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Education - Failing Schools

States stepping in at urban schools in crisis

Troubled by inadequate schools and unresponsive administrators, legislators are allowing states to intervene using drastic measures

By John Ritter
USA TODAY

HARTFORD, Conn. — The news hit like a sledge in the heart at America's second oldest school. Outside evaluators revoked Hartford Public High's accreditation — in effect, labeling the 133-year-old institution a failure.

But as troubling as that news was — teachers were shocked, students were angry — it was merely the catalyst for bigger events. Connecticut's Legislature, exasperated by the dismal performance of schools in the state's largest city, rushed through a law to abolish the locally elected school board and empower the governor to appoint a new one.

The June 1 state takeover came as a relief to Hartford after years of school board mismanagement, policy failure, political infighting and declining academic achievement. Across the country, takeovers are an increasingly popular tool of last resort when firefighters over-heat schools' ovens and threaten the ability — or unwillingness — to reform.

Yet there is no evidence that takeovers can turn school failure into success. No research suggests that they translate widespread academic improvement. New Jersey has been running two troubled urban districts, Jersey City and Newark, since the late 1980s and seen only a modest bump in test scores. Among the most visible failures: Connecticut's Youngstown, Conn.-Newark, N.J. Washington, D.C., and Chicago. None of these school systems has shown dramatic results either, though educators caution that it probably is too early to expect big gains.

Schools in all three cities had hit rock bottom, just as they had in Hartford. And if educators agree on anything about the nation's dysfunctional urban schools, it's this: Turning them around will take a long time. Assorted problems — academic and non-academic — have to be addressed at once: crime and security, dilapidated buildings, mismanagement, curriculum overhauls, even big foules and cafeteria food.

If the state simply eliminates a new layer of control, without meaningful reform in the classroom, no amount of bludgeoning will change the status quo. Twenty-seven states now permit some drastic intervention — takeovers, the closing or consolidation of schools, chaperons, or school board rescues. And several others are considering their own "school health" laws.

But most often, "we see the biggest changes in management and finance, and that's not what it's about," says Hal Hayden of the Northeast and Islands Regional Education Laboratory at Brown University, the group that studied Hartford's schools and made recommendations to the state.

"It's about student learning and increasing student perfor-

mance. That's where the focus must be. Otherwise, what we're doing is painting the house a different color, but it's still the same house."

Differing tactics

There is nothing approaching a standard takeover. In Washington, a control board appointed by President Clinton picked a retired Army general to shape up D.C. schools. In Illinois, the Legislature essentially said to Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, "The schools are yours, go work a miracle." In Ohio, the Legislature can't decide whether to ratchet up the Cleveland takeover with a law making Mayor Michael White the school czar.

But one thing any takeover needs: experts. "It's a three-hand job and the school board, legislators around — union contractors — notwithstanding. That's possible in only a few states."

As high-profile as takeovers are, they're relatively rare — and part of a broader movement in the 1980s to hold failing schools accountable. Government impotence is at an all-time high, and lawmakers in state after state are feeling the need to improve or well improve changes. "Accountability is just enormous in the states this year," says Kathy Christie, policy analyst at the Denver-based Education Commission of the States. "We could see a bunch more takeover laws this year. And if not takeover, tougher accountability."

In urban districts like Hartford, underfinanced and plagued by suburban flight, the socio-economic realities of inner-city life magnify schools' shortcomings. More than a third of families with children live below the poverty line.

Because fewer than half of Hartford's children go to preschool, large numbers arrive in kindergarten not knowing the alphabet or how to differentiate colors. Only 40% of Hartford Public's students graduate from high school, compared with 80% statewide. Scores on standardized tests are Connecticut's lowest. Drugs and gangs are pernicious influences.

"We have kids who say they're going to die anyway so why stay in school," says Armando Cruz, Hartford Public's principal. Besides deficiencies in curriculum and teacher-retention, lack of discipline was cited in the accreditation decision, which the district is appealing.

Also cited was the failure, after years of promises, to bring buildings and classrooms up to receding standards. The Ivybridge media center, for example, is too small, just two of its computers are wired to the internet, and at least triple the number of books and videos should be available in a high school with 1,960 students. "We have so many needs," says Ibrahim Norma Cherry.

Teachers critical

School is out in Hartford, and the new school board hasn't announced major plans yet. A 46-point improvement plan that the Brown University lab came up is expected to form some basis for changes.

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN
6-10-97

It's clear that Hartford's teachers will be crucial to reform. Depending on the source, teachers are either the glue that holds a crumbling system together or the root of many of its problems.

"People don't understand how many hours these teachers put in," Cruz says. "This isn't a suburban district where you have a lot of stability. Teachers are resolving all kinds of problems, all kinds of emergencies. They're tutoring, mentoring, visiting homes, helping kids find jobs, training them for interviews."

Eschban Gonzalez, a junior honors student, says, "The teachers are there for us all the time — before school, after school. We call them at night."

But critics say, Hartford's highly paid teachers — average pay \$34,000, with many above \$70,000 — are protected by restrictive work rules, won't work in contracts negotiated over many years that rob the district of flexibility to make major reforms.

Donald Romanik, president of the district board, says, "The teachers' contract regulates every aspect of how to run the schools — from extra pay provisions to the number of hours, teacher conferences, to restrictions on the number of required lesson plans, to what they assignments."

Takeovers that have teeth are those that give new boards power to move teachers and principals around, experts say. If districts will unions, that means power over contracts.

In Connecticut, a strong union state, the Legislature handed Hartford a mixed bag. The new board can go over union leaders' heads and appeal to the membership to approve changes. But a membership do vote kills the proposal.

Two years from now, though, all bets are off. The law sets up a clean slate for talks on a new contract. If disputes between the board and the union go to binding arbitration, the arbitrators can ignore precedent or any previously negotiated work rule. The law says the arbitrators are bound only by what's best for the children. If the board makes the case that a change is good for kids, the teachers must comply.

For now, almost everyone is taking a high road. Superintendent Patricia Daniel, hired this year by the old board, does not believe the goal of raising Hartford's test scores in just three years is unrealistic. "I won't use the fact that kids are from welfare families as an excuse for not learning," she says. "And I will not let anyone else here use that as an excuse."

Teachers union president Cheryl Daniels says if the new board "really wants to help it will embrace the people working in the system already."

At Hartford Public, the immediate worry of students like Suzi Senna, a sophomore honors student, is whether the accreditation crisis will pass before her chance of a college scholarship is ruined. "We're all middle class or lower-middle class here and we can't transfer out to private schools because we can't afford it."

Educator -
turning schools

USA TODAY
TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 1997

Approved
Read
COS

Education - failing schools

MEMORANDUM

TO: BRUCE REED, ELENA KAGAN, MICHAEL COHEN

CC: MARY SMITH, WILLIAM KINCAID

FROM: TOM FREEDMAN
JULIE MIKUTA

RE: SCHOOL TAKEOVERS

DATE: JUNE 9, 1997

SUMMARY

State takeovers of financially bankrupt schools have occurred for at least 15 years. In the last 8 years, this power has been expanded to include 'academically bankrupt' schools. Currently, 22 states empower state boards to intervene in districts that underperform academically for an extended period of time. Most state interventions occur in several stages, and some form of takeover is usually applicable after approximately two to three years of low performance. Takeover strategies vary but usually include the reconstitution of the school board, administration, school professional staff, or some combination of these bodies.

TAKEOVERS OF 'ACADEMICALLY BANKRUPT' SCHOOLS/ DISTRICTS

Attached is a state-by-state list of the sanctions that states can take against failing schools, and a summary of actions that have been taken across the country. This list was compiled based on a survey of education journals and newspapers.

State/ District	Sanctions outlined for failing schools	Criteria	What they've done/ effectiveness surveys
AL	State takeover of schools or districts possible; parents help develop school improvement plan		State currently runs 2 districts and Birmingham is on probation
AR	School improvement program administered by state education dept; if insufficient progress, could lose accreditation		
Chicago	<p>Schools risk probation; if they fail to measure up after 1 year, district officials have options ranging from firing staff members to shutting down schools</p> <p>Schools on probation receive assistance in monitoring management and instruction</p>	85% of students must score below reading norms on Iowa Tests for school to be put on probation	<p>109 (out of 554) schools on probation in Oct 96</p> <p>of 71 elem schools on probation, math scores improved in 69; reading scores in 54</p> <p>37 of 38 high schools improved math scores; 30 improved reading scores</p>
Cleveland	Reconstitution after 3 years of no progress	standardized tests, others unnamed	
CT	State can replace local school board		6/1/97: takeover of Hartford schools by state; appointed panel runs schools for 3 yrs

Denver		Iowa Tests, other tests, parent involvement, number of suspensions, participation in gifted/talented program, building maintenance, allocation of resources	2/97: School board approved reconstitution of elementary schools based on these criteria
FL	after 3 years of 'school failure', sanctions range from appointment of new principal to state withholding of district funds	7 performance goals, including basic reading and math competencies	1997: Ed Commissioner identified 158 failing schools based on low scores on standardized tests
GA	Increased state aid to schools identified as low performers; reconstitution of school officials possible		
Houston		fewer than 20% of students meet test standards; other unnamed criteria	reconstitution of 2 elementary schools; one has done very well resources available for schools that need to improve
IA	State board removes accreditation; corrective stages implemented; if no progress, board could merge district, appoint interm administrator or place district under receivership		
IL	After four years on watch list; state may reconstitute staff or reassign students		
Indianapolis		staff and student attendance; assessment on tests; graduation and remediation rates; and amount of contact with parents	1996: placed 90% of schools on probation based on these criteria

KY	Schools that meet own achievement goals in 2 years qualify for bonuses; sanctions include state assistance and firing of staff, superintendent and local school board		
LA	8/96; state panel recommended rewarding high performers and sanctioning low performers after state intervention		
MA	Local boards have authority to take over schools with support and technical assistance from state commissioner; districts may reconstitute school staff; current law gives schools 2 year warning, but likely to be made more severe		State has taken over 1 district
MD	State identifies 'failing schools'; state dept teams audit school; state may order school to be operated by a third party	low and declining test scores	cash rewards to schools that achieve excellence 48 schools reconstituted since 1994 (40 of Baltimore's 80 are eligible; 6 schools in Prince George's county reconstituted)
MI	After 3 years on probation, school may be closed; district must cover incurred expenses	over 80% failure on state proficiency test or if dropout rate exceeds 25%	Debate currently on criteria, not on basic theme
Milwaukee	Reconstitution at discretion of superintendent		
MN	2/94 Proposed legislation to reconstitute schools after 3 years of low performance	performance gap between minority and majority students in these areas: dropout, discipline rates, acad achievement, enrollment in remediation, special ed, and honors classes	

MO	Reconstitution of board members possible; local board shall not issue or renew contracts to either superintendents or principals of academically deficient schools for one year		
MS	State can withdraw accreditation; additional funds may be provided to help restore accreditation; interim administrator may override any local board decisions		
MT	1/27: Gov Racicot advocated adoption of statewide standards for schools and development of sanctions		
NC	Assistance teams identify schools as low-performing; reconstitution of school board, and replacement of superintendent and/or principal possible; local board powers suspended	student performance on writing and math tests, attendance, college preparation and dropout rate	
NJ	1988 law allows for state takeover of schools/ district if they fail to meet state certification standards; reconstitution of local board and superintendent; state takes over for a minimum of 5 years		state takeover of schools in Jersey City and Paterson Gov Whitman made 'improving failing schools' central point of social agenda, 1/95
NM	State provides personnel to operate any school or district failing to meet state performance standards; until improvements are seen, powers and duties of local board are suspended		

NY	<p>State identifies low performing schools; requires district to develop corrective-action plan</p> <p>Subject to district takeover; principal may be removed</p>	<p>minimum competency requirements on math, writing and reading tests, dropout and attendance rates</p> <p>90% of students must pass competency test in 3 years or school is on probation</p>	<p>Schools on list receiving technical assistance and aid</p> <p>Chancellor of NYC schools has taken over 14 schools since 1996</p>
OH	<p>State appoints monitor to oversee educationally deficient districts at district's expense; monitor implements corrective-action plans; no mention of removing board or superintendent</p>		
OK	<p>School identified as 'low performing' after 1-2 years of poor performance; as 'high challenge' after 3 years; state intervention at either level</p>		
Philadelphia	<p>Reconstitution after 3 years of no progress</p>		<p>Teachers union leading the revamping of 6 schools</p>
RI	<p>working on performance standards</p> <p>plans for state takeover of schools</p>		
San Francisco	<p>Reconstitution based on district superintendent decision</p> <p>have had radical closing strategies since 1984</p>	<p>attendance, chronic absenteeism, request for student transfers, test scores</p>	<p>8 schools reconstituted since 1994</p> <p>flat test scores in reconstituted schools</p>

SC	<p>If minimum standards are not met, districts undergo audit; after 6 months of no improvement, state may recommend to governor that superintendent be removed, escrow funds, or provide technical assistance</p> <p>4/96: Proposed legislation to fire principals/ superintendents of low performing schools failed</p>		
TN	<p>since 1992, state can takeover schools on probation for two years; audit conducted internally by state department</p>	<p>promotion, dropout and attendance rates; value-added assessment; pass rate on high school exit exam</p>	<p>for each of past 2 years, fewer than 2% schools meet all 5 criteria; no actions taken yet</p> <p>reward high-performers (thousands of dollars each)</p>
TX	<p>State publishes list of low performing schools; grants of \$4-5,000 available to parents to transfer kids out of low performing school;</p> <p>if district doesn't improve after 1 year, state may appoint local residents to exercise powers of board; after two years, district can be annexed to adjoining district</p>	<p>Less than 20% pass rate on standardized tests and dropout rate of 25% or over</p>	<p>gives \$5,000 to principals of schools that exceed standards</p>
VA	<p>Governor's Commission (1996) suggested suspension of school and board leaders of failing schools and barring of students from drivers' ed who don't meet 9th grade standards</p>		
WV	<p>If a school is denied accreditation, its district must develop improvement plan; sanctions increase in severity each year of no progress; final stage is potential removal of superintendent</p>		

**RAISING STANDARDS AND STRENGTHENING ACCOUNTABILITY:
KEYS TO IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

DRAFT--October 28, 1997

POTUS quote

President Clinton visited Oscar Meyer (sp??) Elementary School in Chicago, where he met with parents, students and teachers to learn first hand of Chicago's school reform efforts.

President Clinton Praises Chicago School Reforms: More than a decade ago, the Chicago school system was singled out for having the schools that were "the worst in America". Today, noting significant increases in test scores over the past two years, President Clinton said that Chicago is now a school system on the move. Over the past two years, since the enactment of legislation placing the school system under the control of Mayor Daley, Chicago has installed a new management team that placed the school system on sound financial footing, invested in needed school renovations and repairs, and adopted tough discipline policies. The school system has raised academic standards and put in new programs to help students reach them, including a strengthened curriculum, expanded participation in preschool programs and kindergarten, outreach and training to help parents be their child's first teacher, and after-school programs that expand learning time and provide extra help to students who need it.

A Model for the Nation: Ending Social Promotions and Intervening in Failing Schools: President Clinton singled out for praise Chicago's tough accountability system, which holds both students and educators accountable for learning.

Chicago has put an end to the practice of social promotions, requiring instead that students meet academic standards at grades 3, 6, 8, and 9 before being promoted. Students who need it are given extra help to meet the standards, through extended day programs that keep schools open longer each day and provide tutoring, enrichment programs and other types of academic help. Students who don't pass the tests at these key grade levels are required to attend summer school. Nearly half (check) of those who attend summer school go on to meet the standards and are promoted to the next grade.

Chicago also holds schools to tough accountability standards, and takes decisive action where schools are failing. Schools with fewer than 15% of the students meeting national norms in reading are placed on probation. These schools are reviewed by an external team, which helps develop a corrective action plan that the school must follow. Schools on probation receive additional assistance and monitoring from an external team. If the test scores fail to improve or if the school fails to implement the corrective action plan, the school district can take additional steps, including removing the principal and teaching staff or requiring them to re compete for their positions, or, if necessary, closing the school.

Federal Support for Turning Around Failing Schools: President Clinton challenged other cities (local school districts) to follow Chicago's lead by taking decisive steps to turn around schools with persistently low performance. The President directed the U.S. Department of

Education to produce and disseminate guidelines on effective approaches to turning around failing schools, based on the experience of Chicago and other cities such as San Francisco, New York and Philadelphia, as well as on lessons from business and from education research. He also directed the Education Department to develop a plan for helping local school districts use existing federal education programs and resources, such as Title 1, the Charter Schools Program, America Reads, and the 21st Century Schools program, to effectively improve or close down failing schools, and to provide the students from those schools with the extra help they need to catch up academically.

dorse Mr Tamraz's scheme, but he had donated at least \$177,000 to the Democrats in 1995-96. And then there are all those White House coffees.

For their part, the Democrats this week put on the stand the committee's first star witness: Haley Barbour, the former chairman of the Republican National Committee (RNC). The Democrats, who still resent Mr Barbour for raising the money that snatched Congress away from them in 1994, are trying to imply that Mr Barbour's Republicans are just as sleazy as the Clinton people. So the Democrats will try to show that, in 1994, Mr Barbour persuaded Ambrous Tung Young, a Hong Kong businessman, to put up \$2.1m in collateral so that the National Policy Forum, a Republican think-tank financed by the RNC, could raise a loan from an American bank. Much of that loan then found its way back to Republican campaigns in 28 states, just in time for the 1994 election. The Republicans sold access too: Mr Young's largesse won him meetings with Newt Gingrich, the speaker of the House, and Bob Dole, then

Senate majority leader.

This all begins to look like simple partisanship. As the Democratic and Republican themes clash, there is plenty of that. Among the committee's Democrats, only Joe Lieberman of Connecticut makes no obvious effort to defend Mr Clinton. Don Nickles, a Republican from Oklahoma, decries all Clintonian wickedness, campaign-finance-related or otherwise. When, eventually, the nuns' immunity is granted, Mr Thompson is relieved: he has no confidence Mr Clinton's Justice Department can "carry out a credible investigation".

But beneath all the partisan posturing and partisan bluster, there is a deep bipartisan current. In Washington lingo, bipartisanship is supposed to be a splendid thing: a way of transcending petty quotidian bickering. But when it comes to campaign finance, there is in fact a nasty, unspoken bipartisan consensus. It is this: both parties are addicted to massive amounts of money, and they do not want to change the system that gives it to them.

public schools since taking direct control of the system in 1995. Mr Daley has walked a tightrope, demanding accountability from the system while staying on reasonable terms with the teachers' union. So far, much to the benefit of Chicago's 425,000 schoolchildren, he has kept his balance.

The irony is that Mr Daley, a Democrat, did not seize control of Chicago's public schools; he was handed it by his political foes. The system was long governed by a semi-independent school board and its appointed superintendent. When the system faced financial collapse in 1995, those officials went looking to the state legislature for money. The legislature, having just gone over to the Republicans, was in no mood for a bail-out.

Instead, it took aim at Chicago's bloated, dysfunctional (and Democrat-controlled) school bureaucracy. It passed legislation making it easier to sack teachers, giving principals more control over their schools, and consolidating 27 sources of state finance into two block grants. Then it gave the whole system over to Mr Daley, sacking the superintendent and school board and replacing them with a five-person school reform board of trustees appointed directly by the mayor. Republicans reckoned the system might actually get better; if not, it would collapse in Mr Daley's lap just in time for the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Oddly enough, this was fine with Mr Daley. The mayor, first elected in 1989, is obsessed with making Chicago a good place for middle-class citizens to live in. He sees better schools as one way to do that. The mayor promptly installed his former chief of staff as chairman of the new reform board, and his former budget director, Mr Vallas, as the executive boss.

The reform team had a simple technique: demand that children learn the basics. As Mr Daley told the National Press Club in his own notoriously mangled syntax, "The idea that we're hearing today that all our education issues can be solved by the Internet, then I feel sorry for public education in America." The reform board opened alternative schools for disruptive young people; required daily homework, added more maths, science and foreign languages to the curriculum, expanded early-childhood programmes and kept many schools open longer. "This is no-brainer stuff," says Mr Vallas.

But the new board went far beyond that. In the past, students moved up from grade to grade, regardless of whether they could read or write. The board ended social promotions; students in the 3rd, 6th, 8th and 9th grades (that is, at the ages of around nine, 12, 14 and 15) who lack the required academic skills must either raise their performance in summer school or repeat the same grade the next year. In the spring of

Reforming the schools

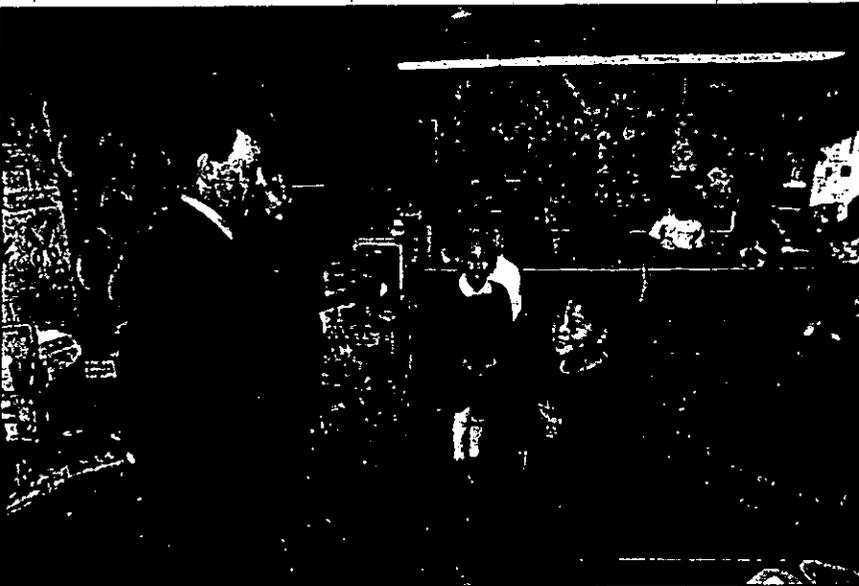
The difference a mayor makes

CHICAGO

IT IS hard to sack a public-school teacher in America. In Florida, one business-education teacher threw books at her students, blamed classroom troubles on spirits that had invaded her students' eyes, and eventually changed her last name to God. It took administrators three years to remove her. In New York city, a special-education teacher caught selling cocaine in Board of Education envelopes was able to keep his

job while serving weekends in prison.

So how is it that Paul Vallas, chief overseer of Chicago's schools, could lay off nearly 1,100 employees at the city's worst-performing high schools and draw only mild protest from the historically militant Chicago teachers' union? The answer is Mayor Richard Daley, who is using his influence as America's most powerful city leader to turn around Chicago's failing



Right, boys and girls: first lesson, syntax!

Educ-failing schools

Fraudulent behaviour

WASHINGTON, DC

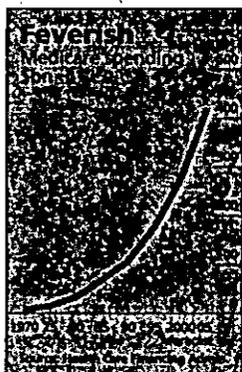
LIES and statistics are nowhere more intimately connected than in the case of Medicare, the federal health-insurance scheme for the elderly and severely disabled. Number-crunchers reach for the calculators, tap in the demographic assumptions of ageing baby-boomers and declare that Medicare, if unreformed, will go bankrupt in 2001. Thus alerted, the politicians squirm this way and that, proposing different schemes to cut Medicare spending to balance the federal budget. The statisticians—praising one plan, scorning another—are in their element.

But so, it seems, are the creative accountants in America's hospitals, insurance companies and medical practices. The Department of Health and Human Services announced last week that a first formal audit of Medicare had revealed annual losses of \$23 billion through fraud and mismanagement. Translate that into real life and it suggests an awful lot of bill-padding or incompetence. Moreover, multiply this annual loss by five and the total, \$115 billion, is precisely the sum Congress

and the president are trying to cut from Medicare spending over the next five years. In other words, clear up fraud and mismanagement and Medicare's problems will vanish.

Or so some naive statisticians and politicians may argue. In reality, of course, a system as big as Medicare, which has 38m beneficiaries and settles 800m claims a year through 59 contractors, will never eliminate financial abuse. A better solution, says the Senate, would be to raise premiums for the wealthy, thus means-testing what has hitherto been an entitlement.

President Clinton, at odds with liberal Democrats, this week agreed. But why? Some Republicans, mindful of their small majority, smell a rat: although the president is promising to "defend the vote of any member of Congress, Democrat or Republican" who supports higher premiums for the rich, there will be plenty of other Democrats who, come next year's congressional elections, will portray means-testing of Medicare premiums as a Republican-imposed tax increase.



in 1996, a quarter of Chicago's 8th-graders were told that they would not be able to advance to the next grade. An astonishing 48% of 9th-graders got the same news. This year, Chicago has nearly 90,000 students in summer school.

Next, the board went after schools with a pattern of failure. Some 109 schools were put on probation because fewer than 15% of their students were achieving the national average for their grade. Each school was assigned a probation team to recommend

changes that would increase student test scores. Most of them improved, by the spring, but seven high schools showed no improvement or got worse. These schools were "reconstituted". Every employee, from custodian to principal, was removed. Some were rehired by the school's new management; the rest were placed in a reserve pool for 20 months (reduced to ten months this week). If they are not hired somewhere else in the system by the end of that time, their contracts will end.

Why has the teachers' union picked no fights with the Daley reforms? To begin with, it won't win. Mr Daley is "the toughest gun in the street", says Paul Green, a professor at Governor's State University near Chicago. The mayor controls the city council, and he won re-election in 1995 by a margin of almost two to one. Aided by a booming economy, he has built a coalition that stretches from middle-class blacks to Irish Catholic homosexuals. Mr Da-

ley, whose father governed Chicago from 1955 until his death in 1976, is known locally as "Mayor for life".

Second, Mr Daley and his team have been magnanimous in victory. The 1995 reform legislation prohibited the Chicago teachers' union from striking for 18 months just as it was preparing to negotiate a new contract. "In that situation, you don't negotiate, you beg," says the president of the union, Tom Reece. Still, the reform board agreed to a four-year contract giving teachers pay rises of at least 3% each year.

And, though in public the theme of the reform has been "no excuses", the implicit contract with the teachers' union has been "no surprises". Reformers have consulted the union before big decisions, even when they agree to disagree. "I've not made a secret of it. I like the mayor," says Mr Reece. "He really loves the town, and I think he really cares about the public-school system." Strange words from the head of a union that has gone on strike nine times since 1972.

Best of all, the reforms are working. For the first time in many years, teachers are excited to be in the classroom. The new reform board has put the fiscal house in order, closing a projected four-year \$1.3-billion deficit without increasing the size of classes. In 1996, the bond-rating agencies raised the Board of Education's debt to investment grade for the first time since 1979, enabling the board to launch a five-year \$850m capital improvement plan.

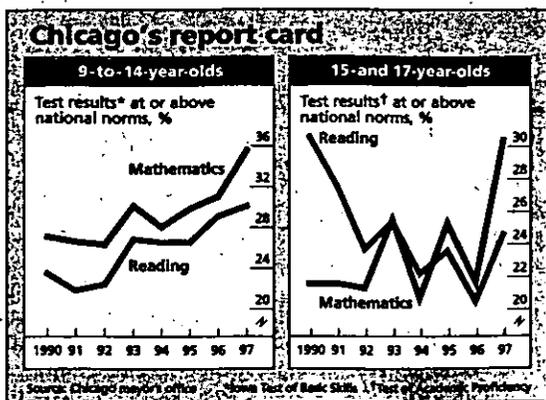
Students are doing better, too. Of 71 elementary schools put on probation, 54 showed improvements in reading and 69 in maths. Reading test scores went up in 52 and maths scores in 61 of 74 high schools. With the end of social promotions, teachers will spend less time dealing with students who have fallen years behind.

Chicago's schools have a long way to go. But the future for students looks better than it has for a long time. Meanwhile Mr Daley, who put his political capital on the line in order to get real reform, appears to be getting his investment back, with interest.

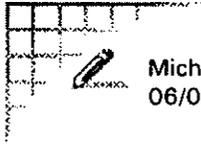
Modern slavery On deaf ears

NEW YORK

NEW YORKERS are adept at ignoring the misery in their midst. In recent years, they have largely ignored a growing band of deaf Mexican immigrants hawking dollar pens and trinkets (with an "I am deaf" tag attached) in local subways and airports. The true cost of this enterprise has now become apparent. On July 19th, after being handed a note by a group of deaf and mute Mexicans, the police freed 45 adults



ED - failing schools



Michael Cohen
06/09/97 12:44:01 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Bruce N. Reed/OPD/EOP

cc: Thomas L. Freedman/OPD/EOP, Mary L. Smith/OPD/EOP, Elena Kagan/OPD/EOP, William R. Kincaid/OPD/EOP

Subject: Re: School Takeovers

ED has some kind of survey and analysis of school and district takeovers in the works; I'll check on its status, and the substance. It is likely to be one of those studies that shows that sometimes this works, and sometimes it doesn't. If they can be pulled to identify some clear lessons about factors that contribute to success, we can have something pretty decent.]

[With respect to Title 1: We do require that states start intervening in failing schools/districts in this coming school year. I don't know what we require by the way of reporting -- whether we require anything; when they have to report to us (before the year on how they will do it, or after the year on what they did); and how long it takes to get any information in a usable form. I'll check on this as well.

My concern about this is a timing one: if we want to announce something in the Fall as we originally discussed, we can put almost anything together -- a survey, guidelines, or a legislative or regulatory proposal. If we want to announce something at the Family Conference, it will be a lot tougher.

Educatic -failing schools

DAVID SHIPLEY

04/28/97 09:17:45 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Thomas L. Freedman/OPD/EOP

cc:

Subject: Yo, baby, yo.

Hey, here's more from the Brentster. D.

----- Forwarded by David Shipley/WHO/EOP on 04/28/97 09:16 AM -----



brent @ nytimes.com

04/25/97 02:03:00 PM

Record Type: Record

To: David Shipley

cc:

Subject: Yo, baby, yo.

See today's editorial on choice. A Lesson from Milwaukee.
Also the following column. I think its important. Hope all's well.
My back is hurting from digging holes for Azalea plant. Man, gardening is hard work.

2ND STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

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words HEADLINE: Editorial Notebook; Philadelphia School Wars BYLINE: By
BRENT STAPLES

Plagued by truancy, violence and underachievement, Philadelphia's public schools are among the nation's worst. As of last year, fewer than 6 percent of the city's high school students tested as competent in reading. The children of the city's middle class _ including its politicians _ have fled to private or parochial schools. Yet despite all these obvious signs of failure, Philadelphians were stunned when their superintendent of schools seized control of two high schools and announced that teachers there would be transferred for failing to raise achievement levels. The takeover provoked demonstrations, vandalism, a lawsuit by the teachers and a scolding from political leaders who knew perfectly well that the superintendent, David Hornbeck, had no choice.

Confidence in the schools had evaporated. A recent poll commissioned by Democrats in Pennsylvania's Legislature showed that 8 in 10 Philadelphians believed the system needed dramatic change. Nearly half the city's whites and three-quarters of its African-Americans favored a voucher plan that

would allow low-income students in failing schools to use public money for private-school tuition. Since most of the whites had already fled the system, the meaningful figure here is the overwhelming number of African-Americans who said they wanted out as well. Their children make up about 65 percent of the school population, which is 80 percent minority. If Mr. Hornbeck does not show swift improvement, the cry for a voucher system will grow.

Several states are considering voucher systems. Wisconsin and Ohio already have such programs for low-income children, allowing them to attend private schools. In Kentucky, a voucher-like law allows families to leave failing public schools and enroll in good public schools, taking state education dollars with them. As a consultant, Mr. Hornbeck helped to write Kentucky's laws, setting up rewards and punishments that have brought greater accountability to the system.

In his role as superintendent, Mr. Hornbeck worries that vouchers for private schools would bankrupt an already cash-starved public system. But pressures are building. The Philadelphia Inquirer recently urged Gov. Tom Ridge to install a voucher system in the nearby city of Chester, which has been under a Federal court order to improve its schools since 1990. The court may well impose a voucher solution that bypasses Chester's public schools if the Governor does not act first.

Last month, Philadelphia's City Council narrowly defeated a nonbinding resolution in favor of vouchers. Two additional proposals are circulating at the state level and could eventually end up as law. One proposal would reimburse only a fraction of the cost of private education. A second proposal by State Representative Dwight Evans, a Democrat from Philadelphia, would reimburse parents in full. The plan draws upon Florence County v. Carter, a United States Supreme Court decision that authorized parents of learning-disabled children to sue for private-school tuition when the public schools failed. The ruling applied specifically to special education, but it was inevitable that lawmakers would try to apply it more broadly.

Mr. Evans dismisses critics who say vouchers would further destabilize the system. The middle class, he notes, has already fled. The African-American poor who support experiments with vouchers do so because they have been left behind with violent, dysfunctional schools with no prospect of improvement. Mr. Hornbeck is, in effect, asking for one last chance to make these schools work. He plans to transfer three-fourths of the teachers in these schools and put new staff and curriculum in place. The aim is to reduce disruption and truancy while improving overall performance.

State takeovers of failing schools are rare. There have been modest successes and some flat-out failures. If Mr. Hornbeck succeeds, Philadelphia's schools could get new life. If he fails, vouchers could be the next stop. BRENT STAPLES LANGUAGE: ENGLISH LOAD-DATE: April 6, 1997

Education -
failing schools

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

September 20, 1996

MEMORANDUM FOR BRUCE REED

FROM: MIKE COHEN

SUBJECT: ACCOUNTABILITY, FAILED SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL CHOICE:
AN ALTERNATIVE TO PAUL DIMOND'S PROPOSAL

CC: PAUL DIMOND
PAUL WEINSTEIN

I have reviewed Paul Dimond's proposal, and have an alternative to put on the table. Paul's proposal would put us on the opposite side of the voucher debate than we are at present. I think that's the wrong approach for education, and the wrong place for the President to be. In addition, I don't think we need to use Title 1 to require accountability tests in the states; virtually every state already has a state testing system and reports results to parents and the public on a school-by-school or district-by-district basis.

However, we need a better answer to vouchers than we have, especially when the debate focuses on doing something for disadvantaged kids in failing (mostly inner city) schools. At present, our answer is that we will help improve the system, with a strategy of raising standards, improving curriculum, etc. While I am convinced these systemic steps need to occur, in and of themselves they do not provide much immediate help to kids in schools that are just plain failing.

The direction in which I think we need to head builds on the President's challenge to states to intervene in schools that are failing and do something serious to turn them around:

- The President needs to make a clear statement that his opposition to vouchers and his support for public education does not extend to supporting schools that are plainly failing. We should not, and will not, defend failure in the public education system.
- The President should reiterate his challenge to state and local education officials to use the testing and accountability provisions they already have in place to identify persistently failing schools, and take steps to turn them around. At present, somewhere in the neighborhood of 10-15 states seriously intervene in failing schools, beyond telling them to develop an improvement plan.¹

¹Every state eventually will be required to have an intervention strategy for failing schools, as a result of Title 1 requirements. However, that strategy is phased in over a relatively length period of time. The proposal here is meant both to preserve and build upon

- **The President should extend the challenge, by calling on states and local school districts to close failing schools, create new charter schools in their place, and allow parents in these schools to send their kids to the new charter or to any other public school in the state/district. He should back up this challenge by offering any state or district that agrees to take this approach:**

- Funds to help support the start up of the charter schools (perhaps from a set-aside we can build into the existing charter schools program);
- Additional funds to be used specifically for providing the kids in the failed schools with extra help and tutoring after school. There should neither be a requirement nor an expectation that this extra help would be provided by the school and its staff. Nor should this be designed to reward failing schools with extra resources. Rather, this should be designed to focus on kids rather than on the schools, and should be an invitation for local government, community-based organizations, the private sector, higher education and employers to all pitch in. The message here is that if the state/district seriously steps up to the plate to fix the school, the federal government will provide financial support for extra help for the kids, so they can catch up to their peers while their school is being turned around.

This component would require some modest funding, Since only a handful of states and districts are at the point of meeting the proposed challenge, and then only for a handful of schools each, the initial funding requirements would not be large.

- If the failing schools are Title 1 schools and the kids are Title 1 eligible (in most situations, this will be the case), Title 1 funds should follow the kid to the new public school, whether it is the charter school or a different public school of the family's choosing.

This last component may at times be at odds with our efforts to better target Title 1 funds to the schools with the largest concentration of disadvantaged students. However, in general we have been willing to waive this requirement if the state or school district has a compelling reform strategy and needed to use Title 1 funds to support it. I think the approach I have proposed here would meet that test.

the Title 1 requirements. It leaves in place the phase-in period, which is in part tied to the expectation that the state will put new standards and assessments in place first. At the same time, it is intended to focus much more quickly -- immediately -- on the most serious cases, based on existing standards and assessments.

This approach has the advantage of building on our support of public school choice and charter schools, and of focusing explicitly on concrete and practical steps that can be take to help kids who need it. I believe that one of the ways in which we are vulnerable on the voucher debate is that we come across as having nothing to offer kids who are stuck in failing schools except the promise of long term reform, while voucher proponents offer a seemingly easy escape to other settings. The fact that vouchers will undermine public schools while helping only a small proportion of the kids who need it is not as compelling as a response which also provides immediate and direct help to kids.