

Chicago's SUCCESSFUL Schools

.. A project of thirteen philanthropic organizations.

A sampling of Chicago's improving schools

The schools described below are representative of the academic progress that many schools are making in Chicago. They are not magnet schools or selective-admission programs; some have test scores that remain far below the national average. But each has documentable gains on test scores over time, and each has instituted conscious strategies to improve. Their daily struggles illustrate the dynamics and difficulties of turning urban schools around.

Barry School

2828 N. Kilbourn, 773-534-3455

90% low income, 638 students, racially mixed

Scores substantially up, math and reading (Designs)*

A changing student body has posed serious challenges for Barry School. The low income population has jumped to 90%, up from 50%, and the percentage of kids with limited English has crept up to 40%. Scores have gone up despite these changes. "You can't lower your expectations," says Principal **Alice Vila**. A new Reading Recovery program means that the bottom 20% of readers get one-on-one attention by a specially trained teacher. A variety of reading materials are available for every student. A new bilingual program focuses on moving all children to traditional classrooms within three years, and all students regardless of language are expected to be reading well before the end of second grade. A science resource teacher helps teachers integrate science into other subject areas. Vila sees a connection between academic success and the arts. A low-income population has meant providing resources at school that many middle-class children get at home: a program through Urban Gateways and the Chicago Symphony, coordinated by **Laura Kidd**, 312-294-3411, means all children learn to play the recorder. Grants from the Illinois Arts Council bring in storytellers, writers and dancers.

"Parents must be a part of the process," says Vila. A parent patrol ensures that kids get safely to school. Special computers are available for parents to take home and learn new skills, and ESL and nutrition classes are available. Barry reaches out to parents early, holding workshops for pre-kindergarten parents. LSC Chair **Peter Cooloegen** spends countless hours at the school, and thinks of his responsibilities as a second job (call 312-408-2580 for contact info).

Bateman

4220 N. Richmond, 773-534-5055

91% low income, 957 students, K to 6th Gr., racially mixed

Math productivity up (Consortium)*

Different students learn in different ways, says Bateman principal **Barbara Peck**. So she encourages her teachers to engage in professional development both inside and outside the school. By understanding and discussing "tried-and-true" teaching methods, along with new approaches such as multiple intelligence, the teachers are more likely to connect with each child. Bateman was the city's first Links to Literacy school under predecessor principal **Mrs. Rudy Lubov**, now the Board's literacy coordinator. The Links

program encourages a culture of reading by having children create paper chains, with each link representing a book read. Teacher **Sharon Deutsch** remembers the 7,000-link chain in 1993 that wrapped 2 1/2 times around the building; last year's students read 31,000 books. Each student this year chose a free book for his or her personal bookshelf. "You have to generate enthusiasm," says Peck. "That's 90% of making things happen." The culture of literacy is supported with discretionary funds and by grants from the Chicago Annenberg Challenge to the Network for Leadership Development. In-school coordinator is **Carol Schmitz**; external facilitator is Designs for Change, **Sue Davenport**, 312-857-9292.

Community member and LSC representative **Lorraine Straw**, 773-338-1111 or 773-539-7690, has participated in Bateman's LSC principal selection process and creation of school improvement plans; she is a board member of the Chicago Association of Local School Councils. Former Bateman parent **Linda Logan** served eight years on the LSC and now chairs the Roosevelt High School LSC; she is manager of school-community partnerships for the training organization Teachers Academy for Math and Science, 312-949-2468. **Regina McGraw** was also on the original Bateman School LSC and one of the members who voted to not renew that principal's contract under the new reform law. She is executive director of the Wieboldt Foundation, 312-786-9377, a funder of reform initiatives.

Beethoven

25 W. 47th St., 773-535-1480

98% low-income, 830 students, predominantly African-American

Scores substantially up, math and reading (Designs)*

Beethoven's test scores are not remarkable, with only 19% of students at or above norms in math and 32% in reading. But they've climbed from dismal levels of 5% reading and 11% math in 1990. In one of Chicago's toughest neighborhoods, the Robert Taylor public housing projects, Beethoven started showing substantial gains in 1993 under former principal **Lula Ford**, now a Board of Ed executive. Gains continue today under principal **Frances Oden**, who has introduced a large-scale tutoring program, Junior Great Books and 90 minutes of language arts instruction each morning. More time on task has been a major thrust, with the vast majority of students now at their desks for two hours beyond the normal school day, until 4:30 p.m. Discretionary funds have been used to create a writing lab with 30 computers, and an in-house medical clinic provides not only health care but career programs for students. A dozen parents are paid a stipend to work in the school every day, and others like LSC chair **LaDora McKinney** are unpaid volunteers.

Erikson Institute works with the school and two others through the Annenberg-funded Farren, Beethoven, Seward Network; project coordinator is Erikson's **Daniel Scheinfeld**, 312-755-2250, ext. 2284.

Beethoven was featured in two recent articles in the school reform journal *Catalyst* (**Linda Lenz**, editor, 312-427-4830). Parent involvement "is among the more ambitious" among schools, with classes for parents in entrepreneurial skills, resume writing, arts and crafts, dancing and preparing children for IGAP tests (May 1997). Morale of teachers is high despite the long workdays, and turnover low, *Catalyst* reported in a Beethoven profile for "School Reform: What Matters Most" (November 1997).

Niños Heroes Academy

8344 S. Commercial Ave., 773-535-6694

93% low income, 711 students, predominately minority

Scores substantially up, math and reading (Designs), math productivity up (Consortium)*

Teachers submit lesson plans and students turn in monthly compositions to Principal **Gloria Stratton**, who requires that each student meet a strong set of educational standards. Teachers are encouraged to be creative and accountable: quarterly assessments in reading and math are published in the school's newsletter. Every student with a deficiency in a basic skill has an individual education program, which teachers closely track. The Chicago Academy of Science's "Science on the Go" program brings a teacher and lab science to the classrooms. Two teachers have won IBM grants to pilot math software on classroom computers (Niños has an average of four computers per room).

LSC Chair **Sharon Baker**, 773-783-8313, says strong communication keeps parents, teachers and students focused on their goals. A school communications representative makes sure parents and community members are up-to-date. Student progress reports go home every five weeks, so "there are no surprises" for parents, students or teachers. Teachers send home quarterly learning goals and set aside time for parents to drop in. Parent and student reading skills are improved through a weekly evening reading class that encourages cooperative learning. About 20% of parents are regularly involved with Niños; five volunteers receive a small stipend to help in the classroom. A Bilingual Parents Committee provides regular events for students and parents to get more involved. Student attendance is closely monitored; names of students with perfect attendance are printed in a monthly newsletter. Teacher **Crystal Cherry** has been with Niños since before reform and has a view of the old and the new.

Oriole Park

5424 N. Oketo Ave., 773-534-1201

63% low income, 353 students, integrated

Scores substantially up, math and reading (Designs), math productivity up (Consortium)*

Every week, Principal **Gail Szulc** and Oriole Park teachers review the curriculum and make changes as needed based on student progress. Szulc uses the same process to allocate resources at the school, providing extra assistance in classrooms that aren't meeting objectives. With about half the student body below the poverty level, Szulc finds that many of her students need help with basic skills. Kids with deficits receive 30 minutes a day of one-on-one attention with a certified teacher-tutor.

Oriole's scores are among the fastest-rising in the city, with reading showing an average annual gain of 5.6% from 1990 to 1997; math rose 8% per year. Szulc attributes part of the gains to new instructional materials. Saxon Math, a program designed by a retired Air Force colonel, emphasizes cumulative learning, so that no math skills are lost along the way. Open Court Reading begins with a phonics-based oral program for pre-readers and moves on to a literature program. Teachers **Vivian Rios** and **Linda Conforti** have undergone extensive staff development and instruction in the new teaching methods.

Ravenswood

4332 N. Paulina, 773-534-5525

95% low income, 588 students, predominantly minority/Latino

Reading productivity up (Consortium)*

Principal **Joy Donovan** roller skated on her school's roof last year after students read 13,700 books in a Links to Literacy promotion. The attention-getting stunt wasn't the first time she had to deliver on a promise. After becoming principal in 1993, she asked teachers what they needed to do a better job, then surprised them by providing what they asked for. She can't always meet today's requests, but recent school history is full of changes: full-day kindergarten instead of half-day, class-size reductions to 20 students each in grades 1 to 3, and two days a week of tutoring for bilingual students making the transition to English-only instruction. Last year, all students who were one year behind grade level had to stay after school for tutoring; this year those one-half-year behind are also included. Donovan does all this with about \$400,000 per year in "discretionary" funds released for local use by the original reform law. Other tricks: heavy use of student teachers and college education students (sometimes 20-30 per day); grant writing; even textbook covers to reduce book-replacement costs. Budgets and school improvement plans must be approved by the LSC, chaired by parent **Dawn Loukota**.

Arts are a recent thrust at Ravenswood, one of three elementary schools in Lakeview Education and Arts Partnership, a \$750,000 Annenberg-funded program. Local artists serve as "substitute" teachers, injecting fun into classrooms while freeing teachers for planning and professional development. Art teachers from LEAP schools team-teach with each other and outside artists; Ravenswood's art teacher is **Kitty Williams**. The three schools rotate host duties for an annual community-wide meeting; this year's event drew 350 people and included a three-choir concert coordinated by Ravenswood teacher **Barbara Joseph**. LEAP's enthusiastic coordinator is **Jackie Murphy** of Northeastern Illinois University's Chicago Teachers Center, 312-733-7330.

Sojourner Truth

1443 N. Ogden Ave., 773-534-8120

99% low-income, 781 students, pre-K to 3rd Gr., predominantly African-American

Scores substantially up, math (Designs)*

Teaching, testing and reteaching -- and constantly measuring student performance -- are the golden rules for Truth principal **Pernicié Pugh**, whose school is on the outer edge of the Cabrini Green housing development. Working with teachers to track each student's progress and identify areas of weakness, Pugh has managed to boost math scores a striking 5% per year. In 1997, 90% of students met or exceeded state standards on the IGAP math test. But the same students are faring poorly in reading, with only 36% exceeding standards on the IGAP test and a startling 8% at or above the norm on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, putting Truth on the Board of Ed's probation list. Many students arrive at the school with limited language ability, Pugh said, a deficit that teachers are addressing through regular grade-level meetings to coordinate instructional strategies.

Development of leadership among parents, teachers and principals was a central tenet of the 1987 reform law, and Truth provides several examples. **Pugh**, hired in 1990, calls herself a "reform principal" and remembers "teachers running out of here when I came in, because I wasn't going to blame the children or parents for what we weren't doing." A leader among the rejuvenated teaching staff is **Mrs. Frances**

level. **Sunday Uwumarogie** coordinated development of the African/African-American curriculum, working with the union's Quest Center, **Allen Beardon**, 312-329-9100. LSC chair **Marva Baker** volunteers in the school almost daily; another regular is grandparent **Ron Burrell**. Two parents are paid a stipend to staff a "mod room" where misbehaving students are sent "to reflect on their behavior." Parents can be reached through assistant principal **Janice Ledvora**. Erikson Institute's **Patty Horsch**, 312-755-2250, continues to work with teachers to develop "responsive classrooms"; she talks honestly about the long-term struggle to improve a school.

*** How school "improvement" was measured**

The education-reform group Designs for Change identified 156 schools that have made "substantial progress" in reading, math or both subjects over a seven-year period, based on scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Using the same data but a different methodology, the Consortium on Chicago School Research identified schools where a high level of learning "productivity" was reflected in individual students' scores tracked over three years. Each school described above was on one or both of the lists. The project identified improvement strategies in each school through news reports and interviews with each principal, members of the school community and education professionals.

Notes on data and other information used

- Numbers used for enrollment and percent of low-income students are for 1995 or a more recent year.
- Low-income designation means that a student's family qualifies for free or reduced-price lunch. In 1996, more than 84% of students qualified for the federal lunch program.
- Racial breakdown is based on 1994 figures and reflects the following definitions: predominantly African-American (over 85%); predominantly minority (over 85% mixed-minority); racially mixed (15% to 30% white), and integrated (30% or more white).
- The school system as a whole in 1996 was 54% African-American, 32% Hispanic, 10% white, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander and .2% Native American.

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