

to reach an educational goal she had let pass her by in younger years.

Miss Schumacher delayed her college education for 20 years, first marrying, getting a job, and raising five children before returning to school full-time.

"You and I were not students of privilege, but we are privileged students," she said. "We come from working-class homes. Some have come from faraway places and began new lives here."

She said many others like herself in school were also trying to reclaim a chance "we let slip by at an earlier age."

A total of 1,546 graduate and undergraduate students received degrees at the ceremony at the school's Brooklyn campus, while honorary doctorates were given to a distinguished group, including the feminist Bella Abzug and the musician Wynton Marsalis.

The chief commencement speaker, Robert P. Moses, recounted his role in the civil rights movement in the 1960's

and recalled its violence.

"They were my teachers and I was their disciple," he said. "They showed me how powerful it is to surrender your life to this freedom struggle."

Aloysius Barkley, 76, was the oldest graduate. "This is a journey that has lasted over 50 years," he said in an interview. "There have been some pitfalls but there's also been some joy. I was determined to get this. I wanted it so badly."

Those receiving honorary degrees, in addition to Mr. Moses, included the African American studies scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. and the former Brooklyn Dodgers pitcher Ralph Branca.

Polytechnic University

It took Edward Coppola 56 years to finish the work for the diploma he received yesterday from Polytechnic University. Mr. Coppola completed more than three years when he left to join the Navy as a fighter pilot in 1941. After the

war came a career as a supervising engineer, and finally he returned to Polytechnic, in Brooklyn, to get a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

He was among 1,019 graduates at Avery Fisher Hall receiving a degree in engineering and science.

Robert Catell, the chairman and chief executive of Brooklyn Union Gas, spoke to the graduates of the connection between Polytechnic and his company.

"Speaking for myself, I would paraphrase the popular philosopher Robert Fulghum," he said. "Most of what I need to know in life, I learned in engineering school. I set out as a young man to be the best engineer that I could be."

In addition to Mr. Catell, recipients of honorary degrees included Dr. Gian Carlo Rota, professor of mathematics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Dr. Sogo Okmura, the president of Tokyo Denki University. ■

45. Baltimore Sun

June 2, 1997 Category: Local

Principal's pursuit of Powell pays off

General addresses Randallstown High graduates a year later

By Jay Apperson
SUN STAFF

From the start, Randallstown High School Principal Barry F. Williams knew it was a long shot to nab one of the country's most sought after public speakers for his school's graduation. But yesterday he beat the odds and presented a man he called a "modern hero" — retired Gen. Colin L. Powell.

"The principal's been after me for two years in a row," said Powell, explaining why he accepted the invitation to speak at Randallstown High's commencement from among the hundreds he receives every year. "I like to speak to younger students in schools. More and more, I speak in elementary schools and high schools rather than colleges."

"They're young and impressionable, and they're still starting out," he said. "College kids are wonderful, but they know what they're doing. They don't need a lot of advice from some old codger like me."

During his 20-minute speech, Powell, the former military commander who turned decided not to run for president,

touched on traditional graduation themes. He asked the graduates to "salute" their parents, and then gave the young people advice on meeting the challenges that lie ahead in a rapidly changing world. He told them to learn from their failures while striving for success.

And Powell, who was chairman of the recent national summit on voluntarism, made a pitch for community involvement. He called on the Class of 1997 — the first class required to perform community services as a requirement for graduation — to maintain the spirit of charity.

"As you try to make more money, as you try to rise to a position in life, remember always to give something in service back to the community and the nation that has given you so much," said Powell, speaking to an audience of 2,500 at the Towson Center.

Baltimore County school officials turned out yesterday to greet Powell, the former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff — and perhaps the biggest name to address a county school graduation.

"I cannot recall our attracting a national figure of his stature," said

Superintendent Anthony G. Marchione, who has worked in the system for more than four decades.

Principal's pursuit

Williams said he first wrote to Powell to invite him to speak at the 1996 graduation.

He explained that Randallstown is a school with a middle-class, predominantly black population, where most students are headed for college. Powell said he had a scheduling conflict, so three students spoke "eloquently" at last year's ceremonies, Williams said.

But Williams renewed his pursuit with another letter in August.

"My pitch was: I described my school, and the need for my students to see that someone can make it if they essentially follow the process, play the game," Williams said before yesterday's commencement exercise. "Since my [school] population is predominantly African-American, I specifically wanted to have an African-American who epitomizes the fruits of hard work."

"Many of the middle-class students don't believe they can achieve. It's sad.

It's one thing for students lower on the socio-economic ladder to say, 'This can't happen for me,' " the principal said. "I just want them to hear from someone who has made it, and made it in a big way."

Last fall, he received word that Powell would speak.

Problem solving

Williams took over as Randallstown's principal in 1995, after a school year marred by discipline problems, disgruntled teachers, arsons and racial unrest.

He imposed new rules, and declared the start of a "renaissance of excellence."

Students who received their diplomas yesterday said Randallstown's problems were not unique, and added that

conditions have improved.

Jerrill Adams, a student government president who plans to continue his studies at Ithaca College in New York state, said some students who left the school now want to come back to take advantage of Randallstown's technological resources, such as ample access to the Internet.

"We are on the highway. We own the highway," Adams said.

Shani Donnell, the senior class treasurer, said, "Randallstown is a good school. It has to be because we got Colin Powell."

Traditional ceremony

Powell sat center stage yesterday as the ceremony unfolded with all the trappings of a traditional high school

graduation.

The school chorus sang, the school band played. Parents dressed up, and brought their cameras. The quiet was occasionally broken by a baby's cry.

The valedictorian, Boma Agboh, traced the students' growth, jokingly saying they started as "fresh meat — oops, I mean, freshmen" who grew more serious about their studies and their futures.

Then Powell addressed the students, saying, "My friends, at the end of the day, what truly counts is family."

Williams said he's been asked what he will do to top his coup of landing Powell as a graduation speaker. He answered with a question: "Will the Popemobile fit in the Towson Center?" ■

46. Dallas Morning News

June 1, 1997 Category: Local

Legislature OKs school-choice bill, sends it to Bush

By Terrence Stutz / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN - School-choice legislation that expands the state's charter school program and enhances the right of students to transfer out of low-performing campuses passed the Legislature on Saturday.

The measure would authorize at least 100 new independent charter schools across Texas and allow nearly 800,000 students to transfer to better public schools.

House members approved the bill 98-42, and senators followed after that, 22-7.

The proposal - the most significant education bill of the 1997 session - now goes to Gov. George W. Bush for his expected signature into law.

He said the legislation "gives tremendous choice to parents and students who are unhappy with the status quo to try something different and better, whether by moving to a different public school or starting their own charter school."

Opponents of the bill - mostly Democrats - asserted that the state was moving too fast in allowing more "open enrollment" charter schools.

State lawmakers limited the number of charter schools to 20 when they authorized them in a massive school reform law passed.

The schools are publicly funded, exempt from most state regulations - such

as class-size limits - and may enroll students regardless of where they reside.

Backers of charter school expansion say the Texas Education Agency has received nearly 370 applications even though the Legislature has yet to expand the program. The original 20 charters already have been awarded.

Besides the 100 new charter schools, the bill would allow an unlimited number of charter schools for students who are considered at risk of dropping out.

The measure's other major provision would allow more students to take part in the Public Education Grant program that allows students to transfer out of schools where a majority have failed the state's basic skills test.

The student transfer program was created two years ago by the Legislature but flopped, partly because of resistance by school districts in accepting the students.

To boost participation, districts also would for the first time receive financial incentives to accept the students.

In its final days, the Legislature acted on several bills Saturday.

GPA requirements

The Senate voted to require universities that use grade-point averages in admissions to set the same standard for athletes and nonathletes.

Backers say the measure, which needs House approval before going to the

governor, is designed to do away with a system in which some universities admit star athletes with lower GPAs and test scores than other freshmen.

The Senate sponsor, Royce West, D-Dallas, said the bill would require colleges to set freshman admissions standards based on the minimum grade-point average used to admit an athlete who receives a state-funded scholarship.

Others questioned the bill's effectiveness since the University of Texas, Texas A&M University and others use multiple admissions criteria. "It does nothing," said Sen. Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo.

Mr. West disagreed, saying, "It sends the right message, that academics is Number 1, athletics is Number 2 in the state of Texas."

Sex-offender bill

Seeking to crack down on sex offenders, lawmakers sent the governor a bill to provide up to 20 years of supervision for such criminals if they aren't sent to prison.

The measure targets community supervision related to a form of probation known as deferred adjudication, in which there is no finding of guilt and people can wipe their records clean if they stay out of trouble for a certain period of time.

Currently, the longest offenders can be put on deferred adjudication is 10 years.

The bill by Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, would allow that to be doubled for sex offenders and would impose other restrictions on its use to punish sex crimes.

Deferred adjudication has been used in child molestation cases because it can be difficult to have a youngster testify, Ms. Shapiro said.

The bill also would allow deferred adjudication only once for sex offenses and enhance penalties if someone gets deferred adjudication, then commits another crime.

Slacker students

Texans who keep taking classes without graduating could face higher

tuition under a bill backed by the Senate. The "slacker-student" bill by Sen. Teel Bivins, R-Amarillo, still needs House approval.

Texas students who have racked up 170 credit hours or more but haven't graduated would pay a price under the measure.

With some exceptions, state funding would be cut off to universities for any more courses the longtime students take. Universities then could charge higher, out-of-state tuition rates to residents taking more than the allowable number of courses.

Professor evaluations

Tenured professors at Texas universities could be fired for poor performance under a bill headed to Mr. Bush. Lawmakers have complained that once tenured, professors face few performance reviews.

A bill establishing such evaluations would require the reviews at least once every six years. Schools would determine the criteria for the reviews and could demote or fire professors.

Professors disciplined for their performance could challenge those actions in court.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. ■

47. Dallas Morning News

June 2, 1997 Category: Local

House-backed bill would ban athletes' special college entry

By Sylvia Moreno / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN - The Texas House, facing a midnight deadline on Sunday for passing bills before the Legislature adjourns this session, approved a measure to eliminate special college admissions standards for student athletes.

The admissions bill, which now goes to Gov. George W. Bush for his signature, requires Texas' public college and universities to apply the same admissions standards to all entering freshmen.

"When you establish the floor GPA, then that applies to all students," said Rep. Ron Wilson, D-Houston, the bill's author.

The bill, Mr. Wilson said, applies to any university that uses grade-point average as a factor in admissions policies. He said that if a university's policy does not refer to GPA but to class rank instead, the bill would still probably apply to the school because class rank is generally determined by GPA.

"Class rank is synonymous with GPA," said Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas, the Senate sponsor of the bill.

The bill - which originally required the schools to set higher admissions standards for athletes than those for other entering freshmen - had been strongly opposed by University of Texas and Texas A&M officials.

They said applying such a standard, for example, would effectively destroy

UT-Austin's nationally ranked, multimillion-dollar football and basketball programs.

In a speech on the House floor, Rep. Sylvester Turner, D-Houston, referred to the school's intense lobbying effort against the bill as "a downright shame."

"To make sure there are browns and blacks on their teams, they will weaken their standards," Mr. Turner said. "If the university can put forth the same effort to make sure athletes are diverse, they ought to put forth the same effort to make sure the universities are diverse."

The language of the bill was changed to say that all entering freshmen, including student athletes, would be required to meet the minimum GPA established by the school. That change, contend UT and Texas A&M University officials, exempts them from the effects of the bill because neither school sets a minimum GPA admissions criterion, relying on a variety of factors.

But Mr. Wilson and Mr. West disagreed. Some minimum GPA, they argued, is implicitly set by the school every year when it makes its admissions offers. And traditionally, some athletes have been admitted with lower GPAs and standardized test scores than their freshmen peers.

"If the question is if an athlete that comes in with a 2.5 GPA and a 900 SAT [Scholastic Assessment Test] score and

you have another student with the identical qualifications, should that regular student that doesn't play football or basketball be admitted?" Mr. Wilson said. "The answer is yes."

UT officials were not immediately available for comment Sunday evening.

With one more day before the Legislature adjourns, the Capitol was active Sunday on several fronts.

Rules on alcohol

People younger than 21 caught trying to buy, in possession of or driving under the influence of alcohol would face criminal penalties and the automatic suspension of their license under a bill sent to Mr. Bush.

Lawmakers, including Senate sponsor Mr. West, said the measure sends a clear message to young Texans: "You drink, you drive, you lose," said Mr. West, D-Dallas.

Under the bill:

- * It would be illegal for people younger than 21 to drive with any amount of alcohol in their blood system.

- * Underage drinkers who drive would lose their driver's licenses for 60 days on the first offense, 120 days on the second offense and for six months on the third and subsequent offenses.

- * They also would face criminal charges punishable by up to 40 hours of community service and \$500 in fines for the first offense and up to six months in

jail and a \$2,000 fine for third and subsequent offenses.

Under current law, drivers under 21 can have a blood-alcohol content up to .07 percent. Older drivers are considered intoxicated at .10 percent.

There also would be new punishments, including driver's license suspensions, for selling alcohol to someone who is under age and for purchasing alcohol for someone under 21.

Other measures cracking down on drinking and driving - lowering the legal blood-alcohol level from 0.10 to 0.08 percent and prohibiting open containers in a vehicle - failed to pass this session.

Property appraisals

The Legislature approved and sent to the governor a property-appraisal bill that falls short of Mr. Bush's effort to sharply limit the rise in property tax rates.

The measure would allow Texans to defer some of their property taxes when the value of their homes increased by more than 5 percent.

The House originally had sought to cap the rise in appraisal at 5 percent a year, House and Senate negotiators agreed instead to a 10 percent cap. They also agreed to allow homeowners to defer the portion of any taxes in excess of 5

percent.

Critics said it would only delay the effects of increased values.

Homeowners would pay 8 percent interest on the taxes they deferred and if subsequent appraised values went up by less than 5 percent, they would have to pay at least a portion of the deferred taxes.

Water conservation

One year after a drought that cracked Texas farmland, spurred local water-saving measures and dried up \$5 billion from the state's economy, the Legislature voted to approve a sweeping water conservation plan.

"This is milestone legislation that will be at the very heart of our legacy," said Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock.

He called the bill protection of "the resource most vital to future generations of Texans," adding that it "signals the beginning of a new era in which vision will prevail over long-standing differences and territorial feuding."

The Senate voted 31-0 and the House voted 140-4 to adopt a compromise bill reached by a committee of members from both chambers. The bill now goes to Mr. Bush, who is expected to sign it into law.

One of the bill's most important provisions is a data collection

requirement designed to pinpoint where and how much water the state has in an effort to develop ways to conserve and maximize future use.

A constitutional amendment that will go before voters in November would consolidate \$1.2 billion in existing bonding authority under the Texas Water Development Board to help fund local water projects.

Child care

Child-care facilities that violate health and safety rules would face a range of penalties under a bill sent to Mr. Bush.

The bill includes new registration of so-called family homes, where up to 12 children, including those of the homeowner, can be cared for after school. At other times, only up to six children not related to the homeowner can be cared for at one time.

The bill by Rep. Patricia Gray, D-Galveston, also would establish fines for child-care facilities for rules violations based on the number of children they care for with the highest fine at \$100. The lowest fine would be \$20 a day for each violation in centers that care for 20 or fewer children.

Staff writer Wayne Slater and The Associated Press contributed to this report. ■

48. Baltimore Sun

June 2, 1997 Category: Local

Novice school board faces 'daunting' deadlines **City's expectations are high for eclectic group of achievers**

By Jean Thompson and
Stephen Henderson

They are top-notch achievers in their own fields, but virtual novices at urban school policy-making. Nonetheless, the nine new members of the Baltimore City school board took on pressure-cooker responsibilities yesterday.

Although they are practically strangers and have held their positions for less than a week, state law gives them 15 days to appoint an interim school superintendent; a month to prepare for the expiration of five union contracts; a summer to draft an initial budget and survival plan for the district; and six months to find and hire a permanent chief executive officer.

Yesterday, the state law granted the board control of the chronically low-performing school system, and started the clock ticking on its deadlines. Decision-making must begin right away.

"It's a daunting time-table," says board member Carl Stokes, a business marketing manager and former city councilman who also serves on the board of the Child First tutoring project. "But schools are not like GM assembly lines that you can shut down while you retool and then reopen with better machinery."

"I'm cautiously optimistic, mostly because there's a lot of talent — people of not only good intentions but people with management expertise who know that we can't Band-Aid the system or think about quick fixes."

Common themes emerge when the individual board members cite their priorities for fixing the schools: improving the quality of teachers, their training and paychecks; reducing class and school sizes wherever possible; auditing and then re-investing the district's budget of more than \$700

million; and winning the public's confidence in the reform effort.

Short-term solutions will not be good enough because legislators and officials have staked careers, taxpayers' dollars, and the future of thousands of students on the five-year school overhaul outlined in the law that took effect yesterday.

Whether the board's newness will be a handicap or an asset remains to be seen: Only one member was chosen from the previous school board, and his tenure there was only 6 months old. Three are former teachers and one a former school psychologist, but some board members have logged little or no time in public schools.

Despite the sudden crush of deadlines, many members cite as their most important priority getting acquainted with their colleagues and the school

Catalysts for Learning

RECOGNITION AND REWARD PROGRAMS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

HELEN F. LADD

Educational policymakers are increasingly trying to hold schools accountable for the academic performance of their students. The most widely publicized approach to school accountability is "school choice." Choice advocates argue that empowering parents to choose among public (and sometimes private) schools will make schools more competitive and thus more accountable. A second approach, adopted with less fanfare by a number of states and localities, is to set up programs that recognize and reward excellent schools within the public school system. Recognition and reward programs provide signals and incentives much like those envisioned for a choice-based school system, with the purpose of improving all schools in the system.

In 1984 South Carolina embarked on a major education reform, which included a statewide program to recognize and reward excellent schools within the public school system. Seven years later, the Dallas Independent School District set up a similar program as the centerpiece of education reform.

Though these two recognition and reward programs differ in some important respects, they both measure student achievement and then rank schools by how effectively they increase student performance. Both then give the most successful schools financial rewards—direct bonuses for teachers and other school staff in Dallas, discretionary school funds in South Carolina. In both, the least effective schools are

subject to increased scrutiny and attention aimed at improving them as well.

Are the incentives working? It is too soon to hazard a final answer, but both programs have now been in effect long enough to provide instructive insights into the strengths and weaknesses of a recognition and reward approach designed to encourage everyone within a school to work together toward the main goal of education—academic learning.

Measuring Performance

The first step in holding schools accountable for student performance is measuring that performance. Few educators today regard standardized tests as a fully adequate assessment tool. They prefer newer forms of assessment that put more emphasis on higher-order thinking and problem-solving skills. Several states, including Kentucky, have moved to more ambitious forms of assessment. But Kentucky's system, and others like it, consume so much teacher time and are so expensive that they can be implemented in only a few grades. Furthermore, difficulties in comparing the results in one school with those in another make such assessments ill-suited to evolving accountability systems. For the near future, at least, the student performance measures will have to be based largely on the results of standardized tests. The challenge is to improve those tests so that they assess more accurately the advanced skills that students need.

Helen F. Ladd is professor of public policy studies and economics at the Sanford Institute of Public Policy at Duke University. She is the editor of Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education (Brookings, 1996). This article is drawn from a chapter in that book, "Recognizing and Rewarding Success in Public Schools," by Helen F. Ladd and Charles T. Clotfelter.

constitutions to adjust to more permissive federal criteria. Some have deliberately rejected the standards emerging from the Supreme Court, imposing aid restrictions that are much more limiting toward religious schools and the families who choose them. However, to the extent that these state provisions interfere with rights protected by the U.S. Constitution, such litigation will require a final hearing in the federal courts. In this sense the state suits represent a temporary legal detour rather than an insurmountable obstacle to school choice. Poor people are entitled to a quality education. Those whose religious beliefs require them to place their children in sectarian schools should not have that choice foreclosed by severe economic burdens imposed through rigid interpretations of the First Amendment.

The history of First Amendment jurisprudence, as written by some 20th-century scholars, could leave readers with the impression that the Founders harbored a deep fear, bordering on animosity, toward religion. To the contrary, throughout the early years of the young republic, education was entrusted to the ministry of various congregations. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights were crafted by men who believed that a robust religious pluralism is consistent with the principles of strong democracy. That conviction is supported by contemporary social science research. The monumental work recently completed by Sidney Verba and his colleagues, *Voice and Equality*, identifies a strong connection between religious involvement and civic involvement, both behavioral characteristics associated with the virtues of republicanism.

Politics, As Usual

It is hard to make sense of it all. Why such rancor over the issue of school choice in its contemporary form? Means testing has eliminated the risk of elitism and the danger of evacuating the public schools. The Supreme Court seems to have discovered an approach to accommodate choice, while at the same time guarding against a form of establishment that offends the Constitution. Parochial schools, for those who desire them, are a cost-effective way to offer poor children an opportunity to receive a quality education in a less segregated setting. The availability of public funds through means-tested scholarships can lead to the growth and development of new schools—parochial, private, and public. Even if taken to its logical conclusion, and the competition engendered by choice results in the closing of some failing public schools, the outcome is not a bad one for public education. Coupled with the evolution of the charter school movement—now flourishing in 22 states, resulting in the birth of hundreds of innovative public schools nationally—choice will ultimately raise the performance profile of public schooling in America. We need to close failing public schools and provide meaningful alternatives to those unfortunate students who have been forced to occupy them. School choice represents good public policy; yet it draws serious opposition.

A large part of the explanation became apparent in Jersey City last winter when PepsiCo announced its intention to fund a private school scholarship program

for low-income students. The Jersey City school district was about to be taken over by the state after a dreadful experience with mismanagement, corruption, and poor quality instruction. The Jersey City teachers' union, a subsidiary of the National Education Association, greeted the PepsiCo initiative with a threat to boycott the company's products. The press reported instances of vandalism against Pepsi machines. There were no public monies at stake in this case, no hint of a Constitutional dilemma. At issue was jobs, union jobs within the public school system. The union understood that if students began to leave the public schools to attend private institutions, it might eventually lead to a decrease in the number of teaching positions in Jersey City, an unacceptable precedent. Lost in the controversy was the fact that for the first time in their young lives, some children would have had a chance to escape the despair of a school system that had become a public disgrace. Under union pressure, PepsiCo terminated its plans.

Teachers' unions are an important voice in the policy process. They have played a crucial role in protecting the rights of teachers, improving working conditions in schools, and attaining more competitive salaries for one of our most essential professions. Union leaders such as Albert Shanker have been at the forefront of initiatives to upgrade teaching and performance standards in education. The American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association exercise extraordinary political power in Washington and the state legislatures. They have a long history of political involvement, and their agenda has often been shaped on behalf of progressive causes. But in the case of school choice, their influence has been used to oppose a policy that could enhance the position of disadvantaged students.

Perhaps it is unfair to expect teachers' unions to support programs they believe undermine their interests, just as one could not expect the well-intentioned executives at PepsiCo to continue a program that would compromise theirs. But school choice presents elected officials at the state and federal levels with real, albeit tough, alternatives. Sometimes acting on behalf of the disadvantaged, the have-nots of the political process, requires unusual courage, a willingness to incur the disfavor of the truly powerful. It comes down in the end to determining our public priorities—politics, as they say.

No, the politics of school choice has not changed very much, but the reasons once offered to oppose choice have begun to fade, exposing the process to more open scrutiny. Politics notwithstanding, many government leaders have begun to reexamine the old assumptions underlying an institutional arrangement that has condemned many poor students to a place in our worst public schools. The momentum has erupted from a diverse coalition of activists that includes blacks, whites, and Hispanics; liberals, conservatives, and libertarians; Republicans and Democrats. Change is in the air, and the new approach to school choice promises to create a level of opportunity for all children that was once the exclusive prerogative of the middle class. ■

Translating student performance into a fair measure of school performance requires taking into account wide variations in the socioeconomic backgrounds of students in different schools. It is no secret that student achievement is highly correlated with family background, most notably, for example, with the education of parents. *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, the landmark 1966 report on America's schools by James Coleman, showed that the socioeconomic characteristics of students explain far and away the largest share of measured differences in educational achievement. Measuring school performance without adjusting for variations in students' backgrounds would wrongly attribute all the blame for poor student performance, or all the credit for good performance, to the schools themselves.

One solution is to shift the focus from the actual test scores of students to the gains in test scores that can be attributed to the operation of the school. But this approach too poses problems. One is technical: how to isolate the component of performance attributable to the school. Accurate measures of key background variables, such as family income or parental education, are typically not available. The measures that are at hand—race or whether the child is eligible for the federally subsidized lunch program—are rough proxies only. The other problem is political. Adjusting test scores by background variables can be misinterpreted as a signal that some groups of students are less able to learn than others and are being held to lower standards.

Measurement Problems

When South Carolina launched its recognition and reward program, state officials decided to rank schools by their students' performance "gains" rather than by actual scores. To measure gains, they used year-by-year data on the test scores of individual students by subject area. A student's gain in, say, fifth-grade math was calculated as the difference between her actual fifth-grade math score and the score statistically predicted for her based on her fourth-grade test scores in math and reading. A school's "gain" index was then calculated as the median value of student gain indexes for all children



Translating student performance into a fair measure of school performance requires taking into account wide variations in the socioeconomic backgrounds of students in different schools.

enrolled in that school for the whole year.

State policymakers were disappointed to find that the gain index, which they expected to be bias-free, favored the schools serving the most affluent students. They attempted to counter that bias by dividing the schools into five clusters defined primarily by the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students as measured by eligibility for free and reduced price lunches. The most effective schools were judged to be those in the top quarter of each cluster.

Like South Carolina, Dallas based its incentive program on year-by-year student test data. But unlike South Carolina, it used elaborate statistical techniques to purge test scores of the effects of students' socioeconomic and racial status, including limited English proficiency and whether students are approved for a subsidized lunch. It also took into account the movement of students into and out of a school, as well as overcrowding in certain schools. School gain scores were calculated as the mean of the student gain scores for all students in the school during the year. As a result of all the adjustments, Dallas was able to rank schools with virtually no bias as to the students they served. All schools had an equal chance to win an award and be recognized as effective. But the statistical analysis underlying the adjustments

has proved so complicated that few people in the district fully understand it. Indeed, the program's complexity undermines its incentive effects by making it hard for school officials to make the link between the things they can directly observe or affect and the types of performance needed to win an award.

Table 1 compares the effects of various ways of measuring school performance. The table is based on test score data for all fifth graders in South Carolina for whom fourth-grade test scores were also available. Each row represents a different ranking of schools based on the fifth-grade scores. The numbers in each row are correlations of the school rankings, based separately on reading and math scores, with the percentages of the students at each school who are receiving free lunch or who are black. The closer the correlations are to zero, the freer the ranking is of bias against schools serving those students. In the first row, the

Table 1. Comparing Socioeconomic and Racial Bias in Various School Performance Measures

Student test score	Correlation of school performance measure with:			
	Percent of students receiving free lunch		Percent of students who are black	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Average score	-0.81	-0.61	-0.71	-0.55
Gain in score	-0.18	-0.07	-0.10	-0.11
South Carolina gain index	-0.29	-0.10	-0.21	-0.13
Dallas gain index	0.08	0.01	0.03	-0.04

Based on data for fifth-grade students in South Carolina. The closer the correlation is to zero, the more free of bias the school performance measure is.

school performance measure is simply the school's average fifth-grade test score. The large negative correlation coefficients indicate a strong bias against schools serving low-income and minority students.

Rows 2, 3, and 4 show what happens when school performance is measured by gains in scores, rather than actual scores. The performance measure in row 2 is the simple change in test scores from fourth to fifth grade. Row 3 approximates the South Carolina methodology, row 4 that for Dallas. In all three rows, the correlation coefficients are much closer to zero than those in row 1, thus providing a compelling case for measuring school performance by test score gains. The Dallas approach is clearly the most bias-free, though, as noted, its complexity and its potentially adverse signals, for example with respect to race, raise problems of another sort.

Neither South Carolina nor Dallas relies solely on the aggregated student test scores in judging school effectiveness. South Carolina considers student and teacher attendance and dropout rates in determining the size of the award winners receive, and Dallas also takes into account schoolwide measures such as student attendance and promotion and dropout rates.

Incentives and Unintended Effects

The goal of a recognition and reward system is to shape the behavior of school personnel in ways that will increase student learning. But, like any incentive program, it can be gamed or corrupted. It may also lead to narrow "teaching to the test" and, by creating losers as well as winners, may lower teacher morale. Anecdotal evidence from South Carolina and Dallas suggests that these problems are real. But experience in both states also shows how program design can help mitigate them.

One way to reduce the harmful effects of teaching to the test is to link the test closely to an appropriate curriculum. Others are to use more than a single test and to develop better assessment systems. Because Texas has a state curriculum and a statewide assessment

tool (the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, or TAAS), Dallas can tie its accountability system to the state curriculum. Dallas policymakers also use multiple outcome measures, including a nationally normed test, various end-of-year tests at the high school level, and SAT participation rates and scores. South Carolina uses only two tests, one a state criterion-referenced test and the other a nationally normed test, and gives the tests in different years, so its program may be more subject to the problems of teaching to the test than is the Dallas program.

South Carolina's classification of schools into five groups to determine effectiveness is based in part on variables under the control of school officials. Not surprisingly, anecdotes abound about how schools have tried to affect their placement—and their chances of winning the \$15,000–\$20,000 award that goes to the most effective schools. In Dallas, concern that schools might try to manipulate the set of students taking the tests has evoked a stern warning that any school trying to do so will be disqualified from the Awards Program. The use of gain scores rather than average scores reduces the likelihood of such manipulation by making it harder to determine which students could be expected to dampen the school's performance. Manipulation is even more difficult when the test scores are purged of the effects of family background.

In Dallas, teachers and principals in winning schools receive \$1,000, secretaries and janitors \$500. Given the relatively high stakes, it is not surprising to find outright cheating. At least twice Dallas officials have found evidence that school personnel tampered with tests to try to raise student performance. The existence of the longitudinally matched sample of student test scores helps Dallas officials uncover such flagrant cheating.

School-based incentive programs are not likely to erode teacher morale as badly as merit pay for individual teachers. But morale problems clearly remain. Awards in both Dallas and South Carolina are based on a school's performance relative to other schools. Thus, teachers can work hard and increase student performance more than in previous years only to find that teachers in other schools did even better. The result can be extreme frustration, anger, and disappointment, especially when few schools are winners. To combat that problem, Dallas introduced a two-tier system in 1994–95, awarding smaller grants to teachers and staff in schools whose performance exceeded predicted performance, thus boosting winners from 20 percent to about 50 percent.

Are Recognition and Reward Programs Working?

Have the recognition and reward programs increased student achievement? Because South Carolina's program was part of comprehensive reform, it is nearly impossible to isolate its effect. But Dallas offers some evidence for evaluating its program.

A carefully controlled comparison of trends in student performance in Dallas on the TAAS with trends in other large Texas cities is encouraging. During 1991–94, Dallas pass rates on the TAAS for seventh graders increased some 10–12 percent more than those

in Austin, El Paso, Fort Worth, San Antonio, and Houston. That finding is complicated by the fact that pass rates went up more in Dallas than in the other cities even during 1991-92, when the Dallas program was just being launched. Comparing pass rates between 1992 and 1994 reveals positive effects on the order of 10 percent for Hispanic and white students, but not for blacks. Moreover, Dallas pass rates rose more relative not only to the average of the five other large Texas cities, but also to specific cities within that group engaged in their own significant local reform efforts.

The higher pass rates do not by themselves prove that the program increased student learning. They could simply reflect better test-taking skills. But other measures also suggest that something good is happening in the Dallas school system. For example, attendance rates rose faster and dropout rates fell faster in Dallas than in other large Texas cities.

Of even greater interest is whether incentive programs will lead to more fundamental long-term changes in the schools that would provide a solid base for increased student learning in the future. Do the programs lead teachers to push for and receive better professional development? Do they encourage schools to find better ways to get parents involved or to identify and correct problem areas more quickly? Do they encourage better leadership in the schools? Although it is not yet possible to answer the first two questions, an answer to the last seems forthcoming: the turnover rate of principals in Dallas schools has increased greatly since 1991-92. Given the well-documented importance of school leadership and assuming the new principals are more capable than the old ones, the more rapid turnover could bode well for future performance.

Some Questions Remain

Experience with recognition and reward programs in Dallas and South Carolina offers several clear lessons. First, if such programs are introduced, school rankings must take into account differences in students' socioeconomic backgrounds. Second, the programs can and must be designed to mitigate certain potentially adverse effects. Third, evidence from Dallas im-



*School accountability
and incentive programs like
those in South Carolina and
Dallas can serve as
useful catalysts for greater
student learning.*

But they cannot stand alone.

plies that, at least for some groups of students, student performance can be improved.

But uncertainties remain. As the Dallas experience shows, trying to make the ranking system scrupulously fair to all schools generates measurement indexes that are difficult, if not impossible, for most people to understand, thus weakening the incentive effects of the program and undermining confidence in it. The challenge is to develop simpler measures of school performance that nevertheless take appropriate account of the background of the students.

Most experience with recognition and reward programs has been in the South, where teacher unions are not strong. As a result, they have been introduced from the top down. Given the key role of teachers in the delivery of education services, their support is crucial for the long-term success of such programs. Yet teachers are understandably nervous about being held accountable for the learning of students who may have little incentive to learn.

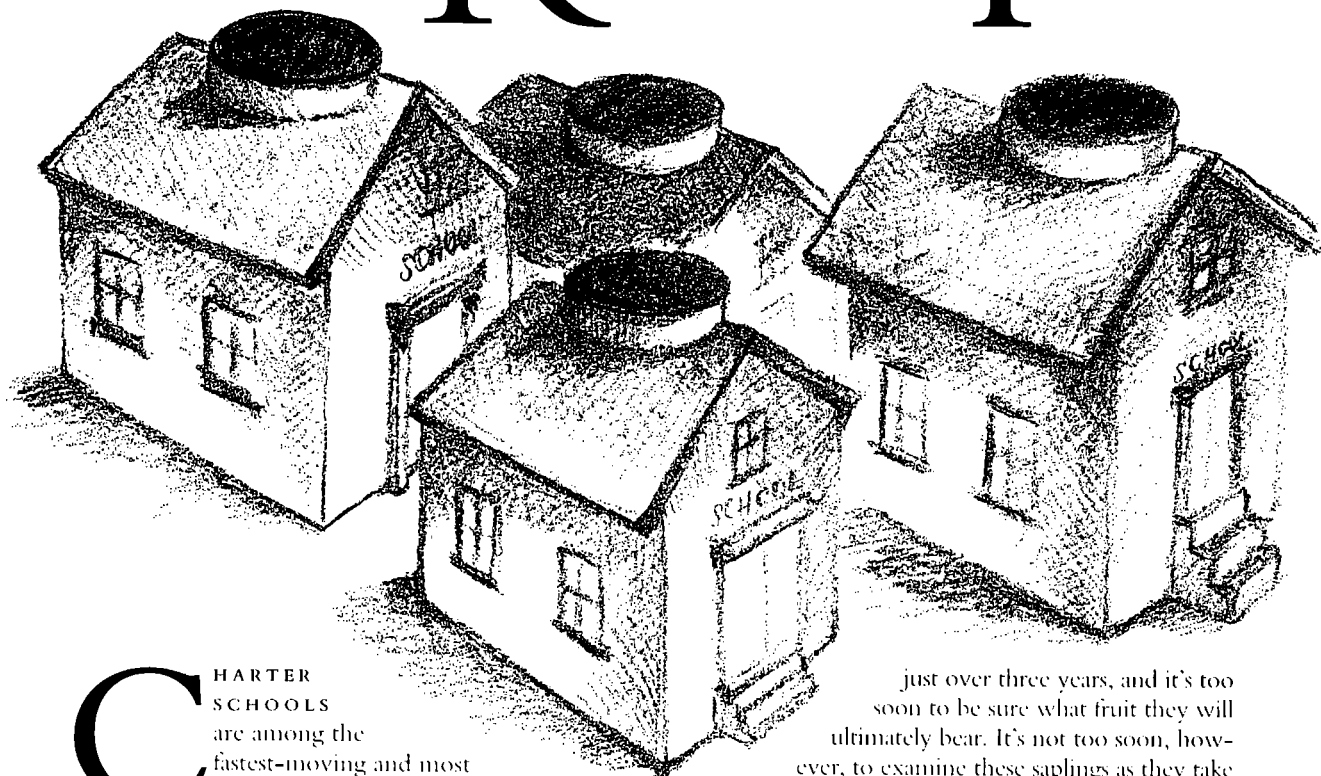
Recognition and reward programs force the state or district to compile a great deal of information that can be used to improve the management of schools. The challenge here for managers is both to make productive use of that information and to assure that it is not misused. Indeed, a primary argument for recognition and reward programs is to improve school

management. The danger arises that statistical methods suitable for ranking schools may be inappropriately extended to smaller units, such as specific classrooms, where small sample sizes make their use problematic.

School accountability and incentive programs like those in South Carolina and Dallas can serve as useful catalysts for greater student learning. But they cannot stand alone. For schools to respond best to new incentives, teachers will need to have new skills and access to good opportunities for professional development, school officials will need more control over their resources and policies, everyone will need better information about educational strategies that work, and state policymakers will need the capacity and resources to provide support for low-performing schools. Only if they are reinforced by such complementary reforms will recognition and reward programs meet their full potential in improving the nation's public schools. ■



FINDING THE RIGHT FIT



CHARTER SCHOOLS are among the fastest-moving and most promising reform strategies in American public education. More than 20 states have enacted enabling legislation, and almost 250 such schools were in operation in 1995–96, with as many as 400 likely next year.

A charter school is a new breed of public school, freed from most state and local regulation for a period of time (typically five years) in return for a solemn pledge—written into its “charter,” a sort of contract with the community or state—to produce educational success in its students. Such a school is open to the public, financed by the public and accountable to public authorities, and free to run itself according to its own distinctive educational vision.

No two charter schools are alike. Some are brand-new, others are former public (and occasionally private) schools that take this route to independence. Some were begun by teachers, others by parents, still others by nonprofit organizations and commercial firms. They come in many flavors—big and little, traditional and progressive, schools for gifted artists and schools for ex-juvenile offenders.

The oldest charter schools have been around for

just over three years, and it’s too soon to be sure what fruit they will ultimately bear. It’s not too soon, however, to examine these saplings as they take root and begin to grow. That’s what we’ve been trying to do, beginning with more than 35 schools in 7 states that we visited during the past year.

THE GOOD NEWS: INDIVIDUALIZED SCHOOLING

In our travels we have found the charter world a varied one, sprinkled liberally with different educational philosophies and curriculums. We do not necessarily agree with every one we have encountered. But we have seen none that seemed outside the pale of defensible, and in many respects familiar, educational thought and practice. We have stumbled on no witchcraft schools or Klan schools, for example. The most unusual we have spotted are a couple of “virtual” schools that use modern technology to instruct students, including “home schoolers,” who are not on the premises.

What distinguishes charter schools is not the originality of their educational vision but their uncommon commitment to it. Only teachers who share a school’s particular approach are hired—meaning that 100 percent of the staff really wants to do what the school says it will do—and only parents who want that ap-

*Chester E. Finn, Jr.,
Louann A. Bierlein,
and Bruno V. Manzo
are the research staff
of the “Charter Schools
in Action” project,
which was launched by
the Hudson Institute in
the summer of 1995.
This article is drawn
from a preliminary
report issued by the
authors last January.*

JP offers back-to-basics school plan

By DAVID AMMONS -
AP Political Writer

OLYMPIA (AP) - It's not a misprint: Legislative Republicans want to get back to the "ADC's" in the schoolhouse.

Majority Republicans on Tuesday offered a back-to-basics plan to overhaul Washington's public schools. It features what leaders called "the ADC's of education." That stands for academics with accountability, discipline and community involvement and choice.

Democrats and the teachers' union, however, see subtle attempts to undermine the Education Reform Act of 1993 and to push a conservative social agenda.

The bills would:

- Establish a statewide goal that 90 percent of all third graders in public school read at or above grade level. Schools that meet the goal would be financially rewarded and their principals' and teachers' evaluations would reflect the accomplishment. Districts that don't achieve the goal and make annual improvements would lose small amounts of state money.

- Authorize charter schools. Those are publicly financed independent schools that would largely work without regulations. Voters rejected such a plan last fall, but Sen. Steve Johnson, R-Kent, says the new version is vastly improved.

- Permit principals and districts to waive regulations that stand in the way of local efforts to improve schools. The bill would make it easier to remove problem teachers and allow districts to remove teacher assignments and the school calendar from collective bargaining.

- Strengthen schools' ability to crack down on gang activities and drug and alcohol problems, make it easier to kick out problem students, authorize school uniforms and allow districts to limit or ban student use of cellular phones or pagers.

- Allow alternative teaching certificates. People with expertise in a subject matter could be hired to teach that subject and would be under the district's supervision during probation. Such people could eventually be hired as regular teachers without going through the regular education courses and credentialing.

- Ban student smoking on school grounds.

"We must raise the academic standards and establish an atmosphere of discipline in classrooms that allows teachers to teach and students to learn," said House Education Chairwoman Peggy Johnson, R-Shelton.

Students should be able to read their diploma when they graduate, and the piece of paper should mean something, she told a joint news conference.

Her Senate counterpart, Harold Hochstatter, R-Moses Lake, said the academic basics, particularly reading, within a safe and disciplined school, are essential if graduates are to make it in the competitive 21st century.

One recent study showed that 44 percent of Washington's fourth graders are reading below grade level, Mrs. Johnson said. High schools and colleges are spending over \$100 million to give remedial courses to students who were passed along from grade to grade without knowing the basics, she said.

-more-

BACK-TO-BASICS, continued...

Gov. Gary Locke said he supports a charter-school plan being developed by Reps. Dave Quall, D-Mount Vernon, and Gigi Talcott, R-Tacoma. He said he also supports a strong education budget - he didn't give specifics - and is a big backer of the work of the state Commission on Student Learning.

That citizen panel is charged with implementing the education-reform law, which sets "world-class" standards for academics and largely leaves it up to local districts how best to achieve the goals.

The Republicans conceded that the law has been resisted by some of their colleagues, but said they are trying to make it work.

Democrats saw a more sinister agenda. The ranking Democrat on the Senate Education Committee, Rosemary McAuliffe of Bothell, said Republicans are trying to undermine the reform law while pretending they are not.

She and other Democrats object to the charter-school bill, waiver of regulations, alternative certification of teachers, and efforts to eliminate a "certificate of mastery" the reform law requires in addition to a diploma.

McAuliffe said she also sees "a social and moral agenda," including Republican legislation against positive references to homosexuality, establishing English as the official language, and rejecting state ties to the federal Goals 2000 program.

The Washington Education Association echoed her concerns.

Mrs. Johnson said she was disappointed in the Democrats' immediate rejection of much of the GOP package. She said they are incorrectly assuming the Republicans have hidden agendas.

"We need people from the other side of the aisle to come in and try to help write good legislation and not just second-guess all the time," she said.

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AVALON, Pa. (AP) - A school board member said his district's new Internet policy will be impossible to enforce.

The Northgate school board near Pittsburgh has forbidden students from obtaining pornography over the Internet. Violators could lose computer access.

The school board voted 7-1 on Monday night to require students and parents to sign forms stating that they understand the policy. The district is using some of its recent \$10 million bond issue to buy new computers.

The policy also instructs students not to reveal personal information to others via their computers.

Board member Samuel Sokol Jr., who voted against the policy, said teachers cannot patrol the Internet.

"You'd have to have a teacher standing over every student," Sokol said.

One Fifth of Schools Put On Probation in Chicago

Part of a Shift Back to Centralized Power

By DON TERRY

CHICAGO, Sept. 30 — In an aggressive effort to renew faith in the country's third-largest school system, Chicago's school board today placed 109 of the city's lowest-scoring schools on academic probation. It was the first time school officials here have used such a heavy stick in the long battle to improve the crumbling educational system.

Today's action, involving nearly a fifth of the city's 557 public schools, allows the board to replace principals and teachers if the troubled schools continue to do poorly after teams of experts help develop new instructional programs and teacher training.

A school was placed on probation if fewer than 15 percent of its students performed at grade level on national standardized reading tests.

The action was announced at a news conference today by Gery Chico, president of the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees, which was appointed in June by Mayor Richard M. Daley to replace the previous board and was given broad powers to improve schools. Its members are appointed by the Mayor, placing him in virtual control of Chicago's school system.

"We have no choice but to act and to act now, so more young lives aren't wasted," Mr. Chico said. "Sure, probation is strong medicine, but strong medicine is what is required."

At 8 of the 38 high schools on probation, fewer than 4 percent of the students were reading at grade level. At one school, only 2.5 percent of the students were at grade level.

Over the next two months in Chicago, eight assessment teams will work with the troubled schools. Then a team of current and retired principals will help put new plans into effect. The board did not set a specific deadline, but if schools do not eventually improve, under the terms of probation principals may be re-

moved from a school and sent to a desk job at the central office. Principals here work under four-year contracts, and when those contracts run out, they can be fired after a disciplinary hearing. By contrast, in New York City, principals are tenured to a particular school, and it is harder to remove them.

Probation in Chicago also allows the school board to remove a probationary school's local council, a group of parents and residents who help manage the school.

The local councils were the backbone of Chicago's vast school reform plan in 1989, which embraced decentralization and greater parental control as the way to improve schools. But Mayor Daley's recent steps have changed that focus, giving him broader central control.

As an "absolute last resort" a school on probation that does not improve could be closed, said Paul Vallas, chief executive officer of the school system. "We will do what's necessary to move the schools forward," he said. "We are at the base camp, trying to climb Mount Everest. We have a long way to go."

The steps announced today in Chicago are similar to New York City's six-year-old effort to improve failing schools. Nearly 100 of New York City's 1,100 schools have been placed on a list of low-performing schools by the State Education Department since 1989. Last fall, prodded by an aggressive new State Education

Commissioner, who threatened to intervene from Albany, the New York City Schools Chancellor, Rudy Crew, ordered the redesign of 13 of the worst schools, with eight getting new principals over the summer.

Phil Hansen, director of the department of school intervention here, said probation lasted a year but could be continued indefinitely.

But some school advocacy groups that have been active in the debate over school reform, like Designs for Change, are worried that the board "hasn't done its homework," said Joan Jeter Slay, the group's associate director.

Ms. Jeter Slay said she agreed that any school where less than 15 percent of the students are reading at grade level is in drastic need of help. But she called the board's plan "confused" and murky when it came details about how it would help the schools improve.

Faust Lopez, the principal of Jungman Elementary Schools, one of the schools on probation in the largely Hispanic Pilsen neighborhood, said he found out last Thursday that his

school was on the list.

He said he would have liked more time to explain that although only 12 percent of his students are reading at grade level, nearly 21 percent are performing at grade level in math.

"My school is in a neighborhood where the only place the students are really exposed to English is at school," Mr. Lopez said. "My school is in a racially isolated community. I welcome the experts to come help us learn how to do better."

Julie Woestehoff, executive director of Parents United for Responsible Education, an advocacy group that also trains local council members to manage schools, said that many of the city's schools had needed much more help and attention but that putting so many schools on probation "was not a healthy thing."

"I don't believe that scaring people is a good educational plan," she said.

At Martin Luther King High School, on the city's South Side, only 3.5 percent of the students are reading at grade level. But the school has improved on a state test, IGAP, for sophomores on reading, math and fine arts. "It's terrible," said Sequana Bryant, a 15-year-old student at the school, a state basketball powerhouse for years. "Why are they putting us on probation? My grades have gone up. The teachers are more into their work than they used to be."

But Sabrina Davis, an 18-year-old junior, said probation would make the teachers and the students "more attentive to their work."

That is what Mr. Chico and the school board hope will happen. "We have to turn this thing around," Mr. Chico said. "We've already lost too many kids. In the last 15 years or so, something really went wrong." Mr. Chico graduated from a Chicago school, Kelly High School, in 1974. Today, he placed Kelly on probation.

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Chicago Places 109 Schools on Academic Probation

CHICAGO (AP) - Nearly one-fifth of the city's schools were placed on academic probation because 85 percent or more of their students scored below the national average on standardized tests.

It is the first time Chicago's schools have been placed on probation.

"Some of the scores are so low, you could achieve a better score by accident," Paul Vallas, chief executive officer of the Chicago Public Schools, said Monday.

The school district, the third largest in the nation, plans to send teams of educators to each of the 109 schools placed on probation - 38 high schools and 71 elementary schools - to try to find out why students are failing and correct the problems.

The teams can replace principals and teachers and decertify school councils, the groups of parents, teachers and neighborhood residents that govern each school. They can close schools as a last resort.

"We are saying to failing schools, 'We will help you, but we insist that you do what it takes to earn the trust of the parents and students who expect you to provide a solid education,'" said Gery Chico, president of the Chicago School Reform Board of Trustees.

Schools were placed on probation if fewer than 15 percent of their students performed at grade level on standardized tests. Attendance, dropout rates and the ability of school leadership to develop plans to improve student performance were also considered.

To be taken off probation, schools must raise student performance above the 15 percent level.

Faust Lopez, principal of the largely Hispanic Jungman Elementary School, which was put on probation, said although only 12 percent of his students read at grade level, nearly 21 percent were at grade level in math.

"My school is in a neighborhood where the only place the students are really exposed to English is at school," Lopez told The New York Times. "My school is in a racially isolated community. I welcome the experts to come help us learn how to do better."

The lowest test scores were at Orr High School, where only 2 percent of students reached national averages for their grade levels in May.

An additional 31 schools were placed on remediation, a less stringent measure that allows school staffs to come up with their own plans to improve student performance.

The Chicago school system's 413,000 students attend 557 schools.

In June 1995, Mayor Richard M. Daley took over the school system, appointed Chico as president of the board and named former city budget director Paul Vallas as chief executive officer of a new management team.

In its first two months in office, the new board ended two years of a teachers' pay freeze with a four-year contract, discovered a warehouse full of wasted equipment and quashed perks for administrators.

Choice Leads To Segregation, Few Gains, Study Finds

New research bolsters earlier suggestions that school choice does little to boost student achievement or revitalize schools and instead fosters racial and economic segregation.

A team of researchers who reviewed five districts say those who take advantage of choice options have better educated and more interested parents and, therefore, likely would perform well in any school.

Unless choice programs address these criticisms, "it is unlikely that choice will do anything other than simply move high achievers ... from one school to another, mistaking the effect of concentrating strong and motivated students for an effect of the school or the choice system," concludes a forthcoming book commissioned by the Harvard University Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Mass.

But a school choice advocate says the research does not paint an accurate portrait of the possibilities in choice. For example, one evaluation studied magnet schools that compromise one small element of the Montgomery County, Md., school district.

"None of these are considered to be 'school choice' districts in the sense that they try to extend the options to the maximum number of

students," said Jeanne Allen, executive director of the Center for School Reform.

One of the report's authors said the Harvard project decided to publish the results of evaluations begun when a group of researchers convened to discuss choice several years ago.

"We chose the five [districts] where sound evaluation work was going on," said Bruce Fuller, an associate education policy professor at Harvard. "We're hoping to encourage sound evaluation over time. It's critical [to have] so we get beyond the polemics."

Fuller used the results of the research to publish a policy brief for the National Conference of State Legislatures, which discussed the issue at its annual meeting this month in Milwaukee.

But the current debate will evoke familiar refrains as Congress and state legislatures consider choice.

Opponents will cite the Harvard report and others as evidence that choice will separate the "haves" from the "have nots" of educational and economic achievement. Choice backers will counter that vouchers ultimately will force schools to change or shut down.

(more)

Choice Leads To Segregation, Few Gains, Study Finds (Cont.)

An as-yet un-introduced House school reform bill would let school districts use federal funds to give vouchers to parents to spend in public or private schools. Ohio and Wisconsin recently passed voucher programs that would let students choose among all schools, including parochial schools, and several states are considering similar proposals.

No Educational Change

Regardless, the nation's longest choice experiment in Milwaukee has failed to spark improvement in student learning, according to an evaluation of the program.

The almost 1,000 students attending nonsectarian private schools showed small, short-term gains when compared to their peers. But by the programs' third year, choice participants' reading scores were no different from their peers, according to University of Wisconsin researcher John Witte.

In a separate study of choice in San Antonio,

researchers found that rewarding high-achieving students with a choice of schools disproportionately leaves out low-income children.

And choice hasn't appeared to sway school officials in those cities and others to overhaul their offerings, the report adds.

"It seems unlikely that choice, by itself, will stimulate creativity and improvement in the development of new, more effective educational programs," it says.

The Harvard-sponsored researchers also studied choice in St. Louis' desegregation plan and Detroit's school reform program.

A summary of "School Choice: The Cultural Logic of Families, The Political Rationality of Institutions" is free from Helen Rodriguez, Harvard University Graduate School of Education, 6 Appian Way, Cambridge, Mass. 02138, or fax (617)496-3095. —David Hoff

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◆ Wofford To Head National Service

Efforts: President Clinton has picked former Sen. Harris Wofford, D-Pa., to head the Corporation for National Service, which runs the AmeriCorps program.

Wofford, whose appointment needs Senate approval, would fill the chief executive officer slot left by Eli Segal, who will be nominated to the group's board of directors.

—Matthew Dembicki

DPS cracks down 36

Shape up or ship out. That is the blunt message of a new Denver school policy that will rate elementary schools according to their success in educating their pupils and restaff the ones that don't measure up.

The new rating policy — tougher than any in recent memory — was outlined by Superintendent Irv Moskowitz in 1995 after a property-tax hike to bolster school revenue failed at the polls. Now the school board is prepared to put it in place this fall.

Effectiveness of each school will be measured by the number of pupils who earn passing grades. In schools that fail to qualify or at least show progress, principals and teachers — perhaps entire staffs — will be reassigned and replaced.

The announcement has angered members of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association, who complained that they weren't consulted on the new plan and were quick to note that some of the problems in under-achieving schools go beyond teachers' control. They cited poverty and parental indifference as such factors, and added that the new plan raises a number of contractual issues that will have to be addressed.

The union's complaints are understandable, for the plan does put teachers on a spot resembling a bull's-eye. But the rigidity of the union's job security and work rules and the reputation of teachers' unions for blocking — or at least resisting — unwelcome change

to protect their own narrow interests are undeniably part of the problem.

There is plenty of evidence that some elementary schools must do better. Last spring, one-fourth of Denver's 80 elementary schools scored at or below the 30th percentile on basic skills tests, which is well below the 50th percentile average for schools nationwide.

Under "process redesign," DPS staffers will track the educational progress of pupils in such low-scoring schools. Then they will evaluate each school, considering parent involvement, ethnic and economic factors and the efforts each one has made to improve.

BUFFALO NEWS

FEB 14 1997

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We can't neglect the need for a skilled work force

President Clinton's new budget is yet another expression of Washington's effort to encourage higher education at the expense of our gradually diminishing industrial base. Wholesale tax credits for parents who nudge their children into college says to our youths that a college degree is the only road to success.

The fact remains, however, that most of all jobs in our country require nothing more than a high-school education. This encouragement into college is commendable but especially exasperating to the thousands of businessmen who are having a desperate time hiring eligible replacements for their retiring skilled workers.

Those of us in industry are now fighting an uphill battle finding a way to provide the workplace skills we need to keep our factories producing the high-quality products demanded of us. Training for entry-level workers with adequate skills to satisfy even the minimal requirements of industry is woefully lacking.

High-school students should, first of all, be counseled that the smart alternative to a college education is to develop a skill that businesses or

industry will embrace. If done with enthusiasm, this will create the demand for vocational training. The schools will then re-establish the curriculum and the classrooms for long-term training programs.

Our legislators should revise Mr. Clinton's budget proposals — not to do away with the tax credits and deductions currently directed toward higher education, but to include these same incentives for students who choose instead to be trained in careers relating to business or industry.

They should also restructure the funding programs already in place to include financial assistance for either updating or complete replacement of training facilities.

The time is now, and the need is not only urgent, it is everywhere. A skilled work force is the backbone of business and industry. Without it we will stagnate.

BOB RODGERS

*President, Rodgers Welding Supply
Buffalo and Lockport*

The teachers are correct that there's no guarantee that replacing principals or teachers will lift schools out of the blabs. But, from a practical standpoint, it is also true that a teaching staff can be far better tuned and controlled than elusive socio-economic influences, and for that reason the school board is right to focus on the teachers it hires.

Some substandard schools probably won't respond to staff changes, and in such cases the school board is leaving open such options as contracting their operation out to private firms like the for-profit Edison Project.

The school board's immediate focus, however, is on the performance of teachers. It is entitled to do this, and in the interest of education it is obligated to.

HISD opts for campus choice plan

Transfers limited by available space

By MELANIE MARKLEY
Houston Chronicle

AI

Houston school trustees voted Thursday to give parents a choice in deciding where their children will attend school, as long as space is available and they provide the transportation.

The plan, approved unanimously on first reading, expands the options for Houston Independent School District parents beginning next fall, but it does not affect magnet schools with selective admission policies. The board will vote again Feb. 20 to finalize approval.

"The more freedom you give people, I think, the more enthusiastic they are going to be about public education," said board President Don McAdams.

Houston Superintendent Rod Paige said, however, that he has no idea at this time what impact the new policy will have on the district.

"It will be a new concept for us, and we fully expect there will be some adjustments made as we go," Paige said. "We are trying to provide opportunities for choice, but that is going to be limited by space availability. How much of a demand there will be for choice, we have no way of judging that right now."

Trustee Paula Arnold said the district should not mislead parents into thinking they can transfer their children to any school they want.

"The truth is, we are a crowded

district. And the truth is, most of our very attractive schools are full," she said.

Some 65 schools are now so crowded that new students moving into the neighborhood are turned away and bused to the closest facility with space.

Many of the plan's details remain to be decided. Officials said principals will be asked to verify the amount of space they have for students from elsewhere in the district.

"All we are trying to do right now is get the process going, to find out how much room we do have in the schools," said Deputy Superintendent Faye Bryant.

School officials said the district will first accept magnet school transfers and majority-to-minority transfers before determining who can qualify for space-available transfers.

A majority-to-minority transfer allows students to withdraw from a school where their race is in the majority and instead attend a school where they would be in a racial minority.

As part of the new policy approved Thursday, majority-to-minority

transfers will now be assigned by a lottery system rather than on a first-come, first-served basis. Bryant said people camp out overnight to get choice assignments, which raises concerns of safety.

Paige also issued a call for more campus charter schools, which draw students from throughout the district. Charter schools and charter programs are created by people and groups wanting to rid themselves of regulations in exchange for proven performance.

At present, the district's campus charters include former Principal Thaddeus Lott's Coalition for School Improvement Charter

Schools, KIPP Academy, Project Chrysalis and Project YES.

In other business:

Trustees voted to begin demolition of Houston Gardens Elementary School and seek bids to replace it for about \$4.9 million. The northeast Houston school was badly damaged when its cafeteria roof collapsed two weeks before school started in August.

The issue has been up in the air for several months while officials decided whether to repair, rebuild or relocate the school, which has had declining enrollment.

Officials had earlier said it would cost \$7.8 million to replace the school. But after reviewing plans to

scale down the size, they estimated it could be rebuilt for significantly less cost.

Trustees voted 5-2 to reject a self-regulating plan for dealing with complaints of board micromanagement.

The proposal by McAdams would have given the board president the authority to mediate complaints from employees who accuse a board member of meddling. Complaints not resolved would have been addressed by the full board.

McAdams said a community advisory committee had recommended the plan in response to state Comptroller John Sharp's performance review, which criticized

board members for micromanaging the district.

But Trustee Carol Galloway said it was never Sharp's intent for board members to govern each other on the matter. Trustee Esther Campos said the policy fails to address what happens if the board president is the one accused of micromanaging.

McAdams joined Galloway, Campos, Arthur Gaines and Olga Gallegos in voting against the proposal, but he said he would bring it up again for another vote. Trustees Laurie Bricker and Arnold voted for it, while trustees Ron Franklin and Clyde Lemon were absent.

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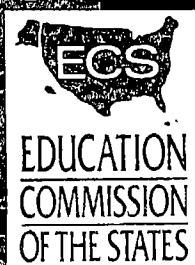
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Va. School Plan Focuses On Testing

Consistently Poor Results Could Lead To State Takeovers

By Spencer S. Hsu
and Robert O'Harrow Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writers

Virginia public schools would be overhauled with tougher graduation requirements and a stronger focus on basic subjects under a proposal released yesterday, and troubled schools would face the threat of a state takeover.

The long-awaited plan is the second half of Gov. George Allen's program to improve schools. Virginia's 133 school districts began following new state curriculum guidelines for each grade level last fall. The rules announced yesterday spell out how those academic standards would be enforced. The state Board of Education will hold public hearings on the proposal and adopt a final version in May.

Under the plan, all high school students—starting with the class of 2001—would have to pass new tests in 11th grade in English, math, science and social studies to graduate.

Individual schools whose students consistently performed poorly on those tests—or on new standardized tests to be given in third, fifth and eighth grades—would get a warning from the state. If scores did not improve, the schools would get a rating of "unsatisfactory" and then face the threat of a state takeover through court action.

Local districts also would be urged to hold back third-, fifth- and eighth-graders who fail their tests. Elementary school students would have to spend more than three-fourths of the school day studying English, math, science or social studies, and high school students would need to take additional courses in math, history and science.

In addition, schools would have to make public their student test scores and their attendance, dropout and crime rates for the last three years, a step intended to increase community pressure on failing schools.

For the first time, Virginia's school requirements "will have rigor. They will have vitality," state Superintendent of Public Education Richard T. LaPointe said in announcing the 40-page plan known as the Standards of Accreditation. "It was obvious we had dumbed down our courses and requirements."

Local school officials and parents generally praised the proposal, which the state Board of Education has been working on for seven

months. But many had reservations about aspects of the program, just as they have harbored doubts throughout Allen's three-year-old drive to overhaul schools.

Robert R. Spillane, superintendent of Fairfax County schools, where one-sixth of Virginia's students are schooled, said that he has yet to study the plan but that he believes that Fairfax's academic requirements already exceed what the state is proposing.

He said the linchpin of the program is the quality of the new state

exams, which have yet to be made public. The exams are to be given for the first time in the spring, although the results won't count until next year's round of testing. "If [teachers] are not teaching what's being tested, then there's a real problem," Spillane said. "Those are the tail that are going to wag the dog."

Prince William Superintendent Edward L. Kelly, whose district is the state's third-largest, said the heavy emphasis on the four basic subjects easily could crowd out art, music, technology and other electives.

By requiring elementary schools

to devote 76 percent of classroom time to the basics and middle and high schools 57 percent, Kelly said, "what you're doing is saying to some children, 'We're not going to give you the options.'"

Another reason for uncertainty, school administrators said, is that the state board still has not explained how many students would have to fail tests for a school to receive a warning. That issue will be addressed in another set of rules to be announced in 1998.

Still, the state proposal drew sighs of relief from legislators and educators who have been frequent critics of the conservative school board. They had feared that board members might use the accreditation

rules to go after such targets as sex education and guidance counseling.

Del. Kenneth R. Plum (D-Fairfax) sponsored a bill last month that would give the General Assembly final say over the accreditation rules, saying he feared that the board would try to appeal to religious conservatives. Yesterday, he said that the board had issued "a much more acceptable product" and that the legislative pressure had paid off. The General Assembly passed Plum's bill, but Allen has said he will veto it.

The Virginia Education Association, the state's largest teachers union, and the Virginia School Boards Association were silent on the proposal, saying they had not reviewed it sufficiently to comment.

Alfred E. Butler, executive director of the Virginia Association of School Superintendents, praised the plan but warned that increased course requirements could mean new costs, for additional teachers and resources such as science labs.

The accreditation standards define the minimum requirements that Virginia's 1,900 public schools must meet to retain academic certification.

In contrast to yesterday's proposal, the current accreditation system allows local districts to certify on their own that they have met state

More...

Va. School Plan Focuses On Testing

continued...

standards. The guidelines also focus largely on nonacademic areas such as school building size, grounds upkeep and student safety.

No school has ever lost accreditation under the current system, La-Pointe said.

Maryland already has adopted rules that hold schools accountable for their students' performance on state tests.

More than three dozen schools, most located in Baltimore, have become candidates for state takeover because of consistently poor results on the tests, which are given to third-, fifth- and eighth-graders. Dozens of other schools across the state received cash bonuses last fall for showing improvement on the tests.

The new Virginia rules would increase from 21 to 23 the number of credits students need for a standard high school diploma. For an advanced diploma, which 47 percent of the 1994 graduating class received, the number of credits would increase from 23 to 27.

The plan also makes virtually obsolete the six-year-old Literacy Passport Test. That exam, first given in the sixth grade, is now the only test Virginia students must pass to earn a high school diploma. About two-thirds of students pass the test the first time, and almost all students in the class of 1996 had passed by their senior year.

That standard pales against national measures of student achievement. For example, only 26 percent of Virginia students passed the National Assessment of Educational Progress fourth-grade reading test in 1994, and 19 percent passed a national eighth-grade math test in 1992.

Educators outside Virginia said that the state's proposal is in line with what a majority of states are doing but added that the plan is notable for its speed and breadth.

"In one form or another, standards are being added in states everywhere," said Chris Pipho, spokesman for the Education Commission of the States, a nonprofit group that provides research and advice to state education officials. But the Virginia board, he said, "is taking a pretty aggressive stand."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To read the full text of Virginia's *Standards of Learning for English, history, math and science*, click on the above symbol on the front page of The Post's site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.washingtonpost.com>

THE WASHINGTON POST

FEBRUARY 25, 1997

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RAISING THE BAR

As part of Gov. George Allen's program to improve Virginia's public schools, a proposal was released yesterday spelling out how new academic standards would be enforced.

Proposed standards for school accreditation

- All students would have to pass a new state test in 11th-grade to graduate. The requirement would take effect with the class of 2001.
- Schools would be encouraged, but not required, to fail students who don't pass state tests in the third, fifth and eighth grades and to make them repeat the grade.
- Schools would be rated based on the percentage of their students who pass those various tests.
- Elementary schools would have to spend 76 percent of the required school day on English, math, science and social studies.

- Middle and high schools would have to spend 57 percent of the required school day on those basic subjects.
- High school students would have to take additional courses in math, history and science.
- The number of academic credits needed for a standard high school diploma would increase from 21 to 23. The number of credits required for an advanced diploma would increase from 23 to 27.

What happens if schools don't meet standards

- Schools with low student test scores would receive a warning from state officials and would have two years to show improvement.
- Schools with a pattern of chronically low scores would be judged "unsatisfactory" and ultimately could be taken over by the state.