

# HIGHLIGHTS

## SLASHING BUDGETS: DESTROYING CHILDREN'S FUTURES?

### DESIGNS FOR CHANGE

In June 2006, the Chicago Board of Education cut **200** special education teachers and **750** special education teacher aides, and set a process in motion that is **destroying** the futures of many of Chicago's **most vulnerable** children.

Top school system officials **claimed** that all of the legally-mandated Individualized Educational Plans that guide staffing and services for children with disabilities **would be honored**, despite these cuts. However, experience in the **first four weeks** of school indicates that this promise is being **repeatedly broken**. This report describes specific examples of the following:

- Children who were guaranteed full-time instructional aides are receiving part-time aides, which **destroys vital continuity** for children with learning or emotional problems. (Roberto)
- Children who need help with instruction are being assigned bus aides and others with **no instructional expertise**. (Steven)
- Severely disabled students are **losing** large amounts of **instructional time**, because their **teachers** must take over responsibilities to **hand-feed or toilet** their fellow students. These jobs used to be performed by **child welfare attendants** (Blair Early Childhood Center).

The cutbacks **began last year**, when children who were a **danger** to themselves were **denied aides**. Megan, an autistic child who licked the floor and would attempt to eat anything she could put in her mouth (such as pencils), was denied an aide because a bureaucrat told Megan's teacher that she was "**containable**."

The cutbacks in special education services have taken place despite the **extremely low achievement and graduation rates for students with disabilities**. The percentages of students with disabilities who met state reading standards **dropped** from 1990 to 1995 at grades 5, 8, and 11 and remain **extremely low**. In spring 2005, the percentage of students with disabilities who met state reading standards was **11%** at fifth grade, **17%** at eighth grade, and **5%** at eleventh grade.

Accurate graduation rates calculated for high school students with disabilities by Elaine Allensworth of the Consortium on Chicago School Research (and released in this report for the first time) indicate that **only 42.4%** of students with disabilities who entered high school in fall 2001 graduated in four years and only **about 48%** will **graduate** with more time.

When achievement and graduation rates are **considered together**, **4,947** students with disabilities entered high school in 2001, but **only about 125** will both graduate and have "proficient knowledge and skills in reading."

To take resources away from these vulnerable students given these shocking results, instead of improving their education, is unconscionable.

**One casualty** of these cuts is the ability of students with disabilities to succeed in the "**least restrictive environment**," which is often the regular classroom. **Skilled teacher aides** are vital to enable students with moderate or severe disabilities to **succeed** in regular classes.

Taking such vital support away leads to the **illegal segregation** of students with disabilities, of which the Chicago Board and Illinois State Board were **found guilty** in the late 1990s in the **Corey H.** lawsuit.

While the State Board has repeatedly cited Chicago for providing **insufficient numbers** of teacher aides in past years, the State Board refused to aggressively enforce the law when Chicago **cut 750** of these vital staff this summer.

Thus, we strongly support the action of the **Corey H.** lawsuit plaintiffs to reverse these staff cuts through **an injunction** and to have the federal court appoint a "**Special Master**" to **ensure** that needed corrective actions **occur**.

It is also vital that parents of children with disabilities and educators, press these issues with **appointed and elected officials at all levels** of government. To get involved, contact Laura at **Designs for Change** (312-236-7252)