Foster kids funnel into struggling schools

Also: One neighborhood’s high-income housing, low-income schools
Foster children deserve more school support

Children who are taken from their parents because of abuse or neglect carry an enormous emotional burden. So it comes as no surprise that research has found that, on average, they do not fare well in school and are at increased risk of dropping out.

“Foster kids are more likely to have academic problems, behavioral problems and mental health problems,” says Ted Greenblatt of Treehouse, a foster care advocacy group in Seattle, Wash., that is lobbying for changes in state law to ease the plight of foster children.

The governmental systems responsible for these children have yet to rise to the challenge of meeting their educational needs. For starters, their record keeping and sharing are so bad that it’s hard to craft targeted solutions.

As a joint investigation by CATALYST and The Chicago Reporter shows, many foster children are concentrated in a handful of public schools. In Chicago, 20 percent of children whose legal guardian is listed as “non-relative” were enrolled in just 32 schools, mostly in the poorest neighborhoods on the South and West sides. The data analysis by Maureen Kelleher of CATALYST and Sarah Karp of the Reporter also found that there are more schools now with a high concentration of foster children than there were 10 years ago. In 1991, only two schools, both for special education students, had enrollments that were at least 10 percent foster children; by 2001, the number was 42 schools.

Compounding the problem, these schools receive few, if any, extra resources to help the foster children.

Child welfare advocates, such as Thomas Vanden Berk, CEO of Uhlich Children’s Home, say the state and school districts must step up to the plate. “If they are going to put all these foster children in a couple schools, then they have to put some money in these schools,” he declares.

Both the state Department of Children and Family Services, which is responsible for foster children, and the Chicago Public Schools have taken some tentative steps in that direction. For the last two years, DCFS has put up $1.5 million a year for extra social workers at schools with the most state wards. All but one of the seniors who were served by the program last spring graduated and half of them went on to college. This year, school officials are convening a focus group to study the education needs of highly mobile children. The committee’s work will culminate in policy recommendations in time for next year’s budget cycle.

Similar efforts in other cities also are worth examining. Earlier this year, a public policy law firm in Pennsylvania released its own recommendations for removing bureaucratic obstacles that interfere with a foster child’s enrollment in new schools. Seattle-based Treehouse is sponsoring a state law that would reduce mobility by allowing foster children to remain enrolled at the same school for the first 60 days of a new home placement.

School improvement efforts don’t always have to cost more money, but in this instance, there’s little way around it. Foster children need more counseling, and overburdened teachers, who are not trained to handle emotional trauma, cannot be expected to do it. If CPS or DCFS hired more counselors and psychologists out of current budgets, they would only be robbing Peter to pay Paul.

State legislators must step in. Without a substantial and timely commitment of extra resources for schools with high concentrations of foster children, the children for whom the state itself is responsible will not get a fair shot at improving their lot in life.

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FOSTER CHILDREN

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Child welfare \textsuperscript{Rx} has side effects for schools

by Sarah Karp

When Tyrone McGhee began missing classes at Austin High School halfway through his sophomore year in 1999, few noticed. The tall, quiet young man says not one teacher or counselor called his house or tracked him down.

“Some of the students cared,” he says. “My friends were like, ‘Hey, where’s Tyrone?’”

McGhee is a ward of the state, and the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is his official guardian, school records show. Caseworkers are supposed to check on wards at their schools every six months. But McGhee said he didn’t see a caseworker that entire year.

His foster parents talked to him about the importance of education, he says, but they were preoccupied with their four other foster children and their work as seamstresses.

For a semester, McGhee, then 17, hardly went to classes. He says he spent most of his time sitting on his bed, feeling alone. By the time his report card came with mostly Ds and Fs, he decided he would not go back.

Like McGhee, thousands of children removed from abusive or neglectful parents and placed in foster care show up in Chicago public schools and try to learn despite a host of personal problems. Many of them end up in just a small number of the city’s 600 schools, a joint investigation by \textit{The Chicago Reporter} and CATALYST: Voices of Chicago School Reform shows.
During the 2001-2002 school year, the community of Austin—where Austin High School is based—had seven schools with high concentrations of foster children, more than any other neighborhood in the city, according to the Reporter/CATALYST analysis.

The concentration creates an extraordinary challenge for schools under intense pressure to raise student achievement, school principals say. But DCFS officials counter that principals are using foster children as an excuse for poor performance. Children's advocates, however, say the schools and the state both need to do a better job of educating these children.

“I say they have to make up their damn minds,” says Thomas C. Vanden Berk, president and chief executive officer of the Uhlich Children's Home, which houses a residential program, school and traditional foster care program for wards of the state. “If they are going to put all these foster children in a couple schools, then they have to put some money in these schools. Or they should spread them out.”

Public officials in the child welfare system say the concentration is a side effect of a DCFS policy that strongly encourages placement of foster children with their relatives. Because most wards come from poor, black communities, that's where they often remain.

Clouding the issue is a lack of firm data. Neither the Chicago Public Schools nor DCFS accurately tracks foster children in the schools, both institutions concede.

The Chicago Public Schools does collect information on a child's legal guardian, who is classified by relationship. A category for “non-relative guardian” includes wards of the state and other children whose legal guardians are not parents or other relatives.

According to the most recent data, 20 percent of these children in 2001-2002 were enrolled in just 32 schools (13 high schools and 19 elementary schools) on the South and West sides of the city. The worst-case example is a school of more than 1,700 with close to 200 of these children enrolled.

Ten years ago, only two special education schools had 10 percent or more of these children enrolled. Last year, 42 schools had crossed that threshold. However, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, which supplied the data to the Reporter and CATALYST, cautions that they exaggerate the number of foster children per school because they are not updated regularly and most likely include children who are no longer in the child welfare system or who otherwise live with adults they are not related to. The Consortium is an independent research group based at the University of Chicago.

“I will go with this as the record of children who have ever experienced abuse and neglect,” says Melissa Rodrick, director of strategic planning with the Chicago Public Schools. She is also a director at the Consortium.

DCFS officials dispute the data. “It is wrong,” says Martha Allen, chief of staff.
“These are the schools ... and the kids with the greatest needs. The two just aren’t compatible.”

State Sen. Rickey Hendon (D-Chicago)

Concentrated Kids

One-fifth of all students with non-relative guardians are enrolled in 32 of the city’s 600 public schools.

These schools are located in poor, predominantly black community areas on the city’s South and West Sides.

Per-capita income

- $0 to $9,999
- $10,000 to $14,999
- $15,000 to $19,999
- $20,000 to $24,999
- $25,000 to $34,999
- $35,000 and above

□ School where foster children have been placed

SOURCE: The Chicago Reporter/CATALYST analysis of CPS data from the Consortium on Chicago School Research

Greatest needs

Whether DCFS or CPS is responsible for educating these children depends on who’s being asked.

Since 1992, DCFS has had a specific legal obligation to make sure its wards are educated, says Benjamin S. Wolf, associate legal director at the Chicago chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union. “DCFS is failing to be a decent, responsible parent, which is especially bad considering we took these children away from their parents claiming we could do a better job,” Wolf says.

Most of the children were struggling in school when they were still living in difficult environments with their biological parents, says Jess McDonald, the director of DCFS.
“So these were the sickest of the sick—
est in many respects,” he says. “The
question is: Where were those schools
serving those kids before they were in
foster care—and tell me again the
responsibility of the child welfare system
for public education.

“Don’t you think it is a little ludic-
rous for a principal to say, ‘I am not
doing well [and] my teachers are not
doing well at teaching because my kids
aren’t smart enough. … I need a better
class of clients’?”

Legalities aside, school principals
simply want more help. They say it is dif-
ficult to meet CPS performance goals
with students whose family lives have
been disrupted. They also say they do
not have the time or energy to deal with
the personal issues many foster children
bring with them to school.

“What more can schools do?” says
Christopher Robinson, who is the assist-
ant principal at Mildred Lavizzo Ele-
mentary School, at 138 W. 109th St. in
Roseland. “I think there is already too
much put on the schools.”

CPS Chief Executive Officer Arne
Duncan says he believes teachers and
principals are working “extremely hard”
to meet the needs of all their students,
and the central office must provide them
with more help if they need it. His staff
is forming a committee to discuss how
to better teach children in special cir-
cumstances, such as foster care. (See
sidebar page 8.)

“This is not about blaming anyone,”
Duncan says. “The question is, ‘How do
we help to break these cycles?’ These are
the children most at risk and we have to
devote ourselves fully to make sure
these children succeed.”

After talking to parents, teachers and
principals in his West Side district, State
Sen. Rickey Hendon (D-Chicago) spon-
sored two bills that would provide extra
financial resources for schools that serve
foster children. “These are the schools
with the greatest need and they are the
kids with the greatest needs,” says Hen-
don. “The two just aren’t compatible.”

But neither of his bills passed, and
Hendon blames Republicans.

State Sen. Dave Syverson, a Rockford
Republican who chairs the Senate’s Pub-
lic Health and Welfare Committee,
agrees that DCFS should be keeping an
eye on the progress of foster children in
school. However, he says that ultimately
the job of making sure foster children
get a good education falls on individual
foster parents and schools.

Syverson believes there is already
enough extra federal and state money is
flowing to schools with lots of at-risk
children. “If you total up all that money
from [federal education] programs like
Head Start and Title I, then it is a lot,” he
says. “That should be leveling the play-
ning field, and, if that is not happening,
then we need to look at that.”

Getting out

Many directors of social service agencies
and advocates believe it was a failure of
DCFS and CPS not to realize, until
recently, that the policy of placing foster
children with relatives would concen-
trate them in poor neighborhoods
whose schools have few resources.

In addition to struggling with family
problems, many foster children have spe-
cial education needs and don’t stay in
one school for long. Experts estimate
that foster children are two to three
times more likely than others to be in
special education. On average, foster
children move eight times before finding
a permanent home, according to DCFS.

“We need to send these children to
schools that have the capacity to deal
with these life situations,” says Jerry
Stermer, executive director of the Chica-
go-based advocacy group Voices for Illi-
nois Children. “We need schools that
can take the time and [have] the resources.”

Fred Long, who lived with his grand-
mother and seven siblings as a foster
child, spent years in the child welfare
system, working his way through col-
lege and into a good job. He says it
makes sense to send foster children to
schools where they can be around other
students who are motivated to learn.

Long says he had more support than
most foster children. His grandmother
stayed after him to get good grades, a
counselor at the school reached out to
him, and a caseworker got him involved
in programs that took him out of the
Roseland community where he lived. “If
you surround yourself with positive peo-
ple you will achieve more,” says Long,
now a youth development specialist for
Uhlich Children’s Home.

But Long says his brothers and sis-
ters have had a hard time. By the time
they were coming up, his grandmother
was getting older and no longer had the
energy to “chastise” them, he says. (See
related story, page 9.)

Long is the only one who graduated
from high school. His youngest sister is
now five months pregnant at age 13. “My
brothers and sisters are still trying to
find themselves.”

Speaking up

A lack of parental involvement is one
reason foster children fail to get a good
education, especially in large systems
like Chicago’s where a mother who
presses for a child’s schooling can make
a big difference, Loyola’s Vidal de
Haymes says.

Previously, social service agencies
and foster parents faced no conse-
quences if the children in their care didn’t
go to school or do well there. But
DCFS is currently working on re-writing
the contracts they have with social serv-
ice agencies—who find foster parents—to
make the agencies responsible.

Carol Martin says part of her job as a
foster mother is to be patient and to
make others who work with her kids
develop the same kind of patience.

Falling behind

The 32 elementary and high schools where foster kids are most often found rank far
behind the city’s remaining schools in reading and math scores. Students at the school
are more likely to be black, poor and to change schools often.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of Students Who Are...</th>
<th>Foster Schools</th>
<th>Rest of CPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Predominantly Poor</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Mobile</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Goal in Math Scores</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Goal in Reading Scores</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: The Chicago Reporter/CATALYST analysis of CPS data
“Because I am in foster care, I have to grow up faster.”

She describes an incident involving her foster son, Dwight, who is a sophomore at Austin High School. Dwight came home from school and complained that a security guard in the cafeteria was picking on him. Martin followed up with a call to the principal to find out what happened.

“Once [the principal] realized that Dwight was one of Mrs. Martin’s boys, everything got cleared up fast,” she says. “Everyone knows me there. And, once they knew that someone cared about Dwight, they treated him differently.”

Mary Ann Alexander and her husband, Prentiss, raised seven biological children, most of whom are grown, and have adopted four others from the foster care system. They also plan to adopt another foster child who is now in their care.

Four of Alexander’s foster children attend Young Elementary in Austin, a school that enrolls more foster children than any other public elementary school, CPS and DCFS officials agree. But their figures differ widely. According to CPS, 196 Young students were living with non-relatives last year; DCFS officials cite a much lower number for this year.

Alexander says she meets other foster parents at Young and hears them complain about DCFS and the school. But she believes it’s her responsibility to make sure the school and DCFS respond to her children’s needs. “Only the foster mother really knows what the child needs,” she says.

Overcoming odds

The breakdown in the education of foster children might have less to do with DCFS placement policy and more to do with problems the schools and DCFS have in getting things done. On the ground level, the debate is between caseworkers, social service agencies, school clerks and principals.

DCFS caseworkers tell of their frustration at trying to work with schools on the simplest things, like registering children for classes. They say they frequently spend days waiting in school offices for paperwork to arrive while the children sit at home.

School staff counter that they have to spend large amounts of time trying to figure out who is responsible for foster children—time that could be spent preparing lesson plans.

“You call one number and it is disconnected, you call another number and the parent tells you the child is no longer with her, and then you call the social service agency and the caseworker is new,” says Charles Robinson, Young’s assistant principal and head disciplinarian. “I get frustrated.”

It’s even more aggravating for the young people involved.

Mary, 17, says sometimes she had no help as she tried to negotiate her way into a good school.

Mary, whose real name can’t be used because she is still a ward of the state, lives in an apartment by herself as part of a transitional living program. Although the other residents of her apartment building are also wards, she often feels alone, she says.

“It is not too good,” says Mary, a tall black girl who wears her hair in a tight ponytail and has dark brown, almond-shaped eyes. “It is not what you would expect if you were living at home. Because I am in foster care, I have to grow up faster.”

She says she wound up in the transitional living program as the result of one bad placement after another.

For her, school was always a safe haven, the one place she could go to escape the chaos in her family life. As a young child, she lucked out because, even as she moved from one house to another, she was able to stay in the same school. Mary had the grades and motivation to go to a magnet high school, but had trouble persuading the administration that a foster child could make it there. After getting straight A’s for a year in a poor-performing high school in her neighborhood, she was allowed to transfer.

But even at her new school, she often feels singled out. “On every attendance sheet, next to my name it lists DCFS as my guardian,” she says. “Sometimes the office will call me using the public announcement system, saying, ‘Mary, your caseworker is here.’

“That is always a long walk from the classroom to the office,” Mary says. “A long walk with my head down.”

Sarah Karp is a reporter for The Chicago Reporter. CATALYST Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher contributed to this report.
Grandparent guardians on the rise

Mary Anna Brown, 74, sits in the attendance office at Marshall High School waiting to discuss her great-grandson’s spotty attendance record. Classes have been in session for only a month yet he has already missed five days.

The 15-year-old freshman is the oldest of five great-grandchildren whom Brown adopted a few years ago following her granddaughter’s death. “I didn’t want them to grow up in a foster home,” she says.

But raising them on her own is a daily challenge to Brown’s energy and financial wherewithal. “I’ve got five children in three schools,” Brown frets as she watches the clock. “I’ve got a new prescription, and I haven’t had time to go get it filled. I have to be home at 1 to meet the bus” for her 14-year-old who is physically disabled.

In Chicago and across the country, more and more grandparents, and in some cases great-grandparents like Brown, are caring for offspring whose parents are unable to raise them. Some become foster or adoptive parents, but most are unofficial guardians who step in before the child welfare system intervenes.

It’s a growing trend nationally and locally. According to the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the number of children living in grandparent-headed households is up 30 percent since 1990. In Chicago, the number of children living with relatives who are not parents rose 23 percent, according to the 2000 U.S. Census.

Many of them are grandmothers. “I have a lot of grandmothers who have taken on their daughter’s children,” says Cathy Williamson, an assistant principal at Schmid Elementary in Pullman. “A lot of times all grandma can do is feed and clothe them.”

Indeed, grandparents who are raising grandchildren are more likely to be poor than wealthy, according to AARP. Brown, for example, gives her son daily bus fare, but not lunch money. “You can come home and eat,” she tells him. “Plenty of food.” She hopes the short leash will keep him off the streets, too.

School officials often see generous grandparents stretching their limited incomes to care for children. “They don’t always have the resources to raise children,” observes Ernestine Rice, teacher assistant for attendance at Marshall High. “Most grandparents split their little monies to raise the grandchildren.”

Rice founded Marshall’s grandparents club, a monthly support group whose members also serve as mentors to students. The group helped Johnnie Mae Riley, 72, keep her grandson, Jason, on track to graduate.

Riley had been parenting Jason since he was 3, but he hit rough times in high school. “He was coming to school high, hanging out, cutting class,” she recalls. “He would never go to class.”

Riley enlisted members of the grandparents club to set him straight. “They all knew his face,” she says. “When they’d see him in the hall, they said, ‘Go to class.’ He got where he couldn’t ditch his classes anymore.”

Attendance assistant Rice tries to persuade Brown to join the group. “I bet our grandparents here could help you,” she offers. “I’m sure they could,” Brown responds.

Rice gives her the dates of the next meeting, and Brown says she’ll try to attend. But later, Rice acknowledges that Brown’s hands are already full and says she hopes she’ll have enough time and energy to make the next meeting.

School officials observe elderly caretakers often lack the energy to keep up with children, supervise homework and advocate for them at school. “I find that to be the biggest problem with foster children,” says Principal Jacqueline Anderson of Young Elementary in Austin. “They try, but it’s still overwhelming.”

Physical stamina is even more important when grandparents are caring for a child with a severe emotional or behavioral problem. At Montefiore Special School, a facility for disturbed boys, many of the 17 foster children attending this year are living with a grandmother, says Principal Mary Ann Pollett.

For Brown, who also cares for a special needs child, taking care of her great-grandchildren is a matter of faith. She refuses to give up on her eldest, though she is worried. “He don’t come home after school. I never see his homework. I never see him study. I’m getting upset.”

Still, Brown says she’s not going to give up. She encourages him to talk to a relative who is younger than she is, and if he drops out of Marshall, she says she will help him find another school. “When I finish up with [my great-grandchildren] late at night, I lay down and ask for strength for the next day,” she says.

Maureen Kelleher
State program strives to engage wards in school

by Maureen Kelleher

L ast year, several boys who were wards of the state and lived together in a group home repeatedly missed classes and caused trouble at Corliss High School.

Principal Anthony Spivey declines to share details, but says their discipline problems were severe enough for him to know them personally in a school of over 1,000 students.

This year, he says, only one of them has landed in his office. For the most part, the boys are better behaved and attending school regularly. What made the difference is Project STRIVE, a program funded by the Department of Children and Family Services that places counselors and social workers in CPS schools with large numbers of foster children. STRIVE stands for Strategies to Rejuvenate Interest and Value in Education.

Now, two STRIVE counselors work at Corliss—one full time, one part time—and they regularly track down absences and counsel wayward students. They also talk to suspended students before those students return to class and help them figure out ways to avoid future trouble.

“It was God-sent,” Spivey declares.

Since it was piloted three years ago, STRIVE has improved the academic outlook for foster children in the 10 schools where it operates, according to school and DCFS officials. DCFS pays two social service agencies a total of $1.5 million a year to place counselors and social workers at those schools. The attendance rate of high school wards who worked with STRIVE counselors is higher than the CPS district average. Last year, all but one of the 32 seniors STRIVE worked with graduated, and half went on to college.

STRIVE counselors keep track of foster children’s attendance and make calls and home visits quickly when they fail to show up at school. They also offer guidance and organize support groups to address emotional issues such as grief.

“It’s definitely making a difference,” says Rosemary Dawson, a staff counselor at Calumet High School. “In a lot of cases, if you don’t have anybody working with [wards] they get discouraged and they don’t come to school.”

The extra counselors and social workers also pick up some of the slack in CPS supportive services by helping other students who are not part of the child welfare system, a measure that helps protect wards’ identities. “Our kids are very stigmatized,” notes DCFS education specialist Krista Hinton.

“The dirty little fact is that DCFS wards do not succeed in school,” says David Simpson, who oversees STRIVE counselors at Youth Guidance, one of two agencies contracted by DCFS. “It’s hard for a caseworker with 20 [foster children] to know the 10 schools they are in.”

The other agency that oversees STRIVE counselors is Metropolitan Family Services.

But STRIVE only reaches a small fraction of the thousands of foster children in CPS schools who studies show are more likely to miss school and eventually drop out before graduating. Last year they served 373 wards. Of those wards, 322 were in high school. Their daily attendance averaged 87 percent, just above the 86 percent average for high school students systemwide.

Foster children need more social and emotional support than public schools are currently financially able to offer, Spivey says. “We need all the support we can get.”

Not surprisingly, STRIVE scores well overall with principals who are participating in the program. “They told me it was doing great,” says Lillie Winston, who oversees a CPS program for foster children and serves as a district liaison to DCFS. Winston met with principals over the summer for a year-end progress report.

Getting started

The tiny program began as a pilot in 1999 at Oglesby Elementary, a school where a sizeable population of current and former state wards were enrolled.

Principal Jo Marie Cooper was glad to get extra support to help students adjust. Before STRIVE came into the picture, the local school council had earmarked a big chunk of the school’s discretionary money to pay for a full-time psychologist to counsel students. “We know that a child is not just a brain,” Cooper says. “A child comes to us with needs—emotional, physical, spiritual. If you’re all pent up emotionally, and I ask you to do an algebra equation, your mind is not on that.”

Hinton, who was a caseworker then, visited Oglesby and learned the school was interested in finding ways to provide wards with extra support. At the time, DCFS had hired Youth Guidance to counsel children outside of schools, but the agency had decades of expertise working inside schools. (Coincidentally, it was in 1999 that DCFS first received data on how their wards were faring in school, and they were not doing well.)

When they first arrived, STRIVE counselors decided the best way to learn about
the school and its neighborhood, Auburn-Gresham, was to track down truants. In the process, Oglesby’s overall truancy rate was reduced by nearly 75 percent.

At the same time, STRIVE counselors were able to get to the bottom of children’s behavior and academic performance problems, something that teachers often don’t have time to do. Angela Lampkin, a 6th grade teacher, recalls the program helped her reach a difficult student. “She didn’t want to read in front of the class or go to the board to do math problems,” Lampkin recalls. “I didn’t know why, because she could do the work.”

The counselor visited the girl’s home and learned that she had taken responsibility for looking after her siblings and doing household chores. The counselor advised Lampkin to work with her one-on-one rather than in front of a group. “Once I did that, things started to turn around,” Lampkin says. “It helped me to remember that her self-esteem was low.”

Program has limits

Oglesby’s improved attendance and increased parental involvement, including foster parents, convinced DCFS it was worth expanding the program. CPS psychologists and social workers are stretched thin. Now there are about 380 social workers and 241 psychologists. Social workers may visit a few schools for half a day every week or a full day every two weeks.

Schools that want more than one social worker have to hire the second one with discretionary money, but that rarely happens, says Karen Sykes, who heads up CPS pupil support services.

DCFS expanded STRIVE at schools with high numbers of foster children by hiring two social service agencies to provide the counselors. While CPS social workers must watch out for a wide range of children and their needs, STRIVE counselors have a more targeted mission. “Our workers know all the wards,” says Simpson. “A kid gets real angry in class and the worker is able to sit down with the child and the teacher, so there’s no more problem.”

However, STRIVE has its limits in the toughest family situations. A STRIVE social worker reached her limit working with a Fenger High student who stopped coming to class. The social worker tracked down the girl’s address and paid her a visit only to learn that she had been kicked out of the house for attacking her grandmother.

“We’re still having a real problem with her attendance, says attendance coordinator Dortha Butler. “It’s not getting any better.”

To make sure teenage wards stay in school, one STRIVE social worker keeps tabs on his 8th grade wards after they graduate elementary school. John Zeigler says most of his graduates are enrolled at Calumet, so he asked STRIVE workers there to let him know how his boys are doing. “They will let me know about the boys’ academics,” says Ziegler, who also keeps in touch with wards who attend other high schools, often by going to a freshman football game. “This program doesn’t end,” he says.

But it could, cautions Simpson. “My fear about STRIVE is it could be a flavor of the month.”

Mary Sue Morsch, DCFS executive deputy director, says her agency has no plans to cut STRIVE. Expanding the program could be tough in this year’s fiscal climate, however.
Chicago schools are not the only ones grappling with the education of former and current foster children. Eight south suburban school districts are asking the state legislature for help with such students.

The superintendents of these districts say that in the past seven or eight years they have seen an influx of foster children and children who were recently adopted. The school districts realized they shared this problem after they got together to form the South Cook Education Consortium to lobby for regional school funding changes. Districts that joined are in South Holland, Posen-Robbins, West Harvey-Dixmoor, Dolton, Harvey, Ford Heights, Markham and Riverdale.

Concentrations of foster children put “undue stress on the local school districts,” says State Rep. David Miller, whose district includes Calumet City and parts of Chicago’s South Side.

This past legislative session, Miller introduced two bills that he thinks would help. One would change the school funding formula to make sure districts get extra money for foster children. The other would make sure districts get reimbursed for educating special-needs foster children, even after they are adopted.

Dorothea Fitzgerald, superintendent of Dolton School District 148, says several of the school districts have had to hire extra social workers to serve the needs of these children. “These children bring with them their anger, [and] they bring with them their gaps in achievement,” she says. “But they bring along nothing in terms of financial incentives.”

With the state facing a budget crunch, neither bill was passed, but Miller said he will push them again in the spring.

Like Chicago, these districts are overwhelmingly black or Latino (97 percent) and poor (about 80 percent). Unlike Chicago, all of the districts have dwindling property-tax bases and deficits.

These districts are small, enrolling fewer than 3,300 students each. As a result, even small changes in student populations can have an impact on both operations and finances.

“Foster children are not the problem,” says Doug Hamilton, superintendent of School District 151 in South Holland. “But in school districts with limited resources, in deficit spending, they are just one more straw on the camel’s back.”

The state currently sends districts extra money for foster children whose special education needs require them to be taught at home or in therapeutic day schools. But schools don’t get any money for foster children in regular schools.

Under pressure from a federal law, DCFS changed its policy in the mid-1990s to encourage adoption. Since then, thousands of children have been adopted out of foster care.

While DCFS gives most adoptive families a stipend, the state stops paying the special education costs the moment a child is adopted. This can be between $13,000 and $25,000, depending on the severity of the child’s needs. Hamilton says he and others are glad to see the state finding permanent homes for foster children, but he believes the school districts should continue to be reimbursed after the children are adopted.

Similarly, DCFS usually pays for counseling for foster children, but the funding stops if the children are adopted. That means less attention is paid to their emotional needs, says Deborah Sazeks, the director of special education at General George Patton School in District 133 in Riverdale.

“They even more falls back to the schools, and the school is being looked at as the end all, be all,” she says.

Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher contributed to this report.
Urban districts search for solutions

Chicago is not alone in its struggle to improve the education of foster children. Researchers agree that foster children face similar obstacles in school no matter where they live. The Department of Health and Human Services estimates that there were 556,000 children in foster care in 2000. The number of foster children in Cook County this year was pegged at just over 15,400, according to DCFS records.

The following roadblocks were outlined in studies by the Vera Institute for Justice in New York and by the Child Welfare Research Center at the University of California:

- Lack of coordination and data sharing between school and child welfare agencies often result in foster children not getting services they need. Yet, some child welfare officials resist sharing information out of concerns for children’s privacy and fears that they will be stigmatized.

- Foster children are highly mobile and often must transfer to new schools. If they have to wait for their records to catch up, they miss valuable school days, which can happen several times a year.

- Frequent court appearances and other appointments cause foster children to miss school, making it difficult for teachers to keep them up to speed in their work.

- Foster children’s own embarrassment about their situation can make them shy and withdrawn from peers and teachers, preventing them from making the personal connections they need to succeed.

- High turnover among caseworkers can aggravate children’s feelings of loss, separation and anxiety and increase their uncertainty about the future. This compounds any difficulty they may have concentrating in school.

- Foster children are more likely to be in special education than are children who live with their parents. Caseworkers and foster parents may be distracted or unfamiliar with the schools and, therefore, unable to advocate for special needs services or keep schools from placing their children in special education unnecessarily.

Solutions to the problems commonly experienced by foster children vary from district to district. “A few champions are making things happen,” observes Ted Greenblatt, education director of Treehouse, a nonprofit devoted to serving foster children in Seattle.

Treehouse and other agencies in Washington are supporting a state bill that addresses the high mobility rate among foster children. The measure would allow foster children to remain enrolled at the school they attend for the first 60 days of a new home placement. Nearly half of all foster children return home within that time frame anyway, one bill sponsor told the Seattle Times.

In New York City, the public schools and the child welfare system have been working since 1997 to match their records on foster children. “It’s still not perfected,” says Eric Nicklas, who oversees data management for the city’s child welfare agency.

The Vera Institute of Justice recently concluded a three-year pilot project to help foster children at four Bronx middle schools. The program, called Safe and Smart, installed full-time education specialists at each school to counsel the children and hold workshops to help teachers better understand the effects of separation anxiety and psychological trauma. But the program ran over budget, and school and child welfare officials have no plans to resume it.

In California, a state program called Foster Youth Services has made headway in easing school transfers by eliminating delays in forwarding school records. Education liaisons who work for the state child welfare agency are now responsible for keeping track of school records for foster children.

The program pays special attention to foster children who live in group homes, a particularly mobile population whose records are often lost.

Another California county found a way to ensure health records for foster children followed them when they transferred to new schools. Problems arose when children could not prove they had been immunized and were required to have unnecessary shots to enroll in a new school. San Diego County created a database that matched health and education records for foster children in all of its districts and hired educational liaisons (similar to those in Chicago) to link schools, foster caregivers and caseworkers.

Tracy Fried, a program coordinator, offers one example of how such efforts have benefited foster children in California. Last year, an education liaison intervened on behalf of a male foster child who was about to turn 18 and drop out because some of his school credits were missing, she recounts. The liaison’s efforts helped the boy graduate high school on time, she says. “[San Diego] County is trying to identify resources so that all foster youth have access to an educational liaison.”

Maureen Kelleher
**Foster children**

“The schools say we can’t do everything. But they are learning that they have to deal with the problems of their students in order for their students to learn.”

Mark Courtney, executive director, Chapin Hall Center for Children

**The problem**

Many children who have been in the child welfare system, who are more likely to have difficulty in school, are concentrated in schools in the poorest neighborhoods on the South and West sides, a joint analysis by CATALYST and The Chicago Reporter shows. These children are likely to attend the system’s worst high schools, and few graduate. Schools get few, if any, extra resources to address the academic and emotional needs of these children.

**Details**

✓ Neither CPS nor the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has accurately tracked the placement or academic performance of foster children. The best available data show that in 2000-2001, 20 percent of foster children in CPS were at 32 schools.

These schools are overwhelmingly African-American (91 percent) and low-income (75 percent). All of the 13 high schools and eight of the 19 elementary schools have such low student achievement that they have been on academic probation for at least one of the last five years.

✓ The concentration stems from a recent push by DCFS to place wards of the state with relatives, officials agree.

✓ A recent study, commissioned and disputed by DCFS, indicates that foster children, on average, perform below other CPS students and that their academic achievement declines the longer they remain in the child welfare system. Frequently, foster children drop out or are listed as missing by the time they reach high school.

**Action underway**

The Chicago Public Schools is forming a focus group on highly mobile children, including foster children, to make policy recommendations for next year’s budget. Figuring out a way to collect data on foster children will be a priority.

“I have no system to get that information,” says Melissa Roderick, head of strategic planning. “I don’t have it centrally. It’s really, really, really a problem.”

DCFS has created educational liaisons to help foster children get school services. It also funds Project STRIVE, which brings extra counseling help to 10 schools with large numbers of students who are wards.

Eight south suburban school districts are pushing legislation that would provide extra money for foster children and reimburse districts for educating special-needs foster children, even after they are adopted.

**Resources**

☞ DCFS has an online guide to help school administrators navigate child welfare agencies. Frequently asked questions cover a gamut of issues, from school-based child welfare investigations to how to track down a foster child’s caseworker. www.state.il.us/dcf/com_communications_protect.shtml

☞ DCFS education advisors intervene on behalf of foster children who need additional school services and serve as a resource for school staff. Cook County contacts are: Marguerite Chapman, south, (773) 371-6029; Christine Feldman, west and southwest, (773) 292-7732; Nancy Hablutzel, north, (312) 328-2477.

☞ Initiatives for Children At Risk (ICARE) is a division of the CPS Office of Specialized Services that serves as a liaison between DCFS and schools with a significant number of students living in group homes. ICARE trains schools to handle student behavior problems, coordinates school placements for foster children and advocates for wards to get special education services. Contact Lillie Winston at (773) 553-1928.

☞ Barbara Javaras oversees the CPS information office in Juvenile Court, which includes both juvenile detention and the child welfare courts that handle DCFS cases. The office helps judges, DCFS caseworkers, probation officers and other court staff obtain student records. (312) 433-5220.

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Chicago Community Trust

- $400,000 to the Chicago Community Foundation for its campaign to expand community schools in Chicago.
- $300,000 to the Strategic Learning Initiative to support its school and professional development project in Pilsen-area schools.
- $250,000 to the University of Chicago’s Center for School Improvement to support a reading development project at nine Chicago public elementary schools.
- $250,000 to Roosevelt University to support an advanced reading development project at nine Chicago public elementary schools.
- $250,000 to the University of Illinois at Chicago to support an advanced reading development program at 10 Chicago public elementary schools.
- $250,000 to National-Louis University to support an advanced reading demonstration project in nine Chicago public elementary schools.
- $250,000 to the University of Illinois at Chicago to support “Best Teachers for Chicago’s Neighborhood Schools,” a professional development project for new teachers in urban school districts.
- $160,000 to the Logan Square Neighborhood Association for its project to strengthen parent involvement in children’s literacy development.
- $110,000 to the Little Village Community Development Corporation to support planning and design of a new public high school in Little Village.
- $100,000 to North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School to support instructional improvement and professional development.
- $100,000 to Young Women’s Leadership Charter School for its language arts program.
- $25,000 to Cabrini Connections to support its tutor-mentor program.
- $25,000 to the Chicago Algebra Project to support a pilot program for fifth-year students at Fenger High.
- $25,000 to the CPS Children First Fund to support a public relations campaign for the district’s new education plan.
- $25,000 to the CPS Department of Professional Development for its teacher and principal leadership programs.
- $25,000 to the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center for its program to support teacher candidates for National Board Certification.
- $25,000 to the Erikson Institute to support a CPS commission that will examine ways to assess student development and achievement.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

- $4 million grant to the Chicago Charter School Foundation to open four small college preparatory high schools in Chicago over five years.
- $5,000 to Life Directions for general operating support.
- $5,000 to the Museum of Science & Industry to support its educational programming.
- $5,000 to Teach for America for salary support for a teacher in the North Lawndale community.
- $5,000 to Youth Guidance for the Comer School Development Program at Chalmers Elementary.

JCCC Foundation

- $5,000 to Chicago Chamber Musicians for music and music history programs at Burr Elementary.
- $5,000 to Chicago Youth Programs Inc. for its SCORE tutoring program, which matches at-risk children in Cabrini Green, Washington Park and Uptown with volunteer professionals and graduate students for one-on-one tutoring.
- $5,000 to the East Village Youth Program for a dropout prevention and college support program that helps at-risk students in near northwest neighborhoods.
- $5,000 to the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance to train West Side high school students to lead conservatory tours, care for plants and work with younger children on plant-related activities.
- $5,000 to the Illinois Unit of Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic to expand services to Humboldt Park students who have visual, perceptual or physical disabilities.
- $5,000 to the Little City Foundation to support art education classes for special education students at two CPS elementary schools.
- $5,000 to the Rochelle Lee Fund for CPS teacher training programs.
- $5,000 to the Smart Museum of Art to integrate museum exhibits into the Chicago elementary and high school curriculum.

Joyce Foundation

- $200,000 over 18 months to Center on Education Policy in Washington, D.C., to study special education systems in Chicago, Cleveland and Milwaukee public schools. The center will recommend revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and monitor the No Child Left Behind Act.
- $110,000 to Parents United for Responsible Education to provide training for LSCs, parents and others committed to CPS improvement.
- $110,000 to Chicago United to improve recruitment, training and retention of minority teachers in Chicago public schools.
- $100,000 to Business and Professional People for the Public Interest to support its small schools initiatives in CPS schools.

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

- $1.2 million to the University of Chicago Center for School Improvement to provide professional development to CPS schools.
- $300,000 to the Academy for Urban School Leadership for general operating support.
- $100,000 to CPS for an incentive plan to reward schools for improving students’ standardized test scores.
- $45,000 to Leadership for Quality Education to implement EXCEL, a standards-based model for principal evaluation, in all Chicago public schools.

U.S. Department of Education

- $529,010 to CPS to provide city-wide supplementary educational support to eligible refugee students.
- $100,000 to CPS for new after-school programs.
- $230,403 to Bowen, Collins and Steinmetz high schools for their dropout recovery programs, which give former students aged 17 to 21 an opportunity to earn a high school diploma and enroll in vocational classes.

Compiled by Faye A. Silas

More Grants briefs can be found online at www.catalyst-chicago.org
NEAR SOUTH SIDE: A DEVELOPER'S VIEW
Near South Side

High-income housing, low-income schools

by Dan Weissmann

Last April, school officials announced they would close Williams Elementary School for poor performance, especially on test scores. Williams would rise again in 2003 as a “Renaissance School,” providing a model for the School Board’s new effort “to transform low-performing neighborhood schools into stellar academic institutions,” said Board President Michael Scott.

In this case, the neighborhood is the Near South Side, which is awash in a tidal wave of gentrification. As on the North Side, new development is changing the face of the community but not its schools. For the most part, the new, upper-income residents who have children send them to public magnet schools or private schools, not neighborhood schools, which include some of the lowest-ranking ones in the city.

“From a personal vantage point, it’s great,” longtime resident Sokoni Karanja says of the development. “I bought my house for a song, and it’s worth a whole bunch of money now, I imagine.” But the neighborhood’s transformation “ought to be made to work for everybody,” he adds.

Karanja is president and CEO of Centers for New Horizons, a social service and community development group serving neighborhoods from Cermak Road to 45th Street. In a message on the organization’s Web site, he says the South Side must not be allowed to become “two separate communities, one of gates and highly selective schools for middle-income families, the other of inferior housing and low-performing neighborhood schools for low-income families.”

So far, Williams School, which is at 2700 south, has been relatively untouched by gentrification. It sits among the Dearborn Homes, a public-housing development that is taking in residents from public housing that is being torn down.

However, two of the three schools that Williams students were dispatched to this year have seen their local enrollments plummet as their neighborhood fortunes rose. Douglas Elementary, 3200 south, is in the middle of the Gap, a beachhead for gentrification more than 20 years ago. Once the city’s largest elementary school, Douglas now has a neighborhood enrollment of just 163 out of a total of 577 students.

Until two years ago, Drake Elementary, 2700 south, drew most of its students from the Chicago Housing Authority’s Prairie Courts, which the CHA has just emptied out. Now the enrollment from its attendance area is 124, about a third of what it was in 1999.

The third home for Williams refugees is the new, $47 million National Teachers Academy, at 1800 south. It is surrounded by the CHA’s Harold Ickes Homes, which also are receiving residents from CHA demolition targets.

But gentrification is fast heading its way. The master plan for the largest South Loop development, Central Station, shows its condos and town-homes stretching all the way to the corner of Cermak and Michigan, two blocks east of Ickes and three blocks from NTA. (Since the early 1990s, Central Station’s best-known resident has been Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley.)

The city and private developers are “lining us up to be Central Station all the way to 67th,” says Karanja. “Everybody just salivates over Central Station because the bottom line looks good, but the human issues that pervade this process are not being addressed.”

CHA officials have not decided yet whether they will rehab or tear down the Dearborn Homes and Ickes, both of which sent children to Williams School. However, since the agency plans to turn all of its properties into mixed-income developments by 2009, a decision can be only two or three years away, says Kathryn Greenberg, the CHA’s managing director for communications.

At least one observer thinks that closing Williams was intended to soften up the community for relocation. “You close the schools that serve those communities, you can be sure [residents] are not going to stick around,” says Dion Miller Perez, an organizer with the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform. “Get rid of the kids and you get rid of the families.”
National Teachers Academy

New gem of a ‘projects’ school

The $47 million National Teachers Academy, the city’s newest, most expensive school, is situated on an island of public housing in a swelling sea of gentrification. Local public housing leaders figure that sooner or later, the sea will claim their impressive new school, which is staffed by master teachers and boasts such extras as a program for infants and toddlers.

Housing trends in the neighborhood suggest it will be later.

Although Dearborn Park, a middle-income development, is not in the Academy’s attendance area, Gloria Williams, head of the tenant advisory council in the Harold Ickes Homes, casts a wary eye at parents there. “Those Dearborn Park folks, we know that they’d want their kids to come, with all that the school has to offer,” says Williams.

Even though an Ickes building was emptied and demolished to make room for the Academy, the CHA has no immediate plans to demolish the development. Indeed, the agency is moving families into Ickes as other projects come down. About 50 families moved in last summer, according to Kathryn Greenberg, the agency’s managing director for communications.

Meanwhile, schools are a non-issue for developers and realtors who are building and selling high-priced housing nearby.

“We’re not saying, ‘Hey, we’ve got schools here,’” says William Warman, an architect and developer who is building the Prairie District Homes, an extension of Central Station, in the Academy’s district. “And people aren’t saying, ‘I’m not buying because there’s no school.’ Retail is what people are looking for: the everyday, less-expensive restaurants, the sandwich shops, the little ethnic dinner spots that are $8-10 a person, instead of $50.”

At the prices Warman is charging—$530,000 to $829,000 for town homes—his customers are expecting to pay for private school, he thinks. Asked about the Academy, he says, “I suppose I should go take a look at that, but I don’t know what kids go there.”

At the large-scale private development closest to the school, brokers say they aren’t targeting families at all. “We are geared for the first-time buyer, primarily,” people who typically don’t have kids, says Diane Frale, a broker selling apartments at Pointe 1900. Of the 59 apartments in the first phase, three-quarters are one-bedrooms, and all but two of the rest are two-bedrooms.

Even some public-school parents in the neighborhood don’t yet see the Academy as an irresistible draw. Tasha Moore, an alumna of Drake Elementary who lives at Cullerton and Michigan, was dissatisfied enough with South Loop School that she tried to get her two sons transferred to Drake under the No Child Left Behind choice program last summer.

When the kids didn’t get into Drake, Moore passed on the Academy and kept them at South Loop. Transportation was the deal-breaker, she says. The kids get bused to South Loop, and as a working parent, she doesn’t have time to walk them to school at the Academy.

She worried that the Academy’s location in public housing might be an invitation to trouble for her older son. Her younger son had already made his preference known. “He’s like, ‘I don’t want to go to school in no projects,’” she says.

By the end of the decade, the picture likely will be different. The CHA hopes to turn Ickes into a mixed-income community by then, Greenberg says. She adds that within the next two or three years, CHA will have to decide whether to rehab Ickes or tear it down. The Academy’s presence could tilt the decision toward rehab. Together, the Academy, upgraded buildings and other private investments in the area might make middle-income residents less skittish about moving in, Greenberg says.
Douglas Elementary: In but not of the Gap

Douglas Elementary gets plenty of attention from the Gap Community Organization (GCO), which has been working to boost the neighborhood's fortunes for 20 years. The group conducts a toy drive every Christmas, floods the school with speakers on career day and supplies a volunteer to sit on the local school council, reports Leonard McGee, the group's president.

But the middle-income home owners the organization represents do not send their children there. “Douglas was never really an option for me,” says Cordia Forte, a Gap resident whose children attend Pershing, a nearby magnet school. With Douglas's low test scores, “I didn’t even consider it,” she says.

Forte’s case is typical, says Douglas Principal Beverly Blackwood, who has seen the school’s enrollment decline from more than 2,000 some 30 years ago to 700 today. Only 163 come from the school’s attendance area. “Within the Gap community itself, there are not that many students,” Blackwood says, and many of them “attend magnet schools and private schools.”

Although Blackwood reports the lack of interest from nearby families as a fact, not a complaint, the subject clearly is a sore spot with the GCO. “Ms. Blackwood is not happy with the level of [enrollment] in the community,” GCO President McGee says. “Now, parents make choices, and they’re allowed to make those choices.”

Douglas arguably is the weakest of the three schools to which students from Williams Elementary were sent this school year. It is one of 50 low-scoring schools where parents could apply to remove their children under the federal No Child Left Behind Act; 84 did, the third-highest total among the 50 schools.

Meanwhile, Pershing Magnet, which enrolls just 273 children, is in much demand. Last year, there were 773 applicants for 30 seats, and at least 230 of the applicants lived nearby. “Several of the realtors have been in touch with me,” notes Principal Katherine Volk. “When they’re selling their real estate, parents want a certain kind of school.

“I can’t make myself into a neighborhood school, but we try to maintain that balance as much as we can,” says Volk, who estimates that 35 to 40 percent of her students come from the Gap and the Lake Meadows apartment complex that surrounds Pershing.

Around Douglas, the limited number of school options is “a big issue,” says Cordia Forte, who serves on Pershing’s local school council. “From the time I first moved into the area, the number of children has really changed a lot.” She would like to see Pershing expand, but school officials say that they have other priorities for their limited construction dollars.

“At some point,” says Forte, “Douglas is going to have to be helped to become the kind of school people will want to send their children to.”

Drake Elementary: Recruiting to stay alive

“We’re going to have a new Near South Side,” says Delena Little, principal of Drake Elementary. “It would be good to have a good neighborhood school when the real estate boom catches up.”

Little hopes that Drake, which she calls “the best-kept secret on the South Side,” will be that school. For now, though, neighborhood dynamics are working against her.

With the Chicago Housing Authority tearing down buildings, many of Drake’s students have been forced to leave the school’s attendance area. This fall, the few remaining families in the Prairie Courts development, which borders Drake on two sides, moved out. Amid the turmoil, Drake’s rising test scores took a dip.

The influx of Williams students, who generally scored half what Drake students scored on reading tests, will make it difficult to resume the upward trend. “Yes, we know that it’s going to affect our test scores next year,” says Little. “You don’t relish the thought of your test scores being low, because that’s how people outside judge you, which is really unfortunate. But there are ways of disaggregating the data [into student groups], and I hope they do that.”

Little is not worried about serving kids from Williams well, since Drake has taught CHA kids for many years. “We’re not the kind of staff where you have to make our lives easy,” she says.

So far, the biggest adjustment has been getting the new arrivals from Williams acclimated to Drake’s school culture, says Julianna Melton, Drake’s recently retired school-community representative and unofficial grandmother. Williams’ kids “weren’t used to” Drake’s highly structured environment, she says. She recalls a visit to Williams for a meeting one day last year, saying, “It was like the place was just up for grabs.”

Drake now serves mostly kids from outside its neighborhood, including some who previously lived in Prairie Courts and now ride the CTA to school. “There aren’t a lot of walkers,” says Little.

If students from Williams leave Drake next year, it’s not clear who will take their place.

There are two large middle-class housing developments in the school’s attendance area, but few of those families send their children to Drake, where 93 percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches.

CHA spokesperson Kathryn Greenberg says that redevelopment plans for Prairie Courts provide for just 134 apartments, with only 25 percent reserved for eligible family candidates.

To stay in business, Drake likely will have to continue to rely on outsiders choosing the school. This year, it accepted all comers for its magnet program in world languages and cultures: 100 students applied, and 100 were accepted, according to Ryan Crosby of the CPS Educational Enhancements office.
New Williams starts out from behind

by Dan Weissmann

On Oct. 1, for the first time since the School Board closed Williams Elementary last spring, the school’s doors opened to children again—the back doors. They were opened to allow the Chicago Park District to resume after-school programs in the gym and lunchroom.

As children gathered outside, Crystal, a 4th-grader, asked a visitor: “When they open this school up again, will the people from this neighborhood be able to come back here, or will it be for white people?”

As Crystal’s question shows, distrust of the Board of Education continues to run rampant in the Dearborn Homes public housing development, which surrounds Williams. The surprise announcement last April that the school would be closed for a year to allow its rebirth as a Renaissance School made many in the community angry. Parents organized community meetings and protests at the school, the Board of Education continues to irritate residents with slow responses to their concerns.

From the start, parents worried that their children would have to cross gang boundaries to get to two of their three temporary schools, Drake and Douglas. Transportation was the biggest issue at two July meetings, one arranged by a social service agency, the other by the board. By the time classes resumed, the board had decided to bus the kids to Drake and Douglas.

The community also was upset that the park district programs were discontinued when the school closed. The Dearborn Homes Local Advisory Council, among others, pressed the board to reconsider that decision.

With all of the neighborhood’s problems, including gang warfare and drugs, “it didn’t sit too well with me that they wanted to keep this building closed,” says John Pointer, who grew up in the Dearborn Homes and has worked at Williams Park since he was a teenager.

With Williams shuttered for a year, he says, “I’d still have a job [at another park]. But what about these kids over here? Where are they supposed to go?”

Still undecided is who will get to attend the new school. At press time, the only sure bet was former Williams students. Discussions were still under way about new neighborhood students—e.g., kindergartners and families moving into Dearborn Homes—and students outside the neighborhood.

Planning for the Williams Renaissance School also has gone slowly. When Schools CEO Arne Duncan announced the closing of Williams and the intention to reopen it with an “accelerated curriculum,” he drew praise from U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, who called the move “a model that people should pay attention to.”

So far, there hasn’t been much to watch. Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins has been “meeting informally with a number of different people” since late April, according to her chief of staff, Hosanna Mahaley, who is leading the efforts to create “Renaissance Schools” at Williams and at Dodge Elementary in East Garfield Park.

In late August, board staff distributed a short community survey listing options for what the new school might look like. There were seven choices for a curricular focus, including arts and humanities, and science and math.

The format was not a hit with parents, says Kimberly Muhammad-Earl, a board official who has been helping to coordinate the board’s community outreach for the Renaissance project. “They said, ‘You’re directing us, guiding us as to what you have in mind for the school,’” Muhammad-Earl recalls.

The board’s first community meeting, held a few days before school started, met with even less enthusiasm. Three parents showed up and were outnumbered four-to-one by CPS administrators.

Community groups that had been asked to help with turnout complained about “not getting enough notice from CPS,” says Andrea Lee, schools organizer for the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group. “There doesn’t seem to be an effort to respect community groups’ need to use their time to the fullest.”

A month later, on Sept. 30, Mahaley led a community meeting at Williams to announce the re-opening of the Williams Park after-school programs and to recruit applicants for an advisory council that will help steer decisions about the school’s future.

CPS officials plan to choose four parents for the council, which will have 12 to 15 members. “It shouldn’t just be us sitting downtown making decisions by ourselves,” Mahaley told parents at the

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**Williams school diaspora**

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<td>608</td>
<td>497*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Williams</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2001-02</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>767</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-03</td>
<td>temporally closed</td>
<td></td>
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*NOTE: These students live in areas now inside NTA’s neighborhood boundaries. SOURCE: Chicago Public Schools
meeting. "There are going to be some decisions we have to make, but there are things we can talk about." The council was chosen in late October and will meet every other week.

Mahaley said the board hopes to make key decisions about curriculum and other programs by January.

At the end of the evening, Mahaley said she was pleased to find that more than 20 parents had signed in for the meeting. "I was totally shocked," she says. "I was expecting two."

The board faces an uphill battle in gaining parents' trust. Tiffanie Pewee, who was a member of the Williams Local School Council when the school closed, says she will apply for a spot on the advisory council, but she doesn't expect much to come of it. "It's a fine time to get somebody's input on something," she says. "They didn't ask for input on closing the school down. They just did it."

She suspects the advisory council will amount to window dressing. "I don't think they're going to take it too seriously," she says. "I guess they feel like we live in a low-income development, so they can just treat us any kind of way."

Parents are not the only ones who are skeptical. Even fans of the board's work elsewhere say that officials have a lot of patching up to do.

The board is doing a great job in supporting community-proposed small schools in Little Village and at DuSable High School, says Mike Klonsky, director of the Small Schools Workshop at the University of Illinois at Chicago. But the way the board closed Williams and Dodge last spring "was problematic," he says, "and once you do something that way, digging your way out is really hard."

Following the community's lead is the key to success, says Klonsky. "If you say, 'We're gonna put some Renaissance School here, and we may call you together to hear your beefs, and then we'll ignore them, like we always do,' you're gonna reap what you sow," he says.

Meanwhile, a fan of the Renaissance School concept is starting to worry about the timetable. Barbara Sizemore, retired dean of the DePaul University School of Education, had worked with Dodge School and has offered to help plan its rebirth.

"I have not heard from them regarding any scheduled activities or any plans," she says. "As time goes on, and it gets delayed, it becomes clear that the school will not be ready to open next year."

Sizemore says she isn't familiar with the situation at Williams, but Mahaley and Muhammad-Earl say that Dodge is further along in the planning process.

"Time isn't the greatest hurdle, says Marvin Hoffman, founding director of the North Kenwood-Oakland Charter School, who has observed other new-school efforts closely. "If they're seriously starting the planning process now," he says, there should be sufficient time.

But he does worry about the system's ability to create a new school amid competing demands. "I have to confess, in spite of the great respect that I have for Arne Duncan and Barbara Eason-Watkins, underneath, I have a terrible feeling that ventures like this at the hands of large bureaucracies are doomed to unravel."

He cites the newly opened National Teachers Academy as an example. Staff there had decided that to get a solid start, the school would open with only preschool and the primary and intermediate grades. But then the board decided to close Williams and send its 6th-through 8th-graders to the Academy.

"I was involved in a startup like this in Houston," he recalls, "and I argued strenuously against opening all the grades simultaneously. Sure enough, it was a recipe for disaster. It was forced on them, and it was very painful to watch [the Teachers Academy] have to replicate that."

Through bureaucratic necessity, he fears, a system of Chicago's size "maybe will always find a way to screw up what are worthy conceptions."
Professional development study:

CPS spent $6,500 per teacher, sees little improvement in return

by Alexander Russo

The Chicago Public Schools spent almost $200 million on professional development last year—just under $6,500 per teacher—but the money yielded little discernable improvement in teaching, according to a first-ever, comprehensive inventory of professional development activities in the system.

The results of spending on professional development are “unclear and highly variable,” states the report, a copy of which was obtained by CATALYST.

Overall, the report suggests that despite pockets of excellence and recent efforts to improve professional development, the school district is far from providing teachers with high-quality, ongoing help that results in higher student achievement.

At $190 million to $200 million, Chicago’s professional development tab represents about 5 percent of the district’s operating budget, a relatively high percentage compared to other districts that have been studied. The total does not include contract-based salary increases that teachers earn for advanced degrees and college credits or the costs of freeing teachers for common planning time, which would have boosted the bottom line substantially. Nor does the report attempt to quantify out-of-pocket spending by teachers that is not reimbursed by the district or school.

Conducted in cooperation with CPS, the study examined the 2001-2002 CPS budget and included interviews with more than 25 central administrators and staff at a representative sample of 21 schools. It cost $250,000 and was funded by the Chicago Public Education Fund, the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, The Chicago Community Trust, The Joyce Foundation and the McDougal Family Foundation.

CPS officials say that they used the findings to craft their new education plan, unveiled earlier this fall.

Program abundance

Researchers found a variety of efforts, including numerous programs run by the district, the work of external partners assigned to schools on probation, privately funded staff development programs and training that schools undertake with their discretionary dollars.

“There are tons of professional development efforts floating out there,” says University of Illinois researcher Mark Smylie, who last year published a survey of teacher participation in staff development for the Consortium on Chicago School Research.

But quantity does not necessarily translate into quality. For the most part, efforts were fragmented and unconnected with either teacher or school needs for improvement.

Typically, they consisted of daylong seminars, one-time workshops, outside speakers or multi-grade, multi-subject presentations.

In contrast, effective professional development programs focus on a clear set of priorities; provide ongoing, school-based support to classroom teachers; deal with academic content as well as teaching methods; and create ample opportunities for teachers to see and attempt new teaching methods, according to many experts.

“Most schools do not have the structures in place to support high-quality professional development,” the report says.

The critical findings are not all that unusual, according to school budget expert Karen Hawley Miles, who authored the report and its model, an audit conducted for the Boston Public Schools three years ago that led to substantial changes. (See CATALYST, June 2002.)

As in other districts that Miles has studied, the central office has not developed clear standards for instructional quality and has scattered professional development programs throughout the bureaucracy without any clear lines of accountability for results. As a result, many schools receive little support or guidance in structuring effective development efforts, the report states.

School-level spending

Unlike other districts, decisions in Chicago about how to spend money allocated for professional development are shared by the central office and individual schools, a result of the move more than a decade ago to shrink the central office and give more authority and discretionary dollars to schools.

On top of district spending at their schools, the 21 schools examined in detail spent an average of 2 percent of their own budgets on professional development, or $2,500 per teacher, an amount that “generally exceeds” the average in other districts. Projected city-
wide, this amounts to about $71 million.

However, schools don’t always spend professional development money effectively, according to Miles. “By and large, we thought that the professional development that was going on at the school level was very limited and not very organized,” she says.

One reason is that schools are reluctant to make the investment that quality demands. “There is a huge amount of pressure at the school level to spend dollars on teachers,” Miles says. “It’s hard to say why you held back $60,000 when you could have had another 1st-grade teacher.”

The report also suggests that problems may be a result of Chicago’s historic reliance on “homegrown” rather than nationally recognized reform models.

While the report did not calculate the cost of so-called “restructured day” schedules, it does say that they have “little or no structure or accountability.” About 400 schools employ the practice, which involves aggregating small blocks of time that teachers have without children present.

Chicago’s use of external partners also is distinctive, according to the report. Services provided by external partners to schools on probation cost more than $5 million a year, but there is “very little oversight or monitoring” of them and little coordination with other district efforts. At current funding levels, the external partner model also fails to provide ongoing, school-based support for teachers.

The report also criticizes Chicago’s new $12 million reading initiative for not being clearly linked with other district programs, such as school probation.

Most of all, the report questions the $56 million in payroll costs spent on eight annual professional development days and institutes. For the most part, schools and teachers decide how to use that time, though the board pays for the time and is technically in control of how some of it is used. The report states that these largely unmonitored days are of questionable effectiveness because neither the format nor the content is responsive to school needs.

These eight days constitute the district’s single largest professional development program, accounting for almost half of what the central office spends each year. Excluding the institute days, annual spending on professional development by the central office amounts to about $67 million, which is about 1.9 percent of the operating budget, somewhat lower than in other districts.

Although the most comprehensive study to date, the report does not address several important professional development issues. They include the cost and effectiveness of tying teacher salary increases to additional college credits, coordination of philanthropic spending on professional development, and the quality and distribution of professional development providers used in schools.

### Recommendations

Recommendations from the report include better coordination and accountability among central office programs, closer examination of spending on professional development days and external partners, and adherence at both school and central office levels to “principles of effective professional development.”

According to school officials, many of these recommendations are being addressed in the district’s new education plan.

In particular, they say that by assigning reading specialists to more than 200 schools and by creating 24 area instructional officers and area reading coaches, the district will be able to better support and supervise schools. The district also has expanded training for reading specialists.

Starting this year, external partners will receive staff development from CPS to help them integrate their assistance with other district-based efforts, such as the reading specialist program. The probation process and definitions are being revamped, as well.

The new standards for measuring professional development, outlined in the report and the education plan, call for professional development programs that are more ongoing, coherent, data-driven and curriculum-focused.

The district also is pursuing a restructuring of the eight institute days as part of teacher contract negotiation.

At least some observers already see a change. “Things are absolutely better,” says Vickie Chou, dean of the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She cites last year’s hiring of Albert Bertani to oversee professional development and the strong presence of Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins, along with the additional district spending on school-level reading specialists.

Chou says that earlier this year Eason-Watkins and Schools CEO Arne Duncan stepped in to protect a professional development effort involving 40 middle-achieving schools from the budget axe.

### Others are skeptical

“I don’t think any big message [about professional development] has been sent out to the schools,” says Chicago Teachers Union President Deborah Lynch.

She also stresses the lack of union involvement in the design and rollout of professional development programs such as the reading initiative—an issue that became highly contentious in San Diego, Calif., which also is working to upgrade professional development.

As CATALYST goes to press, the School Board has not completed plans for making the report public and providing an official response. In 1997, the administration of former CEO Paul Vallas commissioned a study of professional development by the consulting firm of KPMG Peat Marwick, but refused to release it.

Additional CATALYST articles on professional development can be found in our April and June 2002 issues and in the February 1998 installment of our special series, “What Matters Most.” They can be found online at www.catalyst-chicago.org.
way at the other five schools. … Hosanna Mahaley, deputy chief of staff to CEO Arne Duncan, has been promoted to chief of staff to Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins. … Jack Harnedy, who oversees magnet schools and programs, has been named academic enhancement officer. He will be responsible for coordinating student transfers under the No Child Left Behind Act.

TEST CHEATING More elementary schools may face investigation for cheating last spring on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, according to a spokesman for the School Board. So far, the board has investigated 14 schools. At four of them, six teachers and one aide now face dismissal. Principals according to a spokesman for the School Board. So far, the board has investigated 14 schools. At four of them, six teachers and one aide now face dismissal. Principals

other investigations,” he adds. “We haven’t determined that yet.”

PRINCIPALS Four interim principals have been awarded contracts at their schools: Jose Barrera, Davis-Shields; Mark Berman, Daley; Leonor Karl, Pulaski; Carol Lovely, New Dawes. … Ron Shields, associate principal at Haines, is contract principal. … These principals have had their contracts renewed: Victoria Cadavid, Pickard; Deborah Clark, Skinner; Delores Rease, Schmid.

LSC EXCHANGE LSCs will have an opportunity to network at a Dec. 7 event hosted by Chicago Successful Schools Project. The exchange will be held at Jones College Prep, 606 S. State St., from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. For information, call 312-344-6403.

NEW REGIONS Management support directors handle the day-to-day management issues—such as transportation and parental concerns—in each of the district’s 24 new area instructional offices. The new management support directors and their former positions are: Area 1, Catherine Sugrue, coordinator, CPS Schools and Regions; Area 2, Vivian Moritz, Region 1 instructional coordinator; Area 3, Shirley Dukas, principal, Coles; Area 4, Diana Scatton, Region 6 administrator; Area 5, Maria Rodriguez O’Keefe, Region 2 administrator; Area 6, Alice Painter, Region 5 coordinator; Area 7, Harry Hardwick, Region 5 coordinator; Area 8, Dean Thompson, Region 6 coordinator, and Susan Milojovic, principal, Dodge; Area 9, Virginia Bautista-White, director, Rodriguez Academic Prep, Arthur Slater, Region 3 administrator and Karen Wilson, principal, South Loop; Area 10, Elba Reyes, administrator, Schools and Regions. Area 11, Katherine Harris, Region 5 administrator; Area 12, Carlos Munoz, principal, CPS Schools and Regions; Area 13, Lydia Butler Williams, Region 4 administrator; Area 14, Deborah Shurney, Region 5 manager; Area 15, Ruth Wallace, Region 2 administrator; Area 16, Lawrence Swanson, administrator, Academic Preparatory and Middle Schools Office and State Rep. Monique Davis, instruction coordinator, School and Community Relations; Area 17, Dorothy McCormick, Region 3 administrator and Ceola Barnes, principal, Terrell; Area 18, Julienne Malloy, Region 6 administrator and Linda Langhart, administrator, early childhood education; Area 19, Carlos Collazo, Region 2 administrator; Area 20, Alejandra Alvarez, director of CPS world language programs; Area 21, Constance Montgomery, principal, Future Commons High; Area 22, Lester Gaines, administrator, CPS Office of High School Development; Area 23, Ronn L. Gibbs, interim principal, Bogan High School; Area 24, Vernal Breshears, Region 5 principal administrator.

Elizabeth Duffrin

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