote about.

She makes her case. The next evening, she and 73 other sophomores became the nation’s first students to earn what many reformers hope will become the credential of the future—the Certificate of Initial Mastery.

“I feel I’ve learned a lot,” said Heidi, after presenting her portfolio. “I can get in front of people and work in groups easier.”

But on the day she got her certificate, critics gathered for a press conference on the school’s front lawn and took turns charging the program lacked substance. “The idiots are coming, and we arecresting them,” said Ron Davis, angry parent of a daughter who said she wasn’t learning anything.

Cottage Grove’s aggressive advance into the certificate system has brought it national attention and countless headaches. Teachers are the first to admit the changes have been unwieldy and crude, but each year the system runs smoother. Now, three years into the transformation, they don’t want to turn back. Neither do most students.

Unlikely leader

The school seems an unlikely place to find a leading edge of school reform. Historically, it has produced an academically lackluster crop of students.

Perhaps dramatic changes in the timber economy made school leaders more sensitive to the need to change the way they were preparing 900 students for adulthood. Today, Cottage Grove graduates no longer can count on good-paying jobs as loggers or mill workers.

Cottage Grove Principal Ed Otton and his staff decided if schools must take a new path, they wanted to help blaze it. The state gave the school grants totalling about $173,000 to pioneer changes outlined in Oregon’s 1991 education reform act.

At the heart of this ambitious reform plan is the use of academic standards rather than course credits as the criteria for graduation from high school. Students were to meet standards for a Certificate of Initial Mastery at the end of their sophomore year. They then would choose one of six broad career paths for their final two years and meet a second set of standards for their Certificate of Advanced Mastery.

Heidi Hansen makes her formal presentation to obtain a certificate of initial mastery.
Teachers developed standards that demand students consistently produce work rating 4 or better on a 6-point proficiency scale—about B work. But unlike grades, the scoring guides are defined in detail with examples so that all teachers and students share a common notion of what a 4 actually means.

The staff dissolved its traditional academic departments and created three teams of teachers: one for the first year of the certificate of initial mastery program, one for the second year and a third team for juniors and seniors working for their certificates of advanced mastery.

Both of the initial-mastery teams teach mathematics separately and integrate social studies, language arts and science. All of the instruction is more heavily oriented toward projects and applied learning.

problems, but they were not getting enough content, teachers admitted.

What’s more, teachers were not getting the training and planning time they needed. Instead of adding teachers, the district was forced to cut staff and planning periods because of budget reductions—the results of a property tax limitation measure passed by Oregon voters in 1990.

So teachers must do their planning during their lunch or after school. “The day is a blitz,” says Wright.

Critics have seized on the school’s struggles as evidence the new system has failed. A group called Parents for Academic Excellence, which wants to repeal the school reform act, is circulating a videotape featuring a handful of unhappy students and parents from Cottage Grove High. Critics complain the school has lowered standards, college entrance exams. Standardized test scores climbed in six out of seven areas between grades 8 and 10 for the Class of 1996, the first group to earn the Certificate of Initial Mastery.

Students express mixed views about this standards-based system. Christine Lillard, 13, a bright freshman who skipped two grades, loves the new school and is earning straight A’s. She likes the practical and interrelated qualities about the curriculum and looks forward to exploring a veterinarian career in the advanced certificate program.

But her classmate, Brandon C. Abbott, 14, finds the new system too demanding and frustrating, though he is learning a lot. “It just seems like I’ve been trying to catch up all year long,” he says.

Of the 170 juniors now attending Cottage Grove, only 81 have actually earned their certificates of initial mastery. Fourteen are repeating the program, 18 are close to completion, and the rest are in alternative and special education programs or are exempt because they transferred from other school districts. Half of the juniors declined to enter the certificate of advanced mastery program, which the school is making optional until it gets students who have had more years to prepare for it.

Critics also point to the large number who have not qualified for their initial certificates as evidence the program has failed. School leaders point to it as evidence that Cottage Grove, unlike other schools in the state, has standards.

And what a difference standards have made, teachers say.

Science teacher Wright says students are working at levels higher than he’s ever seen in his 25-year career.

“The expectations are much, much higher,” he says. “I hardly ever see a student turn something in that is not at the B level.”

Librarian Yvonne Buermann says that in her 30-year career she’s never seen students use the library as much or as efficiently as they do now in Cottage Grove’s new structure.

“I’ve seen lots of things come and go,” she says, as she looks over the jazz display. “I’ve never before seen anything that has as much promise as this.”

William Graves

“Expectations are much higher. I hardly ever see a student turn something in that is not B level.”

—Rick Wright, teacher
HELPING SCHOOLS HELP THEMSELVES

By
Argle K. Johnson
General Superintendent
of the Chicago Public Schools

We are following the School Reform Act—helping some of our schools in crisis find their way to success. Through a plan for remediation, a school in critical need receives special attention to redefine and implement its School Improvement Plan. During the six years of school reform, remediation has not been utilized as a method for improving schools, but that has changed—and the process is now in full swing!

To date, six schools are shifting their visions toward advancing student achievement. The subdistrict superintendents for the Lewis, Tilton, Brown, Curtis, and West Pullman elementary schools, along with Austin High School, have prepared lengthy remediation plans that focus on strategies for achieving goals in their School Improvement Plans.

Each school placed on remediation must have its own improvement strategies developed by a team that includes the subdistrict superintendent, the school’s teaching and administrative staff, and local school council (LSC) members. Under the 1988 School Reform Act, the subdistrict superintendent and subdistrict council are primarily responsible for developing, monitoring, and fine-tuning the remediation plan. The subdistrict superintendents and outside school development experts become a regular presence at those schools that are struggling to make improvements.

In District One, Lewis Elementary School, 1431 North Lemington Avenue, will have to show professional growth and improved student achievement. The school’s LSC also must take action on the expenditure of rollover funds, fill teacher vacancies, and review the principal’s contracts.

Brown Elementary School, 54 North Hermitage, and Tilton Elementary School, 223 North Keeler Avenue, share similar challenges. Their District Four Council has placed the two schools on remediation in order to improve school leadership, safety, the LSC/principal relationship, instructional climate, and the ability to resolve disputes.

The District Ten Council is helping West Pullman Elementary School, 11941 South Parnell, and Curtis Elementary School, 32 East 115th Street, commit to sound, student-focused educational programs. At West Pullman, teachers and administrators are concentrating on increasing student attendance, expanding the use of computers and other technology, and recruiting community partners, some of whom include the Teachers Academy of Mathematics and Science and the Developing Communities Project. Curtis Elementary School, meanwhile, is working to strengthen its community relations by resolving disputes. The remediation team is helping Curtis implement school expenditure plans as they relate to the goals and objectives of the School Improvement Plan. Also, the long-term goal at Curtis is to build a positive, nurturing school climate that supports the school’s instructional programs.

In District 11, Austin High School, 231 North Pine, has become the first high school to be placed on remediation. LSC members are confident that, with the remediation team that is in place, time, guidance, and a focus on student needs will help the school to improve.

Using the remediation process, the aim is to improve the teaching and learning process, thereby increasing student performance according to state standards in reading, writing, and mathematics. The plan also addresses the need to create a safer environment for learning.

Remediation is positive and sustaining. It is not a way to chastise schools that have weaknesses. It is not a way to damage perceptions of schools. It is not a way to lower students’ self-esteem or teachers’ morale. Rather, it is an evolving, ongoing support process that is flexible and designed to meet the needs of individual schools. Remediation offers a school and its community the opportunity to help themselves as they chart a new course and direction for true and verifiable school improvement.
Johnson wants full overhaul, settles for ‘remediation’

by Michael Klonsky

On March 21, the local school council at Austin Community Academy High School mustered its first quorum all year. Supt. Argie Johnson had come to speak, but it was no occasion for pride. Rather, Johnson read them the riot act.

Your reading and math scores are among the lowest in the state, she told them. Ninety-nine percent of your students can’t write up to state standards. On any given school day, nearly 30 percent stay home. Often the target of thieves and vandals, the building itself is in disarray and disrepair. And with groups of gangbangers congregating after school on adjacent street corners; many students say they are afraid to come to school.

Flanked by top staff members and accompanied by Board of Education President D. Sharon Grant and Subdistrict Supt. Grady Jordan, Johnson shocked many in the unusually large audience when she asked: “Did you know that in one year alone [1992] there were 26 fires set inside this school?”

Johnson told the group that since Austin wasn’t making any progress, she had planned to shut the school down that night and immediately “reconstitute it” as a restructured high school. Reconstitution, a strategy for school change begun 20 years ago in New York City, means, simply, starting over. Typically, a new principal and new, like-minded teachers are brought in to craft a new program around a new vision; sometimes, a number of small schools are created to replace one large school.

For months, Chicago’s business community had been urging Johnson to reconstitute failing schools. However, shortly before the Austin LSC meeting, board attorneys warned the superintendent that such a move might be illegal under Chicago’s School Reform Act. First, they advised, Austin had to go through a remediation process and then probation, all of which could take more than a year. Hearing that, Johnson relented.

But she successfully pressured Jordan, who had resisted remediation for any of the city’s high schools, to ask the High School Subdistrict Council to put Austin on remediation. “We’re not being punitive,” Jordan told the council on March 28. “We’re just trying to help a school that’s in trouble.”

It was unclear to most subdistrict council members exactly what remediation would mean. Few specifics were offered. Even so, the obvious sentiment of the body was that despite uncertainties, remediation had to begin.

With a block of pro-remediation community groups hovering in the wings, 34 of the 40 council members present voted for the resolution, three voted against and three abstained. But that wasn’t good enough; the measure needed a majority of full council membership, or 37 votes. Again, members asked what specifically would be done to improve the school inasmuch as, according to Jordan, few resources and no new money would be made available. While this question was never addressed, the second vote somehow managed to pick up three more “ayes,” and the resolution passed.

Immediately following the council’s action, Johnson appointed Lynn St. James, former principal of Lindblom High School, to lead a remediation team. St. James currently heads the Chicago Forum for School Change, which she describes as the Chicago center for the Coalition of Essential Schools. The team will bring together

Community resident Jerry Cobb asks Supt. Argie Johnson a question at a packed Austin LSC meeting in March, where Johnson made her case for overhauling the school.
specialists in such areas as curriculum, school security and special education, as well as representatives from Austin, including a student, a teacher, a local school council member and community organization members. The team's recommendations are due on the general superintendent's desk by May 31.

While Johnson's bill of particulars against Austin could well have been leveled at a number of other Chicago high schools, Austin caught the superintendent's attention last year when the school invited her to speak at its graduation ceremony. Johnson was stunned to learn that out of an incoming freshman class of 450, only about 80 students would be getting their diplomas.

Community pushes change

Johnson also was pressured by a coalition of Austin community groups that had been locked in a struggle with Acting Principal James Williams over what they see as Williams's failure to carry out reforms. Several of these groups are involved in a community development effort spearheaded by Shorebank. One of the most active banks in the African-American community, Shorebank made $52 million in loans for small businesses and housing on the South and West sides last year.

But with Austin Community Academy tagged as one of the city's most troubled high schools, community redevelopment and new construction are handicapped, says Josh Lee, director of the Austin Labor Force Intermediary (ALFI). Lee's group was set up by Shorebank to help develop a skilled labor force for the hoped-for new businesses. ALFI is part of a coalition of groups, including the Austin Coalition for Education, North Austin Council, Westside Health Authority, WSCORP and Youth Guidance, that had been pressing Johnson to take decisive action.

"Austin is a school that doesn't work, and, sadly, people have begun to accept that as the way things are," says Jennifer Tilton, who as project director for Westside Health has worked with the school in a number of areas, including arranging field trips and summer jobs at hospitals for the students. She offers as an example the school's late registration of students—usually not completed until mid-October. "People think that's okay because that's the way it's always been done," she says.

Tilton believes the problems at Austin are more complex than bad teachers or administrators. "It's more the whole school culture," she explains. "Kids drop out or are pushed when they reach their 16th birthday, and there's nothing else out there for them. Reconstitution alone won't do it. But it's a place to start. We need to change the reputation of the school and then bring in some good programs with high expectations. When kids don't show up, there must be people who contact their families and involve them."

Austin's Chicago Teachers Union delegate, Louis Pyster, sees an anti-teacher focus in the remediation process and doesn't like it. "It's ridiculous to think that the teachers at Austin are totally at fault or that somehow you are going to bring in a new group that's going to do better," insists Pyster, who has been teaching at Austin since 1966. "We are just as good a group of teachers as any in the city. If we're given the resources and a competent administration that allows us to do our job, we will be successful."

Pyster is not opposed to remediation if the process brings outside help and

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**The Student Body**

1,403 students, 100% black, 63.7% low-income. The mobility rate is 44.4%, nearly twice the citywide average. The graduation rate is 28%. The attendance rate is 72.3%. The percentage of chronic truants is 27.9%, more than twice the high school average. Standardized test scores are abysmal.

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<th>10th-grade</th>
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**The Neighborhood**

"While the community is racially mixed, Austin Community Academy High School is not. There are isolated pockets of financially stable family units... A drive throughout the community graphically displays the poverty pockets: broken windows, abandoned buildings, closed-out businesses and [abandoned] vehicles; 48% of the neighborhood houses are vacant."

— 1994 Quality Review, Illinois Public

**Recent History**

- In 1992, then-Principal Decalvin Hughes proposes that six schools within-schools open in a year. While some faculty members think he's moving too fast, community groups support him.
- In September 1993, with the minischools set to open, a central-office scheduling mandate throws everything up for grabs. Four minischools are salvaged.
- In summer 1994, Hughes retires. To the chagrin of community groups, the local school council taps Assistant Principal James Williams, whose appointment is thrown because the LSC voted on the phone, not at a regularly scheduled meeting.
- In March 1995, Supt. Argie Johnson moves to reconstitute the school but settles for remediation. In April, Williams gets a legal contract.
resources to the school and "isn't just a paint job." But he says that any reorganization plan must involve teachers and the union.

Although dropout rates citywide have declined in the last five years, 25 percent graduation rates are not uncommon in Chicago high schools, many of which have been virtually untouched by school reform.

Austin and the other high schools historically have been large, impersonal institutions with a heavily bureaucratic superstructure of assistant principals, department heads, curriculum facilitators and other non-classroom personnel. The school day commonly is divided into pre-set time slots for each subject, and teachers work in relative isolation in their areas of specialization. In settings like these, it's easy for kids to fall through the cracks; at Austin, there's little in the way of a safety net to catch them.

The Austin community coalition had been despairing over the decline of the restructuring programs begun by former Principal DeCalvin Hughes, who took early retirement last fall. While many teachers resisted Hughes's reforms and found him overbearing, the community supported his efforts because he built partnerships with several school-reform groups and community organizations.

Hughes also was on ALPI's board of directors and had invited ALPI to help establish one of what were to be eight small job-oriented programs that would integrate school and work. Austin had received a three-year, $201,000 grant from the Illinois State Board of Education to establish these so-called partnership academies. According to Lou Berkman, a senior consultant at the state board, a combination of state and federal funds also would have enabled the school to reduce class sizes and schedule an extra class period.

But after months of planning by Austin's school and business partners, Acting Principal Williams pulled the plug. Critics contend he didn't want to share power with outside agencies or give autonomy to teachers. But Williams says the program wouldn't work because of scheduling problems. "The two business courses that were the basis of the program were inaccessible to most of our students," he says. However, seven other Chicago schools have figured out ways to create partnership academies.

A traditional administrator

While Williams insists he isn't opposed to dividing the high school into smaller units, the minischools program initiated by his predecessor even before the school received the academies grant is

'It's not all that bad'

Teriane Madison, Michelle Cadena and Tina Hunter don't like the bad publicity their school has been getting. Huge headlines in the neighborhood newspaper, blaming Austin's failures, make the three juniors angry.

The three have big plans for their future and seem smart and motivated. CATALYST caught up with them after school at the Westside Health Authority on west Division Street in Austin, where they often hang out and take part in the Community History Project, doing interviews with older residents of the community or tutoring other students. Teriane, 17, wants to be a lawyer. Michelle, 17, aspires to teach or work with the elderly. Tina, 16, plans to be a dancer and a computer technician.

CATALYST There's been a lot in the papers about Austin recently. What do you think about all the publicity?

TERIANE A lot of people think that Austin is a bad school. It's not all that bad. I like some of the teachers, you know. I like the ROTC program. And Michelle and Tina are in an African dance program. But you have some students that just don't care. They don't care about anything. And a lot of people put Austin down, but Austin is not a bad school.

CATALYST What's good about it? Is it going to help you become a lawyer?

TERIANE Well, the school is basically set up in sections. Okay. It's called schools-within-schools. There's a professional development program which is dealing with the law. You have, what's the other one? The Performing Arts School, if you want to grow up and be a singer and all this. Then we have careers and business schools.

TINA I like it because whatever field you pick, it helps to develop what you want to do in the future. Like I have many goals. I want to do some of everything, and so I'm in the School of Performing Arts. I want to be a dancer, but you know, I always want to do other things. But I take modern and African dance classes.

CATALYST What makes so many kids want to drop out?

TINA I think that what makes students want to drop out is that they don't think they have the potential. Even if the teachers might not teach you, you should have enough encouragement to say, "Well, teach me this—teach me that. I don't know this, and I don't know that."

MICHELLE When other students drop out, it affects me. I love acting, so I signed up for the drama class. But only 20 kids came to class even though there were a lot of us enrolled. And only five of us really participated.

CATALYST So you couldn't put on a production?

MICHELLE Right. It's a shame because our teacher was affiliated with Victory Gardens Theater. So he got us summer acting classes, and I was really into them. But since there were only five people, they cut out the summer classes.

CATALYST Tell me something good that happened to you in school.

MICHELLE One day when my regular teacher wasn't in school, I went to this reading class just to sit in. I was so...
barely hanging on.

In 1992, Hughes proposed six mini-schools that would operate in conjunction with such outside groups as the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the business-backed Cluster Initiative, which has since pulled out of three of the four neighborhoods where it was working. Lead teachers were chosen for each of the six. Despite resistance from teachers who wanted to proceed more slowly, all six schools were set to open in September 1993. It was then that all Chicago high schools were hit with a central office mandate requiring 50-minute class periods. Aimed at saving money, the move created turmoil at most high schools. (See CATALYST, December 1993.) A demoralized Austin staff and an angry Hughes got four of the six schools back on their feet, but the program lost its early vitality.

Williams, who worked briefly as Hughes’s assistant after years in central office, is viewed by many on his staff as a traditional administrator. “He knows his way around the school bureaucracy and how to get things done,” says teacher Mary Ann Casey, herself a former assistant to Hughes and now a Williams supporter. “He knows where his students are going and what courses they have to take to succeed. He tries hard. But it’s hard to be a new principal. He wants every student to achieve, to get out of the neighborhood.”

Casey notes that Williams launched a reading-and-vocabulary-building program that every student attends from 8 to 8:50 each morning. He also used federal funds to bring in a new print shop.

Casey is critical of the way community organizations, such as ALFI, “want to use the school to get their plans funded by the state without bringing anything to the schools themselves.” Casey says that Williams turned away the Shorebank school-to-work program because the bank wouldn’t provide insurance or transportation. “The bank had written up proposals for some training of our students,” said Casey, “but they didn’t want to take any direct responsibility.”

According to ALFI Director Josh Lee, Hughes’s departure was followed by a “hasty LSC decision” to make Williams acting principal. The LSC “rushed to meet board deadlines and awarded Williams a contract after voting by phone,” he reports. “There was amazement by the stuff I saw. He [the teacher] made it so much fun. Like everybody thinks reading is boring because we just got this new reading program we have to go to every day. So everyone is like—I ain’t never going to read.” Well, I went to his class. It was so funny, you know they’ve got vocabulary words and everything. And he would play games with them. For example, everybody listens to rap, but they don’t really get the meaning of it. So he played this rap tape and the kids had to find the real vocabulary words in the rap. It was so much fun.

CATALYST Do you or your parents worry about you going to Austin?

TINA No. My mother is on the local school council, so she knows pretty much what’s going on. She tries her best to make the school better for the other students.

CATALYST When I went over to the school the other day, I saw a bunch of guys hanging out on the corner over on Lake and Central Park. Does that make you nervous or afraid to come to school?

TERIANE It depends. When I see a group of guys like that, I don’t walk on the same side of the street.

TINA If you’re in your own neighborhood, you know, it’s not a problem, because I know a lot of people in my neighborhood. But if it’s not a place where I know the people, I’ll cross the street and keep on walking, I would just like to say this: In every school there are bad people, period. Austin is not a bad school. It’s just a few bad people that make the school look bad. They’re just so quick to put Austin in the newspaper—you don’t see them going to other schools and pointing out their bad things.

MICHELLE I say to myself, Austin is not the best school, but every school has its problems. It’s not the students’ fault. Like they just did something in the Austin Voice about students failing writing and reading. But that’s not the students. Why don’t they just see what the Board of Education is doing? What are they doing for us? They’re doing nothing for us. But they don’t publicize that. There’s a lot of good things going on here. One girl named Priscilla Horton was a Congressional Page. But did they put that in the newspaper? No.

TINA Most of the things they say are true, but they could have put it in a better way.

Michael Klonsky
no opportunity for community input, and the decision wasn’t proper. The community organizations wanted another principal.”

ALPI contacted the board’s legal department, which concluded that the LSC’s decision to hire Williams was invalid because it had not been made at a properly called meeting. A new vote was taken at the LSC’s March 21 meeting, and Williams failed to win the seven votes needed for a four-year contract. At the council’s April 11 meeting, however, one member switched sides, giving Williams the votes he needed. Even so, he faces the possibility of removal after the remediation process.

Williams’s hope is that under remediation, Austin Community Academy will attract a lot of outside attention, new resources and a support network. He wants to change the name of the school and create a new image. But he doesn’t think the process has been fair to him or to the school.

“I inherited these problems,” says Williams. “I’ve only been here since September.” He pulls out a computer-generated list of student reading scores, expressed in stanines, which run from 1 at the bottom to 9 at the top; the list is an unbroken list of 2s and 3s. “Will remediation change that?” he asks.

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Reconstitution becoming a trend

Reconstitution, or closing a school and reopening it with a new program and new faculty, is gaining trend status. The State of Maryland has moved to reconstitute three failing Baltimore schools. In San Francisco, the superintendent, as part of a desegregation consent decree, reconstituted three schools last year; more than a dozen other schools face reconstitution this year if their scores continue to fall.

In New York City, reconstitution has gone hand in glove with the creation of smaller, innovative schools. Twenty years ago, an elementary district superintendent there shut down a large, failing school and created six smaller schools in its place, including the now-famed Central Park East Elementary School.

But the approach lay dormant for a long time. In 1992, Deborah Meier, who launched the Central Park elementary and, subsequently, secondary schools, persuaded then-Chancellor Joseph Fernandez to shut down a large failing high school as part of his plan to create smaller high schools.

In 1993, Julia Richman High School, a troubled neighborhood school in Manhattan, took in no new freshmen and began to go out of business; a year later, James Monroe High School in the Bronx began to wind down. Both schools, which together had enrolled some 6,000 students, are being replaced with a dozen smaller schools, most of them run by the local branch of the Coalition of Essential Schools, which Meier heads.

The Julia Richman building will house some of the new high schools, new small elementary and middle schools, an infant and toddler center and a professional development institute for teachers.

Reconstitution also is part of new federal Title I law, offered as a sanction districts can impose on schools that fail to help low-income students achieve “adequate yearly progress.”

Reform Act paved way

In Chicago, the concept of reconstitution arrived with the School Reform Act, which gave the superintendent authority to replace principals, teachers and local school council members at schools that had failed to improve following a remediation process. As it turned out, no schools were even put on remediation until late last year and only then under pressure from Supt. Argie Johnson, who as a deputy chancellor in New York was involved in the Julia Richman phase-out. Johnson now wants the Legislature to give her the authority to intervene directly instead of having to wait for remediation, which must be initiated by subdistrict councils.

It’s a strategy that could attract foundation support, including a chunk of Chicago’s $50 million Annenberg grant, which is aimed in part at creating smaller learning environments for students. In New York, $25 million in Annenberg money is being used to create a “learning zone” of about 100 small schools, serving a total of about 50,000 students. At least 50 of the schools will be newly established or carved out of existing large schools, including 10 of the city’s most troubled.

Reconstitution has gained the support of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) “under certain circumstances.” In its most recent Newsline publication, the AFT says: “If accompanied by other needed reforms, reconstitution can present opportunities. Teachers understand how important a school’s culture can be to inspiring and promoting student achievement, and they also know that the culture in some buildings has deteriorated beyond repair. Reconstituting staff may be a prerequisite to turning the school around.”

But the union warns that it “can also be harsh on teachers.” In San Francisco, for example, teachers in targeted schools “were left struggling to find new positions.”

In New York, the AFT local there recently negotiated a process with the board in which some of the city’s worst schools can be reconstituted, while giving a measure of protection to teachers’ seniority rights. Under the process, Newsline reports, up to half of the staff in a targeted school can keep their positions, with seniority determining which ones. A joint personnel committee including union members from the school would fill the remaining slots on the basis of how well applicants’ qualifications fit the school’s new educational focus.

Michael Klonsky
HELPING CHILDREN BECOME “INTELLIGENT VOICES”

By Deborah Walsh
Director, CTU Quest Center

Over the last 30 years, a revolution has occurred in psychology, a shift from behaviorism to a science of the mind, says John Bruer in his book, Schools for Thought: A Science of Learning in the Classroom (MIT Press, 1993). The study of how we think, remember and learn, he says, has profound implications for restructuring schools. Research in this field can be the basis for redesigning learning environments.

This research supports the idea that expertise is domain-specific, i.e. expertise in one area doesn’t necessarily transfer to other areas. In studies of chess experts, according to Bruer, they learn about 50,000 different chunks of chess information in ten years. The difference between novice and expert performance depends on highly organized deep knowledge gained after extensive experience and practice.

Other research in cognitive science studied “intelligent novices,” those who learned new things easily regardless of how much domain-specific knowledge they had. Intelligent novices were more able to think about their own thinking and control their mental processes. Less skilled novices were unable to employ these strategies. All this research emphasizes the essential nature of a deep knowledge base (the what of learning), the ability to think about your thinking (the how of learning) and tremendous implications for schooling.

In an earlier column I described an approach to teaching comprehension called Reciprocal Teaching. This approach was created by Ann Marie Palincsar and Ann Brown in the late 1980’s. They identified the complex functions that expert comprehenders use and defined four simple strategies: summarizing, questioning, clarifying and predicting:

Summarizing a passage requires that a reader recall and state the meaning he has constructed. A reader who can summarize has activated background knowledge to integrate information in the text, allocated attention to the main points and evaluated the meaning for consistency. Formulating a question demands that the reader monitor the gist to pick out important points. When clarifying, a reader must allocate attention to difficult points and engage in critical evaluation. Making predictions involves drawing and testing inferences on the basis of what’s there together with background knowledge. A reader who self-consciously uses all four strategies would certainly appreciate that the goal of reading is to construct meaning. (Bruer, 1993)

Sixty-five CTU Quest school teachers participated in a two-day reciprocal teaching training this winter to learn what they could do to help children understand what they read. They were taught by an original practitioner. Teachers begin explicitly teaching and modeling the four strategies during the first week and providing lots of practice. To keep the discussion groups small enough for daily individual practice, they train student leaders, able readers who can model good comprehension and keep the groups focused.

The remaining 20 half-hour sessions emphasizes small group discussion, with the leader reading a passage of the selected text. Each member of the group summarizes the passage, formulates a question, clarifies challenging words or ideas and makes a prediction of what might come next.

In talking with some of these teachers as they practice becoming skilled reciprocal teaching teachers, they are excited and encouraged by their efforts. This model allows them to get inside the heads of their students to understand their deficiencies. They realize how critical prior knowledge is and they despair at how lacking in it many of their children are. One said, “I never would have dreamed that my kids would ask for clarification for the things they did... As teachers we don’t clarify enough.”

Acquiring these strategies is a slow process, especially in classes with high risk students and few role models of good reading, but students are responding. Teachers can see them consciously thinking and talking about the strategies and using them in other classes. Kids are speaking up more and asking for clarification of things like they never had before.

The students are becoming intelligent novices, readers who become increasingly practiced in the skills with which to approach unfamiliar material. Their students’ vocabulary and knowledge bases are growing. And thanks to advances in our understanding about how children learn, Chicago teachers are able to apply these findings to the benefit of their students. Will it make a difference on test scores? We are using a performance-based reading comprehension test designed on this model. Tune in next month for early results.
It will take time for schools to develop ‘winning culture’

by Primus Mootry

The March issue of CATALYST featured a thought-provoking article on the Corporate/Community School, “Private school that went public faces vexing choices.” As the project director of the effort, my own general conclusion, especially as applied to systemwide impact issues, is that we must reform reform. What I mean by this can be viewed to some extent through the lens of the Corporate/Community School’s “lessons learned.”

The Corporate School opened in September 1988 as a laboratory for change in public school policy and practice. The media declared the school an instant success. Forbes, Fortune, Newsweek, the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather, CNN and other national and local print and electronic media told the world about the wonderful things we were doing. Fortunately or unfortunately, the media tend to look favorably on school reform efforts even though it usually takes years for results to be seen. Lesson #1: It’s left up to the media, any attempt at school reform is doomed to succeed.

In the matter of student achievement from the very beginning we were asked: “How are your children doing on standardized tests?” I find it interesting that Ted Sizer’s Coalition of Essential Schools is going through a similar experience. And look at Education Alternatives, Inc., which is operating several schools in Baltimore; after only two years of experience, critics are saying that all that this firm has achieved is that the same dumb kids are coming out of better-equipped schools.

Standardized tests do not necessarily capture what is taught in a given school. At the Corporate School, for example, students received ongoing instruction in two foreign languages, word processing and other computer functions, and social skills development, e.g. conflict resolution and values. A conscious decision to use limited instructional time in these important areas may mean that students do less well on standardized tests.

Lesson #2: As currently used and interpreted, standardized test scores are not a good indicator of either the success or failure of a given school or curriculum approach. And though it may seem an outright contradiction, we must not allow poor test results, in the absence of any better benchmarks, to contribute to public indifference, misplaced blame or complacency among educators and boards of education.

Lesson #3 concerns time. One of the least understood variables in any attempt at realistic school reform is time and the proper use of time. We do not understand the time it takes to cre-

We do not have a moment to waste in ensuring the proper conditions for realistic reform are in place.

Primus Mootry coordinated the research, strategic planning, organizing and fund raising that brought the Corporate/Community School to life in 1988. The business-sponsored school, located in North Lawndale, joined the public school system last September. Mootry continues his fund-raising work. Under the auspices of a Kellogg Foundation grant, he also is working to develop a Leadership Education Zone that would make Greater North Lawndale schools focal points for family and community development.
very different from a year in the life of a child. As one nationally respected educator points out, if you are a 2-year-old who turns 3 or a 3-year-old who turns 4, that one year, in human developmental terms, is like a decade. For lack of readily available, high-quality early childhood education programs, we are losing the education battle on the front end.

The lesson here is that, whether you’re dealing with a single school or an entire school system, it will take time for a winning culture to develop even after the proper conditions have been put into place. And since we generally begin losing students at about the 3rd grade, we do not, as a society, have a moment to waste in ensuring the proper conditions for realistic reform are in place.

I believe we succeeded in creating the proper conditions at the Corporate/Community School and in understanding what those conditions might look like for an entire system. Unfortunately, as a business-sponsored school committed to helping achieve fundamental change in public school policy and practice, we simply ran out of time. This raises another point concerning time and corporate involvement in various reform efforts.

Mismatched partners

The Corporate/Community School was at the crest of a new wave of corporate involvement in education. During its six-year operation as a private school, its investors contributed more than $12 million to support its programs and related activities, e.g. outreach to the public schools. This level of corporate investment in such a high-focus, philanthropic effort is absolutely unprecedented.

Lesson #4 is related to Lesson #3. Vernon R. Loucks Jr. of Baxter International, a co-founder of the school, put it well in an article he wrote for the Winter 1992-93 issue of the Stanford Law and Policy Review. “Corporation[s] emerge as a serious mismatch to serious school reform programs. Business has the money and the people, but it also thinks in terms of decades.”

For the most part, our efforts at school reform continue to duck the significant issues such as early childhood education; teacher competence; funding inequities; management and fiscal instability; outdated union, code and regulatory practices; and so forth. Instead, we continue to debate all sorts of ideas like: choice, vouchers, small schools, charter schools and everything else. We continue to study the problem. We continue to avoid the obvious. We keep getting nowhere. The Corporate/Community School worked to avoid rect what may be a failing course of action. This is why I believe we must reform reform. Otherwise, valuable time is wasted. Wasted time means wasted lives.

I recently returned from an eight-day education and human-service delivery seminar in Israel. During the visit, my colleagues from the United States and I had the opportunity to visit the campus of the Haddasim Youth Village. The village provides schooling and other supports to disadvantaged children of every race, religion and socioeconomic background from all over Israel and the world. Its director, Cavi Levi, made it clear that every office, window, rock or boulder was there for a reason.

There were even notable things that were not there—for a reason. For example, there were no signs posted anywhere on campus. The reason? So visitors would have to ask someone—usually a student—how to get from here to there. The purpose? To empower the children in every conceivable way. According to Levi, “Our goal is to ensure that no child will fall or fail through the cracks. We have safety nets, and safety nets for the safety nets.”

Compare this attitude to the way in which we treat America’s children—especially those who come from dysfunctional families and who live in the daily chaos of our poorest communities. While adults fascinate themselves with study and debate about whether this or that does or does not work, nationally millions of our poorest children fall through the cracks of failed education and human-service delivery policy.

As educator and sociologist Liz Schorr and others have pointed out, it isn’t that we lack the financial resources to rescue these children. Nor is it that we are genuinely puzzled as to what must be done. The plain fact is that, as Vern Loucks put it in his Stanford Review article, “The problem of generating the political muscle necessary to cause managed change is the great hurdle for all who are active in the drive to improve education.” The Corporate/Community School’s other founder, Joe Kellman, puts it more bluntly: “We have the words; what we lack is the will.”

Lesson #5: “If we keep doing what we’ve always done, we’ll keep getting what we’ve always gotten.”

In the final analysis, what the Corporate/Community School speaks to is the healing power of direct action: a decent physical plant, quality instructional leadership and staff, strict monitoring and accountability for performance, preschool beginning with 2-year-olds, social service networking and a refusal to countenance failure. However, it is important to add that these qualities, in and of themselves, do not translate into instant results in the classrooms of school reform.

True reform implies a change in the reward system that drives the entire enterprise, and a profound change in the culture of the institutions called schools. This will take not only the proper conditions; it will also take time. It will take determination and a willingness quickly to acknowledge and to cor-
Replace Pershing Rd. complex with neighborhood districts

by Michael J. Fahy

Is the Chicago Board of Education and its bungling bureaucracy capable of being restructured, or should it just be abolished? And if it is legislated out of existence, what should replace it?

The board's far-reaching powers and assiduous efforts have not been matched by profound accomplishments. Most of our high schools have composite ACT scores at the very bottom of nationwide averages. And those are the test scores of only our best students: More than half have already dropped out. Education of children has become subordinated to jobs for adults. Many board employees today see their jobs not as jobs but as entitlements. This nearly $3 billion annual payroll system has run amok.

The board's academic devastation of our children is matched only by the board's disastrous management of facilities. Accountability is flagrantly lacking in the board's often questionable negotiations. "We have to value our long-term employees," was board member Pamela Lenane's explanation of the new union contract clause wasting over $20 million on unneeded engineers for nonexistent high-pressure boilers. Who will value our long-term students? Who will value our long-term taxpayers?

In our multilayered bureaucracy, the board's attainments must be evaluated not abstractly but in light of the efficiency with which the board places our taxpayer dollars into the classrooms.

Accountability is vitally needed throughout the Chicago public school system, yet the board has no organized procedures for accountable management.

The vastness of this not-yet decentralized school system makes for an impersonality of viewpoint that is antithetical to recognition of students as human beings rather than statistics. The size of the Chicago school system is conducive to the development of bureaucratic complicity, inertia and inbreeding. To whom is the Pershing Road Complex accountable? Certainly not to students, parents or taxpayers.

Like a distant king

To local school council members on the firing line, the Pershing Road Complex is the quintessential obstruction to much-needed classroom reforms. LSCs seeking to make major changes are more likely to be sanctioned than commended. Is the superintendent in the faraway Pershing Road Complex any more capable of local decision making than was the distant king in Thomas Paine's trying times?

On September 1, 1994, the head of the board's Law Department, flanked by board members and the entire board management hierarchy, arrogantly refused to submit high school internal-accounts audit reports to a state Senate committee investigating corruption in our public school system. The Pershing Road Complex so sustains itself on bureaucratic bungling, theft, corruption and mismanagement that the distinction between malfeasance and misfeasance blurs.

Manifestly, an organizational pattern, however well conceived initially, can become outdated, especially in the fast-moving society which now confronts us. Paradoxically, although much thought has been given in recent years to new curricula, improved methodology and revised standards, there is a tendency to hold on tenaciously to the concept of a Board of Education inherited from earlier periods in the development of public education.

The current "factory model" design of public schools does not fit our international economy as we advance from the manufacturing age into the information age. We are at a radical turning point in the history of public education. The information age, with its technological interconnectivity, demands a radical new structure for public education in the 21st century.

At present, there is almost a naive optimism on the part of community leaders and school reform groups that the mere existence of a racially balanced central governing body consisting of well-motivated, dedicated people is bound to have a salutary effect on the administration of Chicago's school system. Until this superficiality of viewpoint is eliminated, the Chicago Board of Education will be more a facade for citizen guidance of the schools than a creative force in the administration of this vital public function. In this, Chicago has yet to demonstrate that it can proceed with the same competence and vigor that has characterized the city in other areas. When the Chicago River burst into our subterranean tunnel, we plugged the hole before we bailed out the basements. Our Board of Education will soon be asking for another bailout, but they never get around to plugging the hole.

Cataclysmic change is needed

We need to get away from the notion that reform must be gradual. Gradual change is no more appropriate here than it was for African-American voting rights in the early 1960s. Cataclysmic change is needed. Attempting gradual change in a bureaucracy is like feeding

Michael J. Fahy, an attorney, has served as chair of the local school council at Lane Technical High School and as a member of the Illinois State Senate's Chicago Schools Turnaround Commission. He also participated in Mayor Richard M. Daley's Education Roundtable panel on governance and oversight.
the crocodiles so they will eat you last.

School reform careerists often point to the successes achieved by principals at Heffran, Spry and Beethoven schools, telling us that such reforms will spread to other schools if we just wait another five years. But these isolated instances of properly functioning schools are not new. Long before school reform, Sabin School became a model for excellence under the principality of Lourdes Montaegudo. Overall district achievement should be measured by test scores, not by isolated examples of reform. High school test scores have not improved.

The in-house restructuring efforts of the Pershing Road Complex cannot succeed because they begin with the fallacious premise that this enormous bureaucratic system must survive decentralization. Endeavoring to restructure PRC is akin to waving a lantern at a runaway train. This system must be decentralized, not restructured.

Requoting Mayor Daley's suggestion to privatize schools, board member Charles Curtis, on October 5, 1994, gave the standard board response: The board is "already working toward eliminating negative aspects" of the school administration. "To . . . say it's a bureaucracy that's not functioning is a disservice to some of our hardworking employees," said Curtis. Nothing is ever said of disservice to hardworking students.

Whenever an investigative crew from WBAM-TV or the Chicago Sun-Times rolls up to PRC, the superintendent du jour proclaims, "We are restructuring. Whatever you find in there, we are going to change it!" But the more the board changes things, the more things remain the same.

History is always a battle between the politics of change and the politics of memory. Let us move forward. The surest way to decentralize is to abolish the central authority. Abolition of the Pershing Road Complex can result in an immediate increase of tax dollars reaching our classrooms.

The a priori thinking of some careerists leads to the conviction that abolition of the Pershing Road Complex would cause widespread chaos in the educating of our young. Can it get any worse than it already is? We must build for the future, and we must build as if we are starting with nothing for it is with nothing that we are starting. If we were publicly funding education for the first time, would we create a PRC? Hopefully not. So why continue it?

Replace the central board with approximately 60 elected neighborhood boards, each with a high school and its feeder elementary and middle schools, comparable in size to other Illinois boards. The boundaries would be the existing high school boundaries, which cross ward borders, making it less likely that school administration will be subjected to undue influence from the ward organizations. The boards would be accessible to the parents of our educationally abused children, and would be held accountable at the ballot box. Campaign contributions could be capped at reasonable levels, and candidates prohibited from accepting money or services from school district employees.

All state and local funding would be equitably distributed on a citywide basis—no change from the present. Current programs regulating the transfer of students from one neighborhood to another for desegregation, special education or to relieve overcrowding would be maintained.

Some subdistrict superintendents would have us believe that the best replacement for the current School Board would be 10 independent boards formed along the present elementary subdistrict boundaries. Nothing could be further from the truth. Some of our most colossal failures have involved the subdistrict level of bureaucracy. Educational governance of subdistrict size does not, will not, cannot adequately serve the local needs of local schools in the neighborhoods of Chicago.

Replacing the powerful Pershing Road School Board with neighborhood boards may seem too radical, too chaotic to some well-intentioned groups, but we are asking only for what everyone else in Illinois already has: local control of local schools.

These neighborhood boards would operate in much the same manner as boards of similar size in other parts of Illinois. Staffing would be minimal. A superintendent, an attorney and other essential staff could be hired on a part-time basis. They will not replicate the Pershing Road monstrousness because:

(a) They will be held accountable by their neighborhoods at the ballot box.
(b) They will not be drained by redundant levels of bureaucracy.
(c) They will benefit from competitive comparison with nearby neighborhood boards.
(d) They will not possess the lobbying clout that PRC has used so effectively against LSCs, parents and taxpayers.
(e) They will not have the citywide clout to suppress reform-minded LSC initiatives.
(f) Parents and community members will control every aspect of local school policy.
(g) While pockets of corruption may exist, the massive corrupt practices of the past won't be possible.

Chicagoans must no longer be denied local governance of local schools. Chicagoans are fully capable of operating neighborhood boards, and are deserving of the opportunity that everyone else in Illinois already has: local control of local schools. That's my opinion. Do you have a better solution? Call me at home: (312) 973-6630.
It's About TIME!
Continuous Growth Initiative Involves Schools in Prototypes

ONGOING TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR ALL

Continuous Growth is one of the T.I.M.E. Project’s major initiatives to support schools and improve learning. T.I.M.E. stands for “To Improve the Management of Education.” By fulfilling personal and unit needs for development, all individuals in the educational community will know how to do their jobs and how their performance impacts student achievement. Other T.I.M.E. initiatives are Conductive Environment, Perfect Match, and Straight Talk.

By Patricia Jackson and Julia West
Team Leaders, Continuous Growth Initiative

What characteristics do you want to see in your coworkers? What should each employee know and be able to do? What do you need in terms of development for your school and for every member of the educational community? These questions sparked thoughtful discussion and productive work at recent prototype meetings designed to test and modify our Continuous Growth design.

We like to use the metaphor of a train to describe our design. There is an individual track and a unit track. At both levels, the improvement plan is the engine that pulls the components of each process forward and unites them in support of student learning. While we intend to put a training and development plan in place for individuals and units at all levels of the system, our initial focus is at the local school.

At citywide meetings in March, 43 schools expressed interest in participating in our prototypes. We invited all of them to take part. As a result, 123 participants from 21 participating schools generated high-performance characteristics for the school system, such as teamwork, love and value of children, open and honest communication, and pride in job. These high-performance characteristics will eventually be verified by the entire educational community. Ultimately, these common values and behaviors will provide the format for a 360° feedback process to enable school staff to identify strengths and developmental needs.

Twenty-six principals also had an opportunity to field-test at IBM a computerized system that surveys, analyzes, clusters, and compares specific skills required by jobs. Principals easily brainstormed and prioritized on line the competencies needed to perform their jobs.

To facilitate the design of the development planning process, 10 schools volunteered to configure cross-functional action teams. For many of these schools, it was the first time that all employee groups and members of the local school council had worked together as cross-functional teams.

In creating Continuous Growth plans for their schools, action teams applied gap analysis to one or two key improvement plan goals. In relation to those goals, they asked, “Where are we now, and where do we want to be in the year 2000?” Once they began discussions, all sorts of ideas emerged. Dixon School, for example, chose “high quality educational experience through student guidance and discipline” as its goal. In deciding to institute a student-run court, team members realized they would need staff who knew judicial procedures, understood conflict resolution, and could facilitate leadership in students. They were eager to put in place a detailed plan to develop that expertise.

In the coming months, we will be incorporating all-new learnings into our design. A survey to verify the high-performance characteristics will be disseminated. A plan to determine competencies and skills for all job categories will be in place. Last but certainly not least, we will continue to address ways to attach time and money to development so that plans are not papers to file, but rather are living documents that guide training and development on an ongoing basis.
Updates

Subdistrict councils targeted by business-backed legislation

by Michael Klonsky

Subdistrict councils would lose most of their power and perhaps even their jobs under a package of legislative proposals developed by the corporate community and backed by key city and state leaders. Under the package, the power to initiate action against failing schools would be transferred from the councils to Supt. Argie Johnson through a new, quasi-independent accountability commission. And the School Board Nominating Commission, which is composed primarily of subdistrict council members, would be abolished, giving the mayor the authority to appoint School Board members directly.

The legislative package, which as CATALYST went to press was not yet in bill form, is being pushed primarily by two corporate groups, Leadership for Quality Education and the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago. It also includes provisions to weaken teacher tenure, give principals more power to choose their staffs and turn over the jobs of the school system’s highly paid engineers to private companies—all of which have been promoted in the past by Republican lawmakers and Mayor Daley.

Money hopes dashed

Before Mayor Richard M. Daley’s controversial airport compact with Gary, Ind., John Ayers, executive director of Leadership for Quality Education, said that corporate leaders were hopeful that these changes in the School Reform Act would “loosen the [Legislature’s] purse strings on financial aid to Chicago schools.” With Republicans newly incensed with Daley, though, Ayers is no longer sanguine. Even so, he thinks the new legislation is “sorely needed whether or not we get more money.” As for making a major change in the Reform Act, Ayers says: “The reform law is a brilliant piece of legislation. But, it is not the gospel.”

Both the business leaders and the politicians are fed up with subdistrict superintendents and councils for failing to take vigorous action at failing schools. Almost five years after schools put their first school improvement plans into effect, only three of the city’s 11 subdistrict councils have put schools on remediation—and only then under pressure from Supt. Johnson. In March, the High School Subdistrict Council put Austin Community Academy on remediation; months earlier, the Subdistrict 10 Council stepped in at West Pullman Elementary, and the Subdistrict 4 Council at Brown, Lewis and Tilton elementary schools. And remediation is only the first step in a lengthy process that could lead, after more than a year, to such penalties as replacement of a school’s principal, faculty and local school council.

In addition, business leaders and Mayor Daley are down on the subdistrict councils because they view them as a base for opposition political groups.

Details of the proposed new accountability commission initially were developed by researcher Anthony Bryk, a University of Chicago education professor on loan to the School Board. Bryk’s January draft suggests that a Chicago Accountability and Quality Assurance Agency be established by state law as a joint enterprise of the Chicago Board of Education and the Illinois State Board of Education. This new agency would provide a compre-

Outside a Senate committee hearing on Chicago schools, reform activists identify the “Top 10 Lies about Chicago School Reform.” Here, Donald Moore of Designs for Change takes the microphone.
hensive system of review, evaluation and analysis of performance for every school in the system. It also would have the power to recommend action when schools fail to improve, including remediation and reconstitution.

Sources close to Supt. Johnson say she favors the commission but now would prefer to create it through negotiations with the Illinois State Board of Education rather than through the political process. Her goal is to lodge accountability with one entity that understands Chicago schools; currently, schools are subjected to several sets of accountability measures, one developed by the state, one created by the Reform Act and one developed by Johnson's administration.

Reformers divided

However, Johnson also wants the authority to intervene directly at failing schools, and she acknowledges that would take a change in the Reform Act.

Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change and a leading author of the Reform Act, agrees that a new accountability process is needed, but is leery about putting too much power in the hands of the superintendent. Moore recalls that he and others who wrote the law wanted to make sure that “intervention wouldn't be done capriciously or against schools that someone didn't like.”

Two alternatives were proposed, he says. One would have given power to the superintendent to place schools on remediation but would have allowed schools to appeal to an independent agency of some kind—Moore says he favored that approach. The second was the subdistrict council process, which Moore says, “obviously hasn’t worked.”

Moore now wants schools to have time to “fix themselves” under remediation and to have the right to appeal actions taken by the superintendent.

James Deanes, who also helped write the School Reform Act, counters: “You haven't given the districts a chance.” Deanes has served on West Side local and subdistrict councils and the School Board Nominating Commission since the outset of reform. “Councils haven't been given the training or resources to remediate schools,” he argues.

“This [the new commission] is just one more layer of bureaucracy using money that should be going to local schools. It doesn't address the root of the problem,” he adds.

The accountability commission would be the third oversight body created by the Legislature but funded by the Chicago school system. Both the School Finance Authority, established in 1980 to sell bonds to keep schools open, and the Learning Zones Commission, established earlier this year to oversee Gov. Jim Edgar's reform plan for Chicago, are funded wholly by the School Board. But the new accountability commission would get some of its money directly from the state, according to an early draft of the proposal.

The commission's work would be overseen by a four-person council, including the state superintendent of education, the general superintendent of the Chicago schools, someone appointed by the governor and someone appointed by the mayor.

The Chicago Teachers Union also opposes creation of a commission. “Over and over, we hear pontification about doing it for the kids,” says CTU spokesperson Jackie Gallagher. “Now we have a new move by people who are not educators or parents to run the schools. Whatever happened to the business community's talk about local control?”

Airport fallout

SPRINGFIELD—Fallout from Mayor Richard M. Daley's attempt to thwart Republican takeover of the city's airports apparently isn't affecting negotiations regarding Chicago schools.

Although there has been speculation that Daley's airport compact with Gary, Ind., could jeopardize ongoing school talks, the mayor and Republicans already agree on several components of the reform package.

“We're not going to screw the kids just because the mayor is an . . . ,” says Michael Cys, cutting himself off. Cys is spokesman for House Speaker Lee Daniels (R-Elmhurst).

While Republican lawmakers say Daley will be hard-pressed to get his agenda through the General Assembly this spring, a bill giving the mayor control of the School Board is still likely to pass.

Daley's negotiators also are still at the table on legislation that would create a new accountability commission, break Chicago into 10 school districts and force the School Board to sell property that isn't needed for educational purposes.

Senate President James "Pate" Philip (R-Wood Dale) is still pushing his plan to ban teacher strikes, eliminate tenure and impose teacher testing. But Gov. Jim Edgar and Daniels say Daley's airport compact hasn't softened their opposition to Philip's bill.

"It's hard to say at this point what will happen," Mark Gordon, Philip's spokesperson, said as CATALYST went to press. "But I think Chicago will find a lot fewer sympathetic ears when they come to Springfield."

Michael Hawthorne

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Comings and goings

LSC SURVEY The Consortium on Chicago School Research is conducting a survey of local school council members to add to its previous surveys of principals, teachers and students. All LSC members will be asked to complete the surveys during their regular May meetings. Results will form the basis for a series of reports; respondents will not be identified.

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS The following principals have received new contracts expiring June 1999: Miryam Assaf-Keller, Lloyd; Yvonne Bennett, Bryn Mawr; Catherine Bushbacher, Reinberg; Peter Bushbacher, Scammel; Ethel James Collier, Burnsie; Willie Critenden, Julian High; Sandra Crosby, Hay; Joanne Davis, Armour; David Domovic, Peck; Katherine Planagan, Manley High; Linda Ford, Brownell; Donald Fumo, Moos/Rocha; Rita Gardner, Shields; Albert Gaston Jr., Fulton; Sandra Givens, Spencer; Mary Goosby, Pullman; Reva Hairston, Terrell; Joyce Jager, Eberhart; Johnetta James, Kilmer; Ronald James, Avondale; Nancy Labo, Burley; Therese McManamon, Peterson.

MORE PRINCIPALS Gaynell Moore, Reed; Richard Parker, Harper High; Rita Pedone, Mt. Greenwood; Zoran Petrovich, Ogden; Linda Pierzchalski, Bogan High; Jacqueline Robinson, Emmet; Sylvia Rodrigue; Perez; Melver Scott, Crane High; Betty Sibley, Cuffe; Lillian Stawicki, Lemoine; Elisha Walker, Doolittle East; Nancy Wallace, Volta; Michael Woods, Westcott. . . .

Interim Principal Miguel Trujillo has been appointed contract principal of Hedges.

YEAR-ROUND SCHOOLS "Year-Round Education: Not Just for Space—But for Space Age Learning" is the theme of the second annual conference of the Illinois Association for Year-Round Education. The conference will be held from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. May 13 at 802 S. Halsted, Lecture Center C-4. Co-sponsors are the Chicago Teachers Union and the Center for Urban Educational Research and Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Registration is $25 in advance or $30 at door. Contact Molly Carroll, IAYRE, PO. Box 25480, Chicago, IL 60625 (312) 534-4315 . . .

Carroll, assistant director of the CTU's Quest Center, has been appointed to the association's board.

FUTURE TEACHERS The Golden Apple Scholars of Illinois program is now accepting applications from high school juniors who want to become teachers. Sixty students will receive financial aid, classroom experience, training and mentoring by an award-winning teacher at participating Illinois universities, in exchange for a commitment to teach in an Illinois school for five years after graduation. Deadline: July 28. For a nomination form, call the Golden Apple Foundation, (312) 407-0006.

WINNING TECHNOLOGY Eleven Chicago public school have won multimedia computer systems and software in the Creative Computing in Education Awards competition, sponsored by Microsoft Corp., Elek-Tek Inc., and Compaq Corp. The 11 schools were selected from 60 that submitted proposals detailing how the technology would be used to improve math and science instruction. The 11 schools are: Bennett/Sheff, Chavez, Healy, Jungman, Kinzie, Ryder, Smyser and Stowe elementary; Arad and Clark middle; and Bogan high. Lynnette Richardson

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