

For Better Schools

A Chicago Board of Education meeting provides an exceptional opportunity to observe citizens' passion over issues that will determine their children's futures. From instructional methods to school closings,



Lisa Scruggs

security practices to facilities improvements, everyone has an opinion. For the past eighteen months, Lisa Scruggs, '98, has been in the middle of the hubbub and nothing could please her more. Scruggs, a partner at Jenner & Block, is serving for two years as senior policy advisor to the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan.

Scruggs provides legal and policy advice in a unique executive loan program. Her portfolio includes some of the thorniest matters of education policy and practice. She tackles school financing, standards and procedures for creating new schools such as charter schools, and the implementation of federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation, among other things. School financing alone draws her into the thickets of pension reform, capital planning, and legislative and constitutional questions related to Illinois' property tax-driven funding methods. Beyond that, as she said, "There are always matters that aren't exactly included in your job description." This usually involves listening to many impassioned people and funneling their input into the system for consideration. "There's a joke around here," she said: "Someone's ticked off? Where's Lisa?"

Scruggs is well prepared for the demands of her position. She earned a Masters' in education policy from the University of Chicago

in 1994 and, during her time at the Law School, she remained very active in matters pertaining to education. She also helped found the Young Women's Leadership Charter School and she is a director of Business and Professional People for the Public Interest, the formidable public interest law and policy center whose education project was led for many years by Jeanne Nowaczewski, '84.

At the Law School, she won the Beale Prize for Legal Research and Writing, as well as the Ann Watson Barber Outstanding Service Award, and she was an editor of *Roundtable*. Nonetheless, she says with a chuckle, "I'm sure some people thought of me mostly as a troublemaker. I'm passionate about diversity of all types, especially intellectual diversity, and I don't mind speaking up for a good cause." She clerked for Judge Ann C. Williams at the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois and the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, who is, according to Scruggs "an incredible legal mind and also an incredible person."

Asked what sustains her through the challenges and stresses of her novel assignment, Scruggs cited the support from Jenner & Block and mentors like David J. Bradford, '76, the vital importance of the task, the passion of the stakeholders, and the intellectual challenge of blending policy-level thinking with feet-on-the-ground administrative and political realities. Then she said, "There's something I've learned about professionalism from the great people I've worked with: there's no time for letting your shoulders sag when things get tough and there's no time for popping champagne corks when things go well. You do your job as well as you can and you get on to the next thing. There's always a next thing." And then she adds, "My twins, Maya and Jacob, who were born last year—it's their future I'm fighting for now."—G.D.