

Catalyst CHICAGO

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APRIL 2005 INDEPENDENT REPORTING ON URBAN SCHOOLS

WHO'S PULLING THE STRINGS?



A BUDGET CRISIS AND MORE CENTRAL OVERSIGHT IS MAKING IT TOUGH, SOMETIMES IMPOSSIBLE, FOR PRINCIPALS AND LSCs TO SHAPE THEIR OWN PROGRAMS

Also: More homeless students burden district services PAGE 19

Game of chance would do a better job of distributing funds to schools



Veronica Anderson

With all the vagaries that go into school finance in Illinois, the state might as well conduct one big game of budget bingo. It wouldn't take much to get it going. Each school superintendent would get a game card with M-O-N-E-Y spread across the five columns.

Instead of numbers, the squares on the grid would specify certain education funding streams, such as capital projects, special education, poverty money and that basic building block of public school finance, foundation level funding. One wild card square would guarantee a district gets fully funded on all counts.

Forcing educators into a game of chance to fund their budgets every year probably would improve the odds that funding would be distributed fairly. That's because Illinois fails the two tests of responsible school funding: Equity and adequacy. As a result, Chicago Public Schools and hundreds of other districts are facing budget shortfalls that have few solutions other than massive cuts in classrooms. Here, the red ink adds up to \$175 million. Chicago school leaders blame the state for failing to raise basic education funding to an adequate level, for underfunding its own mandates in special education and bilingual programs and for shortchanging Chicago teachers' pensions.

Only 36 percent of the district's operating budget is state funded; the national average is 50 percent. Hitting that target here would bring Chicago an additional \$560 million, a

windfall that this year would have provided schools with an extra \$1,300 per pupil. Doing so would also bring state lawmakers within striking distance of the minimum \$6,405 per pupil spending level recommended by the Education Funding Advisory Board.

Many believed that when Democrats took control of state government, the stars had aligned in favor of school finance reform. As it has turned out, that is only wishful thinking.

The reality is that Gov. Rod Blagojevich has flat out refused to entertain a widely supported tax swap proposal—a recent poll pegged voter support at 69 percent—that would more equitably distribute school funds, making it possible for more districts to operate in the black and provide a decent education. House Speaker Michael J. Madigan has said he will not step out on a limb without the governor's leadership. And Senate President Emil Jones, who has taken a strong and very public stance favoring the measure, cannot get it passed on his own.

Rather than weigh a small state income tax increase that would lower property taxes and raise more money for schools, the governor is gambling that every year, he'll be able to find

enough money for schools elsewhere in the state budget. This time around, he found \$140 million by raiding idle cash in other state accounts; Chicago would get \$16 million of it. He's also eyeing yet another cigarette tax hike to reinstate a popular school construction program.

"I agree that there's an over-reliance on property taxes to fund schools. The state should pay a larger share," Blagojevich said during his budget address in February. "I know that if we don't raise income and sales taxes, we will have to make more difficult decisions, but that's what we're supposed to do."

Is this any way to finance the future of our state? Clearly, the state must step up and close the budget gap. What the current crisis calls for is budget rationality, a reliable source of revenue to secure enough funds and to put a stop to the herky-jerky process of lobbying and begging that schools now face every year. Even Mayor Daley has softened his initial support for building a casino here that would help fill the state's coffers, saying that solid school funding comes first.

But if history is any indication, when it comes to paying for schools, political will extends only as far as the next sin tax. After all, schools continue to receive some of the proceeds of the state lottery, and a new casino would generate plenty more cash.

Who knows? Another game of chance might well be next. Bingo anyone?

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Veronica Anderson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DISCRETIONARY SPENDING

Budget crunch strains schools

Facing one of the tightest budget cycles in years, Chicago's public schools are grappling the prospects of deep cuts in the classroom, a shrinking pot of discretionary poverty funds and little or no control over how to spend it. The district responds to requests for relief and restores some money for preschoolers it had initially held back. But nearly everyone is feeling squeezed. **COVER STORY: PAGE 6**

BETTER OFF SCHOOLS TO GET MORE TITLE I, POOREST WILL RECEIVE LESS

CPS is moving away from a longtime practice of concentrating poverty funds in schools with the highest poverty rating. **PAGE 10**

HOW POVERTY FUNDS ARE SPENT

A *Catalyst Chicago* analysis examines patterns in discretionary spending. **PAGE 12**

FREE REIGN, THEN REINED IN; 'WELL-RUN' SCHOOL EMPLOYS 26 COUNSELOR AIDES

How Clemente and Schurz high schools are spending discretionary money. **PAGE 14**

DISTRICT SETS ASIDE EXTRA FUNDS AS SAFETY NET FOR WEALTHIER SCHOOLS

School reform advocate notes state law requires that schools get "fair share" of local tax revenue. **PAGE 15**

COVER ILLUSTRATION BY DENNIS NISHI



JOHN BOOZ

Rosa Zacarian, a parent at Pickard Elementary, and her daughter Carla demonstrate an experiment on momentum during a workshop to teach parents how to help their children academically. See story, page 16.



In review

1990: Local school councils at half of the system's some 550 schools for the first time sign principals to four-year contracts.

1995: Under pressure from Supt. Argie Johnson, the subdistrict superintendent overseeing high schools reluctantly puts Austin High on remediation. (At the time, the Reform Act allowed only subdistricts to put schools on remediation and probation.)

2000: The School Board finally gets to take advantage of tax increment financing districts. Mayor Richard M. Daley announces that forthcoming tax money from the central Loop TIF will back \$170 million in borrowing for school construction.

For a school reform timeline stretching back to 1985, go to www.catalyst-chicago.org and click on "reform history."

DEPARTMENTS

UP CLOSE Page 16

- Teaching parents to teach kids

UPDATES Page 18

- Backers fall short with money, disclosure
- Homelessness on the rise in CPS
- Panel aims to shield school funding

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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
- Calendar of events

Notebook

Q&A with...

Sally Polasek,
Teen Parent Services

TIMELINE

March 6: Tutors fired

One of the nation's largest private tutoring companies is fired from seven elementary schools following complaints at those schools about oversized classes, lack of teachers and other problems. New York-based Platform Learning provides tutoring for 14,000 children in 76 CPS schools under a \$15 million contract. Similar complaints about Platform surfaced in other large districts, but Chicago is the first to remove the company from problem schools. Children from the seven schools will be placed with other private tutors or the district's own program.

March 10: Pershing

Parents at a local school council meeting protest a decision to "de-magnetize" Pershing Magnet school and turn it into a K-3 school called Pershing East. Low-scoring Douglas would become a 4th- through 8th-grade school called Pershing West. CEO Arne Duncan says dozens of children are turned away from Pershing each year and that his plan will make the school's high-quality curriculum available to more students. But one parent questioned why Pershing was "dragged into this mess," referring to efforts to transform failing schools.

March 23: Principals

Calling their 2 percent pay raise an insult, the head of the principals association said the group wants to change state law and allow principals and assistant principals to organize as a union. Principals traditionally have received the same percentage raise as teachers and expected to receive a 4 percent increase. "The principals simply feel disrespected and very oppressed. We are tired of it," said Clarice Berry, head of the Chicago Principals and Administrators Association. The average principal salary is \$115,000.

Teen pregnancy is one factor behind the district's high dropout rate. Pregnant teens often find themselves pushed out the door of their school with few options since the district shut down two of three schools for pregnant girls and cut out the highly praised Cradle to Classroom program, which provided services to teen mothers and helped them stay in school. Sally Polasek, an administrator for the state's Teen Parent Services program, talked to Associate Editor Maureen Kelleher about the difficulties she faces helping teen parents navigate the school system.

What do pregnant and parenting teens need most?

For teachers and counselors not to encourage them to leave. Principals have told students in 6th, 7th and 8th grade that they have to go to Simpson (the only remaining school for pregnant girls). Girls have tried to get in, found there was a waiting list, and wound up dropping out. Students are not always told that homebound services are available. And if there isn't someone to help them through every step to get those services, sometimes the student just falls between the cracks. Then, they try and go back to school and now they're too old for elementary school or have trouble getting into an achievement academy (for overage 8th-graders). I shouldn't be able to go to my reception room, grab a young woman, ask her why she is a dropout and hear the same stories all the time. Very few teen moms left school because they wanted to. Most of them tell these real horror stories about how they were pushed out the door.

What has happened since Cradle to Classroom staff were cut?

In the past it was common for us to have a relationship with the workers, for verification of student attendance, for sharing information about developmental screenings in the infants and to just touch base to coordinate services. Now they've disappeared.

What impact has the closing of the two schools for pregnant and parenting teens had?

A lot of those girls left and did not make the transition from Tesla and Arts of Living

ELSEWHERE

Rhode Island: Teacher contracts

A business-led coalition has recommended that the state take over negotiation of teachers union contracts, according to a March 20 *Associated Press* story. The Education Partnership maintains that teachers unions are barriers to better schools and that the state could do a better negotiating job than individual school districts. The group also recommended having statewide standards for teacher evaluations; creating four categories of teachers and paying higher salaries to those at the top; and giving principals the power to determine curriculum, make budget decisions and hire and fire teachers.

Florida: Charter debt

Over one-fourth of the state's charter schools are in debt and have been forced to cut services or borrow money, according to the March 15 *Orlando Sentinel*. Overall, 62

of 222 charters ended 2003 in the red, a state report found, and most of the charters with deficits were run by private management companies. The report found that inaccurate enrollment projections, high start-up costs and a lack of financial experience led to the big deficits. An analysis by the *Sentinel* found that some charters spent half as much on instruction as public schools, but two to six times as much on administration.

Massachusetts: Worst schools

Business, civic and education leaders are urging legislators and the governor to spend \$90 million on the state's worst schools over the next three years, according to the March 11 *Boston Globe*. The group also wants the state Education Department to form a collaborative of failing schools and work with superintendents to find the best interventions; failing schools would be allowed to pick from a variety of improvement strategies, such as longer school days.

IN SHORT

"We do more for inmates in Joliet than we do for kids in Chicago.

Inmates get a daily exercise break."

Retired principal and CPS administrator Margaret Harrigan, a guest on the March 13 public affairs radio show "City Voices," criticizing the lack of recess in Chicago schools.



JASON REBLANDO

back to their own high school. There wasn't room for all of them at Simpson.

CPS is reaching out to older teens with few credits through its new "Learning in New Communities" schools. How are these schools doing and are they appropriate for some of your clients?

My difficulty in finding schools for our clients has been that we cannot get 16-year-olds placed through the CPS office of dropout retention and recovery. They told me that they would only serve kids who were 17 or over. I've got 16-year-olds who may not have an 8th grade diploma, whom nobody has room for.

I've heard that the LINC schools have a lot of vacancies and have had difficulty recruiting students. The problem is that so many dropouts have been out there for a while, they have low literacy levels and they're getting older. And it's questionable whether they could possibly get a high school diploma before they turn 21.

Do teens realize the impact that having a child could have on finishing school?

Kids are not very future-minded. And most of them were not planning on this. Most adolescent moms were sexually assaulted or abused before age 18.

Should pregnant teens and teen moms be required to get counseling to avoid future pregnancies?

I don't think you can force anyone to go to counseling. But I've never seen a kid that turned away from information if it's offered.

Some research shows that girls who have a stronger sense of identity and of their future are less likely to get pregnant.

If girls feel that they have no future in school, or boys for that matter, they're not going to stay there. Positive youth development is what will save our kids. And that means you can't cut out all the music and drama and dance, and you have to offer tutoring. You have to connect education to the real world. ■

ASK CATALYST

West Pullman Elementary has needed building renovations for years. How does CPS determine which schools get money for that?

Joyce Johnson, parent, West Pullman

A technical team evaluates each school every three years, and money for building renovations is directed towards the schools with the greatest needs, according to Sean Murphy, CPS chief operations officer. Renovations fall into one of four categories: Phase I is the highest priority and covers exterior features. Phase II covers mechanical, electrical and plumbing needs; Phase III covers interior spaces, and Phase IV, the school grounds. If a school has immediate threats to health or safety, Murphy says that his office controls an emergency fund and can address those problems immediately.

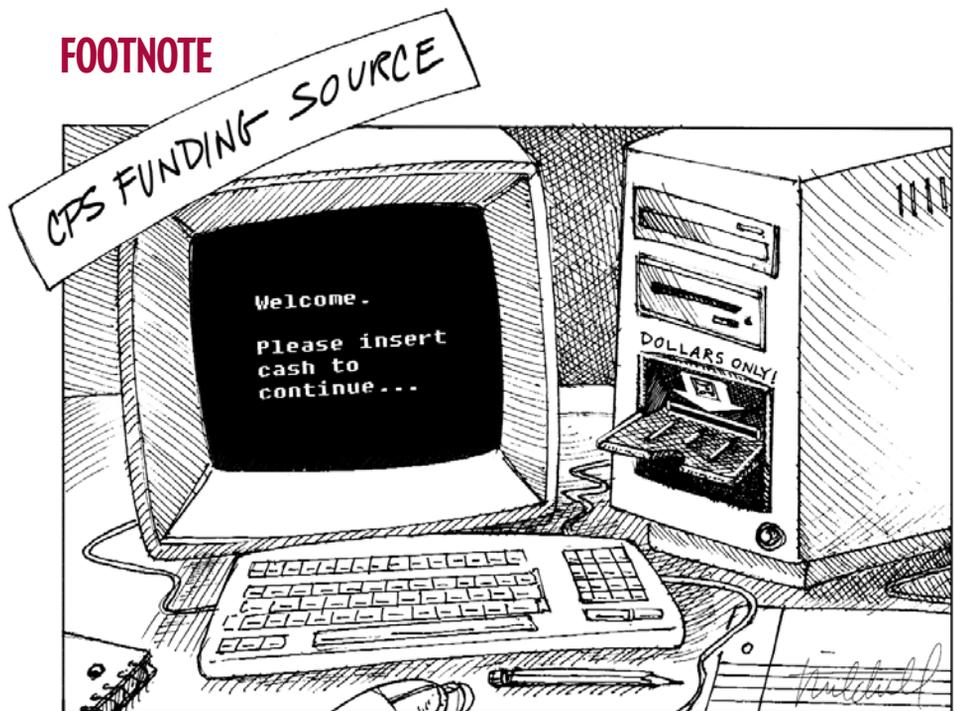
But CPS has yet to release data that would tell schools where they rank in the needs assessment and why, counters Jacqueline Leavy, executive director of the Neighborhood Capital Budget Group. West Pullman, for instance, has had only 24 percent of its Phase I needs covered, while other schools have received money for Phase IV projects, according to CPS school assessments, which can be found online at <http://www.cps.k12.il.us/Operations/cip.html>.

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

MATH CLASS

Enrollment is declining at Chicago City Colleges, and branches that are predominantly African-American are the hardest hit, according to an analysis of data from the Illinois Community College Board. Two campuses experienced enrollment growth between 2000 and 2004: At Daley, where the student body is 62% Hispanic, enrollment rose 10%; and at Wright, which is 47% Latino and 37% white, enrollment rose by 1%. At five other campuses, enrollment fell: 24% at Olive-Harvey (80% black); 15% at Kennedy-King (85% black); 9% at Malcolm X (58% black); 5% at Truman (54% Hispanic); and 5% at Harold Washington, whose student body is the most integrated—45% black, 20% Hispanic, 22% white and 12% Asian.

FOOTNOTE



KURT MITCHELL

Budget crunch strains schools

By John Myers

In a small, sunny library on the city's Northwest Side, eight faces beamed relief after a month of grueling budget meetings. A rookie local school council turned veteran after approving Monroe Elementary's tightest budget in years.

Faced with a \$177,000 decrease in discretionary money—the state and federal poverty funds that councils control—new council members forced a compromise with the principal over spending priorities. When the dust cleared, three teaching positions and three school aides had been slashed from the \$1.1 million discretionary budget.

"The budget is a very big responsibility," says LSC Chairman Miguel Sotomayor. "We were really squeezed."

Councils across the district are feeling financially squeezed this year, and those at schools on probation find themselves squeezed out entirely. The percentage of state and federal dollars going into schools' discretionary pots is shrinking, down 9 percentage points

since 1999. And the purchasing power of those dollars (\$429 million this year) has diminished significantly, a *Catalyst Chicago* analysis has found. (See chart on page 13.)

Adding fuel to the fire is Chicago Public Schools' projected \$87 million shortfall in general state aid next year—a figure that could soar to \$175 million if plans to boost funding with gambling revenue flop. Faced with similar financial dilemmas in the early 1990s, CPS cut hundreds of aides, assistant principals and truant officers to balance its books, and many schools tapped discretionary money to rescue some of those positions.

CPS Budget Director Pedro Martinez says he hopes this time the cuts will not be as deep, but notes, "There's just no way to cut \$175 million without touching the classroom."

Initially painful for most schools was a district decision—one that it later partially rescinded—to stop counting

low-income preschool students in calculations that determine how much each school is allocated in poverty funding. Both Supplemental General State Aid and federal Title I funds are distributed to CPS schools based on the number of low-income children each enrolls. But for the first time, when schools received their preliminary budget allocations in March, some 17,000 poor preschoolers were left out, hitting 383 schools with no warning or explanation. The change would have cost Monroe nearly \$100,000 in poverty funds.

The board will also drain \$1.5 million from schools' discretionary coffers by charging them a \$2 monthly fee for each computer to connect to the citywide network. (Monroe will have to pay about \$4,000 for its 200 computers.)

Meanwhile, the district's tough probation policy got tougher on spending. This winter, schools on probation

As the district challenges the state to cough up more money, it is also fending off school leaders and councils seeking financial relief.

This report is the second of three that will analyze Chicago Public Schools' budget policies and practices. In this issue, Catalyst Chicago looks at how schools spend discretionary funds, and whether district policies have an impact on those decisions. The budget analysis project was made possible by a grant from The Woods Fund of Chicago.

received letters from Chief Education Officer Barbara Eason-Watkins advising them that area instructional officers (AIOs) had the power "to lock 100 percent" of discretionary funding until they reached an agreement with principals on how it would be spent. (This year, AIOs could put a lock on 50 percent.)

G. Alfred Hess Jr., an author of the 1988 reform act that gave LSCs control of discretionary funds, says poverty grants were designed to supplement regular board-funded



JOHN BOOZ

At a March 30 hearing of the City Council Education Committee, Ald. Arenda Troutman (left) grills School Board President Michael Scott (right), Budget Chief Pedro Martinez (center) and CEO Arne Duncan (not pictured) about school closings in her ward and the district's plans for Renaissance 2010. She and others challenged CPS for making room in next year's budget to pay for construction projects related to the new schools initiative while putting most others on hold citing lack of continued funding from the state.

programs, an acknowledgement that it costs more to educate low-income children. As it is, schools with fewer poor students tend to get a bigger share of regular program funds, according to a recent *Catalyst* study on budget equity. (*Catalyst* February 2005)

PRESCHOOLERS OUT, BACK IN

For years, CPS included preschoolers when calculating each school's share of Title I and state poverty funds. But this winter, when school budgets were being prepared, it adjusted allocations for next year to include only low-income students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

After principals slated to lose money balked, district officials revisited the matter and contacted the state board of education to verify they had interpreted the regulations properly. Interim State Superintendent Randy Dunn weighed in, and in a April 6 letter to CEO Arne Duncan, ruled that preschoolers should be included in the state grant formula.

Still, preschoolers will fetch fewer dollars this year. Only poor preschoolers in all day programs will get the full per pupil share of \$716. The vast majority, though, are enrolled

in half-day programs and those schools will get \$358 per pupil. And, Martinez says, the federal rules clearly exclude preschoolers from Title I funding. (See story on page 10.)

Principals whose schools have early childhood programs are heaving a sigh of relief that some of the lost poverty money will be restored. Carlos Azcoitia, the principal at Spry Elementary, regained about \$14,000 of the state portion his school's projected overall poverty fund loss of \$100,000. Azcoitia notes that special government grants earmarked for early childhood education pay for preschool teachers, but poverty funding picks up other schoolwide supplemental materials and programs, such as teacher training and new library books.

AIO HOLD THE PURSE STRINGS

Regardless of shifting bottom lines, a third of Chicago's schools have virtually no say in discretionary spending. CPS stiffened its accountability policy in February 2004, more than doubling the number of schools on probation this year to 212. The district also detailed requirements for probation schools' discretionary spend-

State poverty grant timeline

Supplemental General State Aid (SGSA) is the lifeblood of school reforms in Chicago. Previously known as state Chapter 1, its 32-year history marks the pendulum swing from centralized control of schools to local control and back.

Distributed to schools based on the number of low-income students enrolled, SGSA constitutes nearly two-thirds of the discretionary money available to principals and LSCs to pay for supplemental programs. The following is a brief history of this funding stream:

1970s Illinois lawmakers create the Chapter 1 program in 1973 to provide extra funds to educate low-income children throughout the state. Three years later, the Chicago Urban League sues Chicago Public Schools for failing to concentrate the money in programs that serve poor children. Lawmakers settle the suit in 1978 by mandating that 60 percent of Chapter 1 money pay for low-income services.

1988 The Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance finds CPS is spending only 43 percent of its state Chapter 1 money on low-income services, fueling another lawsuit that charges the district with misspending nearly \$2 billion since 1978. Under fire, state lawmakers rewrite the rules governing CPS's share of Chapter 1 in the Chicago School Reform Act.

1989 The Reform Act shifts control of state Chapter 1 spending from central office to principals and local school councils. The funds will be gradually reallocated in 20 percent increments beginning this year, leading to a full transfer by 1993.

1993, 1994 The financial transfer hits a snag when state lawmakers allow the School Board to balance its budget by keeping \$32 million in Chapter 1 money that was due to be distributed to schools.

1995 The state Legislature puts Mayor Richard M. Daley in charge of Chicago's school system and eases many financial constraints on the School Board. One of those provisions allows the board to freeze the

Continued on page 9

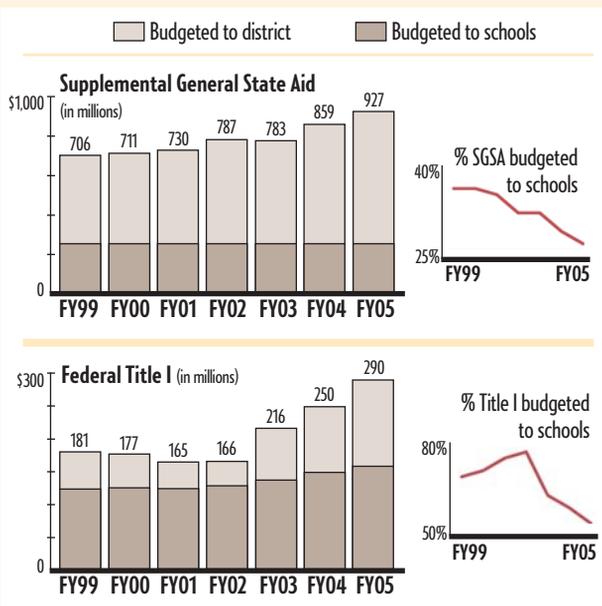
Monroe Elementary Principal James Menconi (left) and LSC chair, Miguel Sotomayor (right), often disagree on spending priorities. But the school's council reached consensus in March after weeks of grueling budget meetings. Also pictured: teacher representatives Sonia Acevedo (left) and Margarita Ampudia.



JASON REBLANDO

SCHOOLS' SHARE OF POVERTY FUNDS SLIPS

State and federal poverty grants to CPS have risen dramatically in recent years, but schools are not receiving the full benefit of those increases. In Illinois, state general aid has jumped 31 percent but poverty funds budgeted to schools has remained unchanged at \$261 million a year. The shift is more stark for federal Title 1. Since No Child Left Behind became law, overall Title 1 funding to Chicago jumped 74 percent, but the amount going to schools rose only 22 percent during the same period.



Notes: Does not include money for child parent centers
Source: CPS Final Budgets 1999-2005

ing, shifting final authority from local school councils and principals to area instructional officers.

Eason-Watkins' letter to probation schools was attached to a menu of "options" for how discretionary money has to be spent. Among the requirements for elementary schools: hiring a second reading specialist—the salary for the first one is picked up by the board—increasing spending on professional development; reducing class size in the primary grades; upgrading math and science programs; and if space allows, providing full-day kindergarten and expanding preschool.

(Before the district restored some of the poverty funding, one principal noted the dictum to expand preschool is "ironic" considering the board's decision to stop counting preschool students in poverty funding formulas. "No one wants to start early childhood programs anymore," she says. "You don't know if they'll fully fund it.")

High schools are required to hire one additional reading specialist and a freshman

counselor, or extend the existing counselor's availability by paying overtime. They must also implement the district's math and science initiatives, which entails converting existing courses to Chicago Math and Science Initiative programs at either a less expensive "slow improvement" level or a pricier "fast track" pace.

Pricing for these measures ranges widely, depending on school size and the options agreed upon by AIOs and principals. For example, the "fast track" science program costs about \$173,000 compared to \$92,000 for "slow improvement." Costs for more generic requirements, like professional development initiatives, vary by staffing needs and programming choices.

Xavier Botana, the accountability chief for CPS, says the new spending requirements were carefully researched. A CPS study of districtwide discretionary spending found a link between spending on the prescribed requirements and higher test scores. Botana also cites national research on the benefits of early childhood education.

Some principals, however, say the requirements are a “one size fits all” strategy that conflicts with the spirit behind discretionary funding, which was created to supplement regular programs at the LSC’s discretion.

Principal Shelby Taylor of Revere Elementary, which slipped onto probation after CPS hiked its accountability benchmarks, concedes that the district reading and math programs are doing some good at the South Shore school. But she complains that probation spending priorities cost five teacher assistants and seven parent workers who helped maintain order in classrooms and boost parent involvement.

And probation status has marginalized the LSC’s input on budget planning, says Taylor. “It is a directive from our AIO to review our budget to make sure it meets the criteria,” she explains.

Probation spending requirements are more painful for elementary schools than they are for high schools, says Principal John Butterfield of Mather High School, a West Ridge school also placed on probation this year.

High schools have more wiggle room because their discretionary budgets are typically much bigger, he explains. “I pity the smaller schools where money is very tight,” he says.

Mather gets some \$1.7 million in poverty funds. The hefty budget gives Butterfield enough financial latitude to take care of required probationary spending—hiring a literacy leader, three math teachers and an extra freshman counselor—and still execute a long-term plan to buy laptops for every teacher. He says the board’s new computer fee, however, sapped nearly \$50,000 and will likely cost him a much-needed technical coordinator.

The authority of area instructional officers to lock all discretionary funds is largely symbolic, says Botana from the CPS accountability office. Rather, the spending guidelines are to be viewed as a “guide” for how schools should spend their discretionary dollars. Final decisions are made by AIOs in consultation with principals.

Botana notes that this year’s 50 percent lock on probation schools’ discretionary budgets redirected close to \$15 million into “key programs.” He expects even more will be rerouted in next year’s budgets. “Clearly, as a system, we stated what our priorities are,” he explains.

AIO Cynthia Barron says many of the 14 high schools she oversees on the Far South Side have not been able to hire the second reading specialist required by probation, and instead are making the most of the specialists already on staff.

Barron says AIOs understand that each probation requirement won’t work for every school, and that they seek input from principals and LSCs. Still, “by freezing the budget, there’s no misunderstanding,” she says.

Don Moore, executive director of the research and advocacy group Designs for Change, says the additional layer of central oversight has yet to prove its worth. “Really good principals say [AIOs] are not helping them at all,” he adds.

TIGHTENING AND LOOSENING BUDGET GRIP

The district is moving steadily toward a new budget system where there are three tiers of local budget authority. Schools CEO Arne Duncan envisions the worst performers will be at the bottom and will have spending priorities dictated to them by central

SGSA TIMELINE *Continued from page 7*

amount of state Chapter 1 money it distributes to schools at current levels, roughly \$261 million, and budget the rest centrally. Indeed, ten years later, the board continues to allocate no more than this amount to schools.

1997 The state Legislature scraps the Chapter 1 program and replaces it with poverty grants that provide substantially less money. However, it also increases general state aid and requires CPS to continue distributing \$261 million to schools.

1999 A coalition of school reformers lobby state lawmakers to raise by \$16 million the minimum amount of poverty funds distributed to schools, and to tie further increases to annual gains in general state aid. Despite initial interest among lawmakers, the plan is never called for a vote.

2003 Chicago stands to benefit when the state Legislature adopts recommendations of the Education Funding Advisory Board to change the formula it uses to calculate each school district’s share of state poverty funds. Briefly, the new formula awards more money to districts that have higher concentrations of poor students and uses a more frequently updated source of poverty data. However, districts slated to lose money under the new formula—many of them rural—win a “hold harmless” provision that guarantees existing funding levels. The formula awards Chicago a \$55 million increase in poverty funds, but the district gets only 25 percent of that amount as the state phases in the new law. Another provision allows poverty funds to be tapped when the state cannot otherwise cover foundation-level education funding, costing winning districts \$7.6 million in 2004.

2004 The district freezes 50 percent of the discretionary budgets of schools on probation and requires them to get spending approval from area instructional officers, effectively stripping control away from councils and giving it back to CPS administrators. The following year, 100 percent of discretionary funds at probation schools are subject to AIO approval.

2005 CPS budget officials exclude preschoolers from calculations used to determine how much poverty money each school will receive in the fall. Later, Interim State Superintendent of Education Randy S. Dunn mandates in a letter to CEO Arne Duncan that the district correct its mistake, forcing CPS to use \$6 million in SGSA reserves to compensate schools with early childhood programs.

John Myers, Daniel C. Vock

management. At the top will be schools with solid academic and financial track records. Money will be allocated to those schools eventually on a per pupil basis, and principals and councils will have authority to draw up their own budgets. (See *Catalyst* February 2005)

The plan sounds reasonable to William Ouchi, professor of management at the University of California at Los Angeles, who studied CPS in 2001. But Chicago has a rather lackluster record for actually

empowering principals financially, he notes.

Ouchi says CPS puts about 19 cents out of every \$1 in principals’ hands. More innovative districts give principals 80 percent to 90 percent of financial decision making.

“That means less local flexibility (for Chicago), more shotgun approaches to districtwide programs and it usually means more bureaucrats deciding how to spend the money,” he says.

But Ouchi questions Chica-

Continued on page 11

Better off schools to get more Title I, poorest will receive less

CPS recalibrates its sliding distribution scale. Schools at the low end pick up over \$200 per student; those at the top lose more.

**By Alexander Russo
and John Myers**

For many years, the Chicago Board of Education has concentrated federal Title I money in schools that rated highest on a special poverty index.

A steep sliding scale—ranging this year from \$200 to \$980 per low-income student—provided schools with the highest poverty rates proportionately more of this federal discretionary money and won praise from researchers studying urban district funding strategies.

However, the School Board recently began tilting the scales in the other direction and may soon change how poverty is defined in the underlying distribution formula, which has been in place for at least a decade. Already this year, 50 schools were added to the Title I eligibility rolls when the board lowered the minimum poverty level to 40 percent. Previously, the lower limit was 50 percent.

Next year, many of these newly eligible schools will get more than double the per pupil amount that schools at the low end of the poverty spectrum received this year. At the same time, funding rates for those at the highest poverty levels will be slashed by 18 percent.

"It was too wide a band for us," says CPS Budget Director Pedro Martinez. "We didn't feel like it was equitable."

The new scale will shift hundreds of thousands of discretionary dollars to relatively better off schools and will force those that are worse off to make even larger cuts than may already be required by the system's projected \$175 million budget shortfall.

Next year, Title I-eligible schools at the bottom of the poverty index will get \$430 per poor student, up from \$200 per child. By contrast, schools at the top of the scale will see their allocations reduced from \$980 to no more than \$800 per poor child.

'I HAD TO FIRE MYSELF'

With a Title I poverty level of 79 percent, Lathrop Elementary in Lawndale has the highest federal poverty index in the district this year. (The index is determined by a weighted average of welfare and free and reduced-price lunch participation rates.)

However, the school will see its Title I funding drop to \$169,000 next year, down from \$291,000 this year. (Besides the sliding scale changes, Lathrop was hit by the district's decision to eliminate preschool students when it tallied Title I allocations.)

Lathrop Business Manager Shonta Arrington says she had little choice but to cut everything that she could, including the school librarian, instructional supplies—and her own position. "I had to fire myself," she says.

A 14-year veteran, Arrington says she's "never seen it this bad" and notes that the school does not expect to get financial relief from central office.

The situation is worse at schools that serve a lot of preschoolers, who had previously been included in federal poverty counts. North Lawndale's Herzl Elementary, which serves 120 preschool students and this year rated among the poorest on Title I poverty scale, is facing a \$280,440 cut in federal poverty funds.

Losing close to \$200 per pupil, Herzl Principal Betty Green is weighing the prospect of dropping three full-day

kindergartens, eight teachers hired to reduce class size, and six classroom aides. "I have to cut vital programs that are critical to the kids," she says. Herzl is on probation and thus required to spend discretionary dollars on the district's prescribed reading and math programs.

But Green is appealing the cuts. She and principals facing similar cuts at Penn and Mason elementary schools met with district budget director Martinez to ask for relief.

Martinez says only a few schools will see declines in Title I funding, and argues those decreases will be mostly due to other factors, such as declining enrollment or fewer students qualifying for welfare or the free and reduced-price lunch program.

These schools are receiving a "double whammy" of reduced poverty and enrollment rates, says Martinez. "The formula factors are all connected," he says. "It's usually not just one thing."

Yet some schools are clear winners solely because of the funding boost at the bottom of the Title I funding scale. Portage Park Elementary, with a 44 percent federal poverty rating this year, will receive a "sizeable increase," but not double this year's \$114,000 in Title I, says Principal Mark Berman, who plans to hire another teacher with the extra money.

Next year, Martinez says six schools—Jones College Prep, Kenwood Academy, South Loop, Chicago International-Bucktown, Nettelhorst, and Ashburn—will no longer be eligible to receive Title I, and 14 others will become newly eligible.

FUNDING UP, DISTRICT 'SET-ASIDE' GROWS

Carolyn Brown, a California State University-Dominguez Hills researcher who studies public school funding, says the Title I distribution scale in Chicago is still steeper than it is in New York and Los Angeles. She speculates that Chicago's redistribution of federal poverty funds is a response to pressure from principals at

low-poverty schools that don't get much—or any—discretionary money. (See story on page 15.)

While some schools are getting less Title I money, the total amount coming into the district is on the rise.

After decades of spreading Title I money evenly across states and districts, Congress created in the No Child Left Behind a more targeted distribution formula law that sent a bigger share of federal dollars to the nation's top dozen big-city school districts.

In Chicago, the change has amounted to a whopping 75 percent jump—from \$166 million in 2001-2002 to \$290 million this school year—netting the city over half of the Title I funds allocated to the state, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

But the share going out to Title I schools has gotten smaller. Three years ago, 78 percent of the district's Title I money was distributed to schools; this year, schools got just 55 percent.

That's because the district is setting aside more Title I money for citywide programs, some of them required by No Child Left Behind. This year, central office kept \$131 million in Title I, up from \$36 million in 2002. Before the federal law was enacted, the district was passing through an increasingly larger share of Title I to schools, growing from 70 percent in 1998 to a peak of 78 percent in 2001, according to a *Catalyst*

Chicago analysis of budget data.

Martinez says that the percentage going to schools next year will stay at about 55 percent.

Chicago distributes relatively less to schools than do other large districts. In 2003-2004, New York and Los Angeles both budgeted more than 70 percent of their Title I funds to schools; Chicago budgeted 60 percent, according to Brown, who studied all three districts.

Still, there is no legal limit on how much money the district can retain for districtwide programs, says Wayne Riddle, a budget expert with the Congressional Research Service. "That's always been a somewhat loose area of Title I," he notes.

DWINDLING WELFARE ROLLS LOWER FUNDING

Under federal law, districts can choose among a variety of methods to rate school poverty levels. Few are still using the combination of weighted welfare and lunch program participation rates that Chicago uses, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Generally, participation in the free and reduced-price lunch program is much higher (85 percent) than participation in welfare, which has been declining since welfare reform laws were passed in 1996. (Welfare participation is used as a proxy for extreme family poverty.)

The number of CPS students whose families are on welfare declined last year by 46 percent—from 41,000 to 22,000

children, says budget director Martinez.

In her 2003-2004 study, Brown found that only 18 CPS schools hit 75 percent—then the high point—on the district's federal poverty index. At the same time, there were 30 schools that were at least 75 percent low income by lunch program participation rates but did not receive any Title I money.

Martinez says the district is indeed considering eliminating welfare rates from the Title I formula. "We're looking at it for the future," he says, though no timetable has been set.

Historically, the formula's balance between welfare rates and lunch program participation was a point of contention between the African-American and Hispanic communities, with the latter participating proportionately higher in the lunch program and, therefore, favoring that element.

Meanwhile, the district is going to work with the schools that face the deepest poverty funding cuts, and may temporarily restore some, but not all, of those funds. When the Title I distribution formula was last changed in 1997, the district paid out \$17 million to soften the blow for 42 affected schools. (See *Catalyst* May 1997)

"We're trying to help," he says. "Budgets for next year are still being adjusted."

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BUDGET *Continued from page 9*

go's decision to give local school councils final say over budgets. He remembers one principal who struggled with a local council comprised mostly of parents with children in the band program. The council wanted to spend an inordinate amount on band equipment and uniforms.

LSC advocates, like Moore, say the financial control given to councils provides a critical check on principals' power. An ineffective principal can hurt student achievement by spending too much on office personnel or other non-instructional

expenses, he contends.

"Decision making always happens in some sort of political context. You can't escape that," says Moore.

MONROE COUNCIL SAVES A POPULAR AP

Politics certainly factored into budget planning at Monroe Elementary as leaders struggled to fill a projected \$177,000 hole.

Principal James Menconi tried to protect three school aides from cuts, but the LSC had other plans. Menconi and the LSC, lead by Sotomayor, scrapped over everything from teacher supplies to a

popular parent mentoring program pushed by a local community group.

In the end, popular sentiment helped Kathleen Bandalik, the new assistant principal, keep her job for a second year. This year, she started a popular Friday morning program for parents called "Café y Conversations," where community members discuss topics ranging from student testing to healthy eating. She's also earned a reputation for responding quickly to parents' concerns. For instance, Bandalik made sure a special education class, where one council member's son was assigned,

was moved from the basement to regular classroom space.

The council won nearly all of its spending priorities, including a request from teachers to spend more on instructional materials, a measure the principal felt was excessive.

"Whatever we do, we have to make sure we keep the kids moving forward," Sotomayor says.

If they fail to do so, the "discretionary" budget just might disappear.

Intern Alejandra Cerna Rios contributed to this report.

Call John Myers at (312) 673-3874 or e-mail myers@catalyst-chicago.org.

How poverty funds are spent

Inflation has zapped schools' spending power of state and federal poverty funds. High schools are using discretionary dollars to hire more than twice as many security staff at more than three times the cost compared to 10 years ago.

And elementary schools earmark more than three-fourths of their poverty funds for instructional expenses, according to a *Catalyst Chicago* analysis of how schools budgeted discretionary funds this year.

High schools, which by necessity have more administrative needs, spend more than a third of their poverty funding on non-instructional expenses. However, a chunk of that money pays for security, a likely side-effect of the district's zero tolerance, according to a recent study by the Advancement Project, a democracy and justice action group based in Washington D.C.

Chicago Vocational and Marshall high schools each allocated a third of their poverty funds to security, more than other schools in the district. Area Instructional Officer Cynthia Barron, who oversees high schools on the far South Side, notes such expenses are subject to scrutiny. "We need to look at that," she says. "It's a place where you don't want schools spending all their money."

The *Catalyst* analysis also found magnet and selective schools tend to spend more on enrichment programs and other extras, a finding backed up by an earlier study on funding equity that noted these schools tend to get more basic funding per pupil than regular schools. (*Catalyst* February 2005)

"[Elite schools] have more flexibility before they get to their discretionary money," says G. Alfred Hess Jr., a school finance and budget expert at Northwestern University.

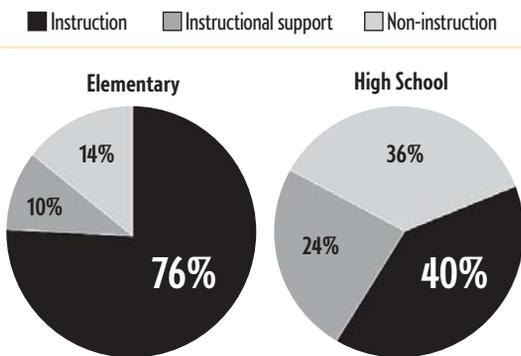
1995 to 2005:

Since 1995, the amount of state poverty funds controlled by schools remains flat at \$261 million a year, while their federal dollars—about \$134 million this year—have increased just 1 percent. The staff buying power of those dollars declined 30 percent in 497 schools studied by *Catalyst*. Ten years ago, the average certified employee cost these schools \$48,770 in discretionary funds; by 2005 the cost had jumped to \$63,430.

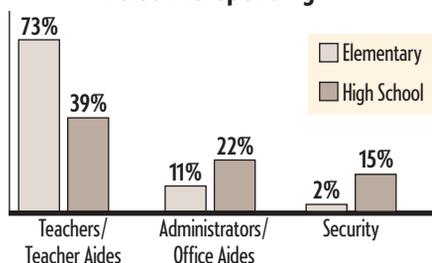
Note: *Catalyst* identified 497 regular elementary

SCHOOL SIZE, GRADES SERVED FACTOR INTO SPENDING

High schools tend to spend more on security, dropout programs, and administrative staff who oversee course scheduling, and discipline and attendance paperwork. All of these expenses divert poverty funds away from instructional spending. Extra teachers to reduce class size are a priority for most elementary schools.

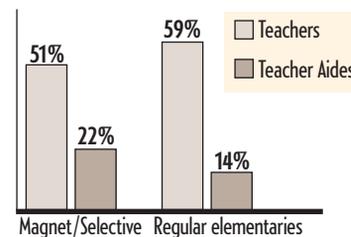


Personnel spending



MAGNET, SELECTIVE SCHOOLS BUY AIDES

Magnet and selective schools tend to enroll fewer students than regular schools, and a lower percentage of low-income students. With less poverty money on hand, these schools are more likely to buy classroom aides instead of more expensive teachers. Still, a *Catalyst* budget analysis (February 2005) found these schools tend to get more financial resources from the district through special programs. Those funds are often used to hire teachers.

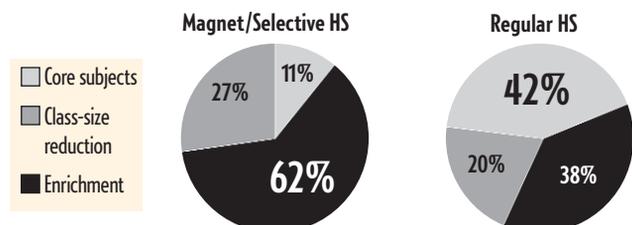


REGULAR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS TARGET CLASS SIZE REDUCTION

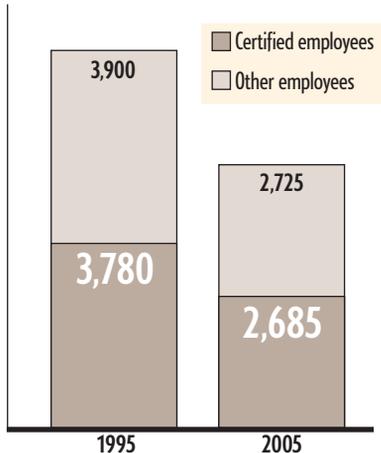
Instructional spending aimed at reducing class sizes
Magnet/Selective: 27%
Regular elementaries: 33%

High school spending on teachers

Magnet and selective high schools tend to hire teachers for enrichment programs; regular high schools target core subjects first.

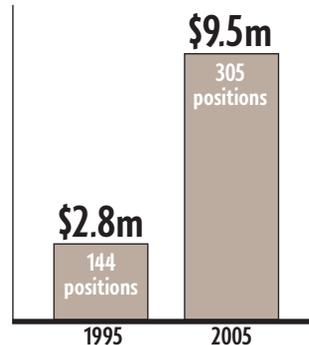


Less bang for the buck



HIGH SCHOOL SECURITY SPENDING SKYROCKETS

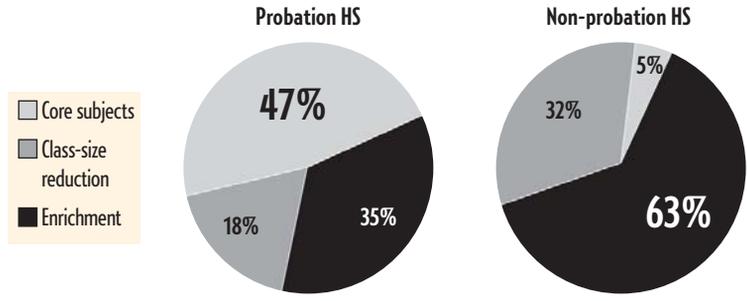
High schools are using poverty funds to employ more than double the number of security staff as they did 10 years ago.



and high schools open in 1995 and 2005. Excluded are child parent centers, charter schools and specialty schools.

PROBATION REQUIREMENTS AT WORK IN HIGH SCHOOLS ONLY

AIOs took charge of discretionary spending in probation schools this year, and their effect was clearly visible in high schools, where those on probation targeted nearly half of their teacher spending on reading, math and science programs. Non-probation high schools spent only a fraction on core subjects, beefing up enrichment programs instead.



Methodology

To analyze how schools spend poverty funds, Catalyst adapted personnel and programmatic spending categories developed by the now-defunct Chicago Panel on School Policy for a 1995 study on school spending. These categories were applied to \$371 million in state and federal poverty funds budgeted to 549 elementary and high schools, representing about 88 percent of the total discretionary money going to schools this year. Some schools were excluded for technical reasons, along with a fraction of funds labeled "miscellaneous."

First, poverty fund spending was sorted into two categories: personnel and non-personnel. Then, using job titles and program codes, personnel expenses (83 percent of funds studied) were further subdivided into one of the following groups: teachers, substitute teachers, classroom aides, administrators, clerical aides, social services, security, parents and other staff. Money earmarked for overtime pay was placed in a separate category, and benefits were prorated based on averages for certified and uncertified personnel.

The second analysis sorted spending into three programmatic areas: instructional, instructional support and non-instructional. For more detail on what was included in each of these groups, visit www.catalyst-chicago.org.

Data for all charts come from CPS budgets, 1995 and 2005

Two spending profiles

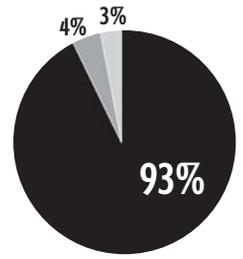
HEALY ELEMENTARY

Among elementary schools that receive \$1 million or more in discretionary money, Healy in Bridgeport spends the highest share on teachers, classroom aides and other instructional expenses. This year, poverty funds are picking up the tab for one part-time and 14 full-time teachers. Healy, whose diverse student body is more than 57 percent Asian, also invests in literacy resources such as librarians and supplemental reading materials.

Mary Ellen Ratkovich, the school's new principal, is looking to earmark more money for technology next year. Healy posts higher than average test scores—67 percent of its students met or exceeded standards in 2004. It also has a higher attendance rate and lower mobility rates than state and district averages.

How its budget breaks down

\$1.18 million



■ Instruction ■ Instructional support ■ Non-instruction

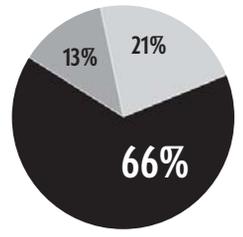
SPENCER MATH AND SCIENCE ACADEMY

By contrast, Spencer in Austin spends a smaller share of its discretionary dollars on instructional expenses. The biggest difference: Spencer devotes a chunk of poverty money to administration and security (\$259,000), and nothing on classroom aides. (Healy is just the opposite, investing a large chunk in classroom aides (\$162,000), nothing in security, and a sliver on one office aide (\$33,000).)

Student performance and attendance is well below average and, as such, Spencer is on probation. The state audited the school's internal financial accounts in 2003, approving all of Spencer's discretionary spending except for \$20,000 in "questionable" parent stipends. The school's new principal, Carolyn Palmer, declined comment on Spencer's budget.

How its budget breaks down

\$1.26 million



■ Instruction ■ Instructional support ■ Non-instruction

Schurz High School 'Well-run' school employs 26 counselor aides

Schurz High School in Irving Park is the aide champion of the city. This year it employed 26 "guidance counselor aides," one for every 96 students.

Prosser Career Academy and Steinmetz High School, both in Belmont Cragin, came in second with nine aides each. At Prosser, that amounts to one aide for every 149 students; at Steinmetz, one for every 271. "They're necessary," argues Principal Sharon Bender. "It helps the school run smoothly, efficiently, effectively."

Indeed, the people who fill the counselor aide positions perform a wide variety of duties. They serve in the attendance and discipline offices, process truants and monitor the halls. Only two are permanently stationed in the guidance office, where 10 certified counselors serve 2,500 students.

Anna Dreschler, an 11-year Schurz veteran, spends most of her time in the school's three-room computer lab. She fine tunes student access schedules, monitors students when they are online—keeping them out of chat rooms, for instance—advises teachers on classroom presentations, answers students' questions and orders supplies and parts.

This year, Schurz spent some \$746,000—a third of its \$2.3 million in discretionary funds—on counselor aide positions.

Chicago Teachers Union delegate Lois Jones agrees with Bender that Schurz is "pretty calm and well disciplined and well run." Still, she remains uncertain about exactly how many counselor aides the school should have. "Do we need as many as we have? I'm not sure about that."

Besides guidance counselor aides, the school used discretionary money to hire three assistant principals (which brought the total to six), five teachers and three security aides.

Jones argues that the school doesn't need three extra assistant principals. "We get more bang for our buck on the guidance counselor aides. With APs, I'm getting someone to hand lesser plans to," she says.

This year, Schurz was put on probation, which means it has to follow CPS guidelines for spending on instructional improvement. In addition, its area instructional officer must approve its budget.

Alejandra Cerna Rios

Clemente High School

Free reign, then reined in

Eight years ago, Clemente High School was under intense public scrutiny amid allegations that state poverty funds had been misspent. The charges sparked calls for more oversight, and for public schools, as well as the district, to be held more accountable for spending practices.

Today, Clemente's finances are "orthodox," says Barbara Radner, who testified before a legislative committee that was looking into the matter in 1997 and now serves as a literacy and curriculum consultant for the school. And since it's on probation, Clemente has to submit its budget to the area instructional officer for approval and allocate a significant chunk to CPS-approved academic programs.

"The money is not really discretionary anymore," concludes social studies teacher Harold Matz, a teacher representative on the Clemente LSC.

At a March 15 meeting, Clemente's LSC reviewed line items budgeted for the \$2.2 million in poverty funds the West Town school is slated to receive next year. The process was a 10-minute formality since Area Instructional Officer Richard Gazda had already signed off.

Spending for probation-mandated programs accounts totaled just over \$341,000, or 15.5 percent, of the 2006 discretionary budget. Those expenses included: \$94,500 to expand the reading program, \$84,000 for the math initiative and \$64,650 for science, and \$98,000 for teacher professional development through Northwestern and DePaul universities. (Another \$49,000 from the general education fund will pay for new math and science textbooks.)

One school staffer who attended the LSC meeting complained that Clemente has to use discretionary money to pay for necessary expenses, such as a third assistant principal who oversees student affairs and a small schools program; five additional security guards (\$185,957); a swimming pool lifeguard (\$28,957); and summer school (\$110,000).

There was not enough discretionary money left to pay for a planned expansion of a tutoring program for students

who have failed courses, which this year cost the school some \$190,000.

Principal Irene Damota declined to comment on the school's budget.

INVESTIGATION SHOOK COMMUNITY

None of the current LSC members, including Damota, were affiliated with Clemente in February 1997 when the Illinois House of Representatives convened a special committee to look into spending allegations made by the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The incendiary story, which proclaimed the school a "hiring hall" for patronage, alleged that the school brought artists and writers to Chicago to raise money for the Puerto Rican liberation movement, and indoctrinated its students in liberation lore.

At the heart of the largely political controversy, which pitted factions within the Puerto Rican community against each other, was whether Clemente's LSC had misspent poverty funds. The faction that controlled the LSC held its own hearings and issued a counter-report, arguing that children in this low-income, multi-cultural community had benefited from the expenditures.

No one involved in the controversy was charged with any criminal wrongdoing.

In its final report in 1998, the special committee determined that Clemente had spent some of those funds questionably, but also that CPS and the state had not provided enough oversight. Senate President Emil Jones Jr., who was not on the committee, recommended more oversight of lower-performing schools. Beginning this year, Clemente and other probation schools, have had to direct spending on CPS-crafted mandates, but the general guidelines for spending poverty funds were never formally revised.

Alejandra Cerna Rios

District sets aside extra funds as safety net for wealthier schools

Next year, CPS plans to dole out \$2.5 million to schools in 'affluent' neighborhoods

By John Myers

An obscure CPS funding program that fattens lean discretionary budgets at schools with the fewest poor students will pay out \$2.5 million to those schools next year. The so-called minimum funding program is a financial safety net for schools that are eligible for some—but not much—poverty money because they enroll more students from middle-income families.

It guarantees a supplemental funding floor that ranges from \$50,000 for schools enrolling up to 200 students to \$200,000 for those with enrollment over 500.

The minimum funding program, which is financed by local tax dollars, survived the chopping block in this spring's tight budget climate that is forcing principals to cut classroom staff and district leaders to hold off scheduled facility repairs.

Tapping local tax revenue may put the district on shaky legal ground, says one school reformer. "The state law says every school is supposed to get a fair share of the local funds," explains Donald Moore of the research and advocacy group Designs for Change. "There shouldn't be any special considerations."

Still, principals who get the money maintain that it gives them financial flexibility where there would otherwise be none.

"The minimum funding money is crucial to the schools that get it," says Principal Robert Guercio of Bell Elementary. The North Center school got \$42,000 from the minimum funding program this year to shore up its \$158,000 state poverty fund grant. "It's ridiculous for the board to come back to me every time they cut something and say, 'Buy it out of your

discretionary money.'"

Bell, where 30 percent of students are low-income, spent its extra money on library books, maps and globes, school aides and partial support for a sign language instructor.

Principal Maureen Connolly of Kellogg Elementary in Beverly concedes "the school is in an affluent area, but we still have to educate the kids." Kellogg used its \$39,000 from minimum funding to pay for a teacher aide and to buy updated core subject materials.

'WATERED DOWN' POVERTY FUNDS

Minimum funding was created in 1998 in response to complaints from a coalition of Northwest Side schools that they were being penalized for posting better test scores. As test scores rose, more neighborhood kids from middle-income families had enrolled and had displaced the bused-in, low-income students who helped the schools qualify for poverty funds.

Eager to keep middle-income families satisfied with the public schools, district leaders then earmarked \$1.5 million to beef up the schools' dwindling discretionary budgets. This year, the districtwide budget for minimum funding was \$3.5 million. CPS Budget Director Pedro Martinez says schools did not

get that much because an unexpected bump in charter school enrollment forced a late shift of \$1 million to cover charter school costs.

This year, close to \$391 million in poverty funding went to 617 schools. About 80 percent of schools are getting \$300,000 or more, and Kelly High School, with more than 2,500 low income students, is at the top of the chart with \$2.6 million.

Though minimum funding is a drop in the bucket, one school finance expert notes that the program dilutes the intent of supplemental poverty money, which is to compensate schools for the additional expenses they incur serving poor students. "The whole idea of discretionary funding has been so watered down," says G. Alfred Hess, who wrote the portion of the 1988 state school reform law that addressed poverty funding reform. "It's no wonder there's no compensatory effects left."

In the past, schools may not have gotten all of the minimum funding dollars the district promised, says Patricia Wells, principal at Franklin Elementary in Near North Side. However, when Wells received budget allocations for next year, she noted that minimum funding dollars had already been loaded in, a sign that it would not be taken away later.

"I get the feeling the budget office is really listening to us," says Wells.

Moore from Designs for Change suggests another way the district can beef up funding for every school: Cutting back on the money it budgets centrally for citywide programs and putting it directly into schools' budgets. The windfall, says Moore, would give schools like Bell, Kellogg and Franklin more wiggle room. ■

Teaching parents to teach kids

Pilsen, Little Village schools offer workshops that give parents the academic skills to help students

By Debra Williams

At Pickard Elementary on a recent Friday, Maria Ramirez and her daughter Diana, a 2nd-grader, go through their morning ritual before class: hugs, kisses and a firm but gentle reminder to Diana to “be good.”

But afterwards, instead of returning home, Ramirez heads to Room 101 to attend class herself.

She and several other mothers will become scientists during a two-hour parent workshop, completing hands-on, interactive projects using household items like string, rubber bands and coins. The group will learn scientific terms, make predictions and craft a hypothesis using scientific principles, and practice what they learn with each other.

At home, Ramirez will practice the projects with Diana to reinforce and supplement what her daughter has learned in school. So far, the workshops are paying off: Diana's grades have risen from B's to A's.

“Before, when my daughter needed help with homework, I couldn't do it because I didn't know how,” Ramirez says. “But now I can explain things to her. And now she has a lot more confidence.”

One of education's bedrock tenets is that parent involvement is critical to a child's success in school. But getting parents involved in schools and their chil-

dren's education can be a struggle in large urban districts like Chicago. Many parent programs fall short because they are social, rather than educational, or involve only occasional workshops, say experts.

Scaling Up Best Practice, the structured series of workshops at Pickard and seven other elementary schools in Pilsen and Little Village, aims to bypass those pitfalls by teaching parents specific skills and techniques to use when helping their children. Designed by the nonprofit Strategic Learning Initiatives, the program also provides professional development for teachers and support to principals.

RESEARCH WILL TRACK TEST SCORES

Most programs do not pose the question, “How can I support my child in the education setting?” says Karen Morris, a co-director of Scaling Up and a retired principal of Saucedo Scholastic Academy. “And workshops tend to be one-shot things.”

Anecdotally, parents and principals praise the program. Victoria Cadavid, the principal of Pickard, says that parents now “know what steps need to be taken” to help their children.

“The topics support what the kids are doing in school,” says Sylvia Stamatoglou, principal of Perez. “And you can just see it in [parents'] faces—they are learning too.”

Research is underway to gather hard evidence of academic improvement, by tracking the test scores of students whose parents attend workshops. Preliminary data is expected in six months.

“We asked teachers if they noticed any major changes in their kids and they listed those kids for us and they were usually kids whose parents attended these workshops,” says John Sim-

mons, president of Strategic Learning Initiatives.

In 2002, Pickard, Perez and Orozco elementary schools formed the Pilsen Education Network and partnered with Strategic Learning Initiatives to bring Scaling Up to their schools. Another network of five schools in Little Village—called Communities Dedicated to Kids, Schools and Success—was formed a year later. Last fall, from September through December, 234 parents attended workshops in the Pilsen schools; another 267 parents attended workshops in the Little Village network.

“Before we became part of the network, we brought in speakers to talk about things like immigration and domestic violence,” says Cadavid. “We also had craft activities. But it was not highly organized and it did not focus on what kids were doing in school.”

Scaling Up requires schools to commit to offering the workshops twice a month for at least four years. Workshops typically cover topics such as math, science, reading and literacy, homework help and how to help children succeed in school and build self-esteem.

Operating on the premise that parents are more comfortable with someone who has a connection to the school, workshops are taught by trained volunteer parent facilitators.

“In other schools, outsiders talk to parents,” says Cris Whitehead, Strategic Learning Initiatives' director of parent engagement and former local school council chair of Saucedo. “Parents are comfortable with people they know.”

To become facilitators, parents attend 10 sessions covering public speaking, leadership, goal-setting and communication. Parents also learn how to design

GET INVOLVED

For more information on Scaling Up Best Practice, call Strategic Learning Initiatives at 312-738-0022 or visit www.strategiclearninginitiatives.org

For more information, on parent programs nationwide, visit www.partnershipschoools.org

workshops and train other parents, so the school can carry on the program beyond the initial four-year commitment.

FIVE-POINT MODEL

Scaling Up is based on a school improvement model created under former Chicago Public Schools Superintendent Argie Johnson, called Pathways to Achievement. (See *Catalyst* November 1995). The model covers five areas that research by the Consortium on Chicago School Research has found to be critical to school improvement: good leadership, a student-centered learning environment, parent and community partnerships, professional development and collaboration and high-quality instruction.

The five-point model “is a powerful tool, but it was not being adequately used,” in large part because doing so requires a concerted, long-term effort, says Simmons. “People are hesitant to take that on.”

Scaling Up’s parent component relies on research conducted by Joyce Epstein, the director of the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University.

“If family involvement activities are linked to school improvement goals like helping children in math, reading or attending school regularly, then those students will do better on tests, have better behavior, and all the other positive indicators of success in school,” Epstein says. (See *Catalyst*, “What Matters Most” series, March 1998)

Schools pay \$45,000 each year for the four years of the program; the remainder of the cost, another \$45,000, is picked up by private funders. (Costs include substitute teachers and training.)

Schools in the Pilsen network are already looking toward next year, which will be the last year under Strategic Learning Initiatives’ guidance.

One potential problem may be a lack of parent facilitators. “It is a huge commitment,” says Whitehead. “Also, sometimes parents’ confidence level raises so much that they go on to school or get jobs and leave.”

In March, Orozco had three facilitators, and Perez and Pickard each had one. The program calls for two at each school.

Still, Simmons says the problem is not insurmountable. Parent facilitators can conduct workshops at other schools, he



JOHN BOOZ

At Pickard Elementary, Lydia Cuellar, a parent engagement facilitator, helps parents conduct a science experiment that they will be able to do at home with their children.

Daily activities become lessons

Through Scaling Up Best Practice, parents at Perez, Pickard and Orozco schools attend workshops tied to classroom work, test-taking or special school projects.

During one workshop in December, parents learned how to make books to prepare them to help their children enter the Young Authors’ Competition, which involves writing and creating a homemade book.

Elaine Ratajczak, who conducts workshops at Pickard, explained to parents, as they composed stories, that the exercise also helps kids prepare for exams. “Many times on [tests], kids will get a prompt to write. This is a fun activity to get them started.”

Workshops also show how to turn everyday encounters into lessons and encourage children’s analytical thinking. For instance, parents are told to pepper their children with questions while reading a story, such as “What do you think happens now? Who do you think lives in that castle?”

“Asking questions prepares them for when teachers ask them questions,” says Cris Whitehead, director of parent engagement for Strategic Learning Initiatives and a former local school council chair of Saucedo Scholastic Academy.

Because parents usually have children in more than one grade, workshops are not grade-specific and use techniques that can be modified to fit all ages, such as word games that can be changed by using vocabulary appropriate to a child’s grade level.

Parent Theresa Gonzales says the workshops showed her how to help her nephew as well as her own child. Her nephew, a student at Pilsen Academy, was preparing for the school’s science fair, so Gonzales showed him how to do an experiment demonstrating how ice melts at different speeds in salt water and fresh water. The youngster won first place.

“I taught him the procedures, how to time it, present it and speak to a judge. My sister asked me how I knew so much,” Gonzales says, with a laugh.

Another parent says the workshop helped boost her own confidence.

“I’ve always had a problem with math. And sentences with the problems—I’m lost,” says Carol Segovia. “I’m someone who has never done division in my entire life, but I did it. And I had fun.”

At the beginning of each year, parents fill out a survey indicating what they’d like to learn for the upcoming year. This year, parents in the Pilsen network asked for a workshop on U.S. history.

“Many of our parents are newcomers,” says Ratajczak. “At 5th grade many of their kids are starting to study history, and when their kids ask questions, they don’t know enough to help them. Parents really want to help their kids, but they need help doing it.”

Debra Williams

says, and principals can step in to recruit parents if needed. “When they are asked, there are many parents who will step forward to participate,” he says.

Next year, Strategic Learning Initiatives is looking to recruit a network of African American schools on the West Side.

“We’ve heard that these ideas may not

work in these schools and we know that’s not true,” says Simmons. “There may be cultural differences among different communities, but the differences do not affect the basic way adults and children learn.”

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

Updates

RENAISSANCE WATCH/MAUREEN KELLEHER

Backers fall short with money, disclosure

The question of how much funding each of the new Renaissance schools will get from the business-backed New Schools for Chicago seems straightforward and simple. But asking it didn't lead to a simple answer.

In February, New Schools for Chicago teamed up with Mayor Richard M. Daley's office to announce it had awarded \$3.7 million to eight schools; so far, the group has not released a school-by-school breakdown of the grants.

Meanwhile, New Schools is not yet halfway to its \$50 million fundraising goal set by parent group, the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago. The groups says it has raised \$24 million and is considering hiring a professional fundraiser, according to documents filed with the Illinois Attorney General's office.

According to Avis LaVelle, a former School Board member and mayoral press secretary who now manages public relations for New Schools, the group has pledged to raise "\$25 million locally [and to] help the city raise \$25 million from foundations and national organizations. We haven't started to tap into national foundations yet. We're in the real infancy stages of this."

THE NEW SCHOOLS CONNECTION?

By piecing together information from the startup schools and the business group itself, *Catalyst* has been able to account for only \$2.9 million of the \$3.7 million announced in February. Individual schools have received anywhere from \$45,000 to \$1 million.

Insiders say the grant amounts weren't disclosed at the press conference because New Schools feared

the disparities would overshadow the big announcement.

As it turns out, \$2 million of the grants come from two existing school-business partnerships, and only one has a firm connection to New Schools.

A \$1 million partnership between JP Morgan Chase/Bank One and the University of Chicago "was before New Schools and it would have happened without New Schools," says Linda Wing, deputy director of the Center for Urban School Improvement, which will run the charter. The money will be used to promote parent and community involvement in the university's new charter school.

LaVelle contends the money can rightly go under the group's banner because JP Morgan Chase/Bank One "wants to channel those contributions through New Schools." New Schools, however, will not administer or oversee spending. Warren Chapman, vice president for community relations at Bank One, did not return calls for comment.

The other \$1 million partnership can claim a solid connection to New Schools through the chair of its board of directors, Don Lubin. The law firm of Sonnenschein Nath & Rosenthal, where Lubin is a partner, was the first corporation to answer the mayor's call for businesses to fund new schools, pledging \$1 million over four years to start the Legacy Charter School in North Lawndale.

LAW REQUIRES TRANSPARENCY

When it comes to sharing information, New Schools for Chicago is playing it close to the vest—close enough to earn criticism in a newspaper editorial.

For one, it asked members of its advisory board—which includes Chicago Public Schools officials—to sign non-disclosure agreements, even though the board would be discussing how to support start-up public schools.

Second, at press time, the group was still holding off on a formal public announcement of individual grants. "We have to check with all of the corporate donors to be sure they are comfortable with the release of the information," LaVelle said. "This has taken a lot longer to work its way through than anything anyone imagined."

Although the leader of one start-up school told *Catalyst* that New Schools officials told her not to disclose the amount of the grant, the information will eventually have to be made public. "Any grant or contract made by or between a public body and another public body or private organization is public record," says Rebecca Watts, public information officer for the Illinois State Board of Education. (Schools do not have to disclose the grants until they have the money in hand.)

Third, New Schools has never publicly outlined its grant criteria, though LaVelle says the priorities will be to invest in small schools and schools with innovative programs.

In fairness, interviews with leaders from the startup schools suggest the group is trying to target funds

Continued on page 22

With this issue, Catalyst launches Renaissance Watch, a new feature that will cast an analytical, behind-the-headlines eye on the ambitious yet controversial Renaissance 2010 plan.

Homelessness on the rise in CPS

Schools cope with academic, discipline problems. Activists say school closings violate homeless students' rights.

By Ed Finkel

The number of homeless students in Chicago Public Schools has more than doubled over the past five years, but advocates believe the district is still undercounting them and CPS officials acknowledge there are problems with its tracking system.

CPS data show the homeless population is on pace to rise again this school year. As of Feb. 28, the number of students identified as homeless during the school year had increased 18 percent over the same time last year, rising to 6,945 from 5,856. Last June, 8,549 students had been counted as homeless during the year, up from 3,786 five years earlier.

Schools with the highest numbers of homeless students are sprinkled throughout the city, according to Pat Rivera, manager of the district's Homeless Education Program. Those schools include Beidler and Lawndale elementaries on the West Side; Senn High and McCutcheon Elementary on the North Side; and Beethoven and Attucks elementaries and South Shore High on the South Side.

Advocates also say CPS has aggravated the problems homeless students face by closing schools under its Renaissance 2010 plan.

Rene Heybach, an attorney for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, says the closings violate a federal consent decree because shutting schools down prevents homeless students from returning to their home school after summer break, which the decree requires.

The coalition filed an enforcement action against CPS in federal court Sept. 7, the first day of school. In January, the two



Linda Little (right) is a parent advocate at Lawndale Community Academy, which has some 200 homeless students. Here, Little works with one of them on an after-school assignment.

JOHN BOOZ

'The school helps in every possible way'

As part of budget cutting last September by Chicago Public Schools, Pamela Williams lost her job as an aide at Lawndale Community Academy and soon became homeless. Her son, whom she describes as a former "straight-A, honor roll student," began to slip academically, even with the tutoring provided by the district.

"He's really going through things," Williams says, noting that, in addition to losing his home, the boy also lost his father, who died of lung cancer last year. "He's off track right now. He needs computer support and things of that nature. No educational service is enough."

Williams has been lucky to receive services from Lawndale. "The school helps me in every possible way they can," says Williams, who is living with a relative and battling cancer. "When I'm in the hospital, they take charge of my son. They help me with food, with clothing, with mental

and physical support, period. Sometimes I am so wiped out from chemo, I sleep all the time. They bring [my son] home after school and help him at the school and everything."

But a lack of staff and time mean schools usually cannot provide the same level of services to every homeless family. Typically, a social worker, counselor or assistant principal serves as the liaison to families, but social workers and counselors usually work in more than one school and assistant principals have other pressing duties.

Linda Little, parent advocate at Lawndale, sees needs similar to Williams'—minus, in most cases, the severe health problem—throughout the population of 200 or so homeless students at the school. "They have one address for a month, and then they move again," she says. "They have to leave whatever they have, and take what's on their back and move on."

Ed Finkel

Law, consent decree require student services

Under federal law, school districts must provide fee waivers, free lunches and any other assistance homeless students might need to attend school. Districts must also immediately enroll homeless students and make sure they know they can enroll in their original school.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act of 1987 became part of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. Illinois has its own law, the Education for Homeless Children Act of 1994, which includes specific procedures for resolving any disputes that arise.

In 1992 the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless filed a lawsuit against Chicago Public Schools stemming from provisions in the federal and state law. The suit was settled in 1997 with a consent decree governing how CPS will provide services to homeless students. The coalition went back to court in 1999 alleging the district was not complying with the decree; that case was settled in 2000.

According to Rene Heybach, attorney for the Chicago Coalition, the decree requires the district to:

- Provide transportation for homeless students to their schools of origin. Busing is provided for students in 6th grade and younger; older students receive CTA fare cards.
- Ensure that students receive appropriate fee waivers;
- Provide tutoring for those in need. Rivera says her office's tutoring program currently serves about 300 students at 13 schools.
- Train the homeless liaisons and clerks at schools, as well as principals, to serve homeless students.
- Inform families of the services available to them and of their right to dispute.

Although the consent decree does not specifically require it, Pat Rivera, manager of CPS' Homeless Education Program, says the system also refers families to public aid programs if needed; offers parent education in shelters; and works to find donations of books, school supplies and clothing.

Ed Finkel

sides reached an interim agreement stating that students affected by 10 closings last year will be assessed and referred to social services if needed.

The case is still pending, however, and

Heybach says CPS has objected to disclosing such information as the detailed reasons for closings, students' mobility patterns, and funding to help students transition to new schools.

"2010 is a massive displacement of these children," says Heybach. "CPS did nothing to assess the impact of this. It was the most un-child-centered initiative that has ever been launched with respect to homeless children."

Heybach wonders why CPS doesn't reopen closed schools by the next fall rather than a year later, "so there doesn't have to be a diaspora all over the city. There's no answer [from the district] so far because, what answer could there be?"

But CPS spokeswoman Sandy Rodriguez says transforming a closed school takes a year because it requires several steps: forming a transition advisory council of community residents to make recommendations about the new school; selecting the new school after proposals are submitted; hiring staff; and recruiting students.

"We want to have a competitive process for different groups to come in and bid," says Jeanne Nowaczewski, director of new schools development for CPS. "That's the essence of Renaissance 2010. It's nearly impossible to do that when you only have a summer, or four or five months."

Rivera says the district will be more pro-active in working with families affected by the three closings slated for this year, since they were announced in February rather than June.

"We have the opportunity to work with those families to make sure the children do get enrolled in their new school before the end of the school year," Rivera says. "We can work with providing transportation services and make sure the transition goes smoothly."

INFLATED FIGURES OR UNDERCOUNT?

The definition of homelessness, established under federal education law, includes families that are doubled-up for economic reasons, Rivera says. Although some might not think of such families as homeless, they have a difficult time proving residency in an attendance area and often don't stay put very long. Counting doubled-up families inflates the numbers, CPS officials say.

"You think of homeless, you think destitute, nowhere to go," says Leonard

Kenebrew, principal of South Shore High School, which has 80 to 100 homeless students on its campus, CPS figures show. (The campus includes the remaining seniors at the original high school plus four small schools.) "But many times, they're with relatives. That exacerbates the percentage. They say 80 to 100, but the number of truly homeless students might be 10 to 20."

Heybach maintains the district's figures would probably be higher if CPS' tracking system were more airtight. In fact, the district's count is determined primarily from emergency contact forms that allow parents to check off their living circumstances without using the word "homeless."

The form is a good way to encourage homeless families to identify themselves, Heybach says, "but it can't be the only way. We discovered in the course of our litigation that [it] was not being used at all schools." CPS keeps a database of families who have identified themselves as homeless on the form or by otherwise informing their school. (The database helps the district determine where services are most needed, she adds.)

As evidence of undercounting, Heybach cites a study based on 1990 Census data and reports from the City of Chicago, which estimated that 22,000 children and youth under age 21 had been homeless over the course of a year.

"What they're counting is so many less than that, that raises a flag for us," Heybach says. "A lot of people are ashamed of it." Finding uncounted homeless students takes effort, she adds. "Some schools are trying; others, it's not on their radar screen."

Rivera agrees that CPS' count is "probably lower than the actual numbers of homeless students out there" and points out that shame and loss of privacy play a role. "Sometimes families don't want to let people know they're homeless," she says. Young people who are not living with an adult "definitely don't want to let people know—even if there's services attached to it."

Self-reporting is even less likely for families who have stayed in the same attendance area and don't need the transportation services, Rivera adds. "The embarrassment factor would outweigh any services they would receive."

Kenebrew says undercounting is also

Continued on page 22

Panel aims to shield school funding

With an eye to ending budget battles, an advisory board asks the state to set aside money for schools first

By Daniel C. Vock

When the Education Funding Advisory Board gave lawmakers its recommendation for a \$1,441 increase in minimum per-pupil spending, the board made another little-noticed but far-reaching proposal that would, in effect, end the yearly battles over how much to spend on schools.

The advisory board called on the state to make education funding a “continuing appropriation,” thus making money for schools immune from budget cuts. Such a change would require the state to set aside money for schools first, before yearly budget negotiations begin.

It would also stop the practice of using money originally earmarked for high-poverty schools from going to general education, because the state would set aside enough money for both, explained former state senator Arthur L. Berman, an advisory board member who proposed the change.

The measure would ensure “we’re not taking from one very important fund, such as the poverty grant, and giving it to another very important fund or even jeopardizing the funding of the foundation level. Both of these, under our intent, would be fully funded,” he told his colleagues on the board.

The board’s move took it a slight step beyond its appointed role, which, under state law, is simply to suggest a foundation level and changes to the poverty grant. But taking action to protect school funding isn’t as politically volatile as urging lawmakers to enact a tax swap to increase school funding, something the board declined to do.

The previous advisory board did just that two years ago, recommending that the Legislature raise the income tax and lower property taxes. But with Gov. Rod Blagojevich advocating expanded gambling to increase money for schools, while remain-

ing adamantly opposed to higher taxes, the current board declined to take up the advocacy mantle again.

Too, advisory board chairman Steve DeMitro, a Chicago attorney, declined to say whether he favors a tax swap.

Three advisory board members favor the idea: Berman, who is a consultant to the Chicago Public Schools; Anne Davis, president of the Illinois Education Association and the lone remaining member of the previous board; and James F. Dougherty, president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, which has long supported the idea. (The board’s other member is Ramon Cepeda Jr., a Darien resident who is a first vice-president at LaSalle Bank.)

REWORKING THE POVERTY GRANT

Two years ago lawmakers made two changes in the way state Chapter 1 funds are allocated. First, at the board’s behest, they moved from using federal Census figures, which are updated only once a decade and typically undercount poor people, to more regularly updated estimates from the state.

Some school districts would have lost money under the change, so the Legislature retooled the law to prevent that. But doing so meant high-poverty schools would end up with less money than lawmakers originally intended.

Second, the Legislature stipulated that money allocated for the poverty grant would be a back-up source of funding for the foundation level: If money for that runs short, as it did last year, poverty grants take a hit.

The advisory board asked the legislature to fully fund both of those compo-



Arthur L. Berman

nents in the future. The continuing appropriation, if enacted, would make sure they were paid for before lawmakers made any other budget decisions.

MORE MONEY TO MEET NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND

One of the biggest questions board members faced is the effect of federal mandates from the No Child Left Behind Act.

Eventually, the law will dictate that all students in a school district meet or exceed certain testing goals. But existing criteria for setting the foundation level are based on schools in which just two-thirds of students, on average, meet state standards on the ISAT tests. Helping schools ensure that all of their students make the grade would raise the amount they need to spend per pupil.

And the tougher the requirements used to find the high-performing “model schools” that will act as guideposts, the less data the board has to examine in determining the foundation level—which could raise questions about whether the foundation level is based on a representative share of districts.

In any event, the board used calculations based on existing criteria to set the foundation level at \$6,405 per pupil, nearly 30 percent more than the \$4,964 the state provided this year.

In 2002, the advisory board set a benchmark foundation level of \$5,665, but lawmakers and the governor haven’t yet met that goal.

Still, one advocate from the Illinois PTA told advisory board members that the group can use its recommendation in its efforts to push for funding changes.

And Bindu Batchu, campaign manager for the A+ Coalition, which advocates a tax swap, says the board’s recommendation carries a lot of weight because it is based on research and not politics.

“That’s the most important benchmark in education,” Batchu says. “It shows how much it takes to pay for a decent education.”

Daniel C. Vock is the Statehouse bureau chief for the Chicago Daily Law Bulletin. To contact him, send an e-mail to editor@catalyst-chicago.org.

BACKERS *Continued from page 18*

where they are most needed. “We came in with money already in hand from our own board members and supporters,” notes Ricardo Estrada, executive director of Erie Neighborhood House, which received \$45,000 because it had already raised \$138,000 and has a fundraising plan. “We didn’t need it, which was good and bad, a double-edged sword.”

ONLY CHARTERS NEED APPLY?

Another question is whether New Schools will show preference to charters over other schools. The corporate leaders backing New Schools include strong champions of the notion that market forces can, and should, be a driving force behind school improvement; they have supported charters in part because charter teachers are prohibited by law from joining the powerful Chicago Teachers Union.

All seven new charters got startup

money, but so far only one of three eligible performance schools, Pershing West, has received funding; the other two, Tarkington Elementary and Uplift (which will replace Arai Middle in Uptown), are still waiting to find out if they will get grants. Performance schools are operated by the district, and their teachers belong to the union.

Martin Koldyke, the venture capitalist who chairs the Academy of Urban School Leadership, which will operate Tarkington, says New Schools put the Tarkington proposal on hold because “there were people on the board who were concerned about the size of the school, and because after two and a half years the governance would revert to a local school council.” While LSCs are elected and are legally required to include parents and community members, the charter law makes no such requirements of charter school boards.

The Academy’s board shares some of the governance concerns, Koldyke says,

but he adds, “We really reacted to the desire on the part of the neighborhood to have the opportunity to have more input at the school.”

Another lingering issue involves the definition of a Renaissance school. While CPS’s definition includes, for instance, schools built to relieve overcrowding and new schools that were in the works before Renaissance was announced, New Schools isn’t willing to stretch the definition that far. That raises the question of whether the two sides have crafted a common strategy for Renaissance.

The mayor appears to be siding with business. “All of those schools are not going to be under the Renaissance umbrella,” says LaVelle. “The mayor would like a more clear definition. This is really about developing high-performance schools.”

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HOMELESS *Continued from page 20*

due to the lack of electronic documentation of students’ moves. “Right now, it’s just a paper trail,” he says. CPS is installing a new electronic student tracking system that should help solve the problem.

‘THEY NEED SO MUCH’

Homelessness creates academic and behavior problems for students, school officials say.

As families move, students can choose to keep attending their home school to avoid the possibility of falling behind at a new school, Rivera says. But doing so often involves a significant commute, and “there’s an attendance problem that sometimes affects academic progress,” she points out.

Jeannine M. Wolf, principal of Lawndale Community Academy, which enrolls about 200 homeless students, says the lack of stability creates a range of problems.

“They have a harder time with their studies,” she says. “If their behavior is not up to par, we have a problem getting a relative to come and see about them. The

kids stay with an aunt one night, an uncle another night. It’s very difficult to get someone to follow through.”

Among other services, Lawndale has a parent advocate who provides counseling for homeless families and a student advocate who helps run a Friday tutoring program for homeless students. “We have a lot of resources, but they need so much,” Wolf says. “I don’t feel we have enough.”

Lawndale’s parent advocate, Linda Little, finds clothing donations and makes sure students keep coming to school, doing their homework and generally succeeding. “If [students] miss two days in a row, I’m doing a home visit to make sure they’re O.K.,” she says. “Most of them want to come.”

Still, Heybach points out that homeless students have become valedictorians and should not all be lumped together as “problem” students.

“Any time you’ve got kids who lack adequate housing, that’s going to play into what they accomplish,” she says. “That’s why it’s so important to identify them, provide them transportation and

make sure they get fee waivers and other things they need to stay on track.” CPS reimburses schools for waived fees.

Diane Nilan, director of Project Reach, a state-funded program that monitors 305 districts in northeastern Illinois (outside Chicago), says student homelessness is not unique to CPS. Outside Chicago, the most severe problem is in southern Cook County, but Nilan says homelessness affects students even in more affluent locations such as DuPage County and Barrington.

Schools and students deal with a host of challenges, including “mobility, an unsuitable environment—shelters are terrible places for kids to grow up and do homework and have a normal life—lack of school supplies, transportation and truancy issues,” says Nilan.

Beyond that, there may be a larger number of homeless students who are not identified properly, Nilan says. “There’s a countless number of kids that we’re afraid are [going] un-schooled.”

Ed Finkel is a Chicago-based writer. E-mail him at editor@catalyst-chicago.org.

www.catalyst-chicago.org

Polk Bros. Foundation

- \$130,000 to DePaul University to train teachers in 20 Chicago public schools to use Chicago Connections, a web-based literacy development program that includes lesson plans, homework assignments and teaching modules that help teachers incorporate social studies into reading, science and math curricula. (First payment of a two-year grant.)
- \$75,000 to the Academy for Urban School Leadership for resident teachers' salaries.
- \$50,000 to New Leaders for New Schools for professional development, training and support.
- \$40,000 to Facing History and Ourselves, for teacher training and resource materials covering the historical impact of racism and the American eugenics movement. (First payment of a two-year grant.)
- \$40,000 to Family Matters for the Community Organizing Initiative, to strengthen parent involvement at Gale Elementary and help parents and other community members address issues in their Rogers Park neighborhood. (First payment of a two-year grant.)
- \$40,000 to Working in the Schools for Power Lunch, a literacy and mentoring program in which corporate volunteers read aloud and talk about books with Chicago Public Schools students. (First payment of a two-year grant.)
- \$35,000 to Friends of the Chicago River for the educational programs offered through the Chicago River Schools Network.
- \$30,000 to the Howard Area Community Center for academic and enrichment activities offered after school, on school holidays, and during the summer for children in grades 3 through 6 at Gale and Jordan elementary schools.
- \$25,000 to Chicago Community Trust for the second year of the Arts Education Initiative, to develop instruction in dance, theater, music and the visual arts.
- \$25,000 to Free Street Programs for arts literacy programs in 10 Chicago public schools. (First payment of a two-year grant.)
- \$25,000 to Lawndale Christian Development Corporation for the Lawndale College Opportunity Program, which provides academic enrichment, homework help, computer training and college visits for students in 8th through 12th grade.

- \$25,000 to Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) for training and support of parents, local school council members, teachers, and community members in schools.

Lloyd A. Fry Foundation

- \$45,000 to the Umjoja Student Development Corporation for operating support and a system to track and support graduates.
- \$40,000 to New Leaders for New Schools for general operating support.
- \$40,000 to Noble Street Charter High School for operating support and expansion.
- \$35,000 to the Erikson Institute for the Assessment for Teaching Project to further develop a diagnostic tool that helps connect assessment to teaching.
- \$35,000 to the Lincoln Park Zoological Society for Project NOAH, a literacy program to stimulate science learning in Chicago Public Schools students.
- \$35,000 to North Lawndale College Preparatory Charter High School for professional development and a program to improve the academic achievement of young men.
- \$30,000 to Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, for its Alliance for Innovation and Excellence, which helps its member schools address specific problems in educational practice.
- \$25,000 to the Little Village Community Development Corporation for an academic coordinator for its Community School Development Project.
- \$25,000 to the Gads Hill Center for the Teen Connection Program, a college prep program for Latino students.

The Oppenheimer Foundation

- \$5,000 to the Northside Learning Center for a track field.

The Chicago Public Education Fund

- \$2,000 to each of the 130 Chicago Public Schools teachers who received National Board Certification this year.

NEA Foundation

- \$5,000 to two teachers at Gary Elementary School to improve literacy and science skills with a school garden project.

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

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Include the writer's full name, title and contact information for verification. Letters should be limited to 200 words and may be edited for space and clarity. Send them to the attention of the Editor.

AT CLARK ST. TYRA NEWELL, director of the office of principal preparation and development, is now deputy director of the office of management and budget, a new position. A replacement for her previous position has not been selected. ...

LAVERNE HALL, formerly a director for the Women's Business Development Center, has been named director of business diversity, replacing **ROSALINDA CASTILLO**, who resigned last year to become a construction manager at the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority.

MOVING IN/ON CREG WILLIAMS, who served as chief officer of education-to-careers under former CEO Paul Vallas, has been named superintendent of the St. Louis Public Schools.

GROW OUR OWN TEACHERS While Gov. Rod Blagojevich has put the Golden Apple Teachers Program on the chopping block again, his education funding plan includes \$1.5 million for Grow Our Own Teachers, a program to increase the number of teachers in hard-to-staff Chicago schools by recruiting teacher aides and others already involved with schools to become certified teachers. Advocates say it could provide 1,000 new teachers by 2016. The bill became law Jan. 1, but without funding.

RENAISSANCE 2010 PROPOSALS In April, CPS will release its official request for proposals for institutions and groups seeking to open a new school under Renaissance 2010. The application will be due July 15. The district is offering a series of workshops to assist applicants with the proposals. Winners will be announced in October. To download the request for proposals, visit <http://www.ren2010.cps.k12.il.us/>

NEW IB SITES Curie High School, Madero Middle School and Locke Elementary School will begin curriculum development and training next year for the International Baccalaureate Middle Years program, bringing the number of IB schools in CPS to 22, the largest of any big-city district. The Middle Years program serves students in grades 6-10. The IB program, overseen by the Geneva, Switzerland-based International Baccalaureate Organization, provides rigorous coursework toward an internationally recognized IB diploma. Some American colleges and universities offer up to one year of credit for students who earn the diploma. Schools must complete several years of training and must be approved by the IBO, which makes extensive site visits. For more information, see *Catalyst Chicago* June 2004.

EARLY CHILDHOOD NETWORK The Early Childhood Network, a program which provides mentoring, professional development, training and other resources to providers, is expanding to the Albany Park area. Early childhood and daycare providers will also receive information about free resources, such as health care, that are available to children in their neighborhood, according to Lenore Johnson, a mentor in the program. The first two network communities were Edgewater and Rogers Park. (*Catalyst* April 2003)

REAL ESTATE PURCHASE The School Board will pay \$8 million to purchase the former Lourdes High School at 4034 W. 56th St. from the Sisters of St. Joseph, a Franciscan order. The building will be used to relocate Hancock High and to relieve overcrowding at Pasteur Elementary. The board will lease back part of the grounds to the order for \$1 a year through 2007.

PRINCIPAL CONTRACTS Interim principals **BERYL GUY** at Hay, **CLIFTON HUNT** at Oglesby, **AIDA MUNOZ** at Carpenter and **LOUISEA STOREY** at Ruggles have been awarded contracts. ... **ELSA CARMONA**, previously a management support director at Region 2 Area Office, is the new contract principal at Little Village Academy. ... **MARY ANN C. FOLINO**, previously assistant principal at Schurz High, has been awarded a principal contract. ... **JOE L. EASTERLING-HOOD** at McDowell, **PHYLIS HAMMOND** at Tilden High, **SABRINA JACKSON** at Turner-Drew, **PATRICIA MCCANN** at Mays, **MAUREEN T. SAVAS** at Nightingale, **KAREN V. SAFFOLD** at Vanderpoel and **SUSAN K. STOLL** at Hanson Park have had their contracts renewed.

VIRTUAL KINDERGARTEN Parents and teachers can learn more about their children's school lessons through CPS' new Virtual Kindergarten. The program, available in Spanish and English, allows parents to view the classroom lesson via video footage and duplicate the lesson at home. The web site, <https://www.virtualk.org>, is in the works. Virtual Pre-K is a similar program for pre-kindergarten.

GOLDEN APPLE TEACHERS Five Chicago Public Schools teachers are winners of this year's Golden Apple teaching award. They are: **KIM BRASFIELD**, Carver Middle School; **ELIZABETH TROST**, Boone Elementary; **MICHELLE M. NAVARRE**, Harold Washington Elementary; **MATHIAS J. SCHERGEN**, Jenner Academy of the Arts; **TRACY KWOCK**, Kipp Ascend Charter. Winners get a \$2,500 cash prize, a new Apple computer, free sabbatical training at Northwestern University in the fall and induction into the Golden Apple Academy.

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