

Catalyst CHICAGO

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INDEPENDENT REPORTING ON URBAN SCHOOLS



PICKING A PRINCIPAL

**CENTRAL OFFICE TAKES POWER FROM
LOCAL SCHOOL COUNCILS AND MOVES
FOR TOUGHER SCREENING TO GET
BETTER CANDIDATES OVERALL**

North Lawndale: Two schools bring vision, new strategies *PAGE 18*

LSCs: Down but not out, they're banding together *PAGE 24*

Our new design: Why *Catalyst* looks so different, and a special offer. *PAGE 2*

Welcome to an improved *Catalyst*



Linda Lenz, publisher

For 14 years, *Catalyst* has given you insightful articles and data about school reform in Chicago. With this redesign, you will now get them in a format that makes them even more useful.

We know that you all are very busy people. So in several ways, we have made it easier for you to quickly grasp what our articles are about and why they are important.

A redesigned table of contents includes more content, and in the rest of the book, secondary headlines and small text boxes highlight essential information. Together, these at-a-glance features will give you a running start on the articles.

One hallmark of *Catalyst* is that its reporting is in depth—we take the time to gather relevant research, a variety of perspectives and the reality of what is happening in schools. We will continue to do that but will leaven the depth with a new section called Notebook. There you will find short items of importance, such as summaries of breaking news from the previous month, relevant news from other cities and “Ask *Catalyst*,” where we will answer questions about school reform from our readers. So start sending them in!

In the past couple years, we tried out several new departments, including UpClose, Research and Portraits. With the help of several dozen readers who participated in focus groups on our redesign, we have settled on three rotating departments: Research, which will explain timely findings; Neighborhoods, which will look at schools from a wider perspective; and UpClose, which will focus on a school, program or person. These

departments will join the long-standing ones of From the Editor, Grants, Updates and Viewpoints, where we hope to print more letters from you, our readers.

In a bit of improved housekeeping, we have listed all of our services and contact information in an expanded masthead that now appears on the inside of the back cover.

Over all, our new look is more professional, continuing a trend that has evolved slowly since our early days of as a black-and-white newsletter. From our focus groups, we know that some long-time readers won't like the new look—they see *Catalyst* as a close friend and don't want to lose it in any sense. We very much appreciate that. However, we also believe it is important to reach beyond readers who eat, breath and sleep school reform. The new graphic presentation will help us attract new readers in the broader community, giving them a better foundation for judgments and actions.

Catalyst was founded on the belief that in large cities, school improvement can and must emerge from different vantage points. No one group of people can see all the solutions, let alone put them into practice. That is why we strive to

serve a broad-based audience, ranging from parents and teachers to civic leaders. We plan each issue with the goal of presenting a mix of articles that variously will appeal to different segments of our audience. Our hope is that readers will step into each other's editorial territory and learn from each other's ideas and experiences.

Along with our sister publication in Cleveland, *Catalyst* also is informing a national movement—as well it should. From mayoral control to school intervention, Chicago has been in the vanguard of reforms that are sweeping urban districts, and *Catalyst*, more than any other publication, has chronicled the good, the bad and the ugly impact of these policies on schools. Similarly, there are developments in Cleveland, including instructional coaching and school vouchers, that have national significance. To reinforce our standing as an authoritative resource for the country, both publications dropped their taglines, which sometimes were misunderstood. Now we are *Catalyst Chicago* and *Catalyst Cleveland*. And we are very excited about this new opportunity to serve you better.

Let us know what you think. Call us at (312) 673-3884 or e-mail us at editorial@catalyst-chicago.org. Of course, story ideas and news tips are always welcome.

SPECIAL OFFER To celebrate our redesign, we are pleased to offer a special subscription rate of just \$9 year and lock it in for three years. To sign up, send in the attached postcard.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Lenz".

PICKING PRINCIPALS

Where councils lost ground

When local school councils were created 15 years ago, they were given perhaps the most significant task involved in improving a school: choosing the principal. But since then, the School Board has created more new schools where central office, not LSCs, has that authority. Local school council advocates fear the number will continue to grow, while the board says its goal is creating innovative schools. **COVER STORY: PAGE 6**



COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOE GALLO

Gary Moriello looks in on a classroom at Gladstone Elementary, where he has been principal for almost 17 years.

CANDIDATES TO FACE NEW HURDLES

Board wants tougher screening to get a better corps of principals. **PAGE 9**

THE LESSONS THAT EXPERIENCE TAUGHT

What worked—and what didn't—when four councils chose new leaders. **PAGE 11**

7 PRINCIPALS IN 3 TUMULTUOUS YEARS

Fear, distrust and verbal crossfire at Sojourner Truth Elementary. **PAGE 13**

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- Down but not out, councils see bright spots in battle for future
- Council federations dot the city.



JOHN BOOZ

Edith Reyes, a student at North Lawndale College Prep Charter High School, strips excess cement from a basement wall in a neighborhood Habitat for Humanity renovation project. **See story, page 20.**

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ON THE WEB

Want to share the wealth of information in Catalyst, but don't want to part with your copy? At www.catalyst-chicago.org you can find:

- PDFs of current and past issues
- Spanish translations
- Directories, like Yellow Pages

Notebook

Q&A with...

Ernestine Rice, attendance officer

TIMELINE

Jan. 15: ISBE controversy

Gov. Rod Blagojevich ignites a firestorm, calling the Illinois State Board of Education a “Soviet-style bureaucracy” and announcing plans to scrap it for a cabinet department he would control. Weeks later, he makes a pitch for a law gutting most of ISBE’s power, leaving it mainly as a consulting body. Supt. of Education Robert Schiller goes on the defensive, saying Blagojevich targeted ISBE because it refused to make political hires and accusing the governor of trying to deflect attention from a more pressing issue: school funding.

Jan. 28: Dropout policy

Aiming to cut the dropout rate, the Chicago Board of Education amends its absenteeism and truancy policy and includes specifics regarding when schools may drop students from enrollment. Some activists cry foul, however, over a provision allowing schools to drop students “when advised orally by a student over the age of 16 or his/her parents.” Critics note that with a single telephone call, students who are not yet adults could drop out without their parents’ knowledge or consent. The legal age to drop out is 16.

Feb. 12: Budget deficit

With the governor preparing to announce his state spending plans, Chicago schools CEO Arne Duncan announces the district may have to cut up to 1,000 school-based positions to help close a \$200 million budget gap for next year. Chicago Teachers Union President Deborah Lynch, up for re-election this spring, threatens to sue to keep teachers and aides from losing their jobs. The board says it hopes to make most cuts through attrition and the need for fewer teachers because of declining enrollment.

ELSEWHERE

New York City: Contract talks

The first bargaining session in months between the teacher’s union and the city ended after barely two hours, with union President Randi Weingarten blasting the city’s contract proposal as an insult to teachers and “a total kick in the teeth,” according to the Feb. 7 *New York Times*.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration wants a streamlined contract eliminating most work rules and ending virtually all seniority rights, giving the city wide latitude to manage the system’s 1,200 schools. The city also wants to pay higher salaries to teachers in shortage areas like math and science and in troubled schools, and to teachers “who demonstrate the ability to positively impact student performance. The union wants raises for all teachers.

Talks resumed Feb. 12.

Oregon: School finance

Five foundations are taking matters into their own hands—and turning to the general public to make the case for reform of the state’s school funding system.

The Chalkboard Project, organized by Foundations for a Better Oregon, plans to hold town hall meetings, focus groups and Internet discussions to get input from the public on how to improve schools, according to the Jan. 19 *Business Journal of Portland*.

The first target will be school funding, says Doug Stamm, executive director of the Meyer Memorial Trust, one of the five foundations. “We feel that our kids are being shortchanged. There is no strong leadership on this issue,” Stamm said in the Jan. 7 Education Week. “There is a general consensus that [school funding] haunts the state as one of its top issues.”

IN SHORT

“I’m not one to blame others for what I did, but if the school had steered me the right way, it could have helped.”

Phillip Parker, an alternative school student and former dropout, in a Jan. 9 Sun-Times article on the ongoing dropout crisis.

Improving attendance has long been a tough problem in high schools, and Marshall is no exception. At 84.5 percent, Marshall’s attendance rate is lower than the citywide average for high schools, 86.5 percent. In comparison, elementary schools post a citywide rate of 93 percent. Associate Editor Debra Williams spoke with Rice, a 30-year Marshall veteran who also started a grandparents program in which older adults provide mentoring to students.

Tell me about a typical day for you.

I usually get to work about 6:45, start calling some students, waking up students, waking up parents, too, to make sure [students] get to school on time. I do my calling early in the morning because that’s when you can catch Mom before she runs out to work or like I said, wake her up.

And at this point, you’ve kind of got a feel for which students need that call.

Yeah I do. You know who needs the call. And even after you call, some will still come in late sometimes. ... If they’ve been cutting, you know you need to talk with the parents and see why, and also let the parent know the child has been cutting class. So after that, I have to get the attendance in on the computer [and] run the bulletin [that goes] to teachers to let them know just who was absent ... My lunch time is when I call my grandparents.

What are the excuses you hear about why kids don’t come to school?

Some students say I overslept and it was too late to come. I was looking for my ID all day yesterday. I didn’t go to the Laundromat. ... They give you all types of excuses. And I tell them, you don’t have an excuse, the bus runs, you can walk to the bus stop. Some of them say they don’t have bus fare, but they do. A lot of them, they’re on their way to school and they get distracted and go someplace else.

CPS has this new policy that says before you can drop a kid from enrollment, someone from the school has to visit the house.

I think it’s a great idea. We have [an employee] who goes out and visits the homes. ... I think it’s something that is needed.

Do you think it’s easier to drop kids now than it was years ago?



JASON REBLANDO

You know, now and years ago are so different. ... Now, if you say, 'You're going to end up being dropped if you don't straighten up, [kids say] 'Oh, go right ahead.' They have this attitude.

What would help you do your job better, your wish list?

I think what would make it easier on all of us is if we had more cooperation from the parents. It's got to start at home. Regardless of how many programs, regardless of how many people you hire to come in and fix this and fix that, there's nothing going to happen unless you get some help from home. ... I invite the parents, 'Come up to the school, look at what your child is doing. Let us know you're coming, feel free to visit the classrooms.' ... And communities have to get involved with the schools. The school can't run itself.

Have you ever thought about expanding the grandparents [program] to elementary schools?

Yeah, I've thought about it. We went to a retreat and some of the different schools at the retreat said, we've got to copy off you. It would be a dream come true for me. It will save some [kids] because we have students right on the edge.

Right now I have a girl, she's angry because she didn't graduate last year. And I told her, 'You know what, you come back, you've got to get that diploma. ... If you want to get the diploma, come to school every day, do what you have to do. And for prom, I'll buy you an outfit.'

There's a college trip coming up. I said, 'I'll sponsor you, I'll ask around, I'll ask my daughter, I'll ask other people to help me sponsor you on this trip.' Because she needs to feel that she can do some things [with her life]. ■

ASK CATALYST

In December, a No Child Left Behind after-school program started up at Kozminski Elementary. How is it different from the after-school program that [CPS] has been running for years? And why did it take until December to start?

Donald Everhart, Kozminski LSC Chair

The program is the result of NCLB, which requires districts to offer tutoring to low-performing children at schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress. By October, only 16,300 students—about 12 percent of the 133,000 students who were eligible, had signed up, so CPS asked the state for permission to use some of its tutoring funds for its own academic, after-school program instead. CPS didn't get the go-ahead until mid-November; hence the December start-up.

The board replaced an existing math and reading curriculum that was mostly drill and remediation with more engaging activities, such as teaching reading and writing through journalism projects, according to Beth Swanson, CPS director of after-school programs. Most schools have combined the NCLB initiative with the existing after-school program, and switched to the new curriculum and materials, she adds.

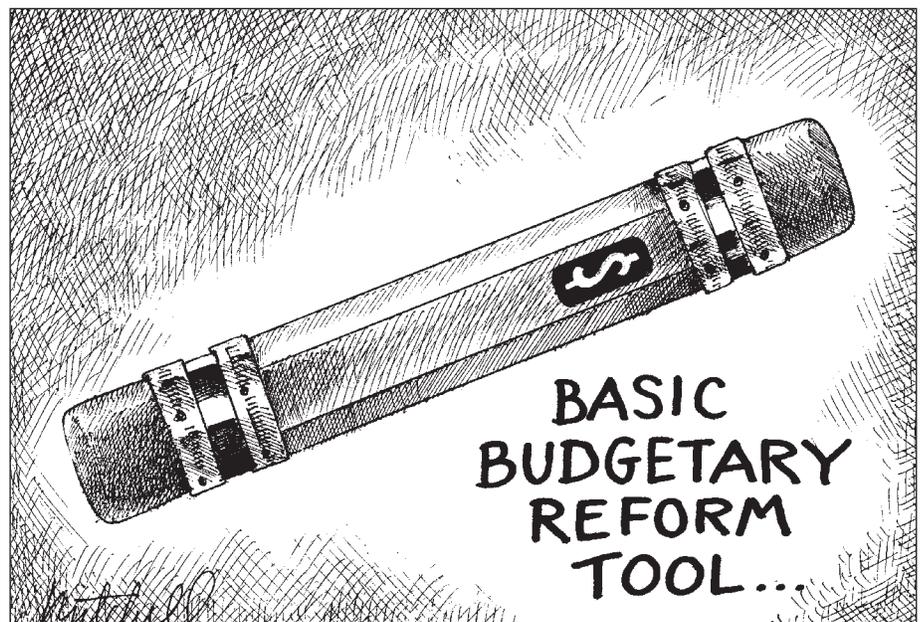
E-mail your question to askcat@catalyst-chicago.org or send it to *Ask Catalyst*, 332 S. Michigan Ave., Suite 500, Chicago, IL 60604.

MATH CLASS

\$24 million. That's the likely minimal cost to the Chicago Public Schools of a proposed law that would raise the required attendance age, also called the dropout age, to **17**. The calculation assumes that **16**-year-old dropouts—who totaled about **2,400** last school year—would stay in school for at least one more year. It also assumes per-pupil spending of **\$10,000**, which is what it was last year in Chicago's public high schools. Extra state and federal money would help cover the cost.

Sources: Consortium on Chicago School Research and the 2003 CPS Comprehensive Annual Financial Report.

FOOTNOTE



Where councils lost ground

By Elizabeth Duffrin

In 1988, the General Assembly stepped over Chicago's ineffective school bureaucracy by giving unprecedented power to thousands of ordinary citizens. Each school would elect a council of parents, teachers and community members with the power, among other things, to select its own principal. That shift to locally controlled schools made Chicago unique in the country.

In 1995, frustration over slow academic progress and continuing labor unrest brought amendments that put the mayor in charge of the school system. Since then, local control of principal selection has eroded, primarily in low-income communities. Today, the School Board holds the authority either to select or to remove and replace the principal in about 115 of 602 schools.

Advocates of local school councils (LSCs) observe that number rising and fear that councils as a whole will see their status in the system slip from step child to orphan. Availing itself of a loophole in

the law, the School Board is creating more small schools and alternative schools that are not required to have local school councils.

"It's important for parents and community to have the strong voice and decision-making capacity," insists Sarah Vanderwicken of the Chicago Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights. "If you don't agree with that, change the law but don't carve out exceptions as you go along."

An announcement in December that the district intended to "revitalize" two dozen schools on the mid-South Side also has raised questions about how those schools will be governed.

These local developments coincide with the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind Act, which potentially expands the board's authority to remove principals beyond those at schools on probation. "We've

discussed that [NCLB] will give us more leeway, but we haven't discussed how we will make use of that leeway," says Daniel Bugler, the CPS accountability chief.

SHIFT BEGAN WITH VALLAS

The same law that put Chicago's mayor in control of the school system expanded the authority of central office. In 1996, the mayor's first school chief, Paul Vallas, took advantage of that authority to place 109 schools on academic probation. Within a year, he removed principals from some of those schools and replaced them with interim principals who served at the CEO's pleasure. The LSC would not be allowed to select their own principal until the school worked its way off probation.

Even some champions of local control found probation justified. But Vallas went further, extending his jurisdic-

tion to other schools. Previously, an LSC temporarily without a contract principal could select its own interim. But Vallas' administration reinterpreted an ambiguous area in the law to grant itself that authority.

In 1999, Vallas attempted to gain control over principal selection at all CPS schools. He requested legislation that would allow him to overrule an LSC that failed to renew a principal's contract. School reform groups rallied, and that provision failed.

While Vallas made stronger accountability a centerpiece of his administration, his successor, Arne Duncan, has pursued two new strategies. He would create new schools, sometimes within existing underperforming schools. And he would attempt to strengthen classroom instruction with sweeping initiatives in math and reading. Both strategies would

Advocates for LSCs say the board is usurping councils' power by opening more schools where central office chooses the principal. The board says it's just creating innovative schools.

run into conflict with local control, particularly around principal selection.

For the district's math and reading initiatives to succeed, the system needs principals who understand instruction, explains one CPS insider who asked not to be identified "It's hard when you can't pick the principal to ensure that the principal is going to be an instructional leader. And it's hard for the local school councils to understand good instructional leadership because they aren't educators."

In creating new schools, Duncan took advantage of two exceptions to the 1988 law that mandated LSCs for all Chicago public schools. The first exception was part of the original law and applied to alternative schools such as those serving pregnant or incarcerated youth. At those schools, elected councils seemed impractical, so the board was given leeway to design its own governance system. The board decided to create advisory councils and retained the ultimate authority on principal selection and budget approval.

The second exception, passed in 1996, extended the rules governing alternative schools to any school the board designated as a "small school." Creators of six new small schools, including Arne Duncan, who then headed an education non-profit, wanted more flexibility on school governance than was permitted by the standard LSC structure of six parents, two teachers and two community representatives. Teacher-lead schools, for instance, wanted more than two teachers on a council. And some small schools were partnered with outside institutions, such as a museum or university, that wanted representatives on the

council. In exchange for the flexibility, CPS retained the authority to approve all the small school councils' decisions.

SMALL SCHOOLS BECOME FLASH POINT

The governance structure of small schools was never an issue while their numbers were few. But new school creation is now a major goal in the Duncan administration's education plan, LSC advocates note.

In August 2001, Mayor Richard Daley announced that five troubled Chicago high schools would be subdivided into small schools with help from a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. High Schools were asked to submit proposals for new small schools, each of which eventually would have its own principal. The first five schools opened at Bowen, Orr and South Shore high schools in 2002. With the Gates money, the district intends to open a total of 30 new independently run small schools, according to CPS small schools Director Jeanne Nowaczewski.

In September 2001, the School Board used the small school/alternative school provision to open its first contract school, the Chicago Academy, an elementary school that would also serve as a training ground for new teachers. Although still part of the public school system, the school would be run by the non-profit Academy for Urban School Leadership. Over the next two years, five more contract schools followed.

Seven months later, Duncan announced the closing of three low-performing elementary schools, Dodge, Williams and Terrell, saying that two of them would reopen as "renaissance schools." Last Septem-



JOHN BOOZ

Geri Bleavings-Booker was shocked to learn that the newly reopened Dodge Elementary, where her daughters Kellie Booker (left) and Kelsi Booker attend, will not have an elected local school council. "They're not trusting the community to make good decisions about the school," she says.

Power: Now you have it, now you don't

Unlike many in the Dodge school community, Dolores Thomas was not terribly upset when the School Board closed the school in June 2002 for exceptionally low performance. She even volunteered to serve on a planning team for the school's reopening. But she is upset now. "Betrayed is the word I would use," she says.

Thomas and her friend Geri Bleavings-Booker, another parent on the planning team, say they were led to believe their school's advisory council would have the same powers as a local school council. But that is not the case.

Dodge is one of the system's six new "contract schools," each operated by one of four non-profit education organizations. The first contract school, Chicago Academy, opened in 2001 as a training ground for new teachers. That school, like Dodge, is governed by the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), which was created by Martin "Mike" Koldyke, founder of The Golden Apple Foundation.

Contract schools are a type of board-designated "alternative school" that is not required to have an elected local school council.

It's not that Bleavings-Booker and Thomas are unhappy with their new school. "We have a very cooperative, community-oriented principal," says Thomas. But they worry about what might happen if she does not stay.

Unlike LSCs, advisory councils do not have the power to hire a principal and approve a budget. "If you exclude [us from] principal selection and budget," says Thomas, "we're back to making cookies and punch."

Elizabeth Duffrin

ber, Dodge became a contract school run by the Academy for Urban School Leadership, and Williams reopened as a trio of contract schools, each run by or in cooperation with a prominent educational non-profit.

Also in September, the School Board put military schools into the alternative schools category. Two already had been operating as alternative schools with appointed

advisory councils that include some military personnel, and the third is considering a switch to that setup.

In December, Duncan and CPS Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins unveiled the beginning of a community planning process to revitalize several dozen schools in the mid-south region, bounded by 31st and 47th streets, the lake and the Dan Ryan Expressway. Once a

The exemptions

1988 Alternative schools

The 1988 Chicago School Reform Act allowed alternative schools, such as those serving incarcerated students, to operate without LSCs.

1995 Schools on probation

Under revisions to the reform act, the School Board may remove principals from schools it places on academic probation and then appoint interim principals to serve at the board's pleasure.

1995 Schools temporarily without a contract principal

When the School Board removes a contract principal for cause at a non-probation school, the chief executive officer appoints the interim principal, who serves out the removed principal's contract.

1996 Small schools

A 1996 law permitted appointed school councils in place of elected LSCs at schools the board designates as "small schools." Unlike elected LSCs, the appointed councils can only advise the chief executive officer on principal selection and other matters.

1996 Charter schools

The state Legislature created 45 charters, 15 in Chicago, for schools that would be run independently of the local school district. In 2003, it boosted Chicago's total to 30.

2001 Contract schools

An innovation under CEO Arne Duncan's administration, contract schools remain part of the school system but are governed by an educational non-profit organization.

2002 Small schools within regular high schools

A centerpiece of the Duncan administration, struggling neighborhood high schools were encouraged to divide into clusters of separately operated small schools.

2003 Military schools

The School Board passed a policy allowing military schools to operate with an advisory council that includes some military personnel.

Elizabeth Duffrin

public-housing ghetto, the area is slated for mixed-income housing. "Just as we did with the renaissance schools, we want a wide-open process, the very best ideas, and the most cutting-edge programs," Eason-Watkins said.

Andrew Wade, executive director of the Chicago School Leadership Cooperative, says many community groups wonder what the CPS strategy is for governing these schools. "Will there be elected councils?"

"We haven't even discussed governance," Duncan says.

COMPROMISE IN LIMBO

With the winds shifting away from local governance, the School Leadership Cooperative organized a subgroup of the LSC Roundtable to craft a proposal for governing small schools. The roundtable was created by Duncan to get community input on board policy. The subgroup included nine non-profits, two foundations, and principal and teacher union representatives.

The subgroup first met in November 2002. A long and agonizing debate ensued. Few participants favored the current policy on small schools, which allows them to choose between an elected LSC and an advisory council. But it took months to forge an alternative. Only one member, a foundation, voted no.

The subgroup submitted the compromise to Duncan in May: Small schools would operate with an advisory council for at least two full school years, which would allow the founding teachers or organizations more representation during the start-up period. Then they would participate in regular local school council elections but keep the option of electing one community representative from outside the school's attendance boundary. The original

six small schools would be exempt from the policy.

As *Catalyst* goes to press, Duncan still has not decided whether to accept the compromise. But he made clear that he favors exceptions to the rule. "To say that the current format is in every instance the Holy Grail and can't be improved on, I don't agree with that," he told *Catalyst*.

"Why even bother having people come together and come to an agreement if you're not going to use it?" says Dion Miller Perez of the Cross-City Campaign for Urban School Reform. "It ends up making the district look very manipulative."

Nowaczewski says that central office may propose a new policy on small schools to the School Board in March, but she declined to provide details. Another option on the table is to keep the current policy, she reports. She declined to comment on the roundtable's proposal.

In the meantime, her office has asked that the five small schools that opened in September 2002 choose between an elected and alternative council, consistent with the current policy. "I have asked each school to survey their staff, their parents, their involved community, their students," she says. "It's a group decision."

Julie Woestehoff, executive director of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) fears that community input will be limited to a chosen few. "The word doesn't get out, and you have people who are already part of the process calling themselves a community and making decisions for everybody."

Don Moore, executive director of the research and advocacy group Designs for Change, questions whether those who opt for alternative

councils fully understand the consequences of that decision. Before 1988, schools operated with advisory councils, he notes. "In a few schools, [their] advice was taken seriously, but in most schools it was ignored. That's why the movement to start councils that had real power started up in the 1980s."

ADVOCATES LOOKING TO LEGISLATURE

Two lawyers who co-chaired the LSC Roundtable committee suggest that CPS is forcing an unnecessary choice between a flexible council structure and full governing authority. Nothing in the law clearly prohibits CPS from allowing small schools to have both, say Vanderwicken of the Lawyers Committee and Pamela Clarke of Leadership for Quality Education.

If CPS rejects the compromise in March, some LSC advocates plan to lobby the state Legislature to close the loophole. "Some of our legislators do listen," says Wade of the Leadership Cooperative, a network of 31 community groups.

Duncan finds the opposition ironic. "Here we are pushing for innovation, and [they are] saying the status quo is perfect." Nowaczewski adds that regardless of the governance decisions at small schools, the growing number of them multiplies the opportunities for parental and community involvement.

But involvement is not power, observes G. Alfred Hess Jr. of Northwestern University, a leading author of Chicago School Reform Act. "Even input that is generally recognized and accepted can be taken away at any moment by someone downtown saying, 'Well, I don't like that decision.'"

To contact Elizabeth Duffrin, call (312) 673-3879 or send an e-mail to duffrin@catalyst-chicago.org.

Candidates to face new hurdles

Both local school councils and the School Board have made **bad choices** in principals. Assessing 'people skills' a big challenge.

By Elizabeth Duffrin

During the next four years, more than half the principals in Chicago Public Schools will become eligible to retire. There is no shortage of candidates for their positions—600 aspiring principals hold the required credentials. But there are questions about quality, district officials say. While the School Board has taken on greater authority to appoint and replace principals (see story on page 6), it also has tacitly acknowledged that it has made bad choices.

Of the more than 70 principals the district has removed since 1995, at least a dozen were interim principals appointed by the board. Of five interim principals the board installed at probation schools last August, two had been replaced by January.

So now the board is aiming to improve the pool of candidates from which everyone is selecting. Its preliminary plans represent a swing of the pendulum.

CPS intends to begin screening candidates for eligibility, requiring them to complete an approved course of study on school leadership, pass a written exam on board policies and have a successful interview with central office, according to a draft of the policy. An interview and exam had been requirements for candidates in CPS prior to 1988.

"There is nothing more

important than quality leadership at the school level," says Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan. "In the next four or five years, we're going to have more opportunity than ever before to have the best leaders possible ready to step in."

The district also plans to require candidates to demonstrate through a portfolio or other means that they have skills in management and instructional leadership.

Principals who know how to improve teaching are critical if the district is to succeed with its ambitious math and reading initiatives and avoid sanctions under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, officials say. Last spring, more than half of CPS schools failed to meet the federal standard on state tests.

But Nancy Laho, chief officer of principal preparation and development, acknowledges that the district has not figured out how to assess the "people skills" of potential candidates, such as the willingness to seek input and build consensus.

Research by the Consortium on Chicago School Research has found that schools with democratic leaders were significantly more likely to be in the district's top quartile in test score growth than were schools with autocratic leaders.

Even veteran administrators say that in job interviews, it is hard to distinguish the

dictators from team-builders. Principal candidates emerge from administrative programs at universities knowing how to talk about collaboration, even if they don't know how to practice it, notes Philip Hansen, a former CPS chief accountability officer who now works for the Illinois State Board of Education. "You never have a candidate say, 'I'm going to go in there and be an autocrat.'"

A poor choice often has long-lasting consequences, even if the principal is removed. In the case of a con-

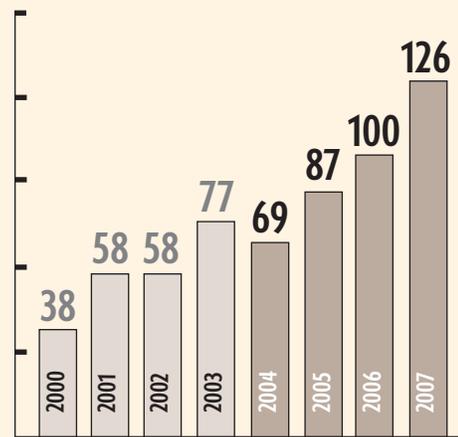
tract principal, a removal can trigger a series of interim principals until the contract expires. Meanwhile, the ousted principal continues to collect his or her regular salary while assigned to a desk job elsewhere.

At probation schools, the board can, and has, removed interims in a virtual instant if the school fails to make quick improvement. At struggling Austin High, for instance, the School Board has removed and replaced principals four times over nine years.

At schools that are not on probation but not making much progress either, LSCs tend to take the path of least resistance, renewing the contracts of mediocre principals, observes Julie Woestehoff,

MORE PRINCIPALS ARE HEADING INTO RETIREMENT

Between 2004 and 2007, 382 principals will become eligible to leave CPS with a full pension. That's more than twice the number eligible to retire in the previous four years, 178.



Source: CPS Office of Principal Preparation and Development

But what are the standards?

Educators who reviewed the School Board's preliminary plan for screening principal candidates say setting clear standards is critical.

DON MOORE, executive director of Designs for Change, sees the proposal as a move back to a centrally controlled patronage system for principal appointment. The policy fails to set detailed standards for meeting the requirements, he explains, leaving much to the discretion of central office administrators. "It provides no confidence to people that they are going to be judged fairly."

He adds that the new requirements likely will discourage talented applicants from outside Chicago because it will be easier for them to secure positions elsewhere.

In contrast, **MARGARET HARRIGAN**, a former CPS official who now instructs master's degree candidates in educational leadership at DePaul University, applauds the proposed requirements, which include earning passing marks on both a written exam and a writing sample, and successful completion of an interview with central office administrators.

"They are taking a thorough look at individuals who are going to be responsible for the education of untold numbers of children," she says. "The more they can find out about a potential principal, the better."

Harrigan trusts that central office will establish fair guidelines for judging candidates on each of the proposed requirements. She says that standards for the interview, for instance, might include ability to speak correctly and fluently, to use good judgment and to think critically.

CLARICE JACKSON BERRY, president of the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association, says she wouldn't have a problem with the interview, writing sample and other requirements if the standards for meeting them were clear. "We'd like to have the criteria spelled out before the policy is approved—not afterwards," she says.

The association won't support the draft policy as written but is in negotiation with central office, she reports. "We're hopeful that we will come to a meeting of the minds."

PAMELA CLARKE, associate director of the business group Leadership for Quality Education, thinks that the new requirements should be part of a broader effort to better educate local school councils (LSCs) on principal selection and evaluation.

Principals report to both their LSCs and their area instructional officers, yet neither group has any contact with the other, she observes. "There needs to be some way of getting the LSCs and AIOs into a dialogue about how to hire a good principal: What does your particular school need in a principal?" she explains.

Central office has yet to come up with a strategy for facilitating such a dialogue, she says. "In fact, I think they've resisted it."



Elizabeth Duffrin

"In the next four or five years, we're going to have more opportunity than ever before to have the best leaders possible ready to step in."

*Arne Duncan, CEO
Chicago Public Schools*



executive director of Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE). "The principal has power over teachers; teachers have a lot of sway over parents. It's hard for a small group to stand up to that."

The pipeline for aspiring principals in Chicago has had few quality controls. Those without experience as full-time assistant principals are required to pass a 90-day internship, but Laho says that she knows of no instance in which an intern has failed to earn a passing grade.

Similarly, teachers and administrators chosen for LAUNCH, the district's selective principal training program, are presumed to be capable when they graduate. The program, run in partnership with the local principals association, Northwestern University and the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago, has trained 188 aspiring principals since 1998. All got its stamp of approval.

"Once you got into LAUNCH, you automatically got out of LAUNCH," says one CPS insider who asked not to be identified. "There was never a careful winnowing-out process."

Faye Terrell-Perkins, LAUNCH executive director, agrees with that assessment and reports that her program

intends to develop stricter criteria for graduation by this summer.

Richard Elmore, a professor of educational leadership at Harvard University, says that districts such as Chicago need to build a career ladder where teachers and administrators can assume gradually more challenging leadership roles as they prove their abilities. He says that by recruiting experienced teachers to coach their colleagues in math and reading instruction, Chicago is in the very early stages of such a strategy. New York and San Diego draw their administrators from these ranks because they understand instruction, he adds.

In addition to new requirements for aspiring principals, the district also intends to step up training for existing ones. According to the draft policy, all novice principals will be required to complete a new-principal support program that formerly was optional.

Some leaders are naturally talented, but to staff a large school system, the vast majority will require training, Elmore says. "A large percentage of [principals] don't know what they are doing, or they would be responding better to the kind of pressures they're under." ■

Lessons that experience taught

Selecting a principal is a local school council's most significant—and most daunting—responsibility. Many council members put in long evening and weekend hours sifting through resumes, organizing community forums and interviewing candidates. Sometimes their hard work pays off; sometimes it does not. Parents on four local school councils shared with *Catalyst* the strategies that helped them pick a winner and the mistakes they hope other councils will avoid.



Linda Calloway

Community representative, former chair Brennemann Elementary, Edgewater

Occupation: Assistant director, childcare center

What didn't work: Time pressure, inadequate background check

When Linda Calloway began her service as an LSC member at Brennemann Elementary in July 2002, she quickly came to feel there was something wrong with Principal Steve Hara and how he had been selected. Small things, like mailings, didn't get done the way they should, she says. "It was always something," she recalls. Rumors had it that Hara had been hired quickly and with very little community input.

"The new LSC members were very concerned," she says, "and we spent most of the summer trying to get good information about [Hara]."

Calloway's fears were largely confirmed by Clara Williams-Okoue, a former commu-

nity representative who had voted for Hara in spring 2002. "We only knew about what he put on the resume," says Williams-Okoue, who taught at Brennemann for many years before retiring and joining the LSC. "We didn't know that he had been put out of a school, and no one checked to see what went on there."

The School Board had removed Hara from Daley Academy in Back of the Yards, according to former Chief Accountability Officer Philip Hansen. Hara was working in central office when he applied for the Brennemann job. LSC members say they took his central office position as a sign that he was well-regarded.

Williams-Okoue blames lack of time for the oversights. The former LSC chair started the process late, she says, and the council feared that if it didn't move quickly, the School Board would appoint an interim.

The new council explored the possibilities for challenging Hara's contract, but the board's Law Department said that proper procedure had been followed. The council and Hara have been at odds ever since, prompting a series of investigations by the School Board. A board spokesman says the situation is still under review. (See related story on page 25.)

Walter Paas

Parent member, chair Jones High School, South Loop

Occupation: Vinyl record importer

What worked: A thorough search, the right contacts

When the principal of Jones High, an elite magnet school, won promotion to area

instructional officer, the LSC didn't rush to replace her. Instead, it followed her advice and that of two top district administrators to go slow.

"They emphasized that we should take our time and be very deliberate and get who we wanted," says Walter Paas, the Jones LSC chair.

The council advertised locally in a school district bulletin, nationally on a principal association website and in the *International Herald Tribune*. This outreach brought in 49 applicants, one from England.

Since LSCs have no budget for principal selection, Paas charged about \$250 on his credit card, and the school later agreed to reimburse him.

Typically, LSCs that want to spend money on principal selection hold bake sales or other



fundraisers, according to William Rice of the Office of Local School Council Relations.

Only about 5 percent advertise beyond the district's e-bulletin, he says, in part because it's hard to place an ad sufficiently in advance of the application deadline.

Paas also reached beyond the LSC relations office for assistance on a variety of matters, calling Domingo Trujillo of the Office of Instruction and School Management, Carlos Azcoitia, then deputy chief education officer, and even Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan.

Those central office contacts helped the winning candidate, a recent doctoral graduate from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, navigate the red tape of matching his out-of-state credentials with local requirements.

The search took five months, and Paas said it was worth the time. Under the new principal's leadership, Jones has a state-of-the-art tutoring program and its highest attendance rate ever, he reports. "Things are going well."



Vanessa Atkins

*Parent member, chair
Deneen Elementary, Greater Grand Crossing*

Occupation: Stay-at-home mom

What didn't work: Insufficient training, too little research

In January 2003, the Deneen LSC began a principal search that by April had ended in deadlock. Unable to agree on a candidate, the LSC advertised the position again. By the time Vanessa Atkins, the LSC chair, thought

to suggest more training for the LSC, the group was too exhausted to think about it, she says. "Everything we did was blind and on trial and error."

Poor interviews were one problem, she says. The council stuck to a few basic questions, such as, Why do you want to be a principal? What do you want to do for Deneen? Atkins ventured a few generic ones she had learned as a billing department supervisor, such as, what are your three greatest strengths and weaknesses? But nobody knew how to question candidates specifically on the many facets of the principal's role, she says.

The council's school visits weren't as productive as they could be either. The Office of Local School Council Relations had warned council members not to interrupt classes, but they thought that meant they shouldn't speak to teachers at all. "Most of the people we talked to were at the front desk," she recalls. "One parent [member] did talk with the lunchroom staff."

In July, the council selected a principal Atkins now finds insufficiently experienced. She thinks the School Board ought to put all councils through mock candidate interviews as part of their basic training. The board training that she and two other parents attended last January stuck to the mechanics of principal selection, such as placing an ad and deciding how many applicants to interview. "They spent 30 minutes talking about it, and that was it."

Dion Miller Perez

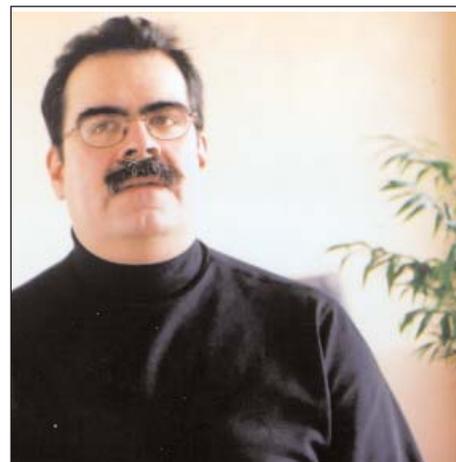
*Community member
Finkl Elementary, Lower West Side*

Occupation: Coordinator, school reform group

What worked: Good training, thorough interviews

Four years ago, Finkl's principal became the first to test a new law allowing principals who fail to get their contracts renewed to challenge the decision through arbitration. Although the principal lost the dispute, the stressful process could have hobbled the council in its search for her successor, says Dion Miller Perez, a community representative who was then LSC chair.

But with help from a program created by a business group in 1998 to guide LSCs through the selection process, the search went smoothly. Called PENCUL, for Partnership to Educate the Next Century's Urban Leaders, the pro-



gram provided knowledgeable consultants to advise LSCs on procedures.

First, it helped the Finkl council set criteria for judging applicants. That made the final selection more objective and less controversial, says Perez. "Instead of it being simply, 'Do I like this candidate, it was 'Does this candidate meet the criteria?'"

The consultant also helped the council develop detailed interview questions. For instance, instead of asking candidates how they interacted with others, they broke that question into parts, and asked them to describe separately how they interacted with different groups, such as parents and teachers.

Candidates' responses were telling. When asked to describe his management style, one assistant principal replied, "I was in the army, and when I say go, I expect people to go." Perez recalls. Another candidate said, "My style is to listen.' Yes, but how do you act on that input? The person couldn't tell us.' "

This school year, PENCUL was discontinued for lack of funding. "It's a huge loss," says Perez.

Elizabeth Duffrin, Alexander Russo

PHOTOS BY CHRISTINE OLIVA

PRINCIPAL SELECTION RESOURCES

THE LSC EXCHANGE: (312) 344-6403
www.newstips.org/schools

CHICAGO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP COOPERATIVE: (312) 499-4800
www.leadercoop.org

CHICAGO LAWYERS' COMMITTEE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS: (312) 630-9744 www.clccrul.org

DESIGNS FOR CHANGE: (312) 236-7252 x241
www.designsforchange.org

7 principals in 3 tumultuous years

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Sojourner Truth Elementary School in Cabrini-Green is on its seventh principal in three years. The local school council blames central office for the turnover. Teachers blame them both. “We’ve been left out to dry,” says one. “That’s the general consensus.” Without skilled leadership at the school, tensions between factions escalated, slowing school progress.

In the view of Charles Payne, a Duke University professor who has studied Chicago schools, urban schools are cauldrons that need expert tending. “What you’re doing in the city schools is taking people—principals, teachers, parents and students—with all sorts of class and race differences, putting them in a place with very few resources and asking them to do an extremely difficult job,” he says. “Naturally their anger has to come out someplace, and it comes out at one another.” That certainly happened at Truth.

Initially, the anger at Truth resided with a group of teachers—largely but not entirely white—who felt that the principal, an African American, played favorites to their detriment. When the School Board removed that principal, pending an investigation into financial mismanagement, the teachers and community activists who supported her were outraged.

From there, it was a run-away train. The School Board sent temporary leaders. The local school council made a selection it quickly came to regret. The School Board rescued the council by removing that principal, but his replacement wound up being more controversial. He, too, left the school, which is now led by yet another interim principal.

All this played against a background of pervasive

fear, distrust and verbal crossfire that no one made a serious attempt to resolve.

In late February, Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan told *Catalyst* that if the infighting at Truth continued, he would “look at doing something very different” with the school. Asked for specifics, Duncan replied, “You figure it out.” Duncan has closed other troubled schools and reopened them with new leadership.

He added that the situation at Truth demonstrates why Chicago needs to raise the standards for becoming a principal.

DECADE-LONG LEADER REMOVED

Principal turnover at Truth, a pre-K to 3rd-grade school on probation, began in 2001.

Pernecie Pugh, whom supporters call a tough but charismatic leader, had led the school for just over a decade. The school’s first local school council hired her instead of retaining Truth’s longtime principal. Over the years, Pugh built strong community ties and was not afraid to visit parents in the gang-infested Cabrini high-rises. “She acted like [she was] one of us,” says Catina Ross, a parent who serves on Truth’s LSC.



JACK BRIDGES

Principal Vergia Haynes counsels a misbehaving student at Truth Elementary. Haynes, who was hired in November, is the school's seventh principal in three years.

But some teachers say Pugh disparaged faculty who were not among her favorites, particularly white teachers. Former Truth teacher Beth Signore, who was assigned to Truth through the Teachers for Chicago program, recalls her introduction to Pugh. "She said, 'You won't stay because our white teachers don't do well here.'"

In the late 1990s, Truth had one of the highest teacher turnover rates in the city, according to a *Catalyst* analysis. Twenty teachers left in two years, at least some due to a lack of support from the principal, says 3rd-grade teacher Bess Bourtzos. "She basically listened to a couple of teachers, and that was it."

But the real turmoil began early in 2001, when the School Board whisked Pugh out of Truth and began an investigation into allegations that she had misappropriated school

funds. Parent Yolanda Scott says that some people in the neighborhood believed the allegations and supported her removal. A teacher recalls, "We jumped in the air cheering."

But others rose in protest. A residents' council in Cabrini-Green passed a resolution in her favor. The LSC organized a community meeting on her behalf, and hundreds of parents and neighbors petitioned local politicians and the board for her return, according to Wanda Hopkins, a consultant from Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) and a former chair of Truth's LSC.

CPS Chief Executive Officer Paul Vallas relented and returned Pugh to Truth that spring; the interim principal assigned in her absence remained to help out. Shortly after Arne Duncan became CEO in June 2001, the CPS law department completed its investigation and suspend-

ed Pugh without pay pending her dismissal hearing.

That action rekindled the protests. In mid-September, about 20 parents barricaded Truth's front doors, urging staff not to enter. "My child cannot get an education without Pugh here," insisted one angry parent, according to a teacher who witnessed the scene. The teacher says some protesters even used Crazy Glue on school locks. The police soon dispersed the group, the teacher says, but the parents' resentment lingered.

Three women who took Pugh's removal particularly hard had grown up in Cabrini and maintained close ties to the neighborhood. Gloria Crite returned to teach at Truth in 1972 and eventually would serve on its local school council. Linda Rule, who was one of Crite's students, joined her 20 years later. Hopkins, who had moved to the Far West Side, kept her children at Truth, and she stayed on to serve as the LSC's consultant. "They respect me because I'm not an outsider," she explains. "I lived what they lived and understand what they need."

Rule always suspected that her colleagues at Truth looked down on her because of her Cabrini roots. Although she had maintained cordial relationships with them, she says that with Pugh gone, she suddenly felt vulnerable. "Once a shield is moved, the lion can attack its prey," she explains. "If you were harboring any ill feelings against me, now it [was] open season." She says that she and her three children, who attended Truth, became victims of harassment and abuse. Eventually, she would transfer the youngest to a different school.

During the turmoil, a number of parents would make repeated child abuse allegations against teachers and principals, further heightening tensions. By all accounts, none of the accusations was substantiated.

TEMPORARY PRINCIPALS NOS. 1, 2, 3

Over the next two school years, Truth would run through three temporary principals. Pugh had been removed by the board, and under board rules, the LSC could not install

a permanent replacement until Pugh's contract had expired.

The first temporary, Doris Barnes, a retired principal of nearby Schiller Elementary, filled in during the year when Pugh was removed and briefly reinstated. Barnes was known in the community and well-respected at Truth. However, she opted not to stay.

The second temporary, Hellen DeBerry, was a trouble-shooter for central office who arrived to open Truth for the 2001-02 school year and stayed only weeks. She quickly drew fire from some Pugh supporters.

Hopkins says she asked CEO Arne Duncan to remove DeBerry because she "didn't know how to work with parents." DeBerry says her assignment was only short-term and that she doesn't remember Hopkins.

The third temporary principal, Joseph Washington, was on assignment from the Office of Accountability. Teachers and council members alike say they found him congenial but not terribly active in pursuing improvements. "He was a good guy," one teacher recalls. "He was there filling a spot." Washington did not return *Catalyst* phone calls.

In March 2002, Pernecie Pugh officially resigned from the principalship at Truth rather than endure a dismissal hearing. She died shortly after. With a contract no longer in force, the board permitted the LSC to select a new contract principal. The board offered to let Washington remain if the council wanted to forgo principal selection, Hopkins says. "But we wanted our own principal."

'PERMANENT' PRINCIPAL LASTS A YEAR

Hopkins recommended Willie Stigall, an assistant principal at King High School and a fellow congregant at the same West Side church. Stigall impressed the council with his commitment to raising test scores while working closely with the LSC, Crite recalls. "He was very adamant about it. He appeared sincere."

But his relationship with the council quickly soured.

Stigall had to contend with two openly polarized factions in the school, each with one teacher representative on the council. Crite, the

technology coordinator, counted among her supporters some veteran classroom teachers and much of the support staff. Second-grade teacher Katy Ahlgren was backed by many of the new teachers who arrived in the late 1990s, as well as by some veterans.

As some of Crite's veteran supporters were leaving for retirement or other positions, the younger staff, many of whom say they felt intimidated under Pugh, were becoming more outspoken.

Student testing became a point of conflict. Hopkins and Crite wanted weekly tests so that the council could monitor student progress. Ahlgren's supporters felt a weekly testing schedule wouldn't align with the length of their textbook units. "If you're testing them all the time, when are you teaching?" she asks.

Stigall did not put a weekly testing program in place, infuriating Hopkins. "He was not strong enough to make the teachers do [it]," she says. However, Stigall says he agreed with Ahlgren, whom he felt spoke for the majority of teachers.

As the school year wore on, Stigall worked less closely with the council, which sided with Hopkins and Crite. "At the end, he just got quiet and kept to himself," says LSC Chair Latina Knight. "Maybe he didn't feel like he could trust anybody."

Teachers describe Stigall's management style as hands-off and easy-going. For one, he didn't visit classrooms to see whether teachers were following the district's new reading initiative, says reading specialist Hawa Jones. As a result, some teachers followed the training enthusiastically, while others did what they had always done.

Stigall says he didn't want to dictate to teachers and risk alienating them. "In a year, it's hard to change people," he says. "It takes time."

That spring, Truth's test scores plummeted from 22 percent to 10 percent at or above national norms. While teachers agree that Stigall was not a strong instructional leader, many blame the decline on the high number of students retained in 3rd grade the previous year, a citywide phenomenon. As a school that only

'Troubled schools need a whole new team'

Truth is not the only school in Chicago to suffer from frequent principal turnover. Thirty-three schools have had their leadership change five or more times since 1995, according to a *Catalyst* analysis of School Board data.

If the data on Truth are any indicator, the total may be higher. That data did not include three administrators who stayed for less than a year.

Barbara Radner, a DePaul University professor who works with schools, says the board is at fault in some cases because it replaced ineffective administrators with inexperienced ones. Often it has no choice, she adds, since a school on probation is unlikely to attract a skilled, seasoned principal.

Radner has a solution: Install a team to get the school in basic working order. The team might include a retired principal who could revamp the instructional program, for example, while the new principal focuses on establishing order.

The board tried a similar strategy at two schools she worked with, Corliss and Harlan high schools, and test scores climbed.

"You cannot underestimate how difficult this job is," she insists. "You can't do it by yourself."

Elizabeth Duffrin

goes up through 3rd grade, Truth is judged solely by its 3rd-grade scores.

Hopkins says the dismal test scores validated her position on Stigall with School Board officials, to whom she had been complaining all year. "They said, 'You all brought him in.' I said, 'You're going to take him out.'"

In an extreme move, the School Board removed a contract principal after a single year on the job, sending Stigall to a desk job. "It's easier for them to remove the principal than to deal with Hopkins," Stigall remarks.

TEACHERS, PARENTS SPLIT OVER INTERIM NO. 4

With three years left on Stigall's contract, Truth again could not hire a contract principal. Instead, central office would send them yet another interim.

Last summer, CPS Chief Instruction Officer Domingo Trujillo invited Hopkins to meet with him and two other district officials to select Truth's next interim principal. Asked why Hopkins was brought in, Trujillo says that the board sometimes seeks input from LSC representatives in



JACK BRIDGES

Wanda Hopkins (left), a consultant with Parents United for Responsible Education, and Latina Knight, Truth Elementary's local school council chair, blame central office for the school's high turnover rate.

selecting an interim, and that Hopkins was "very active in the school and is an advisor to the council."

Although Hopkins says she preferred another candidate, the group settled on Arnold Bickham, an assistant principal at Copernicus Elementary. Like many district-appointed interim principals, Bickham had attended LAUNCH, the district's selective leadership training program.

Arriving at the end of August, Bickham dove into his new job with gusto. He quickly hired an education consultant to help teachers organize the curriculum. He and the consultant also checked to see that teachers were following the reading initiative, according to Hawa Jones.

"He kept everyone on their toes," a teacher agrees. "Things started looking hopeful. People realized we were not dealing with an idiot this time."

He clamped down on student discipline, too, suspending more stu-

dents than before for fighting and other disruptive behavior, all sides report. The crack-down thrilled most teachers but infuriated parents, including those on the council.

"Why were you suspending these little kids who are trying to get an education?" asks LSC Chair Knight.

Bickham also stepped into a dispute between Rule and another teacher whom she had repeatedly accused of harassing her and her daughter—this was the second teacher whom Rule had accused of abusing her children since Pugh's departure. Rule says Bickham moved her to a nearby child parent center.

In mid-October, Knight found in her school mailbox a thick envelope with no return address. The envelope contained a stack of newspaper articles and other documentation concerning Bickham's criminal past. She quickly alerted Hopkins and the rest of the council.

At about the same time, LSC parent representative Catina Ross says she heard a boy tell his mother that the principal had choked him.

The next day, October 22, the boy's mother confronted Bickham, who called Officer Shirley Brown of the 18th District to take a report. Reading from the report she filed at the time, Brown says that the boy was sent to the principal's office for hitting Knight's daughter in the eye with an eraser. The boy tried to escape, she continues, but Bickham caught him by his jacket. Both Bickham and Knight, who was also present, stated that the boy tripped, according to Brown.

"The boy agreed that nothing happened after that," says Brown, still reading. "Then his mom said, 'I thought that you said that he choked you and threw you down.' Then the boy changed his story around and said, 'Yeah, he did.'"

Knight disputes that she even spoke with Brown, or that she witnessed the boy trip. After she heard that the boy was choked, she says she called Hopkins.

PRINCIPAL'S CRIMINAL RECORD EMERGES

Shortly after the police report, Bickham went to a principal's meeting and never returned. Teachers puzzled over his absence and the appearance of an unfamiliar district administrator in the school.

Days passed. At a Wednesday staff meeting, the unfamiliar administrator announced that Bickham was under investigation but did not elaborate. The next morning's *Chicago Tribune* solved the mystery.

The *Tribune* reported that Arnold Bickham, a former medical doctor, was under investigation for misconduct involving "student discipline issues." The article went on to report that in 1979, he was sentenced to two years in federal prison for defrauding the U.S. government of job training funds at his abortion clinic. In 1988, he lost his medical license after a judge found him guilty of forcing a young woman to leave his clinic while bleeding and in shock. She later died. In 1992, he was sentenced to 30 months probation

for performing a pelvic examination without a medical license.

CEO Arne Duncan acknowledged that in applying for employment, Bickham had disclosed his past to Chicago Public Schools, according to the *Tribune*. Under state law, individuals convicted of some non-violent crimes are not prohibited from working in schools; Bickham fell into that category. Now assigned to a desk job, Bickham declined to comment for this article.

Faye Terrell-Perkins, who recently became director of LAUNCH, says the training program did not hold Bickham's past against him because he already was working in the district as an assistant principal and had fully disclosed his criminal record. "How much do you hold against [someone] for prior mistakes?" she adds.

Most classroom teachers at Truth say they don't care about his past. "Everyone has a past, some more notorious than others," one teacher remarks. "I thought he would help turn the place around."

"We felt like the Board of Ed didn't respect us enough as professionals to listen to us before they took our principal out," says teacher Krista Adams, who left Truth for another Chicago school in January. "It made us feel like pieces of trash. People broke down and cried."

Truth parents felt differently. Officer Brown hurried down to Truth the afternoon the *Tribune* article appeared. In the lobby, she heard outraged parents discussing it. "They felt, 'How dare the board put in a man with a record like that.' People felt the board didn't care about them. 'They'll put anyone over in this community.'"

Following the article, Brown says that more angry parents called CPS complaining that Bickham had abused their children. The time between the alleged incidents and the reporting of them makes her doubt their veracity. "If this happened, why didn't you file a police report?" she asks.

Bickham was cleared of the abuse allegations but was not returned to Truth. Trujillo says that the committee that hired Bickham for the principal-

ship at Truth was unaware of his past. "Everybody wants to pass the buck," says Terrell-Perkins of LAUNCH, "but everybody should have known if it's in his file."

PRINCIPAL NO. 7 ARRIVES, MORE TEACHERS LEAVING

In selecting an interim to replace Bickham, the board consulted the LSC, which recommended Vergia Haynes, the assistant principal at Anderson Elementary and the Truth LSC's second choice when it selected Stigall.

Teachers, many of whom still mourn the loss of Bickham, say they are fed up with the turnover. Each

And the two factions are again at odds on instructional issues. For instance, the staff has identified 25 3rd-graders who could potentially reach grade level by May and get the school off probation. Crite wants teachers to send them to her computer lab for extra help, but they are refusing.

Hopkins says it's because they don't like Crite. She insists that Ahlgren and three other teachers she knows only by sight are trying to run the school. "They make me so angry, I don't want to know their names," she says.

Crite and Hopkins accuse the white teachers of being prejudiced

"If you're going to put a principal in a school that's already failing, it needs to be an experienced, strong principal. A school will function no matter where it is as long as the administration functions."

Krista Adams, former Truth teacher

administrator demands new procedures, schedules and paperwork, they say. "It's not about teaching anymore. It's about learning what to do to cross your T's and dot your I's with the principals."

Many blame Hopkins and Crite, whom they believe control the LSC, for chasing off principals. They see Haynes, who also grew up in Cabrini-Green, as their pawn.

Teachers are particularly angered by the letters of reprimand many found in their mailboxes the morning after Christmas break. Haynes wrote them up for a range of offenses, including turning lesson plans in a day late. The teachers wonder why she didn't talk to them first. "I've seen teachers in tears [over] those letters," says one.

Haynes says that Christmas break was the first chance she had to write the letters. "Teachers weren't here for me to talk to them," she says.

Teachers, meanwhile, report filing grievances with the teachers union for everything from the school's faulty heating system to the principal allowing a custodian to lead a prayer at the Christmas party.

against black students, and are insisting on diversity training. White teachers say they are offended. "I had a job waiting for me in Glenview, but I like a challenge and I wanted to help," says one. "I was hoping to be appreciated."

Haynes reports that she has high hopes for Truth and has already seen improvement. Since she organized common planning time for teachers, the kindergarten and 1st grades are writing lesson plans together, she says.

Jones, the reading specialist, has observed teachers making progress with the district's new reading strategies. But she knows of seven classroom teachers who are planning to look for work elsewhere next year, besides the two who moved on in January.

"If you're going to put a principal in a school that's already failing, it needs to be an experienced, strong principal," says Adams, who departed for a West Side School that has a long-tenured leader. "I have always taught in the projects. It's not the environment. A school will function no matter where it is as long as the administration functions." ■

NORTH LAWNDALE



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CALIFORNIA
WESTERN



In a struggling community, signs of progress on horizon

“One thing I’d really like ... is to have some schools in Lawndale that are looked at with envy—a place where any parent would say ‘I’d love to have my kid in that school.’”

School Board President Michael Scott

by Maureen Kelleher and John Myers

A recent report from the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago singled out Area 8, which includes most of North Lawndale, as one of the three elementary school areas with the poorest academic performance. The single high school within North Lawndale’s boundaries, Collins, is on academic probation.

Schools do not operate in a vacuum, so it’s no surprise that those in North Lawndale are struggling. The neighborhood is struggling as well. Median family income is a paltry \$20,253. Crime is prevalent; in 2002, the community racked up 35 violent crimes and 56 non-violent crimes per square mile, one of the highest rates in the city.

Children especially face tough circumstances. Among families with children, 51.5 percent live in poverty, and 83 percent are headed by single parents or by grandparents, according to “Chicago Kids Count,” a report compiled by the research and advocacy group Voices for Illinois Children. And North Lawndale has the fourth-highest population, among Chicago’s neighborhoods, of children with elevated lead levels in their blood—a precursor of potential learning and behavior problems.

The neighborhood’s decline began with the riots that followed the 1968 assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., devastating much of the community’s infrastructure. Then, by 1970, an estimated 75 percent of local businesses had left, taking jobs with them. When jobs left, people followed. The population

plummeted by about half between 1970 and 1990, and by another 12 percent between 1990 and 2000.

Still, the news is not all doom-and-gloom. The city is trying to spur economic development with special taxing districts and other initiatives. And community leaders point to several projects as a sign of better times, including rehab of the Pulaski Avenue el station, a new police station in Homan Square and rehab and construction of hundreds of affordable housing units by a network of community organizations.

In 1995, the Steans Family Foundation chose North Lawndale as the focus of its grantmaking. By 2001, it had poured more than \$11 million into economic development and other programs, including education.

“Schools are a direct barometer of the quality of life in the community,” says Derrick Harris, president of the North Lawndale LSC Federation, which is seeking to strengthen local school councils.

Two schools already have a track record of achievement, Kellman Elementary and North Lawndale College Prep Charter High School. And after decades of neglect, the physical condition of many schools has steadily improved, especially since School Board President Michael Scott, a North Lawndale resident, took over.

“One of our goals is excellence in every community, and one of the things I’d really like to do before I leave here is to have some schools in Lawndale [that] are looked at with envy,” says Scott. “A place where any parent would say ‘I’d love to have my kid in that school, and by the way, what’s the housing stock like around here? What are the parks like?’” ■

This is the fifth installment in an occasional series examining schools from a community perspective. Previous reports on Back of the Yards, Hyde Park, Little Village and Near South Side can be found online.

Charter gives kids a vision for college

By Maureen Kelleher

In late January, 13 seniors from North Lawndale College Prep Charter High School sit seminar-style around a group of tables, talking with deans Chris Kelly and John Horan about how to stay focused through senior year.

"All my brothers and sisters, when they were in senior year, they dropped out," one girl recalls. "I feel like I'm tuned into their vibrations, so I need to stay focused on my goal." She adds that her entire family is planning to attend her graduation.

"Do you feel some pressure because of that?" Horan asks her.

"Yeah, a lot of pressure to stay in school," she replies.

Horan asks the class how many will be the first in their families to go to college. Six or seven hands go up. "I'm the first son to go to college," Obi Henderson notes with a smile. His older sister was in the first graduating class at the school and is now a sophomore at Hampton University.

Another boy jumps in to say he's also feeling a lot of pressure from his mother. "I'm gonna be her only child who goes to college," he tells them, saying his two sisters got pregnant at a young age and his brother is not pursuing education.

Such issues are what sparked the creation of North Lawndale College Prep. The school's founders initially envisioned an elementary school but switched gears when parents and local principals told them that what the neighborhood really needed was a college-focused high school, one that would help teens address the problems that could easily sidetrack them from college.

Now, word is spreading through North Lawndale and into other West Side neighborhoods that the school offers young people, regardless of their test scores, a solid chance at a high school diploma and a college degree.

The school, which enrolls just 350 students, got its start as an idea float-

ed by the board of Chicago's I Have a Dream Foundation, which provided support to elementary students throughout their high school years, with the goal of getting them into college. (I Have a Dream is no longer operating in Chicago.) Horan, then executive director of the foundation, says the board asked him where he'd like to be in five years. "I'd really like to work at a school," he told them. Horan recalls board member Burt Kaplan of National Bedding/Serta Mattress suggesting I Have a Dream start a school.

LIMITED HIGH SCHOOL OPTIONS

North Lawndale surfaced as a likely location because I Have a Dream had three projects underway in the vicinity. The proposal for a charter elementary was accepted in January 1997, but word from the community spurred the founders to retool it.

Principal Mattie Tyson of Johnson Elementary was among those pushing for a high school. Some of her students had been adopted by United Airlines through I Have a Dream, and she wanted them, and all her students, to have better high school choices. "I saw it really as an opportunity to grow a high school for my graduates," she says. "I don't like throwing my kids to the wolves. That's what I think happens when they go out there and they don't get the support they need."

Horan recalls that 100 to 150 people showed up at focus meetings at Johnson about the proposed school. "They felt the grade schools were pretty good but there were limited high school options," he says. The only high school within North Lawndale's official borders is Collins High, one of five high schools put on intervention in 2000. North Lawndale's youth also live in the attendance areas for Manley High, just north of the border in East Garfield Park, and Farragut High to the south in Little Village. Both have been on academic probation since 1996.



JOHN BOOZ

Gladys Reyes (left) and Janay Clyde are members of North Lawndale College Prep's political action committee, which promotes community service and civic involvement. Here they work on a Habitat for Humanity Project.

Collins and Farragut are both within walking distance of the home of North Lawndale College Prep parent and board member Shari Johnson. "If North Lawndale hadn't opened, my child wouldn't have gone to either one of those," she says, though she herself graduated from Farragut. (In recent years, Manley has significantly increased the number of seniors going on to college through a partnership with the Umoja Student Development Corp. However, last year's dropout rate was 27 percent.)

The community input spurred the partners from I Have a Dream and the Steans Family Foundation to become the only group in Chicago to ever return a charter. "Greg Richmond asked, 'Are you sure you want to do this? People are killing for these

things,” Horan recalls. But their retooled proposal for a high school sailed through in December 1997.

The board spent the summer of 1998 scouring the neighborhood for an alternate site after Tyson pulled out of a plan to open the charter inside Johnson, citing lack of space. Chair Greg Darnieder, then Steans’ executive director, found one in an unlikely place—Howland Elementary, a deteriorating school where the principal was one of 11 suddenly removed by Paul Vallas that summer.

Darnieder approached brand-new interim Principal Millicent ReChord, from Disney Elementary on the North Side. “I had nothing to lose,” he says. “I didn’t know [ReChord] from a hole in the wall. I thought maybe in the absurdity of it all there [could be] a mutual vision.”

Miraculously, there was. “They had the vision, and I welcomed them,” says ReChord, who now works for the city’s youth arts program, Gallery 37, but remains on the charter’s board. “I just saw where it was going to be a miracle place for these kids.”

“About two weeks before school started, we found out it was going to be at Howland,” says Shari Johnson. “I was really happy then.” Howland is across the street from her home.

ReChord says it was a tougher sell to convince the Howland community that having the charter in the building was a plus. “They saw it as an invasion, as a loss,” she says. “I would sit up at night thinking of ways to help them understand this is not a takeover.”

Meanwhile, rumors ran rampant that Howland would be closed. There was even talk that the building was going to be torn down so Pacific Garden Mission, a homeless shelter, could be relocated there. “That was a big slap in the face,” says Richard Townsell, the executive director of the North Lawndale Christian Development Corp., who sits on North Lawndale College Prep’s board and lives in the neighborhood.

ReChord credits the charter’s board for pushing CPS into renovating Howland, which needed work in the west wing, gym and auditorium. “They’re an active group of people who believe in the mission. There is

nothing that will stop them. ... The push was unrelenting to provide a safe and clean space for these kids to learn,” ReChord says

Meanwhile, Lawndale Community Church allowed the charter to use its gym for basketball and its sanctuary for assemblies. The charter’s board itself spent about a million dollars in rehab money, some borrowed from the Illinois Facilities Fund, says board member Robin Steans.

Though fixing up the facility was a hard fight, creating a workable leadership structure was an even greater challenge. The school cycled through three principals in its first two years and finally settled on sharing leadership among three deans: Horan for

“[The board members are] an active group of people who believe in the mission. The push was unrelenting to provide a safe and clean space for these kids to learn.”

Millicent ReChord, board member, North Lawndale College Prep Charter

student life and community affairs, Kelly for operations and finance, and Anika Spratley for curriculum and instruction. Last year, the school also hired Josephine Gomez, formerly a teacher leader at Manley, to provide additional curriculum guidance.

The charter’s greatest strength has been to give students social support and challenging life experiences to help them stretch and grow. Through Phoenix Rising, students get summer opportunities targeted to each grade level. Freshmen attend outdoor wilderness experiences in places like Colorado, where they are exposed to a drastically different environment and learn survival skills. Sophomores attend college summer programs, and juniors are placed in internships with major businesses, law firms and other companies.

The counselor-student ratio is 1 to 105, significantly lower than in Chicago Public Schools, and counselors stay with their students for four years. Students also take a course called College Prep for four years, which gives them a chance to explore college choices and develop insight into themselves and their lives.

Parents of early graduates say they are delighted with their children’s experience. “I am really happy she was a part of that,” says Rosie Patton, whose daughter Jackie graduated in the first class and now attends the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. “She received a lot of opportunities she would not have gotten from the quote-unquote, regular public high schools, and that I’m proud of.”

North Lawndale’s staff says frequent turnover among elementary school counselors hinders efforts to forge tighter relationships with the local elementary schools, although Tyson and other area principals and counselors do encourage their stu-

dents to apply.

When former students from Dvorak Elementary returned to tell Principal Leonard Moore about the charter’s college counseling component, Moore was impressed. “They told me it really helps them stay focused,” he says. “I thought that was unique.”

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NORTH LAWDALE VS. COLLINS

North Lawndale charter performs far better than nearby Collins on most measures. Its ACT score, however, is still lower than 18, the level at which students generally are considered ready for college-level work.

	N. Lawndale	Collins
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	370	901
ATTENDANCE RATE	92	80.5
YEARLY DROPOUT RATE	2.4	11.5
GRADUATION RATE	92.9	54
ACT COMPOSITE	15.4	13.7

Source: School Report Cards

Kellman shows what can be done

Now an area instructional leader, former principal works to spread its strategies to more schools.

By Maureen Kelleher

In every classroom at Kellman Elementary, posters emblazoned with two questions serve as a constant reminder of the school's mission: "Are Kellman students learning? How do we know?"

Kellman, which sits at the southern edge of East Garfield Park but draws many of its 300 students from North Lawndale, has been repeatedly recognized for outstanding academic achievement. A majority of students perform at or above grade level on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test, and the school has a waiting list because of its stellar reputation in the community.

Principal Brenda Browder has a succinct explanation for the school's performance: "Everything here is done purposefully."

Some of Kellman's success undoubtedly stems from its small size and the fact that most students enter from the state pre-kindergarten program, which gives them a leg up in terms of school readiness. And while Kellman is not a selective magnet school, families must apply, and the school does have some control over admission.

Even so, Kellman students come from the same economic and social circumstances as their peers in nearby schools. To reach them, Browder and her mentor, former Principal Rollie Jones (now area instructional officer), have worked to create a school where the focus is on high-quality instruction. The school is open 11 months of the year, and teachers push students to read at grade level (and beyond), write frequently and engage in classroom discussions and independent research.

To improve instruction at other schools in North Lawndale, Jones is using some of the same strategies she brought to Kellman:

LEARNING THROUGH OBSERVATION

At Kellman, Jones spent a year taking stock before rocking the boat. "The first

year, there were no sweeping changes because I had to get in there and see what was going on with the least interruptions possible," she says. Even after taking over, she kept watch, but in a non-threatening way. "I was in and out of classrooms all day long. I wanted teachers to feel comfortable and show them that when I come into the room, this is just part of what I do," she says. "I pick up ideas, and I see what teachers are doing. I share them with other staff members."

As an area instructional officer, she not only conducts walk-throughs, but also encourages principals to visit each other's schools. "We're having the principal from school A go with the area team to school B to do a walkthrough," she says. "They're going to take something back with them."

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

At Kellman, Jones kept the weekly half-day that founders had set aside for professional development. In Area 8, principals gather monthly, and one principal, often with staff, makes a presentation on an instructional strategy that has worked at his or her school. In January, Browder and two Kellman teachers demonstrated ways to teach students how to answer extended-response questions on the Illinois Standards Achievement test. These usually require higher-level skills, like in-depth analysis of a reading passage or a step-by-

step solution to a math problem.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Browder says Jones expected a great deal of her teachers and students, but made that clear in a trusting, friendly way. "She respected your professionalism. When she turned something over to you, she trusted you to do it," Browder says.

Now, Jones recognizes the challenge of setting high professional standards on a larger scale. "We're working on expectations, raising the bar on that. I know what we have to work with," she says. "People have all kinds of excuses why our children are not moving. The principal has to raise the bar on what to expect out of the teachers. It starts from the top down."

Jones has demonstrated a willingness to take drastic steps when needed. One principal at a consistently low-performing school in her area, Bethune Elementary, was removed from his post at the beginning of the year.

SUPPORTING STAFF

Kellman staff praise Jones' willingness to support teachers by getting materials, providing training or just offering encouragement. Parent volunteers credit Jones with encouraging them to pursue careers in education and go back to school.

Across North Lawndale, Jones is working to reduce teacher turnover and improve classroom management. "The discipline problems often come about because you have new teachers," she notes. This year, she has worked to give every new teacher in Area 8 a personal mentor and brought 11 schools a Texas-based program to improve classroom management.

Principal Jacqueline Baker of Pope Elementary, who was notified in December that her school was being put back on probation, praises Jones for "working with me as opposed to working against me." ■

ON THE WEB

Go to www.catalyst-chicago.org for:

- More on North Lawndale College Prep's counseling program, which is carried out by five licensed counselors and social workers.
- Interviews with School Board President Michael Scott, Area 8 Instructional Officer Rollie Jones and North Lawndale LSC Federation founder Derrick Harrison on what's needed to improve North Lawndale schools. Scott grew up in Lawndale.

School repairs up on Scott's watch

By John Myers

Mattie Tyson says it's the first winter of good health that she's had in 15 years. As principal of Johnson Elementary in North Lawndale—where she says schools have long been neglected—the cold winters and Johnson's faulty heating always triggered sniffles in her and her students.

But recently installed windows, doors and unit ventilators fixed the problem. Tyson and other principals are crediting School Board President Michael Scott, a lifelong resident of North Lawndale who owns property just blocks from Johnson, for bringing needed capital dollars to this set of traditionally starved schools.

"It had been literally years since any school had had anything done," Tyson says. "I credit Mr. Scott for being aware of the needs of North Lawndale schools."

Betty Green, principal of Herzl Elementary, agrees. She says Scott's "high-profile" community leadership is paying off for her school. (Scott attended Herzl from 3rd to 6th grade.) Last March, CPS embarked on Herzl renovations expected to cost more than \$3.4 million. With new windows, bricks cleaned and crumbling entrances recently repaired, Green now heralds the school as "one that students can be proud of."

When asked if North Lawndale's schools have received a larger portion of capital investment spending during his time in office, Scott says "let the record speak for itself."

A *Catalyst* analysis of CPS renovation projects suggests an increase in spending on North Lawndale schools relative to citywide spending after Scott took office at the end of fiscal year 2001.

Scott points out his duty to address citywide capital needs equitably, but admits that his intimate

knowledge of the area factors into the attention recently paid to North Lawndale schools.

"You have to be equitable in your distribution of resources, and I'm very conscious of that and I go all over the city and I try to help wherever I see a need. But I'm far more familiar with what's going on [in North Lawndale]," says Scott. "I see these schools as I go about my daily life, and if I see something that is wrong, I feel responsible."

Still, not all of North Lawndale's needs have been addressed, says Andrea Lee, schools coordinator for the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group, a non-profit watchdog organization. An NCBG analysis of CPS

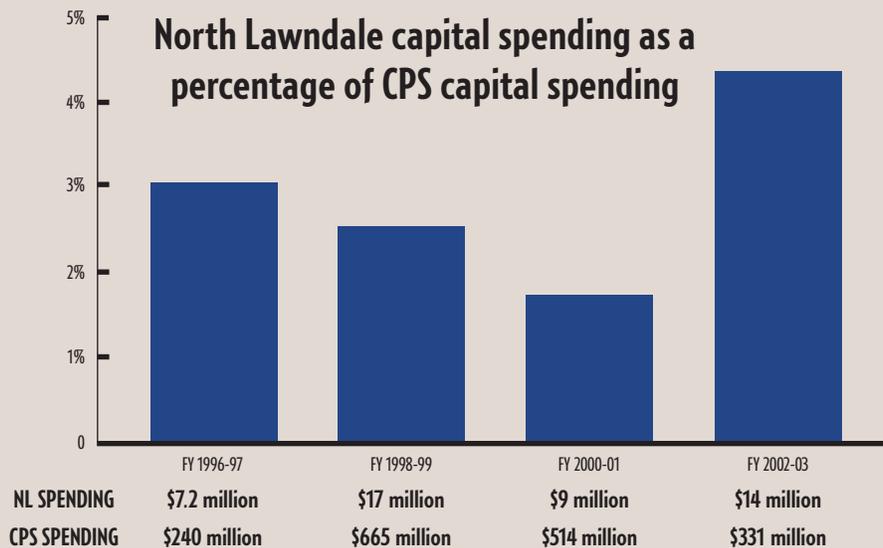
capital spending data from August 2003 shows about 30 percent of budgeted projects in the community are incomplete.

To ensure that Chicago's public school needs are addressed equitably, NCBG advocates the use of a master facilities plan—complete with a detailed school analysis and input from parents and school leaders. The organization is assembling a model facilities plan that it hopes to submit to the board in June.

Scott points out that North Lawndale schools have suffered years of "benign neglect." That means "when you put \$10 to \$15 million into 12 schools, it's almost like a drop in the bucket." ■

NORTH LAWNDALE CAPITAL SPENDING RATE MOVES AHEAD OF CITYWIDE EFFORTS

In 1996, CPS launched a massive capital improvement program to renovate worn-out school buildings and build new schools to alleviate overcrowding. During the first five years, North Lawndale's percentage of the spending declined gradually. But after Michael Scott's appointment to School Board president at the close of fiscal year 2001, the rate of capital spending in North Lawndale rebounded. Scott is a lifelong resident of North Lawndale.



Source: Chicago Public Schools Department of Operations
North Lawndale spending is based on project completion dates. CPS spending is based on encumbered funds.

Down but not out, councils see bright spots in battle for future

By Alexander Russo

Hopes were high that Chicago's local school councils would get a fresh start when Arne Duncan replaced Paul Vallas as the school system's chief executive officer nearly three years ago. However, few of these hopes have been borne out—leaving LSCs with many of the same problems they faced before.

"It's hard to say whether things are worse, but they're definitely not better," says Julie Woestehoff, executive director of PURE (Parents United to Reform Education). "The players are essentially the same, and they're playing the same games."

Fifteen years after LSCs were created, some are asleep at the switch, but many continue to struggle to establish the full role that the Chicago School Reform Act intended for them, according to their supporters. And yet, LSCs have proven themselves resilient, and some recent events point toward at least modest improvements in their situation in the future.

The mid-April LSC elections are the most immediate challenge. A late-starting campaign season is typical, but this year there is little money to recruit new council members. LSC advocates could not persuade private funders to renew their support—up to \$430,000 in recent years—for citywide, community-based recruitment. The School Board has made a contribution to the cause, but it is just \$50,000.

"There's always a new group of parents coming up," says Don Moore, executive director of Designs for Change, a research and advocacy

ELECTIONS AT 590 SCHOOLS

TOTAL OPENINGS

3,540 parent seats
1,180 community seats
1,180 teacher seats

AT EACH SCHOOL

- Parents and community members elect six parents and two community members
- School faculty elect two teachers

group. "They don't learn about LSCs by osmosis."

As of mid-February, just 885 candidates had signed up to run, compared to over 1,800 at the same time two years ago.

ENCROACHMENT ON AUTHORITY

LSC advocates see more fundamental, long-running challenges, including encroachment on their authority over principal selection, budget approval and school improvement plans.

"There was sort of a turning point in the late 1990s when LSCs started to be told that if they didn't approve [the budget] by a certain time, then the budget would be 'loaded' without their approval," says Woestehoff.

"It happens all the time." As a result, she says, LSCs' budget authority is increasingly "more on paper than anything else."

There are lots of ways that principals can bypass LSCs or limit their opportunities to influence the budget and school improvement plan, LSC members say. They can neglect to give LSC members monthly budget reports. They can hide what they are doing by splitting funds into a variety of places. They can delay showing the next year's budget to the LSC until the last minute, thereby running out the clock until budgets are due in central office.

Roughly two-thirds of LSCs aren't participating meaningfully in the budget and school improvement process, says Valencia Rias, a policy advocate with Designs for Change. She calls the situation a "quiet epidemic."

More generally, council advocates say that CPS has largely left LSCs out of its core education initiatives. "How are LSCs being included in the conversation about instructional improvement?" asks Andy Wade, executive director of the Cooperative for Chicago School Leadership. There are "two different school reforms going on," he says, one by CPS and the other by individual LSCs. Wade cites the board's decision to place reading and math specialists in many schools without preparing or integrating the new specialists with school-based approaches.

Larger trends in education reform also have tended to push LSCs out of the picture, according to Don Moore. "Everything is about instruction," he

says—even though research that he and others have done finds that parent involvement and collaboration among adults are just as important. “A ‘laser-like focus on instruction’ is just not going to do it,” he contends.

LSC FEDERATIONS ARE FORMING

But LSC advocates take heart from several recent developments.

New alliances of neighboring LSCs are popping up in several areas of the city. (See article on page 26.) And LSC advocates lined up citywide leaders, including Duncan and Chicago Teachers Union President Deborah Lynch, to participate in a citywide summit and 15th anniversary celebration. Forming a new collaboration, Lynch worked with LSC advocates last year on the law that revamped the Professional Personnel Leadership Committees at each school.

The LSC Roundtable, an advisory group of CPS officials and community groups, has recently reconvened after several months’ hiatus. Previously, it scored a few small accomplishments. LSC members now can have ID badges to ensure that they can gain entry to their schools. And CPS accepted a recommendation of the roundtable that an external, conflict resolution program be piloted at roughly 12 schools this spring.

What little research has been conducted on LSCs suggests that most of



JOHN BOOZ

At a South Side United Federation meeting, member Jose Garcia says CPS is not providing tutoring to enough of its students who qualify for it.

them fulfill their basic responsibilities and are viewed positively by their school communities. Surveys conducted in the mid-1990s by the Consortium on Chicago School Research indicated that only a handful of councils suffered from serious dysfunction. However, a 1997 Consortium report said that a quarter to a third fell short of being “proactive agents for improvements.”

“Some LSCs are dormant,” says John Ayers, executive director of Leadership for Quality Education, which has supported LSC elections in the past.

A 2003 teacher survey conducted by the Consortium found that more

teachers had no knowledge of their councils. One out of three teachers said they were “not at all” knowledgeable about the LSC, up from one out of five teachers in 1994. However, teachers who did know about their councils thought more highly of them than before. Seventy percent of those familiar with their LSCs said they were “really helping to make this school better,” up from 63 percent nine years ago.

Historically, LSCs have shown themselves to be remarkably persistent, having faced down a series of direct attacks from 1995 through 2001, when Paul Vallas left the school system’s helm. More than 7,500 candidates ran for some 5,600 LSC seats in 2002. “Under all of this pressure, it’s a real tribute that LSCs haven’t gone away,” says Woestehoff. “In spite of all odds, LSCs are as strong as ever, maybe even stronger.”

And many are tireless. Roughly half of LSC members run for re-election, advocates estimate.

Veronica Butler, council chair at Brennemann Elementary in Edgewater, is one of them. Despite a running battle between the LSC and the principal, Butler says, “I will run again. As long as my son is in that school, I want to be a part of what is going on.”

Budget battle at Brennemann

Brennemann Elementary School in Edgewater is an LSC hot spot.

Some LSC members have asked the School Board to remove the principal, and the principal reportedly has asked the board to dissolve the LSC, an action the board has not taken in two years.

Their dispute centers on the school budget. The LSC majority rejected a proposed budget last spring and has been fighting ever since to ensure that the budget reflects its priorities.

“[The principal] never put our changes in,” says LSC Chair Veronica Butler, citing ongoing differences over professional development, non-teaching staff positions, class size and materials. “We’ve never had an approved budget or school improvement plan.”

But Principal Steve Hara says he has little control over budget matters. “If there’s something that they don’t like, they can overrule the principal even if it doesn’t make for sound educational practices,” he says, citing the need for more school supplies and textbooks. “They can change anything they want.” He also accuses the council majority of failing to fill vacancies on the LSC for fear the new members will support him.

CPS spokesperson Mike Vaughn says the board is working “to bring about a greater sense of cooperation [at Brennemann]. We have not yet made a decision regarding placing the school in educational crisis.”

Alexander Russo

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Council federations dot the city

By Debra Williams

Local school councils across the city increasingly are turning to each other for support, forming alliances to share ideas, provide training and work to strengthen councils as a whole. In some cases, they're also forming ties with community organizations that can bring additional resources to the table. "This is very empowering," says Nancy Jones, who works with councils for the Chicago Successful Schools Project. "They are trying to solve their own problems." Here are a few:

SOUTH SIDE UNITED LSC FEDERATION 20 COUNCILS

Doris Sipp, a parent LSC member at Bennett/Shedd, sees power in numbers. "With the proper training, we can stand toe-to-toe with the system to bring about significant change."

Formed last fall, the federation's first organizing project was to get CPS to let more families apply for tutoring services mandated under the federal No Child Left Behind Act. On Feb. 11, it won coverage of its efforts in both the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Chicago Tribune*.

The reform group Designs for Change is helping the federation in its work.

GRAND BOULEVARD LSC EXCHANGE 15 COUNCILS

The exchange's mission is three-fold: share ideas, be a unified voice when confronting CPS to make changes and have an impact on legislation involving schools and education.

"As a group, we have a lot of power," says Stephen Mitchell, an Overton LSC member. "We can hold people accountable."

Created last year and sponsored by the Chicago Urban League and the Grand Boulevard Federation, the group currently is working on ways to provide councils with training on principal selection.

After that, says Mitchell, "We'll talk about next steps, which could be to look at the SIPPA [school improvement plans] or the budget."

NORTH LAWDALE LSC FEDERATION 29 COUNCILS

"Some LSCs don't know what a good school looks like," says Derrick Harris, a community rep at Herzl Elementary who heads the federation, launched in 2003. "Some members don't know what their roles are and that they have the potential to make a great impact in their schools. We are trying to change that dynamic. This is how and why we came to be."

The federation holds monthly meetings to talk about LSC responsibilities, the importance of parent involvement and issues such as the No Child Left Behind Act. This spring, the federation also will be involved in LSC elections.

"We are looking at going school by school and putting together a slate that has an agenda and is not just running to run," explains Harris. "A lot of these councils are ineffective. Some have no passion, no commitment and no purpose for why they chose to run."

KENWOOD/OAKLAND LSC ALLIANCE 9 COUNCILS

Four years ago, the Kenwood/Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) became a CPS-approved training site for LSCs. In 2001, it helped launch the alliance.

"We believe that community-based organizations are an untapped resource for local school councils," says Jitu Brown, a member of the alliance and KOCO. "This was strong in the 80s, and then it waned in the 90s. But now there are lots of efforts to get this going again."

The alliance currently is working on a model for bringing together reform groups, community-based organizations and local school councils. (At *Catalyst* press time, the model was set to be presented at a citywide education summit.)

"Reform agencies need to build alliances with CBOs [community-based organizations] to make sure that the resources they have get to all the schools," Brown explains. "And to do that, CBOs should be able to bring to the table parent organizations, councils, churches,

neighborhood families, youth organizations and businesses that are interested in supporting schools."

AUSTIN LSC NETWORK 27 COUNCILS

Last fall, the network partnered with the Austin Chamber of Commerce. "We found out that businesses wanted to work with schools, but they didn't know how," says Carol Johnson, a long-time LSC member at several schools who oversees the network. "Now they can through the network. We're now talking about them adopting schools."

In a pilot program, 10 businesses will provide store discounts to a select group of students, recommended by teachers and other staff, as an incentive to improve attendance, behavior and academic performance.

WEST TOWN LEADERSHIP UNITED 6 COUNCILS

In 1998, West Town Leadership United formed an action council that began meeting every month so members could share ideas and information about what's happening at their schools. In 1999, the action council created a parent policy committee to conduct research and advocacy on issues that affect councils and students citywide. (West Town Leadership United is also involved with housing and immigration issues.)

For instance, the parent committee successfully lobbied CPS to change the selection process for funding provided through Project CANAL (Creating a New Approach to Learning), a federally funded program to improve schools.

Instead of getting money "based on who knew who, now schools apply through a request for proposal, which makes it fair," says Idida Perez, who heads the group.

The parent policy committee now includes councils and community organizations from West Town, Uptown, Englewood and Austin.

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Chicago Community Trust

- \$860,000 to the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center to partner with CPS in the creation of a development program that offers teachers a year of preparation before they enter the National Board Certification candidate support program, to open satellite sites across the city to house both programs, and to train certified teachers to be teacher-mentors.

Chicago Public Education Fund

- \$175,000 to LAUNCH, the Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago which prepares qualified CPS administrators to be principals.
- \$75,000 to Teach for America for operating expenses.
- \$50,000 to CPS to support the Rising Star Initiative, which recognizes CPS schools with the highest improvements in test scores and other areas.
- \$45,905 to the National Teachers Academy to support a project in which National Board certified teachers design professional development initiatives.

Joyce Foundation

- \$125,000 to the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform to research how central office policies and practices affect schools' efforts to improve instruction and achievement.
- \$335,000 to the University of Chicago Center for School Improvement for teacher preparation and for planning of new school initiatives in the mid-south neighborhoods of Chicago.

MacArthur Foundation

- \$600,000 over three years to the Community Renewal Society to support publication of *Catalyst*.
- \$125,000 over two years to the Children First Fund to support the "Rising Star Initiative," which rewards schools for improvement on standardized tests; and \$205,000 to help support CPS development of a plan to improve schools in the mid-south communities of Chicago.
- \$239,000 to Technical Education Research Centers to explore digital technologies in support of district-wide instructional improvement

Mayor's Office of Workforce Development

- \$549,826 to the Office of Education-

to-Careers to fund Jobs for Illinois Graduates, which prepares high school youth for employment.

Oppenheimer Family Foundation

- \$196,000 in 163 grants of up to \$2,000 each, to CPS teachers for classroom projects.
- \$1,400 to the Telpochcalli School to support its literature and drama program.

Peoples Energy Corporation

- \$7000 to the Newberry Library to support Teachers as Scholars, a series of professional development seminars for CPS teachers.
- \$3,000 to the Constitutional Rights Foundation, which works with CPS teachers to implement civic education in the classroom.

Polk Bros. Foundation

- \$75,000 to the Academy for Urban School Leaders to support residents' salaries.
- \$75,000 to the University of Chicago mathematics department to support its summer institute, which provides professional development for CPS middle school math teachers.
- \$55,000 to the Chicago Commons Association to support Nuevos Futuros, which helps Back of the Yards teens complete high school and pursue post-secondary education.
- \$55,000 to Columbia College Chicago for its Arts Integration Mentorship Project, in which CPS teachers learn to use art to improve student literacy.
- \$50,000 to the Chicago Public Education Fund for operating expenses.
- \$50,000 to Loyola University of Chicago for a professional development sequence for CPS middle school science teachers.
- \$50,000 to the Jewish Council for Youth Services for its Adventure Education program which teaches teamwork and leadership skills to students at three CPS high schools.
- \$45,000 to the Logan Square Neighborhood Association to support its Parent-Teacher Mentor Program in which parents receive training and then work 2,000 hours in the classroom at one of six Logan Square elementary schools.

Additional grants can be found online at www.catalyst-chicago.org

Catalyst Chicago is an independent publication created to document, analyze and support school improvement efforts in Chicago's public schools.

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ON THE WEB Back issues, a timeline history of school reform, citywide education statistics, school improvement resources, phone directories and more.

"CITY VOICES" Editor Veronica Anderson hosts this public affairs program at 6:30 a.m. the second Sunday of the month on WNUA-FM, 95.5.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Include the writer's full name, title and contact information for verification. Letters should be limited to 200 words and may be edited for space and clarity. Send them to the attention of the Editor at mail address, e-mail address or fax number listed above.

AT CLARK STREET CELESTE GARRETT, former urban affairs editor and reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*, has been hired as CPS press secretary. **MIKE VAUGHN**, former managing editor of *Chicago Educator*, has been named deputy press secretary. Joi Mecks has been promoted from deputy director of communications to director of marketing, a new post. ... **EUGENE PAJAKOWSKI**, a manager in the Office of Technology Services, has been promoted to director. He replaces **SHARNELL JACKSON**, who is now the chief eLearning officer.

MOVING IN/ON MICHELLE BOONE, former head of the Gallery 37 arts-training program, is now culture program officer at The Joyce Foundation. She replaces **REGINALD JONES**, who is now head of the Steans Family Foundation. ... **VICTOR GONZALEZ** and **EILEEN CAMACHO**, both of the Chicago Teachers Union, have been promoted. Gonzalez, former assistant to the president for leadership development, replaces **ROBERT PEICKERT** as chief of staff. (Peickert resigned last year.) Camacho, a field representative, is now director of field services and will take over some of Gonzalez's former duties. ... **DIANA NELSON**, former director of public affairs at the Union League Club of

Chicago, has been appointed executive director of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. She replaces **ANNE HALLETT**, who plans to work as a consultant on various small schools and community organizing projects.

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS The following interim principals have been awarded contracts: **CRYSTAL BELL**, E.F.Young; **SHELTON FLOWERS**, King High; **STANLEY GRIGGS**, Owen; **DOROTHY THOMAS**, Hyde Park Career Academy; **SUZANNE VELASQUEZ**, Clissold.

The following principals have had their contracts renewed: **MAHALIA HINES**, Hope College Prep; **VIVIAN HUDSON-DAVIS**, Mason; **SUSAN JENSEN**, Finkl.

BOOK CONTRIBUTOR KEN ROLLING, national executive director of Parents for Public Schools (PPS) and former head of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, is co-author of a chapter in "Letters to the Next President: What We Can Do About the Real Crisis in Public Education." (Teachers College Press, February 2004). The chapter by Rolling and co-author **SANDRA HALLADEY** calls for more school funding and a role for parents in school decision-making. Halladey is associate director of the San Francisco chapter of PPS.

GOLDEN APPLE FINALISTS Twelve Chicago Public Schools teachers are finalists for Golden Apple teaching awards. They are: **DONALD ASHER**, Harper; **JELAINE BINFORD**, Curie; **MICHAEL CARLSON**, Kelly; **TIMOTHY DEVINE** and **CHRISTOPHER PELLIKAN**, Northside College Prep; **ELENA DIADENKO-HUNTER** and **DAVID MCKOSKI**, Clemente; **DIEGO GIRALDO**, Jones College Prep; **WILLIAM OLSEN**, Noble Street Charter; **ELIZABETH PIZZA**, Brooks College Prep; **JESSE SENECHAL**, Kelvyn Park; **LUCILLE SHAW**, Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences. Winners get a \$2,500 cash prize, a new computer, free sabbatical training at Northwestern University in the fall and induction into the Golden Apple Academy.

John Myers

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