

**BROWARD**

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School officials link safety, dress codes

By **DANIEL de VISE**
Herald Staff Writer

Student crime is dropping faster at Broward schools that require uniforms than at schools without the strict dress codes, district officials announced Tuesday.

From fall 1996 to fall 1998, school crimes fell by 34 percent at elementary schools with mandatory uniforms. Crime fell by 22 percent at elementary schools without uniforms for the same period, according to a district analysis. Schools with optional uniform policies were not studied.

In middle schools with uniforms, crimes declined by 35 percent during the same time span. Crime fell by 24 percent in schools without uniforms.

District leaders are highlighting the relationship between falling crime and uniforms as the popularity of school uniforms surges in Broward schools.

At least 70 elementary and middle schools plan to have students in uniforms this school year, up from 50 campuses last year, according to an informal survey by The Herald.

Crime has been falling steadily over the past few years in the Broward school district, a trend attributed to increasing prevalence of security cameras, law enforcement officers and conflict resolution classes on campus. The trend is expected to continue.

What's new is the finding that crime is falling faster at schools with mandatory student uniforms than at schools without them.

"It does seem to suggest a positive effect," said Laura Green, a researcher with the school district who wrote the 26-page status report on uniforms.

The study compiles "critical incidents," which the district defines as all student infractions that require investigation by police or other emergency personnel.

They range from fights and vandalism to sexual assault and arson.

Green cautioned that the report draws no conclusion as to whether students commit fewer crimes as a direct result of wearing uniforms.

But educators nationwide have embraced school uniforms as a solution to a host of campus problems. Other school systems have reported reduced campus crime at schools with uniforms. Anecdotally, educators and parents say children seem to behave better and to treat one another as equals when everyone dresses alike.

"Young people tend to behave the way they dress," said Ronald Stephens, executive director of the nonprofit National School Safety Center in Westlake, Calif. "When you begin to control and manage student dress, you also begin to affect student performance."

But not every school system has found a link between uniforms and school safety. Last year, frustrated Miami-Dade school leaders announced that fights had nearly doubled in a four-year span at middle schools with uniforms. Results from elementary schools were

inconclusive.

Uniforms remain popular in Dade, where 209 schools have mandatory uniforms.

In Broward, district researchers found a range of evidence that matching dress is improving student behavior and campus climate:

The share of students who reported feeling safe from crime at school rose from 71 percent in 1996-97 to 77 percent in 1998-99 at elementary schools with mandatory uniforms. That finding is based on annual student surveys conducted in all schools.

Among teachers, the share who said they felt safe at school rose from 76 percent to 83 percent in the two-year span studied at elementary schools with mandatory uniforms.

Feelings of safety increased at schools without uniforms, too, but to a smaller degree.

The Broward study is the latest dispatch in a national dialogue on school uniforms that goes back to the dawn of the uniform movement in the late 1980s.

Ten years ago, a tiny handful of the nation's public schools had students in uniform. But by 1998, according to a survey by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, 11 percent of elementary and middle schools nationwide required uniforms.

In Broward, the school uniform movement has grown from two schools in 1990 to at least 70 elementary and middle schools in the coming school year.

With school district support lukewarm at best, the uniform movement has spread mostly through PTA meetings and school newsletters.

"Kids look great when they're dressed like this," said Cathy Victor, a Weston parent. "They look like they're ready to learn."

Victor has children in Everglades Elementary and Tequesta Trace Middle, both in Weston. The middle school adopted a uniform policy last year; the elementary school enacted one for this fall.

Under current policy, a school can require students to wear uniforms only upon the approval of two-thirds of the families affected.

A uniform policy in high school would have to be initiated by students -- a virtual impossibility, because student aversion to matching dress tends to peak in the upper grades.

A family that doesn't wish to participate in a mandatory uniform policy may opt out by filling out an exemption form and then meeting with the principal or a designee to discuss the exemption. Despite those hurdles, the uniform movement seems to be gathering steam. At least 20 schools approved new policies for the fall. Some of the momentum came in response to the Columbine massacre. After the shooting, School Board member Diana Wasserman asked all schools to reconsider uniforms.

"To most of us, it's a no-brainer," said William Bell, principal of Silver Lakes Middle School in North Lauderdale.

The school adopted a uniform policy this year at the urging of parents, who were tired of shopping for name brands, and teachers, who were tired of the constant dress code violations.

"It's virtually a daily battle with somebody -- the backless shoes, the short tops, the short shorts," Bell said. "Daily."
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PUTTING ON UNIFORMS

In an effort to reduce crime and misbehavior, at least 20 Broward schools are

outfitting students in uniforms this fall, according to an informal survey by The Herald. They will join 50 other elementary and middle schools already in uniform. (At most schools, families that don't wish to participate can sign a waiver to opt out of the rule. A few of the policies are completely voluntary.)

Schools adopting uniform policies this fall:

Charles Drew Elementary, Pompano Beach

Coral Park Elementary, Coral Springs

Everglades Elementary, Weston

Fox Trail Elementary, Davie

Griffin Elementary, Cooper City

Maplewood Elementary, Coral Springs

Norcrest Elementary, Pompano Beach

North Lauderdale Elementary

Park Springs Elementary, Coral Springs

Sheridan Park Elementary, Hollywood

Tedder Elementary, Pompano Beach

Westchester Elementary, Coral Springs

Apollo Middle, Hollywood

Indian Ridge Middle, Davie

McNicol Middle, Hollywood

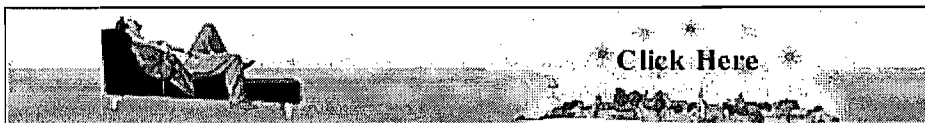
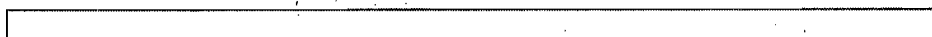
Nova Middle, Davie

Ramblewood Middle, Coral Springs

Sawgrass Springs Middle, Coral Springs

Silver Lakes Middle, North Lauderdale

Walter C. Young Middle, Pembroke Pines



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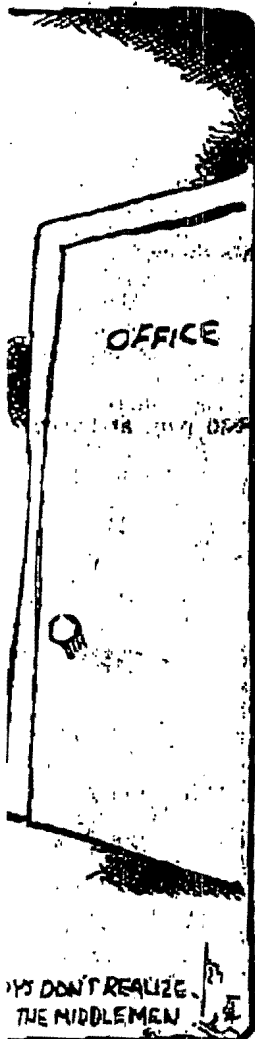
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Bold Action for Public Education

At a recent visit to the UTC Children's Center, a model early childhood education center, I had the opportunity to send e-mail and surf the Internet with Ellen, one of the center's star students. Ellen, just four, has mastered technology because she is learning in a stimulating and enriching environment. As a result, she will likely advance through school with the skills she will need to succeed in life.

But for every Ellen and every school like the Children's Center, there are many low-achieving students and schools in Tennessee and throughout the nation. Our challenge is to reverse this trend and prepare every child for the competitive global marketplace in the 21st century.

Congress recently enacted Ed-Flex, a proposal I supported, which allows the secretary of education to waive certain regulations linked to federal education aid to the states.

Ed-Flex is a common-sense reform measure that will relieve school districts of burdensome regulations. Now, Republicans in the Senate have taken a good new idea embodied in Ed-Flex and transformed it into a bad old idea. Their proposal, known as Super Ed-Flex, would consolidate all state-administered federal education aid into a block grant to be dispensed solely by the states, with only a modicum of federal requirements. Under the proposal, states would be allowed to commingle all education funds, and they could be used for any educational purpose permitted by state law.

Turning federal education aid into a simple revenue-sharing program, as proposed under Super Ed-Flex, is the wrong approach. It ignores the fact that school districts rely on property taxes for the bulk of their dollars. More affluent school districts naturally have more resources to improve schools, while those in low-income areas do not. Super Ed-Flex would eviscerate programs like Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act



HAROLD
FORD JR.

(ESEA), the federal government's largest compensatory education aid program which gives less affluent school districts a fighting chance.

We must resist the extremist impulse to abandon the national role in supporting our neediest students. Title I provides nearly \$8 billion a year to school districts with high concentrations of families living in poverty. Last year, Hamilton County Schools received approximately \$6.5 million under Title I. Although this funding plays a vital role in keeping poor schools on a fiscal par with wealthy ones, the federal government is not leveraging this investment to drive better performance. Title I schools regularly perform below the national average, because the federal government, as a matter of policy, allows it to happen.

Rather than eliminating Title I, we must acknowledge its shortcomings and retool it for the 21st century. To accomplish this, we must establish performance-based education policies guided by three key principles: accountability, competition, and investment. Common sense dictates that in an increasingly mobile society, local control need not conflict with a national commitment to ensuring that all children achieve a common level of competency in reading, writing, math and science, and that all teachers measure up to a common set of professional standards. For too long, federal dollars have flowed to state and local governments without adequate accountability.

First, we must reform ESEA by linking its funding to key performance measures such as ending social promotions — advancing students from grade to grade

based on age rather than achievement. Other performance-based measures should include improving teacher quality, closing failing schools and linking federal funding to a state or school district's achievement of established performance-based benchmarks. Super Ed-Flex would do little to encourage failing school districts to move toward this kind of results-oriented approach.

Second, we must not be afraid to promote competition in public schools by supporting public school choice.

Finally, investing in our schools is a national issue. No issue is more important to national and economic security.

If the federal government can subsidize highway construction and other infrastructure needs, it should also support the modernization and construction of public schools to meet the nation's \$112-billion school infrastructure crisis. If we do not, students in urban and rural areas will continue to attend deteriorating schools with leaky roofs, no air-conditioning, inadequate heating and crumbling walls.

Moreover, school districts in fast-growing suburbs will continue to be forced to educate students in trailers and makeshift buildings. This federal investment can and should be linked to high performance standards.

We do a disservice to Ellen and her peers — our nation's future stakeholders and stockholders — when we rely on old labels like conservative or liberal to advance ineffective education policies. Block grant schemes, like Super Ed-Flex, are an abdication of national leadership in education. But Tennesseans will also no longer allow us to defend the indefensible by accepting the status quo of the current system.

I am ready to do my part to support bold change in public education.

Harold Ford Jr., a member of the House Education and Workforce Committee, represents Tennessee's 9th Congressional District.

The Philadelphia Inquirer, August 19, 1999

Metro

Union seeks end to merit system

The local covering supervisory workers in city schools also wants 15% raises over 2 years.

**By Susan Snyder
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER**

The union representing principals, assistant principals, and other supervisory employees in the Philadelphia School District wants a 15 percent increase in its pay scale over the next two years.

The Commonwealth Association of School Administrators -- which has lamented the loss of city principals to higher-paying suburban jobs -- also seeks to end a merit-pay system for principals, which union leaders claim actually sets pay back further. Raises under that system will soon be distributed for the first time.

Union officials made their pitch during recently concluded arbitration hearings. Arbitrators are expected to decide on a contract by Aug. 31 -- the date the current three-year pact expires. The union and school district will be bound by the decision.

The association is one of four unions in contract negotiations with the school district this year. The only union not negotiating is the largest, the 20,000-member Philadelphia Federation of Teachers, whose contract expires next year.

Contracts covering school police, food-service employees, bus drivers, maintenance workers, and others are set to expire at the end of this month. Collectively, the four unions cover more than 7,000 employees.

The union that represents about 4,000 bus drivers, bus attendants, building engineers, mechanics and others is scheduled to meet Monday and will ask its members to authorize union leaders to call a strike if necessary.

"This local traditionally takes an authorization vote in June," said president Tom Doyle. He added that he delayed the authorization vote this year "to send a message to management that we were willing to sit down and talk and have fruitful negotiations. Obviously, there were some problems there. We're still trying to bang away but it's up in the air."

One contentious issue is the district's decision to eliminate attendants from some bus routes.

District officials declined to speculate on the possibility of labor unrest with the start of the school year approaching.

"It's too early for us to speak to that kind of thing," district spokeswoman Barbara Grant said. "We're at the table with our four unions and we're trying to work out a contract that's fair to our employees and that balances the interest of our employers with the interests of all the other stakeholders we obviously have to answer to."

Grant declined to release details of the district's salary and benefit offers to the unions.

This week, Michael Axelrod, president of the principals' union, outlined the proposal, under which the lowest principal's salary would rise from \$60,583 to nearly \$70,000 over two years and the highest salary would go from \$84,271 to nearly \$97,000.

"We're getting people saying they don't want to move into the principalship because it doesn't pay them to do so," Axelrod said.

He also said that under the current system, the gap between teachers' pay and principals' pay is shrinking. The district lost 28 of its 265 principals to retirement and resignation in June, and several others have announced plans to leave since then.

In addition, the union seeks to return to a seven-step system in which new principals automatically were bumped up in salary each year. The incremental system was abandoned in favor of merit pay, under which principals who exceeded or greatly exceeded standards last school year are to be given raises of 1.5 percent and 3 percent in addition to their overall base increase of 4 percent. Those who simply met standards or did not meet standards will get no bonus.

Axelrod said that under merit pay, principals will take longer to reach the maximum salary even if they greatly exceed standards. Though a merit-pay system could benefit principals at the top of scale, many of those have retired, he said. He also questioned the criteria for evaluating principals, especially one provision that indicates principals should be concerned about the "spiritual well-being" of their staffs.

"Suppose I'm a follower of Dionysus," Axelrod said. "Does that mean the principal has to arrange for bacchanals and vats of wine in order to meet my spiritual needs? "

The 600-member union also asked the district to contribute more toward current health insurance and put aside \$2,500 a year per employee for health coverage after retirement. The union also proposed a reduction in the work year from 190 to 185 days and the restoration of extracurricular pay.

The School Police Association of Philadelphia, representing about 425 officers, has five negotiating sessions scheduled through Aug. 31. The union seeks a four-year pact. President Michael Lodise is optimistic that a settlement will be reached.

Officials of the 2,100-member school cafeteria employees union could not be reached for comment.

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FIRST OF TWO PARTS

Special Education a Failure on Many Fronts

Thousands of California students are labeled "learning disabled"-- often with lasting consequences--because they were not taught to read. Those with major handicaps also are poorly served.

By RICHARD LEE COLVIN and DUKE HELFAND, Times Staff Writers

Tens of thousands of students in California's special education system have been placed there not because of a serious mental or emotional handicap, but because they were never taught to read properly.

Failed by mainstream classes and teachers, they are then referred to special education and labeled "learning disabled." There they are failed a second time, by a badly flawed system designed to be their safety net.

The needless referrals and inadequate instruction for these children are widely acknowledged by educators and officials but are rarely addressed.

As a result, public education costs have spiraled upward and academic prospects have dimmed for otherwise bright children sometimes described as "instructional casualties."

"Learning disabilities have become a sociological sponge to wipe up the spills of general education," said G. Reid Lyon, who heads the federal government's research efforts into reading and learning disabilities. "It's where children who weren't taught well go in many respects."

California has 651,000 special education students--about one in 10 public school students. Of them, 18% suffer disabilities that include emotional disturbance, mental retardation and autism. Another 26% are in special education because of speech and language impairments such as stuttering.

But more than half of special education students are called "learning disabled," a catch-all category primarily for children who have trouble reading. That category has grown by 63% over the last 15 years.

Almost all of the students who have been designated as learning disabled because of reading difficulties should not be in special education at all, said Alice Parker, California's director of special education. That's as many as 250,000 students statewide.



Special ed teacher Anna Rubin helps student at Polytechnic High in Long Beach. He spent 80 minutes writing a sentence.
 RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times



Sammy Gallay practices his reading skills with help from teacher Evan Postal at Haskell Elementary School in Granada Hills.
RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

"They have not been taught how to read," Parker said. "And that is deplorable."

Leading research now shows that the reading problems most of those students suffer from could have been reduced, or even avoided altogether, had they received systematic, intensive instruction as early as kindergarten in how letters represent sounds and how letters go together to form words--the basis of phonics.

Beginning in the late 1980s, however, explicit lessons in phonics were downplayed across the country, and especially in California. The reduction in such lessons contributed to a steady rise in the number of students identified as learning disabled, state officials now say.

Many of them were allowed to languish in regular classrooms until they slipped so far behind their peers that their problems became serious.

Misguided teachers and administrators also contribute to the improper placement of students in special education classrooms.

The learning disabled label is sometimes recommended by teachers who want the best for struggling students but are overwhelmed trying to give special attention in a crowded classroom.

"They see a special ed teacher down the hall with a smaller class, and they work to get the kid in that teacher's classroom," said Doug Fuchs, co-director of the federally funded National Center on Accelerating Student Learning at Vanderbilt University.

Other teachers see special education as an easy place to dump students with behavioral difficulties.

"You have a kid with a problem, so the teacher says, 'Let's ship him out of here and into special ed,'" said Alan Mori, the dean of the school of education at Cal State Los Angeles.

A state task force that examined special education, however, concluded that the biggest factor driving the dramatic growth in the number of learning disabled students is poor general education instruction, particularly in early reading.

A "significant number of children labeled learning disabled or dyslexic could have become successful readers had they received systematic and explicit instruction and intervention far earlier in their educational careers," the task force concluded in a report last month.

Some children--experts say between 2% and 5%--have such severe learning disabilities that they would need extra help--and probably separate classes--no matter how effectively regular classrooms were functioning.

Special education was designed a generation ago to help those children and others with emotional, physical or mental disabilities.

But for many, including those with vaguely defined learning problems, it can become a trap of inappropriately slowed-down instruction, lowered goals and a lifetime of stigma.

Schools and districts, citing financial shortfalls, regularly fail to provide the classroom aides, specialized materials and extra services guaranteed by law to their special education students.

Students in special education classrooms are three times more likely to have



San Bernardino High special ed teacher Royalstine Bowman conveys practical life lessons. District officials plan to replace her curriculum.
RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

untrained teachers. They are twice as likely to drop out of school prior to graduation. And while special education, in theory, is meant to give needy students extra help in catching up to their peers, inadequate instructional methods often leave them permanently behind; fewer than 10% of children who are saddled with the label of learning disabled ever leave special education.

Taxpayers Face Hefty Bill

For taxpayers, the result is a hefty bill. School districts spend an estimated \$5,500 a year on special education services for each learning disabled student, meaning the extra--and largely unnecessary--costs to the system could run \$1 billion or more.

"Everyone knows the way we have been providing special education isn't working," said Janny Latno, a veteran special ed teacher in Vallejo and a consultant to the state association that represents special ed instructors.

Further, educators expect the numbers of students designated as learning disabled to grow as reforms of the general education system take hold, including the end of both bilingual education and social promotion and the start of tough accountability measures that can force the closure or takeover of low-performing campuses.



San Bernardino High School special education student Chris Broussard, center, is in Junior ROTC.
RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

Those measures could create incentives for schools, or parents, to seek to label students as disabled and avoid the consequences of poor scores on standardized tests. Special education students are required to take such exams, but last year about one-third of their scores were not reported in California because of accommodations that provided simplified test directions and other assistance.

"In some of our more dysfunctional school systems, there will be chaos and more lawsuits," said Kevin Feldman, director of reading and early intervention for

Sonoma County and a member of the state task force that reviewed the link between special ed and reading instruction. "That may be what it takes to get our attention. That's the price we have to pay."

Screening Methods Called Flawed

Students in special education classes, whether they are labeled as learning disabled or have a more serious disorder, are supposed to be exposed to the same topics and ideas and held to the same standards as their non-disabled peers. When most California fourth-graders study the Spanish missions, their special education counterparts are supposed to do the same--albeit through alternative methods.

And so, one recent day, the assignment in Toni Cognein's English class was for students to read "Tom Sawyer," the classic American novel required of all eighth-graders in the Los Angeles Unified School District.

Yet with its colloquial language and dense vocabulary, the book was far too difficult for Cognein's learning disabled students at Marina del Rey Middle School.

So the teenagers listened to the book on tape. They watched a movie based on the story. And, rather than read Mark Twain's actual prose, they used an abridged version, with pictures, written at the fifth-grade level. Even then, the students struggled to pronounce words such as "daintily" and "superintendent" when they took turns reading the novel aloud.

"You work from where they are," Cognein said.

Cognein's class is one of eight serving the school's 150 learning disabled students, who account for 17% of the school's total enrollment.

"A lot of these kids weren't identified until fifth or sixth grade," Cognein said. "It's really too late. Why does that happen?"

The reason for late identification is rooted in the 1975 federal law that mandated special education programs nationwide.

The law said a disabled student is one who demonstrates a disorder in the "basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language." That manifests itself as an "imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or . . . do mathematical calculations."

That definition drew on research which indicated that many students who were falling behind in school had identifiable neurological disorders or they misperceived letters.

Because methods of observing the brain in action were too crude to pinpoint dysfunctions, educators developed an indirect method to measure unexplained gaps in performance: Schools would give children an IQ test. Then they would measure their reading performance. If the IQ test results were significantly higher than the reading scores--meaning a student was bright but could not read--a child would be designated disabled.

"It's not like diagnosing cancer or heart disease," said Thomas Hehir, the former director of special ed programs for the U.S. Department of Education and now a lecturer at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "It's not science. There are lots of kids with reading problems who are not learning disabled."

Hehir and other leading researchers now argue that the method is fundamentally flawed. Because achievement tests measure academic skills, the gap between intelligence and performance doesn't show up reliably until the third or fourth grade.

That's too late for most students to catch up. For those who are not identified until third grade, 75% continue to experience reading difficulties through high school, according to research funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Moreover, the intelligence tests themselves are notoriously inaccurate and are so similar to the achievement tests that any gaps between the two result from testing error rather than actual differences, said Lou Danielson, a top researcher with the U.S. Department of Education.

Nonetheless, in most schools the method of identifying students for special education is embraced by psychologists, teachers and principals because they lack a replacement for it.

Increasingly, however, experts in education and psychology are leaning toward a different view of what causes students to fall behind.

In a 1998 article, professors Robert J. Sternberg of Yale University and Louise Spear-Swerling of Southern Connecticut State University proposed doing away with the concept of learning disabilities altogether.

They argued that, although variation in reading ability exists, there is little evidence to support an artificial dividing line between those who are called disabled and those who are simply poor readers.

In fact, most poor readers stumble over the same thing, which is dealing with the sounds within words, and they need instruction focused on that problem.

The imprecise way of identifying special education students is illustrated at Sunnymeadows Elementary School in Moreno Valley.



Amalia Barron, another of Bowman's students.
RICK MEYER / Los Angeles Times

Throughout the day, special education students rotate through Nick Maricic's cramped bungalow in groups of no more than five or six. The students, who are mostly 8 to 10 years old, leave their regular class and come to Maricic, where they learn rules to sound out words and get intense practice in hand gestures that reinforce vowel sounds and in blending letters.

After school, six other students gather around the same table in Maricic's room. They get the same lessons as those during the day. There's only one difference between the two groups: The school does not consider the kids who get help after school to be learning disabled.

Maricic identified those children by analyzing scores from the Stanford 9 standardized test. He looked for students whose reading score was at least 30 points below their math score two years in a row--figuring those students were intelligent but simply behind in their reading skills.

"I'm just trying to get them to reach their potential," he said. "This could have been done before. There's nothing magical here."

After a half-hour, more children trickle in. Maricic spends 30 minutes with each one. The difference with this third set of kids is that their parents are paying Maricic for his services.

Some of these tutoring clients already are in special education classes but still are not receiving this kind of instruction. Others, such as 8-year-old Krista Hoffman, are in regular classrooms but struggle to keep up.

Although Krista attends another school in Moreno Valley, her mother brings her to Maricic's classroom twice a week after school. Maricic used to teach at Krista's school; she was referred to him by her second-grade teacher.

Krista stumbles on words Maricic points to from a list. He has her repeat each one she misses until she gets it right.

Krista's mother sits at her elbow, hanging on every word and even correcting some of her mistakes.

"Why didn't my daughter get this in first or second grade?" Michelle Hoffman said. "She could spell and read because she could memorize. But she had no phonics skills. It's frustrating for me."

Neither Very Special Nor Educational

The fact that many students are being placed in special education programs unnecessarily would be less of a problem if those programs truly provided effective services. Often, however, special education is neither very special, nor educational.

Since their creation, special education programs have not been held to answer for the results they produce. Instead, they have been measured by whether they adhere to complicated procedural rules.

Now, a shift in thinking at the federal level is trickling down to the states. Under new federal rules, most special education students are to take the same tests and learn the same subjects as those in the general student population. Those rules are only now taking effect and no one knows yet whether, or how, they can be enforced.

For now, the system remains one that is extremely costly, but with little accountability.

Nationally, special education costs about \$43 billion, providing services to 5.2 million children and adults from birth to 22 years of age. The cost has risen rapidly in recent years.

Congress envisioned the federal government covering 40% of those costs, with states picking up the rest.

But the federal purse has covered only about 12% of what was spent. This year, local California districts will kick in about \$1.3 billion for special education, taking it from funds meant to pay for general education services. The state pays \$2.2 billion.

Citing those financial constraints, school districts often argue that they cannot

afford to meet the needs of special education students without shortchanging those in regular classrooms.

"It's easy to say, 'Give the kids everything they need,' " said Owen Waters, who is working on school finance issues for the California School Boards Assn. "But then the state doesn't pay its bills and, guess what, you just mortgaged the education of the average kid in every school district."

Services Fall Short

In many school districts, however, services for special education students fall far short of student needs.

Special education classrooms often are relegated to the fringes of schoolyards. At some schools, they are taught in cramped teacher lounges; when the state's class-size reduction program went into effect, increasing the demand for classrooms, special education teachers were displaced and many were forced to go from room to room to teach.

Teachers say they often lack materials designed for their students' needs, forcing them to cobble together a hodgepodge of books that are too difficult or outdated--a problem that state officials now recognize.

Reading Texts 10 Years Old

The problem leaps out at Lane Elementary School in Monterey Park, where learning disabled students in one classroom use 10-year-old reading books produced at the height of the whole language movement and a set of fraying phonics texts published in 1966. A teacher found both sets, bound by yarn, in the school's dusty storage room.

"We're always last in line for getting materials," said one of Lane's special ed teachers.

Last summer, the state for the first time adopted textbooks geared for special education students. The texts, which feature explicit phonics lessons, reflect the state's academic standards for language arts. But many schools are unaware that the texts have been made available or have yet to buy them.

Moreover, most special education teachers do not receive any more training in how to teach reading than do other teachers. The result, many critics say, is that students often do not get the highly structured lessons that experts say they need most.

Making those problems worse, nearly one in three California teachers assigned to special education duties--as many as 9,000--lack full credentials, according to one study. By comparison, one in 10 general education teachers statewide lacks a credential.

An unknown number of special education classes are taught by a rotating cast of long-term substitutes.

School administrators say it is difficult to fill special education jobs, which demand inordinate hours, produce mountains of paperwork and involve disputes with ornery parents--all without the benefit of additional pay.

"We're hiring anyone off the street who will fill a classroom," said Ron Pinsky, director of special services for the North Monterey County Unified School District, where one-third of the 21 special education teachers lack credentials. "There are far easier teaching jobs that pay the same."

Meanwhile, veterans are fleeing special education, trading their pressure cooker assignments for easier jobs in regular classrooms and creating yet more holes to fill, leading educators say. The exodus has been exacerbated by the state's popular class-size reduction program, which has created new opportunities for teachers in regular classrooms. "That's happening all over," Pinsky said.

Anna Rubin is among the newcomers filling the empty special education slots. Three months into her job at Polytechnic High School in Long Beach, Rubin, 27, is frustrated by the bumpy road.

The district gave Rubin just two days of training--covering topics such as

managing her classroom and filling out paperwork for individual education plans--before assigning her to room 31 of the sprawling campus near downtown Long Beach.

The English and history teacher has since discovered that the textbooks in her room are useless for her students, who read about as well as 8- and 9-year-olds.

Her duty, to "adapt" the ninth-grade curriculum to her students' abilities, is almost impossible. "Great Expectations," the sweeping tale that other ninth-graders are expected to read, seems more useful to her students as a doorstep than as a familiar high school steppingstone.

And so Rubin throws together her own history and English lessons, dipping into a cardboard box under her desk for lesson plans and teaching manuals left to her by a veteran colleague who recently fled the field.

"I didn't realize the enormity of the task," said Rubin, who spent four years working as a special ed instructional assistant at other schools.

Rubin knows that academics don't come easy to her students. One of them took an hour and 15 minutes to compose five sentences using his vocabulary words. As she helped him, four others all but ignored their assignment, telling jokes and cursing at each other.

So, as Rubin acknowledges, only part of her job is teaching; the rest of it is trying to keep her restless students on task. She knows that after years of not learning, they have either lost interest or are fed up with trying.

Based on Decades of Experience

Royalstine Bowman, a 33-year veteran teacher at San Bernardino High School, favors teaching students life skills with a home-grown curriculum that district officials have dubbed "Bowman's Way."

She has little patience with current research that focuses on daily doses of phonics instruction for special education students.

Her approach is based on three decades of experience, salvaged teaching manuals dating to 1942, and a belief that even the most impaired learners can be taught to become independent.

For her students, ranging from ninth- to 12th-graders--Bowman's Way means getting drilled on the importance of a firm handshake, a confident introduction and legible handwriting. It means learning how to tell time and how to make change, how to cook and how to fill out job applications borrowed from local fast-food stands and Cadillac dealerships.

For a few students, it also means patient individual help in learning to memorize their home address and to spell their last names.

District officials make it clear that they believe Bowman's Way is outmoded. They plan to replace her curriculum with one that makes expert reading instruction a priority.

"I don't care what kind of situation a student is in, being in special education is no excuse for not learning to read," said Joan Roberts, hired a year ago to upgrade the district's special education program. "I want our students learning to read right up to the last second of their senior year."

Bowman counters that "the experts don't know my students."

"The truth is, not every student goes to college," she said. "And nobody asks applicants for jobs as custodians and stock boys what their reading level is."

Dream May Be Out of Reach

For Amalia Barron, the dream of becoming a kindergarten teacher does seem out of reach. Approaching graduation from Bowman's program, she works at a local fast-food stand stuffing "super burritos," tallying daily proceeds and closing the shop when the boss is away.

A San Bernardino High senior, she has been in the special education pipeline since fourth grade. At 18, she still recalls the sting of having first- and second-grade classmates call her "dumb" for stumbling over simple words.

She wonders how different her aspirations might be today if teachers had begun early on to work on her reading difficulties. And she winces at the memory of her first-, second- and third-grade teachers, "who overlooked me because they thought I wasn't worth the effort."

Back then, her mother's pleas for assistance were dismissed by school authorities who urged that she "wait and see if your daughter's problems work themselves out over time."

"If those teachers had paid more attention to me and my reading problems," Barron wondered aloud, "would I even be in special education today?"

Times staff writer Louis Sahagun contributed to this story.



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SECOND OF TWO PARTS

It's Often Years Before the Learning Disabled Are Diagnosed

Education: Critics say school districts use a 'wait to fail' policy that puts off testing by experts until third or fourth grade, when help comes too late.

By MARTHA GROVES and RICHARD LEE COLVIN, Times Education Writers

After enduring a "living hell" before getting her sixth-grade son into a school for learning disabled children, Kristi Wicker resists the urge to imagine "What if?"

What if Kyle had not languished for six years in a Long Beach public elementary school without proper instruction?

What if teachers and school psychologists had identified his dyslexia--and helped him compensate for it--before he slipped years behind his peers in reading ability?

"It's best to put that behind me," Wicker said. "It's painful. He lost a lot. I can't even imagine how different things would be."

So it goes, parents say, with thousands of youngsters designated as learning disabled in California. As with Kyle Wicker, the difficulties often fester until they take an emotional as well as an academic toll.

The family suffers too. "I can't tell you how many nights I went to bed sick and in tears," Kristi Wicker said.

As years slip by, low self-esteem and reduced expectations compound the learning problems, often condemning a child to a lifetime of mediocre accomplishment and what one psychologist calls "learned helplessness."

Consider Toby Swift, 12, a seventh-grader with a near-genius IQ whose reading nonetheless barely comes up to the level of a typical third-grader. Toby's inability to read is so central to his personality that he once dictated an essay revealing his fear that literacy would make him a different person.

With his parents reading his homework to him and Ramona Middle School in La Verne allowing him to take tests orally, Toby made the honor roll last year. But his parents despair that he will ever be able to fend for himself, given the likelihood that he will never be able to read well enough to pass a driver's test, let alone apply for a good job.

Meanwhile, the struggle to find the appropriate instruction for Toby has



Toby Swift, 12, right, attends a reading class at Ramona Middle School in La Verne.
(RICK MEYER/Los Angeles Times)

consumed his parents and embittered his father, Tim Swift.

"Our basic thing since Day 1 has been having Toby learn how to read, and he still can't, and that's why we're frustrated," Swift said.

Policies Unchanged for Decades

The sorts of frustrations experienced by the Swifts and the Wickers are typical of those that face the families of the more than 650,000 special education students in California.

Often the frustrations are deepened by policies that were adopted early in the history of special education and never changed, despite research suggesting that they were poorly thought out.

One of the biggest problems, education experts say, is that most students who are diagnosed as having a learning disability are not identified until third or fourth grade at the earliest--too late for them to ever catch up, educators say. This misguided "wait to fail" policy, they add, sets up children for a fall.

"We know fairly conclusively that if children have trouble reading by the end of first grade, it's very demanding" to get them up to speed later, said David Chard, a researcher at the University of Texas in Austin.

Pupils who are simply struggling readers, researchers say, can benefit greatly from intensive phonics instruction as early as kindergarten. Given that, researchers assert, early identification and intervention with reading help could drastically reduce the rolls of learning disabled students.

Other children with more serious, neurological problems could also be kept out of special education, or at least have their educations managed more successfully, even if they continue to need some bolstering throughout their school careers.

Kristi Wicker's fears surfaced early on. As a 4-year-old preschooler, Kyle could not identify letters. He finished kindergarten at Los Cerritos Elementary School in Long Beach knowing only five letters and no sounds.

Wicker, who runs a day-care center in her home, worked with Kyle, but, she said, "if we studied for 30 minutes, he had no retention 10 minutes later."

Over the next few years, Wicker endured an often frustrating series of meetings with officials from the school and the Long Beach Unified School District. Teachers and psychologists routinely reassured her that Kyle was simply immature and anxious. She continued to insist that something was seriously amiss.

By fourth grade, spelling tests began, and Kyle could not spell any of 20 chosen words. He took to disappearing in the morning, pleading with his mother not to make him go to school, where, he said, his teachers didn't understand him.

Feeling desperate, Wicker took her son to Claudia McCulloch, an educational psychologist in Torrance. Astonished at the depth of Kyle's language processing problems, McCulloch advised Wicker to demand psychological testing for Kyle to determine whether he had identifiable learning problems.

Whenever a parent makes such a request, a school is obliged to follow through. And in December of fourth grade, a school psychologist determined that Kyle had a "specific learning disability" and was thus eligible for special services. In a follow-up conversation with Kristi Wicker, the psychologist ruled out dyslexia. The next month, the school and Kyle's parents held their first Individualized Education Plan meeting.

Parents Cope With a Daunting Process

Often maligned by parents as an intimidating, bureaucratic process, the Individualized Education Plan is a step toward getting a child into special education after he or she has been identified as learning disabled.

It involves gathering a gaggle of teachers and psychologists along with the parents--no easy feat. Participants set goals and establish an instructional plan. The process can drag on, and parents complain that a child's teacher often is not let in on the new strategy.

As often happens, the Wickers discovered Kyle's case dragging on: dueling experts, disagreements over diagnosis, a threatened lawsuit. It was not until last summer, with Kyle due to enter sixth grade, that the district acquiesced to the Wickers' demand that Kyle be placed at the Prentice School, a private Santa Ana school for dyslexic children. The district agreed to pay the annual tuition of \$11,500 and to cover transportation costs.

As of early November, the district had not yet signed a contract with Prentice, nor had it worked out a transportation arrangement. The Wickers, meanwhile, are paying a friend about \$600 per month to ferry their son to and from school.

Kyle's mother said he is thriving at Prentice, which accepted him despite concern that his dyslexia was too severe for the school to handle. His class has 16 students (versus more than 30 in the public school) and a nearly full-time teacher's assistant.

An outdoorsy, husky youngster who loves playing roller hockey, Kyle is described by his mother as shy and kind. Speaking comes hard to the 11-year-old, who struggles to find the right words and sprinkles sentences with "fillers" such as "stuff," "things," "uhs" and "ers."

For the first time, she added, he willingly reads at home and can start his homework. He is more positive and confident.

"He laughs," Wicker said with evident relief. "He's just a different kid."

The Long Beach Unified School District maintains that its interventions were helping Kyle.

"We offered a free and appropriate public education here," said Kristin Powers, a school psychologist for the district.

The district's goal, dictated by federal law, is to educate each child in the "least restrictive" environment. By definition, Powers noted, Prentice is more restrictive because it serves only dyslexic children.

It is tricky, Powers said, to attempt to prescribe an educational treatment for a specific learning disability. It is quite different from devising a treatment for strep throat or allergies.

"It's a wonderful idea, but it doesn't work that way," she said. Current research, she added, supports trying a variety of interventions to see what works for an individual child.

Not Accepting Failure for Her Son

By contrast with Kyle Wicker, Toby Swift did receive special attention early. Whether the attention was helpful, however, remains an issue.

Instead of the kind of rigorous, repetitive practice with letters and sounds that researchers say works best for students like him, Toby was given dextroamphetamine, a stimulant, to improve his concentration. The Swifts, meanwhile, were urged to be patient and to work with him on memorizing word lists and flash cards.

Angela Swift, Toby's mom, had a perspective that most other parents do not. She has been a special education teacher for more than 20 years, and had grown to accept the fact that few of her students were learning to read.

"I was taught to slow it down, do it again and be nice," she said of the instructional methods she used.

When it came to her own son, however, she woke up to the fact that failure was not all right. She promised him--and herself--that she would help him learn to read. The medicine made Toby thin and depressed, so she discontinued it.

During the summer before Toby entered third grade, his mother began using a commercial phonics kit and then signed him up with a private clinic that charged \$100 per week for two hours of intensive phonics.

As do many parents of learning disabled children, she hit the Internet, doing her own research. She has taken him to clinics to have his eyes examined, bought him special software to allow him to dictate assignments into a computer, and constantly juggled his class schedule to try to make sure he learns grade-level

material.

When Toby was in the fourth grade, she began writing letters to the Bonita Unified School District to plead for help in teaching him to read.

"I am not willing to spend another year hunting and pecking for something that works," she wrote in a 1996 letter to the **Please see DIAGNOSED, A21**
DIAGNOSED: Too Late Continued from A20

school district, one of dozens to politicians, researchers and newspapers she has collected in a thick notebook. "Programs have already been developed, tested and widely used. It is time for Bonita Unified to train its teachers in effective methods and then insist that those be used."

Some of the "multisensory" methods that Swift researched involve the use of computers to train the brain to recognize sounds more quickly. Others rely on tiles or rhyming games. But few public school teachers have been trained in these methods; moreover, they typically do not have time to work intensively one-on-one with students.

Eventually, Bonita began responding. This year, Toby and his classmates listen as reading teacher Mary Lou Casas pronounces nonsense syllables; they then arrange letter tiles to represent the sounds they hear.

The walls and bulletin boards in the room are covered with letters and letter combinations. A special computer shows in rapid-fire fashion words that have similar characteristics, such as the ending sound of "justice" and "balance."

But although these sorts of programs are widely touted as helpful for students with reading problems, they may have come too late for Toby, who has become thoroughly discouraged by his years of schooling problems.

As other students vie to shout out the words, Toby continues to play with tiles and puts his head down on the desk. He makes only half-hearted attempts, grumbling that Casas "says them too fast."

With high school only two years off, the Swifts are considering selling their house and moving to upstate New York, so that Toby can attend a private, college-preparatory high school for learning-disabled students.

"We already know what's going to happen if he goes to a regular high school: He'll get frustrated and wind up in continuation school," Tim Swift said.

Angela Swift, despite all her efforts, still has regrets. She acknowledges that, given the severity of his disability, Toby might not be much further along even if the school district had properly addressed his needs earlier.

But, she said, "if he wasn't further ahead, we'd at least know we'd done everything for him."





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Early Intervention to Save Struggling Students

■ Education: Assessment and action in some districts reduce the special ed rolls while cutting costs and boosting self-esteem.

By DUKE HELFAND and MARTHA GROVES, Times Staff Writers

Instead of waiting for children to fall behind, some elementary schools in California are attacking potential academic failure at the earliest signs of trouble.

By doing so, they are reducing the ranks of students landing in special education and, they say, boosting achievement.

Teachers at these schools--scattered among urban centers, mountain burbs and wine country suburbs--begin assessing youngsters in kindergarten, well before most children face their first standardized tests.

Seeking to reach a broader range of children, instructors from general education and special education team up to offer the advantages of both worlds.

They provide extensive lessons in letter sounds, phonics and other reading skills, which can bolster struggling pupils at risk of later being tagged learning disabled simply because they cannot read well.

"With the right intervention, you can thwart the need for special education," said Martin Cavanaugh, assistant superintendent for Elk Grove Unified, a suburban Sacramento district which is the 12th-largest in the state.

Researchers have long advocated early intervention, and many districts, including Los Angeles Unified, are beginning to model changes after Elk Grove's overhaul.

But early intervention as a practice has not filtered down to the vast majority of California schools, already burdened by a raft of other general education reforms and staffed by legions of inexperienced teachers.

It is too soon to know how effective the reforms in Elk Grove and other districts can be in the long run, but they show promise: Referrals for special education are plummeting. Discipline problems are waning. Attendance and test scores are rising.

Before Elk Grove embarked on the reform six years ago, nearly 17% of its enrollment was designated as special education. Now special ed makes up less than 9% of the 45,000 students.

Educators say the initiatives also produce other significant benefits.

They keep students in general education classrooms where expectations are higher, and they help students avoid the loss of self-esteem that can result from being classified as learning disabled.

The efforts also free up specialists to work with more children, and they save money that would be spent attempting to fix problems down the road when chances of improvement are vastly reduced.

"We want to keep these youngsters on the same trajectory as all other children," said Marion Joseph, a member of the state Board of Education and a driving force in California's return to phonics.

Elk Grove educators use an approach they call "neverstreaming"--a reference to students never having to leave the mainstream curriculum.

At each school, teams of teachers from general and special education--along with psychologists, speech therapists, administrators and others--meet six weeks after the start of school to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each student on campus.

Students who are behind get lessons in phonics, spelling and other skills in small groups at campus "learning centers" staffed by special education teachers and other specialists.

Meanwhile, the campus teams also address problems beyond the classroom by arranging for food, shelter, clothing or counseling for students and their families.

"We are front-loading services for students with what they need, when they need it, rather than providing services based on categories of students," said Cavanaugh, the assistant superintendent.

Third-grader Brittney McClain of Isabelle Jackson Elementary is an enthusiastic beneficiary.

Last year, as a beginning second-grader, Brittney was still struggling to make connections between sounds and letters.

She began attending 45-minute sessions at the school's learning center, four times a week. Working with no more than five other students, Brittney reviewed the first-grade reading program, which covered sound-spelling connections and the blending of letters to create words, among other things.

Now the 8-year-old has mastered the alphabet and all corresponding sounds. She is reading more fluently. And she has become a more confident learner, buoyed by continuing visits twice a week to the learning center.

Without the boost, "Brittney would definitely have been in special education," said Heather MacKenzie, a special ed teacher who works with her. "I think she's going to be fine."

The additional attention has kindled enthusiasm in Brittney.

"Sometimes I make believe that I'm playing at school even when I'm at home," she said. "I just wish I could go to school every day."

For the last two decades, school districts targeted students such as Brittney for special help only after seeing them fall behind in regular classrooms.

Part of the reason involved funding. Schools received money for students they placed in special education, with the amount dependent on the type of placement.

That created an incentive to funnel more students into the system, especially into the most costly settings, and to keep them there.

But the formula recently underwent a major shift based in part on the successful reforms in Elk Grove. A law that went into effect last year gives school districts the financial flexibility to serve students before they enter the special education system.

In effect, it is now possible and desirable to spend extra money earlier on students, to avoid their later placement in even costlier special ed programs.

As a result, schools are trying myriad variations on the early intervention theme.

At Mattie Washburn Elementary School in Sonoma County, teachers test each kindergartner and first-grader four times a year to determine knowledge of basic language skills.

Those youngsters who get first crack at intervention fall into a middle range in reading ability--a group that usually would not warrant such treatment.

"The purpose is to give them the quick start they need with an intense program," said reading specialist Judy Harris.

At Mariposa Elementary School in Brea, teachers have created new partnerships to serve students.

The school has flooded its classrooms with special education teachers--two of its own and another dozen student teachers from nearby Cal State Fullerton. The adults can lavish attention on children whose needs might go unattended at other

schools.

First-grade teacher Traci Yocum is joined each morning by special ed teacher Karin Clark. The two, along with an aide, separate the class of 18 into small groups in different parts of the room.

"With more adults in my classroom, I'm able to do strategies with the lower kids before they fall through the cracks," Yocum said.

Asking teachers to rethink their approach has produced unexpected pressures. At some schools, the changes have met resistance from veteran teachers.

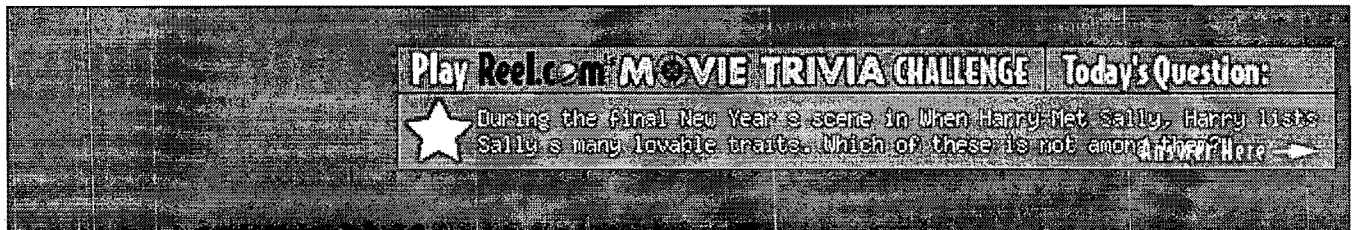
In Butte County, after the number of special ed referrals soared, Principal Cheryl Monteith pushed teachers to focus more on early reading instruction in regular ed classrooms.

Monteith had to cajole some staffers. "As a principal, it took all my positive energy to keep everyone moving forward," she said. "It's hard for some of our teachers. All of a sudden you don't have a special day class" where you can send problems.

Schools where early intervention is only a fledgling reform must go on faith. But advocates of the approach argue strongly in its favor.

"We're going to prove that all kids can learn and all kids can succeed," said Al Velasquez, principal of La Gloria Elementary in Monterey County, where teachers take the extraordinary step of requiring floundering first-graders to spend three months repeating kindergarten.

"We've got to make the foundation as solid as possible. If a child is going to get referred to special ed, it's after we have tried everything else."



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SECOND OF TWO PARTS

Special Ed Grads Learn Struggling Doesn't End With School

By LOUIS SAHAGUN, Times Education Writer

They were Narbonne High School's special education class of 1999: 17 dedicated seniors who overcame physical handicaps and learning disorders to finish school June 23.

I knew you could do it! exulted the teachers, counselors and parents who got personally involved in their academic climbs.

What no one can tell graduates such as Lisa Burchette, 19; Robert Blanco, 18; Monticue Hurndon, 18; and Carlos Celaya, 18, is what happens now.

Like former special education students everywhere, when they crossed the stage to pick up their diplomas and certificates of completion, they also stepped into a statistical void. There never has been a system to track the career trends of special education graduates, let alone suggest who among them might become successful, or not.

School officials can only hope that the "career training" they received as seniors will reduce their chances of failure in increasingly competitive job markets.

But four months after finishing high school, Burchette, Blanco, Hurndon and Celaya were struggling--some harder than others--to come to terms with their permanent disabilities ranging from dyslexia to difficulties dealing with words and numbers even as they tried to shape new careers in junior college and the workplace.

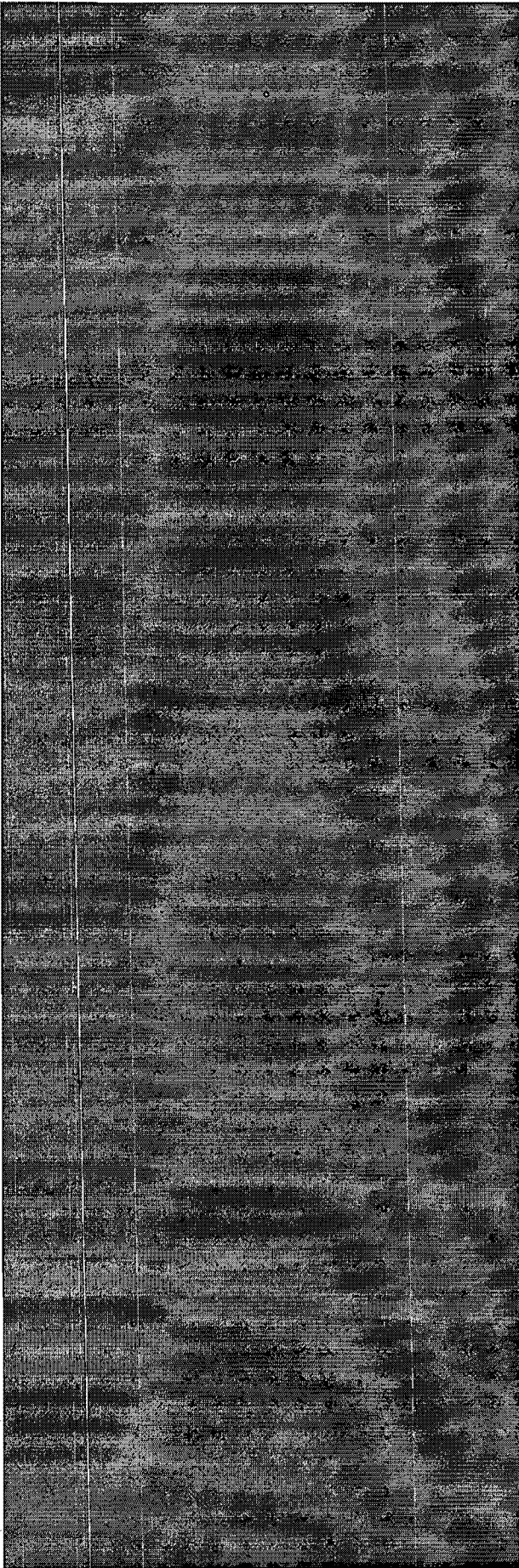
Robert Blanco

The gold tassel off Blanco's mortarboard still hangs from the rearview mirror of the metallic aquamarine 1966 Mustang his parents bought him as a graduation present.

Trouble is, Blanco, who has problems deciphering words and recalling what he's read, has yet to pass his driver's license examination.

"I study and study, but every time I take the test I miss a license by one question," he said. "And I've taken the test three times!"

As if that were not painful enough, the clean-cut young man who sports fashionable oval eyeglasses was recently released from his first full-time job as a



was recently released from his first full-time job as a sales associate at a local Kmart after only 90 days.

He said supervisors at the store insisted that it was "nothing personal," just a consequence of a change in management.

The car--and the lost job--have become nagging reminders of his difficulties in school with reading and retention, which became acute in the third grade after he was involved in an automobile accident.

Undaunted, however, he pressed ahead to earn the high school diploma that hangs high on a wall in his parents' living room. Now, he wants a decent job to help him chart a secure financial future.

"I've filled out dozens of job applications over the past two weeks at places like clothing stores and pastry houses," he said. "I've even made follow-up calls. They say: 'We're working on it.'"

Erasing a smudge on the hood of his Mustang with a rag, he added: "Meanwhile, I've got to get that driver's license. Hopefully, my first drive will be to a new job."

Lisa Burchette

Burchette is impossible to miss at the Marriott Hotel in Torrance on "salsa night."

She's the 6-foot-tall, ponytailed security officer in a black uniform making the rounds in the hotel's two bars, lobbies, restrooms and parking structure.

The fact that she cares passionately about her job--and has been getting raves from her supervisors--has made her a local hero among Narbonne High's special education teachers and counselors.

In school, Burchette, who has difficulty reading and composing her thoughts in written form, spent an hour a day in an expository composition class.

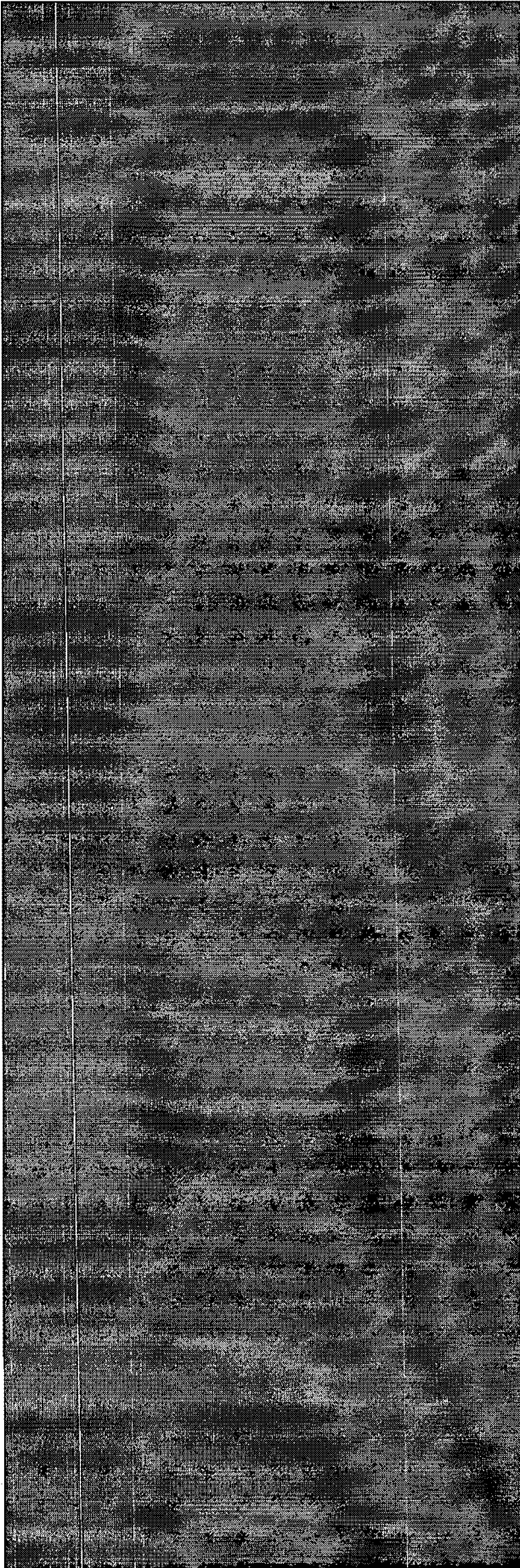
As a security guard, she earns \$8.25 an hour conducting investigative patrols and handling calls for help from hotel guests. During the slow graveyard shifts that Burchette pulls twice a week, she also tackles homework assignments from a math class that she takes at Harbor Community College in Wilmington.

"I'll be at the Marriott until I graduate from college," said Burchette, who wants to become a probation officer. "I'm taking one class in basic math right now, and getting straight A's. Next semester I'll take a full load."

On Tuesday she started a second job as a dispatcher for the Renaissance Hotel in Culver City.

"I need the extra money to move out on my own," said Burchette, who shares an apartment with an older sister.

"A lot of people think special education students can't do much of anything on their own, that we're handicapped, slow or dumb," she said. "We are not. We simply have a disability. And we have to learn to



work through it.

"But no matter who you are, you won't get far in this world if you don't speak up; I've never been embarrassed to ask for help when I need it," she said. "Another thing: The more you read, the more you remember. Keep on reading."

Monticue Hurndon

No sooner had Hurndon introduced himself to a coach at Long Beach City College than he was instructed to enroll in a schedule of history, economics and health classes that left lots of time for football practice.

That was Sept. 19. Now, the tall, muscular, bright-eyed youth with an easy smile is behind in his history reading assignments by at least 150 pages, and too embarrassed to tell his coach about it.

"Coach never asked if I was dyslexic and I never told him," Hurndon said in an interview in the living room of his home. "Now, I need some serious help. Each chapter in history is about 50 pages long, which means it takes me forever to read them."

With the help of his mother, Sharon, a service manager at a Manhattan Beach meatpacking plant, he's trying mightily to catch up. Each night, she reads her son's assignments aloud while he takes notes. It is a slow, arduous routine that keeps them up until 11 most weeknights.

Hurndon, who received a "letter of recommendation" instead of a diploma because he failed to pass all of his proficiency exams, has yet to sign up for tutoring programs available at Long Beach City for students with special needs.

"I just haven't gotten around to applying for a tutor yet," he said. "I will, though. Got to. I can't leave it all up to my mom."

In an interview in her corporate office, his mother said: "We are determined to do whatever it takes to get through this phase of his life. If college doesn't work out, then we'll do a trade school.

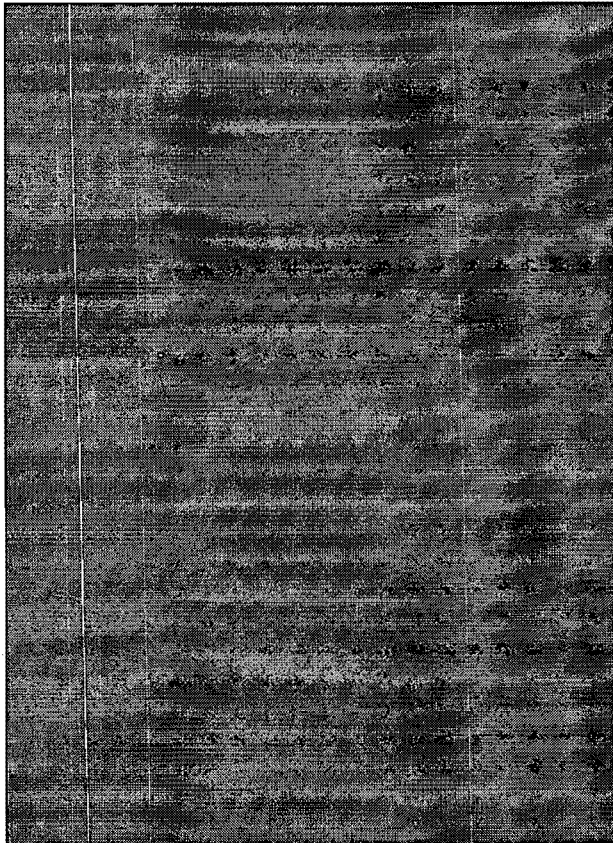
"Things are tight financially," she added. "But you can't hang a dollar sign on your child's education. I'll give him all the tools I can, and pray for the best."

Carlos Celaya

Over a cheeseburger and fries at a restaurant near Narbonne High, "Polar Bear," as Celaya's high school friends referred to him, talked about his dream of finishing high school, joining the Marines, seeing the world, then coming home to raise a family.

"I had it all worked out. I thought life was going to be easy. I was wrong," he said. "I got a letter of certification instead of a diploma. Without a diploma, I can't join the Marines.

"My big problem is that I mix Spanish and



English when I read and write," he said. "That's because when I was in elementary school, I was switched from English to Spanish and back again in just a few years.

"Now, I've got big problems with long words," said Celaya, who received intensive phonics instruction throughout his high school years.

Celaya avoided mentioning his learning problems when he landed a job at a local drugstore in July as a part-time stock boy.

But they came back to haunt him.

"Within three weeks, I was working full time and the manager asked me if I wanted to be an assistant manager," he recalled. "I said: 'Sounds cool. I'll think about it.' "

In fact, he wondered whether he could handle additional responsibilities that were all but certain to involve reading and writing.

An argument with his supervisor provided a way out. "I told him I didn't want that job. So I'm still working part-time.

"I'm just going to have to set a new goal for myself," he added, twirling his tiger's eye class ring on his finger. "Maybe I'll go to college and become an accountant. I've always been better with numbers than with words."

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Learning: Many Problems but Many Remedies

Saying 'we've never found a perfect brain,' Dr. Mel Levine uses a model of learning's components to pinpoint weak spots. The approach has won fans--and \$10 million in backing from Charles Schwab.

By RICHARD LEE COLVIN, Times Education Writer

CHAPEL HILL, N.C.--They stood face to face, the doctor and his patient, thumbs in their ears, fingers wiggling.

The doctor was Mel Levine, a pediatrician winning praise nationally for his diagnoses and theories about learning difficulties. The patient was Teddy Shinkle, a 13-year-old from Michigan dressed in an oversize flannel shirt and Doc Martens.

What they were doing was trying to pinpoint why Teddy, a bright, hard-working kid with ambitions of becoming an architect or a lawyer, writes sentences like this: "If I happen to get of this I would start a small company." Before the exam in his cramped office, Levine was reassuring.

"We could do this with all the kids in your class and we'd find different strengths and weaknesses," Levine said as he administered the first of 31 tests, including the finger-wiggling, to see if Teddy could keep track of his hands without seeing them. "We've never found a perfect brain."

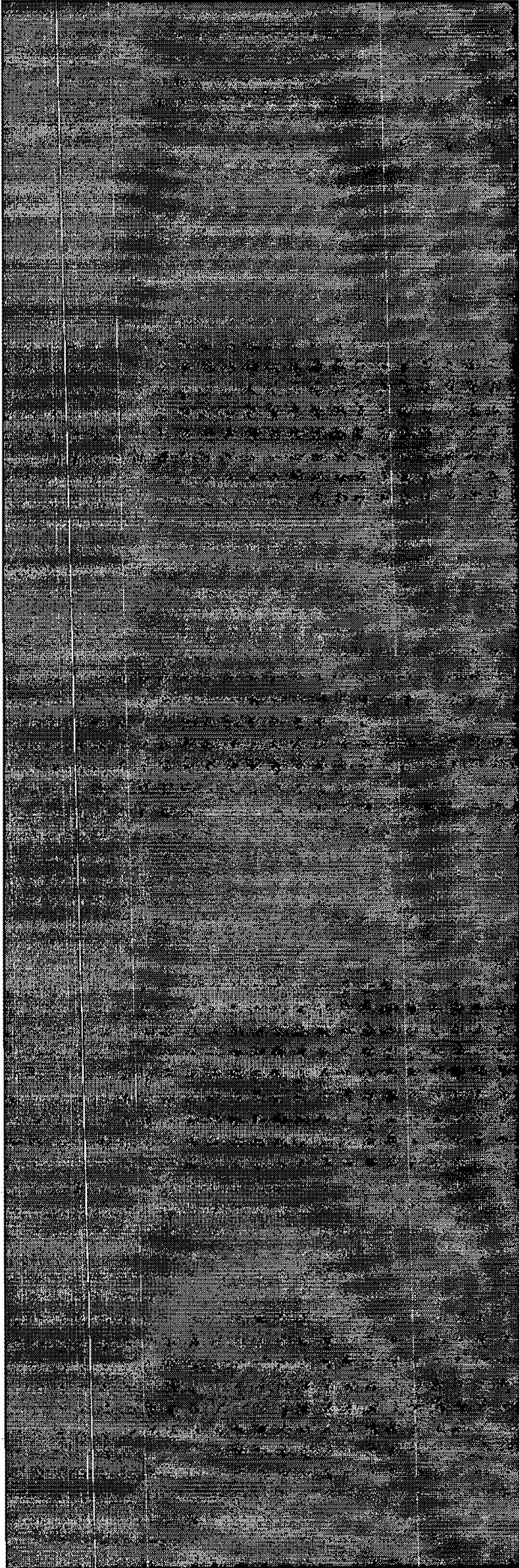
That philosophy--which stresses learning differences rather than learning disabilities--is at the heart of Levine's pioneering approach.

Drawing on more than 20 years as a clinician as well as the research of cognitive scientists, Levine compiled what is the only comprehensive model of the components of learning.

Laid out on a placemat-size sheet of paper, it is daunting in its complexity. It has eight "constructs," such as language, memory, attention and social cognition (important for reading cues from fellow students or the teacher).

Levine says every person has a neuro-developmental profile that combines strengths and weaknesses. "Everyone has dysfunctions. It's all a question of which ones they have."

What schools should do, he says, is play to individual students' strengths and figure out ways to bypass or strengthen their weaknesses. But schools



bypass or strengthen their weaknesses. But schools rarely are that flexible. Instead, he says, they tend to slap labels on kids who don't measure up, calling them slow, lazy or learning disabled. And that narrow approach, he says, has caused the number of learning-disabled students to rise 38% nationally in a decade.

To decide who is disabled, schools generally rely mostly on tests of IQ and academic skills.

But such tests are widely discredited, even by top special education officials with the U.S. Department of Education. They can be very inaccurate. And they don't result in a diagnosis or a prescription. They merely produce a label.

Such labels, Levine says, discourage kids. "They interpret it to mean their brain isn't very good."

Levine acknowledges that his approach to learning has yet to be scientifically validated. He also agrees that its successes are anecdotal.

But as he presents his theories to teachers across the country, support is growing.

Last summer, 1,800 teachers completed two weeks of training in his theories, observation techniques and teaching methods at 10 regional "Schools Attuned" centers, including three in California: the Etta Israel Center in Los Angeles, UC Irvine and the Children's Health Council in Palo Alto.

Among the high-profile backers of such ventures is Charles R. Schwab, the stockbroker and financier who discovered as an adult that he is dyslexic.

"Mel is a real pioneer," said Schwab, whose family foundation recently put up \$10 million in a matching grant to support the spread of Levine's ideas. "There isn't just one mind that fits all sizes, just like there are many sizes of shoes."

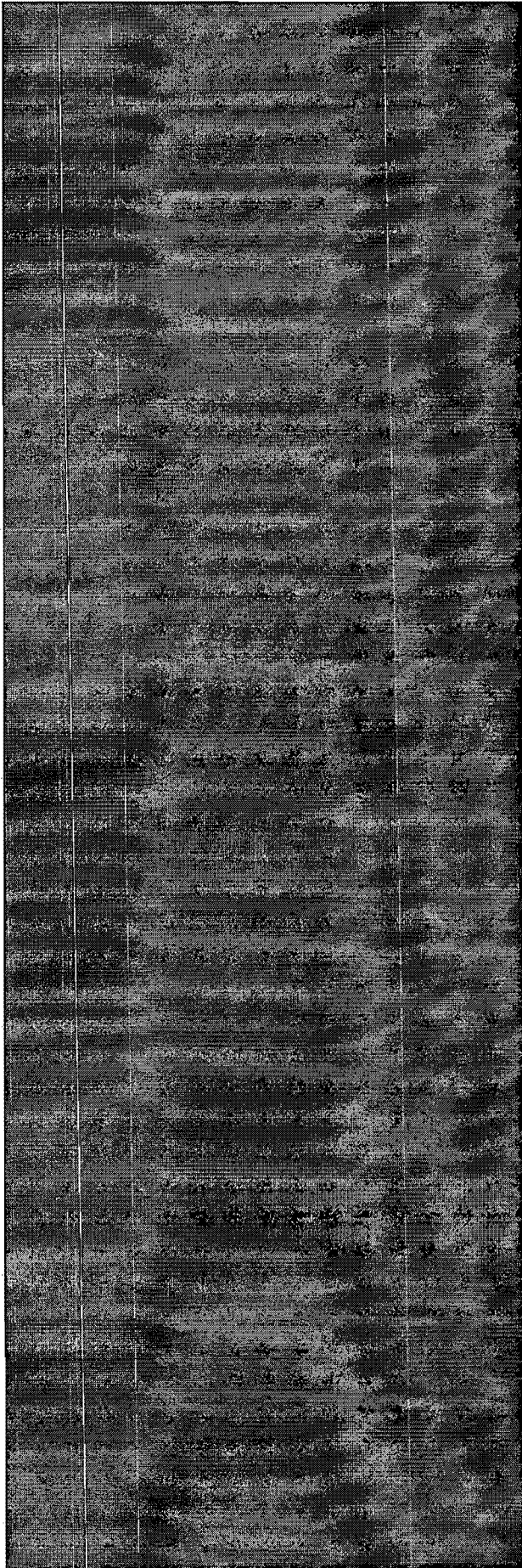
But, in most cases, Schwab said, teachers think "there's only one way to teach kids."

Many parents and students wind up searching for help outside schools. "I just want him to reach his potential," said Linda Shinkle, Teddy's mother, explaining why she sought out Levine, who is director of the Clinical Center for the Study of Development and Learning at the University of North Carolina.

Ruling Out Various Problems

Teddy's learning problems started in the first grade with reading. He could memorize words fine. But he had trouble linking letters to their sound. By second grade, Teddy was leaving the house each morning in tears, telling his mother he wasn't smart enough for school. A school psychologist told Linda he would never learn to read.

But Shinkle, an attorney in private practice in the town of Williamston, near Lansing, didn't accept that dire prediction. She hired a tutor who worked with Teddy an hour a day on letter sounds. She also put



him in a private school with small classes.

Today, Teddy reads fine, if slowly, and has some lapses in spelling. He's strong in math and science, enjoys art and is popular and athletic. But his writing is laboriously slow. Even his speech is halting. "In school, I want to say things, but I have a hard time putting it into words," he told a therapist.

In Levine's office, Linda Shinkle watched anxiously as Levine had Teddy touch his fingers to thumbs in a rapid-fire sequence, draw a long line between two other lines, and write the alphabet as one long word as fast as he could. That told Levine that Teddy's small motor functions were fine and shouldn't hinder his writing.

Other tests, such as a game of pig Latin and answering questions such as "What is a piece of clothing that rhymes with the word 'ox?'," showed that he had no trouble with language. And further exercises revealed that his memory and conceptual understanding were intact.

Teddy stumbled only when asked to make up a sentence and to orally summarize a paragraph Levine read to him about pollution's effect on birds. He understood it, but when he tried to retell it he got it all out of order and even made up details.

Levine said the tests showed that Teddy's dysfunction is isolated and relatively mild. He has a rich imagination and is thoughtful, but has trouble getting ideas across.

"It's like a marvelous factory that creates all sorts of wonderful packages, but there's not enough delivery trucks to get the product out," Levine told Linda and Teddy after the exam.

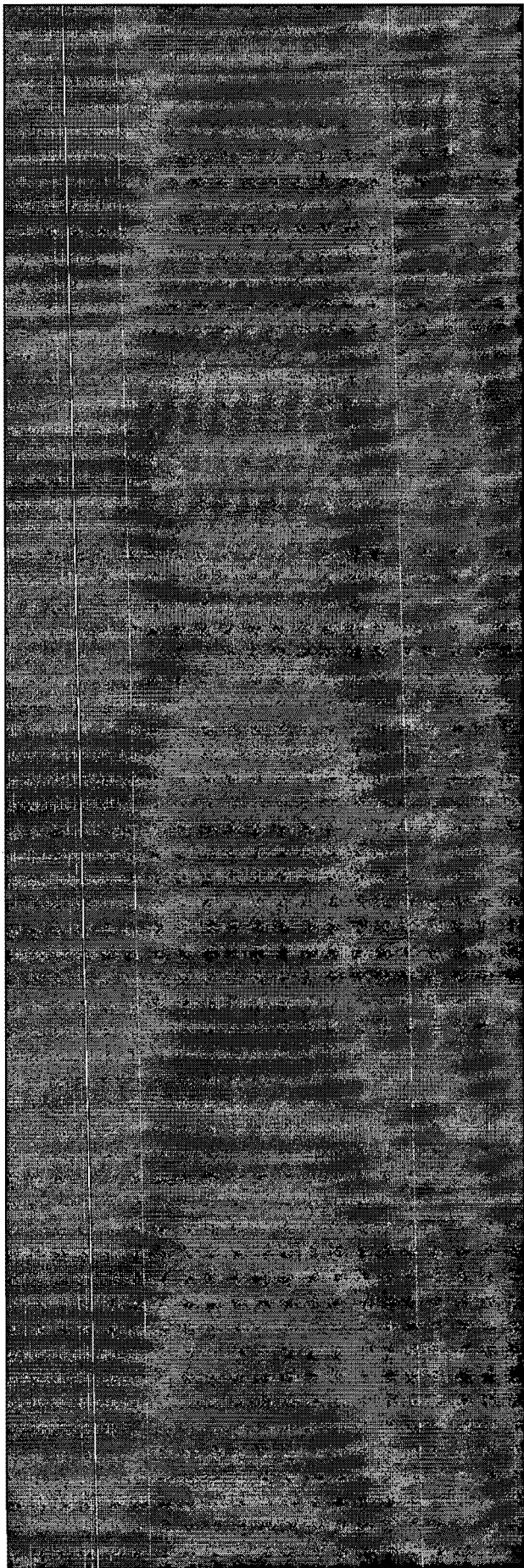
Because difficulties like Teddy's are not severe, they would probably be overlooked initially in school. But that could be disastrous, with frustration leading to anger. "When you neglect these language expression problems, these are the kids who get put on Prozac in the 11th grade," Levine said.

He recommended a long list of ways for Teddy's teachers and mother to help him practice expressing himself, by summarizing a book or the action in a football game, for example. He also recommended that Teddy use a computer, and dictate the first draft of essays or reports into a tape recorder.

"There's a lot of stuff you could do for him that wouldn't cost a penny," Levine said.

Obviously, teachers have neither the time nor the expertise to conduct as extensive an exam as Levine. But, he said, they can learn to observe students in a variety of settings and can consider all the factors that go into learning.

Take writing, for example. A student must have ideas, must access the words to get them across, and must form them into phrases that conform with the rules of English. Beyond that, forming letters involves four neurological processes: visualizing the



shape of letters and words, accessing the sounds of words from their storage place in long-term memory, creating letters, and monitoring one's progress, which Levine calls a feedback loop.

Interest in Learning Developed in Philippines

Levine, 59, was a Rhodes scholar, then attended medical school at Harvard University. After that, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and it was while stationed in the Philippines that he became interested in learning, volunteering to be the local school's doctor.

Back in Boston, he was on the faculty at Harvard and also became the chief of ambulatory pediatrics at Children's Hospital. While there, he helped write the special education law for Massachusetts, which did not require students to be diagnosed as disabled to receive services. Federal law, only recently changed, did.

Because he's a doctor, not an educator, Levine said, his ideas are not always popular in schools of education. So he's had to take them directly to teachers and parents.

Helping him do that have been some powerful allies.

The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation supported the compilation of his model of learning with a \$1.2-million grant. Then the Harvard Graduate School of Education convened a meeting to see how Levine's work might be shared more widely.

It was there that Levine met Schwab. Together, they formed an institute called **All Kinds of Minds**.

Two purposes of the institute are the support and development of the regional centers, which help classroom teachers understand Levine's model and how to use it to help their students. Another powerful ally is the family foundation of Disney Chairman Michael Eisner, which recently donated \$1 million to Levine's institute.

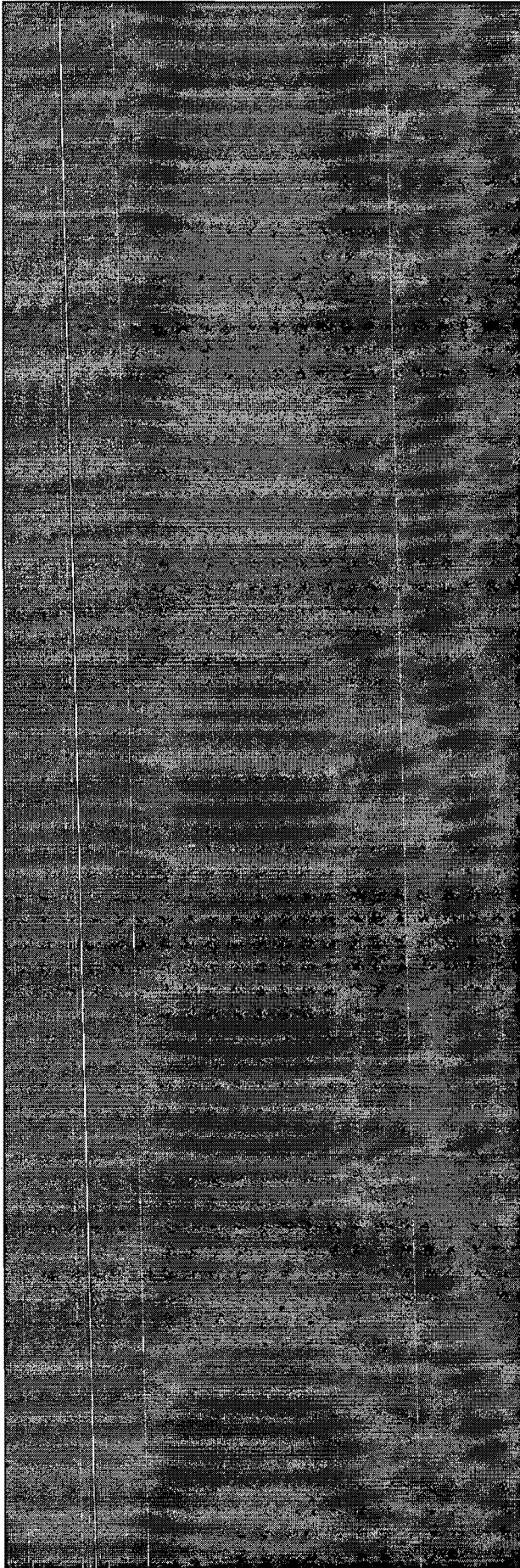
Another boost will come a year from now, when public television will broadcast a major series featuring Levine that will be accompanied by books, videos, audiocassettes and a Web site.

Parents, many of whom have grown discouraged by their children's lack of progress in traditional special education courses, tend to be devoted fans.

Jim McCarthy, a public affairs executive with Citgo Petroleum in Tulsa, Okla., has seen positive effects from it with his fifth-grade daughter, Caitlin.

She has great difficulty writing. Her attention span is short. And it's hard for her to understand speech, but it's easier if she can focus on someone's lips when they talk.

So, to help her, her teachers at Monte Cassino School, one of the city's top private schools, make sure she is looking at them when they talk. She's allowed to use a computer to write her assignments,



which seems easier for her than writing by hand, and she completes her spelling tests orally.

"The game is to find a way to unlock that ability to learn . . . so they have that joy and excitement," McCarthy said.

Teachers Also Like Levine's Work

Teachers too find Levine's work valuable. They say his model gives them terms and justifications for some of the things that good teachers do instinctively, such as breaking up long lessons into shorter chunks. But it also helps them consider other explanations for an apparent lapse in learning.

Barbara Smith, a second-grade teacher at Mangum Primary Center in Durham, N.C., is in her first year of using Levine's ideas. One of her students, Morgan Parks, would read a particular word perfectly, but "then when it comes up again, he wouldn't have a clue."

After consulting her materials from the Schools Attuned training, she decided he needed to work on decoding words. Smith sent home word games. "Now," she said, "he's making a lot of progress."

But Smith and other teachers also say that Levine's model can be overwhelming, especially for young teachers who are merely trying to get through the material they need to cover.

Part of it is that each of the eight "constructs" Levine describes could be the topic of a dissertation itself. And part of it is that Levine uses terms such as "temporal-spatial organization" and "ideational linkage cohesion."

G. Reid Lyon, director of federal reading research programs at the National Institute of Child and Human Development, praised Levine's emphasis on improving teachers' level of understanding. "There's no doubt that teachers are going to be much better practitioners, the more they know that is valuable to know," he said.

But Lyon too worries that Levine's model is overly complex. Plus, he said, it includes concepts not yet proven to be germane to effective learning.

In response to such concerns, Levine and his staff are rewriting the Schools Attuned curriculum to make it less theoretical and more practical.

Celia Ripke, principal of Gardner Elementary School in Los Angeles, and two of her teachers spent two weeks last summer being trained in Levine's work at the Etta Israel Center. They decided to try it out immediately, rather than wait until they had mastered all of the ideas.

Teachers at the school gave them the names of 22 children who seemed ripe for referral to special education. After observing them closely, as Levine does, Ripke and her teachers decided that 10 of them were not learning disabled. Instead, they had other issues that could be addressed in alternate ways.

"In the past," Ripke said, "all of them would have been referred to special education because we wouldn't have had that tool."

Tips to 'Manage' Learning

Dr. Mel Levine, a North Carolina pediatrician who has specialized in learning and behavior difficulties for 25 years, contends that schools are far too quick to label children as learning disabled. Learning is complex, requiring the smooth meshing of different skills, such as memory, attention and language.

All people have strengths and weaknesses in various areas, he says. Teachers, therefore, should modify their classrooms in response to those differences in help students "manage" their learning as effectively as possible.

* * *

ATTENTION

As alternatives to Ritalin or other stimulants prescribed for students with problems paying attention, teachers can try:

- * Front-row seating. The child is closer to the teacher and in a direct line of sight.

- * Special signal. A prearranged cue can tell the child to get back on task without humiliating him or her.

- * Attention meter. When the teacher is giving directions, for example, he or she could put a cardboard meter's pointer at 100%.

- * Frequent short breaks. The child should be allowed to stretch or walk around before getting back down to business.

- * Breaking up lessons. This can help maintain focus.

- * Color-coding. On overheads or handouts, most important information should be in one color with nonessential information in other colors.

* * *

MEMORY

Schools require students to memorize massive amounts of information, but a poor memory does not necessarily indicate poor understanding. Also, there are different types of memory: short term, long term and active. Some tips:

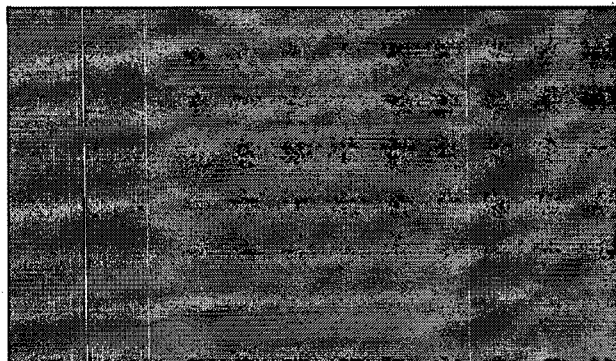
- * Practice. Build working memory with mental math. Give students a list and have them repeat it--backward.

- * Repetition. When giving directions, have students repeat them.

- * Multi-mode. Give directions orally, but also write them on the board.

- * Modify assignments. Allow students with long-term memory trouble to write key information on cards to use during tests.

- * Technology. Students with short-term memory trouble often have difficulty putting their ideas on



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paper in cursive writing. A computer keyboard seems to be easier for many students.

- * **Modify tests.** Oral tests place less drain on memory than do written tests, while still determining whether concepts have been learned.

- * **Strategies.** Teach children to picture something they need to memorize. Then, keep checking to make sure they are using it.

Sources: Schools Attuned; Bina Varughese, coordinator of educational services, Summit View School, North Hollywood

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Whom to Contact for Information

Here are organizations to contact for information on learning disabilities. The Web sites also lead to dozens of other sources of information on special education.

All Kinds of Minds

<http://www.allkindsofminds.org>

International Dyslexia Association

8600 LaSalle Road, Chester Building, Suite 382
Baltimore, MD, 21286-2044
(410) 296-0232

<http://www.interdys.org>

Learning Disabilities Assn. of California

655 Lewelling Blvd.
San Leandro, CA 94579
(916) 725-7881

<http://www.ldaca.org>

Schwab Foundation for Learning

1650 S. Amphlett Blvd.
Suite 300
San Mateo, CA 94402
(800) 230-0988

<http://www.schwablearning.org>

Council For Exceptional Children

1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589
(703) 620-3660 or (888) CEC-SPED

<http://www.cec.sped.org>

California Department of Education

Special Education Division
515 L Street
Suite 270
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 445-4613

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed>

National Institute of Mental Health

6001 Executive Blvd., Rm. 8184
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
(301) 443-4513

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<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/learndis.htm>



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Guidelines on Standardized Tests and Civil Rights Get Reworked

By KENNETH R. WEISS, Times Education Writer

In an attempt to mollify critics, the U.S. Department of Education has revised draft guidelines on how schools and colleges can use standardized tests without violating the civil rights of minority students, who often score lower on such tests than whites.

An earlier version, circulated last May, drew a barrage of complaints from conservatives and education lobbyists who said that it undermined--rather than bolstered--the legitimacy of using standardized tests to measure student achievement or aptitude.

The stated goal of the guidelines, which are advisory, not binding on schools or colleges, seemed straightforward: Explain a complex and sometimes contradictory set of civil rights rulings in one helpful booklet that would show educators how to use standardized tests without getting sued.

But lobbyists and education lawyers complained that the earlier version would do the opposite. They feared it would provide a guidebook on suing school districts or college admissions offices.

"When we heard that some people were construing it as a road map to litigation, we took a long, hard look at it," said Arthur L. Coleman, the Education Department's deputy assistant secretary for civil rights.

After six months of revisions, the guidebook has swelled to five times its former size. Now chock-full of legal citations, the reworded document reads more like a helpful synthesis of court rulings and educational principles than an advocate's guidebook.

"It's a step in the right direction," said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president of the American Council on Education, which represents 1,800 colleges and universities. "We're far more comfortable with it than we were six months ago."

The guidelines explain that tests must be "educationally justified," if using them to determine who advances a grade in school, graduates from high school or gets admitted to college has a "disparate impact" on students from different ethnic groups or races. In other words, if black or Latino students persistently score worse on a test than whites, school officials must be able to cite an educational reason for the questions that are used.

The guidelines will undergo two more revisions before being officially issued in May.

Much of the debate over the guidelines has focused on how they would affect the SAT, which is used widely by colleges and universities as a criterion for admission.

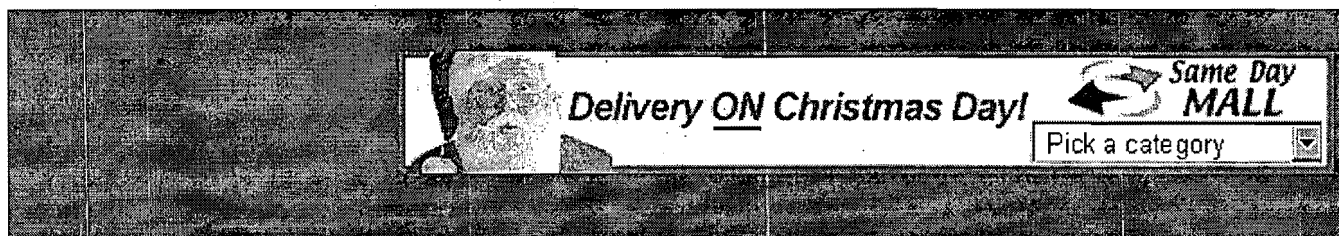
But Coleman said the driving force behind the Education Department's guidelines is the proliferation of high-stakes tests in elementary, middle and high schools.

Six states now rely on tests as a condition of grade promotion and the department estimates that 26 states will use standardized tests as a condition of high school graduation by 2003. California hopes to begin phasing in its high school exit exam next fall.

Already, though, Texas officials have been sued over their high school graduation test by opponents who say that African American and Latino students are failing in disproportionate numbers.

The Education Department continues to champion programs to elevate school standards, Coleman said, including the use of tests to set benchmarks on students' progress.

"At the same time," he said, "it's critically important that educators and policymakers understand the fundamentals: using tests in appropriate ways that will comply with federal nondiscrimination laws."





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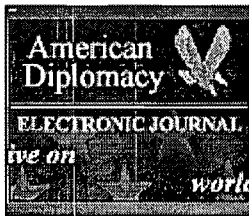
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He's Here! And There!

Heading in all directions won't get Al Gore where he wants to go.

By Dana Milbank

Sunday, December 19, 1999; Page B01

The problem with pandering, as Vice President Gore is fast learning, is that once you start, it's hard to kick the habit. Promise the auto workers something to win their vote, and soon you'll be making concessions to the Sierra Club. Throw the left-handed oboists a bone, and before you know it, you'll have Swedish-American vegetarians knocking on your door.

It became apparent last week that Gore is sliding down this slippery slope. On Monday, Gore declared that he wanted to abandon the Clinton administration's "don't ask, don't tell" policy for gays in the military--one more attempt to secure a crucial constituency before the New York and California primaries on March 7. Leaving aside the merits of Gore's position--the policy, by most measures, hasn't worked--his stance is politically reckless and easy for Republicans to exploit in the general election. Gore's pollsters objected to the move, and no wonder: When Bill Clinton tackled this subject soon after his election in 1992, the resulting backlash sent the president into a skid that took three years to reverse.

Why would Gore open this can of worms?

Before anybody could figure out that one, Gore confounded his supporters again with a follow-up pander. On Tuesday, Gore broke with the Clinton administration to recommend "flexibility" in the use of marijuana as a pain reliever. A hit with the drug-legalization crowd, Gore's new position goes even further than that of his more liberal Democratic challenger, Bill Bradley.

By Wednesday, you could hear the groans coming out of the Capitol Hill offices of the Democratic Leadership Council, the brain trust for the moderate "New Democrat" movement that carried Clinton to the White House. The New Democrats thought they had put together a winning formula: Toss out the old interest-group politics and tout centrist policies that appeal to the vast suburban middle class that now dominates the electorate. It worked for Clinton in '92 and '96. This time, Republican George W. Bush has anticipated the strategy; the Texas governor has adopted many of the New Democrats' ideas. He's defying the interest groups of the right by flatly refusing, for example, to commit himself to naming a running mate or a Supreme Court justice who is opposed to abortion.

To the moderates' dismay, Gore, once the centrist heir to the New

Democratic movement, seems to be morphing into Walter Mondale and Michael Dukakis before their very eyes. Bradley, it might be argued, has no choice but to paint himself as liberal in order to mount an insurgent challenge to the more powerful Gore. What's Gore's excuse for responding in kind? Donna Brazile, Gore's campaign manager and a former acolyte of Jesse Jackson, spelled it out a month ago in her now-famous remarks to Post political reporter Ceci Connolly: "The four pillars of the Democratic Party are African Americans, labor, women, and what I call other ethnic minorities." She then listed other "emerging constituencies": environmentalists, gays and the disabled.

The DLC's weekly newsletter protested such logic, equating it with "the failed Democratic presidential campaigns of the 1980s." Sen. Joseph Lieberman, DLC chairman and a Gore supporter, called the criticism a "warning sign" for Gore to return to the suburban middle class. The Clinton White House has voiced similar worries.

Yet Gore's panderama continues. Earlier in the fall, he objected to the Clinton deal with congressional Republicans that cleared the way for the United States to pay its withheld U.N. dues, worried that he would lose women's support because of the agreement's ban on U.S. money to international groups that advocate abortion rights. Gore regularly delivers a full-throated defense of affirmative action, aggravating Democratic moderates seeking new solutions. Rarely a day goes by when Gore doesn't attack Bradley's health care plan (a proposal that the DLC gave favorable reviews) as an assault on the poor, the disabled and minorities. And even before his "don't ask, don't tell" declaration, Gore had sought to secure support from gay voters by announcing his opposition to a California initiative against gay marriage. Earlier, Gore had been noncommittal, but he got religion when he heard that Bradley was about to state his opposition.

Gore's behavior is worrying for the Democrats. As the Republicans choose between two attractive moderates, John McCain and Bush, the two Democrats--both traditionally centrists--act as if they are campaigning for the Cambridge city council. Some blame Tony Coelho, Gore's campaign chairman, who, as the Democratic whip in the House, was an expert at playing interest-group politics. Now, by pursuing a similar strategy for Gore, Coelho risks winning the Democratic nomination but dooming Gore in the general election by handing suburban, middle-class voters to the Republicans. That's how Anita Dunn, a top Bradley adviser, interprets Gore's strategy: "He has sacrificed his New Democratic credentials for the constituency politics he needs to get the nomination."

The New Democrats aren't willing to abandon the vice president just yet. He is, after all, a founding member of the DLC. "I'm inclined to give him a break" because he's in a fight for the nomination, says Lieberman. There are some hopeful signs that Gore has begun to heed the advice of his moderate supporters. He's been focusing more on the Clinton administration's accomplishments, taking credit for the booming economy. There is also reason to believe he will soon be talking more about the impressive success of welfare reform, which Bradley opposed. And Gore continues to touch on New Democratic issues. He hasn't wavered on free trade or a strong military, and his recent speech on fatherhood, like earlier speeches on civic

partnerships and livability, comes straight from the DLC's playbook.

At the same time, however, he has turned his back on some DLC notions that draw stiff opposition from various interest groups. For example, he has ridiculed Bradley for once entertaining the concept of education vouchers--an idea favored by many New Democrats, but which is anathema to the major teachers' unions. And the vice president has attacked Bradley for suggesting that an older Social Security retirement age might be discussed as part of entitlement reform--a proposal that causes palpitations in the senior citizen lobby.

In Gore's defense, there is ample evidence that the special-interest strategy still works in Democratic primaries. The vice president, after slipping behind Bradley in the New Hampshire polls, is again competitive. And a New York poll by Quinnipiac College, released last week, found Gore had moved ahead of Bradley in that state, 42 percent to 39 percent, compared with a November survey that had Bradley ahead, 47 percent to 38 percent. Gore can also argue that Bradley's surge left him little choice. Earlier in the campaign, Gore ignored Bradley and aimed for the New Democratic center--only to find that Bradley had mounted a serious challenge by appealing to voters on the left.

While Gore is now putting up a fight for the liberal interest groups, he isn't going as far as his rival in many cases. The Advocate, a national gay magazine, noted in October that Bradley "took a position to the left of . . . Barney Frank" (the openly gay Massachusetts congressman) and quoted Bradley as suggesting that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 be rewritten to include gays. Bradley has even attacked Gore, author of a best-selling book on saving the environment, for not being enough of an environmentalist, blasting the administration for renewing undeveloped offshore oil leases.

Such attacks from the left would help Gore in a general election--but only if he resists fighting Bradley for every interest group. After Gore announced his opposition to the "don't ask, don't tell" policy, the Bradley campaign accused Gore of being a Johnny-come-lately to the issue--to which Gore proudly boasted that he has always held this unpopular opinion. The Gore campaign sent out a two-page fact sheet that painstakingly outlined how "in the early days of the Clinton-Gore administration, Vice President Al Gore was a forceful voice in support of lifting the ban on gays in the military." The campaign substantiated this with quotes from six publications, going back to the early days of Clinton's first term.

Let's accept that Gore opposed the policy in '93. Let's also accept that it's a matter of principle, not politics. Still, why would he wait until now to say so, right after Hillary Clinton did the same thing, after Bradley had announced his views, and knowing that the issue had caused Clinton such trouble in '93? Gore tied it to a recent well-publicized conviction in the gruesome murder of a gay soldier, Pfc. Barry Winchell, who was beaten to death with a baseball bat while he slept. Fair enough. But even some of Gore's advisers said they didn't see the point in Gore making such a statement right now. "There's risk, and there's not a lot of reward," says one.

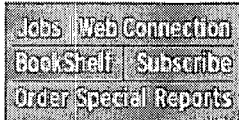
Gore still has time to return from the "four pillars" to his New

Democratic instincts. Gore's advisers, stung by the moderates' criticism, have been calling some top Democratic centrists to reassure them that, while the vice president remains committed to the cause, he must balance it with other issues. But such calls compound the New Democrats' worries. The phone calls suggest that the Gore campaign is treating the moderates as if they were just another constituency group demanding a seat at the table. Gore, Coelho and Brazile must realize that the middle class isn't an interest group. It's the American electorate.

Dana Milbank, a senior editor at the New Republic, is covering the 2000 presidential campaign.

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in the car

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January 2000

Brain Drain

Commentary

By John Merrow

Related stories:

Read a related commentary about teacher certification, "Misfire," in this issue of *Teacher Magazine*.

"Fordham Issues Low Grades to States on Teacher Quality," from *Education Week*, Nov. 17, 1999.

"Will the Best and the Brightest Teach?," May 5, 1999.

On a warm spring afternoon in Texas, about 25 education majors, all young white women, are waving plastic toys in the air, giggling and singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." They're pretending to be 5-year-olds as part of their teacher training.

In rural Georgia, 850 miles to the east, a young man is leading his 9th grade English class through the day's vocabulary. One of the words is "strenuous," which he has written on the board as "strenous." During the lesson he reviews the definition, the spelling, and the syllabification, never catching his mistake. His students dutifully copy his spelling mistake into their workbooks.

Education's real problems lie within the system that is already in place, and no influx of idealistic men and women will change that.

And in Oakland, California, an 11th grade biology class is having its 163rd consecutive class meeting without a certified science teacher-their instructor being the latest in a yearlong parade of substitute teachers to march through their classroom.

Taken together, these three anecdotes would seem to support President Clinton's contention that we are facing a major crisis in teaching, that we need more teachers, and that we need better-trained teachers. Administration officials and many others contend that our schools will have to hire more than 2 million teachers over the next decade. Washington has pumped \$100 million into recruiting and training, but the Clinton administration wants to increase that amount tenfold.

I would make a different argument. I believe these vignettes, and the circumstances behind them, demonstrate that our education system has an unacceptably high tolerance for mediocrity. What's more, our current national, state, and local policies merely reinforce the status quo.

Although some regions of the country are having difficulty finding teachers, and shortages exist in a few fields (science, math, and special education), we now produce more teachers than we need-at least 30,000 a year by some estimates. What shortages exist would be better labeled "self-inflicted wounds." These tend to be inflicted in one of three ways: Schools underpay and mistreat teachers and

eventually drive them from the profession; inept school districts cannot find the qualified teachers living under their noses; or substandard training doesn't prepare young men and women for classroom realities.

Consider this metaphor: A swimming pool with a serious leak. You wouldn't expect that pouring more water into the pool would in time fix the leak, but that's precisely our approach toward the so-called teacher shortage. Everyone's noticed that the teaching "pool" is low-and getting lower. Impending retirements, increasing student enrollments, and legislation mandating smaller classes, particularly in the lower grades, are the reasons, we're told. The response has been to recruit more people into teaching, using a variety of strategies including public-service-announcement campaigns, \$100 million in federal money, hiring bonuses, help with mortgages, and recruitment trips to Spain and other distant lands.

The pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. We're misdiagnosing the problem as "recruitment" when it's really retention.

Dire warnings are not new, and neither are these strategies. Almost every U.S. president since Harry Truman has warned of teacher shortages, and large-scale recruitment efforts have followed. Yet the pool keeps losing water because no one is paying attention to the leak. That is, we're misdiagnosing the problem as "recruitment" when it's really "retention." Simply put, we train teachers poorly and then treat them badly-so they leave in droves.

As it happens, new evidence indicates increased interest in teaching among our nation's university students. A 1998 survey of over 300,000 entering college freshmen reveals that more than 10 percent of them say they want to teach after they graduate. The recent results are the best showing for the teaching profession since the early 1970s and almost twice what they were in 1982, which was the lowest point of interest in teaching. On the surface, the news is encouraging, but just because 22 Princeton undergraduates want to teach (up from three a few years ago), no one should assume we're out of the woods. We aren't.

The fact remains that our nation's 1,300 schools and colleges of education are already producing more than enough teachers. But about 30 percent of those newly minted teachers don't go into classrooms. Some never intended to; they were majoring in education because it's an easy way to get a degree or to have a "fallback" career option. Others found they couldn't get teaching jobs in their hometowns, and so they found other work; sticking close to home was the goal, not becoming a teacher.

Many who become teachers don't stay long. An estimated 30 percent leave the field within five years; in cities, the exit rate is an astonishing 50 percent.

Of every 100 new graduates with licenses to teach, 30 do not. Of the

remaining 70, at least 21 will have left teaching within five years. At the very least, that is an inefficient use of human and material resources.

Education's real problems lie within the system that is already in place, and no influx of idealistic men and women will change that. Our recent investigation into the teacher shortage for a PBS documentary found a systemwide pattern of mediocrity and incompetence that begins in schools of education and infects the entire system.

In Georgia, we found that school administrators frequently assign teachers to teach subjects regardless of whether they had majored or even minored in those subjects in college. For example, the young man who couldn't spell "strenuous" is a middle school physical education teacher and coach, but he'd been assigned to teach English, history, and math at the local high school. He knew he was in over his head, but he had no choice. In that particular high school, at least 20 percent of the faculty were teaching classes in subjects they hadn't themselves studied.

This is standard operating procedure in many districts, not just in Georgia, because lax state accreditation rules metaphorically look the other way. Georgia's particular loophole allows a teacher to teach two of five classes "out of field" without being counted as "out of field." Imagine the uproar if podiatrists spent 40 percent of their time performing brain surgery.

In other places, we found qualified, certified teachers who simply couldn't penetrate incompetent school bureaucracies. Katherine Scheuermann, who has a California license to teach science, applied for a teaching position in Oakland in 1997 and again in 1998. She finally got a response-nearly two years later-in the form of a letter inviting her to apply for a position in bilingual education. Without much difficulty, we found two other certified teachers who told essentially the same story: Oakland's bureaucracy was impenetrable, so they looked elsewhere.

Oakland is not an anomaly, according to those who have studied the issue. City school systems tend to be run by overstuffed bureaucracies. And, as mentioned, cities lose teachers at an alarming rate. For example, Oakland has to replace up to 30 percent of its teachers every year, even though it pays well for a school district. Why do science teachers leave? Ask veteran Nancy Caruso:

"I had no water, and I was supposed to teach science. I was toting water from a decaying toilet, basically little gallon containers, one at a time, and it was just very frustrating for me. And if you look around, I'm in a decaying building. It's graffiti-ridden, trash everywhere, and it seems like nothing that could get done gets done."

New teachers seem to be treated even worse. As Caruso, who just left after 10 years at Oakland High School, observes wryly: "Administrators give new teachers the hardest, most challenging classes and the most preparations, so they have maybe four different classes to prepare for every day, and then administrators expect that that's going to make them excited about teaching. It's just not

conducive to retaining young, enthusiastic people. They get burnt out, and so they go to the suburbs or they leave teaching completely."

But mediocrity and incompetence begin earlier, at most of the 1,300 institutions that train teachers. Their parent universities tend to treat education programs as "cash cows" for their overall needs, diverting tuition paid by education majors into law, medicine, engineering, and nursing programs, for example. As Stanford University professor Linda Darling-Hammond notes, "If you are preparing to be a teacher, you can expect about half of the tuition money you put into the till to come back to support your preparation."

Recruiting more teachers seems like the simple solution to the shortage. It's also the wrong approach.

Training teachers on the cheap means large classes on campus, rather than intensive (and more expensive) work in real schools with real children. So, for example, we found those would-be teachers at Texas A&M earnestly pretending to be 5-year-olds for 50 minutes at a stretch. "It's as close as we can get to the real thing," one student told us, apparently unaware of the existence of a dozen elementary schools within a few miles of campus.

Training on the cheap means more part-time faculty and lower salaries for those with full-time jobs. It's no secret that schools of education are at the bottom of the university pecking order. On the bottom rung of the education school's own ladder of prestige are those who actually train teachers.

It's likely that unimaginative training has an unintended consequence: It breeds contempt for the profession these students are supposed to be getting ready for. We asked a class of seniors, on the verge of graduating and moving into classrooms, whether they were having doubts about their career choice. Virtually every hand went up.

Most schools of education know how to train teachers well, but that requires more time and money. About 30 percent of A&M's education students are enrolled in a separate and more rigorous program, one that requires them to spend 40 hours a week in a public school, working with a mentor teacher. Throughout the year, these students take most of their university classes in the public school, often taught by experienced public school teachers.

Where are the university's education professors? Most are back on campus, lecturing, writing, and doing research-and for good reason: They will not get tenure for doing a good job of training teachers. Tenure is awarded to those who do research and publish.

Competition from "alternative certification" programs could force education schools to shape up. These programs, designed to attract and train older professionals looking to change careers, generally

provide an intensive summer of training and a year of weekend meetings, a far cry from the four- or five-year programs at education schools. Some of the nation's 120 alternative-certification programs are suspect, but others seem rigorous. For example, graduates of the state's alternative program in Austin routinely outperform graduates of nearly every education school in Texas on the state test for teachers. And districts rush to hire graduates of alternative programs.

Recruiting teachers is an appealingly simple solution to a complex problem. It's also the wrong approach. It not only lets education schools and public school systems off the hook, it actually rewards them. After all, those federal training dollars are going to be spent at education schools. And it treats these institutions as part of the solution-which seems akin to asking the polluters to clean up the river.

Most of all, however, current national policy seems to be a waste of money and a strategy that's destined to fail. As University of Georgia professor Richard Ingersoll notes: "We can recruit all kinds of qualified people and persuade them to go into teaching, but if they get into jobs that aren't well-paid and don't have particularly good working conditions in which they're given little say in the way schools operate, it's not going to really solve the problem because a lot of these people will leave."

Ingersoll is correct. If teacher training were rigorous and demanding, and if teaching were a well-paid occupation in which expertise was respected, and if out-of-field teaching were simply unacceptable, there'd be no teacher shortage. That would fix the leak.

John Merrow produces and anchors The Merrow Report, a television documentary series on education that airs on PBS stations nationwide.

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Vol. 11; number 4; page 50-51

LESSONS

Jacques Steinberg

Relighting a Fire in Teacher-Burnouts

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. THE signs of burnout in a teacher who has reached a certain age are timeless: the sigh of resignation upon opening a daily instruction plan yellowed from repetition; the realization that while the students never seem to get older, you certainly do; the gnawing sense that a can't-miss lesson has long ago lost its punch.

If such emotions are universal, no matter the profession, then so, until recently, has been the recourse. Teachers, like lawyers or journalists, have often had little choice but to take the path toward retirement when reaching such a crossroad.

Now a small but growing number of school systems, including Palm Beach County's 9,000-teacher district, are trying to change that. The districts have begun relieving some of their best teachers of classroom duties and enlisting them as mechanics of a sort, their sole job to service worn-out teachers who may have logged over 100,000 miles on their odometers but who, with proper retooling, can travel thousands more.

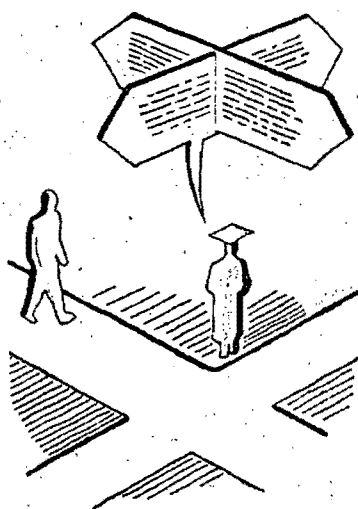
The mentors take seats in the back of the veterans' classrooms, suggest techniques, books and lesson plans that they may not have tried and provide a sympathetic ear.

"I take the attitude that this was a good teacher at one time, but something has changed," said Lisa Grives, an elementary-school teacher for 17 years here who now works exclusively as a coach of fellow veterans. "We're there to redirect them into thinking about what they came into teaching for."

"I want them to succeed," added Ms. Grives, one of three mentoring teachers in the district. "If they see that they can't succeed, I'm there to support them."

In many cases, the forces pushing for such intervention are the nation's two largest teachers' unions — the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association — which previously paid little heed to burnout.

The unions and the districts are



David Suter

facing crises on two fronts. With many school systems already short of teachers, and with hundreds of thousands who were hired to teach the baby-boom generation preparing to retire over the next 10 years, school systems risk losing their elder statesmen and their institutional memory unless some veterans can be persuaded to stay on longer than they might have imagined possible.

The unions have also realized, with the rush of charter schools and voucher programs, that the educational reform movement will proceed with them or without them. With their support for mentoring some senior teachers, and for coaxing those considered hopeless into leaving, the unions hope to demonstrate that they have heard the clamoring for new ways to elevate student achievement.

With as many as half of all new teachers in some schools quitting within five years of their first day, dozens of districts across the country have developed mentoring programs intended to build the skills of rookies. California recently made such programs mandatory. But what districts like Palm Beach County — as well as Columbus, Ohio; Rochester,

N.Y., and Minneapolis — have realized is that developing young teachers is not enough.

In Palm Beach County, a diverse district that stretches from bejeweled Boca Raton to hardscrabble Jupiter, the results of raining assistance on veterans are already visible: of the 94 teachers who have entered the one-year program since it began in 1995, either referred by a concerned administrator or volunteering for it, one-third have since received a favorable evaluation from their principals, their jobs secure.

Yes, another third have resigned, retired or been fired, and the remaining third either are being reassigned outside the classroom or are still in limbo. But the district and the Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association point with pride to those 29 success stories, teachers who as recently as five years ago would most likely have never continued in the classroom.

To maintain teachers' trust, the program emphasizes confidentiality, and one successful graduate of it, a 43-year-old elementary-school teacher, agreed to be interviewed only if she was not identified by name.

After 17 years in front of her classroom, the teacher said, she had grown so tired of "doing the same things" that she began taking her pupils on wild tangents that never got back to the point at hand. Her principal eventually noticed, and offered her the mentoring program as a way to rescue her career.

After a "day and a half of crying," during which she seriously considered a job selling school supplies, she accepted her principal's offer.

Over the course of the next year, her mentor, Ms. Grives, worked to rebuild her into the teacher she once was, modeling new lesson plans, drawing out her frustrations and rekindling the joy of molding a young mind.

"Now I can't wait to go to work," she said. "And it was cheaper than therapy."

The New York Times

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 15, 1999

Europe's Plea for Chechnya Cease-Fire Is Rebuffed by Russia

By MICHAEL R. GORDON

MAKHACHKALA, Russia, Dec. 14 — The chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe urged Russia and Islamic rebels today to agree to a cease-fire in Chechnya. But his plea was ignored, and Russia continued its heavy shelling of Grozny, the Chechen capital.

"I have made an appeal for a cease-fire, and if there is an attack on Grozny, I have not been answered," the official, Kurt Vollebaek, told reporters here today. "On the contrary, they are doing just the opposite of what I asked for."

The visit by Mr. Vollebaek underscores the dearth of Western influence over Russian policy in Chechnya. On the first full day of his three-day visit, Mr. Vollebaek not only had his plea rejected, but the Russians also bluntly informed him that they saw no role for his organization.

Like Western political leaders, the group has been concerned that civilians are being put in danger in Chechnya and wants to see the turmoil in the breakaway republic resolved by negotiation.

But the Kremlin asserts that suspending military operations now would simply allow the rebels to rebuild their strength and sow disorder throughout the south.

Even Mr. Vollebaek's visit did not come about easily. The organiza-

tion's role was hotly debated last month at the European summit meeting in Istanbul. Eventually an agreement was reached allowing Mr. Vollebaek to travel to the region.

But Moscow has sought to define the scope of his trip. Aleksandr A. Avdeyev, a senior foreign ministry official, said in an interview that Mr. Vollebaek's visit has been organized by Moscow to demonstrate that much of the Caucasus is stable and that Russia is a good custodian.

Mr. Vollebaek, in fact, did not start his visit in Chechnya. Instead, the Russians arranged for him to come to Dagestan, to the east.

Last August, Dagestan was invaded by Islamic militants operating from bases in Chechnya. And Mr. Vollebaek and several foreign reporters were whisked by helicopter today to the Botlikh area so Moscow could make its case that it was the militants who were responsible for the fighting in Chechnya.

The former war zone is a stunning landscape of snow-capped mountains, sheer cliffs, alpine meadows — and destruction. One of Mr. Vollebaek's stops — Tando, a tiny village with a commanding view of the valley — was leveled in the fighting last summer.

Residents said more than 200 militants seized the town, proclaiming they were going to drive the Russians out of the Caucasus. After the villagers fled, Russian troops coun-



Despite the West's pleas, Russia's attacks on Grozny continued.

terattacked with artillery and air strikes, demolishing the village.

Mr. Vollebaek said here in Makhachkala, Dagestan's capital, that the damage made a strong impression on him. But he added that his goal was to prevent similar attacks on civilians in Chechnya.

That brought a tart response from Nikolai Koshman, the Russian official in charge in Chechnya, who noted that Russia halted its earlier military campaign against the militants in 1996 when Chechnya achieved its de facto independence. Among the results, Mr. Koshman said, were an expansion of the militants' operations, hundreds of kidnappings and

the rebel attacks on Dagestan.

During Mr. Vollebaek's tour in Dagestan's mountains, the roar of Russian artillery fire in Chechnya could be heard in the distance.

The Russians appear determined to win the battle for Grozny, regardless of what the West thinks. This quest has lent an air of unreality to Mr. Vollebaek's peace mission.

On Wednesday he plans to visit Chechnya and Ingushetia, to the west. He expressed the hope that his meetings today with the leaders of Dagestan and his scheduled session with the president of Ingushetia might encourage a political settlement.

He acknowledged, however, that the Russians had scant interest in his proposal to involve the organization in the sort of mediating role it played in the 1994-96 conflict.

And he acknowledged that the Russians think his group should confine itself to organizing relief assistance for Chechnya, and not dispense political advice.

"They understand they cannot find a solution without including the Chechens somehow," he told reporters here. "Where they disagree with me is the international role. Their view is that this is something that Russia can solve by itself, that Russia is a great power, Russia is mighty, Russia can deal with its own business, and it does not need the international community to assist them."

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Monday, January 10, 2000

Wanted: Schools' Savior; Must Be Fast

Leadership: L.A. Unified finds itself in competition with other big-city districts for someone to take on the daunting, politically treacherous job of superintendent.

By LOUIS SAHAGUN, Times Education Writer

Los Angeles needs a permanent schools chief. So does New York City, San Francisco, Oakland, Las Vegas and Detroit, to name just a few of the major American cities in search of a superintendent.

Public expectations are so high, problems so entrenched and the politics so treacherous that the average tenure for a superintendent of an urban district is 2 1/2 years. Los Angeles schools chief Ruben Zacarias, who leaves office Jan. 15, lasted just that long.

To find its third superintendent in five years, the Board of Education has promised to conduct one of the most extensive executive searches in its history. This time around, the district has instructed its headhunters to consider candidates from the military and corporate world, as well as educators.

Some of the potential candidates already being mentioned by board members include a few who have been driven out of their superintendent jobs. Most often mentioned is Rudy Crew, who was forced to step down as chancellor of the New York schools after a clash with Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. Another popular name is Bill Rojas, who took over the Dallas schools after being forced out in San Francisco.

"It used to be a kiss of death to get fired by a large city. Not anymore," said Paul Houston, executive director of the American Assn. of School Administrators and a former school superintendent. "Getting canned in some of these places is almost a badge of courage and honor.

"Big cities need someone to die for their sins," he said. "They look for a savior on a white horse who will save them from themselves. What the new superintendent gets is a call to be accountable, without the tools to get the job done. When his team starts losing, city officials say, 'It's time to get somebody new.'"

The result often means scrapping the predecessor's initiatives and starting the reform process all over, with little academic achievement to show for it, according to Paul Hill, a research professor at the University of Washington's Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs.

Educators in Los Angeles might also be accused of looking for a superman to lead the 711,000-student district. In interviews, they expressed a need for someone who can restore stability and public confidence to a district that suffers some of the lowest test scores in the state, and who can lead the district beyond the political and ethnic turmoil that helped bring down Zacarias.

"We need someone with two key qualities," board member Caprice Young

said. "They must be able to articulate a vision for what our kids need to succeed in the new millennium, and they need to know how to run a \$7-billion organization.

"We're not just looking for a change agent; we need someone who can sail this ship," she added. "Many organizations seek the tried and true. But what we are facing is so new that there are few people who have succeeded there before."

New Leader Faces 'Gargantuan Task'

The new superintendent will have to contend with a swarm of pressing problems, including foundering test scores, overcrowded campuses, the end of social promotion, a movement to break up the sprawling district, newly arrived immigrants who perform poorly in English, a lack of available land for new schools, and dangerously polluted school sites.

Teachers union demands for a 6% increase in salary portend contentious bargaining negotiations this summer.

"The new superintendent faces a gargantuan task; I wish him or her the best of luck," said state Sen. Martha Escutia (D-Whittier), who described the school district as "a political hornet's nest in which many local officials feel they are getting very little in the way of quality education."

To pave the way toward a smooth transition, Ramon C. Cortines will become Los Angeles' interim superintendent on Jan. 16. He, along with Howard Miller, the district's chief of operations, have embarked on a mission to resolve many of the district's major problems by the time a permanent superintendent is selected in June.

"We're on a very, very fast track," said Cortines. "I would hope some of this district's most difficult problems will be behind us by the time a new superintendent arrives."

He intends to divide the district into eight to 10 semiautonomous "mini-districts," shift decision-making authority from district headquarters to schools, and reassign hundreds of headquarters bureaucrats into the field to assist teachers and principals needing help.

They already have ordered that all students have textbooks and a clean, accessible bathroom by June, and scaled back a Zacarias-backed plan to end social promotion in all grades this year.

In the meantime, following a national trend, the school board has ordered its search firm--Hamilton, Rabinovitz and Aschuler--to cast its net wide for all qualified candidates with strong communication skills and leadership experience.

The firm, which in 1995 recruited Thomas Payzant to the top schools job in Boston, expects to contact 5,000 people across the country to solicit applications, and to place advertisements in general media newspapers and specialized magazines such as Education Week.

Ed Hamilton, chairman of the search firm, warned against settling on any favorite candidates before his nationwide search is completed.

"Reading the headlines wrongly suggests there are a half-dozen potential candidates who keep getting hired and fired like football coaches," he said.

"That's not to say certain talented, experienced people won't be considered. But I would not bet on any individual based upon how soon or late their names appear on people's lips."

But others say the reality is that most school boards don't want to trust their districts to someone without experience in education. By and large, they prefer education reformers with a gift for avoiding tumult.

But finding experienced school administrators willing to take over large urban districts is becoming tougher every year, experts say.

Taxpayer revolts, ballooning student enrollments and decaying schools have helped make the post of superintendent "one of the most scary and challenging jobs in any sector on the globe," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools. That organization represents the nation's largest school districts.

"It's an exhilarating, 'only for the brave of heart' kind of job, and when it's over, the typical reaction is, 'That was great, but I ain't doing it again,' " he said. "That's why, when it comes to traditional superintendents, the number of candidates a major city can expect is well below what it was 10 years ago.

"The candidate pool is so shallow right now that Los Angeles and New York may find themselves competing like never before," Casserly said.

Late Sunday, the New York school board hired an interim superintendent, Citigroup executive Harold Levy.

The candidates pool was apparently reduced by one Thursday when Crew was appointed head of a new educational training center at the University of Washington.

Others who have been mentioned as potential candidates include San Diego Unified School District's chancellor of instruction Tony Alvarado; Elk Grove Unified School District Supt. Dave Gordon; Houston Independent School District Supt. Rod Paige; Fresno Unified School District Supt. Carlos Garcia, and Maria Casillas, a former Los Angeles Unified School District regional superintendent who leads a reform effort known as the Los Angeles Annenberg Metropolitan Project.

Panel Gets Off to Rocky Start

A 14-member citizens committee, consisting of two appointees chosen by each school board member, was formed to gather community input on the qualities needed in a Los Angeles superintendent. The committee must give its recommendations to the board by Jan. 24.

The panel got off to a rocky start Wednesday night when it convened for the first time in the Roosevelt High School auditorium. The meeting, which was advertised in local Spanish- and English-language media, became a sometimes rancorous affair attended by only 25 people. Many of them were loyal to Zacarias. Some criticized the selection process.

"This is theatrics," said Elena Arias, a local school district volunteer. "That's why few people bothered to come out. They know the system is fixed. They know these people already know whom they want to be superintendent."

A meeting the next night in San Fernando drew a slightly bigger audience.

Panelists blamed the low turnouts on inadequate planning and advertising, and difficulty in stirring public interest immediately after the holidays.

As the city sorts out the criteria for selecting the next superintendent, the issue of race arises.

School board President Genethia Hayes and board member Young insist that ethnicity should not play a role in the process. Others say that ethnicity is a valid and important consideration in a district that is 70% Latino.

"It seems to me that ethnicity is not irrelevant in Los Angeles--nor should it be the primary determinant," said Gregory Rodriguez, a Los Angeles-based fellow at the New America Foundation, a nonprofit public policy think tank in New York. "After all, it is a stage in the development of emerging groups that they use their ethnicity to gain access to the mainstream."

For all the challenges facing Los Angeles Unified, the man who is poised to briefly take control of the district says it's the opportunity of a lifetime.

When asked if he would consider staying on beyond June, Cortines laughed and said, "Heavens no!

"But if I was younger, I'd fight for this job; sure it's tough, but I wouldn't want a job that wasn't tough," said Cortines, who ran the New York City schools from 1993 to 1995. "This job is not about magic; it's about hard work and keeping your eye on the issues involved in making our kids better students.

"The danger is that incoming superintendents promise too much, and the people who employ them are just as unrealistic in wanting a magic elixir, or someone who walks on the high rocks," he said. "So we all have to be careful about what we promise, and what we ask for.

"But I think this is the greatest job opportunity in the country," he added. "And I'm optimistic about the search. Is this district going to improve? Hell yes!"





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THIS STORY HAS BEEN FORMATTED FOR EASY PRINTING

A primer on N.H. school funding crisis

By Globe Staff, 1/2/2000

How it began: A lawsuit was filed in 1991 on behalf of students in five poor school districts. Named after the central New Hampshire mill town that led the fight, the Claremont case is based on the premise that the state's constitution, like the Massachusetts constitution it was modeled on, held public education to be a state responsibility. Until this year, New Hampshire ranked last in the nation in state support of public education. Schools were funded almost exclusively by local property taxes.

How it was decided: The state's highest court ruled in 1993 that each child is guaranteed an adequate education and required the state to provide adequate funding. When a lower court ruled the current system was adequate, property-poor towns appealed. In 1997 the high court found the state's system of funding education with wildly disparate local property tax rates unconstitutional. The Legislature was ordered to fix it.

How it works: The new system relies largely on a tax of \$6.60 per \$1,000 of value levied on all property. Local communities collect the tax and send it to the state, which then redistributes it to school districts on a per-pupil basis. Communities may use all of the money to improve education or none of it. This year, most communities used it to lower property taxes.

Biggest flaws: Property-poor communities in particular say the \$4,220 per pupil guaranteed under the temporary tax is not enough to provide an adequate education. They also say it doesn't provide real or permanent relief from property taxes that can top \$4,000 per year on a \$100,000 home. Property-rich communities, which must pay an additional \$24 million to the state, say the "Robin Hood" tax plan harms the poor and elderly who live in their communities. They say they're not necessarily wealthy and they're being penalized just because they have succeeded in attracting business and industry. They also argue that the new tax is unconstitutional because it relies on an unfair and outmoded assessment system.

Major opposition: Mostly from the 50 or so property-rich towns that now pay more. Those towns have been joined by towns likely to pay more in the future as well as towns that say an income tax is the fairest way to fund education.

Why it's such a big deal: The "Live Free or Die" state has long treasured its role as the only state never to have enacted a broad-based sales or income tax. It is one of two - Alaska is the other - that still lacks either. So devout is tax antipathy that a pledge to veto a broad-based tax has been required of every successful gubernatorial candidate in modern times. Freedom from a sales or income tax has come at a price, however. New Hampshire relies more heavily on property taxes for revenue than any other state.

Other alternatives floated: Statewide personal income tax, expanded legalized gambling, capital gains tax, sales tax. Drawbacks have been cited for all of these.

What's next: The statewide property tax law ends Jan. 3, 2003. Committees studying the issue will report in January 2001. The tax issue promises to be the top one in state elections

in November.

Mini-glossary: A **donor town** is one of 50 or so property-rich communities that pay more to the state than they get back under the new tax. A **receiver town** is one where the ratio of pupils to total taxable property is relatively low. Those communities get back more than they pay to the state. **Property-rich towns** typically have ocean or lakefront real estate, or lots of commercial and industrial taxpayers that have kept tax rates low. **Property-poor towns** have high tax rates because they have little to tax. Some are aging mill towns.

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Fixing Schools Is Top Task

By Rene Sanchez
 Washington Post Staff Writer
 Wednesday, August 18, 1999; Page A1

CERRITOS, Calif.—How much and how fast is California trying to overhaul its woeful public schools? Let Sydney Pringle, the principal here at Pat Nixon Elementary, wearily count the ways.

There is the tumultuous switch back to teaching phonics, she says. And the spending frenzy to create smaller class sizes. Plus the dismantling of bilingual education, the end of social promotion and tough new oversight of teachers.

"It's almost hard to keep track of it all," said Pringle, whose school 20 miles southeast of Los Angeles is in the multicultural heart of Southern California. "There's a lot of hope, but a lot of pressure."

And this is just the beginning. Across the Golden State, whose public education system was once the envy of the nation but is now plagued with high dropout rates, strained budgets and teacher shortages, voters from all sides of the political spectrum have joined voices in a deafening shout: Fix the schools.

No other issue -- not crime, not jobs or health care -- resonates nearly as much with the electorate. And the mood here is in many ways a symbol of the nation's deepening anxiety about public education, as polls constantly show.

Today, nearly 70 percent of Californians say they would be willing to pay more taxes if it meant better schools, an astounding shift in a state famous for its trend-setting tax revolts.

Improving public education has become the singular theme of the new political era unfolding in California, which for the first time in nearly 40 years has a state government dominated by Democrats. The subject of schools, and what role Washington can play to help them, is also confronting presidential candidates at every turn here as they begin battling to win the allegiance of the state's pivotal 15 million voters.

But the all-out campaign to revitalize California's classrooms is proving to be a case study in just how complex, elusive and politically risky school reform gets once rhetoric becomes reality.

This is the largest and most diverse state school system in the country, with nearly 6 million students and counting, and closely watched by educators from coast to coast. Yet even with money pouring in from the state's economic boom, no one expects academic progress to come easily.

"It feels like there's a tsunami of reform hitting the schools right now," said Mary Sieu, deputy superintendent of the school district that includes Cerritos. "Some people are confused by it, some people are angry about it and some people want even more, faster. So much is happening in such a short time."

In his first six months in office, Gov. Gray Davis, the Democrat who won a landslide victory last fall by promising to make education his "first, second, and third" priorities, decided to raise spending on schools by \$2 billion. He also summoned state lawmakers to a special legislative session devoted exclusively to his education agenda, which they approved with ease.

It will give schools money to spend more time on reading and require every high school senior in the state to pass a written exam for the first time in order to graduate. All schools now will be judged and publicly ranked by an elaborate statewide "performance index," with the worst schools qualifying for more staff and money immediately. And instead of getting evaluated only by their principals, California teachers also will be assessed by groups of their peers -- an idea that educators say has created more professionalism in the ranks in the few places in the nation where it has been tried.

Davis, a notoriously cautious politician, even took the startling step recently of pledging not to seek reelection if the state's test scores have not risen by the end of his first term. So far, by the looks of how well he is faring in the polls, California voters seem pleased.

But the same education establishment that was never a fan of Republican Gov. Pete Wilson, whom Davis replaced, does not sound quite so thrilled -- nor does the powerful California Teachers Association, which campaigned relentlessly for Davis last year, nor do the union's critics.

There are cries emanating from those groups that the governor wants too much change too fast, or is trying to micromanage classrooms from the capital in Sacramento, or is caving to union demands to weaken accountability measures for teachers. Reform fatigue also seems to be setting in at some schools. It is all just the kind of carping that has derailed ambitious attempts to improve public education in other states in recent years.

"Already, you're hearing schools around the state say, 'Stop, we're overloaded with new programs. We need another master plan first,'" said Michael Kirst, an education professor at Stanford University.

Others are complaining that the style and substance of Davis's approach is not much different from aggressive steps that Wilson took on education during his last years in office. Critics are also attacking the new governor for not putting more of the state's huge \$4 billion budget surplus into classrooms.

The full plan that Davis has for California's schools is not clear yet, but at times he and his allies appear to be forsaking the traditional Democratic script on education and choosing a more centrist, less predictable course.

When the teachers union tried earlier this year to win collective bargaining for faculty at all of California's promising new "charter" schools, which receive public money but set most of their own rules, neither Davis nor the Democrats who have firm control of the state legislature backed the measure. Yet they acceded to the wishes of union leaders and other local education officials who wanted to make the new school-by-school performance rankings more vague.

"Davis is not giving the teacher unions carte blanche," said Rep. Scott Baugh, a Republican assembly member from Orange County. "But he is still dancing with the education bureaucracy, and he won't get true reform that way."

The schools debate here could soon get even more volatile. Davis and the Democrats have yet to take up the sensitive question of whether teacher tenure should be curtailed, for example. And one of the most divisive national issues in education -- whether to allow students to attend private schools with tuition vouchers paid for with public money -- may land on the ballot just in time for California's high-stakes presidential primary early next year. A victory for vouchers in a state as large as this one could have an impact across the nation.

"There is considerable drama to what is going on," said Wayne Johnson, new president of the 300,000-member California Teachers Association, which supports Davis on many issues. "Everyone involved has their own agenda for the schools, and the public's expectations for improvements are very high."

Yet some parents are reacting warily to all the grand talk, for other recent initiatives to revive the schools have not lived up to advance billing.

This summer, a study of California's \$1.5 billion-a-year effort to reduce class size in elementary grades concluded that while test scores have risen slightly, the rush to hire so many teachers during the past two years has forced many schools to lower their standards and to rely on makeshift classrooms.

In the district that includes schools in Cerritos, officials say that scores of new faculty members have been given "emergency" credentials to teach even though they lack full certification in some subjects. And many of the 700 students who attend Pat Nixon Elementary School spend part of their day crammed inside one of the classroom trailers that line the grounds.

There is now one teacher for every 20 students in the early grades at Nixon, which educators say is a good ratio for learning. But the figure in other grades is an alarming 32 to 1. And the school still cannot afford to hire a counselor.

"The schools are under so much pressure to improve, sometimes you feel like they say, 'Let's just do whatever and hope it works,' " said Eleanor Tomlin, a computer consultant who has two children at Nixon. "But that can't keep happening. They obviously still need more resources and a better plan."

California's schools, like the state itself, are in the midst of profound demographic upheaval. Classes are overcrowded, enrollment is climbing -- the state could have 300,000 more students in a decade -- and many of the newcomers are poor immigrants. California is now responsible for educating nearly half of all the children in America who are not proficient in English.

If patterns of population growth hold, demographers say, in a few decades almost one-fifth of all the school-aged children in the country will be in California's classrooms.

In a suburban community such as Cerritos, which a generation ago was still a rural dairy town but is now home to more than 60,000 residents and the country's largest auto mall, the class portraits at Pat Nixon Elementary are a small but telling illustration of the state's future. Perhaps the nation's as well.

The school, like so many others across California, no longer has a racial majority among its students: Thirty-six percent of them are of Asian descent, 19 percent are white, 17 percent are black, and 13 percent are Hispanic -- which is the fastest-growing group.

"If you think education is a big deal now in California, watch how much of an issue it will be in a few years as the electorate keeps growing and changing," said Mark DiCamillo, director of the independent Field Poll in the state.

There was a time when California, even with rising population, managed its public education system fairly well. Its per-pupil spending and its teacher salaries were among the highest in the nation, and its classroom results were among the best. The schools were so good that it is not unusual to hear stories of how families tolerated the headaches of Southern California, such as traffic and smog, just long enough for their children to graduate. Then they would move.

But today, the state's high school graduation rate is one of the worst in the country -- almost one-third of ninth graders do not earn diplomas, the latest reports show. California's reading scores, meanwhile, have sunk as low as those in the poorest states of the South. Per-pupil spending is below the national average. About half of the teachers in the state quit in five years.

The root of the problem is a subject of furious debate. Proposition 13, approved by California voters in 1978, capped local property taxes -- the prime source of funding for schools -- and shifted the burden of spending for public education to the state. A historic wave of immigrants also greatly increased the number of poor children in public schools. In San Diego, for example, the percentage of students in poverty has soared from 42 percent to 60 percent in a decade. And Democrats have long charged that Republicans often did not make public education a priority during their 16-year reign in the governor's mansion.

But the blame game seems to be ending. Responsibility for improving the schools is now squarely on the shoulders of the

Democrats presiding in Sacramento and, in no small measure, the principals and teachers in schools such as Nixon Elementary trying to juggle everything the politicians want.

Under orders from the state to stop promoting underachieving students, the school is trying to hire more staff and create tutoring programs to help those failing in the classroom. Pringle, the principal, is also revamping the math curriculum to give students doses of algebra much earlier. And all of Nixon's faculty must participate in new workshops on teaching students how to read.

Pringle sounds optimistic about the coming blitz of changes, but she is also realistic. Her school, like many others in California, has a long way to go.

"The state is finally taking a hard look at the public schools again, so some good things should come from that," she said. "But if people expect a quick fix, and keep putting too much pressure on schools without giving them the resources they really need, the whole thing could backfire."

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Ohio school mayhem

By Suzanne Fields
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The plot is right out of Dickens -- a mean and pompous judge throws his weight against poor children, pretending he's doing the principled thing according to the law.

U.S. District Judge Solomon Oliver Jr., appointed by President Clinton, used the power of the bench to prevent 3,801 inner-city children in Cleveland from going through the schoolhouse door of their choice.

You could call him the Governor Faubus of Ohio. Instead of defying desegregation, he defies a state vouchers program in existence for four years. Instead of backing the segregationist establishment, he's backing the "educationist" establishment.

The teachers unions are cheering him on. He's the darling of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which wants the wall of separation so high it blocks out the sunshine, and a coalition of civil liberties advocates who define "liberties" that often shut out the civil.

On the day before public schools opened in Cleveland, Judge Oliver issued an injunction to halt the use of vouchers for private schools. His reasoning was simple: The program is unconstitutional because most of the 56 private schools are sectarian and thus have "the primary effect of advancing religion."

Instead of sharpening their pencils, snapping colored tabs in their notebooks and trying to decide whether to pack peanut butter and jelly or chicken sandwiches in their lunch boxes, children enrolled in the private schools had to worry about a last-minute switch to a new school. As if back-to-school jitters aren't bad enough.

Forget for a moment the outrage of timing, though the ruling a day before the schools opened sent both public and private schools into turmoil. Forget that some of these children have been attending the same school for four years. Put aside the fact that the parents of these children, some of whom have two or three children in the voucher programs, had to scramble to find new places for their kids or figure out a way to get the money for tuition.

One arrogant judge has created havoc in a system already in grave trouble by pursuing his own common-sense defying notions of law.

The voucher program is popular with nearly everyone -- beginning with state legislators. The Supreme Court of Ohio said it did not run against the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court, which has not ruled specifically on such a program, has nevertheless allowed public aid to religious schools as long as it was not directly given by the state but came through parents and vouchers.

More than 17,000 low-income parents in Cleveland applied for the voucher slots, more than four times the number of total slots. Christine Sula sends three children, age 6, 8 and 10, to a Catholic school. "I think it's discriminating against people of faith," she told the New York Times. But for the moment it's certainly discrimination against low-income families. They're seeking a better education for their children than they think the public schools provide. They're motivated by the same ambitions as the private school liberals.

At the least, the parents of these children have made a choice at considerable economic sacrifice to send their children to private school. The vouchers, worth \$2,250, don't cover expenses. Tuitions vary and uniforms and supplies are more expensive than in public school.

We would never have heard of vouchers if the public schools had kept up standards. The rich do what the rich have always done: they send their kids to the best schools that money can buy. Lots of middle-class parents do too. Dual-career couples often spend most if not all of their second income on private school tuition.

Steve Forbes got it right: "All parents should be allowed to send their children to schools that work -- schools that provide discipline, are safe, academically challenging, and reinforce the values parents teach at home." He calls education "the civil rights issue of the 21st century."

In a last-minute decision, the flinty-hearted judge relented and allowed children already on vouchers to attend school, for now. As for all the others who have applied, they will just have to bide their time until three judges at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit have reviewed an appeal of Judge Oliver's decision. The parents in Cleveland's inner-city have their fingers crossed. So do we. We've had enough of Dickens' "Bleak House" for the first semester.

Riley goes 'back to school'

WASHINGTON (AP) - Like millions of school children, Education Secretary Richard Riley will be riding a big yellow bus this fall.

The nation's top education policy-maker will log 500 miles in a five-state, five-day "back-to-school" tour through the South, bringing the message that good schools equal a good economy.

"A high-quality education is the key to economic growth," said Riley, who noted that more than half the nation's job growth in the last 10 years has been in the South.

Returning to his roots, the one-time South Carolina governor hopes his visits to Tennessee, Alabama, South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia will link the region's booming economy to its school reform efforts.

North Carolina, for instance, has more teachers certified by a voluntary national board aimed at producing "master teachers" than any other state. Georgia is guaranteeing that universities will retrain classroom teachers if schools don't think they are doing well, as long as the teacher is teaching in the field he or she studied.

Riley's tour, which starts Monday in Chattanooga, Tenn., will include 10 schools, from preschool to college. In past years, Riley marked the "back-to-school" ritual in late summer and early fall with plane trips to dozens of schools, where he read to young children or explained department policies to their teachers. This week, only the mode of transit is different.

The Success Express is really a two-bus caravan of air-conditioned, 35-passenger executive charter coaches covered with yellow vinyl and black trim.

"I'm taking this trip to get a firsthand look at the progress that has been made, and at what can be done to get ready for the future," Riley said this month when he released record school enrollment numbers.

Highlights of the bus tour will include a rally in Chattanooga, Tenn., for the launch of the Mars Millennium Project. That is a program to help schoolchildren nationwide learn about science through designing a Mars colony.

The tour also will celebrate a reading program in Birmingham, Ala., and highlight arts education in Mableton, Ga.

More than 60 education officials and policy-makers are accompanying Riley as he greets schoolchildren and parents and delivers specific ideas on how parents can help their children get the most out of school.

Aides said Riley, 66, who plans to retire after his cabinet stint, wanted to do something special for the approaching millennium as the Clinton administration winds down.

"Both buses are full," said Riley spokeswoman Julie Green. "The secretary is really looking forward to having this opportunity to get people excited about going back to school and encouraging parents and communities to get involved in education."

Riley will also call attention to administration initiatives such as increased funding for school construction and new teacher hires to reduce class sizes.

This fall, Congress considers a 34-year-old law that governs the bulk of federal education spending. Republican leaders, planning a similar bus tour through Indiana, Kentucky and other states, are pushing their own education programs that emphasize tuition tax breaks for parents and more direct control of funding by the states.

"I don't doubt Secretary Riley's desire to improve education, but he needs to explain what's missing in

American education is accountability," said Nina Shoraii Rees, education policy analyst for the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington think tank.

The Success Express will stop Tuesday in Birmingham, Ala.; Wednesday in Atlanta and Greenville, S.C., and Thursday and Friday in Charlotte, N.C., and Fort Mill, S.C.

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