

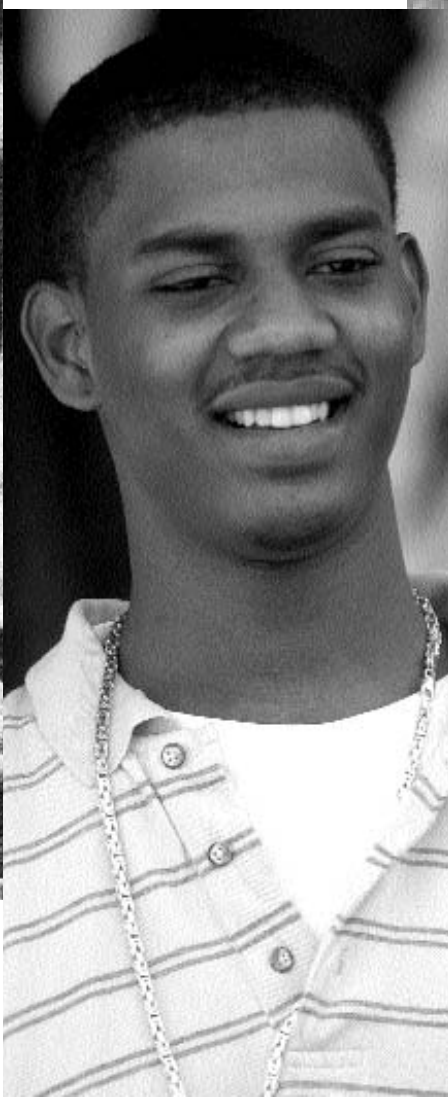
Catalyst

FOR CLEVELAND SCHOOLS

August/September 2002

Did Cleveland
high schools prepare
these students for
college?

Stories begin on page 4



In Updates

As Nov. 5th vote approaches,
community leaders
assess mayor-appointed
School Board

CATALYST: For Cleveland Schools is an independent publication created to document, analyze and support school improvement efforts in Cleveland's public schools.

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Catalyst

FOR CLEVELAND SCHOOLS

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Did Cleveland high schools ready these kids for college?

Maria Garcia, Tenisha G. Robinson, Tamielle L. Tomlinson and Christopher L. Burris are graduates of Cleveland Municipal Schools now attending college with varying degrees of success.

Their performance in college classrooms is, in part, a measure of the amount of preparation they received from their respective high schools.


To examine how well teachers, counselors and curriculum equip kids for success in college, *CATALYST* trailed these students for five months at a community college, a private university and a historically black college.

Our examination of the district's efforts to provide college preparation for some of its 15,000 high school students comes at a pivotal time. After focusing intense efforts on improving elementary schools for four years, this spring CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett turned her attention to high schools by appointing a team of administrators to implement reforms. In addition, the district is seeking a share of \$25 million in grants now available to Ohio's urban high schools through the Bill & Melinda Gates and KnowledgeWorks foundations to create small schools within high schools with large enrollments.

On the following pages, profiles of the students show how much each relied on their high schools to provide critical direction, from choosing the right prep courses, to taking entrance exams, selecting the right college and figuring out how to pay for it. Maria, Tenisha and Tammy are first-generation college students who could not look to parents or siblings to help them navigate these uncharted waters. Chris, the one exception, spent the last two years of high school living with college-educated relatives well-equipped to guide his way.

The students' individual experiences illustrate the findings of a *CATALYST* survey of Ohio college students. Among other things, it found that Cleveland students get less information about college from their high schools than low-income students in other urban districts. About 650 students from the four universities Cleveland students attend most often responded to the survey. About 23 percent of students surveyed identified themselves as disadvantaged, meaning they are low-income, minority students whose parents did not have bachelor's degrees. Nearly 15 percent of overall students surveyed said they were graduates of Cleveland Municipal Schools; nearly all of those identified themselves as disadvantaged. Of those respondents, nearly 15 percent said they were graduates of Cleveland Municipal Schools. (Read the survey analysis at www.catalyst-cleveland.org.)

In the area of academic preparation, Maria and Tammy demonstrate the findings of a *CATALYST* analysis of courses taken by students in Cleveland high schools. It shows that local kids often do not take the classes necessary to succeed in college. These findings support a recent report by the Ohio Board of Regents, which concluded that up to 70 percent of Cleveland students require remedial classes when they get to college, and that 57 percent of all Ohio students need remedial courses.

Each of the four students profiled here face a number of obstacles, both personal and academic, on their way from Cleveland high schools to Ohio's colleges and universities. Taken together, their efforts illustrate that resilience is one essential key to college success for Cleveland students. 

Sandra Clark

Poorly prepared student struggles to become a nurse

By Sandra Clark

MARIA GARCIA arrives at Cuyahoga Community College two hours early for her 3 p.m. anatomy and physiology final at the end of spring semester.

She settles into a row of chairs in a hallway. As more students join her, chatting, Maria keeps reading from lecture notes, worksheets and diagrams. She flips through them over and over.

A quick glance at the clock overhead says its 2:47 p.m. Maria nods her head pessimistically and sighs, "No." She does not feel confident. She had a chance to drop the class weeks ago, but decided to tough it out. So she continues mumbling and memorizing.

Another look, 2:58. Time to go.

"I wanna get this over with," she whis-

Students who take advanced courses score low on college exam

By Sandra Clark

FEW CLEVELAND high school students take advanced courses, a *CATALYST* analysis of course-takings shows. And even those who do take advanced courses post relatively low scores on the ACT college entrance exam, according to a study by the ACT.

pers to herself then heads for her final.

Anatomy, physiology, chemistry and everything science has not come easily to Maria. That hurts the 21-year-old Tri-C junior. The first-generation college student is studying to become a pediatric nurse. The problem is, after her family moved to Cleveland from New York City, she graduated John Marshall High School with only one science class under her belt.

The deficit has made passing college-level sciences a big hurdle. Maria took chemistry three times before finally passing it with a "C."

The failures took her out of position for a full scholarship to Ursuline College's Breen School of Nursing in Pepper Pike where she is bent on attending.

Maria was earning a 3.9 GPA until she ran into science and other academic trouble last year. The Introduction to Chemistry class knocked her cumulative average down to a 2.5, ruining her eligibility for Ursuline's better scholarships, which require 3.3 to 3.7 cumulative averages, an Ursuline admissions counselor says.

Mary Jane Wheeler, assistant biology professor at Tri-C, has seen the rigors of college science mow down many students. She has been teaching at Tri-C for 30 years. Wheeler blames high schools for not requiring students to read non-fiction, broaden their vocabularies and master spelling and grammar.

Those skills are important because, at its core, undergraduate science mostly is reading comprehension on the highest order, Wheeler says.

Between 1997 and 2001, only 43 of 1,172 students took classes labeled honors, which include physics, calculus and advanced English, the CATALYST analysis found. Viewed another way, of the 39,786 course takings by those students, only 176 were honors.

The number of students in the analysis was based on available data. About 2,090 students graduated from Cleveland schools in June 2001. Generally, about 600 students go on to four-year colleges each year.

Those students who chose to plod through derivatives in calculus did not do much better on the crucial college entrance exam than those who stayed with lower-level courses, according to the ACT's 2001 *High School Profile*

Students tackle mountains of text, which is not spiced with suspense or romance. Within that text, they encounter words like tuberosity, the place where muscle attaches to bone. Students must know the word's precise meaning, spelling and usage.

"It is so essential to have a good background, otherwise you're building on sand and everything collapses," Wheeler says.

Maria knows her academic background is shallow. Still, she believes she can make it to and through the Breen School. It has two attributes that make Maria desperate to enroll there: Breen focuses strictly on nursing and it is located near her family, which suffered a terrible blow six years ago.

"I don't want to be too far away from my brother," says Maria of 18-year-old Nelson.

So she does not give up. If all goes according to her plan, she will apply to

Top: Maria Garcia takes her anatomy and physiology final at Cuyahoga Community College.

Middle: Maria translates English to Spanish for children at the West Side Community House where she works.

Report. The average ACT score for Clevelanders who took a battery of math courses culminating in calculus was 18; the average score for those who took less math is 15.6.

Other Ohio students who took the same math series with calculus scored an average of 24.7; nationally, such students scored an average of 24.2. The highest ACT score is 36.

Cleveland students who took on other advanced subjects did not fare much better. (See chart page 7.)

"One wonders what the hell is going on in that class where they did calculus," says Joshua G. Bagaka's, an assistant professor of education research at Cleveland State University, who ana-

Continued on page 6



Photo credit: Piet van Lier



Photo credit: Thomas Ondrey

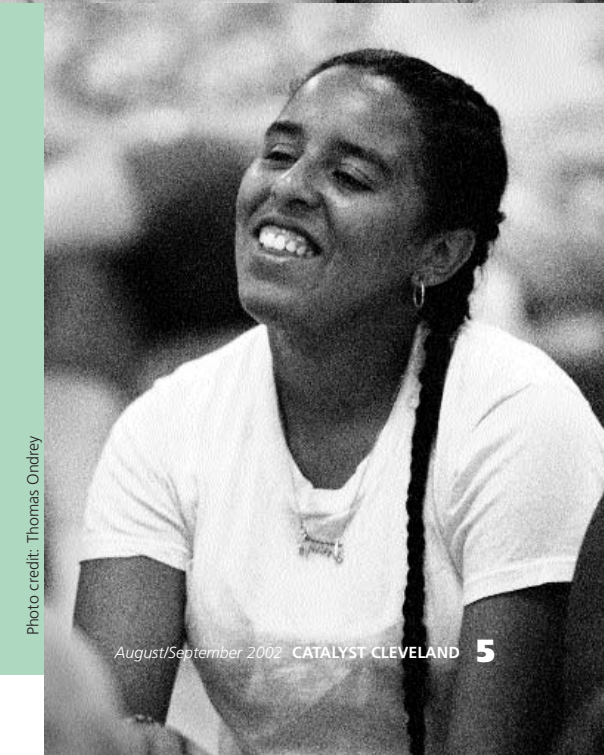


Photo credit: Thomas Ondrey

Ursuline in time to enter in the fall of 2003.

In the meantime, she has to take college entrance exams, scoring about a 1,050 on the Scholastic Aptitude Test or a 23 on the ACT to qualify for full scholarships. She also plans to get six science courses under her belt before transferring. There will be first aid, as well as more biology to take before advancing to Ursuline. It is cheaper to wrestle with those courses at Tri-C than to try, fail and try again at Ursuline.

"It's \$493 a credit hour," Maria recites. "That's a lot of money."

Preparation at John Marshall

Maria links her academic setbacks to the lack of college preparation she received at John Marshall, where she graduated in 1999.

She transferred from New York's Morris High School to John Marshall in 1996 in time to start 10th grade.

John Marshall has changed a bit since then. It still is Cleveland's largest high school, enrolling 2,115 students.

Academically, however, John Marshall, like other Cleveland high schools, needed work. When Maria attended, the district only required one year of science for high school graduation, says school counselor Harriet Richardson. Maria had already fulfilled that requirement by taking biology at Morris High in New York.

After checking records, Richardson, who neither remembered Maria nor recalled talking to her about college,

says Maria took home economics which included a childcare class instead of more science courses.

Veronica Foster was counselor assigned to Homeroom 901. Maria was one of about 400 students Foster counseled that year. The American Counseling Association, which represents school counselors, recommends a student-counselor ratio of 250-to-one. Cleveland's ratio is closer to Marshall's 400-to-one. Foster does not remember Maria, but says all students are advised about the courses universities require students to take while in high school.

"If she was at John Marshall any length of time, she would have heard us say what graduation and college requirements are," Foster insists. "We told them three units of science. I know we go over that material every year with students."

Maria counters that she told counselors she wanted to be a nurse. However, she says, it may have been during senior year when she made up her mind. Additionally, Maria did not see taking a childcare course as a mistake because she wants to be a pediatric nurse. Since no one in her family attended college, Maria relied primarily on school for direction.

"If she told me that [she wanted to be a nurse], I certainly would have told her she needed chemistry," Foster says.

Foster's best guess is that Maria did what many students do: Opt out of the more difficult science and math classes to ensure higher grade point averages.

Parents often overrule counselors, allowing their children to take less challenging classes, Foster says.

"You talk, and you talk and you talk, and students ask 'Do I need it for graduation? It will drag down my GPA.' After a while you just say, OK."

Had the district required Maria to take three years of science, as experts prescribe, her college experience might be unfolding differently.

Science is only one of Maria's academic shortcomings. Poor spelling and grammar skills also pose huge hindrances.

"It's still a little difficult for me to understand English and write a paper because I have all that Spanish in me," she explains.

Maria, who is a Puerto Rican born in New York, grew up speaking mostly Spanish at home but learned English there as well. She slips in and out of Spanish at her job as a counselor in the childcare center in the West Side Community House on Bridge Avenue. When she reproaches herself for doing something silly, the words come out, "Que boba!" or "How stupid!"

Her writing is nearly as troublesome as her abilities with science. "Maria had a terrible time with spelling," says Tri-C's Mary Jane Wheeler, who taught Maria's anatomy and physiology class this spring. "I don't know how she ever graduated from high school."

lyzed the course data for *CATALYST*.

"People have to think about the courses they are taking," says Bagaka's, who was once a high school math teacher in his native Kenya. "But they also have to think about what is going on in those classes. It's depressing."

The problem is twofold, Cleveland school officials say: (1) Cleveland schools offer too many courses, and (2) the content even in high-level courses is not up to snuff.

The district must pare down the number of classes, standardize content and encourage more students to take the tougher courses, says Wayne W. Marok, a member of a team appointed by schools chief Barbara Byrd-Bennett in April to reform the district's 17 high

schools. Marok also is an assistant principal at James Ford Rhodes High School, considered one of the city's leading high schools.

Broad curriculum costly to students

The district's new high-school reform team, headed by Rhodes Principal Kathleen Freilino, plans to change high schools and curriculum beginning this fall.

"The purpose of reform is to make high school more rigorous so students will have the choice of going to college, work or both," says Myrna Elliott-Lewis, the district's chief academic officer.

For example, students graduating in 2003 will be required to take a third

A *CATALYST* analysis of more than 39,786 course takings by 1,172 9th- through 12th-graders between 1997 and 2001 showed:

- Only 176 of the 39,786 course takings were titled honors. Those courses were taken by 43 students in the sample group.
- About 30 percent of students earned credit in 0 to 2 math classes by 12th grade.
- About 70 percent of students earned credit in 0 to 2 science classes by 12th grade.
- About 96 percent of students earned credit in 0 to 2 foreign language classes by 12th grade.
- The bulk of courses taken were below students' grade level, although that has improved since 1999.

Source of data: Cleveland Municipal School District
Analysis: Joshua G. Bagaka's, associate professor of educational research at Cleveland State University.

Without Advanced Courses

■ Cleveland
■ Ohio
■ Nation

■ With Advanced Courses
(Calculus, Physics, English IV)

Maria says she took four years of English earning one "B" and three "Cs." She took no courses for bilingual students.

Critical writing matters, a CATALYST survey of students at four Ohio universities shows:

- Students who said their schools strongly emphasized it report a 3.1 GPA.
- Students who said their schools did not report a much lower GPA of 2.4.

Study skills make a difference, the CATALYST survey shows:

- Students who said their high schools taught study techniques report a 3.0 GPA or a "B."
- Students who said their schools did not report a 2.8 GPA or a "C."

The trend holds true for graduates of Cleveland schools:

- Students who said their high schools emphasized study skills report a 2.8 GPA.
- Students who said their schools did not report a 2.5 GPA.

Maria learned she is not at all squeamish.

"When it comes time to open someone up, I'm

going to be really happy. ...A lot of people dissect frogs and pigs in high school. I'm sorry I missed that."

Maria knows she will meet students at Ursuline with firmer academic grounding who have dissected pigs. Still, she is steadfast in her desire to graduate Ursuline. The need to please her mother fuels her quest.

Maria sees graduating Ursuline as a tribute to her mom, Migdalia Feliciano, who died of liver complications on Nov. 5, 1996. She was 50 years old.

"My mother never got out of high school," Maria says. Her father did not graduate high school, either. "My goal was to be the first one to graduate from high school and college in my family. That's what really keeps me going."

The final grade

Maria does not wallow in self-pity over her mother's death. It is as if she declines to acknowledge anything negative.

That may explain why days after the anatomy final, she avoided going to the teacher's office to check her score. Instead, she waited for her semester grades to come in the mail.

She failed the class.

"Well, I'm afraid Maria consistently got the lowest grade in the class," her teacher, Wheeler says. She received a 41 percent in lectures and 46 percent in laboratory work during the course.

"You have to achieve 60 percent in lecture and lab in order to pass the class," Wheeler explains. "And that's passing it with a 'D.'"

Despite knowing there was a possibility she would fail anatomy, which would increase the distance between herself and Ursuline by lowering her GPA, Maria decided not to drop the course.

Instead the first-generation college student used the strategy she created to make it through this tough new world: Take the course, learn as much as possible. Then, if necessary, take it again.

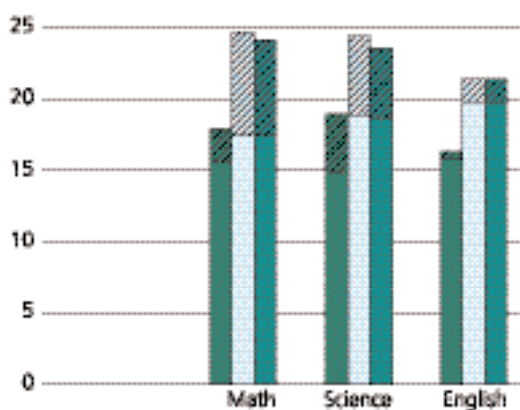
"When I take it over it will be review to me." 🍎

Despite the gaps in Maria's academic foundation, she stays afloat at Tri-C, earning a 2.7 cumulative GPA and 2.3 for the spring semester. She attributes her grades to personal tenacity and a college survival class Tri-C offers incoming freshman. The class has study skills on its roster. Students are instructed to study in a quiet place, such as the library, rewrite notes taken in class immediately and copy important facts from textbooks.

"I should have had it in high school," she laments. "It would have helped me a lot, actually. I think I wouldn't be having so much trouble getting these classes together now."

Such difficulties are not shaking Maria's wide-eyed excitement about a career in medicine. In Tri-C classes, she has seen a human lung and watched a cat being dissected. Professors also have shown Maria and her classmates a trachea, a human windpipe. From that,

Average ACT Scores
(cumulative scores)



year of science instead of two years. The third year of science brings the district's curriculum in line with the state's new graduation requirements.

Also beginning this school year, students will need a grade-point average of 2.0. There currently is no GPA requirement for graduation. The GPA requirement will increase each semester until it reaches a 2.5 in 2004.

The reform team also plans to whittle the number of high school course offerings to 300 from more than 1,000.

In some cases, course titles are so vague, it is hard to tell what the course covers or its level of difficulty. There's consumer math, business math, general math, life-skills math, integrated math and algebra I. The math course

taken most frequently by seniors was integrated math II, the CATALYST analysis shows.

Math courses will drop to 8 from 16, says Marok.

Most of the lowest-level courses such as consumer- or life-skills math will disappear from the curriculum, Elliott-Lewis says. Low-performing students who might have been assigned to them should get tutoring and other interventions until they can do higher-level work, she says.

A few less demanding courses such as pre-integrated math will remain but can be taken only as electives, says Elliott-Lewis.

"In two or three years, we should

See **ADVANCED COURSES** page 15

Doting teacher and counselor guide student to college

By Sandra Clark

AS A HIGH SCHOOL student, Tenisha G. Robinson watched her mother steer the family through the crisis of drug abuse and other trying situations. She vowed to graduate and go on to college to make her mother proud.

The two shared a close relationship. But there was little Willie Robinson could do to help her daughter fulfill her dream of going to college. A healthcare worker, Willie Robinson did not attend college. That left Tenisha with only her teachers and guidance counselor to rely on for help.

They delivered.

At Martin Luther King High School, doting counselor Daisy Perkins and English teacher Phyllis M. Thomas loaded Tenisha with information on where to go to college and how to pay for it.

"I was filling out two scholarship [applications] a week for two or three months," Tenisha recalls. "I'm happy she made me do it, though."

During senior year, Tenisha saw Perkins everyday, getting about a half hour of her undivided attention.

In June 2000 when Tenisha graduated with a 3.8 grade point average, ranking second in her class, she had a full scholarship — \$23,630 a year — to Capital University, a small private college in Columbus. In the fall, she will begin her junior year as a political science major with a minor in accounting. She plans to be an attorney.

Tenisha is aware that some high school students in Cleveland schools do not receive the kind of attention she did. For instance, her roommate, Tamielle L. Tomlinson, attended John Hay High School where she said she received little help from guidance counselors. (See story page 10.) Tenisha attributes her own experience to the size of her high school. MLK has 270 students, (40 were in Tenisha's senior class), and is Cleveland's smallest high school.

Thomas says she and Perkins "shower" MLK students with information and assistance. Along with Jennifer McQuate of the Cleveland

Scholarship Program, Perkins and Thomas helped get \$1.8 million in scholarships for students who graduated in June of this year.

MLK's English Department chairwoman, Thomas considers it her job to push students to apply for scholarships, prepare for the job market and improve academically, even gifted students such as Tenisha.

"She didn't work nearly to her potential and still got As," Thomas says. "I pushed her hard from grade 9 to grade 12."

Tenisha admits: "In high school, I never studied. I never had to."

She passed four of five sections of the Ohio Ninth Grade Proficiency Test in 8th grade. She passed the fourth, citizenship, in 9th. "And I was half a point away in citizenship," Tenisha boasts.

Now that Tenisha is in college, Thomas' insistence that she work harder has taken hold. Tenisha has become a more dedicated student, who is as meticulous with her work as she is with grooming her burgundy-colored braids and French-manicured toes. Not one page of her thick, loose-leaf binder is out of place. Topics are separated by colored tabs. Notes are organized by date. "When I take notes, I try to write in complete sentences so I

understand them later," Tenisha says.

She says she does whatever is necessary to do well at Capital, a small campus of 1,880 undergraduates, where professors usually know students by name. Tenisha's efforts are apparent in Managerial Accounting, her most demanding class, thus far.

"Sometimes I study with a group," Tenisha says, adding that accounting is so complex she and fellow students always study in groups.

Tenisha's classmate Carl F. Fanning, a junior at Capital who graduated Cleveland's John Marshall High School in 1999, has observed her work ethic: "For one of her classes, accounting — it was a very difficult class — she had a midterm coming up that she didn't understand. She took it on herself to read, read and re-read until she figured out what was going on. Most people, myself included, would have read it once or twice. She kept going. That impressed me."

Communications Professor Stephen C. Koch recognizes Tenisha as a serious student who sits in front in his class, takes notes and asks questions, unlike many students.

"Tenisha is making sure she's getting her money's worth," Koch says.

Despite the hard work, Tenisha's

**"I WAS FILLING OUT TWO
SCHOLARSHIP [APPLICATIONS]
A WEEK FOR TWO OR
THREE MONTHS. I'M HAPPY SHE
MADE ME DO IT, THOUGH."**

Tenisha G. Robinson,

Cleveland graduate now attending Capital University

GPA, 2.6, has come down since high school. Still, she wants to make the dean's list.

Although she is dismayed to have a 'C' average, Tenisha says, "I earned it. If you were to ask me, I could tell you what's going on."

Handling adversity is old hat for Tenisha as it is for many first-generation college students. During high school, a family member with a drug problem

pick up her daughter for summer break, the two giggled and sang Al Green songs out of tune.

"She's a wonderful person," Robinson says of her daughter.

Robinson, 53, has given Tenisha moral support and spending money, but she could not assist in choosing a school or pursuing financial aid.

"I mostly went along with what she wanted to do," says Robinson. 🍌

Cleveland students, like other disadvantaged, first-generation college students surveyed, are less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, stay out late or feel lonely in college than their more middle class peers, the **CATALYST** survey shows.

	Abuse drugs/alcohol	Stay out late	Feel lonely
Cleveland	14%	41%	41%
Not Cleveland	29%	72%	60%
Disadvantaged	14%	Difference between two groups too small to count	59%
Not disadvantaged	45%		73%

was in and out of jail. Tenisha's mother, Willie Robinson, had to take in another family member, adding a fifth person to the family's two-bedroom apartment.

During the crisis, Robinson continued to hold down her job and did her best to maintain order at home; and Tenisha worked hard to keep her grades up. "Although it was a hardship, it motivated me," she recalls. "I said 'I'm not going to disappoint my mother.'"

In the two years that Tenisha has attended Capital, her mother has driven the 197 miles from Cleveland to visit as often as she could.

When Robinson drove to Capital to

Top: Two first-generation college students from Cleveland schools became roommates and learned their high school experiences were very different. Tenisha, left, received support from teachers and counselors while Tammy, right, had to find her own way to college.

Bottom: Tenisha and classmate, Carl F. Fanning, congratulate each other after their well-received speech.

MATH KEY TO COLLEGE SUCCESS

Taking advanced mathematics in high school greatly increases a first-generation college student's chances of getting a college degree, according to Clifford Adelman, senior research analyst at the U.S. Department of Education.

Finishing any math course beyond algebra II-trigonometry or pre-calculus, for example, more than doubles the odds that a student who enters college will earn a bachelor's degree, Adelman says, based on his research.

Advanced math supplies "a certain kind of reasoning and momentum in a world that's gone quantitative," Adelman explains.

His 1999 report, *Answers in the Tool Box*, suggests that higher-level math along with an equally rigorous course load is a better predictor of college success than such items as grade point average, ACT scores and class rank.

"Kids with ACT scores of 18 go to college," he says. "Kids with ACT scores of 13 go to college. ... The vast majority of colleges in this country, 85 percent, are not selective. You got a high school diploma, a college prep curriculum, you took the test, basically, you're in," Adelman asserts. "The point I'm working on is what makes the difference toward completion."

By Sandra Clark



Photo credit: Will Shilling

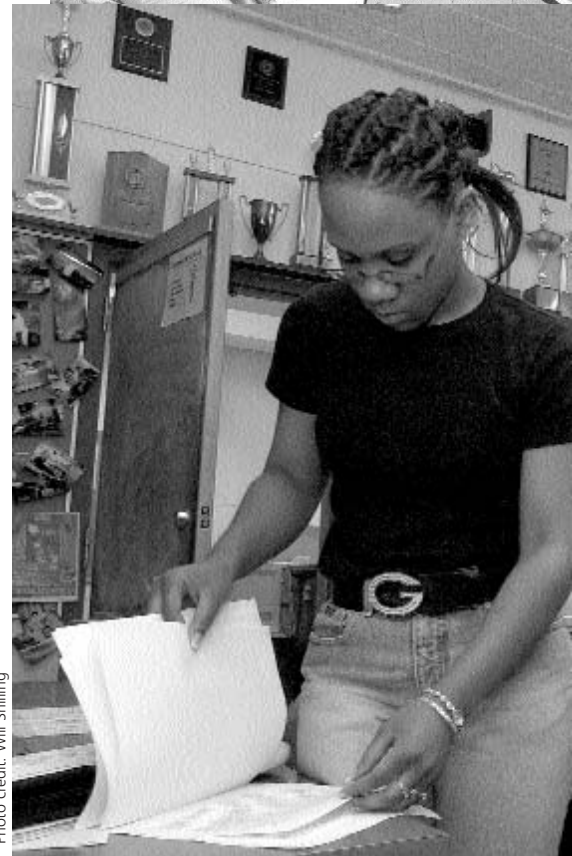


Photo credit: Will Shilling

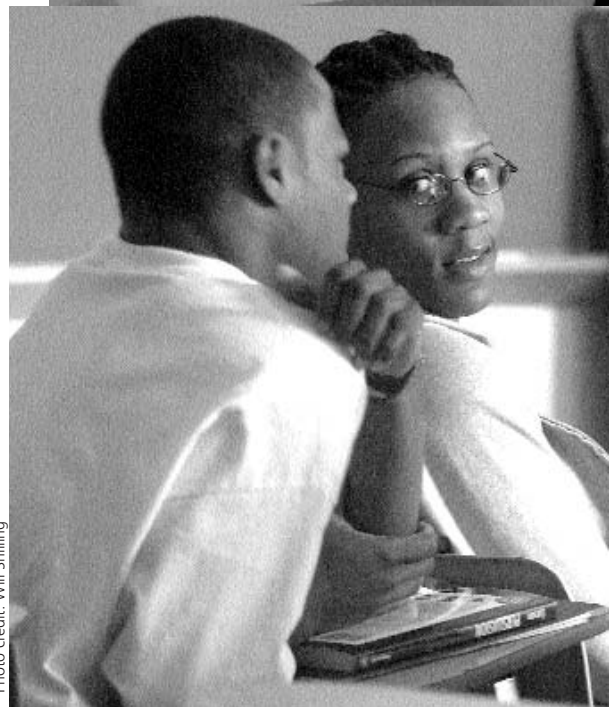


Photo credit: Will Shilling



Photo credit: Will Shilling

John Hay graduate finds her own way to college

By Sandra Clark



Photo credit: Will Shilling

THE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S machinery for preparing students for college did not work properly for Tamielle L. Tomlinson.

Yet, she managed to thrive. In June, she completed her sophomore year at Capital University, where she is an early childhood education major with a 3.2 grade point average.

Always a stellar student, Tammy has had a tough time throughout her years in Cleveland Municipal Schools. Her family moved so frequently that Tammy attended five elementary schools and two middle schools. They moved twice while Tammy was in high school.

Tammy was a middle school honor student, but her school scotched an opportunity for her to attend a prestigious, private high school that would have prepared her well for college. Upon hastily enrolling in John Hay High School, Tammy was given remedial classes, wasting about two years that could have been spent on more rigorous courses. High school counselors did not help her choose a college or assemble a finan-

cial aid package. Her mother, Debra Johnson, a nursing assistant, did not attend college and could offer little assistance.

Despite it all, Tammy, who turns 20 in September, was a high-performing student when she graduated John Hay in June 2000. With a 3.67 grade point average, Tammy graduated in the top fifth of her class.

Getting ahead in high school, accepted to Capital and about \$25,000 in scholarships and grants was a challenge that Tammy pretty much faced on her own.

Like 78 percent of Cleveland Municipal School students, Tammy was disadvantaged. Most of these students are first-generation college students who must rely heavily on their schools to provide information on preparing for college, a *CATALYST* survey shows.

The *CATALYST* survey of students at four Ohio universities shows that for information about college:

- 56 percent of middle class students rely on parents
- 27 percent of Cleveland graduates rely on parents

The survey also shows Cleveland graduates receive less information about college from their high schools than disadvantaged students in other districts:

- 44 percent of Cleveland students rely on schools
- 53 percent of disadvantaged students elsewhere rely on schools

Middle: To Tammy Tomlinson, Allen Iverson's never-give-up style of playing basketball symbolizes resilience, a hallmark of her life.

Bottom: Tammy enjoys early childhood education classes, where she is researching whether or not children display their preferred learning styles in pre-school.



Photo credit: Will Shilling

College preparation should begin in middle school, says Paulette A. Busher, head guidance counselor at John Hay. Still, Busher says, "You'd be surprised at how many kids come in not knowing there is such a thing as an SAT or an ACT."

John Hay's college counseling procedures should begin in 9th grade when kids are informed of necessary course work, testing, grades and financial aid, Busher says. Practice SATs are given to honors sophomores and all

juniors in attendance on the day they are given. For seniors, the process deepens with workshops on transcripts, selecting colleges and applying for financial aid. Guest speakers are brought in. Advisors from the Cleveland Scholarship Program, Inc., an outside organization that helps high school students throughout the region apply for college and scholarships, counsel students individually.

The process did not work properly for Tammy. Even her CSP advisor let her down.

She had been an honor student at Harry E. Davis Middle School, where she was one of three students to pass all five parts of the Ohio Ninth Grade Proficiency Test in 8th grade. She had been tapped by the A Better Chance program, which places disadvantaged students in private schools, to apply to schools in Pennsylvania. Davis school officials did not submit paper work on time and Tammy ended up hastily enrolling in John Hay, she says. Officials at Harry E. Davis Middle School could not be reached for comment this summer.

Program records indicate that a deadline was missed and Tammy lost an opportunity to apply to a school on scholarships worth between \$15,000 and \$22,000 annually.

When Tammy arrived at John Hay, she was surprised to be given a battery of what she calls "low-level classes" that included pre-integrated math, which summarizes general math. Tammy was hardly challenged by it. She recalls the class included "stuff you should have been doing in 8th grade" such as multiplying and dividing decimals.

"I thought I was in a retarded class," Tammy says, with a surprising amount of calm. "I don't think they ever checked to see what level I was on."

She never asked for a different schedule and simply accepted the school's decision to place her there. She says she just did her work and, by 10th grade, placed out of the remedial classes. That year, her English teacher Elaine Mason noticed that Tammy was miles ahead of her classmates and recommended she be assigned to more rigorous courses.

"Ray Charles could have seen this in her," Mason enthused.

She suggests Tammy was over-

looked because of low expectations, no parent advocate, no pre-testing of incoming freshmen and counselors who are too overwhelmed managing records to see students individually.

"It's a crime," Mason states. "She sat through all those baby classes. She wound up basically helping everybody else. She wound up basically teaching the class."

By 11th grade, Tammy was taking honors English at John Hay, and, eventually, took two college-level classes at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio, via the School to College Articulation Program. Yet, she remains disappointed that so much time had been lost that she was taking chemistry and trigonometry her senior year while other honor students were taking physics and calculus.

Mason agrees saying that more challenging courses could have changed Tammy's self-confidence as well as her future.

"Tammy could have been a rocket scientist," Mason asserts. "I'm not sure she knew about all the other possibilities."

Tammy is a shy student, which may have been why she "slipped through the cracks" at John Hay. Busher says she does not remember Tammy. But she says it is not uncommon for students' scheduling problems to go undetected if the student does not complain.

Quiet kids may escape counselors' attention because their time is consumed managing records of students who fail or transfer to and from the school, Busher says. Tammy's graduating class contained about 130 students, down from 150 who started senior year in the fall and 900 who started as freshmen four years earlier.

That is when CSP advisors normally step in. They dispense information because counselors often are so overwhelmed.

However, conversations with CSP's Rebecca Wong left Tammy disappointed. Wong advised Tammy to wait for ACT scores to be released before applying to college and plan on attending a state university in the meantime, Tammy says.

"Ms. Wong assumed I wouldn't do well," she adds. Tammy earned a 25 out of 36 on her ACT. The score is within the range sought by selective universities, but Tammy says she did not know it was a good score.

Wong no longer is a CSP advisor and could not be reached for comment. Maria I. Boss, CSP's executive director, says its advisors should not discourage students from attending the school of their choice. However, the program does want students to attend college and find jobs in Ohio in an effort to support the state's economy.

"We see two or three thousand people in a year," Boss says. "This is the first time I've heard of an advisor discouraging a student. I'm not denying it happened. Maybe it was a misunderstanding."

Misunderstandings add to burdens Tammy overcomes alone

Tammy's unassertiveness may have left her vulnerable to misunderstandings that followed her from middle to high school.

Apparently, her way of dealing with problems is not to attack them head on. She simply tries to keep scoring despite adversities.

And she wears a perpetual smile, says fellow Capital student, Carl F. Fanning, who also knows Tammy's roommate, Tenisha Robinson.

"Tammy is joyful," according to Carl. "She doesn't let things bother her. She rolls with the punches and is always smiling."

Tammy did not ask her family to intervene when she was toughing it out at John Hay.

"My mother didn't go to college," Tammy says. "She really had no idea what to do or where to go..."

"I don't fault her," Tammy says. "She really didn't know what was going on and I rarely talk about school to her."

Instead, Tammy relies on her aunt and uncle, Wayne and Barbara Owens of Cleveland Heights, for support. The Owensens are both teachers.

"They think education is something you have to get," Tammy says.

They provided stability because her family moved so often.

She visited the Owensens regularly during high school. "I would go over on weekends. They live down the street from the library so I started staying during the week sometimes."

Eventually, she stayed. 🍌

Family of Cleveland teachers sends foster child to college

By Sandra Clark

THE LIFE Christopher L. Burris led for most of his young life pointed anywhere but college. He cycled through several foster homes before finally being adopted. Then, his adopted mother died.

At age 18, Burris was again looking for a family. The one he found, made up of four Cleveland teachers, changed the course of his life dramatically.

"I wasn't going to go to college," says Chris. "If it weren't for them giving me that extra push, I don't think I'd be there."

This fall, at 20, Burris will begin his sophomore year at Central State University in Xenia, Ohio, where he is a music major.

Chris' life is something of a Fresh Prince of Bel Air story: Much like the hit sitcom of the 1990s, Uncle Mike took a fatherless, teenaged nephew into his posh Cleveland home, guiding the boy toward higher education.

The details of Chris' life lend themselves more to drama, however, than comedy.

Chris was born in Cleveland in 1982 to Pamela James, 24. Unmarried and unemployed, she was not prepared to care for a child.

She took him to Louisiana where she had family, but left him with relatives when she was unable to manage. "My mother was going through hard times. She couldn't take care of me."

Chris wound up in one foster home after another. Finally, one foster mother, Earline Burris of Franklinton, LA., who took the boy in when he was six years old, adopted him at age 11.

Earline Burris was short and stout, the kind of women you think of when you think, "Grandma," Chris says, grinning.

The widow and retired hospital cook lavished Chris with kindness and hearty meals. Cakes, pies, greens, red beans and rice. And this being Louisiana, gumbo.

"I'll never taste that food again in

my life," Chris laments, the grin fading.

She did not spare the rod, he says.

She would cut a switch — a thin tree branch stripped of leaves — to swat Chris and his foster brothers for misbehaving. "Y'all cut out that foolishness," Chris remembers her yelling.

Because of such discipline, Chris has become a courteous young man who refers to people as "Miss," "Mister," "M'am" and "Sir." He is still amazed at the things city kids get away with.

Earline Burris also cultivated Chris' singing voice, making sure he attended rehearsal and sang on the choirs at the Lighthouse Pentecostal Church. It was there that he learned the power of song and began to think about a career in music. Maybe.

That glimmer of hope turned to pessimism when Earline Burris died the day after Christmas in 1997.

"I woke up and went to the bathroom," Chris remembers. "The telephone rang. She had a pacemaker and the hospital would call to check on her. That day, the telephone rang, she didn't answer it, so I went to wake her up. She wouldn't wake up. It's like, I jumped out of my body looking at her. It was strange. I still cry to this day about it."

Chris says her death led him away

from school.

"When she died it was like I didn't care no more," he says.

He fell to the care of Burris' adult daughter, Sheila Burris.

The two did not get along. She told him he had to leave when he turned 18. Chris, 15 at the time, took her seriously.

He had seen kids come and go throughout his years in foster care. Even in the Burris home, kids would be gotten "rid of." All the instability of his early years came rushing back.

About three years later, Michael James received a long distance telephone call at his Cleveland home from an 18-year-old boy he barely knew. It was Chris, the lost son of his niece Pamela James, asking if he could come to live with him.

James, and his wife, Donna, had met the boy only twice: Once when they became Chris' Godparents during a church ceremony when he was 2. And once during a trip sponsored by Chris' father, Ronald Sharpe, three years prior. Even though the family barely knew the boy, they held a family meeting to consider his request.

There were concerns.

"What kind of habits did he have?" James recalls family members' questions. "Does he steal? Lie? Will he

**"I'M DOING BETTER IN COLLEGE
THAN I DID IN HIGH SCHOOL.
IF IT WEREN'T FOR THEM
GIVING ME THAT EXTRA PUSH,
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Christopher L. Burris,

Cleveland graduate now attending Central State University

come into this household and put people against each other."

On the other hand, James' daughters reminded their dad that he had never had a boy around the house. "You put out the trash, do the lawn and the painting. When we hear a sound at night you get up to check it out... That was the selling point."

The family voted unanimously to take Chris into their home on E. 73rd Street in a renovated section of Hough, once destroyed by race riots.

The Jameses enrolled Chris in Martin Luther High School, where he entered as a junior. "He impressed us as a good guy," James says. "He was hard-working but lacking in academic skills."

During the second marking period, Chris and his new family encountered their first challenge. Chris brought home a report card containing two Ds and four Fs.

Says James, Chris did not know poor grades were unacceptable in his newfound family of educators. James teaches math at Cuyahoga Community College. His wife teaches 3rd grade at John W. Raper Elementary School; daughter Dawn, 29, teaches 5th grade at Anton Grdina Elementary School; Donya, 24, substitute teaches while she works on a doctorate at Case Western Reserve University; Dachan, 21, is a senior in pre-law at Grambling University; and Donea, 18, plans to study architecture Kent State University.

"We didn't scold the boy," James says. "We said, 'In this household we don't go for Ds and Fs.' In the third marking period, the grades got better."

It did not happen by magic. It was work.

According to James, Chris' geometry teacher called to say the boy was headed for a D in the class. Uncle Mike pulled an all-nighter with Chris to prepare him for an exam. Sometime during the session, James realized Chris' problems: He did not know the meaning of words such as lines and plains. Once he knew, things began to click, James says.

Chris earned an 82 on the test and taped it to the refrigerator.

The report card became four Cs and one D. Then some As and Bs started to appear. Chris sang in talent shows and got calls from girls the following day. Donna James teases her nephew. He became Prom King then graduated MLK with about a 2.0 GPA.

Before that, the school's staff had

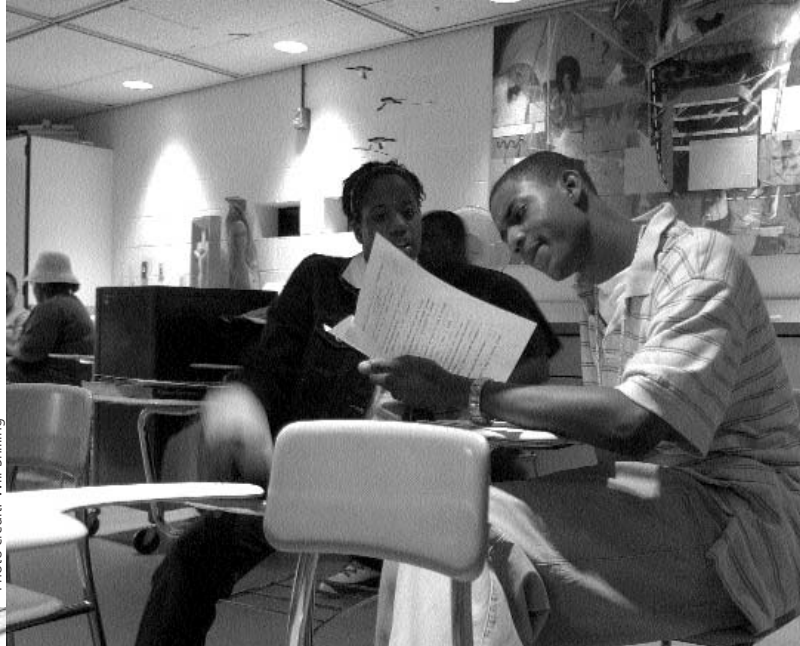


Photo credit: Will Shilling



Photo credit: Will Shilling

Top: Chris chose Central State University, a non-selective historically black college in Xenia, Ohio, "because I didn't think I could get into any other college." Here he discusses tests results on Arts of Africa with a classmate.

Middle: Chris rehearses "Vamuvamba," a percussive Kenyan song about the crucifixion as a tenor in the Central State University Chorus. The group toured 11 cities in April.

Bottom: William H. Caldwell, director of the Central State University Chorus, calls Chris another "culturally deprived" student with unschooled, raw talent. Caldwell predicts Chris will be reading music by the end of his sophomore year making him eligible for a scholarship.



Photo credit: Will Shilling

**"WE DIDN'T SCOLD THE BOY.
WE SAID 'IN THIS HOUSEHOLD,
WE DON'T GO FOR DS AND FS.'
IN THE THIRD MARKING PERIOD,
THE GRADES GOT BETTER."**

Michale James,
college instructor who guided his godchild to college

gone to work getting him into college. MLK English teacher Phyllis Thomas encouraged Chris to go to Central State. The school could teach him music and help him overcome his remaining weaknesses in reading and writing. MLK counselor Daisy Perkins arranged financial aid and teacher Luther Towers got Chris an audition with William H. Caldwell, associate professor of music and conductor of the Central State University Chorus.

Chris sang a jazz number. Caldwell was impressed enough to bring Chris

on board. In order to get a scholarship, however, Chris must learn to read music, broaden his vocal range and embrace Italian, German and several African languages in which the choir often sings.

Pamela James still marvels at how her son has grown into a reedy 6-foot-1-inch-tall college sophomore with her eyes, nose and smile. "If he had stayed with me, he might not have gotten" to college, she says.

Mike James measures her character in the support she has given Chris

since he has been in college.

"Over the year, she's sent \$90," he says. "But it's big for her because she works at Burger King. To get \$90 out of her is something like getting \$1,000 out of me. But she did it."

Because of the family support, better grades and his personable manner, Chris was able to tour with the Central State University Chorus this year, singing in such cities as Chicago, New York, Philadelphia and Akron.

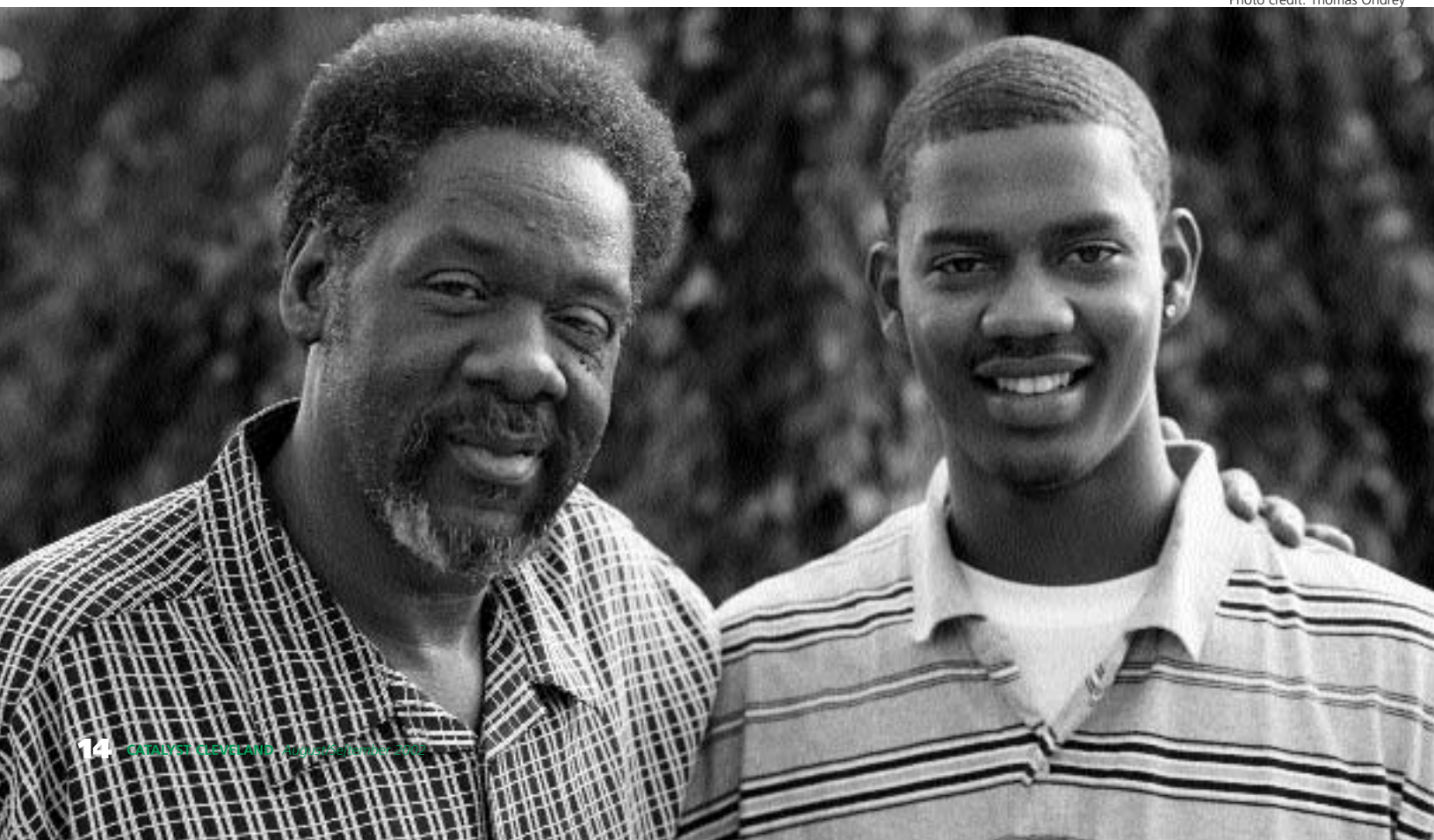
The tour put stress on Chris' GPA. It went from a 2.7 to a 2.41. His course load includes a handful of one-credit music classes, which turned out to be very detailed and time consuming. One class that posed particular difficulties had drills in which students must identify notes by their sound.

Ever concerned about pleasing his new family, Chris apologizes for his grades but says they told him a lot of freshmen have a tough first year. He thanks his Uncle Mike as he did when he graduated MLK, saying he owes his diploma to his uncle.

"You don't have to thank me," James tells Chris, "just pass it on." 🍌

Below: "He's, like, my father," says Chris Burris, right, of his uncle Mike James. "The first father figure I ever had."

Photo credit: Thomas Ondrey



Who graduates from college?

One way to gauge how successful Cleveland's disadvantaged students are in completing college is to follow the numbers at the four public universities local students attend most often, Cleveland State, Ohio State, Kent State and the University of Akron. Overall, graduation rates by race at these institutions show black students are less likely to graduate than Asian and white students. However, blacks are more likely to complete OSU than they are to finish at the other schools. And KSU shows the smallest gap between black and overall graduation rates.

4-Year graduation rate for students starting in 1995

	***CSU	OSU	KSU	U of Akron
Black	2.3%	16.5%	11.9%	5.7%
Hispanic*	8.1	13.1	4.6	20.0
Asian	15.2	23.7	26.9	37.8
Native*	0.0	22.7	0.0	0.0
White	9.8	23.8	13.7	10.3
Overall**	8.2%	23.4%	13.5%	11.0%

6-Year graduation rate for students starting in 1995

	***CSU	OSU	KSU	U of Akron
Black	9.2%	42.6%	36.3%	24.1%
Hispanic*	21.6	48.6	13.6	20.0
Asian	42.4	64.4	57.7	40.0
Native*	0.0	50.0	37.5	39.9
White	34.1	56.7	42.7	39.9
Overall**	27.2%	56%	42.1%	38.3%

Source: Cleveland State University, Ohio State University, Kent State University, and the University of Akron.

*Rates often are based on small numbers of enrollees.

**Overall equals the percent of the entire 1995 freshmen class graduating in 4 or 6 years. It may include foreign or other students not listed.

***CSU has many adult students who may take longer to graduate than those attending more traditional universities.

from **ADVANCED COURSES** page 7

start to show increases [in test scores] so students in Cleveland will be equal to their contemporaries in other districts," Marok says.

High school reform experts who have tackled such problems say the reform team's next step should be to upgrade and standardize content so that the same material is taught in every high school.

Students should be required to take standardized end-of-year exams that can assess whether the quality of instruction is consistent from school to school, says Gene Bottoms, with the Southern Regional Education Board in Atlanta.

However, Elliott-Lewis says such testing won't be necessary because course content will be revised to reflect the district's academic standards which are districtwide for each subject and so specific that testing won't be necessary. "If you have standards you don't need that," she contends.

The district's new course requirements also will align more closely with the ACT organization's course recommendations for college-bound students: Four years of English, and at least three years each of science, social studies and math, including trigonometry or other courses beyond algebra II.

Typically, students who follow the ACT regimen score higher on the ACT and, thereby, have a better chance of landing scholarships and getting into prestigious universities.

Most Ohio universities accept any student with a high-school diploma, says Robert Sheehan of the Ohio Board of Regents. However, the average score for freshmen admitted to more selective universities such as Ohio State University falls between 22 and 27, well above the Cleveland average of 16.2.

Students admitted to Ivy League and other nationally prominent schools typically have a minimum score of 27, says Ed Colby, spokesman for ACT, headquartered in Iowa City, Iowa. 🗳️

Extras

Survey shows how district can better prepare students for college

By Sandra Clark

To succeed in college, disadvantaged students need Cleveland high schools to place more emphasis on study skills and critical writing courses, a CATALYST survey has found.

The survey also shows that Cleveland students are worse off than their disadvantaged peers in other districts, when it comes to their high schools providing them with college catalogues, financial aid brochures and other information on how to choose a college.

About 650 undergraduates at four Ohio universities participated in the survey. Students at Cleveland State University, Ohio State University, the University of Akron and Kent State University completed the questionnaire in February and early March.

Disadvantaged students are those who are non-white, have a family income of \$20,000 or less and their parents do not have a bachelor's degree. About 23 percent of students surveyed identified themselves as disadvantaged. Nearly 15 percent of students surveyed said they were graduates of Cleveland Municipal Schools. And nearly all Cleveland graduates identified themselves as disadvantaged.

About 71 percent of Cleveland school's students are black and 8 percent are Hispanic. About 78 percent qualify for free- and reduced-priced lunch.

Study skills and critical writing needed

The survey highlights the achievement gap between disadvantaged students and their more middle-class peers.

Disadvantaged students surveyed say they are earning a grade point average of about 2.7. Their middle-class peers report a higher GPA of about 3.2. Survey responses point to high school courses that teach study skills as one way to shrink the gap. In fact, all respondents who said their high schools taught

study techniques reported higher grades in college, about a 3.0 GPA or a "B." But students whose schools did not teach the skills reported earning only a 2.8 GPA, a "C."

The trend holds true for Cleveland graduates whose high schools taught such skills. Those students report a 2.8 GPA, while those whose schools placed no emphasis on study skills reported a 2.5 GPA.

James Ford Rhodes High School on Cleveland's west side teaches study skills, as part of a new course called Freshman Seminar, says Principal Kathleen Freilino.

The course teaches students how to do research, take notes, organize notes and other materials and how to identify the main point in reading assignments. In addition, the seminar will also teach students and their parents about the SAT, ACT and what type of grades and courses are needed to get into college.

The program will be implemented district wide come fall, says

Freilino, who will head the district's new office of high school reform next year.

The survey findings also show that high school critical writing classes can be a grade booster in college.

Students who said their schools strongly emphasized critical writing report having a 3.1 GPA, while those whose schools did not teach it report a much lower GPA of 2.4.

The survey findings on critical writing and study skills further informs the national conversation on what high schools need to do help disadvantaged students succeed in higher education.

Much of that discussion has focused on the need for a rigorous academic curriculum with at least four years of English, three years of math, science, social studies and at least two years of foreign language for disadvantaged students. Calculus and physics should be included in this battery of courses.

Taking math beyond algebra 2 including trigonometry, pre-calculus and calculus trumps any disadvantages an urban student might bring with them to college, concluded a 1999 report by Clifford Adelman, senior research analyst at the U.S. Department of Education.

Cleveland students need more access to information about college

Like many disadvantaged students, Cleveland graduates have fewer reliable sources of information on where to go to college and how to pay for it than their more advantaged peers, the survey shows. About 56 percent of higher-income students say their parents were their primary source of college information. But only 27 percent of Clevelanders turned to their families for help. That leaves schools as a primary source of college information for local students. However, the survey findings show that, compared to disadvantaged students in other districts, Cleveland students receive less information about college from their schools.

About 44 percent of Clevelanders reported receiving such information from high schools, compared to 53 percent of disadvantaged students elsewhere who said they relied on their schools for college facts.

"That's been true for as long as people have been looking at first-generation college students," says Richard C. Richardson, higher education professor of New York University.

"They turn to their families, who want them to go to college, but they don't know what that means," Richardson says.

Richardson does not believe schools can be trusted to pick up the slack. "Counselors make judgments about students," he asserts. "A counselor may not perceive this person as someone who could benefit from their help" regarding college.

Snap judgments may happen in Cleveland where the counselor-student ratio in high schools is about 400-to-1, says Sheila K. Jackson, head of the guidance department at Lincoln-West High School. The American Counseling Association, an Alexandria, Va., -based group that represents school counselors, recommends a ratio closer to 250-to-1, Jackson notes. Lincoln-West compensates by assigning a counselor to the senior class, says Jackson, who is fulfilling that role this year.

Assistance from outside organizations usually works best at helping disadvantaged students pick a college and finance their education, Richardson says.

The Cleveland Scholarship Program, Inc., is a key source of outside help for Cleveland schools. It places



35 counselors in the district's 17 high schools. "Some schools have two [counselors] because they are so huge," says CSP Executive Director Maria I. Boss. "And that still is not enough."

CSP dispenses scholarship money as well as advice to local students.

Jackson says CSP's help is valuable because college advising can get lost in a counselor's other duties, which include helping the entire student body schedule courses.

"I don't know what we'd do without the Cleveland Scholarship Program," Jackson says.

Mobile students score lower on state test

By Sandra Clark

CLEVELAND 4TH-GRADERS who changed schools one or more times during the school year scored lower than their stable classmates on all five sections of the Ohio Proficiency Test, according to a CATALYST analysis of test scores from 1997 to 1999.

On average, mobile students scored 5.12 points below their more stable counterparts. The largest spread between the two was in math and science. The smallest gap was in reading.

The analysis of test scores of 16,278

mobile students by income is often widest for mobile students who pay full price for lunch and smallest for students on free lunch. In many areas, poor mobile students do better than well-off mobile students. (See chart page 5.)

Similar conclusions can be drawn when comparing students from single-parent and two-parent homes. Mobile students from single-parent homes often do just as well as mobile students from two-parent homes. (See chart page 5.)

Mobility refers to students who change schools one or more times during an academic year. Students change schools frequently due to school choice, family moves, poverty, home-

is something children can learn at home, says Russell W. Rumberger, education professor at University of California, Santa Barbara. Families rely on schools to teach math and science, which is why the achievement gap in those subjects is largest, Rumberger says.

CATALYST's findings come as no surprise to Robertson. The district has not targeted mobile students for any special help, Robertson says. However, he adds that districtwide initiatives such as establishing standards and periodically assessing students' strengths and weaknesses should help them. (See story page 9.)

"Beyond that," Robertson says, "we are trying to make sure they have access to good teaching and what we need to do for all kids."

Cleveland findings reflect studies done elsewhere that linked student mobility to lower achievement.

For example, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Family Housing Fund and other groups studied mobile students in the city. The year-long study,

MOBILITY

students, 1,914 of whom changed schools at least once during the school year, was conducted for CATALYST by Joshua G. Bagaka's, assistant professor of educational research and statistics at Cleveland State University.

"Across all five parts of the Ohio 4th- and 6th-grade proficiency test, mobile students consistently received lower scores than their stable counterparts," Bagaka's says.

"I don't think we need to down play the role of mobility here," Bagaka's says. "Schools should find ways of giving mobile kids special attention because they are at risk of failing."

Bagaka's analysis also showed that the test scores of mobile students suffered regardless of the students' family income or whether they live with one or both parents.

The analysis also shows: The achievement gap between stable and

lessness, changes in child custody and other problems.

Cleveland's mobility rate has fallen from 19.5 percent in 1998 and 1999 to 15.8 percent in 1999 due in part to the end of desegregation, says Peter A. Robertson, Cleveland Municipal School District's executive director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment.

Individually, however, high-poverty elementary schools such as Willow, East Clark, Bolton and George Washington Carver reported rates nearing 30 percent during the period.

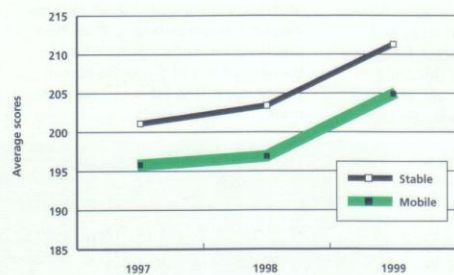
Based on student demographics and test scores from 1997 through 1999, the analysis indicated an achievement gap that varied little even as the test changed in difficulty during the period.

The highest achievement gaps in math and science were 7.5 points and 9.2 points, respectively. The average gap in reading was 3.5 points. Reading

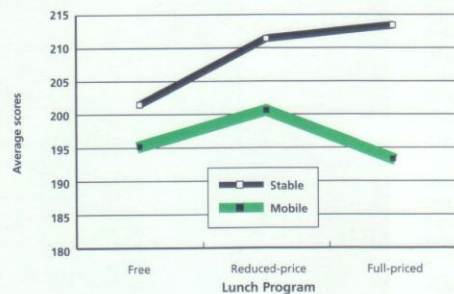
called the Kids Mobility Project, found that students who moved three or more times earned reading scores that were half that of students who stayed put.

David Kerbow, a University of Chicago researcher who has studied mobility in Chicago Public Schools, says constant movement slows the learning pace for not only mobile students but also their stable classmates. An analysis of math in highly mobile classrooms shows teachers frequently stop and start to integrate new students with varying achievement levels into the class, Kerbow says. Introduction of new material slows as the teacher begins keeping lessons basic. And, over time, students in highly mobile schools get instruction that is about a year behind that of students in more stable schools, Kerbow reports.

Cleveland 4th-graders who changed schools one or more times during the school year scored an average of 5.12 points below those who did not change schools on the math, reading, science and citizenship sections of the proficiency test.

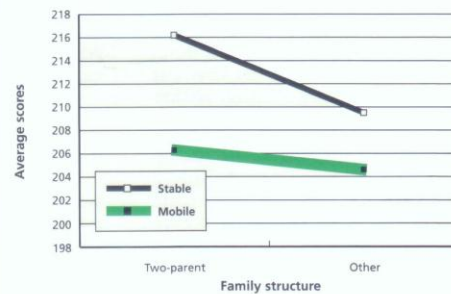


Students from higher-income families who changed schools scored nearly 20 points lower than their counterparts who stayed at the same school.



Achievement differences between mobile and stable students in the Cleveland Municipal School District on the Ohio 4th-grade Proficiency Test (1997-1999). Scores represent the average of scores combined from the math, reading, science and citizenship sections of the exam.

Mobile students from two-parent homes often scored no better than mobile students from single-parent homes.



Source: Data from CMSD; CATALYST analysis by Joshua G. Bagaka's, assistant professor of educational research and statistics at Cleveland State University

Miles Park finds answers

By Sandra Clark

A TOUR OF MILES PARK Elementary School offers a snapshot of mobility—its causes, its impact and even a way to minimize its harm.

Any staff member can guide the tour. They all have stories.

Clerk Ella Kirtley can explain what a task it is to keep pace with the rapid student turnover. Librarian Jeanne Irvin says she spends countless hours and dollars retrieving books from students who leave. Second-grade teacher Jane E. Rodgers can demonstrate how she tries to teach an ever-changing class.

The Cleveland Municipal School District, like most in the country, has no official policy for mitigating the impact of mobility. The district has been pushing schools to improve proficiency test scores without taking mobility and its drag on achievement into account, Miles Park Principal William J. Bauer says. So the school struck out on its own, making the needs of mobile students a schoolwide focus.

"The area superintendent says 'You did good [with proficiencies] last year. How much are you going to improve this year?' " Bauer says. "There's a new student, there's a new student, there's a new student with grades lower than an LD [Learning Disabled] student. You're a teacher and you're responsible for increasing scores every year."

The staff is fluent in mobility because enrollment shifts dramatically here. The school's 1999 mobility rate, the most recent available, of 14.7 percent is below the district average for elementary schools, about 16 percent.

Yet, staff sees a constant churning of students in and out of the school. To date, the school's enrollment shifted from 530 students, to 510 and then 571 for a total change of 81. That means about four whole classrooms full of kids have come and gone this school year. The impact the movement has on learning at the school is huge, Bauer says.

Mobility's influence on behavior and achievement becomes clear one day when Kenneth returns from speech lessons to Rodgers' 2nd-grade class. The tenor of the class shifts. A slight rumble of discord replaces the chatter of children constructing a picture graph.

Kenneth, not his real name, is the most recent of eight new students in Rodgers' class this school year. Kenneth rarely follows school rules and is functioning below grade level, Rodgers says. His classmates know this and give him grief. Little shoves are sent his way, to which he responds by glaring at the tallest kid in class.

He stands out, Rodgers says. Kenneth is the only student not wearing the school's blue and white uniform.

"My students are starting to write paragraphs, and he can't write a sentence," Rodgers says. "I don't have time to work with him."

"I move quicker," Rodgers says. "I'm a 25-year teacher. He had a first-year teacher."

Students like Kenneth are in danger of failing. A 1994 General Accounting Office report on mobility said 3rd-graders who have changed schools frequently are 2-1/2 times as likely to repeat a grade as 3rd-graders who have never changed schools.

A CATALYST analysis of mobility in Cleveland schools also showed a link between mobility and retention.

The analysis also showed average proficiency test scores of mobile students are about 5 points below scores of stable students.

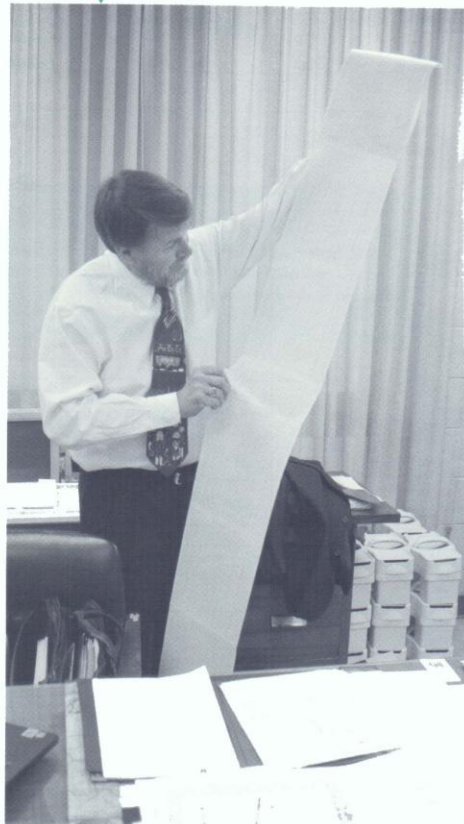
Janice Smallwood's 4th-grade class at Miles Park has 24 students. Seven are new. When Smallwood tested reading and math levels, students scored between 4.66 and 1.68. Six of the mobile students are at the bottom of the list, scoring below those

labeled Learning Disabled. Tianna scored 3.84, the highest of all new students, to rank 11th in the class.

Bad behavior

Behavior is high on the list of areas affected by mobility. The GAO report said that children who move frequent-

Miles Park Elementary School Principal William J. Bauer unfolds a sheet that lists the names of students who transferred in and out of his school since August. The list is as long as he is tall.



ly are 77 percent more likely to have four or more behavioral problems than those with no or infrequent moves.

This constant movement, loss of friends and the effort it takes to make new ones can be "a social nightmare," says Ted Feinberg, assistant executive director of the National Association of School Psychologists.

Some mobile students are content to quietly scope out the class before inserting themselves into the mix. Some use humor to cope, Feinberg explains. The antics of a 4th-grader who had attended about five schools constantly pulled the class off task, says Miles Park teacher Teresa Goetz. She telephoned the boy's previous school to get his history and found that he had jumped on one child's outstretched leg, breaking it. In November, the boy transferred to another school.

A move from family to foster care sent a Cleveland student to Hawthorne Elementary School in Lorain. This boy was so desperate to make friends, he stole money from a teacher's purse and passed it out to fellow students, Hawthorne Principal Loretta Jones says.

"What we see are kids who are depressed because they don't have a social network," Feinberg says. "Kids feel awkward and uncomfortable. They try to prove themselves through strength and coolness."

No records

In addition to behavioral and academic problems, mobile students frustrate administrators because the children seldom arrive with records, grades and immunization forms.

Clerk Ella Kirtley spends half her day enrolling new students, withdrawing them and searching for records from their old schools.

Kirtley is retired but Bauer has convinced her to stay on because he doesn't think he can find another clerk who can keep up.

What's scary to Kirtley is how difficult it is to get vital information on students and how quickly that information changes.

Addresses change, telephone numbers change and pagers are cut off so frequently that "You can't be up to date with emergency cards," Principal Bauer says. Sick children have been sent back to class because the school



Photo Janet Century

Teresa Goetz teaches 4th graders at Miles Park. The first-year teacher recently graduated Cleveland State University. Asked if college prepared her for classroom mobility, she replies, "No. No. No. Not even close."

could not find an emergency contact, Kirtley says.

Testing mobile students

Neither Cleveland schools nor the Ohio Department of Education have official strategies to mitigate the impact of mobility. Academic standards are surfacing as a way to be sure all kids are exposed to the same information and tests even though they change schools. (See story page 9.) The state department also plans to create a system of exchanging student records using Education Management Information Systems. The system should be completed in two years, says department spokeswoman Dorothea Howe.

But for the most part, teachers and principals individually hammer out solutions. Some start by finding out the student's performance level so they can be placed in the appropriate class. This is an informal process at most schools.

For example, at Willow Elementary School, Tannesha Saunders' 4th-grade teacher casually quizzed her when she joined the class in October.

"I think she wanted to see what I knew," says Tannesha, who attended four schools in three years. "She'd teach some stuff then she'd ask some people some questions. Then she'd ask

me a question and I answered it."

Tannesha says the teacher also gave her a buddy, "Brittany, to help me with my work and show me around like where the lunchroom was."

Testing for placement of new students is serious business at Miles Park. New students are given the Star Test for reading and Computer Curriculum Corp. for math, says Miles Park's Assistant Principal Kelley A. Dudley. Both tests assign a grade equivalent based on the student's score and prescribe what students should study to close any achievement gaps, Dudley says.

Star Test scores correspond with grade-appropriate books in Accelerated Reader. Computer Curriculum aligns math with grade levels and allows students to work on problems during math lab and after school. Students work independently or get tutoring from retired professionals who volunteer.

Paris, a new student in Smallwood's 4th-grade class, moved up a grade level to 3.6, Dudley says. "He's still behind, but look where he came from," she says. ●

Photo Tom Ordrey

By Sandra Clark

KENZA C. BALDWIN and her three children have moved four times in the past two years, due in part to homelessness. Finally, she has landed a new apartment. But the drawback is that another move means her 5-year-old son William McDonald will have to change schools.

The shy, impish boy is among a growing number of Cleveland Municipal School students who are dealing with the trauma of homelessness and school mobility. Homelessness alone can make children aggressive, withdrawn or depressed. Some regress and become overly dependent, studies say. Couple that with changing schools and the combination can diminish academic prospects for homeless students, studies conclude.

The district has licked many school

tary School, which is located in one of the district's high-poverty areas. Unless a parent demands transportation to the old school, says Howell-Curtis, the child goes to the nearest school.

If homeless families repeatedly change shelters, children repeatedly transfer to schools nearest the shelters, Howell-Curtis says. "What we say when that happens is 'Leave the children here, instead of uprooting them, until you get on your feet,'" Howell-Curtis says.

For children like William, the resulting disruption can lead to academic failure and behavioral problems.

"He doesn't want to get transferred," Baldwin says of her oldest child, a kindergartner at Case Elementary School. "She [his teacher] shows him the attention he needs. She's not one of those teachers who knows she has 23 kids in the class. She treats everyone individually."

The teacher, Michele Lampley, says William has gotten pretty attached to

repeat a grade and wind up in special education than their more stable peers. (See charts page 13.)

The federal law that attempts to guarantee homeless students equal access to education addresses transportation. It gives parents a choice to send a child to the "school of origin" for the remainder of the academic year. But the law has a clause: The choice must be "feasible" and "in the child's best interest."

Custody cases when the child's location must be secret or hours-long bus rides are two reasons that remaining at the old school may not be in a child's best interest, says Thomas C. Dannis, homeless coordinator for the Ohio Department of Education. The expense and logistics may make transporting students to their "school of origin" unfeasible for a school district, he contends.

"What they're doing is creating an out," counters Laurene M. Heybach, director of the Law Project of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. "If

Homeless students fight to

STAY PUT

issues facing homeless students. However, keeping students in their original schools remains thorny. Federal law allows parents to choose where their children attend school, but the choice must be in the child's best interest and feasible.

The district's policy on providing transportation for homeless students is the same as it is for others, even though the homeless families may move more frequently.

Marcia Zashin, coordinator of Project Act, which helps homeless families tackle school issues, says her office tries to make special arrangements for school bus transportation and sometimes gives bus tickets.

But parents "have to fight for it," says Rojeana Howell-Curtis, principal at George Washington Carver Elemen-

her. She does not want to see him go.

Lampley calls William "the baby of the class." He's among the youngest and smallest. He sucks his thumb.

"He leans and lingers on me. He's always wrapped around my leg," Lampley says. "He's very dependent on me."

Dependent behavior is among a host of problems brought on by homelessness, which makes keeping William and Lampley together as long as possible critical, research suggests. The Institute for Children and Poverty in Washington, D.C., estimated that 16 percent of homeless kids it surveyed in 1999 changed schools three or more times in a year.

Dubbing them "America's nomads," the survey in 23 communities found homeless children are more likely to miss two consecutive weeks of school,

it costs the schools too much money, it's not in the child's best interest."

Frequent moves

The number of homeless students like William is growing. In 1993, the district established Project Act. During the 1999-2000 school year, it served an estimated 1,438 homeless students, a 12.4 percent increase over the previous year. Lack of affordable housing and welfare reform are among the causes, says Claudia Coulton, social welfare professor at Case Western Reserve University's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences.

Coulton, who is studying the impact of welfare reform policy, says the majority of former recipients work but earn about \$13,432 annually. About 30 percent to 50 percent of their

income is spent on housing, forcing some families to move or be evicted when they can't pay, Coulton says.

"It's growing," says Zashin, Project Act's coordinator. "We've got more parents and more school personnel contacting us and telling us about additional families. We're [hiring] a new social worker. We're [also] able to hire a new aide we didn't have before."

More families also are "doubling up" by moving in with friends and relatives for short stints. Shelters limit the amount of time a family can stay to as little as two weeks. Each situation can add to the number of times kids change schools, the National Coalition for the Homeless reports.

Project Act served 292 students in

September, Dannis adds some changed schools up to eight times during the period.

Change can hurt

Multiple moves are hard enough for adults, says Sharon F. Fields, program director at Bishop William M. Cosgrove Family Center for the homeless. "It's extremely painful for children."

Each child responds differently to homelessness, says Zashin. The stress makes some kids aggressive while others withdraw, afraid their peers will know they don't go home after school, Fields says.

"Some withdraw and are unable to trust people," says Zashin. "Some children fall asleep in class. It may be the

only safe place they're in all day.

"They may not have a place to do homework because the shelter is crowded and noisy," she adds.

Miles Park enrolls a number of homeless students, says Principal William J. Bauer. He says he has seen kids leave the building and get into the family car in the school's parking lot and stay there all night.

Children lose things during such upheaval. Baldwin and her children lost clothing after one move. She believes the real loss for her son William will be the bond between teacher and student.

William is polite beyond his years, teacher Lampley says, and gets on well with his classmates. Her only concern

William McDonald, pictured below, transferred from Case across town to Paul Revere Elementary School and things have not been going well for him since, says Project Act coordinator Marcia Zashin. Paul Revere is near his new home in Cleveland's Miles-Union area. Baldwin says she tried to take William by bus back to Case, but with two other children at home, one with severe asthma, she could not manage. William missed a week of school due to stomach flu, Baldwin says. And he still is unfamiliar with the alphabet, his new teacher Robin Cangelosi says.

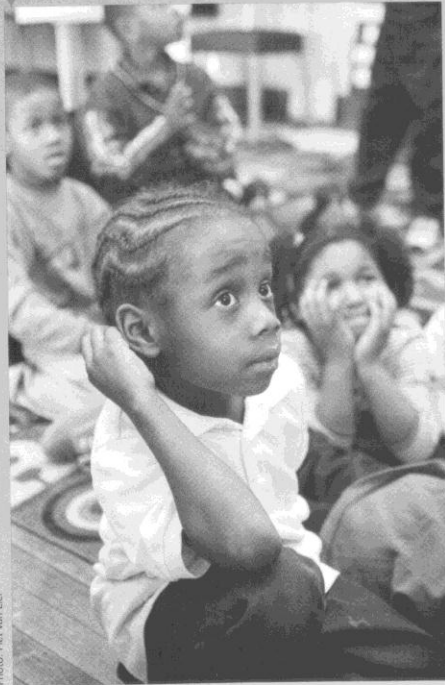
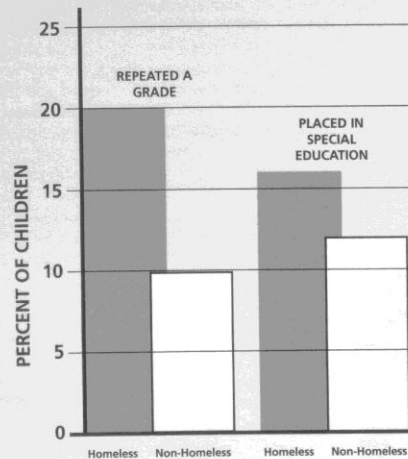


Photo: Piet van Lier

HOMELESS

Nationally, homeless children are about 20 percent more likely to repeat a grade than their non-homeless classmates. About 16 percent of homeless students are placed in special education compared to 12 percent of other students.



Source: The Institute for Children and Poverty; National Center for Education Statistics.

is his academics. He attended pre-school and once knew the alphabet.

Apparently, he has lost some of that. Learning the alphabet again may be tough. At Case, children must recognize letters out of order and they do not sing them, Lampley says.

"Regression is a definite symptom of homelessness," says Barbara J. Duffield, education director for the National Coalition for the Homeless in Washington, D.C.

Homelessness can chip away at self-esteem and lead to hyperactivity, dependent behavior, underachievement or regression. Suicidal feelings are common among children over five, a study by the Institute for Children and Poverty says. The majority of children dealing with homelessness are young, the study says. The average age of the students Project Act serves is seven, Zashin says.

"William is not the same child he was last year," Baldwin says. "He focuses more on things that were tragic and sad than he would on things that are important."

Still, teacher Lampley believes she could help the boy.

If only he'd stay put.

Her right vs. reality

Transportation, or lack of it, will move William from Case Elementary to Paul Revere Elementary. He'll have to go eventually, but Baldwin wants to keep William at Case as long as possible.

"Transportation has to be what the school has to offer," Zashin says. Parents can request that a child stay in the same school, she says. If it is farther away from the new location, parents must transport the child themselves.

"She has the right to keep him in that school until the end of the school year," Duffield says. "But there's a difference between the right and the reality."

The reality is Baldwin has no car.

Baldwin says she asked Case Principal R.E. Oba Lloyd for transportation to keep William with Lampley. She says she was told she would have to provide her own transportation. Lloyd says he does not recall the conversation, but

says that is what he would have told Baldwin had they spoken.

Her son should remain at Case because Lampley "understands [that William] has gone through a hard time," Baldwin says.

Lampley also knows and accepts William's little quirks. She plans to note them on his student records in hopes his next teacher will accept them, too, she says. She'll note: William always takes two meals, he eats one and takes one home. Another William trademark is the bag of chips he takes to lunch. When the class lines up, hands clasped behind their backs, William is the only one holding a bag of Cheetos in his teeth.

Before lunch today, William rushed over to Lampley complaining about a disagreement between Jason and him.

Thumb in mouth, William threw his arms around her leg and held her until she solved the conflict and convinced him to go sort colorful geometric shapes by size.

"When he's gone, I'm going to cry," Lampley says. ●

DISTRICT HOMELESS PROGRAM WINS ACCOLADES

In the mid-1980s, half of all homeless children were not attending school, the National Coalition for the Homeless reported. But by the mid-1990s, attendance for homeless students had risen to 86 percent nationally, due in part to a federal law designed to give homeless students equal access to education.

Congress approved the Stewart B. McKinney Act in 1987 to remove barriers that often prevented homeless children from getting into school.

For example, schools required homeless children to present proof of residence, immunization and previous records before they could be enrolled. In the upheaval of repeated moves, many homeless children lose these items. Many also lack transportation, clothing and school supplies, the coalition reports.

In 1993, the Cleveland Municipal School District launched Project Act with funds the McKinney Act provided to local districts through state education departments. Cleveland received \$172,505 for fiscal year 2001, 10 per-

cent below the previous year. The district is one of twelve in the state to get funding to provide direct services to homeless children and youth. Services include enrolling and transporting kids to school as soon as they are reported homeless.

In addition to immediate enrollment and transportation, Project Act tutors homeless students and trains staff on how to identify and handle homelessness.

It also helps at home by providing parents with voicemail boxes so those who don't have phones can get messages about jobs, housing or school emergencies. It hands each child a bag of toiletries and a backpack full of school supplies, "so they walk into the classroom like everyone else," says Marcia Zashin, coordinator. The backpack also contains a planner so students can tell a new teacher what they studied last.

The local program was selected best demonstration model of innovative programming by the National Association for Homeless Children and Youth.

The law and Project Act are credited with whittling away at barriers to schooling. By 1995, attendance for homeless students jumped from 50 to 86 percent nationally, according to National Coalition data.

A few barriers persist, however.

Students nationwide still have difficulty getting evaluated for special education, gifted and talented programs, obtaining counseling and participating in after-school activities, Duffield says. Frequent school changes mean attendance at after-school practices and meetings would be sporadic. The moves also hamper evaluations for special education and gifted programs.

In some cities, students still are fighting for the basics: enrollment and transportation. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless settled an eight-year legal dispute with Chicago Public Schools in July. The district can no longer deny enrollment due to residency requirements or lack of records. It also must pay about \$3 million in bus and cab fees so transient students can stay in their old schools.

—Sandra Clark