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ABSTRACT

The data for this report on school dropouts in New York City were collected by means of in-depth interviews with high school staff members, students, and dropouts. A total of 229 persons were interviewed in 53 high schools with dropout prevention programs distributed throughout the city. All respondents were asked approximately 50 open-ended questions which allowed them to comment freely on a wide variety of issues. The report is divided into four major sections. The first section discusses problems that lead to dropping out, student perceptions of dropout prevention programs, the importance of early dropout prevention, and the evidence that dropouts can be successfully remediated. Section II is subdivided into eight chapters, each discussing reasons for the dropout problem as understood by staff members in the interview sample. Included in these chapters are discussions of attendance, academic failure, and discipline. Section III presents a discussion of the common elements of successful programs and the problems which have caused some programs to be i***fective. Recommendations for elementary, middle, and high schools are presented in Section IV. (Author/RLV)

INTERRUPTED EDUCATION:
STUDENTS WHO DROP OUT

PROJECT #5003-95401

SEPTEMBER 30, 1979

NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION

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INTERRUPTED EDUCATION:

STUDENTS WHO DROP OUT

(5003-95401)

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FOREWORD

Prepared by Dr. Alan S. Blumner
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This study takes measure of the dropout student and what the student, staff, and administrators have to say about the dropout problem. The study reveals that the New York City schools have the capacity to meet this problem and that, on a small scale, there is real and continuous success. Documented in the words of teachers, administrators, and of the students themselves, the study undermines the popular myths that "those kids" cannot be reached and that "the bureaucracy" cannot be responsive. Further, compelling evidence of the willingness of "the bureaucracy" to respond is found in the Afterword to this study written by Nathan Quinones, Executive Director of the Division of High Schools.

What next? This is a question that we who have been involved with this study hope will be taken very seriously by policy makers at all levels who determine the resources available to the school and the priorities to which the schools are to respond.

INTRODUCTION

This report vividly documents the dropout problem in New York City Public Schools as perceived by over 200 of the school system's staff members and students. From in-depth interviews, the report captures the individual experiences, personal insights, and illustrative anecdotes of adults and young people who know the problem intimately. The study of the problem, then, is based mainly on subjective material. The findings, however, represent themes in the interviews--areas of strong agreement--rather than idiosyncratic elements. In other words, the respondents' shared understandings, mutual concerns and common criticisms shape the direction of the report. Interviewed staff members offer the practical wisdom that years of working with dropouts have taught them. Students in the high schools, at one time on the verge of dropping out, give their reasons for wanting to leave their schools. Finally, actual dropouts tell about the schools they left and how the person without a diploma fares in the outside world.

The respondents' discussions of the problem, reported in the study, lend a dynamic quality to the narrative. Furthermore, their words add to the meaning of the dropout phenomenon in a way that statistics fail to do. Expressing feelings of hurt, anger, fear, frustration and hope, the respondents convey the difficulty and pain for students, parents and school staff members dealing with the problem. The respondents' accounts also contribute to an understanding of the complexity of this problem. For example, they offer a portrait of the dropout that is multi-dimensional, that defies convenient stereotyping.

Interestingly, the opinions and observations of the dropout problem that emerge in this study find support in many recent studies which say

there is cause for concern as voiced by respondents in this report. A dropout's chances of becoming a successful citizen or a fulfilled person are severely diminished by the lack of a high school diploma. High correlations between dropping out and unemployment and criminal activity have been documented by several studies. Several of these important studies are reviewed in the New York State Minority Task Force Report, Truancy in the Public Schools of New York City. One review of a New York State Education Department Study states that the high school dropout confronts "relatively high unemployment and relatively low earnings".[1] The same conclusion appears in Randall King's The Labor Market Consequences of Dropping Out of High School. He points out that "The labor market problem of high school dropouts are well-known--higher unemployment rates, lower earnings, and less favorable occupational distribution as compared to high school graduates".[2] In addition, the Monthly Labor Review states, in an August 1970 report on the employment of high school dropouts and graduates, that "School dropouts have double the unemployment rate for 16-24 years old vis-a-vis graduates of the same age".[3] Persuasive evidence for these conclusions appears in statistics collected by the U.S. Department of Commerce. According to the data, males who complete eight years of elementary school can expect $343,730 in lifetime income; those who complete one to two years of high school can expect a lifetime income of $389,208; those that complete four years of high school can expect a lifetime income of $478,873; and those that complete four years of college can expect a lifetime income of $757,923.[4]

The increasing concern about the dropout problem that seems to be surfacing for many educators, parents, and community members, may, in fact, be related to the depressing realities of the job market for teenage youth. Where in the past the uneducated youth was able to join the

unskilled labor force, in today's world jobs have become highly specialized and technical, and require greater amounts of formal education. Commenting on this problem, the Minority Task Force Report states, "The best indication of the problem faced by dropout youth entering the labor market is that 16-19 year olds accounted for only one-tenth of the nation's labor force in 1975, but one-fourth of the unemployed".[5] The problem getting work for the New York City dropout is no less severe. According to the 1979 Current Population Survey, in the second quarter of this year there were 58,000 unemployed youth between ages 16 and 19.[6] Further evidence of the problem comes from the school system's Bureau of Attendance figures, 1972 to 1978, which show that "over 17" discharges rose sharply in number (26,112 to 40,354) while "employment" certificate discharges dropped sharply (5,668 to 1,343).[7]

Employment possibilities for the black or Hispanic youth who drops out are much bleaker. U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare statistics reveal that black men and women, without diplomas, have almost double the unemployment rate of their white counterparts.[8] This situation holds true for New York City. According to the Minority Task Force study, which reports 1977 Bureau of Labor statistics on youth unemployment rates for New York City, the white dropout who enters the labor market faces a 25.5% unemployment rate, while the black dropout faces a 44.0% unemployment rate.[9] This means that nearly one-fourth of the white youngsters, and nearly one-half of the black youngsters will not find gainful employment.

This disastrous situation, for minority youth in particular, appears even more frightful when one considers the conclusion of the Fleischman Report on the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education in the State of New York that "If a student in New York State is black or Spanish-speaking, he is more likely to drop out of high school

before graduation".[10] Though the argument is based on entering and graduating statistics for the class of 1967, it is highly likely that the same is true today. First, the dropout rate for the city has not declined, and secondly, the minority population of the city has been increasing rapidly in proportion to the non-minority population.

Youth crime, it is not surprising, is related to the dropout problem. The Minority Task Force, after a review of studies on the subject, reports that "Levels of educational attainment correlate inversely with criminal behavior.[11] As supporting evidence the Task Force Report refers to a study reviewed by the Development Council of New York City (EDC) which finds that "High school dropouts are three to five times more likely to be arrested for committing juvenile crimes than are those in high school".[12]

Studies of the financial costs of the dropout problem offer compelling figures. For example, the Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity studying the problem in 1972 concluded that school dropouts "burden society with reduced national income and government revenues as well as increased costs of crime and welfare".[13] They estimated that the failure to attain a minimum of high school completion among the population of males 25-34 years of age in 1969 cost the Nation $237 billion in income over the lifetime of these men. The costs to the Nation of crime and welfare attributable to inadequate education were estimated at about $3 billion a year respectively. Furthermore, the study reported steady increases in these costs over time.[14] The Committee's findings, then, appear as valid today as they did seven years ago.

Apparently, New York City is paying a heavy financial price for its school dropouts. One indication of the cost appears in the EDC report referred to earlier. This report claims that the cost of youth crime

to New York City is approximately $329,000,000 and argues that most youth crime is related to dropping out and truancy. Referring to New York City Police records, the report presents evidence that the majority of offenses by juveniles are committed during school hours: in 1976, 31,350 were committed Monday through Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., as compared to 2,109 committed between the hours of 12 to 8 a.m., and 9,921 committed between 4 p. and 12 p.m.[15]

Overview of This Study

The data for this report were collected by means of in-depth interviews (lasting from 1 to 2½ hours) with high school staff members, students, and dropouts. A total of 229 persons were interviewed in 53 high schools with dropout prevention programs distributed geographically throughout the city. The interview sample included 98 staff members (administrators, teachers, counselors) in local high schools, alternative high schools, and Auxiliary Services; 76 students in mainstream and alternative school dropout prevention programs who had "bloomed" (experienced success) in their program; 31 students who dropped out and then returned to school ("returnees"); and 24 non-returning dropouts. All respondents were asked approximately 50 open-ended questions which allowed them to comment freely on a wide variety of issues. All respondents were assured absolute confidentiality and anonymity. The interviews were conducted by persons trained by project staff (see Appendix G). Many of the student interviews were conducted by interviewees who themselves were dropouts at some point in their high school careers.

This report is divided into four major sections. Section I contains three chapters. Chapter I discusses problems that lead to dropping out as perceived by students and dropouts. Chapter II presents students' opinions of dropout prevention programs (includes "bloomers" and "returnees"). In Chapter III, two issues raised by the data are discussed. One points to the importance of early dropout prevention as the most effective way to deal with the problem. The other offers tentative evidence that dropouts can be successfully remediated and urges the school system to reach out to these young people.

Section II is subdivided into eight chapters, each discussing reasons for the dropout problem as understood by staff members in the interview sample. Therefore, chapter headings reflect issues raised by the respondents, and the order in which they are presented reflects approximately the importance assigned to them judging by the frequency and strength of respondents' comments. Each chapter consists of a brief discussion of the findings, followed by the interview data presented in the format of stated problem area and suggested solutions. The problems and solutions were identified by a thematic analysis of the data. Direct quotations from the interview material are provided to highlight the discussions (see additional quotes in Appendix J).

Section III presents a discussion of the elements which are common to "successful programs" and a recognition of problems which have caused some programs to become ineffective or abandoned. The discussion is based on survey data from 22 mainstream high school prevention programs.

Section IV presents recommendations. They are the conclusions of this project's staff members after analyzing and integrating the data.

SECTION I

Findings from Interviews with "Bloomers," Returnees, and Dropouts

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEMS OF POTENTIAL AND ACTUAL DROPOUTS

The interview data from potential dropouts show that these students are not blind to their own inadequacies, yet they recognize that the school system is partly responsible for their problems. When asked why they thought they had experienced problems in school, slightly more than one-third blamed themselves. Less than a third blamed factors beyond their control, such as the home situation. About a third held schools responsible.

Data that helped to identify problem areas from the point of view of students, resulted from a variety of questions. "Bloomers" were asked, "What kinds of problems did you experience in school which led you to this program?" Dropouts and returnees were asked, "What were the main reasons you dropped out of school?"

Clearly, problems experienced by students interact with one another and have multiple origins. Though in this sense the problems can not be regarded as mutually exclusive of one another, for the purpose of our analysis, we have categorized them as follows:

A. Complaints about schools.

B. Academic difficulties.

C. Emotional problems and problems with friends.

D. Problems that relate to students' home lives.

The discussion of these problem areas develop in the order of their importance which emerged from the data.

A. Complaints About Schools

There are areas of strong agreement among potential and actual dropouts regarding their dissatisfactions with school. The most

frequent complaints were about teachers and other staff members. Three other areas mentioned often were the school curriculum, school as a bureaucracy, and school rules and regulations. A sample of quotes from the students' interviews are presented here.

(On teachers and other staff members)

"Teachers do not teach for a full period. They have a tendency to treat us like children. Place was guarded like a fortress. Teachers were all right; they just did not do their job."

"Because I do not speak to anyone about my problems, and besides I felt there was no one who I could really talk to. I felt my counselor really did not give a shit."

"Teachers did not understand; they should have more patience, especially with young people. I used to read the New York Times at the age of three. So, I know that it was not me."

"I did not go to school; I did not want to go. A friend of mine got mugged. The public schools of New York City are no good. The teachers do not care."

"I think that classes were too big. Did not get along with teachers. I think that some of them were class prejudiced."

"Yes, I tried to speak to the guidance counselor. Every time I got a pass they told me to come again. I got fed up with that, and when I came with my mother, she said I should have seen her before. She (the counselor) was just talking away. She was not talking to me. I was so angry I did not even say anything."

(On curriculum)

"School was all right, but it's nicer to hang out especially in warm weather. Some classes (English and Math) were boring (not hard). I wanted vocational school in September, but did not get it."

"Did not go to classes because they just did not grab me--saying things over and over; got restless in class, not comfortable."

(On bureaucracy and school rules and regulations)

"In the regular school I felt in prison. The rules, guards, and door locking after the late bell. No remedial or reading programs were offered to me in the 9th grade where I really needed it. I knew the rules like walking in the halls, but I did not catch on to the learning. No one took time with me."

"Rules are important, but it is also important maintaining a relaxed atmosphere with the freedoms of an adult and a student."

"Schools are highly overcrowded. During change of period, there's total chaos in the halls. It is difficult for one teacher to teach 35 students and teach them well. You feel that you are really wasting your time in school. The majority of the teachers are disinterested."

"An administrative error where a person with the same name got left back resulted in my also getting left back. I tried to get the matter straightened out, but to no avail. In turn, I lost interest and dropped out. I felt I was being cheated and unjustly treated."

"I was absent because my child was ill, and when I returned to school, after caring for her, I found I was discharged."

"The fact that I was ignored when I had a problem which was caused by a mistake the school had made. I was in the 11th grade. I just gotdisgusted with the system and left. The damage being my wrongfully held over instead of my being promoted."

"I went from School A to School B with a transfer, but the school would not accept it (too late in the term); also, because my mother is not living near School B, but I did not want to live with my mother (near School A). So, I let it go (dropped out). At first, I tried to speak with the counselor at School A, but I was already living in the Bronx with my sister. I never connected with the counselor in Brooklyn, so I gave up. I was just tired of being placed here and there."

Teachers and other staff members. All groups of students expressed strong dissatisfaction with teachers and other staff members (e.g., guidance personnel, deans, etc.). They described them as not caring about them as people, unwilling to help the student with problems, unable to communicate effectively with young people, unable to offer clear explanations in class, prone to himiliating students, and particularly insensitive to students with problems (e.g., slow in class).

Curriculum. All three groups of students felt that the curriculum offered in schools does not meet their needs or interests. The most frequent criticisms of the curriculum pertained to the lack of job training. Students felt that it does not prepare them for the world of

work, nor does it help them to secure work. Other criticisms pointed to the curriculum's inflexibility in the sense that the individual's interests can not be accommodated. Some students described the curriculum as boring, while others said it is too difficult.

School as a bureaucracy. Most students interviewed agreed strongly that the atmosphere of most schools created problems for them. Typical words used to characterize schools included "crowded," "inflexible," "uncaring," "unsupportive." As examples of problems with the bureaucracy, they cited the difficulties involved in changing classes they do not want or do not like, and in finding solutions to problems with teachers.

Rules and regulations: When "bloomers" were asked, "Which of the school's rules and regulations give you the most trouble?", the overwhelming majority identified attendance problems (lateness, cutting, and absence). Respondents next identified the need for hall passes as another bothersome rule. They complained, in particular, about the need for hall passes whenever they want to go to the bathroom. Judging from their remarks about hall passes, students feel terribly confined by the lack of freedom of movement within the school setting. It also seems that the wish to address personal interests (e.g., "hanging out") often interferes with obeying school rules. Other rules that students frequently have difficulty with include: no smoking, no talking, no eating, dress regulations, and restrictions against leaving the school for lunch.

B. Academic Difficulties

Respondents most often referred to their poor grades, the experience of failure, being left back, and not being able to graduate with

their classmates as problems that contribute to their decision to drop out, or to think about it. Many students explained their academic problems in terms of their inability to concentrate on their classwork and the lack of the ability to memorize. The lack of these skills, respondents said, leads to their feelings of being overwhelmed by the schoolwork.

C. Emotional Problems And Problems With Friends

In this category of problems, most respondents mentioned their peer relationships. They identified negative influences from peers such as drug taking and "hanging out." Other problems relating to experiences with peers include feeling lonely and alienated, and getting into fights and arguments.

Less frequently mentioned are problems that seem to describe the students' emotional lives. They talked about feelings of anxiety, fear of failure, and feelings of confusion. The origin of these feelings, according to students, is both the home and the school. That is, they referred to a lack of emotional support from the home or disruptive family situations, as well as the indifferernce of school personnel towards their problems. Here the respondents speak for themselves.

> "Pressure came down--in the street, in my home, in school, and in my relationships. There were so many pressures and responsibilities I began to overload. I had to explode. I also dropped out of junior high school for about a year and a half. It was different at that time. I was involved in violent actions. I was young, hardheaded; I would not listen."

> "You may have personal problems with the teacher. I find myself attacking a teacher verbally, I think because of his position over me--dominant. I disliked feeling inferior."

> "Violent relationships--I have beaten teachers with fists and chains. But I regret all of that."

"I guess the main reason I dropped out was that I hung out with the wrong crowd. There was not a day that I did not play hooky or cut a class."

"Because coming to school near the building, you will see every Tom, Dick, and Harry standing out on the cars getting high and asking people why don't you stand outside instead of going in."

"I was not interested in school. I did not care. Most of the time I was in the park playing handball. I got to the front gates and down to the park."

"Only difficulty is racial, with white students. They will walk through the hall and say some kind of name, or in class make a smart remark about color."

"Not going, truancy, lack of self-confidence, thought I was stupid, unfamiliar surroundings. Went to Catholic school, did not know the whole world was not Catholic. I was scared when I found out I had to be with blacks and Puerto Ricans."

"How could I think of the future when I was so busy messing up the present."

D. Problems That Relate To Students' Home Lives

Respondents' comments about out-of-school problems relate mainly to pressing home responsibilities. They identified having to work to support elderly or sick parents, siblings, a wife and/or children, or simply wanting a job, as experiences that interfere with their lives at school. Some had unrealistic expectations about marriage or employment. Most of these students expressed the wish that a compromise had been reached with their schools, so that they could have continued school and attended to the demands on them from their home lives. A few quotes follow:

"Some of the reasons I dropped out were that I had to deal with school life and at the same time I had to deal with my social and personal family life, and the pressures were too great. For example, my family was never well off financially, and I would have to do my part as the eldest of three children to make ends meet, and I would fall behind on my school work."

"Because I thought I would get married and live happily ever after, and would not have to worry about anything."

CHAPTER II

STUDENTS' AND DROPOUTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PROGRAMS

Overview of Findings

It is clear from the data that "bloomers" see their programs as having a strong, positive influence. Many "bloomers" reported that they thought about dropping out of school before they came to the program. Since being in the program, only one of the students who had thought of dropping out was still thinking about it. When asked whether they would have dropped out if not for the program, more than half of the respondents answered that they would have or might have dropped out.

Returnees also have been affected positively by their programs. All of them described feeling more hopeful and positive about the future since being in their programs. They mentioned plans for careers or jobs; some hope to attend college. Almost all returnees thought that most dropouts would return to an educational program if given the opportunity. Only one of the dropouts interviewed thought that dropouts would not return given the opportunity.

Positive Features Of Prevention/Retrieval Programs

Students in programs were asked to describe the aspects of their programs that work best. Returnees were asked to discuss what the schools could do for dropouts, and dropouts themselves were asked what advice they had for schools. The features most often identified by all students include staff and teacher attributes, program structure, curricula, and other students. The respondents also made some suggestions for improving prevention/retrieval programs which will be included in this discussion.

Teachers and other staff members. Students and dropouts emphasized the need for teachers who are committed and caring, who give individual attention, who offer help to students, and who, in general, teach better. The overwhelming majority of "bloomers" cited such teachers as the best aspect of the program. Many of the "bloomers" said that they prefer teachers in these programs to teachers in the mainstream.

Staff such as administrators, counselors, and security guards were also described as supportive and helpful. They offer advice to students in trouble, encourage students to attend class and remain in school, and in general, extend friendship to students. They help students to secure desired coursework and help them to find employment. One comment from a "bloomer" seems to say it all.

> "You can tell the head of the program everything. There are no inhibitions; there's a lot of people in the program having the same problems you are. Mr. _____ will make you talk to someone who has had the same problem you are going through if he can not help you. He only knows from facts about drugs, pregnancy, etc. He will refer you to someone who has had firsthand experience rather than his fact booklets. If you have a problem with a teacher, he will have a talk with them. He will call parents on your behalf explaining to the parents what the teacher may be doing wrong. I may not want to tell my parents because of embarrassment, even though they may be able to help."

The best teachers in prevention and retrieval programs were described as friendly, informal, and patient. They maintain a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom. They communicate with students in their own language and tolerate the expression of personal feelings in class. These teachers are good listeners. Here are some of the comments students make about teachers in their programs.

> "Once when I got arrested for rape, it was a case of mistaken identity. When the teachers heard about it, I had already been in Rikers Island for four days. They were furious and came to court, and the one who could not come sent all kinds

of letters saying how I could not possibly do a thing like that. They saved me 5 years in jail. I will never forget that as long as I live.

"She is a mother figure. If your parent gives you advice, she explains to you why. She does not slow up. She is demanding, but does not push too much. She does not treat us as high school students. She talks to us in our language ("cool out," "chill out," etc.). Mother figure--she gives us that push; she tells us that education is important, but she does not force you to learn."

"Well, like I said, if we do not hand any nonsense, she would not give us any nonsense. I like a person that tells you the truth whether it hurts or not. Some things you just can not say to a person in a nice way. She wants us to be honest. I try to be; I do not know about the rest of the class now. She is one teacher I can say that gets you ready to deal with the outside world. Now that we have about 60 kids in our program, only about half of them are serious about it. She can not throw them out because of the bureaucracy in the school."

"Mr._____has been on and in the streets longer than we have, and he knows the ropes. He will always say, "You can't bullshit a bullshitter." He cares about us. He is straight with us. He does not hold anything back."

"Very friendly. They do not put themselves like teachers. They are on the student's level. They know where the students are coming from. If they see you are messing up, they will help. When teachers are on your level and know what you are talking about, it makes them seem like human beings. They seem to like what they are doing."

The teachers instruct on the learning level of the individual student. They allow students to work at their own pace and give individual attention in class. They make reasonable work demands, give time beyond class time, and are concerned for the student's progress. They take classwork seriously, but have a sense of humor and make learning fun. They discipline without punishing or humiliating. They express their own opinions to students and give clear explanations in the language of young people while providing the right amount of challenge. They relate course material to real life experiences and prepare students for life after school. They repeat things until the student understands

while varying the routine and pace of classwork. They are seen as intelligent and knowledgeable of the subject matter. When asked to describe the best classroom teachers in their programs, the "bloomers" and returnees had these comments:

> "He jokes around with us. If we are reading a book, he makes a joke about something in the book. He does not have us write a lot of things in our notebooks. He said that most of the time, when we write in our notebooks, we do not look back on it. He talks in our language. He makes learning fun. He asks us questions, and he expects us to ask him questions."
>
> "My English teacher is not boring. You like to come to class because she is funny, but gets down to work. She can keep a class under control without any threatening or yelling. She does more than what she has to according to the curriculum she is given. Every Friday she will take us to the writing center."
>
> "He will go through the lesson regularly. If there is a question, he will go back over it. And if you still don't understand it, he will continue with the lesson and take you aside and explain it to you."
>
> "They present the problem to you. If you do not know what you are doing, they will come over and help. It's almost like being tutored. They give personal attention, yet it does not seem to take up class time."
>
> "The teachers create an atmosphere for me to discover new things on my own. They respect different opinions and make students feel valuable."
>
> "Friendly, sweet, and kind. She goes over the answers you got wrong. First, she makes you read it. Then you look at the example and you go step by step. Then she will show you how to work it out. Then you do it. If she sees you making any mistakes, she will help you out. She will ask you what you want to do. If she sees you doing too much in a specific area, she will move into another subject. That way you have worked on all the subjects easily, and you won't be back on just one subject so you can move on to the other sections as soon as possible, even though it all depends on you."
>
> "There is none of the best or the worst. Everyone is treated the same. If you are doing good, they tell you, 'Good, and keep moving along.' But there is nothing like, you did better than he."
>
> "The main thing is that when you do something that you think is good, you get congratulated. They always congratulate you."

"They (the teachers) are all right. They help and try to get you on the right foot. They keep pushing you. If you are right, they agree with you. They don't take sides."

"It feels good. You come to school. It does not feel like an obligation. There is no one on your back. It feels like you are doing a job because you are learning; but you do not feel it's forced on you because of the way they treat you. I move on smoothly on the schoolwork because the teacher takes it step by step. This has helped me, because when I study at home, I do it this way. The way I have been taught helps me when I take work out. It does not feel like schoolwork. It feels like a game sometimes, so I just continue doing it. I want to move on and make it to college."

"Over here there is less time in class. I can go to work and I need to work. I find it's O.K. because they help me in the main areas where I need help. The prejudice, there isn't any. In school you find it even in the teachers. In school they would not like you. They would ride on you, sometimes to help you but you could not know it. In Spanish, I missed two tests because I was sick. I was good in Spanish, but she failed me. She used to do that for a lot of Puerto Rican kids."

"They give you a little of everything in every subject. This freshens up my mind. They give me the test soon. They give you on the test what you studied, and if you do not remember it, they give you the work again. I like the way they are treated. They treat you like adults in college, not kids. In other schools the teachers are screaming. They have an attitude and take it out on you. Here you don't see angry teachers because of the problems they have. You see that you are being helped here. If you aren't good in one area, they help you out. They will stay the whole day if you need it, and then see if you can do it on your own. It's like everyone is being tutored individually."

Program structure. Another aspect that students felt contributed to their success was the particular structure of their programs. "Bloomers" approve of the smaller classes, shortened school day, and relaxed, home-like atmosphere. Dropouts spoke of the need for such an atmosphere and for less crowded classrooms. "Bloomers" appreciate that they have input in programming. They mentioned also a minimum of rules and the lack of regimentation. They value the preparation for careers or jobs which is built into their programs. Similarly, dropouts mentioned the need for alternative programs that combine

work and study, or that allow for outside employment and child care. Some examples of students' comments include the following:

> "It's not noisy; you can concentrate. You feel relaxed; you don't have to move from one place to another. You are just here for three hours. You don't need a pass to go to the bathroom. As long as you study, it is like feeling free."

> "Some teachers would embarrass you in front of everybody if you came late. Here they ask you; you don't need a pass, you just tell them. If you need help, they try to work it out. Here, there is less kids in the school."

Curricula. Most students cited the coursework as a valuable part of their programs. It was described as helpful and not too demanding. Students are able to progress at their own rate. The work is fun, yet challenging and motivating. Returnees also described a curriculum program that is more interesting than that of the mainstream. Dropouts referred to the need for such curriculum. One returning student said about his program:

> "You work on whatever you want. If you want to work on math, social studies, or reading, they give you an assignment for the subject. Also, they test you, and even though they did this in school, over here you get the tests right away, the same day."

Other students. Support from other students was seen by "bloomers" as important. Other students in the program were often described as friendly and as providing a good example through their own success. They helped the respondents to relate to and respect others.

Suggestions By Students For Improving Program

"Bloomers" were asked whether they had any suggestions for changing their programs. About half thought no changes were needed. A few hoped that the number of programs such as theirs would be increased. They stated the need for programs that are alternatives to the mainstream. Among their suggestions was that the program be more demanding in terms

of rules, curricula, and the process of selecting students for admission. There were a few mentions of the need for improved physical facilities and materials, more preparation for jobs or college, more extracurricular activities such as field trips, and better race relations.

Returnees and dropouts were asked what advice they had for schools. They stated the need for programs that treat them as individuals. For example, one dropout said,

> "I would expect it to be sympathetic with my problems and set up a program where I could learn without having too much pressure placed on me as far as the work and the time involved in the work. To teach in a fashion that would be interesting instead of boring and give me individual attention when I need it."

Some of their other suggestions to improve schools were:

> "They could send some program representatives to try to talk to some of them (dropouts). Open up a place where they could just walk in and talk about their problem."

> "Do a questionnaire like this for their own school; find out what is wrong with their students."

> "Set up a committee of students who know how to get in contact with other students (dropouts). These students could get credit for their participation."

> "Be kind to kids who do not do good in school. Usually, they want to but don't know how. If a teacher really cares and especially if you think he or she loves you you want to work harder to please the teacher."

> "If they were shown that it isn't as easy as it appears. There should be some kind of shock treatment to show them that it isn't easy out there. The education department should start something like the recent program on TV, "Scared Straight." Have it directed at kids who think about dropping out."

The Effects Of Programs On Their Students

"Bloomers" perceived their programs as improving their personal and academic lives. The overwhelming majority of "bloomers" felt that the programs helped them to be better people. There was an even

greater perceived impact on their academic lives. Almost all "bloomers" said that their programs helped them to be better students. Comments reflecting their progress include:

> "I am more choosy about who my friends will be because I want friends who will make me improve as a person, not go down on the ladder."
>
> "Yes, now I am more mature than I was. I won't be using profanity as much. I can walk away from trouble without fighting."
>
> "My main problem was arguing. It shows me how to look at both sides of a problem and what to do in that type of a situation."
>
> "I used to be wild. Not anymore. That also influences your grade. I don't know, it is just out of habit now. It's just that I want everyone to have great respect for me."
>
> "It's helped me to see myself as I really am. With the special courses, they inject different things to teach you about yourself. There is a course where you speak to the teacher and your fellow students about yourself, and they give you feedback."
>
> "When you go to classes that are boring and then you go to this program, it relaxes you and gets you ready for the next classes afterward. You get to let out all of your anger. We get to do stuff for old people in the neighborhood; like we put on programs at Christmas."

Improvements As Students

About half of the "bloomers" felt that their classroom behavior improved since being in the program. Better attendance (e.g., less "hanging out") and more self-control in the classroom were cited most often. "Bloomers" also mentioned that they now contribute more in class and are generally more involved in classwork. Those who described improved relationships with teachers since the program, most often attributed the change to the fact that teachers in the program are nonauthoritarian, informal, and easy to talk to. Improved attendance and academic progress were two other areas often cited by the "bloomers." In addition, they reported that they give more thought

to the importance of a high school diploma, they are more willing to meet work demands and to obey rules and regulations, and they are more concerned about the world of work. Lastly, they mentioned that their study habits and ability to concentrate improved.

Personal improvements. Improved "interpersonal" skills including more willingness to cooperate, were also seen as important results of their experiences in programs. Respondents also mentioned a stronger sense of responsibility and better self-control. An example of improved self-control is the less frequent or discontinued use of drugs. Some "bloomers" reported that they are now seeking out friends who avoid drugs and "hanging out" and who are trying to better themselves. In addition to their increased interpersonal skills, over half of the "bloomers" felt that the programs improved their opinions of themselves. They most often cited an increase in self-confidence and the perception of themselves as potentially successful in life.

Changes in thinking about the future. A dramatic change attributed by "bloomers" to programs is with regard to thinking about the future and the world of work. The majority of "bloomers" felt that their programs are helping them to plan for the future. Nearly all reported having learned things that would be of value in the world of work. The most cited work-related skill was that of the ability to communicate, both on the job and in job interviews. Vocational skills and a sense of responsibility were also mentioned by respondents. Here is how one student explained the effect of his program on his attitude about the future:

> "Listening to the senior citizens talk. It is funny to see what they have been through because I do not want to be in some of the situations, like some of the senior citizens are. Some of them even worry about where their next meal is going to come from. I think it prepares me so I will never be in a situation like that."

CHAPTER III

A DISCUSSION OF TWO SUGGESTIONS FROM THE DATA

Identifying the Hard-Core Dropout

Some of the data imply that there is a kind of hard-core dropout distinguishable from those dropouts who eventually do return to school. One variable which suggests this fundamental difference between hard-core dropouts and returnees is the extent to which the youngster thinks about the future. Dropouts and returnees were asked whether they had given any thought to how leaving school would affect their lives in the future. Returnees were evenly split on this question, but among dropouts, twice as many gave no thought to the future as those who did give it thought.

A second distinguishing variable seems to be the value that students place on education. When "bloomers" were asked, "How important is it to you to get an education?", almost all said it is important. When asked, "If important, have you always had this attitude?", the majority of "bloomers" said "Yes." In contrast, an analysis of questions about the meaning of education to dropouts reveals that though nearly all said <u>now</u> it is valuable, nearly all said that it meant nothing to them when they dropped out.

Reaching Out to the Dropout

There are suggestions in the data that dropouts would be receptive to the school system's efforts to retrieve them and that there may be an optimal time period for outreach. Almost three times as many dropouts and returnees felt that they would not drop out if they had it to do over again, as those who felt they would drop out again. Also, most dropouts

either tried to return to school or thought about it, and all of them feel that they would want to go back to some kind of educational program if given the opportunity. All but one dropout thought that returning to school would have a major effect on their lives.

Evidence that the dropout experience alters the meaning of education for youngsters also suggests that dropouts would be receptive to returning to school. Dropouts claim that education is now important to them because they see its connection to job success, self-respect, and respect from others, although it meant little or nothing at the time they dropped out.

Another indication of their availability is that many students who leave school feel that they do not benefit from doing so. When asked whether dropping out benefited them in any way, dropouts were evenly split, while twice as many returnees said they did not benefit as those who said they did benefit. Their comments about work illustrate this point. Although a surprising number of respondents reported that they were able to find work while dropped out, (almost four times as many said that they found jobs as said that they had not), only about half of the respondents who found work were satisfied with their jobs.

It is also clear from the data that the experience of dropping out itself acts as a catalyst for youngsters wanting to return to school. The experiences of dropouts on the whole were harsh. They mentioned the difficulty of finding a job, disliking the job they take, feelings of lack of self-respect and respect from others, and boredom. Descriptions about their experiences as a dropout include the following:

> "Once on my own, I couldn't afford to take care of my responsibility. I had a job and sometimes my boss would leave a note for me to do something, and I couldn't read it. I was a butcher and I couldn't read the scales. I was at the point where I once considered suicide."

"Never drop out; it's too hard afterwards, much harder. You usually forget most of what you learned, and you have an inferiority complex."

"I dropped out of high school because my mother wasn't getting enough money from the welfare, and I had to get a job. The job that I got wasn't working out the way that I had planned it would; not enough money. They told me the best way to get a good job was to finish school."

"After you start seeing the outside, and some people involved in school and taking on that responsibility, you feel left out. You wind up on the street, and those are the ones in criminal activity. They are looking for a buck, to look good, for a girl; acting as if being out of school didn't affect them; trying to hide the fact."

The interview data point out, furthermore, that if the school system worked at returning dropouts soon after they leave school, it might well be successful in its efforts. Data that contribute to this conclusion include: Most returnees said that they thought about returning to school during the first year that they were out; about half thought about it within the first six months after having dropped out; half of the dropouts said that they could have been persuaded to stay in school at the time that they dropped out; about half of the returnees reported that the school did take some steps to retrieve them, whereas most dropouts say that the school did not take steps.

SECTION II

Findings from Interviews

with Staff Members

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Why Students Drop Out of School

"Students drop out for a whole range of reasons, such as, lack of interest in subject matter, lack of priority of education in their lives, lack of understanding between staff and students, student's inability to see the use of education, students' feeling of powerlessness by teachers and administrators who believe in authoritarian strategies. Students reject authoritarianism. Educators don't recognize this because this is the system they came from. Regular problem solving strategies seem to have no effect with dropout students. You need new ones, or keep on losing ground. Students' living conditions are unimaginable. They suffer from such social, environmental conditions as poverty, neglect, lack of concern by family, and lack of awareness by teachers of these conditions, lack of caring."

"They drop out because of lack of adequate programs for them. These students should have more vocationally geared programs to train them for getting jobs. They have family problems. Parents are uneducated as to what their kids are doing in school. Some of the students are working to support the family. Students are out all night either working or running aroung, or sometimes are babysitting. They have poor health; they get sick and fall behind. Work is too boring for the brighter students. Illiteracy is a big problem. Some have mental problems, fear of being on their own going from class to class. It's a lack of security . Some of these students fall so far behind that they are forced to quit. They don't get caring on the part of the teachers. The teachers feel that they are not getting paid enough to give any extra time and energy. There is little individual attention. The teacher should give students more individual attention and care, and the school system should show more concern for these students. Have smaller classes; 1 in a class so they can get what they need."

"They drop out because they are behind in reading, therefore, frustration. They can't cope with the work. They fall further and further behind; it's not true. They're not teaching anything, but this attitude becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Also, you find a senior who shouldn't be in an academic program but in a vocational school program, but they missed the exam, or decided too late, or didn't know the options. A counselor can't always tailor a program to the kid. The kid may not be found in time. This is because of the system of automatic progress. By the time they're in high school, you can't pick up all the problems. They're passed on from elementary school and not seen till high school. Never before have these kids been picked up for evaluation and testing. The system is not making school and the world of work compatible."

"I constantly hear their complaints about the indifference toward them. Students feel no one cares. And financial reasons--staying in school is a burden for them. Also, this type of kid has difficulty dealing with anything long range. They need a variety of short term goals. Their orientation is to the present, not the future. Students dislike school, say that there's nothing here for them, nothing to do. Something less structured might make them stay, such as, five periods and work experience instead of eight solid academic periods. Give them experience outside textbooks, to make "inflation" mean something. Many have a lot of anxiety about getting out of their home situation. They want out perhaps because of alcoholic parents or abuse. They want to be treated as adults and they think adults don't go to school."

CHAPTER I

STAFF MEMBERS: TEACHERS, COUNSELORS, ADMINISTRATORS

Recognizing that potential and acutal droupouts usually have problems beyond the school's control, repondents from this study have a general belief that their youngsters can learn and that school can educate them despite these problems. The key to success, repondents firmly agree, is a staff that has skills for relating to and teaching the student who is vulnerable to dropping out. Staff members, in addition, must be willing and be allowed to expend an unusual amount of time and energy with students, and must believe that students with problems can succeed. Repondents suggest, in other words, that staff members are most successful with these students when they want to work with them, have the necessary "knowledge", and expect them to achieve. Least successful with these students, respondents report, are teachers, administrators and counselors who do not understand these students' problems, who are not comfortable with their lanaguage or personal styles, and who lack skills for effectively communicating with them.

Respondents also mention that staff members who tend to engage in a conflict of wills with students, where authority wins out in the long run, are often unsuccessful with dropout-prone students. Their opinion is that this discipline-oriented approach, with students who themselves typically lack the skill to explain their problems or to request help verbally, exacerbates tensions and prolongs conflict situations. The respondents claim that these exchanges often result in the student being "pushed out" of school instead of being helped. This results in heightened

feelings of hostility and anger toward school and school authorities.

Teachers

Comments about teachers fall into two categories -- how the system fails the teachers, and how the teachers fail the students.

System failures: Some respondents were more critical of the system than others, but even the least critical respondents referred to the rigidity, hugeness, and cumbersomeness of the system's bureaucracy which make any changes or adjustments in procedures extremely difficult, if not virtually impossible. Typical comments were: "The system rewards mediocrity; they don't want hard working teachers." "If you innovate, experiment, you get in trouble." "If your're good, it's bad; they hate anybody who rocks the boat." "The system wears you out." By "the system" some respondents meant the Central Board, some a combination of Central Board and the school's administration and principal. Some mentioned the union saying in effect that the union's awareness of the past exploitation of teachers has, in some cases, caused it to discourage the giving of time and effort.

Teacher failures:

The majority of respondents made some reference to teachers who should not be working with potential or actual dropouts because they lack skills and a caring attitude. Many of the respondents express the opinion that so much of the dropout problem is related to this mis-match. They say, in particular, that some classroom teachers do not have appropriate knowledge, skills, or experiences to enable them to reach students who are underachieving. They explain that dropout-prone students with academic problems require teachers who can identify their special difficulties, who have ways to motivate the unwilling student, and who have

the patience to work with the student who expects to fail.

Respondents also mention that some teachers don't seem to have the psychological stamina needed to work with the dropout-prone student. They claim that these students often are emotionally demanding, and tend to wear-out staff members who can't pace themselves, that is, parcel out their energy in relation to their own needs.

Counselors

The need for a much expanded counseling component is the sum total of respondents' comments about this subject. Besides academic and career counseling, respondents named a wide range of other services which schools should provide the dropout-prone student. When asked, "What are your specific suggestions for improving counseling for the dropout-prone student?" their answers included the following list.

Counselors should: (1) provide a flexible program of studies with easy access to a variety of approaches to learning (2) lead sessions on interpersonal skills, value clarification, descision making, conflict resolution, self-discipline, good nutrition, study habits, sex education personal grooming, and health maintenance, (3) give students information about the personal, financial and professional rewards of education, (4) enhance the student's self-image, help develop self-confidence, (5) expand contact with parents so as to involve them in their child's life at school, (6) work with parents to develop good counseling skills, and (7) make sure students acquire a saleable skill, with work experience while in high school.

Not only did the overwhelming majority of respondents say that the schools need more counselors, they stressed the need for better counselors. As in the case of teachers, respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of specifically trained counselors for work with dropout-prone

students, and counselors who want to work with them. They mentioned the need for counselors to be familiar with and sympathetic to the student's ethnic group and life style.

Administrators

Many respondents referred to the critical importance of good leadership to a program's or school's success. The principal or director can set the tone, articulate the philosophy, and personify the practice of the setting. Ideally, he/she should be, according to the respondents, fair, able to maintain or raise morale, "go to bat" for staff and program, set the level of expectations for staff and students, and maintain personal, supportive contact with both groups. He/she must be accessible and serve as a catalyst for the creativity of the staff. According to some respondents, dropout prevention programs often do not get this caliber of leadership because the appointments are political.

Respondents reported that the principal and other senior administrators of a high school, within which there is a special program for potential dropouts, can "make or break" the program by their attitude and actions. Some respondents claim that their programs are regarded by their administration with distaste and are tolerated at best. Their school principals lack enthusiasm and do not actively support them. Several respondents cited fellow faculty making disparaging references to their programs. One respondent said, "The administration treats us like a stepchild. They make it clear they couldn't care less. They sort of tolerate us. And I don't know why because we make them look good; we keep a lot of kids in school for them." This negative attitude of the leadership, respondents argued, transmits to the rest of the school so that the special programs, and their staff and students, are stigmatized by the rest of the school.

Other respondents reported that their administrations extend themselves to provide every assistance. This kind of active support, respondents explained, is absolutely essential to special programs which are faced with enough challenges without having to deal with hostility or indifference within the school system itself.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Teachers	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Policy and decisions made by central administrators often are unsuitable and counterproductive for field staff working with dropout-prone students.	1. Solicit input from field staff before handing down policies. Suggestions include: (a) increase collaboration between central administrators and field staff through problem solving workshops.
The teacher's role is too narrowly defined with respect to students who have many personal and home related problems.	1. Expand the responsibilities of teacher. Suggestions include: (a) mandate and train subject teachers to instruct reading when necessary, (b) require teachers in settings with large populations of dropout-prone students to assume counseling responsibilities, (c) encourage teachers to work on students' problems after school hours (phone calls, mail home, tutoring, etc.). 2. Consider changing certification requirements to permit use of experience in lieu of certain course requirements.
System does not reward teachers who are dedicated to and successful with the dropout population.	1. Reward excellence. Consider some kind of merit system. Suggestions include: (a) master teacher designation, (b) money bonus for teachers producing increase in student attendance, higher reading and math scores.
System frustrates and discourages innovative, creative teachers. It resists change and there is too much "red tape."	1. Create ombudsman role (at Board of Education) who has direct access to Chancellor and can assist teachers in the implementation of creative practices.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Member: Teachers	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Union awareness of past exploitation of teachers causes it to discourage giving of time and effort.	1. No solutions offered.
There is no adequate system for holding poor teachers accountable due to tenure.	1. Consider accountability measures. Suggestions include: (a) develop supportive, periodic evaluations of teacher performance. (b) train superviors to identify ineffective teaching approaches and to provide constructive feedback.
Insufficient representation of racial minorities on school staffs (students need appropriate role models).	1. No solutions offered.
Some teachers unwilling or unable to work with students plagued by personal or family-related problems that interrupt their progress in school.	1. Change assignment procedures so that schools with large populations of high risk students receive teachers who have the talent and the desire to work with them. Suggestions include (a) give schools more autonomy in hiring teachers, (b) allow for specially qualified teachers to volunteer for particular sites, (c) when must cut staff, don't cut on basis of seniority only.
Some teachers lack teaching techniques and skills for working with students who have a history of academic failure and are not motivated to learn.	1. Better prepare teachers to work with this population. Suggestions relate to teacher training and in-service: (a) <u>teacher training</u>: (1) lengthen period of student teaching, (2) enable "master" teachers from inner city schools to teach in college classrooms, (3) teach instructional techniques proven most successful with unmotivated students, (4) make courses about the teacher's own mental health mandatory in college, (5) teach about cultures of inner city youngsters/ethnic groups. (b) <u>in-service</u>: (1) provide orientation sessions for teachers new to a school in its problems and practices, (2) support groups/sharing meetings for mutual guidance, reassurance, skill exchange.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Teachers	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Some teachers lack interpersonal skills for effectively communicating with problem students.	1. Specifically train teachers in techniques for dealing productively with hostile, hypersensitive, acting out students. Suggestions relate to in-service: (a) provide group counseling for teachers to gain insight and control over their own behavior when faced with difficult students, (b) provide workshops in conflict resolution, nonauthoritarian approaches to disciplining, nonjudgmental forms of criticism.

Direct Quotations From Interviews with Staff Members:

How the System Fails Teachers

"Most teachers don't want to see these dropout-type kids in the building. This is typical of all teachers in all schools. This attitude must be overcome. None of these programs can work in chaos and violence, and the lack of security in the schools indicates to teachers that the Board doesn't care. So double the security force, protect teachers, and then teachers will see that it's not empty posturing. Without protection, teachers want the violent kids out of school, so something tangible must be done first, before teachers will see that the Board is serious about dealing with the problem."

"With budget cuts we lost the best, many dedicated teachers and that spirit is gone. Many teachers have given up. Now they are not very successful, even with good intentions. Because of budget cuts there is demoralization. They feel they are on the front lines. Feel they have no way to control what's happening. And because of seniority, schools are left with oldtimers. At this school, these older teachers are used to white, middle class girls. Now they are teaching in a ghetto school. They have not adjusted to that for the most part."

"There is no sense of renewal for teachers. There are not programs where teachers are encouraged to change their teaching, to discuss their relationship with students, and there is a breakdown in contact between administrators, teachers, and students. This eventually leads to looking at the job as routine."

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Descriptions of Teachers who are

Effective with Potential and Actual Dropouts

"You must tell them not to give up because of those things beyond their control. Probably the teacher won't be able to do much about the kid's family life or even his low self-esteem. And, he or she must be careful, because there's much self-fulfilling prophesy. When the teachers say to themselves, "This student, because of these problems, will never learn" -- it happens. So the teachers must never stop trying to maximize their effectiveness. Have students learn despite the constraints. Teachers must learn to accept these constraints and work within them."

"A teacher shows concern by being a willing advisor, staying after school, going out of his way to help the kid. Call parents. Follow up on a kid or inform him that he cares. Treat kids as individuals with individual personalities. Become a surrogate parent in a way. Help with another teacher he is having trouble with."

"Go after the kid after he makes a step backwards. Confer with him, take him out for a soda, telephone. He/she has to feel it constantly. Being willing to take risks for kids. Even if disappointed time and again. Stick your neck out. Fight the system to defend the student. Be available. Establish contact with parents, home."

"Give time. Show specific interest, ask about problem they had last week. Compliment on appearance, clothes, compliment on achievement...personal attention. I go to each student and work individually; this is better than standing in front of class. Spend time talking. Don't hassle them. They have trouble with authority."

"To work well with these students be honest. Tell them off when necessary. Don't lie to the kids. They need structure, honesty, discipline. Tell the kids they've done something right. Be genuinely open. You can praise the kids, they thrive on that."

"Good, successful teachers with such students are those who make themselves aware of the individual needs of the students. They take the time. They feel it's their responsibility to get the students involved. They have good teaching skills--are well prepared, use good questioning methods, know educational materials and their use. The best teachers are the best educated. They have good attendance. It doesn't have as much to do with a teacher's experience as with good supervision. That is very important--can make all the difference."

"Must be dedicated, must care. Must have willingness to get involved beyond school hours. Call for kid, follow-up, see kid. Do more than basic requirements. People who can and do listen, hear him, but understand. Have tolerance of various behaviors. No preconceived ideas. No prejudice, or at least less. Willingness to give of oneself--effort, time. Kids recognize this. It's the art of teaching. They have a style. It varies. The teacher who manages to convince the kid that they are on the kid's side; that happens infrequently with the dropout student."

"Talk to kids, not just in the classroom. Be friendly, but not their friends. Make a distinction. You are the same as I am because we are humans and have feelings, but we are not the same because I am older, etc. Spend time after school. Don't be afraid to do things with the kids; i.e., watch softball game."

"Must be tolerant, kind, inventive, flexible, but structured. Willing to try stuff that is crazy, but structured enough to systematically make notes on results. Must be both. With a wide background. Ideally, come from many backgrounds. Teacher has to present a program, but be able to depart from it. It's difficult. Most important are kindness and flexibility. Teacher has to push for improvement without hurting their feelings, which are very easily hurt. They will walk away. You may have to change your program in one day quickly, or your students leave."

"Greet kids by name. The personal approach. Follow up on absenteeism and ask reasons and how kid is feeling or what's going on. Try to find out about kid's personal life without prying. Personal contact like "How's the job?" "Plans for this and that" sports, cars, etc. Some friendly interest in some shared aspect--personal touch, but not overly friendly or disclosing; i.e., personal life, drugs. Do discuss issues like drugs, films, articles--attention to ongoing issues."

"Must be able to relate to the student. Must be able to overlook minor indiscretions on the part of the student. Must be able, when assigning a grade, to evaluate the work the kid has done individually (in relationship to his own improvement; not comparing the student with the class). Teacher must not hesitate to take extra effort; call the nome, find the student in another class."

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Counselors	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
As in the case of teachers, counselors also are frequently unprepared for or unsympathetic to dropout-prone students.	1. Better prepare counselors for working with particular populations through in-service training. Suggestions include: (a) provide orientation sessions for counselors new to a school in its problems and practices, (b) support groups/sharing meetings for mutual guidance,

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Counselors	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
	reassurance skill exchange, (c) teach about cultures of inner city youngsters and ethnic groups.
Some counselors do not have the personal skills that these particular students need (perhaps as basic as listening) though they may be very good at college or career counseling.	1. Better prepare counselors through in-service training. Specific suggestions include: (a) provide group counseling for counselors to gain insight and control over their own behavior when faced with difficult students, (b) provide workshops in nonauthoritarian styles of communicating.
	2. Reconsider assignment procedures for counselors. Specific suggestions include: (a) allow counselors to volunteer for schools they want to work in, (b) consider match ups between types of talents of person assigned and particular needs of student population.
	3. Extend counseling function to school staff not necessarily credentialed as counselors: i.e., enable school aides, paraprofessionals, teachers to do counseling.
Current counseling services in many schools are insufficient. The counseling load in schools with high dropout rates is unrealistic.	1. Increase the number of counselors where the need is greatest. The ratio recommended by respondents ranges from 1 counselor to 20 students (for a dropout prevention program) to 1 per 100 students and up to 1 per 800 students. Everyone deplores the ratios found in some schools of 1 counselor per 2,000 students.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Counselors	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Students most in need of help are least likely to get it because counselors have options about which case to work on, and for a variety of reasons (e.g., wanting to maximize number of students served, not wanting to spend time on "hopeless" cases), often do not choose the potential dropout.	1. The system should establish counseling priorities so that difficult cases do not get neglected. 2. Omnibus counselors: One counselor identified to work with student throughout stay in high school, including all his needs, program, attendance, work goals and placement, personal problems, behavior problems, etc.
Too much "administrivia": counselors are burdened with too much paperwork which prevents them from giving time to students.	1. Reduce paperwork for counselors. Suggestions include: (a) add paraprofessionals, office aides to take care of much of the active paper work (b) improve intra staff communications about students, keeping usable records of all contacts.
The dropout-prone student needs much more counseling on various subjects in addition to traditional career and college guidance.	1. Counselors should lead groups on topics such as developing interpersonal skills; e.g., how to function in a group, how to communicate, how to express anger in socially acceptable ways, how to resolve conflicts.

(Problems, cited by staff members, pertaining to administrators are presented in discussion format in Section II, Chapter VII.)

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Improving Counseling for Potential Dropouts

"Institute omnibus counseling where the counselor is responsible for everything for the kid from the beginning to end, personal, program, etc., all aspects. Do not have more than 300 kids to one counselor. Have more paraprofessionals and aides to follow up on calls and letters. Pursue kids, parents, and attendance office people. Decrease the caseload of counselors and increase aides to go out in the field and bring parents and kids in."

"Workloads for counselors are overwhelming because they have to deal with emotionally disturbed kids, career, college, etc. It's more than just dropout problems. There are bilingual problems, and numbers are everything. Teachers could take on a kid, but most teachers won't. If every teacher took one kid with problems under his or her wing, 200 kids could get one special person to help them out in a school. But, you can't force them and they won't."

"Counselors have to find a way to talk to the total school population through the group process. They should emphasize decision making and the clarification of values. We ought to train counselors in these areas to deal with whole classes, not 1 to 1, but 1 to 10, or 1 to 20. Deal with whole groups, so you can take over a class for a period and reach all the kids. That will maximize their effect."

"We're not talking about numbers, but the quality of counseling. Everyone who works with kids. The first line contact people, teachers and administrators, should be involved in counseling. We are trying it. It takes time and effort to train for this. The "heavy stuff" is left to the psychiatrist, but we all are and should be "counselors." Accepting this fact is first. We are not just teachers of content, but teachers of kids. Maybe we need to see kids as clients, in the same way a doctor has a client, and see them as people coming to us with many kinds of needs, not just for content."

"At high school level, a lot more follow up is needed; i.e., call the same day the student doesn't show. Immediate contact helps. Schools don't use peer counseling; i.e., the buddy system, etc. to help kids as much as they could. This requires more time for me and other teachers to make contact. More assistance in helping kids see life goals, objectives, etc. There's a lot of talk about it, but not much seems to really happen here."

"We need teachers to act as counselors, or bring in paras. Counseling work does not require specialized training; you can use uncertified people. The elevator operator in our building is serving as a counselor without being recognized or rewarded. Just be able to give useful advice. Counselors should themselves go to the homes of students, and see where the students live. They don't. Have social workers or paras who make home visits."

"Teachers and counselors must discuss students all at one time in a group. They need to share information regarding each student. Kid does all right in one class, but messes up in all others. Find out what's going right in one class. How come this one teacher got through to him? We need to learn if the student is sick, pregnant, or worked up. Here, one boy was getting each girl pregnant; we found out when we compared notes. I'm not sure the city can afford to do this. The student may have simultaneous

problems: health, mental health, academic, and economic. Students eat junk; they live on potato chips. They need to be told what's good. Some don't eat at all. Nobody takes care of them. We assume all people learn certain things--eating, bathing--but it's not so. Many of the kids need a good medical exam. They've not learned basic living skills. They need IQ testing; many are below average. They need extra help. They can be helped. It's the smarter ones who are more likely to make trouble. The weaker ones often are passive."

"In our school we have each staff member acting as surrogate parent to ten advisees. We tap into the student's emotional life. That's a very important link. School is and should be a part of the community. It should be aware of everything in the community--housing, health, food, and social services. It should be able to make referrals, intervene. We need after school centers. School should be part of a child's whole life, not only academic. It should be associated with play, too, not a cold impersonal building that shuts at 3 p.m. The system doesn't contact homes to find out what the problems are. It needs to reach out via home visits, extensive phone calls, truant officers, family assistants, and street walkers. Find out why a child is sleepy, dirty, drinking, or taking drugs."

CHAPTER II

SIZE--BUREAUCRACY

The problem of size, that is, the largeness of units, was spontaneously mentioned by almost every staff member sometime during the interview. Not all addressed themselves to the same aspect of the problem. Some mentioned the vastness of the school system and its massive bureaucracy; many spoke about the hughness of some high schools; and probably the greatest number spoke about excessive class size.

Some respondents described the negative effects of the largeness of schools, classes, and the system on teachers. They spoke of the inability to make personal contact with students, of not being able to efficiently reach officials who are in positions to do something about pressing problems, and of the interminable processes involved in getting anything done which is the least out of the ordinary (sometimes because the proper forms do not exist!). For other respondents, the vastness of the system was too depressing to even contemplate.

All agreed that particularly for potential dropouts, big is bad. The largeness of the system and of schools is seen as depersonalizing and alienating. Respondents explained that it requires good social skills and a fair amount of self-confidence to find one's way among thousands of students. Most dropout-prone youngsters either do not ask for attention, or try to attract it by undesirable behaviors. Quite a few respondents pointed out that for many of these students the transition from the relatively protected, small world of the junior high school to the usually overwhelming high school is traumatic. They just can not cope.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Size	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Size of classes is a problem for students and teachers. Classes are too big for dropout-prone students to get individual attention and instruction. Individualizing is difficult in classes of 30 to 40 students and creates frustration on the part of teachers.	1. Some respondents who call for a smaller teacher to student ratio indicate that it must be accompanied by a change in the teacher's attitude. Otherwise, it will not make a difference in the experiences of students in the classroom.
Large schools are problematic for dropout-prone students. Students in risk of dropping out, more than others, need consistent attention from caring adults and a sense of belonging to a family or a community. They are less able than others to request the help, or develop attachments in a mass setting. They relate to persons rather than institutions, and they tend to "get lost in the shuffle" because they don't know how to seek out support from school authorities and teachers.	1. The solutions mentioned address themselves to creating smaller units within large schools--mini schools--or to creating off-site programs which are considered preferable. 2. Better orientation of students coming from junior high school to high school. Each junior high school entrant, and often his/her parent, can meet student's counselor in spring before entrance, and in a few schools already do. Weave high school program around student's needs.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Comments about the Size of Schools, Classes, and the System

"The system contributes to the dropout problem by its immensity. The structure is such that most individuals don't see overall plan--where they fit, where they are going. This is true for students and staff, so they revert to a kind of lock step, not following, a deadening situation. It keeps them out of touch with their own goals and purposes."

"There is little chance for change. Even if good things are done in one place, it is hard to disseminate this so others can learn of something that works and can also implement it. Bureaucracy makes implementation difficult. By the time these changes are made, you have lost timeliness because the population affected keeps changing."

"There are too many kids in classes; i.e., 48 in one of my classes--overcrowding. There is no chance for teacher interaction, and no chance to learn or contact the teacher. There is lack of the attention that these kids particularly need."

"Bureaucratic. Slow moving. Red tape. Frown upon innovations. Rules and regulations. For example, it's good to go on field trips and visit places of work, but it's difficult to take a class out of school because of the need for forms, approval, and consent of administration. This frustrates teachers from innovating. One positive point is the alternative schools. They can get around some of this. Also, good stuff is done at the central office, but dissemination of the information is tough. There is a need for more openness, sharing, and cooperation. There is a communication problem in getting information into schools and getting some schools to accept new ideas. Good curricula, etc. are written, but are never used in schools. This way much good effort is lost."

"The system is too big. There is too much of a bureaucracy. For example, when a counselor identifies a kid who needs special education, by the time the kid gets in the special ed class, he has dropped out. The waiting lists are very long. Home instruction programs where students get work at home also have taken a long time to implement. When you recommend a student for another program in a different school than they are currently enrolled in, there is a great time lag."

"If a kid changes his goals, there is no system flexibility. For example, if a kid decides in 11th grade that he wants to go to a vocational school, he can't get it because vocational is only open in the 9th and 10th grade. Size--sheer volume and numbers are a problem; i.e., record keeping for transferring from school to school. We can not make changes if there are cut-off dates. Sometimes all the regulations "snowball." One problem leads to another. Parents do not always know English and can not communicate with the school staff."

CHAPTER III

OUT OF SCHOOL PROBLEMS THAT AFFECT DROPOUT-PRONE STUDENTS

Respondents typically characterized students with whom they've worked who are likely to dropout as stressed by a variety of personal and family related problems. The type of problems and their severity vary with the student--conflicts with parents, trouble with the law, sick or ill family members, financial problems, being a young parent, suffering from depression, intense anxiety or fears about school. According to the respondents, many students lean towards dropping out, or actually do, because they are unable to cope both with the stresses of school and their personal lives. Their problems often occupy the time, their energy, and their thoughts, and so interfere with their abilities to attend school, to concentrate and to learn.

Some respondents say that their students are so problem-ridden that nothing short of a massive social service intervention by the school system could enable them to remain in school. Other respondents say that their youngsters basically need a friendly ear, a confidant, some sound adult advice, and emotional support as they work through stresses in their lives.

The respondents differ, therefore, about the specific role of the school system when it encounters youth who have difficult lives; however, the majority of respondents agreed that the system does have a responsibility to reach out and support these students in their attempts to attend and succeed in school. There was also wide agreement that currently the school system is not doing all that it can in this regard. Respondents argued for the reordering of budget priorities to provide schools with the necessary resources to respond to, or to refer

problem-ridden students; an increase of staff training for all school staff who face these students; a management plan to increase co-operation with the city's social service agencies and thus eliminate much duplication of effort.

To illustrate the point of view that the system can do more to help students cope with personal stresses, many respondents related anecdotal accounts of some of their own successes. These accounts told of caring adults who take out-of-school time to listen to a troubled youngster; teachers who share their own advice and experience in an effort to counsel students; staff members who go to students' homes to talk with parents so as to better understand a problem; counselors and administrators' tireless efforts to work with students and their families to minimize major stresses--unemployment, sickness drugs or criminal activity, divorce, etc.

Interestingly, many respondents believe that often a small effort to help a student goes a long way in terms of building mutual rapport, and therefore increasing the student's positive thinking about school. Examples of these efforts included finding part-time work for a student, getting a babysitter for a young mother, giving an alarm clock to a late sleeper, referring an alcohol father to a clinic, and helping a girl resolve a conflict with her boyfriend.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Out-of-School Problems	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Entering students often lack educational preparation/support from the home. The current system operates on the assumptions that parents prepare their children for the system by providing motivation for schooling, behavioral and social skills expected by institutions.	1. Parent education. Suggestions include: (a) teach parenting--how to motivate children for education, how to support attendance and punctuality, how to reward desired behavior, how to increase their child's cultural experiences, how to develop and

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Out-of-School Problems	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Our respondents question some of these assumptions. Most believe that the bulk of parents of high risk students do not themselves have sufficient skill, knowledge, and control over their own lives to be able to provide everything they may wish for their children. Others say that some parents are not even aware of the requirements fo their role in this respect, such as, supervise attendance, homework, sleeping habits. Many respondents are fully aware that the parents most in need of help are least likely to avail themselves of it. Still, they feel attempts must be made by schools, or by community agencies in concert with schools.	supervise study skills, how to deal with school authorities; (b) provide courses on child development and child rearing. 2. Provide counseling for parents. Suggestions include: (a) group counseling, (b) parent support groups, (c) psychologically oriented courses or psychologists provided in evening schools, (d) psychologically oriented courses provided through educational TV. 3. Use family assistants to visit homes. 4. At school, provide breakfast, recreational areas for parents, and homework helpers.
Potential dropouts frequently have legal, housing, physical, mental health, and/or financial problems, and few resources or skills for addressing them. This onslaught of problems makes it difficult for them to attend school consistently and interferes with their ability to concentrate when they are attending.	1. School system needs to become actively involved in the solution of the problem affecting student's learning experience. At the very least, appropriate school personnel should be actively involved in referrals to appropriate agencies (give information to parents, set up appointments, accompany if necessary, follow through on results of referral, pick up on unresolved problems). At most, the schools should have the resources and will to intervene even more intensively (such as getting students out of jail, going with them to clinics, contacting landlords, lawyers, or welfare workers, placing them on jobs.) 2. Plan for students who must work full time to get a diploma through an alternative to the regular high school. 3. Increase schools' capacities to do job placement.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Out-of-School Problems	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Schools do not identify problems early; some do not ever get identified. If dealt with, the remedies more often fulfill the school's perceived responsibility, rather than deal effectively with the problems. (For example, sending absence notices home to which no one responds.)	1. Any problem should be examined by school authorities, and its origin determined. (Respondents stress that only then can appropriate solutions be found; i.e., sleeping in class may be due to lack of supervision at home, poor nutrition, boredom with curriculum, physical problems like anemia, eyestrain.) Suggestions include: (a) develop criteria and procedures for noticing and picking up that a problem exists, (b) improve record keeping on student progress, (c) identify staff for continuous scrutiny of records, (d) systematic sharing of information about each student by all staff, (e) develop guidelines for determining the point of school's intervention for remedying student's problems, (f) provide time, opportunities for staff to talk to student himself about the problem.
Potential dropouts frequently lack interpersonal skills which exacerbates school problems: how to function in group situations, how to communicate their ideas effectively, how to express both their positive and negative feelings in socially acceptable ways.	1. Expand counseling function of schools to include personal counseling (advice about individual problems, provide courses in interpersonal skills and personal development (gaining self-image), discussion groups on decision making, value clarification, conflict resolution, study habits, the meaning of education, and the whole range of the problems related to growing up. Suggestions to achieve this include: (a) increase opportunities for group counseling and peer counseling, (Many respondents report very positive results from both of these techniques.) (b) give minimal training to every person employed in school building (bus driver, elevator operator, lunch room attendants, maintenance men) to communicate positively with youngsters.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Comments about Improving Communication with Parents

"Parents should be phoned and contacted, not just mailing. Make calls at night. Hire personnel or reimburse teachers for this. Because parents work and kids get the mail, you need to call at night. Teachers should talk to each parent of each student, regardless of whether there is a problem, and maybe the parent will alert the teacher to some problem."

"Face-to-face communication is better than written; otherwise, telephone. Make yourself available after school hours, with counselors making calls from their own homes at night. A letter is the last possibility saying, "I tried to reach you, but could not." We need to do family counseling with the parent and the student present. Create an atmosphere of support from different people, not just the counselor. The professional must not be judgmental. Parents should feel they can come back. Counselors should not claim to be experts in communications."

"Have parent workshops with day care service available for those who need it so they can attend. Have evening workshops. Have progress reports on positive behavior, not just negative. Parents have had it up to here by high school time with their kids. All they have ever heard is bad. Each letter has always been bad news. You should give them coffee and cake and show them the folder containing the child's work and tell them of progress. They go home glowing, and the child comes to school glowing. Parents are happy to once hear something good about the child."

"Make parents see the value of education. Get in touch with them. Bring them into school. Use Ceta funds and get students who have finished school to go and talk to parents and involve them, at off hours. Use publicity, meetings in community centers or central job sites to contact parents. It helps if school personnel can talk in parents' language, Spanish or Chinese. We need translators in school. Have to change the whole concept of separation of school and community. Have parties, good parties, so good that more will come to the next one. Word gets around if you treat people right. Treat them pleasantly. Start with parties and get to know these parents."

"Staff involvement at the home level, even just helping a parent with budgeting time, so a kid can help the parent out at non-school times. Groups of parents could come and talk and start a parent group for discussing problems and help parents get feedback to solve their problems. The main thing here is staff involvement. Go to the homes or call at non-school hours. Impress parents and kids with a desire to follow through. Counsel parents on how to arrange their needs and the kids time with the kid's school responsibilities. Make the parent aware what demands school places on the kids. Have parent talk groups to share problems and solutions with other parents--problems such as baby-sitting, best route to school, etc."

CHAPTER IV

ATTENDANCE

According to the staff members interviewed, the bulk of dropouts arrive in high school with inadequate basic skills. One of the reasons most often given for this was poor and erratic attendance. Respondents recognized that erratic attendance, especially if it begins at the elementary level, leads to skill retardation; skill retardation insures continued academic failure; continued failure leads the student to frustration and to a rejection of school which expresses itself in continued truancy and an eventual dropping out. It is this pattern which respondents call the "vicious cycle," and which most say must be broken by an effective school response and intervention.

While excessive absence causes problems, it is also regarded as the result of other causes, such as lack of personal motivation, home problems, and peer pressure. However, whether poor attendance is explained by "chaotic family life," or "lack of interest in schooling," or the "school turning off the kids," or "poor teaching," there was agreement that dropouts tend to have histories of truancy in elementary schools which are usually continued in high school. Most said that if this pattern is set early in elementary school, it is extremely hard to remedy at the high school level.

Problem Area Cited By Staff Members: Attendance	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Absence because of lack of parental supervision of, or support for attendance. Many parents do not adequately understand the need for consistent attendance, or do not take sufficient interest in their child's school attendance. Respondents give examples of parents who pull their child out of school toward the end of the term for a family trip without an understanding of the consequences to their child of missing all final exams. In many instances parents do not know that their offspring is being truant, either because the child deliberately misleads them, or because they go to work and do not see if the child actually goes off to school.	1. Increase school's communication with parents of potential drop-outs. Suggestions for how to maintain effective parent contact include: (a) establish positive relationship with parents early to develop their cooperation, (b) avoid only contacting with negative news about their child (failure, truancy, behavior problems), (c) maintain contact on an on-going basis (either via counselors, attendance officers, or teachers) and inform parent about the fact that their child is absent, and of the importance and consequences of poor attendance. (d) make phone calls to find out why child was absent on same day, or as soon as possible, (e) keep parents' work phone number on file (as well as those of grandparents of other close relatives), (f) enable teachers/staff to have easy access to school phones, (g) make provisions to contact parents after work hours or in early morning hours. (h) use students to call their peers; set-up a buddy system.
Absence because of home problems/obligations. Student has to cope with own or family needs because parent(s) is incapacitated (sick, alcoholic, addicted, working full time, etc.), or because student has to take mother to hospital, or serve as interpreter in welfare office, or has to work to support family, or has to care for own baby, or has no place to live, or has no one to clothe or feed him or her, is being abused, etc.	1. Schools should intervene or make referrals to solve home and personal problems interfering with attendance. Respondents' suggestions include: (a) schools must have strong counseling/social service components to identify whole range of problems early, intervene quickly, and make effective, swift referrals, (b) to the extent that some problems are beyond actual solution (e.g., physically or emotionally ill parent, unstable family situations) troubled students should at least have a concerned and sympathetic staff member

Problem Areas Cited by Staff Members Attendance	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Absence because of feelings of hopelessness and futility about school. Students with a long history of failure feel defeated and fall so far behind they give up on school; they feel the school has given up on them and see no point in continuing. Many, in addition, see no connection between school attendance and any pay off, such as a job or career.	assigned to whom they can talk and who will monitor their progress. 1. Reverse the pattern of continuous failure by providing positive experiences in school for students. Suggestions to accomplish this include: (a) approach students with poor attendance on a personal basis, in a nonthreathening manner (handwritten notes, willingness to explore the problem), (b) identify students' needs and interest areas, (c) provide student with a program or class where some achievement is insured and where other positive experiences and reinforcement for effort are built in features of the activity;use a marking system which awards all work done with part of a credit. (d) give student much individual attention in class and in dealing with personal problems, (e) closely monitor students' attendance and make adjustments at first sign of no progress.
There is nothing in school to hold students' interest or engage their involvement (school is boring). Some respondents attribute habitual absence to lack of fit between the students and the school curriculum. What is taught, and the way it is taught, is irrelevant to the students' lives and experiences. Respondents claim that the curriculum is dated, uninterestingly or ineffectively presented, and in general, fails to tap students' interests or address students' needs.	See Chapter V on curriculum and instruction.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Attendance	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Absence because of lure of street life, peer pressure to stay out, lack of self-discipline, lack of motivation. The attractiveness of other options to going to school are frequently cited in the context of competing environments (i.e., "the street's" appeal is relative to the school's lack of appeal). Some respondents say that since the student's motivation for school is not very strong, any temptation will do to keep him/her out. Absences are also attributed to lack of self-discipline, an underdeveloped sense of responsibility, and the inability to defer gratification.	1. Counter appeal of street life and peer pressure for absence. Suggestions include: (a) use peer counseling groups to induce attendance. Natural leaders among dropout-prone students should be identified, "converted" and involved in the task of turning around other students, (b) invite successful members of the student community to counseling sessions or classes as living examples of the positive effects of completing high school. Hardcore unemployed dropouts (or ex-prisoners or drug addicts) could serve as negative role models.
Absence because of emotional problems. Students are absent because they are depressed, anxious, or otherwise psychologically unable to cope with the demands of school, and get no proper attention and help with their problems. These psychological and emotional problems are often related to other home problems.	1. Review alternative approaches to counseling and guidance employed by some alternative schools and dropout prevention programs.
Health problems. Students are absent because of illnesses. Dropout-prone students appear to have a high incidence of untreated ailments. In one program respondents report an inordinately high incidence of asthma. In another school, respiratory diseases are named as a cause of much absence.	1. Pursue these problems through omnibus counseling, with paraprofessional help.
The school's response to poor attendance is inadequate at several levels. The response is not swift enough and it does not touch the root of the attendance problem. Many respondents agree that, by and large, when and if the school does respond to the student with attendance problems, the real	1. Revamp and fund the Bureau of Attendance to provide service to every school. 2. Increase the number of community street workers who can make personal contacts with truants. 3. Change the allocation formula so that schools with large

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Attendance	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
cause of the problem is not addressed (most frequently the school's response is to contact the home to let the parent(s) know their youngster is not in school.). Respondents feel that it is rare for schools to make strong efforts to investigate the real reasons that a student is not attending and rarer still for schools to provide supports to the student that may help him/her overcome the problem. In some cases, respondents admit, schools do not have the resources or manpower to effectively deal with the problem after they have identified it.	numbers of truants are not deprived of funds due to poor attendance rates.
Suspension as a penalty for chronic poor attendance is frequently counterproductive. In view of its prevalent use by schools, it is surprising how few respondents suggest suspension when asked how to deal effectively with students whose attendance is poor. One respondent offers the opinion that it is totally illogical to impose the penalty of not coming to school. An explanation for "flying in the face of logic" seems to be that some administrators and teachers do not have other answers for dealing effectively with poor attenders; i.e., a few respondents express the view that "nothing really works" when the student has a history of poor attendance. Many other respondents, though, seem to feel that the schools use suspension because it is the easiest way to deal with what can be a difficult problem.	Respondents are of the opinion that suspension is most effective as a way of treating only those students with behavior problems who value their school setting, and therefore experience suspension as a penalty.
ADC form/attendance connection: While discussing the subject of attendance, a number of respondents raise the issue of the welfare letter. Probing revealed that they are referring to a form issued by the Welfare Department (actually by HRA, also called	Respondents are calling for some reform to induce parents receiving ADC to accept a fair share of responsibility for their child's attendance where it is evident that they are not. Most respondents were unclear about the

Problem Area Cited by Staff Memebers: Attendance	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
"face-to-face" which must be signed by the school certifying that a student is enrolled in the school, so that the parent can continue to receive ADC payments for the child. These respondents are expressing frustration and disapproval of a system which permits the parent to come to school and get the form signed even if the child attends as little as one day in that term.	kind of reform that might be possible, but requested that the issuance of checks be directly related to the actual school attendance of children.

CHAPTER V

ACADEMIC FAILURE: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Respondents were in strong agreement that the academic-comprehensive high school curriculum is not effective with students who may be on the verge of dropping out. It's ineffective for a variety of reasons. Respondents argue that it demands too much conceptual work for the student whose reading level is low, who lacks the ability to concentrate in class, and whose skill in analytical thinking has not been developed. The academic curriculum may strike many students as irrelevant, especially if they have pressing personal problems, if they are not goal or future-oriented, or if they believe that an ability to deal with the demands of street life is the proper measure of personal success. Finally, it is difficult for the student who has not had broadening social experiences, whose frame of reference for interpreting ideas and events is defined by the boundaries of his/her own personal world. As one teacher put it "They will get to the Roman Empire but first let them get to Clinton Street,"

Respondents also agreed that the typical mainstream instructional methods and materials are not sufficiently practical for unmotivated students and students who do not have college aspirations. They neither prepare students for the world of work immediately after high school, nor equip them with skills for being effective adults and citizens. Also, there was strong agreement that the teacher's repertoire must be diverse for potential dropouts. Respondents characterize most of these students as having few study skills, or or having difficulty paying attention and focusing in on a task, or having low frustration levels. They stress the importance of en-

gaging these students' interests by varying the method of learning. A number of people commented, for example, that the developmental lesson plan, in particular, and any other singular approaches to teaching a lesson, cannot be relied on to work with these students. The developmental lesson plan is difficult for the slower or shy student because it relies on classroom discussion. Plus, it creates problems for the student with poor classroom attendance who falls behind because lessons proceed at the pace of the teaching program, rather than the student's learning pace. The respondents emphasized again and again the need to aim materials and methods, as much as possible, to the individual needs, experiences, and learning styles of students. Said in another way, they commented that teaching materials and methods should interest and engage students but not make inordinate demands on their capacities for achievement.

Respondents also noted that there are among dropout prone students many who read well and who are definitely college potential, if given individual attention. According to respondents, flexibility of schedule and access to a variety of programs are the keys. In addition several respondents observed that many of the students who drop out are not at all different from many students remaining in schools. They point out that in terms of reading and math scores, the two groups are not very different. As one respondent put it, "Being severely handicapped academically is not unique to dropouts." Throughout the interviews, these respondents focus not so much on preventing dropping out, as on achieving learning. They stress the importance of disseminating knowledge of alternative methods to teachers in academic comprehensive high schools who are still tied to approaches that no longer work for them.

An analysis of respondents' suggestions for specific changes in current curriculum requirements gives the impression that there is wide disagreement about standards for high school graduation. For example, some strongly criticized the new State minimum competency tests for being unrealistic. They argued that failure to pass these tests, which they expected of many students, would give students another reason for dropping out. Other respondents, however, took the position that such fundamentals as are required by the State tests should not be watered down. They discussed the need to teach these competencies in the context of a variety of instructional programs which take into account differences in learning pace, attention span, verbal skills, reading level, and need for supervision in learning.

Respondents also suggested a variety of new course offerings for dropout-prone students. The most recommended subject was "survival skills," e.g., how to budget time and money, how to balance a checkbook, how to deal with institutions, agencies, and authority figures, how to use the public transportation system, how to get and hold a job, how to respond to frustration appropriately. Also, they consistently stressed the need for courses with practical applications and for teaching everything using a practical, as opposed to a theoretical or abstract orientation. Hands-on learning experiences and work-related subjects and skills were universally recommended.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Curriculum	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
The academic-comprehensive high school curriculum is unrealistic in that it does not provide for some students' elementary basic skill levels, poor study habits, and conceptual limitations at time of entrance into high school. The high demands of the curriculum not only do not produce learning, they create frustration, failure, and strong resentment to the content.	1. Identify students unable to cope with curriculum demands because of skill/conceptual problems early in junior high school via careful scrutiny, and provide intensive remediation before pattern of failure in secondary school can develop. 2. Tailor teaching material/curriculum requirements to student's ability level. 3. Enable brighter potential dropout to enroll in mini-school where he/she can forge ahead through increased attention to needs.
Curriculum not varied enough. Students bored with content. It is not seen as relevant to their lives. It is remote from their experiences and interests.	1. Provide greater variety of courses. Offer courses that reflect students' interests, life experiences, community affairs. 2. Orient courses to world of work, including all academic courses. 3. Increase opportunities for involvement in sports and the arts, and make better use of such existing programs as Reading in the Arts.
Curriculum content not oriented to hands-on instruction. There is widespread belief among respondents that hands-on teaching methods are the most successful with dropout-prone students. Not enough of the current curriculum and materials support this effort; and those that exist are not being used.	1. Structure curriculum offerings to maximize experiential, hands-on learning experiences. Industrial arts shops can be used all day long, not just for a few periods. Reading and writing can be taught in those settings.
Curriculum ignores important educational needs of students.	1. Mandate "survival" skills--life skills courses (e.g., personal development, practical living classes, such as learning how to budget, nutrition and grooming habits, time management, how to use public transportation beyond their neighborhood, how

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Curriculum	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
	to deal with administrators, how to be a good parent and spouse 2. Build into curriculum such concepts as: future orientation, postponement of gratification, study skills, logical thinking.
Curriculum does not "make sense" to students. Students are unable to see "payoff" of educational process. In addition, typical approaches to teaching stress academic learning and undervalue other kinds of learning.	1. Show results of academic success in terms of real people (show their homes, how they spend leisure time, income levels, conditions at work.) 2. Introduce personal values clarification in early grades 3. Introduce career education in every course. Show the value of all kinds of work, not just professional. See many suggestions in selected quotations on Educating for the World of Work.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Instruction	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Structured developmental lesson plan counterproductive for this population. Because students have short attention spans or difficulties conceptualizing or poor note taking skills, this approach to learning is ineffective.	1. Vary instructional techniques and learning activities during a single class period.
Potential dropouts need much personal attention and individual instruction. All respondents stress repeatedly that dropout-prone students require inordinate amounts of personal attention in the classroom to achieve learning. Many say that currently teachers do not individualize instruction enough out of ignorance, inability due to class size, or low expectations of their students.	1. Instructional techniques and materials must be carefully geared to the student's skill level to insure success. 2. Each student should be able to advance at his/her own pace, so that failure is avoided. 3. Increase use of learning packages which can be taught in six week cycles and that contain sequential skill programs.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Instruction	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Teachers lack skill, time, or inclination to diagnose each student's strengths and weaknesses.	1. Provide training, time, and instruments to enable teachers to assess individual failure problems.
Teachers criticize too much, too openly. Students with a history of failure are hypersensitive to criticism. Many teachers are not aware of, or insensitive to this characteristic. Teachers often are sarcastic when they give criticism, or they ridicule or berate students for failing.	1. Train teachers to give criticisms in ways that do not undermine the student's self-confidence. Use faculty conferences, role playing, films.
Success not built into each task. Not only do dropouts shrink from criticism they require continual encouragement, support, and praise for every achievement. This is not provided in the typical classroom.	1. Increase opportunities for providing feedback to student about classwork. 2. Increase teacher's awareness, through training, that reinforcement for small successes supports learning. 3. Consider the positive marking system that offers partial credit for small accomplishments.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

The Academic Problems of Many Students Who Drop Out

"They do not have grade level reading and math because from first grade kids do not get remediation. Therefore, frustration--and it only gets worse each year. The parents do not make kids do homework, or do not know how to be of assistance themselves as parents. They do not instill a commitment to education."

"They do not learn in the lower schools. Kids coming in with 5th grade skills. Bright kids are often practically illiterate. Schools are not held accountable. They keep passing them along, and diagnose some others as having reading disabilities."

"Many kids who drop out have a pattern of failure--they almost expect to fail--and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy, because after awhile they do not prepare. Here we make curriculum so the students have success, and that leads to remarkable changes."

"Too much watching TV. Poor foundation in elementary school. Not enough testing by Board of Education to isolate learning disabilities problems, other than special ed. Do not detect eye and ear problems so some forms of cognitive and hand and motor skill problems. Lack of trained personnel in area of reading. Supposedly, every English teacher is a specialist in reading, but this is not so..."

"Short attention span...Poor self image which leads to terrific difficulties in self-discipline. In being able to go over their own work, they can see mistakes and correct. But they lack ego strength for this. They lack a great deal of general info about the world we all live in. So even if they can read, they do not relate to the material."

"Many Hispanic students only speak Spanish at home and have difficulty with the English language. They do not receive reinforcement of reading skills learned in school. Many Hispanic students have been placed in ESL programs (bilingual) in elementary school and kept in these programs throughout their entire educational career. The ESL program was designed as an interim program and these students should have been mainstreamed within two years."

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Techniques and Curricula that Are Effective with Potential Dropouts

"For dropout-prone students, you need: small group instruction; individual assignments and goals, materials, sequential learning; great deal of praise, positive encouragement; short units of instruction; instant rewards; hands-on experiences, kids taking shop; an informal environment. The English teacher here does not teach a class, but has individual programs for each. Tailor their teaching methods. Be prepared for a tremendous amount of work."

"The curriculum devised by the system does not often meet the needs of this student. Ninth grade science is very abstract and they are not asked to apply it to the students. Here, biology students learn about cells from their own mouth. They see them in a microscope. But, the students get no counseling regarding what careers could involve looking thorugh a microscope. No career counseling is associated with these things that are taught. I think this should be mandated."

"Concentrate on the amount of improvement and not the actual level of performance in the student. Accept the kids. Get to know them as individuals, outside class. Enjoy the kids. They can be fun and funny."

"We need more relevant school programs in terms of economic skills. Automotive education is in demand. Greater emphasis and imaginative planning for skills courses for lower level students; for example, apprenticeship programs for students uninterested and unable to complete a comprehensive high school program. Apprenticeships in the building, automotive trade, health field, etc."

"I recall a student who told me that he "needed to know when he was doing something wrong." He felt we gave him too much responsiblity without training him how to take on responsibility. He was not ready to take on the freedoms or responsibilities that we gave. We should train and help students take on and understand what the responsiblities entail, how to deal with them, etc. Schools should help students see the very real consequences of some life experiences, roles, etc. We teach a lot of academics, but not enough about life choices, consequences, roles, and their real demands."

"What our school stresses is often irrelevant to students' lives--the content of education. We need more vocational, more realistic orientation to the outside world. Our students do not know how to travel across this city, never mind exploring other countries in books. It is the way it is taught, really. There has to be more variety of teaching. There is too much reliance on textbook learning, not enough on experience. Take trips. Do not teach about the stock market; take them there. Nobody here does this anymore, though they used to. Do not teach them about law. Take them to court and law offices where they can see it in practice. Then, they can read about it. We need small classes for that. The school system is set up for masses. Look into any classroom at any time. You will see each teacher doing the same thing--talking. We need video tape recorders, TV and movies. It is expensive. This equipment breaks. It is hard to work with. So what? Use it. I gave my students tape recorders to record an oral history project."

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Educating for the World of Work

"Provide apprenticeships in trades, actual work experience. In our school they were making alterations. Students who were watching a workman said in disbelief and shock, "You work this hard every day?" They must learn about work. We could let our students cope with their own physical situation in a school; build bookshelves, plaster, paint, or make repairs. If they learn skills this way, they get a sense of achievement. Take an unpleasant situation and change it for the better. This way they will learn skills and experience how it can affect their own life space and fix up a building, all at the same time."

"There has to be a development of specific skills; e.g., on-the-job training in a company business is advantageous. Provide "career education." I do not mean vocational training. I mean a process which helps people see where they are before they decide where they want to go. It means exploring yourself, knowing yourself, before goals can be set. The next step in the process is learning how to make steps toward these goals. "Reality testing" means getting a chance to see how your own values and these goals fit into the real world of work. For example, you can say "money is important," but in reality you may discover that there are some things you won't do for money. The "readiness factor" has to be considered in job training. It goes back to the idea of picking them up when they are ready. Teachers have to have an active part in designing a program, or else it is somebody else's program. They have to feel they have put together something that will work for the population they have."

"Schools could negotiate with the labor union to set up apprenticeships, programs where a kid has the hope of getting a decent salaried job. Negotiate with labor unions to set up programs for tutoring students in the necessary reading, writing, and math skills for that job."

"This training must have emphasis not only on specific skills, but on work-related skills; getting to work on time; how to relate to co-workers, to clients, to supervisors or authority. They can not deal with some of these concepts, what is involved with getting and keeping a job, or that a supervisor supervises and gives orders."

"Provide outside speakers for career awareness. These speakers could come from industry. The students could get an idea of what will be expected from them in the field. They can get a practical idea of what will be expected of them."

"Fuse all subjects with a "world of work" curriculum. Make the curriculum seem to have more relevance to students' lives. Fuse each lesson with information regarding work; e.g., in a court case, who was involved, lawyers, court clerks. This should apply to all subjects. We must learn how to implement career education in class. There is a great need for role models. Business people and workers should be brought into class. High school kids should be taken on field trips. In some families no one works regularly, so they need role models in school."

"Create 15 clusters: health, education, etc. Each kid should work in industry for one term. The kid is trained in an actual job or general "family" of jobs, or "cluster." Kid would learn human relations, basic skills, what it takes to succeed, how to follow instructions, and attendance. Every kid should have it, but early. Kids tend to drop out early--freshman or sophomore years. In the junior year everyone should work for credit. The job site would be compatible with a kid's interest. Need employer's approval. In the sophomore year, give preparation for work experience. Students would interview workers and employers. Go on field trips. Jobs and education can be intertwined. This would make kids more marketable; i.e., six months of work."

"Extend school day to use shop areas without interfering with regular day school. Hire people from industry to train; i.e., retired aircraft personnel or union people. Hands-on experience. Internship program. Use people in courts and at banks. Use local gas stations for kid who wants to be a mechanic. He may find out he does not want it after all. Get cooperation from community agencies. Kid should still get credit. Call it "life experience " Pay students. It should be like they would be doing it at work. Train for entire world of work, not just job; i.e., salary, benefits, job responsibility, arriving on time, calling if late, etc. If that is never learned in school, then where?"

"Have pre-employment classes--electricity, building maintenance, home health aid. Have classes for people who are out of school, non-employed or underemployed. Have short-term programs to qualify them for work. They should get a certificate in some cases, or some qualification for a job level. Need to teach English as a second language with these job skills. They have calls from machine shops, electrical shops, and not enough kids to fill them; not true in plumbing or housing fields, but this industry involvement is possible and it works; i.e., former students recommend the school; good relationship between kids and the industries; so, this can be expanded to meet the needs of dropouts."

"Do not give them money to go to school. Vocational testing is most important. Also, interest inventories. ASVAB--Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery; this is free. Find aptitudes and strengthen. Also test for job preference and aptitude. Newsletters to help find jobs and tell what is happening in the world. Let them pursue it as well as with counselors. Give the kids the information and let them pursue it, as well as give alternatives for after leaving school. Also, have a strong business department, secretaries, SIS--Shared Instruction Services. Have half at this school, half at other schools with some specialities. This is now available to all high schools, but not now used. After school occupational skills' program. For the kid who goes regular day and wants some professional training or career training, provide school training in specific career and guidance."

CHAPTER VI

DISCIPLINE

Discipline problems most frequently mentioned by staff members include lack of self-control, dislike for authority, and a lack of understanding of many school rules. Interestingly, what emerged from the data is a conviction on the part of many staff members that the discipline difficulties of students in the mainstream are as much a function of the school setting as of the students.

Two issues seem to be involved here. First, some of the alternative settings have fewer and different regulations, thus offering students less opportunity for breaking rules. Secondly, most of the staff members of these settings have a radically different orientation to discipline and employ different techniques for settling conflicts. The result seems to be that students whose behaviors were unacceptable in the high schools are functioning in alternative type settings. In one alternative program a respondent said of his students, "Almost every kid has beaten up somebody in a school; some have been in jail." He went on to say that dealing with antisocial behavior is very time consuming and eats into teaching tim but concludes that it is as much a priority as classroom teaching.

According to respondents, students with discipline problems tend to have trouble dealing with all forms of authority; they experience most restrictions on their behavior as intolerable demands; their acting-out is mostly in response to something they perceived as extreme provocation or personal attack. The respondents distinguished, though, between students who require a great deal of structure (e.g., not much free time in class or during school day, tight supervision) and those who do not; those who need some traditional

approaches to learning (e.g., memorizing, drills) and those who do not; and those who benefit most by strong disciplining from those who fare best when discipline demands are kept to a minimum. All respondents prefaced their remarks about discipline with the advice that one must know each student well so as to suit the demands and penalties to the developmental stage and temperament of the student; i.e., threatening a student with lower grades only if he/she cares about grades; or knowing when to "stroke" and when to be tough.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Discipline	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Rules are often unnecessary, applied without concern for individual needs, or do not make sense to kids. This statement is not made in the absolute sense, but rather in relation to these students for whom rules in general are a problem. Respondents say that this group has a very low tolerance for demands from others and, in particular, find it difficult to take seriously rules which "don't make any sense" to them or which they do not value.	1. Keep rules to a minimum. Have only those which are absolutely necessary to the school's operations. 2. Have a clear statement of rules and penalties. 3. Be flexible. Most respondents mean make the fewest possible demands on entering students and progressively increase them as their ability to deal with them grows. It also may mean giving students another chance, two, three or even more times, depending on the needs of that particular student. 4. Be consistent in applying rules, which respondents say does not conflict with being flexible because you call a student on every infraction, although you may then negotiate. 5. Have a "bottom line" for unacceptable behavior.

Problem Cited by Staff Members: Discipline	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
	6. Reward for observing rules. These students require reinforcement from adults. Some respondents actually feel that a reward system influences student behavior more effectively than any system of penalties.
	7. Discuss with students the need for particular rules eliciting from them agreement that these rules are necessary. Explain clearly the long range consequences of misbehaviors.
	8. Involve students in rulemaking and enforcement. Rely on peer pressure to maintain discipline.
Teachers and administrators are too authoritarian. Some respondents claim that school personnel are insensitive to students, that they attack verbally and humiliate needlessly, that they "overreact" and exacerbate situations into confrontations, that they lack skills in defusing tensions. Some are described as having "unresolved ego needs," who like "power tripping."	1. Avoid authoritarian behavior. Do not give peremptory orders; do not attack, embarrass, belittle, or berate a student particularly in front of others. Respondents consistently make a distinction between criticizing the behavior, not attacking the person. The message must be, "I reject your behavior/performance, not you."

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Disciplining Potential Dropouts

"In the relationship of staff to students, do not overreact. Have the training to deal with so-called "deviant behavior." Psychological training. Learn crisis intervention if there is a fight. Learn to defuse potentially violent activity, not aggravate it. You must be able to distinguish between real discipline problems and what I call normal acting out. To one person, if a student calls out in class instead of raising his hand, it is a discipline problem. To me, that is not a discipline problem. There are different methods and techniques to be employed for specific situations. The knowledge is out there, it exists. It is not being provided, pre- or in-service, for teachers."

"One method is to challenge every antisocial activity in class. It cuts down on teaching time, but to lose that behavior aspect is our biggest problem. Spell out all rules. Be consistent. You apply rules and then have sanctions, points off, etc. All should be done politely. You must set up a system of successes, small attainable goals. Do not ask for too much. Fractionalize success. These kids need a great deal of control, but in a positive way. Begin low, work up. This needs enormous amount of time and effort. Minimal civil standards must be maintained. Nobody, teacher or student, is permitted to yell, scream, abuse, or hit anybody. Nobody must do that. Set minimal demands, but those must be defended. You must deal with behavior because just skill teaching will not help a person keep a job."

"Tell rules and stick to them. Guarantee a swift response, just as stated. Be consistent and fair. Keep good records, follow up. Communicate with the home. Daily attendance slip for cutters or truants, card signed by each teacher and parent. Why does this work? Because a student knows these people are going to do what they say. They are going to do it, and he knows, "I will not be able to get lost in the shuffle."

"You have to show them a reason for the rule. You cannot ever back them into a corner. Try to find a middle ground, a give and take, conciliatory position. In some cases, I have made contracts with kids. Then he sees his part, his right to make up his rules. Then the responsibility stays with him, too. I am always joking with the kids. Stay relaxed. Avoid the harsh tone and attitude. Kids will more than likely react to you in the way you come on with them."

"Do not come on as the authority figure. Human-to-human basis approach. "I am here to help and not punish" helps insure success. Use the "guidance approach" in discipline. Look at your record. Review kid's records. Confront him with "Where do you want to go from here?" "How can we help?" Do not say, "We are going to suspend you, give you a hard time." This does not work. Constructive joining with the kid on a one-to-one basis to help arrive at solutions. Do it in private. Do not challenge kid in public with his peers around. Call him over privately."

"You cannot go behind kid's back and call parents. You must convince kid that calling is important, and then call the kid's parents with the kid sitting there or on the phone, a three way conversation. This way you can represent the kid's position. So, the kid should know and be there when you call. Help the kid see that the parent is not his enemy, or help the kid negotiate with the parent."

"Educational contracting. The student is called before the student committee. The case is brought up to that committee. The student is confronted with the unacceptable behavior, then a contract is negotiated. The behavior that the committee wants the student to change is identified. Consequences are then presented to the student if changes do not occur."

"Pointing out the alternatives. If you do not make it here, let us see where you will be in one year, two years, or five years. Then the positive approach--let us go to the counselor to see what jobs there are. What job can you get? Do you want to do this for the rest of your life? Give them alternatives."

"Peer pressure works for discipline, and if school means enough to them, they behave out of fear of the consequences. They very much want not to go back to their old schools. This is their last chance."

"Talk. Depersonalize the problem. We have several rules here: (1) no physical or verbal attacking; no hurting self, others, or property; (2) no sabotage of the learning experience for others. So, when there is a problem in one of these, you confront it in terms of these rules. The "talk" comes from what needs the student has and how they can be met more appropriately. We have no deans. We have a counseling approach. The talking system works here although often it is a pain. . . We do not ever verbally attack them. You must play by the same rules with everybody; be consistent and fair. Black, white, and Spanish kids know when you are fair. They notice. You must be fair and consistent if you want credibility. Do not treat one race or group differently."

CHAPTER VII

THE SYSTEM'S PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Apparently, for dropout prevention programs, small is beautiful. Staff members claimed that these programs' success rates are directly related to the extent to which they can provide students with personal attention and support, allow for friendly, warm, informal relationships between staff members and students, and individualize the task of learning. Clearly these factors depend, in large part, on a high staff to student ratio, good support services, and ample resources.

Respondents were asked, "What accounts for the failure of dropout prevention programs?" Most replies point to the fact that, for different reasons, the programs are unable to do the kinds of things just described. One reason mentioned is budget cuts which make it impossible for programs to serve their students effectively. Another reason is that when the programs are replicated the size of the student population often increases dramatically, or the staff to student ratio is reduced. However, it appears that programs do succeed in some high schools in spite of budget cuts. Indeed, one principal, describing a new 200 student school-within-the-school for ninth graders with records of failure said "It costs nothing above what those 200 students would cost in mainstream classes. They now have a coordinator and the same guidance counselor and a team of teachers offering a career-oriented cluster of courses."

The interview material reveals that in some high schools there is antagonism between the mainstream staff members and people working in the prevention program. These feelings of antagonism were not fully explored in this study, but some explanations appear in the data. One is that some high school principals are not ideologically committed to these programs, or for other reasons (e.g., budget) do not want them to survive.

Another explanation is that there is an attitude of "them" and "us" between staff members who work only with students in prevention-type settings (in alternative schools, in particular) and staff members who relate to the rest of the mainstream student population. Tentative evidence for this rift is suggested by comments from alternative school members who suspect that the mainstream feels that alternative schools are "taking their students." Additional evidence is the finding that there are some strong differences of opinion between the two groups of staff members. For one thing, they differ in their views of how seriously the system is dealing with the dropout problem. When asked, "What is your impression? Are schools throughout the system making a good effort to help kids remain in school?", 39% of the mainstream staff members responded that the school system is making a good effort as compared to 13% of the alternative staff.

The interview data also reveal that mainstream and alternative staff differ in their degree of pessimism about the dropout problem. All staff members were asked, "What percentage of dropouts do you think would return to school if encouraged by family, teachers, or others?", and "If all the schools in the system were making a maximum effort to help kids remain in school, what percentage of the kids who have dropped out would have remained?". Approximately 66% of staff interviewed in the mainstream high schools felt that less than 50% of dropouts would return to school if given encouragement by the school system or by families or friends. In contrast, only 22% of those interviewed in alternative schools felt that less than 50% would return.

A third explanation for antagonism between mainstream and alternative staff members is that some mainstream staff prefer alternate schools which are remand schools for discipline problems, not special schools for the often quiet dropout. Whatever the explanation for the antagonism between two camps, the fact is that competition, ideological differences, and interpersonal tensions

exist. Whether or not the competition is unhealthy, or the ideologies incompatible, or the tensions irreconcilable remain to be determined.

The interview data revealed that administrators, teachers and counselors staffing the existing dropout prevention programs are in need of more information and training that will enable them to increase their successes with students. This conclusion stems from an analysis of respondents' answers to the question "Most people we've interviewed seem to know very little about how schools in other big cities are dealing with the dropout problem. How useful would this information be?" Seventy-eight percent of the staff members felt it would be useful to have information about programs dealing with dropouts. Several interviewees qualified their remarks by saying that only information from programs that have been proven successful would be useful. Interestingly, only 4% of the respondents said that New York has been a leader in the area of dropout prevention and that looking at other programs would be "re-inventing the wheel."

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Currently Operating Prevention Programs	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Lack of support by mainstream administrators. A fair number of respondents claim that pervention programs are treated as "stepchildren." By this they mean that the home school administration does not give them the support they need; i.e., they are not philosophically committed to the program; they do not "put themselves out" when the program requests something of them.	1. Increase visits by principals to mainstream high schools whose mini-programs are successful and to alternative schools with a high student morale and success with graduates. 2. Increase mutual respect by sharing problems and successes at Superintendent monthly meetings.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Currently Operating Prevention Programs	Solution Suggested by Staff Members
Success kills them; i.e., programs that work for a small population of students are then expanded to population size that, in effect, destroys the heart of these programs which is their emphasis on personal contact, individualized instruction.	1. Set up more of these programs without enlarging the population. There is never a time when some set of students does not need another school-within-the-school model.
Programs designed to return students to the mainstream seem to have less success at reducing the dropout population than those that allow students to remain in the setting. As one staff member put it, "I can tell the students who won't make it when they return to the high school, but we send them anyway because they can only stay in the program for a year at most."	1. Allow alternative programs to graduate their own students, unless the student wants to return to the mainsteam to graduate from it.
The programs wind up as "dumping grounds" for any students with whom the mainstream will not or can not deal. Many respondents claim that their programs sometimes take in students who don't belong in them. In effect, they violate their own admission criteria. Since they are philosophically committed to providing an alternative for students, they feel compelled to take some students for which the program has not been designed (e.g., very low readers). "There is no place else to send them," respondents say. This dilemma often results in putting an inordinate burden on the program's staff members and resources. It also tends to increase the mainstream's impression that the programs are "dumping grounds."	1. Provide more in-school programs that can meet different needs of potential dropouts. 2. Supply alternative schools with staff and resources to teach students with very low reading levels.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Currently Operating Prevention Programs	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Programs are replicated without first being adequately evaluated. Some respondents blame the failure of particular prevention programs on the fact that they were not evaluated before they were replicated in other schools. These respondents claim that a program's success is often related to variables which are not taken into account when another school tries to implement them; i.e., socioeconomic characteristics of the student population, strong staff agreement about program goals and ideology, high expectations of staff members.	1. Develop evaluation strategies to identify the effective features of particular programs; then share these models with field staff doing program development.
Programs lack sufficient money, adequate teaching materials, and support services. Many respondents complain that budget cutbacks in recent years have all but eliminated the possibility for success. The reduction of staff, and in particular the loss of para professional staff members, severely reduced the ability of these programs to "reach the individual student." That qualified staff is the key to program success is captured by one respondent's remark that, "A program rides or falls on the quality of staff. That's where the war is won or lost." Respondents also comment that the programs' successes are related often to innovative teaching and counseling approaches, and the lack of money for new kinds of curriculum materials and special training for staff members makes innovation difficult if not impossible.	1. The school system must make a financial commitment to alternative programs for potential and actual dropouts, both in-school and independent.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Problems of School Programs for Potential and Actual Dropouts

"Programs are instituted with limited funds for only one year. It takes one-half year to get it going and then it's cut, regardless of its effectiveness."

"There is a tendency to have pilot programs with high quality personnel. Then it works and is expanded, but with lower quality personnel. With smaller numbers there is better feeling and atmosphere. So, if successful, it expands and is less successful. Also, usually they don't have the same initial focus. With 80 students there is intimacy and all stay; with 200 students there is less intimacy and more absence; with 500 students, 50% drop out so the programs are fundamentally different from the ones that worked."

"The program was doomed to failure. It had personnel taken away because of budgeting, even though it worked well. The correlated curriculum was good. Everyone knew all the teachers and students, and everyone else in the program. There was positive peer pressure on kids to come in because kids ask each other where to go. This program didn't fail for lack of support and participation by students or staff, but because dropouts are just not a priority. They are first to be cut. Many programs are cut out even though they are not failures."

"Information would be helpful. We get a sense of being alone, confronting huge obstacles. It would be helpful to know that others are sharing the same difficulties. We feel we are Cinderella. We have no facilities. Two rest rooms for 700 people. No gym, library, etc. So, if you have a sense of support from others, it is helpful. Establish a support system for people in these programs."

"You should have teachers who want to teach here, who care, who want to see progress. You really can't assign to programs like this. But we've had teachers come to us, assigned, from the main building and they survive. They become changed human beings. There they were dying, and here they are very happy. So, after a few years, these people were yanked out and pushed back into the regular system, a hellhole."

"When students leave our program, they don't do well back in the mainstream because here they get a lot of attention. They get a chance to relate to the teacher as a human being. If a teacher has 20 or 40 kids in class, the one or two who don't perform won't be getting the teacher's attention. We can go around the room and talk to each student. "Why are you tired, sleepy?" "Why were you out?" In a big

school they get lost in the shuffle. They are good at it. They are not aggressive. Their way of dealing is to walk away. These are not your discipline problems. We are not talking of disruptive kids. They are quiet and passive."

CHAPTER VIII

RETURNING THE DROPOUT TO SCHOOL

Staff members agreed that the school system has the responsibility of providing opportunities for people to complete their high school education until the age of 21. Many even said that the opportunity should be lifelong.

Everyone agreed that every effort should be made to return young students (under 17) to school to complete their high school education (though not necessarily to the school from which they dropped out). Programs designed for returning dropouts, respondents say, need to be conveniently located, inviting ("welcome them with open arms"), and accessible (i.e., simple procedures, non-threatening staff members).

One major difference of opinion among respondents, however, was how aggressive the school system should be about retrieving over 17 year olds. The rationale given for not actively recruiting dropouts over 17 years old back into school is that some youngsters need personally maturing experiences before they can muster the self-discipline and sense of responsibility that schools require of them. These respondents argue that the harsh experience of the real world proves the importance of a school diploma more than exhortation by school authorities.

The opinion of others, however, was that youngsters should be in school; that the real world quickly brutalizes a young person, and that this kind of experience is unecessary. Many of these respondents claimed most dropouts, therefore, would return to school and succeed if given the encouragement and opportunity. Respondents touting the benefits of being out in the world, on the other hand, say that even if dropouts were returned to school, most probably wouldn't have the drive to follow through on what was required of them.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Re-entry	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
The system has abandoned or does not care about dropouts. A large proportion of respondents think that the schools, by and large, are relieved when kids drop out; and are therefore highly unlikely to either prevent dropping out or actively solicit the return of students. May point out that often students are "pushouts" rather than dropouts.	1. Take steps to change the perception that the school system has abandoned the dropout. Suggestions include: (a) make strong financial commitment to address needs of students in risk of dropping out and dropouts, (b) support field staff committed to saving these students by providing leadership and information about effective programs and practices, (c) insure input from knowledgeable staff in program development. (A few respondents remark that "this study" was a positive indication of the system's interest.)
Most dropouts do not want to return to their home high school. Dropouts may be motivated "to go back to get my diploma" somehow, but very rarely wish to go back to their old high school to do so. They associate negative experiences with it, think "people there hate me," expect rejection or "hassles" and usually know no one there to talk to.	1. No clear cut solution to this problem emerged from the interviews. Some respondents feel that rigid zoning enforcement has a lower priority than getting a student to complete his/her high school education and should, therefore, be ignored in most cases. Others feel that to permit "problem" kids to transfer to a school of their choice is a case of "rewarding the troublemakers."
Re-entry process is too complicated and difficult. Those students who would return to their home schools find procedures complex, too bureaucratic, unpleasant. Usually they have to deal with the same school officials with whom they have had trouble before.	1. Reduce the complexity of procedures for returning to high school. Make the re-entry process reasonably pleasant so as not to alienate the student all over again. 2. Re-entry process should not lend itself to re-opening old antagonisms between the student and the school administration; so, dropout students seeking re-admission should be interviewed by a person who has no administrative role in the school to lessen the chances that the student will have to deal with someone with whom there is a history of conflict.

Problem Area Cited by Staff Members: Re-entry	Solutions Suggested by Staff Members
Dropouts do not get information about other educational options. Dropouts usually do not know, and are usually not informed by their schools about where and how else they can complete their high school education. Students unable to seek out this information, who do not know whom to ask for help, or who are embarrassed, afraid of being ridiculed, or considered stupid, do not find out what is available.	1. Counselors, administrators, attendance officers, or any other staff members in contact with a student on the verge of dropping out should offer him/her information on all available educational options open to him/her, such as night high school, G.E.D. programs, independent citywide schools, or any other alternatives. 2. Mount a vigorous advertising campaign to encourage dropouts to return and provide information about what programs are available to them. These advertisements should be aired on disco or pop radio stations, appear on public transportation poster ads, and in community newspapers. 3. Publicize statistics about dropouts on welfare rolls, in prison, on dope, etc.
Students may have the same or more personal problems as they had when they dropped out.	1. Provide students extensive support services in the form of counseling, job placement, financial support, or special instructional programs in order to finish school.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Returning Dropouts to School

"The key is a sympathetic, understanding person to relate to kids, one who has the skills to show the kid the benefit of a high school education. The faculty and school have to accept that this is the role of the school and welcome back these kids despite their past record; to be supportive, not antagonistic."

"Allow them to come back. Open the doors to them. Now, they are met with open arms. There should be outreach. They must hear about what is available. Many have left because of hostility, so to bring them back into the same conditions that drove them out is a problem. There must be a bridge of understanding. You can create the right environment, but also, the student must want to learn."

"Offer some incentive, some immediate goal. If out of school for more than 6 months, they won't come back for a year or more. The longer they're out, the harder it is to get them back. They are reluctant to give up jobs. They should be able to get the same first class diploma at night. It should not say evening school on the diploma. There is a big psychological difference between the two diplomas. State aid for night school, but make it quality with no stigma on diploma."

"We should have school-based, citywide programs. One program doesn't solve this problem; one or two prevention programs per school would handle it. We should encourage these youngsters to participate in other programs outside regular schools. Kids would rather drop out than travel some place, even if it is in their own best interest. Continued education program of support services should be as good as those in high schools. Parents should be encouraged, made aware of programs and philosophies. Neighborhood street workers and outreach to pick up kids and set up sessions to bring them back in. Kids often want a second and third chance. The school doesn't always take them seriously."

"Know who you are dealing with. Students drop out for different reasons. They have some sort of emotional problem; they are not the regular students because they could not make it in a regular school. Considerations should be: (1) better counseling, (2) more information for the student concerning the alternative programs, and (3) visit all the high schools meeting with the students, informing the students of the special programs and alternatives available to them."

"With enrollment dropping and extra teachers being laid off, the idea of dealing with people over 17 would be a boost in employment of teachers and use of schools to work with adults, dropouts, and returnees. Schools are equipped to work with this population, but there's conflict between labor and education. Who should train the unused resources? Perhaps the school. Maybe even side by side with regular classes or at night."

SECTION III

An Analysis of Mainstream High School Programs for Potential and Actual Dropouts

Purpose of this Discussion

To prepare for the task of recommending high school programs to deal with the dropout problem, we examined closely a sample of the programs (22) offered by the 46 mainstream high schools in which we interviewed staff and students. The programs we analyzed share two characteristics: (1) they all have some kind of admissions criteria, and (2) they all offer an instructional program (varying from the mainstream) that leads to a regular high school or G.E.D. diploma (granted either by the program or the mainstream).

For the purpose of the following discussion, these two characteristics will define "program." The discussion, then, does not refer to support services offered to the dropout-prone student by many high schools (e.g., attendance awards, tutoring, peer counseling, work opportunities, remediation clinics, etc.). It pertains only to mainstream high school prevention efforts defined by the above mentioned characteristics.

Data Collection

The data for this discussion were collected, mainly, by surveying the high schools for programs specifically designed to deal with the problem of students dropping out. These steps were followed in gathering the information.

1. A checklist of approaches typically used in dealing with the dropout problem was sent to 110 high schools. (This information appears as a directory for the mainstream high schools. See Appendices F & I.) Eighty-four percent of the schools responded.

2. Requests for more detailed program descriptions were made of the 46 mainstream high schools in which interviews were conducted. Twenty-seven program descriptions were received.

Selection of Sample and Scheme for Analysis

Five of the descriptions which were received did not fit the working definition of "program" utilized in this research. That is, they either lacked courses of instruction and/or did not have criteria for pupil admission.

Specifically, one consisted of attendance awards, two provided drug counseling, one trained students to be peer counsleors, and one arranged for work experiences.

Twenty-two of the programs, as described by their own staff members, were characterized by an instructional program and admissions criteria. These 22 programs provided the basis for the following analysis. In order to make sure that the sample was not unrepresentative of the kinds of prevention programs operating in the mainstream high shcools, follow-up phone calls were made to the programs for which we lacked descriptions. Information from these calls led to the conclusion that these other programs did not differ, in any major way, from the sample that was being examined.

The 22 programs are analyzed in terms of the following dimensions: on-site or off-site, entrance criteria, size of student population, program focus (General Equivalency Diploma, remediation, career orientation), approach to curriculum and instruction (i.e., tailored to the pace of the individual, or tailored to the level of the group), relationship with home school (i.e., preparation for re-entry, or alternative to mainstream), and approach to discipline (mainstream guidelines, or program developed guidelines).

Discussion of the Data

While it is true that, by and large, the dropout population under discussion can be characterized by common school-related, family and personal problems, it would be incorrect to think of all dropouts as closely resembling one another.

Dropouts come in a variety of types, each "category" with characteristics requiring different and sometimes mutually exclusive educational efforts. To illustrate, some dropouts have grade level, or near grade level skills, but because of truancy, for the most part, have accumulated very few high school credits. Other dropouts have only 3rd or 4th grade level reading skills. In addition, in both groups students may or may not have acute

home related problems (such as, a sick, alcoholic, drug addicted, or abusive parent, dependent siblings, inadequate housing, insufficient income), or they may or may not have had discipline problems in school.

Another distinguishing characteristic is their age. Contrast the 15 year old dropout with the 21 year old. These two age groups differ in terms of maturity, motivation, degree of responsibility for others (being a spouse or parent), and breadth of life experience. Also, employment possibilities, to the extent that they exist at all, are more accessible to the older dropout.

Dropouts again differ in that some are native to English, while others are non-English speaking, which creates an additional source of problems.

The reason for drawing attention to this variety of characteristics--age, school performance, language--is because the data suggest that dropout prevention program development within the New York City public shcools has not been designed with the variety of types of students in mind. While their programs show an impressive variety in terms of admission criteria, objectives, and curriculum foci, the variety seems to reflect the lack of a coordinated, systematic response to the task of program development. Essentially, an analysis of 22 prevention programs reveals that the range of these programs throughout the school system serves only a few types of dropout-prone students. (See Appendix H.) It also indicates that many schools that have dropout prevention programs exclude all but a narrowly defined group within the school's entire dropout-prone population. The exclusion of students is mainly a result of age and/or reading level admissions criteria.

One group of students excluded from programs are those who read below 6th grade level. Almost all of these programs have a reading level minimum as part of their admissions criteria. Many require at least a 6th grade reading level, but in some cases, it is higher. Clearly, a high percentage of dropout-prone students, bilingual and otherwise, can not meet this minimum. They are

reading at 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade levels. Evidence that contributes to this conclusion comes from our review of individual high school reading scores and our interview materials. Although the 16 year olds (or older) who are reading at below the 6th grade level can apply to Auxiliary Services, it is not really a viable option for many students in the category because:

1. There is a waiting list of approximately 4,000 applications for Auxiliary Services (by their own claim).

2. These sites are sparsely located involving longer travel hours and more expense to students than if they attended their neighborhood high school.

3. Many of the dropout-prone students are not "together enough" to secure a school referral to Auxiliary Services. In addition, Auxiliary Services is not permitted to accept students without referrals until they are 17 and "official dropouts."

The prevention programs, on the whole, do not serve high school students from 14 to 16 years old. The majority of them, our analysis reveals, has an average requirement of 16 to 17 years old. Considering that the social research literature on dropouts indicates that most leave school before they reach 16, one question to be asked is why this group of 14 to 16 year olds is not in prevention programs.

Some of the programs under discussion also require that students spend at least one-half to a full year in the mainstream high school before they become candidates for the prevention program. The rationale for this requirement, conveyed through informal conversations with staff members in different programs, is that incoming students are given an opportunity to succeed in the mainstream before becoming eligible for a special program. Ironically, the requirement increases the risk of students dropping out. That is, it is a detriment to those students who for a variety of reasons

can not wait out this period before becoming eligible for the program. For example, there are students who have a history of failure and do not want to repeat the experience in their first year in high school, and those who are not motivated to "sweat it out" for the diploma.

These programs also do not seem adequate to meet the needs of students who are more motivated by the prospect of work than the improvement of their skills. Our survey shows that only 25% of the programs have a work or career orientation component, and even among these, only half offer real job training or work experience. This situation is made more critical by the fact that the city's vocational schools must reject a considerable number of students who apply to them.[16]

And yet another category of students whose need is not adequately addressed is the student who has a record of behavioral problems (other than the kinds of serious problems that qualify students for special education for the emotionally handicapped). Our survey suggests that programs are not designed to help this type of student; 75% of the programs surveyed report that they follow mainstream guidelines in their approach to discipline. An irony here is that some students with behavior problems, but reasonable skill levels, are placed in prevention programs designed for slow learners. They are put there to get them out of the mainstream, yet they wind up not being served by the academic component of the program.

Additional Observations with Respect to Independent Citywide Alternative High Schools

To compound the problem of appropriate placement for potential dropouts, the ten independent alternative high schools are limited in the extent to which they serve this population.

For one thing, the alternative schools, like the mainstream prevention programs, do not seem to be designed to admit certain types of potential

dropout students. To illustrate, a scanning of their eligibility criteria makes conspicuous by its absence the lack of provision for discipline or behavior problems.[17] Behavior probelms (such as personality conflicts with teachers, fighting with other students, and being disruptive) are often mentioned by our interviewees (staff and students) as causes for dropping out (or "being pushed out"). The absence of even a mention of behavior problems as a criterion for entrance to alternative high schools leads us to suspect that few of the independent alternative high schools have been designed to attract students who have had behavior problems. In fact, our interview material suggests that some of the students characterized as "disruptive" by the mainstream are in an alternative school through "luck" rather than systematic referral.

There are many more students in need of an alternative to the high school mainstream than these schools can accomodate. That is, the total population of alternative high schools is approximately 11,083.[18] This is a fraction of the students that the school system loses every year--about 35,000 to 40,000.[19]

Also, these schools frequently can not serve students living in various sections of the city. For example, there is no alternative high school in Queens or on Staten Island, and students in these areas can not attend three of the ten alternative schools because of their residency requirements.

Finally, five of the schools restrict students on the basis of an age minimum or academic prerequisites. Our data show that many students can not meet either the age or academic requirements. Even for potential drop-outs who do find themselves eligible for one of these schools, there are otner obstacles. At least two of the schools have a six month waiting list (by their own claim), and one requires the attendance of a parent or guardian at orientation sessions before the student can be admitted.

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

Program Development for Potential Dropouts

"There should be a dropout prevention program for all who have poor performance in freshman year. For kids who are getting lost in the shuffle, use a mini-school. Offer equivalency programs for 18 to 19 year olds who were very far behind in school. Have something for kids with very poor attendance. We had one program where an attendance officer met with them in small groups, 9 or 10, and acted as an ombudsman to the school for them, and discussed their feelings and problems."

"Programs like this can not become a dumping ground for disturbed kids who can not behave. Do not dump them into these programs. It is not worth the wear and tear on teachers and students. This is a great tendency that kills these programs. Dropouts should be screened before entering to determine the type of problem."

"The Board is providing alternative forms of education, and in spite of problems, it is O.K. There are difficulties, but they are good tries. The entrance requirements are too hard sometimes. Some kids who need the programs can not get in because of the requirements."

"We have analyzed past experience in the program, and we have become aware that we can not be all things to all kids. This helped us adjust to, and concentrate on what we can do. We have to identify very clearly for our clientele, and ourselves, what the school is all about. Our program is career education and our clarity about our program's goals and what it can offer gives us an identity. It helps students to choose or not to choose our program."

"We need better articulation between high school and feeder junior high school. Each does not know what the other is doing. There is not enough contact. We are now visiting feeder junior high schools to identify problems, potential dropouts. Give them an introduction. Wean them into full day here. Hand pick teachers. Have summer introduction program in junior high school. There is a trauma in going to a huge high school. Try to find out which kids must get personal attention so they will not sink. The good, no trouble, "Joe middle class" kid gets hardly any attention, and some of our staff resent that the student who, in their opinion, deserves it least gets all the attention."

Direct Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

The Ideal Dropout Prevention/Retrieval Programs

"These programs should be career oriented, have goals, stress concrete abilities and competencies, and give intensive instructions. They must be fairly small, so they can become a very close knit group where kids can gain a lot of encouragement. They need a sense that there is a person you can go to who is in charge, and you can get things done. Small program with a sense of purpose. Caring is all. If you are involved and you care, then it is encouraging to the kid."

"Have a dropout program that is small where the teachers want to be, out of free choice, and where students have power. They should feel they have a say in things when they do come back to school. You need to be sure that the students care and that the staff does too. Students are turned off by big buildings, so we need different physical spaces. You would have to upgrade reading, writing labs, not necessarily remedial. Put emphasis in all content areas. Provide more access to world of work and internships for students."

"It does not hold water that kids must have a diploma. We should be able to make a kid feel satisfied when he is gone as far as he can. Goals must be realistic. A diploma may be an unrealistic goal for some kids. It may take longer than four years. We can provide kids with education skills and strengthen them so they can market them."

"Actual physical place should be attractive. Setting should be physically small and limit number of people involved. Teachers must be volunteers. You can not assign people to do this, autonomy in hiring. Ideally, do not split teachers' days in two places. You need a 100% commitment to a program like this. Bend a lot of the rules. Give teachers in the program freedom of action for adjusting long-term and short-term changes as the need arises."

"It would be housed off-site. Staff should be made up of volunteers. You need someone with extra patience and motivation to work with these students. And you would have to provide remediation. Provide for individualized instruction to enable students to achieve at their own pace. There should be on-going admittance into the program throughout the school year. Provide career, academic, and personal counseling and coordination with the employment counselor. Make referrals to outside agencies if necessary. Prepare for G.E.D."

"Put many demands on students; e.g., the more difficult the program, the harder they work. Programs that are very easy do not get students to meet their potential. Some demands include: dress code, behavior code, restricting the use of certain types of language, attendance, and punctuality. The students are informed about the expectation the field makes; for example, it is hard work and not very glamorous."

SECTION IV

Recommendations

Introduction

Though this is a study of the dropout problem in New York City's high schools, evidence points to the conclusion that the process of dropping out begins earlier than the secondary school. And though the mandate was to generate recommendations for high school programs that would reduce the dropout rate, a conclusion is that reform is needed at other levels. The recommendations, then, affect all levels of the school system, and do not only address the issue of new programs.

A final comment. These recommendations are presented with the suspicion that the problem the New York City school system faces in reducing the dropout rate is not lack of information about the kinds of programs that are effective, but that the system does not act on what it knows. Various reports, some dating as far back as 1959, about the school system's history with dropout prevention clearly state many of the same recommendations offered here and the same solutions offered by the interviewees.[20]

Why the system does not act on what it knows might be a useful topic for further study. Partial answers to the question, however, appear in the interview data. When staff were asked the question, "What's your impression? Are schools throughout the system making a good effort to help kids remain in school?", it was discovered that a sizeable number of respondents think that nothing is happening. Thirty-six percent said, "No, they are not trying." Another 12% said that they are trying but not achieving any results. When asked to explain their answers, many respondents claimed that the dropout problem exists because "the system" intends that it exist. One respondent pointed out that the system calculates the dropout population into its proposed budget as a permanent feature, that it in fact counts on those students not being there because it does not provide for them. As

one respondent said, "Do you know how many teachers they would have to hire to teach 30,000 more kids each year?"

When asked, "What steps could central administration take to convince people in the field that dropout prevention is a high priority?", respondents most commonly mentioned the restoration of some service that was cut (number of counselors, Attendance Bureau personnel), or the expansion of these support services. More bluntly, they mention money. These respondents feel that if the system and/or society want to solve the problem, they know full well what they need to do--attack the problem with sufficient energy and resources: "If they mean it, they will put their money where their mouth is." "They cut the heart out of services these kids need most, and then they want us to believe it is a high priority!"

A few respondents suggested that the social system needs a certain proportion of failures, apparently to provide a cheap reserve labor force, and that the school system is merely a reflection of this situation. Other respondents placed the responsibility for either creating or exacerbating the dropout rate on principals, teachers, and other school staff. Typical comments are: "These people do not like these kinds of kids." "The people who run the schools are afraid of them; kids like that make them uncomfortable; they want them out." "They do not want these students; they make them nervous; they get rid of them." Others say that the schools are victims. The schools mean well, but are totally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems with which they are asked to cope, and thus fail the problem-ridden student.

Recommendations are submitted here with the conviction that they could serve to reduce the dropout rate significantly. However, there is the fear that they will be more reference material for personnel of the Board of Education studying the dropout problem four years from now.

ect Quotations from Interviews with Staff Members:

How the School System Could Prove that It Cares about the Dropout Problem

"If the Board wants dropout prevention to be a priority, all it has to do is mandate it. Give money and flexibility to teachers and schools. The Board has to initiate programs and provide supportive personnel at the Board, not necessarily in the schools. To begin to change its image as a bureaucracy, it can stop working with paper and start with people."

"For starters, revamp the hiring processes. Have more community input, and do not retain by seniority only. There should be more avenues of communication between teachers and Board decision makers. Allot necessary money. Make everyone accountable throughout the system--the Board and teachers. We need accountability, like the contract system with students."

"Show them the statistics on the increase in crime rate. Show the statistics on truancy rates and crime rates. Convince the administration that there is a need for more qualified teachers. More funding for personnel is needed. Some of the teachers are illiterate themselves."

"Are there people who do not feel the dropout problem is an issue? If you want to convince me, put money on the line. Make money an issue if you lose students. Make the high school competitive. If money is an issue, to save your job you will make it a priority. Have students who have dropped out explain why, and publish such study results like this one. Maybe go to vouchers--the student goes where he wants to go if schools do not meet his needs, if staff does not care. Then you have no one in the class; you lose your job."

"It seems that money and time is what produces major effect. Give me money and time. Do not just approve a program, then not fund it. If I am to call 25 kids, I need the time! They have got to give me a phone! An office. They expect everything to function out of a teacher's locker. Seems to be underutilization of space."

"Identify the schools with the highest dropout rates. Declare them disaster areas. Throw out the administrators. Encourage only those teachers who want to stay, to stay. For others, staff with volunteers. Take people who want to teach there. Instructional program in school should at first concentrate on reading, probably bring up to grade level first. Forget about keeping the system we have. Just get them into reading and writing. Later, do other liberal arts subjects. Need a longer school day. All schools are doing the opposite. Push the day to start earlier and earlier...They have too many problems to deal with to solve in a few hours. Do not have a whole day of academics. Have music, sports, and clubs. But a long day in school. One way or another, spend most time on reading. Do not bother with science until later. Have a progression from "disaster schools" (reading schools)

to mini-schools (more normal); maybe eventually to a normal high school curriculum for some. In "disaster schools" the whole day should be different. If students can not read at 16, do something radically different."

"Spend 6 or 7 hours a day on this one task...If you want to stop illiteracy, it can be done. Other countries have done it. Have massive all day programs until you break through. Have a summer camp program. It is very important to this group. Get them out of the city with their teachers. This is a chance to develop relationships, good experiences, and broaden horizons. That can make them change. We think of trips and things like that only for elementary schools; we should not. This population needs it badly."

"Experimental schools lead the way, but these serve elite populations, certain segments of the population. We need this type of freedom to experiment within traditional schools with average, non-elite students. You might attach small schools to colleges; i.e., City College with uptown students. As knowledge is gained in the experimental schools, it can be put into practice, that is, those strategies which are effective in other traditional schools. Try different techniques, less hard and fast rules, and structures."

"There is a need for a better racial mix or balance. More racially mixed teachers and students. Have some match between students and teachers by race. Establish better role models. The system has the necessary programs; the missing link is the racially balanced or mixed environment."

"Keep some valid statistics to determine when class size makes a difference. What are attendance problems? Follow up and see what effect class size has on student in these categories--attendance, success in subject area focuses, and school retention. Follow up those who leave schools. Use the information from "separation interviews" of students leaving. Also, what effect does school size have on anonymity of students. School is perceived as not caring. Look to see where the successes are, and what causes them. A valid statistical study should be made correlating overcrowding factors with the variable mentioned. Maybe it does not always have the same effect. I would like to see what related to what. Also, every dropout has a separation interview with the guidance counselor. How are these used? What consensus of reason comes straight from the kids themselves as revealed in these interviews?"

GROUP I

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Attack Lack of Basic Skills

As students who are behind grade level are passed on from the elementary to the junior high, and then to senior high, the prognosis for their academic success worsens. Additionally, the repeated experience of failure apparently has crippling psychological consequences for youngsters, i.e., lowered self-esteem, negative attitudes toward learning, and minimal expectations of self and others. These predictable results lead to the conclusion that the school system must take responsiblity for student failure.

A comprehensive plan to deal with potential drop-outs must be a K-12 effort. Aspects of this plan should include:

A. Remediation programs at every grade level, for students who fall behind. Intensify this effort in the elementary schools. Consider Transitional Class Program as a model.

B. Educational alternatives for students who do not succeed in remediation programs (e.g., classes characterized by experimental teaching approaches, highly innovative materials, and individualized learning prorams).

C. A system for monitoring the implementation of the newly ueveloped promotional policy, along with adequate resources to the schools to insure compliance with its provisions.

D. Early detection of learning problems that have physical bases as mandated by Public Law 94-142. Schools need to be provided with the wherewithal to comply with the 94-142 regulations. Preventive measures must also be taken by the school system. The Board of Education should provide every child who enters school a thorough physical examination to

detect physical learning disabilities (e.g., poor eyesight, hearing problems, lack of nutrition, poor motor skills, hyperactivity, etc.). This physical health record should follow the child through his/her school experience, and periodic examinations should be provided thereafter.

Intensify Efforts to Respond to the Problem of Poor Attendance

Because attendance is crucial to the success of all other educational efforts (you cannot teach children who are not there), make attainment of regular attendance a top priority. Steps toward this goal should include:

A. Increase staff and material resources so that the elementary schools can service children beyond the academic arena. Working in tandem with other social service agencies, the elementary schools must have a greater capacity for helping children who are unable to cope with schooling because of personal or family related problems.

B. Intensify parent education programs in all elementary schools. Schools cannot take for granted that parents know legal or educational consequences to themselves and to the child who does not attend school regularly. These programs need to be carefully planned, sensitively executed, and financially supported. And given that many of the parents who need educating cannot or will not come to the school itself, steps to bring parent education into the community deserve serious consideration.

C. Upgrade mechanisms for enforcing compulsory attendance. This report endorses the suggestions for a comprehensive attendance program outlined by the Chancellor, and in particular, the strengthening of the Bureau of Attendance so that it can realistically pursue its responsibilities.[21]

D. Provide attendance service at night. Refer to the Family Assistant Program as a possible model for this effort. Connect this service to Board funds so that regulations do not limit programs to poverty areas only, as happens with some federally funded projects.

E. Relate the issuance of the welfare letter to attendance record in each report card period. Set this up as a Board of Education - Social Service Department cooperative venture in which parents need not come to school, but are aware that welfare checks covering the in-school child are dependent upon his being in classes as well as in the school building.

Work Toward Better Cooperation with Social Service Agencies that Serve Students' Personal and Family-Related Problems

There are many agencies helping youth in New York City - police, schools, health agencies, religious groups, private and public social service agencies. They do not work together; there is overlapping of expenditure. Each school can set up a cooperative relationship with all agencies serving its students. These efforts can act as the catalyst for bringing these groups together, starting to overcome their interjurisdictional jealousies, keeping them from drifting apart again. Until this is done, many youngsters will fall between the cracks in our massive system.

GROUP II

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Create Dropout Prevention Programs and/or Alternative Type Schools for Middle School Students

The school system should implement dropout prevention and retrieval programs at the junior high/intermediate levels. In many cases, high school is too late to "turn around" the student who has a history of failure and/or poor attendance and/or discipline problems. In addition,

dropout-prone students can usually be identified by the time they reach the middle schools.

Two major considerations should guide program development.

A. Group potential dropouts in junior high schools by shared characteristics so that programs can be designed with particular groups in mind. One possible approach to grouping is offered here:

By Skill Level

1. At grade level
   - and/or Truant
   - and/or Behavior Problems
   - and/or Personal/Home Problems
   - and/or High Motivation/Low Motivation
2. Two years below grade level
   - and/or Truant
   - and/or Behavior Problems
   - and/or Personal/Home Problems
   - and/or High Motivation/Low Motivation
3. Any of these above and: Limited English or non-English speaking.

B. Model the program after others that have proved successful.

According to the findings of this study, there is wide agreement about the kinds of educational programs that are most likely to be effective with students who are not being served by traditional schooling. A literature review of the studies and evaluations of dropout prevention and retrieval porgrams for effective features lend support to these findings. A summary list of characteristics shared by successful programs dealing with high risk students is provided here. Listed first are the features of prevention programs, followed by an additional list of features

especially effective for retrieval programs.

1. Staff members who have counseling skills, including the ability to offer emotional support to students.

2. Nonauthoritarian relationships between staff members and students.

3. Personal counseling supplemented by group counseling and/or peer counseling.

4. Policies and regulations that provide students with structure, but that are not implemented rigidly; i.e., consider students' individual needs.

5. Some student involvement in decision-making processes.

6. Career information that leads to job entry positions.

7. Actual work experience.

8. Strong ties to social support agencies so that referral work, with follow up, is thorough.

9. A curriculum adaptedto the needs and interests of students.

10. Attention to reading improvement and the practical appreciation of mathematics.

11. Learning experiences where success is built in; tasks that are challenging but not overwhelming.

12. Individual attention made possible in the classroom.

Additional Features of Retrieval Programs:

1. A monitored work/study program (apprenticeships in trades).

2. Training in areas that lead to guaranteed employment.

3. Cooperation of industry.

4. Updated machinery/technology.

5. Guidance about how to fill responsibilities in the world of work (being on time, etc.)

Intensify counseling and guidance for dropout-prone students.

Use a teacher advisor system, where all staff, including principal, can volunteer to work with a group of 10-20 advisees who want to discuss problems, need an adult advocate to settle conflicts, or need help negotiating the system. The guidance staff might supervise and coordinate the advisee sessions. Staff members volunteering for this effort should receive teacher-effectiveness training and be trained to implement the advisee system in their own schools.

GROUP III

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HIGH SCHOOLS

The lack of correspondence between available programs and the whole range of needs of dropout-prone students has been discussed in this report. Also cited was the fact that there are many more students who need the services of special programs than there are places for them. The net result of recommendations here is to systematically diversify options to the mainstream high school for this population of students. There ought to be more of the existing kinds of programs and/or schools for students in risk of dropping out, and new options need to be designed to meet the needs of students who are not being served. The recommendations are:

Provide a Real Option to the Mainstream School Experience in Every High School for Entering Students in Risk of Dropping Out

An option to the mainstream should be available in every high school for dropout-prone students. These programs should be characterized by goal oriented subject matter, staff members trained to work with dropout-prone students, and a program size of no more than 200 students. Most important, these programs should be able to enroll a student for more

than one year, and if necessary, allow the student to remain in the program during his/her stay in high school. Start these mini-schools early (9th grade) but also form them for superannuated failing students to take the High School Equivalency Test, and for tenth graders to feel out careers. The system has many working programs which are well deserved in such booklets as, Toward the Twenty-First Century, and its supplements, Community as School and Humanization and Involvement: the Small Unit Approach.[22] These materials should serve as guidelines to program developers.

In addition to replicating existing dropout prevention programs, new kinds of programs should be developed. Consideration in the development of new programs include:

A. Provide for students who are below 16 years of age with below grade level skills.

B. Emphasize job skill training that is realistically connected to the job market, along with an emphasis on remediation.

C. Develop a component that is aimed at affecting students who have had discipline problems.

Expand Existing Services that Already Address Some of the Needs of Potential and Actual Dropouts

This recommendation is made with the realization that the claims of success made by staff and students in prevention programs and alternative high schools have not been empirically validated. Admittedly, there is a need for an evaluation of these schools and programs. Any definitive evaluation of their successes, however, will be difficult.

Some of the problems are predictable. First, many of the mini-programs operated by the mainstream are simply too new. Secondly, the evaluation designs built into the independent citywide alternative schools are often informal and partially subjective. Thirdly, any attempt to

compare the success of one setting with another would be problematic at best. With different student populations, program objectives, and curricula, it is hard to determine a basis for comparison. Given these problems, it is recommended that top level administrators address some of the more complex issues raised by this kind of evaluation, and that their agreements then guide the evaluation design. Three topics, in particular, need their consideration:

1. The level of commitment from the Office of Educational Evaluation and Division of High Schools to the evaluation.

It will be difficult to evaluate, in less than a two year period, how successful these settings have been with dropout-prone students. Also, the evaluation effort will require staff members with technical expertise in the areas of testing, observational analysis, and interviewing. In other words, this project needs adequate funding and resources to insure high quality results.

2. The ultimate goal of the evaluation. Will settings with poor results be eliminated? Will successes be replicated?

3. The scope of the evaluation. Will mainstream mini-programs, Auxiliary Services, and/or independent alternative high schools be evaluated? And on what basis will particular sites be identified for evaluation?

In any event, serve the current student population by expanding services where evidence for the need is apparent. Expansion should include:

A. Providing a citywide alternative high school in Queens and Staten Island.

B. Creating an additional citywide alternative school setting in sections of the city where the existing alternative(s) have waiting lists.

C. Increasing the number of vocational opportunities.

D. Increasing the number of centers operated by Auxiliary Services.

E. Increasing the number of programs for young mothers and fathers.

Expand services so that they include curriculum and teaching materials aimed at the role of parent, child development, and child care. Resources, such as kitchen and nursery, should be on-site to allow students to apply what they learn. (A model for this kind of program exists in the Philadelphia School System.)

Intensify Dropout Retrieval Efforts in Every High School

Findings from this report suggest that the first six months, up to a year after a student drops out, may be the optimum time for reaching out to encourage students to return. Every high school needs to identify staff, and provide resources, for this effort! Some staff members, or students, should be trained to go into the communities to track down a student and speak face-to-face with him or her about the possibilities of returning. The school should also train staff or students to counsel returning students for a period of time as their attempt to readjust to the demands of school life.

Provide a Team of Master Teachers to Offer Workshops to Staff in Dropout Prevention Programs

This study tapped the current thinking and appraisals of persons in the field. Though in large measure subjective, the method made it possible to identify recurring features of programs that appear to be effective. There is a need for practical illustrations of these widely accepted, common features.

Staff members in many of the programs say that they do not know much about what is happening in other programs, and that they would like to

know more. They need information that will help them implement program features they do not have, and in other instances, improve on what they do have. It is recommended that this need be met by a team of master teachers who can visit schools to demonstrate approaches, share experiences and wisdoms, offer guidance and support, and give information at the "nitty-gritty" level. A team of teachers taking training together can then disseminate their sensitivities to more and more staff members. Training should also be provided for supervisors so that they can learn to pick up insensitive remarks of teachers, as well as ineffective instructional approaches.

Take Steps to Revise the Academic-Comprehensive High School Curriculum So that It Better Meets the Needs of a Growing Proportion of the Student Population

Since there is such strong agreement among respondents that the mainstream curriculum is irrelevant to the needs of more and more students, one is led to conclude that, however diverse, it should undergo a review. Steps in this direction should include:

A. The academic-comprehensive high school curriculum should be assessed for its assumptions in regard to levels of abstraction, and different kinds of skills. This analysis should be used to assist the high schools in determining the extent to which their course materials are appropriate for the comprehension levels of their students. The high schools should be required to: 1) analyze student "error", not just for raw scores, but in terms of particular strengths and weaknesses, 2) examine course materials for assumptions regarding conceptual skills and other kinds of skills and 3) take steps to secure or develop materials that appropriately match the comprehension levels of their students, 4) make maximum use of curriculum materials such as various work

oriented courses, those for cluster curricula for 9th and 10th graders, and teaching materials aimed at non-academic learners.

B. Expand high school courses and learning experiences that teach skills in logical thinking; e.g., understanding cause and effect, judging probability, recognizing and sorting out contradictions.

C. Require courses that prepare students in terms of their personal and social development for the world of work and adulthood; e.g., dealing with persons in authority, managing personal time, following directions, accepting responsibilities, settling conflicts, etc.

D. Consider respondents' suggestion that some students should be offered a curriculum of core courses different from that of the mainstream. Our data reveal unanimous agreement that the curriculum program for students in risk of dropping out of high school should be different from that of the mainstream. Respondents' views of this difference have been discussed in Section II of this report.

Not to explore the possibility of an alternative curriculum, one respondent cautions, is to "give no one what they really need in an effort to pretend that everybody is alike." Other respondents fear that the new minimum competency requirements will only increase the dropout rate because they are unrealistically high for many students.

Better Inform Students about the Policies and Penalties of Their Own Schools; Educate Students about the Meaning of Rules and Authority

Students' misbehaviors seem to be related to several issues: (1) lack of clarity for many students about their own school's rules and penalties, and (2) the lack of an understanding and appreciation of why rules are important and how the breaking of them affects an entire community. To remedy this situation, the following is recommended:

A. Revise the leaflet entitled Rights and Responsibilities of High School Students published by the school system. This publication, if

redesigned, could serve as a model for improving student handbooks in current use. As a model, it should simply and clearly state typical school rules and penalties, describe procedures for recourse, explain students' legal rights, distinguish rights from privileges, and identify circumstances under which students can be denied rights and privileges. It should be written in language that students themselves can understand and given to every student who enters high school. Legal terms such as "defamation" should be defined; practical illustrations of the abuse of "freedoms" should be articulated; and the consequences for the individual and the school community when rules are broken should be discussed. Older students should be assigned to orient small groups of younger students to the school's policies and expectations.

B. The school curriculum should address, explicitly, issues that will teach students about their relationships to rules and authority. These issues might include the concept of justice, questions of fairness, and the purpose of rules in families, communities, and institutions. (Refer to curriculum materials and studies based on Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral development.)[23]

Identify High Schools with the Poorest Attendance Rates and/or Lowest Achievement Scores and/or Highest Dropout Rates.

Consider the possibility of radically reorganizing these schools; i.e., alter their curricula materials, create "house units" of no more than 500 students (refer to the Cambridge School System, Massachusetts, for this model), and require group counseling sessions for staff and students around "live" issues in the school (e.g., stealing, poor attendance, racial tensions). Set up as many goal-oriented schools-within-the-school as student needs indicate. (refer to Humanization and Involvement: The Small Unit Approach for this model). Organize an analysis of the cost

of such restructuring, including concomitant savings to the mainstream.

GROUP IV

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Set as a Priority the Return to School of as Many Dropouts as Possible

Some steps the system can take toward this goal are as follows:

A. Establish centers where students out of school for any length of time can be counseled about finishing their education. These centers should be strategically located, i.e., near areas where truants and dropouts are likely to spend time. The total number of centers and their locations should reflect the severity of the dropout problem in particular sections of the city. The centers should be staffed, in part, by young adults who themselves have experienced dropping out, and who have been trained to do peer counseling and referral. These staff members should know about all school programs available for the returning students and which of them have openings. In effect, they should facilitate the student's application and acceptance. The existence of the centers should be advertised on radio and on the New York City Metropolitan Transit system (M.T.A.).

B. Solicit media support for a pro-education campaign. The aim of this campaign would be to "glamorize" the good student image, to change many students' opinions of the educated person from a negative to a positive one, from "bookworm" or "out of it" to the "together" person.

C. Redefine the purpose of the exit interview. The exit interview, when students are discharged, should be for the purpose of establishing a contact person for each student in the case that his/her return to school is possible. In other words, whoever conducts the exit interview should

be responsible for maintaining periodic contact (every six months) with students through phone, mail, or personal visits. This would be for the purpose of checking if the student has renewed his/her interest in school. Before the student leaves school, he/she should set up an appointment for another interview (within six months to a year) where return to school would be considered. Exit interview staff should take responsibility for getting in touch with the student so that the interview could take place.

It also should be an opportunity to genuinely counsel the youngster and to discourage leaving school, to inform students and parents of the full consequences of dropping out and all available options for overcoming educational and social difficulties. In the case where a student is transferred, or referred to an available educational option, school officials should provide follow up to insure that the student has successfully adapted to the new setting.

D. Prepare informational material specifically written for the departing or dropout student. Written materials should be provided to students leaving school that inform them about returning to school, where to go for guidance, and how to make application to particular programs. Avoid educational jargon. Write in "good" high school language. These materials should be available in English, Spanish, and Chinese at minimum.

Take Bold Steps to Improve the Quality of Teachers and Other Staff

One of the firmest conclusions of this study is that staff members can be the key to solving the dropout problem. The evidence suggests that positive expectations with regard to students who have difficulty learning, skillful counseling of problem ridden youngsters, and inspiring, creative teaching are the answers. Given the overwhelming nature of the evidence, the school system must make every effort to staff its schools with persons

who have the necessary skills and commitment.

To accomplish these goals, it is recommended that a broad-based task force representing, at minimum, the Board of Education, the United Federation of Teachers, Council of Supervisors and Administrators, and the Parent Federation be formed so that some resolution of several important and difficult questions can be approached: What incentives can the school system develop to attract the kind of teachers needed? How can hiring criteria be made more job-related? How can inservice programs dealing with dropout prevention be developed and implemented? What can parent organizations and civic organizations do to improve services to potential dropouts? What accountability measures can the system institute for teachers, administrators and counselors?

The task force should explore the work of the school system in reponding to these and other dropout related problems. A preliminary inquiry conducted for this study points to several school systems with exemplary models:

1. The Washington, D.C. Public School System has a team of master teachers to evaluate new candidates.

2. Washington, D.C., Seattle, and Salt Lake City Public Schools have procedures for the removal of poor teachers. The shared features of their plans include, in part, written criteria for identifying the poor teacher drawn up through negotiations between the school system and the teacher's organization, a period of remediation for poor teachers with a time line for improvement, and litigatior procedures for removing teachers who do not improve with remediation. (It appears that school systems have had varying success with their plans. Seattle and Salt Lake City report the most success. Other relatively unsuccessful efforts usually involved conflicts between the school administration and the teacher's union.)

In addition, in ongoing consultation with union leaders, train administrators to use staff to its fullest potential within the contractual framework. Ample safeguards against exploitation are provided in the greivance procedures.

Take Steps to Strengthen Financial Resources for Special Programs

Federal funding is intended to be seed money for special programs. The federal agencies will not pick up the cost of a program after the close of its funding period no matter how successful. The Board of Education, parents and students must confront the Mayor and the State Legislature with the need for on-going funds for programs that give evidence of success with dropouts.

In addition, the unions, administration and parents must be encouraged to work together to acquaint Congress with problems of federal funding regulations. In some cases, for example, they are too rigid. They can limit a program to providing remediation, when counseling and work training are just as important to the student behind grade level. Also, they require poverty area populations, and so frequently deprive other dropout-prone students of help.

Collect Accurate Statistics on the Number of Dropouts from the New York City Schools

Attempts to obtain reliable figures from the Board of Education on the dropout rate from New York City Schools led to the conclusion that important information is not being processed and/or collected by its bureaus, and that when information does exist, it is not easily available, even to Board of Education personnel.

Two sets of statistics on dropouts from the New York City Public Schools were examined: the "Annual City-Wide Report on Dropouts for Public

Academic and Vocational High Schools" which has figures up to the 1975-76 school year, and a report by a citizen's group called Advocates for Children.[4] Each report presents different kinds of attendance data, and gives somewhat different results. Also neither report seems to present a satisfactory way of defining or counting dropouts.

Having one set of reliable figures would perform a real service to those trying to deal with the problem, as well as settling the current controversy about which, in fact, are the "correct" figures. In addition, disseminating accurate figures might have a salutory effect on those persons in the school system or city/state administration who are not aware of the problem, or who minimize it. The following preliminary steps are recommended to remedy this situation:

1. Develop a systemwide formula for defining the dropout. At present there is no mechanism to include:

a. Students who drop out in elementary school and junior high schools.

b. Students both under and over 17, out consistently for 90 days, called "long term absences" (LTAs), where it has been ascertained that the parents know the student is truant and the student is not interested in being in school.

Also, the current definition of a dropout is too broad because it includes persons up to 21 years of age who receive a high school or G.E.D. diploma in an evening high school, through Auxiliary Services, or the Bureau of Continuing Education, or Council Against Poverty programs. Students who receive these degrees should be added to that year's graduates, regardless of when they began high school. For clarity's sake, this figure might be recorded separately before being counted with the total number of graduates.

2. The Bureau of Attendance should be responsible for an annual report about the dropout population. It should include figures showing dropout rates from individual schools (high school, junior high, elementary), dropouts from citywide alternatives, and dropouts from high school mini-programs.

3. Computerize attendance information for all students in the school system so that their movement within or out of the system can be traced. The Metropolitan Educational Laboratory of the New York City Board of Education could provide this service with a substantial increase of resources. It already has in place a mechanism for processing student directory information on every student in the school system. However, currently it is equipped to process only aggregate figures on attendance, and not attendance information on individual students.

AFTERWORD

Prepared from a "Reaction Memo"

By Nathan Quinones,
Executive Director,
Division of High Schools

The dropout study offers us an in-depth analysis of the problem. This scrutiny has helped to identify a number of the sub-elements. Neen Hunt and her staff have signaled how the dropout population varies in age, language handicap, academic achievement, and behavior. Much of our thinking concerning dropouts has been in terms of limited dimensions perceiving them as a homogeneous group rather than a heterogeneous one. This awareness is particularly useful in developing strategies for dealing with the problem.

One of the most important findings of the study is that retrieval efforts on the part of the schools are effective. Clearly, there is a part of the dropout population that is willing to return to regular school but reluctant to take the first steps. The school's obligation to initiate contact can not be denied nor avoided.

Consistently, the key factor identified as crucial to the success of a retrieval system is the quality of the personnel involved. These qualities as revealed by the study point to teachers who are caring, committed, and challenging. The insufficiency of such teachers and the constraints on selection and retention of personnel are major difficulties affecting program design and implementation.

The dropout problem is recognized by the High School Division as a major concern that must be addressed. In that regard, I have established as policy that each high school must develop an outreach program. We are

providing a specific portion of the budget allocation for each school for this purpose and will be suggesting optional programs for the schools to consider for implementation. In addition, we are exploring with a major university the development of a prototype outreach center to service high school age youth.

A new program, Operation Far Cry, will shortly be initiated as a major thrust by the Board of Education in retrieving out-of-school youngsters.

Among the excellent recommendations made, I would add the use of the courts with an early identification system and a massive and serious media campaign supporting the campaign.

As a follow up, I would suggest an assessment of the effectiveness of those dropout retrieval and dropout prevention programs identified here. This would be particularly useful for purposes of replication.

I have already indicated the importance we are devoting to this area and wish to state further that the two key indicators for assessment of professional effectiveness rest on the relative improvement of student achievement and retention.

FOOTNOTES

1. Truancy in the Public Schools of New York City, New York State Senate Minority Task Force on Truancy, Senator Carl McCall, Chairman, March, 1978, p. 9. Source cited in Task Force Report: State of New York Office of Education Performance Review November, 1974.

2. King, Randall H., The Labor Market Consequences of Dropping Out of High School, Ohio State University, Center for Human Resource Research 1978, p. 9.

3. "Employment of High School Graduates and Dropouts," Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 93, N8, August, 1970, p. 36.

4. National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics, 1976, Edition (U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 1977), Table 18, p. 20.

5. Op. cit. Truancy in the Public Schools of New York City, p. 10.

6. New York State Department of Labor, Division of Research and Statistics, Bureau of Labor Market Information.

7. The data from 1972-76 are from the Annual City Wide Report on Dropouts for Public Academic and Vocational High Schools. The 1977-78 data derive from a hand tabulation performed at the Bureau of Attendance. The analyst responsible for this latter tabulation indicated that a number of reports were missing.

8. U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education, 1977 Edition, Vol. 3, Pt. 1, p, 197. Table 4. 12.

9. Op. cit. Truancy in the Public Schools of New York City, p. 10.

10. Fleischman Report on the Quality, Cost and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education in New York, Chapter 1, "The State of Education in New York" p. 41.

11. Op. cit. Truancy in the Public Schools of New York City, p.11.

12. Ibid., p. 11, Source cited in the Task Force Report: Economic Development Council of New York City.

13. The Effects of Dropping Out, Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity, United States Senate, August 1972.

14. Ibid, Summary of Findings, X1.

15. Op. cit. Truancy in the Public Schools of New York, p. 14. Source cited in Task Force Report: Economic Development Council of New York City.

16. Memo dated February 7, 1979 to Nathan Quinones, Executive Director, from George R. Quarles, Chief Administrator, regarding, "Response to Gerald Freeborne Re: The number of students applying for and denied admission to vocational high schools."

It should be noted that the demand for seats in the vocational high schools continues to outstrip available places. Although data for this school year again show an increase in projected opening school registers beyond the record high of previous years, an even greater number of applicants are being denied their choice.

Comparison of 1978 and 1976 totals

	Sept. '78	Sept. '76
# Accepted by Test to Screened Programs	15,499	14,210
# Rejected by Test from Screened Programs	12,155	9,908
# In Excess, Unscreened Trade Programs	1,128	574
# In Excess, Unscreened Exploratory Programs	2,566	1,259
Gross Opening Registers	42,548	42,103

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18. New York City Board of Education, Comparative Analysis, Organization of the High Schools, Fall Term, 1978.

19. Bureau of Attendance of the New York City Board of Education, Annual City-Wide Report on Dropouts for Public Academic and Vocational High Schools, 1976.

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21. Memo dated September 29, 1978 to Members of the Board of Education from Frank Macchiarola, Chancellor, New York City Board of Education, regarding, "A Comprehensive Attendance Program."

22. Board of Education, Toward the 21st Century, The Task Force of High School Redesign of the Office of High Schools and the Chancellor's Center for Planning, 1971.

23. Lawrence Kohlberg, "Stage and Sequence: "The Cognitive Developmental Approach to Socialization" in D. Goslin (E.) Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1969).

24. Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., The Number of Graduates from New York City Public Schools: Enrolled Pupils and Former Pupils, Study by Susanna A. Doyle, October 12, 1978

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