

Catalyst CHICAGO

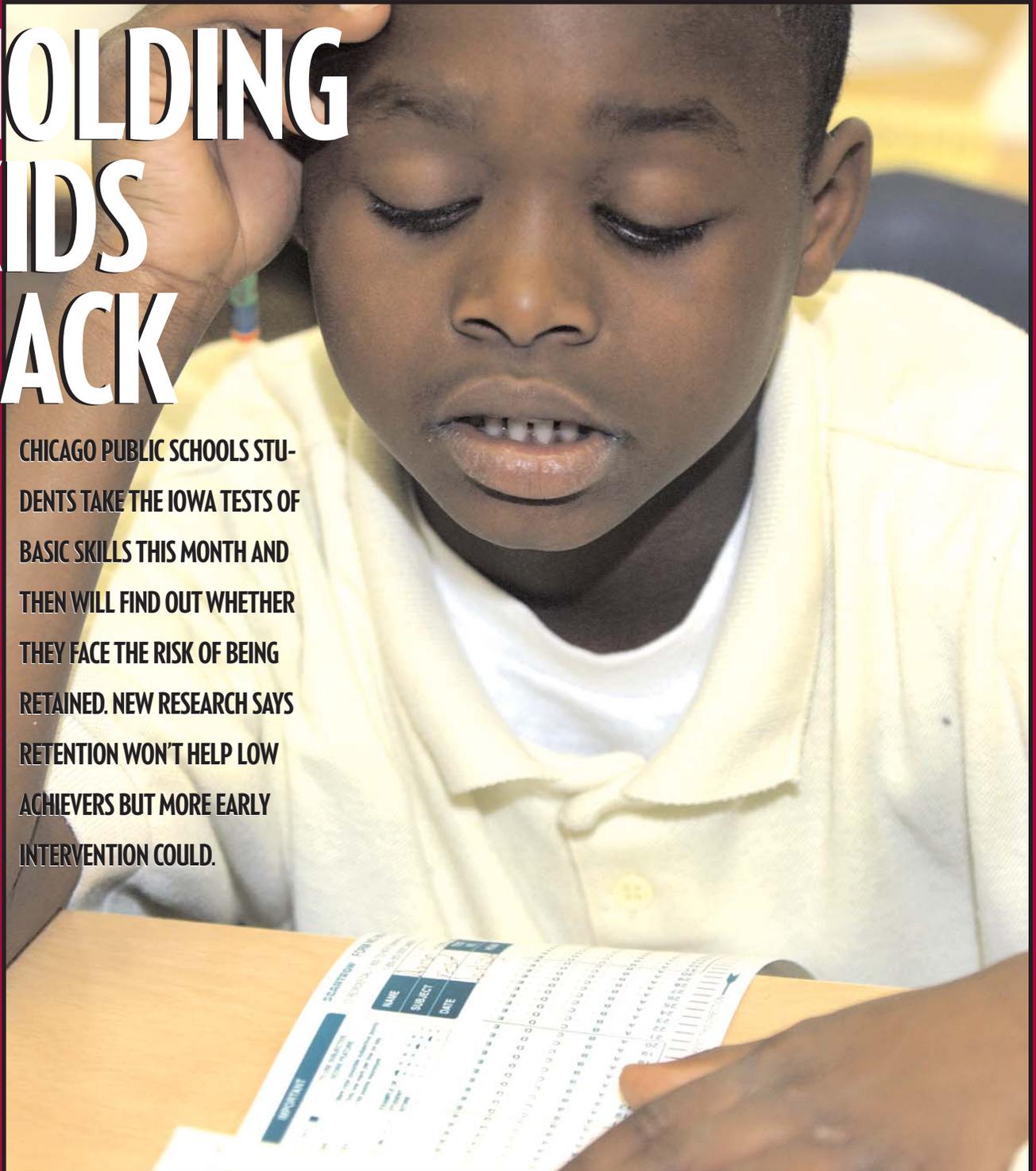
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MAY 2004

INDEPENDENT REPORTING ON URBAN SCHOOLS

HOLDING KIDS BACK

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS STUDENTS TAKE THE IOWA TESTS OF BASIC SKILLS THIS MONTH AND THEN WILL FIND OUT WHETHER THEY FACE THE RISK OF BEING RETAINED. NEW RESEARCH SAYS RETENTION WON'T HELP LOW ACHIEVERS BUT MORE EARLY INTERVENTION COULD.



Meet the candidates: CTU, principals association election reports **PAGE 19**

Living up to Brown v. Board



Veronica Anderson

This month, as we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision on racially separate schools, you have to wonder what Justice Thurgood Marshall would say about student retention if he were alive today.

Retention, a popular strategy used by urban school districts to end social promotion,

is favored by policy makers and the public despite definitive evidence that it does no good for the kids who are held back. Retained kids do not improve academically and are more likely to drop out of school. And a recent study of the policy as it has been implemented in Chicago shows a disproportionately negative effect on black students.

Parallels can be drawn to how racial segregation was viewed in the 1950s. The policy was widely practiced and supported by large segments of the population, especially in the South. History certainly documents that black students were shortchanged academically.

The difference, though, lies in how people feel about what those policies represent. All but the most ardent of racists would have to admit, then and now, that Jim Crow schools were wrong. By contrast today, people feel, in their hearts, that for poorly prepared students, retention is somehow right.

A national survey of parents found 68 percent would support promotion policies that could result in their own child being retained. Another survey of Chicago teachers shows most are on board with the Chicago Public Schools promotion policy.

How then, are we to combat such misguided faith placed in a dubious practice? What would Justice Marshall, who argued Brown before the high court, do?

"Thurgood Marshall was an activist," says professor Carl Grant, director of the department of curriculum and instruction at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. To challenge segregated schools, he helped bring together the best minds, who decided on a mission and then, took action. "I do not see that kind of effort and energy and activism today to help black kids learn," notes Grant, who believes retention should be used only as a last resort.

A Brown-inspired effort to undo retention would begin with soul-searching dialogue about why so many black children are being held back, Grant offers. According to the Consortium on Chicago School Research, CPS retains more black kids in 3rd, 6th and 8th grades because their test scores are lower and because they attend the lowest-performing schools. The study also notes that the amount of support minority students get from teachers and parents can also affect retention rates.

Next, policymakers would tap experts on the front line—teachers, principals and student leaders—who know best what works and doesn't work for kids on the fringes of academic life. And then the community would rally around the proposals and noisily demand that Illinois live up to its responsibility for educating all of its children by providing the necessary funds.

A solid infusion of financial sup-

port from wealthy individuals and institutions would pick up where government dollars leave off. (The costs associated with some solutions, such as smaller class sizes and hiring better teachers, are steep.)

Most difficult of all, however, would be changing the attitudes that bolster support for retention. Stereotypes that say the kinds of kids who are retained can't learn give teachers and schools a pass, Grant argues. "We have to believe that kids can make it. We just have to teach them how."

Replacing retention policies with the help kids need would take this country one step closer to realizing the equal education opportunity goals of Brown.

ABOUT US It's good to be back, taking on the challenge of juggling editorial work with taking care of an energetic baby girl.

I'm pleased to report that **Lorraine Forte**, who returned to *Catalyst Chicago* shortly before my leave, will rejoin the staff permanently as consulting editor. In that capacity, she will serve as editor of our new Notebook department and as a host on our monthly radio show, "City Voices," and will oversee special projects.

More good news. Associate Editor **Maureen Kelleher** has won the public service award in the national contest sponsored by the Society for Professional Journalists. Her March 2003 cover story on guidance counselors won in the newsletter division.



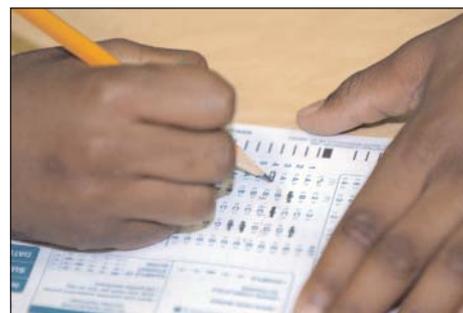
Forte

Veronica Anderson

STUDENT RETENTION

Popular despite the research

Decades of research on student retention have found that repeating a grade generally does not improve students' academic performance and, in the long run, increases their chances of dropping out. Yet the popularity of such policies is growing. The reasons range from a perceived lack of alternatives, to the motivation that the threat of retention generates in at least some students and parents. **COVER STORY: PAGE 6**



JOHN BOOZ

ON THE COVER: Aaron Boswell, a 3rd-grader at Beethoven Elementary, concentrates during a practice session for the upcoming Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EFFORTS TO END 'SOCIAL PROMOTION'

Senior Editor Elizabeth Duffrin sorts the research findings into a Q & A **PAGE 8**

THREE WHO WERE KEPT BEHIND

Even a well-regarded school couldn't get these 3rd-graders to pass **PAGE 11**

OLDER 8TH-GRADERS TAKE NEW ROUTE

Board overhauls the old transition centers **PAGE 13**

3 ROUTES TO SENN HIGH SCHOOL'S CATCH-UP ACADEMY

Direct from 7th grade, by accident, 8th grade failure **PAGE 14**



PHOTO BY JOHN BOOZ

Linda Norby, an art teacher from Owens who recently became National Board certified, admires a Greek inspired house created by kindergartner Tamra Watkins.

DEPARTMENTS

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- CTU Election: 'Bread and butter' vs. reform agenda
- Board insider challenges new president of principals group

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ON THE WEB

Go to the *Catalyst* web site, www.catalyst-chicago.org, for news and resources on Chicago school reform, including:

- Spanish translations
- Citywide data from the 1980s
- Calendar of events

Notebook

Q&A with...

Phillip Jackson
founder, Black Star Project

TIMELINE

March 24: ACT Charter

The School Board recommends renewing the charter for the Academy of Communications and Technology, a month after threatening to shut it down because of low test scores. A statistician hired by ACT showed that, despite its low scores, the charter was performing better than other West Garfield Park schools. ACT students and supporters turned out to lobby for the school in February. ACT serves 6th- through 12th-graders.

April 21: NCLB

The 2004-05 school year will be the worst year yet for elementary school-children trying to transfer out of failing schools. An estimated 190,000 students will be eligible to transfer to better-performing schools under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, but only 500 seats will be available—one seat for every 380 students. No open seats are available in better-performing high schools. A lottery to decide who can transfer will be held in June.

April 22: Gifted slots

CPS announces plans to add 300 more 1st- and 2nd-grade slots for gifted children at 12 elementary schools: Andersen, Cook, Deneen, Curtis, Gale, Henderson, Fairfield, Nixon, Oglesby, Spencer, Ninos Heroes and Parker. The move is aimed at keeping high-achieving students in neighborhood schools. CPS also will offer 500 new slots for fifth-year seniors through its Virtual High School program, which allows students to take courses over the Internet.

Phillip Jackson is a walking warehouse of statistics on the academic achievement gap between black and white students. “Most parents know it exists, but they don’t know the true extent of it,” says Jackson, one-time deputy chief of staff under former Schools CEO Paul Vallas and founder of the Black Star Project, a parent-involvement initiative. Jackson is engaged in what he calls a “shock and awe campaign” to jolt minority parents into becoming more active in their children’s education. He spoke with Consulting Editor Lorraine Forte about the roles of parents and schools in teaching children and the impact of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education* to desegregate schools.

ELSEWHERE

Texas: Sin taxes

Republican Gov. Rick Perry is facing opposition from his own party over his plan to increase sin taxes to pay for education, according to the April 24 *Houston Chronicle*. Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst both oppose the idea, and the GOP-controlled Legislature isn’t jumping on board with Perry. The governor wants to cut property taxes for more affluent homeowners while increasing cigarette taxes, imposing an admission tax on topless bars and expanding video gambling to racetracks.

California: College prep

A bill now pending in the Legislature would require all high school students to take a college-prep curriculum starting in 2010, according to the April 21 *Contra Costa Times*.

Students would have to take the minimum requirements for admission to col-

leges in the state university system. “All of our students need the skills once reserved for our college-bound students,” says state Schools Chief Jack O’Connell. In order to pay for the more rigorous coursework, schools would be given more flexibility in how they spend some state funds.

Maryland: Teacher rehires

Schools will no longer be able to rehire retired teachers since lawmakers scrapped a plan aimed at bringing veteran math, science and special education teachers back to struggling schools, according to the April 14 *Baltimore Sun*. Lawmakers could not agree on reforms to curb misuse of the program. An investigation by the *Sun* found that many of the rehires were at high-performing schools and some were earning over \$100,000 in combined salaries and pension. As many as 1,000 rehired teachers and principals won’t return next school year unless they agree to work part time or reduce their pensions.

When you talk about parent involvement, what do you mean?

We’re talking about not simply making parents the first, best and most important teachers [of their children], but also making parents the ones who create and maintain educational standards. ... Right now, especially for black and for Latino parents, other people are creating those standards and those standards are not very high, and, in fact, they’re very, very low. The only people who are going to create high standards and maintain high standards for black children [are] black parents.

How do you help parents to know, ‘This is what my kids should learn. Maybe I didn’t go to college, but these are the standards?’

It is untrue that you have to have gone to college before you can set high standards for your child’s education. ... That’s something that not only schools [say], many parents believe it. ... We’ve got forums, we’ve got charts, we give parents the information they need to take into the schools and to let the schools know, these are the standards that we want you to teach our children.

How do you suggest that parents work with schools to make sure that they have enough resources, that teachers have the right expectations, that the principal is doing his or her job?

I would say a massive infusion of parental involvement at all levels of the educational

IN SHORT

“We may lose some money, we may not, but it’s the right thing to do. I don’t want to make money and poison kids.”

Chicago Schools CEO Arne Duncan at an April 20 press conference, discussing the board’s plan to put healthier food and beverages in vending machines.



JASON REBLANDO

system, at the governance level, at the grass-roots level, at the field trip level, at the report card pickup level. ... We think that parents should make it a point to personally make contact with each and every one of their children's teachers all the way through college.

Why do you think black parents, Hispanic parents are not more involved in their children's education?

Especially after Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, black parents gave up the ghost. They said, the game is over, we have won, now our children must be educated like all other children. And what we are finding now is that today, in the year 2004, many black children were better educated before Brown than after. ... I am not speaking against integration. In fact, in the world today, integration is a must. ... I am saying that young people, especially the young black men, coming out of high schools today are no more equipped to succeed in this modern technological society than the man in the moon. ... They can't read. They can't do math. They can't use computers. They're not articulate. Nobody's going to hire them.

Is there anything else that you want to say about the role that schools should play or what parents need to do to work with schools?

There is no way that these schools can educate black children without parents, families and communities [getting involved], and that includes churches. We need churches to step up. ... We need the black business community, which is absent from this. ... The black middle class can't run away from this problem like they tried to run away in the 60's and 70's. ... The first people to run away from it were the black middle class. Others are running away as well, but the black middle class can't run fast enough and they can't run far enough for this not to come back and haunt them. ■

MATH CLASS

\$100 million. In February, Schools Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan warned that CPS would have to cut spending by that amount to help balance its 2005 budget. In April, two days before Duncan and Board President Michael Scott joined other school and civic leaders in Springfield to lobby for more school funding, budget officers made the cuts official. Among them: **\$20 million** in administrative costs, which represents about a **10 percent** cut in non-school spending and the elimination of over **200** positions; **\$60 million** from local school budgets, by eliminating positions due to a projected decline in student enrollment; and **\$20 million** from grant-funded programs. Meanwhile, at schools on probation, at least **\$60 million** will be shifted to pay for reading coaches, full-day kindergarten and smaller classes in primary grades.

CAPITAL DISPATCH

SPRINGFIELD—The Illinois legislature has approved a bill designed to increase the number of teachers in high-need schools by recruiting parents and teacher aides.

Under a new program called Grow Our Own Teachers, universities would work with school districts, community groups and colleges, and teacher unions to help people already involved with schools become teachers while they remain in their current jobs. The bill would forgive student loans if the newly minted teachers stay in high-need schools for five years. Schools' eligibility would be determined based on the percentage of uncertified teachers and the rate of teacher turnover.

State Sen. Iris Y. Martinez, the Chicago Democrat who sponsored the measure,

says it would curb high teacher turnover in needy schools and could add 1,000 new teachers by 2016.

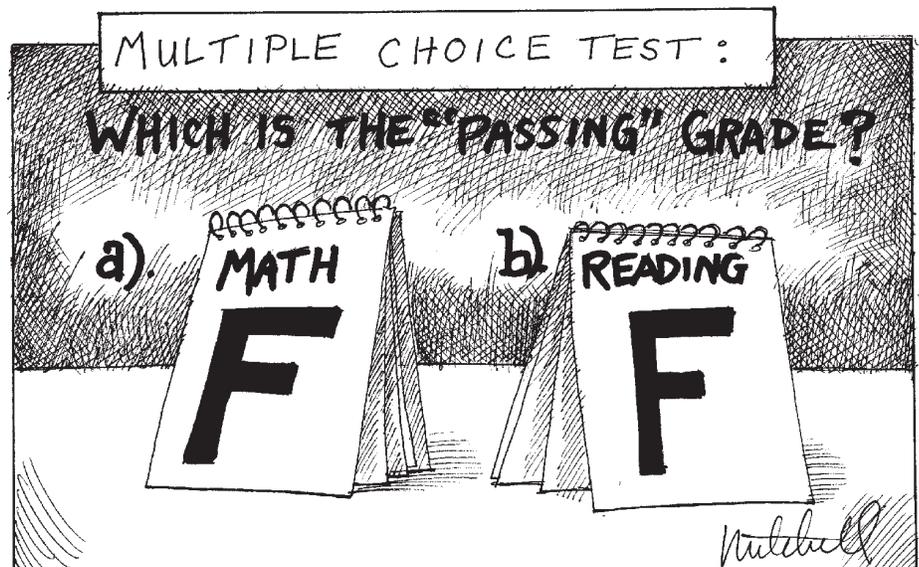
Lawmakers who voted against the bill expressed concerns over costs, at a time when the state is facing a projected \$1.7 billion deficit. As written, the bill does not include funding, which would have to be appropriated annually.

Many opponents suggested the state should first pay for its proven teacher-training programs, like the Golden Apple Scholars, which Gov. Rod Blagojevich cut from his budget. Supporters are trying to restore that program's \$3.8 million funding.

Blagojevich has until late July to act on the new measure.

Daniel C. Vock

FOOTNOTE



KURT MITCHELL

Popular despite the research

By Elizabeth Duffrin

In April, researchers who have closely tracked Chicago's practice of retaining students who have especially low test scores switched from a cautionary yellow light to a blazing red.

Their latest studies again found that holding low-achieving students back did not help them academically and increased the likelihood they would drop out. The retained students had fallen far behind their peers in the earliest years of school. By the time the school system provided extra help to these students, researchers found, the help was not enough.

"They should get rid of retention," says Melissa Roderick, a director of the Consortium on Chicago School Research and a co-author of one of the studies. "It just didn't do anything for these kids."

Anticipating the Consortium's red light, the School Board already had tapped the breaks on its policy, removing math scores from the promo-

tional criteria and barring repeat retentions under certain circumstances. But the board refused to stop retaining students altogether.

"I am convinced in my heart this is the right thing to do," said Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan, arguing that promotion standards are needed to motivate schools and students. Duncan has lots of company.

Decades of research on student retention have found that repeating a grade generally does not improve students' academic performance and, in the long run, increases their chances of dropping out. Yet the popularity of such policies is growing.

Chicago, which began retaining low-scoring 8th-graders in 1996 and 3rd- and 6th-graders in 1997, has led the most recent wave of retention policies. In two State of the

While policy makers push for research-based programs, they continue to ignore research showing that retention does not help students who are held back. And the public backs them up.

Union addresses, President Bill Clinton praised Chicago's tough stand on promoting students as a model for the nation. Since then a handful of states, including Texas, Florida and North Carolina, and at least 18 cities have mandated promotion requirements at certain grade levels. "Many cities took their cue from Chicago," observes Michael Casserly, of the Council of the Great City Schools.

In the 1980s, New York City was in the lead with its Promotional Gates program, which required low-scoring 4th- and 7th-graders to repeat those grades. The students were put in classes with 20 or fewer students who were taught by specially trained teachers. Initially, their achievement rose, but then the gains subsided, according to a Board of Education study. Meanwhile, the dropout rate among students

who had been retained in 7th grade began to climb. By 1990, the program was gone.

Despite this experience, New York City again has a policy to retain low-scoring students. This time, it is aimed at 3rd-graders.

Nationwide, 68 percent of parents would support standards for promotion even if it meant that their own child would be held back a grade, a 2000 survey by Public Agenda, a non-profit polling and research organization, found.

In Chicago at least, the overwhelming majority of teachers agree that the CPS promotion policy is consistent with their own views about what's best for student learning, according to a recent Consortium survey.

Kathy Christie, who tracks policies and research for the Education Commission of the States, says that policy makers

NEW CPS PROMOTION POLICY FOR 3RD, 6TH AND 8TH GRADES

REQUIREMENTS

Automatic promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ ITBS reading score at/above 35th percentile■ And passing grades in reading■ And fewer than 20 unexcused absences
Conditional promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ ITBS reading scores 24th to 34th percentile■ With satisfactory reading grades, attendance or behavior, promotion to next grade■ With unsatisfactory reading grades, attendance or behavior, summer school required
Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ ITBS reading score below 24th percentile even after summer school

RESTRICTIONS

- No more than one retention in each grade grouping: K-3, 4-6, 7-8
- Students who turn 15 by Dec. 1 of the next school year and do not successfully complete summer school are assigned to a transitional program that is conducted at seven high schools

tend to disregard the research on retention because they don't see better alternatives. Passing unprepared students to the next grade is likewise ineffective, she continues, and legislators feel that retention policies can at least spur schools and parents to focus more attention on low-achieving kids.

Indeed, when the Chicago Board of Education dropped math scores as a retention trigger, it drew fire from local editorial pages. "If the kids aren't learning, the solution isn't to surrender, to push them on through the school system and pop them out with a degree that is meaningless," the *Chicago Tribune* protested.

Gary Orfield, Harvard University professor of education and social policy, thinks politicians are ignoring retention's long-term negative impact in favor of short-term political gain. Cracking down on automatic promotion "seems bold and decisive," he says.

Opponents of retention say the remedy is to promote students but give them individualized help in the next grade. That way, students have a chance to catch up without the negative effects of retention, explains Don Moore, executive director of the research and advocacy group Designs for Change.

MOTIVATES BORDERLINE KIDS

However, others fear that automatic promotion, even with extra help, will undermine the motivational force that promotion standards provide in some cases.

"The argument for this policy is not that the retained students would do better but that students overall would do better in order to avoid retention," says Fred Hess, director of the Center for Urban

School Policy at Northwestern University. "The tradeoff is between a few kids who might drop out anyway and a great number of students who do better throughout school as a result of the policy."

Chicago's policy did in fact motivate 6th- and 8th-graders to work harder, and their teachers and parents to offer low-achievers more support, according to surveys conducted between 1994 and 2001 by the Consortium.

Roderick also acknowledges that it would be hard to get students to attend summer school without the threat of retention. In the 1998-99 school year, the Consortium asked 6th- and 8th-graders whether they would do so.

"Their answer was 100 percent 'No,'" says Roderick.

Roderick doubts that retention provides any motivation in 3rd grade, where the largest number of students are retained. Compared to older students, 3rd-graders are less able to manage their own study habits, she observes. And while many older students simply needed to fill in gaps in their learning—a manageable task with short-term effort—many 3rd-graders are encountering material for the first time with huge deficits in vocabulary and reading comprehension.

Besides, she says, "I don't think a 3rd-grader, particularly a low-skilled 3rd-grader can think that far ahead and understand what it means to be retained."

CPS officials credit the motivational effects of the promotion policy for spurring systemwide improvements. Standardized test scores did rise in the wake of the promotion policy, especially among the lowest achievers, but researchers say there likely were many causes, including the policy of

putting schools on probation and removing principals from some of those schools.

With rising test scores among students entering high school, the dropout rate for students who got to high school declined. However, Consortium researcher Elaine Allensworth found that students who were retained under the board's policy faced an even higher risk of dropping out. Being retained in 8th grade raised a student's likelihood for dropping out by age 19 by 29 percent, she reports.

STILL MORE HELP ON THE WAY

While the School Board has rejected the researchers' advice to scrap retention, it has taken to heart their recommendations to provide extra help earlier. Next school year, 20 to 40 high-retention schools are to get full-day kindergartens and preschools, a new literacy program, an expanded summer school and closer supervision.

Citywide, retained students also will get extra attention, school officials say. For example, all schools will be required to write and follow a personalized learning plan for each retained student. Previously

retained 4th- and 7th-graders will be required to attend summer school. And the district's 320 school-based reading specialists will work with classroom teachers on strategies to help retained students.

Roderick, who opposes automatic promotion alone, thinks the school system is headed in the right direction with its new interventions.

But for many children, the district's intensified focus on reading instruction will not be enough to prevent school failure, Roderick predicts. In case studies conducted during the 1998-99 school year, she found that retained students had fallen behind for many reasons, including undiagnosed health problems, needing eyeglasses and high absenteeism.

Retaining students won't solve any of these underlying problems, she observes. Yet a comprehensive program to address their health and family issues is unlikely given the district's financial constraints. "Without any extra help from the state, I don't know how they're going to do it."

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Research report

What we know about efforts to end 'social promotion'

THE NEW STUDIES

"Ending Social Promotion: The Effects of Retention"

Jenny Nagaoka and Melissa Roderick
The Consortium on Chicago School Research, March 2004

Analyzes how the CPS promotion policy impacted the reading achievement of 3rd- and 6th-graders.

"Ending Social Promotion: Dropout Rates in Chicago after Implementation of the Eighth-Grade Promotion Gate"

Elaine Allensworth
The Consortium, March 2004

Studies the impact of 8th-grade retention on high school drop-out rates.

"Ending Social Promotion: The Response of Teachers and Students"

Robin Tepper Jacob, Susan Stone, Melissa Roderick

The Consortium, February 2004
Reports the results of surveys and interviews with principals and teachers on the impact of the CPS promotion policy.

"Same Old, Same Old: A Qualitative Look at Student Retention Under Chicago's Ending Social Promotion Policy"

Susan Stone, University of California at Berkeley

Mimi Engel, Northwestern University
Unpublished
Describes the experiences of 22 retained 6th and 8th-graders, based on interviews with the students and their teachers.

ON THE WEB: Got to www.catalyst-chicago.org for links to the published studies.

The Consortium on Chicago School Research has conducted several studies on various aspects of the Chicago Public Schools program to ensure students are academically ready for the next grade. Here *Catalyst* Senior Editor Elizabeth Duffrin sorts the findings to answer fundamental questions.

DOES RETAINING KIDS HELP?

Generally, no.

Retained 3rd-graders showed the same inadequate progress in reading over two years as similarly low-achieving students who, in previous years, had been promoted to the next grade.

Retained 6th-graders actually fared worse in reading than their promoted counterparts.

Retained 3rd-graders were three times more likely to be placed in special education within two years, compared to similarly low-achieving students who were promoted.

Retained 6th-graders were six times as likely to be placed. And the special education placement did not accelerate students' growth in reading. The high placement rate suggests that many of the special education referrals were unnecessary, according to researcher Melissa Roderick.

Students who were retained in 8th grade were far more likely to drop out. The retained students who dropped out did so at an earlier grade and, consequently, had earned fewer high school credits than did the non-retained students who dropped out.

SO, IS IT BETTER TO PASS KIDS TO THE NEXT GRADE EVEN IF THEIR SKILLS ARE WEAK?

No. Students who are retained and enter high school behind their same-age peers are more likely to drop out, but so are students who enter high school reading substantially below grade level.

WHY DO SOME STUDENTS FALL SO FAR BEHIND?

The reasons for low achievement are many, researchers say. They include problems with particular students, particular schools and the district as a whole.

Student problems. Retained students typically start school with lower academic skills than their peers and then fall further behind each year. Based on standardized reading scores, the sharpest drop-off in achievement for low-performing students occurs in the primary grades. "They go nowhere in 1st grade. They go nowhere in 2nd grade," says Roderick.

School problems. More than half the students retained by CPS have come from 100 of the city's 600 public schools. These schools tend to have a higher-than-average proportion of disad-

vantaged students, but Roderick notes that there are schools with similar student bodies that perform better. These findings suggest that many students repeat a grade due to low-quality instruction, says Roderick.

System shortcomings. Previous case studies by Roderick and a team of researchers revealed that retained students may suffer from a combination of learning, health and social problems. Common problems are high absenteeism in the primary grades, frequent school changes and health problems that may include poor eyesight, depression or asthma, she says. The district does not have any comprehensive system for schools to identify, track and address these problems, she adds.

DID THE THREAT OF RETENTION MOTIVATE STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS TO TRY HARDER?

For 6th- and 8th-graders, yes, according to Consortium surveys.

In 2001, 62 percent of teachers reported that the threat of retention motivated students to work harder. And low-achieving students reported much greater support from

parents and teachers than they did before the promotion policy was implemented. The gap in the amount of parental and teacher support reported by low-achieving and average- to high-achieving students has narrowed substantially since 1994, the Consortium found.

The Consortium did not study the motivation of 3rd-graders, as it considered them too young to answer survey questions.

DID THE PROMOTION POLICY LEAD TO BETTER TEACHING?

No, according to teacher interviews and student surveys.

In surveys, teachers reported that they modified their instruction to help kids meet the promotion standards. Eighth-grade teachers taught more 8th-grade level math than they had before the policy—previously they had spent more time reviewing lower-level skills. They also increased the amount of time spent on reading comprehension.

Teachers at all promotion gate grades substantially increased the amount of time they spent on test preparation.

However, in interviews, teachers seldom reported changes in their teaching methods or indicated that they had pursued additional professional development in math and reading instruction.

Students surveyed in 2001 didn't report feeling any more challenged by or engaged in their class work than did students surveyed in 1994.

DID THE PROMOTION POLICY LEAD TO HIGHER STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT?

Maybe.

Since 1995, citywide performance on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills has risen 15 percentage points in reading—to 41 percent at or above national norms—and 19 percentage

Board constantly tinkers with the policy

Every year since 1996, the School Board has revamped its promotion policy in an effort to raise standards while retaining fewer students. Some changes raised the bar for promotion, while others created loopholes and second chances. Extra supports for retained students have come and gone, some with little effect. Here are strategies the board has tried:

REVISED REQUIREMENTS

Raising the bar. The School Board raised the cutoff scores required for 8th-grade promotion to high school every year from 1997 to 2000. Pass rates were fairly stable until 1999 and then dipped.

Waivers. Schools have always been allowed to request waivers to promote students who just missed the official cutoff scores but had good grades and attendance. In 2000, the Consortium reported many irregularities in the handling of waivers. For one, some regional officers were more lenient in granting them than others. Also in some years, many more students received waivers than the School Board acknowledged.

More waivers. For 2001 promotions, the School Board came up with a more structured waiver policy that also reduced its reliance on standardized test scores. It raised the scores required on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) for automatic promotion, but lowered the minimum scores required for a waiver. Students who fell between the two could still advance if they had completed summer school and performed well on other measures, including grades and attendance.

New cut-off scores. In 2002, the board made a technical adjustment to its test score measure. At the same time, it adopted a new form of the ITBS, which boosted Chicago's reading scores but lowered its math scores. That year, the number of retained students soared, largely because they just missed the math cutoff score.

Math requirement dropped. At the end of 2003 summer school, the board quietly dropped math scores as a promotion requirement, and the number of retained students again declined. The change became policy in 2004.

SECOND CHANCES

Mid-year promotion. In 1999 and 2000, retained students retook the ITBS in January and jumped immediately to the next grade level if they earned a passing score. The practice reduced the number of students who were over-age for their grade and therefore at higher risk of dropping out. But schools complained that the mid-year reassignments were difficult for them to manage and for students to adjust to, says William McGowan, formerly with the CPS Office of Schools and Regions. Some 8th-graders still are promoted mid year, often into the second semester of 9th-grade classes, according to the Office of High School Programs.

Double-promotion For several years, retained 3rd- and 6th-graders who tested at grade level by the end of the year could attend a special summer program and then skip 4th or 7th grade to rejoin their original classmates. But the program was expensive, so the district dropped it, says McGowan, adding that few students qualified.

EXTRA SUPPORTS

Summer school for 3rd-, 6th-, and 8th-graders. Students who failed to meet the standardized test scores required for promotion were required to attend a six- to seven-week summer school program and retake the ITBS. Summer school substantially increased the number of students able to meet promotion requirements, the Consortium found.

Summer school for 1st- and 2nd-graders. Beginning in 1998,

the board opened an optional summer school for low-achieving 1st- and 2nd-graders. The citywide program ended last summer. But this summer, there will be a mandatory summer school for low-achievers in 2nd grade who attend certain schools with high retention rates.

PROGRAMS FOR RETAINED STUDENTS

After-school programs. The board offers extra instruction in math and reading at nearly all elementary schools. Retained students at low-performing schools are required to attend.

Retired teacher tutors. In 1997, the board began to hire retired teachers and college students to tutor retained students. The initiative ended after several years due to budget cuts, says McGowan.

Smaller class size. In 1998, the board hired extra teachers to lower class size for retained students at some schools. That program was dropped in 1999 when the district received a federal grant that paid for more than 200 teachers to reduce class size, but not specifically for retained students.

Despite the extra help, retained 3rd- and 6th-graders did not show any more improvement in their reading test scores than did similar students who were promoted, according to the Consortium.

Special schools for over-age 8th-graders. Beginning in 1997, students who would reach the age of 15 by December 1 but had not yet met the promotion requirements for high school were assigned to special regional "transition centers." There they got remedial instruction in math and reading, and extra counseling, tutoring and other support services. Students who met promotion requirements moved on to high school, but about 80 percent still dropped out by the end of 10th grade, according to the Office of High School Programs.

Elizabeth Duffrin

points in math—to 48 percent at or above national norms. Pass rates for students subject to the policy also increased.

Consortium researchers say a range of factors may have contributed to this progress, including summer school, after-school programs and a policy enacted in 1996 that placed schools with low test scores on academic probation.

They support this conclusion by noting that test scores have increased even for students who were not subject to the board's promotion policy because of their special education or bilingual status.

DID THE POLICY OF RETAINING LOW-SCORING STUDENTS CONTRIBUTE TO THE DECLINE IN THE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE?

Maybe.

The Consortium calculated the chances that 13 year-olds would drop out by the time they turned 17. Students who were 13 in September 1994, before the policy was enacted, faced a 29 percent chance of dropping out by age 17. That percentage dropped to 25 percent for students who were 13 in September 1998.

This decline likely is due in part to the fact that students generally are entering high school with higher test scores. However, researchers cite other possible factors:

An increase in the number of courses needed to graduate. Taking a more challenging course load increased the number of credits students earned and kept them on track for graduation.

Changing demographics. Students' average economic status increased, which tends to lower dropout rates.

New magnet high schools. Selective schools attracted more high-achieving students.

A probation policy. To avoid sanctions, schools need-

ed to improve achievement.

A drop in the teen pregnancy rate, a national phenomenon.

DID ANY OF THE EXTRA PROGRAMS THAT WERE PART OF THE PROMOTION POLICY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes.

Students in danger of retention who attended the board's Summer Bridge program made modest gains in their math and reading test scores, and those gains were sustained through the next two school years. The students who were the furthest behind made the greatest gains, although most of those students were still retained.

The board's after-school program for low-achieving students, which provided an extra hour of instruction in reading and math, produced small standardized test score gains, according to a forthcoming study that Roderick co-authored.

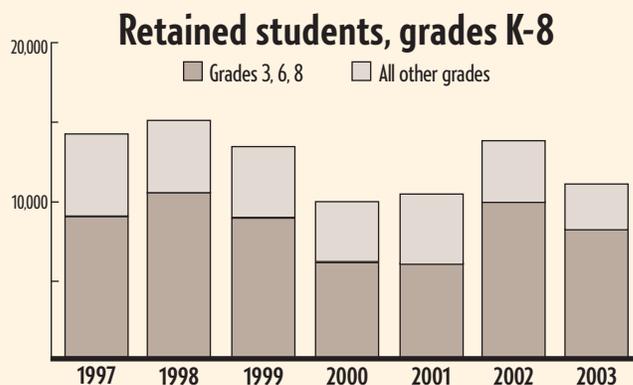
Researchers did not study two other programs for retained students. Those were the provision of extra teachers to reduce class size at high retention schools and the hiring of 500 retired teachers and 250 college students to tutor students who had been retained.

However, neither of these extra supports closed the achievement gap for retained kids. Even those who made strong test score gains during summer school continued, on average, to show meager progress during the school year.

While the six- to seven-week Summer Bridge program had a prescribed curriculum, the board did not give teachers who worked with retained students during the regular school year any strategies for diagnosing and addressing their problems,

NUMBER OF RETAINED STUDENTS RISES, FALLS

In the seven years since the board's promotion policy has been fully in force, the percentage of students retained at the three gates in elementary school has ranged from 9 percent to 15 percent. When all elementary school grades are included, the range is 5 percent to 7 percent.



Notes: Excludes students with disabilities. In 2003, math dropped from criteria. Source: CPS Department of Research and Evaluation

says Roderick. "Teachers didn't know what to do."

DID RETAINED STUDENTS GET DIFFERENT INSTRUCTION THEIR SECOND YEAR IN A GRADE?

It varied, according to a study of 22 6th- and 8th-graders who were retained in 1999-2000.

Most of the students simply repeated the same material in the same way, according to researcher Susan Stone of the University of California Berkley. Teachers paid little or no special attention to the students' social or academic issues, she says, and students complained that they learned nothing new. "Some kids got extremely frustrated and disengaged."

Teachers were likewise frustrated, she reports. "Many said, 'We're not being given much support in figuring out what to do.'"

However, at a few schools in the study, teachers pooled their expertise and took a more systematic approach, says Stone. For example, they discussed specific problems their students had, such as paying attention, and talked about teaching strategies and

homework assignments targeted at those difficulties.

Not surprisingly, students at these schools reported learning more and believed that repeating a year served a purpose.

Teachers at these schools also created a climate where retained students felt supported rather than stigmatized by their peers, Stone says.

At one school, a girl repeating 6th grade reported that when she finally met the promotion requirement, the whole class applauded and said that they knew she could do it.

"You'll often see in the retention literature [that] all kids who get retained have a terrible experience self-esteem wise," Stone remarks. "Our research shows it really depends on how the adults shape the experience for them."

Years later, Stone found that the few 6th-graders with good experiences during the retention year were more likely to enter 8th grade near the promotion standard. The others were definitely still struggling, she says.

Elizabeth Duffrin

Three who were kept behind

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Beethoven Elementary is a well-run school that is unusually resourceful in attracting extra supports. Even so, some of its students fail to make it through the School Board's promotion gate. Repeating a grade gives some kids enough time to catch up while others continue to struggle. In the following examples, the children's names have been changed to protect their privacy.

"JOSEPH," AGE 10, HAD BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

When Joseph transferred to Beethoven in fall 2002, his file contained a note from his 2nd-grade teacher listing seven incidents of poor behavior, including refusing to line up in the hallway and showing off his underwear to the girls.

During his first weeks at Beethoven, it was more of the same. "He would hit and play and run," recalls Caroline Dunlap, Joseph's 3rd-grade teacher that year. And he could barely read or write, she says.

But now Joseph is at a 3rd-grade reading level, his teacher reports and will likely make the cutoff scores for promotion to 4th grade. Teachers attribute his progress to personal attention, high expectations and a behavior modification program called Phases that Beethoven is piloting.

Dunlap referred Joseph to Phases soon after he enrolled at Beethoven. The program is aimed at helping students who have mild behavior problems interact better with their peers. Trained parent instructors hold weekly discussions for groups of three to five students. Often the instructor will present a story about a conflict—a boy disrupts a jump rope game, one girl hits another—that the students must figure out how to resolve. Instructors also visit children in their classrooms to monitor and redirect their behavior.

Dunlap says she also let Joseph know that unruly behavior wouldn't be tolerated in her classroom. At the same time, she assured him she would do all she could to help him succeed. She started by inviting him to a small-group tutoring session she offered on her own time before school. "It wasn't overnight, but his

behavior changed," she says.

By the end of the year, Joseph had made progress but not enough to hit the mark for promotion to 4th grade. Summer school didn't get him there either.

For his second year in 3rd grade, he moved across the hall to Dona Maldonado's class, and some of his behavior problems resurfaced. So his teacher had him resume the Phases program.

On a morning in mid-March, Charlene Cowans, a Phases instructor, visits Maldonado's morning reading lesson to monitor Joseph and two other boys. Cowans passes by Joseph's desk frequently to remind him to pay attention, to stop drumming on his desk, to put his drawing away and to answer Maldonado's question about a new vocabulary word.

By the time Maldonado asks students

How Beethoven beats the odds

Half of the students forced to repeat a grade under the School Board's promotion policy are concentrated in 100 of the city's schools. Not surprisingly, these schools serve a disproportionate number of disadvantaged students. But even in the poorest communities, some schools beat the odds and end up retaining relatively few students. Beethoven Elementary is one of them.

For the last four years, Beethoven has posted test scores that topped the city average. That translates into fewer student retentions. For example in 2002, the district as a whole retained 21 percent of 3rd-graders; Beethoven retained just 10 percent.

Faculty members cite a wide variety of reasons for their relative success. Principal Dyrice Garner also has a ready list of resources she believes the school needs to reach all children.

What has helped:

- **Leadership.** A supportive administration has made teachers willing to put forth extra effort, such as tutoring students on their own time.
- **Professional development.** Most teachers have earned state endorsements in teaching reading. Many have them in teaching math.
- **Long school day.** Beethoven insists that all students stay for the after-school program unless a parent explicitly objects.
- **Health clinic.** The clinic is run in partnership with the Illinois School of Professional Psychologists and John Stroger Hospital. Students receive immunizations, physicals, emergency care and counseling from a full-time nurse, two part-time physicians and graduate students in psychology.
- **Mental health program.** In partnership with the University of Illinois at Chicago, the "Phases" program provides a full-time social worker

and two trained parents to work with students having emotional or behavioral difficulties.

- **Communities in Schools.** This nonprofit connects students and their families with needed social services.
- **Boys and Girls Club.** The club operates on site from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily and provides 350 Beethoven students with recreation and a homework center.
- **College tutors.** Columbia College sends four tutors four or five times a week.

What is still needed:

- **Full-day kindergarten and preschool.** Beethoven can afford only half-day programs.
- **Free eyeglasses** for every student who needs them and a backup pair.
- **More training** to help parents support their children's learning at home.
- **Computers** with educational software for families to use at home.
- **Home libraries** for students.
- **More field trips** to help children build the background knowledge they need for better reading comprehension.

State Schools Superintendent Robert Schiller, who visited Beethoven last October, says the school is impressive not only for the number and quality of its support programs, but also for the staff's sensitivity.

During his visit, a small boy arrived late carrying a bag of chips and a soda. Frances Oden, the principal at the time, gently took the snacks away, promised to return them after school and sent an assistant to find him a nutritious breakfast.

"It was just touching," says Schiller. "That caring nature exemplified the whole school."



JOHN BOOZ

Third-grade teacher Pamela Willis leads a book discussion during Beethoven's after-school program. Although the district does not mandate enrollment, nearly all Beethoven students attend.

to write a response to their textbook reading, Joseph is slumped in his seat, shredding a scrap of paper in his desk. Cowans lifts him gently out of his seat and guides him into the hallway. "You know you can be better than what you're doing," she tells him softly. "You need to straighten up."

Joseph nods at the floor, and she leads him back to his desk. With Cowans standing over him, he begins to write, slowly. After a few minutes, he picks up speed. By the end of the reading period, he has written the longest response, a full page in small, neat print, explaining his prediction with "transition words" like "first," "second" and "finally."

"He's turned around a lot," Maldonado remarks. When he misbehaves or has a bad day, she often calls on Cowans, Dunlap, or the boy's grandfather, she adds. "He has a feeling that we're all working together, and we're all watching him."

"SUZANNE," 11, DOESN'T DO HOMEWORK, HAS POOR ATTENDANCE

Suzanne transferred to Beethoven last fall as a retained 3rd-grader from a neighboring elementary school that had been closed for poor test scores and low enrollment. Given the girl's age, she likely either started school late or is on her second retention, says her teacher, Deborah Simpson. But Simpson is unsure because

Suzanne's school records have not yet arrived at Beethoven from central office.

Suzanne is enthusiastic about school and pays attention, but she rarely does homework. She also has erratic attendance—100 percent one month, 50 percent the next.

One afternoon in March, Simpson previews the math homework during the last half hour of the after-school program. She questions the students at length, using multiple examples to ensure they understand the steps and vocabulary they will need to complete it. Suzanne is among the most active participants.

"What do you call shapes that are the same size and same shape?" Simpson asks.

"Ooooo!" cries Suzanne, waving her hand wildly. "Congruent!" she cries out when Simpson calls on her.

"Good! Excellent!"

But when Suzanne returns the next morning, she hasn't attempted either worksheet.

Simpson says that when she asks Suzanne and her younger brother about why they don't complete homework, they say they don't get any help. Simpson has little contact with the children's mother—the family does not have a phone so messages must be relayed through a friend who does. (Of her 22 students, only eight have parents who are easily

contacted by phone, she reports.)

In the late 1990s, Beethoven had parent attendance officers who made home visits, but the board cut funding for those positions, says Principal Dyrice Garner.

Simpson knows little about Suzanne's family but speculates that the mother may work late afternoons and evenings, which has become common since welfare reform, she says.

Of Simpson's 22 students, only about 12 complete their homework regularly, she says, and they easily outperform the rest of the class. "It makes a big difference."

"JOHN," IS EASILY DISTRACTED, HAS POOR VISION

John entered 3rd grade in 2002-03 with very low reading and math skills and had great difficulty focusing on his schoolwork. He was very immature and playful, recalls Deborah Simpson, his teacher.

Mid-year, she referred him for a special education evaluation, which found that he needed glasses. By then, it was too late for him to catch up, so he repeated 3rd grade.

Even with glasses, he continues to have difficulty. During whole-class instruction, Dunlap positions herself near John and a handful of other struggling students so she can closely monitor their work. When she's near him, John pays attention, answers questions and happily completes his class work.

But as soon as she steps away, he's out of his seat or playing at his desk or arguing with the child next to him.

John's mother is also puzzled by John's behavior, Dunlap says.

In the meantime, Dunlap gives him as much personal attention as she can. Monday through Thursday, she tutors John and up to four other boys for an hour, following the after-school program. On a recent day, she couldn't stay late. "They were so upset. 'We staying? We staying?'" they kept asking her, she says.

Even with the extra help, John's inability to work unsupervised likely will prevent him from meeting the cutoff scores for promotion once again, Dunlap believes. Under a new board policy prohibiting double retentions, he will pass into the 4th grade after completing summer school. "He's not doing acceptable work for 3rd grade. It [won't] get easier as he gets older," she says. ■

Older 8th-graders take new route

Elizabeth Duffrin

Soon after the School Board adopted promotion standards in 1996, it faced a dilemma. With thousands of children now forced to repeat a grade, many were reaching the age of 15 without an 8th-grade diploma. That would leave them too old for elementary school but unprepared for high school.

So the next year, the district opened nine small regional centers where some 1,300 over-age 8th-graders were to be brought up to speed in reading and math. With nearly twice the amount of money per student that high schools had, each center featured smaller class sizes and extra support staff, such as a full-time social worker.

Even so, students made scant headway. On average, students who spent a year in a center made only a half-year's progress in reading and one month's progress in math, according to a 2003 study by the Consortium on Chicago School Research. And 80 to 85 percent dropped out by the end of 10th grade, according to the CPS Office of High School Programs.

While the centers were strong on caring—students reported much more personal attention than did the average 9th-grader—they were weak on curriculum, the Consortium found.

This fall, the district retooled the program, putting the centers inside seven regular high schools and providing a nationally recognized high school program and monthly professional development for teachers.

Veterans of the old centers who spoke with *Catalyst* were generally positive about the changes but uncertain how large a dent they would make in the dropout rate.

"The weakest students need one-on-one tutoring," says one teacher. "Even if you have 15 students, you can't do one-on-one."



Student advocate Doris Lebron pauses to banter with students Fermin Lozano and Susana Orduno at Senn Academic Achievement Academy.

JOHN BOOZ

The site change for the Academic Achievement Academies, as they now are known, was aimed at easing students' transition to high school. It also eliminated the expense of maintaining separate buildings. Next year, academy students are expected to enroll in the high school where their academy is located so academy staff can offer continuing support services.

The new academy curriculum, developed at Johns Hopkins University as part of the Talent Development High School model, emphasizes group work, which teachers credit with motivating students. Consultants from the program provide monthly staff development for academy teachers, and new subject-area coaches visit classrooms to give teachers new ideas and feedback.

But many students have problems with family, drug abuse and other issues that teachers feel at a loss to address. "I think it's a little late for a lot of these kids," says one.

Still, by the end of the first semester, attendance and reading gains were outpacing last year's record. Of 1,100 academy students, 630 passed all their first-semester courses and, therefore, earned 8th-grade diplomas midyear, according to Edward Klunk of the Office of High School Programs

HOW ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT ACADEMIES WORK

- Students who fail to meet minimum standards required for high school admission and are too old to remain in elementary school (age 15 by December 1) are enrolled at their regional Academic Achievement Academy.
- The seven achievement academies are housed at Senn, Westinghouse, Crane, Tilden, Robeson, Chicago Vocational, and Julian high schools. (Initially, there were nine free-standing centers)
- During the first semester, students take double periods of math and reading and a seminar that teaches study skills, conflict resolution and goal setting. Those who pass all their classes earn an 8th-grade diploma
- Second semester, all students begin 9th-grade classes taught by academy teachers. Those who fail the first semester but pass the second earn an 8th-grade diploma.
- Classes continue over the summer, and those who pass all their 9th-grade courses enter a regular high school program as sophomores at the beginning of the next school year.
- Central office has not yet decided what to do with academy students who fail to earn sophomore status by August. They might repeat the academy program, enter the regular high school program as freshmen, or enroll in yet another alternative program the district might develop.

Klunk is eyeing another outcome, though. "The real measure of the success of this program is how many of these students are ready to go into 10th grade by the end of summer," he says. ■

3 routes to Senn High School's catch-up academy

ZULYANNA MENDOZA, 16

CAME STRAIGHT FROM 7TH GRADE

Many students assigned to an achievement academy get angry. Zulyanna felt relieved. Having repeated both 6th and 7th grades, she was too old to stay in elementary school for 8th grade. The academy would give her the chance to skip ahead and, if she passed her classes, get into 10th grade only a year behind.

"When you've got that chance, you might as well take advantage of it," she decided.

Zulyanna's route to the academy likely is not what the School Board had in mind. The curriculum is designed to remediate in a semester kids who failed 8th-grade reading and then move them into high school coursework. The first semester, it forgoes science and social studies in favor of double periods of math and reading and a study skills class.

But a growing number of academy students were retained more than once before getting to 8th grade. Nearly 350 of the 1,100 students enrolled in achievement academies this fall came directly from 7th grade, another 32 straight from 6th grade, and one from 5th grade.

Rita Jung, director of the Senn Academy, says the students who came from 7th grade do about as well as those who failed 8th. Zulyanna passed her first-semester courses and earned her 8th-grade diploma.

Zulyanna's reading difficulties in English may stem from her Spanish-speaking background. Born in Chicago to Mexican immigrants, Zulyanna moved in at a young age with grandparents who speak primarily Spanish.

Math came easily to her, Zulyanna says, and indeed she scored above grade level on standardized tests. But reading was a different story. "Once I

finished reading, I didn't remember what I read," she explains.

In 6th grade at Bateman Elementary, she missed the reading cutoff score and repeated the grade at Scammon Elementary following a family move. Her aunt, Maria Ayala, says Zulyanna took the setback nonchalantly. "She said, 'Oh, well next time I will [pass.]'"

Despite her struggles, Zulyanna recalls mostly enjoying elementary school. In 5th grade, she won 3rd place at the school science fair. Her second time through 6th at Scammon, she and her friends did a history fair project on their elementary school and won an honorable mention, she says. "When it comes to projects, I'll do it."

But towards the end of elementary school, her motivation petered out. Her second time through 6th grade, she says she'd do her work once in awhile. "It was easy." She didn't work any harder in 7th grade. At the end of that year, she was retained once again.

Although there are no promotion requirements for grades other than 3rd, 6th and 8th, schools have retained increasing numbers of students in the other grades. In 2002, Scammon retained 24 percent of its 7th-graders, including Zulyanna.

Scammon's principal, Peter Bushbacher, says that many in that class were unmotivated. "I don't feel we're serving students by promoting them and keeping [our] fingers crossed that they do better."

The second time through 7th grade, Zulyanna says she made hardly any effort. "It gets boring when you have to do the same thing over again. We read almost the same stories."

It took promotion to the achievement academy to re-energize her. While Zulyanna doesn't do all her

homework, reports English teacher Steve Kanoon, her questions and comments keep his class going. And she'll reread a difficult passage until she understands it. "A lot of the kids, if they don't understand it, they give up."

Now Zulyanna has her sights set on college and a career as a massage therapist. "I actually changed when I came to this school," she says. "I promised my family I was going to do it."

ASHLEY SERRANO, 14

LANDED THERE BY ACCIDENT

Ashley Serrano doesn't belong at Senn Achievement Academy, her teachers agree. After graduating from a Catholic middle school with a B average, she was set to enter Gordon Technical High School, according to her mother, Rhonda Serrano.

But when Serrano lost a well-paying job, public school was the only option. "She had wanted to go to Gordon so badly she sabotaged the test for the public school system, thinking that they wouldn't take her," her mother explains. "She didn't realize they would demote her."

Serrano says she appealed to a contact at central office, but to no avail. "Our policy is clear," says CPS spokesman Mike Vaughn.

Arriving at the academy, Ashley was initially in shock. The students were rude, and the work remedial. She brought home books that in her mother's view a 6th-grader could read.

Ashley says she was so bored that she began to wander around the room and help other kids, just for something to do. Soon she had a revelation. "It made me feel good about myself to help other people," she says. "Later on, those people began to understand, and they started helping other people."

The academy program emphasizes group work and encourages students to teach each other. Ashley's social studies teacher, Leonard Evans, credits cooperative learning with fostering teamwork and even transforming some students' attitudes towards school. "Our class is really connected," Ashley agrees.

For instance, three soft-spoken Mexican girls who were failing at the beginning of the year worked in a cooperative group. When one girl decided to pull her grades up to A's, the other two followed her lead, earning B's and C's, Evans says.

Ashley is her class's best role model, Evans reports.

In mid-March, after completing a textbook chapter on the Middle East, Evans gives them 45 minutes to draw one photograph from the textbook and write a caption explaining its significance.

Ashley goes all out with her Sumerian ziggurat, folding her drawing of the ancient golden temple to stand upright and attaching a long staircase to create a three-dimensional model

At the end of the period, a troubled boy whom Evans says Ashley has taken under her wing, presents her with his Iranian flag sketched in magic marker. He smiles as she teases him about his lopsided stars.

While the year has set her back academically, Ashley plans to persevere in school and perhaps pursue a career in marine biology. Already she has enrolled in a junior life-guarding course. Now she's trying to motivate classmates to take school more seriously.

"Some of the students say, 'I'm going to drop out and become a drug dealer.' Well," she recalls explaining, "you're going to need to know math to become a drug dealer."

"JUAN," 15

FELL SHORT ON 8TH-GRADE READING SCORES

Juan says he's angry at the district's new policy that would return him to Senn next year instead of his neighborhood high school. The academy program is good, and the teachers are helpful, he says, but the

commute is too much.

Senn Academy students come from the widest geographical area and have the longest commutes—up to three hours round-trip on public transportation. Juan's morning commute alone would take over an hour, but his mother spares him. "My mom is quitting her job because she has to take me to school. There's no way I'm staying in Senn."

But students like Juan, suffering with both low academic skills and personal issues, are those most in need of extra supports and supervision.

Juan arrived at the academy by

"Some of the students say, 'I'm going to drop out and become a drug dealer.' Well, you're going to need to know math to become a drug dealer."

Ashley Serrano, 14

the most common route: He failed to hit the reading scores he needed to graduate from 8th grade.

Born in Mexico, Juan started school late, enrolling in a bilingual program at his Northwest Side elementary school. At the end of 4th grade, when he transitioned out of the program, his reading scores were well below average. In subsequent years, his scores slipped further. He finished 8th grade with reading scores in the bottom 20 percent, an F in English and only marginally better performance in math.

At the academy, he continues to struggle. "He can read, but a lot of these kids say the same thing, 'I can't remember anything I read,'" says social studies teacher James Lohmeier. "I don't know teaching reading. I don't know where to begin," he adds.

Juan's English teacher, Melissa Taguchi, says she doesn't have the diagnostic skills to help him, either.

And his math teacher, Valerie Douglas, says that Juan's math skills are so low that she doesn't think he can complete the work independently. She doesn't have time to work with him one-on-one during the school day, and he won't stay after school for tutoring, she adds.

First semester, Juan barely made

the grades to earn his belated 8th-grade diploma. Now in 9th-grade classes, his grades are slipping.

In late winter, Juan's teachers began to fill out the paperwork needed for special education testing. Virginia O'Brien, the academy's special education teacher, says that while it's possible for learning disabilities to go undiagnosed until high school, she thinks that's unlikely. "Usually we get these kids by 3rd to 5th grade."

Academy staff has turned around some of Juan's behavior problems, however. First, Tony Colston, who assists teachers with discipline and

tutoring had a talk with Juan after he repeatedly blew up at his social studies teacher. "He said, 'Stop doing it because you'll be in more trouble,'" Juan says. "He was right. I changed my attitude."

Then, after Juan skipped a day of school, student advocates Doris Lebron and Leticia Arroyo showed up at his house on Saturday. Finding no one home, they returned again on Monday. This time, they found Juan home alone. "You should have seen the look on his face when he saw it was us," says Lebron.

As requested, Juan's mother attended a school conference and spoke to each of his teachers. Since then, Juan has come to Lebron and counselor Jacqueline Ray for help with some serious family issues that were interfering with his attendance.

He hasn't skipped school again, Lebrone reports. "He saw that we care and that we are not giving up."

Elizabeth Duffrin

ON THE WEB

Go to www.catalyst-chicago.org for:

- An article on three schools with above-average percentages of low-income students but below-average percentages of 3rd-grade retention. Local school officials describe what they do.
- Spanish translations of selected articles about student retention.

Attempt at critical mass falls short but pays dividends

Only two of 23 teachers earned National Board certification, but schools say instruction improved

By Debra Williams

When Darlene Flynn of Owens Elementary found out that her school was going to offer a program for teachers who wanted to earn the profession's highest credential, National Board certification, she immediately signed up.

"I was excited," says Flynn, who teaches kindergarten at the school in West Pullman. "I thought that this would help me improve my skills and it was so convenient."

Teachers at Owens and nearby White Elementary had been targeted to participate in an initiative of the civic group Chicago United that aimed at increasing the number of National Board-certified teachers. Chicago United raised money to pay for on-site classes, mentor training and candidate application fees. The program would support teachers for three years—one year to prepare for the extensive application process, a second year to undergo the process itself and a third to train successful candidates to become mentors.

"We were trying to build capacity with National Board, and we wanted to eliminate as many barriers as possible," explains Carolyn Nordstrom, former president of Chicago United.

In all, 23 teachers—17 from Owens and six from White—signed on, representing close to the entire faculty at each school.

But after the first year, Flynn dropped out for personal reasons. "I wanted to do it, but I would have had to put in too much time. It's a very involved process, and I have a husband and kids who are still at home."

Seventeen other teachers quit that first year, too. Of the remaining five who completed the application process, only two—one from each school—earned National Board certification.

What happened at White and Owens demonstrates the challenge of shepherding teachers through the National Board pipeline. On average, only 50 percent of first-time applicants eventually obtain certification.

The process requires 200 to 400 hours of work outside the classroom, according to estimates by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, which issues the credential. Applicants must complete an extensive series of assessments, including portfolios, student work samples and videotapes, then write analyses that demonstrate content knowledge and their understanding of how to teach those subjects.

"People discovered it was a lot of work," says Owens art teacher Linda Norby, one of the two who achieved certification. "Many had small children and family concerns. I had no small children to worry about."

Even so, Owens Principal Samuel Jordan and Yvonne Womack, former principal of White, deemed the pro-

gram a success. Teachers are now more reflective about instruction, they say, and are more apt to be guided by best practices and open to changing their teaching approach.

Chicago United chalked up a win, too. "You have to look at it as an investment that had other benefits," says Nordstrom. "If the faculty and the principals thought it was good, then it was good. If teachers say, 'This changed us,' that was the goal."

WELCOME PLAN FOR BOTH SCHOOLS

Chicago United began working with Owens and White as part of a larger plan to improve instruction, especially in math and science, in West Pullman. In 1999, the group brought in the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science (TAMS) to provide professional development at 10 area elementary schools.

But two of those schools, Owens and White, had worked with TAMS a few years earlier, so Chicago United offered them a National Board preparation program instead. Coursework would be provided by Illinois State University.

Jordan says Owens had raised its math scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills by working with TAMS, so the faculty was open to the idea of more professional development. "I've always encouraged my teachers to reach higher," he says.

Same for teachers at White, says Womack. White already was in the

For more information on the National Board certification process and standards, and a list of National Board-certified teachers, go to www.nbpts.org

habit of offering teachers additional supports, such as keeping the building open in the evening, and providing computers and other resources. "Anything out of the ordinary, we supplied it because we knew the kids would benefit," Womack adds.

By offering the National Board preparation program to the entire faculty at both schools, the partnership was looking to get "a larger pool of successful candidates," says Jackie Simmons, a former Chicago United project director.

During the first year, however, teachers realized how demanding the process was. They wrote papers based on observations of their students, videotaped classroom lessons, critiqued each other and learned how to reflect on their own teaching practices. For 10 months, they met after school once a week for at least three hours.

"I don't think that the teachers understood the rigor of the process," Simmons says. "It's like preparing for a marathon."

Kathleen Kornhaber, a special education teacher at White and the other teacher who earned certification, agrees, noting that she spent every Sunday working on her application. When it was over, "my husband was glad to get the mess out of the dining room," she says.

Lynn Cherkasky-Davis, founder of a candidate support program at the Chicago Teachers Union's Quest Center, says she advises teachers to reconsider starting the process if they have other time-consuming commitments. Some teachers are weeded out by the program's application, which can take up to 15 hours to complete.

It's typical for more than half of teachers in pre-candidacy programs to drop out, says Lynn Gaddis, director of Illinois State University's National Board Resource Center. "We've seen this throughout the state. Once teachers see the time and work involved, they self-select out."

ONE IMPROVES, ANOTHER HOLDS STEADY

While many of those involved in the Chicago United program say it was worthwhile, only one school has since



National Board certified special education teacher Kathleen Kornhaber (above) uses geometric blocks to teach students Mckay Sherman and Omar Cottrell. Owens art teacher Linda Norby (left), who is also nationally certified, shows off her students' creations, which were inspired by Georgia O'Keefe.

JOHN BOOZ

posted an increase in test scores.

The percentage of children at White who meet reading and math standards rose slightly, by 4 percent and 2 percent respectively, while the program was in place between 2000 and 2003.

Meanwhile, results at Owens were mixed. The percentage of children meeting state standards in reading fell from 42 percent in 1999 to 36 percent in 2003. During the same period, math scores were unchanged.

Jordan points to school-based

problem solving, a CPS strategy used to decrease the rate of special education referrals, for Owens' falling scores. (The strategy, begun seven years ago, requires schools to try a variety of academic and behavioral interventions before referring students for special education.)

"We had children that needed special education services, but we were restricted from referring them," says Jordan. "Children that should not have been taking the tests were taking the tests."

North Carolina study finds certification pays off for students

Students taught by teachers who are National Board-certified scored as much as 15 percent higher on standardized tests than students taught by teachers without Board certification, according to a study of North Carolina elementary students released in March.

Previous studies have looked at the effectiveness of National Board certification. But the new study, conducted by researchers at the University of Washington, is believed to be the first large-scale research to examine the relationship between individual teachers and the achievement of their students.

Researchers collected math and reading scores of 3rd-, 4th-, and 5th-graders in North Carolina for 1996 through 1998, then linked more than 600,000 student records to individual teachers. Students of board-certified teachers scored higher than students whose teachers attempted but failed to earn certification. The gains made by 3rd-graders and lower-income students were as high as 15 percent.

Still, critics warn that while the study looks promising, it is not definitive.

"Everyone should know that this pioneer study is quite limited—limited to North Carolina in the late 1990s, for starters, and to students in grades 3, 4, 5," warns Chester Finn, Jr., president of the

Washington, D.C.-based Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. "Many of the student gains associated with [National Board-] certified teachers are small, and some aren't statistically significant."

But North Carolina was the ideal state in which to conduct the study, say researchers. Its roster of 6,600 National Board certified teachers is the highest in the nation.

"North Carolina has had 10 years to grow this," says Karen Garr, director of the Southeast Regional Office of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. "Plus, we've had a supportive environment from the state board of education, and we had Gov. [James] Hunt." Hunt, who served as governor for eight years, is the founding chair of NBPTS.

When he was in office, "every principal got a letter from him every spring and fall that said, 'Go find teachers to encourage to go through National Board,'" Garr says. "The candidate count really did go up when those letters went out."

"We have a lot of schools now where something is happening to the culture," Garr says. "One teacher is a spark, and it's like rubbing two sticks together. Principals are saying, 'I'm impressed that you are doing this.' The process mushrooms."

Debra Williams

Research shows, however, that National Board certification can have a measurable impact on achievement. A recent study in North Carolina found that National Board-certified teachers are more effective at raising test scores, especially the

scores of low-income children. (See sidebar.)

Still, staff at Owens and White say teachers have changed their classroom strategies for the better.

Teachers at Owens are "using more cooperative grouping with the

children," says Jordan. "They are more open to being observed by their colleagues, and they are talking about what they are doing."

Owens literacy coordinator Nedra Durham says participating in the program taught her to be more cognizant of students' strengths and weaknesses, to examine what she does in the classroom and to focus on standards. "Everything in National Board makes you analyze what you do," Durham says.

Phyllis Chappell, a 1st-grade teacher at Owens, says she learned to better assess what classroom activities work. "I automatically do this now. I'm even working on developing a primary rubric for our curriculum." Chappell, who completed the process but still needs to retake one part of the process to earn certification, plans to start anew at the Chicago Teachers Union Quest Center this coming school year.

Womack says teachers at White began "checking what they were doing against National Board standards, and what they had learned was being implemented in the classroom."

To contact Debra Williams, call (312) 673-3873 or send an e-mail to williams@catalyst-chicago.org.

LETTERS TO CATALYST

North Lawndale LSC group stresses it began trend

This letter is being written to thank you for publicly acknowledging the errors made in the article "Council federations dot the city" in the March 2004 issue regarding the North Lawndale LSC Federation. Further clarification is necessary.

Your article failed to mention that the trend of "council federations dotting the city" began in North Lawndale—where student and school performance lag significantly behind city and state norms. LSCs have enormous responsibilities and have the potential to make a huge impact on their schools. However, because many people don't fully understand their roles as LSC members, or don't have adequate support structures, some of this impact is

lost. The North Lawndale LSC Federation is an attempt to change this dynamic.

The North Lawndale LSC Federation is a not-for-profit charitable services organization providing advocacy, information dissemination and leadership development opportunities. Our mission is to help LSC members become better, more effective public servants by reducing the number of LSC members uninformed about critical issues and trends impacting their roles and responsibilities. The Federation's advocacy in October 2003 was responsible for CPS restoring the \$400 allocation each LSC gets for training. The LSC Resource Center will open by September 2004 to help council members

acquire a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities, recognizing that people have different learning styles.

Our organization is incorporated with the State of Illinois and has a governing board of directors. The Federation's model is a united alliance of 29 LSCs, along with community stakeholders, churches, CBOs and businesses committed to school reform to improve student achievement. On July 26, 2003, the Federation received the 7th Congressional District's Education Champion Award for exemplary leadership and innovation in school reform.

Derrick B. Harris
President/CEO

North Lawndale LSC Federation

'Bread and butter' vs. reform agenda

Deborah Lynch, the 'new union' president of the Chicago Teachers Union, faces three challengers who want more focus on compensation and teachers' rights

By John Myers

Last October, Chicago teachers authorized a strike after rejecting a proposed five-year contract that was backed by their union's leaders. Anger over the contract's length and health care costs fueled the rejection.

In late November, they approved a revised package by just 2,503 votes (15,289 to 12,786), locking themselves into a four-year pact but winning 4 percent annual pay raises.

Dissatisfaction lingered, sparking a three-way challenge to union President Deborah Lynch in the upcoming May 21 election. If no candidate wins a majority, there will be a two-way runoff.

The challengers—Earl Kelly Prince, Marcia Williams and Marilyn Stewart—say the union should scrap Lynch's reform-minded leadership for a back-to-basics approach focused on wages, benefits and contract enforcement. They contend Lynch is not tough enough to wrangle with the board over those issues.

"Everyone went backwards in the contract," says Prince, a veteran field representative. "We don't want a union that is all directors, that is all Quest Center."

Lynch supporters applaud her for balancing traditional labor aims with professional development initiatives. They note that contract gains came alongside expansion of the Quest Center, the union's training ground.

Julia Koppich, co-author of "United Mind Workers: Unions and Teaching in the Knowledge Society," says that Chicago's 4 percent annual raises were "excellent" relative to other urban districts, where most teachers won 2 and 3 percent raises—or in some cases, none at all.

Adam Urbanski, president of the

Rochester Teachers Association, says reformist leaders like Lynch are winning national prestige by emphasizing board-union collaboration to improve schools. He co-directs the Teacher Union Reform Network, a national collective of some 30 locals that promotes union leadership in school reform.

Local support, says Urbanski, hinges on whether teachers see their leaders as co-opted by management.

"[Teachers] want somebody who by way of reform can emphasize some basic things that are important to teachers, such as class sizes, student discipline and safe schools and teacher voice," he says.

Urbanski says Lynch has gained ground on these issues and is viewed nationwide as a strong leader on equal footing with the board.

HIGHEST RAISES IN 16 YEARS

But Williams, a teacher and union delegate at Wadsworth Elementary, expects a backlash vote to stun the leader. She says Lynch "rolled over and played dead" during contract negotiations, essentially doing the board's bidding by pressuring members to vote for both proposals.

Theodore Dallas, Stewart's pick for vice president, says teachers passed the second proposal only to avoid striking over the holidays.

But Lynch trumpets the contract as a hard-fought victory in harsh economic times, adding that it was the leadership's request for a strike authorization that forced the board's hand.

"We saw the highest pay raises in any 16-year-period over the last 20 years," Lynch says, noting that provisions regarding step increases and extra sick days also boost the salary gains. "The Board of Education is now claiming

they're in a \$200 million budget deficit, so anyone who thinks they would've gotten more out of negotiations doesn't understand the budget." (In late April, the board announced \$100 million in cuts.)

Stewart counters that higher health care costs cut the 4 percent annual increases nearly in half. She says Lynch regularly dupes members by highlighting contract gains while obscuring the bad news in rhetoric, a complaint seconded by the other candidates.

To back the charge, they point to the delayed release of contract details, alleging the "tactic" keeps members uninformed to mute election unrest.

The union recently posted the full contract to its web site, a process delayed by printing and legal issues, says Lynch. She adds, "What our members voted on last November is exactly what is going to be in the final contract book."

Lynch points to other gains, including \$900 bonuses for paraprofessionals, a fourth preparation period for elementary teachers and a strategy to enforce rules on class sizes.

She also heralds efforts to democratize union leadership; for instance, elections are now certified by the American Arbitration Association, and results are published online. Plus, Lynch says, committee participation was opened to the full membership, and union leaders regularly poll members to identify needs.

But Lynch says her team's real coup was the restoration of bargaining rights lost in Mayor Richard M. Daley's 1995 school board takeover, including the right to bargain over class size, academic calendar and staffing issues.

Chicago teachers lost their bargaining rights and saw flat wages before Lynch took charge, Urbanski notes. "Some expected

What challengers would do

The candidates seeking to oust Chicago Teachers Union President Deborah Lynch all want to add more field representatives, saying the union has become bloated with too many administrators, especially in the Quest Center. Here's a snapshot of their campaigns:



MARCIA WILLIAMS
INDEPENDENT CAUCUS

SLATE: Vince Macina, Steinmetz High, vice president; Suyapa Garcia, Schurz High, recording secretary; Linda Goff, Chappell Elementary, treasurer.

EXPERIENCE: Williams, a teacher at Wadsworth Elementary, served as a union delegate for 16 years. Besides filing numerous grievances for teachers, Williams has also been involved in 21 arbitration cases and five successful unfair labor lawsuits.

WHY VOTE FOR WILLIAMS?

Williams says she has more time in the union trenches than Lynch. She also says Lynch is a weak negotiator, who failed to communicate effectively with members and has not done enough to help teachers who lost their jobs when schools were closed for low enrollment. In such cases, Williams says seniority should determine which teachers find jobs first.

PRIORITY AS PRESIDENT?

Pressure the board to drop a contract provision that makes annual raises "contingent upon a reasonable expectation" that funding is available.



MARILYN STEWART
UNITED PROGRESSIVE CAUCUS

SLATE: Theodore Dallas, Wells High, vice president; Mary McGuire, Beaubien Elementary, recording secretary; Mark Ochoa, Logandale Middle, financial secretary; Linda Porter-Milton, Nicholson High, treasurer.

EXPERIENCE: Stewart, an elementary teacher at Kinzie, has served as a union delegate for 22 years and has held a number of other union posts. She has a master's degree in counseling from Governors' State University.

WHY VOTE FOR STEWART?

"The bottom line is, when you negotiate a contract you never give back anything you've already won," she says. Stewart promises no more four-year contracts, and she decries the switch from flat-rate employee health care contributions to percentage-based contributions based on salary. "As you make more, you pay more."

PRIORITY AS PRESIDENT?

Use monthly meetings with board leaders to push policy changes that would override unpopular provisions in the current contract, particularly those related to health care benefits.



EARL KELLY PRINCE
CTUNITY CAUCUS

SLATE: Shanie Keelean, Ashburn Elementary, vice president; Phyllis Trotman, Barton Elementary, recording secretary; Bill Malugen, Roosevelt High, financial secretary; Mable "ML" Rembert, Lake View High, treasurer.

EXPERIENCE: A former elementary teacher, Prince is now on what he calls "forced, unpaid leave" from the union until the election is over. He is a 25-year union veteran, and spent the last 22 years as a field representative. He has held several other union positions.

WHY VOTE FOR PRINCE?

"I am the union. I am the union history," says Prince, noting his service under four union leaders. He says the union needs a more militant approach toward the board, especially regarding disciplining of teachers.

PRIORITY AS PRESIDENT?

Restructure the union office to boost contract enforcement. Prince is also asking the American Federation of Teachers to investigate his claim that the Lynch team campaigned on the union's dime.

PHOTOS BY JASON REBLANDO, CHRISTINE OLIVA

more ground could have been made up."

He says Lynch knew her re-election would hinge on the contract, but there is more for teachers to consider.

"Lynch is a good example of the teacher leader of the future," he says, adding that her real legacy may be the deal she struck last year forging a board-union partnership to try shared intervention in struggling schools before shutting them down. If the schools don't show academic improvement within a year, the board can close them.

The deal puts teacher professionalism

to the test, essentially giving the union equal responsibility for the schools' success or failure, says Urbanski. "[It's] uncharted waters ... and she had the guts to do it."

Lynch's challengers say the deal is dangerous. "Everyone knows it takes more than a year to turn a school around," says Prince.

Closing partnership schools could fuel teacher resentment, a condition that author Koppich says is growing as teachers deal with mounting accountability pressures. She says "besieged" teachers

have bolstered "old guard" unionism in some environments.

In areas like Chicago, Koppich notes, there is a base of older teachers who cherish a union history that emphasized traditional union aims. Alongside them are newer teachers who typically want a union that emphasizes professional development and teacher enterprise. And, says Koppich, it's tough for a reformist like Lynch to satisfy both parties.

To contact John Myers, call (312) 673-3874 or send an e-mail to myers@catalyst-chicago.org.

Board insider challenges new president of principals group

Close race expected, organization's direction at stake

By Alexander Russo

What was considered an easy reelection for Clarice Berry, president of the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association, is now up for grabs with the entry of a well-connected opponent.

Linda Pierzchalski, Area 19 instructional officer and former principal of Bogan High School, threw her hat into the ring in January, vowing to pick up where long-time CPAA president Beverly Tunney, who died last year, left off.

The election, to be held by mail-in ballot during the first two weeks of May, offers the organization's roughly 1,400 voting members a choice between leaders with very different styles. They can opt for someone who believes working and speaking publicly, as Berry has in recent months, or for someone who is likely to continue Tunney's practice of working behind the scenes in cooperation with the Board of Education, as Pierzchalski prefers.

PRESIDENT WILL HAVE TO JUGGLE ROLES

"This is going to be a pretty close race," says Peter Martinez, director of the Center for School Leadership at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

Until now, the principals association has provided "a nice balance" between serving as an outspoken advocate on job issues, a role typically assumed by labor unions, and serving as a professional development resource to its members, he notes. Whoever gets elected will have to address both roles.

"You've got all kinds of administrative demands being put on principals," Martinez notes. "At the same, time you have a large number of schools on probation, an area where [the principals association] ought to be working closely with the board."

Compared to the teachers union, the principals association, founded in 1886, is relatively weak. The association is not a recognized collective bargaining unit. Principals cannot strike and lost their right to tenure in 1989. Central office administrators—60 percent of whom belong to the principals association, Berry estimates—largely serve at the will of the board.

However, the association negotiates with the board for annual salary raises and benefits increases. It also provides a number of services to members, including legal counseling, an annual conference and professional development programs for new and experienced principals.

Tunney, who headed the organization from 1993 to 2003, is widely credited for expanding its professional development offerings. Two showcase programs are LAUNCH (Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago), which trains aspiring principals, and LIFT (Leadership Initiative for Transformation), a training and support program for principals during their first year on the job.

Tunney is also credited with having persuaded the board to raise principals' salaries substantially over the years. While she was at the helm, top principal earnings grew from \$80,000 to \$120,000. "I started at \$50,000 in 1990 and left last year at more than \$100,000," says one retired CPS principal.

Perhaps most significant, Tunney had the ear of former Schools CEO Paul Vallas, whom many say relied on her for advice on education issues and strategy. Vallas spoke at Tunney's memorial service.

The relationship appears to have paid off. During the Vallas years, most principals felt they were able to run their schools without central office interference, educators say. In several cases, principals whose contracts were not renewed

by their local school councils landed jobs at the central office. Vallas sided with principals in a 1999 battle with local school councils over principal hiring.

"Bev's approach was that you have to be at the table to get more for your members," says Karen Carlson, a longtime CPS principal and Tunney supporter who recently left CPS to become assistant superintendent for Waukegan schools.

'FIRST MINORITY PRESIDENT'

Still, critics of Tunney's administration contend that she did not fight hard enough to counter harsh accountability programs, which placed dozens of schools—including Berry's—on probation, remediation or reconstitution.

Driven by concerns that Tunney had gotten too close to the board, Berry decided to run for president in 1998. She lost that race and a subsequent one in 2001.

Last year, however, Berry won a razor-close runoff election against two Tunney loyalists to finish out Tunney's unexpired term. "She won by eight votes," remembers David Peterson, who served as assistant to the president under Tunney.

While campaigning, Berry played up her years of experience as an elementary school principal and the diversity of her slate. "I am the first minority president of the association," Berry says.

In the wake of campaign rhetoric, some feared that Berry would immediately begin battling the board and undo many of Tunney's initiatives. Such fears have proven unwarranted, as Berry retained some Tunney staffers and kept professional development programs intact.

Berry has, however, publicly taken on the board and the Chicago Teachers Union. For instance, she criticized the board for blaming principals for rodent problems in schools. She also blasted a CTU initiative to rate principal performance and post the results on the Internet. Berry demanded that the union not

Who they are



CLARICE BERRY

CURRENT POST: President, Chicago Principals and Administrators Association

PREVIOUSLY: Principal, Fiske Elementary School

POLITICS: First African-American CPAA president

PRIORITIES: Salary raises, state legislation to protect retirement benefits, raising the group's public profile



LINDA PIERZCHALSKI

CURRENT POST: Area 19 instructional officer

PREVIOUSLY: Region 1 officer, principal of Bogan High

POLITICS: Ally of longtime CPAA president Bev Tunney

PRIORITIES: Protecting central office jobs, working collaboratively with CPS, CTU

PHOTOS BY E.J. RUBLEV, JOHN BOOZ

release the survey results.

In the future, Berry says, "We want to weigh in on every single policy."

Other Berry accomplishments have not been widely publicized. This winter, she won 4 percent raises across the board for principals, assistant principals and central office administrators. Board officials credit her with ensuring that the revised CPS principal selection criteria do not require 600 existing candidates, most of them assistant principals, to start from scratch. (See *Catalyst*, April 2004.)

"I know I was perceived prior to my election as a bomb-thrower," Berry admits. "But I've proved that impression wrong during the past eight months. I'm aggressive as president, but I know I'm not helping members if I am constantly creating schisms."

A TUNNEY LOYALIST

Supporters of Berry's opponent nonetheless believe that Pierzchalski can do the job better.

Pierzchalski has a broader range of experience in the school system, they say, having held posts as a principal and an administrator. She also has experience with racial politics, having persuaded a racially divided local school council at Bogan to renew her contract shortly after arriving at the school. Sup-

porters say Pierzchalski's smooth transition from principal to region officer to area instructional officer in three years proves she's on the inside track with top board officials.

Like Tunney, Pierzchalski believes that working behind the scenes is the most effective way to operate. "Bev did an outstanding job," she says. Rather than generating headlines, like Berry did over the CTU principal survey, Pierzchalski's approach would be, "Let's sit down and work it out. That's the way to go."

Style differences aside, Pierzchalski's main goals are increasing membership and regaining central office jobs lost to budget cuts over the past 18 months.

Overall membership in the principals association is at a historic high, just over 2,100, according to officials. Yet only 60 percent of central administrators belong. ("Why would I pay \$600 for nothing?" asked one Clark Street administrator.)

Pierzchalski supporters note that Berry was not able to soften the impact of the new probation policy, which could mean half of CPS principals would work at the will of the board rather than under four-year contracts.

"Under Beverly, somebody was always at the table," says Peterson. "I don't know if that's happening as much today."

"The new [probation] policy is trou-

bling to us," Berry responds. "We didn't have a chance to weigh in and, in fact, got only two hours notice."

Given last year's close runoff, observers say it would be difficult to predict a winner.

"I have a sense that it's a little soon for people to evaluate Berry," says Brenda Bell of Leadership for Quality Education. "I was told that she played unfair and played the race card. I found none of that to be true."

Berry has the advantages of incumbency, a respectable track record during her first eight months, and her alliance with elementary school principals, who comprise the majority of the group's membership.

By contrast, this is Pierzchalski's first run for the group's top office, and she got a late start, beginning to spread the word of her candidacy in March. However, many members view a vote for Pierzchalski, perceived to be a powerful insider, as a vote for Tunney. Pierzchalski ticks off a list of education leaders—Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason Watkins, Professional Development Officer Al Bertani, Chief Instruction Officer Domingo Trujillo, even CTU President Deborah Lynch—as those with whom she has a successful working relationship.

Late-breaking events could influence the election's outcome. Results of the CTU principal survey could give Berry the chance to position herself as a vocal champion of principal interests. Another round of central office job cuts—CPS announced 200 will be eliminated by next year—could give Pierzchalski a chance to speak out about regaining jobs.

Perhaps most significant is the new probation policy, which will impact principal hiring decisions across the system. Berry strongly opposes the policy, which would mean less job security for principals. Pierzchalski has taken a moderate stance, contending that, in some cases, area instructional officers are in a better position than LSCs to make decisions about principal hiring.

The final tally may ultimately be a case of who or what is most familiar to members, Peterson says. "It's only been eight months, and in some cases, people choose the devil you know."

To contact Alexander Russo, call (312) 673-3837 or send an e-mail to russo@catalyst-chicago.org.

The Joyce Foundation

- \$15 million over three years for research and policy initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining teachers in low-performing schools in Chicago, Cleveland and Milwaukee. (The foundation has not determined what portion of the money will be directed to Chicago schools.)

Chicago Community Trust

- \$500,000 to the Teachers Academy for Mathematics and Science for the readiness program of the Chicago Mathematics and Science Initiative.
- \$180,000 to Scholarship America for the William J. Cook Scholarship Program for 2004.
- \$300,000 to the Rochelle Lee Fund for general operating costs.
- \$90,000 to Associated Colleges of Illinois for general operating costs of its teacher development program.
- \$75,000 to Umoja Student Development Corp. for program expansion at Gage Park High.
- \$75,000 to Kaleidoscope Chicago for salary support for an education specialist.
- \$50,000 to Parents United for Responsible Education, for general operating costs.
- \$40,000 to the Community Renewal Society to support the publication Catalyst Chicago.
- \$25,000 to CPS for new high school science laboratories.
- \$25,000 to the Chicago Foundation for Education for teacher-led professional development.
- \$25,000 to One-to-One Learning Center for professional development for reading programs in five CPS schools.

Chicago Public Education Fund

- \$240,000 to 80 CPS teachers and \$55,000 to 6 CPS schools for National Board certification efforts. Schools with six or more teachers working on certification can receive up to \$30,000 for on-site professional development. Individual teachers who earn certification can get a one-time \$3,000 salary bonus.

Polk Bros. Foundation

- \$10,000 to the Developing Communities Project for a service-learning initiative involving 25 students from Brooks

and Harlan high schools. Students will teach their peers about the importance of voting.

Chicago Foundation for Education

- \$37,105 to CPS elementary school teachers to adapt past mentor teachers' classroom projects.
- \$800 to 11 CPS elementary teachers who will organize groups of four to six teachers to study successful teaching strategies; and \$300 to 58 CPS elementary teachers who are interested in joining the study groups.

BP Foundation

- \$35,000 to CPS for operating costs of the student science fair.

Girls Best Friend Foundation

- \$49,500 over three years to Project Exploration for Sisters 4 Science, an after-school program that promotes leadership development and natural science explorations for girls in 6th through 8th grades on Chicago's Southwest Side.
- \$49,500 over three years to Family Matters for Sisters of Struggle and Sisters of Unity, two community building and entrepreneurial skills programs for middle and high school girls living in the neighborhood north of Howard Street.
- \$49,500 over three years to Chicago Women in Trades for a leadership development and peer network program for high school girls in vocational classes.
- \$49,500 over three years to the Redmoon Theater to develop a four-year curriculum for Dramagirls, a performance group of middle school girls in Logan Square.

- \$13,200 to Street-Level Youth Media for a media arts program for high school girls to explore gender issues.
- \$16,500 to El Centro Comunitario Juan Diego for art and health programs for Latina girls.
- \$11,000 to Chicago Health Connection and CPS for a teen peer leader program designed to support pregnant teens and parents.

Nike Foundation

- \$2,500 each to 23 CPS teachers to support innovative teaching, creative instruction and high expectations of students.

Daniel Eder

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"CITY VOICES" Consulting Editor Lorraine Forte 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.

MOVING IN/ON Former state **SEN. ARTHUR BERMAN** has been appointed to Gov. Rod Blagojevich's Education Accountability Task Force, which will have input into restructuring the state Board of Education. Berman is a legislative policy advisor for CPS. For a complete list of task force members, go to www.catalyst-chicago.org. ... The International Reading Association has elected University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) family literacy expert **TIMOTHY SHANAHAN** as its vice president. Shanahan, professor of urban education at UIC, will serve as the association's president-elect in 2005, and as president in 2006. ... **KAREN G. FOLEY**, formerly the executive vice president of corporate development at CNA Insurance Co., was named president of Scholarship Chicago, a local nonprofit that provides grants and other resources to high school students. Foley succeeds **JOHN MITOLA**, who had held the post as a volunteer. Mitola, CEO of Electric City Corp. and chair of the Illinois Tollway Authority, will remain on Scholarship Chicago's board. ... **GEORGE SCHMIDT**, former teacher and editor of Substance newspaper, was

named director of the Chicago Teachers Union's department on safety and security.

PRINCIPALS Former Acting Principal **GEORGETTE WATSON** of Brentano Math & Science Academy has been awarded a four-year contract. ... Former Assistant Principal **MARIA PHEIFER** of Boone Elementary School has been named acting principal. She replaces **KAREN G. CARLSON**, who is now associate superintendent for bilingual and special education for Waukegan district public schools.

LSC ELECTIONS A total of 6,970 candidates ran in elections to fill approximately 5,800 slots for local school council members. Elections were held on Apr. 21 and 22.

SCIENCE FAIR WINNERS Fifteen winners of the CPS student science fair will compete against others from across the state in the Illinois Junior Academy of Science Symposium. The top three students are **LASUN OLADEJI**, **SCHAR GAFOOR** and **DANIEL BLUMENTHAL**, all from Lincoln Park High.

Other schools that will be represented include Lane Tech High and Walter Payton College Prep.

ARTS PARTNERSHIP The **REDMOON THEATER** selected **AUDUBON ELEMENTARY** for a year-long arts integration partnership to begin next fall. The theater group will work collaboratively with teachers to create a curriculum for each grade level. Audubon was chosen from among 30 CPS schools that applied.

AWARDS The American Educational Research Association has awarded the 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award for outstanding contributions to the curriculum field to **WILLIAM SCHUBERT**, professor and chair of curriculum and instruction in the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Education. The award recognizes "outstanding scholars with a strong continuous record of accomplishment" in curriculum studies. The American Educational Research Association represents approximately 22,000 professionals who conduct research and evaluation in education.

Giselle Fuentes

CATALYST CO-HOSTS BROWN V. BOARD FORUM

A public forum to discuss the impact of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka will be held May 17 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Chicago Historical Society at 1601 N. Clark St. Legal and educational experts and community leaders will explore the legacy of the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision. *Catalyst* Publisher Linda Lenz will moderate a panel discussion of what needs to be done today. Alysia Tate, editor and publisher of *The Chicago Reporter*, will provide closing commentary on the status of school desegregation 50 years after the landmark decision.

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