



Headlines

8.01.08 — 8.08.08

Article	Date	Headline	Publication	Author
1	7.31.08*	<p><u>Chicago Public Schools adding to list of year-round schools</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Chicago Public Schools officials are expected to announce Friday that they will more than double the number of year-round elementary schools this year.</p>	Chicago Tribune	Chicago Tribune Staff
2	7.31.08*	<p><u>Invest in quality after-school programs</u></p> <p>Excerpt: As co-chair of the Lake County After School Coalition and sponsor of Illinois House Resolution 384, which established the After-school Funding Policy Task Force, I have followed with interest the recent series by Tribune reporters Stephanie Banchemo and Patricia Callahan regarding the state funding of after-school programs.</p>	Chicago Tribune	State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-Vernon Hills)
3	7.31.08*	<p><u>APS Board sends off superintendent Small</u></p> <p>Excerpt: Sylvester Small attended his final Akron Public Schools (APS) school board meeting as superintendent July 28.</p>	West Side Leader, Akron Leader Publications	Jeff Gorman
4	8.01.08	<p><u>McCain and Obama's education policies: Nine things you need to know</u></p> <p>Excerpt: While you're more apt to see this year's presidential candidates</p>	The Huffington Post	Martin Carnoy

verbally jousting on the economy, Iraq, and the war on terror, less sexy, non headline-grabbing issues like national education policy could ultimately have as profound a long-run impact on our country.

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| 5 | 8.02.08 | <u>Rivals take presidential campaigns to Florida</u> | The New York Times | Michael Cooper |
| | | Excerpt: Senators John McCain and Barack Obama campaigned in the crucial swing state of Florida on Friday, with Mr. McCain trying to court black leaders while criticizing Mr. Obamas educational policies. | | |
| 6 | 8.02.08 | <u>Errors may snarl state testing</u> | Chicago Tribune | Stephanie Banchemo |
| | | Excerpt: Wild swings in the scores on this year's elementary school math and reading exams raise new questions about the reliability of the state testing system used to rate schools, apply federal penalties, and even put some kids in summer school. | | |
| 7 | 8.02.08 | <u>Obama addresses National Urban League</u> | MSNBC | Mike Memoli |
| | | Excerpt: Obama used his address to the National Urban League to defend his record on education, saying he would put his ideas up against McCain's "any day." | | |
| 8 | 8.02.08 | <u>Lessons from Locke</u> | Newsweek | Donna Foote |
| | | Excerpt: Earlier this summer, Wendy Kopp flew round trip from New York to L.A . in one day. Kopp, the founder of Teach For America the national teaching corps that recruits high-performing college grads to teach in low-performing public schools wanted to personally welcome some 700 new recruits to summer boot camp. | | |
| 9 | 8.03.08 | <u>Oakland high school is just for immigrants</u> | San Francisco Chronicle | Trevor Hunnicutt |
| | | Excerpt: The students at Oakland International High School form a real-life melting pot. | | |

10	8.03.08	<u>School leaders say funding answer still elusive</u>	Chicago Daily Herald	Matt Arado
		Excerpt: Another school year will soon get started, which means another debate about how to fund public education in Illinois.		
11	8.03.08	<u>Going off to school: The buddy system</u>	Chicago Tribune	Tom Hudley
		Excerpt: Marcus Sanders, 18, who grew up in Chicago and graduated from the Chicago Military Academy, is a big-city kid not easily intimidated by things that go bump in the night.		
12	8.03.08	<u>It's time for education reform</u>	The New York Daily News	Sen. John McCain (Op Ed)
		Excerpt: Campaigning at town halls across America, I am often asked about my plans to reform our public schools.		
13	8.03.08	<u>Class struggle: Five ways to motivate students</u>	The Washington Post	Jay Mathews (Op Ed)
		Excerpt: My Post colleague Marc Fisher had a terrific rant on his Raw Fisher blog last week about a story I did on the strange case of Matthew Nuti.		
14	8.04.08	<u>Groups seek funds to raise high school grad rates</u>	Crain's Detroit Business	Sherri Begin
		Excerpt: United Way for Southeastern Michigan has launched an effort to raise \$10 million to help low-performing high schools in the region improve their graduation rates.		
15	8.04.08	<u>In Maine, a laptop for every middle-schooler</u>	MSNBC	Jasmin Aline Persch
		Excerpt: Does a child learn better when he or she has a laptop to use in the classroom?		
16	8.04.08	<u>Summer school lessons; our view: Extend summer school's benefits to every child</u>	The Baltimore Sun	Editorial Board

		Excerpt: Come the end of August, thousands of city youngsters will be returning to school. But for many of them, it will feel as if they hardly left.		
17	8.05.08	<u>Teach for America gives no easy lessons</u>	USA Today	Greg Toppo
		Excerpt: In 2005, journalist Donna Foote visited a friend's classroom at Locke High School in Los Angeles and was shocked to discover ninth-graders "sounding out words like C-A-T.		
18	8.05.08	<u>School budgeting by '65% solution' more popular in South</u>	USA Today	Bill Kaczor
		Excerpt: Conservatives and libertarians nationwide tout the "65 percent solution," an enticing, simple — and some say deceptive — school budgeting concept, as a way to increase classroom spending without raising taxes.		
19	8.05.08	<u>Extracurricular politics</u>	The Wall Street Journal	Editorial Board
		Excerpt: Teachers' unions are expert at presenting the interests of their members and of public school students as one and the same.		
20	8.05.08	<u>Summer often spells no vacation from homework; some educators rethinking workload</u>	The Washington Post	Donna St. George
		Excerpt: Issie Griffith conquered two novels and a 100-page math packet on a recent summer break. So this year, the 12-year-old was ready for her latest load of vacation homework: four books to read, each with written summaries, preparation for the rigors of sixth grade.		
21	8.05.08	<u>Rising bar trips up some of Minnesota's best schools</u>	Minneapolis Star Tribune	Emily Johns and Patrice Relerford
		Excerpt: Nearly half of Minnesota's public schools are failing to meet state standards in math and reading, which can trigger consequences		

ranging from a black mark on a school's reputation to forced restructuring of programs and staff.

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| 22 | 8.05.08 | <u>U.S. is losing education race with China</u> | Newsday | Jennifer Wheary |
| | | Excerpt: As the Olympics open on Friday, Americans will turn our gaze to China and gear up for some competition. But even if the American team brings home more gold medals, when it comes to our Asian economic rival, we may have already lost. | | |
| 23 | 8.05.08 | <u>4 St. Paul school must 'prepare for restructuring'</u> | Pioneer Press | Doug Belden |
| | | Excerpt: Four St. Paul schools are facing the toughest consequences the district has ever seen under No Child Left Behind and must prepare for restructuring. But because the district saw the problem coming, two of the schools are already gone. | | |
| 24 | 8.06.08 | <u>Focus school emphasizes leadership through technology and communication</u> | KPTM FOX News 42 (NE) | Meghan Youker |
| | | Excerpt: They went back to school before most of their neighborhood friends. About 120 kids showed up Wednesday for the first day of class at the learning community's first focus school. | | |
| 25 | 8.06.08 | <u>Ariz. educators embrace trend of technology in their curriculum</u> | The Arizona Republic | Megan Gordon |
| | | Excerpt: Just two decades ago, many schools had only a few computers and taught lessons about typing. But Monday marked a drastic change for Arizona schools as one of the first K-5 technology academies opened its doors to students. | | |
| 26 | 8.06.08 | <u>Where the race now begins at kindergarten</u> | The New York Times | Winnie Hu |
| | | Excerpt: Parents who sent their toddlers to the well-regarded Mandell preschool on the Upper West Side used to count on getting into the | | |

private school of their choice.

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| 27 | 8.07.08 | <u>In under-5 set, minority becoming majority</u> | The Washington Post | N.C. Aizenman |
| | | Excerpt: A surge in Hispanic immigration over the past decade has dramatically altered the racial and ethnic composition of the region's youngest residents, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released today. | | |
| 28 | 8.07.08 | <u>Kids' fear of violence are a call to action</u> | Chicago Sun-Times | Chicago Sun-Times Staff |
| | | Excerpt: It's hard not to cry when you hear their voices. | | |
| 29 | 8.07.08 | <u>Meeks' fury over schools ignited in past</u> | Chicago Tribune | Eric Zorn (Op Ed) |
| | | Excerpt: To better understand the determined fury of State Sen. James Meeks—his fiery rhetoric on education funding and proposals to spark city-suburban confrontations—we must look back to spring 2006, when Meeks himself got a schooling he can't forget. | | |
| 30 | 8.07.08 | <u>'They are being robbed of their childhood'</u> | Chicago Sun-Times | Rosalind Rossi |
| | | Excerpt: Maybe kids do know best. For a social studies project this year, fifth-graders at Little Village Academy plotted a cost-free way to counter the guns and gangs that plague their neighborhood: They asked parents to volunteer to lead after-school programs in drawing, painting, handcrafts, dancing, sports, cheerleading and chess. | | |
| 31 | 8.08.08 | <u>Businesses added to Meeks' school boycott</u> | Chicago Sun-Times | Rosalind Rossi |
| | | Excerpt: For three days, hundreds of students would cut their classes and camp out instead in the lobbies of some of Chicago's most prominent businesses -- from the Chicago Stock Exchange to Aon Corp. -- under an expanded September school boycott | | |

plan detailed Thursday by state Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago).

**While these articles did not appear during the week of 8.01.08 – 8.08.08, they have been included due to the relevant subject matter.*

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Chicago Tribune

Chicago Public Schools adding to list of year-round schools

7.31.08

Chicago Tribune Staff

Chicago Public Schools officials are expected to announce Friday that they will more than double the number of year-round elementary schools this year.

The addition of 23 more year-round schools pushes the district's total to 41. They'll begin the school year with a full day of classes Monday.

The district is moving more schools to year-round status to keep students inside school buildings during the summer, when violence spikes, and to help stave off learning losses that occur over the summer.

Students attending a year-round program have the same number of school attendance days, but vacation is spread throughout the year into shorter, more frequent breaks. The traditional school calendar has a 10-week summer break.

The district is asking parents and guardians to have all physical and immunization records complete for the first day of school, but the deadline for compliance is Oct. 15, officials said.

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Chicago Tribune

Invest in quality after-school programs

7.31.08

State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-Vernon Hills)

As co-chair of the Lake County After School Coalition and sponsor of Illinois House Resolution 384, which established the After-school Funding Policy Task Force, I have followed with interest the recent series by Tribune reporters Stephanie Banchemo and Patricia Callahan regarding the state funding of after-school programs. In fact, it was a similar investigation several years ago that prompted my legislative action.

HR-384 established the task force to develop recommendations for the administration and coordination of the after-school, mentoring and student-support line item in the State Board of Education's budget. The task force includes stakeholders who understand the importance of quality after- and out-of-school time programs and services.

The resolution was adopted unanimously and is supported by the governor's office and the Illinois State Board of Education. Our primary purpose has been to address

the issue of accountability from the programs receiving this funding.

The Illinois After-School Partnership has been meeting to develop policy recommendations to ensure adequate funding and accountability, using national standards and best practices. The Tribune series has helped to focus attention on the need for a change in the process.

The recommendations of the After-school Funding Policy Task Force will guide that change. We must invest in quality after-school programs and services, both to ensure that our children have access to programs that promote their academic and personal development and to help them make healthy choices to avoid engaging in or being victimized by juvenile crime and violence.

For every dollar spent on quality after-school programs, the state can save \$7 in reduced costs for juvenile detention, teen pregnancy and substance abuse. These dollars are scarce, so increased accountability is vital. The report of the After-school Funding Policy Task Force is a step toward a system that can work. Our children deserve a system that works to help them become the very best they can be.

—*State Rep. Kathy Ryg (D-Vernon Hills)*

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West Side Leader, Akron Leader Publications APS Board sends off superintendent Small 7.31.08

Jeff Gorman

Sylvester Small attended his final Akron Public Schools (APS) school board meeting as superintendent July 28.

The school board sent him into retirement with a plaque that marked the renaming of the Administration Building in his honor.

"Sylvester is a legend and we all need to recognize that," said board Vice President James Hardy. "We are very lucky to have a superintendent who helped us to make such a smooth transition. That doesn't happen in every city."

Small's 38-year career in the Akron school system ends today, July 31. Current district Executive Director of Business Affairs David James will take over tomorrow, Aug. 1.

"There are lots of little Sylvesters out there," Small said. "We need to help them and give them opportunities."

Debra Foulk will take James' position. She had been the coordinator of business support systems.

Also, Paul Flesher will take the position of executive director of facilities and capital improvements. He will work on the school reconstruction program, building operations and maintenance.

In addition, Laura Kepler will become the new coordinator of child nutrition services.

Also at the meeting, the district announced the second annual Backpack Adventure at the Akron Zoo will be Aug. 12-13 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

"This is our way of giving back to the community and thanking the parents for working with us," said Director of Community Partnerships Judi Hill.

Last year, the APS gave out 750 backpacks filled with school supplies. Hill said she hopes the number will grow to between 2,000 and 2,500.

"The kids go around the zoo and fill their backpacks," said school board member Amy Grom, who volunteered at the event last year.

Hill said volunteers are still needed for this year's event, even if only for an hour.

Architect Dave Granger, of GPD & Associates, presented the school board with plans for changes to the Leggett, Rimer and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) community learning center buildings.

The school board OK'd a new plan for the STEM building that will add more glass to the exterior of the new school at the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

"This will add more light to some of the classrooms," Granger said. "Broadway is a major thoroughfare, and you will be able to see it's a school."

The changes will cost \$75,830.

In other business:

- The board agreed to change the blue accents on the new Rimer and Leggett buildings to more neutral colors.
- The board voted to update its anti-bullying policy. The updates include increased training and more regimented enforcement. "Our policy has spread to other school districts," said Hardy. "This will actually get the rules into our schools to keep students safe."
- The board is considering updating its employee dress code. Board member Shelia Smith has been leading the effort. "We've moved in that direction for our students," said board member the Rev. Curtis Walker. "Now we are looking at the people who are their role models."

The APS school board is next set to meet Aug. 11 at 5:30 p.m. at the Sylvester Small Administration Building, 70 N. Broadway. The Joint Board of Review will meet at 4 p.m. that day.

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The Huffington Post

McCain and Obama's education policies: Nine things you need to know

8.01.08

Martin Carnoy

While you're more apt to see this year's presidential candidates verbally jousting on the economy, Iraq, and the war on terror, less sexy, non headline-grabbing issues like national education policy could ultimately have as profound a long-run impact on our country. After eight years, the report card on No Child Left Behind is filled with

C's and D's. Math scores are up nationwide, but the high school dropout rate isn't coming down, and too many schools are focused on passing fill-in-the-bubble tests instead of real learning.

For those who don't follow the education debate closely, there are two main philosophies that currently dominate the field: one is that market competition (choice) among schools gets kids learning more, and one is that more learning means investing more and earlier in kids and better teachers. Each candidate has aligned himself with one of those camps.

With that as a backdrop, I'll give you the quick rundown on where both candidates stand and what their key policies are, with some brief analysis of their positions. While education policy may not be the key deciding point for most voters, at least you'll know what the candidates propose on this important issue.

1. McCain and Milton (Friedman)

McCain is a school choice man, and he takes his message directly from the new Republican orthodoxy's playbook. That playbook is drawn from Milton Friedman's 1955 proposals for school vouchers. Friedman claimed that government funding (through vouchers) for families who wanted to send their children to private school would generate two big payoffs: lower-priced education through competition and greater parent satisfaction through choice. The McCain platform goes a step beyond Friedman: it lumps charter schools in with private school vouchers as part of the market solution to improving education. But Friedman's case was mostly ideological - he had no direct evidence that educational markets worked better than a public school system, or that privately run schools could deliver a better product for the same or lower price as public schools.

2. It doesn't work but its cheap

The upside for McCain's position is that Americans generally like the idea of school choice. They lump notions like choice and competition into the same category as apple pie and motherhood. Another advantage is that it's cheap. The downside is that, despite what Milton Friedman may have believed, school choice does not make for better schooling. Careful research evaluating voucher plans and charter school education shows that vouchers and charters do not raise average student test scores, not even in inner cities where better schooling alternatives should make a big difference. Competition among schools doesn't work either: studies show that the presence of charter and voucher schools in neighborhoods doesn't improve the performance of students in "competing" traditional public schools.

3. Obama's "better resources" strategy

Obama's approach to improving education is the polar opposite of McCain's. McCain assumes that public school efficiency is the problem and more choice will solve it. But Obama reasons that you can't build a Lexus from Yugo parts. His platform focuses on making better educational resources available to kids before and during their school years. That includes investing more in childcare and preschool, raising the quality of teachers, and investing in out-of-school activities to reduce dropouts.

4. Charter light

Obama likes charter schools, but in a different way from McCain. For good reason, he rejects McCain's premise that charter school choice can "solve" American students' achievement problem. Instead, Obama sees space in the public system for "good" charter schools that innovate or attract creative social entrepreneurs into education, and he wants to regulate mismanaged charter schools out of existence, like happens in his home state of Illinois.

5. Is it worth the price?

The political downside to Obama's plan is that it means spending more now, but the payoffs are 15-20 years down the road. Another disadvantage is that some Americans don't believe spending more on schools actually makes them better. The upside of Obama's plan is that the data are beginning to show more spending works, especially when it goes into pre-schools and incentives to attract better-prepared young people into teaching. A major Rand Corporation study shows that investing early (as early as pre-natal) in poor kids has a large payoff -- about four dollars for every dollar invested. Other good research shows that having a teacher who knows more math or science or English and how to teach it effectively helps students do better in those subjects.

6. A tale of three cities: Milwaukee, Washington, D.C., and New York

Thanks to a Wisconsin Supreme Court decision in 1998, Milwaukee's experimental voucher program expanded to private religious schools. By 2007, 15 thousand voucher students attended more than 100 private schools. Milwaukee also has full public school choice, including charter and magnet schools. The bottom line is that with all this choice and competition, Milwaukee's test scores have not increased since 1999-2000, after a modest rise followed the initial announcement of the voucher program expansion.

Similarly, In Washington, D.C., charter schools and vouchers were supposed to raise dismal student performance in a school district many considered the most inefficient in the country. About a third of DC students shifted to non-traditional, publicly funded charter and voucher schools. Yet, after more than five years of choice, students in charter and voucher schools do no better than students in public schools, and students in public schools are doing no better because of competition from charter and voucher schools.

In contrast, New York City went for the teacher improvement strategy. The City raised starting teachers' salaries and promoted teaching fellowships and the Teach for America program to bring more high achieving college graduates into City schools. Expanding the pool of good teachers has raised the quality of teaching for low-performing students, and this seems to have had a major impact on overall test scores, especially increasing learning gains at the bottom of the achievement distribution.

7. Numbers don't lie

If choice is supposed to be the answer to improving schooling for underserved children, McCain needs to show why it has not worked for students in two major cities with showcase programs. The New York results support Obama's case that attracting increasing numbers of talented young people into teaching will improve student achievement. Combined with other data showing large gains from spending more on kids before they ever get to school, Obama's investment strategy looks like a much better bet than school choice.

8. Economic policy also impacts school achievement

Kids' economic and social situations have a major impact on their success in school. Differences between McCain and Obama's tax policies may be as important in influencing educational outcomes as differences in education strategies. Whether we get McCain's plan of continuing to use government tax policy to favor the wealthy versus Obama's to shift public resources to the middle-class, the working poor, and the socially disadvantaged would affect millions of children's economic conditions at

home, thus their school performance. Data show that when a country's income distribution is more equal, average school achievement is higher.

9. The real school choice

You've probably figured out by now that you have a real choice in November between two very different education proposals. One would mainly shift some public school kids into similarly performing private and charter schools. For all but these few, not much else would change. The other proposal could bring lots of kids into childcare and pre-schools, recruit more math majors into teaching, and might make a big difference in the lives of the next generation. It could start kids in quality programs early and keep many more from dropping out and out of prison. Not as hot an issue as Iraq or gas prices, but maybe much more important for defining who we are twenty years from now.

Article 5

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The New York Times Rivals take presidential campaigns to Florida 8.02.08

Michael Cooper

Senators John McCain and Barack Obama campaigned in the crucial swing state of Florida on Friday, with Mr. McCain trying to court black leaders while criticizing Mr. Obamas educational policies.

Suggesting that Mr. Obama was captive to labor unions, Mr. McCain told the National Urban League that if Mr. Obama continues to defer to the teachers unions, instead of committing to real reform, then he should start looking for new slogans. Mr. Obama has been sharply critical of the law, President Bushs signature education policy, which Mr. McCain generally supports. The law increased educational accountability standards for states, and teachers unions have strongly opposed efforts to renew it.

Mr. McCain, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, used much of his speech to highlight his support for charter schools and voucher programs that would allow more parents to send their children to private and parochial schools. Teachers unions have generally opposed these initiatives.

He faced skeptical questions from the largely black audience about his support for a ballot initiative banning affirmative action, for his stance on gun ownership and for his opposition to a federal holiday honoring the Rev. Dr. in 1983 (Because I was wrong, he replied). Although Mr. McCain was greeted with a standing ovation, and left to one, his remarks about Mr. Obama, his likely Democratic opponent, were often met with silence.

Asked about affirmative action, he said that affirmative action is in the eye of the beholder and praised the United States military as the nations greatest equal opportunity employer.

Mr. Obama campaigned in St. Petersburg, where at a high school gymnasium he unveiled what he called his emergency plan to address the nations economic woes. His proposals include a \$500 energy rebate for individual workers and \$1,000 for families - his response to Mr. McCains endorsement of more offshore drilling for oil - and a surtax on oil profits to pay for \$50 billion in new spending, half of which would go to state governments that are also hurting and the rest to the depleted Highway

Trust Fund. This rebate will be enough to offset the increased cost of gas for a working family over the next four months, Mr. Obama told the crowd. Or, if you live in a state where it gets very cold in the winter, it will be enough to cover the entire increase in your heating bills. Or you could use the rebate for any of your other bills, or even to pay down debt. Michael Powell contributed reporting from St. Petersburg, Fla.

Article 6

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Chicago Tribune **Errors may snarl state testing** **8.02.08**

Stephanie Banchemo

Wild swings in the scores on this year's elementary school math and reading exams raise new questions about the reliability of the state testing system used to rate schools, apply federal penalties, and even put some kids in summer school.

Now an outside auditor has been brought in to investigate why test results fluctuated up to 10 percentage points from those of the previous year. If problems are not figured out and corrected by fall, parents and schools won't have an accurate measure of how well children performed on the state's high-stakes achievement exams.

The inexplicable shifts on the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) administered this spring were found in districts throughout the state and spread across student race and income levels. The most dramatic swings came in reading at the 3rd, 4th, 6th and 8th grades.

State education officials would not give specific details about the size of the fluctuations at each grade level for each exam. But Matt Vanover, spokesman with the Illinois State Board of Education, said some scores increased dramatically while others decreased significantly. 'Typically, you expect to see steady growth or scores holding steady,' he said. 'We observed changes that are outside of what you would expect to see.' The outside auditor is looking into possible problems with the ISAT test construction or possible errors in scoring the exam.

School districts have reviewed preliminary test scores. The state plans to get final results to parents by Nov. 1.

Illinois has been plagued with testing problems since 2002, when No Child Left Behind required states to ramp up testing. In every year except 2005, testing data has been riddled with errors, seriously delayed or contained sizable shifts.

Last year, the high school reading scores dropped about 5 percentage points, the lowest pass rate ever recorded, but an outside audit could not determine the cause of the precipitous decline.

This is the first time that the grade school test itself has been called into question. The state paid Harcourt about \$3.2 million this year to create and score the exam.

The state's testing problems worry some local school officials. 'Despite the problems, I've had faith in the testing system until this year,' said Carole Cooper, director of assessment and accountability for Carpentersville School District 300, where reading scores dipped in 26 of 27 schools after increasing in previous years. 'I don't think

this problem will be worked out until two to three years from now, and by then, we will have moved on to another assessment.' Since the federal law was enacted, many states have had difficulty delivering timely and reliable test results. Meanwhile, they are using the results to sanction schools and in some cases make children repeat a grade. 'This is yet another example of why critics warn against the overuse of standardized tests for high-stakes decisions, like student retention, school ratings and teacher firings,' said Bob Schaeffer, with FairTest, a non-profit group that's been critical of the overuse of standardized tests. 'These exams are not the absolute, accurate measure politicians say they are.' In Illinois, the state is paying the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation about \$20,000 to investigate this year's ISAT problems. The Kansas-based company is looking into, among other things, whether the construction of the exam was flawed.

Each year the state uses a slightly different version of the ISAT, but creating the exam is a complicated process.

The state keeps a bank of test questions from each year. Every question is tested to make sure it is not flawed. Then, questions are given weights based on the degree of difficulty. Tougher questions are worth more.

Researchers are looking into whether this year's weighting process was flawed. If it was, it is possible to recalibrate and rescore the exam, state officials said.

Some scoring declines were expected.

For the first time this year, the state required students who speak English as a second language to take the regular exams instead of the easier test they used to take.

In Barrington Community Unit School District 220, the reading score for that small group of students plummeted from 71 percent passing last year to 44 percent this year, said Jeff Arnett, district spokesman. 'We've said all along that we were concerned that these students might have a tough time with this test,' Arnett said. 'We want to work with the state to arrive at a solution, but we are very concerned about these results.' Vanover said the fluctuations were not isolated to non-English speaking students and there were too few of them to sway the scores.

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MSNBC **Obama addresses National Urban League** **8.02.08**

Mike Memoli

ORLANDO, Fla. -- Obama used his address to the National Urban League to defend his record on education, saying he would put his ideas up against McCain's "any day."

"Now, I recognize my opponent came before you yesterday, he attacked my record on education reform," he said. "This is someone who's been in Washington nearly 30 years, he's got a pretty slim record on education, and when he has taken a stand, he's been on the wrong side of the line."

He said McCain voted against increased funding for No Child Left Behind, Head Start and Pell Grants, and supported the abolishment of the Education Department.

"His only proposal seems to be recycling tired rhetoric about vouchers," he said. "Now, I've been a proponent of public school choice throughout my career. ... What I won't do, what I do oppose is using public money for private school vouchers. We need to focus on fixing and improving our public schools; not throwing our hands up and walking away from them. We need to stop the partisan attacks, and start getting results for our children."

Obama received an enthusiastic greeting from members of the organization, and pledged to revive urban areas, saying that the problem of cities aren't "just 'urban' problems anymore."

"They are America's problems, and have to be solved with effort and resolve by all Americans," he said.

Alluding to his historic candidacy, Obama said his "story, and so many other improbable stories, would not be possible without all that the Urban League has done to put opportunity within the reach of every American."

"I will never forget how my journey began," he said. "I'll never forget that I got my start as a foot soldier in the movement that the Urban League helped build -- the movement to bring opportunity to every corner of our cities."

He also quoted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who said that the "inseparable twin of racial justice is economic justice."

"You know that you can't take that seat at the front of the bus if you can't afford the bus fare," he said. "You can't live in an integrated neighborhood if you can't afford the house. And it doesn't mean a whole lot to sit down at that lunch counter if you can't afford the lunch."

Obama promised to attend the organization's next meeting, in his hometown of Chicago, next year if elected. And he said he'd welcome them to the White House in two years when the organization celebrates its centennial.

"In my administration I expect that the White House will be the people's house," he said.

Article 8

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Newsweek **Lessons from Locke** **8.02.08**

Donna Foote

Earlier this summer, Wendy Kopp flew round trip from New York to L.A. in one day. Kopp, the founder of Teach For America the national teaching corps that recruits high-performing college grads to teach in low-performing public schools wanted to personally welcome some 700 new recruits to summer boot camp. When she took the podium, the teachers-in-training started cheering before she could finish saying her name. Then it was rapt silence as she exhorted them to engage in the battle for educational equity, first as quality teachers, then as leaders of the systemic reform

needed to close the appalling achievement gap between the richest and the poorest students. It was a rousing call to arms not unlike the one I heard the summer of 2005 when I began to follow four TFA recruits through their first year of teaching.

Today TFA is not only the post grad destination of choice for many of America's top college seniors, it's also a magnet for reform-minded philanthropists. Despite a battered economy, TFA is on target to raise \$110 million in fiscal 2008, a 40 percent hike over the previous year's record intake. The number of applicants has spiked to a record high now 25,000 college seniors compete for the privilege of taking on one of the toughest jobs on earth. Among the candidates: 11 percent of seniors at Yale, 10 percent at Georgetown and 9 percent at Harvard. This summer, 3,700 corps members who were carefully culled for their leadership skills through TFA's data-driven, envy-of-Wall Street selection model underwent an intensive, five-week crash course in teaching. In a few weeks, they will begin their two-year classroom commitments.

They will be assigned to schools like Locke High School in Watts, where I spent my year as an embed. At Locke, a school hemmed in by competing gangs, 2 percent of ninth graders are proficient in algebra; 11 percent read at grade level. Too many can't read at all. I learned that when a friend asked me to visit the school months earlier. As I sat in her classroom, she carefully enunciated the word 'cat' while holding up a finger for each sound in the one-syllable word. 'Cuh-A-Tuh,' intoned Ms. Levine: 'CAT.' Her embarrassed ninth graders reluctantly repeated the exercise. It was excruciating to watch. When I later realized that Locke would be a training site for TFA's L.A. summer institute, I wondered: what could be learned about how we educate our most impoverished students through the teaching experiences of our most privileged?

Lessons emerged on a daily basis. Some of the most important:

The American system of education is broken. America has been wrestling with the problem of declining student achievement ever since 1983, when the government issued the report 'A Nation at Risk,' which warned of a 'rising tide of mediocrity' that threatened our country's future. Twenty-five years on, the tide is in. The United States truly is a nation at risk our graduation rate ranks 19th among top developing countries. At Locke, 1,000 ninth graders were enrolled in 2001. Of the 240 who graduated four years later, only 30 were eligible to apply to a California state campus. Note to Obama and McCain: do the math. The impact an uneducated populace has on the integrity of the country's social fabric and the health of the economy cannot be underestimated.

It's the teachers, stupid! The single most important factor in student achievement is the quality of the teacher. And yet, we have no effective system to attract, train, retain and promote high-caliber candidates for our schools. Today's teachers score in the lowest quartile of college grads and too many of the schools that train them are diploma mills. By making its program highly selective and attaching status to the job, Teach For America has proved that it is possible to get the best and the brightest into our classrooms. But no one not TFA, not the districts, not the unions has figured out how to keep them there. TFA's most recent alumni survey indicates that one third of former corps members are still teaching K12. Critics charge that the recruits' short forays into the classroom exacerbate the critical issue of staff churning in our neediest schools and gibe that TFA really stands for Teach For Awhile. But the truth is, up to half of all the country's 3.5 million teachers bail within five years. Low pay, low status and low satisfaction undoubtedly drive many out. The transformation

of teaching into a financially rewarding profession with high standards of admission and accountability would go a long way toward establishing staff stability.

San Francisco Chronicle
Oakland high school is just for immigrants
8.03.08

Trevor Hunnicutt

The students at Oakland International High School form a real-life melting pot.

There's Esteban Rojas, 17, who arrived from Mexico three years ago and still speaks mostly Spanish.

French-speaking Valerie Ndong, 16, who goes by Grace, emigrated from her West African home in Gabon to be with her mother in Oakland.

And there's Qi Ruan, an 18-year-old native of China who arrived here less than a year ago, speaks Cantonese and struggles with English.

In the school's auditorium, student drawings of their homelands colored the walls recently. In one, a row of shanties sits along a snaking river.

"Hi. My name is Antonio," an accompanying placard read. "I am 17 years old. I am from Thailand and made a mural about it. I was born in a refugee camp because my people are Karen, and we don't belong to Thailand. My mom is from Burma but we aren't allowed to be there, so we have to be in camps in Thailand. My mural has pictures of the camp I lived in."

The school opened its doors a year ago at a former middle school on Webster Street in the Temescal neighborhood to serve a diverse group of high school students with some things in common: They are all relatively new to the country, they are trying to become fluent in English, and nearly all qualify for a free or reduced-price lunch, an indicator of low socioeconomic status.

In regular high schools, students who are new to English don't always get the attention and college-prep academics they need, said Alison McDonald, an Oakland district administrator who oversees high school principals.

"They're not sidelined there," she said. "It has to be rigorous because they are preparing these kids to pass the exit exam, to get a diploma and to go to college."

A radical approach

It is a different model - a somewhat radical approach - that keeps the immigrant students together for their entire time in high school. Unlike at newcomer high schools where students are there only briefly, the International High students already feel a sense of ownership in their school, McDonald said.

The school started with 100 students last year and expects to grow to 400 over the next few years. The school reaches out to churches, refugee groups and other organizations to recruit families, some of whose children do not go to school.

The school boasts a college-prep curriculum and English classes and strives to keep the students there until they graduate. It's a relatively untested approach and marks a departure from "newcomer" high schools, where recent immigrants typically study for several months or a year before transferring to a mainstream school.

Oakland International is the 10th school to open in the Internationals Network for Public Schools, which receives funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The other nine schools are in New York City, and there are plans to open one in San Francisco next year.

"They serve an incredible niche of young people who come from all over the world and are English-language learners," said Michelle Fine, a psychology and education professor at the City University of New York, who studied the schools in New York. "Somehow in these schools, they've figured out how to create a community that values difference but that also values trust and support."

Yet some education experts think Oakland International's melting pot is missing an ingredient seemingly required for assimilation in American society: a mix of American teenagers.

Separate - and unequal?

"Review of the history of racial segregation in this country confirms that separate schooling has meant unequal schooling," Rosa Castro Feinberg, an education professor at Florida International University, wrote in a 2000 study of newcomer schools. "Thus, we have many good reasons to be wary of the consequences of segregation on the basis of language, no matter how good the plan or how benign the intentions."

Comprehensive data on immigrant academic performance are difficult to obtain, but experts say that immigrant students have an advanced battery of needs - economic, cultural and educational.

Teachers at Oakland International specialize in one academic area but are all considered language instructors. They speak primarily in English to students and rely on students to translate if necessary.

English integration

Language-building activities are a part of every activity at the school. For a rock-climbing outing late in the school year, for example, students read about the basics and history of the sport and then filled out a response sheet that tested reading comprehension. Then they went rock climbing.

Oakland International's principal, Carmelita Reyes, said she would characterize the school's model not as experimental but as an option that can have great benefits for students with advanced needs.

"There is one to two hours of English language development at mainstream schools," said Reyes. "For some students that works, but for others it's frightening, confusing and frustrating."

Student Qi Ruan, however, questioned the isolation from native English speakers at the school. The 18-year-old lives in Oakland's Chinatown with her parents and has little opportunity to practice English.

"I want to study in a school that many people speak English well," Ruan said. "The United States citizens, they study in different school, right? So it's hard to speak more English in my life."

Chronicle staff writer Jill Tucker contributed to this report. E-mail Trevor Hunnicutt at thunnicutt@sfchronicle.com.

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Chicago Daily Herald
School leaders say funding answer still elusive
8.03.08

Matt Arado

Another school year will soon get started, which means another debate about how to fund public education in Illinois.

State Sen. James Meeks of Chicago's South Side got the conversation going recently when he urged Chicago students to skip class on Sept. 2, the first day of school in the city, and try to enroll instead at Winnetka's New Trier High School.

Meeks hopes the protest will shine a light on what he considers to be an unfair school funding system in Illinois, one that favors rich areas over poor ones. The New Trier district, with two high school campuses, spends about \$17,000 a year on each of its students, while Chicago Public Schools, a unit district that includes both elementary and high schools, spends about \$10,000.

Suburban school leaders understand Meeks' frustration, and they agree that the existing funding system benefits certain districts more than others.

The key, they say, is finding a solution that will equalize funding levels without hurting suburban schools.

"We're very protective of the resources we have," said Bill Dussling, a school board member in Northwest Suburban High School District 214. "We don't want to see that jeopardized."

Illinois schools derive the bulk of their money from local property taxes, a system that can give districts in property-rich areas a distinct funding advantage.

Some have suggested that property taxes be supplemented by revenue from a statewide tax, such as an income or sales tax, in order to offset that advantage.

Suburban school leaders remain cautious about that idea. Dussling, who's been on the District 214 board for 11 years, believes that could leave suburban districts with less money and less control.

"The linchpin of school districts is local control," he said. "I don't want the state to take a role in telling us what to do."

District 214, which covers Arlington Heights, Buffalo Grove, Mount Prospect and several neighboring suburbs, spends about \$14,500 on each student, according to the most recent state report card.

"My job in District 214 is try to do the best I can for this community," Dussling said. "The people here like what the schools provide, and we can't endanger that."

Ken Kaczynski, the school board president in Elgin Area School District U-46, said the funding question pulls him in different directions. On the one hand, it bothers him that some districts can barely raise enough money to provide basic services.

"If this is the land of opportunity, then we as a state and as a society have an obligation to create those opportunities for everyone, as best we can," he said.

At the same time, Kaczynski said he's not yet convinced that moving away from property taxes is the way to solve the problem. Property taxes provide exactly the kind of stable, reliable funding source that schools need if they're to sustain academic progress, he said.

"Would a different kind of tax be as reliable? I think it's still pretty unclear," he said.

U-46, a unit district, spends about \$9,000 per student.

Suburban education leaders pointed out that even "property-rich" districts can find it difficult to cover expenses while providing the academic results their communities expect.

Tax caps place a limit on how much schools can get from property taxes, while costs related to things like fuel and health care continue to rise.

"All of us use the money we have," said Stephen Daeschner, superintendent of Indian Prairie Unit District 204. "But at the same time, we never have enough. I would like to see schools all over the state funded better, but I'm not sure at this point how we'd go about it."

District 204, which spends about \$8,600 per student, covers portions of Aurora, Naperville, Plainfield and Bolingbrook.

Donald Schlomann, superintendent of St. Charles Unit District 303, believes that relying less on property taxes would help make school funding more equitable, and that politics is the biggest obstacle to making that happen.

District 303, a unit district, spends about \$9,300 per student.

"I think there would be a way to make it work without hurting the kids out here in the suburbs, but we'd have to put aside politics to get there," Schlomann said.

The worst thing would be to do nothing, as underfunded districts in one area can hurt everyone down the road, Schlomann said.

"As a statewide system, we're only as strong as our weakest link," he said. "If we're failing to educate children somewhere, whether it's St. Charles or Chicago or anywhere in the state, and we have to remediate them down the line in the prison system or elsewhere, that's not a good way of doing things."

Chicago Tribune
Going off to school: The buddy system
8.02.08

Tom Hundley

Marcus Sanders, 18, who grew up in Chicago and graduated from the Chicago Military Academy, is a big-city kid not easily intimidated by things that go bump in the night.

But he admitted he was more than a little spooked by an incident that occurred during a recruitment visit to Denison University in rural Granville, Ohio. It was just after midnight and he was walking alone across campus when he heard footsteps behind him.

Or rather, hoofsteps. 'I turned around and-oh my God-it's a deer. I froze. I'd seen deer before, but I'd never been that close to one before,' he recalled with a laugh. 'I don't want to say I thought he was going to eat me or anything, but he had very big antlers.' Close encounters with local fauna are just one of the many unanticipated interactions that can make life challenging for minority students from urban backgrounds attending predominantly white private colleges in small-town America. More pressing problems include subtle racism, isolation, a vague vibe that they are viewed as charity cases admitted by virtue of their skin color, and complete bafflement over the affluent, suburban, middle-class culture that prevails at most of these campuses. Fortunately, Sanders could call upon his posse. As one of 72 Chicago-area high school seniors selected for a Posse Foundation scholarship, Sanders will be attending Denison next fall with nine other Posse Scholars who have spent months working together to make sure they are ready to cope with any challenge that comes their way.

The Posse Foundation is an innovative scheme brought to fruition almost 20 years ago by Deborah Bial, an education specialist who was troubled by the high failure rate of promising minority students recruited by top-tier universities.

One such student explained to her that he would have stayed in school if he'd had his 'posse' with him-using the popular urban expression for his network of neighborhood buddies. That's when Bial hit on the idea of recruiting a cross-section of kids from urban public high schools, bonding them into cohesive groups of 10 or 12, and sending them off, en masse, to some of the nation's best universities.

The program, which started off as a shoestring operation in New York, has expanded into a well-financed and highly praised organization with offices in six cities, including Chicago, and an annual budget of \$8 million. To date, some 2,200 Posse Foundation scholars have gone off to 28 universities with \$220 million worth of full-tuition scholarships in their pockets. Last year, the awarded Bial one of its 'genius' grants for her work as an education innovator.

But the most significant measure of Bial's success is the 90 percent graduation rate of Posse Foundation scholars-far higher than the national rate of about 50 percent for all freshman entering four-year institutions. 'Historically, a lot of programs that aim to help these students are looking at what's wrong with them-they are poor kids, they are at-risk kids, they are kids from urban high schools. We take a different approach. We're looking at what's right with them. We are a strength-based

program,' Bial explains. She also stresses that Posse is a not minority program or an affirmative action program, but rather a diversity program that enables small liberal arts colleges 'to represent the true demographics of the U.S .' The organization takes a non-traditional approach to recruitment, scouring inner-city high schools for youngsters who show leadership qualities and group interactive skills that would not necessarily be reflected in their grade-point average or SAT scores. 'In the first round (of the selection process), we don't even look at grades or transcripts,' says Chastity Lord, the program director of Posse Chicago.

Once the candidates have been identified, they are placed in group situations where their interpersonal skills can be evaluated by Posse staff members. A rigorous winnowing process follows. 'We put them into dynamic settings-large groups, small groups-and observe them as they interact with their peers. We are looking for noncognitive traits that we think can predict success: leadership skills, the ability to resolve conflict. It's the same thing you would be looking for if you were hiring someone in the corporate world,' Bial says. At the end of the process, college admissions offices are presented with a group of 20 or so candidates from which a posse of 10 or 12 is chosen.

The participating colleges love it. 'It affords us the opportunity to recruit from areas we would not normally recruit from, and to see students we would not normally see,' says Lisa Scott, director of equity and diversity at Denison.

Those sentiments would be echoed by the admissions office of almost any small Midwestern liberal arts college. Eager for diversity and multiculturalism, these top-quality institutions try hard to attract minority students, but because they are not big, urban or famous for their athletic teams, they often see their best prospects choose schools that are.

Denison, which has 2,100 students and yearly tuition and fees of \$41,580, has been participating in the Posse Foundation program for eight years. This fall it will be accepting two posses, one from Chicago and another from Boston.

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The New York Daily News It's time for education reform 8.03.08

Sen. John McCain (Op Ed)

Campaigning at town halls across America, I am often asked about my plans to reform our public schools. And the answer begins with two points on which most everyone agrees: Every public school child deserves a first-rate education. And too many of our schools are producing second-rate results.

Beyond that, the education debate divides quickly into two camps. Some say all that's needed is more taxpayer money, along with more prekindergarten and after-school programs. Others believe that the basic structure of the education system is flawed, and that fundamental reform is needed. You can put me squarely on the side of major reform.

These days, the cause of education reform crosses all boundaries of party, race and financial means. In New York, Mayor Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel Klein have taken up the cause of reform, as have many others, including the Rev. Al

Sharpton. These men are strong supporters of the Education Equality Project, a group dedicated to finally changing the status quo in our education system.

This group of leaders is no longer willing to accept a public school system in which many students never even graduate or learn the basics of math, science and English. As Chancellor Klein puts it, "In large urban areas the culture of public education is broken. If you don't fix this culture, then you are not going to be able to make the kind of changes that are needed."

The chancellor speaks for many, and especially for parents who cannot afford a private school. Consider the example of the Opportunity Scholarship program in Washington, D.C., which serves more than 1,900 children from families with an average income of \$23,000 a year. More than 7,000 more families have applied for that program. What they all share is the desire to get their kids into a better school.

Yet Democrats in Congress, including my opponent, Sen. Obama, oppose this program. Not long ago, addressing the American Federation of Teachers, he dismissed public support for private school vouchers for low-income Americans as "tired rhetoric about vouchers and school choice." That went over well with the teachers union, but where does it leave children who are stuck in failing schools?

Parents ask only for safe schools, competent teachers and diplomas that open doors of opportunity. When a public school fails, repeatedly, to meet these minimal objectives, parents ask only for a choice in the education of their children. No entrenched bureaucracy or union should deny parents that choice and children that opportunity.

If I am elected President, school choice for all who want it, an expansion of Opportunity Scholarships and alternative certification for teachers will all be part of a serious agenda of education reform. We will pay bonuses to teachers working in our most troubled schools because we need their fine minds and good hearts to help turn those schools around.

We will award bonuses as well to our highest-achieving teachers. And instead of measuring teacher achievement by conformity to process, we will measure it by the success of their students. Moreover, the funds for these bonuses will not be controlled by faraway officials. Under my reforms, we will put the money and the responsibilities where they belong - in the office of the school principal. One reason charter schools are so successful is that principals have spending discretion.

I am proud to add my name to the growing list of those who support the Education Equality Project. But one name is still missing: Barack Obama. My opponent talks a great deal about hope and change, and education is an important test of his seriousness. The Education Equality Project is a practical plan for delivering change and restoring hope for children and parents who need a lot of both. And if Sen. Obama continues to defer to the teachers unions, instead of committing to real reform, then he should start looking for new slogans.

McCain, a senator from Arizona, is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

The Washington Post
Class struggle: Five ways to motivate students
8.04.08

Jay Mathews (Op Ed)

My Post colleague Marc Fisher had a terrific rant on his Raw Fisher blog last week about a story I did on the strange case of Matthew Nuti. Matthew is a bright if somewhat disorganized 16-year-old, recently expelled from the very selective Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology because his grade point average slipped below 3.0.

Marc objected to this new and extraordinary school policy. "Grades are a means of communication and motivation," he said. They won't work in that way, Marc said, if you turn "mediocre grades into a death sentence." You can't motivate a corpse, just as you can't urge greater effort out of a student who has been kicked out of your school.

Marc's reminder of the importance of motivation in education inspired me to resurrect one of the best books I have read on the topic, and add it to the Better Late Than Never Book Club, my official list of works I should have read when they actually arrived in the mail. This latest entry is a particularly hideous example of my slothful tendencies. "Engaging Minds: Motivation and Learning in America's Schools" by David A. Goslin was published in 2003.

Thankfully, good advice never goes stale. Goslin's thoughts, still fresh and relevant, can be summarized as five ways to motivate students, a topic of central importance in the national effort to improve our schools.

1. Only work on those who need it. Goslin, past president and chief executive of the American Institutes for Research and former executive director of the National Research Council's Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, has a lesson for Marc, me and other report-card advocates. Grades, he says, are often not as motivating as we would like them to be. They lose their power for most students because "only so many A's and B's are awarded in each class, irrespective of the performance of the rest of the students in the class. Underlying this practice is the philosophy that if all of the children received high marks, grades would lose their value to motivate student performance. The result, therefore, is that many students are not motivated to work hard because they know that they have little chance of beating out the best students for a good grade." How do you motivate them then? That is what the rest of the book is about. Goslin suggests, among other things, well-planned teaching, more optimism about each child's chance to learn, closer teacher-student relationships, smaller schools and grading by mastery, not the curve -- meaning you tell the students what they must learn, check off each concept or skill as they master it, and don't fret if some students take longer than others.
2. Stop telling them they're smart. "While there is much talk in American society about the importance of hard work and its relationship to success in life," Goslin writes, "most Americans act as though innate abilities are the primary determinants of their most important accomplishments."

Obvious signs of this culture tendency include gifted-and-talented programs and college admissions based on the SAT. Goslin favors the contrasting Asian philosophy that effort, not brains, brings success. He also wants teachers to make clear to each student what has to be learned, and express confidence each can learn it.

3. Make sure the homework isn't stupid. Goslin calls this problem "inefficiencies in the learning processes." He says, "There is a great deal of evidence that an enormous amount of effort on the part of children, not to mention their parents and teachers, is wasted." We all have favorite examples, like the log cabin we made out of Tootsie Rolls for history class, or those names of obscure points of grammar we never quite memorized and later realized even professional writers don't need to know, or the copying of long passages that would have been better remembered if our teacher had encouraged discussion of their relevance to our world. Goslin says learning would benefit if we dispensed with the notion that every teacher, school or district should pick the textbooks and teaching methods they like best. He prefers a national curriculum and nationally certified teaching methods based on research on what works, and what doesn't. I sense he would also support letting teachers with good track records do anything they want.
4. Show some respect for learning. We Americans, despite our bookish founding fathers, have always had an anti-intellectual streak. Watch any teen drama on television to see how the best students are portrayed. One of our great economic strengths is our willingness to forgive bad grades in school if you show up to work on time and apply yourself to your job. If you come up with some great new ideas, all the better, no matter what your grade-point average was. The richest man in the world, that bespectacled genius in Washington state, is a college dropout. Goslin understands our attitude, but pleads for some adjustment. Maybe we should point out to our children that although Bill Gates doesn't have a bachelor of arts degree, he sometimes goes off for days at a time just to read books and think.
5. Involve the kid's family. "The school is only one of the two principal socializing institutions in society, the other being the family," Goslin says. He wants more support at home for learning. My only complaint is that he gets the sequence wrong. He leaves the impression that the schools need involved parents to improve, when in many instances skeptical and distracted parents only become engaged in their children's studies when they encounter great educators who are raising achievement and asking parents to back them up. Motivation comes from many places, but if teachers don't know how to produce it, none of the rest of us are going to have a chance of having any impact on our favorite reluctant scholars.

Crain's Detroit Business
Groups seek funds to raise high school grad rates
8.04.08

Sherri Begin

United Way for Southeastern Michigan has launched an effort to raise \$10 million to help low-performing high schools in the region improve their graduation rates.

The agency and the Detroit-based Skillman Foundation have contributed \$1.5 million each.

The AT&T Foundation today is to announce another \$1 million grant to the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund, bringing the total investment to \$4 million.

The three organizations plan jointly to pursue additional grants to reach the \$10 million mark, said United Way CEO Michael Brennan.

"If we are going to compete as a country in this global society, we have to have a workforce that's ready," said AT&T Michigan President Gail Torreano, a United Way board member and chair of its Educational Preparedness Council and of the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund.

Given the needs of Southeast Michigan, AT&T's employment of 12,000 people in Michigan and the AT&T Foundation's launch last spring of a program aimed at strengthening student success and workforce readiness in the U.S., the investment made perfect sense, Torreano said.

"When you look at issues of current and lifetime income, health disparity, incarceration rates, literacy rates — all of that leads to the fundamental foundation that education is one of the key drivers of both economic and emotional and physical success," said United Way CEO Michael Brennan.

The aim of the program is to turn around the 30 or so Southeast Michigan high schools labeled as "drop-out factories" in a 2007 Johns Hopkins University study because of their graduation rates of 60 percent or less.

The schools are in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

The goal is to increase graduation rates to 80 percent or more of entering students within five years of the program's launch in the 2009-2010 academic year, Brennan said.

"There's no question there's a crisis, particularly at the high school level in Detroit," said William Hanson, director of communications and technology at Skillman.

The plan is to implement best practices that have worked in Boston and New York and other parts of the country by working with nationally known educational intermediaries to create smaller, more personalized learning environments.

United Way plans today and Tuesday to host a group of nationally recognized intermediary nonprofits at Lawrence Technological University so the target high schools can meet them and learn more about their work.

Many of the intermediaries, which include EdWorks, First Things First and the Institute for Student Achievement, have garnered past funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Brennan said.

Administered by United Way, the Greater Detroit Education Venture Fund will make annual grants of \$320,000 directly to the intermediary partners of larger high schools and \$80,000 to smaller high schools with 500 or fewer students.

The grants would be renewable for up to five years and are being made to intermediaries to keep them accountable, Brennan said.

The 30 or so “drop-out factories” in metro Detroit will compete for the dollars, he said, by demonstrating leadership support and readiness within the school and a partnership with a proven intermediary.

United Way has invited the schools to submit a turnaround proposal to qualify for funding, Brennan said.

With \$10 million in hand, the fund expects to begin making grants for turnaround efforts at six large high schools of about 1,500 to 2,000 students or more in the 2009-2010 academic year, Brennan said.

The plan is to break those six schools into smaller schools of 500 students or fewer to give students a more targeted and personalized approach. The smaller schools could have an academic focus more geared to students' abilities, such as math and science or arts, he said.

The intermediaries also would help implement best practices such as site-based management of academic performance and instruction and stronger and more targeted relationships with the student population that would help those schools increase their graduation rates to 80 percent within five years, Brennan said.

The program will entail a year of preparation to get schools lined up for the turnaround work scheduled to begin the fall of 2009, he said.

“We certainly hope that with a clear demonstration of local private funding ... it will put us in a position to attract national foundation funds for the Venture Fund,” Brennan said.

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MSNBC **In Maine, a laptop for every middle-schooler** **8.04.08**

Jasmin Aline Persch

Does a child learn better when he or she has a laptop to use in the classroom?

In the United States, Maine has led the way with its laptop program, which has made students more enthusiastic in the classroom, but not necessarily resulted in better test scores.

The state started its laptop program for 7th-graders in 2002, and later expanded it to 8th graders and to one-third of the state's high schools. Maine is spending \$90 million through 2010 with Apple to supply computers, software, warranties, technical support, training for teachers and installation of Wi-Fi networks in all middle schools across the state.

Every year, about 43,500 students and teachers get their own iBooks, which cost about \$600 each. The state of Maine says students can take their iBooks home after school and keep them during vacations.

The feedback from inside the classrooms has been pretty positive. More than 80 percent of instructors say the laptops help them make lessons more personal to students, make it easier for students to study problems from the real world and to dig deeper into certain topics, according to a survey by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute, established by the Maine legislature in 1995.

Many teachers who were surveyed also said that students using laptops are becoming better at combining information from multiple sources and expressing their thoughts. Students in the program report that they understand the material better.

But whether its program can measure up to the federal government's key yardstick — improvement in standardized test scores — is another question.

"What you can do on laptops isn't measured on current standardized tests," said Mark Warschauer, an education professor at the University of California in Irvine and author of "Laptops and Literacy: Learning in the Wireless Classroom."

Preparing students for work world

Maine teachers help students sift through vast data on the Web in all subjects, including language arts, social studies and science.

Students can access the most current information on their laptops, opposed to books, which may quickly become outdated. Maine maintains its students are learning "21st-century skills" such as collaborating, collecting pertinent information on the Internet — and spawning original ideas.

"Employers are more supportive in certain industries because they might care less what somebody's test score was than do they have the innovative abilities necessary to succeed?" Warschauer said.

Not everybody thinks that laptops in the classroom is a good idea.

Some schools' programs around the country have faced widespread computer glitches, teachers not knowing how to teach with laptops — and to a much lesser degree, yet way more publicized — the issue of students using the Web to cyberslack, cheat and view porn.

Maine has been criticized for not studying whether laptops land more students on the honor-roll list, according to "America's Digital Schools 2008."

"What we need to look at is the broader impact on student improvement," said Timothy Magner, the director of the Office of Education Technology, a branch of the

U.S. Department of Education. "One of the key metrics is test scores. We're keenly interested in that."

Attendance up, detentions down

Maine's laptop program has had other positive effects. From the beginning of the program, class attendance rose and detentions dropped.

The reason: The laptops seem to better grip the attention of 7th- and 8th-graders, who are tech-savvy multi-taskers. Three-quarters of Maine's middle school students say they like school more since getting their own laptops, according to a study by the Maine Education Policy Research Institute.

Statewide test scores haven't changed much. But a study led by University of Southern Maine professor David Silvernail found that the average 8th-grader using a laptop did score significantly higher on the writing part of a statewide exam called the Maine Educational Assessment.

Students earned higher marks on the handwritten test despite mainly writing on their computers during lessons — aided by a spell-checker. Silvernail's new research focuses on whether laptops might help Maine students grasp pre-algebra.

"Maybe the full potential of the laptop isn't being realized," he said.

Meanwhile, all teachers in the program will continue to go through training this year, which researchers have found is critical to the program's success.

Same opportunity for all students

Bette Manchester, the first director of Maine's laptop program, said the state also wants to use its laptop program to solve an age-old educational problem: How to offer every child the same opportunity at a quality education. She now is head of a private research center, Maine International Center for Digital Learning, which is developing new approaches for the laptop program.

The laptops might help breach the economic barrier to school success. Silvernail found that on statewide writing exams, economically disadvantaged students using laptops did outperform advantaged students who didn't use their computers.

Still, the laptop program has faced setbacks. Maine wanted to expand its laptop program to all high schools four years ago, but state budget cuts have prevented that.

"There's no question that there's enough good results to say that we need to keep going," said Manchester.

The Baltimore Sun**Summer school lessons; our view: Extend summer school's benefits to every child****8.04.08**

Editorial Board

Come the end of August, thousands of city youngsters will be returning to school. But for many of them, it will feel as if they hardly left. This year, about 22,000 students attended the city's month long, half-day summer learning programs. Only a fraction of them came to make up courses they failed. Most were there to take advantage of enrichment courses in reading, math and the arts designed to help them retain skills learned the previous year and give them a leg up on the next.

The purpose of summer school has changed since 2003, when the city adopted a policy of social promotion that allowed students to pass no matter how poorly they performed in the classroom. The change was controversial then, and it remains so, but one positive result was that the emphasis in summer school shifted from remediation - so-called make-up courses - to enrichment programs that, in effect, create a longer school year for the students enrolled in them. Promotions no longer hinge on summer school attendance.

The number of children held back a grade in 2003 is roughly the same as the number in the current summer school session. A large proportion of city students from disadvantaged backgrounds are at risk of failing, and their numbers remain fairly constant over the years. Summer programs let educators give them extra attention without holding them back a grade, which studies show only makes kids more likely to drop out.

Despite funding cuts, the city managed to continue the programs this year, mostly by "clustering" those previously offered at separate schools in a single facility. It was a clever use of limited resources but only a stopgap solution, because there are thousands more kids who could benefit from the extra help.

School officials should consider lengthening the school day or even adding another month to the school year. That would require action by the legislature, but the success of the current program argues strongly for the idea's merit. If the goal is to ensure that every kid gets a quality education, bold steps will be needed to get the schools back on track.

USA Today**Teach for America gives no easy lessons****8.05.08**

Greg Toppo

In 2005, journalist Donna Foote visited a friend's classroom at Locke High School in Los Angeles and was shocked to discover ninth-graders "sounding out words like C-A-T. They couldn't read." A former Newsweek writer, Foote had been following Teach For America (TFA), the elite teacher preparation program, since its founding in 1990, and soon learned that Locke was home to the largest cluster of TFA recruits in Los

Angeles.

The program recruits top college graduates for two-year teaching stints and has recently attracted more than one in 10 graduates at the nation's top colleges. So Foote decided to write about "how we teach our most impoverished students through the eyes and the experiences of our most privileged." Her new book, *Relentless Pursuit* (Knopf, \$24.95), follows four "corps members" during their first year at Locke. USA TODAY spoke with her recently:

Q: The idea that bright college graduates can teach the nation's most challenging students with only five weeks' training is remarkable, really. You quote one critic who quips that she wouldn't want to be inoculated by someone from "Nurse For America." Did you find the brief training adequate for the teachers you followed?

A: I'm not sure that any first-year teacher assigned to teach in a low-performing school is ever fully prepared. The job is all-consuming and incredibly demanding. Certainly, all of the Locke corps members struggled mightily, especially during the first few months of teaching. But the students of the teachers I followed all ended up making significant academic gains. A recent, small study by The Urban Institute found that TFA high school teachers are generally more effective than their experienced colleagues. The fact is, though there are exceptions, too many of our traditional teacher education programs are diploma mills. In the ideal world, admittance to two-year teacher education programs would be highly selective and their graduates would all be competing for high-paying positions in the most challenging classrooms. We don't live in that world. At schools like Locke, the alternative to a TFA recruit is usually a long-term sub or a school district castaway.

Q: In one chapter, a corps member considers quitting, saying he (and his fiancée) are "tilting at windmills" trying to make a difference. How widespread was this thinking at Locke? What happened to this fellow?

A: At one point or another, each one of the corps members I came to know experienced moments of self-doubt and feelings of futility. TFA reports that 12% of corps members fail to complete their two-year assignment. The TFAers at Locke all understood their colleague's frustration, and not a single one was critical of his decision to leave — though other staff members regarded it as proof that TFA teachers were not committed to the community. Today, he is happily married and living and working in L.A.

Q: One of the criticisms of TFA is that it requires just a two-year commitment from corps members. Many veteran teachers say that drains society's support for teaching as a career. How valid is this complaint?

A: Teachers, regardless of the path they take into the classroom, are leaving in droves. Some 14% of all new teachers quit after their first year; almost 50% are gone within five years. Teacher retention in low-performing schools is particularly difficult. At Locke, roughly 30% of the staff exit annually. Though the majority of TFAers leave soon after fulfilling their commitment, quite a few were still working at Locke the year I was there, and they were widely regarded as among the best on staff. Of the four teachers I followed, only one expected to remain in teaching after the two-year commitment was up. Things didn't turn out that way: They all got hooked. One just finished her third year at Locke. The other three left Locke but remain in education.

USA Today **School budgeting by '65% solution' more popular in South** **8.05.08**

Bill Kaczor

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Conservatives and libertarians nationwide tout the "65 percent solution," an enticing, simple — and some say deceptive — school budgeting concept, as a way to increase classroom spending without raising taxes.

The idea is to require schools to spend 65% of their budgets on classroom expenses as opposed to administrative costs. It's been pushed for three years but has sputtered nationally, with only Georgia and Texas adopting it.

Undeterred, backers have focused on Florida, where the measure has earned a place on the November ballot but is being challenged. Approval in Florida, supporters believe, could spur more states to do the same.

"The administrators are fighting this tooth and nail," said Tim Mooney, a spokesman for First Class Education, an organization formed in Washington to promote the idea.

The plan has drawn opposition from teachers, school boards and the national PTA. Financial research and rating firm Standard & Poor's released a study in 2005 that found no relationship between student achievement and the percentage of a school's budget spent in the classroom.

Whatever momentum the idea had faded quickly because of the S&P study and a growing national focus on student achievement measured by standardized tests, said Mike Griffith, with the nonpartisan Education Commission of the States.

There's also disagreement over how classroom spending should be defined.

Federal statistics show school districts nationally spend an average of 66% of their budgets on classroom instruction and related expenses and about 11% on purely administrative costs. They also spend 5% on support services such as libraries, school nurses and guidance counselors and 18% on transportation, food services, maintenance and other operational costs.

But First Class Education counts teacher training, transportation, food services, counselors, nurses and librarians as administrative costs. Under the group's definition, classroom spending includes athletics and other extracurriculars, plus teacher salaries and supplies.

Sixty-five percent was set as the goal because a quarter of the nation's school districts could meet it when the campaign was launched, Mooney said.

But only four states — New York, Maine, Tennessee and Utah — then met the standard statewide.

Texas and Georgia closely follow the group's criteria. Florida's proposal would leave the definition of classroom spending up to the Legislature.

Critics note that rural districts typically have higher busing costs while poor ones

spend more on food. Many school officials say those functions are vital but not considered classroom expenses under the 65% solution.

Jackie Lain, associate executive director of the Texas Association of School Boards, said his state's districts are struggling to meet the requirement without raising taxes as fuel and food costs rise.

"You can't educate kids if they are not there," Lain said. "You can't educate hungry children."

Georgia and Texas officials say their programs are too new to assess.

Lawmakers in at least a dozen states have rejected the concept, including Utah, the home state of Internet retail entrepreneur Patrick Byrne, who came up with the idea and founded First Class Education.

Voters in Colorado defeated a 65% proposal in 2006, the same year sponsors abandoned petition drives in Arizona, Oregon and Washington state. The Oklahoma Supreme Court threw a 65% proposal off the ballot last year.

Kansas has embraced the concept as a goal, not a requirement. The state's deputy education commissioner, Dale Dennis, said it has been effective in getting school boards to discuss ways to meet the target without tying their hands.

In response to the push, Louisiana requires school systems to spend at least 70% of their budgets at the school building level — including the salary of the principal and other administrators — and no more than 30% on the central office.

Lloyd Dressel, finance officer for the Louisiana School Boards Association, said the requirement has had no effect on school budgets because most systems already divvied up their funds that way.

The Florida Legislature also declined to pass the 65% solution in 2006, but the proposal was put on November's ballot by the appointed Taxation and Budget Reform Commission.

It's being used to sugarcoat a school voucher provision in the same proposed state constitutional amendment, said Ron Meyer, a lawyer for the Florida Education Association, the statewide teachers union.

Polls show a majority of Florida voters oppose vouchers but like the 65% solution by an even bigger margin.

"People think that perhaps spending at least 65% in the classroom is a good thing, and it is," Meyer said. "The point is we're spending more than 65% in the classroom already. What we need to be doing is continuing to up the resources and not simply cut the pie differently."

The union and other opponents are suing to remove Amendment 9 and another pro-voucher proposal, Amendment 7, from the ballot.

Mooney, a Republican political consultant, said his group doesn't want to impose draconian penalties for missing the mark but that districts should have to explain how they are spending taxpayer dollars.

"If you can't get 65%, give us the reasons why," Mooney said.

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The Wall Street Journal **Extracurricular politics** **8.05.08**

Editorial Board

Teachers' unions are expert at presenting the interests of their members and of public school students as one and the same. Which is why it's always illuminating to see how the nation's largest teachers' union, the National Education Association, spends its political money.

Each year, NEA members pay into a "Ballot Measure/Legislative Crises Fund" that allows the union to spend tens of millions of dollars on all manner of state and national political issues. Mike Antonucci of the Education Intelligence Agency, a longtime union watchdog, has tracked this fund's spending. In the 2007-08 fiscal year, not surprisingly, the NEA spent \$2.3 million -- on top of \$1 million spent the previous fiscal year -- fighting a school voucher referendum in Utah.

But other expenditures reveal this national NEA cash -- which is separate from PAC contributions that must adhere to federal campaign-finance laws -- as a fund for various and sundry left-wing political causes. Mr. Antonucci reports that during the current fiscal year the NEA sent the Hawaii State Teachers Association \$20,000 to conduct polling on a state constitutional convention. It sent the Massachusetts Teachers Association \$60,000 to oppose a state income-tax repeal. And it sent the Florida Education Association \$200,000 to oppose property-tax cuts in the Sunshine State.

Expect more of the same going forward in a state near you. "Unlike most previous years," writes Mr. Antonucci, "NEA finished 2007-08 with a surplus of nearly \$5.9 million, which means the union will enter the 2008-09 school year with almost \$20 million available to spend." It's a shame the NEA doesn't spend as much money and effort trying to improve lousy schools as it does trying to keep taxes high.

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The Washington Post **Summer often spells no vacation from homework; some educators** **rethinking workload** **8.05.08**

Donna St. George

Issie Griffith conquered two novels and a 100-page math packet on a recent summer break. So this year, the 12-year-old was ready for her latest load of vacation homework: four books to read, each with written summaries, preparation for the rigors of sixth grade.

Now it is just a matter of finishing it up as the days of summer dwindle.

"I have a lot to go," said Issie, who spent many hours this summer at the pool, with

friends, and at tennis and acting camps. Still, she said, "I know I'm going to get it done."

For Issie and many other students across the Washington region, summer homework is as familiar as fireworks in July and back-to-school shopping in August. Often, it goes far beyond the summer reading list that some of their parents remember from childhood. First-graders solve math problems. Middle schoolers create plot summaries. High school students pore over Shakespeare, Dickens and Twain.

Lately this modern rite of the season is under increased scrutiny as many educators rethink how much summer homework students should get, whether it should be required, and how it is related to classroom lessons.

Supporters say summer homework staves off the learning loss that comes with so much time outside the classroom.

Some educators point out the limitations: Students work on assignments largely without teacher support; summer work can pose grading problems in the fall; and the requirements may overwhelm already-stressed kids who need the break.

"Summer should be summer," said Jayne Fonash, guidance director at the Academy of Science, a magnet high school in Loudoun County, which assigns one book, a "fun science read," with no reports or tests. "We really do believe summer is the time to rest and rejuvenate and then come back to school in September excited and ready to go."

Although not universal, the notion appears to be more common than it was a few years ago. For a time, summer homework was on the rise, many educators said, a sign of serious-mindedness about academic achievement. It often counts as a grade.

"I think the pendulum has shifted," said Gail Hubbard, supervisor of gifted education and special programs in Prince William County, where summer homework policies are under review. "I think we went for several years requiring more and more and more." Now, she said, the goal is "to make sure it benefits the learner instead of burdens the learner."

At Walter Johnson High School in Montgomery County, summer math packets that were once routinely required became optional last year, said Principal Chris Garran. This year, they have disappeared.

"We really didn't see a difference between students who did the packet and those who didn't," he said. The school's English department still requires students to complete a reading assignment, but Garran said he believes in limiting the overall workload.

Students already face a lot of academic pressure during the school year, Garran said, and many are busy with part-time jobs, internships, charitable projects and family vacations. "I'm not the biggest fan of summer homework," he said. "I'm one of these educators who still likes the idea of summer."

At Walter Johnson and other schools, educators have differing views.

Supporters of summer homework said the assignments can help in several ways. For high school students taking advanced courses, summer reading can help keep minds sharp and study habits intact, while reducing the number of books students need to

read during the school year. The assignments can take the pressure off students by spreading out the workload.

For students across many ages, the phenomenon of summer learning loss also is well-documented, said Harris Cooper, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Duke University who has studied the subject.

In math, most students lose ground over the summer, according to comparisons of standardized test scores, Cooper said. In reading, middle-class students hold their own, but students from low-income families slip, he said.

Cooper said it could take students several weeks to regain the learning lost over the summer.

Many parents say they appreciate the assignments, or even want more of them, hoping to keep their children engaged in academics rather than playing video games or watching television or just being bored.

Consuvello Bryant of Mount Rainier, a mother of four sons, said her children's school gives out suggested reading lists but no required assignments, which she thinks is not enough. Her summer rule is: Math and reading come before playtime. Her children gather for schoolwork in the mornings; the eldest went to summer school.

"I believe if you don't keep up, then when you go back to school, you'll be behind or just mediocre," she said. "I believe kids are what you make them."

Frani Jamieson of Lake Ridge, who buys educational materials for her children to use while school is out, said her son, Kevin, 9, a rising fourth-grader, did not receive required assignments, only a list of suggested reading. Extra credit is given for doing the work.

"I'm going to have him write a summary of the books," she said.

Kevin Jamieson, standing nearby, looked up from his Nintendo DS. "Huh?" he said.

At School Without Walls in the District, an application-only high school, the summer demands are high. The school has an extensive reading list, but Principal Richard Trogisch makes no apologies. "There is a strong correlation: If you read, you lead," he said. "This is a dream-maker, and you get out what you put in."

Some of the heaviest summer homework loads are shouldered by high school students in such selective programs.

Samir Hazboun, 16, who is part of an advanced communications program at Montgomery Blair High School, has five books to read and write about, along with five reports on books previously read. He has to visit and write about a place of worship. His has to read and answer questions about a history book.

This summer, Hazboun went on a three-week mountain hike with a Quaker group and was an intern at Hispanic Link news agency. His homework still awaits him, but he is hoping to preserve the illusion of a free summer as long as possible. "I go in one big rush a few days before it's due," he said.

Even schools with the most demanding programs are scaling back some.

At Yorktown High School in Arlington County, Principal Raymond Pasi said faculty, administrators and parents discussed the issue of summer homework at meetings over the course of two years and decided against requiring it, even for Advanced Placement classes.

Among private institutions, Norwood School in Bethesda requires summer reading, but the school has shifted away from summer report writing. "The message we've been trying to get out to families is about the importance of reading," said Susan Rosenbaum, principal of the middle school.

Nancy Kalish, co-author of "The Case Against Homework," said that schools have piled on work, with the notion that more is better, and that it detracts from a love of learning.

"Kids who are grinding through huge amounts of summer homework go back to school . . . already burned out," Kalish said. "What would be better would be to challenge students at all levels to read as many books as they could of their own choosing."

Such changing views have become apparent to Lori McCarthy during recent years as her five children have risen through schools near her Chevy Chase home.

A few years back, she said, her children seemed to get summer assignments in every subject -- social studies posters, math sheets, reading lists, even science experiments. "Oh my goodness, it's just been overwhelming sometimes," she said. Now, "it seems to be getting more reasonable," she said.

Still, last week she drove her 17-year-old son, who worked three part-time jobs this summer, to St. John's College High School to turn in his summer reading report on George Orwell's "1984" by the July 31 deadline.

In another sign that summer homework is far from gone, McCarthy said that even her rising first-grader, who is autistic, has a math packet and a reading list.

At Holy Redeemer Catholic School in Kensington, Principal Harriann Walker said summer homework there once included many intricate projects. Parents said it was too much, so the school cut back. Now the school has changed course again. "We swung the whole pendulum, one way and then the other, and now we're back to the middle," Walker said.

For students across the region, the question of the moment is whether summer homework is done.

Sascha Jantsch, 13, of Mechanicsville said that although he thought the book he read for ninth-grade English, "Night" by Elie Wiesel, was well-written, the assignment had its drawbacks.

"It makes you worry through the summer," he said.

He asked his sister, Audrey, 10, why she had not yet started her second assigned book.

"You have 20 days left," he reminded her.

Minneapolis Star Tribune
Rising bar trips up some of Minnesota's best schools
8.05.08

Emily Johns and Patrice Relerford

Nearly half of Minnesota's public schools are failing to meet state standards in math and reading, which can trigger consequences ranging from a black mark on a school's reputation to forced restructuring of programs and staff.

According to data released Tuesday by the Minnesota Department of Education, 937 of 1,951 schools are not making "adequate yearly progress" under the 2001 No Child Left Behind law. That number is up sharply from 727 schools last year and 483 in 2006.

The list is growing, officials say, because slight test score gains didn't keep pace with annually increasing benchmarks.

The increase frustrates some educators, who say the system is designed to eventually label all schools as failing. But others say the law forces schools to devote resources to students they overlooked before.

"Some of the ways of reporting it are frustrating," said Minnesota Education Commissioner Alice Seagren. "But we're not going to go back to the old way of doing things, of just letting kids pass from grade to grade without having any kind of a proficiency standard."

Several high schools hailed as among the best in Minnesota and the nation, including Edina, Wayzata and Eastview in Apple Valley, also were labeled as "underperforming."

Newsweek magazine had ranked Edina as one of the nation's top 100 high schools earlier this year.

Some educators predict the addition of such schools to the list is certain to alter attitudes about the federal law.

With those schools on the list, "It's not 'those kids,' it becomes 'our kids,'" said Tom Dooher, president of Education Minnesota, the statewide teachers' union. "And when people with influence see that it's happening to them, they're going to put some influence and pressure on the political system to change it."

An uphill battle

According to the 2001 No Child Left Behind law, states need to test how different student groups fare in school. If one group -- such as special-education students -- fails to meet targets on state tests, the whole school is labeled as not making "adequate yearly progress."

For schools receiving federal Title I money, failure means penalties that increase over time, from having to offer transfers and tutoring to restructuring an entire school. The proficiency level required each year is a moving target -- by 2014, the law says, every student group in the country is supposed to pass the tests.

Sanctions don't apply to schools such as Edina, Wayzata and Eastview, which don't receive federal Title I funds for low-income students.

About 37 percent of the state's elementary schools and 52 percent of Minnesota high schools didn't meet targets this year. Statewide, middle and junior high schools fared the worst, with almost 70 percent not making the grade. Among charter schools, 58 percent did not meet goals.

"There are so many ways to fail," said Charlie Kyte, executive director of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators, "and they keep raising the bar. No matter how hard we try, we end up having more schools look like they're not making it."

Many educators credit the law with forcing teachers and staff to focus on student groups that might get overlooked in wealthy schools with smaller concentrations of low-income students or students of color.

Edina and Eastview High Schools, for example, were both identified as not making their 2008 achievement goals because of the performance of their black students on the 11th-grade math test. Black students make up 6 percent of the students at both schools.

"We take the test seriously but it's a challenge because all of the bars keep getting raised," said Edina Superintendent Ric Dressen. But, "we're going much deeper into the data to track students."

About half the schools failed to get their low-income students across the line, and about as many fell short with special-education students. From there, black students, those who speak limited English and Hispanic students were the most common groups to fall behind.

"If you have a sizable special-education or [limited-English] program, it's very challenging to make those targets," said Don Pascoe, testing director in Osseo, the state's fifth-largest district, where 23 of 26 schools didn't meet their goals.

Urban districts struggle

Minnesota's two urban districts continued to struggle. In Minneapolis, only 12 of the district's 81 schools met testing benchmarks. St. Paul fared slightly better, with 20 of 77 schools making the grade.

Last year, Lucy Laney and Nellie Stone Johnson elementary schools in north Minneapolis were the first Minnesota schools to be restructured under the NCLB law. Each received additional attention, such as extra teacher training and class size reductions, under the district's North Side Initiative. But both schools still made the list this year.

"Sometimes it takes more than a year to get traction with these programs," said Dave Heistad, Minneapolis' testing chief.

This year, four Minneapolis elementary schools are on the state's restructuring list and nine must prepare to restructure. St. Paul must prepare to restructure three schools.

Superintendent Bill Green pointed out that Minneapolis students made testing gains similar to those seen statewide. He said the data reveal challenges, not excuses for failure.

"We're a district that believes wholeheartedly in accountability," he said. "The challenge for us is, we must go faster and further than any other district in the state."

St. Paul Superintendent Meria Carstarphen echoed Green, saying that despite "encouraging" gains in math and reading scores, "We know we have to really move up our game."

Carstarphen pointed to district-wide efforts to improve professional development and restructure programming. Interventions take time, she said, but the district is watching closely to see what works.

Ames Elementary, for instance, was removed from the list of underperforming schools after two years of good performance. Principal Delores Henderson credits high expectations and increased individual attention for the gains.

Revisiting the law

The 2001 No Child Left Behind law is up for reauthorization but will stay in effect until Congress acts. Opposition is growing not only in Minnesota, where some legislators want to opt out of the law, but nationwide.

Last year, the Department of Education and a group of Minnesota education organizations issued recommendations for improving the law. The department said the group's consensus was that the law needed to be "mended, not ended."

The list of struggling schools is helpful because it lets parents know that students at certain schools may be eligible for supplemental services such as tutoring, said Minneapolis' deputy superintendent Bernadeia Johnson. For the community, the list is "a trigger point that says your school is a high priority," she said.

But Carstarphen said schools could be nearing a tipping point where, instead of feeling resolved to raise test scores, they could get frustrated with the system.

"I'm not frustrated," she said. "I do think there's a lot more we could do about our practices that would give kids a better outcome. ... We just need to be careful and make real-time adjustments when things don't make sense. If we can keep our heads on straight that way, educators worth their salt will get that and do what they need to do."

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Newsday U.S. is losing education race with China 8.05.08

Jennifer Wheary

As the Olympics open on Friday, Americans will turn our gaze to China and gear up for some competition. But even if the American team brings home more gold medals,

when it comes to our Asian economic rival, we may have already lost.

This loss is not taking place on any athletic field. It's happening in our colleges and universities and in our ability to produce skilled workers.

Three decades ago, 30 percent of the world's college students were from the United States. Today, that figure is just 14 percent. We produce 70,000 engineers a year. Official records say that China produces 650,000. American experts don't necessarily believe that, but even their revised figure, 350,000, shows a huge difference.

The Centre for International Governance Innovation, a global think tank based in Canada, says that China will have more engineers and scientists with doctorates than the United States by 2010. They also estimate that within four years, 90 percent of all scientists and engineers with doctorates in the world will be Asians living in Asia.

When it comes to cultivating technological talent, the United States is losing ground that we may not be able to make up, and as a result, we're falling behind on the inventiveness necessary to be successful in a hyper-charged 21st-century economy. Measured by the number of new patents awarded, the percentage of the population working in idea-generating occupations, and the ability to adapt to changing conditions, today's American workers are less successful than past generations.

So how do we change course?

The answer involves tapping into underutilized potential. In recent years, China has revamped its higher education strategy to focus on getting more people from poor families into college and graduate school.

The Chinese government has prioritized keeping university fees and housing costs low. It also encourages master's and doctorate programs to drop the fees associated with postgraduate study.

In concentrating on cutting college costs, Chinese authorities recognize that low-income and working-class communities are the source of the nation's future human capital. Making college more affordable means accessing untapped potential. The Chinese get it. We don't.

More Americans are going to college than ever before, but there are still worrying differences between who participates in higher education and what they do there. These differences fall along income lines.

The richer your parents are, the more likely it is you will go to college, the better school you'll attend, and the more likely you are to complete your degree and perhaps go on to even more advanced education.

Each year about 400,000 college-qualified high school graduates from lower-income families (those earning less than \$50,000 a year) do not enroll in a four-year college. More than 150,000 don't enroll in any college at all.

Imagine the possibilities if we could use a combination of private scholarships and federal funds to steer some of these 550,000 students into studying science or gaining other skills that will augment America's technical prowess. We'd be well on our way to catching up to China's engineering, science and doctorate production.

While the United States has made gains recently in increasing the federal financial aid available to many of these students, we still have a long way to go.

Last week Congress moved to reauthorize the Higher Education Act. Critics and pundits say that the new bill takes small to midsize steps to control college costs and direct more aid to students at the lower end of the income spectrum. While these intentions are an encouraging sign, fiscal conservatives are balking at the additional cost.

Only time will tell if more money makes it into the right hands in a way that actually constitutes a solid investment in the nation's human capital and ability to develop scientific talent.

But it would be unwise to put all of the eggs for enhancing educational attainment and the acquisition of technical skills among lower-income students into the federal basket. The private sector can and must play a role. A report released last week by the Institute for Higher Education Policy says that corporate interest in philanthropy related to higher education is incredibly strong. According to the report, nine out of 10 Fortune 100 companies have set education as a high priority for their philanthropic efforts. If some of these efforts were coordinated around the shared goal of targeting lower-income students to increase our scientific talent, the long-term results would be worth far more than the initial investment.

We have good opportunities on the table for increasing our ability to compete with China. The question is how well we can coordinate public and private efforts to rally around the cause of moving untapped potential where it is needed most.

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Pioneer Press

4 St. Paul school must 'prepare for restructuring'

8.05.08

Doug Belden

But two programs have already been shut down or merged

Four St. Paul schools are facing the toughest consequences the district has ever seen under No Child Left Behind and must prepare for restructuring. But because the district saw the problem coming, two of the schools are already gone.

Homecroft Elementary's program was eliminated at the end of last year, and Cleveland Junior High is being combined with Farnsworth Magnet Elementary.

As for the other two, Arlington High School has a redesign well under way, and Humboldt Junior High will need to take its reprogramming plans up a notch this year, said St. Paul Superintendent Meria Carstarphen.

Overall, a few more St. Paul Public Schools failed to meet state targets this year compared with last year — 56 out of 77, up from 53.

None of the district's secondary schools made adequate yearly progress toward academic goals, nor did the district as a whole. But every student group (defined by

race, economic status, special education, etc.) made at least some academic gains, officials said.

But as federal accountability standards ratchet up each year on the way to 100 percent proficiency by 2014, more and more local schools will find themselves to be multiple-year laggards, putting them at risk for consequences ranging from program redesign to merger to closure.

"Everything's moving up, but it's not big jumps, and it's not accelerating the pace fast enough," Carstarphen said. "We'll have to do more faster."

At Humboldt Junior High, the curriculum is being revamped this fall to focus on environmental science and technical education. But a more far-reaching effort is needed, said Carstarphen, including support from outside partners.

"We're going to need a bigger lift," she said. "It's going to need a lot more."

Humboldt Junior High Principal Tim Williams said Ecolab, Hamline University and other local partners are already on board with the school's new direction, and the school will look for other opportunities to collaborate. The goal is to make Humboldt kids more successful, he said, and "the track that we're going on will allow that to happen."

In the case of Cleveland — as well as Monroe Community School, which is listed as requiring "corrective action" and is merging with Linwood Elementary — the district is hoping the state will consider the merged entities to be a new school with a blank slate for No Child Left Behind purposes, said Michelle Walker, chief accountability officer.

Two other St. Paul schools — Washington Middle and Open School — have posted lagging test scores for four years and are now classified as needing corrective action. That is one of the triggers under district guidelines to initiate program changes at a school.

Washington has already been retooling as part of Arlington's new biotech focus, but it's less clear what changes might be contemplated at Open School.

On the positive side, Adams, John A. Johnson, Frost Lake, Hayden Heights and Ames elementaries all made adequate yearly progress and came off the state's watch list. Highland Park Elementary hit its targets after two years of lagging scores, but the school will still be required to offer school choice options to parents.

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KPTM FOX News 42 (NE)

Focus school emphasizes leadership through technology and communication 8.05.08

Meghan Youker

OMAHA (KPTM) - They went back to school before most of their neighborhood friends. About 120 kids showed up Wednesday for the first day of class at the learning community's first focus school.

It's a new year and a fresh start for students at the Underwood Hills Focus School at

90th and Western. "No one knows each other. They're not neighbors. They're not friends from last year," said fifth grade teacher Angie Deck.

Most of the third, fourth and fifth graders are bused in from the Omaha, Westside and Elkhorn School Districts. Teachers and students say the diversity is a plus. "I'm looking most for new friends and people who I can help with stuff that they don't understand," said fifth grader Christian Harmon.

The focus school has an extended school calendar and extended school day, with tutoring and activities that run until 5 p.m. It emphasizes leadership through technology and communication. High-tech equipment and individual laptops are meant to keep kids excited about learning.

"Kids are set up into groups or teams. Everything is done to help them in collaboration and in working together," said Underwood Hills Principal Bret Anderson. The focus school is somewhat of an experiment.

It's the first joint effort between districts in the 11-member-learning community. "We have a unique opportunity to kind of be on the grassroots level, to build a new way to form schools, a new way for kids to learn about people in different parts of the community," Deck said.

The results could help shape metro schools of the future. "I think everybody is watching to see how things work out and see the things that we're doing with the kids and to see if that really makes an impact on achievement," Anderson said.

35 percent of students at focus schools are supposed to come from low-income families. Special lessons are meant to encourage family participation.

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The Arizona Republic **Ariz. educators embrace trend of technology in their curriculum** **8.06.08**

Megan Gordon

Just two decades ago, many schools had only a few computers and taught lessons about typing. But Monday marked a drastic change for Arizona schools as one of the first K-5 technology academies opened its doors to students.

Scales Technology Academy in Tempe boasts a 1-1 ratio of students to laptop computers. The school's principal, David Diokno, said it is the first Arizona elementary school to do so. The Arizona Department of Education does not track such information.

"We saw that there was a need that was expressed by parents in our district," Diokno said. "We did a lot of research, and now we're opening a brand-new school with close to 600 students."

The academy is part of a growing trend within state districts to incorporate technology into classrooms. Almost every school district has some ban on tech toys that many say interfere with classroom discipline, such as cellphones and iPods. Recently, many of these districts are using some of the banned technology as a way to educate students in the classroom.

"A lot of our classrooms use Smart Boards," said Kristen Landry, Madison Elementary School District marketing and communication director. "The computer image is projected onto a screen. The students can go up to the screen and touch it. It's almost like the iPhone."

Smart Board is a product many districts around the Valley have integrated into classrooms. This interactive white board combines the uses of overheads, scanners, projectors and the Internet into one system. It can cost upwards of \$5,000 to install one Smart Board.

"I truly believe Smart Boards can be used in every single classroom subject," said Diokno, whose school has the board in every class. "Almost any subject you can think of can be enhanced through the power of the interactive white board."

Other tech toys that districts use are Nintendo Wii for fitness and education games, podcasts and Internet resources such as YouTube and Google Earth. VoiceThread is a Web site that allows teachers to upload classroom videos for students to comment on.

"I can put a picture or a video of something that is going on in our class on (the site) and after, kids can plug a microphone into the computer and add comments or thoughts verbally," said John Enright, a second-grade teacher at Madison Rose Lane Elementary School in Phoenix. "It's kind of like graffiti or message board. It's one way that I can assess kids who have trouble learning in the written form."

With all the new technology, some parents are worried that it has become a "convenient curriculum."

"It's made things way too easy for assignments. It's too cosmetic and too easy," said Chandler resident David Harbster, a parent of two grown children. "To me, the computer is just a very big fancy filing cabinet. I think we need to slow this baby down. It's a two-dimensional space on a computer, but we live in a three-dimensional world."

Harbster said he agrees that technology is a good learning tool but believes that many schools are overusing it.

"It's almost become a video drug," he said. "I think it's becoming, 'How much we can do?' rather than asking what the real benefits of this technology are. It's very seductive, and it's designed to be that way. And schools are trying to stay ahead as best they can, but it's too much."

Diokno said Scales Technology Academy stresses Tempe Elementary School District's curriculum standards but uses technology to enhance the learning process.

"We're not going to be only about technology. We're going to infuse it into the curriculum," he said. "Our kids are in the digital age. So now we are enhancing our curriculum through the infusion of technology. It's an added resource."

Many teachers and districts are at different stages of the implementation of technology in the classroom. Although it may be challenging and time-consuming to keep up with new technology uses, Madison teacher Enright said it is how children learn.

"I think the imagery we use with technology is really a more effective way to teach kids than simply telling them something," he said. "The bonus is a lot of those materials are interactive, which is a better model of teaching."

The New York Times
Where the race now begins at kindergarten
8.06.08

Winnie Hu

Parents who sent their toddlers to the well-regarded Mandell preschool on the Upper West Side used to count on getting into the private school of their choice.

But with the recent boom in the city's under-5 set, the competition for kindergarten places can rival that of Ivy League admission. This spring, for the first time, several of the 43 Mandell preschool graduates found themselves without anywhere to go. So Mandell, which has been around for generations, decided to do its part to ease the kindergarten crunch by opening its own \$2 million elementary school, in a 17,000-square-foot storefront on Columbus Avenue at 96th Street.

"I think we've reached a crisis level in terms of capacity," said Gabriella Rowe, Mandell's head of school. "Although the majority of our families are still going to be able to send their children to their first-choice school, it's clear that it's going to become more difficult every year if these numbers continue to increase."

The new school, financed through bank loans, will start with 50 kindergarten students in two classes. Ms. Rowe plans to expand to 450 students through 8th grade by 2017. Tuition is \$28,000 for the 2008-9 school year, rising to \$30,000 the next year.

Despite mounting layoffs on Wall Street and the broader economic downturn, private schools in New York City continue to thrive, with administrators and consultants saying this year has been the most competitive yet for admission to kindergarten. Some estimate that several hundred children were rejected from every place they applied.

About 150,000 students are enrolled in private and parochial schools in New York City; about 1.1 million attend the city's public schools.

Emily Glickman, a private school consultant for Abacus Guide Educational Consulting, which helps parents gain admission to private schools, said competition had intensified not only for brand-name schools like Dalton, Collegiate and Trinity but also for lesser-known and newer schools, as more couples opt to have two or more children; more families remain in the city rather than moving to the suburbs; and the wealthy in New York get wealthier.

The Claremont Preparatory School, which started in Lower Manhattan in 2005, is expanding to seven kindergarten classes from three after receiving more than 1,100 applications this year, up from 700 the year before. Claremont, which has nearly 500 students in kindergarten through eighth grade, also plans to open a high school in September 2009.

In Brooklyn, a group of parents and educators in Fort Greene and Clinton Hill are

also opening a new private elementary school, the Greene Hill School, which will emphasize hands-on learning in art, music, and physical education and cost \$13,500 a year, according to Diana Schlesinger, the school's co-director and a former director of the education program at the American Folk Art Museum.

On the Upper West Side, the Mandell School was started in a brownstone on 94th Street in 1939 by Ms. Rowe's grandfather, Max Mandell, who had worked with runaway boys at Bellevue Hospital Center. Every morning, he stood outside in a suit and tie to greet his students.

Ms. Rowe, 42, a petite woman with red hair, grew up above the preschool and used to help empty the trash and paint the classroom walls. She attended the Nightingale-Bamford School on scholarship, then majored in French and European history at Bryn Mawr College. She worked as an investment banker at Merrill Lynch and as a management consultant before joining the family business in 1999.

Ms. Rowe said she began planning an elementary school five years ago to allow families to continue their education at Mandell, which emphasizes a progressive curriculum of academics, citizenship and community involvement. She pushed up the timetable in December when she saw the increased demand for private school slots. By February, she had received 50 applications for the first kindergarten class of 25, including two from children in Mandell's preschool. In March, she opened up a second 25-student kindergarten class, and received 100 more applications within 48 hours.

Colette Alderson, whose 5-year-old son was in preschool at Mandell, said that she and her husband, Scott, the president of a software company, looked at other schools but decided not to apply. "I knew the fit was right, so I didn't see a reason to change schools," said Ms. Alderson, 40. "I didn't really view it as a new school, but as an extension of a very established, well-known preschool."

Another parent, Cheryl Wischhover, chose Mandell's elementary school for her 5-year-old son over a public-school gifted program, saying she liked the focus on teaching to each student's strengths and weaknesses, the well-planned curriculum and the school's close relationship with families. Ms. Wischhover, 37, a pediatric nurse practitioner, said she applied to five other private schools for her son, but was rejected by one school and wait-listed by the other four.

"Many people I know got into at least one school, but I definitely know people who didn't," she said. "It was a really tough process."

Ms. Rowe has hired 20 new teachers, including specialists in fine arts, music, drama and physical education, and a psychologist, and promises a five to one student-teacher ratio for the elementary grades. She is also negotiating for an additional 47,000-square-foot space nearby for the upper grades.

She said she had been fielding calls all summer about kindergarten in the fall of 2009, though applications will not be officially available until Aug. 18. "I expect the real chaos will come in September," she said.

Mandell's preschool students are guaranteed a place in the elementary school, and seven families have already said they plan to attend in 2009-10, Ms. Rowe said. She added that she would continue to help preschool students get into other private schools if they prefer. This spring, five students were admitted to Dalton, four to Brearley, and three each to Chapin, Collegiate, Trinity, Spence and Nightingale-Bamford, some of the most competitive private schools in the city, she said.

With the first day of school looming, Ms. Rowe checked on the construction last week at two lower floors of the red-brick high-rise that will house the elementary school. She raced from one end to the other, pointing to empty spaces that would soon hold a first-grade classroom, an art studio, a music room, a nurse's office, a teachers' lounge and a school psychologist's office. "I know the floor plan in my sleep," Ms. Rowe said, stepping nimbly over construction materials piled on the concrete floor.

The Washington Post
In under-5 set, minority becoming majority
8.07.08

N.C. Aizenman

A surge in Hispanic immigration over the past decade has dramatically altered the racial and ethnic composition of the region's youngest residents, according to U.S. Census Bureau figures released today.

As with minorities in general, immigrants tend to be younger than non-Hispanic whites and still in their childbearing years. As a result, in five suburban Washington counties, more than half of children age 4 and younger were minorities when the annual Census Bureau survey was taken a year ago.

In three of the counties -- Prince William, Montgomery and Charles -- the share reached about 60 percent. And in Prince George's, where Hispanic immigration has supplemented an even larger African American population, more than 90 percent of these children are minorities.

The implications for governments and communities are wide-ranging, demographers said. As the current crop of youngsters reaches kindergarten age, school systems that would otherwise be losing students will continue to grow or remain stable. They will also need to accommodate an ever-larger number of students who were raised in immigrant households where English was not spoken.

In addition, although most Hispanic children younger than 5 are native-born U.S. citizens and therefore eligible for government health care and other benefits, research indicates that if their parents are not U.S. citizens, they will be less likely to claim assistance, said Michael Fix, director of studies at the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute.

"All of this really reinforces the importance for counties to increase their investment in early childhood development now," Fix said. "If you don't make that investment, one of the penalties you pay down the line is that you have kids in school who don't speak English well and whose overall performance lags behind."

Fix pointed to studies indicating that as many as 75 percent of elementary school children learning English as a second language were born in the United States.

"Even more worrisome is that over half of the English-as-a-second-language learners in high school were native born," Fix added.

As these minority children mature, counties that until fairly recently were dominated by non-Hispanic whites are likely to shift to majority-minority status, said William

Frey, a demographer with the Brookings Institution.

"The bubbling up [of minorities] that we're now seeing at the younger ages will continue to move up through the age range, through the teenage years, the working-age years and then the housing-buying years," he said. "The child population is really a microcosm of the future."

Minorities had already grown to 47 percent of the population in Charles and 48 percent in Prince William in July 2007, up from about one-third in 2000. Montgomery, at 46 percent minority, is also getting close.

Demographers cautioned, however, that the extreme ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of area minorities makes it difficult to make broad predictions about the impact of the region's impending shift to majority-minority status.

In Prince George's, for instance, 62 percent of children younger than 5 are non-Hispanic blacks, and they include a substantial share born to affluent families.

Similarly, in Fairfax County, Asian children account for 17 percent of those younger than 5. Often born to upwardly mobile immigrant professionals who encourage them to supplement regular schoolwork with additional classes, Asian students are disproportionately represented among the county's top-performing students. And last month it was announced that for the first time Asian Americans will outnumber whites at the county's most prestigious public magnet school, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology.

Nor can Hispanic immigrants, who hail from a wide range of nations, be easily categorized.

"You cannot necessarily predict that just because they'll become majority-minority, all these schools will become low-income," Fix said. "The Washington area has one of the most diverse foreign populations in the nation."

Adding to the complexity of the picture is that the Census Bureau collected its data through July 2007, before the current economic downturn and before Prince William and other counties adopted initiatives against illegal immigration.

In Prince William, the percentage of students enrolled in classes for English as a second language dropped nearly 5 percent from a record of 13,404 in September to 12,775 by the end of the school year. The impact of the downturn and immigration restrictions will be reflected in Census Bureau data to be released next year.

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Chicago Sun-Times Kids' fear of violence are a call to action 8.07.08

Chicago Sun-Times Staff

It's hard not to cry when you hear their voices.

"It would be wonderful [without guns] because I wouldn't have to go outside thinking I could get shot at any minute and there would be no more of me," one Chicago Public Schools seventh-grader said.

A second-grader's greatest fear? "To be shot on the heart."

Here's a sixth-grade boy describing a city without guns: "I would be happy to go outside. . . . I can ride my bike, go to the pool, and yell and say Holalaya."

Sometimes we forget these are just kids.

That's the power of the Chicago Sun-Times' three-day series, "Schooled in fear," which ends today. In a year where 36 CPS children died violently, the Sun-Times showed readers the fallout extends far beyond 36 grieving families.

Nearly 500 students at three CPS elementary schools in Woodlawn, Little Village and West Town were surveyed by reporters Rosalind Rossi and Art Golab.

The kids' greatest fear? Getting shot.

Among fifth- through eighth-graders, more than a third know a friend or a relative who has been shot to death.

These youngsters are victims without ever being hit by a bullet. The violence pervading many neighborhoods has left far too many chronically fearful and utterly isolated. Kids are so afraid they spend nearly all their non-school hours cooped up at home. And when they get to school, there are few ways for them to blow off steam.

Of the three schools surveyed, none had recess. Just one third of all CPS schools have it regularly.

Of the three schools surveyed, just one had an art teacher.

And most kids in the three schools get gym just once a week. The state says it should be daily.

These are just the kinds of activities kids told the Sun-Times they crave. They are also what the experts recommend to process trauma and learn how to get along with other kids.

It's also good for the bottom line: Kids who can climb the monkey bars, dabble in art or play an instrument are likely to do better academically and be less disruptive.

James Garbarino, director of the Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University Chicago, said the survey responses represent a "call to action." We couldn't agree more.

Chicago schools did away with recess in the late '70s, and it's time to bring it back. Schools CEO Arne Duncan supports it, and a bill requiring it is pending in Springfield.

That takes money, of course. Schools need staff to supervise students on the playground and more time in the school day so recess doesn't cut into math, reading and science. A third of CPS' schools have figured out how to do it. The rest could do the same.

For schools in the toughest neighborhoods, this page calls for a more radical solution.

CPS has one of the shortest school days in the country. It should be extended for all schools. But at a bare minimum, it must be longer for the lowest-performing schools, which are often in the most violent areas.

This will make room for some of what these kids are missing in their neighborhoods: recess, art, music, gym. In short, some semblance of a normal childhood.

Nearly 200 low-income Chicago schools have repeatedly failed testing goals of the federal No Child Left Behind act and must make major changes. The feds say extending the day can be one piece of their restructuring plans. Illinois has new federal powers to intervene more aggressively in failing schools and to target more resources there. The state is cooking up its plan this year. We say a longer school day should be at the top of the list.

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Chicago Tribune
Meeks' fury over schools ignited in past
8.07.08

Eric Zorn

To better understand the determined fury of State Sen. James Meeks—his fiery rhetoric on education funding and proposals to spark city-suburban confrontations—we must look back to spring 2006, when Meeks himself got a schooling he can't forget.

He was frustrated. The "tax-swap" idea he favored—increasing income taxes and cutting property taxes to reduce school-funding disparities between rich and poor districts—was going nowhere in Springfield.

His fellow Democrat, Gov. Rod Blagojevich, was adamantly refusing to consider a hike in income taxes, even one theoretically neutral.

So Meeks announced he would run for governor that fall as an independent.

"We had petitions printed up and ready to go," Meeks said in an interview Wednesday. "Our party was called People First."

This was bad news for Blagojevich. His re-election hopes relied on strong support among African-American voters, and Meeks is the popular pastor of an African-American mega-church on the South Side.

On May 19, 2006, the day before Meeks was to launch his petition drive, he met privately for three hours with Blagojevich and their advisers, he said.

"They assured me they had had bidders lined up for the lottery, and the proceeds would put \$10 billion over five years into education," Meeks said.

"And believing that Gov. Blagojevich was an honorable man and a man of his word, I told him I would get out of the race," Meeks said.

The men were coy about the deal. But four days later, Blagojevich announced at a news conference his intention to sell or lease the lottery and spend the \$10 billion

windfall on schools. Aides added that the formal proposal would not be ready until the legislature's fall veto session—one week after the election.

Blago being Blago, he also took the opportunity to say it was "cynical" for any of us to link this announcement to Meeks' withdrawal from the race.

Then when the fall veto session rolled around, the victorious Blagojevich team didn't put forth a lottery-for-schools package or lend any PR muscle into promoting the idea to balky legislators. And—presto! change-o!—in his March 2007 budget address, Blagojevich said he hoped to "generate \$10 to \$12 billion [from a lottery lease] and put that toward our pension obligation."

Education money was now to come from a new, gross-receipts tax on business (which, like the lottery-for-pensions idea turned out to be a complete non-starter in the General Assembly.)

"He never discussed with me why he let it drop," Meeks said. "He never said, 'I made this promise to you, but I can't keep it.' I just had to suffer embarrassment in front of all my colleagues, and I had to listen to reporters in Springfield tell me that I got the shaft."

"Meeks should feel betrayed by his colleagues in the General Assembly" who have not OK'd any of Blagojevich's school-funding plans, gubernatorial spokesman Lucio Guerrero said.

But it's Blagojevich who has created the poisonous atmosphere of mistrust in which the legislature will convene in special sessions next week to consider his other, other lottery-lease idea (this time it's to help pay for a \$25 billion construction plan) and to address school-funding reform.

"I'm prepared this time," Meeks said. He's been calling for students to boycott Chicago Public Schools and attempt to register in suburban districts.

And he said he won't stand down or support any construction plan until the governor does more for education reform than just make promises and float notions.

It seems someone has learned his lesson.

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Chicago Sun-Times **'They are being robbed of their childhood'** **8.07.08**

Rosalind Rossi

Kids 'need recess' — Students in violent neighborhoods should have physical, artistic and social outlets to help them cope with the trauma of their everyday lives, experts say

Maybe kids do know best.

For a social studies project this year, fifth-graders at Little Village Academy plotted a cost-free way to counter the guns and gangs that plague their neighborhood: They

asked parents to volunteer to lead after-school programs in drawing, painting, handcrafts, dancing, sports, cheerleading and chess.

"Kids would be interested in after-school programs and it would keep their minds off gangs," explained Marissa Juarez, 11. "It would keep them inside and safe."

The fifth-graders also may have hit on just what they need to help them heal from the effects of urban violence.

The physical, social and artistic outlets kids urged are among the coping mechanisms experts recommend for those touched by violence. Similar activities are used with children in war-torn countries.

In the first two days of "Schooled in Fear," the Chicago Sun-Times reported how kids at public elementary schools in three areas of the city -- Little Village Academy, Sexton Elementary in Woodlawn and Talcott Elementary in West Town -- have been affected by violence.

Students reported being afraid to run to the store, walk to the library, play freely outside their homes, and even play with other kids on their block.

"I'm saddened" by the Sun-Times' findings, said Sexton Principal Ginger Bryant. "I'm a little angry because I feel my children are being cheated of really experiencing life. . . . They are being robbed of their childhood."

'A call to action'

The same kids who say they can't play freely outside their homes due to violence don't get much relief during school, either.

Not one of the three schools the Sun-Times surveyed offers recess. Most kids in all three get gym only once a week.

Only one school has an art teacher. All three offer optional after-school activities, but kids said they could use more.

Only a third of all Chicago public elementary schools have regularly scheduled recess, officials say. Some kids figure lack of recess is just another message from adults that it's not safe to be outside.

"Maybe [we don't have recess] because they are afraid of what will happen to us," said one Little Village fifth-grader.

The kind of child-led "free play" kids enjoy on playgrounds "is one way they process trauma," said James Garbarino, director of the Center for the Human Rights of Children at Loyola University Chicago.

Art, recess and physical activity benefit all children, but "kids with difficult lives need them more than other kids," he said. "It's a nasty irony that they are less likely to have these things."

Garbarino likened the Sun-Times survey responses to those of children in war zones and said they are "a call to action."

'Ways of Healing'

At Sexton, 12-year-old Terry Barry used to play basketball at a court across the street from his house, but he hasn't been there much since one gang opened fire on another there in September. Now, his main form of exercise is the martial arts class he takes for protection.

The fifth-grader said kids could use more exercise; he wants daily gym and recess. He says he can tell the difference in kids after their weekly gym class.

"After gym, people are all happy," Terry said. Afterward, in class, "They don't get out of their seats. They sit and pay attention. They are more calm."

The Community Stress Prevention Center in Kiryat Shmona, Israel, recommends physical exercise, art and social activities for traumatized children in war-ravaged countries, but the methods work with kids in other situations, said Frank Zenere, a national child crisis expert and school psychologist for the Miami-Dade County public schools

Physical activity and organized sports are not only "diversions, but they are also ways of healing," Zenere said. "It gives people a mental break and builds endurance."

Sports also provide a chance for kids to socialize and gather strength from others, Zenere said.

In war-torn areas, Zenere said, psychologists using the Kiryat Shmona model also will stock a tent with artists materials and "kids will be drawn to it like magnets," covering the walls with drawings of what they've experienced.

"Not everybody is comfortable sitting down and chatting. But given another way, [kids will] come forth and tell you what their concerns are," Zenere said.

On the South Side, one second-grade teacher at Sexton asked kids to draw violence they'd seen and was surprised at some of the results. A little boy drew himself watching from a window as one man shot another man in the stomach. A classmate drew her aunt being "car-jacked" at gunpoint.

But with pressure to produce specific math and reading scores in the wake of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, arts have fallen by the wayside at some schools, to the detriment of the "whole child," said Barbara Radner, director of DePaul University's Center for Urban Education.

"We need to give kids what they need. They need recess. They need arts. And they need it built into the regular day. Kids who face all these challenges need all this the most," Radner said. "You've identified a serious problem."

'They are more afraid'

Chicago elementary schools have the 12th-shortest instructional day among the hundreds of elementary school districts in Illinois, only 308 minutes, state data indicates. At Sexton, like many CPS schools, most kids get gym, library and music once a week.

"Our feet are held to the fire with this testing," Sexton's Bryant said. "Realistically, the school day needs to be extended." Even an hour more would help, she said.

Bryant said she'd love to offer recess, but she would need extra money for the personnel -- perhaps parents paid a stipend -- to monitor it. Those extra bodies could help in the classroom as well, she said.

As a school on academic probation, Sexton replaced its art teacher with "another position that would help us . . . academically," Bryant said. And although Sexton has a part-time social worker, the results of the Sun-Times surveys suggest a full-time one would be helpful, she said.

"We really don't know what [kids] have gone through a lot of times," Bryant said. "Kids really internalize and look at things differently than adults. They are more afraid."

Sexton students reported the most exposure to violence of any surveyed. Among Sexton fifth- through eighth-graders, 98 percent have heard gunshots in their neighborhood; 85 percent know a friend or relative who has been shot at, and more than three-quarters have lost a friend or relative to gunfire.

According to an African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child, but when children report they fear associating with people on their own block, "we have lost the village," DePaul's Radner said.

Until the core problem of safety on the streets is solved, schools must address the needs of children who walk in their doors, scarred by violence, Radner said.

"These kids *are* victims of the bullets. They are not being shot, but they are being hurt," Radner said.

"The collateral damage is emotional, which means the school has to provide an astonishing amount of support.

"The school has to be the village for these kids."

Contributing: Art Golab

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Chicago Sun-Times
Businesses added to Meeks' school boycott
8.08.08

Rosalind Rossi

For three days, hundreds of students would cut their classes and camp out instead in the lobbies of some of Chicago's most prominent businesses -- from the Chicago Stock Exchange to Aon Corp. -- under an expanded September school boycott plan detailed Thursday by state Sen. James Meeks (D-Chicago).

"I dare the business community to arrest our children and send them to jail because all they want is a quality education," Meeks said.

More than 1,000 parents, children and school activists packed the Daley Center on Thursday to hear Meeks outline his latest version of a plan to galvanize attention on

a state school funding formula that has created the second-largest funding gap between rich and poor districts in the nation, according to one 2008 analysis.

Last month, Meeks, a South Side pastor with a huge congregation, revealed plans to protest school funding inequities by sending busloads of Chicago Public Schools students to New Trier High School in Winnetka on Sept. 2 -- opening day for most CPS kids.

On Thursday, Meeks said he wants to expand the boycott to four days. On Sept. 3, 4 and 5, the protest would move downtown and into the lobbies of "every major building," including the Chicago Stock Exchange, the Mercantile Exchange, Chase Bank, Fifth Third Bank, and the Aon building, Meeks said.

There, CPS students would "take a seat on the floor and learn," Meeks said. Retired teachers would hold class in lobbies for about four hours a day, Meeks said.

The goal is to "sensitize" Chicago's business community to the "seriousness of this problem" and encourage them to get involved in crafting a solution, Meeks said.

"If they won't let us in [to their lobbies], we won't go in, but I guess we'll just sit on the sidewalk. That's when we'll protest. We'll picket because then business will be showing their insensitivity to this crisis," Meeks said.

Chicago School Board President Rufus Williams said Meeks' boycott plan will hurt Chicago financially by reducing the system's attendance rate for September -- traditionally one of the best-attended months and therefore one of three generally used by Chicago as the basis for state funding.

"If the message is fix school funding, we are all for it. If the method is to keep kids out of school, we are completely against it," Williams said.

Meeks also voiced support Thursday for an idea by Will Burns, the Democratic nominee for the 25th District state Senate seat, to craft and pass a bill this coming legislative session that would abolish the current school funding formula by Dec. 31, 2010. That means lawmakers would have two years to come up with a replacement.