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ABSTRACT
        A summary is presented of a study to determine the
impact of school authority systems on student disengagement from high
school. Student disengagement is defined as the extent to which
students refrain from participating in activities offered as part of
the school program, tasks of scholarship and citizenship, and
extracurricular activities. The project focuses on the processes for
the evaluation of student performance in the areas of academics,
social behavior, and extracurricular activities through a study of
four incompatibilities which are contradictory, uncontrollable,
unpredictable, or unattainable. The incompatibilities of these
evaluation processes were linked with three forms of student
disengagement: lowered effort engagement and lowered effort
assessment, participation in negative activities, and withdrawal.
Four high schools in the Rushton School District in Missouri were
studied. Research methods included interviews with all administrators
and a sample of teachers as well as a survey of a 5 percent random
sample of the students. Findings showed a positive relationship
between the incompatibilities in the authority and evaluation systems
for all three areas and the three forms of student disengagement.
Recommendations included that policies and practices be modified to
alleviate incompatibilities in the evaluation system, that consistent
and reasonable goals and standards be set, that structural changes be
made which would facilitate compatibility, and that teachers spend
more time setting student expectations and communicating criteria and
procedures for evaluation. (CK)

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ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS AND STUDENT DISENGAGEMENT
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Washington University

April 1982

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This report is a summary of the final report for the project on Organizational Evaluation Systems and Student Disengagement in Secondary Schools. The final report is presented in nine chapters. In this report we will briefly discuss the major points in each of the nine chapters.

The first chapter of the report presents a discussion of the forms and sources of student disengagement. After reviewing the various concepts used by social scientists to describe the estrangement of individuals from organizations (alienation, anomie) we define student disengagement as the extent to which students refrain from participating in the activities offered as part of the school program, activities associated with the common tasks of scholarship and citizenship, and the more specialized tasks inherent in extracurricular activities. We go on to describe the typologies of estrangement phenomena developed by Merton, Hirshman, and Spady. Finally, we develop our own typology of three forms of student disengagement: apathy or low level participation, violence and vandalism or participation in negative activities, and absenteeism or student non-participation.

The second half of the chapter is devoted to a discussion of the sources of student disengagment that have been identified by social scientists. Five general sources of disengagement are presented. The first source, student origins, refers to experiences early in the lives of students which lead to their eventual estrangement from school. School policies and procedures, those aspects of the school program under the control of educators, are cited as a second general source of disengagement. A third source lies in the school environment, those aspects of life within schools that are not directly controlled by school policies and procedures, including such things as peer influences. The community environment, conditions within the community and the family, is a fourth source of disengagement. Finally, anticipated student futures, the perception of students as to their chances of attaining valued success goals, is a fifth general factor influencing student disengagement from school. After briefly reviewing research dealing with the effects of each of these five major sources of disengagement, we explain that the present study focuses on one aspect of the policies and procedures of schools, the processes for the evaluation of student performance.

In Chapter 2 we present the theory of evaluation and authority developed by Dornbusch and Scott. The theory relies on a six stage model of the evaluation process. The six stages that make up the model will guide our inquiry into the practices of administrators and teachers as they evaluate student performance in school. The stages are: 1) allocation, the process of assigning a task to an individual performer, 2) criteria setting, determining which dimensions of the allocated task are important and the standards for performance along each of the important dimensions; 3) sampling, the process of collecting information on the performance of the allocated task according to the criteria that have been set; 4) appraising, the act of assigning an evaluation to a performance by comparing the criteria

set for the task performance with the sample of information collected on that performance; and 6) working with the performer to plan for improvements in performance.

In the second half of Chapter 2 we discuss the relationship between evaluation and authority in organizations and highlight the four incompatibilities in organizational authority systems identified by Dornbusch and Scott. The four incompatibilities form the basis for our investigation of problems in the evaluation of student performance in schools. The four incompatibilities are:

Type I: Contradictory Evaluations which occur when performers are put in a situation where the receipt of one evaluation at or above a level acceptable to them necessarily entails receiving another evaluation below a level acceptable to them.
Type II: Uncontrollable Evaluations which occur when performers receive evaluations below a level acceptable to them for performances or outcomes they do not control.
Type III: Unpredictable Evaluations which occur when performers receive evaluations below a level acceptable to them because they are unable to predict accurately the relationship between attributes of their performances and the level of evaluations they receive.
Type IV: Unattainable Evaluations which occur when the standards used to evaluate performers are so high that they cannot achieve evaluations at or above a level acceptable to them.

Dornbusch and Scott link incompatibilities in the authority system to instability and suggest three ways in which individuals may react in situations of authority system instability: 1) they may lower the level of performance they deem acceptable, 2) they may create pressures for change in the organization, and 3) they may withdraw from the organization. The three reactions parallel the three forms of student disengagement discussed in Chapter 1: low level engagement, engagement in negative activities, and withdrawal from school.

In Chapter 3 we present discriptions of the school district and the four high schools where they study was conducted. The schools are part of the Rushton School District, a suburban district in a major metropolitan area in the midwest United States. By most common measures the four high schools are among the better public high schools in the area.

We then discuss the procedures used for the evaluation of students in three areas: academic performance, social behavior, and extracurricular performance. Data for this section come from structured interviews with all the administrators and a sample of the teachers in each school. The four schools, which we call Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Washington, have rather distinct approaches to the evaluation and supervision of students in each of these areas. Still, there are three common themes in the approaches of these schools to the evaluation of students. First, three of the four

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schools employ strategies which implicitly or explicitly avoid the
setting of rules and formal policies. We attribute this decision to
avoid formal rules to two factors. First administering formal rules
and policies quickly becomes a complicated business and takes a great
deal of administrator time. If a school can maintain a community of
consensus among students and keep the number of problems low, it is
likely to be less time consuming to deal with specific incidents one
by one than to administer an elaborate set of rules and procedures.
Second, schools may avoid rules because student tasks are often not
visible and predictable. When the activities of performers in an
organization are more complex and subject to change and where they
cannot be easily observed, rules may inhibit the necessary re-planning
in reaction to changing conditions and may not facilitate the
management of the organization.

A second trend concerns the variation in the degree to which the
schools specified rules in the three areas of student performance. At
each school administrators were more likely to have developed rules
for the supervision and evaluation of student behavior than for either
academic work or extracurricular activities. At each school the
supervision and evaluation of student academic work was delegated to
teachers, while the supervision and evaluation of student performance
in extracurricular activities was delegated to students under the
guidance of sponsors and coaches. We suggest that administrators are
more likely to retain supervisory and evaluative rights over student
behavior than over student academic performance because behavior is
more visible and less complex than academic work. While the case of
evaluation of students in extracurricular activities is more
complicated, we suggest that administrators refrain from an active
role in the supervision and evaluation of students in extracurricular
activities because evaluation is an integral part of many of these
activities and students themselves can take the lead in evaluating
their performance in these activities.

A final trend noted in the four high schools concerns the sources
of policy for the evaluation of student performance. Those
interviewed at the schools pointed to the same sources for policy:
the board of education, the central office administrators, the
curriculum coordinators, departments within each of the schools, and
individual teachers.

In Chapter 4 we examine the relationship between incompatibility
and student disengagment at the school level. Data for this analysis
come from a survey of a 5% random sample of students at the four high
schools for a total of 293 surveys.

Because students in schools report to multiple supervisors, we
had to consider the fact that students are subject to multiple
authority and evaluation systems. Together these multiple systems
should influence overall disengagement from school. In this section
of the report, we discuss the results of our examination of students'
overall view of the authority and evaluation system for the three
student tasks. Later we report on our examination of specific

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classroom authority systems.

Students were asked a series of questions about the levels of specific incompatibilities they experienced overall in school. They were asked to estimate the total levels of these incompatibilities for all of their supervisors. Summary measures were constructed to reflect the presence, number, and relative frequency of incompatibilities in the evaluation systems for each of the three tasks: academic performance, social behavior, and extracurricular activities. Students were also asked to estimate the total levels of their disengagement in terms of the three forms of disengagement identified earlier. Summary measures were constructed to indicate the presence, number of instances, and degree of apathy, negative activities, and withdrawal.

Analyses of the data from the student surveys shows that students do report substantial levels of each of the four incompatibilities. Further, the data presented clearly demonstrate a positive relationship between incompatibility in the authority systems for the three tasks and the three forms of student disengagement. The relationships reported are somewhat weaker than those reported by Dornbusch and Scott. These relatively weaker relationships are not surprising given the greater complexity of the evaluation and authority systems of the high school and the greater generality of the measures of disengagement. Here we asked students to report on the levels of incompatibilities and the levels of their disengagement without reference to specific superordinate-subordinate situations. In Chapter 6 we present the results of analyses of this same relationship with data focusing on particular classes, and in Chapter 8 we present the results of this relationship with data focusing on particular extracurricular activities.

In Chapter 5 we present the results of our examination of the practices used by teachers for the evaluation of the academic performance and social behavior of students in classes. The data for this analysis come from interviews with 57 teachers in the four Rushton high schools.

Each teacher was asked to describe his or her approach to the evaluation of student academic performance and social behavior in terms of the six stages of the model discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, for example, teachers were asked to explain how they set criteria for academic performance in their classes. Our analysis of the teacher interview data revealed patterns of teacher behavior related to each of the six stages. Two general themes emerged from the teacher responses.

First, there is considerable variation among teachers in their approaches to the evaluation of students. Some teachers have very well articulated systems for assigning and evaluating student tasks. Other teachers have virtually no system at all. For these latter teachers the supervision and evaluation of students seems to be conducted in a very casual manner. This suggests that students might

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easily encounter evaluation and authority systems with considerably higher levels of incompatibilities in some classes than in others.

A second general pattern in the interviews is suggested by the inventory of techniques teachers used to address various aspects of the evaluation process. A number of teachers seem to have spent considerable time working out procedures for dealing with the evaluation process. These teachers tended to focus on one or two elements identified in our model of the evaluation process. Few teachers approached the evaluation process in a comprehensive way, paying attention to all six stages. From this we conclude that the processes highlighted by the model are, indeed, relevant to the concerns of practicing educators and that teachers might improve their approach to evaluation by considering the full perspective presented in the total model. Teachers might reduce the levels of incompatibilities in their classroom evaluation and authority systems.

In Chapter 6 we present the results of the analyses of student responses to questions regarding incompatibilities and disengagement in particular classes. Data for the analyses come from the student survey. Students were asked to indicate how frequently they experienced each of eleven instances of incompatibility in the evaluation system for academic performance and each of seven instances of incompatibility in the evaluation system for social behavior. Summary measures were constructed to reflect the presence, number, and relative frequency of incompatibilities experienced by students in each of their six current classes.

Students were also asked to indicate the levels of their disengagement in each of their six current classes. Summary measures were constructed to reflect the presence, number of instances, and degree of student withdrawal and student engagement in negative activities. These three types of summary measures were also constructed for three different dimensions related to the concept of apathy or lowered student engagement. One set of items tapped the tendency of students to lower the level of evaluations which they would consider acceptable. Another set of items produced a measure which we call lowered effort engagement. This measure was a less subjective measure of student effort. These items required students to report on the incidence of concrete behaviors related to effort. A final set of items produced a measure which we call lowered self-assessment of effort. This measure was a more subjective measure of student effort. These items required students to report on their own assessment of how hard they were working in each of their classes.

The analyses for academic work reveal an interesting pattern of findings related to student apathy or lowered acceptance level. First, in all analyses there is a strong positive relationship between incompatibilities in the authority and evaluation system and lowered student acceptance levels. Students who report experiencing the incompatibilities are more likely to also report being satisfied with less than an optimum grade.

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Second, there is a strong positive relationship between incompatibilities in the authority system for academic tasks and lowered student effort engagement in class. Students who experience the incompatibilities are more likely to describe themselves as putting forth less effort in class when effort is assessed by this less subjective measure.

Third, there is a negative relationship between incompatibilities in the authority system for academic tasks and lowered student self-assessment of effort. Put more directly, students who experience incompatibilities are more likely to describe themselves as putting forth more effort in class when effort is assessed by this more subjective measure.

These three findings produce an interesting pattern and one which suggests a powerful explanation for student apathy. Students who experience high levels of incompatibilities in the authority and evaluation systems for academic work in their classes not only set their sights lower and engage in fewer behaviors indicative of effort; they also feel as if they are working harder and putting forth more effort. These students are working less and feeling it more!

With this pattern in mind, it is easy to see how such students may become caught in a downward spiral. Confronted with evaluation systems that are not soundly based, these students lower their expectations and find themselves striving for much less desirable outcomes. Unable to see clear and powerful relationships between their efforts and the evaluations of those efforts, they reduce their efforts and appear to be unphased by the evaluations they receive. Finally, because very little of their work is connected to any valued outcomes, the small bit of effort they do put forth assumes greater proportions in their thinking.

The relationship between incompatibilities in the authority system for academic work and student engagement in negative activities is strongly positive. Students who experience incompatibilities in the authority and evaluation system for academic work in their classes are more likely to engage in negative activities in those classes.

Finally, there is a positive relationship between incompatibilities and student non-participation and withdrawal. Students who experience incompatibilities in classroom authority systems for academic tasks are more likely to withdraw from participation in their classes.

Overall, there is strong evidence that incompatibilities in the authority system for student academic work lead to student disengagement from class. That disengagement takes the three forms outlined earlier. Students who perceive the systems for the evaluation of their academic work as having high levels of incompatibilities are likely to lower their acceptance level, devote less effort to class tasks, engage in negative activities, and withdraw from participation in class activities. Moreover, these same

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students are more likely to feel that they are working harder than students who perceive the systems for the evaluation of their academic work as having lower levels of incompatibilities.

Reviewing parallel analyses for the task of social behavior, we find many of the same general trends, but they tend to be somewhat weaker and less consistent. The relationship between incompatibilities and lowered student acceptance levels is positive but not as strong as it was in the case of academic work. Students who perceive incompatibilities in the authority system for the evaluation of social behavior are more likely to report that they are willing to settle for a less than optimal grade.

The relationship between incompatibilities and lowered student effort engagement is positive. Students who perceive incompatibilities in the classroom authority system for social behavior are more likely to report lower levels of effort engagement. This is consistent with the findings for academic work.

Unlike the analysis for academic work, we do not find strong and consistent evidence that students who experience incompatibilities in the system for the evaluation of social behavior feel that they are working harder. Overall, there appears to be a very slight positive relationship between incompatibilities in the evaluation system for social behavior and lower self-assessment of effort.

Students who experience incompatibilities in the authority systems for social behavior do lower their acceptance level and do engage in less effort, but they don't begin to feel that they are working harder. This may be because students don't typically conceive of social behavior as a task at which they work.

While incompatibilities in the authority system for social behavior in classrooms do not appear to have as powerful effects on student apathy as do incompatibilities in the authority system for academic work, they do have as powerful effects on student engagement in negative activities and student withdrawal. There is a strong positive relationship between incompatibilities in the authority system for social behavior and student engagement in negative activities. Students who experience incompatibilities in the authority system for social behavior are much more likely to engage in negative activities than those who do not experience such incompatibilities.

There is also a consistent positive relationship between incompatibilities in the classroom authority systems for social behavior and student non-participation or withdrawal from classes. Students who experience incompatibilities are more likely to withdraw than students who do not experience incompatibilities.

While incompatibilities in the authority systems for both academic work and social behavior are related to disengagement, problems in the authority system for academic work appear to have a

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greater effect on student apathy and problems in the authority system for social behavior appear to have a greater effect on student withdrawal and participation in negative activities. Further analyses utilizing multivariate techniques should permit us to more precisely define the complete pattern of relationships.

In Chapter 7 we present the results of our examination of teacher practices for the evaluation of students in extracurricular activities. The data for these analyses come from structured interviews with 27 teachers who served as sponsors or coaches in the four high schools.

Each teacher was asked to describe his or her approach to the evaluation of student performance in extracurricular activities in terms of the six stages of the model of the evaluation process. Our analyses of the teacher interview data revealed patterns of teacher behavior related to each of the six stages. Here we present only our general conclusions.

The evaluation of student performance in extracurricular activities differs in several important ways from the evaluation of in-class performance. Evaluation seems to be a more integral part of most extracurricular activities. The formal selection processes that characterize the task allocation phase, the specification of criteria, systematic sampling through films of performance, the feedback provided by competition, and the formally scheduled opportunities to work on improvement all seem to be a more integral part of the sponsor's role than they are of the classroom teacher's role.

The greater integration of evaluation processes in extracurricular activities may be a result of the greater visibility of student performance in such activities. Student performance is more visible not only to sponsors, but also to other students whose own performances and evaluations are closely related to the performances of their teammates, and to the larger "publics" within the school and the community who witness extracurricular competitions.

These factors seem to make for a situation where students can take more responsibility for their own evaluation. Students allocate tasks to themselves when they try out for teams and clubs. In so doing they come to understand the criteria and standards expected. They compete against clear standards, their own and others. They receive direct feedback from their efforts, and they take more responsibility for improvement through participation in practice and rehearsal sessions. Evaluation of student performance in extracurricular activities comes from teachers, peers, the public, and in a very substantial way, from the students themselves.

In Chapter 8 we present the results of the analysis of student responses to questions regarding incompatibilities and disengagement in particular extracurricular activities. Data for the analysis come from the student surveys. Of the 293 students in the total sample, 117 reported participating in one extracurricular activity. In

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addition, 64 reported participating in a second extracurricular
activity.

Students were asked to indicate how frequently they experienced
eleven instances of incompatibility in the system for the evaluation
of performance in extracurricular activities and eight instances of
incompatibility in the system for the evaluation of social behavior in
extracurricular activities. Summary measures were constructed to
reflect the presence, number, and relative frequency of
incompatibilities experienced by students in each of their
extracurricular activities.

Students were also asked to indicate the levels of their
disengagement from each of their extracurricular activities. Summary
measures were constructed to reflect the presence, number of
indications, and degree of student withdrawal, participation in
negative activities, lowered effort engagement, and lowered
self-assessment of effort.

The pattern of results suggests a fairly consistent portrait of
the major relationships. Incompatibilities in the system for the
evaluation of student performance in extracurricular activities are
strongly related to lowered effort engagement among students. Those
students who report incompatibilities in the evaluation of their
performance are much more likely to also report reducing the effort
they devote to the activity.

No such positive relationship was found between incompatibilities
in the evaluation and authority system and lowered self-assessment of
effort. Student self-assessment of effort appears to be unaffected by
the levels of incompatibilities in the evaluation system.

The relationship between incompatibilities in the evaluation
system and student participation in negative activities is strongly
positive. Students who report experiencing incompatibilities in the
system for the evaluation of their performance, are much more likely
to report engaging in negative activities related to the
extracurricular activities.

The relationship between incompatibilities in the evaluation
system and student withdrawal from the activities is only slightly
less positive. Still, those students who report incompatibilities in
the authority system are more likely to report withdrawal from the
activity in some form.

When we examine the relationships between incompatibilities in
the evaluation system for social behavior in extracurricular
activities and the forms of disengagement, we find the same pattern of
results although the relationships are a bit weaker.

The relationship between problems in the evaluation of student
performance and behavior in extracurricular activities and student
disengagement from those activities is positive and consistent with

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the pattern of results found in our analysis of the same relationship at the school and classroom levels. Thus we have consistent and convincing evidence that the predictions we made at the beginning of our investigation are, in fact, confirmed. Further analyses will allow us to investigate complicating factors.

In Chapter 9 we present the policy implications of the study. This chapter is based in part on the discussions that took place at a conference of administrators from the four Rushton High Schools. At the conference we presented the results of the study to the administrators. The administrators were asked to respond to two general questions. First, we wanted to know if our findings "made sense" to them as school administrators. That is, we wanted to learn if they could identify practical problems that contribute to or result from the theoretical phenomena we described in our study. Second, we wanted to try to derive some practical implications from our finidngs. We wanted to know if our study provided them with information and perspectives that they could use to guide their work as administrators.

The administrators seemed to find that our results made sense. Further, they were able to formulate general implications for administrators, teachers, and students. The administrators cited three courses of action for school administrators. First, they suggested that policies and practices could be modified to alleviate incompatibilities in the evaluation system. For example, one administrator suggested that a master schedule be kept of academic events (major tests, etc.) to avoid conflicts in scheduling major assignment and tests. A second type of administrative initiative was to strengthen subject matter departments within the school so that they could set goals and standards that are consistent and reasonable. A third set of initiatives could be classified as structural changes. For example, one administrator proposed an advisory system where time was provided in the school schedule for teachers to work more closely with a small group of advisees. Another suggestion was a restructuring of the school to have teaching teams or a house plan in order to minimize some of the incompatibilities currently experienced by students.

The administrators cited two recommendations that they would make to teachers regarding the evaluation of students. First, they felt that teachers should spend more time setting student expectatons in the classroom. Second, they felt that teachers should devote more attention to communicating criteria and procedures for evaluation. They noted that teachers might spend less time defining a grading system (i.e. the system by which scores on tests and quizzes are summed to produce a final grade) and more time clarifying the entire evaluation process from task allocation to improvement.

In conclusion, the phenomena highlighted by the theory of evaluation and authority appeared to be quite relevant to the concerns of administrators. Moreover, they were able to identify practical strategies for alleviating at least some of the incompatibilities experienced by students.

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