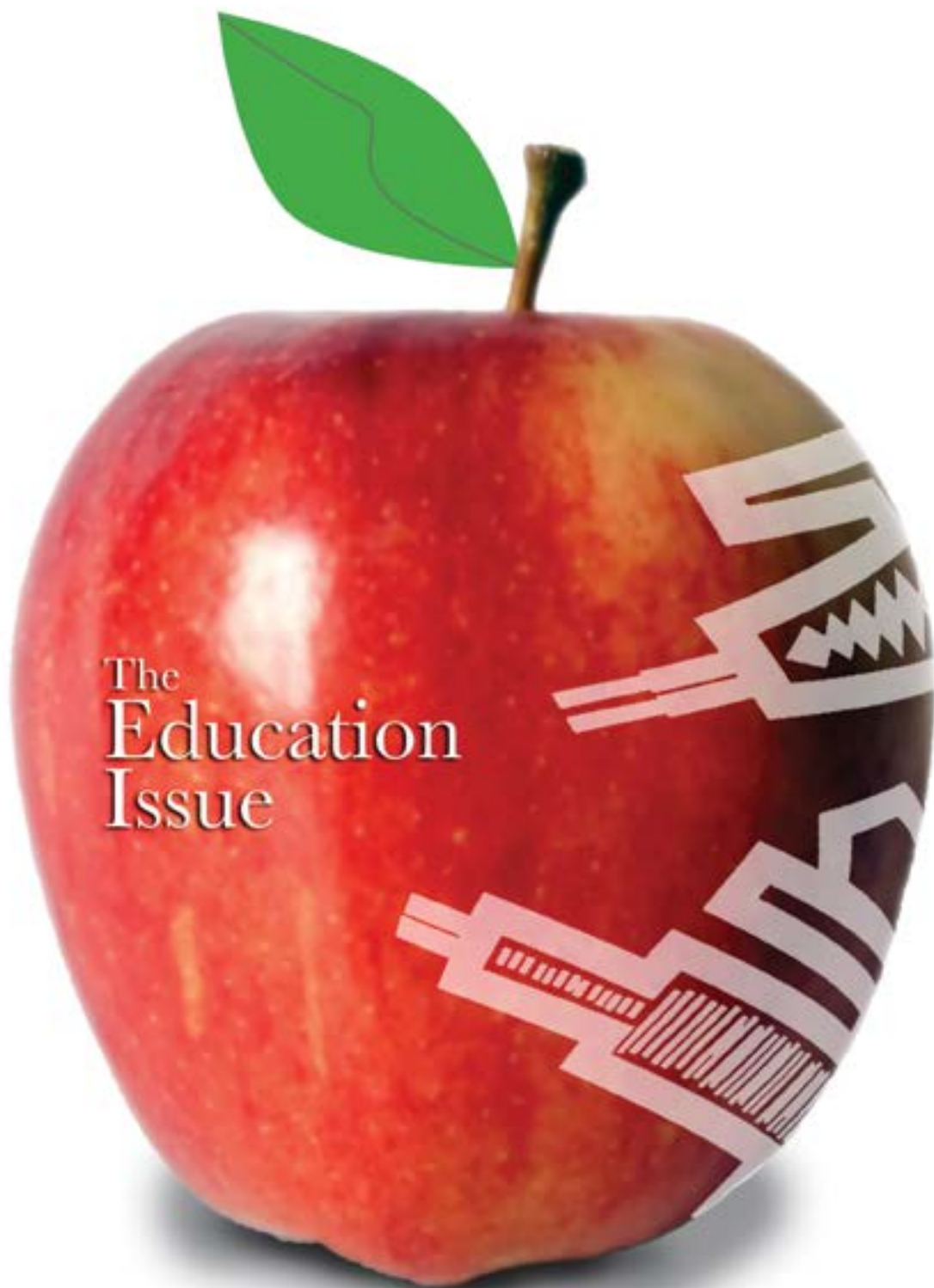


# MOSAIC

MAGAZINE: VOL. 12, 2015



The  
Education  
Issue

**A LOYOLA STUDENT SOCIAL JUSTICE PUBLICATION**

# L YOLA

## College of Arts & Sciences

As the largest of Loyola's schools and colleges, we are committed to providing every student with a transformative education. We have 18 academic departments and 20 interdisciplinary programs—all based on the Jesuit tradition of rigorous academic study and firmly grounded in the liberal arts.

Learn more at [LUC.edu/cas](http://LUC.edu/cas).



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*

# MOSAIC

*Table of Contents*

## PROFILES TRENDS

- p.12 UPLIFTING UPTOWN
  - p. 36 YOUR FACE HERE
  - p.18 SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE
  - p.43 TEACHING GRIT
  - p.16 DIGGING DEEPER ROOTS
  - p.52 UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
  - p.56 CROWDFUNDING CLASSROOMS
  - p.38 DOLAN FOR DEMOCRACY
  - p.21 A SAFE BET
  - p.40 BY THE BOOTSTRAPS
  - p.48 CONFESSIONS OF A SCIENCE TEACHER
  - CHARTER V. PUBLIC SCHOOLS p.46
  - NOT STACKING UP p.34
  - CTU V.P. Q and A p.24
  - BUILDING BLOCKED p.26
  - CONNECTING THE DOTS p.54
  - MULTI-LEARNING p.59
- 
- FEATURED STORY:**  
THE LEO WAY: Creating a sense of brotherhood in an all-boys South Side high school p.30

# MOSAIC

## *Editorial*

Editor-in-Chief	MOLLY BREWER
Managing Editor	TAYLOR UTZIG
Content Editor	ELLIE DIAZ
Content Editor	MARISSA BOULANGER
Web Editor	KATINA BENIARIS
Web Editor	ZEQI GUO
Photo Editor	TIM NAGLE
Assistant Editor	ISRAA ELHALAWANY
Assistant Editor	HAILEY PETERSON
Assistant Editor	EMILIO BERMEO
Assistant Editor	CLAIRE MILLER
Assistant Editor	CHASE DIFELICIANTONIO
Sales Representative	NICK GREENHALGH
Sales Representative	JAKE MAZANKE

## *Design*

Managing Editor	SUSIE MOSKOP
Creative Director	LAYNE HILLESLAND
Copy Chief	LIZ GREIWE
Web Editor	CHELSEA RIFFE
Assistant Web Editor	KATINA BENIARIS
Photo Editor	SHEENA LAKHANI
Videographer	NEHA SIMON
Social Media/Promotions	ADDIE WHELAN
Advertising Manager	DENA KHALAFALLAH

## *Faculty Advisors*

Editorial	JOHN SLANIA
Design	JESSICA BROWN

## *Headquarters*

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO  
51 E. Pearson St. | Chicago, IL 60611

## *Cover Design*

Susie Moskop  
Layne Hillesland



Visit us online at <http://loyolamosaic2015.wix.com/home>

Printed by Vision Integrated Graphics

# 1234

THE LOYOLA EXPERIENCE

# EXPERIENCE MORE

THE CENTER FOR  
EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Academic Internships • Service-Learning  
Undergraduate Research • ePortfolio

LUC.edu/experiential



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

# LOYOLA

**INSTITUTE OF PASTORAL STUDIES**

**CHICAGO • ROME • ONLINE**

Learn more at [LUC.edu/IPS](http://LUC.edu/IPS).



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*

# MOSAIC

*Letter from the Editors*

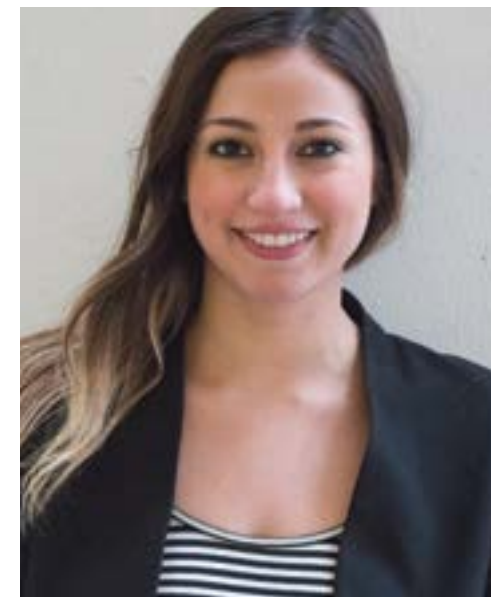
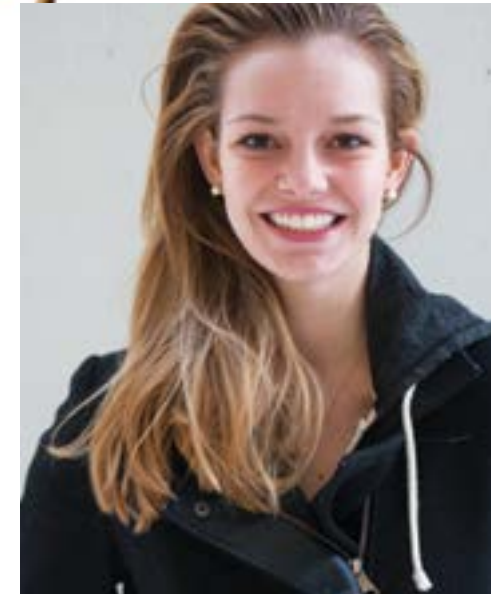


While education is perhaps the most important of subjects in any community, the education system in Chicago is riddled with an array of problems. Its issues are many and the solutions seem daunting and elusive. Over the years, nearly 50 Chicago public schools have been closed due to the economic situation in Illinois.

From the feature of Leo Catholic High School on the city's far South Side to Disney Elementary Magnet School on the North Side, the 2015 edition of Mosaic highlights the many diverse academic sectors in the city.

Whether you struggled through high school or went to an Ivy League school, understanding America's primary education system reveals many truths about society. By the end of the semester, each member of our staff — editorial, photography, design — learned so much about what it is like being educated in the melting pot that is Chicago. We hope to shed light on not only the injustices plaguing our youth, but also to highlight those who have taken working for a better education upon their shoulders.

Ultimately, we hope to convey the fact that quality teachers and resources are both a right and a privilege.



# MOSAIC

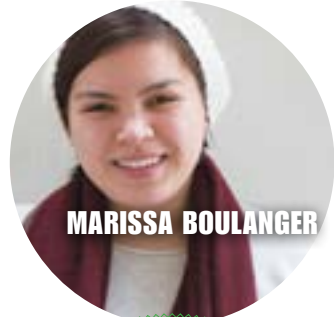
Staff



KATINA BENIARIS



EMILIO BERMEO



MARISSA BOULANGER



MOLLY BREWER



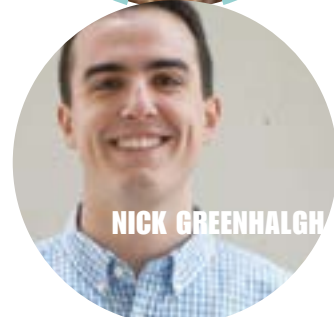
ELLIE DIAZ



CHASE DIFELICANTONIO



ISRAA ELHALAWANY



NICK GREENHALGH



LIZ GREIWE



ZEQI GUO



LAYNE HILLESLAND



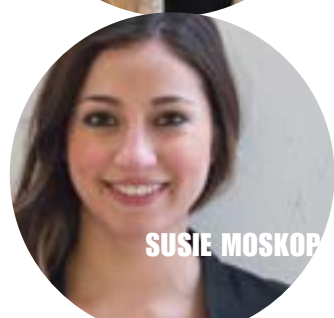
DENA KHALAFALLAH



SHEENA LAKHANI



JAKE MAZANKE



SUSIE MOSKOP



TIM NAGLE



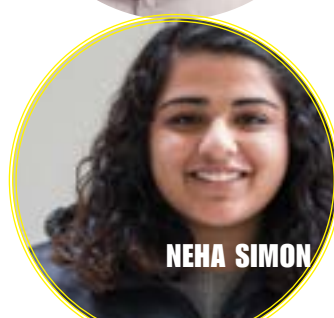
CLAIRE MILLER



HAILEY PETERSON



CHELSEA RIFFE



NEHA SIMON



TAYLOR UTZIG

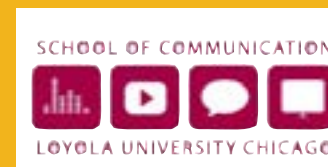


ADDIE WHELAN

# JOURNALISM

The Loyola Journalism Program wants to acknowledge the hard work of our journalism students, and commitment to knowledge and truth represented in these pages. Like any 'ism' our program exemplifies a distinctive practice, system, and philosophy of reporting with integrity coupled with using the latest technological advances to tell stories that people need to know about.

**CONGRATULATIONS TO THE MOSAIC STAFF!**





**Monday through Saturday 6:30am-11pm**  
**Breakfast | Lunch | Dinner**  
**30 E. Chicago Ave**  
**www.cfawatertower.com**  
**312-266-8888**



# MOSAIC

Online

## Blog post

*Our staff comments on personal experiences with education in Chicago and offers their commentary on other pressing debates.*

### JROTC Layne Hillesland

A visit to Senn High School brings to light nearly 25 percent of students who chose the Junior Officers' Training Corps for a shot at a college education.

### Education & Politics Liz Greiwe

The political voices in Chicago – some teachers and parents – grapple with the city's academic issues.

### Art Education Katina Beniaris

A discussion about the importance of art integration in urban settings.

### CPS vs. SPS Sheena Lakhani

A Q&A with Haya Ahmad, a suburban high schooler is now working with CPS.

## Behind the Scenes




The editorial staff speaks about their reporting experiences.



The design staff shares their insights gained while laying out the magazine.



<http://loyolamosaic2015.wix.com/home>



PHOTOS BY GRETTA PATRICK  
Graffiti and mosaic cover the walls of Uplift.

# UPLIFTING UPTOWN

*High school reclaims underserved students on Chicago's North Side*

BY TAYLOR UTZIG

**C**hor H. Ng didn't want to be a teacher. He wanted to affect change. Now, as the curriculum coordinator at Uplift Community High School, Ng embodies the change he has always wanted to see in Chicago's Uptown neighborhood.

In a neighborhood riddled with crime, Uplift shines as a beacon of hope to its students. On the school's third floor hallway wall, a colorful mural of Gandhi looks over the students as they make their way from class to class.

Underneath, the quote, "Be the change you wish to see in the world," hangs as a reminder for all those who walk past.

All the intricate graffiti and mosaics that line the hallways illustrate what the school was born out of: a neighborhood bound in a struggle for better health, housing and most important, education.

After almost closing in 2004, Uplift has flourished as a result of three teachers, all community members of Uptown, who decided not to let their school fail. Nearly 10 years later, Uplift stands as a monument to their dedication. "We are a very unique story," Ng said.

According to the Chicago Public Schools' website, about 321 students are enrolled at Uplift Community High School, which has an 82.2 percent African American population and a 10.6 percent Hispanic population.

While any number under 600 is considered small in the urban school system, the small-scale setting allows for a more tailored, individualized learning experience, Ng said.

Keira Marte, a 17-year-old senior from Lo-

*Next page >*



< From previous page

gan Square, exemplifies the impact of such a close-knit learning environment.

"I have become more resourceful and have been encouraged to always do positive things and be involved in my community," Marte wrote in an email. "One of my education goals is to not only go and graduate from college but use my story and the things I have learned at Uplift, such as solidarity."

Uplift boasts a strong 86 percent graduation rate as of 2013, which is 10 percent more than the CPS average.

"They come here and they know at least we give them a fighting chance," said Ng, who attributes many of his own success to the teachers and community leaders in Uptown.

Ng, 41, grew up in Chicago attending five different elementary schools, moving around the neighborhoods of Andersonville, Lincoln Square and Logan Square, until finally settling in Uptown.

At a young age, Ng began participating in youth programs, coaching softball and tutoring younger children at a "strike" school — a place where students would come to learn when the unions were on strike. Without knowing it, Ng had already begun his training to be a teacher. "They just slowly, progressively through high school, molded us into teachers," Ng said.

But even after graduating from Whitney Young High School in 1991, Ng did not pursue teaching until he was about to graduate in 1995 with a degree in psychology from the University of Illinois.

John Yolich, a childhood friend who also grew up in Uptown, told Ng about a program called "Teach for Chicago."

At what used to be Arai Middle School in Uptown, Ng taught on a team with Yolich and another Uptown native, Karen Zaccor, 58. Living in Uptown since 1978, Zaccor worked with various community organizations

over the years.

"I would come by and knock on their door and talk to his mom," said Zaccor, remembering how she had met Yolich and eventually, Ng.

However, as a result of Mayor Richard M. Daley's Renaissance 2010 — a program that called for 100 new schools by 2010, Arai would soon be closed and eventually replaced. In response Ng, Yolich and Zaccor, all teachers at the middle school, wrote a request for a proposal or RFP, to replace Arai with Uplift Community High School.

"We didn't want to lose that school," Zaccor said. "Arai was the center of the community, but we also felt like Arai had never met its potential."

"We knew to affect change in the school and in society, it wasn't going to happen from the outside. You have to start on the ground level," Ng said.

In 2005, Arai officially became Uplift.

"It probably wasn't the best written RFP, but they saw the way we taught and really believed in the way this school could achieve, so they gave a school to three yahoos with no administration background," Ng said, laughing. "Ten years later, we are still here."



CHOR L. NG

Along with Chor H. Ng at Uplift is his younger brother, Chor L. Ng, age 38, another child impacted by Uptown's community vision of social justice.

"I went into teaching not just to be a teacher but to teach a specific group of students: the underprivileged and economically disadvantaged," Chor L. wrote in an e-mail. "It was almost a duty for me to eventually go to Uplift."

Unlike the neighborhood school Chor H. Ng had envisioned, today Uplift pulls the majority of its stu-

dents from the South and West Sides of Chicago.

With the opening of 60 new charter schools between 2012 and 2017, Uplift is feeling the pressure to recruit students closer to the area.

"We are uniquely affected because those charter schools ... are opening in the South and West side, where our base of students is coming from," Chor H. Ng said.

Looking forward, Chor H. Ng and the enrollment staff at Uplift want to diversify their student population while partnering with local service agencies around the community.

"Our ultimate goal is that by the time they are seniors, they are spending half of their time with the service agency, understanding what they want to become and go to college with that," Chor H. Ng said.

Yet amidst the more affluent neighborhoods of the North Side, misunderstanding often overshadows Uplift's mission.

"We want to partner with these service agencies, which are around this neighborhood," Chor L. Ng said, "but there is a big stigma towards us as a school because its predominantly African-American and our scores are not that high."

In 2013, Uplift was almost 15 percent below the district overall test performance scores.

"Our kids move, they come to school, they go to college; our end numbers don't look that great but anyone who comes in here knows it's not because people don't try here," Chor H. Ng said.

With a core of people who have lived in Uptown and have known each other for the last 30 years, Uplift presents a glimpse at what can be when members of a community come together with a common vision.

"We are doing our part to help the next generation," Chor H. Ng said, "and we see it here." \*

BY MARISSA BOULANGER

Walking into Paul Robeson High School, a security guard checks bags as students make their way through metal detectors. The student-made art and inspirational quotes on the walls lead to large and sparsely decorated classrooms, some converted into oversized offices.

Michael Meyer leaves one of these offices and walks to the in school suspension room carrying only a binder and a potted plant.

“The kids that I haven’t interacted with, all they know is I’m the guy that walks around with a plant,” Meyer said.

As he enters, Meyer greets Coach Q, the security guard monitoring the students, while placing his plant in the center of a circle of chairs.

The room quiets as Meyer invites Coach Q and the students to take a seat. The five boys eventually make their way to the chairs.

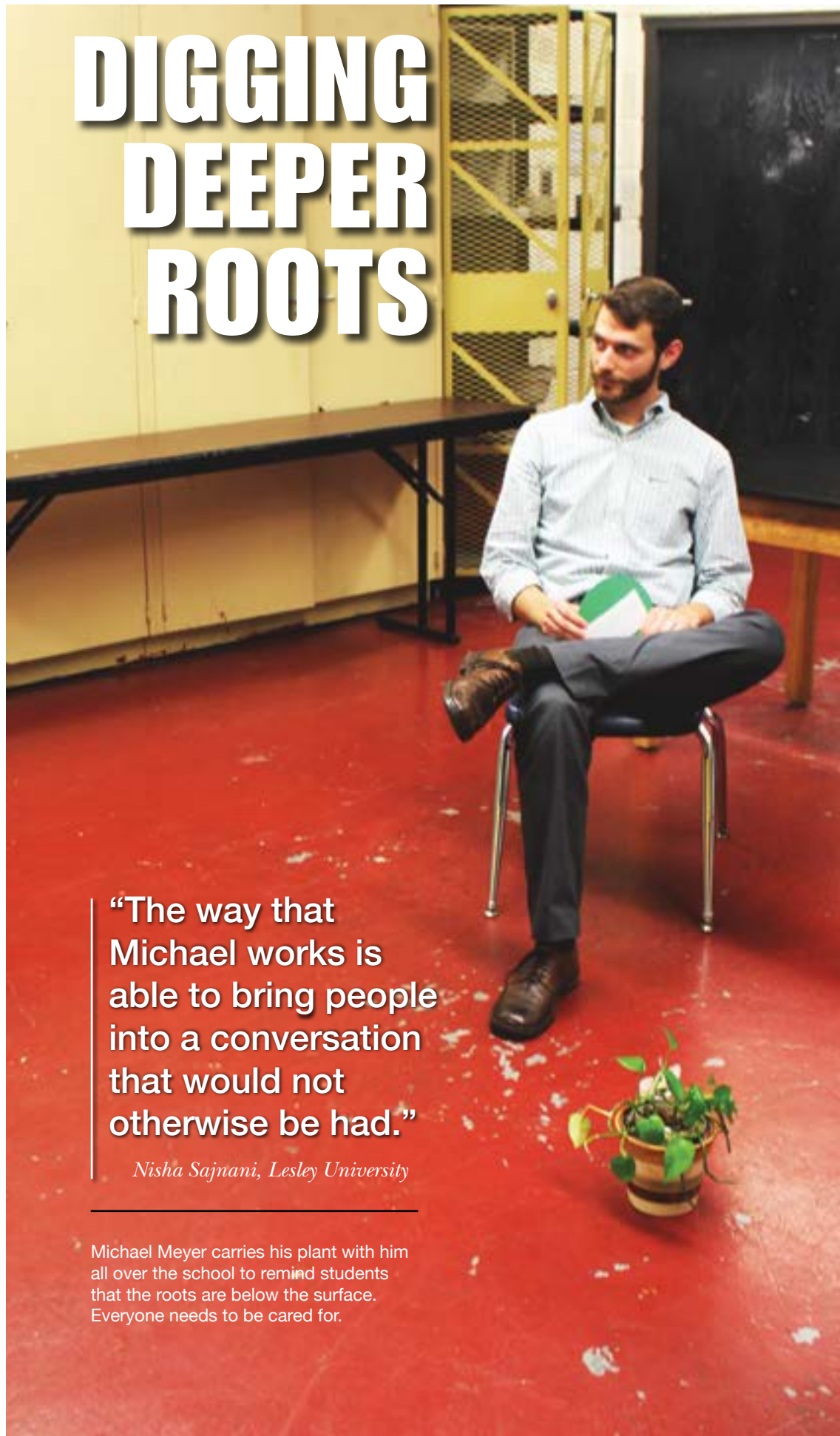
Meyer takes them through the circle process, starting with ground rules, then beginning with questions such as “How is your day?” and “What holds you together?”

Answers from the students are minimal, but Meyer pushes forward. A boy mentions his daughter. Another admits marijuana is the only thing keeping him in his classes.

When Meyer asks what the school would be like without metal detectors, he finally gets a response from most of the students. None of them would come to school anymore. The threat of weapons would be too high.

Michael Meyer, 28, is a restorative justice practitioner. His job is to provide justice in schools in a non-judgmental and equal way.

“[I] look at not just the victim, but the victim’s needs caused by the harm, the offender’s needs that led to



# DIGGING DEEPER ROOTS

“The way that Michael works is able to bring people into a conversation that would not otherwise be had.”

*Nisha Sajjani, Lesley University*

Michael Meyer carries his plant with him all over the school to remind students that the roots are below the surface. Everyone needs to be cared for.

the harm, and the community’s needs as well,” Meyer said.

He does this through one-on-one conversations, visiting classrooms, discussions about values, storytelling and the circle process.

Circle, sometimes referred to as a peace circle, is a technique where people impacted by a situation come together to discuss it and find a resolution. The circular arrangement makes people equidistant from the center, not making one person as the center of a situation.

“If everyone [in the school] was willing to do a circle and be open and honest, we all would be like a family,” wrote one of Meyer’s students. “Everyone would be able to talk to one another with respect or know when and when not to say the right or wrong things.”

Circles are meant to promote growth, which is why Meyer carries around his plant. It’s a symbolic reminder that there are roots beneath the surface and that, like plants, people need to be cared for.

“The way that Michael works is he’s able to bring people into a conversation that would not otherwise be had,” said Nisha Sajjani, Meyer’s thesis supervisor in 2013 at Lesley University, a small college in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Though he runs into some resistance, Meyer tries to make social justice relevant to students, especially through music. While working for Roca Inc., a justice organization for high-risk young adults in Massachusetts, he used hip-hop to help young men get back on their feet. Now at Robeson, Meyer is fundraising for drums to add to circle. The drums would be used as a way for students to nonverbally express what they feel.

The concept of restorative justice is increasingly used by CPS with Chicago-based organizations such as Alternatives Inc. and Umoja Student Development Corp. providing training



PHOTOS BY BRIDGET MURPHY

Meyer shares affirmations during a ‘circle’ talk, which he says inspires respect.

and practitioners.

Meyer, who earned his bachelor’s in music education at DePaul University in 2011, works with Alternatives, which collaborated with CPS to bring restorative justice into the CPS Student Code of Conduct.

He spends one day a week at the Alternatives office, and the other four days at Robeson in Englewood, a South Side neighborhood consistently ranked as one of the most dangerous in Chicago.

Robeson has low levels of student growth and some of the lowest student attainment rates in the city, according to its CPS Progress Report. The student population is 99.4 percent black and 99.7 percent low income. The school is on an 18-year probation and has a student body of 295 despite its 1,300 capacity.

There is much uncertainty around the future of Robeson. Meyer said it brings up the question, to him as well as teachers, “Is this all for nothing?”

Since restorative justice started at Robeson in 2013, suspension rates went from 99.3 suspensions per every 100 students in 2012 to 70.5.

“The first day I was in school, teachers connected the dots,” Meyer said. Teachers have told him his work

prevented violence and improved reading levels in their classes.

Meyer does not believe it’s all his work, but the work of community.

“I’m not bringing a lot to the table, but I’m setting the table,” he said.

Meyer finds it important to utilize other school faculty and community members to make circles work. One of the people he brings in is Robert Miller, a Robeson security guard.

“He knows the students, knows their families, where they’re coming from,” Meyer said.

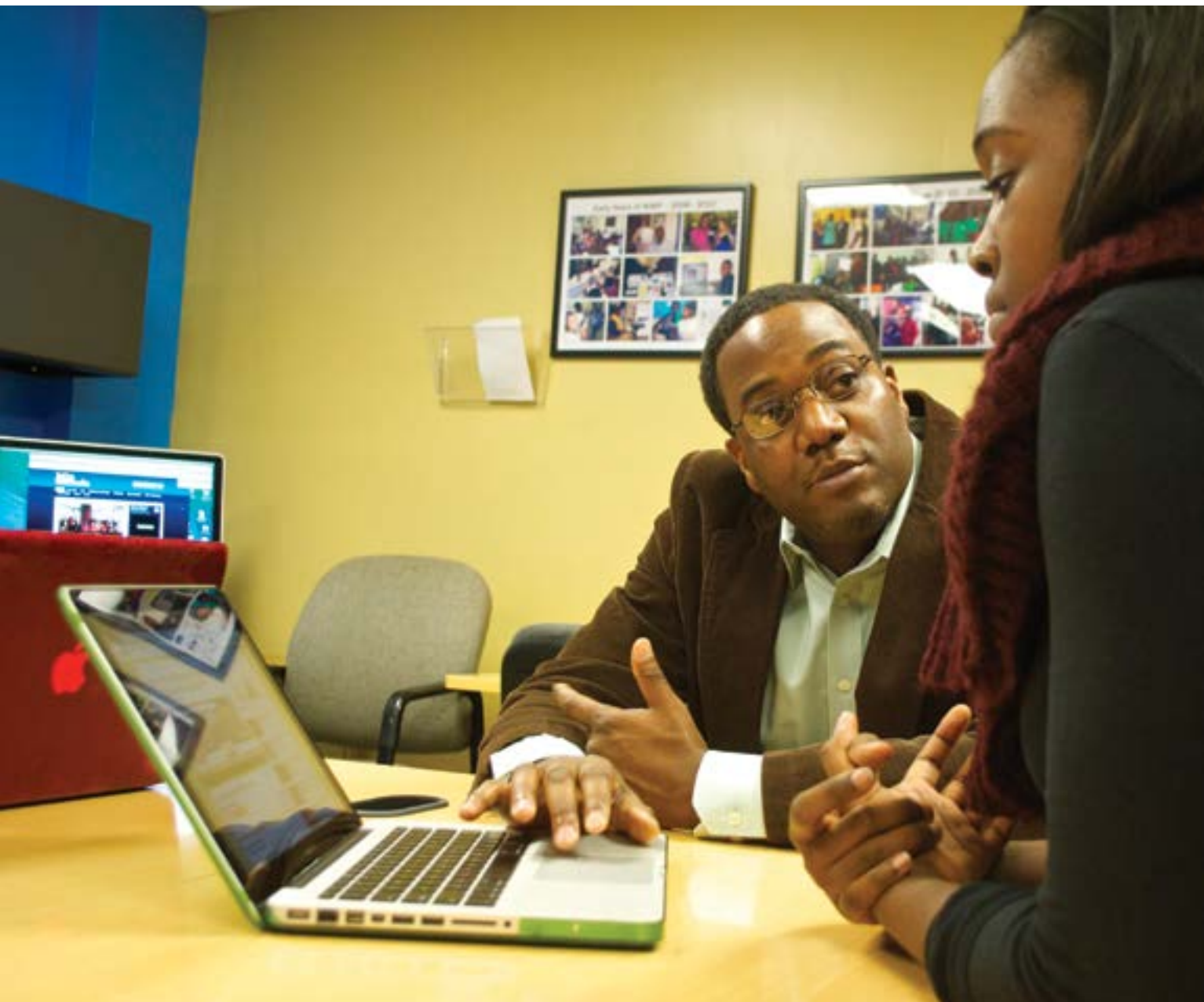
But Miller believes Meyer takes on a lot of work. “He’s got a hard job. He has to build relationships, form bonds,” Miller said.

And these bonds are not easy to make.

At Robeson, students are scared to even be outside after school hours, a big difference from Meyer’s suburban Chicago high school experience. The track team practices in the halls rather than the track field they have outside.

Meyer just wants kids to see they matter and people do care about them.

“I hope they see they’re part of a global movement,” Meyer said, “And I hope to be standing there with them.” ★



PHOTOS BY MORGAN BARNETT

Frank Latin works with a student at Westside Writing Project, a youth enrichment program that builds communication skills in media.

# SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE

*Youth community newspaper gives students a chance to explore their lives*

BY CLAIRE MILLER

When Frank Latin began giving youth a space to write in his Westside community paper, he saw a stark contrast between their innocent perspectives and the violent Chicago neighborhood where they lived.

Latin likened their experiences to being, “in the jungle.” Every day, he said, kids were just trying to get from point A to point B without getting eaten by a bigger animal. But Latin saw the value in younger children tackling grown-up issues from their perspective in West Humboldt Park.

“There’s a voice there that’s not being heard,” Latin said. “And it’s relevant.”

Latin, 40, the founder of the Westside Writing Project, is tall and confident. The program he started offers students the chance to improve their communication skills and develop a voice through journalistic storytelling and digital media.

The main tenants of the program are exposure, support and guidance in digital media. Students from a variety of Chicago Public Schools on the West Side can join the program starting in seventh grade.

Starting as a community newsletter 15 years ago, the Westside Writing Project blossomed into a newspaper and finally a youth publication called *The Ave*, in 2006.

“Once I saw that the students were interested and looked forward to coming to this program, I had to make it happen. It was going to continue,” he said.

The Westside Writing Project is located on Chicago Avenue in Austin, the largest neighborhood in the city and one of the most crime-ridden. Still, the streets are quiet. Many storefronts are vacant and the sidewalks are littered with scraps of papers and fliers.

The program recently moved into

its own space tucked into the back of Sankofa Cultural Arts and Business Center, a maze of meeting spaces and large open rooms. A wall features pictures documenting the evolution of the program. On another there are decals with phrases such as “gather opinions,” “evaluate sources” and “DON’T just repeat” printed in black letters. There is a separate room with a green screen and a video camera for filming news shows.

Nora Bhuiya from New Lenox met Latin through their work at the Illinois Department of Transportation. She agreed to help him with the layout of his newspaper and their friendship has grown over years of working together.

Originally from Hungary, Bhuiya said Latin’s knowledge of the neighborhoods has given her a better understanding of different Chicago communities and their issues.

She said his goal was to highlight

**36.8**  
percentae of  
Humboldt Park  
residents who do  
not have a high  
school diploma,  
according to the  
Chicago Tribune.  
The number  
for the city of  
Chicago is  
20.6 percent

positive aspects of troubled neighborhoods and translate that into working with youth.

“He makes them feel good, he makes them feel valuable. Because maybe these kids don’t feel valuable....maybe they feel that they are no one. But he tries to uplift them,” Bhuiya said.

Caroline Latin-Smith, Latin’s mother, said he wants kids to realize the opportunities that are available to them.

Latin grew up in an atmosphere of competition as a child in Muskegon, Michigan. School came easily to him, his mother said, but sports were his love.

“He was the kind of kid who would go with his buddies to go play basketball all day, but he always had a book in his back pocket. Where if he got a minute, he was going to read something.”

*Next page >*



Students at Westside Writing Project practice filming with a green screen for story.

“[Frank Latin]’s actually playing a key role in West Humbolt Park and the West Side because he’s giving people a different way out. He’s giving them hope.”

*Richard Marion, West Side Project Participant*



< *From previous page*

Latin-Smith said.

Attending Roosevelt University on a basketball scholarship, Latin acquired his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in economics and began working for the Illinois Department of Employee Security after graduation.

He currently works full-time downtown at the U.S. Department of Labor in foreign labor certification and has a set of 5-year-old twins, one boy and one girl.

According to Latin, keeping the project going has not been easy with little to no support from elected officials.

The project operates on a shoestring budget. It is funded by small grants and run completely by volunteers. Latin said he has five people to assist him.

He considers the program “a step-child of non-profits.” There is interest and impact on the ground level that continues to grow, but Latin feels they

have been ignored beyond the immediate community.

The inspired and self-motivated students involved in the program are the core reason Latin remains committed. Richard Marion is one of those students. Marion, 19, grew up on the West Side and attended Chicago Academy for high school. He is currently in his second year at Iowa State University, majoring in business and marketing, but hoping to make film his career after school. He has been working with Latin since sixth grade and plans on continuing to collaborate with him moving forward.

Marion recently finished his largest project to date, a 20-minute mini-documentary on the war on drugs in Austin.

He said he wants the program to develop a bigger audience and be recog-

**14**

*the number of youths from the Westside Writing Project who participated in a workshop hosted by Loyola University’s School of Communication in 2014*

nized for what they’ve accomplished with the resources they have.

“He’s actually playing a key role in West Humboldt Park and the West Side because he’s giving people a different way out,” Marion said of Latin. “He’s giving them hope, he’s giving them a place they can go after school, he’s giving them opportunities.”

According to Latin, the long-term goal is for the program to be sustainable — to keep growing, developing stronger partnerships and continuing to provide students with the skills to enrich and improve their lives.

“We’ve built a solid foundation on people who are really sincere and value the program,” Latin said, “Not just people who want to come in for a photo-op. I like where we’re headed.” \*

# Congratulations, Mosaic.

Loyola University Chicago School of Law joins *Mosaic* magazine in celebrating its 12th issue.





PHOTOS BY EMILIO BERMEO

Kids in the after-school program seem to participate more than during the day, according to Grace-Ann Richardson.

# A SAFE BET

*After-school program improves students' performance*

BY EMILIO BERMEO

**J**ayavi Johnson, 8, understands science better in her third-grade after-school class than in her regular morning courses.

With fewer students and more personalized instruction, the new after-school program at Burke Elementary on Chicago's South Side, offers students an opportunity to get additional assistance while providing them with a safe environment.

Educators hope the one-hour lessons will galvanize the students' learning experience so their progress is reflected at the end of the year in their Northwest Evaluation Association test scores.

"After-school helps us learn because there are not a lot of people, and we can learn better with no noise and no playing around," Johnson said about the program, which has an enrollment of more than 50 percent of the school's 440 students.

"It makes us pass to another grade, keep

going on."

Burke Elementary is located in Washington Park, one of the most crime-plagued neighborhoods in Chicago. It ranks No. 3 among neighborhoods with the most violent crimes, such as murder and assault, and No. 4 in property crimes, such as burglaries and stolen vehicles, according to data compiled by the Chicago Tribune.

Chicago Public Schools reports that 93.6 percent of the students in Burke Elementary come from low income households. This program, known internally as "after-school," provides further assistance to families and reduces dropout rates by cutting down the time they are exposed to the social and economic difficulties at home and on the streets.

The after-school program was established after Burke was awarded with one of the School Improvement Grants that the Illinois State Board of Education offers for institutions devoted to revamping their aca-

demical standards.

"The application was a strenuous process that caused a really quick turn around," said Tenesha Hatter, the school's assistant principal and administrator of the after-school program. The subsidy – obtained last July – supplies Burke with \$3 million in additional resources for the 2014 to 2016 school years.

Burke's administration promoted the program throughout Washington Park, culminating with what the principal called a "jamboree day" just before classes started in August.

Many parents signed their children up for after-school on the first day. Hatter said having the students at school for an extended period of time helps their families, who in most cases have to work and are forced to leave their children home alone in the afternoons.

Since her daughter began attending the after-school program, Emikia Bell has had more time for herself.

"It's helping me a lot, too, because I just went back to school," Bell said. "Now I don't have to stop studying, stop cooking or stop getting the school clothes ready to help my daughter with her homework."

Not only do the students and their parents benefit from after-school, but it also creates a working place for teachers.

Grace-Ann Richardson has been teaching English at Burke for six years. Since she started tutoring for the after-school program, she has found her job more enjoyable; it helps her achieve her aspirations of stimulating the learning process of every student.

"During after-school, I have a smaller group of students, so it is much easier to work," Richardson said. "The students who are afraid to speak up in the big classroom open up during after-school, and that is very rewarding. The kids in my after-school class are working below their grade level, so I am really hoping that with extra guidance, they will at least be on grade level."

While there is still much to be incorporated at Burke, like teaching equipment and recreational activities to motivate students, Richardson is optimistic.

"This is necessary for many of the students, because they learn better in a smaller class environment, so in after-school, you'll see them shine like they don't in their regular classroom," she said. "The kids are here, and we're just ready to go on and see the results." ★



**No. 3**

*where Washington Park ranks among neighborhoods with the most violent crimes, like murder and assault*

**96.3**

*percent of students in Burke Elementary who come from low-income households*

**No. 4**

*where Washington Park ranks in property crimes, such as burglaries and stolen vehicles*

**>50**

*percent of the school's 440 students enrolled in the after-school program.*



## CTU vice president discusses the struggle for education equality

BY CHASE DIFELICIAANTONIO

Nearly 85 percent of Chicago Public School students come from low-income households. Or look at it this way: Out of the 400,545 students currently enrolled in Chicago's public schools, more than 340,463 of them face an uphill battle against poverty. Barely a third of those students will meet Illinois state exam standards in reading, math and science. Only 69 percent of them will graduate from CPS within five years, well below the national graduation rate.

When educators think of CPS, this is what comes to mind for Jesse Sharkey, vice president of Chicago Teachers' Union.



PHOTOS BY CHASE DIFELICIAANTONIO

Jesse Sharkey was acting president of the Chicago Teachers' Union while Karen Lewis had to leave for health reasons.

# 85

percent of Chicago Public School students who come from a low-income household

**Mosaic:** What exactly is the connection between poverty and poor scholastic performance?

**Sharkey:** Academic achievement tracks the academic achievement of a student's parents which in turn closely tracks wealth. You can tell more about what kind of test scores students in a school get by looking at the kind of cars that are in the parking lot of the school than you can by looking at the grades of the students.

**Mosaic:** Can we say that an economic gap correlates to an education or achievement gap? Is it just a matter of parents having more money and education and passing that to their kids or is there more?

**Sharkey:** It massively correlates. For example, students who grow up in an environment where they're worried about where their next meal is coming from or whether or not there is going to be a roof over their head because they're dealing with foreclosure, or homelessness, or eviction or whatever, are almost necessarily going to be less able to focus on academic performance. They're going to be sitting there preoccupied by a set of things and worries. A student who not only is totally secure in their lodging but is getting to think about the vacation they're going to take to France or whatever is going to have a huge advantage in that regard. Being in an environment where there is a quiet place to do homework versus people that have a huge family in a very small place. That's an academic challenge. It's true that teachers are important but the home environment of the student has three times as much effect on the academic outcome of a student as a teacher does.

**Mosaic:** What can be done from the school angle that you feel is effective?

**Sharkey:** If you're the school that's in a community where violence is a big issue, for example, you know that you're going to have students dealing with grief, with loss, ... post-traumatic stress. Those things can really destabilize an academic environment. You're going to need to have some kind of a plan that there should be council on staff, there should be training for staff so that people have some

# 69

percent of low-income household students in CPS who will graduate high school within five years

awareness of what to say and what not to say. That's not going to be a magic bullet for the academic performance of the school but it can certainly have an impact.

**Mosaic:** Studies have shown that there is a lot of difficulty in these communities that have a lot of poor students that it's difficult to attract and retain skilled teachers? How do we get good teachers in these schools and how do we make them stay?

**Sharkey:** What's the incentive of a person to try to stay in an inner city school and teach? If essentially there's a teleology that says that good teaching produces good test scores, the test scores of your students are bad therefore you can't be a good teacher. If you're a bad teacher, therefore you deserve to be fired. Now I want to be a good teacher, I go work in a tough school, but why would I stay there if I can already tell in advance that I will be considered bad if I stay in the school? We have to respect the profession; we have to stop trying to load it up with standardized tests. The other thing I would say it has to do with trying as a society to have some way to understand what poor kids are dealing with, to not just make a pathology out of their poverty. We're being taught to see all the things that are wrong with those communities.

**Mosaic:** Do nonprofits fulfill a valuable role in all of this?

**Sharkey:** I think that we're going to need something that looks more like a political movement. You're not going to solve the question of revenue for the schools if you leave that question only to the people who have a narrow technical expertise of how K-12 public inner city education works. You're going to need broader segments of society saying we care about educating children in our entire society, therefore we're willing to pay more taxes, therefore we're willing to have a progressive income tax in the state of Illinois. I think broader layers of our society coming to be more familiar with what's going on in the schools and the education helps. It helps broaden out that awareness and make the demands for educational justice be more widespread. ★



# BUILDING BLOCKED

*Lack of funding leads tots to jump over preschool, leaving them less prepared for kindergarten*

**BY KATINA BENIARIS**

Every morning, a group of elementary students on the West Side of Chicago walk around a colorful room to explore their various play stations. One child puts on a white lab coat while playing with a stethoscope. Another child goes on his tip-

py toes to place a blue block on his rainbow tower. Other students sit on the alphabet mat as the teacher's assistant shares the leaves the class collected earlier. The teacher walks around the busy classroom as she monitors playtime, a big role in a preschooler's development. Through creative learning, they're one step closer to their kindergarten readiness.

An early childhood education gives these young students the opportunity to get a head start on their education. Many Chicago Public School classrooms function like this one, but only 46 percent of children ages 3 to 4 in the United States currently attend preschool. Why is CPS following the country's trends with lacking high-quality preschool?

"The problem is that there needs to be more space. There's a great need for early childhood education especially in the low-income neighborhoods," said Bonnie Roelle, 70, a recently retired CPS administrator for the early childhood education program. "Pre-K is not mandated by the state. Principals have to serve the K-12 to the state, so the first to go is the pre-K. We need more facilities for these young children."

Mayor Rahm Emanuel and city officials have announced a new budget plan that involves a \$17 million investment in expanding high-quality programs for early childhood education in CPS through the use of a new financial tool called social impact bonds. For the next four years, the plan will work toward financing about 2,600 seats for children in half-day preschool programs in low-income neighborhoods.

"It's our most vulnerable population and it's our responsibility as a society to support them, support the folks who work with them and the parents who raise them," said Catherine Main, 49, the Clinical Instructor and Program Coordinator of the Early Childhood Program at University of Illinois at Chicago, said.

The focus on at-risk children aims to decrease the achievement gap in the city. Children who don't attend preschool are 50 percent more likely to be placed in special education, 60 percent more likely to not attend college and 70 per-

cent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime, according to early childhood education advocate group, the Ounce of Prevention Fund.

"Their brains are developing. The more you work with them, the more they learn," Roelle said. "They're like little computers... they store all this data and it's better to start at a young age."

Since the 1960s, the Child-Parent Center program in CPS provides services in primarily low-income neighborhoods to preschoolers and their parents. They require parents to be involved at least 2 1/2 hours a week in their child's learning whether it be at home or in the classroom.

"When I think about low-income, I think about the stress that it can bring to a family," Main said. "When you're struggling to think about how you're going to pay rent or how you're going to bring food on your table, there is a lot of stressors in that."

Chicago-Parent Centers have faced many setbacks over the past decades due to budget cuts, low class attendance and declining enrollments. After visiting a few Child-Parent Center programs, Emanuel plans to move forward with this new investment to greatly improve at-risk children's readiness for full-day kindergarten.

"We are going to have universal pre-K for all 4-year-olds of low income families. The kids who need it most, and the parents will also receive educational support so what happens in the classroom is not lost at home; it is reinforced," Emanuel said, during the Chicago City Council meeting in November after a 41-5 vote passed the new budget plan for the expansion.

This new investment improves funding for high-quality pre-K programs in six CPS elementa-

**2.5**

*hours a week CPS requires for parents to be involved with their children's learning*

**46**

*percent of children ages 3 to 4 in the United States currently attend preschool*

**50**

*percent of children more likely to be placed in special education if not attending preschool*

ry schools with a high percentage of low-income families: De Diego Community in West Town, Melody in Garfield-Humboldt, Thomas in McKinley Park, Wadsworth in Woodlawn, Peck in West Elston and Hanson Park in Belmont-Cragin.

Preschool teacher Tina Kritikos, 48, of Budlong Elementary, agrees that early childhood education should be expanded, including a focus on at-risk students.

"Most of our students are free or reduced lunch. Many of our students are English language learners. They learn a lot about communicating, social skills and so much language. From September, where they don't know barely any English, to the end of the year, there are just huge leaps of improvement," she said.

Through the Early Learning Illinois standards, Kritikos and other CPS preschool teachers follow a creative curriculum with teacher strategies that focus on the students' growth before they step in for their first day of kindergarten. Many goals include routine, social skills and emotional development that occur through project-based learning.

Roula Savakis, 42, sends her son to preschool at Budlong.

"My son comes home and tells me he wants to be a fireman," she said. "He learns about the community."

Chicago will be the fifth city to participate in the social impact bond program in the U.S. and the second targeting early childhood education, right behind Utah.

"Let's proceed with caution and keep the focus on making things better for the children and families," Main said, thinking over this new budget plan. "If we want to help young children, we really have to help young families and children in the community, too."

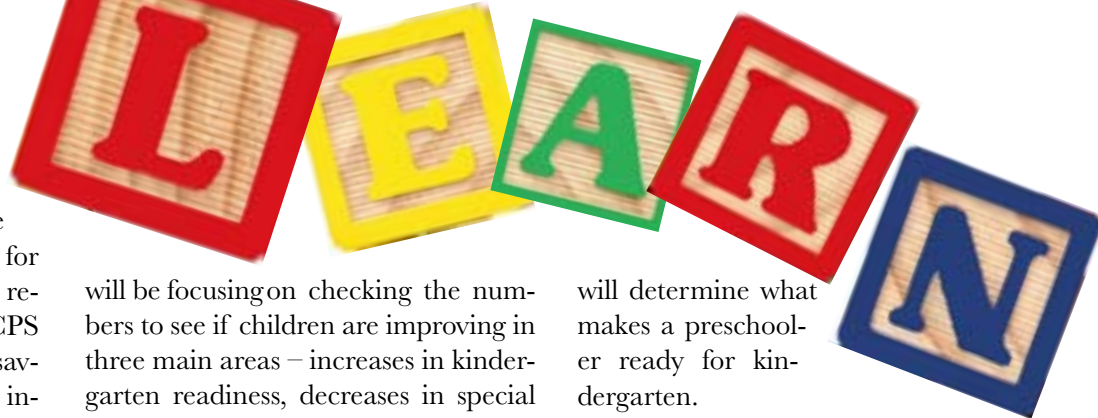
*Next page >*

< From previous page

The investors behind the \$17 million hope to see a vast improvement for these at-risk kids, while they claim that CPS saves money for students that do not utilize extra resources such as special education. CPS will receive about a third of the savings, while the rest will go back to investors, according to Crain's Chicago Business website.

"We should be putting a priority on early education by setting a budget or to expand that to every child," Ald. John Arena of Chicago's 45th Ward said. "But financing it to the benefit of the financial community and using our children as collateral is not the way to do it."

Over the next four years, the finance community and the city of Chicago



will be focusing on checking the numbers to see if children are improving in three main areas – increases in kindergarten readiness, decreases in special education enrollment and increases in third grade literacy tests.

"We are going to continue to move this city forward. We have to knuckle down, and push forward to the things that we need to improve and save our future," said Ald. Deborah Graham of Chicago's 29th Ward said.

The question remains of how these benchmarks will be collected over the next years and little details have been shared on how the evaluation process

will determine what makes a preschooler ready for kindergarten.

"We need to remember that these kids are young and we should put the focus more on their social and emotional development rather than so strongly on their academic development," Kritikos said. "The focus should be more how they get along and how they feel about themselves. More emotional and social skills would go a longer way in preparing them for school and for life." \*

**"It's our most vulnerable population and it's our responsibility as a society to support them..."**

*Catherine Main, University of Chicago*



Loyola University Provost John Pelissero  
Image courtesy of luc.edu

pro·vost

# CONGRATULATIONS!

To the editors of Mosaic Magazine and the authors whose works are published in these pages. We are proud of the work and efforts of all our Journalism students.

The Office of the Provost



Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives

# THE LEO WAY

*A South Side Catholic school creates a sense of brotherhood*



PHOTOS BY SUSIE MOSKOP

LEFT CLOCKWISE: Isaiah Nichols transferred to Leo after his sophomore year for a better opportunity. A cross on the doorknob shows the building's deep Catholic roots. After-school wrestling is a popular program at Leo.

## BY JAKE MAZANKE

Isaiah Nichols was afraid to go to school in the morning. Each day, Nichols faced harassment and bullying from fellow students at his charter school on Chicago's South Side.

"(The charter school) was very hostile. Many of the adults there really weren't helping, some students were in gangs, there was a lot of negative things going on," Nichols said.

After Nichols finished his sophomore year, his mother knew she needed to find another option for her son. She took her son on a tour of a school in the Auburn Gresham Neighborhood: Leo

Catholic High School.

"I was looking for a school that was going to challenge me and help me get to college and develop me as a person and help me build my character more," Isaiah Nichols said.

On the tour of Leo, his mother, Frankie Nichols was informed of the \$7,000 tuition, a sizeable sum for a family of modest means. She was so worried about the safety of her son at his old charter school that she said she would be willing to pay for a better education for her son. The tuition would cost less than a funeral for her son, she said.

Frankie Nichols believes that she made the right choice by sending her son to Leo, an all-male high school.

"They have done amazing with with him and he has had a chance to be himself," she said. "Now he is bugging me, he wouldn't be late, we have to be out by 7:30. He hasn't missed a day or anything. He has had perfect attendance."

Although Leo Catholic High School is located in a neighborhood with one of the highest crime rates in Chicago and has seen a significant change in the student body since it was founded 89 years ago, it has been successful in graduating students and sending them

to college.

When Leo was founded in 1926, the Auburn Gresham neighborhood, where the school is located, was almost exclusively white. It was comprised heavily of Irish Roman Catholics who flocked to the neighborhood because of its proximity and easy accessibility to the Chicago stockyards.

Now the neighborhood is 98 percent black.

Dan McGrath, who was a 1968 graduate and the current president of Leo Catholic High School, saw the change within the neighborhood while he was a student.

"Between my sophomore and junior year at Leo, there were some black on white shootings on the South Side," McGrath said. "The shootings caused a white flight at supersonic speed."

When McGrath enrolled at Leo High School in 1964, he said the student body had a population of more than 1,000 students who were predominantly white. By the time he graduated, McGrath witnessed many of the white students move away from the South Side and leave Leo.

Leo currently has an enrollment 150 male students who come from 29 different zip codes around Chicago. The

student body is 92 percent black.

Although the surrounding area has changed in the last 89 years, Leo has remained a constant in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood.

Leo stands between many boarded up and run down buildings. It is evident that the large, tan brick structure on the corner of South Sangamon Street and 79th Street is a clear outlier in its environment. The gated entrance leads to a small courtyard that is often filled with students after school hours. The doorway leading into the school is framed by two large pillars which extend upward to support a small overhang that adorns a cross.

When entering the building, the aged wooden floors wind through quaint faculty offices and into a corridor that is designated as the school's hall of fame. This small hallway is lined with trophies and plaques of the many achievements that the school and students have gained throughout the years.

The end of the hall of fame opens into a large lunchroom that echoes with the booming banter of students. There is a high energy present during lunch hours, as students can be seen scooting between tables, laughing and joking. The smell of freshly cooked food

and the clear odor of the teenage boys is pungent in the air. Between bites of their lunches, it is not uncommon to see students pushing and grabbing at one another, innocently roughhousing.

Within the classroom, the teachers of Leo have been successful in working with their students to prepare them for further education. Over the last six years, Leo has graduated all of its seniors and sent 96 percent of its students to college.

Yet, many of the staff members at Leo credit their academic successes to the motivation of their students who are determined to make the most of their education.

"The families don't have as much as other families at other schools I've been at, but they care just as much," Leo principal Philip Messina said. "We have a school of motivated families. There is a tuition here. For a family that doesn't have a lot to begin with and that family chooses to pay tuition, I mean, that is motivation in itself."

The most important value of the school, a strong sense of brotherhood within the student population, is something that Leo has aimed to teach its students for many years.

*Next page >*



**“I was looking for a school that was going to challenge me and help me get to college and develop me as a person and help me build my character more.”**

*Isaiah Nichols*



Classes contain a small number of students at Leo, which makes for a more intimate, enhanced learning environment.

**< From previous page**

“The values that they instilled in me, we instill in the kids today. I think it makes a difference in the way our kids are developed and their success in college and how they go about becoming men,” said Michael Holmes, a Leo alumnus and current dean of admissions.

A sense of brotherhood is established the moment the incoming freshman walk in the door at Leo, and the first thing that every student learns at school is the Leo fight song. The sense of brotherhood is what many of the Leo faculty say help propel so many of their students to graduation.

“If you have a bond with your fellow

brother, you are gonna push him, you are going to motivate him to get better,” Holmes said.

Leo senior, Dexter Dale Jr. is a prime example of the importance of leadership. Although he was excited about applying to college and spending time with friends in his final year of high school, what he wanted most from his



As part of their tradition, students hold up an ‘L’ for Leo with their hands in the cafeteria during lunch.

senior year was to be seen as a good leader to the younger students.

“We want the freshmen to have a good start like we did,” Dale said. “We want the freshmen to follow in our footsteps so they can have an enjoyable year.”

Fellow senior Isaiah Nichols has also blossomed into a great leader since he

has enrolled in Leo. He is regarded by many of the faculty as one of the best and brightest students at the school, and is currently ranked second in his graduating class.

Isaiah has high aspirations for his future. His long time dream has been to study criminal justice in college and eventually become a member of a po-

lice SWAT team.

“[Leo] has changed me a lot. I have different perspectives about things in life,” Nichols said. “I know the definition of how to be a responsible man. I know how to work hard and be more determined and dedicated because I have a lot of father figures at Leo and a lot of role models.”\*

# NOT STACKING UP

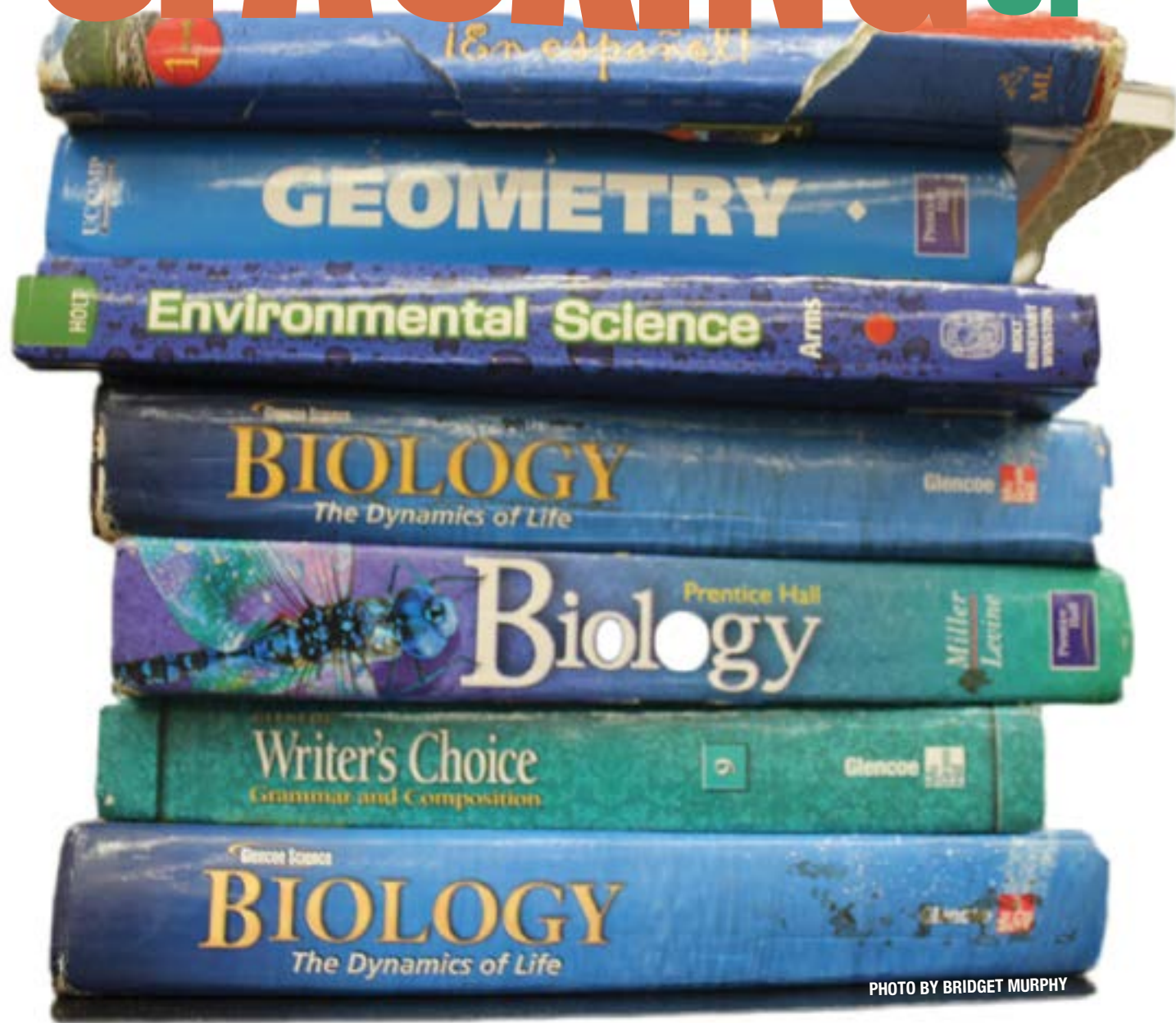


PHOTO BY BRIDGET MURPHY

*Budget cuts threaten CPS libraries,*

*but advocates fight to keep them open*

BY ELLIE DIAZ

Last year at Halloween, Kozminski Elementary School students decked out in ghost, superhero and butterfly costumes gathered around a librarian for story time. The bookshelves were stocked with dictionaries and children's books. Reading posters and literary artwork covered the walls.

Last year, the only inhabitants of the library were the ghosts of long-gone characters. Books gathered thick layers of dust and stagnant air pooled around empty chairs.

In June 2013, Kozminski's library closed due to student-based budgeting, said the school's previous librarian Lyn Dixon in an interview with the Hyde Park Herald.

Principal Myron Hester and Assistant Principal Michelle Brumfield reopened the library in September 2014 after deciding students would benefit from a library program. Genni Olson, Kozminski's only teacher librarian, spent unpaid time cleaning and restoring the previously abandoned classroom.

"We don't have a huge student population so we can't have everything," Olson said. "I think libraries lost out."

Kozminski Elementary isn't the only Chicago school to struggle with keeping its library active. Budget cuts and new budget plans threaten Chicago Public School libraries and librarians, forcing organizations, librarians and communities to fight to keep them open.

Chi School Librarians, an advocacy group and official committee of the Chicago Teachers Union, reports more than 50 percent of CPS schools don't have a librarian. That's a 45 percent reduction in just three years. CPS budgeted for 454 librarians two years ago, 313 librarians last year and only 254 this year, according to NPR.

When school budgets are cut, libraries are one of the first places to take the hit. School budgets were cut by \$100 million last year, as stated in a Chicago

Catalyst analysis.

Durkin Park Elementary School's library used to be housed in a windowless 12-foot by 15-foot supply closet where only a few students could squeeze in at a time to check out a book.

Sharon Gonciarczyk, Durkin Park Elementary's certified computer librarian, explained that high enrollment and lack of space forced the library from a classroom into a storage closet.

After fighting passionately for her students and community, Gonciarczyk finally received her library. In 2012, the school built a new cafeteria addition and the old cafeteria space was converted into a library.

"It was wonderful," Gonciarczyk said. "Even for me who fought for it for 10 years, (students) finally get a space called a library that they can actually walk in and get books."

The library now fits 40 people and has six computers, windows, comfortable chairs and walls covered in books. Durkin Park Elementary students have a safe space to read and check out books.

Libraries are not only a place to check out books, but also offer a unique environment for students to reflect and interact with others, said Jane Currie, a reference librarian at Loyola University Chicago.

"They're learning spaces (and) social spaces. Spaces where people can come together in a different way than they otherwise would," said Currie, 40. "The school library gives children the chance to choose a book on their own and be able to take it home and engage with it."

While some might look to public city libraries as a substitute for school libraries, Currie and Gonciarczyk agree that that's not always an option for disadvantaged neighborhoods.

"(Parents) are afraid to send their kids to walk over there by themselves," Gonciarczyk said. "The parents don't have time to take their kids to the public

50

percent of  
Chicago  
Public  
Schools that  
don't have a  
librarian

library."

Libraries aren't the only ones struggling to keep afloat with budget plans. Librarians are being left out of budgets and are either fired or moved to classrooms to become teachers. There are more than 200 schools without a library or certified teacher li-

brarian, the Chicago Teachers Union reported.

Chi School Librarians, comprised of six CPS librarians, was created in 2013 when the librarians noticed a decline in members during professional development days.

Its main goal is to have a professionally trained librarian in every CPS school. The organization said one way to achieve this is to reduce standardized testing and divert that money to libraries and librarians.

"We're testing our students more, which does not raise test scores," said Nora Wiltse, a member of Chi School Librarians. "But if we were to take that money and invest it in school librarians, that would actually raise test scores more than just adding more tests."

Test scores are significantly higher for schools that have full-time certified librarians, according to compiled data from the American Association of School Librarians. The association also reports that when spending for school libraries rise, reading scores rise too.

Ninety-seven percent of Americans agree that school library programs are an essential part of the education experience, a 2009 ALA survey found.

Robert Seal, the dean of libraries at Loyola University Chicago, acknowledges that most people understand libraries are important, and suggests public librarians share their stories to citizens and combine forces to work their way through legislation.

"Libraries are a place to open up your eyes and your mind to different ideas, to learn about other people and cultures," Seal said. "I just think it makes you a better person." \*

**A**s the school day winds down on a warm Monday in September, a crackling voice comes over the PA system at Sullivan House Alternative High School on Chicago's South Side.

The voice calls for a select few students to come to the office. These students won't be punished; in fact, they'll be receiving gift cards for strong academic work and perfect attendance.

The voice calling the students to the office belongs to Dr. Thomas Gattuso, principal at Sullivan House. "Dr. G" as his students affectionately call him, gives out these rewards from time to time.

At some schools, rewards like these may not be commonplace, but the same thing can be said about Sullivan House in general. Not your typical high school, most students here are dropouts.

"Most of our kids dropped out," said Gattuso, 61. "A lot of our kids had to realize that getting a job at 17 without a high school diploma is not going to lead them very far. So (for) a lot of our kids, something hit them and they realized they have to go back to school. That's why they're here."

Sullivan House Alternative High School was first opened in 1975 (just off of 82nd Street), making it one of the oldest charter schools in the country.

Because it is a charter school, Sullivan House is able to create a diverse curriculum for its student body. Students study everything from biology and anatomy to journalism and entrepreneurship.

Students from the ages of 16 to 21 who have dropped out or left traditional high schools can attend the South Shore school. Significantly, when they graduate from Sullivan House, they receive a high school diploma, not a GED.

Charter schools throughout Chicago have gained a bad reputation because of the ulterior

**330**

*the number of students enrolled at Sullivan. Up from just 80 since 2004*

**21**

*oldest age of a student at Sullivan House*

motives that lead to their creation

These schools are often seen as money-making ventures rather than institutions devoted to education, a stigma Sullivan House confronts daily.

"The problem is we're not like a lot of those other charter schools. Forty years ago, we were one of the few charter schools period," Gattuso said. "Now charters evolve and have gotten a bad name. And unfortunately for us, because we were way before them."

In the 11 years since Gattuso became principal, enrollment has risen from 80 students to the 330 Sullivan House has today.

One of the largest alternative high schools in

the city, Sullivan House would continue to grow had Gattuso not capped the school's enrollment despite rising applications.

For English teacher Michelle Morris, Sullivan House was where she always belonged. After previously teaching in the Chicago suburbs, Morris made the move to Sullivan

**YOUR FACE HERE**

*The South Side's Sullivan House makes sure graduation hopes aren't just pipe dreams*

House 10 years ago to escape the restraints of suburban public schools.

"I'm very alternative in the way I was raised and the way I brought myself up and the way I've been my whole life," said Morris, 37. "It's always been really hard for me to be confined to certain set of rules or borders or boundaries," She cited the freedom she feels at Sullivan House as one of the main reasons for staying over the last decade.

Morris also appreciates the honesty and openness of her students.

"They always call me out when I have my gray hair showing," she said. "They appreciate you more, they listen and they laugh more. There is a lot more spirit here than there ever was at the public schools. The kids just get really real, there is no façade just straight up truths all the time."

In addition to English, Morris teaches a journalism class and oversees the production of Sullivan House's monthly studennewspaper.

One of Sullivan House's students, Dantrell Brown, has a keen eye for writing. Brown, 17, entered Sullivan House looking for a small school where he could feel safe and comfortable, something he says he has found within school walls.

As for his future, the junior has his goals set. "I wanna have at least 10 books out," Brown said. "Romantic books." He hasn't considered college yet, although he still has time.

For many students at Sullivan House, this is the first time college has been brought up as a possibility.

"We still have kids in 2014 that are the first ones in their family to graduate high school," Gattuso said. "A lot of them think college is just a pipe dream, and it's not." ★



# DOLAN FOR DEMOCRACY

*One North Side school teacher shows students how to be their own civic advocates*

BY CHASE DIFELICIANONIO

**O**n a chilly, late September morning at Edwin G. Foreman High School on Chicago's Northwest Side, students shuffle and shout as teachers herd the swirling mass inside the monolith beige brick-and-mortar structure. Carved high about the main entrance is the school's motto: "A brave man may fall, but cannot yield."

The slamming of locker doors and the electronic hum of the bell announce the start of what appears to be just another Wednesday morning.

But something different is happening in Ryan Dolan's first period English class.

In a dimly lit classroom, 13- and 14-year-olds hunch over glowing laptop screens, scanning the United Nations website for information about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as Michael Jackson's "Thriller" album plays softly in the

background. This is a Mikva Challenge classroom.

A non-profit educational organization founded in honor of former judge and Illinois congressman Abner J. Mikva, Mikva Challenge seeks to fashion students who are active participants in the American democratic process through an approach aptly named "action civics."

Mikva Challenge is funded through private donations, corporate partnerships and service fees paid from schools. Mikva works with more than 5,300 students at 93 high schools throughout Chicago each year and has an annual budget of roughly \$2 million.

Through action civics, Mikva teachers and staff seek to make civics learning a process in which students are actively involved in the political process.

"The best way to learn how to participate in a democracy is to participate in a democracy," Jill Bass, the director of curriculum and teacher development at Mikva

Challenge, said.

Mikva has a number of ways of doing this. Its approach involves both working directly with youth, as well as writing curriculum and applying it in classrooms like Dolan's.

Part of this approach is what Mikva calls "issues to action" curriculum. That is why Dolan's freshmen are grappling with a document studied by law students.

Dolan's students will identify a human rights issue in their communities that they feel passionately about and produce a two-minute speech about it as part of Mikva's "Soapbox" project.

Students are then challenged to research their topic and address it by creating an action model.

Mikva brings in guest speakers, and the whole process culminates at the end of the year with a civics fair and citywide speech competition attended by other classes, teachers and Chicago policy makers that in the past have included Chicago Public Schools CEO Barbara

**"There's social emotional growth that students experience through their participation."**

*Jill Bass, Mikva Challenge*

Byrd-Bennett.

"Students get a chance to meet these people that they didn't even know existed before they started analyzing power structures. All of a sudden those people are in the room with them," Dolan said.

While not always the case, some issues that start as Soapbox projects can take on a life of their own.

"The Peer Health Educators are a club [at Foreman High School] that started because of a Soapbox speech," Dolan said. "They identified the issue of teen pregnancy and the high rates of sexually transmitted infections in Chicago. They've since gotten a condom availability program in the school. They've gotten grant money to teach in the school and broaden our sexual health program."

As part of its dual approach, Mikva engages students outside the classroom, as well, with groups like its education council. Usually composed of 15 to 20 students, education councils use the same issues-to-action method, identifying a problem and then creating an action model to change it.

Sixteen-year-old Xiao Mei, who goes by Lin, is a junior at Jones College Preparatory High School and has been a member of Mikva's education council for two years.

In that time, she has met with Byrd-Bennett to recommend changes to policy and procedure.

"We recommended a review of security guards in schools because we felt they were rude and harassed students," said Lin. "We created a survey for students to evaluate security guards and the review is in progress." Council initiatives aren't always resounding success, however, a major learning component of the project.

"The biggest challenge though is getting adults to see what youth need, what they're going through," Lin said.

Like in any political arena, success is not always ensured. Failure is part of the process.

"When you engage in politics, you aren't always successful," Bass said. "You don't always get the win, which is a hard lesson for anyone. There's social emotional growth that students experience through their participation."

Back in Dolan's classroom, the wheels are starting to turn for 14-year-old freshman John Smith. His convictions are strong about issues he is passionate about.

"They say we have all these rights but we're not equal," Smith said. "Cops kill people every day and they just get suspended."

It is Smith's fire that fuels the Mikva model. For Dolan, this is exactly the kind of response he intends to get out of his students.

The first step is getting them to care, then to raise their voices. ★

**88**

*percent of Mikva alumni are registered voters*

**5300**

*students in Chicago are involved in Mikva*

**450**

*Mikva students volunteered in the 2012 elections*

PHOTO BY B. COLEMAN  
ILLUSTRATION BY J. BROWN

BY HAILEY PETERSON

**K**aleyah Wesley remembers the struggles she endured as a sixth-grader. Waking up at 5 a.m. to the sounds and shifts of the guests at the New Life Interim House, a shelter in Rogers Park, she would quickly shake her siblings to consciousness as she scrambled to get ready for school.

"We would sometimes miss meals, and sometimes I wouldn't do my homework because I would have to help out my mother more around the shelter," Wesley said.

After getting ready, Wesley and her three younger siblings would pace around the CTA, reading routes, transferring lines and relying on the guidance of total strangers, in an effort to make it to school on time.

Things are much better for her now. Wesley is now 15, and she benefits from many resources that the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless offers to students in her situation.

She and her siblings are provided with daily transportation to get to and from school after the organization visited their shelter and informed them about their educational rights.

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless is a non-profit organization that advocates for changes in public policies to restrain homelessness. They monitor and promote social programs to those in risk.

More than 22,000 students who enrolled in Chicago Public Schools during the 2013-14 school year were homeless. That's a 3,475-student enrollment increase from the previous year, according to data tracked by CPS' office of Students In Temporary Living Situations.

Out of all the students enrolled in CPS, about 5 percent are homeless.

The coalition is taking a hands-on approach by focusing on the root of the issue: a lack of awareness.

Hannah Willage, a community organizer at the coalition and a member of its speakers bureau, explained that many children are surprised when they are informed that the term "homeless" may include their own living situation.

"We're not just talking about the man on the street with a cup. We're talking about anyone who doesn't have a permanent housing," she said.

Willage and other members of the coalition use personal and intimate methods to spread awareness. Last year, they teamed up with Chase Bank and went to the steps of Orr Academy High School, located between the West Garfield and Humboldt Park neighborhoods, to hand out fliers advertising services for homeless students.

The coalition seeks to attain strong connections and relationships with the people for whom they are advocating, with the intention of building communities for those who may have lost faith in the idea of support and togetherness while experiencing homelessness.

Many of the coalition's members were or are homeless, so their commitment to the issue is tied with a familiar cause. This is the case with Wesley's mother, Marilyn Escoc, who went from being unemployed to holding a full-time position at the coalition after she volunteered there.

The members of the coalition who have suffered from homelessness and the liveliness of the CPS students are what Willage says gets her up in the morning and paints a smile on her face as she walks into work.

So much so that after weeks of spending time at Tilden High School — where approximately 50 percent of the students are homeless — she was panicked when one of her favor-

ite students wasn't in class one day. Her guardian instincts took hold as worst-case scenarios raced through her head.

But her sheer panic was short-lived when she was informed that the student was just home sick that day.

"They've survived so many hardships and they still have so much passion and spirit, and I wanted to get to work with them," Willage said. "That's what brought me to the coalition."

Willage works with teachers to incorporate service-learning opportunities into the curriculum. For example, students can learn public speaking skills, how to set up a meeting or how to dress professionally — skills that future employers will be looking for.

The coalition and its Loyola University Chicago branch, Loyola Coalition for the Homeless, have also teamed up to go before the Illinois State Legislature to push for better educational resources.

Every year in Springfield, they encourage legislators to restore funding in the budget for these programs.

"[Homeless students] get as many resources as they can through the public school system, but they sometimes slip through the cracks, which means they're not getting the education that they need to pull themselves out of homelessness," said Genta Meccolli, a 20 year-old junior economics major and member of Loyola coalition.

During a speakers bureau, Caroline O'Sullivan, a 19-year-old sophomore elementary education major, addressed why homelessness is such an important issue in the city.

"In Chicago Public Schools alone, there are over 22,144 students experiencing homelessness, about 10 percent of the national statistic of 200,000," she said. "That is something that is very close to home. This is something that's happening in our backyards." ★



PHOTO BY SHRUTI SHARMA

Hannah Willage, a community organizer at the Chicago Coalition for the homeless, poses with other CCH members.

# BY THE BOOTSTRAPS



88.7 fm

Loyola's student-run radio station for independent music and news

# TRUE TEACHING GRIT

*A special education teacher prepares her students for the real Chicago*

BY KATINA BENIARIS

A traditional private Catholic high school on the far Southeast Side of Chicago functions as a traditional education institution — with one exception: the small group of middle-school students who walk in and out with a security guard everyday.

Elementary school Gallistel Language Academy operates in three locations between 102nd and 104th streets in the East Side neighborhood. Due to overcrowding in Chicago Public Schools, Gallistel rents out the top floor of St. Francis de Sales High School to fit about 150 students — specifically fifth graders and a couple of special education classrooms.

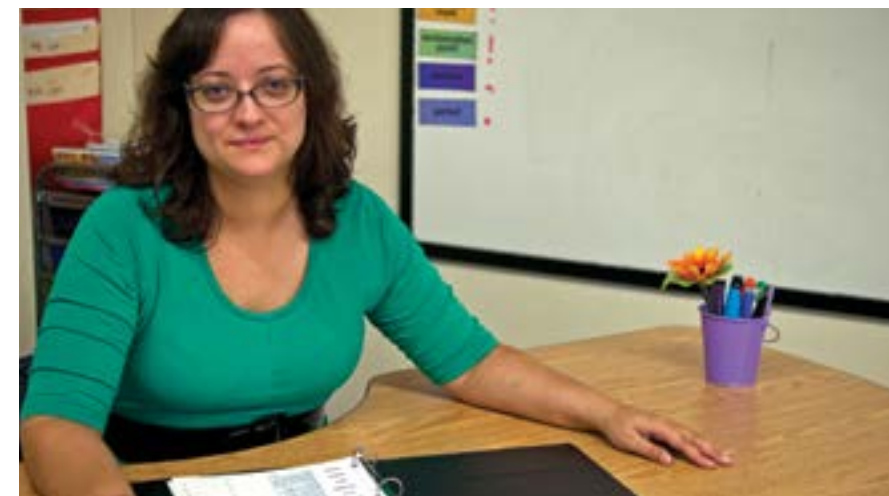
The sixth and seventh graders have to travel across the street with a school worker to their resource-based learning. They're special education students who are in regular classrooms as well.

"I tell my students that they're preparing for college since they have to commute from building to building," said 26-year-old Melissa Dippel.

Dippel works as a sixth and seventh grade special education resource teacher for Gallistel. She spends half the day working in a small resource room ranging from five to 15 students, while the other half is spent assisting her students in general education classrooms.

Her main challenge consists of helping these at-risk students with limits set by the board of education.

After graduating from Columbia College Chicago in arts management in 2009, Dippel decided to return to her hometown of Cleveland to devote her time perform-



Next page >

< From previous page

ing community service for the nation as an AmeriCorps member. Working as a third grade teacher aide in Cleveland schools sparked a new and surprising passion for Dippel — teaching.

In 2010, Dippel moved back to Chicago and received her teaching certification through a fast-track program called the Academy for Urban School Leadership.

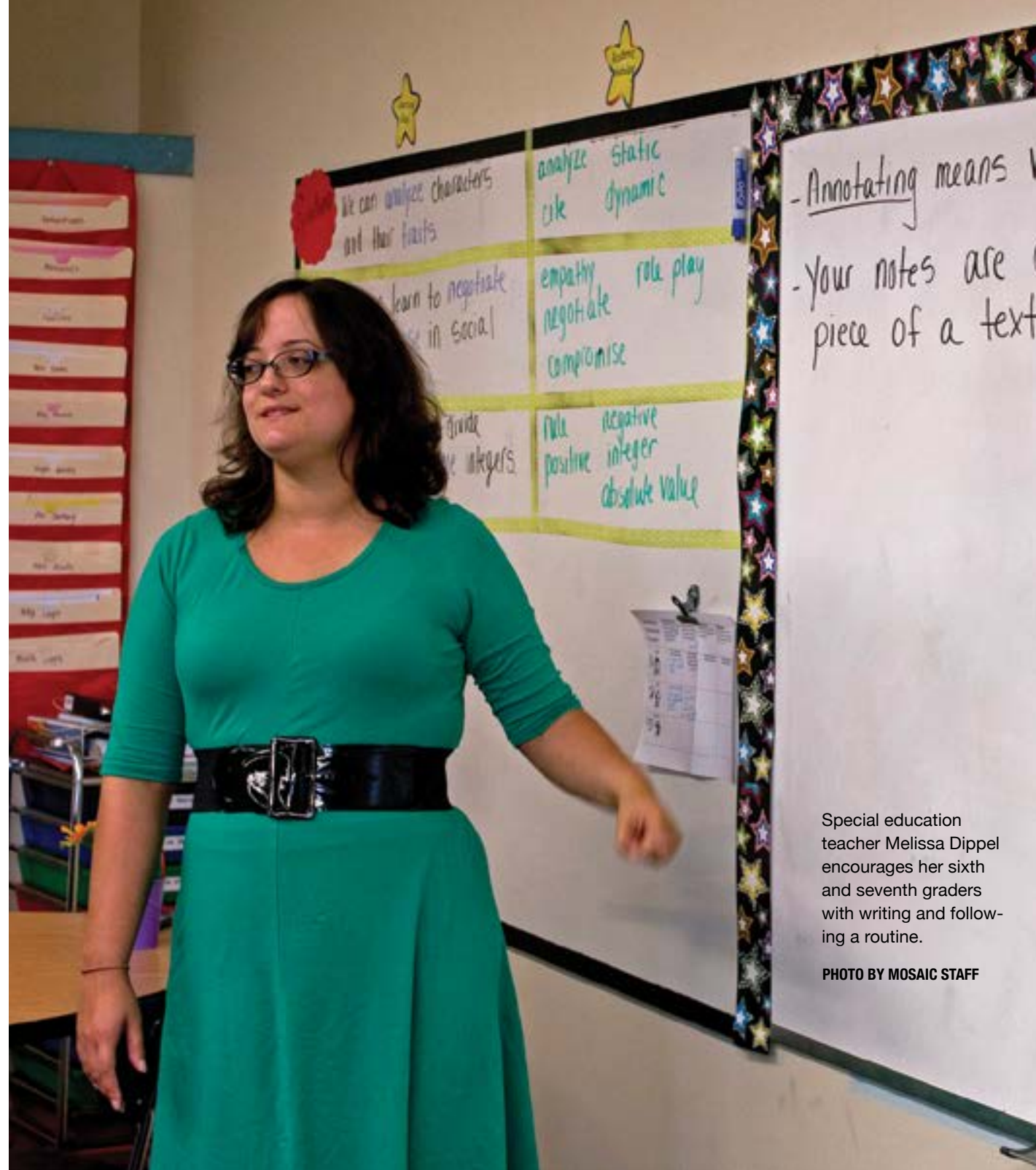
Her connection with the young students originally inspired Dippel to continue teaching primary grades in the city of Chicago. She landed her first official CPS teaching position as a third grade teacher at Plato Learning Academy, an elementary charter school in the Austin neighborhood. After working for a year there, she was still searching for a CPS school that made her feel at home.

Even if she had received a certificate in special education, Dippel never thought she would need one until a sixth grade special education teacher position opened at Gallistel.

“I’ve never set foot in a special education classroom,” Dippel said. “I’ve never even set foot in a middle school room. But, I knew [Gallistel] was the place I wanted to be. I took it kind of by accident and then fell in love with it.”

According to its Illinois Report Card, Gallistel holds nearly 1,400 students between the grades preschool to eighth. The student population is 96.7 percent Hispanic, 96.1 percent low-income and 9 percent students with disabilities.

In Dippel’s classroom, students have a variety of learning disabilities, but they’re also blended into the general education classrooms. Dippel explains that her students face various disabilities, from mild autism to dyslexia, but CPS prefers to group these students in a general learning disability cat-



Special education teacher Melissa Dippel encourages her sixth and seventh graders with writing and following a routine.

PHOTO BY MOSAIC STAFF

**“What she stresses is teaching students to be advocates for themselves.”**

*Andrea Porth, 37, fifth grade special education teacher*

egory.

Each student follows an Individualized Education Program, which describes the goals the special education team sets for the child during the school year. Dippel then coordinates with the general education teachers to see their lesson plans and apply these learning goals to her own classroom.

Her resource class follows the subjects — reading, writing and math — while students work in a more resourceful learning setting that is different than a standardized classroom for about three hours each day.

Despite working in a small space with little resources, Dippel has decorated the room with a bookshelf holding more than 200 books. The class also recently welcomed two new hamster friends to their classroom.

Dippel sits down with her students in small groups to review reading comprehension worksheets. She focuses on the main reading goal as she encourages her students to ask questions, make notes in their passages and participate.

“She’s constantly seeking new information from a variety of sources. You don’t have a lot of people who do that,” said Elizabeth Newman, 54, a CPS case manager counselor, explaining Dippel’s contribution to Gallistel’s special education department. “She makes a big connection with her students. A lot of students even say that she’s their favorite teacher.”

For many middle school students in CPS, the process of getting into a selective high school starts earlier than expected and Dippel worries about her students, who have trouble taking the test that becomes a major requirement to get into these schools.

“This rat race of selective enrollment high schooling is never even an option for my kids,” Dippel said. “It’s unacceptable that they don’t have any high school options.”

She instead concentrates on having them

transition smoothly to their neighborhood high school with strong social skills because she believes that they need to understand how to accommodate their cognitive delays and intellectual disabilities outside of the classroom.

“A big focus in my classroom besides academics is a lot of perseverance, grit, social-emotional learning and the kind of soft skills that will make you better at life in general,” Dippel said.

A section in Dippel’s writing class involves teaching empathy and communication through a program she uses titled “Second Step.” Her students learn the importance of empathy and communication through emotion-management and decision-making presented in videos. Dippel has her students apply their own social skills by talking together with their peers about the problems presented in the videos.

“What she stresses is teaching students to be advocates for themselves,” said Andrea Porth, 37, a fifth grade special education teacher at Gallistel. “Her students are strong in the classroom and they are positively strong on what they need when they leave the school setting with real life skills.”

Dippel plans to focus on improving her students’ needs for their household settings as well. She assigned students to write in their journals about their day-to-day routine from after school to bedtime. This exercise allows Dippel to teach students the importance of following a routine at home that will overall their grades at school and hopefully continue to improve their life styles with their learning disabilities as they grow older.

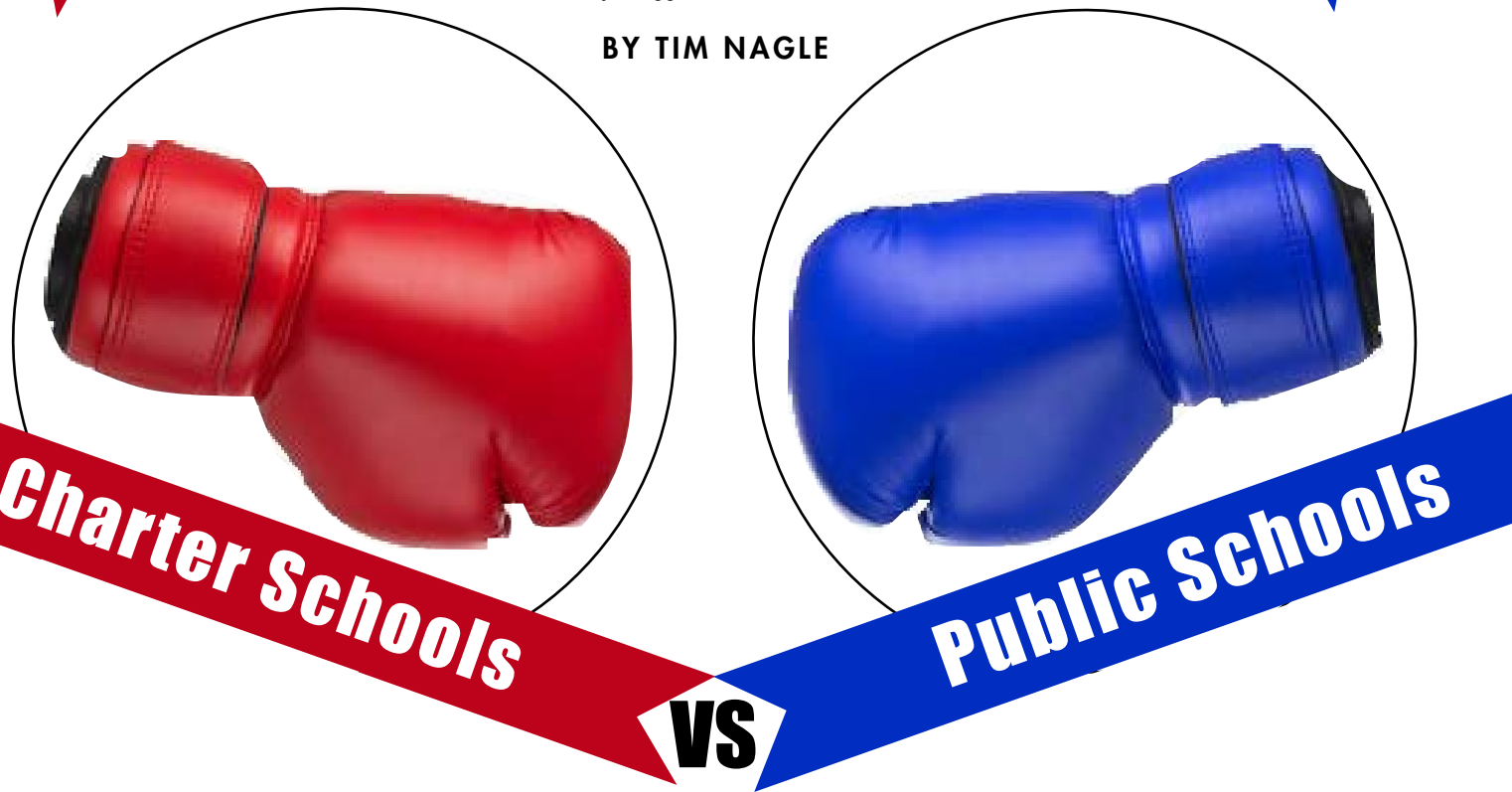
“If I get them back on track, they would be less likely to drop out in high school,” Dippel said.

My hope is that I could build their emotional and social skills up, as well as many academic skills I can, so they’ll survive in the real world.” ★

# FACING OFF

Chicago's public and charter schools meet problems with vastly different resources

BY TIM NAGLE



**F**rom the outside, DRW College Prep Charter School appears no different than most Chicago Public Schools. Located in Homan Square on the city's West Side, the school is a large brick building on what could be any neighborhood street in Chicago.

But inside students are learning with cutting edge technologies, such as computer labs and iPads.

The DRW College Prep School, part of the Noble Network, opened its doors in 2012 with funding support from the DRW Trading Group. The school incorporates technology-based learning tools into their core curriculum.

Across town on Chicago's Southwest Side, traditional Chicago Public Schools like Morgan Park High School are lobbying for better resources like new textbooks.

"At charter schools, all the students are

doing work on iPads, while some older [traditional public] schools are fighting just to get a functioning computer lab," said Loretta Balsam, a special education teacher at Morgan Park High School.

The difference between schools' resources illustrates the larger issue of education inequality in Chicago.

In May 2013, Mayor Rahm Emanuel and the Chicago Board of Education announced the closing of 50 public schools. It was the largest school closing in U.S. history. Schools predominantly located in low-income, minority neighborhoods on the city's South and West Sides, were closed for "underutilization."

Seven months after cutting funding for many CPS schools, the Board of Education voted to open seven new charter schools in January 2014, adding to the growing number of charter schools in Chicago. Illinois Network of Charter School President An-

**At charter schools, all the students are doing work on iPads, while some older [traditional public] schools are fighting just to get a functioning computer lab."**

*Loretta Balsam, special education teacher*

drew Broy has said he hopes 60 new schools will open in the city by 2017.

Charter schools are taxpayer-funded, privately managed institutions that operate differently than traditional public schools but are still tuition-free. The schools are independently run, which allows school officials to operate with more autonomy than regular public schools. They follow the standards of their charter instead of the State Board of Education requirements.

Prospective students applying to charter schools are not limited to the city's school zoning requirements. Most schools are non-selective; students are admitted through lottery systems based off the availability of open seats.

Charter school advocates believe that charter students are more serious about their schoolwork because they choose to attend these schools, which therefore should result in improved student performance.

However, a recent study conducted by the Institute of Metropolitan Opportunity at University of Minnesota Law School comparing charter and public schools in Chicago found that charters are barely outperforming traditional public schools. The analysis looked at data from Chicago schools for the 2012-13 school year such as pass rates, ACT scores and attendance.

"Chicago Public Schools have some of the lowest scores in the country on these issues," said Myron Orfield who heads the institute. "It is not a question [of whether] Chicago Public Schools are doing great; it's just the charters are worse."

The study concluded that students at charter schools had higher attendance rates than traditional public schools, ACT scores were close to equal for students in both school systems and charter schools had lower pass rates than public schools in math and reading.

Still, some have questioned the study's findings.

"We thought there were a lot of inaccuracies in [the study]," said Jill Levine, executive director of right angle program at Noble Charter Schools. "The article lumped all charter schools together."

The Noble Charter School Network consists of 10,000 students in 16 high school campuses across Chicago such as DRW Col-

lege Prep. The school network has received national recognition for their performance grades and college preparation. In 2013, nine of the top 11 nonselective schools in Chicago average ACT scores were Noble schools.

While Noble Charter Schools have noteworthy statistics, their schools only make up a fraction of the charter schools in Chicago.

Loretta Balsam said she believes one reason for charter school expansion is poor financing by the city.

"Unfortunately, the children of Chicago are suffering because politicians have not been fiscally responsible in making sure that the funds paid into the system were kept up," Balsam said.

While performance trends between charter and public schools are relatively even, their budgets are not. According to CPS budget documents, public school budgets were cut by \$351 million over the past year while charter school spending increased by \$427 million.

Balsam believes the money and resources should be evenly distributed.

"We would rather see the outside corporate funding fed into existing public schools to help increase neighborhood schools, especially on [Chicago's] West and South sides, which are lower socioeconomic areas that don't have a loud voice fighting for them," Balsam said. "They want equitable services, facilities and equipment for these children."

Chicago Teacher's Union president Karen Lewis has strongly opposed the Board of Education's expansion of charter schools and believes Mayor Emanuel's education reform is creating a two-tier education system.

Lewis and her supporters argue that charter schools only benefit a select portion of CPS students, while the majority of students are forced to learn with less than optimal resources.

University instructor Jilana Ordman believes the charter school expansion in Chicago is distracting the public from the larger issue.

"Charters give a way to opt-out of the public school system," Ordman told the Chicago Tribune. "That distracts attention from building better schools for everyone." ★

**131**

*number of charter schools in Chicago*

**50,000**

*number of students in Chicago charter schools*

**60**

*number of charter schools Illinois Network of Charter School President Andrew Broy hopes to open by 2017*

**\$351**

*million dollars cut from CPS public school budgets in the past year*

# CONFESSIONS *of a* SCIENCE TEACHER

“SOCRATIC  
METHOD”

THINK *more* CRITICALLY

MAKE  
CHICAGO  
A BETTER  
PLACE

Has Her Struggles

drive my students crazy”

be authentic

BY ZE QI GUO

It's a Saturday morning, but Katie Hottinger, 32, isn't at a yoga class or shopping for groceries. She's hunkered down in her tiny apartment in Chicago's Hyde Park, grading a stack of science tests spread before her on the kitchen table.

Grading on weekends is a normal part of the routine for Hottinger, a high school science teacher. She works at Gary Comer College Prep, a charter school in the neighborhood of Greater Grand Crossing, located on the South Side of Chicago, where 96 percent of the students are African-American and 4 percent Hispanic.

Even though she attended private schools all her life, Hottinger believes in public education.

"I grew up in this more privileged position going to private schools and certainly valued the education," she said. "But I think it's problematic if quality education is something that is privileged. I don't believe it should be."

In 2010, when she decided to become a teacher, she was admitted to a master's degree program at the the University of Chicago's Urban Teacher Education Program, which aims at preparing teachers for the Chicago Public Schools. After she finished her degree in 2012, she began her quest for a teaching position in a public school.

"Being a student of the University of Chicago, you can't help but to notice the racial composition of the South Side," said Hottinger, who is white.

Having received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Chicago, Hottinger has been able to observe the South Side of the city with her own eyes.

"There is such segregation in Chicago that it has been built into the way schools work in the city. As someone who lives in Chicago and loves the city, I see my job as a teacher as one way to try to make it a better place," she said.

Before she decided to become a teacher, Hottinger was an actress. She performed in theaters on and off for more than 10 years.

"I think theater for me was always sort of an escape thing," she said. "I enjoyed being outside of my normal self on stage. But with teaching, I'm definitely more myself. Because with kids, you have to be authentic. They can smell fake instantly."

Hottinger's insight about children comes from years of experience. As the oldest child of her family, Hottinger frequently watched out for her brother and sister. As she and her siblings grew up, her sense of responsibility remained intact, so she started to help children outside her home.

## Believe in PUBLIC EDUCATION

*humbling of the teaching process*

Working with young people has always been a theme of Hottinger's life. Starting from high school and then through college, she did a variety of volunteer tutoring with children.

"I've always been fascinated by how people learn," she said. "The most exciting part about teaching is getting to see that light bulb go off."

At school, Hottinger motivates her students to think more critically. "She encourages them to be responsible for their own learning," said Lynette Gayden, a fellow teacher and Hottinger's planning partner for her biology class.

Despite of her passion for public education, Hottinger — like every young professional — has her struggles, especially when it comes to her use of the Socratic method, which consists of using questions that stimulate students to formulate answers for their own inquiries.

"I think I sometimes drive my students crazy, with answering their question by asking them a question back. I want them to think harder on their own before I answer," she said.

Apart from that, Hottinger enjoys the rewarding moments. Details like a warm letter from her student and a Sunday casual drink and talk with the cohort of teachers she went to graduate school with continue to remind Hottinger why she wanted to be a teacher in the first place.

"As a teacher, I'm not yet at the place where I feel like an overachiever, which is a role I have been getting used to growing up; and I don't know I ever will be," Hottinger said. "But, for the most part, things do get better. And it's helpful to try and take the humbling of the learning process to heart, so that you can really mean it when you tell students: even if it's frustrating, you can get better at this." ★



## Loyola Advertising & Public Relations



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*

## IT'S COOLER BY THE LAKE



### Welcome Ramblers!

The Office of First-Year Experience is dedicated to the success of freshman and transfer students. You are important to Loyola and we're so glad you are here! At FYE, we will welcome you into the Loyola Community and encourage you to make the most of your Loyola experience. We support your learning and growth as a well-rounded individual as you work toward becoming a Loyola graduate.



# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

*Roseland's Agape Community Center broadens students' horizons*

BY MOLLY BREWER

**D**errion Albert, a 16-year-old Fenger High School honors student, was on his way home from school on Sept. 24, 2009 when he was caught in the middle of a brawl between neighborhood rival gangs.

That fight would kill him.

The video of Albert's death went viral on the Internet. It has become a national example of the violence that seems to have plagued Chicago's South Side.

In the background of the video, there is a lone, gray building standing beside an empty parking lot, surrounded by litter on the pavement.

Ironically, that very building that stood witness to the death of Albert's life is the location of a mission-based, after-school program called the Agape Community Center.

In Greek, the word Agape means "unconditional love."

The Agape Center serves as refuge for youth seeking to escape the daily problems they face at home and around the impoverished community of Roseland.

On average, the unemployment rate in Roseland is around 17 percent, while the per-capita income is just under \$18,000 per year.

The neighborhood is littered with boarded-up and seemingly abandoned homes. There are few grocery stores, restaurants and outside community spaces.

Marc Henkel, the co-city director of the Agape Center, has devoted his life to helping these children find their purpose.

When Henkel, 48, first moved to Roseland 26 years ago, he was one of the only white people living in the neighborhood. He believes that in order to help people, one needs to experience their problems firsthand.

"What I've come to learn is that yes, there's violence, but there's a whole lot more people that want to do positive things

17

*approximate percentage unemployment rate in Roseland*

\$18,000

*the average per-capita income in Roseland per year*

than want to do negative things," he said.

The majority of Roseland's population is black. The community often faces issues that stem from a lack of family support and resources from schools, many of which, are on performance probation or have faced severe funding cuts.

"They come [to the Agape Center] because they see people who truly care about them," Henkel said. "They get a hug every day, they get people who know their names, adults who care about them."

The fear that something bad could happen is a familiar feeling for former Agape Center student Henry Walker, who is now 33 and works as an assistant principal in Normal, Illinois.

Growing up in Roseland and attending the impoverished schools in the area, Walker had little insight into the world outside of his own, often scary, backyard.

"Simply getting to school was a challenge in itself," Walker said.

The fear of stumbling upon the wrong group of people often determined if Walker would take the public bus to school that day.

Walker came across the Agape Center when he was in the fifth grade and decided to join a friend for a game of basketball during their open gym time after school. That evening soon turned into a routine for Walker.

"Part of what kept me away from being deeply involved [with gangs] was going to the Agape Center and connecting with Marc," Walker said. "Accepting spirituality and having some kind of accountability was instrumental in helping me see the bigger picture."

That bigger picture meant exploring other areas in the city and trying new experiences that were not available to him before attending the Agape Center.

"For inner city kids, when you say Chicago, it's the neighborhood. It's the hood, the inner city," Walker said. "Once I saw that it was a different world than what I had been presented with or what I had known, it changed my curiosity."

Antonio Allen, 16, a student at Harlan Community Academy High School, avoids the gangs and violence by participating in Harlan's drum line and looking ahead to post-graduation.



PHOTOS BY MOLLY BREWER

To escape problems at home and on the street, the Agape Center offers youth a place to stay after school in the Roseland community.

"I'm not too much of a person to follow the lead or somebody else and the example they set," Allen said. "[After I graduate,] I want to take up biomechanics as a trade and go to school for psychology."

The resources that Harlan has provided to Allen have made this possible, despite common perceptions about the school and the Roseland community.

"As far as what we have [at school], if something is wrong, if it's an issue with messed up books or something, it's because the students treat them that way, but I've learned to deal with it," Allen said. "It's not as bad as some people would make it seem."

Claire Florine, 25, Allen's AP Language and Composition teacher, agrees that her students shouldn't be treated differently by people because of their impoverished upbringing.

"They're not much different than you and I were when we were in high school," Florine said. "They want to have fun and they want to be loved just like any other kids."

It is for that reason that Henkel chooses to remain in the Roseland community and continues to fight for the South Side students every day.

"I think whenever a person learns about a different culture that's different from their own," Henkel said, "their life is enhanced and can only become more enjoyable." ★

**"Part of what kept me away from being deeply involved [with gangs] was going to the Agape Center."**

*Henry Walker, former Agape student*

# CONNECTING THE DOTS

Schools use themes as a teaching method in their curriculum

BY EMILIO BERMEO



PHOTO CREDIT/EMILIO BERMEO  
Students at UNO Academy on the field.



Carlos Perez, 15, always dreamed of becoming a professional soccer player. Inspired by his desire, he enrolled in UNO Soccer Academy, a high school on the South Side of Chicago.

He was very passionate about the game, but his grades were poor and his behavior was turning troublesome.

Perez started attending UNO Soccer Academy in 2013, when the school opened in Gage Park – a working-class neighborhood that has a large Hispanic population.

Now a sophomore, Perez became interested in pursuing other vocations alongside his soccer training.

“I would like to be a soccer player, but that’s really hard to get into, so I’m also interested in becoming a journalist or an architect,” he said. “And I think this school is going to help me.”

By virtue of his enthusiasm for soccer, and the opportunity to study in an institution that was built around the sport, Perez is one of many students that found motivation through theme-based education.

UNO Soccer Academy builds its curriculum around a specific discipline, with the goal of having this particular

field acting as the medium towards better education. Although this model is typical of magnet schools, there are now charter schools that are implementing this teaching method.

“This idea of themed high school education is starting to pop up more,” said John Loehr, director of curriculum and assessment of UNO Soccer Academy. “It keeps the students engaged and provides focus and continuity.”

Disney Elementary Magnet School, offers arts and technology integrated education since 1973. It was the first school of this kind in Chicago, but now it is one of 41 magnet schools in the city, according to CPS data.

Located in Mount Greenwood, a neighborhood on the South Side of the city, Chicago High School for the Agricultural Sciences is a public school that opened in 1985 on what once was the last working farm in the city.

The hallways in “Chicago Ag” – as the school is also known – smell like zucchini bread. The reason is that the food science class is studying the chemical process behind baking. The ingredients consist, mostly, in the products grown by the agriculture class.

Students can cultivate vegetables all year round thanks to the greenhouse

es that the mechanics class builds and maintains. After the harvest, the finance class prices the products and sells them. When there is a surplus, the food science class closes the cycle by using the residuals for educational purposes.

“Our focus is to learn by doing,” said William Hook, principal of the school. “That’s the key — hands-on application every day. That’s what I’m afraid is missing in a lot of education areas. Students don’t know why they’re doing what they’re doing, but our students are doers.”

Chicago Ag is one of seven agriculture schools in the country. Its 78-acre campus is a true land-lab that offers urban students the opportunity to pick between different pathways: horticulture, agriculture mechanics, agriculture education, food science and animal science.

Jessica Cegielski, 16, choose to follow the horticulture track and hopes to have some valuable experience by the time she graduates.

“My dream is to go to grow grapes and make wine in California,” she said. And now, thanks to the courses she takes at Chicago Ag, she’s getting hands-on experience towards a future career in viniculture – the science of producing grapes for wine.

Her horticulture classmate, Sean Tobin, 16, wants to go to college for crop science and become a farmer.

“While other students are sitting in a classroom, I am in the field, and I actually learn about the things I’m interested in,” Tobin said.

Chicago High School for the Agricultural Sciences is one of the top performing public schools in the area. In 2012, Chicago Magazine ranked it 13th best high school in the city. It has a graduation rate of 93 percent and 87 percent of its students go to college, according to the principal.

It is not surprising, therefore, that more schools are incorporating similar components into their instruction. UNO Rogers Park, for example, is now integrating a fine arts focus throughout its curriculum.

After observing the rapid growth of the soccer academy, UNO Rogers Park – located in the former St. Scholastica Academy campus, on Ridge Boulevard – decided to take the same approach and use art as a connecting educational element.

Like with sports and agriculture, education can be imparted through any specific topic. There are schools in Chicago that offer programs with strong

emphasis in languages, science or math. Institutions like Chicago Ag and the UNO Soccer Academy have joined the tendency for what might become a popular approach to education in the future.

At the soccer academy, even test day is seen through the eyes of the school’s theme.

“Testing time is like a game, when you really have to excel in your skills to be able to demonstrate how hard you’ve worked,” said Angelina Bua, UNO Soccer’s school director. “Our goal is not only to have our students get to college, but also to have them graduate from college.”

Erdnic Cohantimur, sports science teacher and soccer coach, thinks that besides the benefits of being active, by playing a team sport, students can learn values like sportsmanship and respect. In this manner, the theme acts as a helping hand to emphasize concepts that the students can take into their professional lives and beyond.

“Getting that mindset around the students, and making them believe that working together, will make them more successful, both individually and as a group, is how we want to influence them,” he said. “There will be many

ways that you have to work with other people in your life. So the way you do it will have an impact in your community.”

Over the past two years, Cohantimur has been sharing these ideas with student Perez. Through several conversations and sports analogies, the coach hoped to positively influence the academic performance and behavior of his student.

After some months, he received a letter from Perez. “He wrote me: ‘Mr. C., I have realized that I have to be better towards other people, so I’m changing my attitude,’” Cohantimur said.

Because his grades and behavior improved, Perez is now able to form part of the school’s soccer team, he is the goalkeeper.

The theme of soccer has been a major input for him to become involved in school activities and, at the same time, take hold of his own education at an early age.

“Themed education can provide additional inspiration and it can represent a shift in the way students see school,” Cohantimur said. “I always tell them, if you change your attitude towards school, good grades will be just the product. They will come on their own” ★

# CROWDFUNDING THE CLASSROOM

*Edgewater teachers use website to raise money for school supplies*

BY ELLIE DIAZ

Students at Passages Charter School had never touched a microscope. They had seen pictures of the tool but were never offered the opportunity to feel the cold, hard metal or look through the lens to find microscopic animal cells.

Emily Corie, a 29-year-old teacher at Passages, raised more than \$500 on a charity website for microscopes and slides for her fifth-grade students in 2012. Corie isn't alone in her efforts. Twenty-six of her colleagues have also created DonorsChoose.org accounts.

The Edgewater neighborhood where Passages Charter School is located has more than 90 percent of low-income students, according to the Illinois State Board of Education on its Illinois Report Card website.

"It's rather simple to set up an account," Corie said. "I've never been to a school where I've had all of the supplies provided for me, and I can't ask parents to pay for additional things or ask principals to fund additional things. DonorsChoose has kind of been a life-saver."

Corie is not new to the crowdfunding world. She already completed nine projects and is currently undergoing her toughest challenge yet: raising \$1,039 for four Samsung Chromebooks.

DonorsChoose.org, founded in 2000, is a free charity website that allows K-12 teachers to post projects and collect funds for supplies and equip-

ment from anonymous donors.

Teachers from high-poverty neighborhoods create detailed project descriptions and choose their equipment through an approved DonorsChoose.org distributor. The contributors, in return, receive photos of students using the new supplies, a thank you letter from the teacher and an update on how the money was spent.

The popular crowdfunding site was created when Charles Best, a history teacher at a Bronx high school, designed a simple website where his colleagues could post ads for much-needed school supplies.

Because of the lack of donors from the startup website, Best secretly funded the projects and rumors spread about its success. Three years later, when Oprah Winfrey dubbed the philanthropy site "a revolutionary charity," the website crashed due to traffic.

In 2007, the small New York-based company opened nationally, and now thousands of teachers crowdfund for sound systems, instruments, field trips, iPads, Play-Doh and other supplies that wouldn't be introduced into schools otherwise.

Students at Passages Charter School speak more than 30 languages and are compiled of immigrants and refugees. Corie said the Chromebooks will allow students to better understand English, create online brochures and even cut down on paper. Because of the easiness of creating a profile, Corie has urged



CREATIVE COMMONS

other teachers to start a project.

DonorsChoose.org has more than 850 projects posted from Chicago and has steadily increased project funds from raising \$46.4 million in 2012 to \$56.7 million in 2013. The increased funding for school supplies can be attributed to budget cuts that Chicago Public Schools face. Non-charter schools underwent a \$164 million budget cut last year, according to a Chicago Teachers' Union analysis.

William R. Harper High School also faces huge cuts in education funding. In 2008, Harper was showcased on National Public Radio's "This American Life." The high school was the first CPS school to participate in the district's turnaround project, a process that gives schools federal, state and city money for a certain amount of time before withdrawing funds. NPR reported in 2013 that Harper would lose \$1.6 million of turnaround money this year.

Vicky Koncir, an English and psychology teacher at Harper, said that this year, teachers have personally had to pay for more supplies than last year. Koncir, 41, currently shares one set of worn books with three other classes. Harper's vacant library, which sometimes provides a safe haven in other schools, doesn't have a librarian and is only used for meetings.

"Most people on staff [use] DonorsChoose. Sometimes there's only so much we can pay out of pocket," Koncir said. "I know that I'm, throughout the year, spending a lot of money."

Koncir's close colleague, Kristina Ballard, has successfully campaigned for 30 copies of "Stolen into Slavery" and 100 spiral notebooks that students can use to take notes or respond to readings with. Only some of Ballard's students come to the first day of school with a pen, pencil and folder. The gleaming stack of novels now sits in Ballard's bright and sunny classroom, along with the other 170 books she's crowdfunded for.

70

*percent of projects that are successfully funded, according to donorschoose.org*

According to Illinois State Report Card, only 7 percent of Harper High students meet the requirements of the Prairie State Achievement Examination and only 2 percent have scored a composite score of 21 or higher on the

ACT. Ballard believes these notebooks and novels could boost reading scores.

"[Students] need the materials to learn but I think that having new and fresh stuff is kind of inspiring and fun for them, too," said Ballard, a history and junior seminar teacher. "And honestly, they get so much out of it, that other people care and donate to them."

West Englewood, where Harper is located, is riddled with violence. In 2012, 29 Harper students were shot and Ballard believes most of her students are forced to associate with gangs.

Throughout her five campaigns on DonorsChoose.org, Ballard raised more than \$6,000 for 201 novels, a document camera, file folders, a Macbook Pro, a Windows QuickBooks Pro and iHome speakers.

"If they see her doing this, going the extra mile (and) getting this stuff into the classroom, it gives them a sort of motivation," said Koncir, who was inspired by her colleague to start crowdfunding.

With notable supporters like Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey and Stephen Colbert, DonorsChoose.org is making waves in the education world and is a feasible way for teachers to receive essential supplies, whether it's high-tech computers or a pack of pencils.

The organization also claims that more than half of the public schools in America have at least one teacher who created a project. The nonprofit organization has raised almost \$270 million dollars and reached more than 12 million students, according to its website.

"I've come to realize that people want to help," Ballard said. "They want to contribute to the solution instead of the problem." ★

# MULTI-LEARNING

*Bilingual education gives students more opportunities*

BY MARISSA BOULANGER

**H**amza Patel went to his first day of class at Volta Elementary School five years ago for pre-kindergarten. Going into class, Patel couldn't understand much of what was happening around him. He spoke only Gujarati, a language from the western Indian state Gujarat.

Luckily, Volta, located in Chicago's Albany Park neighborhood, is a bilingual school. Patel was able to have a teaching assistant in his class to translate the English to Gujarati for his first couple of years there.

Now 10-years-old and in fifth grade, Patel speaks English in all of his classes.

"The bilingual programs have made my son aware of the importance of our native language," said Rizwana Patel, Hamza's mother. "I continue speaking in Gujarati with my children at home whereas now he learns everything in English at school."

Bilingual education has become a trend over the past few years, with Illinois being the first state to mandate it for preschool in 2010.

A majority of bilingual programs in the United States revolve around Spanish, but Chicago Public Schools' diverse 64,000 English-learning student population has led to the development of programs including Gujarati, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Mandarin.

There are various types of bilingual education, but CPS primarily employ Dual Language Education and Transitional Bilingual Education in early childhood classrooms from preschool to the third grade.

Dual Language helps both non-native as well as native English speakers become bilingual. Students have classes with emphasis on both languages, usually up to fifth grade.

Transitional Bilingual aims at taking students from their native language to English.

They are usually found at the pre-kindergarten through second grade levels.

Some transitional models allow for a gradual flow, slowly putting more English into the curriculum of bilingual students. Other transitional models abruptly stop native language learning. Students go from all native language classes in second grade to all English classes in third.

"It's not like we're trying to keep them bilingual the entire time," said Perla Gamez, a psychologist and professor at Loyola University Chicago who does research in Transitional Bilingual Education classrooms on how children learn language.

There has been a lot of controversy surrounding the implementation of bilingual education. Research has shown many Dual Language students outperform English-only students after five to seven years of bilingual learning.

On the other hand, a survey by the Center for Equal Opportunity showed that 80 percent of respondents "wanted their children's academic courses taught in English and not Spanish if it meant more time spent learning English."

However, Naseem Umar, Volta's Bilingual and Parent Coordinator, feels that students benefit significantly from starting with their native language.

"Our vast number of immigrant children have flourished only because of our bilingual programs," Umar said. "We have provided them with survival skills, a new language (English). We have built their self-confidence and taught them how to be proud of their cultural heritage."

Rizwana, too, is happy with her son's experience.

"He began learning English quickly because he could understand things when they were explained to him in Gujarati," she said.

The effectiveness of bilingual education

seems to be compromised by the lack of standardization, according to Gamez.

"It's not about the programs, it's about the quality of the instruction," Gamez said.

Her research has shown that teachers who speak more complex words impact students more than teachers who use simpler words. It is the difference between a teacher saying, "come to the edge of the carpet," versus, "come to the perimeter of the carpet."

Along with this comes issues in standardized testing. For programs that teach a native language in immersion until second grade, testing in English in third grade can skew results.

"The only harm is when they go to take those tests in third grade," said bilingual educator Laura Litton.

Litton believes bilingual programs to be helpful to English-learning children, except the one caveat.

"I would say the majority of students are able to be more comfortable," Litton said.

The inclusion of native languages in schools allows for more bonds between school and home.

Each school implementing a Transitional Bilingual Education program is required to create a Bilingual Advisory Committee. These allow for more parental involvement and more crossovers between home and school culture.

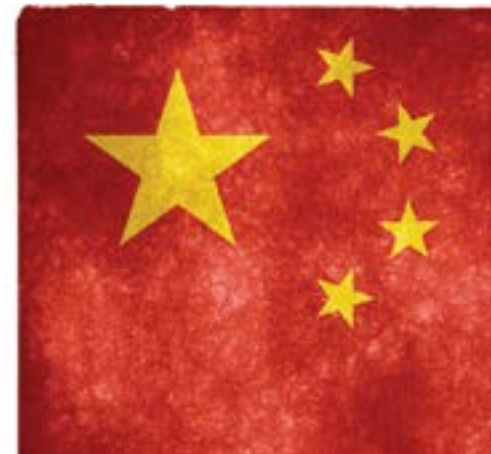
Rizwana is a member of Volta's Bilingual Advisory Council, and thinks the engagement she has with the school aids her son's education.

"I learned that I could help my son succeed academically by being involved in this school and learning more about the educational system in this country," Rizwana said.

Administrators agree.

Litton has seen a large influx of culture at schools with bilingual programs. Parents take on the work of bringing cultural celebrations to their children's schools, like the Day of the Dead or Día de los Muertos at Ruben Salazar Bilingual Center.

"Teachers like the parental involvement because they want parents to understand that they are equal partners in their children's education," Umar said. "Teachers or the school alone can't make a difference without the parents' support."\*



PHOTOS BY/NICOLAS RAYMOND:  
CREATIVE COMMONS



## **Master's in Global Strategic Communication**

Find a competitive edge on the international stage—while studying in Chicago, London, or Beijing. Through Loyola's Global Strategic Communication program, professionals and recent graduates in public relations, marketing, and other communications fields can enhance their digital fluency, writing and analytical skills, and leadership capabilities.

To learn more, visit [LUC.edu/soc/academics/msglobalstrategiccommunication](https://luc.edu/soc/academics/msglobalstrategiccommunication).



*Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives*