

**NLWJC - Kagan**

**DPC - Box 022 - Folder 012**

**Education - Turnaround Schools**

DRAFT

Education - turnaround  
schools

MEMORANDUM FOR

FROM:

SUBJECT: Commencement Address at an Urban Turnaround School

Thus far, there are plans for the President to deliver three commencement addresses: Morgan State; West Point; and Sidwell Friends. There is also interest in having the President deliver a fourth speech, concerning themes of racial reconciliation, in a West Coast commencement. We urge that a fifth site should be added to the slate, whether billed as a part of the commencement series, or as a free-standing event. The President should visit a once-troubled public high school that has recently made dramatic strides, embodying some of the key principles of our education agenda: high standards, better teaching, greater discipline, more parental involvement. Visiting such a "turnaround school" could send a powerful message that high standards can yield greater student achievement in a diverse, challenging urban setting, not just comfortable white suburbs. It could also provide an opportunity to reinforce the message of racial reconciliation.

Adding a turnaround school graduation to the President's calendar is critical for several reasons:

- The President's initiative on national standards will only succeed if it is firmly embraced by our nation's urban schools. However, many urban teachers, administrators and parents view the standards movement warily, concerned that adopting higher standards and testing for performance can only set up their children--and their schools--for failure. Focusing national attention on a real urban high school that is beginning to see the results from higher standards could build on next month's Education Town Hall to help urban parents and educators understand why the President passionately believes that all students can do better if we ask them to.
- Another potential threat to the President's standards initiative is the risk of test-related litigation. Mike Smith, Mike Cohen, and others have been meeting with the civil rights community to try to address concerns that they have expressed about the national reading and math tests. However, we are far more likely to succeed the more the President can communicate that this is an achievement initiative that will benefit minority groups, rather than a pure testing initiative that will penalize them. Showing that standards have worked in a predominantly minority school would help get this across.
- Many parents, businesspeople, legislators and others are on the verge of

concluding that urban public schools are beyond salvation, that there is nothing we can do to make them safe and educationally sound. This cynical attitude feeds public sentiment for vouchers and other quick fixes, rather than supporting the more complicated, long-term task of reform the public schools that serve 90% of students. Visiting a turnaround school conveys that if we raise standards, get parents more involved, and pay attention to the basics, we can make our urban public schools safe centers of learning.

- Finally, unless such a visit is scheduled, we will soon find ourselves defending the fact that as the President has embarked on his campaign to raise standards across the nation, he will have elected to visit two of the more exclusive schools in the country (the North Shore high school from the First in the World consortium and Sidwell) without setting foot in an urban high school. Visiting a turnaround school to discuss higher standards would show that the President is in tune with the needs and challenges of our urban public schools.

These considerations should be addressed now, before the end of the current school year. If we delay until this fall, there is a serious danger that negative impressions will have had too much time to harden.

If, as we recommend, the President were to visit a turnaround school, our top choice would be DeWitt Clinton High School in the Bronx. This school has a graduation date of June 25, but has expressed a willingness to adjust to accommodate a Presidential visit.

- Dramatic turnaround story in a large, highly ethnically diverse high school. Identified seven years ago as a low-achieving school by New York State, with low attendance and high dropout rates. The formerly all-male school raised expectations (expanded AP program, eliminated all non-Regents level courses, and tripled the number of students moving on from Limited English Proficient program), and substantially increased parental involvement.
- Dropout rates and attendance have dramatically improved, and far more students are taking and passing rigorous regents exams (although the total receiving Regents diplomas is still under 20%).
- Selected by Redbook magazine in 1996 as one of the five most improved high schools in the nation, and given a high rating for performance from New York Times.
- The school is celebrating its Centennial this year.
- Distinguished alumni including Daniel Schor, Bernard Kalb, A.M. Rosenthal, Neil Simon, Richard Rodgers, James Baldwin, Ralph Lauren, Fats Waller,

Garry Marshall and Burt Lancaster. Press interest in a Presidential visit to DeWitt Clinton would likely be high.

- The President has expressed a general interest in going to the Bronx.

Other possibilities for visiting a turnaround school would include:

- Patterson High School, Baltimore, Maryland -- Formerly one of the lowest-achieving schools in the state, the school reorganized into smaller five schools within schools (including four career academies in the upper grades), allowing closer ties with caring adults and improved safety, discipline, and student performance.
- West Mecklenburg High School, Charlotte, North Carolina -- Within a two year period the school raised its test scores, increased parental involvement, and had a 75% increase in students making the honor roll. It also reduced violence and the number of weapons at school.

Again, we think adding a turnaround school to the schedule for this spring is of tremendous importance to the President's education agenda; waiting for next fall would be too late. If there is support for this general concept, but additional options are necessary, we would be happy to ask the Education Department for an expanded list of candidates.



June 5, 1997

Office of the Mayor  
Richard M. Daley  
Mayor

Contact: Mayor's Press Office  
(312) 744-3334

**CHICAGO MAYOR RICHARD M. DALEY  
SAYS CITIES MAKE TOO MANY EXCUSES FOR FAILING SCHOOLS**

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Chicago Mayor and U.S. Conference of Mayors President Richard M. Daley today urged local governments around the nation to stop making excuses for the failure of public schools -- and said that the only way to truly change American society is to improve public education.

In a speech before the National Press Club in Washington, Mayor Daley called on mayors to make a personal commitment to improving public schools. Mayor Daley also recounted Chicago's experience in overhauling its public schools, a process that began in the spring of 1995.

"Not too long ago, everyone believed that Chicago's schools would continue to get worse," Mayor Daley said. "Secretary of Education William Bennett once called our schools the worst in the nation, and the description stuck. But today, the Chicago Public Schools are finally moving in the right direction."

Mayor Daley recounted the steps taken over the past two years to turn the Chicago Public Schools around -- including the appointment of a new management team for the schools, closing the Chicago Public School's budget deficit and beginning the nation's most ambitious capital building program, raising school performance standards and placing the weakest performing schools on academic probation.

As a result of these changes, Chicago Public Schools have seen their highest test score increases in a decade and soaring enrollment across the city. But Mayor Daley added that he is not content with this progress -- and that he is personally committed to turning the Chicago Public Schools around.

"Improving schools is the only way to make a lasting change in this country," Mayor Daley said. "It is the only way to lift people out of poverty -- to cut down on crime -- and to create a stronger economy.

"The only way for our city -- or any city -- to have a bright future is for public officials to devote their full energies to improving our public schools."

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## **Chicago Public Schools Progress Highlights July 1, 1995 - Present**

The Illinois General Assembly made school reform an agenda priority for the 1995 Spring session. The Assembly enacted sweeping legislation that changed the governance structure of the Chicago Public Schools. The Amendatory Act of 1995 replaced the 15-member Board of Education with a 5-member Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees. It also altered the Board's authority over budget and management decisions by consolidating funding sources into block grants.

On **July 1, 1995** Mayor Richard M. Daley appointed the new Board of Trustees and management team to run the Chicago Public Schools. Mayor Daley took action based on new state law granting him greater authority over the school system for the next four years.

Since then, the new CPS administration team has eliminated a \$1.3 billion four-year budget deficit, negotiated a four-year contract with the Chicago Teachers Union, developed an \$850 million five-year Capital Improvement Plan and developed a set of "Children First" educational initiatives to raise academic achievement. Following is a recap of the first two years.:

### **July 1995**

- New management discovered warehouse filled with furniture, classroom supplies and toilet paper that should have been issued to schools.

### **August 1995**

- Budget balanced by eliminating \$150-million deficit first year and \$1.3 billion shortfall over four years, without increasing class size or compromising education services.
- Four-year contract with Chicago Teachers Union signed, avoiding strike threat and promoting long-term stability.
- \$850 million plan to repair, refurbish and build new schools.

### **September 1995**

- New policy adopted to create far-reaching code of ethics, prohibit nepotism.
- After-school programs of academic and recreational activities developed for students, community residents.

**October 1995**

- CPS began establishing new small schools or schools-within-schools.
- Uniform Discipline Code strengthened to include mandatory expulsion of students carrying firearms.
- New code supports “zero tolerance” policy for disruptive, inappropriate or violent behavior.

**November 1995**

- General contractors and property advisors retained for repair, maintenance, engineering, construction projects.

**December 1995**

- CPS sold \$45 million general obligation certificates, system’s first direct securities offering in nearly 20 years for capital repairs.
- New spending guidelines approved for State Chapter 1 funds earmarked for schools with high concentrations of low-income families.
- Six-month leadership training and support programs started for new principals.

**January 1996**

- Local school councils required to consider implementing uniform or dress code policy to improve educational environment.

**February 1996**

- CPS unveiled comprehensive education plan to improve student achievement, strengthen accountability.
- Alternative schools opened for dropouts and disruptive youth, providing specialized curriculum to meet at-risk students needs.

**March 1996**

- Three major bond rating agencies raised CPS credit rating to investment grade for the first time since 1979, improving efforts to finance the system’s aggressive capital improvement plan.
- Long-standing social promotions eliminated.
- Spring deadlines on student enrollments and transfers approved to minimize fall staffing changes, cut student mobility.

**April 1996**

- CPS received bond insurance covering the system’s capital improvement plan. Saves \$150 million in interest charges.
- Some 8,000 candidates attracted to local school council elections, more than in previous election three years earlier. Voter participation higher than in both prior elections.

**May 1996**

- Health care, insurance contracts changed for greater cost-effectiveness. Four year savings: \$115 million.
- Unscrupulous vendors banned from doing business with school system.
- New practices introduced to prevent overcharges.
- Ties with bus companies severed for not complying with tougher safety standards.

**June 1996**

- Reading and math scores increased at most elementary grade levels in Iowa Tests of Basic Skills.
- Policy passed to require daily homework assignments.
- Summer school programs underway for 100,000 students.
- Freshman academies authorized in 61 high schools to reverse declining test scores.

**July 1996**

- \$2.8 billion balanced budget plan approved. Includes expanding kindergarten services, programs to stimulate high schools' academic performance.
- Plans finalized to serve 5,000 additional children in pre-kindergarten programs.
- School lunches privatized to improve quality, variety of food for students.

**August 1996**

- Scores up in several areas of Illinois Goal Assessment Program (IGAP). Scores rose for American College Test (ACT) first time in five years.
- Math, science scores gain over 1995, out pacing statewide increases at almost every grade level. Third grade reading, math scores up.
- Schools on academic watch list drop from 148 in 1995 to 127. Expect further decline to 108 this fall.
- Trustees approve the creation of eight new small schools to downsize school population.
- The school promotion policy is revised requiring summer school for underachieving students in the third, sixth, eighth and ninth grades.

**September 1996**

- A systemwide truancy initiative is launched that includes teams of parents and staff to work directly with truant students and includes an automated calling system and a 24-hour Truancy Hotline.
- 109 schools placed on academic probation (38 high schools and 71 elementary schools) after fewer than 15 percent of their students performed at grade level on ITBS or TAP reading tests. Another 31 schools were placed on remediation.

**October 1996**

- CPS reached out to a citywide contingency of interfaith clergy to help strengthen community ties and student achievement.
- Assessment teams began working with probation schools on reviewing student improvement programs and school budgets.

**November 1996**

- Trustees adopted resolution in support of National Education Day.
- Trustees strengthened 16-year-old residency policy requiring new employees to be residents of the City of Chicago.

**December 1996**

- Successful educators dispatched to probation schools to serve as probation managers.

**January 1997**

- Schools launched extended-day program in 40 schools to provide elementary school students with an additional hour of instruction, recreational activities and a nutritious meal.
- Trustees authorized the CPS to negotiate contracts with 10 organizations seeking to establish charter schools.

**February 1997**

- CPS developed character education curriculum for students.
- Trustees approved new standards for the retention and selection of new principals requiring at least five years of teaching experience, three years of administrative experience, a master's degree and a Type 75 State of Illinois Certificate.
- CPS expanded Phase II of the Capital Improvement Program to include 615 new projects at 432 schools and the issuance of \$500 million in new bonds to finance the project. Capital Improvement Program totals \$850 million.
- CPS lowered the mandatory school attendance age from seven to five.
- CPS began implementing high school restructuring plan by requiring two additional years of science, another of math and requirements of two years of foreign language study and career education.

**March 1997**

- CPS cracked down on tuition fraud from non-Chicago residents who enroll their children in the system while concealing their residency; CPS stands to recover nearly \$800,000 in loss tuition.
- New entrance and academic requirements instituted for high schools.

**April 1997**

- Reading and math scores among ninth and eleventh graders increased in most high schools in the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency; reading scores in both grades increased to its highest level since 1993.
- CPS earned an increase in its investment grade credit rating for the second time in the past two years; Standard & Poors A-, Moody's Baa3, Fitch Investors Service, Inc. BBB+.

**May 1997**

- Reading and math scores increased at most elementary grade levels in the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills; percentage of students scoring at or above national norm levels highest since 1990.
- Trustees adopted academic standards in core subject areas for all grades.



## Schools

Total: 557

- 483 elementary schools including:
  - 11 middle schools
  - 36 magnet schools
  - 11 year-round schools
  - 25 small schools

*(elementary and secondary)*
- 74 secondary schools including:
  - 7 vocational schools
  - 9 magnet schools
  - 8 community academies

## Alternative Programs

- 54 sites:
  - 36 for dropouts
  - 18 for disruptive students

## Student Enrollment

Total: 424,454 (1996-97)

- 16,125 PreK
- 35,289 kindergarten
- 253,026 elementary
- 95,691 secondary
- 20,056 special education (PreK-12)
- 1,798 alternative schools
- 2,469 tuitioned out

### Racial Breakdown: (1995-96)

54.5% African-American  
 31.3% Latino  
 10.8% White  
 3.2% Asian/Pacific Islander  
 .2% Native American

## Additional Information

- 79% of students come from low-income families
- 22% of Illinois' public school children attend CPS
- 14.9% are limited-English-proficient
- 89.2% attendance rate for elementary schools
- 73.3% attendance rate for high schools
- 11.4% are children with special needs

## Pupil/Teacher Information

20.5 pupils per teacher in elementary schools.  
 21.0 pupils per teacher in high school  
 \$41,427 average teacher salary  
 \$65,518 average administrator salary

## Employees

Total budgeted positions: 45,118 for 1997

- 42,404 (schools)
- 1,534 (citywide services)
- 1,180 (central service center)

### Racial Breakdown (1995-96)

- 50.3% African-American
- 34.7% White
- 13.1% Latino
- 1.6% Asian
- .2% Native American

### 557 principals (1996-97)

#### Racial Breakdown (1995-96)

- 51.3% African-American
- 37.1% White
- 11.2% Latino
- .2% Asian
- .2% Native American

### 27,190 teachers (1996-97)

#### Racial Breakdown (1995-96)

- 43% African-American
- 45% White
- 8.7% Latino
- 1.8% Asian
- .3% Native American

## Budget Information

- Operating budget -FY97: \$2.8 billion (estimated)
- Local sources: \$1.504 billion (estimated)
- Federal sources: \$386 million (estimated)
- Per pupil operating expenditures for 1993-94:
- \$6,525 supplemental education programs
- \$4,378 basic education

## Local School Councils

- Each Local School Council consists of:
  - 6 parent representatives
  - 2 community representatives
  - 2 teachers
  - 1 principal
  - 1 student representative in each high school

revised May 1997

# City math, reading scores soar

## Elementary schools post best test results in decade

BY ROSALIND ROSSI  
 EDUCATION REPORTER

For the second year in a row, math and reading scores in Chicago's public elementary schools hit their highest marks in a decade, with math scores posting "tremendous" gains.

The upbeat news comes two weeks after the School Board reported even stronger gains in high school scores and reflects two consecutive years of overall improvement on the nationally normed Iowa Tests of Basic Skills after a decade of seesawing or flat scores, board officials said.

Board President Gery Chico has scheduled a news conference today to tout the results, which could bolster efforts to win state school funding reform.

"We've got two men on and no body out," Chicago public schools Chief Executive Officer Paul Vallas said of the back-to-back gains. "We've had two years of gains in reading and math in the elementary schools, but we still have a long way to go. We want to see improvement every year."

The announcement coincides with the end of two years of legislatively mandated school reform that put Mayor Daley in control of the school system.

Results showed third- through eighth-grade math scores jumped an overall 4.6 percentage points, with strong gains in every grade. Reading scores rose only a single point, with three grades posting gains and three showing drops.

But overall math and reading scores still were the highest this decade. Accountability Chief Patricia Harvey called the math jumps "tremendous."

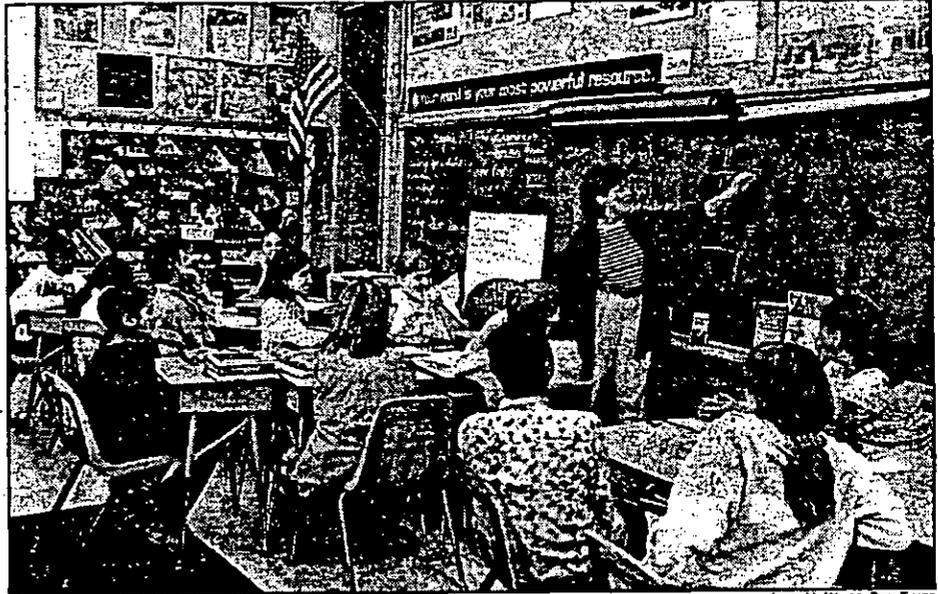
In math, 35.6 percent of all students hit or beat the national average.

In reading, 30.1 percent of third- through eighth-graders at least met the national norm. Though grade-by-grade results were mixed, a huge seventh-grade jump—6 percentage points—pulled overall scores into the plus column.

Chico said reading remains a concern but that giving schools expert help under probation has "produced dividends."

In reading, 76 percent of probation schools showed gains, vs. 57 percent of all elementary schools. In math, 97 percent of probation schools showed gains, vs. 83 percent of all elementary schools.

This year's scores also marked the first time stakes were attached to the tests for third-, sixth- and ninth-graders, who now, with eighth-graders, face summer school



JOHN H. WHITE/SUN-TIMES  
 Marianne Noonan teaches a sixth-grade class at Burley School, 1630 N. Barry. The school posted a gain of more than 36 percentage points in combined math and reading scores on the Iowa tests.

### BIG GAINERS

Schools with biggest increases in Iowa tests over last year:

- 1. Burley
- 2. Beldier
- 3. Galileo
- 4. Orfale Park
- 5. Alcott
- 6. Morae
- 7. Pershing
- 8. Ravenswood
- 9. Black
- 10. Leland

SOURCE: Chicago Public Schools

and the possibility of being held back if their scores are too low.

"The stress is out there," said Teresa Moy, assistant principal at Perahing Magnet School. "Students were very concerned about not being able to be promoted."

In addition, schools know they can be placed on probation if 85 percent of their students do not hit national norms on the tests. After nine years of reform, Harvey said, "maybe one of the missing pieces of reform was accountability."

Some schools did falter: 187 showed reading drops and 76 dipped in math.

Those schools could face the next level of sanctions—reconsti-

### ■ Test scores; Pages 14, 15.

tution, the restaffing of their entire building. Vallas said two or three elementary schools and three or four high schools will face reconstitution by summer.

The largest combined reading and math elementary gains—not counting Beaubien, which absorbed Burbank's gifted students this year—came at Burley, a Lake View school with 86 percent low-income kids. Burley math and reading scores together jumped more than 36 percentage points.

Principal Nancy Laho attributed the gains to a determined effort to

raise expectations after staff realized they had been inflating grades. Although only a quarter of students were meeting national reading norms last year, 70 percent of all grades were A's or B's, Laho said.

Burley revised its grading system and wrote grade-by-grade and schoolwide standards. Students were required to memorize math facts, take timed tests and use flash cards. Teachers read aloud and required independent reading of "quality literature" daily.

"The payoff will be when these scores go home," Laho said. "Children can say, 'Wow, it was a hard year, but we did it.'"

Contributing: Jon Schmid

FOR ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS

# Chicago Tribune

Friday, May 23, 1997

Chicagoland  
South

50c Newsstand

## ★ Test scores soar at city schools on probation

Numbers up, but still  
below national norm

By Janita Poe

TRIBUNE EDUCATION WRITER

Last fall when Chicago Public Schools chief Paul Vallas placed more than 100 schools on academic probation, many students and officials expressed embarrassment—even anger—that their schools were being singled

out for the bureaucratic equivalent of a trip to the principal's office.

Now, with the release Thursday of scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills for Grades 3 through 8 showing marked improvement in many schools on probation, officials at some of those schools say it was that very attention and pressure that seems to have gotten results.

Whether the slew of probation managers, external partners and

other visits by the central administration produced tangible changes in instruction remains debatable. But one thing seems indisputable: Probation delivered a psychological punch.

"What these scores tell me is that probation is working," Vallas said.

Of the 71 elementary schools on probation, 54 improved in reading and 69 in math, according to preliminary reports on

the test scores. On Thursday, officials said 22 of those schools are now eligible to be removed from the designation.

Overall, 393 of the city's 473 elementary schools tested improved in math and 271 had higher scores in reading than the previous year. Schools doubling their test scores in at least one of the subjects included Beidler, McNair, Carver Middle and Morse.

School administrators plan a

news conference to discuss the scores at 10:30 a.m. Friday at the Parkman School.

Pat Harvey, the schools' accountability chief, said she was encouraged by the scores because of gains made by the poorest performing students.

"The lowest performing students are getting better, and so are the two groups next to them," said Harvey. "... I think the message is that all kids,

SEE SCORES, PAGE 20

# Scores

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

regardless of where they are born, regardless of their station in life or their race, can achieve."

The release of the preliminary data—a small percentage of makeup tests were not included—was being pointed to by Vallas' allies as proof that the new management team for schools is succeeding. Earlier this month, school leaders announced even greater gains in high school students' scores on the Test of Achievement and Proficiency.

But some school-reform leaders say the scores are indicative of improvements implemented over the last decade, not any recent revamping.

"There's been a trend of improvement over the last seven years, and we're pleased to see that trend is continuing," said Donald Moore, executive director of Designs for Change, an educational research and reform group.

"I think principal leadership, the involvement of the local school councils and the commitment of teachers to working together have paid off."

Though the overall scores



Two Beldler Elementary School 3rd graders enthusiastically compete to answer math questions in class.

Tribune photos by Chuck Berman

improved, that improvement was not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension

declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

And scores of 30.1 percent in reading and 35.6 percent in math mean that the vast-majority of students were below national norms.

For schools on probation, the improved scores were a reason to rejoice.

Geraldine Moore, principal of Beldler in the Garfield Park neighborhood on the West Side, said her staff initially was "devastated" about being placed on probation. But the status also was a "wake-up call" to improve standards at the school, she said.

"We wanted to know 'Why, what had we done wrong?'" said Moore, a former parent aide who has been principal of the school since 1994. "But what we did was to turn it into a reaffirmation. We looked at our weaknesses and set out to improve them."

The work apparently paid off: Reading scores at Beldler more than tripled—from 10.2 in 1996 to 33.3 in 1997—and those in math rose from 24.8 to 36.3 during that same period.

Moore said the renewed commitment spilled over to the five-member probation management team, set up in October and headed by West Side education legend Marva Collins. The team implemented many of Collins' methods—including a focus on phonics and repetition—and also began following her lead on stu-



Beldler Elementary School Principal Geraldine Moore gets a hug from 3rd grader Lawrence Barron.

dent encouragement and regimented daily schedules.

Beldler also was one of 132 schools to set up extended school days this year; the school added two hours of optional math and reading study for four days a week after school. By early winter, Beldler had developed a motto, prominently displayed on the school marquee: "Probation brings opportunity."

Principals at other schools posting improvements also said the

## Citywide test scores improving

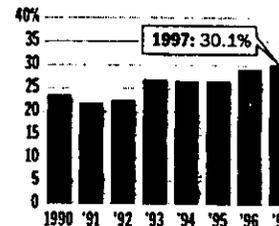
The scores of Chicago Public School students in Grades 3 through 8 on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills show improvement following a move in which low-achieving schools were placed on probation.

### Scoring at or above the national norm

About a third of reading and math scores in 1997 for Grades 3 through 8 are at or above the national norm, which is the average test score of a representative sample of students in the United States. Nationally, the average student scores in about the 50th percentile.

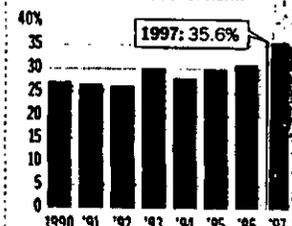
#### Reading comprehension test scores

Percent of reading test scores that are at or above national norm



#### Math test scores

Percentage of math test scores that are at or above national norm



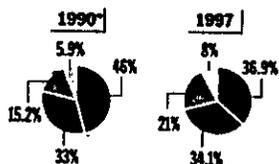
### How test scores breakdown

In 1997, 36.9 percent of the reading test scores fall in the same range as the lowest 25 percent of student reading scores nationally. This is an improvement over 1990, when more than 45 percent of reading scores fell into this category.

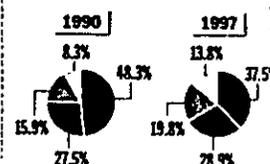
KEY:

- 1st-25th percentile (lowest)
- 26th-50th percentile
- 51st-75th percentile
- 76th-100th percentile (highest)

#### Reading comprehension test scores



#### Math test scores



"Because of rounding, the percentages do not equal 100 percent. Note: Scores are based on preliminary data, and a small percentage of test scores have not been included. Source: Chicago Public Schools

Chicago Tribune

probation status forced them to focus on specific problems at their schools.

Albert Gaston, principal at the Fulton School in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, said his school was "already on its course" and did not modify any curriculum, programs or instruction methods. But he said teacher and student motivation increased after the school went on probation.

Though the overall scores improved, that improvement was

not seen uniformly. For instance, pupils at or above national norms in reading comprehension declined slightly for the system's 3rd, 6th and 8th grades.

Vallas and other officials said they hope to make even more significant improvements on testing in the next few years. The increases made by the probation schools, they said, prove any school can succeed if goals and priorities are set for them.

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## Editorials

# High schools start the long climb up

The remarkably encouraging scores posted by Chicago high schools on the latest round of standardized tests reflect more than individual school achievement. They are a fair measure of the success of schools chief Paul Vallas and his administration.

It's a relative success, to be sure, because Chicago high school students are still barely on the charts compared to kids across the country in reading and math skills. But their year-over-year improvement on the nationally normed Tests of Achievement and Proficiency is nonetheless a wonder to behold.

Of the city's 74 high schools, 61 scored higher than last year in math, and 52 schools had more students scoring at or above the national norm in reading.

Reading and math are the only subjects of the tests, which are taken in the 9th and 11th grades. But those two basic skills are pretty good indicators of student abilities in other subjects as well.

Chicago Public Schools administrators cracked down on the high schools last fall, putting more than half of them on academic probation. That unprecedented step meant those schools had to revamp their programs and raise test scores, or teachers and principals could lose their jobs. What's more, 9th graders who did not meet minimum proficiency levels on this

year's test faced mandatory summer school for the first time.

Call it accountability, call it the fear of God; whatever you call it, it worked.

Another innovation that may have helped raise scores was the creation of 54 freshman academies that offered 9th graders a core curriculum and helped the kids adjust to a high school setting.

There were the usual naysayers who claimed the improved test scores were the result of "teaching to the test" or that scores were higher because a new, tougher promotion policy kept kids out of high school who didn't belong there.

And to that we say, "So what?" Schools and students alike are better off when kids are at the grade level, that matches their abilities. It's the way other school districts operate, and this puts Chicago schools on a par with them on nationally normed tests.

As for "teaching to the test," if exams are designed to test what students are supposed to know, then there's nothing wrong with teaching that to them.

In the final analysis, kudos are in order for Vallas and his crew, but the real credit goes to the most important actors in this pleasant turnabout: the teachers and students of the Chicago Public Schools.

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# Chicago Sun-Times

An Independent Newspaper

Thursday, May 1, 1997

## Power of learning

Power teaching + power learning = powerful results.

That equation sums up the colossal effort it took for some Chicago Public Schools to turn around abysmal test scores after being placed on probation last year. Instead of hand-wringing, teachers and administrators put their heads together and came up with strategies to tackle the problem.

The good news that high school students posted gains in this year's Tests of Achievement and Proficiency comes at a critical juncture. Time is running out for the General Assembly to come up with a school funding plan that will ensure the state provides an equal level of funding for all public school students.

As part of school funding reform, some legislators have linked accountability with funding. The dramatic gains posted by students, under the guidance of motivated teachers, demonstrate that kind of accountability.

Students who had difficulty comprehending what they read, a skill necessary to excel in all other classes, were given techniques that brought the words to life. At Amundsen High School on the North Side, where students nearly doubled their test scores, teachers did not settle for a cookie-cutter approach. They tried several different strategies, including the use of such basic skills as highlighting and making notes of important passages.

Last year, scores were embarrassingly low. This year there is plenty to celebrate. Thank you administrators, teachers, parents and students for a job well done.

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Standard-bearers: Brown and students

## EDUCATION

# A Small Step for Chicago

Are the nation's worst schools finally on the mend?

BY JOHN McCORMICK AND STEVE RHODES

**B**ARELY A YEAR AGO, ENGLEWOOD Academy was one of the worst public high schools in Chicago. Street gangs ruled the hallways. Security guards extorted bribes from students. Teachers didn't assign homework; only 5 percent of the students could read at grade level. Then the city's new school czar installed a tough principal, Tommye Brown, who spent the year taming the place. Early this month, Brown announced the results of all his improvements at Englewood. Brown reported that the ninth and 11th graders had improved their reading scores by 20 percent: now 6 percent of Englewood's students were reading at grade level. Some teachers burst into tears of joy.

Not many cities would take pride in such a statistic, but a school system often derided as the nation's worst appears to have turned a corner. Citywide, the percentage of Chicago high schoolers who meet national norms rose this year from 21 percent to 25 percent in reading; in math the percentage leaped from 22 to 30. Elementary-school test scores jumped last year, and officials expect still more gains when this year's scores are tabulated.

It would be heartwarming to trace the gains solely to inspirational efforts in the classroom. But the Chicago reversal, still in its early stages, is as much about sticks as carrots. District officials threatened to close schools, remove educators and hold back students if performance didn't improve. The state legislature, tired of Chicago's failures, had given these extraordinary powers to Mayor Richard M. Daley. In turn, Daley appointed his former budget director, Paul Vallas, to head the sinking system, and told him to fix the schools—or else. "We set high standards," Vallas says. "Then we let everyone know the consequences of not meeting them." Last fall Vallas put 109 of the city's 557 schools on academic probation.

Those schools have been deluged with extra help from the central district. "It wasn't 'Let's look for who's to blame,'" says Thomas Reece, head of the Chicago Teachers Union. "It was 'Let's look for how to im-

prove,' which was pretty well received." Each probationary school has been given the services of outside experts, often from university education departments. The outsiders began by posting on classroom walls simple lists of what each student is supposed to learn in each subject. "We can make major gains just by getting the basics under control," says Melissa Roderick, a University of Chicago professor who is tracking the system's turnaround.

Schools have been ordered to stop the practice of "social promotion" of students who can't do the work. And teachers are trying new approaches. One experiment is to drill students in the vocabulary they'll need to comprehend a subject before the teacher launches into the material itself. Another involves diagramming, in chart form, every lesson imaginable. That reduces abstractions to visuals: time lines in history class, plot development in English, how to spike a volleyball in phys ed.

Many teachers say there's another factor at work, too. For the first time, many kids think someone cares whether they succeed or fail, and they are responding. Now there's a reason to burst into tears of joy. ■



Tribune photo by Phil Greer

First-grader Courtney Ward, 7, gives a winning smile during a press conference at Francis Parkman Elementary School, where officials announced the city's improved Iowa test scores.

**'The concept of intervention works. Everyone can take heart, but no one should think this is good enough.'**

Gery Chico, president of the Chicago School Reform Board

## City's schools take pride in decade's best scores

By Annie Sweeney  
TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

Chicago elementary school scores on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills are as high as they have been in a decade, officials reported Friday.

Based on the test results, school officials were also able to calculate how many youngsters will have to go to academic summer school this year—82,000 of the 426,000 Chicago public school students.

Chicago schools deputy education officer Blondean Davis said she was not alarmed. "To me, that says we are intervening on behalf of these children," she said.

The number includes 48,000 3rd, 6th, 8th and 9th graders who scored too low on the Iowa and other recent skills tests and will attend the board's 2-year-old summer school program.

In addition, 16,000 high school students will have to make up course work, and 18,000 are being sent to special programs at their particular

schools.

Chicago officials celebrated the test results as proof that summer school and other efforts—extended day programs, changes in local school personnel and academic probation—have been successful.

"The concept of intervention works," said Gery Chico, president of the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees, adding that there is more to be done. "Everyone can take heart, but no one should think this is good enough."

According to the overall Iowa test results for pupils in 3rd through 8th grades, 30.1 percent scored at or above the national average in reading, up from 29.1 percent a year ago, and 35.6 percent scored at or above average in math, up from 31 percent.

Of the 71 elementary schools put on academic probation by the school board, 54 improved in reading and 69 in math, according to the report. Twenty-two of those schools could be eligible for removal from probation.

A8 Friday, May 23, 1997

# Chicago test scores improve

## Greatest gain in math; reading up slightly

**By Steve Metsch**

Staff Writer

Math and reading scores of Chicago's third- through eighth-grade students improved in the past year, according to Iowa Tests of Basic Skills results that the Chicago School Reform Board will release today.

The greatest improvement was in math, where 393 elementary schools improved, 76 declined and four remained the same.

### CHICAGO

Reading scores citywide improved for the second straight year, albeit by a smaller margin.

Last year, only 31 percent of the students citywide had math scores at or above the national norm. This year, 35.6 percent of the 147,952 students scored at or above the norm.

Math scores improved in every grade except third. The citywide increase was the biggest gain in eight years and marked the third straight year of improvement.

"I was particularly elated by the huge gains in math," said Chief Education Officer Lynn St. James. Math scores are a better gauge of ability because, unlike reading, they are "culture-free," she said.

This year, 30 percent of the

148,388 students read at or above the national norm, a 1 percent increase over last year.

Reading improved in the fourth, fifth and seventh grades and dropped in third, sixth and eighth. Citywide, reading improved at 271 schools, declined at 187 and remained the same at 15.

"The secret is to let people know there are stakes attached to the work they do. Before, there were no stakes attached to the tests. Now we have mandatory summer school, transitional schools and no more social promotions. So the students take the test more seriously," St. James said.

She blamed smaller gains in reading on the fact that for many English is a second language.

One of the top gaining schools on the Southwest Side was Eberhart Elementary, 3400 W. 65th Place, in the Chicago Lawn neighborhood. Math scores leaped from 43.9 percent last year to 56 percent, while reading jumped from 32.1 to 40.4 percent.

"We were disappointed in our scores last year and were trying to push reading. We've worked very hard this year. We doubled the time, from 40 minutes to 80, that we spend on reading each day. This shows it works," Principal Joyce Jager said.

Another impressive gain was

found at Johns Elementary, 6936 S. Hermitage Ave., where reading scores rose from 8.4 to 14.9 percent and math from 9.3 to 17 percent.

Results were mixed at Sheridan Elementary, 9000 S. Exchange Ave., on the Southeast Side, and Peck Elementary, 3826 W. 58th St., on the Southwest Side. At both, reading fell while math improved.

Both tumbled at Byrne Elementary, 5329 S. Oak Park Ave., in the Garfield Ridge neighborhood. Reading dropped from 58.3 last year to 51.5 percent this year, while math went from 52 to 50 percent.

The drop in reading at Mount Greenwood Elementary, 10841 S. Homan Ave., was from 60.6 percent to 56.5 percent. Math inched down from 53 to 52.1 percent.

Mount Greenwood principal Rita Pedone blamed the third grade, which has only 36.7 percent of its students scoring at or above the norm. But there is hope.

"When in the first grade, those kids had three different teachers. One on maternity leave was replaced by two others. That's hard, especially in the first grade," Pedone said.

Eighteen of those students will attend mandatory summer school because they did not meet requirements for promotion. Pedone looks for summer school to help their scores next year.

# Test scores add up to improvement

## Officials all smiles at math, reading results

**By Steve Metsch**

Staff Writer

When Iowa Test of Basic Skills results showed reading and math scores in the city's elementary schools were the best in a decade, Chicago Public Schools officials were quick to take note.

"These numbers demonstrate that our elementary schools continue to improve," Chicago School Reform Board President Gery Chico said in a prepared statement.

Lynn St. James, chief education officer, said scores demonstrate "a renewed commitment by principals, teachers and parents to provide students with a quality education to help prepare them for college or the work force."

But some school reform groups were just as quick to note that the scores released Friday were another extension of the school reform started in 1990 rather than the new leadership team installed in 1995.

"It's just another year of upward trends. It's nice to see school reform con-

tinue to work. There's nothing to make this different from the trend that's been going on," said Julie Woestehoff, executive director of Parents United for Responsible Education.

Nonetheless, Chicago's public elementary school students did score 4.6 percentage points better overall in math. Nearly 36 percent scored at or above the national norm.

A total of 30.1 percent of students were at or above the norm in reading, an improvement of 1 percent over last year and a two-year gain of 3.6 points.

Some of the best improvements came at schools on academic probation, where the central office has been monitoring and assisting those schools because of low scores in the past.

Woestehoff questioned if intervention or reform made the difference.

"You hate to say it's proof that intervention makes a difference, but the ones where we intervened saw better scores," accountability director Phil Hansen said Friday.

Twenty-two of the probation schools improved by 15 percent or more and 37

of those schools had their best scores in more than seven years, Hansen said.

"So, we are really pleased with that kind of increase in probation schools. We've given them a lot of support and I think that it had an effect," Hansen said.

Schools where reading and math improved: Barnard, Black Magnet, Bryn Mawr, Caldwell, Cassell, Clay, Clissold, Coles, Dore, Eberhart, Edwards, Gallistel, Goodlow Magnet, Grimes, Hale, Hearst, Johns, Kellogg, Lee, Mann, McKay, Nightingale, Owen, Pasteur, Sawyer, Shoop, Sutherland, Thorp, Tonti and Vanderpoel Magnet.

Seven schools saw drops in reading and math: Byrne, Dawes, Ninos Heroes, Keller Magnet, Mount Greenwood, Taylor and Warren.

Schools where reading declined and math improved or stayed the same: Addams, Bright, Burnham, Carroll, Davis, Esmond, Grissom, Gunsaulus, Hoyne, Hurley, Kinzie, Lenart, Morrill, Peck, Randolph Magnet, Sheridan, Stevenson, Sullivan, Twain, Washington and Whistler.

Only two schools, Hancock and Marquette, saw reading improve and math drop.

# School's scores shoot up

BY ROSALIND ROSSI  
EDUCATION REPORTER

Fueled by a drive to get off academic probation, Amundsen High School teachers and students this year did what would normally be considered amazing: They nearly doubled their test scores.

And that's just a preview of some of the good news to be unveiled today, when Mayor Daley will take the unprecedented step of hosting a news conference on Chicago public high school test scores.

Labeled "in crisis" only a year ago, the high schools are expected to show systemwide gains in reading and even stronger jumps in math on the nationally normed Tests of Achievement and Proficiency taken

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# Scores

Continued from previous page

in April. Only one of the system's more than 60 regular high schools posted a drop in math, sources said, and more than 80 percent of them showed gains in reading.

At Amundsen, 5110 N. Damen, Assistant Principal Kenneth Hunter said a reading push raised reading scores and had a spillover effect on math. Said Hunter: "Kids will get better at word problems if they read more closely."

Last week, word of Amundsen's gains spread because it supposedly showed some of the biggest jumps among high schools on probation. About half of all city high schools are on probation. This year, Amundsen's percent of ninth- and 11th-graders meeting national TAP norms rose in reading from 11.6 to 22.1 and in math from 15 to 28.6.

For starters, the school prepared for this year's tests almost as if it were going to battle. A month before Amundsen was placed on probation, said Principal Edward Klunk, teachers decided to focus on reading—the gateway skill to knowledge and the first indicator of whether a school should be on probation.

Meeting weekly, the task force developed a list of reading strategies and monthly calendars for teaching them and testing students. Teachers

shared reading passages—such as newspaper articles on interest rates that formed the basis for math word problems—and keyed them to the length of TAP passages.

"Every day a different department did nothing but reading strategies," said task force member Mary Ross. "On Monday it was English. On Tuesday it was social studies and business, on Wednesday it was math and science, on Thursday it was fine arts and physical education, and on Friday it was English again."



Mary Cappetelli  
Reading stressed

Each strategy was used by all teachers for two to three weeks at a time, then replaced by a new one, so at least one technique was bound to hit home.

The reading techniques included "KWL," or having students outline what they KNOW about a subject, what they WANT to know, and what they had LEARNED. It also included "mapping" the main idea and its subsets, and "sustained silent reading" for 10 to 15 minutes, followed by journal writing about the reading passages.

One technique, called "Sketch to Stretch," required students to sketch what a reading passage conjured in their minds, and then to defend it.

The strategy meant English teacher Mary Cappetelli merely had to walk up and down the aisles to see if students understood the word "diverge" in Robert Frost's famous poem, "The Road Less Traveled." She knew some didn't because they were drawing one road instead of two.



Alex Paniagua  
Mixed opinions

"The best readers start to visualize and make like a film in their head as they're reading," said Cappetelli. "Poor readers don't know how to do that."

Even students' inability to underline or highlight in their textbooks was addressed. Students created margin notes by using Post-It notes instead.

Amundsen also started new after-school speed-reading classes for honor students. Many of them had high grades but low reading scores because they were not native readers of English.

But by the end, said Hunter, students could read John Steinbeck's novella *The Pearl* in 18 minutes and pass a test on it.

Teachers wrote up schoolwide reading tests and started giving them in November—five months before April's TAPs. In February, students took a reading test almost every day, plus a reading test every Friday in English class.

In one junior English class, almost all students thought the new reading push improved their reading skills. Some said the extra tests will help them prepare for college; others found them repetitious.

"You need as much practice as possible," said Alex Paniagua, 17. "But there's too much English, where they give you the same tests in every class."

Some teachers said the push helped teachers teach better; others were not sure. But Ross was certain about one thing: "We were so driven toward doing better on TAP and getting rid of that label of probation none of us liked."