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At Goudy, the future dies early

By Bonita Brodt

CHICAGO SCHOOLS: 'WORST IN AMERICA'

First in a series on the Chicago Public Schools, the system called the worst in the United States by the secretary of education.

Principal Thomas J. "Doc" McDonald reaches up to smooth a shock of white hair that has spilled onto his forehead. He notices the smudge of blood on his hand. Then he lunges, eyes flashing. *"Give me that pipe!"* Circling him in the second-floor hallway are two pre-teen students, Arnaray Bibbs, who is armed with a long, unraveled piece of cardboard tubing, and Maurice Elliston, who is swinging a stubby piece of copper pipe.

No one wants to hurt anybody. It is a game, actually, not uncommon in this schoolhouse. To see who can last the longest.

To see who will flinch.

"Give me that pipe," McDonald tells Maurice, turning his back on Arnaray, who swings the cardboard tubing and whacks the principal on the backside. McDonald spins around to deal with Arnaray and then Maurice jabs the pipe at his behind. The hair bobs as he pivots. His face burns red. *"I said give me that damned pipe!"*

"Shut up, Doc," says Maurice, who has abruptly tired of this exercise. He flings the pipe weakly. McDonald grabs it.

But no one really wins.

Welcome to Goudy Elementary, a place where children with no other options for an education are learning their first and probably most important lessons about school.

It is hardly the best of what Chicago Public Schools have to offer.

It is far from the worst.

It is one of the 402 regular elementary schools run by a school system that U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett has called the worst in the nation. A seven-month Tribune examination has found that whether the system is the worst or not, it is a disgrace.

Behind the walls of this hollow educational warehouse at 5120 N. Winthrop Ave., the futures of 690 children from the Uptown neighborhood are being silently but certainly shaped by an antiquated system where education is often secondary to a maze of other interests and each day is a test of endurance in which the most important lesson to be learned by anyone is how to survive the 5½-hour school day.

"I call this the William C. Goudy Non-Academy," McDonald says as he tends to the wound on his finger.

"It's a gravity school. I take anything that walks in."

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The brick is sallow, tired-looking. Painted window frames have peeled. What passes for a play area around

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this rectangular, three-story fortress is a forbidding expanse of buckling pavement that spills into a back alley without the benefit of a protective fence.

There is no recess.

There are no swings. Not even a rusted jungle gym. Just the lonely poles that support three graffiti-scarred backboards stripped of all but one bent basketball rim.

Sometimes the morning bell rings at 9 precisely. Sometimes, at 9:05. Usually, school begins whenever somebody in the office remembers to push the button. The automated bell ringing system installed a year ago by the Board of Education has been serviced once, but it has not rung automatically yet.

"Let's go! Let's go!" barks Maria Bonilla, a hallway monitor who is one of the first faces to greet the children each morning, frowning as she uses her whole arm to wave the sea of incoming bodies toward two sets of stairs.

Not five minutes pass and into the main school office walks teacher Fani Cahill with the first of this day's casualties. She has her arm around Frank Kotszycki, who is still wearing a milk mustache from his breakfast and who has a big red bump above his left ear.

"Ms. Trigg," begins Cahill, trying to snag the attention of the school clerk, who has a way of making it clear that she does not like to be bothered. "Frank refused to go into the room this morning, again, and there was a scuffle with the security guard and his head was banged up against the lockers.

"There is a bump," Cahill says, pulling the 12-year-old over so that she can run her fingers over the swollen spot. "Do I need to fill out an accident report?"

"Is he breathin'?" Vera Trigg asks without looking up from her newspaper.

"Yes, I'm afraid he is," Cahill admits.

"Then no report."

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Beyond the high-profile magnet schools and special programs that lure children from the most motivated families on the promise of something better sit the schools for 73 percent of the 419,537 children who are enrolled in Chicago Public Schools. They are the children who have been left behind.

Goudy is one of the regular neighborhood schools festering in academic and spiritual distress.

In Chicago, nearly half of the children who enter the public school system drop out before graduating from high school. The underpinnings of this failure begin early in elementary school, the years when a child may be turned on to the idea of an education or forever lost.

As part of its examination of the schools, The Tribune spent nearly four months inside Goudy Elementary to see what public education has come to mean.

There is nothing selective about a school like Goudy. Its doors are open to anyone—not only all the children who happen to live in the neighborhood, but also to all teachers the system assigns, no matter what their ability or expertise.

Some children who go to school here come from stable homes. Some are reared in families where one or both parents work. But almost all of the children who depend on this school for a grounding in basic academic and behavioral skills are like 68 percent of the children in the city's public schools: They are poor.

Goudy's students emerge from the corridor of unrelenting poverty that cuts through the northern fringe of Uptown, a depressed pocket on the North Side where welfare is the going wage.

Though the school sits in a census area where only about 50 percent of the residents have been tallied as low-income, 98 percent of the Goudy students come from families so poor that the children qualify for the federal government's free lunch.

Like many neighborhood schools in poor communities, Goudy serves a population so transient that about half of the students who arrive in the fall are gone before June. New students arrive continually to take their place.

As is the case throughout the public school system, the students at Goudy are overwhelmingly minority: 45.1 percent are Hispanic, 34.3 percent are black, 11.2 percent are Asian and 2 percent are American Indian; 7.4 percent are white.

To walk with these children, to follow in their footsteps, is to take a journey through a world where everything is not always what it seems.

It is a place where the principal is also a truant officer and social worker because the system has not provided

enough of that kind of support. The building engineer, at $34,301 a year, makes more than many teachers.

Because of a professed lack of space, some children attend reading class for the better part of the school year in a noisy auditorium. Others get their lessons in the school's garage-like annex, seated at desks shoved together in a narrow hall. Two remedial classes of 1st graders, many of whom have already flunked a year, share one confusing classroom where bulletin boards serve as a makeshift and hardly soundproof divider between the groups.

But children are often secondary to other considerations when it comes to doling out the rooms.

Except for the small reading group she teaches each morning, Susan Malis, a teacher with political clout, has an entire classroom virtually to herself. It is her office. Complete with a telephone.

Audrey Wilborn, the school's first full-time librarian in four years, was amazed to find books were covered with dust and spilling into haphazard piles on the floor.

"Library was free time and a break for the teacher," Wilborn observed as she wrestled a pencil from a 2d grader who had scribbled over the words of Dr. Seuss.

"It had nothing to do with learning to appreciate a book."

Though the two 8th-grade classrooms are side by side, the teachers seldom share their plans. Still smarting from political battles about who would get to teach the most motivated students, they do not always speak.

In the history book used by the brighter class of 8th graders, Ronald Reagan is president. The slower class reads fror.. a text in which Richard M. Nixon is still in office.

All kinds of "lessons" are taught at Goudy.

Children are entrusted with flag duty at some schools as a way of teaching responsibility and civic pride. At Goudy, it is the responsibility of building engineer Dennis McGovern and his staff of five janitors.

After school one Friday, one of McGovern's men did not tend the American flag. It was left flapping at top of the pole. By Saturday, it was lying in a crumpled heap on the muddy ground where it was pelted by a fierce spring rain.

By Sunday morning, it was stolen.

Up in Room 303, where the federal government is spending nearly $75,000 so students can receive remedial instruction in reading and math, teacher Ruby Smith, who aspires to be a principal, explains that she does not actually "teach" because her elaborate computer system tells children how to chart their own course of study in her room.

Smith is paid $34,110 a year and has enough of a budget to pay for a full-time aide to help her with the six groups of 16 children who come to her room, a luxury the system does not provide for regular classroom teachers who are responsible for as many as 39 children at one time.

By the end of this school year, a little more than $1 million will have been invested in the repair of this building to ensure that public education will continue for maybe another 51 years in honor of William C. Goudy, an Illinois statesman who in the 1800s established a reputation as a brilliant courtroom attorney and for whom this school was named.

One afternoon, 8th-grader Marc Venton began to chuckle as he watched a laborer on his hands and knees replacing the black and maroon checkerboard squares of floor tile with light-colored tiles that make the hallways look brighter but will certainly show dirt.

"What a joke," Venton said.

"It's like when your mom tells you to clean up your room and you put all your dirty clothes in a closet.

"That's not going to make this a good school."

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"Would Earl Davis please report to the office. If you are in the building, please come to the office. You should now be in reading. Thank you."

There is a M*A*S*H-like atmosphere about Goudy. All day long, voices crackle over the public address system. The principal interrupts one afternoon to alert the whole school that a group of boys is running wild in the second-floor corridor. The clerk sends her voice into classrooms when she needs to know something, when she wants to continue an argument after a teacher has stormed out of the office, or on paydays when she orders some teachers to come to the office during classtime to pick up their "negotiables," the school's euphemism for paychecks. The word has been used ever since a teacher said she complained that she did not feel secure when the word "paychecks" was announced in the presence of the low-income students who attend Goudy.

Assistant principal Paul Goldstein sends out all-points-bulletins for students who walk to their morning reading class and keep on walking, right out of the school.

On this day, Earl and a classmate walked down Foster Avenue to the McDonald's.

"We stayed there until reading was over," Earl, who is 13, explained the next day. "Reading is horrible. Boring. The same old thing day after day, story after story in this dumb book.

"You just want to escape sometimes. There's nothing to do in this school that's fun."

Children cry out for something more.

But they do not get it at this neighborhood school.

There is no science lab. No art teacher. The school is rich in remedial programs that draw attention to a child's failures. But there are no real extra-curricular activities that might help children excel in something either before or after the school day.

Two pianos shoved up against a wall in the auditorium served as bookshelves for a reading teacher for much of the year. At least they are good for something since there is no music program any more.

There is no Parent Teacher Association. No student council. Not a single notebook, T-shirt, or pencil that has been stamped with the school's name.

There used to be a pretty good basketball team called the "Goudy Cougars." But the team is history. So are all the trophies. Years ago, they were stolen.

Organized team activities come on a good day in gym class that takes place on a hardwood floor that begs for a good varnishing and under huge windows protected by steel mesh and framed by heavy mustard-colored curtains that hang in shreds.

Though private washrooms reserved for the principal and the teachers are kept in good supply, soap, paper toweling and toilet paper are not always available for the children. For the better part of the school year, there wasn't even a working toilet paper dispenser for the boys. The school was cut down to only two working washrooms for 690 children to accommodate the contractor's renovation schedule. By Thursdays, the entire second floor would be permeated by the smell of the boys' washroom. On Fridays, the odor would be gone.

Up until this year, teachers were allowed to walk their classes a few blocks to the public library for an enrichment period. But the district office put a stop to that after an assailant ripped a gold chain off teacher Mary Terretta's neck on the sidewalk, right in front of her students.

New to Goudy this year are the two long rows of Apple computers in Dan Griffin's classroom. Paid for by the federal government, this is where the older children learn word processing and computer programming, and it is one of the few rooms in the building where the children do not bolt toward the door when the class is over.

But this may be short-lived. The pro-

gram is now in jeopardy because Goudy was informed that the money may not be available next year.

Aside from what happens in the classrooms between 9 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., about the only other activity for students at Goudy is eating. Even that is not all fun.

Though the building is being renovated, there are no plans for a lunchroom. The school was built without one in 1937 when the neighborhood was different and when school officials felt they could safely send the children home to eat and then trust them to return.

So some children use a first-floor classroom that is a makeshift eating area. It is small. Stuffy. A tragicomic theater when tempers flare.

"Stand back! Stand back!" warned lunchroom attendant Richard James, who one day in a moment of desperation grabbed a wooden spatula and swatted it at 13-year-old Berlington Card, who, to the delight of his lunchroom audience, was acting his usual role of trying to make James crazy, this time by trying to touch all the onion rings in an aluminum pan.

Most children, however, dine in the school auditorium, where awkward hands must negotiate food trays down long aisles and then carefully balance them on laps, portable lunch tables or adjustable desktops while sitting in hard, splintery chairs. A janitor usually positions himself near the stage with a mop and bucket to tend to the inevitable mess from spilled trays.

Even when well-meaning teachers try to get activities going for the benefit of the children, their colleagues often greet them with a cold response.

Librarian Wilborn sent a note around to all of the teachers one day asking if they would take part in a special "Goudy School Ethnic Fair" that she wanted to plan.

"These teachers make me sick," Fani Cahill sighed as she read over the list, on which 7 of 16 teachers had responded with "no" by the time the sheet arrived in her room.

"Every time you want to do something for school spirit, they say they don't have any time," Cahill complained. "Well, what do they have time for?"

Then she gave her middle desk drawer a ferocious yank and rummaged until she found a sharpened pencil.

"Yes," Cahill scribbled onto the paper. *"Of course."*

There is one extra-curricular activity of sorts during the schoolday.

It's called "playleading."

"I'm going to tell on you all, I mean it," yells Mark Brown, a skinny 8th grader whose arms are flailing as he tries to corral the tiny kids scampering in all directions as they run out of the washroom. It was his job to manage their bathroom recess.

In the kindergarten room, 8th-grader Tracy Logan is frowning as she wipes off desktops and cleans up after children who have left crumbs from their cheeseburger lunch.

"It's all right, I guess," Tracy says, shrugging when asked about her task.

Seventh-grader Wanda Jackson slams the door to Room 312 behind her. She glowers at the 3d graders who are laughing as they run around the room. Her shoulders visibly stiffen.

"I hate this," she snarls, a menacing look on her face. "I hate little kids."

"Playleading" is another Goudy euphemism. It is the time every day when older students are pulled away from their studies to tend to children so the teachers can take their union-negotiated breaks.

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"Keisha, look at me. Look at me! I said look me in the eye. Did you hear me? Look at me, Keisha!"

Counselor Barbara Boxton was livid. Sitting in front of her in the counseling office was 6th-grader LaKeisha Showers, a girl who only last year was attending Goudy in dresses but who had been coming to school in blue jeans and boys' black gym shoes.

Now, Boxton was trying to make sense out a situation where LaKeisha beat up classmate Danny Beals in an argument over a brown crayon.

This was not the LaKeisha that Boxton knew.

When she taught 4th grade and LaKeisha was one of her students, the girl made an impression as a polite child whose behavior was as feminine as the pretty dresses she liked to wear.

But a lot can happen in two years.

"Why in the world would you go after a boy like that?" Boxton was saying. "I am so disappointed in you. Look at

me, Keisha! You *know* I care about you. You told me I was your favorite teacher, isn't that what you said?"

"You was until today," LaKeisha whispered, turning her head ever so slowly and, when she finally looked directly at Boxton, the tears spilled out of her eyes.

Boxton watched her and slumped a little in her chair. Then she exhaled, and the sound filled the office.

"We're losing her," she said as she watched LaKeisha's tears drip onto a page in her math book. "I'm just watching her slip away.

"I don't know what's going on in that room."

School cannot be all things to all children, particularly for those who may need the most. There is only so much of a connection that a school counselor like Boxton can make through tough talk and a little intervention.

Fights were common among the children assigned to Room 305. One day it was LaKeisha and Danny. Another day it was Larry Brantley who, in an argument over one of those "he say, she say" things, punched a girl so hard that he was sent to the principal's office and she was given a wet piece of paper toweling to reduce the size of the welt.

Their teacher, Susan Belter, was the first to admit that something was terribly wrong.

"I have a room of 39 overage, unmotivated 6th and 7th graders," explained Belter. "Most of them have already flunked one year of school.

"And I am not prepared for this. I have absolutely no idea of what to do."

Because the neediest children in the upper elementary grades can be the most difficult to motivate, these students often become educational hot potatoes when it comes to assigning children to teachers.

Although Belter, a former welfare caseworker who is a full-time substitute teacher, has been praised for past accomplishments, she was given a roomful of the school's abysmal achievers in her third year at Goudy.

No one suggested that Belter might excel with a group of older students at risk of turning off on school.

Susan Malis, a teacher who also does administrative chores, said Belter got the assignment because it was good for teachers' morale to pass such groups around.

"It was my turn," Belter said.

During the first half of the school year, one of Belter's students threatened suicide. One ran away from home and a second talked about doing the same. Two are children of neighborhood prostitutes.

In March, after episodes including a near physical attack from a parent when Belter gave a child an F, Principal McDonald removed her from her full-time teaching post.

And when she left Room 305, it was with the sinking feeling that while she had tried to help her needy students, she had actually spent a lot of time pushing them out the door.

One day, in the middle of a lesson, one of her students just got up and left. That in itself was not unusual. But when he came back, he was sweaty and laughing. Then he was summoned out of the room.

"He just walked out of the school, walked to Broadway, stole a woman's purse, and the woman chased him all the way into the school to get it back," Belter explained.

"And he thought it was funny."

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Dorothy Nygren had to do a little detective work to get the Apple computer into her classroom.

When she spotted the abandoned machine in the schoolhouse one day, she found out that it had been assigned to a teacher who no longer wanted it.

Public school teachers are often good scavengers. They have to be when all the Board of Education provides for in-

structional materials beyond the basics like books, paste and paper is $28 per teacher for the entire school year.

In her classroom, Nygren leads her students on pretend archeological digs. She teaches ballet and uses chalkboard trays as the barre. On Fridays, there are enough musical instruments so each child can participate in rhythm band.

Not every teacher has Nygren's creativity and energy.

And few have the extra $500 she received this year to provide for a lot of the "extras"—like the the special art supplies and the oversized word-and-picture books on mythology—that the 36 children who have been grouped together as the brightest of the school's 3d and 4th graders use in her room.

Nygren and three other teachers at Goudy receive this money as part of the state-funded "gifted" program in the regular neighborhood schools. The term "gifted" is usually a misnomer because although some testing is involved, the standards for acceptance vary with the neighborhood and the school. Generally, these children tend to be the most motivated children left after the city magnet schools skim off the best.

When Goudy's fourth such classroom opened this year for 6th and 7th graders, McDonald said he couldn't even bribe some of his teachers to take the room because of the extra work.

So he said he settled for a teacher who came to Goudy on an administrative transfer after being suspended for three days on a charge of striking a child at another school. The teacher, Helen Manos, maintains it was an accident.

Only 15 to 20 percent of Goudy's students land in these so-called gifted classrooms.

The majority of the children are placed in the regular classrooms, where they are so far behind that even the most generous estimate by McDonald suggested that only about 25 percent of them are performing at grade level.

These children learn their lessons in rooms where, despite the union contract calling for lower limits, as many as 39 energetic children are assigned to one teacher.

Fourth-grade teacher David LaRue is short 12 English books and 10 science books for his 37 students.

Henry Caldwell has no real geography books. He improvises, partly with the benefit of scenes of America depicted on the calendars he has hung over the chalkboards.

First-grade teacher Helen Harris has been asking to have writing lines painted on her chalkboard since 1964.

Ann Jardine, who teaches a remedial class of 1st graders, was amazed to see the difference when she dipped into her own pocket and spent $80 to replace the tattered reading books she had.

"You can see it in their eyes," Jardine said. "And by the way they touch them. They don't even realize they're developing a love for a book."

In January, not even midway through the school year, clerk Vera Trigg had to begin rationing pencils, construction paper, paper clips, writing paper and other supplies. She had watched in disbelief one day as her funds for instructional supplies were slashed from $1,504.76 to $13.76. The cutback was part of Goudy's contribution to the money that the school board cut from other parts of its budget to scrape up a raise to settle this year's record teachers' strike.

The most basic of supports for the classroom teacher are lacking as well.

The title of school social worker is actually a misnomer for Edna McCoy, who explained that the personal counseling she would like to offer the children was virtually impossible because the budget cuts trimmed her visits from once a week to twice a month.

The same round of cutbacks also meant that truant officer James Ellis reports to Goudy once a week instead of twice.

Dedicated teachers cry out for something better.

"I want to be a part of something I believe in," said teacher Nancy Banks, who has taught at Goudy all but one of her 33 years in the public schools.

When she was younger, she did things like visit homes and try to provide a social connection for her needy students. Sometimes, she even invited students to visit her house. But so many children with so many needs simply became too much.

"You try," said Banks. "If you care, you always try. But I am constantly amazed by how little I am able to do."

In 1978, back when Banks had more than just a glimmer of hope about the future of the public schools, she bought the manual and studied and took the exam to qualify her to be a principal.

"I really thought I could make a difference," Banks said.

Two years passed without the results being posted. Finally, she received a letter from the Board of Examiners explaining that because of funding constraints and declining student enrollment, the system had no need for more principals and was simply tossing the exam out.

Banks keeps the letter in its original envelope.

In detached bureaucratic language, it wished Banks, anonymously referred to as a principal "candidate," continued success in her professional career.

It makes no mention of how she performed on the test.

"Couldn't they at least have told me if I passed?" she asked.

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A long time ago, Principal McDonald found his own formula. During his 39 years with the public schools, he has mastered the most important lesson to be learned by anyone: How to get by.

Politics? He knows how to play that game.

"Oh, I'm very nice to Susan Malis," he explained, unabashedly admitting that he has benefitted greatly by having Malis on his staff.

"I give her a nice room. She's brought a lot of money into this school."

Malis is the daughter of Louise Malis, a former Chicago PTA president who during the 1960s and '70s rose to prominence as an influential member of the Board of Education.

McDonald, who is 65 and has been principal of Goudy for 20 years, said he believes it was the presence of Malis that provided him with the clout to attract major reading enrichment programs to Goudy, which was selected from among many public schools where the students had abysmally low reading scores.

For six years, Malis has held what is now a $32,563-a-year position as one of Goudy's two special reading teachers.

Though Malis acknowledges what she called "real problems" with the kind of instruction offered in some of the school's reading classes, she said she rarely ventures into classrooms to assist or offer much teaching advice even though those duties are within her purview.

Instead, she explained, she spends a lot of her time coordinating reading materials and doing administrative work for the principal.

So at Goudy, where 70 percent of last year's 8th-grade class scored below national norms on reading tests, the special reading resource teacher devotes a lot of time to programming the school day, organizing class rosters, tabulating promotion and failure reports, ordering textbooks, conducting standardized tests, serving as a liaison with the renovation contractors, and raising money to make up for funding cuts by organizing the events in which children sell gift items, candy and taffy apples.

It's all a matter of priorities, McDonald likes to explain.

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"My mother said it was the opportunity of a lifetime," 9-year-old Twanna Walker said of her decision to leave Goudy in the first semester to attend a special academic program at Pritzker Elementary School on the Near Northwest Side.

Twanna still walks through the alley and across Winthrop Avenue to Goudy every morning, but more than an hour earlier than she did before. One in a cavalcade of yellow schoolbuses picks her up and takes her on a trip that can be as long as an hour, door to door.

But even the best of what the public school system has to offer is imperfect.

Sometimes the buses are late. Or they just do not come.

Which is one reason 12-year-old Uday Khedkar is back at Goudy.

For most of the year, Uday stationed himself outside of Goudy as early as 7:30 so he wouldn't miss his ride to 7th grade at Whitney Young Magnet School on the West Side.

"I really liked it," Uday explained.

"But it was just too hard to get there. The buses either didn't come or I missed some school because they were late. I took the train for a while, but that was very difficult. I had to transfer. My dad tried to get me in a better school that was closer, but the programs were all full."

So in May, Uday transferred back to Goudy, his neighborhood school.

At Whitney Young, he said, he could put his hands on flasks and beakers in a laboratory instead of reading about science in an outdated textbook. He had a laminated student identification card that he proudly snapped onto his shirt. He could sit in a real lunchroom and comfortably eat his lunch.

His English class was for high school credit, and one of his last assignments was to write a sonnet.

In the "gifted" classroom at Goudy, Uday said that the biggest academic challenge he has had during the 90 minutes assigned to reading and English each morning is an assignment on sentence forms.

"It's really boring," said Uday. "The work is so much easier and I spend most of my time just sitting around. I usually finish quicker than the other kids, so I just do all of my homework in class.

"It's really depressing to be back in this school."

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Well-meaning teachers find that they have to wrestle with a lot more than academic standards if they hope to make education more than an abstraction.

Children know to go to Room 304 if they need a sweater for winter or maybe a nice pair of jeans. Eighth-grade teacher Bernice Eiland keeps bags of donated clothing for them in the back of her room.

Before she took a personal leave, children would stream into Room 306 all day long to see teacher Fani Cahill. Some wanted to borrow one of the special reading books Cahill kept in her closet. Others simply sought her. Cahill did not know the Cambodian girl who was standing shyly outside her classroom one day two years ago. The 6th grader was pregnant, and Cahill was the one to whom she confided.

Though it may not always stand out as a beacon of hope in a tired neighborhood, the schoolhouse is often the closest thing to stability that many of its families know.

Teacher Helen Harris discovered this before school one morning when she looked up and saw a young mother standing at her door.

"She said, 'I just killed my baby, Mrs. Harris. What should I do?' " Harris remembered. "It happened many years ago, but it really made an impression on me. She came here because this building was the only consistent thing in her life."

Failing disadvantaged students for lack of achievement is discouraged at Goudy. In the long run, Principal McDonald believes, failure in the early years may not be the best solution for the underachieving child.

So each year, often regardless of what a lot of them have accomplished, hundreds of children are promoted after receiving what often amounts to a passive exposure to learning, a concept that is troubling to teachers who recognize that the future is being shaped a little bit with the passing of each school day.

"We're just pushing them through, pushing them through," observed LaRue, the 4th-grade teacher. "It just scares me to death."

Every year, teacher Dan Griffin attends the graduation ceremony at Senn Metropolitan Academy, the neighborhood high school where most of Goudy's graduates enroll.

"I know a lot of them move out of the neighborhood," said Griffin, who has taught at Goudy for 19 years. "But every year I look at the program that lists all the graduating seniors and I just don't see the names I should be seeing.

"And I think to myself: 'My God, what's happening to all these kids?' "

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Goudy has been fraught with potential safety hazards this year during rehabilitation. One Friday, as Principal McDonald was making his afternoon rounds, he noticed that one of the two stairways was still blocked off by painters who stood on scaffoldings and rolled a thin coat of dull, beige paint over the walls.

McDonald was afraid that children might get hurt.

He walked briskly to his office, rolled his chair over close to the microphone and sent a message over the intercom into each classroom.

"Teachers. We have a safety problem. The painters are still working on the north stairway. It is blocked off and a very dangerous situation, so please walk your children out of the building and out to the sidewalk to ensure their safety.. Again, teachers, walk your children to the sidewalk. Please."

McDonald swung his chair away, folded up his half-glasses, and tucked them into his jacket pocket.

"They won't do it," he said.

Several minutes before the bell was rung, 25-year-veteran teacher Bette Jarrow was the first to bound down the stairs and race toward the office, without her students, to sign out for the day.

Close behind, and laughing with Jarrow as the two scurried down the main corridor, was Rudolph Gonzalez, a substitute whose 4th-grade room was in such an uproar that day that both the assistant principal and McDonald had come in to help him establish order. On one visit, McDonald found Gonzalez with his back literally pinned against the wall by a group of laughing boys.

Children started to run down the one available staircase, the older ones leading the charge.

"Go home!" yelled hallway monitor Maria Bonilla, frowning as she gestured madly toward the school's south door. "This door! Go home! Go home!"

Reading teacher Nanette Turetgen had a wild look about her as she obediently tried to hold a group of young children behind her outstretched arms at the bottom of the staircase. A bewildered Mary Leahu came down the steps looking for her 3d-grade students. But they had already fled.

When the bell finally rang, McDonald walked over to a window at the back of the school office. He pushed back the curtain and took inventory of the teachers who had done what he had asked.

Of the 34 teachers assigned to Goudy, he was able to count those he spotted on the sidewalk on one hand.

"It doesn't surprise me," McDonald said, shrugging.

"You get used to it.

"You see, when you've been here as long as I have, you come to realize that not a lot of what goes on in this building happens for the benefit of the kids."

Chicago Tribune

Tribune photo by Ovie Carter

Goudy Elementary 4th graders learn the value of following orders—the straightest line goes to lunch first.

Where survival is the lesson of the day

By Bonita Brodt

CHICAGO SCHOOLS: 'WORST IN AMERICA'

This is the second in a series on Chicago public schools, the system called the worst in the U.S. by the secretary of education.

Third-grade teacher Mary Leahu is standing in the middle of Room 312, one shoe resting on a crumpled candy wrapper and her glasses slightly askew. Her face is pressed close to a page in the teachers' manual that suggests how to conduct the reading lesson for the day. The room smells like corn chips. The pencil sharpener is grinding.

At the supply cabinet, one student is handing out stacks of red construction paper to her friends.

On the chalkboard, another child has printed "kiss my ass."

"All right, we must read," Leahu announces, ready to begin the lesson. "David, read . . . David! . . . David?

Finally, she looks up from the page.

"Where is David?" Leahu asks no one in particular.

"He ain't here," explains Aretha Johnson, whose mouth is full of sunflower seeds. "He blowin' his bad breath on the door."

David is outside the classroom with his nose pressed against the door's glass window. He is laughing. Leahu moves toward him. He disappears. Then she pans the classroom and notices the chaos around her. She blinks as if caught in the glare of headlights. She freezes.

As part of a seven-month exami-

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Lessons

Continued from page 1

nation of the Chicago Public Schools, The Tribune spent nearly four months visiting the classrooms of Goudy Elementary in Uptown to see what public education has come to mean for the children whose futures are being silently but certainly shaped in one of the 402 regular neighborhood grade schools.

Behind each classroom door at Goudy is a story about public education. And there are as many kinds of stories as there are kinds of teachers: inspiring, sad, effective, cruel, bewildered, even absurd.

Probably nothing has more to do with the kind of learning that takes place than the teacher's ability to manage a room of as many as 39 children.

In Room 312, Leahu heads to the pencil sharpener, where Victoria Brantley has been sharpening the same pencil for several minutes:

"You must do your reading," she tells Victoria.

"I got to sharpen my pencil."

"Your pencil is sharp," Leahu orders, pulling at Victoria's arm.

Victoria yanks her arm back, makes a face, then breaks off her pencil point.

"Guess it's broke now," Victoria says.

To the supply cabinet, where Serena Brown has been passing out construction paper until only a few sheets are left:

"Stop it," Leahu yells, grabbing Serena by the arm. "You cannot take paper from there."

"You don't touch me, my momma gonna sue you," Serena cries, slapping Leahu's hand with such force that the crack sounds all through the room. Leahu looks at the girl but does nothing. As she walks away, Aretha stands up and points:

"Yeah, and you touch me my momma going to come in here and beat your butt, yes she will."

While it is true that children from low-income families can pose a challenge to teachers, particularly when they live in an isolated world where lessons taught might not be reinforced in the home, in a truer sense many of these children are not that much different from children in any other school.

They respond to teachers they feel care and respect them. They challenge authority from time to time.

"I've had discipline problems before," admitted Leahu, who has taught in the Chicago Public Schools for seven years. "But not this bad. What can I say? I'm here. I'm trying."

Three years ago, school board records show that Leahu received official warning at Bethune Elementary School on the West Side that her teaching performance was unsatisfactory, the first step toward a teacher's possible dismissal.

But the system gives teachers a second chance, and Leahu received an administrative transfer to another elementary school, where last year she received a "satisfactory" rating, the lowest acceptable.

Then she asked for a transfer to Goudy, at 5120 N. Winthrop Ave.

Her assignment was a room of 3d-graders, many of whom had already flunked. Leahu fought a daily battle that often dissolved into chaos and spilled into the hallways, interrupting other rooms. Her job was all the more difficult, Leahu said, because many of the children were being taught out of the same books they had the year before.

In March, more than halfway through the school year, Principal Thomas J. McDonald removed Leahu from her teaching assignment after an incident in which he said a girl assaulted a boy in the classroom and carved deep bleeding scratch marks in his face.

Leahu is now a "floating" teacher who assists in other classrooms in the afternoons.

But in the mornings, she still has the responsibility of teaching her group of academically deficient children how to read.

"We call this the 'bad room,' " one of her students, 3d-grader David Morris, explained one day. In full view of Mary Leahu, he tossed wet shards of red candy up at the ceiling in what appeared to be an experiment to see if they would stick.

"She thinks we're stupid. She gives us all the answers. She don't know how to

make us act, so we tear up the place.

●●●

The sign on the door to Room 101 is printed in red, stenciled letters. It reads "Welcome to Our Little World."

Inside, the day's attendance is tallied on the chalkboard as "13 girls + 12 boys = 25 children. Not far from the equation, 1st-grade teacher Helen Harris is sitting cross-legged on the floor.

Gathered with her in a circle are 10 children eagerly watching as she thumbs through a stack of small manila cards on which she has written words that begin with "qu".

"That is absolutely perfect!" Harris says, smiling as she praises Larry Porter for recognizing how "quiet" is pronounced much differently than "quite."

The children are smiling, too.

There is a warm feeling about Helen Harris' classroom, a place where it is not unusual to find several different lessons simultaneously taking place. The children respond to both the structure and freedom in this room.

"Excuse me, Patricia," says Charles, who inadvertently bumped into his classmate while both were placing their papers on top of the work pile.

Patricia looked at him and smiled.

"First grade is my absolute favorite," explained Harris, a slender woman with a gravely voice who got her grammar school education at Goudy and now is in her 24th year of teaching at the school.

"Let me alone, I've got to alphabet these," says a little girl who is trying to tell a classmate that she cannot be bothered because Harris has given her the job of putting the day's papers in order according to last names.

Responsibility is a lesson Harris teaches every day.

"I am not your mother, I am not your maid," she announces as she stands in the center of the classroom, pointing to the neglected Philadelphia Cream Cheese tubs that are used to hold paste. "Larry?" she asks. "Charles?" The two boys scamper to put their supplies away.

Her students always go home with marked papers. She wants them to learn from their mistakes.

"Be more careful," Harris wrote to Donna, who missed eight problems on her math paper, including 5-3 = 3.

"What happened?" she asked of Gennifer, who got 20 out of 30 wrong. "You did not think."

"Nice work!" was her message to Huong, who had only missed one problem.

"Almost Perfect!" Helen Harris wrote.

●●●

They call it "The Jail."

"Warden" Henry Caldwell stands up in front. Lean and mean. Hair clipped close. Usually in a suit and a pair of well-shined shoes.

"I'm the SOB of the third floor," he says.

His 33 sixth-graders are hunkered over their books. The talkative one is in segregation with her desk pushed way up against the front wall.

Room 309 is stripped down to the bare essentials. American flag in back. Nothing much on the walls. A few calendars with pictures of landscapes dangle over chalkboards. Two lonesome globes rest on top of dusty bookshelves.

Caldwell is slight and stony-faced. In his hand is a ball point pen and a long slip of paper. On it, he makes checkmarks to tally episodes of unacceptable behavior., He'll need that paper at the end of the day.

Until he's ready, nobody leaves.

"Please, Mr. Caldwell," the assistant principal pleaded over the intercom one day. "Please bring your students down to lunch. We've got good chicken today."

He speaks in a dull monotone. Words drone. He gets impatient when the answers are wrong.

"Okay, if you're stupid sit there like a dummy," he tells a boy who cannot estimate a quotient.

Correct answers are often in chorus.

"' . . . the wide white silence' and the 'black penciled on the snow.'' Class, with a poem like this you have to . . .

(Chorus) "Think."

". . . which means you have to use your . . ."

(Chorus) "Head."

". . . and you need to use your head to use your . . ."

(Chorus) "Imagination."

Caldwell means business when he tallies those checkmarks at the end of the day. When he counts a lot of them, he puts the whole class "on punishment," which means he leads all 33 to the designated spot at the top of the north stairway, girls in one line and boys in the other.

Then they march. Down and up. Three flights down and three flights up.

Warden Caldwell marches right along with them, in front of kids who are gasping, sweating, who curse him softly but who keep on marching.

Usually, for a half hour or more.

●●●

"Good morning, 301, and let's have them," 4th-grade teacher David LaRue says with an outstretched palm. He has positioned himself strategically beside the aquarium so they will see him when they bound into the room. The week before, 25 of his 37 students flunked their spelling test, which was unheard of because the class usually performs much better. So he ordered everyone to take the test home for a parent to sign.

"Sharena?"

"I forgot."

"Timothy?"

"Uhm, don't got it."

Three days had passed and only 16 tests had made it back.

LaRue deals with Tory Robertson, who is ready to hit the girl sitting in his seat. He takes attendance. He collects lunch money from those who pay. He leads the Pledge of Allegiance and sings the "Star-Spangled Banner" a little off key. He checks in calculators that went home overnight. He tries to find out more about the two missing math books. He tells Dawayne Holloway he wants to speak to his mother because he's tired of him walking in late.

For the third time, he extends his deadline so the children can return a form with a parent's signature that will enable them to receive a free poster and a free book.

"It's time," Rodney Leggett announces as he jumps up from his seat.

A chorus of chairlegs start scraping across the wooden floor.

The first 15 minutes of the school day have passed quickly.

More than half of his young students get up and leave.

All day long, LaRue's 37 students take part in a chaotic and often confusing game of public education musical chairs.

His classroom has become secondary to a maze of instructional programs, some funded generously by the federal government, that are in place in the school because Goudy's students are poor readers, low achievers, ethnically diverse, and because they come from low-income homes.

While his students move in and out of his classroom and scatter through the building for a little of this and a little of that, LaRue teaches whatever he can to whatever children are left over in his room.

He teaches a lot of lessons over and over again.

"There is no continuity to the school day," said LaRue, 28, a teacher who is frustrated by the ways of the public school system. "It's just various degrees of cha s, every day, all day long. Lessons just don't sink in.

"When I ask, I am told it is for the benefit of the children, but I don't see it," said LaRue, among whose accomplishments with his children is turning an F speller into the two-time champion of Room 301's spelling bee. "I don't see the gains."

LaRue tries to make a difference in the lives of his young students by sprinkling the academics with lessons about life. He wants them to realize that they don't have to live on welfare, but there are no jobs for people who cannot read.

One day, he sat down with a pencil and paper, did some figuring, and confirmed his worst suspicion—that the longest period in the entire school day that he has all of his 37 children together, uninterrupted and fresh enough to respond to his best shot, is 30 minutes.

Which means that David LaRue has his work cut out for him between 12:45 and 1:15.

●●●

The kids call Room 306 the "Psycho Ward."

Meet some of the boys assigned to this room:

There's Cinque King, the boy who punched the gym teacher.

And Antonio Robertson, a pencil-thin character who got in a fight with 3d-grade teacher Mary Leahu one day and knocked the glasses off her face.

Maurice Elliston is the feisty one who nearly gave a teacher a heart attack the day he smuggled an authentic-looking toy pistol into her room.

Arnaray Bibbs has been caught with a real weapon twice. Once Principal McDonald confiscated a kitchen knife the boy said he brought to school for "protection." The second time, McDonald called police after Arnaray threatened to kill a teacher who tried to make him do some work. The weapon was a pair of toenail clippers with a tiny knife on one end.

Sometimes they're bad on purpose. At least that's what their teacher has come to believe. "In a way, it's expected of them," explained Fani Cahill. "They know they have an audience. A

lot of it has to do with the chemistry of all of them being put together in one room."

The system deals with the most difficult children by evaluating them and using red ink to stamp their permanent record cards with the words "Child Study." The children are labeled "B-D" for behavior-disorder and placed in special classrooms.

This is much different from the way the system deals with teachers who have trouble in school. It tolerates them and even compensates for the weakness.

Though there are incidents, some of the boys do well when they fan out into the school's regular classrooms for reading classes. Principal McDonald believes that having all the boys in one room works against them. He would prefer to have them assigned to a regular class with the B-D teacher as a backup when they need help.

Hardly a day goes by when somebody isn't chasing these boys down the hallway. Sometimes it's McDonald, the security guards, or other students who tease the boys, calling them "psycho" or "brain-damage," a play on the label B-D.

Often, it was Cahill, a gifted teacher who in April took a personal leave.

Room 306 was often in an uproar. The kids swung brooms. Threw wastebaskets.

Two of them threatened to kill their bus attendant one day.

These boys cried when they lost a basketball game, threw snowballs at pedestrians from their third-floor classroom window, but they sat quietly when Cahill told them a story about her life or when she read them a nursery rhyme.

Occasionally, they even let her teach.

●●●

Barbara Barajas tried bringing order in Spanish. In English. In Spanish again. She clapped her hands. She frowned. Then she walked over and flicked the lights on and off and ordered the children to sit, fold their hands, and put heads down.

"They just get crazy, and I have no idea of what else to do," Barajas explained as she stood helplessly in front of Room 204.

Barajas, who had taught in Texas, was new to Goudy this year. She was not prepared for so many children with so much energy in one room. Hers was a class of 35 low-achieving 1st and 2d graders. She said school was in session three weeks before she received any books.

Not even two months into the school year, she quit.

On her last day, she received love notes and goodbye hugs from the children. After they left, she took a few minutes to pick candy wrappers off the floor and throw away a couple of broken pencils. Then she put on her coat, grabbed her purse and left.

On top of her desk sat the crate of teaching materials she brought with her from Texas.

"I don't want it," she said as she fled down the second-floor corridor.

"I don't know if I'll ever teach again."

'Knock on any door' is principal's motto

By Bonita Brodt

"I'm a lousy administrator, I'll admit to that," said Principal Thomas J. McDonald as he drove down Wilson Avenue in his mobile office, a dirty brown Peugeot that had two Hathaway ties and a copy of "Descartes' Dream" amid the rubble on the back seat.

"In my later years," explained the man who for two decades has been in charge of Goudy Elementary School, "I've tended to neglect the things I don't care that much about so I can spend more time on the things I like."

He slowed down a little and leaned forward to peer through the windshield. "I think this is it," he said, nodding toward a large apartment building. He found a parking space, then bounded out of the car and down the sidewalk, white hair poking out from under a tweed cap and a slight stoop to his gait.

Throughout the Chicago Public Schools, there is no one more influential in shaping the day-to-day operation of a school than its principal.

On this afternoon, McDonald was six city blocks from his Uptown schoolhouse and a world away from the administrative tasks that he abhors. He was looking for one of his Goudy families, a mother who had moved with her five children after she could not scrape together the rent.

The building was the kind where the visitor has to be buzzed inside, and there was McDonald, this 65-year-old, well-dressed suburban gentleman with an ulcer, peering through a pair of half-glasses to scan mailboxes for the name Elliston. He couldn't find it so he tried the old trick of pressing all of the buzzers. That didn't work. Finally, two men walked into the vestibule and when they were buzzed for entry, McDonald smiled slyly as he sneaked in.

"My boss ordered me not to do this," McDonald said as he started down the hallway. "He doesn't want me to go out into the community. But I ignore him. I learn something behind every door."

His face fell a little when he walked inside the apartment.

It was a tiny, one-bedroom space. Dark because the curtains had been drawn. A cockroach was crawling over food left out on top of the stove. Sommers Elliston, a 3d grader who had just walked the six blocks home from Goudy, was standing as he watched a small black-and-white television showing cartoons on a snowy screen. There was no chair for him to sit on. There was hardly room to walk. The small living area was crammed with three sets of bunk beds that accommodated five children and two adults.

McDonald had come looking for Janet Elliston, hoping to talk with her about her 12-year-old son, Maurice, one of the boys in the school's behavior-disorder classroom. He had become more unruly than usual that week. The principal had called the police after episodes in which the boy kicked his teacher, fought with a security guard and left McDonald redfaced after wrestling with him in his office.

Unlike the school system he works for, McDonald tries never to look at a child in isolation.

Janet Elliston had not yet returned from work, but a family friend in the apartment told him that the mother was planning to move her kids to California. It was helpful, for it told McDonald something he did not know.

He visited for a while. Then he waved to the children and walked out past a cardboard box that served as a wastebasket. In it, 1st grader Essie Elliston's math paper, marked in red ink with a perfect 100, was crumpled and covered with cracker crumbs.

When the door closed behind him, McDonald shook his head.

"You have to wonder how some of these children survive," he said.

"You see, most of my teachers have never been in that apartment," McDonald said with a knowing look.

"They have no idea how far some of these kids come to go to school."

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McDonald is a legendary character in Uptown, the principal who runs his schoolhouse from the streets.

The system gives principals great leeway in how they operate. And the policy McDonald considers most effective in running his school was not developed by the Board of Education.

He calls it "knock on any door."

He pounds the pavement with the determination of a police detective. One day he's standing in the Red Rooster tavern on Argyle asking the man nursing a 10 a.m. beer if he's heard anything about a young runaway. Another morning, he's sipping coffee with the street people at Don's grill, trying to find out about a neighborhood squabble affecting the kids in his school.

He is not the kind to sit in an office and talk about the staggering needs of his students while complaining that the system has cut his truant officer down to only once a week and cut his social worker to only twice a month.

He does not spend much time in his office at all.

His preoccupation is with doing whatever it takes to get children into the schoolhouse so they at least have a chance to learn.

"It's a question of priorities," McDonald explained one morning as he grabbed for his coat. "The solution is often the problem in the public schools.

"You can't do anything for these children if you don't know where they come from, what they are like. No one else is going to do this," he said as he headed out the school's main entryway. "So I do a lot of it myself."

His daily sojourns take him to the sidewalks of Uptown, where he stops to talk to a young woman he suspected of working as a prostitute when she attended Goudy and who now has an eerie look about her with yellow, jaundiced eyes. She laughs when he reminds her of the time she stole a taxicab while a student at his school.

And it takes him up steps that have been encrusted with vomit and into hallways that reek with a mingling of urine, sweat, and leaking natural gas. In his 20 years as principal, McDonald has become so familiar that building engineers know to let him into apartments with passkeys so he can see if the family he is looking for is still around.

He knows everybody by their nicknames—Sparkle, Juicy Lucy, Punkin, Turtle, and Hillbilly John.

They all call him "Doc."

It was McDonald who cultivated the nickname. He uses it not only for familiarity but also to poke fun at the doctorate of education that he needed for advancement in the school system but which he laughingly dismisses as "virtually useless" for anything else.

His methods are a little unorthodox when he is out in the community.

He has been known to drag truant children out of closets and give them a forcible escort to school. He has taped notes to doors so the parent would know he was watching.

"In the warm weather," said Goudy teacher's aide Velma McLaurin, "you see ole Doc with a stick chasing after kids in the alley trying to get them in school."

On occasion, he has been known to kick a behind.

"I was mad as hell," McDonald explains, recalling an incident that he said took place on a warm spring day during one of his first years at Goudy.

"I took a kid out on the sidewalk, and I booted him as hard as I could. Then I looked around and saw all these people watching me from their porches and I thought, 'Oh, oh, what have I done now?' It was the '60s and here I was, this white man doing this to a black child.

"Then the funniest thing happened," McDonald remembers. "They all gave me a big round of applause."

●●●

Inside the schoolhouse, McDonald does not always enjoy such an enthusiastic following.

He's a little unorthodox there, too.

While it is often said that a public school is a reflection of its neighborhood, it is a reflection of its principal as much as anything else.

McDonald, a mathematician, brings his own personality, eccentricities and style to Goudy. He refers to himself as the "paradoxical principal."

Some of his teachers often have a difficult time coping with what that has come to mean.

"This school used to be a gorgeous melting pot," said teacher Ruby Smith. "We had an international festival where the parents would display things they made, and we would have a potluck and a program in the gym."

McDonald says he does not believe in such "showcase" activities.

"I've been here 19 years, and I still can't get used to it," said teacher Dan Griffin. "I like balanced discipline."

McDonald does not run a traditional disciplined school.

"You can't send a kid to the office for punishment," said 4th-grade teacher David LaRue. "They *like* to go to the office because they know they can play with Doc."

Eighth-grade teacher Bernice Eiland put it this way: "He loves all children. He doesn't care what or where they've come from. I don't think anybody questions that.

"But to work in this school, you got to be strong, you hear me? You got to be strong."

McDonald does not require that his teachers chart out customary lesson plans. He does not ask them to follow school board policy and assign homework, so not all of them do. When it comes right down to it, McDonald does not seem to believe in a lot of conventions that come with running a school.

"Let's see what's going on here!" he exclaimed one morning. All of a sudden, he grabbed hold of the edge of his desk and pushed so that his chair, on rollers, sailed back toward the public address system. Then he just started flipping buttons, his voice cutting into a series of rooms: "Are they behaving today, Mrs. Leahu?"

He spends a lot of time in the hallways, usually with a couple of children tugging at his hands. He is a benevolent yeller who one minute is screaming "Shut up! Mind your teacher!" to a gaggle of boisterous students and then the next minute is joking with them in the hall.

He wrestles with boys who are reluctant to talk to him by holding onto and yanking their thumbs, and he randomly fishes through their pockets for "gyppers," paper clips that have been bent to the size of a quarter for free video games, or for the markers and shoe polish used to scribble graffiti.

Occasionally, he confiscates real knives and toy guns.

"I violate their civil rights every day," McDonald explains.

Some of the older kids in the building laugh at his antics and try to take advantage of his kindness. They call him "crazy ole Doc."

Younger ones sometimes call him "Old McDonald" and sing the song when they see him coming.

He doesn't mind any of it. Nor does he get upset when the children do not give him the kind of respect that is customary for a principal.

One afternoon, he was walking down the hallway and spotted 4th-grader Shawn McDowell with a piece of wood that doubles as Room 301's hall pass.

"Hey!" McDonald called out. "What are you doing with that stick?"

"I'm going to hit you in the ass," Shawn said playfully.

And he did.

●●●

Thomas J. McDonald, who is paid $55,975 a year, is one of the survivors in the Chicago Public Schools.

His 39 years of service have made him wise to the many failings of the system and he is skillful in the manipulations needed when antiquated policies have little application in the day-to-day operation of a public school.

"All principals are liars," he says. "If anyone wanted to find out what I'm doing, they'd have to go through my desk." He laughs, looking down at a mishmash of papers and the ever-present stack of books on the philosophies of Rudy Rucker and Jean Piaget.

"In the public school system," McDonald explained, "you can fake almost anything."

The two Cambodian aides who are supposed to work with Cambodian children were observed doing a lot of other things, like mopping tables after lunch in a kindergarten classroom, watching a classroom while a teacher took a break and running the ditto machine.

"It's a violation," McDonald admitted when he was asked about such tasks after an auditor came through the school one day.

"But that's for me to let them do and for them to catch," he said. "They didn't find it."

And many administrative tasks that might ordinarily fall to the principal or the assistant principal are assumed by the two special reading teachers who are at Goudy because of the school's history of poor reading scores.

"You see," McDonald explained. "I have a system that allows me to spend time doing the things I like. And I'm a good company man. My boss, Howard Sloan, wants us all to be good company men. Actually, there's only two things I really have to do when I run this school. One, I must never embarrass my boss, and two, I must make him look good once in a while."

McDonald is usually quick to accommodate vocal complainers, particularly when he feels they are people who might be able to make life difficult for him.

But he is open about the fact that he sometimes finds ways to make life less than pleasant for a teacher with whom he having a disagreement. He can have a hair-trigger temper, and when it goes off he sometimes yells at a teacher right in front of the class.

"I yell at her whenever I have the opportunity," McDonald said one day as he stopped in the hallway to look in on teacher Helen Manos in Room 310.

McDonald has virtually no say over what teachers are sent to Goudy. Manos was transferred from another school after having been suspended for three days on a charge of striking a child. She maintains that it was an accident.

Manos is barely 5 feet tall and heavy. She walks with a cane. McDonald as-

signed her to a classroom that requires her to walk up and down three flights of stairs several times a day.

"I call that a challenge," McDonald said. "If you give somebody enough of a challenge, maybe they'll quit."

Though he is diligent in cultivating connections with the families whose children go to Goudy, he manages to keep them at arm's length when it comes to the operation of his school.

"What I've got here are unsophisticated parents," McDonald said. "They have no idea of the kind of power they could have. My friends in the suburbs tell me about parent groups and all their meetings, and I have to laugh.

"Actually, I prefer it this way. It's easier for me to run the school."

McDonald's boss, District 2 Supt. Howard Sloan, voiced support for the principal of Goudy School.

"I think he's quite a brilliant individual," said Sloan, "and he certainly has a lot of opinions.

"I understand what he is trying to do. I think he does a nice job, an adequate job. He's pragmatic if you will, out in the hallways, that kind of thing."

After returning to Goudy one morning after presenting his annual principal's "Performance Objectives" to Sloan, McDonald took a copy of his report out of a folder.

"It's a fake," McDonald explained as he examined the 10-page document, in which he listed certain objectives and weighted each with the percentage of effort he would invest in each category.

McDonald, who tends to frustrate less abstract thinkers with his habit of equating human behavior with mathematical principles, pointed to a category entitled "Improving School Pragmatics."

"He didn't even ask me what that meant," McDonald said, chuckling.

Then he flipped through the report and pointed out that his percentages added up to a 125-percent effort at Goudy School.

"He asked me why I said 125 percent," McDonald related, a sly grin coming over his face.

"And I said, 'Why, I always give you 100 percent, Mr. Sloan.' "

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Though there have been some academic gains during his tenure, McDonald does not share the system's obsession with evaluating the children according to how they score on standardized tests.

"They tell us nothing that we don't know already," McDonald said, "that children from low-income families tend to score lower. I'd like to throw out the testing program altogether and replace it with an Index of Decent Human Beings. I think that would tell us more about these kids in the long run."

McDonald hates to suspend students. So instead of suspending Antonio Robertson for hitting a classmate, McDonald *threatened* to suspend him.

"I ain't gonna be suspended," Antonio protested as McDonald held onto the boy's collar and tried to keep him from running after his classmate.

"I'm gonna come to school tomorrow. I'm gonna come to your stupid-assed school."

Sure enough, Antonio came to school.

Walking down the street one afternoon, McDonald waved at Debbie Gutshall, a Goudy graduate who dropped out as a freshman in high school. She was carrying a sack of groceries.

"Say," McDonald said, stopping to talk with her about her daughter, who now attends his school. "Candy is doing real well."

"That's right, Doc," Gutshall said, smiling. "I make sure she's there every day."

McDonald smiled to himself as he walked dow.. the sidewalk.

"I was always after her, trying to get her to come to school. Now, you see, she wants something better for her daughter."

"Mom talks about Doc," said Candy Gutshall, an 8th-grader. "She tells me about when she went to school. She does not want me to make the same mistakes."

McDonald is one to give bus fare or lunch money to kids who say they need it. If a child is hungry, McDonald will often feed him, especially if he passes along little tidbits like who is drawing graffiti in the bathroom and in what locker the markers are being stashed.

It is difficult for McDonald to turn any child away.

Lunch did not agree with a 1st-grade boy one day, and he got sick all over his blue jeans. The school office was in a panic. No one was answering the boy's home phone. He was crying. The smell was terrible.

Then McDonald came walking down the hall.

The black-haired boy looked down at his pants. Then he looked up at McDonald with a pathetic expression. "Come on, Caesar," McDonald said, "I'll take care of you."

McDonald knew the boy's family. He knew where the child's baby-sitter lived.

So he put on his hat and his coat and he walked the boy to the sitter's home.

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Thomas J. McDonald said he plans to retire at the end of this school year.

Chicago Tribune
Wednesday, May 18, 1988

For many pupils, learning never starts at home

By Bonita Brodt

Fourth in a series on the Chicago public schools, the system called the worst in the nation by the secretary of education.

The stairwell was dark and the steps groaned as teacher Fani Cahill ventured into the run-down apartment building in Uptown, the place that one of her students knows as home. On the second floor, she knocked firmly on a door.

It opened just wide enough for 12-year-old Antonio Robertson to poke his head out.

"Oh, man," the boy said, scowling.

"I told you I was coming," said Cahill. "I told you I would be here to talk to your mother about what's been going on with you at school."

Antonio's mother, Alberta Robertson, appeared at the door. She looked at Cahill. Then she eyed her son.

"It's good to see you, Miss Cahill," she said, smiling tentatively. "Come on in."

Visiting the homes and classrooms of the children who attend one of Chicago's 402 regular elementary schools reveals that the children's family and school environments are desperately at odds. And the children are caught in the middle.

As part of a seven-month examination of the Chicago Public Schools, The Tribune spent nearly four months with the children of Goudy Elementary, 5120 N. Winthrop Ave.

Antonio lives only a block from Goudy, but like most of the children who depend on the public school system, he has to cross great distances to get to school.

His home is a dark, three-bedroom apartment that is shared by two families. He is one of 15 children who live there.

He does not have his own bed.

Antonio is short and wiry, a lively boy known as "Pooh" who has a quick wit and the kind of street smarts that come with living a lot in just 12 years. Part of him is tough, a lot of mouth. Part of him begs to be a child.

Cahill was visiting because it had been a particularly bad week at school for Antonio, who has

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Kids

Continued from page 1

repeatedly gotten into the kind of trouble that attracts the police.

One morning of this week, he had bolted out of Goudy with two buddies and skipped the better part of the day. Another time, he had fought with his classmates, then slipped down the hall to Room 312. There, he got into an argument with 3d-grade teacher Mary Leahu and knocked the glasses off her face.

"Sometimes, I don't know what to do with the boy," Alberta Robertson said as she walked over to turn down a blaring stereo. She explained that Antonio had become increasingly difficult since his 15-year-old brother was murdered last August when the family was living in the Henry Horner Homes on the West Side.

"Pooh was getting out of hand in the projects," Robertson said. "I wanted to get out and get something better."

So they moved to this crowded apartment in Uptown, doubling up with another family to meet the rent.

Robertson sat down on one end of the couch. Cahill sat on the other. With his head down, Antonio sat in between.

The only light in the living room came from a small lamp. Posters from the Chicago Bears and the Chicago Transit Authority decorated the room. A raincoat dangled from a nail in the wall.

"It was not a mistake," Cahill told Antonio's mother. "He went down and hit the teacher in the face."

"What the hell is the matter with you?" Robertson asked, turning to look at her son. "What you want to go and do that for?"

"Speak up, Antonio," Cahill said.

Antonio said nothing. His nostrils flared.

"Mrs. Robertson, I am very concerned," said Cahill, who, like the Robertson family, is black. "Antonio somehow thinks he is not going to live long. He cannot think about the future. He's very upset about his brother's death.

"He says, 'When I get killed, boy, I'm gonna have the biggest funeral,' and I tell him he's just going to be another nigger dead. We've got a serious problem here, Mrs. Robertson. I want Antonio to make it. What should we do?"

The mother shook her head and was silent.

"I can't do nothin' with him," she finally said, her voice soft. "You might as well just put him away."

Cahill sighed. Then she looked hard at her student.

"Antonio," Cahill said, tugging at his arm. "Do you want to be put away?"

The boy said nothing.

"Look at your mother," she said. "Tell her you don't want to be put away."

He looked down.

"Antonio!," Cahill yelled. "They *can* put you away, do you know that? You won't get out till you're 18. And you ain't as big as a knittin' needle. You'll come out walkin' like a sissy. Do you know that?"

Antonio frowned.

With her arms crossed, Robertson stared at her son as she and Cahill talked for a few more minutes.

Then Cahill gathered up her things and headed for the door. Antonio held it open, but she paused before walking through.

"Until you learn to love yourself, I'm going to love you," Cahill whispered as she put an arm around his shoulders. "We are going to work together, you and I."

Antonio smiled weakly. His lips were trembling.

But he did not cry.

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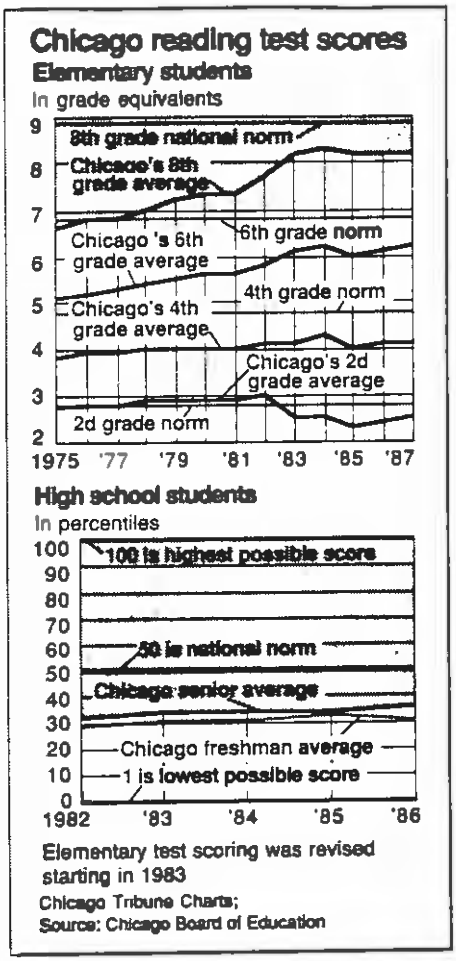
One of the underpinnings of the American system is the belief that its public schools provide a stepping stone to a better life.

But as effective as some of Chicago's elite public magnet schools are for the children of motivated families, the public school system fails utterly in meeting the challenge of educating the students left behind, a staggering number of whom might be at risk of failure from the very first day they walk through the schoolhouse doors.

These very children are part of the system's problem. Many come from desperately poor and unstable families, lacking positive role models, raised by parents who work rarely, if at all, and who move



several times a year in the search of affordable housing.

Some children come to kindergarten still not toilet trained. There are 1st graders who come from homes where there is so little nurturing that they haven't learned colors and numbers. Eight-year-olds who tear pages out of books for toilet paper because they come from homes where there never have been books. Sixth-graders who don't know offhand how many inches there are in a foot because they have never worked with a ruler. Pre-teens who are mystified by the most common nursery rhymes and guess that "Humpty Dumpty" is a rap.

Few of these children have ever been to the zoo.

Few of these children have parents who have much schooling themselves. And these adults are barely prepared to help their children learn, much less to make demands of college-educated teachers and school administrators in an effort to get better schooling for their children.

Yet these impoverished children, who need so much and can be so difficult to teach, are the ones who have no option but to depend on public schools that have the least to offer.

With every scramble to scrape together the money to give teachers a raise to settle a strike, these schools lose a little more.

It is early in elementary school when a child is either turned on to the idea of an education or is forever lost. And at a school like Goudy, so much has been taken away that there is not a lot to keep the children interested unless teachers go way beyond what the system requires of them.

Classes in art and music are long gone. There are no extra-curricular activities. This year, the links to the parents were cut back—the school now gets a truant officer once a week and a social worker only twice a month.

School is a place where as many as 39 Goudy students are crammed into a classroom for the 5½-hour school day. They get no recess, but they do get tattered and out-of-date textbooks that are often in short supply.

Goudy's children come from families so uniformly poor that 98 percent of them qualify for the federal government's free lunch program.

A generation or two ago, many of these children might have left school at an early age to work in an economy that needed unskilled people willing to dig holes by hand or carry heavy things around. But now machines do that, and there is almost no demand for the unskilled, so these children must depend on the schools for whatever hope they have for a better life.

Three decades ago the majority of the student population was white and came from middle-class or working-class homes. Since then, after the racial turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s drove many children out of the public schools,

the student population has changed dramatically.

Today, a full 68 percent of the 419,537 children enrolled in the public school system are poor. Overwhelmingly, they are minority: Sixty percent are black, 24 percent are Hispanic, 2.9 per cent are Asian, and .2 per cent are American Indian or Alaskan; 12.9 per cent are white.

However dramatic this change in the nature of the challenge, the system has changed little in response.

"The schools have always been a middle-class institution with middle-class values," said Michael Bakalis, dean of the School of Education at Loyola University, observing that there is a fundamental conflict between the expectations of the institution and the grim realities of the children of poverty.

While it is unrealistic to think that school can be all things to all children, the job of the institution is to teach. Teachers and school administrators often throw up their hands and ask how the schools are supposed to make a difference when so much is lacking in the home.

School Supt. Manford Byrd Jr., for one, places final responsibility for learning on the children, rather than on the school system.

"The learner must learn for himself or herself," he says.

Not everyone shares his view.

"The school is called upon to play a parent role to compensate for a lack of support," said John McDermott, program chairman of the City Club of Chicago and former editor and publisher of the Chicago Reporter, an investigative newsletter that focuses on racial issues.

"We are losing a whole generation because of the inability of the school system to respond to the children," he said.

This is true of every urban school district in the country with a significant poor population. No American school system has found a way to teach impoverished children effectively and consistently. But a Tribune survey of other major cities found that Chicago lags badly in an emerging national effort to find approaches that work.

"You look at these kids and it's so frustrating," said Henry Caldwell, who teaches 6th grade at Goudy.

"You think, 'I'm teaching and they're not learning,' and you really struggle with that.

"Eventually, you realize that teaching is just not enough."

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"Give me the parents of these children," says teacher Fani Cahill, who has taught at Goudy for 16 years. "Let me show them how to parent and we wouldn't have the problems we have."

One year, Cahill sent a pre-primer reading book home with 8-year-old twin brothers. Several days had passed and the book had not yet made it back.

So Cahill, one of the few Goudy teachers who tries to narrow the gap between the family and the schoolhouse by

making visits to the home, went looking for it.

"I walked into that apartment and I was livid," Cahill recalled. "I demanded to know what happened to that book. The mother told me it was in the bathroom. I said, 'The bathroom?' So I went into the bathroom and found they had torn the pages out and used them as toilet paper. They even showed me how to crumple the pages up and rub them back and forth in their hands to make them soft."

By visiting the homes of many of her students, Cahill said she better understands why they have such a hard time adapting to the structure of school.

"They need mothering more than they need a teacher," Cahill believes.

Cahill has taught lessons about how flowers are for everyone's enjoyment after one of her students went around her classroom and picked all the blooms off her potted plants.

"I passed out dictionaries once to teach a vocabulary lesson," Cahill recalled. "And one of my students started ripping out the pages when he found a word. I said: 'What are you doing? You leave the pages there for the next person.' And he told me: 'That's their problem. This is my word.' So I taught a whole lesson on the value of a book."

But a lot of the time, especially with the children who are the biggest discipline problems, Cahill finds that she does not always get a lot of reinforcement from the home. She has gotten used to that.

One day, she phoned a mother to discuss the volatile temper she was seeing in her son. After she explained the situation, she said the mother made one statement: "I don't know why the f— you're calling me."

Cahill said she called another mother so many times this year that the mother finally told her not to bother her any more and to call the school social worker instead.

"She kept saying, 'When he goes to jail, I'm not going to come for him,' and I kept trying to say, 'We are not talking about 'when,' we are trying to keep that from happening.

"A lot of these parents," Cahill said, "don't seem to see any options."

"Let's tell the truth here," said teacher Bette Jarrow, who started the school year with a room of 1st and 2d graders and one 3d grader, most of whom, she said, did not know all of their colors or their numbers. Only a few could read.

"The school has everything but the labor pains," Jarrow said. "A teacher cannot take mom and dad's place. What am I going to accomplish when mom doesn't take the time to pick up a can of peas and say, 'Green! Round! Peas!'?"

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"I have to be very careful when I assign homework," teacher David LaRue said of his 4th graders. "I have to make sure it's something we've gone over in class. I can't give them something new because many of the parents either don't help the kids or they don't understand the work the kids bring home."

LaRue, 28, grew up poor in the Robert Taylor Homes public housing project on the South Side. But he had the benefit of a family that expected a lot. Above all, it was intact. He works hard to inspire his 37 students.

"I know the odds are against these children," he explained, "I'm just trying to even them up a little bit."

One of the most haunting discoveries LaRue has made about his students is that already, only midway through grammar school, many of them seem to be losing interest in education.

He sees that their eyes are opening to the world around them, and that many are beginning to understand the realities of the isolated and economically deprived neighborhood they are growing up in. He struggles to translate academics into real-life lessons the children can take with them when they leave his

classroom at the end of the school day.

"Sometimes, it's like I'm teaching French," LaRue said.

"These are kids with very little or no self-confidence. Their experience in life has been so limited. They are afraid of learning because it involves something they decide is difficult because it is new.

"These kids are aware of their failures. Some of them act like the game's already over and the other team won.

"And they have to be pushed. They already know they do not have to do a lot of work to get passed on in school."

He knows that a lot of his students are not pushed at home.

He reached in the folder in the bottom drawer of his file cabinet and pulled out a few of the notes that parents have sent to school with their children.

"Christopher has Been absent Last Week Because It was to cold," one of them read.

"Would you please sent Denise home by 12:00 noon Cause I have to go some where and she have no place to go. so if you can give her a pass so she can Leave," another said.

"Gary have a appointment to see the Doctor on friday. I have been going to school. Gary Aunt have been keeping out of school until friday. I think need to be in school."

"Please excuse Tammie for not having her spelling book She let her sister have it she was supposed to have lost it."

LaRue rummaged through a pile of spelling papers until he came up with the paper where "alphabet" was spelled "afeBet," "telephone" was spelled "tellofon," and "enough" was spelled "enof."

Out of the 20 spelling words the children were supposed to study for the test that week, Tammie got only one of them right.

She knew how to spell the month of May.

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Even when parents try to do the best for their children, their actions can be touching but counterproductive. Many just don't know how to help the schools help their children.

Ten minutes after the morning bell rang, Marlena Holman walked meekly into Room 210. The 2d grader hung onto the doorknob as she looked at her teacher. It was not an amicable meeting of the eyes.

"Do you have something for me?" teacher Susan Schindler snapped.

Marlena nodded, and handed her a folded up note from home.

Teacher,

Because of an overload of homework Marlena and I was up until 2:30 a.m. on 1-27-88, hence, we overslept yesterday and she was unable to make it to school.

Parent; L. Holman

Then Marlena went to her desk, reached into her bookbag, and pulled out what appeared to be a three-inch stack of homework papers. Schindler couldn't believe her eyes. Marlena had been absent for eight days and the rules of her classroom are that all work must be made up. But not in one day.

"When you owe me work, you know that doesn't mean you give it to me all at once," said Schindler, a dark-haired woman with sharp features who was frowning as she flipped through the pages.

"To get all this done you stayed up till 2:30 then missed school?"

Marlena nodded.

"Oh, jeez," Schindler said, walking away from the girl and shaking her head.

Mrs. Holman said later at her apartment that she had kept her daughter home because she was sick. Poking her head around her half-open front door, she said also that she felt the schoolwork might be too hard for Marlena.

Schindler, who teaches an accelerated classroom for Goudy's brightest 2d graders, said that Marlena had fallen behind.

"This really frustrates me," said Schindler, "because I care about these

children. She can do the work."

Teacher Susan Belter remembers how her classroom was interrupted by a parent who walked to school to complain about the 20-page paper she had assigned on Ancient Egypt to her 6th and 7th graders.

LaKeisha Showers did not turn one in.

"She told me her father said she didn't have to do it and I said that was not true because that was what I had assigned. Then I look up, and who walks in but LaKeisha's father.

"In front of all the kids, he yells, 'You can't assign that much work to my baby. That's too much for her.' And LaKeisha just sat there and grinned."

Herbert Franklin, LaKeisha's father, explained that he went to school that day and talked to the teacher because his daughter told him she had only one week to do the 20-page paper, and he did not feel that was enough time.

"I told the teacher that was just too much to do in one week," said Franklin, a laid-off die caster.

Asked about his hopes for his daughter, Franklin said he wants her to go to college so she can work as a secretary when she grows up.

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Teacher Cahill got tickled one day when she saw one of the boys in her room for children with behavior problems teetering playfully on the inside window ledge. She called him Humpty-Dumpty and she recited the nursery rhyme.

But none of the pre-teen students knew what she meant.

"They thought it was a rap," Cahill remembered. "They had never heard it. They didn't even believe me until I brought in a book of nursery rhymes and pointed to the page and said, 'Look! Here it is!' "

Ann Jardine, a teacher in one of Goudy's remedial 1st-grade classes, remembers the little girl who came to her room at the age of 7 having never spent a day in school.

"Her mother explained that the girl knew her alphabet, and I said 'Oh?' So she asked the child to sing the alphabet song," Jardine said. "When she was finished, I pointed to some letters on the bulletin board.

"The child had no idea what any of the letters were."

First-grade teacher Helen Harris went to Goudy as a child when the neighborhood was much different. She returned to her public school as a teacher and has been there for 24 years.

But she has still not gotten used to what the children tell her about their family life.

"They talk about fights, knifings, arguments where furniture is thrown and where people are drunk. Many insist there are guns in the house. You really have to step back and think that these are the children you are so desperately trying to teach."

Last year, when Harris found that one of her 1st-grade students had $40, she went to the office and called the parent.

"He said he had just left the store without his cart full of groceries because there was no money in his wallet and I said, 'I know, I've got it right here.' "

The next day, she asked the child what happened.

"Nothing," Harris recalled. "There was no punishment for having stolen money from a parent's wallet."

This year she found one of her 1st graders with $15. She informed the parent, who said the child shouldn't have taken it from home and promised punishment.

The child told Harris the punishment was to watch TV.

"Last year, I was devastated," said Harris. "This year, let's just say I was crucially hurt."

Chicago Tribune
Thursday, May 26, 1988

Dreams, and little else, go with 8th graders

By Bonita Brodt

Fifty-five ribbons will be handed out this year at Goudy Elementary, silken tokens to be worn like badges of honor during the last few days of school. The girls pin them to their blouses. Boys fasten them to their pants.

The children wear them as a prelude to their 8th-grade graduation in June.

They signify the end of the formative years that a child spends in the Chicago Public School system. The end of elementary school, where the underpinnings of failure are often firmly established, where a child is either turned on to the idea of an education or forever lost.

Over the course of a seven-month examination of the Chicago Public Schools, The Tribune spent time with the students who are a part of Goudy's Class of 1988.

These are some of the children Goudy will send on to high school:

There's Chanel Branch, who after a fight with a girlfriend came to school with her cheeks carved up with scratch marks. She is 14, on welfare, and the mother of a 14-month-old son.

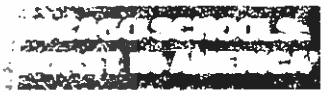
Marc Venton took the initiative to apply to Sullivan High School. But he was not accepted. "He hurt himself," said Barbara Boxton, Goudy's school counselor, who said she understands that he was turned down largely because of his attitude during a personal interview at the school.

Ronald Sims has already joined a neighborhood street gang. "It was stupid," he explains. Yet, he wears his gold earring to flaunt his membership most every day. He points to the mark under an eye, a scar he said he received during his mandatory initiation "violation," 40 hits with bats and sticks. He says he won't subject himself to another 40 hits required for a safe passage out of the gang.

Delia Avila, who said her family speaks only Spanish, has learned English at Goudy. Her teachers say she has made great strides. This year, she reads from a 4th-grade book.

Myreon Flowers has been

See 8th grade, pg. 18



Tenth in a series on the Chicago Public Schools, the system called the worst in the nation by the U.S. secretary of education.

Continued from page 1

tested to read poorer than the average 3d-grader. But he has moved from 7th to 8th grade halfway through the school year because Goudy is strict about following the Board of Education policy that a child, often regardless of academic accomplishment, should be promoted out of elementary school in the year he turns 15.

At the top of the class is Hector Ayala, a soft-spoken boy who wears dark-rimmed glasses. He is called "the smart one" by his peers. First marking period, he received an A in language arts, A+ in math. He liked "Animal Farm," one of the novels he has read this year.

Bobby Brantley is also in 8th grade. But he refuses to sit in teacher Bernice Eiland's class.

So he walks the hallways. Runs errands for teachers. Reads movie star magazines and listens to his Walkman while sitting in the school's behavior-disorder classroom because he likes that teacher. Occasionally, he just leaves the building and says he is going home to watch TV.

He, too, will graduate.

Halfway through the school year, only six of the prospective 8th-grade graduates at Goudy, 5120 N. Winthrop Ave., were considered by their teachers to be performing on an academic level that is expected in 8th grade. Both teachers report that more children are doing better now.

Nearly all have received check marks on their report cards indicating that they need to exercise more self-control.

But if the ribbons will signify anything, it is that none of these things really matter, at least not where 8th-grade graduation is concerned.

What matters is the child's age. That and the U.S. Constitution. State law requires all 8th graders to pass a test on the Constitution before they can be promoted out of elementary school.

"They know they have to pass that test," says Nancy Banks, one of Goudy's two 8th-grade teachers. "It gives us a little magic from January to June."

The test is often administered more than once.

"When I was principal at Schubert [elementary], we had to give the test to some kids five times so the sixth time they would know what it meant," explained Thomas J. McDonald, who for 20 years has been Goudy's principal.

"That was a better school," said McDonald, "so we certainly have to do that here."

At Goudy, one of the public school system's 402 regular elementary schools, everybody knows the unwritten policy:

Eighth-graders do not flunk.

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By the time the children walk into Goudy's 8th-grade classrooms, they have been in school for 8 and sometimes even 9 or 10 years.

In Room 304, Bernice Eiland teaches the brightest 8th graders. These children study from a history book where Ronald Reagan is president.

Next door, Room 302 is for the 8th graders who are farthest behind. Nancy Banks teaches a split class with these 8th graders mixed together with the highest-ranking 7th graders. Her students study history from a text that ends during the presidency of Richard M. Nixon.

Enter Room 304:

Eiland is trying to explain a worksheet on word meanings. She stops to reprimand Margarita Rodriguez for tossing a gum wrapper toward the waste basket. She remarks on the diet of a boy who is making smacking noises as he sucks on a piece of candy before 10 a.m. Then she continues on, explaining each and every direction on the worksheet before she will allow the students to begin.

"What are you supposed to write on your paper first?" she begins.

"Following directions is the most important thing in the world. Life is direction."

She is interrupted by a ripping sound.

"James, that is not the way to turn your page. To turn it over you take the top of the page not the bottom. Demetris, put your book on your desk. Tillis, is that your nice coat on the floor?

"Lastly," Eiland continues, "we have drawing conclusions. What does it mean to draw conclusions? James?"

No answer.

"Mark?"

"Drawing the end?"

"Get out your dictionaries," Eiland commands, sighing. The students all reach into their desks. "Find the word 'conclusion' and read what it means."

Enter Room 302:

The math assignment is on long division. Decimals are involved. Chanel Branch is hiding her pink calculator under her desk to do the problems. The children are chewing gum. Talking. Banks has done her best to give individual attention to everyone who needs it but this exercise dissolves into chaos when the students become frustrated by their inability to do the work.

"Shh! Shh!" begs Banks. She is clapping her hands for emphasis and her voice is getting strained.

"Boys and girls, *please*. Shernette, listen. Wanda, listen. You can learn from

your mistakes as much as anything else."

From these classrooms emerge the children the public schools have groomed to become high school freshmen in the fall.

Both Banks and Eiland say they often have to wonder what the teachers have been teaching during all the years of elementary school.

"Last year, I said to my kids, 'How many of you have studied the Civil War?' and they just looked at me," recalled Banks, a teacher for 33 years. "This year, some of the children do not know their multiplication tables. I was talking about pronouns once and a girl said, 'Miss Banks, what's that?' "

Eiland, who has taught for 18 years, has made similar discoveries.

"Some of these children know nothing about government," she said. "We were having a lesson about the Amendments one day and I asked the children what it meant to bear arms. One of them said like two arms put through a shirt.

"Many of these kids have been lost during grammar school," said Eiland. "When they get to 8th grade, the job is to get them back."

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"When I go out the door in the morning," said 8th grader Chanel Branch, "my little boy be holding onto my leg, crying sometimes. When I get home after school, he be asleep. He misses me when I be at school, and I miss him, too."

Chanel, who became pregnant when she was 12, is a short girl still plump from weight gained during pregnancy. She works hard to keep up with her studies but says it is difficult to do all of her homework at the same time she is trying to care for her son. She named her baby Stephen Dwayne after the doctor who delivered him.

The Tribune asked members of Goudy's Class of 1988 to write essays entitled, "Where do I go from here?" about their plans after graduation.

In hers, Chanel said she wants to graduate from high school and become a "post lady" who delivers mail.

"I could support my baby and help him get a good education and send him through college," Chanel wrote. "If he have kids he will know how to support them and not run out on them like most guys do."

Kim Le was the only student to aspire to the medical profession. He wants to study to be a doctor.

"When I became a very well doctor," Kim wrote, "I would traveled to every poor country to help the people there got well."

Robert Crawford is a 13-year-old who flunked last year. He was making Bs and Cs in his second year of 7th grade when, over the protests of his classroom teacher, he was promoted into 8th grade because the school counselor said he was doing well in reading and his standardized test scores suggested that he was capable of more challenging work.

After he graduates from college with a business major, Crawford said, he plans to open an office in California or Hawaii and own a "lakefront beach home."

"And i'm going to be driving my ninety thousand dollar ferrari. Then by day i'm going to be a lawyer by day and a peaceful man by night," Robert wrote.

James Traywick's plans include getting a scholarship to attend college and getting a job as a bank clerk during his second year as a business major.

"I will get a job at IBM as a data processer," he wrote. "After my second year I will get a loan for a fiero . . . Then after I find me a girlfriend I will propos to her. we will get marry on June third. After we get marry I will by a plane trip to Rio. After we get back from Rio I'll start saving money to by a swimg pool."

Roy Nunez plans to attend a junior college after high school graduation so he will be better prepared for college. "When I get to college I plan on taking engineering classes and play sports," he wrote. "I want to play for a baseball team and if baseball doesnt work out, Ill have my education to fall back on."

Raul Martinez wants to study technical training in high school.

"When and if I graduate High school I want to go to college and get enginerir training," Raul wrote. "if I graduate college I want to Learn How to fix cars and trucks and drive them. But I don't want to drive those Little pizza trucks, I want to drive the "Big rigs" the 18 wheelers Like my father."

After spending two years in classrooms for children with behavior problems, William Tillis was "mainstreamed" into Bernice Eiland's regular classroom this year to prepare for his entry into high school. He has been doing well.

"A lot of times, being in that room made me feel down, like I wasn't no good," explained William, a slender boy who said he often baby-sits his six younger brothers and sisters.

In his essay, he wrote: "When I get in my freshman year, I am going to play basketball, or football. . . . I hope to go to a good college and when I get to colleg I will do six years and get a good degree."

Margarita Rodriguez, a shy girl with a pretty smile, wrote that she plans to attend "Amusen" high school and after that, go to college for four years.

"After I finish College," she wrote, "I want to work with Computers or be an actress."

Candy Gutshall says her mother talks often with her about the importance of staying in school. Her mother, Debbie, said she ditched a lot of classes while at Goudy. She graduated from 8th grade, but dropped out of high school in her freshman year.

"After my 4 years of high school," wrote Candy, "I want to try to find a small job. Then I hope to get a better job later in life. I want to try and get a job as a secretary." Candy also mentioned that she hopes to find a "good-looking guy with money" to marry and who will take her on a week-long honeymoon in Hawaii.

One morning this year, three Chicago police squad cars sped to Goudy after Ronald Sims' teacher told the principal she thought that he was hiding a weapon in his desk. The police, according to Principal McDonald, found a real knife and a toy gun stashed among Ronald's school books.

In his essay, Ronald wrote about the challenge of staying in high school.

"When I do get to High School," he wrote, "I going to try my best to stay in school and not be on the streets . . . High school is going to be tuff, but I'm going to bare with it."

Detric Butler, who says he wants to pursue a career in either decorating, electrical work or machine trades, said that in whatever he does, he wants to be someone who does a good job and offers young children hope.

"The best that I can do for my self and the future of this world is to be a great role model such as Martin Luther King, Daniel Hale to the young people of the future."

Goudy has no organized sports, so Marc Venton plays on Chicago Park District teams. He plans to attend college on a football scholarship and would take courses in accounting because he would need something "to fall back on" if sports did not work out.

"After all my years of playing football I'll be recognized as a great player and drafted into professional football," Venton wrote. He said he would buy his mother a house with his earnings, travel the world when age forces him to retire, and then live off the income he will make from the four apartment buildings he will own.

Hector Ayala intends to graduate with honors from "Lame Technical" high school and hopes to play on the football team there. He said he would also take courses in math and science to prepare for college.

"After, college If I an mot drafted by a proffesional football team, I would go farther in my career and become a lawyer," Hector wrote.

"If I an prosperous in a business or become a succesful Lawyer, I would like to get married, buy a house, near a stream or river, have a car, and start a family. I would also like to give money to charities and special association to help the meedy.

"Finally, I'll retire and live the rest of my days with my family. I chose a river to be by my house because I would also like to go fishing three times a week after I retire."

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Nearly all of Goudy's prospective graduates were assembled in Room 304 one afternoon to hear a counselor from Senn Metropolitan High School make her pitch. "Don't overlook your neighborhood high school" was the topic.

Though members of the Class of 1988

applied to eight different public high schools, most of those who stay in the Uptown neighborhood and go on to high school will either by choice or by default become members of the freshman class at Senn, 5900 N. Glenwood Ave.

The counselor stood at the back of the room and clicked slides through the projector while speaking with the rehearsed enthusiasm of an airline stewardess explaining how to locate the emergency exit doors.

"Honors level means the work is a little bit harder," she offered. Ronald Sims, who was lying across a desktop, looked at classmate Detric Butler and rolled his eyes.

When the counselor flashed a vintage photograph of Senn's first faculty from 75 years ago, Sharese Scott put her head down on a desk. When she looked up once the presentation was through, the girl had sleepy eyes.

To a group of children for whom public school has meant little more than the bare essentials of reading, spelling, math, a little history and a lot of repetitive remedial exercises, this counselor talked about "program options" available in a school with a staff as big as three of Goudy's 1988 graduating classes combined.

"Wow!" Demetris Smith exclaimed in a loud whisper when she said that Senn offers art classes and that a student there designed the city's vehicle sticker one year.

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The colors will be gold and burgundy. They will wear caps and gowns.

Teachers have grown accustomed to the wrinkles. Most years, only a fraction of the class follows directions properly so that the folds in the gowns that come from shipment relax out.

It will cost nearly $30 for each child to take part in 8th-grade graduation this year. It must be paid in cash. School counselor Barbara Boxton said she ordered the "deluxe package" and among the things the money will buy are the class portraits, autograph books, ribbons, caps and gowns, the diploma cover and the special graduation lunch.

Most families will invest even more in clothes.

"They go all out," explained Boxton, who said that some parents buy their daughters formal dresses for graduation that look like lacey bridal gowns.

Last year, the boy at the bottom of the graduating class was dressed better than anyone else.

"He attended only one class during the school day, and that was to learn how to read," recalled teacher Fani Cahill. "And he showed up for graduation in a white tuxedo with a pink cumberbund."

The school usually ends up spending about $300 on each graduation, said Boxton, to cover expenses including the entire graduation package for children whose families cannot afford to pay.

Though he does not like to admit to it, Principal McDonald can be a soft-touch at graduation time. He has been known to dip into his pocket and pay for a new dress or two so a classmate can look just as special as a friend.

June 28 will be a milestone for the 8th-grade students who are a part of the Class of 1988 at Goudy Elementary School.

For if present trends continue within Chicago Public Schools, it will be the only graduation that about half of these children will ever have.

Chicago Tribune
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Reform's a heartache for parents at Goudy

By Bonita Brodt

On a warm night last September, in a Chicago public school where there hasn't been a strong parent organization in about 15 years, an important lesson in the politics of parental involvement was being taught in the auditorium of Goudy Elementary School.

As she looked over the standing-room-only crowd of some 210 people who had come to a meeting that would start the process of selecting a new principal, Lonnie Johnson, a mother of six who is president of Goudy's Local School Improvement Council, wondered how such a golden opportunity could be slipping away so fast.

Chicago Schools: 'Worst in America'
A followup

For nearly a year, Johnson had presided over a council she described as having no real members. Now, a lot of people with vested interests were showing concern. The meeting attracted almost all the school's teachers, Board of Education bureaucrats, seasoned community organizers, neighborhood residents, people who aspired

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to be principal and political factotums from the 48th Ward.

And there were parents. Nearly 140 parents, a fractured agglomeration of low-income and ethnically diverse people who, in this company, were like sheep among the wolves. They would not be made to feel welcome in the decision-making process nor meaningfully educated about the power that suddenly had fallen into their hands.

Worst of all, many would be driven from the one process that could have a profound impact on the future of this troubled Uptown school at 5120 N. Winthrop Ave.

Last spring, a Tribune series called "Chicago Schools: 'Worst in America'" explored the abysmal state of public education in Chicago and focused on some of the system's most debilitating problems as evidenced in the daily operation of Goudy.

Responding to widespread criticism, state lawmakers in July passed school reform legislation that, if it survives political wrangling between lawmakers and Gov. James Thompson in the fall legislative session, will result in a major transfer of power from the monolithic Board of Education to the parents who send their children to Chicago's 595 public schools.

The idea is that parents, who will be handed decision-making powers broader than they have now, will be more attentive to the needs of children than the bureaucracy that for so long has put a host of other issues first.

But Lonnie Johnson isn't so sure.

Before she knew what was happening at this Sept. 27 meeting, Johnson, a diminutive woman with no real leadership experience, had been skillfully muscled out of the way.

"We gotta get on with it," announced District 2 Schools Supt. Howard Sloan when he beat Johnson to the microphone and waved away a teacher who was about to translate interim principal Donald Cohen's welcoming speech into Spanish for the heavily Hispanic crowd.

Sloan had the floor for much of the evening, but did little to tame the circus-like atmosphere that engulfed the room. "We don't need any more noise with the mouths," the $66,960-a-year administrator admonished as he struggled to talk over the din.

Parents who cared enough to come to a council meeting, some for the first time, were confused by a chaotic two-hour session that left their most basic questions unanswered. Instead, it degenerated into a *pro forma* exercise of Sloan's legal obligation to recite school board guidelines to be followed in electing a committee of mostly parents that would nominate candidates for principal.

It was part of a much larger lesson about how community activists, teachers and school bureaucrats have taken an active hand in trying to mold parents to fit their own interests, a situation not unique to Goudy.

"I wasn't prepared for this," said Johnson, who, after being elected committee chairman, resigned in disgust and refused to have anything more to do with the group.

"It's all politics, and I don't like it. People trying to push you and pull you all different ways. It's under the table and dirty.

"I don't like to see parents being used."

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For two decades, Thomas J. McDonald was principal of Goudy. He frequently made house calls to reach out to disadvantaged families, yet kept parents at arm's length when it came to running his school.

When he resigned in August, 45 people applied for his job. And like inhabitants of a country ill-prepared for independence, Goudy's unsophisticated parents found themselves in a position to wield power that plenty of people wanted to show them how to use.

A bitter wedge quickly developed between Hispanic and black parents, a critical split for a school whose enrollment is closely divided between the groups.

Of the 599 children at Goudy and another 127 at the school's Jose Marti branch, about 45 percent are Hispanic and 34 percent are black. Of the remainder, about 11 percent are Asian and 9 percent are American Indian or white.

Johnson, who is black, has never had a lot of help or success

in energizing black parents to come together. Hispanics were quick to mobilize, but they did not accomplish this on their own.

Comite Latino, a North Side group whose goals include improving the social and political status of Hispanics, and the longtime activist group, Organization of the Northeast (ONE), joined forces to organize parents into a group called PAGES, an acronym for Parents Association for Goudy School.

Though Linda Wright, a ONE organizer, explained that PAGES was for all Goudy parents, this was not to be the case.

At the most heavily attended

PAGES meeting, a mostly Hispanic crowd of nearly 90 parents gathered in an Uptown church basement. Much of the Spanish was not translated for the handful of black and Asian parents there.

But a key PAGES agenda—to push for a Hispanic principal—was universally understood.

"This was my invitation," grumbled Joyce Ross, a black parent who displayed a flyer, written in Spanish, that had been sent to her home.

"We're all in this damned mess together," said Tyrone Johnson, also black. "But these people want to improve things for only one group."

The split grew even deeper as the school year approached and Carlos Soto became a highly visible candidate.

"I feel I have a lot to offer Goudy," said Soto, a 33-year-old Puerto Rican who since last spring has let it be known in various circles that he wants to be Goudy's principal. He has spent 12 years in the system, the last four as assistant principal at predominantly Hispanic McPherson Elementary, 4728 N. Wolcott Ave.

Before Francisco Mendoza, a PAGES leader, was elected to the committee, he was declaring his preference for one man.

"Carlos Soto," he said in an interview. "I believe Carlos Soto is the best person for the job."

Mendoza, influential among Hispanic parents, said he first learned of Soto through Hispanic teachers. But his formal introduction came over the summer in the Comite Latino office where organizer Manuel Melendez saw that the two met.

Twice, Soto accepted invitations from Melendez and appeared at gatherings of Hispanic parents. Though Melendez said he knew of other candidates, he said there was "no particular reason" why he did not extend such invitations to anyone else.

While it is entirely within his purview to provide an *entre* for just one candidate, his actions raise questions about how parents can be unwittingly susceptible to the influence of outside groups.

Melendez shrugs off such questions. "I knew he [Soto] wanted to be principal. I'm not a campaign organizer for Carlos, but if you want my personal opinion, I want Carlos for the job."

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A fraction of the parents who turned out for the first council meeting were still showing up in October, when it was time to get down to the crucial business of electing the committee.

"A lot of teachers were not our allies," said Lonnie Johnson. "They were hypocrites. They would pull me aside and say parents better get their act together, then they'd start badmouthing other teachers who seemed to be for one candidate or another. One said, 'You know, Lonnie, we don't need a principal who's a Jew.' "

While Howard Sloan maintains he tried to be helpful, Johnson feels the opposite.

"His way of dealing with me was 'Don't worry, we'll take care of it,' and I needed answers, not that."

"I've never seen anything like this," said Penny Kajiwara, an Uptown woman whose behind-the-scenes efforts for parents over the last 20 years have won her wide respect and the clout that enables her to get some board members, administrators and Sloan to listen when she calls.

She jumped into the battle over the summer when word circulated that Sloan was backing one candidate, Sharon Bender. An interim principal at another school, Bender has political connections with the regular Democrats in the Goudy area and ran unsuccessfully for 48th Ward alderman in 1987.

"I got on the phone and let him know I was watching," said Kajiwara. "I said, 'You know, you're only one person, Mr. Sloan. You're not going to screw up that building because I'm going to get involved.' "

Sloan denies he has backed any candidate. More recently, however, he has been said to favor Carlos Soto.

There are no Hispanic principals in District 2.

Under Kajiwara's tutelage, Johnson worked to mend divisions. On the first Saturday in October, the two of them went to a parents meeting at Francisco Mendoza's house that was supposed to lessen tensions between PAGES and the council.

Soto was there at Mendoza's invitation. And in front of everyone, two of the school's most influential bilingual teachers created even more divisions when they argued over his candidacy: Rose Dela Rosa, a Puerto Rican, publicly supported Soto for principal. Angela Vilasusa, a Cuban, did not.

"I thought, 'Wait a minute. Wait a minute.' I always believe in doing things legally," said Kajiwara. "I will play behind closed doors, but this was not the way to go about the process. I knew Carlos. I liked him. There was a good chance he might be the best candidate.

"But this was not proper. It must be fair."

Sloan said he learned of what happened "many days later" and could not recall precisely how he found out. Kajiwara, however, said she was on the phone with him shortly before 8 a.m. the following Monday to complain about the episode at Mendoza's house.

To her surprise, her phone call appeared to set off a chain of events widely interpreted as an effort by the district office to put a stop to the wild confusion by subtly trying to influence who would be elected to the committee.

A few hours after Kajiwara said she made her call, Ray Reddick, a District 2 official, appeared at Goudy and summoned the two bilingual teachers out of the building along with a black teacher, Ruby Smith, who had worked for Soto last summer but had not been at Mendoza's house.

"Basically, the incident had to be addressed," said Reddick, who walked the three to a restaurant.

But he covered additional ground.

Over coffee, Reddick instructed the teachers to sit together and agree on a list of 11 people they thought would be good choices to serve on the committee.

"It was merely an exercise," said Reddick, who said the list was meaningless except as a vehicle to unify the teachers.

The teachers, apparently, were not so sure.

"We [the teachers] were talking about that when we walked back," said Dela Rosa. "I got the feeling, when we left, that we were supposed to work with parents to get them elected."

Then some curious events began to unfold.

Copies of a list with 11 names circulated throughout the school.

Lonnie Johnson was talking about the committee with a Goudy staff member when the subject of her interest in working as a school crossing guard came up.

"The person said, 'We can make a few phone calls,' and I was being told that if I found a way to get some people on the committee, they would help me get the job."

One morning, when Kajiwara was in Goudy, she said Ruby Smith took her aside.

Smith declined comment for this article. Kajiwara, however, said the two sat down in the auditorium to talk.

"Ruby wanted to discuss the composition of the committee," said Kajiwara. "I said how can we say who will be on the committee? I said the only way we can do this legally is when the body elects their representatives.

"She took out a piece of paper and wrote down 11 names, hers was one. Then she handed me the paper, and said 'This is Mr. Sloan's list.' "

"I have no idea why Ruby Smith would say that," said Howard Sloan.

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When the ballots were counted, nine parents, three teachers, and one community member had been elected to the 13-member committee.

Two of them—a community representative employed by District 2 and a parent who works at Goudy—are members that board spokesman Robert Saigh described as "generally discouraged" because of the potential conflict-of-interest arising from their less-than-independent status with the schools.

Though reform legislation will streamline the procedure for nominating a principal, under the current law this committee will come up with three top choices and Howard Sloan will pick one. Last year the average salary for a Chicago principal was $53,871.

The new legislation does virtually nothing to address the issue of outside interests tampering with parental control.

"I've learned a lot about the politics of being a candidate," said Soto, who along with Sharon Bender made the cut from 45 applicants to 18 finalists.

Knocked out of the running, candidate Diana Azcoitia is crying foul.

"Even board people told me, 'don't even bother' to apply to Goudy because it's going to be Carlos Soto," said Azcoitia, a coordinator of bilingual education for the schools.

"I call this electing a principal Chicago-style. It's an unfair process for the rest."