

Local School Councils

Can democracy save IPS?

How IPS can be managed by self-government:
parents, community, school staff, and students practicing
American grassroots self-determination

Parent choice vs. Parent voice

Top-down control vs. Bottom-up democracy

“Is America possible?”
~ Vincent Harding

“No parent wants their child to fail.”
~ Valencia Rias-Winstead

To be sure, no system of governance—especially mayoral accountability—is perfect. However, Local School Councils for public education exceed other options in the ability to create the strong, publicly accountable leadership through democratic principles needed to enact sweeping educational change. And it does so while emphasizing local grassroots neighborhood authority, leaving the families and community members of each Indianapolis Public School in charge of their educational destiny.

“Given the level of accomplishment of Chicago’s Local School Councils, the key issue is not whether they should exist, but how all Local School Councils can meet the standards attained by the best ones.”
~ Don Moore, Designs for Change

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Executive Summary

How do we run our schools? A local nonprofit corporation suggests that the current governance structure of the Indianapolis Public Schools is to blame for inadequate student achievement on standardized test scores. And so, the not-for-profit recommends that we dissolve our elected school board and replace it with mayoral school control and an appointed board. The following pages outline a very different school reform model, one that calls for *more* democracy, rather than less.

Local School Councils, first organized in Chicago by a grassroots movement almost 25 years ago, liberated schools from the top-down control of a central office and put the destiny of each school firmly in the hands of local partners. Under this shared decision-making model, each Local School Council brings the principal together with teacher, staff, parent, student, and community representatives to develop the school's improvement plan, establish its vision and manage its budget, among other duties. Because each principal is hired by the Local School Council, the principal owes his or her allegiance to the council, rather than a downtown bureaucrat. In turn, principals are free to innovate, supported by LSC members that have a strong incentive to organize the school in the way that suits their main local constituent: the students.

Chicago's Local School Councils have demonstrated improvements in school safety, student voice, parental involvement, teacher satisfaction, and community relations. Major research indicates that low-scoring schools with Local School Councils showed substantial and sustained improvement in reading test scores. Perhaps more important than all of these significant gains, however, Local School Councils strengthen communities through democracy and foster a concerned, enlightened and active citizenry. Other school reform models profess to fuel the economy with school choice and a prepared workforce, but this unique reform model fuels America itself and its promise of self-determination through self-rule.

Local School Councils have the potential to act as citizen incubators in any school, but their impact proves more profound when in schools that serve low-income and minority families (a large presence and important constituent in IPS and Chicago). Middle-income school staff sometimes undervalue such families. Through LSC structure, however, families and community members operate on equal footing with the principal and all staff. So, LSC schools enjoy a healthy balance of power and the kind of home and school partnership that supports students. While the competitive "school choice" model invites families to only "vote with their feet"—to leave an unsatisfactory school—Local School Councils invite families to "sit at the table" and use their voices to help their schools improve continually.

The following narrative receives support from the research of educational experts who have investigated the Local School Council model, the importance of democracy in public education, *and* the importance of public education to democracy. Appendix A offers a more detailed list of LSC's strengths and its most vocal supporters. Appendix B outlines the numerous studies, reports and books (published 1991-2012) on Local School Councils and the valuable lessons learned from the Chicago experience.

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Local School Councils: Can democracy save IPS?
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How Do We Run Our Schools?

“I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves, and if we think them not enlightened enough to exercise their control with a wholesome discretion, the remedy is not to take it from them but to inform their discretion.”

~ Thomas Jefferson

In 2002, the controversial No Child Left Behind federal mandate took effect. This policy produced a new series of benchmarks from which to judge schools. According to these benchmarks, many schools in the Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS) failed to make “Adequate Yearly Progress.” In response to sustained low test performance, the Mind Trust, a local non-profit, released a proposal entitled, “Creating Opportunity Schools” [See: www.themindtrust.org/OpportunitySchools/MindTrust-Dec15.pdf] which claimed IPS's current governance model a source of this failure.

The Mind Trust organization claims the traditional school board arrangement proves ineffective and calls for mayoral control of IPS. The mayor would appoint three board members and the City-County Council would appoint two—one representing each party’s caucus. The mayor-led board could then appoint the school superintendent and direct him or her to carry out The Mind Trust Plan.

The present IPS school board model consists of seven members: five elected from each of the five IPS districts and two elected district-wide. The terms stagger, so that the entire board never comes up for re-election at the same time. Among other duties, the board sets goals for the district, approves policy, and hires a superintendent. Starting in 2012, school board elections have moved from the May primary ballot to the November general elections.

IPS has defended the current board model by publishing, “Growing A+ Schools: A Progress report on the IPS 2010-2015 Improvement Plan in April of 2012.”

[See: www.ips.k12.in.us/fileadmin/Assets/AboutUs/pdf/IPS_Report_v12S.pdf]

Reforming the governance of IPS depends not simply on a discussion of mayoral control versus traditional school boards, but what a democracy requires of its public schools. If we agree that a significant part of public education prepares future citizens, then Indianapolis needs a model that better reflects, supports, and enables democratic values. Indianapolis needs a model that recognizes the global trend toward democracy, which the United States promotes for other citizens in other countries who seek, embrace, and even put their lives at risk for the right to self-government.

Local School Councils: Democracy at Work

The Chicago School Reform Act of 1988 created a Local School Council (LSC) for each Chicago public school. Local School Councils provide direct leadership for each school. Their primary responsibilities include the development of the vision of the school, selecting the school’s principal, renewing the principal’s contract, and managing the school’s budget for the school year. Most significantly, the council develops the school’s improvement plan for academic achievement.

The Reform Act resulted from grassroots work to improve Chicago public schools through decentralization: taking decision making power away from the school district’s central office and giving it to schools. Many Chicagoians had complained that the bureaucratic organization of the school system

did not allow for parental or community input. The Act put strong faith in the ability of parents, community members, and educators to govern their children’s public school. [See: www.cps.edu/pages/LocalSchoolCouncils.aspx] As a result, Local School Councils have provided a viable option to a single school board for 25 years in Chicago. Their Local School Councils consist of:

- 6 parent and 2 community representatives each elected by parents and community residents of the school's enrollment area
- the school's principal, who is selected by the council; the principal hires teachers
- 2 teachers
- 1 non-teaching staff member
- 1 student at the high school level

The Chicago Board of Education appoints the teachers, staff members, and students to each Local School Council following a Non-Binding Advisory Poll. All LSC members act as volunteers, and receive no pay. [See: www.cps.edu/About_CPS/Departments/Documents/LSC/LSCElectionGuide.pdf].

Regarding magnet schools, Local School Councils consist of six parents who are elected out of the pool of parents who have children in the school. Parent council members can live anywhere in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) district. The two community members however, must be from the magnet’s neighborhood.

Research and validation

Local School Councils have demonstrated improvement in school safety, student voice, parental involvement, teacher satisfaction, and community relations. [See Appendix B: Sebring, 1995 & 1996; Ryan, 1997; Bryk, 2010.]

A major research project covering 1990-2005, analyzing elementary school achievement data from 144 low scoring schools totaling 100,000 students, showed substantial and sustained improvement in reading test scores through grade 8 (Designs for Change, 2005).

“Given the level of accomplishment of Chicago's Local School Councils, the key issue is not whether the councils should exist, but how all councils can meet the standards attained by the best ones.”
~ Don Moore, Designs for Change

An analysis by Bryk (2010) points out additional strengths of Local School Councils. When parents and community can access and share control over organization and structure of their schools, they not only bring their knowledge about their community to the policy table, but they also help to formulate practical, cost effective solutions to neighborhood problems based on their expertise (Fung, 2004).

Local School Councils work because they can hire the right principal

In some cases, members of Local School Councils may bring ideas that improve their schools. In most instances, this type of school reform works because the councils hire strong, innovative principals accountable to the students, parents and community, and also to teachers. Principals inherently receive the autonomy they need to implement their innovative ideas, and run the school effectively. Principals also receive strong parental support because parents choose them.

Traditionally, the school district chooses a school's principal. Thus, the school leader owes allegiance not to the school community, but must please the central office whose administrators have little interest in giving principals full autonomy (Olivos, 2006). Principals hired/fired by their Local School Councils become effective principals because they share power and responsibility with teachers, parents, students, and community.

Local voice leads to meaningful choice

While vouchers and other forms of school choice allow parents to provide feedback to a school through their decision of whether or not to enroll their children, LSCs provide a mechanism through which the school remains accountable during the entire year. A context exists where stakeholders may discuss concerns on a regular basis, instead of simply "speaking with their feet" once a year.

Local School Councils expand educational choices. Variation inevitably develops within local neighborhood control, leading to more innovation and more meaningful choice (Moberg, 2000). LSCs offer stakeholders a democratic voice in the way their school functions. This voice expands the limited freedom given by choice and may make choice, and mayoral control, irrelevant if local schools prove satisfactory and responsive (Moberg, 2000). *In a school system based on individual schools run by the voice of their own Local School Council, the district will not get choice as a vehicle for change; it will get change that will result in empowered choice* (Moberg, 2000).

The purpose of public education: freedom and equality

Much of the current discussion about education reform concerns college and career readiness. America's survival does depend on sound economic practices. The inventiveness and entrepreneurial spirit each enabled by America's climate of liberty, remain essential to our nation. Public schools prepare students for workforce and career development, yet this purpose remains secondary to the higher civic responsibilities of public education. (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Engel, 2000; Loflin, 2008; Dyke, 2010).

Government schools exist to create a concerned, enlightened, and active public who practice self-rule. The purpose of public education serves to make America possible. Yet, over 40 years ago Jerry Farber, professor of English at the University of San Diego, stated that public schools "...make democracy unlikely." We see the results today in rates of voter turnout, parental involvement, and incarceration. Farber cited top-down bureaucratic management, the silencing of student voices, a focus on compliance and control of behavior over critical thought and creativity as factors that contributed to these current results.

To ensure our public schools not only make democracy "likely," but make America itself possible, these institutions have a civic duty to preserve and transmit the democratic ideals of freedom and equality. Our public schools provide the ideal training ground for students as future citizens.

National popular education reform expresses the ideals of freedom through choice, and self-determination (autonomy) through decentralization. Unfortunately, these attempts at reform fall short in providing a strong democratic structure that raises an informed and critical public (Dyke, 2010). *Local School Councils go well beyond choice to both decentralize power and guarantee a framework for student, parent, and community voice.*

Equity and competition

The current education reform movement also relies on competition as a method to promote school improvement. While competition improves efficiency in a business model, nowhere in human history has competition led to equity or equality. The competitive model produces no greater likelihood of effective innovation than the democratic reform strategy of Local School Councils, and remains more likely to produce and reproduce inequalities (Moberg, 2000).

“Competition favors the already powerful and if you unleash competition, then schools which are powerful from the start, are going to thrive and those that are not powerful are not magically somehow able to develop the ability to compete.”

~ Pamela Grundy, Charlotte, NC <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/2011/03/parents-across-america-on-corporate-interests-in-education/>

An unprecedented cross-class, multiracial coalition

The 1988 coalition of Chicago businesses and grassroots activists from almost every ethnic and racial background, representing virtually every Chicago neighborhood, came together to advance legislation that would lead to Local School Councils (O’Connell, 1991). LSCs have proven to bring a more diverse and representational leadership body to public education. Education historian Michael Katz (1995) observed: “Reformers in the city [of Chicago] created an unprecedented multiracial, cross-class coalition dedicated to school improvement through democracy.”

While every school can benefit and improve by having Local School Councils, this local governing body proves especially beneficial in schools that have high rates of low-income and minority families (as in Chicago and in IPS). Typically in such schools, families and students must continually navigate between two worlds: between home and family traditions, language and rules and those of the school (Olivos, 2006). Unfortunately, in this scenario, family and school can develop an adversarial relationship in which schools wield all the power and families do all the conforming. Conversations are one-way not two-way. In this situation, parents reject engagement, even though it is interpreted as them not caring, because they know their voice will not be heard. This imbalance of power, negatively impacts the school, as well as school-home, and school-community relationships (Olivos, 2006). With LSCs, however, low-income and minority parents sit as social equals at decision-making tables with teachers, staff, principals and other community members. LSCs restore family and school to their proper role as partners.

Each school works as a community: responding to the needs of students, parents, staff, and the neighborhood. Under this shared leadership, public schools can function as “citizen incubators,” preparing students as active participants in the struggle for a more democratic community. Public schools can mold citizens into knowledgeable, caring members of local neighborhoods, and the larger society of the state and nation, who will work toward bettering American society (Dyke, 2010). America only remains possible as an idea if we encourage and support democratic values within the everyday interactions of *all* citizens (Biesta, 2007). Local School Councils can further this aim more than any other current form of school governance.

“With proper support and oversight, LSC’s are proven, effective, publicly elected school governing bodies. Lastly, who in their right mind would eliminate the largest body of African American and Latino

elected officials in the United States? LSC's, with the right support, can become powerful local lightning rods for education equity!"

~ Response #15 www.catalyst-chicago.org/notebook/2010/02/10/bill-would-strip-local-school-councils-principal-selection-budget-powers

The Local School Council movement is an American story

The Local School Council movement tells an American story. How a community found the political will to change public policy by blending large-scale demonstrations and lobbying in Chicago exemplifies American-style self-government. LSCs prove parents and community leaders in and among a wide diversity of urban neighborhoods can devote sustained effort to collaborate with educators in improving their children's schools, *if real authority shifts to the neighborhood level* (Moore, 2000).

Challenges of Local School Councils

Local School Councils evolve over time. Chicago has encountered many challenges in the struggle to improve their schools. Henig and Stone (2008) note that pre-existing intercommunity animosity can impede outcomes with Local School Councils, while also suggesting using LSCs as a lever to overcome existing obstacles with time and support. Despite these issues, all schools run by Local School Councils have improved, even if only marginally. [See Appendix B: More & Merritt, 2002; Bryk, 2010; Luppescu, 2011; Designs for Change, 2012.] Local School Councils require similar conditions to thrive as turnaround or charter schools. But, as we have seen in Chicago, LSCs offer a direct way of better meeting these requirements, more consistently raise test scores, and promote remedies to "social toxins" such as poverty, alienation, unemployment, violence, inadequate housing and health care (Ginwright, 2010) which the current popular reform agenda does not address (Bowles & Ginitis, 1976; Anyon, 1997; Beilock, 2010). LSCs provide a more logical choice as the primary option for reform, especially considering that the concept can be adapted and improved.

A recommendation: Each IPS school managed by a Local School Council

IPS should study, establish, enable, perfect, and surpass in quality the Local School Council concept used in the Chicago public schools since 1988. Chicago Public Schools have over 404,000 students in more than 675 schools. Surely, LSCs can work in IPS with its 33,000 students and 64 schools.

The success of Local School Councils rests on the belief that so-called average community people can achieve effective school reforms. Neighborhood leaders become "professionalized" by taking risks and learning from their mistakes to make self-determined schools happen (Russo, 2004). Chicago demonstrates that an IPS school's individual LSC member—a parent or community person with little or no formal experience in education, administrative concerns, or budget decisions—can effectively run a school. This grassroots democracy stimulates organizational change within schools, which in turn improves teaching and learning.

Reforming education through the governance of Local School Councils requires hard work, is highly political, and often stirs controversy (Russo, 2004). Still, this democratic model of reform can prove transformational for individuals, schools, communities, and in fact the entire IPS school district. Most importantly, Local School Councils serve as an example to the world of just how US citizens practice their democracy, and how much they believe in self-determination and America's possibilities for equality, justice, and liberty.

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APPENDIX A

The strengths of the Local School Council concept

“This is the largest municipal election in the United States, and chooses the nation’s largest number of elected officials of color.”

~ Don Moore of Designs for Change on the 2012 LSC elections

According to Valencia Rias-Winstead (personal communications, May 15-17, 2012), **Local School Councils:**

- identify their own issues, problems, and difficulties. By understanding the families, children, culture, neighborhood, and teachers, LSCs can “twist” curriculum to meet the needs of these stakeholders
- can pay attention to quality of instruction since members serve as an integral part of what goes on in the classroom and school
- will have more capacity to handle and resolve school complaints, personnel and funding issues, or budgeting better at the local level than at the district or school board level
- make it easier to appreciate the uniqueness of each school. Many urban systems have regional directors who cannot possibly give equal attention to all the schools in their region
- eliminate most of the “red tape” of top-down excessively bureaucratic regulation in school decision-making

Also, Rias-Winstead (personal communications, May 15-17, 2012) **notes that School Councils:**

- show that no other group has the best interests of the students in mind or experiences the results of poor education than a school’s families (parents), and neighborhood/community
- help schools get the teachers and administrator who have passion and commitment
- show that when schools and community fail the children, they and the children will suffer the results of gangs, violence, drugs, and many social ills
- show that while members are not paid with money (that could provide a consideration for attending so many meetings per year) they do get “paid” with confident students, successful citizens, safer communities, and hopefully a return on their investment when they are aged
- increase the commitment to improving the schools and supporting the public school system. LSCs allow teachers, parents, students, and community members to enjoy the opportunity to serve or be represented on a school council that has a role in shaping the policies and programs of the school
- provide important components of the school’s assessment of success in meeting statewide standards
- assist in preparing the school improvement plan, and so have a role in shaping the school’s achievement of the professional development and parent involvement goals of school reform

- involve people who work in and support the school in the development of the school's improvement plan, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation
- place the community school at the center of planning, goal setting, and budgeting for school improvement
- provide additional opportunities for those closest to the teaching/learning process, teachers and administrators, to innovate and create
- allow teachers and administrators to work with parents, students, and the community to become more responsive to the needs of a particular school's population
 - for example, the teachers at a particular school may understand through work with the LSC, that the characteristics of their students require a particular type of in-service training not offered nor needed district-wide
- involve different groups--teachers, parents, students, and non-parent community members--in school decisions, providing the school with different and mutually complementary perspectives on its improvement goals and plans

With respect to American-style democracy, according to Fung (2006), Local School Councils:

- represent a particular institutional design regarding democratic organizations, such as our public schools, which intend to bring about the greatest level of civic participation and deliberation
- make our public school system a democratic urban institution unlike any other in America
- provide examples of ways in which participatory democracy effects social change
- when properly designed and implemented, these councils of participatory democratic governance can spark citizen involvement that in turn generates innovative problem-solving and public action
- increase civic participation and voter turnout at the community and neighborhood level
- rebut claims of infeasibility or inadequacy of grassroots public participation in policy deliberative democratic theory
- rediscover the best traditions of American self-government through individual, family, neighborhood, community, cultural, economic, political, and educational self-determination
- introduce us to democracy's heroes at the most fundamental level: parents, grandparents, guardians, students, and neighborhood residents practicing community self-determination
- provide a way to critically examine the functionality of participatory democracy as a school-reform strategy
- provide transformative practices emphasizing genuine political participation to parents and community citizens who on a day-to-day basis feel powerless as a result of having their voices

“drowned out” by the traditional school model where parents/neighborhood residents are expected to support the school and district unquestionably

- seek to build trust between parents and community residents and their public schools by engaging each other in deliberative problem-solving at the grassroots level

Local School Councils, according to Fung (2006), illustrate:

- that an enlightened view of autonomy requires empowering those involved in school decision-making with freedom/responsibility from the beginning of school reform, not after the school has been reformed
- that citizen participation makes public schools more fair and effective
- what happens when the presence of minority, less educated, diffident, or culturally subordinate parents, students, and neighborhood members--who are often overlooked by those who are wealthy, confident, accustomed to management or otherwise privileged--become empowered
- that public agencies, such as school systems, can improved when they welcome citizenry into their governing structures
- that the inclusion of neighborhood residents into the implementation and execution of governing affairs, has the potential for enhancing the quality of civic engagement
- that when citizens access and share control over organization and structure, they bring their knowledge about their community to the policy table
- how members, due to their expertise in urban living, can formulate solutions to neighborhood problems
- how the hierarchy that exists within traditional school governing structures can damage relationships among a school’s principal, teachers, parents, and community members, leaving them ineffective in forming bonds, dysfunctional in pro-activity, as well dejected and silenced
- what happens when students, teachers, parents, and community members work together to challenge and change the hierarchy that exists within traditional school governing structures—the unilateral, top-down imposition of power and authoritarian standards
- that ordinary citizens can come to believe in a benefit to participation: that meetings do not just result in talk or venting sessions, thus generating the interest that motivates participation
- the essential role of decentralization in dis-entangling civic participation from the top-down administrative outcomes and routines
- what happens when both citizens and school professionals direct their own participation, contribution, and “develop their own agendas and set their own ends”

With respect to organizing schools for improvement, according to Bryk (2010), Local School Councils:

- created “a new force field” of “democratic localism” that works horizontally, not vertically (top down) in improving urban schools
- show the power of educational change when community and educators participate as a coalition in school reform
- conceptualize a system of essential supports which provide a dynamic and multi-directional approach to school reform
- show what happens when staff, parents and community truly engage in responsible autonomy for school reform by providing an understanding of the nature of what happens within school buildings as fluid, complicated, relational, and interactive
- take the analysis of race and socioeconomic status to a fine-grained level, because local councils help to effectively explore the conditions that facilitate and impede the ability of urban parents and neighborhood members to act as a critical resource in their very own public school’s improvement
- show school reform as more than “turning schools around,” but must involve initiatives to reduce the social, economic and racial isolation found in many urban schools serving students of all colors
- play a role not in reconstituting schools and school staffing, but in reconstituting relationships
- through school governance mechanisms, such as shifting the authority to the school level in partnership with parents, students and adults in the community, demonstrate the nature of engagement, communication, and change processes
- provide an alternative to the story of the current school reform efforts, which tout parental and community involvement, yet offer few mechanisms for realizing the potential of this essential support to urban school improvement

“If the system is sufficiently democratic...the public's voice can help shape the system [and]...each school. There is a value, if we want a democratic society, in having educational institutions recognizing broader responsibilities than their own profit and loss. There is value, both educationally and politically, in involving parents and communities as much as possible in the schooling of society's next generation.”

~ David Moberg

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APPENDIX B

Outlines of studies, reports, and books published between 1991-2012 concerning Local School Councils, those community empowering entities of local self-determination created by the Chicago School Reform Act of 1988

Abbreviations

CPS Chicago Public Schools

CCSR Consortium on Chicago School Research

CURE Chicagoians United to Reform Education--a coalition, dating from spring of 1997

DfC Designs for Change

LSC Local School Councils--set up under SB 1840 to run each Chicago public school

NCLB No Child Left Behind

PURE Parents United for Responsible Education—north Chicago the group of parents/teachers

UNO United Neighborhood Organization--network organization of Mexican-American communities

1991

School reform Chicago style: how citizens organized to change public policy. By Mary O'Connell. Neighborhood Works. Chicago: Center for Neighborhood Technology.

<http://designsforchange.org/pdfs/SchlRfrmChgoStyle.pdf>

Mary O'Connell's book is based on the important question: How did Chicago find the political will to remove the way their schools were run? And, what lessons, if any, can be learned from this story of democracy at work--not just for people working on school issues, but those intent on changing public policy?

She leads readers through the 1980s' movement to decentralize CPS. This is one of the city's largest, most successful community organizing campaigns and one of the most recent examples of authentic, American-style democracy.

Chicago schools were some of the worst in the nation. Many were frustrated, especially parents. CPS teachers went on strike several times. The public anger and frustration, as well as scholarly research, all pointed toward the central bureaucracy as the heart of the problem.

The year following the strike, an unusual coalition of educational reformers--including white, black and Hispanic community organizations, and the business establishment--successfully pushed for state legislation. O'Connell believes the support of the business community, both financially and politically, was essential for school reform. The new law radically decentralized power to the local school level, giving parents and community representatives primary responsibility to hire and fire principals, set budgets, and approve school plans (Moberg, 2000).

LSCs give families a dominant voice over the school their child/ren attended and the staff whose wages parents paid with their taxes. Teachers are also empowered. Their two LSC seats give direct influence over school affairs, including the choice of principal. Teachers also have advisory responsibility over

school curriculum and instruction through the teacher-elected Professional Personnel Advisory Committee (PPAC).

By creating LSCs, the campaign planted the seeds for a number of today's reforms, including filling teacher vacancies without regard to seniority and giving schools more autonomy.

1993

“A View from the Elementary Schools: The State of Reform in Chicago” July, 1993. By Anthony S. Bryk, et. al. Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR).

http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/AViewFromTheElementarySchools_TheStateOfReformInChicago.pdf

The concept of LSC instituted broad and deep changes aimed to revitalize urban schools as a central educative institution in a community. This initial and in-depth report offers an early assessment of the post-1988 reform efforts in Chicago elementary schools. These LSCs faced the challenge of initiating local governance, picking and evaluating their principals, approving the school budget and School Improvement Plan (SIP).

The authors draw on field research, CCSR survey data, and case studies of six Chicago elementary schools to evaluate the extent to which decentralization created a need for a new infrastructure to support individual school development. They concluded that at this beginning stage of reform, all concerned--the parents/community members of LSC, the teachers, and principals--needed constant professional development. This development was not just the responsibility of CPS. A variety of groups, including the teachers union, local colleges and universities, and other business and civic groups took a constructive role in this regard.

The authors also used data to address the major premise of Chicago School Reform Act (PA 85- 1418): Will providing for authentic and direct democracy at the school/neighborhood level bring about the wide systemic restructuring needed to sustain improvements in teaching and learning? Against this standard, the report judged the first phase a success.

1995

“Charting Reform: Chicago Teachers Take Stock” August, 1995. By Penny Bender Sebring, et. al. Consortium on Chicago School Research (CCSR).

http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/Charting_Reform_ChicagoTeachersTakeStock.pdf

In 1994, as Chicago completed the fifth year of school reform under the Chicago School Reform Act, the Consortium on Chicago School Research surveyed teachers. In all 6,200 elementary, and 2,600 high school teachers completed the surveys. Teachers' survey responses related to three of the five essential supports for student learning: school leadership, parent involvement, and professional community. The contrasts between the responses of teachers in high schools and elementary schools were broad, and these differences are explored.

Individually tailored reports were provided to the 266 elementary and 46 high schools. The report focuses on school leadership, parent involvement, and professional community and development. Survey responses made it clear that a broad set of developments must occur if Chicago is to fulfill the intentions of the reforms. Teachers, parents, and the community must work together more cooperatively

to engage students in learning. Most teachers held their principals in high regard and saw them as the most important agents of local school reform. Findings of the surveys also indicated that reform is progressing more successfully in smaller schools where leadership and a sense of professional community are more easily fostered (www.amazon.com/Charting-Reform-Chicago-Teachers-Stock/dp/B002X3FHU0)

1996

“Charting Reform in Chicago: The Students Speak” July 1996. By Penny Bender Sebring et al. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/ChartingReformInChicago_TheStudentsSpeak.pdf

By giving power to local schools, the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act sought to weaken central authority in the school system and to promote greater site-based control. This report presents the voices of students regarding their school experiences--how they describe their teachers and peers, their classes, and their own efforts. Data was gathered through a survey administered during May and June 1994 to a total of 39,000 6th-, 8th-, and 10th-grade students in CPS. Students expressed the most positive attitudes toward their teachers. Elementary school students reported higher levels of engagement when teachers demonstrated keen personal interest in them and also pressed them toward academic work. Although African-American students were less likely than other student groups to report feeling safe, there was considerable variation among African-American schools. The data also suggest that academic standards for many students are too low. The most negative reports of learning climates came from 10th-graders, who were subject to rising absenteeism and course failure. A conclusion is that good instruction rests on a base of human and social resources. The findings support the viability of the Chicago school-improvement framework, which says there are five essential supports for student learning: school leadership, parent involvement, professional development and collaboration, a student-centered learning climate, and quality instructional programs.

www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICEExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED400592&ERICEExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED400592

1997

“Charting Reform Local Leadership At Work” December, 1997. By Susan Ryan, et. al. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/ChartingReform_LSCs_LocalLeadershipAtWork.pdf

For the first time CCSR conducted a survey of parents and community members on LSCs. According to the authors, their findings largely validate the wisdom of the 1988 Reform Act.

By giving LSCs significant resources and authority, and by expanding opportunities for local participation by parents, community members, and staff, this reform has enlarged the capabilities of school communities to solve local problems. The report found many school communities--including many poor, minority, and disadvantaged--have used these opportunities wisely to advance improvements in the schools. An analysis found that LSCs can be productive when they pick the right principal, enable parent and community partnerships, promote professional development and quality instruction, and have student-centered classrooms at their school.

Some, however, have been left behind. Thus, these findings also validate the need for increased oversight of LSCs that lies behind provisions of the 1995 Reform Act. The authors found a small fraction of school communities that were deeply troubled and appeared, for the moment at least, unable to govern themselves productively. The report suggests that if there is to be any real hope of advancing educational opportunities for the children enrolled in these schools, external accountability and thoughtful external intervention is required. The effectiveness of these new oversight powers in addressing the problems of non-functional LSCs, without hampering those that are functioning effectively, merits further study.

1998

“Charting Chicago School Reform: Democratic Localism as a Lever for Change” August, 1998. By Anthony S. Bryk et al. Consortium on Chicago School Research.
http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publication?pub_id=104

In 1989, Chicago began an experiment with radical decentralization of power and authority. This book tells the story of what happened to Chicago's elementary schools in the first four years of this reform. The result is a complex picture of the Chicago reform that joins the politics of neighborhood democracy to school change. An in depth review of the book by Nancy Roberts (2000) follows:

Basic in this reform is the central policy question: *Is democratic localism (expanded American-style democracy for neighborhoods) an effective lever for urban educational improvement?* In other words, could grassroots democracy stimulate organizational change within schools, which in turn would foster improved teaching and learning? Using this theory as a framework, the Bryk and others gather massive quantitative and qualitative data to examine how the reform actually unfolded at the school level.

With longitudinal case study data on 22 schools, survey responses from principals and teachers in 269 schools, and supplementary system-wide administrative data, the authors identify four types of school politics:

- strong democracy,
- consolidated principal power,
- maintenance, and
- adversarial.

The authors determine that in about one-third of the elementary school communities most in need of change (those where student assessment was significantly below national norms), experienced 1) greater democratic participation, 2) a focused systemic approach to change, 3) new relationships to parents and local communities, and 4) the cooperative engagement of teachers around school improvement and classroom instruction.

From this political perspective, the book directs attention to the idea of a “strong” democracy “where citizens work together to articulate and advance a locally defined common good” (p. 48), and to “unitary politics,” in which a set of principles are held in common among organizational members to provide the guiding framework for institutional life (p. 266). The book show central to this brand of politics are 1) sustained citizen participation, 2) a greater emphasis on self-government and consensual decision making, 3) public concern for the common good, and 4) a legitimation of core values and guiding ideas through public dialogue. Thus, enhanced democratic activity at the neighborhood level is viewed as an effective antidote to unresponsive societal institutions like urban public schools.

2000

“The System Matters: Chicago Activists Win District-Wide Change” By Dr. Don Moore
www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/system.pdf

The paper by Don Moore of Design for Change gives a short yet quality review of the history of Chicago school reform. The following is a compilation of ideas and quotes:

“The System Matters” repeats the story of how Mayor Harold Washington’s Education Summit spawned the broader Alliance for Better Chicago Schools (or ABC’S Coalition) and brought together parent, community, and business leaders around a common reform agenda. The coalition included Chicago grassroots activists from every racial and ethnic background and virtually every Chicago neighborhood. Yet, the coalition also included Chicago’s two most influential business organizations: Chicago United and the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club. Education historian Michael Katz observed, “Reformers in the city had created an unprecedented multiracial, cross-class coalition dedicated to school improvement through democracy.”

The ABC’S Coalition blended large-scale demonstrations and lobbying in Chicago and Springfield that showed broad parent and community support with the expertise of professional lobbyists and public relations specialists.

The Reform Act put strong faith in the abilities of parents and educators at each school to improve the quality of their children’s education by shifting key decisions to the school.

The Reform Act was aimed at creating a framework for the Chicago school system in which innovation would be supported and rewarded, rather than punished; it fundamentally restructured the school system’s rigid top-down bureaucracy. Katz subsequently called the Reform Act “the most complete restructuring of an urban school system in the twentieth century.”

“Can Democracy Save Chicago's Schools?” December, 2000. By David Moberg.
<http://prospect.org/article/can-democracy-save-chicagos-schools>

The article was published in December 2000. Over the horizon could be seen the authorization of the No Child Left Behind Act, which was signed by President Bush in January of 2001. NCLB intended to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice.

Moberg’s article reviews the 1988 crisis in public education in Chicago. He interprets the response to this crisis as one where the public’s anger and frustration about their schools, as well as scholarly research, all pointed toward the CPS central bureaucracy as the heart of the problem. He notes that Chicago's reform solution to the crisis emphasized democratic “*voice*” as the way to influence schools. It was based on the idea that local school control through urban neighborhood democracy in the form of Local School Councils would create more effective, responsive, and innovative schools.

In his article, he compares the idea of local democracy to NCLB’s focus on a free-market model of parental school “*choice*.” He does this, first by reviewing the problems created and faced by those involved on Chicago school reform:

- Teachers, not just parents, were not trained to carry out the reform's objectives.

- Many teachers, veterans of decades in the schools, became cynical, suspecting the central bureaucracy would ultimately regain control.
- Some LSCs were bogged down in conflict, unable to forge a consensus.
- Reports concluded that at best 25 schools--less than 5 percent of the total--had undertaken significant restructuring.
- Although reform had diminished the size of the CPS bureaucracy, the central office remained protected. Top administrators successfully did everything they could to save themselves.
- The 1991 financial crisis forced teacher layoffs and reduced school budgets. This had a negative effect on the ability of LSC to bring reform.

In spite of these limitations and problems, Moberg supports parent *voice* over parent *choice*. He sees Chicago's school reform as one of the most dramatic and ambitious responses of our American democracy to its promise of equal opportunity. Ironically, despite the historically unfair and inadequate support for urban education, public education carries an especially heavy burden in American culture, Moberg asserts: It is the key to “equality of opportunity,” the basis of social equality.

Moberg looks at the “free market” of parent choice vs. the democracy of parent voice this way: “If the system is sufficiently democratic...the public's voice can help shape the system as well as each school. There is a value, if we want a democratic society, in having educational institutions that recognize broader responsibilities than their own profit and loss. There is also value, both educationally and politically, in involving parents and communities as much as possible in the schooling of society's next generation.”

2002

“Chicago's Local School Councils: What the Research Says” By Donald R. Moore & Gail Merritt.
www.designsforchange.org/pubs/LSCresearch_feb02/LSCindex.html

Moore and Merritt researched about LSCs and provided the following verification of the power and effectiveness of the clear majority of Chicago's LSCs. They viewed the findings as largely validating the wisdom of the 1988 reform act.

- Parent and community LSC members are substantially better educated than the average adult resident of Illinois.
- The typical LSC meets monthly and nearly always has a quorum. The average parent or community LSC member devotes 28 hours per month.
- The CCSR carried out a detailed study of how a cross-section of LSCs carried out their key responsibilities. They concluded that 50%-60% were high functioning, 25%-33% were performing well but need support, and 10%-15% had serious inadequacies.
- CCSR also concluded that the vast majority of LSCs are viable governance organizations responsibly carrying out their mandated duties.
- In a city notorious for corruption, all objective evidence points to the fact that very few LSC members use their office to engage in corrupt activity.

Overcoming Weaknesses and Expecting More

Given the level of success of LSCs, the key issue is not whether LSCs should exist, but how all LSCs can meet the standards attained by the best ones. Persistent problems include:

- Intervening effectively to rebuild the 10%-15% of LSCs that are dysfunctional. Even if a new LSC or another drastic change is needed (based on a fair independent investigation), the long-range objective must be to help create a viable independent LSC that will lead the school effectively-- rather than to establish long-term central control.
- Significantly strengthening those LSCs that meet all their responsibilities but are not catalysts for significant educational improvement.
- Strengthening LSCs as one critical part of an overall strategy to improve Chicago's high schools, which have thus far failed to significantly improve.
- Increasing the focus of all LSCs on making specific changes focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Making Excellence a Reality

To build on the strengths of Chicago's LSCs and overcome weaknesses, those committed to excellent Chicago schools must take major actions to change the ways in which LSCs are currently treated and educated:

- Central office staff continues to interfere inappropriately in LSC decision making, often pursuing their own political agendas. LSCs and their supporters need to act to stop these abuses and create an oversight process for LSCs that solves problems and builds capacity.
- The current process for educating and assisting LSCs violates widely recognized standards for effective adult education. An infrastructure must be put in place independent of the school system's central office to provide high quality education and assistance to LSCs on a large scale.

Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement. August 2002. by Anthony S. Bryk, and Barbara Schneider. http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=103
www.amazon.com/Trust-In-Schools-Resource-Improvement/dp/0871541793

In a review of *Trust in Schools* by CCSR, it is noted that Americans agree on the necessity of education reform, but there is little consensus about how reach this goal. The rhetoric of standards and vouchers occupy center stage, polarizing public opinion and affording little room for reflection on the intangible conditions that make for good schools. *Trust in Schools* engages this debate with a compelling examination of the importance of social relationships in the successful implementation of school reform.

Over the course of three years, Bryk and Schneider studied reform in 12 Chicago elementary schools. Each was reorganizing in response to the 1988 Chicago School Reform Act. Drawing on years longitudinal survey and achievement data, as well as in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, parents, and local community leaders, the authors develop a thorough account of how effective social relationships—which they term *relational trust*—can serve as a prime resource for school improvement. The personal dynamics among teachers, students, and their parents, for example, influence whether students regularly attend school and sustain their efforts in the difficult task of learning. Such schools were more likely to show marked gains in academics.

Bryk and Schneider identify interactions and behavior characterizing various levels of trust in teacher-parent relationships. Four levels and areas were identified as: No Trust, Minimal Trust, Strong Trust, and Very Strong Trust. Each area's assessment is based on the type and level of quality regarding interactions concerning: parents as partners, respect and conflict between teachers and parents, parental support for the teacher at home, care for the school community by the teacher, and usefulness of communications.

2003

"Carson Elementary: An Exemplary Urban School That Teaches Children to Read." September, 2003. By Matthew R. Hanson and Donald R. Moore. Designs for Change. www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/carson_summ.pdf

In the 2003 report (Hanson & Moore, 2003), an analysis revealed how the school had exceptional student achievement results--with a special emphasis on how children learn to read. Carson's 1,240 students were 99% low-income, and two-thirds of them spoke little or no English when they entered school. Yet, in spring 2003, 68% of Carson's eighth graders met or exceeded the national average on the Iowa Reading Test, and 73% did the same in math. According to the report the efforts of Carson's LSC was significant:

- The principal, hired by the LSC, actively encouraged teachers and LSC engagement.
- Teachers in grade-level and school-wide leadership teams planned, shared, and made important school-wide decisions.
- The LSC had decisive power and shaped the school climate, pushed for a new building, maintained high parent involvement, and engaged them in reading level improvement.
- Great care was taken in hiring. Consequently, teacher turnover was very low.

2004

School Reform in Chicago: Lessons in Policy and Practice. Edited by Alexander Russo. www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=11351

School Reform in Chicago is a compelling set of perspectives on the wave of transformations through the collaboration of educators, community activists, parents, and politicians. The primary purpose of the book is to highlight key issues and dynamics that influenced CPS. The scope of the lessons learned can be used as a road map for other struggling urban systems.

The book also:

- a) acknowledges that large urban bureaucracies need to be streamlined, but asserts organizational and governance changes do not, by themselves, cause school district employees to get smarter and more effective in their work.
- b) urges reformers not to get caught up in battles related to organizational structures, but to stress developing people who will ultimately make reform happen.
- c) focuses on schools and community and the role of: 1) parents in reform and the history of decentralized LSCs, and 2) policy and politics regarding reorganization of CPS headquarters and the union's role in reform.
- d) presents powerful insights into what is truly needed to create lasting reform, emphasizing the concept of social trust as a cornerstone.

- e) focuses on the issue of upgrading professional development of teachers as major in moving CPS forward.
- f) presents both positives and negatives, thus reaffirming that school reform is hard work, highly political and often controversial, but that it is ultimately achieved by dedicated people who are willing to take risks and learn from mistakes to make it happen.

2005

“The Big Picture: School-Initiated Reforms, Centrally Initiated Reforms, and Elementary School Achievement in Chicago (1990 to 2005).” September, 2005. By Designs for Change.

www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/BP_summ_090106.pdf

www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/BP_rpt_092105.pdf

In The Big Picture, studies showed major achievement gains over a 15 year period in 144 public K-8 inner city grade schools. All were low achieving in 1990, but have on average, moved from 20% above the national average in 1990 to the national average of 50%. These schools called “Substantially Up Schools” are 87% low-income and serve 100,000 students--a network of radically improved schools in Chicago as large as the entire Baltimore school system.

These schools are almost entirely neighborhood schools that must accept any student from their attendance area who asks to be admitted. Each school has an elected parent-majority LSCs that select their principal. Staff is unionized.

The report published “Five Essential Supports for Student Learning” found in successful schools:

1. School Leadership Focuses on Success for Each Students. Effective leadership by LSC, principal, and teacher leaders; teachers carefully selected.
2. Social Supports for Learning (School Culture). A student discipline process promotes self-discipline; attention is paid to a student’s emotional as well as academic growth.
3. Family and Community Partnerships Support Learning. Families are made to feel welcomed and respected when visiting and encouraged to actively participate in school-wide activities. Community agencies aid a school’s improvement priorities.
4. Adults Collaborate and Learn. Teachers/staff work in teams; staff development includes assistance in the classroom.
5. Quality Learning Activities--with a special literacy focus: teachers teach both “reading for understanding” and phonics.

2006

School reform, corporate style: Chicago, 1880-2000. By Dorothy Shipps.

www.amazon.com/School-Reform-Corporate-Style-Government/dp/0700614508

Education researcher Dorothy Shipps (2006) studied Chicago school reform. She concluded that if corporate and teacher union leaders work together on behalf of school reform, they would be an unbeatable combination. Unfortunately, she also concluded that although Chicago business leaders want equal educational opportunity for all children, their judgment has often been clouded by the limits of their experience and sometimes resistance to unions. Why? Unions are an organized group with enough resources and independence to challenge them as their equals.

As a result of this problem, she suggests teachers unions create a coalition with urban public school parents on behalf of their common interests. This will create a new reform agenda, if possible – in opposition to corporate agendas, if necessary. Teachers, like urban families, have too much to lose to remain on the sidelines of reform and must build a powerful and effective teacher-community partnership.

This comprehensive summary of Chicago school history argues that the dominance of corporate solutions for urban school reform have several sources:

- extraordinary resources and power,
- a consistent corporate agenda, and
- institutionalized patterns of access,
- the popular belief that school is a lever for economic development.

If reform is to reach deeply into classrooms, Shipp concludes, *it might well require a new coalition of teachers' unions and parents to create a fresh agenda that supersedes corporate interests.* This study clearly shows that, in Chicago as elsewhere, urban schooling is intertwined with politics and power

2007

“Chicago School Reform: Lessons for the Nation.” January, 2007. By Julie Woestehoff and Monty Neill <http://pureparents.org/data/files/Final%20report.pdf>

“Chicago School Reform: Lessons for the Nation” reports the U.S. faces a critical choice. We can, 1) continue to follow the path of punishment and privatization promoted by business and political interests and enshrined in NCLB, or 2) expand the fairer, more effective strategies that have been evolving in the most successful schools in Chicago and elsewhere. This report takes a close look at both what research shows has not and has worked.

What has not worked?

The test-focused environment created by NCLB encourages these harmful practices. Among the ineffective, damaging practices carried out in Chicago are:

- educationally counter-productive central office interventions--most rooted in the misuse of
 - scripted curricula and reconstitution
 - high stakes testing, and
 - grade retention based on test scores.
- undermining local decision making
- increased privatization.

What has worked?

The report suggests alternative approaches to NCLB--sustained, continuous school improvement strategies shown to be successful:

- Improve funding adequacy and equity.
 - Chicago’s Mayor and CPS need to establish a fair, adequate and equitable distribution of resources within CPS.
- CPS must initiate a program of sharing best practices developed in its stronger school.
- Elected parent-majority LSCs must be the default governance structure in all non-charter schools.
 - Outsource LSC support/training to qualified groups and individual to avoid conflict of interest

- CPS must improve curriculum and instruction and foster high-quality professional development:
 - Drop scripted curricula: move away from “teaching the test.”
 - Ensure that professional development focuses on authentic, intellectually challenging and engaging curriculum and instruction.
- CPS must prioritize professional development; use a decentralized and collaborative approach.
- CPS must improve parent involvement training and practices:
 - Ensure that schools have access to high-quality training for parents and teachers on parents’ right to observe classrooms, help with improvement planning and evaluation.
 - Construct a comprehensive annual parent survey requiring all schools to report publicly.
- CPS must use quality assessment practices, and fair and beneficial accountability policies:
 - Ensure learning high-quality assessment is part of expanded professional development, i.e. formative assessment techniques.
 - Rely more on performance-based assessments than standardized tests.
 - Halt the grade retention programs.
 - Closely observe remediation, probation, and intervention provision and programs.

2009

“Still Left Behind: Student learning and Chicago's public schools” June, 2009. By the Civic Committee of the Commercial Club of Chicago
www.civiccommittee.org/Still%20Left%20Behind%20v2.pdf

A 2009 report by the Commercial Club of Chicago reviewed the previous 20 years of school reform. The report concluded that most Chicago students drop out or fail and related this to the vast majority of elementary and high schools, which do not prepare students for success in college and beyond. The report countered the then general perception that Chicago schools were gradually improving. The dramatic gains in the reported number of CPS elementary students who meet standards on state assessments were due to changes in the test made by the Illinois State Board of Education rather than in real improvements in student learning.

To make sure CPS is working the report recommended that credible information on student achievement is essential. CPS and the state should use rigorous national standardized tests. The Commercial Club recommended that the State Board of Education designate an independent auditor with responsibility for ensuring published reports regarding student achievement in CPS are accurate, timely and distributed to families and stay close in an easily understood format. Also recommended was providing families with meaningful school choice, including charters and contract schools. Choices offered parents would help spur all schools in CPS to improve. Finally, the report stated it was the quality of the teacher in the classroom, not the background of the student that determines if students succeed.

2010

Organizing for school reform; Lessons from Chicago. By Anthony Bryk, et al.
<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/books/osfi/prologue.pdf> Also see the 2009 PowerPoint presentation by E. Allensworth at www.communityschools.org/.../1/.../Elaine_Allensworth_CSwebinar...

In *Organizing for school reform; Lessons from Chicago*, the CCSR analyzed why students in 100 public elementary schools in Chicago improved substantially in reading and math over a seven-year period, while students in another 100 schools did not.

As a result, some main practices and school and community conditions for improving schools were suggested: school leadership, parent-community ties, and instructional guidance. Each tie directly to the membership and responsibilities of LSCs. Student-centered learning climate and professional capacity were also mentioned.

Bryk and his co-authors also analyzed the community context linking school improvement with the levels of social toxins such as poverty, racism, healthcare, uncertainty or unemployment (Ginwright, 2010) and social resources in school neighborhoods. This raised troublesome questions about Chicago's capacity to improve schooling in its most neglected communities without substantial parent and community engagement viable LSCs can provide.

What the book illustrates is the sizable number of Chicago schools that have improved radically, embodying a common set of principles which focus around building cooperation among all the adults who are important in a child's life (Moore, 2000).

2011

"Trends in Chicago's Schools Across Three Eras of Reform" September, 2011. By Stuart Luppescu, et al. <http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/downloads/5003trendsthreeras.pdf>

"Trends in Chicago's Schools Across Three Eras of Reform" finds that Chicago Public Schools have experienced tremendous growth in graduation rates over the past 20 years, but learning gains have been modest. The report tracks elementary and high school test scores and graduation rates in Chicago since 1988, when U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett proclaimed the city's public schools to be the worst in the nation. Key findings from the report include:

- Graduation rates in Chicago have improved dramatically, and high school test scores have risen; more students graduate without a decline in average academic performance.
- Math scores have improved incrementally in the elementary/middle grades, while elementary/middle grade reading scores have remained fairly flat for two decades.
- Racial gaps in achievement have steadily increased, with white and Asian students making more progress than Latinos, and African American students falling behind all other groups.
- Despite progress, the vast majority of CPS students have academic achievement levels that are far below where they need to be to graduate ready for college.

2012

"Chicago's Democratically-Led Elementary Schools Far Out-Perform Chicago's 'Turnaround Schools' Yet Turnaround Schools Receive Lavish Extra Resources" February, 2012. By Designs for Change. www.designsforchange.org/democracy_vs_turnarounds.pdf
www.substancenews.net/articles.php?section=Article&page=3089

The report shows what Chicago calls "turnaround" is actually the program called "reconstitution" and every reputable study nationally since the mid-1990s has concluded that reconstitution does not work. The most interesting fact is this research is not new, but backed now by years of data refuting the policy of reconstitution: the privatization of school management and firing of entire staffs to "fix" schools (Kugler, 2012).

The unheralded reforms brought about under the authority of parent-led, democratically-elected LSCs have been far more effective. The report on Chicago's democratically-led elementary schools notes:

- Evidence does not justify more of the School Turnaround Strategy in high-poverty schools.
- Each phase of the School Turnaround effort has been generously supported with extra resources, including for school leadership, teachers, staff, and facilities.
- Chicago must have an equitable transparent process for allocating desperately-needed resources. School communities have repeatedly sought these same resources now given to the Turnaround Schools, but have been denied.
- The academic progress of Elementary Turnaround Schools and their high teacher turnover rate, which undermines the basic culture of the school, the researchers say the resources devoted to Turnaround Schools can be better spent by supporting alternative research-based strategies.
- This study indicated that the high-poverty schools achieving the highest reading scores were governed by active LSC.
- Related research indicates that high-poverty elementary schools with dedicated strong LSCs and sustained test score improvements tend to carry out a specific set of practices and methods of organization:
 - strong but inclusive principal leadership,
 - engagement in school-wide improvement by effective teachers, active parents and community members, and students deeply engaged in learning
- A basic distinction between schools is:
 - high-scoring schools carry out engaging instructional activities that help students master demanding standards,
 - low-scoring schools focus on various forms of test preparation.
- In their practice of School-Based Democracy, the school community functions as a unified team and understands and acts on the close relationship between the issues facing the school and community.
- While even the highest-scoring schools, based on existing measures, need to improve, the practices and methods of collaboration characterizing high-poverty schools showing sustained improvement are clear. Thus, resources now used for Turnaround Schools must be shifted:
 - to helping these effective schools become resources for other schools, and
 - to support their own mutual continued improvement.

“Turning Around Low-Performing Schools in Chicago.” February, 2012. By Marisa de la Torre, et al. University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research.

<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/12CCSRTurnAround-3.pdf>

<http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/turning-around-low-performing-schools-chicago>

The study examined five different reform models initiated by the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in 36 elementary and high schools identified as chronically low performing. The five reform models were:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Reconstitution | 4. Academy for Urban School Leadership |
| 2. School Closure and Restart | 5. Office of School Improvement. |
| 3. School Turnaround Specialist Program | |

Changes in student populations varied across reform models.

- Schools undergoing these reforms and remained neighborhood schools generally served:
 - the same students, and the same types of students, as before intervention.
- Schools that were closed and replaced with charter or contract schools generally served:
 - more advantaged students after intervention.

- The teacher workforce after intervention across all models was more likely to be
 - white,
 - younger, and
 - less experienced.

Summary of Student Outcomes

- On average, Chicago elementary/middle schools that underwent reform made significant improvements over time. Four years after intervention, the gap in test scores between reformed elementary/middle schools and the system average decreased by almost half in reading and by almost two-thirds in mathematics.
- On average, Chicago high schools that underwent reform efforts did not perform differently than similar schools in terms of absences in grades nine through 12 or in terms of the percent of students on-track to graduate by the end of ninth grade

How Should We View These Results?

The study suggests turning around chronically low-performing schools is a process rather than an event. It does not occur immediately, but can occur when hard work and resources are sustained.

The 4 suggestions compiled in the “IES Practice Guide on School Turnaround” are:

1. As a result of case studies, schools must:
 - establish strong leadership focused on improving school climate and instruction,
 - strengthen partnerships across school communities,
 - monitor instruction,
 - address discipline, and
 - build distributed leadership among teachers in the school.
2. Maintain a consistent focus on improving instruction by having staff collaborate around data to analyze school policies and learning conditions.
3. Pursue quick wins that target critical but immediately addressable problems, including student discipline and safety, conflict in the school community, and school beautification.
4. Build a committed staff, dedicated to school improvement through collaboration.

This is consistent with research at CCSR which examined:

- 100 elementary schools that made significant progress over a 7-year period.
- 100 more that did not make such progress.

The research found that schools strong on at least three of five essential elements were 10 times more likely to improve and 30 times less likely to stagnate than those that were strong on just one or two:

- effective leaders,
- collaborative teachers,
- strong family and community ties,
- ambitious instruction, and
- safe and orderly learning climate.

http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/pdf/practiceguides/Turnaround_pg_04181.pdf

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