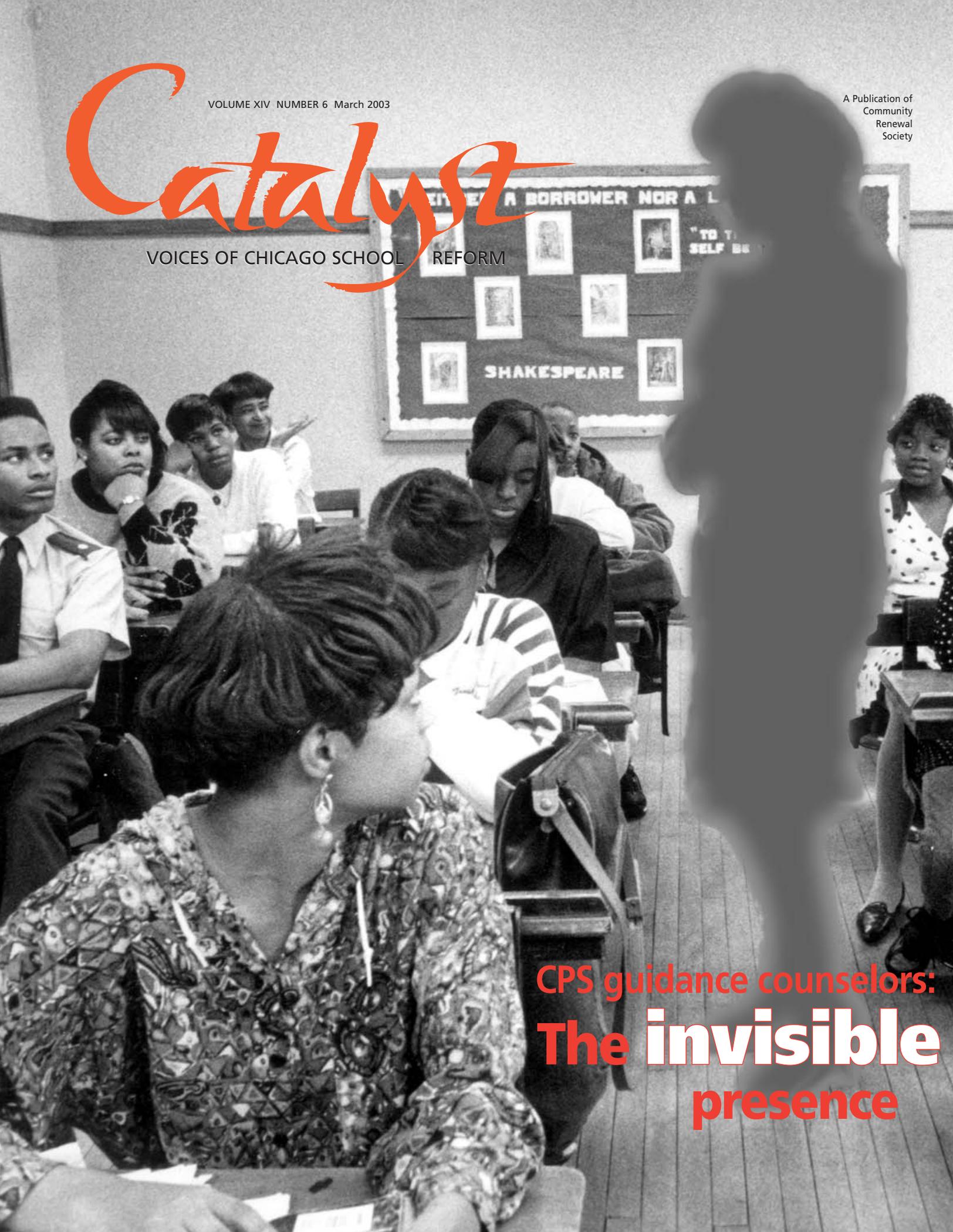


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Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM



CPS guidance counselors:
**The invisible
presence**

Getting personal is what it takes to help kids

Guidance counseling is about getting personal, so I'll begin by doing so myself.

As a high school student, I visited the counseling office three times in four years. The first was a mandatory meeting—each freshmen was pulled out of class for a brief, inconsequential question-and-answer session. (I don't remember what we talked about, but I do remember the counselor was put off when I laughed at one of her inquiries.)

I paid my second visit when I was a senior and needed my counselor to complete a required recommendation for an application to a highly selective university. My third visit was to complain to the department chair about the mediocre reference that my counselor had written. The chair did not know me personally but, taking note of my strong academic record, said simply, "I'll fix this." I can only wonder what my counselor was thinking.

I subsequently received a reference that reflected my work and abilities and was accepted into the college of my choice.

Initially I got a bum steer, but I was fortunate to have access to another counselor who looked out for students' best interests. In contrast, many Chicago public school students who need guidance far more than I did have no contact with a counselor.

As Lincoln Park junior Jocelyn Krause told *CATALYST* for this month's issue, "I have never seen my counselor. I don't even know what she looks like."

In terms of numbers, guidance counselors are waging a losing battle—at the high school level, the School Board pays for only one counselor for every 360 students, a sure formula for anonymity. Five years ago, the board attempted to rectify the situation by requiring every high school to create an advisory period. There, teachers would meet regularly with 15 or so students to discuss problems and plans for the future. The thinking was, if kids felt teachers and other adults in the school knew them better and cared what happened to them, they would perform better in class.

But that's not what happened, according to a 2001 study of Chicago's high schools. For example, at Kelyvn Park, advisories consisted of assemblies held every five weeks. At Farragut, they were 10-minute sessions held four days a week. Northwestern University researcher G. Alfred Hess Jr., who conducted the study, said that central office provided no leadership to redirect the advisory program and set it on a productive course.

However, that may be changing. CPS's Office of Strategic Planning has convened a task force to study advisory and make recommendations for improving it. If they're taking suggestions, here are a couple worth considering:

- Tap one of the growing number of outside tutoring and mentoring groups to develop an advisory curriculum and help the system reach more of its students. The College and Career Readiness Network, for example, proposes creating an electronic mentoring system that would link corporate executives and high school seniors via email and online forums.

"Many kids have no direction in thinking about college," says Bank One Vice President Joan Klaus, who founded the Network. "We see an awful lot of [average] students who would consider college if they had someone to push them."

- Check out the award-winning counseling program at south suburban Rich South High School, where counselors work with a set of students for four years and are expected to take the initiative. Kids often don't see the relevance of talking to guidance counselors; adults in the system must take responsibility for drawing them in and showing how they can help them.

Beyond model programs, central office must work to inculcate the idea that high schools are supposed to prepare students for a productive life after high school, not simply get them to pass tests.

ABOUT US Congratulations to Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher who won the International Reading Association's print media award for her April 2002 cover story, "Scaling the Reading Wall: Chicago's new strategy to teach all children to read."



Veronica Anderson

CATALYST: Voices of Chicago School Reform is an independent publication created to document, analyze and support school improvement efforts in Chicago's public schools.

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Catalyst

VOICES OF CHICAGO SCHOOL REFORM

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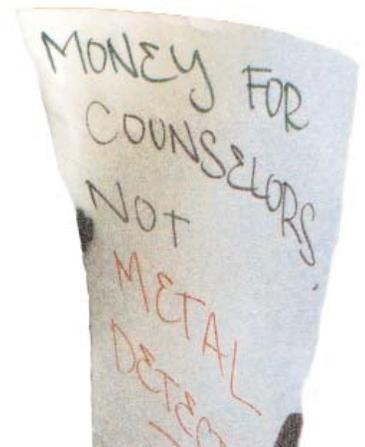
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*On the cover: Photo illustration by Christine Oliva.
CATALYST file photo by John Booz.*



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2001, 1998 Sigma Delta Chi for public service
1998 Chicago Association of Black Journalists
1998, 1993 Peter Lisagor Award,
Best Newsletter
1999, 1995 Peter Lisagor Award, Reporting
2001, 2000 Peter Lisagor Award, Public Service

2000 Peter Lisagor Award, Online Reporting
2001 Peter Lisagor Award, Editorials
1997 International Reading Association
1996 Education Writers Association
1997, 1996, 1995, 1994, 1993 Distinguished
Achievement Award; 1994, Best Newsletter,
Educational Press Association of America

With little guidance, *students drift* through and out of school

by Maureen Kelleher

At Gage Park High School, counselor Kenneth Banks complains of spending more time doing paperwork than talking to students about colleges and careers. This year, he is responsible for tending to the academic and career counseling needs of close to 300 seniors. Three other counselors and a trainee cover juniors, sophomores and freshmen.

Ideally, Gage Park counselors would be proactive and help students address problems—like class cutting or academic failure—that jeopardize their chances of graduating, Banks explains. But the department is short two counselors, and one of the vacancies is filled by a teacher working toward state certification.

“Less than one percent of our time is spent doing the counseling we were trained to do,” Banks complains. “If you look at my desk, you see that I have 100 different things I have to deal with.”

Similar stories crop up throughout Chicago Public Schools. Commonly, high school students visit with school counselors once a year, when it’s time to schedule courses for the following year. However, some students talk with counselors even less frequently, or not at all.

“I have never seen my counselor,” says Jocelyn Krause, a junior at Lincoln Park High School. “I don’t even know what she looks like.”

For many CPS students, guidance counselors are the invisible man, or more likely, the invisible woman. In theory, school counselors would know their students well enough to help them weather academic and personal crises, and guide them to make wise decisions about the future. But in reality, they are often overworked, in short supply and steered away from direct contact with students. A survey of CPS graduates in 2000 found 40

percent of seniors saying no one at school talked to them about college or helped them fill out applications.

Under such conditions, connecting with students should be an expectation for all school staff, not just counselors, say high school reform experts.

“What is fundamentally important is that every youngster belong to somebody,” says Gene Bottoms of the Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta and director of its well-regarded High Schools that Work program. “Counselors have to prepare teachers to play that role.”

African-American and Latino students, who are more likely to drop out and less likely to attend college, rely more heavily on getting information and guidance from school staff to plan for college and choose demanding courses. Counselors are safety nets who fill in those gaps and prevent them from falling through the cracks. Yet a recent survey of students at four predominantly Latino CPS high schools found nearly half of the respondents at one school had never met their counselor; the average at all four was 27 percent. (See story, p. 6.)

Also, a national study found that black students are less likely than whites to develop bonds at school with an adult—someone who could motivate them and help them get into college.

In recent years, Chicago public school students who make it to high school have a better shot at graduating, but the district still lags behind the state in graduation rates. Last spring, 82 percent of high school seniors in Illinois graduated, but only 68 percent of those in CPS did.

Likewise, only 5 percent of Illinois seniors dropped out last year, but 14 percent did in CPS. “Counselors play a critical role in identifying potential dropouts and directing those students to services

that will prevent them from dropping out,” notes a recent report by ASPIRA Inc. of Illinois, a Puerto Rican nonprofit.

Boosting the quality of guidance counseling available to students can be done in one of two ways. Investing in hiring more counselors is a strategy to which North Lawndale Charter can attest. Other high schools, particularly small ones like Best Practice High, create a climate and class structure that invites all adults to pitch in on student guidance.

Making such changes district-wide, however, has proven difficult. In tough budget times, paying for counselors is not a priority. Also, the board’s advisory program, started in 1997 to cultivate stronger relationships between teachers and small groups of students, has not made much headway so far.

Spread thin

Sheer numbers are the main reason guidance counselors have such a tough time spreading themselves around. CPS assigns one counselor for every 360 high school students, and one counselor for each elementary school with at least 350 students. (Elementary schools over 1,200 get one and a half.) The ideal ratio, according to the Washington D.C.-based American School Counselor Association, is one to 250. Overall, the vacancy rate appears low—about 7 percent as of January, or 62.5 positions—but that’s because another 97 positions are filled with teachers like the one at Gage Park who are working toward getting counseling certificates.

Illinois ranks fourth worst in the nation with its counselor-student ratio of one to 700.

Retirements in the next five years are expected to spread school counselors even thinner. About 20 percent of the



Chicago public high school students who belong to the Youth First! Coalition call for “more counselors, not more metal detectors” among other demands at a January protest at the Federal Plaza.

state’s 2,800 school counselors are expected to retire during that period, says Toni Tollerud, executive director of the Illinois Counselors Academy. “There’s definitely a shortage all around,” she says.

Plus, counselor training programs are time-consuming and unable to keep up with demand. “It’s not the kind of program where you can mass produce a huge number of counselors in a given time,” she adds.

Besides being short-staffed, school counselors are also pulled in too many directions and have little time to focus on individual students. National experts recommend school counselors spend 70 percent of their time working with students alone or in small groups, and the rest of their time doing administrative work. But in CPS, guidance counselors are more likely to spend the bulk of their time mapping out individual students’ course schedules, administering standardized tests and performing clerical tasks.

Some guidance counselors, however, manage to build solid relationships with students. Lake View High School counselor Steve Maras keeps close tabs on Terence Thomas, whom he recruited from Young Elementary in Austin. Through the ups and downs of high school, Maras has been a steady presence for Terence, helping him keep a B-minus

grade point average while he played on the school’s basketball team. When his grades slipped, Maras helped him shape up, says Thomas. “Mr. Maras told me to stop playing [around] so much.”

Maras also helped Thomas complete applications to four colleges. In mid-February, Thomas learned he stands a good chance of being admitted to the University of Illinois at Champaign through a special program for underrepresented students.

Deploying staff

The way a high school deploys its counseling staff can have a significant impact on the kinds of relationships counselors can forge with students. Lake View counselors each work with one grade level—Maras works only with seniors, for instance. The students they work with change from year to year.

Another common strategy—one used at Gage Park—is to assign counselors to work with a class of students throughout their four years in high school. Once they graduate, the counselor begins a new cycle with incoming freshmen the following year.

Each method has advantages and disadvantages, notes Jean Perez, CPS director of citywide guidance. Counselors who work only with sophomores, for exam-

ple, “get really good at it,” she says. “The drawback is you don’t get to know the students like you do if you have them for four years.” By contrast, Perez notes that counselors get to know students well when they work with them for four years, but they don’t develop a network of relevant resources, particularly important when working with seniors.

But at some schools, counselor-student assignments are a hodgepodge, where counselors work with a cross-section of teens from all four grades. ASPIRA, which surveyed four schools using this model, recommends scrapping it because freshmen and sophomores get shortchanged.

Poor job descriptions

Counselors’ duties are also haphazardly assigned. “No one really knows the counselors’ scope of services,” says the ASPIRA report.

Their best-known responsibility is helping students set up or change course schedules. Such meetings could be opportunities to discuss a student’s goals, and explain to them how tough courses like advanced mathematics may help them.

But there’s not enough time, says Banks, who saw all 350 of his then-juniors last spring when they stopped by to

schedule next year's courses. A strict timetable limits meetings to about five minutes per student, he notes. "It's not really quality counseling time."

School counselors are trained to interpret standardized test results for students and teachers. But often they're tapped to administer the tests themselves, a time-consuming responsibility that covers the gamut from distributing test materials to supervising security to training teachers to monitor tests.

Dean Strassburger, a counselor at Lincoln Park High, coordinates over 1,000 Advanced Placement exams over a two-week period every May. "You have to get [tests] to the teachers, you have to get things organized and divided up, you have to make sure it's all secure," he explains. "It's a bureaucratic nightmare."

The department chair has it worse, supervising three exams at three different times of the year, he adds.

The American School Counselors Association says both scheduling and test administration are inappropriate duties for counselors. Other tasks they consider inappropriate are signing tardy excuses, substituting for absent teachers and clerical recordkeeping.

Such mundane tasks are unlikely to

go away. "There are not enough hands to go around," says Banks, who hid from his students for a week in January so he could prepare materials and order lunches for a conference on 8th grade to high school transition. "The kids were going crazy," he recalls.

Principals bear some of the blame for misusing guidance counselors for clerical work, says Tollerud. "If administrators understood how much they're paying somebody to be a secretary, they wouldn't do that."

More than 40 percent of counselors are earning between \$51,400 and \$76,400—salaries in the second-highest pay range on the teacher salary scale.

Some counselors are at fault, too, says Russell Sabella, president-elect of the American School Counselor Association. "Some counselors find it's a lot less stressful than dealing with students."

Triage counseling

Administrative distractions leave counselors only enough time to address students with the most critical academic or behavioral needs, or demanding high-achievers.

Jacqueline Guerrero, a junior at Jones College Preparatory High, was not satisfied with the counselor she was assigned to and shopped the department until she found a better fit.

Counselor Dan Connor of Senn High confers most often with students who are truant or failing—or close to it. "I tend to get to know the students who are having adjustment issues as freshmen."

Middle-of-the-road kids get lost, Connor says. "It's those students who are doing fine in their classes, coming every day, that I don't get to see. They need me less." But those children want and could benefit from some attention, he adds.

Students do want that attention. At the January School Board meeting, sophomore Carlos Delcid begged for extra money to hire more counselors at Steinmetz High, where eight counselors serve more than 2,800 students. Although many students speak Spanish or Polish, none of the counselors speak either language, he told the board. "There aren't that many counselors out there—they can't handle that [load]," says Delcid. "I haven't seen my counselor since freshman year."

Getting more counselors and qualified teachers topped the list of demands

Guidance for Latino students falls short

A study of counseling practices at four Chicago public high schools with predominantly Latino enrollment indicates many Latino students are not getting basic services that could help them stay in school.

A survey of students at those schools last winter and spring found that 40 percent had not yet met with a counselor that year. Latinos had the least contact compared to Asian and white students. Overall, 31 percent of Latino students surveyed said they had never met with their counselor, compared to 16 percent of Asian students and 17 percent of white students.

Over 4,200 students completed the surveys, for a response rate of 62 percent. Most respondents, 60 percent, were freshmen and sophomores.

The study was conducted by the Chicagoland Latino Educational Research Institute, the research arm of ASPIRA Inc. of Illinois, a Puerto Rican nonprofit group. Virginia Valdez, who oversees the research institute, wrote the report. The names of

the four schools were not disclosed.

As at other high schools, freshmen at these schools spent little time with counselors, while seniors used counselors' services more than any other grade.

Counselors tend to focus on juniors and seniors and their plans after high school, but younger students need counseling to keep from dropping out, Valdez says. "There should be more focus on freshmen and sophomores. It's your freshmen and sophomores who are likely to drop out."

Counselors interviewed for the study told Valdez they were not involved when the advisory program was planned at their schools, even though the School Board mandated advisory in part to ease counselors' burdens. As a remedy, Valdez suggests that schools assess student needs and use those findings as a guide for advisory curriculum.

Other key findings include:

- Only 30 percent of the students surveyed indicated counselors had helped

them choose courses. Research shows that students who select courses with input from counselors are more likely to take college preparatory courses. Only 19 percent of students surveyed said that a counselor had given them information about honors or Advanced Placement classes.

- A majority of students—52 percent—said they did not know their own grade point average. Students who did not know their GPA were less likely to have spent time with a counselor.

- School staff failed to help students when they were in academic or other trouble. About one-third of students said no one had spoken to them when they missed more than five days of school in a quarter. (If a student misses five days without excuse, a parent conference is required.) Nearly half of the students surveyed whose grade point averages were below 1.75 said no one had spoken to them about missing class or their overall performance.

Maureen Kelleher

at a recent protest organized by Youth First! Campaign, a citywide network of grass-roots youth organizations.

Advisory solution

So far, the School Board's major initiative to improve high school guidance is a mandated weekly advisory period. The idea was for division teachers to cultivate closer relationships with students and to offer group guidance on social, academic and career issues.

Attending advisory is a graduation requirement, but only some schools let students earn credit for the class. "That's a local decision," notes advisory case manager Deborah Caise-Fitzpatrick. CPS does not track the number of schools where advisory carries a credit.

With little oversight from central office, there is "a tremendous amount of diversity" in high school advisory, says Jennifer Loudon, assistant director of strategic planning. Freshmen at Kenwood High, for example, earn credit for advisory and use it as a study-skills course. At Senn, advisory period is ground zero for the school's service learning program. "Schools are using it to meet their needs," Loudon observes.

The class of 2000 would disagree. In a CPS survey, nearly 60 percent of them said advisory was "only a little" or "not at all" useful.

Some outside observers view advisory skeptically. "I've witnessed advisory over the years. It's a time for taking roll and crowd control," says Jo Thompson of the Scholarship and Guidance Association in Chicago, a nonprofit hired to provide therapeutic counseling in some public schools.

In a 2001 study of CPS high schools, Northwestern University's Center for Urban School Policy found that "the meaning of advisory has been progressively diluted and the range of activities conducted under this label has significantly expanded."

Rather than building stronger relationships with students and paving the way to address social development issues, the study reported, advisory teachers feared moving beyond their traditional roles, and central office neither trained nor encouraged them to do so.

"Teachers really did not feel they were competent to do the social curriculum," says author G. Alfred Hess Jr. Advisory will improve only when "the

CPS counselors

As of January, 663 counselors were employed in Chicago public schools. Most are highly educated veterans. A master's degree is required, but many have completed extra coursework.

Race/Ethnicity

Black	47%
White	44%
Hispanic	8%
Asian	1%

Demographics

Male	19%
Female	81%
Avg. age	53
Avg. years w/ CPS	22

Where they work

Elementary school	58%
High school	42%

Education

Bachelor's degree only:	< 1%
Master's degree:	26%
Master's w/ add'l courses	70%
Doctorate:	4%

Source: Chicago Public Schools

district decides to deal with the teachers' sense of inadequacy and unwillingness to deal with student issues. It's an unwillingness that's rooted in a lack of training."

CPS officials are looking for ways to improve advisory classes. A planning group chaired by Area Instructional Officer Norma Rodriguez is just beginning to examine the course.

"Maybe advisory isn't working exactly the way we want it to work," says Melissa Roderick, CPS director of strategic planning. "Going to college is not just about getting applications in. It's involving teachers in academics as part of a significant career planning effort."

Some observers say an overhaul of advisory is in order. "The advisory has to be re-examined to make it more productive," says ASPIRA report author Virginia Valdez, who adds that hiring more counselors should be the first priority.

State education officials are looking to ease credentialing requirements to draw more people into the profession. Illinois is one of a handful of states that requires school counselors to have both a master's degree in counseling and a teaching certificate. (Most states do not require a teaching certificate.) State regulation does allow districts to hire "student development teachers," who are working to earn a counseling degree. CPS employs 97 such teachers, who help stem the counselor shortage.

At press time, the Coalition of Illinois Counseling Associations was drafting a

bill to remove the requirement that counselors hold a teaching certificate. Some research indicates that school counselors with a year of experience and no teaching certificate perform just as well or slightly better than counselors who have teaching credentials, says Scott Wickman, president-elect of the Illinois School Counselors Association.

Just as the state is lowering the bar to enter the profession, it also is pushing to improve the quality of school counseling programs. Last summer, the Illinois State Board of Education created new standards for school counseling, which will eventually be used to evaluate schools' programs.

Counselor training is getting a boost, too. The Illinois Counselors Academy, created in 1999, aims to offer quality professional development programs on par with the established Illinois Administrators Academy which trains principals. But the fledgling institute has not yet found a stable source of funding, says Executive Director Tollerud.

Models emerging

Nationally, the push is on to improve counseling, especially for poor and minority students who need it the most. Counselor-student ratios are high across the country, averaging one for every 490 students; the worst is in California, where there is one counselor for every 994 students.

The American School Counselor Association has developed a model of school counseling that is being adapted by many states, including Illinois. It calls for counselors to integrate individual and group work with students across grade levels, and to coordinate their efforts with teachers.

"We are encouraging counselors to get into the classroom more often," says Dale Septeowski, coordinator of the school counseling program at Concordia University in River Forest, Ill. "However, often there are roadblocks." Teachers and administrators feel strapped for instructional time and may be reluctant to sacrifice class time for career discussions, he explains.

Another new model would recast guidance counselors from gatekeepers, determining who gets into what courses, and paper-pushers, to advocates who fight for equal access to higher-level courses, particularly for poor and minority students who, for a variety of reasons, are often passed over.

The Education Trust, a nonprofit education policy and advocacy group based in Washington, D.C., is offering professional development for counselors and is working with six universities to change counselor preparation programs. "The goal is to train school counselors to be leaders so they can initiate methods to improve student academic achievement," says Reese House, who oversees the initiative. So far 12 districts—Oakland, Calif. and Queens, N.Y. among them—have received training. (CPS central office staff were unfamiliar with the program.)

The new models for guidance counselors, which focus on professional development, are light years from day-to-day life for CPS counselors in struggling neighborhood high schools. They have access to a limited number of training workshops each year, says Valdez, who interviewed counselors for the ASPIRA report.

From Gage Park's Kenneth Banks's perspective, change isn't coming any time soon. "It would be great to be able to do small groups and things like that, but programming-wise it's impossible," he says. "I haven't been able to do one for about seven years."

Managing Editor Faye A. Silas and interns Genevieve Lill and Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz contributed to this report.

Students sound off

What makes or breaks a counselor

What works: Listening and giving support

The daunting transition from middle school to high school was even more challenging for Bowen High sophomore **Olivia Rodriguez**, who entered freshman year unable to write in English. "I've been having problems now that everything is in English," she says.

Her counselor helped by recommending that she take English as a second language courses for another year until her writing improved. He also suggested courses led by teachers who are patient with her struggle to grasp written English. Olivia hopes her counselor will also help her make a smooth transition to college. "He can tell me what university or college will be better for me," she says.

Danielle Robinson of Orr High says her counselor is a resource and advisor. She has visited him about once a week since entering her junior year.

"He suggested little ways of how I should go about [doing] things, education and attitude-wise," Danielle says. "He tells me to stay in my studies, take the ACT, go on the Internet and look for federal and state grants. Basically, just go after what I want."

What doesn't work: A discouraging attitude

Senn High senior **Josh Justice**, 17, will head to Columbia College this fall to major in journalism, but he gives no credit to his college counselor for helping him get there. "I've heard from some people that when they ask about colleges, she says 'Oh, I'm sorry, you don't have the GPA for that,'" says Josh. "You're supposed to give [students] confidence, not discourage them."

Too many students, too few counselors

Steinmetz High sophomore **Arthesha Perry** almost had more face time with the School Board at its January meeting than she has had with her school counselor. Arthesha, 15, was one of four Steinmetz students to address the board about various issues, including the school's counselor shortage. "Since freshman year, I've only seen [a counselor] two or three times," complains Arthesha, who adds that there is always a line at the counselor's office. "And with all the kids here, she has no time."

Along with greater access, Arthesha says she would like to see the counselor take an active interest in students' lives. "She won't come to us," she says. "I wish she would just come around and ask us stuff."

Uncompromising counseling

Jacqueline Guerrero went to see her counselor at Jones College Prep first thing last fall to lighten her advanced placement (AP) course load.

The 16-year-old junior says the counselor would not let her postpone taking AP Biology for fear that Jacqueline might slip from her ranking in the top 10 of her class. Determined to drop the course, Jacqueline switched to a different counselor who allowed her to alter her schedule. She says the new counselor is someone she can tell anything to and whose opinion she trusts. Jacqueline realizes her old counselor had good intentions, but she didn't understand her academic needs.

"I had already discussed [changing courses] with my parents and everything," says Jacqueline. "So I knew this was the best option for me and I wished she had understood that, too."

Genevieve Lill

Lake View High:

Golden rules for counseling success

by Maureen Kelleher

Counselors at Lake View High get good reviews from the school's toughest critics—the students.

Junior Stephanie Butler recalls counselors stepping in on her behalf when she was in trouble. "They talked to teachers for me," she says. "If they see you slacking off, they'll come to you. You don't always have to go to them first."

At Lake View, counselors make customer service a priority. Though beset by many duties, meeting students' needs comes first.

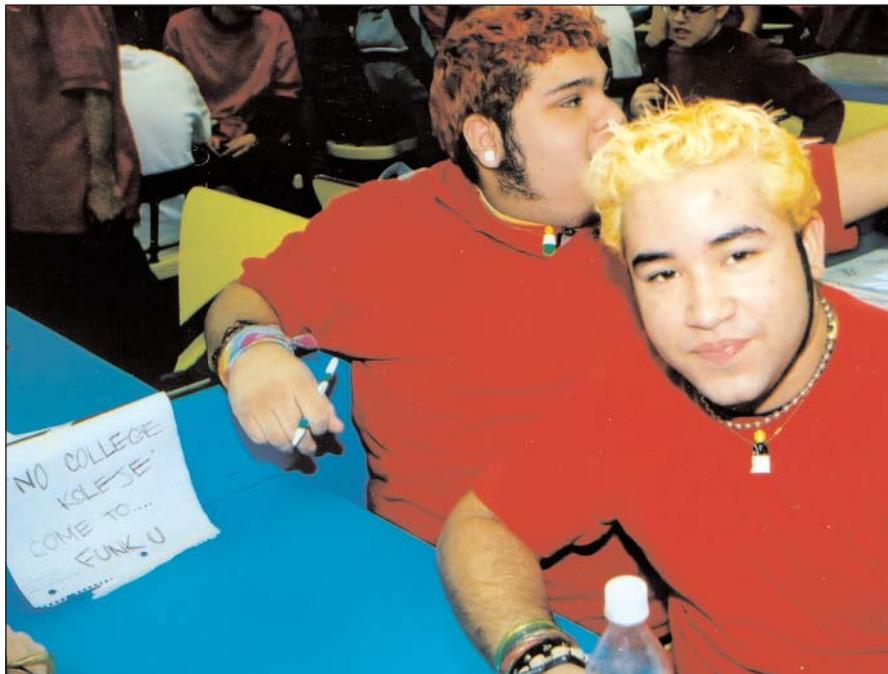
Recent figures indicate they're making headway. Counselors estimate that in the last few years, about 70 percent of Lake View graduates have gone on to two- or four-year colleges and universities.

Lake View's four-person counseling staff faces the same challenges as colleagues in other Chicago public schools. Each is responsible for an average of 300 students. Each has multiple duties. The freshman counselor, for instance, splits her time three ways: supporting entering freshmen, recruiting 8th-graders and chairing the department. The sophomore counselor doubles as a special education case manager.

However, the Lake View staff is a standout when it comes to teamwork and networking. The counselors enjoy warm, collegial relationships, which translate into pitching in to help each other when needed. They also take advantage of Lake View's network of resources, including a full-time school social worker and an on-site health center.

"They've developed a system that works," says Jo Thompson of the Scholarship and Guidance Association, a private nonprofit agency in Chicago that provides additional counseling services for Lake View and 21 other CPS high schools. "It's very unusual, in my experience. There's a real integration of services."

Lake View also has the advantage of a supportive principal, who holds down paperwork so that counselors have more



CHRISTINE OLIVA

Seniors Enrique Vales, right, and Ryan Rizzo create a mock college at Lake View High's college fair. After graduation, the boys are planning to tour with their band, but they appreciate counselor Steve Maras' entreaties for them to pursue higher education.

time to spend with students.

Treating kids with courtesy, respect and even affection are points of pride for Lake View counselors. "We try to be human beings to the kids," says Steve Maras, who counsels seniors. Positive attitudes and a few "golden rules" have made the department more responsive to students' needs.

Rule 1: Be visible

Lake View counselors don't wait for students to come to them. They circulate daily in hallways and the cafeteria and anywhere else students frequent. They even show up at after-school events.

"I like to stay for the basketball games, Steve [Maras] likes to go to the football games," says sophomore counselor Ron Melman, who bundles up in January to hang outside with students before and after school. "It's kind of a natural thing. It's good to see where the alliances are [among students]."

It's also a deliberate thing. Six years ago, when high school advisory became

a requirement, Lake View Principal Scott Feaman asked each counselor to work with one grade level and its division teachers. That made it easier for counselors to track down and talk to students, whose lunch schedules are arranged by grade level. Sophomores eat during fifth period, for example.

Lake View stands in sharp contrast to some other high schools where "the counselors sit in their office and do nothing," notes Maras, a 31-year veteran. "We get out in the hallways, we look for problems, we're accessible. The kids know every day I'm down in the lunchroom for 10 to 15 minutes."

Counselors' cafeteria visits also help push students through red tape. In January, juniors who need to make up credits have an opportunity to sign up for night school during their lunch period. To be eligible, though, they need a referral from a counselor. In the cafeteria, junior counselor Sharee Levenson uses a hand-held microphone to let students know she's available, then she strolls the cafeteria for the rest of the period. Several sign up.



Lake View High's guidance team, from left: Steve Maras, Ron Melman, department chair Jo Lipson and Sharee Levenson.

"She comes down every day with an announcement or something for the students," says Assistant Principal Lena Talley.

Rule 2: Get personal

With adolescents, it's the personal touch that counts. Once a week, freshman counselor Jo Lipson, who also chairs the department, drops off birthday cards for students in division teachers' mailboxes. "One little girl told me she hung it up on her bedroom wall," Lipson says.

Levenson greets senior Melissa Kurzac with a big hug when she spotted her among the throng in mid-January at Lake View's annual college fair. "Are you calm?" Levenson asks. Kurzac, who's applying to the University of Illinois, says she feels sick.

"Ms. Levenson has been there since freshman year for me," says Kurzac. "She helped me pass my classes, get on track. I love her."

"This is a very child-friendly school," says social worker Sandy Addison. "It's the tone of the school."

Building strong relationships with students "really is the cornerstone of our work," says Russell Sabella, president-elect of the American School Counselor Association and a counseling professor at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers. "Counseling is a process of change that can only happen when students trust their counselor, when they know their counselor cares and under-

stands and respects their needs."

Sometimes a counselor's own life experience builds a bridge to the students he or she serves. Melman is a veteran special education teacher and also raised a child with special needs. "I'll always look out for them," he says.

For Maras, going the extra mile is a routine counseling strategy. When students need extra money and attention, for instance, he hires them to work in his garden and pays \$10 an hour.

Senior Alen Mesic praises Maras for helping him realize that he wants to study mechanical engineering after high school. Another senior, Enrique Vales, credits Maras for supporting his rock band by hiring them for gigs at school, even as he tries persuading him to study music in college before going on the road.

Maras insists this personal investment is part of his job. "They come in sick—go buy them tea. Wouldn't you do that for a kid? You have to break down the barriers of teacher-student with these kids."

Rule 3: Delegate

Principals create the conditions for counselors to work well with students. Lake View faculty and counselors appreciate Principal Feaman's mix of hands-on and hands-off management. Although Feaman is visible, knows students personally and sets up systems to run the school smoothly, he doesn't

micromanage, they say. Faculty and staff have autonomy to make decisions and solve problems.

When it comes to day-to-day operations, "he pretty much leaves us alone," says Melman. "He's supportive and trusts our judgment."

Feaman also has relieved counselors of some administrative burdens. For one, he appointed the school's disciplinarian, who has administrative credentials, to a post that closely resembles an assistant principal. (Lake View doesn't enroll enough students for the board to pay for a second assistant principal.)

The biggest relief has been having the additional "assistant principal" do test administration, a chore that is the bane of counselor's existence elsewhere. "We don't want counselors to have their valuable time taken up with collecting the tests, tracking where they are," says Feaman. "This enables our counselors to be more effective at what they're doing." And that includes helping teachers and students interpret test results.

Counselors themselves are getting better at delegating. In addition to counseling sophomores, Melman is responsible for managing the cases of about 160 special education students. However, he is training special education teacher Patty Arroyo to take over case management duties. As a result, case management takes up only one-third to 40 percent of his time.

"I'm kind of weaning away from scheduling stuff [like Individual Education Plan meetings], and giving it to some of the new teachers," he says. Arroyo will continue to teach for at least part of the day. "She's such a good teacher; we don't want to take her out of the classroom."

Melman also has backup from social worker Sandy Addison, who provides individual and group counseling to special education students. Addison is on site four days a week, and supervises interns who also help with counseling.

A weak spot in the counseling department is getting more help to freshmen. Freshmen counselor Lipson juggles that responsibility with recruiting—a big job at Lake View, where half the students are from outside the attendance area—and attending off-site meetings as department chair.

Some students think she's overworked. "I remember coming in as a freshman with a lot of questions about credits and work," says sophomore

Clifton Ellis. "It's hard to get information from her. She's overloaded. She should have a co-counselor, somebody to help her."

Teachers say freshman transition could use more attention, too. Valerie Collins, who teaches algebra to freshmen, says that for freshmen, the reality of high school sinks in when first-semester report cards come out. "By the time you get your first one, it's too late [for some to recover]," she says. "That's how so many of them fall by the wayside."

Adding a fifth counselor could ease Lipson's load, but there's no money in the budget to pay for one, Feaman concedes. "I need another counselor," he says. "We'll be looking at discretionary money and see if there's enough to provide one." A Spanish-speaking counselor would be an asset, he says. Lake View is 60 percent Hispanic.

Rule 4: Network

Feaman and his counselors know that they alone cannot reach every student. "We're aware that four people, no matter how good they are, can't meet the needs of 1,200 students," Feaman says.

To fill in the gaps, they rely heavily on a network of resources, including the Scholarship and Guidance Association.

The school is also one of 11 CPS high schools with an on-site health clinic.

Advisory period, which attempts to offer group guidance and is mandatory in CPS high schools, is taken seriously at Lake View, which offers credit for the class and requires students to make up missed sessions. "We view advisory as an extension of our counseling program," Feaman says.

Counselors say advisory can provide an early warning that students need help. However, students' views are similar to those of their unsatisfied peers around the system. Butler, the junior, says advisory is "not helpful."

"We haven't been doing anything," she says. "It's just been some free time, whatever. If you've got homework, do homework."

Teachers may be finding it more useful. Counselors meet monthly with the division teachers to prepare advisory topics. In January, for example, the teachers learned how to interpret student scores on EXPLORE and PLAN, tests that prepare students for the ACT.

Beyond advisory, the Scholarship and Guidance Association pitches in to provide academic and behavioral counseling. In a typical year, SGA counselor Robert van Treeck may see as many as 60 students. Lake View counselors are "great" to work with, Van Treeck says.

"They know what to watch for, they know what's a good fit. Often they check with the kids before they refer them to me, so they're ready to talk."

The guidance counselors keep tabs on which services individual students are using and make sure students don't use them to avoid being in class, says social worker Addison.

Perhaps the biggest backup for Lake View counselors is the school's on-site health center, which includes a full-time psychologist. Mental health is among the top reasons students use the health center, which receives 4,000 visits a year.

"We do a complete social history on any student who comes in for a physical," says medical director and physician Liz Feldman. Feldman and two nurse practitioners ask screening questions, including whether grades have dropped from the previous year and whether the student has been suspended or is frequently in detention. "If they say yes, our next question is, 'Who's your guidance counselor?'"

Lipson is grateful to have on-site services. In the past, counselors would refer families to outside providers, but "we really couldn't make sure the child was seeing someone," she says. "This way, we can take the family over and introduce them to the therapist. We can make sure they are getting some service." ●

Liz Monge: Preventive medicine

Liz Monge, the daughter of immigrants from Mexico and Costa Rica, became a college counselor to prevent young people from having experiences like hers. As a freshman at Whitney Young High in 1984, a counselor placed her in the business track, even though she was valedictorian of her elementary school and had off-the-chart test scores.

"I expressed to my counselor that I was interested in pursuing the honors track in biology," she recalls. "My counselor said that I wasn't good enough for the honors program."

Were it not for an outside organization, the League of United Latin American Citizens, Monge may not have gone to college at all. A representative from the group visited Whitney Young weekly. "He would come in and set up a table," Monge recalls. "I finally took notice and

walked up to the table."

The visitor asked Monge what she planned to do after high school. "Oh, nothing, really," she recalls telling him.

"He said, 'Oh, no, you're going to community college, at least,'" Monge recalls. At his prompting, she applied and was accepted to Triton College. As a student there, Monge signed up for a class that required an internship at Triton's in-house television studio. "I was challenging myself to get out of my shell." It paid off. Monge grew confident enough to run for and win a student government seat, and she set her sights on studying communications. Monge says she enjoyed the experience, but "felt cheated because it should have happened in high school."

She went on to enroll at Northern Illinois University and graduated with a degree in communications in 1995.

Though few Latino students were enrolled at Whitney Young in her day, Monge says most other Latinos were placed in business classes at Whitney Young and she suspects staff simply had lower expectations for them. Studies have shown that school officials often have low expectations for students of color.

Since earning her bachelor's degree, Monge has worked to help other first-generation college aspirants reach their goals.

Now a college counselor at Young Women's Leadership Charter, Monge is working to ensure her charges have every opportunity to excel. "When I was a student at Whitney Young, my counselor did absolutely nothing for me," she says. "That was a great motivator for me to serve the community, especially young students of color, to pursue higher education. They can be achievers even if they aren't No. 1 and didn't get straight A's."

Maureen Kelleher

Guidance for counseling

Some innovative and resourceful schools are successfully tackling the dilemma of providing students with quality guidance on college and career choices. Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher highlights a few local examples.

Best Practice How to use advisory

At Best Practice High, two counselors serve 430 students, but they are backed up by 30 teachers who keep tabs on an assigned group of students for all four years.

"That [teacher] is on top of everything that this kid is up to," says teacher leader Mark Fertel. "When they graduate and walk across the stage, that's who hands them their diploma."

The arrangement has turned Best Practice's advisory period into one of the best-functioning advisories in the city. Unlike most CPS high schools, Best Practice teachers meet with their 16 or 17 advisees every day for nearly an hour. (Elsewhere, once a week is more typical.) Advisors get to know students personally and help them with course selection from year to year.

The closeness also makes it easier to catch students headed for trouble. Best Practice teachers work in grade-level teams that meet weekly to discuss students. When a teacher has a problem with a student, he or she checks in with colleagues to pinpoint the best strategy or determine whether a parent should be called.

As a relatively new school, Best Practice had the advantage of building an advisory program from the start. Teachers were hired with the expectation that they would also be student advisors. "We didn't have the problem of buy-in so much," Fertel notes.

A strong advisory program frees Best Practice counselors from the overwhelming administrative duties their colleagues face at other CPS schools. Here, teacher-advisors handle class scheduling logistics and work with students to choose their courses. "It frees our counselors to counsel," Fertel says.



Latoya Wheeler (left), an Anderson Elementary graduate and now president of her class at Robeson High, fields questions from current Anderson students about life in high school.

North Lawndale Charter Making an investment

A tiny charter high school is making a big investment in counselors.

Principal John Horan of North Lawndale Charter High has five full-time and one part-time counselor to serve 372 students, or one counselor for every 68 kids. "It's a big budget priority," he says. "One counselor for 300 kids is not going to cut it."

Counselors are responsible for individual and family counseling, and running student leadership and peer mediation programs, says Horan. "This year, one counselor's entire job is to keep track of last year's inaugural graduates and make sure they are succeeding in college, the military and the workplace."

That counselor is Ramona Robertson, now director of alumni affairs. She has worked with North Lawndale's first graduates since they were freshmen. Over the years, she has visited students and their families at home and in the hospital, and she was present when one student gave birth. "As the years progress, you get to know the families," she says. "It facili-

tates better relationships."

Last August and September, Robertson was on the road, visiting alums as they settled into college life—Clark University in Atlanta and Carleton College in Minnesota, for instance—and networking with admissions officers to help future North Lawndale graduates get into college.

"Every week I was somewhere," she says. In January, when Robertson drove one former student to Nebraska's Doane College, she took along eight North Lawndale students to tour the campus. "Many of our students will function better at smaller university settings, since they are used to a smaller, personal environment," she says. "That's one of the lessons we are learning."

Anderson Elementary Start early

At Anderson Elementary, counselor Elise Post organizes a career week in partnership with Women in Trades to expose girls to non-traditional occupations. She also invites

See **COUNSELING** page 14

Alternative safety net programs pick up slack for city's public schools

by Faye A. Silas

On a frigid night in January, the chapel of a 156-year-old church in West Town is overflowing with teens and adult tutors huddled in small groups over tables covered with notebooks, papers and textbooks.

The scene is typical for a Wednesday night meeting of TEAM, which stands for Tutoring to Educate for Aims and Motivation, an alternative tutoring and career counseling program run by the Erie Neighborhood House. TEAM is one of dozens of local programs run by non-profit groups that encourage low-income, mostly minority students to finish high school and go to college.

In many ways, such programs pick up the slack for CPS counselors, who often are unable to meet all students' needs for college and career preparations. Some programs—University of Illinois at Chicago's Early Outreach, for one—begin working with students as young as 8 to improve their science, math and language skills, and expose them to health and science professions.

"We see an awful lot of students in the middle who would consider college if they had someone to push them," says Joan Klaus, a Bank One Corp. vice president who works with Saturday Scholars, the bank's 14-year-old college readiness program. "Counselors' work load is so large that it's humanly impossible to reach all the students that might need that extra push. There's a gap."

Five years ago, Klaus founded an organization to help fill that gap. The College and Career Readiness Network is comprised of programs that offer college preparatory services to low-income students. About 140 corporate and non-profit groups have joined the Network, which meets four times a year.

Klaus estimates that Readiness Network members serve roughly 5,000 students a year. "Just a drop in the bucket. We need to reach so many more," she adds.



JASON REBLANDINO

Wells High sophomores Ana Padilla and Isaac Castro (center) discuss schoolwork with their tutor, Sam Riseman, in a tutoring and counseling program offered by the Erie Neighborhood House in West Town.

CPS officials welcome the assistance provided by the outside groups. "Any program that gives our kids assistance is valuable," says Jean Perez, who oversees CPS guidance counselor programs. "It takes more people than those in our schools to assist our students."

The following snapshots offer a glimpse into two alternative college and career counseling programs, and illustrate how they can make a difference in students' lives.

TEAM

TEAM is a collaborative effort between Erie Neighborhood House, a West Town social service agency, Northern Trust Corp. and 12 CPS high schools. Created in 1984, TEAM offers support services that promote academic achievement and encourage teens to go to college. TEAM also holds workshops on college admission, scholarships and entrance test preparation. It also sponsors an annual college fair.

Weekly small-group tutoring is the foundation of the TEAM program. This year, 77 students, most of them from

Wells High School, and 67 volunteer tutors meet every Wednesday evening.

"We see many marginal students who have really blossomed," says TEAM director Maria Matias. "They're doing well in school, they're anxious to make something of themselves and they appreciate what the volunteers do for them."

TEAM has a strong track record: Overall, 98 percent of participants graduate from high school and, in the last five years, 97 percent have enrolled in college. TEAM staff did not provide data on the number of students who complete college.

Northern Trust supplies the majority of TEAM's tutors and, along with other corporate and foundation funders, provides scholarships for students going to college.

TEAM and Erie House supplement CPS counseling efforts, Matias says. At Wells, a predominantly Latino school with close to 1,200 enrolled, counselors are "so swamped, they don't have the time to find many resources," she explains. Two years ago, Erie House opened a satellite office there to support TEAM students and serve as a resource for immigration, health issues, adoles-

“We see an awful lot of students in the middle who would consider college if they had someone to push them.”

Joan Klaus, College and Career Readiness Network

cent boys and other services requested by the school.

For Ana Padilla, a Wells sophomore honor student who joined as a freshman, TEAM is more than just a tutoring program. The program, and her tutor, Northern Trust computer programmer Sam Riseman, lend support, encouragement and an ear. Riseman is a good listener and a friend, she says. “If I have a problem at home or at school, he listens and gives advice. We talk about homework, what’s happening during the week, the future, college—everything.”

One of five children, Ana finds it difficult to study at home. “Erie House is my second home—it’s easier for me to concentrate here,” she explains.

Wells sophomore Isaac Castro says Riseman has helped him resist peer pressure to smoke, drink, do drugs and join street gangs. Although his brother and many of his friends have chosen that path, “my friends respect what I do,” notes Isaac.

“Being a teen [boy] isn’t easy, but he has a quiet determination that is admirable,” says Riseman, who concedes that urban youth often struggle with negative influences.

As both students move closer to graduation, Riseman expects to help Ana apply to college and Isaac join the U.S. Marines. “I’m not an expert, I’m here as a resource,” Riseman says. “They don’t

have to be concerned that I’m judging them. It’s nice having an opportunity to take my perspective on life and share it with them.”

Early Outreach

The Early Outreach Program of the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) offers a variety of academic and college-career supports to underprivileged minority students. The program has two components: a math and science education initiative for Latino students, and Saturday College, an academic enrichment and college-career prep program for 3rd through 12th grade students. About 370 students from public, private and parochial schools participate.

Classes for both programs are held for four hours on Saturdays during the school year, says Deborah Um’rani, Early Outreach director. Students and their parents must sign a contract to commit to the programs, students must maintain a B average, and parent involvement is a prerequisite, she says. More than 95 percent of Early Outreach graduates go to college.

Participants in the Latino math-science program attend Juarez or Clemente high schools, where counseling staffs are overburdened and have little time to help kids prepare for college, Um’rani notes.

“Early Outreach is the only structured college prep program at the schools,” she says. “We’re doing the whole job.”

Arturo Ortiz, chair of counseling at Juarez, concedes that five counselors and a social worker juggle a multitude of tasks to serve the school’s 1,646 students. He estimates that 40 percent of the school’s graduates go on to two- or four-year colleges.

Juarez students benefit from Early Outreach, but Ortiz says he is disappointed that its staff and his counselors don’t have more contact. There is no relationship between the program staff and Juarez’s counseling staff, and only once was he asked to distribute flyers about the program, says Ortiz.

“These programs come in thinking that there’s something missing,” Ortiz says. “The general philosophy is that high schools aren’t doing these things, but they are.”

But students appreciate the help. While counselors have helped her choose classes every year, Yessica Mercado, a Juarez senior, says she has relied on Early Outreach for an academic boost and for help navigating college admissions and scholarships.

It is eight o’clock on a recent Saturday morning and Yessica is one of hundreds of students carrying bulging book bags into the Behavioral Sciences building on the UIC campus. She has attended Early Outreach classes since she was a freshman and hopes to become a nurse.

Yessica and her younger sister Yesenia, a Juarez junior who is also in the program, will be the first in their family to go to college. Her parents—mom is a housekeeper and a dad is a mechanic—completed school only through 7th-grade.

“My parents are happy that we’re here,” says Yessica. “They’re proud of us because we’re trying to succeed.” ●

COUNSELING

continued from page 12

Anderson graduates to talk to 8th-graders about life in high school.

Post holds these events to give kids an early opportunity to begin thinking about what they want to do and how to get there. Research shows that the classes students take in 6th, 7th and 8th grades affect whether they can take college preparatory courses in high school. Those whose parents have not been to college are most in need of guidance, says a 2001 report by the National Cen-

ter for Education Statistics.

“There are a lot of very important reasons [to start early],” observes Vinetta Jones, dean of Howard University’s school of education. In middle school, students are placed on academic tracks that can open or close the doors to higher education, she adds. Guidance counselors play an important role because they decide who gets information about advanced courses, she says.

Post can spend more time counseling students because she does not manage special education students. The princi-

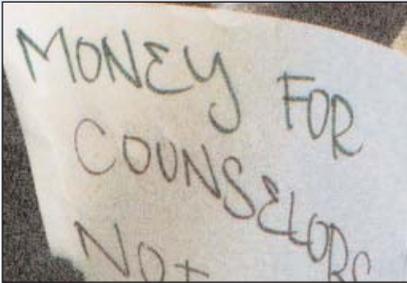
pal uses the school’s discretionary money to pay for a full-time special education case manager.

That’s a luxury many elementary school counselors do not have, observes Charlene Vega, who oversees pupil support services for CPS. Case managers track special education students’ individual education plans, meet with parents to discuss those plans and complete related paperwork. High schools, by contrast, often have a dedicated case manager on staff. “It is a time-consuming responsibility,” Vega notes. ●

Catalyst

Briefing page:

High school guidance counselors



"Counselors' work load is so large that it's humanly impossible to reach all the students that might need that extra push. There's a gap."

Joan Klaus, founder, College and Career Readiness Network

The problem

High school guidance counselors are in short supply, and those on the job struggle to serve an overwhelming number of students while keeping up with a host of administrative tasks. As a result, many CPS students do not get enough guidance to succeed in high school and move on to college or the workforce.

CPS counselors are assigned to high schools at the ratio of one for every 360 students; the American School Counselor Association recommends one for every 250 students. Experiments to reduce the ratio in some high schools, such as North Lawndale Charter High, have produced results, but a counselor shortage makes hiring difficult, and in these tough economic times, the School Board couldn't afford to pay them. Upcoming retirements are likely to make the situation worse.

Since 1997, high schools have been required to offer an advisory class that pairs a teacher with a group of students for four years. The class is intended to help students bond with someone on school staff who could help them realize their goals, but research indicates it has yet to fulfill its mission on a large scale.

Staggering statistics

Forty percent of respondents to a survey of CPS's class of 2000 said they received no help from faculty or counselors with

college applications. African-American and Latino students, who are more likely to drop out and less likely to attend college for a variety of reasons, rely more heavily on guidance counselors to get information about colleges and careers, and to prevent them from falling through the cracks. Yet a recent survey of students at four mostly Latino Chicago high schools found that 27 percent had never met their counselor.

Filling the gap

District purse strings are tight, and it's unlikely that additional counselors will be hired anytime soon. The strategic planning department recently convened a group of educators to study the high school advisory program and recommend ways to improve it.

More promising is the growing number of nonprofits offering tutoring, mentoring and college readiness services to students who need it. Ten years ago, a group of Cabrini-Green volunteers formed the Tutor/Mentor Connection, which today recruits volunteer tutors for over 500 youth programs.

Joan Klaus, a Bank One Corp. vice president, founded the College and Career Readiness Network for organizations that provide college readiness programs to low-income and minority students. About 140 area corporate and nonprofit groups have joined.

Partnerships with local hospitals

have resulted in on-site health clinics at several schools, including Lake View High, where counselors are particularly adept at teamwork and networking. These clinics offer mental health and counseling services, taking some of the load off school counselors.

Resources

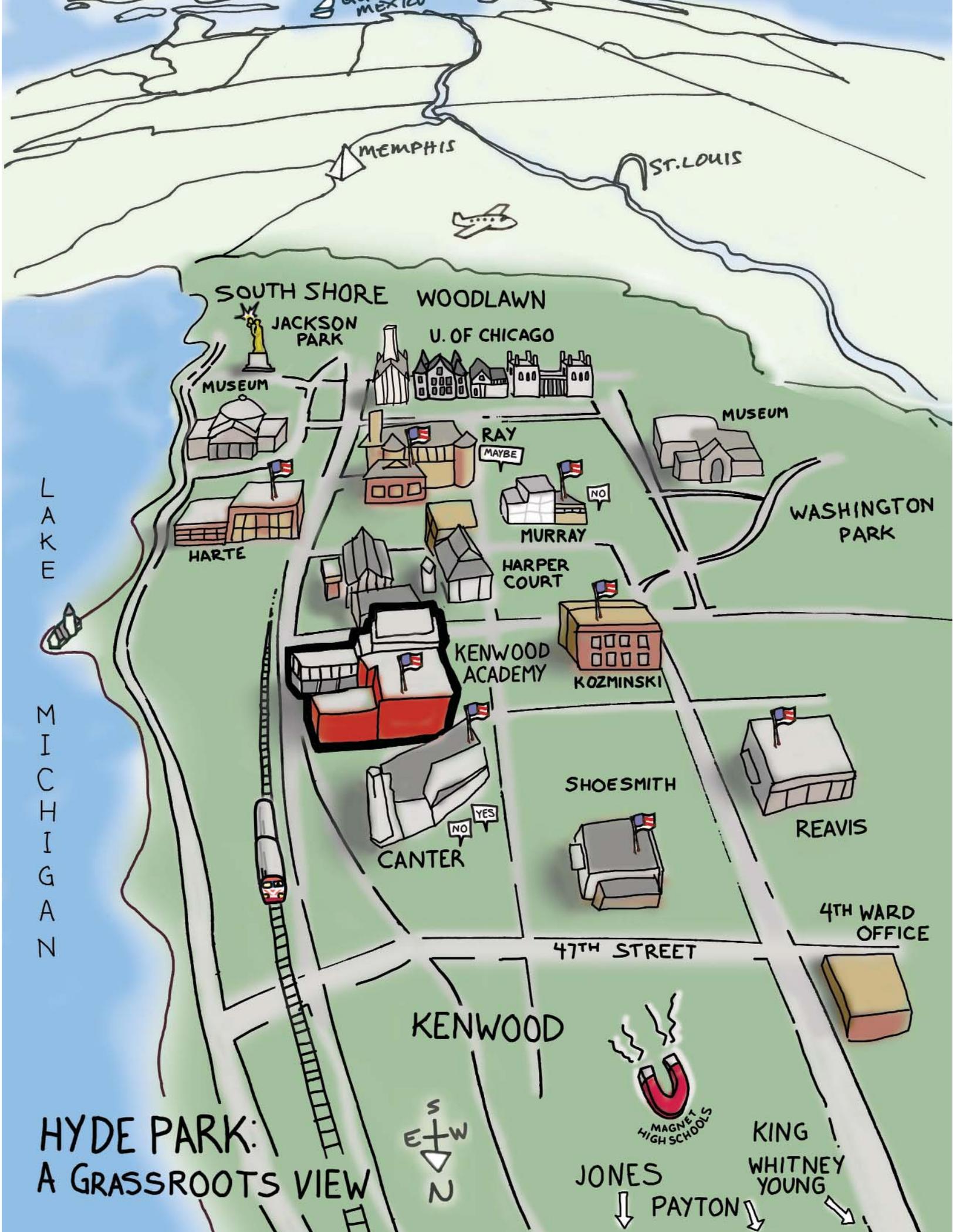
⇒ "Twenty Questions to Ask Your Guidance Counselor" and other tips to help students prepare for college can be found on the College Board web site. <http://www.collegeboard.com>

⇒ For information on the College and Career Readiness Network, a coalition of college readiness agencies and programs, call (312) 494-6745.

⇒ The Tutor/Mentor Connection recruits volunteer tutors, trains them and offers other support services for area tutoring and mentoring programs. It also publishes a directory of places where after-school tutoring is held. For information, call 312-492-9614 or visit the web site at www.tutormentorconnection.org

⇒ Another college readiness program, Early Outreach, is open to students in 3rd through 12th grades. Classes are held at University of Illinois at Chicago. Call (312) 996-2549.

⇒ Tutoring to Educate for Aims and Motivation (TEAM) offers tutoring and college prep for students in the West Town community. Call (312) 666-3430. www.eriehouse.org.



MEMPHIS

ST. LOUIS

SOUTH SHORE WOODLAWN

JACKSON PARK

U. OF CHICAGO

MUSEUM

MUSEUM

L A K E

HARTE

RAY
MAYBE

MURRAY

HARPER COURT

WASHINGTON PARK

M I C H I G A N

KENWOOD ACADEMY

KOZMINSKI

SHOESMITH

REAVIS

CANTER

NO YES

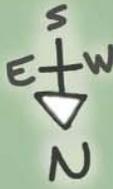
4TH WARD OFFICE

47TH STREET

KENWOOD



HYDE PARK:
A GRASSROOTS VIEW



JONES

KING
WHITNEY
YOUNG

PAYTON



Hyde Park

Stemming a local brain drain

by Elizabeth Duffrin

Three years ago, educators and activists in Hyde Park, home of the prestigious University of Chicago, set out to reconfigure their public schools to accommodate and attract more students from the neighborhood.

Overall, the public schools were not meeting the demand for high-quality education. Nearly a third of Hyde Park children were enrolled in private elementary schools, according to the most recent census. Many others vied for slots in the two top public elementary schools while other schools had to recruit from outside the neighborhood. When it came time for high school, many students left the neighborhood.

Although Hyde Park's neighborhood high school, Kenwood Academy, is one of the best in the city, it is not highly regarded by Hyde Park's middle-class parents. In the late 1990s, the school's standing suffered a sharp decline with the opening of several highly selective college preparatory high schools. Between 2000 and 2002, the percentage of public school students from the neighborhood enrolling in Kenwood dropped from 80 to 68, according to a *CATALYST* analysis of School Board data.

This is the second installment in an occasional series that examines schools from a community perspective.

In Hyde Park, one of the city's most integrated neighborhoods, tensions tend to be more about class than race, residents say. Not surprisingly, the

school improvement plans that emerged to attract more neighborhood students aggravated that tension.

At the elementary level, several K-8 schools would convert to K-6 schools and send their 7th- and 8th-graders to a redesigned Canter Middle School, which until this year had to recruit students from outside the neighborhood to fill its seats. This move would allow one elementary school to take in more K-6 students and two others to reduce overcrowding.

The principals who pushed this plan easily won support from the University of Chicago and the alderman, who also saw a high-quality middle school program as a way to funnel more bright students into Kenwood Academy.

"The desire [was] to build a K to 12 program specifically geared to Hyde Park families and children," says Virginia Vaske, area instructional officer for elementary schools in Hyde Park and neighboring communities.

However, the principals of the two area K-8 schools with the most low-income students, Kozminski and Reavis, decided not to participate in the middle school plan, raising eyebrows among Hyde Parkers concerned about equity.

"These kids deserve the same opportunities," insists Judy King, chair of the Kenwood LSC. When Canter tried to pull out of the plan, the School Board overruled it, citing the best interests of the children, she says. "Why can't you overrule Reavis and Kozminski for the benefit of the kids?" she asks.

At Kenwood, improvement is riding, in part, on an augmented magnet program and a smaller school size. To accomplish the latter, the school is

admitting fewer students from outside its attendance boundary. These students come mainly from impoverished, largely black communities on the South Side

Again, this strikes a nerve with some in the liberal, politically active community.

"Whether or not a young black male gets well-educated can make the difference between whether he spends his life in a good job or in jail," says Patricia Ashby, a former Kenwood LSC member.

Some also see a racial component to the plans, specifically an effort to raise white enrollment at Kenwood, which is 91 percent African-American. Two of the new feeder schools for Canter Middle School, Murray and Ray, have a relatively high enrollment of white students, 24 percent and 20 percent respectively. With Canter intended as a stronger bridge to Kenwood, white enrollment at Kenwood could increase.

At Kenwood, the improvement plan is unfolding without much public dis-sension.

However, the middle school plan has been in constant turmoil. There, ongoing conflicts have less to do with class or race than missteps in the planning. An early controversy over the restaffing of Canter, which had a closely knit faculty, set off an unexpected chain of events that included the displacement of a principal; the departure of most of the faculty, who were replaced largely by novices; and a disorganized school opening. Now a group of unhappy parents threatens to pull out of a program they helped to create.

Hyde Park has high standards for its schools, observes Cydney Fields, principal of Ray elementary. "This is not a community that has a problem speaking up."

The battle for Canter Middle School

by Elizabeth Duffrin

The idea of a middle school to serve all of Hyde Park had been kicking around the community for decades. In 1999, principals of three K-8 schools in Hyde Park—Harte, Murray and Ray—got serious about it and quickly brought on board the principal of a middle school in nearby Kenwood.

With limited resources, the K-8 schools could not address the unique social and emotional needs of children in 7th and 8th grades, their principals agreed. For example, they could not provide advisory periods or a variety of clubs and sports teams.

“I really felt we shortchanged them,” says Virginia Vaske, the former Murray principal who is now an area instructional officer.

Besides, moving the older students out would free up space at Ray and Harte, which had grown crowded, and allow Murray to expand its enrollment in the lower grades.

James Johnson, the principal of Wirth Middle School (renamed Canter in 2000), also supported the concept. Since Wirth drew students from only one area school, the K-5 Shoemith, he had to recruit from outside the area to fill his seats. If Harte, Murray and Ray also fed into Wirth, he wouldn't need to recruit.

During 1999-2000 school year, the four principals met at local restaurants to hash out a plan. But that cooperation didn't last long. Within a year, Johnson and his staff were so angry at what they viewed as a takeover of their middle school, that they tried to derail the plan. Amid much turmoil, the plan went forward, and the new Canter Middle School got off to a shaky start last September. At this point, some parents are optimistic, some are apprehensive, and some are trying to pull out.

Formal planning for the school got underway at an October 2000 community forum, where participants agreed to form a steering committee made up of four representatives from each school. Committee members then organized



JOHN BOZ

When Canter Middle School's former leader abruptly departed, Carolyn Epps stepped into the breach as interim principal.

forums to share information and solicit ideas at their own schools.

In the fall of 2001, the steering committee presented a tentative curriculum with a “global village” focus. It included interdisciplinary projects with themes such as “World Citizenship” and “Environmental Interdependence,” as well as courses in Spanish, French and Japanese.

Cooperation disintegrates

Every local school council (LSC) approved it, except for Canter's. By then, it had sunk in that the proponents meant to close Canter and reopen it as a new school. Under that scenario, teachers would have to reapply for their jobs.

Parents and administrators at Murray and Ray, in particular, took for granted that Canter would start over with a new curriculum and a new faculty. Both schools boast high test scores and accelerated programs—for example, they begin foreign language classes in kindergarten. In contrast, the test scores at Canter, which enrolls more low-income students, were below grade level.

“They had a lot of kids that were not from the Hyde Park neighborhood and a program that wasn't the next logical step for Ray, Murray and Harte,” says Vaske.

But the idea of rebuilding Canter from scratch, and possibly losing long-time teachers in the process, offended

many in the tightly knit Canter community. Principal Johnson had been a teacher or administrator at Canter for nearly 30 years. Many teachers had taught at there 10 years or more.

“We weren't a perfect school, but we were a good school, and it was a wonderful place to work,” says former Canter teacher Stephanie Gates.

Canter's school librarian, Gretta Chamberlain, says her opposition formed at a community forum at her school. “Some of us would be rehired, and some of us wouldn't,” she recalls hearing. “We were not the ones they wanted to teach their children.”

To Johnson, the whole planning process smacked of arrogance. “The people on the south end of the community wanted to dictate who the teachers were, what the curriculum was. You can't take over a building like you're the Vietcong.”

In Vaske's view, the Canter contingent was “pretty entrenched in keeping Canter as Canter and accepting new kids rather than reopening it as a new school.”

When the steering committee presented a finished curriculum, Canter teachers insisted that a similar curriculum already was in place, with student advisories, units with international themes and units that spanned subject areas, such as science and social studies.

To global village proponents, what already was in place was beside the point. Their approach was to design a school and then find a place for it, not to consider whether the Canter program was good enough, says Vaske.

However, before the School Board could require Canter teachers to reapply, it needed evidence that the global village proposal was substantially different.

The Office of Accountability visited the school in the fall of 2001 and concluded that while Canter had many strengths, including a “family-like atmosphere,” it lacked some elements of a middle school, such as a staff development plan centering on the social and emotional needs of that age group.

That was good enough for the School Board, which approved the new global village curriculum in January 2002. But by that time, the controversy had set off

a chain of events that ultimately would destabilize the program.

Musical chairs

Principal Johnson had planned to retire in Summer 2002. But the global village proponents so angered him, he says, that he decided to retire early to let the current LSC pick a successor rather than leave it to an LSC elected later by the larger community.

Johnson called it quits in January 2001, and the School Board appointed Ora Elder, Canter's assistant principal, as the interim principal. It asked the LSC not to select a permanent principal because of the school's pending overhaul.

Indignant, the LSC solicited resumes. One of the applicants was Theresa Speegle, a young administrator in the board's middle school office who had been program coordinator at a nationally recognized middle school. The steering committee had drawn on her expertise, and she had become their choice for Canter's new principal. "She was obviously very knowledgeable about middle schools," says Vaske.

Speegle made it into the top five of 30 applicants, Chamberlain recalls, but she was the only one who had not completed the School Board's training requirements for a principal appointment. However, Chief Education Officer Cozette Buckney let the council know the board was willing to appoint Speegle as acting principal pending her completion of the requirements by summer 2001.

The LSC wound up rejecting Speegle but for other reasons, according to Chamberlain, who said members felt under attack and wanted to choose a leader they trusted. So the council promoted Ora Elder from interim to contract principal.

In fall 2001, the board tapped Speegle to coordinate the planning of the new Canter curriculum. She made the rounds of the feeder elementary schools, explaining her vision and winning the support of many. "I thought, she's a real dynamic go-getter kind of person," recalls Betsy Budney, a Murray parent.

Shortly after the School Board approved the curriculum in January 2002, central office asked the LSC to postpone the regular LSC election from spring until the fall. That way, parents of

students coming from Murray, Ray and Harte could vote.

The LSC agreed at first but then changed its mind. The School Board then went to court to halt the spring election, but a judge sided with the council. In May, the Canter community elected a council staunchly opposed to the pending changes at their school.

Dashed expectations

Determined to support the new program, the School Board cleared the way for Speegle by offering Ora Elder the interim principalship at Smyth elementary, effective July 1. Elder accepted, and the board then appointed Speegle as Canter's interim principal. But with that late start date, she would have only two months to hire a staff.

As it turned out, only a handful of Canter's staff reapplied, according to several sources. The departed teachers who spoke with *CATALYST* said they

Indeed, parents complained about disruptive classrooms.

When the new Canter opened in September, some parents of incoming students remained anxious; others were excited.

Dissatisfaction quickly set in.

Some parents accustomed to the renovated facilities at Ray and Murray were angry that Canter had no library and an undersized gym and cafeteria.

The global village curriculum fell short of expectations, too. Murray and Ray students found themselves repeating old foreign language lessons alongside Harte and Shoemith graduates who had had no more than two years of foreign language.

Some complained that the program failed to challenge their children. "I don't need my kids to be in a highly competitive environment, but I don't want the expectations to be so low that they don't have to work for any grades," says Betsy Budney, whose twin daughters attended Murray.

"They [Canter] had a lot of kids that were not from Hyde Park and a program that wasn't the next logical step for Ray, Murray and Harte."

Virginia Vaske, area instructional officer

wanted to return but felt they had to secure positions sooner than mid-summer. "Why would we wait until the last minute?" asks teacher Stephanie Gates, who landed at Carnegie elementary.

When Speegle was done hiring, only five of some 20 Canter teachers remained. Over all, the faculty had less teaching experience, with a third having a year or less, according to board data.

There were staffing anomalies as well. Speegle filled two teaching positions with day-to-day substitutes. She also assigned several new teachers to classes with a disproportionate number of special education students and then put those classes together on the third floor.

"That was an accident waiting to happen," one new Canter teacher remarks.

The transition also was troubling to long-time Canter parents, who felt the loss of former teachers, according to one new teacher who asked not to be identified. That resentment had an impact on their children, she says. Fights broke out between the 8th-graders remaining from the old Canter and the incoming 7th-graders. "There was a lot of displaced hostility," the teacher says.

Adding to the disarray, Speegle became ill and was frequently absent. The *Hyde Park Herald* later reported that she had had an appendectomy early in the school year. In November, the Canter LSC announced that Speegle had taken an indefinite leave of absence for health reasons.

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Kenwood Academy limits outsiders

By the fall of 1999, competition from the city's new college prep magnet was beginning to weigh on Careda Taylor, the principal of Kenwood Academy. A neighborhood school with a large magnet program, Kenwood was a top pick for high-achievers around the city. It also attracted a large proportion of students from the surrounding Kenwood and Hyde Park communities.

But Taylor sensed that was about to change, as did her contacts at the University of Chicago, she recalls. Top-scoring students, they feared, would be lured away by the college preps.

Although the university runs the prestigious University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, it has a stake in the reputation of nearby public schools. "We cannot attract students and faculty to the University of Chicago if the neighborhood is not perceived in the best possible terms," says Duel Richardson, the university's neighborhood relations director.

That spring, the Kenwood local school council got to work on a plan to make the school more attractive.

Three years and two spirited school council elections later, a plan is in place. Kenwood is strengthening its magnet program and, to reduce crowding, is taking in fewer students from outside its attendance area. But some see the "Future of Kenwood Plan" as a way to keep poor kids out for the benefit of Hyde Park's middle class.

"I call it 'The Strategic Plan for the Gentrification of Kenwood,'" says Judy King, chair of Kenwood's local school council, who was elected after the plan was adopted.

Some also believe an unspoken goal of the plan is to make Kenwood better reflect the racial composition of the neighborhood, which means bringing in more white students. Combined, Hyde Park and Kenwood are 33 percent white, according to the 2000 census. But the percentage of white students at Kenwood Academy dropped from 10 percent in 1990 to 4 percent in 2002. Meanwhile, black enrollment grew to 91 percent.

"As it's gotten less racially diverse, it's become more difficult to attract non-



CHRISTINE OLIVA

Neighborhood enrollment at Kenwood Academy has slid since the opening of new magnet schools. Still, it is considered among the city's best neighborhood high schools.

African-American kids to the school," says 4th Ward Alderman Toni Preckwinkle, who thinks good school leadership is the key to improving racial balance.

Hot LSC contest

As the "Future of Kenwood Plan" unfolded, it became clear that some supporters in the community had another unspoken goal, the removal of Taylor.

Taylor's contract was up for renewal in the spring of 2000, and that was a hot topic in the community.

Some Hyde Parkers felt that under her tenure, the school had become less safe, less orderly, and that teachers distrusted her management. Her supporters blamed the school's troubles on outside factors, such as College Preps luring away top Kenwood teachers. They insisted Taylor needed more time to make improvements.

Taylor won another four-year contract by the slimmest of margins, 5 to 4.

That decision sparked a vigorous contest for the local school council elections held later that spring. Twenty-three parents and neighborhood residents competed for eight seats. A slate of five viewed as Taylor critics all won seats, as did two Taylor supporters.

Ken Warren, a Kenwood parent and a University of Chicago professor, ran independently, and the council subsequently elected him chair. Since this council would be up for re-election before Taylor's next contract renewal, its

goal was only to press for school improvements, he says.

During the 2000-01 school year, Warren organized a round of community forums to solicit ideas for redesigning the school. School structure was a major issue, with suggestions ranging from subdividing into small schools to reopening as a full-fledged magnet school.

The small schools proposal had scant support. But teachers overwhelmingly supported a magnet designation because they believed it would draw more resources for the school. However, as they subsequently learned, magnet status guaranteed little extra funding.

In the end, the council decided it would enhance the appeal of its existing magnet program, which serves honors-level students. Now all students in the program could accelerate their coursework and qualify for one or more University of Chicago classes their senior year, tuition free.

The size of the school's enrollment also had come under scrutiny during the community forums. Like many high schools in middle-class neighborhoods, Kenwood is able to attract high achievers from neighborhoods with low-performing high schools. At Kenwood, accepting these students has boosted the school's test scores but left the school crowded with more than 1,800 students.

Reducing enrollment would make it possible to reduce class size and allow for more individual attention to student needs, forum participants said.

The "Future of Kenwood Plan" called

for reducing enrollment to 1,500 over the course of several years. In October 2001, the local school council gave its approval. It anticipated that test scores would dip initially but then recover as students from an upgraded neighborhood middle school, Canter, entered Kenwood in fall 2004. Careda Taylor says she supported reduced enrollment but thought the council was overly optimistic about its benefits.

Scott Chesebro, who cast a dissenting vote on the “Future of Kenwood Plan,” says it’s unrealistic to expect that these measures will lure back the neighborhood’s “whitest and brightest,” given the wide array of magnet schools and programs now available.

He thinks it is both unwise and unfair to reduce the number of high-achievers accepted from elsewhere. “For

many people outside the Hyde Park neighborhood, Kenwood is still considered a premier high school, one they desperately want their children to get into,” he says.

New leadership

Taylor’s standing as principal got a boost in the 2002 council elections as four candidates seen as supporters, including Chesebro and King, were elected. Even so, she decided to call it quits when, in November, the School Board offered her a position as special assistant to the chief education officer.

“I felt like perhaps I was in the way of progress,” Taylor says of her decision to step aside. “There were many forces—the alderman, the University of Chicago, and

the community who might have supported the school more if I was not there.”

Ald. Preckwinkle says she hopes that new leadership will result in more “non-African-American” enrollment at Kenwood. When asked whether she lobbied to have Taylor eased out, she replied, “No comment.”

The School Board dispatched Arthur Slater, a management support director and former principal of Austin High, to serve as interim principal at Kenwood. The search for a contract principal is underway.

The University of Chicago’s Richardson sees quality leadership as the key to making Kenwood more attractive to the neighborhood. “Good principals attract good teachers. That’s at the core of making a school work.”

Elizabeth Duffrin

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Some parents saw the departure of the charismatic Speegle as another blow to the faltering school. “A lot of confidence we had in the program was confidence in her as a person,” says Robert Quashie, Ray LSC chair.

At the start of December, Speegle stepped into an administrative position in the School Board’s mentoring program for new teachers. “I’m really quite happy there,” she says. She declined to answer further questions.

By then, the board had assigned Carolyn Epps, the assistant principal at Harte, as Canter’s interim principal. Epps moved to restore order. She replaced the day-to-day substitutes with certified teachers and requested extra special education staff.

By January, parents’ feelings varied widely. Parents of 7th-graders on the more smoothly running first floor expressed the most confidence. “My children have been pleased with the level of engagement and enthusiasm on the teaching staff,” says Ken Sawyer, whose twin daughters attended Murray.

But others were distraught and spread the word. “Our parents are not happy, and as a mother of a 6th-grader, I’m not happy,” says Megon Hill-Washington, vice chair of Murray’s LSC, who had rallied support for the global village proposal.

In February, Murray’s LSC petitioned

the School Board to stop sending Murray students to Canter for two years, pending full implementation of the program. The council also presented a list of 22 expectations, including a more advanced curriculum, a new gym and a new library stocked with foreign language books. Board members pleaded for patience and asked for 30 days to begin addressing the parents’ concerns.

If the board has not made adequate progress by March, Murray parents intend to petition once again for a moratorium, says Hill-Washington. “We’re not going away.”

So far, the Ray council has heard rumblings of parent discontent but no groundswell of opposition. But if Murray succeeds in withdrawing, that would cost Canter not only highly motivated students, but also energetic parents, Quashie notes. In that case, Ray might choose to pull out, too, he says.

Harte’s LSC intends to stand by Canter, according to chair Tamara Reed. With their well-regarded assistant principal now at Canter’s helm, Harte parents are confident, she says. At Shoesmith’s February LSC meeting, representatives seemed only vaguely aware of the controversy, except for one who knew parents from Murray and Ray.

Meanwhile, Epps has visited the Ray and Murray LSCs to reassure parents that the global village will be going full force by September. “The more high-

level students we have, the more our curriculum can be geared to address the needs of those students,” she stressed to the Ray council in February.

Three Canter LSC members who opposed the school’s transition have dropped out and been replaced with supporters, according to Canter community representative Tony Wilkins. A principal selection process is underway, and Epps is among six finalists, he reports.

In retrospect, Vaske thinks they should have waited to have all the pieces in place before opening Canter. “I think it was rushed,” she says.

Julie Woestehoff of the advocacy group Parents United for Responsible Education, who advised the former Canter LSC, says the process could have gone more smoothly if proponents had worked harder to get buy-in from the existing Canter faculty. “If your approach is to bully the current school and force out anybody who disagrees with the change, then you don’t have a very good beginning.”

Canter teacher Sherri Bivens sees a team spirit growing at the new Canter and the momentum to make the needed improvements. But she worries that the rough start could have a long-term impact on the school’s reputation. “We have to prove ourselves, and they don’t give you a lot of time,” she says. “Hyde park is not the place you make mistakes, especially with their children.” ●

Grants

Atlantic Philanthropies

- \$2 million over four years to University of Illinois at Chicago for a four-year research project to create methods to enhance technology use in schools.

Chicago Community Trust

- \$364,000 to University of Illinois Bureau of Educational Research for the first two years of evaluation of the Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project that works to improve reading scores in 40 CPS schools through university-based teacher training and the provision of reading specialists.

- \$225,000 to Citizens' Scholarship Foundation of America for the Trust's William J. Cook Scholarship program for male high school seniors in Cook County.

- \$222,000 to Noble Street Charter to improve math and science instruction.

- \$200,000 to CPS Office of the CEO for the Diploma Project to reduce dropout rates.

- \$100,000 to LEAP! To Language for a demonstration project of the SmartSchool program, which is part of a charter pre-school initiative.

- \$90,000 to Associated Colleges of Illinois for the first of a five-year project to increase ACI graduates' presence as teachers in CPS.

- \$62,000 to Umoja Student Development Corp. for program support and to replicate the project throughout CPS.

- \$50,000 to Community Renewal Society to support *CATALYST*.

- \$50,000 to Latino Education Alliance to support the Early Intervention Program and Benito Juarez High's College Readiness activities.

- \$50,000 to Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) for operating support.

John G. Searle Fund at the Chicago Community Trust

- \$6.63 million to CPS to implement the Advanced Reading Development Demonstration Project in 47 schools over the next two years.

- \$970,000 to University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education to support the "Best Teachers for Chicago's Neighborhood Schools" project.

- \$500,000 to Golden Apple Foundation to expand the GATE, teacher education program.

- \$400,000 to CPS High School Read 180 project.

- \$250,000 to New Leaders for New Schools to design, implement and evaluate an effective school residency program that trains CPS principals.

- \$300,000 to CPS for the Rochelle Lee Reading for Deeper Meaning Project.

- \$175,000 to CPS for the Children First Fund.

- \$100,000 to North Lawndale High School for teacher and staff development and training.

Chicago Foundation for Education

- \$248,171 to 535 teachers from 236 CPS schools to support special projects. The grants, up to \$400 each, will affect approximately 42,566 students.

Harris Bank Foundation

- \$37,000 to Henson Elementary to support a full-time coordinator for the school's literacy program.

Joyce Foundation

- \$165,625 to Erikson Institute to study the feasibility of providing universal access to early childhood education for families in Chicago.

- \$160,000 to National Center for Fair and Open Testing to promote alternative assessment and accountability in public education and to continue its work with the Assessment Reform Network.

- \$75,000 to Leadership for Quality Education for continued assistance to charter schools.

John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

- \$404,000, three-year grant to Chicago Community Foundation/Chicago Community Schools Fund to support the expansion of community schools.

- \$275,000 to Chicago Principals and Administrators Association/Chicago Leadership Academies for Supporting Success for the continuation of their leader training programs.

- \$35,000 to Umoja Student Development Corporation to support replication of its program throughout Chicago high schools.

McDougal Family Foundation Grants

- \$60,000 to the Erikson Institute for continued development of comprehensive assessment tools for use in new teacher

preparation programs.

- \$57,872 to the Field Museum to test and evaluate an Education Program Continuum that provides professional development in environmental education to Southeast Side teachers.

- \$50,000 to Metropolitan Family Services and \$15,000 to the Chicago Community Foundation to support a partnership with Sullivan Elementary, part of the Campaign to Expand Community Schools in Chicago.

- \$40,000 to Rochelle Lee Fund for general operating support.

Nike Foundation

- \$2,500 to Ryerson School for the production of a student-designed book.

Northern Trust Company Charitable Trust

- \$7,500 to Junior Achievement of Chicago to support its mentor program.

- \$5,000 to Midtown Educational Foundation for operating support of its tutoring program.

Oppenheimer Family Foundation

- \$202,000 to 400 CPS teachers from 158 schools to support hands-on learning projects outside of the classroom.

Polk Bros. Foundation

- \$160,000 over two years to Associated Colleges of Illinois to continue the scholarships and campus support of its minority achievement programs.

- \$85,000 to Youth Guidance for the Comer School Development Program.

- \$50,000 to Columbia College to support the Arts Integration Mentorship Training project, which provides CPS educators with new art-integrated interdisciplinary strategies for teaching writing and reading.

- \$50,000 to Community Renewal Society to support the associate editor's position at *CATALYST*.

- \$45,000 to Logan Square Neighborhood Association for the Parent-Teacher Mentor Program.

- \$30,000 for Community Organizing and Family Issues for the Family Focused Leadership Training and Organizing project in Austin.

Compiled by Genevieve Lill

More Grant briefs can be found online at www.catalyst-chicago.org

No Child Left Behind

CPS reluctantly offers parents tutoring choices under federal law

by Alexander Russo

Facing a bleak financial future and tough new federal requirements, Chicago Public Schools is delaying and seeking to restrict the supplemental tutoring options that certain children are entitled to under the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Just as Chicago provided school choice to students at only a portion of the eligible schools last fall, CPS now proposes to provide parental-choice tutoring this year to children at only 13 of the 25 eligible schools, leaving 12 high schools out of the loop. Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins cites unspecified “questions” about serving the high schools this year.

However, federal education officials have signaled that CPS may not get away with that. “Nobody has been given any special dispensation to serve fewer schools this year,” says Melinda Malico of the U.S. Department of Education. “They have to provide the option for supplemental services to any low-income student in a school that is in the second year of school improvement.”



For-profit tutoring companies dominate the first crop of approved providers of “supplemental services” under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

NCLB entitles low-income children in schools that have failed to make adequate yearly progress on tests for three years in a row to receive free tutoring from a provider approved by the state; parents may choose which one. Illinois has approved 13 providers, including CPS itself and for-profit companies such

as Kaplan Learning Centers and the Princeton Review, which usually cost families hundreds of dollars. Priority for tutoring is given to low-scoring, low-income children.

The money to pay for the tutoring will come out of Chicago’s federal Title I allotment, which rose significantly this year to help cover the demands of NCLB. Indeed, the federal law says school districts must set aside 5 percent to 15 percent of their Title I money for such tutoring. In Chicago, that amounts to at least \$10.8 million and as much as \$31.2 million this year alone.

However, the board may not have much of its Title I money left after using much of its increase to beef up existing programs like on-site reading specialists, professional development and after-school tutoring.

These expenditures are linked to the federal law because they are targeted at the 179 schools that have failed to make

Eligible schools

Low-achieving students at 25 Chicago public schools are eligible for free tutoring this year from providers that include such prominent firms as Sylvan Learning Systems and Voyager Expanded Learning. However, the School Board is attempting to restrict the parental-choice tutoring option to the 13 elementary and middle schools in the group and let the high schools wait until next year. Here are the schools that, as of mid-February, were in and those that were out. Details were still being negotiated. The program was not expected to begin until March at the earliest.

IN

Attucks, Bethune, Carver Middle, Cather, Doolittle, Faraday, Farren, Hamline, Howland, Medill, Morton, Pope, Tilton.

OUT

Carver, Collins, Crane, Farragut, Flower, Harper, Manley, Marshall, Orr, Richards, Tilden, Wells.

“The full list has to be available to families. Parents choose.”

Lee Milner, spokesman, Illinois State Board of Education

adequate yearly progress for at least two years in a row. In federal lingo, those schools are deemed to be in “school improvement.” Some Title I money also is being spent to support schools that received students under the NCLB program of school choice.

CPS blames the state and the feds for coming up short on money for parental-choice tutoring. “At the time we introduced and finalized the [student] choice program in July, we thought we were exempt from supplemental services this year,” says spokesperson Joi Mecks. “We already had our [own] tutoring program in place.”

This school year, only 25 Chicago schools fall into the category where children may obtain free parental-choice tutoring. However, given Chicago’s test score history and the new law’s increasing demands, the number could climb into the hundreds in future years and

easily eat up the whole \$31.2 million.

For several months, CPS maintained that it did not have to provide any tutoring at all this year, based on preliminary action by the U.S. Department of Education that the department reversed in August. Until recently, CPS also appeared to be trying to exclude other tutoring providers that were approved by the state and to keep all the tutoring to itself. As late as January, CPS reportedly was thinking about not allowing outside providers to have access to classrooms after school, a decision that would have made outside tutoring much less attractive to parents.

CPS reversed itself, however, when state and federal officials indicated that was not acceptable. “The full list has to be available to families,” says Lee Milner, spokesman for the Illinois State Board of Education. CPS has now met with the other 12 approved providers and plans

to release information to parents about specific options once agreements with them have been signed.

Feds question plan

Federal officials are even questioning the state’s decision to certify CPS as a provider. “While there are many schools in CPS that are doing a good job, it is not clear if the district as a whole should have been designated as an approved provider,” says Malico.

Malico says high-level officials have called the state and expressed concern about CPS being approved as a provider, except perhaps for children whom other providers are not equipped to serve, such as autistic children or children in underserved areas of the city. Similar issues have been raised in other large cities.

Also, because it plans to use regular CPS teachers, the CPS program is the most costly, about \$2,700 to \$4,200 per child. In contrast, only one of the other 12 providers—Voyager—tops \$2,400 per pupil. Chicago’s higher pricing, in effect, reduces the number of children who could be served.

Picking the right tutoring

If and when Chicago parents get to select tutoring for their children, what should they look for? CATALYST put that question to three experts on tutoring. Here’s their advice.

■ **Timothy Shanahan**, director of the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the architect of the Chicago Public Schools’ Reading Initiative.

“The most important thing to look for is how much time is actually going to be spent on *teaching* kids,” he says. Shanahan says that many tutoring programs now in the public schools are focused more on rewarding and entertaining kids rather than instructing them. “A lot of time in tutoring gets wasted,” he says. “A lot of those after-school programs give very little instruction.”

He says good tutoring programs shape and reshape teaching to match individual student needs.

“How are they going to target the

kids’ individual needs?” he asks. “Are they using an ‘in-the-can’ program, or do they have the ability to adjust?”

Worksheets, workbooks and computerized programs cannot replace tutors working with students individually or in small groups, says Shanahan. But not every tutor has to be a certified teacher, he adds. Tutors just have to be trained, well matched with students and supervised by experts in instruction, he says.

Shanahan says that the reading specialists CPS now has in about 200 elementary schools should be involved in developing a coordinated program so that outside tutoring meshes with the school program. However, it remains unclear whether such interaction will take place.

■ **Edward E. Gordon**, an expert on tutoring and author of “Tutor Quest: Finding Effective Education for Children and Adults.”

He tells parents to look for the following:

- An experienced company that has strong references.
- Tutors with college degrees and coursework in the areas they are teaching.

- Tutors who are well supervised by a master teacher.
- A program that provides regular student progress reports.
- A place that seems safe and appropriate for your child.

Gordon agrees with Shanahan that tutoring should be individualized. “We’re talking about one-to-one education,” he says. “This is not schooling.”

Gordon also says to avoid programs that focus on preparing students to take tests. “Tutoring does not do well at helping a student pass a test,” he says. “If that’s all tutoring is for, then that is really just a crutch.”

■ **Daniel Bassill**, president and founder of Cabrini Connections, a nonprofit that promotes tutoring and mentoring.

Effective tutoring also involves social and emotional support for the students, he says. “If you don’t address attitudes, aspirations and motivation, you can spend tons of money, but you may not get many results.

“When I say tutor,” he stresses, “I mean someone who is a surrogate parent.”

Alexander Russo

Both the state and the city have dragged their feet. Tutoring was to be available in September, but the Illinois State Board of Education did not approve providers until early December, and CPS did not meet with those providers to begin coordinating services until two months after that. CPS doesn't plan to launch the program until March at the earliest.

Publicly, CPS officials pay lip service to the tutoring requirement. "It's always good to provide extra instructional time to students who are in need," says Eason-Watkins. As for opening the door to other providers, she says only, "We're going to comply with the law."

Chicago isn't the only city taking a minimalist approach. Elizabeth Wolff, research director for the national community group ACORN, says San Diego, Boston and Philadelphia sent parents notices about tutoring with "wording that no one would understand." Relatively few parents responded, she says. In New York, according to Wolff, parents were given too little time to respond, and several have initiated a class-action lawsuit against the city.

She ridicules Chicago's ongoing

negotiations with other providers. "These people have already been approved by the state of Illinois. I don't know what they [CPS] think they're doing—checking for terrorists?" Wolff calls most districts' efforts "uniformly terrible."

To many school administrators, teacher unions and others, the tutoring provisions in NCLB are little more than watered-down federal vouchers—a Republican-inspired attempt to undercut confidence in public schools while siphoning federal funds to pay for private-sector programs of dubious merit that can be taught by instructors who aren't certified teachers.

However, the measure had Democratic support in Congress, and tutors are required to show evidence of progress that is, in many ways, more rigorous than school-based accountability.

Using public money for additional outside tutoring is not new, though typically school officials, not parents, choose the tutoring organizations and shape the programs. In Chicago, for example, the School Board and individual schools have paid for the services of Sylvan Learning Systems and Voyager Expanded Learning, among others. For-profit tutoring has been used in California and Massachusetts to help low-income students do better on the SAT and on high school entrance exams.

Ross Weiner, a senior policy analyst at the Washington, D.C.-based Education Trust, applauds the tutoring requirement as one more way to put pressure on public schools to improve. "This is going to take a little time to ramp up," he says. "But at some point soon, parents in these communities are going to have several options for tutoring. School districts are either going to have to explain how they are doing things differently during the regular school day, or they are going to lose out."

In the meantime, CPS is still planning to get word out about tutoring options at 13 schools later this spring. The Illinois State Board of Education will review another round of applications from prospective tutoring agencies later this year. And the U.S. Department of Education says that it will continue to press the state to examine whether CPS and other districts are doing enough to meet the requirements of the law. ●

For-profit companies dominate list

Almost 300 agencies in Chicago provide some form of organized tutoring to children, according to Daniel Bassill, founder and president of Cabrini Connections, a nonprofit that promotes tutoring and mentoring.

Yet, only 25 organizations applied to offer their services under the No Child Left Behind Act, and only 13, including the Chicago Public Schools, were approved by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). Most are for-profit companies.

The application process is extensive. For example, applicants must demonstrate that students they served previously improved on state or national tests and that their programs are based on research. That tends to favor large national organizations.

"The process was too cumbersome," says Edward E. Gordon, author of "Tutor Quest: Finding Effective Education for Children and Adults." He describes the state board's tutor approval process as "overkill."

As a result, Gordon says, "The best tutors are not there." He cites, for example, the thousands of tutors—most of them current or retired teachers—who work with children on their own or in small groups. "The majority of the quality tutoring is done by those people."

Timothy Shanahan, a reading professor who designed CPS's Reading Initiative, speculates that CPS will end up providing most of the additional tutoring. His reasons include parents' familiarity with the public schools and the schools' experience with all types of students, including bilingual and special education students.

School Board officials currently are negotiating on program particulars, including sites and schedules. Under the law, tutoring may be provided after school, on Saturdays and during the summer. Tutoring can be conducted individually or in small groups.

The Illinois State Board of Education is now accepting applications for additional providers and will release a new list this spring. For more information and an application, go to the No Child Left Behind section of ISBE's web site, www.isbe.net.

Alexander Russo



SYLVAN
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Providers

In addition to CPS, the approved providers are:

- Brainfuse Online Instruction
- CS&C
- Huntington Learning Centers
- I CAN Learn Education Systems
- Kaplan K12 Learning Services
- Kumon North America
- The Princeton Review
- Progressive Learning
- SCORE! Educational Centers
- Sylvan Learning Systems
- Ventures Education Systems
- Voyager Expanded Learning

CPS reduces special ed referrals

by Debra Williams

A year after Chicago Public Schools stepped up its efforts to reverse high special education referrals at some elementary schools, referral rates at most of them are down.

In October 2001, central office rounded up 31 schools where special education referral rates were double the citywide average—about 2 percent of enrollment. It invited principals, special education teachers and support staff to discuss strategies to reduce the numbers and map out a plan. Afterward, representatives from each school met monthly to report on their progress.

“Call it targeted monitoring,” says CPS Specialized Services Chief Officer Sue Gamm. “This was the first time we’d brought schools together as a group to work on this.”

A year under the microscope has made a difference. By fall 2002, referral rates at 27 of the schools had dropped, but most remain above the citywide average. Rates at two others went up. Two schools have been closed.

Gamm, who began tracking referral rates six years ago, notes that some children are mistakenly routed into special education when what they really need is help learning to read or support to overcome problems at home.

According to national research, 80 percent of students who are classified as learning disabled—the fastest-growing category of special education enrollment in CPS—have trouble reading.

“It happens,” says Linda Taylor, co-director of UCLA’s Center for Mental Health in Schools. “We send teachers to do a hard job with so few tools. They’re taught if you can’t make it with a kid, send him out as opposed to ‘I can’t make it with this kid, give me resources.’”

School-based problems

Six years ago, Gamm’s office began to introduce schools to a process that would help tackle high referral rates.

Known as school-based problem solving, the process encourages educators to consider a variety of academic and behavioral interventions before recommending that a troubled student be placed in special education.

“School-based problem solving supports kids who are not in special education but not making it,” says Richard Swastek, a CPS program manager who trains school faculty to use the process.

Since then, hundreds of schools have been trained to use school-based problem solving, and Swastek expects all 600 schools in the district will be using it by 2004. Yet at some schools, the referral rates remained above average. That’s why Gamm and her team decided to track more closely a manageable number of schools whose principals, teachers and support staff would be convened monthly to discuss student issues, share solutions and plot referral reduction plans.

To support them, each school had access to a regional specialist in special education and a facilitator for school-based problem solving.

Canty Elementary in the Belmont-Cragin neighborhood received training in school-based problem solving in 2000. But by 2001, staff who had been trained had left the school and special education referral rates were up to 4.5 percent, says case manager Lorraine Balleh. After participating in the CPS monitored program last year, Canty’s referrals fell to 1 percent. “This time, we really banded together,” Balleh says. “Everyone got trained and we really committed to the process.”

After a year in the program, referral rates dropped from 5.5 percent to 2.2 at McCorkle Elementary in Grand Boulevard. “We started school-based problem solving four years ago,” admits Principal Janet House. “But we didn’t use it to the degree that we did last year. When we found out our referral rate was high, we took the program to heart and began really implementing it.”

At Libby Elementary in the Back of the Yards, case manager Betty Washington says 3rd-grade students who were retained for low reading scores have

been the primary source of special education referrals.

Since being trained in school-based problem solving, Libby’s psychologist regularly visits classrooms to look for students with cognitive deficits that could be easily addressed by teachers. The school also began grouping students by reading level instead of by grade. Every eight weeks, teachers would test them to find out whether they were ready to move up to the next reading group.

Monthly referrals have dropped from five to two, but Libby’s overall rate remains above average at 3.1 percent.

Keeping rates down

Gamm says school-based problem solving can be a long-term solution if schools with above average referral rates continue to use it. “It works more often than it doesn’t,” she says. “If two schools receive the same training, and it works in one school and not in another, then you ask yourself, ‘Is it the program or the implementation?’”

Some principals, though, wonder if they’ll be able to keep referral rates down in the long run.

“We’ve gotten our numbers down, but this year we’ll have to refer some of the same kids we looked at last year,” says Principal Frances Oden of Beethoven Elementary, where referrals fell below one percent from 5.7 percent. “We don’t see them maintaining and increasing progress.”

At McCorkle, Principal House agrees. “We use a volume of social services because emotional problems keep our kids from learning,” she explains. “It’s a constant process—we evaluate, address needs, reorganize and assess again. After awhile, though, it becomes obvious that some kids are still not going to make it.”

“In some cases, this happens,” says Richard Swastek, a CPS program manager who oversees school-based problem solving. “If a kid crashes, then he may really need special education services.”

Referral rates rose at two schools that were monitored last year. One of them,

Watchdog group 'ran its course'

by Genevieve Lill

The Chicago Panel on School Policy, a school reform group known at its peak as a budget and finance watchdog, has closed its doors after 20 years.

Tough economic times and foundation belt tightening are forcing nonprofits to cut their already-lean budgets, notes Executive Director Barbara Buell. While current funders had vowed to continue supporting the Panel, Buell says she and the board of directors weren't confident it would be enough. "The funders agree with me that it was appropriate for me to be very fiscally responsible right now."

"The Panel has no outstanding debts," Buell adds. "It was a time to say, 'Alright, do I start some projects not sure if I'll have enough money to complete them? Or, do I go on the conservative side and not start them if I can't finish them?'"

For those who have worked with the Panel, stepping off the school reform bandwagon seemed the next logical step for an organization that had taken a backseat in recent years.

Five years ago, the Panel shifted its mission away from CPS budget analysis and policy research to focus instead on tracking school programs. The move followed the 1996 departure of Executive Director G. Alfred Hess Jr., who had led the Panel for more than a decade.

"I'm not sure it's bad for nonprofits to go out of existence," says Hess, now a professor in the School of Education and Social Policy at Northwestern University. "Non-profits have a cycle of getting support and then losing support as the issue that they're involved with changes,

and the funders change their priorities."

According to Hess, the Panel's recent work—school policy evaluations that come out up to six times a year and a parent involvement initiative—is "not focused on contentious areas," which are more appealing to funders.

Buell agrees that the Panel had a reputation for being hard-hitting and more actively involved in promoting change under Hess's leadership. When she took the helm, the organization assumed a non-confrontational personality similar to her own, she says.

New report format

The Panel's Initiative Status Reports—some previous issues have covered principal training, national certification for teachers and year-round schools—provided interim feedback to show whether programs were working, Buell explains. In six years, the Panel published 20 such reports. Since 2000, it has distributed 500,000 pamphlets that condensed the report research into more usable formats for parents, Buell says.

Still, the Panel's lower profile limited the influence of its fact-finding, says Julie Woestehoff, director of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE). "You have to show that you have an impact," she says.

Historically, making an impact was routine for the Panel, which was originally called the Chicago Panel on Public School Finance when it was created in 1982 in the wake of a district financial crisis. The organization comprised representatives from as many as 20 nonprofit agencies and reform groups that were looking to dissect the School Board budget to expose flaws in the system.

referrals will look like a lot," Gamm explains. "And because of their size, they don't have the support staff. [Donoghue is] saying, 'Hey, we have some kids with serious behavior and emotional problems.' We'll take a look, keep working with them and see what can be done." ●

"When we started the Panel, we were unique," says Tee Gally, a founding member. "It was imperative that a neutral agency and community group undertake the task of [examining] the way the board was handling its money."

In 1985, the Panel teamed with another reform group, Designs for Change, to issue a report on school dropouts that changed the way school districts across the country looked at dropout rates, Gally says. More significantly, the report sparked a grassroots movement that eventually led to major education reform in Illinois, she adds.

After passage of the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act, the Panel reinvented itself as an objective watchdog of district revenue and spending.

Says Hess: "One of the reasons we did budget analysis was to reveal what the actual priorities of the schools were as opposed to what people said they were. Today the policies are much more articulated so the need doesn't seem as urgent."

But Hess and other reform leaders believe there is still a void that needs to be filled.

"Budget analysis desperately needs to come back," says Andrew Wade, executive director of the Chicago School Leadership Development Cooperative. Wade, who spent two years with the Panel, says his group does some budget work, but not enough "to fill that policy research gap."

Though the Panel will maintain its web site, and Buell will continue doing research independently, the organization, in Gally's words, "ran its course." ●

Correction

In the February issue, the names of CPS bargaining team members Rochelle Gordon and John Frantz were misspelled. Ald. Patrick O'Connor's ward—49th—was listed incorrectly. A letter to the editor misspelled the name of Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Director Jess McDonald. *CATALYST* regrets the errors.

Donoghue Elementary in Oakland, nearly doubled its referral rate to over 10 percent—the highest in the city. The other, Alcott Elementary in Lincoln Park, edged up slightly by a fraction of a percentage point.

"They are small schools so a few

COMINGS AND . . . GOINGS

AT CLARK STREET Former Chicago Board of Trade President **David Vitale** joins CPS as a senior advisor to CEO Arne Duncan. In this unpaid position, Vitale will assist Duncan in replacing directors for several departments—accountability, education-to-careers, operations and technology—who have left in recent months.



Vitale

...**Marilyn Johnson**, CPS general counsel, left her position Feb. 25 to become general counsel at the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority. **Robert Hall Jr.**, first assistant attorney, will assume her duties until a replacement is hired.

MOVING IN/ON **Timothy Knowles**, deputy superintendent of Boston Public Schools, was named executive director of the University of Chicago's new Center for Urban Schools, Communities and Their Improvement, which will open this fall. The Center for Urban Schools will absorb the professional development work of the Center for School Improvement, and it will launch a new urban teacher preparation program. Knowles will begin work Aug. 1. ... **Bindu Batchu**, a technology

associate at the Metropolitan Planning Council, has been promoted to manager of Network 21, a civic coalition working to reform the financing and accountability of Illinois' public schools. She replaces Leslie Lipschultz, who resigned in January. ... **Jay Rehak**, an assistant director at the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center, was named CTU director of media relations.

SPRINGFIELD State Democrats, now the majority party in the Illinois Senate, have named **Miguel del Valle** (D-Chicago) to chair the Senate Education Committee. In the General Assembly, state Rep. **Calvin L. Giles** (D-Chicago) retains his position as chair of the House Elementary & Secondary Education Committee, and state Rep. **Michael K. Smith** (D-Canton) has been tapped to lead the House Appropriations-Elementary & Secondary Education Committee.

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS **Clifton D. Burgess** and **Barbara D. Nettles** signed four-year contracts with Von Steuben High and Earle, respectively, after serving as acting principals at those schools. ... **Linda K. Everhart**, interim principal at Dulles, is now contract principal. ... **Denis Sweeney** joined Logandale as contract principal. Sweeney was formerly assistant principal at Davis.

PRINCIPAL RETIREMENTS **Solomon E. Gibbs**, McNair; **Gloria Archbold** is serving

as interim principal at McNair. ... **Janice B. Ollarvia**, Fenger High; assistant principal **Patricia Nichols** is acting principal.

NATIONAL CERTIFICATION Last month, 93 CPS teachers who earned National Board Certification—the profession's highest credential—received \$5,500 one-time awards from the Chicago Public Education Fund and the School Board. They will also receive \$30,000 over 10 years from the Illinois Board of Education (ISBE). Also, the Public Education Fund awarded \$30,000 grants to three schools where four or more teachers earned the highly regarded certification that uses rigorous standards to assess teaching practices. Those schools include Blair Early Childhood Center, Pierce and Sumner elementaries.

AWARD **Anthony Bryk**, a University of Chicago sociology professor who founded the Consortium on Chicago School Research, is one of two recipients of the first Thomas B. Fordham Prize for Distinguished Scholarship. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, based in Washington D.C., recognized Bryk, now on sabbatical, for his school research, analysis and reform work. Bryk, who also runs the university's Center for School Improvement, will share the award with Paul Peterson, a government professor at Harvard University. The two will split a cash prize of \$25,000.

Genevieve Lill

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