Chicago Public Schools
Illinois

Chief Executive Officer: Arne Duncan
Primary contact: Xavier Botana, director, NCLB accountability office*
Schools studied:
  - Carson Elementary
  - Pope Elementary
  - Walsh Elementary
410,874 students, K-12, urban

District and School Descriptions
Chicago Public Schools (CPS), one of the largest urban districts in the country, began implementing novel school reforms designed to increase equity and student achievement in the mid-1980s. For example, a 1989 state law required the district to create local school councils to oversee the daily operations of each school, and in 1995 the mayor took control of the district, appointing a chief executive officer in place of the former superintendent. District-initiated reforms have frequently preceded similar reforms required by No Child Left Behind.

All the schools included in this case study are predominately low-income. Carson Elementary and Walsh Elementary, both on Chicago’s south side, are also predominately Latino schools. Carson serves almost 1,300 pre-kindergarten through 8th grade students and has a special dual-language program that prepares students for academic work in both Spanish and English. Walsh is smaller, serving about 570 students, and uses a hands-on science curriculum. Neither school is currently in improvement. Pope Elementary is a predominantly African American school on Chicago’s west side, serving about 200 students. The school is currently in restructuring under NCLB and plans to use small-group instruction and a schoolwide discipline program to change the school climate and raise achievement.

Key Findings

- Since the inception of NCLB, Chicago has made some progress in academic achievement, particularly in reading. District officials attribute these gains to a three-year-old reading initiative. But this progress has not been uniform across all schools. More than two-thirds of schools are identified for improvement, as is the district as a whole.

* Other contacts for this case study include Audrey Cooper-Stanton, chief literacy officer; Crystal Sykes, NCLB project manager, office of NCLB compliance; Kathleen Mayer, principal, Carson Elementary; Ann Tysiak, assistant principal, Carson Elementary; Rosa Alvarez, bilingual lead teacher and literacy lead teacher, Carson Elementary; Rosalba Granados, bilingual kindergarten teacher, Carson Elementary; Martha Hurtado, bilingual kindergarten teacher, Carson Elementary; Stephanie Mulder, literacy lead teacher, Carson Elementary; Denise Philbin, interventionist and parent liaison; Laura Sierra, dual-language first-grade teacher, Carson Elementary; Jacqueline Baker, principal, Pope Elementary; Michael McKinney, writing teacher, Pope Elementary; Judith Sands, P.E. teacher, Pope Elementary; Stephen Flisk, principal, Walsh Elementary; Victoria Jackson, science specialist, Walsh Elementary; and Susan Zaplain, parent volunteer, Walsh Elementary.
The district has typically had trouble offering school choice under NCLB because of limited space in schools eligible to receive transfers. For 2005-06, the district’s three lowest performing schools received priority to offer school choice under NCLB. About 1,100 students were eligible, but only about 250 students applied for transfers, so the district was able to offer choice at 15 additional low-performing schools. This year 23% of eligible students applied for transfers—up from past years but still a minority of those eligible.

In a show of flexibility, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has allowed Chicago to provide supplemental educational services, even though the district has been identified for improvement and is therefore barred from offering these services. District officials said they were able to convince ED by showing that the district’s program was not significantly different from outside providers’ in raising student achievement. The only significant difference was money. The district’s tutoring cost less than one-third of what the private tutoring services cost.

The district is implementing a range of strategies in schools identified for corrective action and restructuring. While most schools in restructuring are implementing the “any other major restructuring” option under federal law, some will be managed by outside experts and a few have closed. Options are based on the district’s own accountability system.

Reading First has fit well into the district’s reading initiatives, district and school staff said. All emphasized, however, that Spanish-speaking students who are just learning English should be allowed to take Reading First’s diagnostic tests in Spanish. The state of Illinois currently requires that this test be given in English.

**Overall Impact of NCLB**

NCLB has added impetus to the Chicago Public Schools’ long-time commitment to improve school performance, district officials said. These officials emphasized, however, that the district’s initiatives are based primarily on its own accountability system and research. “We want to look at the whole picture, and [NCLB] gives us a blurry, low-pixel picture of what’s going on,” said Xavier Botana, director of the district’s NCLB accountability office. He explained that as a result, the district has to do additional research and assessment to determine the best strategies to help schools, raise student achievement, and close the achievement gap.

**NCLB and Student Achievement**

With a combination of the four state tests used in Illinois, the Chicago school district has steadily increased passing rates by 2 percentage points each year since 2002, as shown on the state’s interactive report card. Scores in reading in particular have risen in the past few years on most tests. On the reading tests used to calculate adequate yearly progress, for example, scores rose to 47.5% passing in 2004-05 from 43% passing the year before, the first year these scores were reported for districts. In addition, all subgroups increased their scores. Botana attributes the rise in the percentage of students passing state tests to “a lot of hard work and our three-year focus on literacy.”

Although Botana said the district also had a math initiative in place, it was not as uniformly implemented in schools throughout the district. “We’re seeing progress where the math initiative is most evolved. They are doing significantly better than other comparable schools,” he added. The district, however, saw a general drop in percentages of students passing the state math tests used to calculate AYP, from 43% in 2003-04 to 41.7% in 2004-05. All subgroups, except white and Native American, saw a similar drop in the percentage of students passing state tests.
Adequate Yearly Progress and School Improvement

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL AYP STATUS
The Chicago school district is in year 2 of district improvement. Based on the general performance of students on state tests, the district met state AYP targets in reading but not in math. In reading, African American students, students with disabilities, and low-income students failed to meet targets. In math, these subgroups, as well as Latino students and English language learners, also failed to meet targets.

Overall, a little more than two-thirds of Chicago schools failed to meet AYP targets. Among Title I schools, 28 are in year 1 of school improvement, 47 are in year 2 of school improvement, 77 are in corrective action, and 185 are in restructuring.

Of the three schools included in this study, Pope has never met AYP targets, despite steadily rising passing rates on state tests. Carson has consistently met AYP targets, with the exception of 2002-03, when English language learners fell short of safe harbor by just 0.5 percentage points. Subgroups that do not meet achievement targets can still make AYP through safe harbor, which involves reducing the percentage of non-proficient scores by 10%. At that time, federal regulations did not allow ELL students to be counted for NCLB after they had been moved out of ELL status. If current policies had been in place, school officials said the school would have met targets.

Walsh has met AYP targets for the past two years and is not in improvement. In 2001-02, the school’s high student achievement caused the district to choose it to receive NCLB transfers; however, the school missed participation targets in 2002-03. A recalculation of 2001-02 participation rates by the state showed that the school had actually missed targets in 2001-02 as well, and the school was placed in improvement and had to offer choice. The students who had transferred into the school in 2001-02 have been allowed to stay, and the school is no longer in improvement.

DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES
Chicago Public Schools has its own accountability system, which corresponds somewhat, but not completely, to the state’s accountability system. Many of the district’s initiatives to improve schools are in response to its internal accountability system, but should also help improve schools for NCLB, district officials reported. For example, all schools placed on probation by the district and all schools identified for improvement by the state get extra attention from their area instructional officer, district officials said. The district places schools on probation if the school’s students, on average, score below the 40th percentile on nationally normed tests, explained Audrey Cooper-Stanton, chief literacy officer. Many, but not all, of these schools are the same ones identified for improvement based on the state accountability system.

In addition, all schools on probation have “lead literacy teachers” who attend monthly professional development on literacy. These lead literacy teachers model lessons in classrooms and pass on professional development to the staff. This reading initiative is the “cornerstone” of the district’s efforts to improve schools, said Cooper-Stanton.

The reading strategies and model lessons used in these probation schools were developed over the past three years. In 2004-05, the district also introduced the “High Quality Literacy Instruction Framework,” a document that describes best practices in reading instruction and is intended to guide all schools. While only schools on probation must have lead literacy teachers, other schools, like Carson Elementary, which is not on probation, may choose to fund such a position. Other schools are also welcome to identify a teacher to attend the monthly training, Cooper-Stanton added.

Although the district reading curriculum is becoming more prescriptive, some teachers said they still found room for creativity. “We still incorporate child-centered ideals,” said Martha Hurtado, a bilingual teacher at Carson Elementary. Hurtado’s class has success using Reggio Emilia, a project-centered approach to instruction. Also at Carson, classroom libraries are filled with children’s books for free reading. Teachers at Carson who had taught in other district schools, however, said that the wealth of books was not typical of all district schools.
In mathematics, the district is developing similar professional development and guidelines for teachers, Botana said. A draft of math benchmarks for K-8, for example, was available to all schools in October 2004. The math initiatives are not as fully implemented as the reading initiative because the district has taken a school-by-school approach rather than a districtwide approach, Botana noted.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES**

In conjunction with district strategies, schools are focusing on grouping students with like abilities and moving them quickly to higher-level skills. For example, at Pope Elementary, students are placed in reading groups based on ability, explained Michael McKinney, the school’s writing teacher for grades 3-8. Students who are below grade level use Direct Instruction (DI), a scripted reading program focusing on basic skills. Once students reach grade-level achievement and are in 5th through 8th grade, they are moved to the Prentice Hall reading program and materials. All staff members, including the assistant principal, teach reading groups so these ability-based groups can stay small. McKinney attributes the schools’ rising test scores in part to this approach to reading. Only 17% of students passed state reading, math, and science tests in 2002. Three years later, 27% passed. Despite the fact that Pope has typically had difficulty meeting AYP goals and has student test scores below the district average, McKinney said this growth in scores represented noteworthy progress.

Teachers at Pope also said the schoolwide “cooperative discipline” program has made a difference in student achievement. The program was introduced nine years ago and has been phased in over time. It is based on praising students for positive behaviors, giving students responsibilities within the school, such as monitoring attendance or managing classroom supplies, and showing little tolerance for disruptive and defiant behavior. “Students become citizens of the classroom, rather than tourists,” said Judith Sands, physical education and reading teacher at Pope.

At Walsh, staff said a district science initiative helped raise test scores across subjects. The school’s combined passing rates on reading, math, and science tests have gone from 49% passing in 2002 to 54% passing in 2005, which is 10 percentage points higher than the district passing rate. In 2004-05 all students also exceeded the AYP targets of 47.5% passing in math and reading, with 52.7% of Walsh students passing in reading and 55.7% passing in math. “In the past two years, the science initiative has really revitalized teachers,” Principal Flisk said. The hands-on, inquiry-based program freed Walsh teacher Victoria Jackson to organize materials, develop model lessons, and provide professional development for teachers.

An added benefit of the program, Jackson said, was that it included special education and ELL classes. This brought the staff together and helped them see that all students were capable of making academic progress. “This science program is just built for everybody. The teachers are using ideas from science in other content areas,” Jackson said, explaining that a whole-staff approach to math is in the works at Walsh.

In addition to strategies for ELLs described below in the section on ELL students, staff members at Carson Elementary have made an effort to include the community in the school. Monthly parent meetings are well attended, staff reported. The school surveyed parents about topics they would like to hear about and then scheduled speakers such as bank representatives and immigration experts, said Denise Philbin, the school’s NCLB parent liaison. In addition to a cooperative staff and high-quality curriculum, Principal Kathleen Mayer attributes her school’s high test scores to community involvement. “We’re supported by families because we support families,” she explained.
CORRECTIVE ACTION AND RESTRUCTURING STRATEGIES

Schools in corrective action are seen by the district as a subset of those on probation under the district’s own accountability system, Botana said. These schools get assistance from a district literacy specialist and receive special attention from the curriculum office. All of these schools also create a corrective action plan. For the 2005-06 school year, 77 Chicago schools are in corrective action.

For the 185 Chicago schools in restructuring for 2005-06, more changes are in store. “We’ve looked at restructuring as an opportunity to look at schools that are academically underperforming and use restructuring as a lever to make changes,” Botana said. The changes for the majority of Chicago schools in restructuring fall under the federal law’s option of “any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reform,” such as hiring outside experts to help the schools or appointing teams of people within the school to manage finances and decision making for the schools.

Typically in Chicago schools, local school councils composed of community members and teachers control school budgets and hire the principal. In schools in restructuring, local school councils have become advisory boards with little power. Instead, the district controls much of the budget and hires the principal. While these changes meet the requirements of NCLB, Botana said management by central office may not be sustainable. “We’re seriously looking at contracts to help us manage some of these schools,” he added. The nonprofit organization Learning Points is already assisting the district with some schools in restructuring. In addition, the Chicago Teachers Union has a school improvement program called “Fresh Start” that is in five schools in restructuring. Botana noted that the district may not develop a blanket policy for schools in restructuring under NCLB. Instead, the district’s accountability system will help guide decisions. “The fact that NCLB labels them for restructuring doesn’t necessarily make them high priority for us,” he said.

The district has added a more extreme option for a small number of schools that have failed to make progress in the district’s own accountability system. Under this program, the district has closed three schools and will reopen them in the next school year using “Renaissance 2010,” a district process for reinventing schools. During the year of closure, committees, which may include district staff, community members, and outside entities like charter schools, meet to redesign the school. Meanwhile, students are relocated to other schools, and school staff members reapply for jobs, district officials said. When the schools reopen a year later, they may have one or more of the following: new teachers, new administrators, new curriculum, or new intervention programs. Some may become charter schools, some may operate under contracts, and some may remain district-operated schools.

Of the three schools that closed in 2005-06, two were in corrective action and one was in restructuring. Botana noted that although this process has promise for improving schools in the last stages of NCLB consequences, the district would not have the capacity to close and reopen all the schools in corrective action or restructuring.

At Pope Elementary, which is in restructuring, teachers were not as focused on the NCLB consequences as they were on local consequences and the overall need to improve. “We’re so focused on student achievement; people don’t think of it as NCLB,” said McKinney. Instead, all efforts are directed at reaching students in a variety of ways: through small-group instruction, cooperative discipline, and a combination of after-school tutoring through SES and a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant that keeps almost all students and teachers in school an extra hour and a half four days a week. Still, the threat of school closure, which has just recently lifted at Pope, has created an atmosphere of urgency.
Impact of NCLB on Curriculum and Instruction

Since NCLB, the district has become more deliberate about identifying and adopting effective research-based materials and texts, officials said. In reading, for example, at least 15 publishers presented materials to the district, Cooper-Stanton said. Then, the district entered a partnership with six publishers to pilot reading materials. Five of these were also identified as district choices for Reading First. The goal, Cooper-Stanton explained, is to continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the different reading materials and choose one to three publishers to serve the entire district.

Using ongoing assessments to help plan instruction is also more common, district staff noted. For example, the district plans to phase in uniform diagnostic reading assessments, Cooper-Stanton said. In 2005-06, the first year of this initiative, all first grade teachers were trained to use Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). Teachers assessed their students using this tool and planned instruction based on the assessment. The assessment has been helpful and easy to use, Cooper-Stanton reported. Teachers used hand-held devices to enter the results of the test. “They get results back almost immediately,” she observed. In 2006-07, DIBELS will be introduced in 2nd grade; in 2007-08, 3rd grade will be added.

English Language Learners

With the Latino subgroup composing 38% of the district’s student population, the majority of Chicago’s English language learners speak Spanish as their first language. English language learners make up 14% of the district’s student body. At the district level, they met AYP targets with a 54% passing rate. Although the ELL passing rate in mathematics surpassed the district’s overall math passing rate by 2 percentage points, this subgroup still failed to meet the AYP target. However, of the three schools that are included in this case study, two have an ELL subgroup, and in each school the ELL subgroup has met AYP targets.

At Walsh Elementary, where ELLs make up 24% of the student population, the subgroup surpassed the 47.5% target in reading tests used to calculate AYP with a 57% passing rate. The subgroup also met the AYP target in mathematics with a 44% passing rate, using the state’s safe harbor provision. Despite their success, the school principal, Stephen Flisk, said staff needs to review the standards and update the curriculum for this subgroup. He also noted that NCLB has served to bring attention to the particular needs of English language learners.

At Carson, where Latino students make up 94% of the student body and English language learners make up 37%, the school’s administration plans to continue the focus on bilingual and dual-language programs. The bilingual program is offered from kindergarten to 8th grade. The program transitions Spanish speakers to academic instruction in English and to classrooms in which English is the primary language. In the first two years of the program, material is usually presented in Spanish while English skills are developed using the state’s standards for English language acquisition. As students progress through the third and fourth year of the program, instruction is presented in English and reinforced in Spanish. Students express their understanding of instruction in whichever language they feel most comfortable. Principal Kathleen Mayer said that this approach also encourages retention of students’ native language. She said that discouraging native language is counterproductive because children spend more time at home than at school; thus parents are the real teachers.

Carson recently expanded its world-language, or dual-language, program to the 8th grade, so it is now offered from K-8. In this program, teachers alternate instruction in English and Spanish to help students gain a high level of proficiency in both languages. While these students often learn conversational Spanish at home, dual-language 1st grade teacher Laura Sierra emphasized, “We want them to have an academic vocabulary as well.”

In addition to these long-term strategies for ELLs, Carson’s Reading First partner, National-Louis University, has teamed up with the school again to create a “5th grade demonstration class-
room.” This project, funded by a foundation grant to National-Louis, will test bilingual teaching strategies and track outcomes, Assistant Principal Ann Tysiak explained. The staff hopes that findings will help not only Carson, but other elementary schools with bilingual students.

The demonstration classroom has already had a positive impact on other classes at Carson, said Stephanie Mulder, the lead literacy teacher who works with the demonstration classroom. “It’s great to be able to see the progress,” she said, explaining that student learning is tracked frequently with assessments. Because of her work with National-Louis University and the demonstration classroom, Mulder has been asked to assist other classrooms as well, she said.

Using these strategies, the school has been very successful with its English language learners. As stated in last year’s report, the revised federal guidelines allowing students to be included in the subgroup of English language learners for two years after they have officially exited a language acquisition program prevents the school from being “penalized for doing a really good job,” Principal Mayer said. This year, with their 67% passing rate in reading and 62% in mathematics, Carson’s English language learners surpassed the district’s 47.5% target in reading and mathematics tests used to calculate AYP.

**NCLB School Choice**

Since NCLB’s inception, Chicago has had difficulty finding enough space in schools for all the students eligible for school choice transfers. Many buildings are simply too crowded to accept transfers, and others are magnet schools that have entrance requirements, Botana said. While U.S. Department of Education policy states that overcrowding is not an excuse for not offering choice, under Illinois state law the district is barred from overcrowding schools to meet the NCLB choice requirements, Botana explained. For 2005-06, only 550 slots were available—more than the 440 available in 2004-05 but down from the 1,100 available in 2003-04. To fill these slots, Chicago identified the 18 lowest-performing schools based on the district’s own accountability system. Three of the eighteen schools were closed by the district because of chronic underperformance. Because the students at these schools were forced to move to other schools, the district made these schools the first order of priority for NCLB transfers, Botana said. About 1,100 students were eligible, but only about 250 students applied for transfers, so the district was able to offer choice at the other 15 low-performing schools. Botana anticipated that all slots would be filled.

In the 2003-04 school year, about 19,000 students, or 7% of those eligible, applied for transfers. The next year 5,933 students, or 3% of those eligible, applied. Although only about 250 students applied for transfers in 2005-06, this represents a large increase to about 23% of students eligible for choice. Still, district officials expressed surprise that so few students applied. “Even in these clearly low-performing schools, when parents had an option for a much higher performing school, they were not trampling each other to get these slots,” Botana observed. “We need to work on improving underperforming schools, not on transporting kids.”

Walsh Elementary has experience with NCLB choice. It was a receiving school in 2003-04, but in 2004-05 it became a sending school because it did not make AYP as a result of low test participation rates. No students transferred out of Walsh, but new students did arrive in 2003-04, and most stayed. Of the students who transferred to Walsh, Principal Steve Flisk said, “For the most part, they are now accepted in the school. I usually say that for those 13 students, it was the best thing that happened to them.” For a solution to low academic achievement in general, however, Flisk said he did not think school choice was viable. Walsh could have been a receiving school again in 2005-06 based on test scores, but the classrooms were full.

Many parents at Walsh were initially concerned about the transfers because they feared overcrowding and behavior problems, said Susan Zapiain, who has three children at Walsh. The 13 transferring students were coming from predominately African American schools with reputa-
tions for lower academic achievement and more behavior problems. Walsh is a predominately Latino school with very few behavior issues. But the school accommodated the new students well, Zapiain said. “Those parents are just looking to get the best for their kids,” she added. I can’t blame them.” If Walsh becomes a receiving school again in 2006-07, Flisk said, “At some level we’d be better prepared, since we’ve gone through it.” For schools that receive NCLB transfers, he recommended identifying resources to help the students adjust to the new school, meeting with parents to explain the situation and dispel fears, and assigning teacher advocates to the transfer students so that if problems occur they can be dealt with swiftly.

**Supplemental Educational Services**

For 2005-06, the district itself will be a provider of supplemental educational services, even though it has been identified for improvement. Typically, districts in improvement are barred from offering SES. In 2004-05, the U.S. Department of Education ordered Chicago and other Illinois districts to stop providing tutoring or risk losing NCLB funds. Chicago and the state of Illinois fought the order well into the spring semester.

In a show of flexibility this September, ED gave Chicago permission to continue offering tutoring services. “We made the case [to ED] by focusing on the outcomes of SES,” Botana explained. “We did a study that showed that there was no significant difference between our program and the tutoring that kids get from private providers.” The public and private programs had similar effects on academic achievement, this district study showed.

The only difference between district tutoring and private tutoring was the price tag, Botana said. The cost of private services is more than three times that of public services. If 100% of students who requested tutoring chose Chicago as a provider, 80,000 students could be served, Botana estimated, but if 100% chose private providers, only about 23,000 could get services. In 2004-05, about 70,000 students requested tutoring. District officials expected this number to increase for 2005-06. “We know we’ll have more takers for SES than money,” Botana said of this popular service. Funds not spent on school choice in 2005-06 will go toward supplemental educational services.

One of the extra costs of SES is monitoring. Chicago has assigned a person at each school offering services to monitor attendance and program activities of outside providers, Botana said. In addition, the district does a yearly customer satisfaction service survey and shares this information with providers so that they can improve their tutoring.

**Teacher Qualifications, Support, and Professional Development**

**HIGHLY QUALIFIED TEACHERS**

In Chicago, 89% of classes are taught by teachers who are “highly qualified” according to state definitions. With 25,501 teachers, Chicago is the largest employer of teachers in the state. “High schools on average are lower in their percentage of highly qualified teachers,” Botana said, noting that highly qualified math and science teachers are especially difficult to find. The district is also concerned about changes to the state’s definition that have made it difficult to determine exactly which teachers are qualified. “We’ve had this for three years and had three different sets of numbers,” Botana noted.

District staff also said that the poorer west and south sides of the city have more difficulty finding and keeping highly qualified teachers. For example, at Pope Elementary, where 95% of students are low income and test scores are among the lowest in the district, teachers said the school had difficulty filling vacant positions. “Some people just don’t like to come to this area of the city,” explained Sands, a veteran teacher at Pope.
Paraprofessional Qualifications and Support

Chicago is conducting an audit of all 4,301 paraprofessionals in the district during the 2005-06 school year. As of November 2005, the district determined that 72% of the 3,668 paraprofessionals for whom the district had complete information were highly qualified by the state’s definition. The remaining 633 who did not have complete information were either new to the district, had moved to other positions, or were still under review due to additional documentation they may have submitted, explained Crystal Sykes, project manager in the district’s office of NCLB compliance.

Finding people who are both qualified and interested in applying for paraprofessional jobs has proved difficult in Chicago because of low pay, Botana said. “There are not a bunch of college graduates that are dying to be paid $13,000 a year,” Botana observed. “It boils down to the fact that these are not highly paid positions.”

Walsh Elementary may lose currently employed paraprofessionals if they decide it isn’t practical for them to go back to school to become highly qualified, Principal Flisk reported. While Flisk said NCLB’s goal of increasing the skill level of paraprofessionals was admirable, “it’s not cultivating someone who’s going to be here long-term,” he observed. Instead, he said he fears that once a person has more college classes, that person will leave schools for higher paying jobs. “You’re elevating the person you have, but you’re creating a revolving door,” he speculated. “Down the road, I don’t know if you’re going to have people with the same level of commitment to the school.”

Funding and Costs

In Chicago, Title I funds have increased from about $264 million for 2004-05 to about $282 million for 2005-06, due to an increase in the number of low-income students. Still, district officials said this did not make up for the $175 million deficit in general operating funds for 2005-06. Botana said the cause of the deficit was inadequate state funding, which is among the lowest in the country. About this gap in funding, he said, “We plugged it this year, and we tried to keep as much of it away from the schools as possible.” Central office decreased its budget by 20%. For example, he noted that in the past, six central office administrators worked with principals on meeting the statutory requirements for removing tenured faculty. Now just one person is responsible for this task for the entire district.

The teaching staff did decrease for 2005-06, but Botana said much of this was due to declining enrollment rather than the budget difficulties. Class sizes, he said, increased by about one student, but most classes were already large, averaging 26 to 28 students.

A levy and property tax increase may be in store for Chicago citizens, Botana noted. “The taxpayers of Chicago carry a huge load,” he observed.

Reading First

For 2004-05, Chicago has 105 Reading First schools. This year is the “carry over” year for funding, Cooper-Stanton said, explaining that the grants have officially ended but that unspent funds are being used to bridge the time before the next round of grants. The district hopes to be funded for another three-year cycle, she said. For 2005-06, these leftover funds are being used for lead literacy teacher positions. The other funds for Reading First were typically used in schools for materials that are still in classrooms, she said, explaining that the professional development for Reading First is being paid for by separate Reading First mini-grants from the state.

One of the major benefits of Reading First, according to Cooper-Stanton, is the frequent use of short assessments. In praise of the DIBELS assessment Chicago is using with Reading First, Cooper-Stanton said, “We’re able to look at students early with assessments. It helps teachers determine whether all the major skills are in place for a student to read on grade level by the end of third grade.”
In terms of materials and the amount of time spent on reading, Reading First did not make major changes, district and school staff said. In Chicago, most schools already had a block of 90 minutes or more for reading. Also, the district’s adoption of new reading texts corresponded with the timing of the Reading First adoptions. The five Reading First texts the district chose were also part of the districtwide adoption.

Staff at all the schools participating in this study said they were thankful for the added Reading First staff person at their school and for the additional professional development. All were also satisfied with their new reading materials. DIBELS worked well at Pope Elementary, teachers said. “It’s able to diagnose deficiencies,” McKinney explained, noting that the school uses the Reading First assessments in conjunction with DIBELS assessments.

At Pope, however, only about 2% of students are ELLs. At schools with higher ELL populations, DIBELS was less effective, teachers said. Of DIBELS, Principal Kathleen Mayer said, “It’s a foreign language test,” explaining that the test asks students to name letters in English and give the sound they represent in English. Students are given no credit for knowing letter names or sounds in Spanish, and no record is kept of this knowledge. “Students are smart enough to know what they don’t know,” Mayer said. She explained that in addition to not providing teachers with information on the student’s knowledge of letter-sound connections in Spanish, the test was discouraging to students.

Bilingual teachers at Carson said they complied with giving the DIBELS to Spanish-speaking students in English. Most, however, also gathered the information about the student’s knowledge of letter names and sounds in Spanish, because they said this told them more about the child’s readiness to begin reading in both English and Spanish. Scores from the English-language DIBELS can even be misleading at times. “With some students it’s on target, but with others it isn’t,” kindergarten teacher Rosalba Granados noted.

Three years ago, when the state made the decision to use DIBELS in English only, there was no normed DIBELS in Spanish. Now that DIBELS has a normed Spanish assessment, Carson’s bilingual lead teacher Rosa Alvarez said she had hopes that the policy will change, calling the current policy “an injustice.”

Cooper-Stanton said the district as a whole supports the use of DIBELS in Spanish, but the state of Illinois specifies that the English version must be used in Reading First schools. “We’ve written many letters,” she said, but to date the state is not allowing exceptions.

Data File—Chicago Public Schools

Location: Chicago
Type: Urban

Number of Schools
Total: 571
Elementary: 483
High schools: 88

Number of Title I schools: 500

Student Enrollment and Demographics
Total enrollment: 410,874
African American: 49%
Latino: 38%
White: 9%
Asian: 3%

Low-income students: 85%
English language learners: 14%
Students with disabilities: 13%
Teachers
Total number of teachers: 25,501
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: 89%

Paraprofessionals†
Total number of Title I instructional paraprofessionals: NA
Percentage meeting NCLB “highly qualified” requirements: NA

Total Number That Did Not Make AYP Based on 2004-05 Testing
Title I and non-Title I schools that did not make AYP, including those in improvement, restructuring, or corrective action: 387

Number of Title I Schools in Improvement, Restructuring, or Corrective Action

| Schools in year 1 of improvement (Did not make AYP for two consecutive years): | 40 | 28 |
| Schools in year 2 of improvement (Did not make AYP for three consecutive years): | 119 | 47 |
| Schools in corrective action (Did not make AYP for four consecutive years): | 179 | 77 |
| Schools in restructuring (Did not make AYP for five or more consecutive years): | 22 | 185 |

Number of Schools Offering Choice and/or SES

| Schools offering choice only: | 0 | 0 |
| Schools in year 1 of school improvement offering SES instead of choice: | 360 | 0 |
| Schools offering SES and choice: | 360 | 309‡ |

† Chicago is auditing paraprofessionals during the 2005-06 school year. Complete information is not yet available.
‡ Due to the limited availability of slots in receiving schools, only 18 of these 309 schools offered choice. These 18 were chosen because they were the most needy, based on the district’s performance and accountability system.