

PURE Tips & Updates for LSCs

Spring 2007

Stop the CPS LSC power grab

Chicago Public Schools officials are working hard to find a sponsor for a change in state law to take away the LSC's principal selection power.

Don't do it!

Legislators we talk to are generally not supportive of the idea. Retired state Senator Arthur Berman, an original architect of the school reform law, publicly told CPS, "Don't do it!"

But anything can and does happen in Springfield and we must prepare for it.

CPS attack nothing new

Over the past few years, CPS and the Board of Education have done everything they can to undermine LSCs. For example:

- There are no current LSC training manuals available, so LSCs have to "trust" CPS's word on LSC policy and procedure (*see p. 3 for more on this topic*).
- CPS passed a policy last January giving themselves the power to fire your principal (*more on p.4*).
- CPS changed the SIPAAA (school improvement plans) from a one year to a 2-year plan in 2006, just before the last LSC election. New LSCs are not being given the opportunity to change a plan approved by the prior LSC, and the next plan will not be approved until after the next LSC election. Some LSCs are not being told that SIPAAAs can legally be changed at any time, and must be reviewed and, if needed, revised at least once a year (*more on p.3*).
- CPS recently raised the level for probation status to 55% of students

meeting or exceeding state standards, putting more schools in a category where the LSC no longer has a vote on the SIPAAA or budget. Yes, folks, in Chicago more than half of the children must now be **above average** for their parents to have a voice in their school.

- Of course, every time CPS closes a school, it disbands the LSC.

What can LSCs do?

Call your state house and senate reps now! All contact information is available on the Illinois General Assembly web site, ilga.gov, or by calling 312-793-3500.

Tell them that

- ▶ You oppose any change in LSC authority.
- ▶ LSCs have done a good job overall with principal selection (studies show greater improvements in schools with active LSCs).
- ▶ LSCs need the leverage of the contract to assure that principals will follow the law and work with the LSC.
- ▶ City Hall is too mired in hiring scandals to be given direct control over 500 principal contracts.
- ▶ LSCs need **more** support, not less.

Ask them to COMMIT to opposing any bill that diminishes LSC authority. And **invite them to your next LSC meeting**. They need to see real LSCs at work.

The truth is out

People all over the city are recognizing that CPS, the school board, and the mayor want to get rid of LSCs.

CPS already behaves though LSCs are advisory only. In doing so, they show a lack of respect for the law and for the work of the tens of thousands of LSC members who have served and are serving as unpaid volunteer school officials, and who often put their safety and well-being on the line to serve.

School board meetings have

become especially unpleasant. Meetings seem like infomercials for Renaissance 2010 schools. LSC members are treated rudely and contemptuously.

The backlash against this disrespect has already begun, most clearly in the case of Curie High School (*see next story*).

Curie LSC, the news, and the truth

It's always an eye-opener to see the difference between an incident you know about first hand and the way it is reported in the news media. There's usually a pretty big difference. Yet people generally believe most everything they read or hear about events or people they have no direct personal knowledge of.

The Curie High School principal non-selection issue is a classic case. People all over the city made up their minds about the LSC based on news reports of what the Mayor and CPS said about them.

Real people, real heroes

Some of the Curie LSC members called PURE for help after reading newspaper quotes critical of Mayor Daley's stance from PURE's Wanda Hopkins and Julie Woestehoff. We met with two of the LSC members to determine for ourselves whether the LSC had been acting within the law. We were satisfied that they were.

No knee-jerk support

PURE has been criticized for supporting LSCs no matter what, but many LSC members are well aware of the fact that we do not support illegal

or unethical behavior on anyone's part.

We helped the LSC members put on a press conference on March 27, to help them begin to get their side of the story out. Of course, they are unable to go public with their reasons for not renewing the principal's contract. But they were able to make a statement refuting many of the accusations that had been made against them, including the charge of racism.

In our press statement, PURE recommended that Mayor Daley ask for and view the student video tapes of several previous Curie LSC meetings to watch the behavior of the Curie principal (the students had showed them to PURE's Julie Woestehoff). We also urged him to watch to see if the principal showed up to the March 31st LSC special meeting.

Well, the mayor has been pretty quiet since then. The principal did not show up for the March 31 meeting, so the LSC was unable to fill a parent vacancy or approve budget transfers needed by the school. The students' documentary is now out on You Tube (search for Curie LSC), so more people can see for themselves the climate in which the LSC has to work. The scenes most damaging to the principal were not included, but what is there is still disturbing.

CPS investigates

Our press conference also challenged CPS's "investigation" of two Curie LSC members' English speaking abilities, which publicly opened up the whole question of the basis for and methods of CPS investigations. The principal has charged the LSC with failing to have a translator available for her closed-session response to their evaluation of her.

The first problem is that the investigator doesn't speak Spanish or have any kind of appropriate credentials for making a judgment about the English-speaking abilities of LSC members via a phone conversation.

Second, there was no basis for CPS to investigate. The charge, if true, does not violate anything under CPS's authority.

Despite the way they act, CPS has limited authority over LSCs. They can

remove an LSC member for failure to take all 18 hours of their training, for not being eligible (i.e. not being the legal parent of a student or living within the school voting boundaries) or for an ethics violation. They can investigate issues appropriate to that authority. That's it. The decision to have a translator in a meeting is under the LSC's authority, not CPS's.

If the principal believes that her right to a fair evaluation was violated, she can bring that issue to the arbitration process or sue the LSC directly. The CPS Law Department will not be representing her. Her own lawyer will hire an investigator if one is needed.

But most likely her lawyer won't waste his client's money because, as Virginia Martinez of the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) said at our press conference, the most appropriate persons to determine if they need a translator are the LSC members.

Stay awake!

What next? Will CPS investigate every LSC member to make sure they stayed awake or paid full attention throughout the principal's self-evaluation? Will there now be a CPS investigator calling each LSC member at home to quiz them on the principal's report so that CPS can make sure everyone heard and understood everything?

The most disturbing part of this is the statement by CPS that they are "obligated" to investigate all complaints that are made to them. This is, of course, not true, especially when they consider anything they themselves want to investigate as a legitimate complaint.

Even in post-9/11 America, investigating someone is considered an invasion of privacy and should only be done in the most necessary of circumstances. Even then, legal protocols must be followed. CPS recklessly investigates anyone for anything, any time. PURE has a binder full of examples of LSC harassment at the hands of CPS.

The frustrating flip side is that when LSC members complain about something, CPS's investigation consists

of asking the accused person (usually CPS staff) if they did what the LSC member said they did. CPS accepts their denial without question and closes the case.

Conflict of interest

Witnesses against Curie LSC chair Tom Ramos at his April 13 ethic hearing were the Curie principal, the one LSC parent representative who supports her, and various CPS staffers who supposedly also "help" the LSC – including Jose Villasenor from the Law Department. This makes a mockery of due process.

PURE has written a legislative proposal that turns these procedures over to a neutral party.

Obama on LSC principal arbitration process

Thanks to Don Moore from Designs for Change for passing along this item from the archives: a 1999 transcript of then-state senator Barack Obama getting clarification on the proposed principal arbitration process. It's clear that the next prez supports the LSC's authority to make principal contract decisions.

Here's a highlight: "George Karle was the coach of the Seattle SuperSonics. They always had a winning record every year, but they never actually won a championship, and, finally, Seattle got rid of him. In this situation, if you've got a principal who's done an okay job but, at some point, the local school council determines, 'You know what? We think that there's another candidate who can take us to the next level', under that standard, as long as they can document that it was a reasonable choice, then that is going to be okay."

Read the entire exchange between Obama and Senator Art Berman from May, 1999, on our web site, www.pureparents.org, or call the office for a copy (312-491-9101).

PURE and our attorney, Elaine Siegel, first came up with the idea to use independent arbitration in these contract non-renewal cases. It's time to apply that same concept to other areas currently under CPS control, such as LSC eligibility hearings.

LSC still decides SIPAAA and budget

This has been a pretty bad year for accountability. First it was the late ISAT results, now the last-minute rush to get the budgets approved.

SIPAAA can always be revised

LSCs are being told that the SIPAAA is for two years and can't be changed. This is utter nonsense. First of all, state law calls for a three-year school improvement plan. But even at that, the plan must be reviewed and can be revised annually if there are aspects of the plan that are not working as they should. That's only common sense. In fact, SIPAAAs can be revised at *any* time by a majority vote of the LSC.

Budgets pre-approved by AIO?

Some LSCs have been told that their budget for the coming year has already been approved by the AIO. Again, this is nonsense. AIOs have no legal authority over your budget. In the case of probation schools, CPS can designate the AIO to decide how a specific portion of your budget is spent, based on the costs of the specific CPS-determined corrective action plan for your school. That plan and budget must be reviewed every year. LSCs of probation schools should keep very close tabs on that corrective action plan and insist that CPS show that it is working – that is, leading directly to improvements in student outcomes – or demand that the plan be revised.

LSC training material...

Where is it???

It's sure hard out there for LSC members when we don't have the up-to-date guidebook that used to be

provided after every LSC election.

The LSC Leadership Development Guide, which was written in 2002, has not been updated or distributed to LSC members elected in 2006.

New manual done 6 months ago

A new 2006 LSC guidebook was prepared by PURE, Designs for Change, and Cross City Campaign under a contract with the CPS School and Community Relations office. Our goal was to create an accurate, useful document that would give LSCs the information you need in a positive and accessible format. We think we succeeded.

Each group used our own materials and prior versions of the CPS manual as well as the experience gathered in our combined 60-plus years of LSC training. We reviewed each others' work to catch errors and shared ideas about the best ways to present information.

We started this project at the end of August. We delivered a completed package of LSC lessons 1-6 before the end of October, 2006. Six months ago.

We have an agreement with the Office of School and Community Relations that we can review their final draft before it goes to the printer. We have been waiting to do that review but have been told for several months that the draft is still "in the Law Department."

Keep in mind that this manual also has to be translated, at least into Spanish, before LSC members see it.

We are very concerned about the delay in getting this valuable resource into LSC members hands. We are also concerned about any changes that CPS might make to our work. Over the years, PURE and others, including other lawyers, have disagreed with a number of interpretations of the law by the Law Department and others at CPS. These range from what to do about Open Meetings Act violations to the powers of LSCs of probation schools. We know some compromises will have to be made but the law must be accurately presented. We are anxious to finish this process.

College of Education Deans helping

Under state law, CPS is supposed

to collaborate with the Chicago-Area Deans of the Colleges of Education (CCADE) in matters of LSC training. This is a holdover from the original 1995 law which put the Dean of the University of Illinois-Chicago in charge of developing the training curriculum and process.

PURE was able to bring the delay in delivering LSC guidebooks to CCADE's attention at their April 17th meeting. We understand that they will be contacting the Board of Education to find out how this situation is going to be resolved.

The back story

CPS originally contracted with a local university to rewrite the manual. After many requests, PURE and others were allowed to look at a draft version.

What we saw concerned us. The format was not user-friendly and much of the content was incorrect. For example, the document was not well organized for finding specific rules or legal points. The information about the make-up of the LSC in the first pages was incorrect.

At first we were asked to submit edits and other suggestions to this document. PURE has done this for free several times over the years. However, we knew that this time CPS had paid the university \$50,000 for the problematic draft – and we were being asked to fix it for free.

Instead, PURE, Cross City and DFC submitted a proposal to write a new manual based on previous CPS versions and incorporating our own best material. Our proposal was accepted and we received \$25,000 which was split among the groups based on the number of lessons we prepared.

We are very pleased with the results and hope that LSC members will soon have this resource in your hands.

What can LSCs do?

Call Arne Duncan (773-553-1500) and City Hall (312-744-1234) and ask when your LSC manual will be available. Call regularly.

Changes at SCR

Since our last newsletter came out, James Deanes has been replaced as Officer of School and Community Relations by Carole Wood. We had been waiting at least three years for this

promised change in direction for SCR, and welcome the new leadership.

Carole Wood has made some positive changes in the department. LSC training is actually available on a regularly scheduled basis (unlike after the 2004 election when PURE did most of the training that was available – and CPS refused to pay us for any of it). She is conscientious and accessible.

Policies further undermine LSCs

Unfortunately, the change at SCR has not slowed the continued attack on LSCs by the Duncan administration. At least two anti-LSC proposals were approved at the January, 2007, Board meeting.

Attack on LSC-principal contract

The first policy illegally allows the Board to terminate a principal's contract without LSC approval and outside of the legal termination processes allowed under probation, educational crisis, or removal for cause.

The policy completely ignores the LSC's legal role to select and evaluate the principal, excluding the group most concerned and informed about the principal's performance.

It has been affirmed in court (CPS v. Martin) that the four-year contract is between the LSC and the principal and that CPS is not a party to the contract despite all their assertions. So they cannot "fire" a principal without going through one of the three processes mentioned above.

This is a lawsuit waiting to happen. Unfortunately, the Chicago Principals' and Administrators' Association has apparently let CPS walk right over them. Schools will suffer as principals become even more conflicted about the lines of accountability.

Don't ask to be a real LSC

The second new policy redefines governance in new schools. This is another overreaching policy that makes it clear CPS is bent on eliminating LSCs.

The proposal formalizes CPS practices that have obstructed the formation of LSCs in small and other non-traditional schools so far. Under this policy, these schools will never have LSCs but mere advisory bodies appointed by the Board.

CPS is watching you

Perhaps the most offensive part of this policy is the "code of conduct" section which allows the Board to remove any member of an appointed advisory body who "disrupts the educational process at the school."

Of course, this could be based on anything. Since the appeal process will be run by CPS, don't expect to win.

An advisory group whose members can be removed for any reason by the appointing body cannot possibly provide meaningful public representation. As Pinocchio found out, there's a world of difference between being a puppet and being a real boy.

No educational basis for policy

At the Board meeting where this policy was approved, Arne Duncan stated that they have determined that advisory bodies work best for small or alternative schools (of course, most new CPS schools are either small or alternative). Well, we checked with Mike Klonsky, the director of the Chicago-based Small Schools Workshop, who assured us that there is no research supporting such a statement.

CPS ignores positive research on LSCs

The way Arne Duncan and CPS have rejected any meaningful public involvement in the schools is especially disturbing given the growing research that LSC governance is a more effective approach to school improvement than the kind of top-down intervention outlined in these two policies (see *Five Essential Supports*, p. 5).

Legal remedy in the works

PURE is working on legal action to address some of these power grabs.

We'll keep you posted.

Find the Board of Education policies:

Go to cps.k12.il.us, About CPS, Board of Education, Board Actions, January 2007 meeting, Small Schools Governance PO2, Principal Remediation PO3.

Join PURE!

Use the membership form on the back of this newsletter, or use the Donate Now! button at www.pureparents.org.

CPS parent survey

During April report card pick up, all CPS parents were given a survey to fill out asking for their feedback about the school and about their involvement.

This is a great step for CPS to take and was motivated to some extent by the parent involvement survey PURE carried out in 2006 (see p. 8). We surveyed about 10% of all CPS parents and even then the positive feedback was strong – parents were so excited about being asked for their opinions!

PURE provided technical assistance to CPS for their survey; in fact, many of the questions come from our survey. We'll be very interested to hear what parents think about it, and to see the results.

This survey finally puts parent involvement on the radar screen at CPS. We expect that schools, LSCs, and NCLB Parent Advisory Committees will get a lot of good information to use in planning local parent involvement programs.

HB 200

Illinois legislators move to fix CPS school closing process

Given the continued lack of evidence that closing and restructuring schools improves outcomes for students, it is encouraging that the state legislature is moving towards increasing accountability and giving the community a larger voice in school closing processes.

HB200 was introduced by Rep. Cynthia Soto who, with former Senator Miguel DelValle, held several meetings with interested groups including PURE to formulate the language of the bill.

HB200 will allow CPS to close a school only if closure is necessary to best serve the school-age children of that community, and then only if CPS uses measurable criteria for closings developed in conjunction with local school councils throughout the school district and applies the criteria consistently.

The proposed law also requires public hearings and voting procedures, alternative school enrollment, transitional services, and an annual report including a report on the impact of the school closure on the children who attended the school.

Given the data recently published by Catalyst, that only 2% of students from schools closed under Renaissance 2010 are actually attending the new schools, this legislation is critical. It will force CPS to be more accountable for the effect that school closings have on children.

Find the school closure bill: Go to ilga.gov, search for HB200 (left column)

Five Essential Supports Work

The newest evidence about what really improves schools can be found in a September, 2006, report from the Consortium on Chicago Research, *“The Essential Supports for School Improvement.”*

The Consortium found that “schools strong in most of the essential supports were at least ten times more likely than schools weak in most of the supports to show substantial progress in both reading and mathematics. These schools were also very unlikely to stagnate.

“In contrast, not a single school that was weak in most of the supports showed substantial improvements in mathematics.” (p. 2)

Five Essential Supports part of reform history

The Five Essential Supports is a framework developed in 1994 under Superintendent Argie Johnson with input from an inclusive group of stakeholders including PURE. It was used then as the basis for school improvement planning.

The Vallas administration discarded the holistic improvement approach in favor of high-stakes testing and punishing and labeling schools.

Designs for Change’s Don Moore has used this framework in his research

over the years, most recently in *“The Big Picture.”* That report concludes that holistic reform under effective LSCs works better than top-down intervention.

In 2006, CPS brought the Five Essential Supports back, slightly disguised as the “Five Fundamentals” of the “Great Schools Model.”

Are some communities too weak to have LSCs?

The Consortium report is generally encouraging to those of us who believe that schools improve when they have enough of the right resources, and not through more testing, labeling, or threats of retention, firing, or closure.

Where the report’s analysis breaks down is in its suggestion that some communities have such weak “social capital” that LSCs probably aren’t a good idea: “...schools with strong essential supports were fairly rare in communities with low levels of social capital. This fact raises serious questions about decentralization as a strategy for reforming the most disadvantaged urban schools...in the end, decentralization seemed to reinforce preexisting social inequalities among school communities.” (p. 47)

This suggests that people in the poorest communities are too life-challenged to have a say in their children’s education. That idea may bolster the Mayor’s efforts to close struggling schools and give them to private managers, but it sounds a little, well, racist.

It’s also contradicted by a 2004 study which found that LSCs actually **build** social capital in more disadvantaged communities. Dr. Archon Fung wrote in *Empowered Participation* that having a voice through the LSC had a strong positive impact in communities where there was little other opportunity for meaningful participation.

We know from our own experience what poor parents can and will do for their children when given some tools and support.

The Consortium report suggests that poor communities should receive extra assistance in strengthening other essential supports. We agree, and further recommend that the extra

resources should include more LSC and parent training and support rather than disempowerment.

Find the Consortium reports: Go to ccsr.uchicago.edu, Research and Publications, select publications.

Time to renew NCLB

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is scheduled to be reauthorized this year. That means that the law has to be approved again, and that now is the time to make any changes. No one knows if the law will actually be reauthorized (renewed) in 2007. In the past, reauthorization of the federal education laws has taken one or two extra years beyond their set “expiration date.” NCLB will continue in its present form until it is renewed.

Public wants major change

According to a Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, the country wants major changes in NCLB. “The public rejects the punitive approach found in NCLB, favors a broad curriculum, prefers more appropriate measures of school performance than a single high-stakes test, and supports efforts targeted at helping our most vulnerable students.”

NCLB reformers are concerned that a quick renewal will short-circuit efforts to make any major changes in the law and leave us with the same problems for another five or more years. But if reauthorization is delayed into 2008, the high-stakes climate of a presidential election will probably make it impossible to pass a revised NCLB until 2009.

Positive proposals on the table

The Forum on Educational Accountability (FEA) has prepared a set of proposals to address the negative, damaging aspects of NCLB and strengthen its more effective elements. They focus on improvements in teacher professional development, parent involvement, and assessment.

PURE helped develop the FEA proposal to strengthen the NCLB parent involvement components to improve the implementation and effectiveness of this aspect of the law.

Find the entire FEA proposal at www.edaccountability.org.

Time for change in the state of shame?

Illinois' education system (motto "second to none") has scored another bottom ranking – 47th among the 50 states in the amount of funding the state provides for education.

In the latest national report card, Illinois had the largest achievement gap between low-poverty and high-poverty students in the nation in three of four tests in reading and math. Illinois ranks 47th among the 50 states in the amount of funding the state provides for education.

State funding in Illinois covers, on average, just 36 percent of the cost of educating a student, far less than the national average of about 50 percent. Illinois ranks an embarrassing first in the nation in the size of the per-pupil spending gap between wealthy and poor school districts. This spending gap has been widening each year.

In general, Illinois remains a low tax state overall, ranking 47th in the nation, and increasing the state commitment to education would not change that.

Now?????

Many political analysts are saying that this may be the best chance we've had in 10 years to get real reform in state school funding.

Please take a look at the information and suggestions at A+ Illinois (www.aplusillinois.org) or call them at 1-877-APLUSIL or 312-863-6014.

PURE is a member of A+ Illinois.

Show US the money

There sure is money in the great state of Illinois, and especially in Chicago, for things that some people care about.

- ▶ Millennium Park cost \$475 million.
- ▶ \$50 million has been pledged for

Renaissance 2010.

- ▶ Chicago has \$25 million in contributions socked away in the bank to finance the city's Olympic bid. That's \$5 million more than we were required to have in the bank by March 31 in order to compete with Los Angeles to be the U.S. candidate.

Loss of more LSC support groups

In February, 2007, Chicago lost two more school advocacy groups, Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform and Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (NCBG).

Cross City and NCBG were nationally-recognized organizations which nurtured civic engagement in Chicago by supporting LSCs and helping communities become more involved in the work of school improvement.

Cross City was the first national group that defined what a decentralized school district should look like and described the new role for the central office in improving instruction. They built a diverse national network of people inside and outside school districts, utilizing site visits and national conferences on issues affecting urban schools to learn best practices.

NCBG partnered with LSCs and community groups to get new schools built and needed repairs for others. Both groups helped LSCs, parents, and the community to understand how public money – their money – is used.

Current local research ("Five Essential Supports") demonstrates that parent and community involvement is critical to improved student performance.

Cross City and NCBG challenged ineffective, damaging reforms and supported inclusive, proven strategies. Attempts by city leaders to marginalize and shut down such programs are self-serving and short-sighted and will ultimately shortchange our children, our schools and our communities.

PURE continues to hang in there

despite big cuts in our own funding. More and more we rely on our members and friends to support our work. Think about it, and then think about checking out the membership form on the back page, or the Donate Now! Button on our web site. Thanks!!!

Internet safety

The Cook County Sheriff's

department runs an excellent program on internet safety which includes workshops and informational materials such as the following tips:

- # Keep the computer in a family room rather than the child's bedroom.
- # Read about and familiarize yourself with on-line services and learn how to log on with your child.
- # Establish a password for your computer to prevent children from being online without your knowledge.
- # Instruct your children never to give out personal information on the computer, such as their name, address, phone number, school name, or a photograph.

- # Instruct your children not to respond to any messages that are mean or make them feel uncomfortable and to notify you immediately.
- # Consult a computer dealer regarding the use of blocking software.
- # Make going online a family activity; spend time with your children while they're online.

Free in-school workshops are available for parents, students, and staff. To set up a workshop on Internet Safety contact the Cook County Sheriff's Office Speakers Bureau (312) 603-6409.

Where's the real voter apathy?

A recent TIME magazine article (4/12/07) looked at Chicago's LSC voting procedures which allow undocumented persons and other non-citizens to vote in the LSC election. TIME said, "The city doesn't track

noncitizen voting, but a district spokesman says turnout is low.”

Compared to what, we wondered? Mayor Daley just won another term with about 300,000 votes. Overall vote totals in every LSC election have topped 100,000 – not a bad comparison for a school board election, which generally attract the least number of voters nationwide.

LSC IDs

A few years ago, after several LSC members were arrested for trespassing when attempting to carry out their duties in their own schools, PURE proposed that every LSC member have an official LSC ID Badge. We felt that every LSC member gets the same background check as school staff, and that LSC members are school officials who play an important role in the school. It just makes sense for LSC members to have a similar status as school and central office staff.

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan agreed and LSC IDs became available in 2003.

This is how it has worked

You should get a letter from your school on school letterhead, identifying you as an LSC member from that school.

Take the letter, and a smile, to the CPS Central Office, 125 S. Clark Street. You may want to call ahead – 773-534-3012 – to make sure someone will be there. Check in at the lobby security desk and ask where to go to get your ID (the office moves around – most recently it’s been across the hall from the Subway sandwich shop).

LSCs can prepare the letters

While it is the principal’s responsibility to provide the letter you need, most LSC members who came to get an ID in the first year had not received one. They had to go up to the fifth floor to get a letter from Local School Council Relations. However, an official letter from the LSC secretary or chair should be sufficient.

ID not required!!! You are not required to have an ID! This is just a

service for those LSC members who wish to have a school ID.

What’s PURE? And what’s Tips and Updates for LSCs?

Newer LSC members may not have heard of us. PURE stands for Parents United for Responsible Education. PURE is a non-profit parent and LSC advocacy and training organization. PURE was founded by a group of parents and teachers in 1987 just before the School Reform Act was passed establishing LSCs at every Chicago public school. We have been providing workshops and support for parents and LSCs ever since.

PURE workshops

PURE’s LSC and parent workshops are user friendly, accurate, and empowering. We schedule our sessions at a time and place that make sense for you. We provide workshops on the full range of LSCs powers and duties. We also provide parent involvement workshops in all areas including Parent Leadership, Home-School Connections, and Healthy Families. We’re offering new parent workshops on the CPS Benchmark Assessments which help parents understand state learning standards and how they can help their children at home to meet those standards.

Advocacy

We also help parents with individual problems (special education, discipline, etc.) and we work for more responsible education policies at the local school level, CPS, state and federal levels. Some of our major issues are educational equity and improved student testing, school accountability, and parent involvement policies.

Up until about two years ago, PURE mailed a quarterly newsletter to every LSC member at their home address. PURE *Tips and Updates for LSCs* helped keep LSCs informed about policies, issues and concerns that affect LSCs and schools.

Then about two years ago, we began to experience major cutbacks in local funding for our LSC work. The same the loss of funding caused several LSC support programs to close their doors recently (see p.6). PURE has decided to ride this out by hunkering down, downsizing, and increasing our income from fee-for-service work such as No Child Left Behind parent involvement programs. We figure that we started out with very little in the way of budget and staff, and we can go back to that. And frankly, we’re just too stubborn to go.

Going mostly paperless

We are still committed to providing timely, useful information to LSCs. We know you need it! We’ve decided that the best way to do that is through the Internet, with a paper copy back-up for those who prefer that. We know not everyone has easy access to the Internet, but many of you do and it just makes sense to use all the resources available.

So, here’s the deal for now. We will write *Tips and Updates for LSCs* newsletters as often as we can and post them on our web site. We will mail occasional post cards to all LSC members letting you know what’s available on the web site and offering to mail paper copies of these resources to anyone who calls and asks.

Call us!

We also keep our outgoing voice mail message pretty up to date. Call us at 312-491-9101 or 877-491-PURE. When there’s a new *Tips and Updates* issue out, we’ll say so on our message.

Join us!

LSC members can join PURE for \$10. PURE members still receive an occasional mailed newsletter. You can join by using the form in this newsletter or by going on our web site and using the secure Donate Now! feature. If you include your e-mail address, we will add you to our regular e-mail list, which is the best way to get the latest news.

PURE Thoughts

Check out PURE’s new blog, “PURE Thoughts”, on our web site, www.pureparents.org. We’re hoping to keep up a pretty regular stream of comments and ideas about education and the Chicago Public Schools from

the perspective of parents and local school council members. Most posts will be written by PURE's Julie Woestehoff, but we'll add occasional comments and ideas from other PURE staff, PURE members, and guests. You can e-mail any comments to pure@pureparents.org.

Two major reports out

PURE's Parent Survey Report

In November, 2006, we finally published the results of our parent involvement survey. Here's what a national parent involvement expert had to say about our report:

"When a well-respected, independent community organization surveys parents and families about their attempts to be involved in their children's education, and how those experiences affect their satisfaction with the public schools, administrators, teachers and policy makers should listen very closely. This report by Parents United for Responsible Education (PURE) is full of vital information about how schools can engage parents more effectively, in

ways that are documented to have an effect on student achievement. This is a terrific public service" (Anne Henderson, Senior Fellow at the Community Involvement Program, Annenberg Institute for School Reform, and author of "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Partnerships on Student Achievement").

The largest survey of parent involvement in Chicago to date, PURE's study took a look at the general state of parent involvement in CPS. We surveyed 4,320 parents in 92 schools. Here's some of what we learned:

- ▶ Student achievement was higher in schools with higher levels of parent volunteering and decision making opportunities and where more parents work with their children at home.
- ▶ Parent satisfaction was most strongly connected to school support for home learning activities and opportunities to volunteer and contribute to school decision making.
- ▶ There are missed opportunities, ways parents might be more involved if they had the chance. We were especially happy to see that high school parents responded in

greater numbers and proportion than elementary school parents. We think that may mean that, with some extra support and opportunity, high school parents may defy the widely-held assumption that they just don't want to get involved.

School reform- NCLB report

Another major report, "Chicago School Reform: Lessons for the Nation," was a joint project of PURE and FairTest which included the input of a number of other groups and individuals. This report reviews the Chicago reforms that have worked and those that have failed, in order to provide some guidance for how to proceed here and with NCLB in the future. The report was cited in the Jan. 31, 2007, issue of *Education Week*.

You can download both reports on our website.

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What is PURE?

Parents United for Responsible Education is a parent-run, parent-organized group formed in 1987 to improve schools for all children by promoting a strong parent voice in school decision-making. We provide parent and LSC training and advocacy throughout the Chicago area.

Membership in PURE entitles you to our newsletter, *PENCIL*, other mailings, and voting rights at our annual meeting.

PURE Membership / Donation Form

Tell us about yourself...

NAME(s): _____ Date: _____

Tel. (wk) _____ Tel. (hm) _____ Fax _____

Address _____ City _____ ZIP _____

E-mail _____

Chicago school (s) involved with _____

LSC parent LSC student LSC teacher LSC community Principal Other _____

Please include your dues with this form: membership dues are

\$25.00 regular \$10.00 LSC member rate

Additional donations gladly accepted! Amount included: \$ _____

Please mail to: PURE 100 S. Morgan Street Chicago, IL 60607

or...join online using our Donate Now! Button - www.pureparents.org