ED 279 989   CG 019 798

AUTHOR   Peck, Nancy; And Others
TITLE   Dropout Prevention: What We Have Learned.
INSTITUTION   ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Personnel
                Services, Ann Arbor, Mich.
SPONS AGENCY   Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED),
                Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE   87
CONTRACT   400-86-0014
NOTE   43p.
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CAPS, 2108 School of Education, University of MI
                48109-1259 ($6.00/copy).
PUB TYPE   Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis
   Products (071)

EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Counselor Role; *Dropout Characteristics; *Dropout
                Prevention; Elementary Secondary Education; High Risk
                Students; *Potential Dropouts; *Program
                Effectiveness; School Activities; *School Counselors;
                *School Role

ABSTRACT
        This monograph was written to provide information on
which students drop out of school and why, and to examine successful
dropout prevention programs. Research is reviewed which has
identified characteristics of dropouts and their reasons for leaving
school. Other studies are cited which explore characteristics of
effective dropout prevention programs in schools. Individual programs
are briefly described and elements of the more successful programs
are summarized. It is concluded that: (1) programs should be
student-centered; (2) programs should be started as early as possible
and should involve families as much as possible; (3) staff selection
and training is paramount; and (4) programs should include attention
to overall school climate and effective school development. The
information and conclusions presented in the monograph are used to
create a series of nine recommendations and guidelines for designing,
planning, and implementing dropout prevention programs. These
recommendations are followed by a description of the role school
guidance counselors can play in the process of developing,
coordinating, and monitoring dropout prevention activities. (NB)
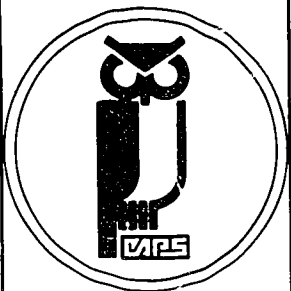
DROPOUT PREVENTION:

WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Nancy Peck

Annmarie Law

Roger C. Mills

ERIC/CAPS

Educational Resources Information Center

Counseling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse

/

ERIC COUNSELING AND PERSONNEL SERVICES CLEARINGHOUSE
School of Education
The University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109-1259
Published by ERIC/CAPS

1987

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nancy Peck is the Director of the Center for Dropout Prevention at the University of Miami and Director of Special Projects for the School of Education and Allied Professions there. She also serves as the Chairperson for the National Network for Dropout Prevention (NNDP). Dr. Peck received a bachelor's degree from Michigan State University and an M.Ed. and Ed.D. from the University of Miami. She has been a teacher and adjunct associate professor at Florida International University and the University of Miami, having served for many years as the Assistant Director and Consultant for the Desegregation Assistance Center at the University of Miami. She is currently a nationally recognized speaker on dropout prevention issues.

Annmarie Law received a bachelor's degree from the University of Florida and a master's degree in Community Counseling from the University of Miami. She is presently working on completing the requirements for a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology. She is currently the Coordinator of the Center for Dropout Prevention at the University of Miami.

Roger C. Mills has been a consultant in the field of prevention for more than 15 years, working with such groups as the National Institute of Mental Health, American School Health Educators' Association, National Council of Community Mental Health Centers, National Institute of Drug Abuse, and U.S. Department of Education, Drug and Alcohol Prevention/Education Project. He received his undergraduate degree from Princeton University and a Ph.D. from The University of Michigan. He is the co-author of <u>Sanity, Insanity and Common Sense: The Missing Link in Understanding Mental Health</u>.

PREFACE

This monograph represents a first step in a major initiative by ERIC/CAPS to rethink and reshape the role of the school counselor in preventing school dropouts. More definitively, we are interested in exploring the interventions that counselors can use to improve school climate and enhance student learning and achievement. Though counselors have sometimes been unable or unwilling to establish priorities that focus on their role in student learning and achievement, recent educational reform efforts aimed at such seemingly diverse topics as excellence, teen pregnancy, and dropouts have either directly or indirectly identified the centrality of services and functions which appropriately can be delivered by counselors. Beginning with this monograph, we intend to present counselors with new strategies, a variety of innovative interventions, and a system of customized counselor/student resources. Most basically, we believe that counselors have a vital role to play in improving school retention, and we intend to assist in both the reconceptualization of their role and the development of an armamentarium of resources that they can bring to the challenge.

An effort to improve educational programs and practices must begin with a knowledge of what is and what works and doesn't work. Peck, Law and Mills have succinctly summarized prior research and program efforts relating to school dropouts and, in a series of nine recommendations, have focused attention on the directions for further effort. The reader will find the writing informative as well as encouraging, even optimistic about what can be done. Our earnest hope is that this monograph will stimulate you, the reader, both to acknowledge the challenge and to initiate your own personal quest to become more knowledgeable about and effective in responding to potential school dropouts.

Garry R. Walz, Ph.D.
Director, ERIC/CAPS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, a variety of major challenges to education have forced educators to rethink their roles and approaches. Among these have been desegregation, initiatives to achieve sex equity in education, proposals for tuition tax incentives, accountability, the return to basics movement, and educational reform. Dropout prevention is now emerging as the newest issue in providing youth the education they need to function successfully in our society and economic system.

Dropout prevention is not new, but national studies have shown no decrease in the dropout rates over the last two decades and an alarming increase in dropout rates in larger urban areas. These are combined with increases in related problems of adolescent substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, teen suicide and delinquency.

Dropouts have tended to come, disproportionately, from families of lower socioeconomic and minority status. However, the problem is not at all limited to these groups. As one example of the trends in major urban areas, in Chicago, 43 percent of all public school students left school prior to graduation. Breaking these statistics down by ethnicity reveals that 47 percent of Hispanic students dropped out, 45 percent of Black students, 33 percent of Caucasian students, and 19 percent of Asian students (Hammack, 1986), indicating that students from a broad range of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds do not see school as a relevant or beneficial experience (Wehlage, 1983).

Broad demographic trends, outlined by Hodgkinson (1985), predict a continuing growth in the population of youth that fit the at-risk profile of students likely to drop out. From 1979 to 1983, the numbers of children in poverty grew by 3.7 million, increasing the percentage of youth in this category from 16 to 22 percent, the highest in 21 years. The average age of Blacks and Hispanics (25 and 22 years respectively) is much lower than Whites (31 years). Since these are the peak childbearing years, these groups will represent a larger percentage of the total population in the coming years. The basic structure and stability of the family is also changing. According to the 1980 census, 59 percent of the children born in 1983 will live in single-parent families prior to the age of eighteen.

1

The Business Advisory Council (1985) report to the Education Commission of the States called strongly for a new stage and a new focus in educational reform that will successfully reconnect both alienated and disadvantaged youth to our educational system. This report not only presents alarming statistics on the growing numbers of youth alienated from schools, but also points to the increased severity of problems directly related to dropping out or failure in school:

1. Teen pregnancy and childbirth rates have grown significantly for all teens, across socioeconomic and ethnic groups.
2. Arrests for teenage drug abuse have increased 60-fold between 1960 and 1980.
3. Youth under age 21 now account for more than half of the arrest for all serious crimes.
4. Homicide rates for non-White teens increased by 16 percent, while homicide rates for White teens increased by 232 percent during the same period (1950-1978).

This study concluded that by 1995, a growing percentage of the youth entering the labor pool (late teens, early twenties) could become productive citizens, but most likely will not, unless something out of the ordinary happens. "They have the intelligence to succeed, but lack important skills, family support, discipline and motivation. . . . An increasingly disproportionate number of them are poor, Black and Hispanic youth" (Business Advisory Council, 1985, p. 8).

Recently, dropout prevention has captured the attention of virtually every segment of our society, including business and government. In the corporate sector, national attention has been drawn to issues of declining productivity and the growth of international competition. The need for a major restructuring of jobs and new types of employee involvement can no longer be denied if the American economy is to remain competitive. At every level of government, as states and the federal government legislate educational reforms, there is concern over the ability of our educational system to produce the kinds of skilled, educated and motivated workers needed in this rapidly changing world of work. It has become essential not only for students to stay in school, but also to develop a higher level of technological sophistication and career orientation, if the United States is to maintain its position in the world economy.

2

8

Increasingly, it is being recognized that the issues of dropping out and dropout prevention cannot be separated from issues affecting our total economic and social structure. These issues include poverty, unemployment, discrimination, the role of the family, social values, the welfare cycle, child abuse, and drug abuse (Novak & Dougherty, 1981; Wehlage, 1986a).

Dropping out not only makes an impact on the preparedness of the work force for entering the economic marketplace, but also creates other, more direct costs for society. People who do not complete school have higher rates of unemployment, are over-represented in correctional institutions and public assistance programs and, in general, show lower lifetime earnings than those with high school diplomas. The Appalachian Regional Commission estimated that dropouts will earn $237 billion less than high school graduates. This represents a tax loss to state and local governments of $71 billion (Research Triangle Institute, 1985). According to one study, in a report prepared by the Dade County Grand Jury (1984), 80 percent of 16-19 year-old dropouts were unemployed. The majority of inmates in any correctional facility are functionally illiterate. A look at the economic trade-off shows that a year in jail costs three times as much as a year in college (Mann, 1986).

Responses to the Problem

In today's world, the future predicted for the dropout is gloomy. An increasingly advanced technological society makes education less of a privilege and more of a necessity, for the sake of both the individual and society. It becomes more and more compelling for the educational system to find ways to attract disadvantaged and alienated students, and to assist them to see the relevance of education to their lives. It is a reality that many of these students have not come from family or socioeconomic environments that are supportive of the school's educational goals. Many of these children must cope with stressful home situations that create barriers to their learning and to their successful functioning in the school setting.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the schools are primary socializing agents in their own right. Children spend over half their waking hours in school, from kindergarten through high school. Schools play a significant role in the developmental experiences of youth, particularly today as the role of the family has changed.

3

In recognition of the nature and severity of the problem, and the expanded role of the school system in the child's maturation, school districts around the country have implemented programs for dropout prevention and retention. Their aim is to assist the nearly one million students who are either dropouts or chronic truants. At the same time, research efforts have expanded to identify who is dropping out and why, and what the essential ingredients are of programs that have demonstrated different degrees of success.

Recognizing that different students have different needs, a wide variety of approaches have been tried. Many different assumptions about the causes of dropping out have also spawned a wide range of strategies and programmatic directions. At this point, we seem to be peeling off the surface manifestations or symptoms and revealing some of the causes that are closer to the core of the problem (Novak & Dougherty, 1981).

In this respect, as better evaluations of model programs are carried out, the art of dropout prevention is maturing to a new stage which parallels the second wave of educational reform. Across the variety of attempted approaches, there seem to be some common ingredients that are essential to program success. These ingredients not only are essential to the success of special programs designed for at-risk students, but also point to key dimensions of change and development that could make our schools better equipped to reach all students more effectively, and to motivate them to continue their educational and career development.

Prevention Instead of Remediation

The alarming proportions of at-risk and alienated youth indicate that the future of dropout prevention is not in isolated programs which grow out of notions of deficit and remediation. Too often schools have waited until students have failed and then attempted to fix the problem. At one level, a new consciousness has emerged that focuses on the ability of schools and communities to identify and assist high-risk students when they need help, or can benefit from help, before the problem becomes so severe that it is more difficult, costly, or impossible to effect meaningful changes. At another level, it is being increasingly recognized that the overall school climate can be influenced in such a way that school is more attractive and educationally rewarding for all students.

The following section of this monograph reviews the results of research aimed at increasing our understanding of who drops out and why. We also look at some of

4

10

the more successful dropout prevention programs that have been implemented around the country, and review the characteristics of the programs that have demonstrated the most success with special populations.

From this review, we can identify the elements in each program that led to positive outcomes. From these shared or common elements, in turn, we attempt to derive principles that operate at a sufficient level of generality that they can be applied to a wide variety of program activities and student needs.

The more successful programs have involved collaboration among the schools, community and business. In drawing on a wide array of resources, they have generated innovative, interesting and relevant educational experiences that have proved attractive, and have had holding power, for the at-risk target population. The new agenda for dropout prevention involves substantially rethinking, redesigning, and restructuring educational delivery systems in a way that accommodates the needs of all students, including those for whom the bottom rung of success is just out of reach. More solid answers are coming because dropout programs now have a history, and significant research is being directed at "what works."

5

CHAPTER II
FACTORS RELATED TO DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

Studies of who is dropping out confirm what, to many observers, is obvious or common sense. Dropouts more often come from families of low socioeconomic status (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Lloyd, 1978; Mare, 1980; Rumberger, 1983; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986a). These students also typically have lower grade point averages and show lower verbal and math achievement as measured by standardized test scores (Cipollone, 1986; Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Hill & Stafford, 1977; Mare, 1980; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986a). Dropouts are also much more likely to have an extended history of discipline problems, the most frequent being truancy and tardiness (Charlotte Mecklenberg Council for Children, 1984; Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Wehlage & Rutter, 1986a).

Characteristics of Dropouts

Families of dropouts tend to be large. Educational attainment and support for educational goals in these families are typically very low. In general, these students tend to have parents and older siblings who have dropped out of school, and their homes do not provide a supportive educational environment (Hill & Stafford, 1977; Howell & Frege, 1982; Masters, 1969; Neill, 1979; Rumberger, 1983; Shaw, 1982).

Perhaps the most thorough analysis of the characteristics of dropouts was carried out by Ekstrom, et al. (1986). In addition to the factors cited above, these researchers noted the importance of the students' self-concept and perceptions of locus of control as determining factors. The authors added the following:

> [These students] are also less likely to feel that they are popular with other students, to feel that other students see them as good students, as athletes, or as (being) important, and more likely to feel that other students see them as troublemakers. (p. 360)

Several authors have found that the typical attitudinal, behavioral and affective characteristics of potential dropouts can be recognized as early as third grade (Hammack, 1986; Lloyd, 1978; Mann, 1986).

Researchers carrying out national and local youth panel surveys and longitudinal studies have followed cohorts of youth for several years. Many of these researchers have followed youth from early childhood through elementary or high school (Block, Keyes, & Block, 1986; Elliott & Huizinga, 1984). These researchers have noted a specific, identifiable set of behavioral, attitudinal and affective patterns in high-risk students. The patterns begin in preschool and show consistency through adolescence, unless reversed by some experience with the schools that turns the child around.

These youth, at an early age, develop a poor self-concept and a high level of insecurity about their ability to learn easily or do well in school. In their earlier educational experiences, these problems are either ignored or misinterpreted by school personnel in a way that lends to academic and discipline problems. Mann (1986) asserts that the process leading to dropping out is cumulative. Early negative experiences with academic performance and discipline lead to negative messages and more concrete problems. These experiences tend to reinforce children's poor self-concept and attitudes or perceptions that school is not for them. They tend to feel that teachers are not interested in them, and that school discipline is neither effective nor fair. Additional evidence for this view is the fact that students who have been retained one or more grades are much more likely to drop out. Lower levels of self-esteem in these students have been identified in many studies of dropouts (Ekstrom, et al., 1986; Sewell, Palmo, & Manni, 1981; Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984).

Reasons Given for Dropping Out

These interpretations of the behavioral and attitudinal characteristics of potential dropouts are reinforced by looking at the reasons youth give for dropping out. A dislike of school and poor grades were cited most frequently (Cipollone, 1986). Stern and Catterall (1985) found that the single most common reason California dropouts gave was that "school was not for me" (p. 3). Ekstrom, et al. (1986) found, in their review of national longitudinal data from N.C.E.S.'s High School and Beyond database, that 33 percent dropped out because they did not like school; 33 percent cited poor grades; 15 percent stated they left because they could not get along with teachers; 19 percent said they preferred to work; 11 percent stated they had to work to help support their family; and 10 percent left due to pregnancy (p. 363). The researchers also found "an externalized locus of control, or

8   13

the feeling that one can do little to control one's destiny, was positively related to dropping out" (p. 367).

Finally, dropouts have been found to have higher rates of absenteeism (Howell & Frege, 1982), and are less likely to be involved in school-sponsored extracurricular activities or the social life of the school (Coombs & Cooley, 1968). These findings again suggest that these students do not feel they belong and do not feel comfortable in school.

This profile of students at-risk might lead one to conclude that the social, economic and family background is the primary cause of leaving school, negating the responsibility of the school system. The findings cited above, however, along with recent research on effective secondary schools conducted at the National Center on Effective Secondary Schools at the University of Wisconsin, suggest that it is not student background but the school's response to it that determines success in school (Wehlage, 1983). This same research further contends there is supporting evidence that schools reject some students and contribute to negative school-based experiences that in turn lead to withdrawal from school (Wheelock, 1986). One study conducted in the Boston schools demonstrated that certain types of discipline, truancy and suspension policies, along with the types of responses of school personnel to students' learning and behavior problems, were correlated with student alienation and dropping out (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986).

These findings indicate that the quality of a student's school experience can either reinforce or act to reverse a negative self-concept and feelings of insecurity about learning. The characteristics of the more successful dropout prevention and retention programs provide significant clues to what the key qualities or dimensions are. The findings also provide guidelines that can help the school environment become a setting which motivates students, contributes to self-esteem, and reduces insecurity about learning in all students.

These guidelines, moreover, can help educators realize how to make education more relevant to students' perceived needs, more involving, interesting and challenging, and therefore more effective. If schools followed the directional clues provided by these more successful programs, it appears that our school system in general would become more attractive, motivating and enriching, moving schools closer to achieving the goals of the educational reform movement in its broadest sense.

9

14

CHAPTER III
CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS

While some authors have pointed out factors in the overall school climate that contribute to dropout rates, most programs carried out to date have not directly addressed this issue. Most programs have targeted a subset of students deemed to be at risk, or who have already dropped out, and developed special programs for these students. These programs have tended to emphasize the following:

1. Smaller classes with a low student-teacher ratio.
2. Personalized and individualized attention to student needs.
3. A vocational, work related, or community service component.
4. Remedial instruction or tutoring in basic skills.
5. Immediate feedback and rewarding student achievement.
6. Emphasis on developing "special" teacher and student cultures, and developing pride in the program itself as being something special. (Hodgkinson, 1985).

Hamilton (1986) carried out a national survey of programs that had demonstrated statistical evidence of reducing dropout rates. One program he reviewed placed students in entry level health care jobs (hospitals, clinics) as an incentive to stay in school. Students also received special counseling; 2.6 percent of this group dropped out, compared to 8.9 percent of controls.

Project MACK in Oakland, California featured work experience and career education, guidance and counseling, health programs and social activities along with an emphasis on basic skills. The dropout rate declined from 16.9 percent to 6.2 percent as a result of this program. The Career Intern Program, begun in Philadelphia, created an alternative high school in which instruction was closely tied to employment demands. Work experience, individual instruction, independent study and counseling made up the components of this program. Follow-up showed 71 percent of these students had graduated and were employed or enrolled in post-secondary education, compared to 39 percent of controls. Common characteristics of these more successful programs were as follows: (1) various strategies were used in an integrated fashion; (2) potential dropouts were removed from the regular

11

school; and (3) participants constituted a small population, on whom a variety of resources were concentrated (Hamilton, 1986, pp. 413-417).

Wehlage (1983) reviewed six exemplary programs for marginal students in Wisconsin high schools. They concluded, in this study, that the key features common to all programs were the following:

1. Small size and autonomy of the program.
2. Teachers communicated expectations of success combined with a high degree of commitment and caring for the students.
3. Teachers expanded their roles to include counseling, advocacy, networking and organizing other outside resources.
4. The teacher culture emphasized collegiality.
5. A supportive peer culture among students provided a family-caring atmosphere.
6. Curriculum and instruction were individualized.
7. Course work emphasized practical, real-world problem solving.
8. Experiential, hands-on learning was used as a motivator.

In a subsequent study, these authors designed or contributed to the design of ten model programs in Wisconsin to test out their hypotheses of what makes a program successful (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986b). They hypothesized that successful programs must:

1. Develop a conception of schooling that will be attractive to high-risk students.
2. Influence students' perceptions about adult caring and interest, as well as the legitimacy of the school's authority. (pp. 2-4)

Wehlage and Rutter call for interventions that involve a major effort to engage alienated youth. They feel that small-sized, school-within-a-school or alternative school programs are crucial to reduce impersonality and to individualize instruction. They also feel that clear identity and autonomy are important features, so that program staff have the flexibility and authority to run their program independently of the larger system.

These authors also hypothesize that the teacher culture must include:

1. Beliefs that at-risk students can learn.
2. Commitment to an extended role, to deal with the whole child.

12

16

3. A strong sense of collegiality that makes teaching more enjoyable, stimulating and professionally rewarding.

The student culture, in their view, must also:

1. Require student commitment to a fresh start.
2. Provide clear rules and behavioral guidelines.
3. Involve a family atmosphere of mutual caring and support.

Other characteristics seen as central to their model programs included:

1. Clear objectives, prompt feedback and concrete evidence of progress.
2. An active, experiential role for students in learning.
3. Experiences with adults who exemplify characteristics of responsibility, maturity and positive human relationships.
4. Real work experience with tasks that need to be done, and "shadowing" of adults in specific occupations.

Programs should not only be attractive for students but also highly desirable places for adults as well (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986b, pp. 13-14). These authors used the Wisconsin Youth Survey to measure program outcomes. This measure was administered pre- and post-program participation. Six programs produced significant improvements in self-esteem. Five produced possible changes in perceived opportunity for success. Four showed improved bonding to schools, teachers and peers, while a few programs produced negatively significant changes on these dimensions. The results indicated a significant variance in program effectiveness, although all were based on the same model.

The researchers attribute this wide variation in outcomes to "less than complete and enthusiastic acceptance of the rationale of the program" (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986b, p. 21), an absence of a positive teacher culture resulting in a negative student culture. In other words, program outcomes were less attributable to the structure of the programs, but rather were determined by "the informal and qualitative dimensions of a program" (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986b, p. 21). The outcomes of these studies are reminiscent of findings that have led to what has come to be known as the "Hawthorne effect" in industry. The original Hawthorne studies were carried out in Chicago in the early 1920s. Researchers were attempting to find out what apsects of employees' jobs or work environment, if changed, would lead to increases in productivity. As these studies were carried out,

13

it seemed to matter less what aspects of the job were changed. It was observed that motivation improved when employees felt that management was interested in them, was concerned about their needs, and genuinely wanted to make their jobs easier and more rewarding. Alternatively, if students or employees perceived that school personnel or administrators did not genuinely care or have their best interests at heart, their motivation and performance would suffer, irrespective of the structure of the program (Suarez, Mills, & Stewart, 1987). In other words, this effect works in both positive and negative directions as a function of students' or employees' perceptions of the teachers' or management's attitudes.

These principles are borne out in a national survey of dropout prevention programs conducted by the University of Wisconsin. Program staff were questioned about the factors they felt were key to program success. The most frequent response, by far, was "the person(s) responsible for the program." The qualities of the staff were identified as follows:

1. Genuinely interested in the students.
2. Able to work cooperatively with other school staff.
3. Eager to work in the program.

Stern, Catterall, Alhadeff, and Ash (1985) studied a group of more successful dropout prevention programs in California. These programs included a street academy model, a caring community, a school enterprise model, a work brigade model and an independent study model. They attributed program success to (1) concrete, practical and immediate learning goals; (2) expanded and non-traditional student roles; (3) doing something useful for others (making a real contribution); and (4) commitment to, and pride in, the program.

The Appalachian A.R.C. Workshop in 1985 showcased "Practical Programs for Dropout Prevention." These workshops identified characteristics of successful programs as similar to those reviewed above, emphasizing that programs should be student-centered. That is, students must be "looked at as individuals, with unique needs and goals; activities must be designed around students' needs, rather than forcing students to fit into programs" ("Journal," 1985, pp. 18-19).

O'Conner (1985) reviewed programs that had demonstrated some measure of success and identified ten common characteristics. He felt that early identifi-cation and effective retention programs from grade three on were important. He also emphasized a student-centered focus which effectively organized and made

14

available a wide array of community resources. He also felt that staff selection and teacher culture were keys to program success. Teachers must be "unafraid and upbeat with the students, and must have a fearless and empathic regard for students" (O'Connor, 1985, pp. 9-10). He also called for a collegial teacher culture and expanded, non-traditional teacher roles. Programs must have school district and administrative support and adequate resources, flexiblity in approaches, school-business partnerships, and drug abuse awareness (O'Conner, 1985, pp. 10-13).

Foley and Warren (1985) looked at the New York City Alternative School programs that had attracted students and developed a stronger sense of pride and community. They felt the key variables contributing to the success of those programs were the following: (1) diversified teacher roles; (2) encouragement of student participation in learning; (3) student involvement in program planning and decision making, with clear standards of conduct; and (4) small school/class size.

Gadwa and Griggs (1985), looking at the role of school counselors, reported results of a survey of administrators in illinois who ranked the effectiveness of dropout prevention programs. Developmental guidance programs K-12 were rated second in importance. These authors emphasized the role of guidance counselors in personal counseling and referral, involvement in work-study programs, job placement, career education that influenced the student's perception of the relevance of curriculum, and counseling to "improve self-image, achievement and develop positive attitudes" (Gadwa & Griggs, 1985, pp. 9-17).

The Charlotte Mecklenberg Council for Children (1984) reviewed the literature on alternative programs and selected the key components of success as follows: (1) low student-teacher ratios; (2) counseling to develop positive self-concept; (3) work-study programs; (4) making academics relevant to vocational/career goals; and (5) teachers carefully selected for their ability to work effectively with those students.

The Southern Growth Policies Board (1985), in reviewing successful school-to-work transition programs, felt that those programs were most successful which:

1. Proceeded first to "repair" students' self-image.
2. Provided concrete, achievable increments of success.
3. Produced a positive student culture (tight-knit, family atmosphere).
4. Motivated students to see their own potential.

15

In the spring of 1986, the Center for Dropout Prevention at the University of Miami conducted a statewide survey to determine the nature and extent of dropout prevention activities in Florida. A review of program evaluation materials and numerous on-site visits and interviews with staff confirm the results of studies cited above and the importance of the following factors:

1. Strong linkages with youth-serving agencies that can appropriately respond to the diverse needs of at-risk students.
2. Periodic coordination meetings for the purpose of assessing program progress and enhancing support from parents, administrators and the community.
3. A strong emphasis on staff development activities and frequent opportunities for staff members to discuss professional issues.

These findings, in general, suggest that school personnel become more understanding and responsive to the needs of high-risk youth, and that school systems free up personnel, to some extent, and support them in expanding their role in relation to these needs. In our work with school systems, we have found that teachers who care, and who want to respond more effectively to the needs of high-risk youth, often feel constrained by the demands of their traditional roles. They also find themselves battling against restrictive school policies and procedures, particularly in the areas of managing discipline and other behavior problems, that act inadvertently to reinforce the cumulative process leading to dropping out (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1986).

In the following section, the elements of more successful programs are summarized. It should be kept in mind, in reading this summary, that the schools involved in the programs provided policy, administrative, procedural and financial support. This support allowed the programs to function with key elements intact and provided the flexibility to rethink rules and policies with respect to the students.

. The major lessons from these studies are summarized and related to future policy and planning directions. Many different strategies and types of programs have been tried around the country. It is imperative, at this point in the development of policy and planning, to take an honest look at what we can learn from these experiences and develop future programs that will address the dropout problem as effectively as possible.

Summary of Core Elements of Successful Programs

From the data, findings, and observations reported above, it is possible to draw some general conclusions that may be of use to policy makers and program planners. These conclusions are:

1. **Programs should be student centered.** It seems obvious that no one structure or set of activities works for all students. Teen parents are different from youth interested in non-college vocations, who do not see the relevance of school to their interests, or from those who desire post-secondary education but are having problems mastering basic skills. Student centered also means using a variety of strategies in various combinations to address the entire range of student needs or factors that alienate them from school. Student centered also means actively involving students in the design of the program to increase their level of commitment and the perceived relevance of the program in their eyes. This type of an involvement has been shown to have a marked impact on motivation and performance (U.S. Department of Education, 1984).

2. **Staff selection and training is paramount.** Over and over, whatever the form of the program or the specific activities, outcome evaluations and feedback clearly show that the quality of the people carrying out the program is the single most important factor in success or failure. It seems to matter less what is done than who does it and how.

All research concludes that at-risk youth have poorer self-concepts, higher insecurity about their ability to fit in at school, and higher subjective perceptions that school is not for them. Staff must be the kind of people who are not only committed to, but optimistic about reaching these youth. They must also be the kind of people who are able to bypass this insecure frame of reference and reach students at a deeper level of mental health, motivation and common sense (Mills, 1986; Stewart, 1985; Suarez, et al., 1987; Suarez & Mills, 1982).

These findings call for developing clear criteria and standards for staff selection. The findings also call for staff development and training in the following areas:

a. How a frame of reference involving poor self-concept, insecurity about learning and alienation affects a child's moment-to-moment behavior, affect and perceptions.

b. How to maintain consistently the kinds of positive, motivational interactions with the child that assist the child to see beyond this habitual frame of

17

21

reference, to experience feelings of self-worth and an internal locus of control, and to realize that they can enjoy, grow and learn successfully in some type of worthwhile educational program.

    c.   How to help alleviate the factors in the learning environment that contribute to insecurity and reinforce a negative frame of reference, while developing factors that contribute to high self-esteem, enjoyment of and excitement about learning, and a positive motivational atmosphere.

    3.   **Begin as early as possible and involve families as much as possible.** Research shows that the characteristics of youth at-risk originate within clearly identified patterns of family interactions and the family educational climate and begin at an early age (Mills, 1986). The sooner these youth begin to have a more positive experience in the educational system, the better. Ideally, programs should begin in preschool or elementary school and mandate some form of parental involvement.

    4.   **Programs should include attention to overall school climate and effective school development (systemic change).** In the review of more effective programs, it was noted that most of these programs targeted specific students, were autonomous and were physically removed from the regular school environment. In this respect, these programs were granted the autonomy and flexibility to try out innovative educational strategies, to involve students more actively and more experientially in their own education, and to expand staff roles to include advocacy, counseling and referral, networking and role modeling.

From the results of these programs, it could be cogently argued that schools in general should exhibit the same qualities and provide the same types of opportunities for all students and staff to have a more meaningful and enjoyable experience with education. School-based research demonstration programs funded by N.I.D.A. and the U.S. Department of Education over the last decade have shown consistently that programs aimed at the overall school climate have been the most effective in reducing the incidence of drug and alcohol abuse and discipline-related problems (Mills, 1986; U.S. Department of Education, 1984).

What this means is that programs should have an impact on the following:

    1.   <u>Organizational and administrative dimensions</u> that affect teachers' stress levels and their ability to respond to the needs of high-risk youth in the classroom and the school setting.

2. <u>Policies, procedures and other mechanisms</u> that affect the overall school climate and the way that learning and behavioral problems are responded to on the part of the schools, either to reinforce or reverse the cumulative process leading to dropping out.

3. <u>Staff development and training</u> in recognizing and responding in the most helpful way to the needs of high-risk youth in the context of the normal role of each staff member in the school and the nature of their day-to-day interactions with students.

4. <u>Factors affecting the overall motivational climate</u> in the classroom and the ability of teachers to engage youth positively in learning.

5. <u>Effective interventions aimed at individual needs of youth</u> for counseling, advocacy, support and caring in a way that assists that youth to function at higher levels of mental health, positive motivation and learning ability in educational settings.

6. <u>Broadening the range of legitimate school activities</u> in a way that responds to the interests of all groups of students and assists them to see the relevance of their education to their personal aspirations, strengths and interests.

CHAPTER IV
RECOMMⱯⱤⱤ ... ⱭS FOR USING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

In terms of the goals of keeping students in school and providing them with a genuinely meaningful educational experience, it seems most helpful to focus on program qualities that were found in the most efficacious programs. Across the board, the most important of these characteristics was the quality of the staff.

These qualities included a genuine regard for the students and a strong belief that these students can learn. Staff were excited and enthusiastic about the program. They also had a strong commitment to a student-centered approach and actively involved students in the learning process in innovative ways. They took steps to make the learning atmosphere a warm, comfortable, home-like climate, in which students' insecurity was alleviated, they felt a sense of belonging, and they were able to learn at their own pace.

A strong argument can be made that schools and teachers in general should be trained to develop this type of motivational climate in every classroom and every school building. Whether schools accept this responsibility or not, they do play a crucial role in the lives of children who are developing emotionally and attitudinally, as well as cognitively. For schools to be effective agents in the promotion of personal and social growth in their students, they must develop and project a genuine caring atmosphere and respect for the needs of all students. A "survival of the fittest" philosophy of school management cannot be accepted in a socially equal society which is expected to provide an educational environment that encourages all students to develop in an optimal atmosphere for learning.

Mary Anne Raywid (1983), in an article entitled "Excellence, Dropouts, Choice," cites the example of an unfortunate student with retarded language development and violent acting-out behavior. His teachers did not see much of a future for him. At age 15 he was finally placed in a school that complemented his learning style, and he began to show promise. His name was Albert Einstein. The effect of the new learning environment was described as "a fundamental turning point" in the educational career of this scholar, who is still seen as this century's greatest genius.

One key to motivating students is to interest them so much in what they are learning that they forget about themselves and become more involved with the

21

curriculum than with their self-concept. Recent findings in psychology have demonstrated that when students are functioning in this way, they are in what Maslow, Rogers, Allport and others labeled a "self-actualized" state of motivation. The final section of this monograph discusses these motivational aspects of dropout prevention more in-depth.

The other key aspect of dropout prevention is promoting a sense of belonging. Children are vulnerable because they are children. They must initially depend on their parents to provide a nurturing atmosphere and to guide them in ways that are in their best interests. Many high-risk children suffer because their parents or guardians cannot provide a nurturing atmosphere, because of the stress in their own lives, or do not understand how to do so.

The next, most developmentally significant experience children have is in school. One of the most important aspects of this experience involves adults they can count on to provide a nurturing environment involving respect and genuine concern. Stability, trust, bonding and caring are the preconditions for establishing a sense of belonging in any setting. The adults in these settings should be role models of responsible and mature behavior and should understand how to relate to each child's separate reality in a way that establishes a positive relationship based on mutual respect.

Teachers whose training has given them the level of understanding to accomplish these goals have found their work a great deal more rewarding. Understanding how poor self-concept and insecurity affect a child enables them to find ways to reach the child, without taking any of a child's behavior personally.

At the same time, schools cannot be expected to take on all of society's problems. Teachers cannot be expected to become social workers or psychologists. However, the schools can play an important role in mobilizing parents, local businesses, social agencies, the media and the community at-large to address the needs of these children appropriately.

The very act of not responding is a strong message in itself. "If educators are to respond constructively to the at-risk population, they must start with the premise that school experiences and family background interact, and have a synergistic effect, which results in a young person's decision to drop out" (Wehlage, 1986a).

With these preliminary comments in mind, we summarize the core elements of the most successful dropout prevention programs for which data are available.

Utilizing this material, and the conclusions in previous chapters, we offer a series of recommendations and guidelines for designing, planning and implementing dropout prevention programs. These recommendations are followed by a description of the role school guidance counselors can play in the process of developing, coordinating and monitoring dropout prevention activities.

We are not recommending any one particular focus, in terms of the content of dropout prevention activities. Different students have different educational/ vocational interests and different needs. In addition, the schools themselves cannot be expected to provide all the resources needed to carry out programs. While educators can initiate ideas and program directions, they should involve a wide range of community resources and organizations. Ideally, this involvement should begin at the planning and needs assessment stage.

Recommendation I: Needs Assessment and Planning Efforts Should be Broadly Based.

Ideally, the needs assessment and program planning process should involve parents, students, businesses, social agencies working with youth and community organizations, as well as teachers and school administrators. If all these groups are included from the beginning, both their understanding of the true nature and scope of the problem, and their level of commitment to and involvement in implementing needed programs will be maximized. The ideal planning process is one in which all potentially affected groups and all groups that could potentially contribute to solutions or provide programmatic resources are involved. These groups should be organized into task forces or planning sub-committees by functional areas, according to the unique characteristics of each community. For example, one area might be vocational/career/work experience. Another might be teen pregnancy, or counseling for drug abuse, or family/parent resources, etc. The number and nature of such groups would vary from one community to another.

These groups should then participate in a needs assessment process to determine what student needs exist in their community in each functional area and why students are dropping out. They should then match these needs with available community resources in each area. All of these needs assessments and resources should be combined into a comprehensive plan.

Once the comprehensive plan is finalized, everyone involved in the planning process should be brought together to understand each component and the overall

23

picture. Ideally, these people would be maintained as an ongoing steering committee that can oversee the implementation of the plan, to insure coordination of the various programs and to fill in gaps or needs identified after the program has begun.

Recommendation 2: Prevention Efforts Should Include All Levels K-12, with an Emphasis on Early Intervention.

It is almost stating the obvious to say that it is easier to reach at-risk youth at the earliest possible age. Ideally, programs should begin in preschool to reach those families whose characteristics indicate that their children may be at risk. Parent involvement in preschool programs, with a strong parent education component, are recommended. Parental involvement should also be solicited as soon as children begin having problems in school.

It is important to educate parents concerning factors in the home environment that are supportive of the child's education and development without making parents feel defensive. There is now a wealth of data from child-rearing studies to be able to clarify the key types of nurturing interactions with children as opposed to those that lead to poor self-concept and insecurity about learning (Mills, 1986). These findings can be shared with parents in an impersonal, educational format, without leaving parents feeling judged or blamed for the problem, because that usually makes things worse for the child.

One key role for counselors, in this respect, is developmental counseling in the elementary years. Ideally, guidance counselors would be trained to spot the consequences of poor self-concept and insecurity about learning, and to work with both the child and the parents in a supportive, positive way. One risk that should be avoided at this stage is labeling children and dealing with them as if they are emotionally disturbed. Rather than helping, this approach normally adds to the negative self-image and feelings of insecurity, making it harder for them to feel normal at school.

By the fifth grade, a reasonably accurate profile of students at-risk can be developed that will catch most of the students headed for trouble in middle school or junior high school. Individualized programs can then be developed that are student-centered (i.e., that address the needs and interests of these youth, and that strengthen their ability to stay in school and their interest in staying).

24

27

Recommendation 3: Organizational Variables, Policies and Procedures Affecting the Schools' Ability to Meet the Needs of High-Risk Youth Should be Revised.

The structural and policy characteristics of more successful programs and more effective schools in general tend to differ in a specific way from traditional school structures and policies. These alternative structures normally involve smaller teacher-student ratios, support for expanded roles for teachers and support for more innovative, positive and flexible ways of managing behavioral, attendance and learning problems.

Schools that are serious about re-connecting high-risk youth should take a close look at the organizational dimensions that facilitate, rather than hinder, teachers' ability to work more effectively with those youth and to respond more effectively to the needs of all students in the classroom. The organization and policies of the schools should be oriented toward reducing stress on both teachers and students, while creating opportunities for the qualities of interactions and relationships that assist students to function with higher levels of interest and involvement in school.

Organizational structures and policies that should be reviewed or revised would include: student-teacher ratios, discipline policies and procedures, absenteeism, truancy, suspension, failing grades, and retention policies. Ideally, these would be reviewed at the school district or at the overall school level, and revised to be more consistent with the ways that the schools would like to respond to the needs of their students.

Recommendation 4: Schools Should Reassess the Relevance of all Their Educational Programs.

The school's academic, social, vocational and athletic programs should be reviewed utilizing the principles of student-centered education as the philosophical base of this evaluation. This principle calls for increased flexibility of schools to find out what their students want and where they are having trouble, to introduce new courses, innovative educational strategies, new social settings and opportunities for all students to find something truly meaningful for them, and to engage them in a more enjoyable way in school-related activities.

This principle does not mean that basic skills are sacrificed. However, psychological studies have shown that children learn best when material is presented at their level, in an enjoyable, interesting way, and is seen as relevant to

25

their interests. Educators must be willing to take more responsibility for making education intriguing, interesting and relevant. New technologies, particularly video and computers, as well as new experiential learning, participatory learning and individualized learning methods, have made a wealth of new teaching tools available. Children do not all learn in the same way. The challenge to educators is continually to broaden their horizons and their own learning to discover new ways to get concepts and materials across to students. In this sense, exploring new teaching methods can bring education alive again for teachers who are experiencing either burnout or boredom in their jobs. The rewards here are just as great for us as teachers as they are for students.

Every student should feel that there is something for them in school. All schools should be more alert to insure that social, athletic and other extracurricular activities do not leave out certain sub-cultures of students, or leave them feeling that they are not the right kind of person to be involved in school. One step in this direction has been the introduction of varsity athletic teams for women. Courses such as prenatal care, parenting and family life skills, and health care also respond to special needs and interests of certain students. Vocationally oriented students should be able to combine, in an integrated fashion, work and academic experiences. Career education should also be relevant to the world of work today and build directly on students' interests. Other courses include sociological and cultural studies of the richness and variety of students' different backgrounds. In these areas, school administrators and educators must be "tuned in" to the backgrounds, interests and desires of their particular student body.

Student surveys and student participation in school decision and policy making have been utilized by many prevention programs as effective vehicles for getting higher levels of student involvement and relevance in school programs. In one school district in the South, one of the authors of this paper worked under a federal grant as a consultant to help schools develop alcohol and drug abuse prevention programs. Student leadership groups were formed in these schools to have input into school programs and policies. At one point, the school board had a special session with the student leaders to solicit their input. Following the session, school board members stated that it was the single most interesting and informative meeting they had participated in since they had been on the board.

Recommendation 5: A Positive School Climate Should be a High Priority in the School and in the Classroom.

One of the key components of more successful programs for dropout prevention has been that students reported a high level of pride and a special enjoyment about being in the program. They felt that they were involved in something special and were eager to participate. William Purkey (Purkey & Schmidt, 1987) stated this principle as "inviting" our children to learn. Schools and classrooms need to become more personalized, inviting and attractive for students. Teachers must know how to maintain control and a sense of purpose and at the same time offer learning in an enjoyable, interesting, supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere.

A teacher's excitement about teaching and enthusiasm for finding engaging and effective ways to get course materials across to students is infectious and will, in itself, help to motivate our youth. In the absence of insecurity, children are natural learners and enjoy learning. This trait should be built on and reinforced in our schools, rather than stamped out by course delivery that is serious, dry and uninvolving.

Guidance counselors should also be given the training, and allowed the time and latitude, to get to know students as people and to explore with them all facets of their growth, affective and attitudinal, as well as academic or vocational. Peer support groups, peer counseling, and other similar approaches have also been used successfully in this respect. Ideally, a wide range of a child's most positive experiences through adolescence should be related to school, as opposed to being associated with groups outside of and alienated from the school culture.

Recommendation 6: Programs Should Continually Expand their Networking and Capacity to Create Linkages across Groups.

Networking must take place at all levels if we are to have meaningful impact. School personnel—administrators, counselors, support services staff, teachers, vocational education specialists, special education teachers—should work in an integrated fashion to provide for the individual needs of all students. Schools should be encouraged to call upon the business community to assist in the provision of high quality programs in career awareness, vocational training, mentor programs, work study opportunities, and training and employment. Social service agencies can be invited to work with school personnel on the development of comprehensive

27

human service delivery systems. Universities and colleges need to collaborate with each other to insure that dropout prevention and effective school principles are emphasized in the course curriculum offered to future teachers. Finally, policy makers and legislators need to be made aware of the needs of school districts and to formulate legislation in response to those needs.

Community and business groups can provide a wide range of resources, fresh energy and new vantage points that not only address needs of at-risk youth, but also provide these students with a wider array of experiences and perspectives related to their schooling. The challenge here for educators is to develop ongoing collaborative relationships and open the doors to bring those resources into education in a relevant way. In every community where this has occurred, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. As stated earlier in this monograph, the dropout problem is a community, business, economic and social problem. Leaders in government, business and social organizations are normally eager to help when they become aware of the nature and effects of the problem in their own community.

A central aspect of many successful dropout prevention programs has been the opportunity for students to go out in the world, to contribute or do something useful for people or organizations in their community. Getting the community involved sometimes means publicizing educational problems, which some school districts are reluctant to do. However, in every instance, rather than criticizing the educational system, the community response has typically been one of stretching their imagination and resources to find ways to help. Positive communication and ongoing interaction are keys to the success of community involvement. Ongoing advisory committees, made up of business leaders, agency directors and government officials, can be a vehicle to insure ongoing coordination and continued development of strong school/community relationships.

Community colleges and universities can often find ways to add to a student's range of educational experiences. Businesses can provide a wide array of types of assistance, from financial help to career awareness, volunteers, speakers and on-the-job training. Community mental health centers, hospitals and health care agencies can provide new learning experiences for students, while giving their staff the opportunity to share what they do with young people. Drug treatment and counseling programs can be both a referral and a learning resource. School districts should be encouraged to take a comprehensive perspective on what resources in the

community can be helpful, and to be creative in their thinking about how to utilize these resources.

Parents should be involved whenever possible. Schools should provide opportunities to enhance their understanding of how they can best help their children interact positively with them. Counselors should not be afraid to be persistent and creative in reaching out to parents. Many parents may also be somewhat alienated from the schools, particularly if their involvement has been primarily centered on their children's problems. School counselors should look for more positive ways to involve parents that are conducive to creating a stronger positive bond and a higher level of mutual understanding between the parent and the child.

One of the keys to a successful program is not only a high level of enthusiasm and expectation among staff, but also their openness and willingness to learn from others. Many model programs and research efforts are now being carried out nationally. These efforts can provide new insights, information and resources for ongoing staff and program development.

As educators, staying in touch with what is going on elsewhere while constantly learning and growing ourselves keeps us fresh, excited and feeling a part of something bigger than ourselves. It must be remembered that staff are always role models for students. If we are open and excited about learning new things ourselves, this excitement will spill over to the students and contribute to their motivation.

In addition, keeping in touch with other programs and with staff carrying out different components of the same program keeps the sense of collegiality, mutual support and teamwork at a high level. If we cannot evidence those qualities in our own work, then we cannot be expected to pass these qualities on to our students as an integral part of what we want them to learn.

Recommendation 7: Staff Should be Carefully Selected.

Over and over again we have seen model programs that were obtaining very positive results lose their effectiveness after a major staff change. While the program structure or content was thought to be the active ingredient, this same structure did not work when staff were running the program who did not understand how to reach and motivate at-risk students. Teachers need to understand the ways that poor self-concept and insecurity about learning have affected these students

29

while, at the same time, maintaining high standards and expectations that these students can perform.

With this understanding, staff selection must not be based on proven competency in particular subject areas alone, but must include the ability and desire to provide a respectful caring environment that responds to the needs of the whole child.

Recommendation 8: Ongoing Staff Development Should be Built into the Program.

Staff of dropout prevention programs are working with alienated and poorly motivated students. It is important that these staff feel supported and able to continue to develop professionally in their role. Staff development should be designed to help them learn more about how to resolve problems positively with students, whether the problems are motivational, disciplinary or academic, and to learn more about new and innovative educational approaches.

Staff development should not be limited to program staff. Training in new curriculum areas, in motivation and in the importance of classroom and school climate is key to program success or failure. If at-risk students are mainstreamed, they should be able to carry their excitement about learning, pride in their schooling, and positive feelings about the educational climate with them throughout their school careers.

Staff development is more than formal workshops offered on a monthly basis and should include an opportunity for school personnel to meet regularly to exchange new ideas and demonstrate successful teaching strategies. The opportunity to discuss professional issues with school personnel as a whole, including student support services staff, vocational education teachers, special education teachers, etc., maximizes the use of all resources within the school, encourages the exchange of differing perspectives and capitalizes on the knowledge acquired through individual trial and error.

Critical Areas of Staff Development

Up to now, we have assumed that while we can train and select teachers based on their competency in the subject matter, it is some elusive, intangible quality in teachers' personalities that determines how effective they will be in engaging and motivating students. Much attention has been directed toward teacher competency in specific subject areas. Although this is important, it has

overshadowed the crucial influences of teaching processes, e.g., motivational strategies, feedback and evaluation procedures, and the quality of teacher-student relationships.

Recent work on the psychology of motivation has shown that teachers can be taught to motivate students in ways that do not involve having to "correct" or build up a poor self-concept, or directly address a student's insecurity about learning (Mills, 1986; Stewart 1985; Suarez, et al., 1987).

Maslow and others in the field of motivation observed and described a state of motivation they call "self-actualization." At this level of functioning, it was found that students were motivated by the excitement of learning itself, an intrinsic interest in the subject matter, and an enjoyment of and pride in learning for the sheer sake of understanding or doing something well.

In one study of a remedial classroom, it was found that in this frame of mind, students dropped their self-consciousness (i.e., were not concerned about their self-image), as they became so involved in the learning process that they literally forgot about themselves (Stewart, 1985). A motivational climate in the classroom that produces this quality of motivation in students is the ideal in any classroom.

Through inservice seminars for teachers, it was found that teachers could be trained to develop a teaching process and a motivational climate in the classroom that fostered this state of motivation. The development of the training program has shown that a teacher's ability to access and sustain such a level of motivation in students involves the following elements:

1. Understanding how to continually demonstrate respect and caring for students in the classroom, while at the same time being able to maintain an organized classroom in an authoritative (as opposed to authoritarian) and effective manner.

2. Knowing how to engage students' excitement and intrinsic interest in learning in a way that bypasses the students' self-consciousness and their concern about self-image or about proving themselves.

3. Understanding how to let go of their attachment to how they think people should learn and to see, individually for each student, how that particular student learns best.

4. Understanding how to relate the subject matter being taught to each student's interests, or to something that will trigger that student's curiosity and innate interest in learning.

5. Understanding ways to actively involve students in the learning process (in an experiential way), so they are more than passive receptors.

6. Understanding how to draw the material or solutions out of the students themselves, in a way that is non-threatening to the students involved, and to trigger students' creative thinking abilities.

7. Understanding the role of a supportive, secure family atmosphere in enhancing the ability of these students to learn in a classroom setting.

8. Understanding how their own attitudes and motivation for teaching affects their students' motivation in a classroom.

Recommendation 9: Ongoing Program Evaluation and Feedback Should be Built in as an Integral Component of the Program.

Programs should be based on measurable outcome objectives with mechanisms for ongoing feedback. When pre-planned objectives are not met, staff should be able to find out why and to modify the program accordingly. Outcome data collected on the program should be related to key performance objectives and do more than document that planned activities have been carried out. Program evaluation and feedback should be integrated with ongoing staff development and training.

35

CHAPTER V
THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

The role of the school counselor or school psychologist is rarely mentioned in the dropout prevention literature, and yet their professional training and areas of expertise appropriately match many of the needs for monitoring and coordinating dropout prevention efforts within schools. A major component of most dropout prevention programs involves counseling and the coordination of a wide range of support services in and out of school.

The school counselor's role in dropout prevention activities can be a central one. Counselors can play an important role in identifying at-risk students, providing short-term counseling and referral services, and involving families and parents. They can provide students with access to needed support services in and out of school and serve as the crucial link between the classroom and these services. With proper training, school counselors can also play a central role in program coordination and in ongoing staff training, consultation and program development.

The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling published a report, Keeping the Options Open, in October, 1986. According to this report, the students who have the least at home, in terms of knowledge about the consequences of course and curriculum choices, are the least likely to have access to informed guidance and counseling in school. The role of counselors has been diffused by the burden of unrealistic student-counselor ratios and scheduling duties. The reorganization of guidance services to include a sharing of scheduling duties with paraprofessionals would free the counselors to play an important supportive role in school dropout prevention efforts.

The counselor's training and talents may best be utilized not only to oversee the guidance department but also to do the following:

1. Assist in the development and implementation of a human services delivery system that coordinates in-school and out-of-school resources.
2. Develop linkages with youth-serving agencies that will serve to meet the many needs of at-risk students. Such services may include counseling, drug rehabilitation, and health and rehabilitative services, to name a few.

33

3. Work with teachers and school administrators to enhance students' academic, emotional and behavioral adjustment.

4. Provide or coordinate parent counseling groups to encourage parental involvement in the educational process.

5. Coordinate peer and mentor counseling programs in an effort to expand the accessibility of counseling services.

6. Coordinate staff development programs that will increase the awareness of problems facing at-risk students and emphasize alternative methods to achieve learning outcomes.

CHAPTER VI
SUMMARY

As can be seen from these findings, and from the directions offered in the previous sections of this monograph, dropout prevention is more than an important issue in its own right. It has implications for systemic, school-wide changes that affect the attractiveness and relevance of education for all students. While special programs are needed for many at-risk students, it seems evident that if schools in general were to exhibit the qualities of the more successful dropout prevention programs, fewer special programs would be required because the regular school system would be able to reach many of these students.

The role of the principal and other school administrators should clearly be to insure the highest overall quality in the school climate and in the classroom atmosphere, as well as to maintain and support linkages with other groups in the community that are crucial to the success of dropout prevention activities. Administrators should ideally receive training in organizational management and in the development of the optimal motivational climate for an educational setting. They would then be able to play a strong leadership role in these areas, for both the dropout programs and the entire school.

The real key to dropout prevention seems to be a revitalization of our educational system that involves genuine caring for students and an understanding of the optimal climate for learning. Teachers must be challenged and supported to innovate in the classroom, and to find new ways to make learning fun, engaging and perceived as relevant to student interests and needs. Teachers must gain an appreciation for the wide variety of student backgrounds, family situations, and cultural experiences. This understanding would help them expand their frame of reference to reach students with very divergent developmental needs.

Dropout prevention programs require the utilization and coordination of school system and community resources matched with student needs. Planning dropout prevention programs involves important decisions regarding school facilities, human resources, instructional approaches and maintaining program support.

Prevention programs, however, traditionally focus on the needs of identified at-risk students only after serious problems have arisen. The knowledge gained

35

from successful dropout prevention programs must translate into awareness of the need for specific intervention programs as well as the need for systematic school-wide changes and community participation in the educational process of our youth.

Identification systems or dropout profiles utilized to establish eligibility for dropout prevention programs have been based on a medical model. It has been emphasized throughout this monograph that, while programs are needed to address the specific needs of teen parents and students demonstrating involvement with drugs, disciplinary problems and academic failure, the emphasis in dropout prevention must not remain reactive but move toward proactive approaches. Two of the major criticisms voiced by dropout prevention practitioners are that, first, students enter their programs with established records of failure and, second, the expectation is to return them as soon as possible to the environment in which they failed, only to repeat the process over again.

The diversity of the at-risk population requires comprehensiveness in our approach to solutions. Educators and members of the research community have provided important insights into the characteristics of at-risk students and key elements of programs leading to successful educational experiences for these students. It is crucial that this knowledge base be utilized by those directly involved in special dropout prevention programs, and even more that it becomes incorporated at a systemic level in schools and made an important component in the education of future teachers.

36

REFERENCES

Alexander, K. L., Natriello, G., & Pallas, A. M. (1985). For whom the bell tolls: The impact of dropping out on cognitive performance (Report No. 356). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, Center for Social Organization of Schools. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 253 842)

Block, J., Keyes, S., & Block, G. (1986). A longitudinally foretelling drug usage in adolescence: Early childhood personality and environment precursors. Berkeley, CA: University of California.

Business Advisory Council, Education Commission of the States. (1985). Reconnecting youth: The next stage of reform. Denver, CO: Author.

Charlotte Mecklenberg Council for Children. (1984). The report for the community committee on dropouts ana truancy in Mecklenberg County. Charlotte, NC: Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools.

Cippolone, A. (1986). Research, program and policy trends in dropout prevention: A national perspective. Cambridge, MA: Education Matters, Inc.

Coombs, J., & Cooley, W. W. (1968). Dropouts: In high school and after high school. American Educational Research Journal, 5, 343-363.

Dade County Grand Jury. (1984, July 17). The high school dropout and the inner city school. Report of the Dade County Grand Jury in the Circuit Court of the Eleventh Judicial Circuit of 1983. Miami, FL: Author.

Ekstrom, R. B., Goertz, M. E., Pollack, J. M., & Rock, D. A. (1986). Who drops out of school and why? Findings from a national study. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 356-373.

Elliott, D. S., & Huizinga, D. (1984, April). The relationship between delinquent behavior and ADM problems. Paper prepared for the ADAMHA/OJJD State-of-the-Art Research Conference on Juvenile Offenders with Serious Drug, Alcohol, and Mental Health Problems, Boulder, CO.

Foley, E., & Warren, C. (1985). Dropout prevention; a first step: The story of New York City's implementation of Education Law 3602(25), relating to attendance improvement and dropout prevention. New York: The Public Education Association.

Gadwa, K., & Griggs, S. A. (1985). The school dropout: Implications for counselors. The School Counselor, 33(1), 9-18.

Hamilton, S. F. (1986). Raising standards and reducing dropout rates. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 410-429.

Hammack, F. M. (1986). Large systems' dropout reports: An analysis of definitions, procedures, and findings. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 324-341.

Hill, C. R., & Stafford, F. P. (1977). Family background and life-time earnings. The distribution of economic well-being. Cambridge, MA: Ballinger.

Hodgkinson, H. L. (1985). All in one system: Demographics of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.

Howell, F. M., & Frege, W. (1982). Early transition into adult roles: Some antecedents and outcomes. American Educational Research Journal, 19, 51-73.

Jones, W. M. (1977, March). The impact on society of youths who drop out or are undereducated. Educational Leadership, 34, 411-416.

Journal of the Appalachian regional commission. (1985). 18.

Lloyd, D. N. (1978). Prediction of school failure from third grade data. Educational and Psychological Measurement, 38(4), 1193-1200.

Mann, D. (1986). Can we help dropouts: Thinking about the undoable. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 307-323.

Mare, R. D. (1980). Social background and school continuation decisions. Journal of the American Statistical Association, 75, 295-305.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center. (1986). The way out: Student exclusion practices in Boston middle schools. Boston, MA: Author.

Masters, S. H. (1969). The effects of family income on children's education: Some findings on the inequality of opportunity. Journal of Human Resources, 4, 158-175.

Mills, R. C. (1986, May). Two non-clinical applications of neo-cognitive psychology in the mental health field. Presented at the fifth annual Conference on Neo-Cognitive Psychology, Advanced Human Studies Institute, St. Petersburg, FL.

Neill, S. B. (1979). Keeping students in school: Problems and solutions. Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Novak, J., & Dougherty, B. (Eds.). (1981). Staying in. A dropout handbook, K-12. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Vocational Studies Center.

O'Connor, P. (1985). Dropout prevention programs that work. Oregon School Study Council Bulletin, 29(4), 7-13.

Purkey, W., & Schmidt, J. (1987). The inviting relationship. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Raywid, M. A. (1983). Excellence, dropouts, choice. Paper presented to the Florida Association of Alternative School Educators.

Research Triangle Institute. (1985). Study of high school dropouts in Appalachia. Research Triangle Park, NC: Research Triangle Institute, Center for Educational Studies.

Rumberger, R. W. (1983). Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background. American Educational Research Journal, 5, 16-17.

Sewell, T. E., Palmo, A. J., & Manni, J. L. (1981). High school dropouts: Psychological, academic, and vocational factors. Urban Education, 16(1), 65-76.

Shaw, L. B. (1982). High school completion for young women: Effect of low income and living with a single parent. Journal of Family Issues, 3, 147-163.

Southern Growth Policies Board. (1985). Off the streets: Training unemployed youth. Foresight: Model Programs for Southern Economic Development, 3(1), 12-19.

Steinberg, L., Blinde, P. L., & Chan, K. S. (1984). Dropping out among language minority youth. Review of Educational Research, 54, 113-132.

Stern, D, & Catterall, J. (1985). Reducing the high school dropout rate in California: Why we should and how we may. In D. Stern, J. Catterall, C. Alhadeff, & M. Ash (Eds.), Report to the California policy seminar on reducing the dropout rate in California. Berkeley, CA: University of California, School of Education.

Stern, D., Catterall, J., Alhadeff, C., & Ash, M. (Eds.). (1985). Reducing the high school dropout rate in California. Report to the California policy seminar on reducing dropouts in California. Berkeley, CA: University of California, School of Education.

Stewart, D. (1985, May). Affective states as the key variable in deterring student mastery of basic reading skills. Paper presented at the fourth annual Conference on Neo-Cognitive Psychology, Kahuku, Oahu, HI.

Suarez, E. M., & Mills, R. C. (1982). Sanity, insanity, and common sense: The missing link in understanding mental health (1st ed.). Milwaukee, WI: Med-Psych Publications.

Suarez, E. M., Mills, R. C., & Stewart, D. (1987). Sanity, insanity, and common sense: The missing link in understanding mental health (2nd ed.). New York: Ballantine Books.

U.S. Department of Education. (1984). The school team approach to alcohol and drug abuse prevention. Washington, DC: Author, Alcohol and Drug Education Division.

Wehlage, G. G. (1983). Effective programs for the marginal high school student. Fastback 197. Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 235 132)

39

Wehlage, G. G., & Rutter, R. A. (1986a). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? Teachers College Record, 87(3), 374-392.

Wehlage, G. G., & Rutter, R. A. (1986b, April). Evaluation of a model program for at-risk students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

Wheelock, A. (1986). Dropping out: What the research says. Equity and Choice, 3(1), 7-11.