



A Year of Accomplishments CORE and GEM Reunite One Year Later to Step Up the Fight for Public Schools

by Nate Goldbaum

One year ago 500 parents, teachers, students and community members came together to launch their historic fight against school closings, turn-arounds, and privatization under Renaissance 2010. On Saturday, January 9, the Caucus Of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) is once again leading the way as a part of the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM). The 2009 Education Summit mobilized grassroots stakeholders to fight

mayoral control and attacks on neighborhood schools the likes of which this city had not seen in decades.

As a result of this dedicated action, the Board of Education was forced to reverse its decision to close or alter six schools. That same movement initiated the Soto bill, which created a state committee designated to oversee CPS's facilities planning. CORE and GEM members remained active throughout the entire process for school restructuring, attending every

hearing CPS held and uniting schools facing similar attacks.

CORE has also been busy building our ranks and pushing the union to fight. Our members Jay Rehak and Lois Ashford unseated incumbent pension trustees in an upset that foreshadows a heated election to lead the Chicago Teachers Union.

This Saturday, CORE and GEM will reignite the fight, as the Chicago Board of Education has signalled an even more draconian set of attacks on neighborhood schools will be announced this winter. Our organization is emerging stronger than before, though. So, we expect more hard work and more of the solidarity that is the hallmark of rank-and-file unionism.

CORE
Events
Coming
Soon

Wed, Jan 13
**After the House
of Delegates
Meeting**
Simone's Bar
960 W 18th St.

Fri, Jan 15, 4:00p
**Chill with CORE
Artis'**
1249 E. 87th St.
Tumbao
3213 W. Armitage

Mon, Jan 18, 11am
**MLK Day March for
Jobs & Pub Svces**
CTA HQ
567 W. Lake St.

Feb 11, 7:30pm
**Master Harold
and the Boys**
Timeline Theatre
\$35 ticket benefits CORE
coreteachers@gmail.com

2010 CORE Candidates



for
**President of the
Chicago Teachers Union
Karen Jennings Lewis**

Karen Lewis considers it imperative that our union take its place on the front lines fighting for justice for our members, our students, and our communities. Our union, indeed our entire profession, is under attack from a well-funded, well-connected foe that sees privatization as its mission. We need an activist leader who isn't afraid to stand up for publicly funded education in this city.

Karen has represented CORE within the Grassroots Education Movement, forging unity with parent, student, and community organizations in fighting for a common educational vision. In this capacity, Karen has

demonstrated her ability to speak to the public and the press as an articulate and forceful advocate for our embattled neighborhood schools.

Karen has experience in corporate America, as delegate from the largest school in the city, and as a member of the CTU Executive Board. As a 22 year veteran of three high schools (Sullivan, Lane Tech, and King), including a year as substitute in elementary schools, Karen provides a unique vision of how the union can work when it is member-driven, transparent and accountable. This is a new time and it's time for a new kind of teachers union.



for
**Vice President
Jackson Potter**

Jackson Potter is a Chicago Public Schools graduate. He worked at Englewood High School for 4½ years and was the union delegate at the building when Arne Duncan called the school a "culture of failure" and started a phase out in 2005. This was the moment when Jackson began to resist the corporate school reform agenda and then joined the staff of Substance newspaper. He also

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for
**Recording Secretary
Michael Brunson**

Michael Brunson has been teaching the elementary grades for six years. He came to teaching after working for many years supervising production and labor at a large manufacturing plant.

Upon entering the teaching profession, he quickly recognized the same production line mentality being imposed on the school system in the name of "quality" and "reform". He is now dedicated to CORE's vision of community-driven education.

Brunson believes it is time for front line educators to engage and impact this so-called "reform"

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for
**Financial
Secretary
Kristine
Mayle**

Kristine Mayle taught at De La Cruz Academy in Pilsen for three years and served as delegate during the phase out of her school last June.

She currently teaches special education at Eberhardt Elementary. While CPS considered De La Cruz "too small," her current school is in many ways "too big." The issues at these very different schools reflect the weakening of our union. Membership numbers are falling and teachers do not feel supported by their union. Ms. Mayle views the role of Financial Secretary

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Potter *continued*

joined a rank and file group of teachers and formed the Renaissance 2010 committee within the Chicago Teachers Union. He fought to give teachers a right to sit at the table with the initial CUE (Chicagoans United for Education) coalition before the CTU dismantled it. Currently, Jackson is the delegate at Social Justice High School in Little Village. He helped to form CORE in May of 2008.

Brunson *continued*

movement. Real education reform must come from real educators, not the business sector and their "philanthropists". It is up to the teachers, working with parents, students, community, and concerned politicians to stop the dismantling of the public school system, the bashing of the teachers unions, and the perversion of the very purpose and goal of education itself.

Mayle *continued*

broadly, with a vision of expanding our membership in numbers and in participation.

Kristine has testified at dozens of hearings, ranging from school closings to charter proposals. She spoke on behalf of CORE at last year's January 10th event at Malcolm X and has worked to inform educators on union issues at numerous workshops, protests, and press conferences. She is Chair of CORE's Membership Committee and has met with teachers from around the country to collaborate on our shared issues.

School Closing Criteria Problematic

by Joe Linehan

For the third time in three years Chicago has changed the criteria by which schools are eligible for closing. The ever changing criteria are supposed to help the schools distinguish which schools are "failing". Yet, despite closing over 70 schools, the administration still can't seem to come up with fair criteria, while their lack of consistency has schools scrambling to see if they're on the chopping block.

There are many problems with judging schools based on attendance and the ISAT test. The culturally biased, multiple choice test is administered by a politically connected company. This contract was awarded under shady circumstances by the Blagojevich administration. That's hardly an equitable way to evaluate schools. Major trends like neighborhood demographics and student mobility can play havoc with test scores, but so can small things like who had a good night's sleep or ate a breakfast before taking the test.

Elementary schools are judged based on ISAT reading, math, and science scores meeting and exceeding standards; attendance; and value-added scores and composite scores in both reading and in math. Charts have been created for all

schools that make it appear very scientific as schools are rated in 8 different categories. Yet, three of those scores come from the same math test and another three are determined by the same reading test. Schools which fail to gain 1/3 of the achievable points are then eligible to be closed.

The constantly changing target makes it difficult for schools to succeed. McKay Elementary on the South West Side is on the bubble; having earned 14 of 42 points. Like all schools potentially facing the chopping block, they are in a working class neighborhood and service a minority population. In 2007 38% of their students met or exceeded standards in math, but in 2008 they improved that number to 46% of their students, and last year they were up to 54%. They showed similar gains in reading and science. Under the 2007 and 2008 scoring systems, McKay would have been safe. With the new system, they are not.

High Schools use a more complex system that evaluates schools based on average ACT, one year drop out rate, attendance, freshmen on track, AP enrollment, AP success, and PSAT scores. While the College Board points out massive flaws in

the AP program, CPS continues to push it. The Prairie State Exams have led to a four year program in many suburbs where students are never given junior status so that they never take the examination. These are the two main criteria Chicago uses to judge high school quality.

Schools can also be closed if a school's enrollment is less than 250 and it is using less than 40% of available space or if in the opinion of the board, the infrastructure of the building is unsound. These rules are applied unevenly. Last year, De la Cruz Middle School was closed due to their "unsafe" building, which was rented to UNO for \$1 this year. Carver Military Academy's "need" for a small program in their large school has prevented Fenger parents from having a safe place to send their kids. Of course, the test score data is also not rated equally or several of the city's charter schools would find themselves facing the axe. Also, the 40% formula is based on utilization criteria from over fifty years ago, which do not account for essential shared school spaces like libraries nor for classrooms which must, by law, be "underutilized" such as special education classrooms. We owe it to our children to find a better solution.

CORE v. High Stakes Exams

by Norine Gutekanst

Standardized test scores have become the weapon of choice to undermine public confidence in our public schools. Dibels, TRC, ACCESS, Math and Reading Benchmarks, ISAT, IAA, PSAE, Practice PSAE, PLAN, EXPLORE, ACT, District-wide Writing Prompt, Scantron Computer Adaptive Assessments, NAEP, WorkKeys, HST/IDS Quarterly Assessments, Grade 11 Field Test. Whew! This list of standardized tests administered in CPS schools in 2009-2010 is not even exhaustive. All of these tests were developed outside of the classroom, and are administered IN ADDITION TO the regular classroom-based assessments that teachers regularly administer to guide their instruction. High-stakes standardized tests have been in our schools since the 1990s

and are used to retain students, send them to summer school, put schools on probation, fire their staffs, charterize them, and close them down. How valid are standardized tests as measures of true student learning? Not very!

First, standardized tests correlate highly with socio-economic status. Students with higher incomes are much more likely to score better on standardized tests.

Second, test developers themselves argue that standardized tests (i.e. ISAT or PSAE) alone should not be used for high-stakes decisions such as putting schools on probation, school turnarounds, student retention, etc. This point has been a basic premise of the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (1999) which were developed jointly by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the Amer-

ican Psychological Association (APA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME).

Thirdly, standardized tests skew the curriculum so that material that will be on the test is emphasized over the critical thinking skills that students so dearly need. Teachers are encouraged to buy-into this curricular emphasis through merit-pay initiatives such as the TAP (Teacher Advancement Program), which pays schools' staffs if their scores go up.

And if scores don't go up, the numbers are used to close the school down. The mayor can point to lazy, greedy public school teachers and call for a "better way" which usually involves brand-new school operators such as charters and contract schools, usually non-union.

Therefore, CPS continues to base high-stakes decisions almost entirely on test data. CPS' 2009-2010 Performance Policy relies on 8 "metrics", 7 of which are ISAT-based. In the high schools, the Performance Policy lists 11 metrics, 7 of which are standardized-test based. Based on these calculations, the lowest-scoring schools are "turnaround-eligible".

CORE, in concert with the Grassroots Education Movement, is opposed to the hijacking of education through the extreme emphasis on test scores. We are united in giving voice to what schools could and should be. CORE is launching a Testing Task Force which will look into alternatives to tests that can better provide "accountability" and equity. We will look into misuse of test scores for promotion, school closings, and "bonus" merit pay in the TAP program. Join us at our first meeting on Wed. Jan. 20th at 4pm at Manny's Deli, 1141 South Jefferson St.

CORE Joins Altgeld Gardens Families Fighting for Schools

by Dave Vance

Students and parents from Altgeld Gardens came to City Hall December 30 to meet Mayor Daley with demands. They chanted, "We have no library, We have no school, Mayor Daley what do you want us to do???"

Since March 12th their community library has been closed. Most of the high school age students are forced to travel out of Altgeld Gardens to go to school. Their neighborhood high school is now a selective enrollment military school. Their middle school with 3 grade levels (6, 7, 8) was closed and their building given to a charter school. Because of "turnaround" at Fenger the school has become unstable and violent.

CORE member Michael Brunson

was among those who joined the students for the protest. "I wish the students could have spoken with the Mayor, but it didn't happen," he lamented.

"We basically accomplished our goal today," said Darnell Boyd, a Fenger student. "But, we really didn't get Mayor Daley to come out. We've been getting ignored for the last several years. It's been the same thing with the Board of Education when we go to them. We called so many times and we get nothing but a dial tone. That's how we feel." But this student and his allies are determined to keep up the fight. Boyd stated, "If no progress is made we will be back."