

# **Friends of Skinner West**

## **A subcommittee of the Skinner West PTO/Forum**

Dear Skinner Parents:

It is often said that the media do not report the good news that is happening, however, on Monday, October 31, 2011 the Chicago Sun-Times released the results of their annual ranking Chicago area schools. For Skinner parents, this newspaper story is not just good news, its great news: Skinner West ranks number five on the list comparing students in the lower-grades and number six for students in the upper-grades (sixth through eighth).

While Skinner has a history of high standings in this ranking, which is based on the average ISAT scores, this year the Sun-Times analysis is particularly poignant given all the changes coming about in the City and CPS and all the challenges we face. Hopefully, this analysis will have successfully conveyed to the public a sense of the blood, sweat, and tears that our children, their teachers, Principal Clark, and the entire staff put into developing the critical intelligence and productive behavior necessary for Skinner students to achieve this great standing, year after year!

Rest assured, the great staff we have at Skinner is not going to rest on their laurels. Although Skinner West has positive momentum on every one of the CPS performance trends and metrics, you know that we must accelerate the pace of this progress because the challenges our children will face are constantly growing larger and more complex. It is no longer enough for a highly motivated and hard-working student to develop a mastery of the required skills of a particular field of study and a familiarity with the plethora of topics in any single field.

To be considered successful, students are now expected to develop a working knowledge in a number of fields and participate in extracurricular activities. In this era of “high expectations for every student” our children are being assessed frequently and repeatedly with nationally standardized exams. The results of these assessments are being used, more and more, to evaluate not only the achievement of the students, but also their teachers and their schools. So the pressure to perform is growing on our children. In addition, CPS is beginning the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards for instruction.

These Common Core standards, which have been adopted by 45 states, are a major challenge to us all: students, parents, teachers and administrators. They require that students provide what is called an “extended response” when being tested in the classroom and on nationally standardized exams. Extended responses require that students learn to understand and be able to explain the thought process they use to solve a math problem or make a determination of what the meaning of a poem or work of literature is. The goal of the Common Core Standards is to provide every student in the United States with instruction that will enable every student to acquire the high-level cognitive abilities to analyze, evaluate, solve “real-world” problems, reason, justify, synthesize ideas and think critically and creatively.

Soon, the ISAT exams will be replaced with ongoing computer based testing within courses and computer based end of year comprehensive exams for every grade. Unfortunately, the new standards and requirements are being deployed at a time of diminishing resources and growing uncertainty. This year Skinner West had its discretionary appropriation from CPS cut in half. Needless to say, the new Common Core Standards will result in expenditures for new textbooks, instructional materials, and most critically, classroom technology. And all of this may well have to come out of our school’s discretionary funding from CPS and funds raised by us, the parents of Skinner students.

Recognizing that our students need to develop a working knowledge of the latest technologies in use today, Friends of Skinner West is purchasing the first set of interactive whiteboards and document camera/projectors from funds raised through the Spring 2011 walk-a-thon. These instructional technologies will be installed in a select group of neighborhood and classical classrooms by January 2012. These sophisticated tools are not just teaching aids but are the type of technology that you would see everywhere from high school classrooms to corporate boardrooms. Over time, our children will get hands-on experience with these devices, without which they would be at a competitive disadvantage, in college and their careers.

Our children should be educated in classrooms equipped with a computer network that enables the teachers to differentiate instruction to ensure that all learning styles and modalities are employed, to accommodate students with special needs, to extend challenges to students based on their individual performance and needs. Our children will be tested on computers and their scores will reflect the extent to which technology has been integrated into their educational experience. Our children deserve to be educated in classrooms that will prepare them for college, graduate school, a career, and a lifetime of learning new skills and knowledge, as they will have to be able to do to prosper in the fiercely competitive global economy.

You are probably asking: how can we expect this to happen, given all the challenges we face. But, why should we accept anything less for our children. The question is: what can we do with what we have. What can we do to build the classrooms that will give our children a fighting chance, and an equal opportunity in the global marketplace that they will have to compete in?

**Right now, you can do something** that will give our children the inspiration to keep their noses to the grindstone of homework, to continue working hard to understand what is being taught in the classrooms at Skinner, and stay on the straight and narrow road to upstanding character and exemplary behavior.

**You can make a contribution to the “Fund for Classroom Technology” of the Friends of Skinner West.** We are asking every family to consider a donation of \$500 to the fund. That’s only about \$10 a week, and what better investment can you make than in the education of your children?

If \$500 is more than you can afford, at this time, perhaps you could make a donation of \$250. Please keep in mind that the contribution you make will be gratefully appreciated. And every dollar you contribute, no matter how much, will go to purchasing the critically important technology needed for your children. Your generous contribution now will make a brighter tomorrow for all our children!

Respectfully yours,

Nell Strong  
Chairperson

Marla Sedler  
Vice-Chairperson

Kim Heather  
Treasurer

Seamus Glynn  
Secretary

P.S. Please ask your employer if they have a matching gift program. If they do your contribution to the Friends of Skinner West will be doubled.

You can contribute online:

Go to the Skinner website ([www.SkinnerSuperStars.org](http://www.SkinnerSuperStars.org)).

Select the DONATE button at the top of the left column and fill in the input box that drops down. Be sure to select Friends of Skinner West as the recipient.

Or you can write a check to Friends of Skinner West and mail or deliver to:  
Skinner West Elementary School - Main Office  
1260 West Adams Street  
Chicago IL, 60607

All donations are fully tax deductible.