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ABSTRACT

Reducing absences is the most readily available strategy that high schools have for reducing the number of dropouts. A sample of approximately 2,000 students who entered three Oregon urban high schools in the Fall of 1983 or 1984 was studied in order to establish criteria for identifying students who were at-risk of not graduating. The group was divided into "at-risk" and "not at-risk" groups on the basis of freshman year Grade Point Average (GPA), and number of days absent. "At-risk" students were identified as those having a GPA below 1.6, and 15 or more days absent. Both groups completed questionnaires concerning their attitudes, expectations, and social and family interactions as freshmen, when they were freshman and again in December 1986. Findings from analysis of the survey, GPA, and absenteeism information include the following: (1) responses to the survey questionnaire indicated more similarities than differences between the "at-risk" and "not at-risk"; (2) two-thirds of the eventual dropouts were identified by 10 days or more of absence in their freshman year; and (3) a slight improvement in accuracy of prediction could be obtained by using the average number of class absences, using a cut-off value of an average of four or more class periods absent. Twelve tables of statistical data and a one-page list of references are included. A copy of the student questionnaire, and a list of programs for at-risk students are included in the appendices. (FMW)

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Findings: The study examined the school experiences and concerns of high school youth at risk of not finishing high school. The sample included approximately 2,000 students who entered three urban Oregon high schools in the Fall of 1983 or 1984 and who completed self report questionnaires as freshmen and again as upperclassmen in December '86. The questionnaire principally dealt with their attitudes toward school, and their expectations and difficulties, but also included questions regarding their parents, peers and friends who had quit school.

Students were divided into at-risk and not-at-risk groups on the basis of their freshman year GPA and number of days absent. Cut-off values of GPA below 1.60 and 15 or more days absent resulted in nearly a fourth of the freshmen identified as at risk.

Examination of student questionnaire responses indicated few differences between schools or between responses by the '83 and '84 freshmen classes. Comparisons between responses of at-risk and not-at-risk students revealed that larger proportions of at-risk students selected negative or non school oriented responses to most items. These distinctions were slightly sharper for comparisons between dropout and graduating students.

Differences between at-risk and not-at-risk students staying in school tended to become smaller. The general pattern of

change for upperclassmen was one of increased positive attitudes, fewer problems, more teacher support and more employment awareness.

The principal reasons reported for their friends quitting school were "poor attitude" and "not caring" (cited by a third), followed distantly by "poor grades," "pregnancy," and "drugs". Over one fourth of respondents said they didn't know why their friend had left school. Only a third of the dropout friends were known to have been counselled by school persons to stay in school; another third were known not to have been counselled. In all thre schools, students were clearly the most frequent "positive" advisors, encouraging over half of the dropout students (in the known cases) to stay in school. At the same time, over a fourth of those dropping out were known to have been encouraged to quit school, either by some non school friend, a school person, a parent, or classmate.

A review of the at-risk identification criteria and cut off values revealed that using a 10 days or more absence cut off (instead of the 15 or more days) identified fully two-thirds of eventual dropouts. Only slight improvement was obtained using the average number of class absences (rather than full day's absences) with a cut off value of an average of four or more class periods absent. Either absence criterion resulted in a one in three chance that an "at-risk" student would not graduate and odds of nearly 15 to 16 that a not-at-risk student would graduate. Either absence measure by itself (without the GPA criteria) would have accounted for roughly half of the dropouts.

Recommendations: Though reliable differences between at-risk/not-at-risk and between dropout and graduating students were repeatedly found in the anticipated direction of more "negative" responses by the at-risk and by the dropout students, the large residual of group overlap compels an emphasis on between-group similarities rather than on differences. Continued searching for differences between subgroups of succeeding and non succeeding high school students, at least in terms of their attitudes, expectations, aspirations, and social and family interactions is not to be encouraged. Indeed, at-risk and not-at-risk freshman students are much more alike in all these areas than they are different. Whereas attitudinal and other self-report of student subgroups may be of interest (and perhaps of value in individual instances), these surveys add little to distinctions between graduates and early school leavers.

On the other hand, reasonably definitive groupings of future dropouts and graduates can be derived from freshman data, particularly student absences and student grades. In the present study these commonly available variables led to at-risk groupings in which the probability of the student not graduating approach one in three. Student at-risk identification procedures along the lines of those used in this project should, in most schools, be easy to develop as a first stage screening. Unless already in place, such at-risk identification is to be recommended along with collection of follow-up data monitoring the school careers of the at-risk student.

Freshman absences appear to be a singularly strong predictor of early school leaving. Even used alone this measure is not an indefensible classification criterion. The predictive strength of early high school absences suggests that schools promptly attend to its student attendance, closely monitor it, and consistently enforce its rules about class cutting and absence. For most schools reducing student absences is probably the most readily available strategy schools have for reducing dropouts.

Final Report
OERI Project No. 117EH 60006

IDENTIFICATION AND SCHOOL RELATED ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS OF AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by
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April 1988

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The writer is pleased to express his gratitude to those persons who contributed to the completion of this project. Particularly in studies within the schools, there are hosts of persons who go unnamed, persons who interrupt their full day to make room for questions and questionnaires: school building administrators, counselors, and students who rightfully wonder what each new research enterprize will gain for themselves or their successors. Though unnamed, these persons are very much in the thoughts of the writer.

Two district personnel deserve a special note of thanks, Bob Stalick and Charles Stephens, who were particularly supportive of the project from its inception to its finale. Appreciation is also tendered to Dean Robert Gilberts whose financial support rescued a floundering budget. And to Deborah Toobert who untangled our computer analysis program and to Barbara McCorkle who reported on the multifaceted at-risk programs in our three schools. More than mention is due Marsha Thompson without whose deciphering and typing skills these pages would hardly have made it.

But first and foremost among the project's supporters has been the Stuarts: Lee Stuart supervised the data collection and conducted many of the school interviews during the writer's extended absence; Ann Stuart served unfailingly as research assistant throughout the year and a half of student tracing and

data compilation. Our unraveling of a seemingly endless chain of recording errors and confusions succeeded only because of Ann Stuart's constructive, always pleasant support and effort. Finally, this report has been much improved for Lee Stuart's critical review and urging of more ample recommendations.

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A. Introduction:

The dropout student has been a continuing problem of public education since the advent of compulsary education. In recent decades the problem has become especially serious given the increasing educational and training requirements for other than marginal employability (of job seeking youth) and our nation's social justice commitment to equal educational opportunity for minority students. Seemingly without exception, wherever large populations of minority students are found, disproportionate numbers of these students continue to be represented among non high school graduates and the unemployed. The concerns generated by these inequalities and the question "What to do about them?" has led to a shift in language and in focus from the dropout student to the student "at risk" of dropping out.

Though this changed emphasis is eminently suited to schools' predilection toward intervention, the precursor requirement of describing at-risk students has generally been left unattended. Apart from such basic demographics as ethnicity and sex, more personalized descriptions of these candidates for early school leaving, encompassing their earliest high school year, have been only sparsely reported.[1]

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[1]Rock et al.'s (1985) more comprehensive report of dropout students from the NCES High School and Beyond Data Base (Study of High School Excellence), for example, described students who quit school exclusive of those who may have been expected to and didn't. Statistics aside, nearly all of the fast growing literature about at-risk students refer to remedial or dropout prevention programs.

This vagueness in description extends to a problem of definition of the at-risk student in all studies. Thus, though educators everywhere express an active concern for these students, they are not always talking about the same persons. Different school administrators and "at-risk" program directors, and certainly different school districts choose different emphases and cut off rules. Frequently, the particular criteria for "at-risk" status appear to be a reflection of the particular school's recognition of those descriptors which prior surveys have identified as related to its' early school leavers.

In the extreme case, of course, all beginning high school students may be considered to be "at risk" of not completing high school. It also is an occurrence much more likely at some schools than at others.[a] Many inner city schools continue to report that as many as half or more of their entering freshmen will not graduate four years later. In most U.S. high schools, the odds of not graduating are nearer one in four. Given these odds of contracting what may prove to be a lifelong disability we would insist on protection to reduce our youth's vulnerability. Protection, however, requires a knowledge of causes or at least, of conditions or carriers promoting the unwanted outcome.

A number of factors have been identified as causes or contributors to early school leaving. These include poor academic skills and ability, failing subjects, truancy, adverse

[a]A report of dramatically reduced dropout rate after a school closure and subsequent mass transfer of students affords an interesting note in this regard (Sexton, 1982).

peer relationships, adverse staff relationships, pregnancy and drugs. Added to these are "dispositional factors" such as history of early pre high school failure, truancy, delinquency, frequent school transfers, and family factors, such as broken marriages, unemployment, older siblings who had quit school and opportunity or need for employment. An array of personality-psychological problems could also be included.

Only some of these many factors are amenable, howbeit, with limited success, to school interventions. But even within the intransigent predispositional or family factors, early school leaving is not a given; most high school students from within almost any category of negative factors do stay in school and graduate. Within these categorical divisions we need to learn more about what makes the difference.

The study reported in this paper was initiated to provide a fuller description of students at risk of not completing their high school education. The report is "longitudinal," comparing "at-risk" and "non-at-risk" high school students as freshmen and following them into their final school year, identifying and contrasting those dropping out of school prior to graduation with those completing high school. The report also addresses the problem of identification of "at-risk" students. It includes a non evaluative description of high school programs in the project schools to reduce dropout.

As a starting place the present study narrowed the listing of causal factors to two measures common to all high schools,

namely grades and attendance. These had proved to be the most dramatically associated in our earlier two year study of absenteeism in the high schools (deJung and Duckworth, 1986a) and remained available to the present study samples for the entire high school enrollment. In an operational sense, the present study proceeded as an extension of that prior study,[a] using students who were freshmen at the time of that earlier study and who were either juniors or seniors at the start of the present study.

The central working objective of the study was to describe students at risk of dropping out of school in terms of their experiences and perceptions of high school. Conceptually, the study started with its focus on those students who had quit school and examined their earlier (Freshman year) reports of school attitudes, expectations, involvements, and successes and failures.

Simultaneously, we examined the reports of those at-risk students who did not drop out, as well as the reports of not-at-risk students who subsequently did. A fourth group, of course,

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[a]That study examined the absence and grade records and over two million class absences of some 10,000 students in six larger urban high schools in Western Oregon. The study introduced the average class period absence (derived from end of term report cards) as the more accurate and complete attendance measure compared with full and half day absence reporting. The relationship between grades and absences proved especially strong with nearly all low GPA students accounted for in the high absent group. Not unexpectedly, early school leavers had (as a group) the poorest attendance and grades. Similar findings have been reported for an earlier study in this same school district (Schellenberg, 1985) and for studies in different locales (ie. Tidwell, 1985 and Williams, 1985).

are those students who stayed and graduated. The more general focus of the study then became how these four student groups overlap: the "at-risk" students who do and who don't drop out; the drop out students who may or who may not have been "at-risk" as freshmen.

A second objective was to consider data which schools might use to better identify students who are likely to dropout. Related to this objective was an examination of the predictive strengths of various cut off values of the two school measures--grades and school absences--especially related to early school leaving.

The third and final objective was to gauge the effectiveness of school programs and interventions aimed at preventing early school leaving. This third objective is more parochial since it is confined to the three participating high schools in the school district which participated in the study. Measuring the effectiveness of these several programs, however, fell beyond the capabilities of the present one year study. Aside even from the very special, almost idiosyncratic student selection criteria employed by different programs and their adaptable and therefore changing activities, the absence of control or comparison student groups and the incompleteness, and indeed, inconclusiveness of immediate, post program "success/failure" reports denies any substantive program assessment.

The principal offering of this report will be a description of personal responses of at-risk students concerning their school

related concerns and attitudes and a comparison of those held by students subsequently completing and not completing high school. The brief descriptions of the varied programs for at-risk students in the three high schools in the study are included only as an appendix to this research report, more as comment on the diversity of school efforts than as demonstrated positive response to the problem of early school leaving.

B. Procedures:

1. Data: Two sets of data were compiled to provide these descriptions and comparisons. The first consisted of student self reports provided from questionnaires completed by students in their freshman year and again two or three years later as juniors or seniors. Though the first two questionnaires were prepared with a special emphasis on student absenteeism, most items dealt with student expectations and attitudes equally relevant to decisions about early school learning. Accordingly, 20 of the first questionnaire's 38 items and 17 of the second questionnaire's 42 items were repeated in the third questionnaire. One new item dealing with the relevance of high school completion and employment was added. Five of the earlier questionnaire items not included in the third questionnaire (for lack of space[4]) also had continued relevancy and were retained for analysis of freshman responses. Together these total to 26

[4]The limit was two sides of one page. A copy of the third questionnaire and those five earlier items are included as Appendix A.

items, thirteen four choice items following the "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", "strongly disagree" response format and the thirteen items offering five alternative responses for statement completions or answers to questions. Eight of these 26 questions dealt with school attitudes, goals and expectations (ie intended graduation, relevancy of high school learning, strictness of rule enforcement in their school, and post high school plans.) Nine dealt with school behaviors such as cutting classes, ease of earning passing grades, obtaining help from teachers and spending time in school activities. Five dealt with parent background and support such as parent education, getting along with parents and parents keeping track of their school progress. Four dealt with non school peers and activities, such as friends out of school and part time employment. Together, these 26 self report items responded to as freshmen, and again, by those still in school, as upperclassmen provide a broad based description of student attitudes, activities, and background possibly relevant to their continuing or not continuing in school.[5]

In addition to the foregoing forced choice items the third questionnaire contained five open ended, completion type questions asking the student to respond to questions concerning a friend of theirs who had quit school. These questions were introduced on the surmise that many students were knowledgeable

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[5]Privacy rights and the vulnerability of school-parent relationships precluded asking quite possibly relevant questions in more fragile and sensitive areas such as drug abuse, social intimacies, and family relationships.

about peers who had dropped out, their reasons for quitting school and what school or outside persons may have counseled with them. Since no identification of this dropout person was requested and since the informant's anonymity (except for data handling) was also to be maintained, little fabrication of data was anticipated. The final questionnaire item was an open ended question regarding conditions which might make the respondent quit school. A copy of this third questionnaire as administered to our student sample is included as Appendix A to this report.

The second set of data consisted of school records, grades, absences, and school withdrawals. In effect, this data collection spanned a full four year period beginning with the prior study of absenteeism conducted in 1984 and 1985 and concluding in early 1988. The project had acquired computer tapes and printouts of student grade reports and absence records for nearly all terms since winter of 1984. Additional special lists of withdrawing students were obtained from the school district's student information bank. These lists in turn were supplemented and updated by direct reference to counselor and record clerk records maintained in each school. School files were also a primary source for records of graduates and probable non graduates. Though each school presently operates a computerized class attendance system, these had not been in service during our students' freshman year. Our basic attendance data source at that time were listings of full day and half day absences provided by a district contracted information management system.

In addition, the average class absence measure developed by the writer's prior study was computed for all students for their first year report cards.

2. Samples and Student Classifications: The total sample consisted of 2,484 students attending three, four year high schools in a Western Oregon city and completing at least one of three student questionnaires administered in the late winter-early spring of 1984, and 1985 and in December of 1986. The three high schools each had student enrollments of around 1,000 students from predominately white middle class and upper lower class homes. Less than six percent of the student population were Asian, Black, Hispanic, or native American. The three high schools spanned a continuum from a strong university preparation emphasis to a high school completion orientation. All schools operated on a trimester system, had open campuses and had inaugurated various programs as part of a district sponsored concern for its at-risk students.(See Appendix B.)

The three questionnaire administration dates permitted a follow up of two principal cohorts of students, the class of '87 consisting of 1,012 freshmen in Spring '84 and the class of '88 consisting of 951 freshmen a year later. These two cohorts exclude 102 classmates missing their initial questionnaire but completing a later one. The remainder of the 419 students, most of whom had transferred into the three project high schools after the earlier questionnaire administrations, completed only the third questionnaire as either seniors or juniors in December of

1986. The total sample for this last questionnaire administration, of course, excludes students who had already left school either as transfers to other schools or as drop outs.

Comparison of enrollment lists indicated that over 85 percent of the total entering freshman classes of '87 and '88 completed their first questionnaire. Table 1 presents the numbers of students completing questionnaires at each administration. Only the cells with asterisks were used in the tallying of the earlier questionnaire responses to restrict the analysis of that data to students as freshmen. Their total number is 1963. The parenthetical entries of 557 and 582 are the numbers of these students who retook the questionnaire as upper classmen. This large reduction includes drop outs, transfers out of the project schools, students retained in grade and students absent the day of the third questionnaire administration. The total number of 2484 students is involved only in designation of students as drop outs, transfers, non graduates, and graduates and in examining the grades and absences of these groupings of students.

For all three administrations questionnaires were distributed under conditions of promised confidentiality and completed during a class period, convenient to the school. An additional 87 completed questionnaires were received from students who were absent during the regular administration but who completed their questionnaire within the following week. Comparison of responses to these late received questionnaires

with those obtained in the regular class administration revealed no apparent differences in responses of absent students.

TABLE 1.

Number of Students Completing Questionnaires Administered in March '84, February '85 and December '86

	March '84	Feb. '85	Dec. '86	Total
Class of '87	1,012*	794	613 (557)	1,038
Class of '88	N.A.	951*	670 (582)	1,027
Transfers In	N.A.	119	335	419
Total	1,012	1,864	1,618	2,484

*Questionnaires completed by freshmen. The numbers in parentheses refer to number of students who had completed a questionnaire as freshmen.

TABLE 2.

Class of '87 and Class of '88 Students Classified as "At-Risk" and "Non-At-Risk" in Each of Three High Schools

	At-Risk	Not-At-Risk	Total
School A '87	90 (28)	232 (72)	322
'88	68 (22)	244 (78)	312
Total	158 (25)	476 (75)	634
School B '87	66 (16)	336 (84)	402
'88	96 (24)	308 (76)	404
Total	162 (20)	644 (80)	806
School C '87	86 (27)	228 (73)	314
'88	84 (27)	227 (73)	311
Total	170 (27)	455 (73)	625
All Class '87	242 (23)	796 (77)	1038
Class '88	248 (24)	779 (76)	1027
Total	490 (24)	1575 (76)	2065

Note: Percentages are included in parentheses.

As noted in the introduction, the present study focused on only two of the more prominent risk factors for early school leaving: poor academic achievement and high absences. Poor academic achievement was defined as a grade point average for the student's freshman year below 1.60. Of those 1,038 class '87 students identified in Table 1, 119 had GPA's this low and were coded "at-risk." Another 123 students with 15 or more days of absence during the 174 school day year were also coded "at-risk" resulting in a total of 242 class '87 students identified as "at-risk," or 23 percent of this cohort group. For the class of '88 corresponding figures were 129 students with GPA's below 1.60 and an additional 119 students with 15 or more days of absences. This total of 248 Class '88 at-risk students constituted 24

percent of their cohort group. In both cohorts the absence criteria approximately doubled the number of freshmen identified as at-risk. Table 2 presents these various samples of freshmen for the three high schools participating. As may be seen from these tabled entries, the proportions of at-risk freshmen are defined by the project cut off values varied only slightly among the three schools in either student cohort aside from the proportionally small number of at-risk students (16 percent) in School B, class of '87. Overall, approximately one in four freshman students were classified as at risk of not graduating using the project's grades and absences criteria.

The two student cohorts were examined and followed in two ways,[6] the first in terms of subsequent school withdrawals and graduation and second, in terms of questionnaire responses as freshmen and again as seniors or juniors. Data regarding eventual student disposition was first obtained from school records. Unfortunately, even in high schools with sophisticated computerized student record keeping, these records are sometimes incomplete or in error.

In the instance of students leaving to transfer to another school, the student may subsequently quit school but remain listed as a "transfer." Some students simply stop coming and aren't there to give reasons and their withdrawal classification

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[6]Initial plans to trace these students' school histories of disciplinary referrals and other in-school reports were reduced to incidental anecdotal reporting due to the incompleteness and sometimes inaccessibility of these records which vitiated summarizations or intergroup comparisons.

is left in limbo for several months. Eventually, unless a student's reasons for withdrawal are legal by state statute which acknowledges only school transfers and "beyond compulsory age," (either 18, or 16 years with parent approval), the student's reason for withdrawal is coded as "other" and he or she is considered a school dropout. If a request later for the student's school transcripts is received from another school, that student should be reclassified as a transfer. However, whether or not this late information enters the student's computerized record is dependent on such consideration as clerical time. On the other hand, some dropout students masquerade as transfers. These would include students initially classified as transfers but for whom a "no show" is more likely since no requests for school transcripts were ever made.

A different instance of "error" occurs when high school students indicate they will enroll in community colleges where they may or may not actually attend and where they may or may not complete a high school diploma or its equivalent. Unless their former high school is notified, (and often this does not occur) these students may be classified as dropouts. A further instance of possible misidentification is the senior who fails to graduate with his or her class. All seniors who have not left school prior to their class's graduation date are automatically "advanced" out of the district's enrollment lists (whether they eventually graduate or not). If a non graduate decides to continue at his or her high school the following school year, he

or she needs to enroll again. This non graduate would only become a drop out if he or she then subsequently did drop out. In the present study, which continued only one term past the class '87 commencement, four non graduating seniors were identified as returning to school and then dropping out.

A further problem in classifying students as dropouts or not is the matter of <u>when</u> that classification decision is made since some students will decide to enroll in a subsequent term, perhaps again leave, perhaps again return. A follow up of an earlier sample of dropouts in this same school district found that over a third of those dropouts responding to a phone survey reported that they had returned to another school to complete their graduation requirements; 17 percent had done so within one year of leaving school (deJung, 1987). A much more exhaustive statewide study concluded that "nearly half (of Oregon dropouts) had finished or were working on a General Education Diploma. (Olsen 1987, pg. 24.)[7]

The present study used a number of student record sources including questioning of counselors and school record clerks to clarify our students' enrollment status. Ambiguous student records were frequently reconciled by this multiple search. For the purposes of forming comparison groups of dropout and non dropout students, the project criteria was the recorded act of him or her discontinuing all schooling.

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[7]Studies from other states have reported somewhat similar percentages (Pallas, 1987).

For our cohort students this meant a record of leaving school after completing a first questionnaire but before graduation and without transferring to another school. For the class of '87 this time frame began in March of 1984; for the class of '88 it began in February of 1985. Since all project data needed to have been collected by February 1988, students who remained in school until that time (within three months of the Class of '88's graduation date) were considered non dropout students. For this time period, a total of 188 students were identified from school records as dropouts, representing 7.6 percent of the total project sample.[e] One hundred and sixty three of these dropout students had completed their questionnaires as freshmen, 96 from the Class of '87 and 67 from the Class of '88.

In developing the data for analysis, two further categories of students were identified, "transferring out students," those leaving their present school for another school, and "non graduates," students still in school but lacking credits to graduate with their classmates. Of the total project sample of 2484 students, 442 were identified as transfers (18 percent), and another 122 as non graduates (5 percent). The remainder 1732 (70 percent) either graduated or were fully expected to within three months.

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[e]Excluding the 503 students transferring to another school from this total increases the dropout rate to 9.3 percent. Sixty four students transferring in from another school after the early questionnaire administration had very incomplete data and could not be included though it is known that at least three of these dropped out. (See Table 10.)

Table 3 presents the distribution of the frequencies of students in the four dispositional student categories for the three high schools. As may be seen from these distributions, two of the three schools, Schools B and C, had almost identical proportions of their students in all categories. Some differences are apparent for School A however, with larger proportions of dropouts and correspondingly smaller proportions of transfers and graduates. In effect, School A students account for almost 40 percent of the three school total of dropouts and very nearly half of the non graduates. For the three schools averaged together, the dropout ratio of dropouts to graduates was one dropout to nine graduates, a figure considerably lower than the approximately one in five reported for an earlier graduating class in the same district (Schellenberg, 1975). This large difference between two studies in the same school district may be attributed to several factors, in addition to actual differences between the earlier and later student group. A first is the immediate loss from the present study of students not completing a questionnaire, students who were absent from class or otherwise uncooperative. Quite likely this approximetaly 15 percent student group included an above average at-risk group. Second, in the present study school leaving was not considered before the first questionnaire administration (March '84) or during the last six months of the '87-'88 school year which went beyond the project data collection period. The Schellenberg study was conducted during the year after his classes' graduation. The

further reason is that the Schellenberg study was able to identify a number of transfer and non graduate students as subsequent dropouts. In terms of the present (Table 3) data, over half of the combined group of 564 non graduates and transfers would need to have become dropouts for the dropout ratio to reach one in five. Other underreporting of dropout students as discussed in the prior section is likely operating. The following questionnaire analysis involving comparisons of either at-risk or dropout students have excluded transfer students. The non graduating group, in some sense also a failure group, however is retained as an intermediary group. Schellenberg's study (ibid) found few of these students subsequently graduating.

TABLE 3.

Project Sample

Classified as Dropouts (DO), Non Graduating, Graduating and Transferring Out in Each of Three High Schools

	Drop Out	Non Grad	Grad	Trans Out	All
School A	74 (10)	60 (8)	490 (66)	119 (16)	743
School B	67 (7)	36 (4)	712 (71)	194 (19)	1009
School C	47 (6)	26 (4)	530 (72)	129 (18)	732
All	188 (8)	122 (5)	1732 (70)	442 (18)	2484

Note: Percentages are included in parentheses.

C. Findings: Self Report Data:

As described in the prior section (Table 1) a total of 1012 freshmen in March of 1984 and another 951 freshmen in February of 1985 completed a questionnaire describing their school related attitudes, goals and expectations. These figures reduced slightly to 1006 and 949 respectively due to missing data. Though student responses were tallied separately for the three high schools, the expansiveness of reporting these tallies immediately suggested a combined, three school sample. Early comparisons among these schools in the prior attendance study had revealed few student differences between schools other than more college prep classes and perceptions of strict enforcement of attendance by School B students for either the first or second questionnaire administration responses (deJung and Duckworth, 1986b). The appropriateness of a combination of all three schools was further supported by data from the third questionnaire administration, which again evidenced only the aforementioned school differences in responses of students. Accordingly, the questionnaires from the three schools were combined for analysis of at-risk/not-at-risk and of dropout/non dropout students.[9]

In developing these analyses, response alternatives to the four choice Likert type items were reduced to an agree-disagree dichotomy. Dichotomies were also developed for all but four of

[9]School differences will again be considered in examining student reports of their dropout friends; see Section D below.

the five choice items which dealt with parents' education, post high school plans, part-time employment and frequency of class cutting. These exceptions will be evident when their response data is reported.

A further sampling combination was considered, namely merging the class of '87 data with that of the class of '88. Table 4 presents the responses of Class of '87 and Class of '88 at-risk and not-at-risk freshmen to those 16 items administered to both classes. Since dichotomous items required reporting of only either response category, only that category denoting negative or less favorable (to school, family relations, etc.) are reported.[10] As may be seen in the tabled data, only two of the 24 response comparisons yielded differences between the percents for the two cohort groups larger than five percentage points.[11] Inspection of responses broken out by subgroups of at-risk/not-at-risk and the dropout, non graduating, graduate classifications similarly revealed only occasional minor differences between the class of '87 and class of '88 students. This absence of substantive differences between responses by the two freshman classes suggests both a sampling stability of the data and the appropriateness of combining both classes into one

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[10]These same reporting categories are followed in all tables of questionnaire responses.

[11]The largest difference is a decrease of eight percent (from 46 to 38) of freshmen in 1985 reporting that their school is not strict in enforcing rules about cutting or skipping (which indeed reflected actual school change during that period). The other "larger" change is a decrease of seven percent (from 35 to 28) in freshmen in 1985 reporting mainly taking college prep courses.

analysis group. Distinctions between the questionnaire responses of these two cohorts will not be further made in this report.

1. Self Reports of At-Risk and Not-At-Risk Students:

One hundred and sixty three of the 188 dropouts from the combined classes of '87 and '88 had completed their freshman questionnaire, as did 86 of the 122 non graduates and 1715 of the 1732 graduates. Of this total of 1964 students, 437 or 22 percent were categorized as at-risk and 1517 or 78 percent as not-at-risk.

TABLE 4.

Freshman Questionnaire Responses Class of '87 and Class of '88

Item Response	Class '87 N = 1006	Class '88 N = 949	Both N = 1954
2--HS Learning is not relevant	77 (8)	65 (7)	142 (7)
3--Not easy to earn passing grades	183 (18)	184 (19)	367 (19)
4--Choose not to go to school	108 (11)	137 (14)	245 (13)
5--Friends have dropped out	109 (11)	105 (11)	214 (11)
6--Do not spend time in extra-curricular activities	460 (46)	422 (44)	882 (45)
7--Parents don't keep track of me	96 (10)	123 (13)	219 (11)
9--Not bothered about skipping	214 (21)	160 (17)	374 (19)
10-Not bothered about cutting	434 (43)	359 (38)	793 (41)
11-School not strict regarding cutting and skipping	459 (46)	360 (38)	819 (42)
12-Teachers don't help me	416 (41)	342 (36)	758 (39)
14-Main classes as college prep	357 (35)	264 (28)	621 (32)
15-Post H.S. plans:			
4 year college	597 (59)	612 (64)	1209 (62)
2 year college	123 (12)	106 (11)	229 (12)
Job/other plans	197 (20)	169 (18)	366 (19)
No plans	65 (6)	47 (5)	112 (6)
16-More than 10 hrs. part-time work	192 (19)	187 (20)	379 (19)
19-Parents' Education:			
H.S. not completed	24 (2)	25 (3)	49 (3)
H.S. completed	212 (21)	201 (21)	413 (21)
Attended college	201 (20)	184 (19)	385 (20)
Completed college	515 (51)	481 (51)	996 (51)
21-Cut more than once/week	113 (11)	156 (16)	269 (14)
22-Lowest acceptable grade:			
A or B	298 (41)	322 (36)	620 (38)
C	375 (51)	490 (55)	865 (53)
D	60 (8)	73 (8)	133 (8)

Note: Only items administered to both classes are included.

Table 5 presents the numbers and percentages of dropout, non graduating and graduating students within the at- risk/not-at-risk groupings who responded to the questionnaire items as described in the left most column.

As perhaps is evident, for all items in both tables the row frequencies add to the same totals as those reported in the Table 4. Items 1, 8, 17, 18, and 23 through 26 are new to Table 5 since they were administered to only one student cohort. The numbers appearing in the upper most row of the table are the maximum number of the combined class '87 and class '88 students responding in each student category; these numbers vary only slightly due to occasionally skipped or inappropriately marked items. However, the number of students responding to the eight items administered to only one class (see asterisk to left of item column) would be approximately half that of the number appearing in the column heading. For dichotomous items, the numbers of students choosing the alternative response (ie, disagreeing with the left most column statement) may be determined by subtracting from the total number of students responding to the item. For the four items reported as other than dichotomies (Items 15, 17, 19 and 22) the different alternatives are described in the left most column. A listing of the full wording of all items and alternatives is included as Appendix A. The tabled entries include percentages, based on the numbers of students within each subgroup (column), and are reported in parentheses to the right of each frequency.

TABLE 5.

Freshman Questionnaire Responses for At-Risk and Not-At-Risk Students Furhter Divided by Dropouts, Non Graduates, and Graduates

Item Response	At-Risk				Not-At-Risk			
	D.O. N = 96	Non Grad. 36	Grad. 305	All 437	D.O. 67	Non Grad. 50	Grad. 1410	All 1517
*1--Do not intend to graduate	2 (4)	0	3 (2)	5 (2)	1 (3)	0	2 (<1)	3 (<1)
2--H.S. Learning is not relevant	19 (20)	3 (8)	28 (9)	50 (11)	8 (12)	5 (10)	79 (6)	92 (6)
3--Not easy to earn passing grades	47 (49)	15 (42)	99 (32)	161 (37)	15 (22)	16 (32)	175 (13)	206 (14)
4--Choose not to go to school	24 (26)	5 (14)	57 (19)	86 (20)	9 (14)	10 (21)	140 (10)	159 (11)
5--Friends have dropped out	19 (20)	5 (14)	45 (15)	69 (16)	13 (20)	6 (12)	126 (9)	145 (10)
6--Do not spend time in extra-curricular activities	64 (67)	15 (44)	177 (59)	256 (60)	34 (52)	23 (46)	569 (41)	626 (41)
7--Parents don't keep track of me	24 (25)	1 (3)	44 (14)	69 (16)	9 (13)	4 (8)	137 (10)	150 (10)
*8--Don't relate to parents	19 (42)	2 (17)	20 (13)	41 (20)	6 (15)	6 (23)	67 (9)	79 (10)
9--Not bothered about skipping	34 (37)	7 (20)	87 (30)	128 (30)	8 (12)	14 (29)	224 (17)	246 (17)
10--Not bothered about cutting	60 (63)	13 (37)	169 (57)	242 (57)	29 (44)	24 (48)	498 (36)	551 (37)
11--School not strict regarding cutting and skipping	41 (43)	14 (39)	127 (42)	182 (42)	29 (44)	26 (53)	582 (43)	637 (43)
12--Teachers don't help me	48 (52)	18 (50)	146 (49)	212 (49)	29 (43)	19 (38)	498 (36)	546 (36)
14--Main classes as college prep	15 (16)	9 (25)	60 (20)	84 (19)	19 (28)	11 (22)	507 (37)	537 (36)
15--Post H.S. plans:								
4 years college	31 (34)	16 (46)	140 (47)	187 (44)	28 (41)	19 (40)	975 (71)	1022 (69)
2 year college	11 (12)	6 (17)	44 (15)	61 (14)	15 (22)	5 (11)	148 (11)	168 (11)
Job/other plans	39 (43)	11 (31)	90 (30)	140 (33)	22 (32)	19 (40)	185 (13)	226 (15)
No plans	10 (11)	2 (6)	25 (8)	37 (9)	3 (4)	4 (9)	68 (5)	75 (5)
16--More than 10 hrs. part-time work	28 (31)	12 (33)	73 (24)	113 (27)	22 (33)	7 (15)	237 (17)	266 (18)
*17--Part-time job is very important	9 (22)	4 (31)	13 (15)	26 (22)	12 (31)	7 (29)	103 (18)	122 (20)
Part-time job is not important	5 (12)	3 (23)	15 (23)	23 (19)	4 (10)	4 (17)	138 (25)	146 (24)
*18--Most best friends are out of school	2 (5)	0	6 (4)	8 (4)	0	0	12 (2)	12 (2)
19--Parent's Education:								
H.S. not completed	6 (7)	1 (3)	17 (6)	24 (6)	3 (5)	1 (2)	21 (2)	25 (2)
H.S. completed	34 (42)	13 (41)	77 (27)	124 (31)	19 (31)	14 (30)	256 (20)	289 (20)
Attended college	13 (16)	3 (9)	64 (22)	80 (20)	15 (25)	12 (26)	278 (21)	305 (21)
Completed college	28 (35)	15 (47)	133 (46)	176 (44)	24 (39)	19 (41)	777 (58)	820 (57)
20--Days truant:								
>2 days this term	19 (45)	5 (39)	47 (27)	71 (34)	11 (28)	1 (5)	75 (11)	87 (11)
>5 days since Christmas	12 (26)	3 (14)	16 (11)	31 (15)	3 (11)	1 (4)	18 (3)	22 (3)
21-->1 class cut/week	46 (52)	9 (28)	57 (27)	112 (34)	15 (22)	12 (26)	130 (11)	157 (12)
22--Lowest acceptable grade:								
A or B	10 (13)	6 (18)	44 (22)	60 (19)	15 (24)	6 (14)	539 (45)	560 (43)
C	46 (58)	22 (65)	127 (64)	195 (62)	40 (65)	31 (70)	599 (50)	670 (51)
D	24 (30)	6 (18)	29 (15)	59 (19)	7 (11)	7 (16)	60 (5)	74 (6)
*23--Have met with counselor about cutting	21 (45)	3 (14)	38 (26)	62 (29)	9 (33)	6 (25)	39 (6)	54 (8)
*24-->3 days anticipated abs.	24 (51)	5 (28)	71 (48)	100 (47)	8 (30)	5 (21)	163 (25)	176 (25)
*25--Parents don't cover truancies	36 (75)	21 (95)	101 (71)	158 (74)	21 (78)	14 (58)	500 (76)	535 (75)
*26--Parents seldom support my plans	13 (26)	3 (14)	36 (24)	52 (23)	12 (44)	6 (25)	98 (15)	116 (16)

Note: Asterisked items were only administered to either Class of '87 or to Class of '88 students.

Examination of the Table 5 entries reveal that for the large majority of questionnaire items, larger proportions of at-risk students than of non-at-risk students selected the negative or non school oriented response categories as described in the left margin. Though only minor proportions of either group selected responses such as "High school learning is not relevant" (item 2), "Would chose not to go to school" (item 4), or "Don't relate to parents" (item 8), the at-risk group proportions tended to be double that of the not-at-risk group. Larger response differences consistently favoring the at-risk student were reported for the several items relating to courses, grades and post school plans. These include responses to "Not easy for me to earn passing grades" (item 3), "Having no special post high school plans" (item 15), and "Would be satisfied with less than a B grade" (item 22). Similarly large at-risk/not-at-risk group differences, but in the opposite direction, were found for the two positive responses to "Taking college prep courses" (item 14), and "Planning to attend a four year college" (item 15).

Another grouping of items with larger at-risk/not-at-risk group differences were those related to skipping or class cutting, "Reporting two or more days truancy" (item 20), "More than three days anticipated absence" (item 24), "Class cutting more than one day per week" (item 21), "Not bothered about skipping" (item 9), nor "about class cutting" (item 10). Another discriminating item in this group is "Have met with a counselor regarding absences" (item 23). Other items referring to parents

relations or to peers or outside of school activities tended to be answered more similarly by at-risk and not-at-risk students. An exception was a negative response to "Spending time in extra curricular activities" (item 6) chosen by a substantial majority of the at-risk students, proportionately more than by not-at-risk students. On the other hand, responses such as "I do not intend to graduate" (item 1), and "Most of my best friends are out of school" (item 18) were rarely selected by any student. Other item responses such as "My parents won't cover for me" (item 25), and "School rules about skipping or cutting are not strictly enforced" (item 11) though selected by much larger proportions of students failed to discriminate between at-risk and not-at-risk students.

Further inspection of the Table 5 entries, within the subdivisions of at-risk and not-at-risk students, revealed repeated distinctions between the dropout student and classmates who stay in a school, either not graduating or graduating. For nearly every item, responses with negative, non school orientations, were selected by a larger proportion of at-risk students who subsequently quit school, than any other student grouping. Distinctions between the graduating and non graduating at-risk students were much less apparent as were comparisons within the not-at-risk dropout student group. Clearly, as a group, the 96 at-risk students who later dropped out are the more "negative" with respect to their questionnaire responses. Considering them

separately within the at-risk subgroup accentuates the already pronounced differences between at-risk and not-at-risk students.

2. Self Reports of Dropout, Non Graduating and Graduating Students:

A more direct comparison of questionnaire responses of the dropout students with those remaining in school but not graduating and those graduating is provided in Table 6. As is likely apparent, the Table 6 entries are merely a rearrangement of those in Table 5 aggregating by the dropout, non graduating, graduating divisions instead of by at-risk and not-at- risk.

The principal comparisons of interest are those among entries in the "All" or total columns. With only three exceptions which were near ties, the dropout students consistently selected larger proportions of negative or non school oriented responses. Differences between the responses of the non graduates and graduates were much less pronounced with several "negative" responses as popular for graduates as for non graduates. The larger percentage differences between the dropout and in-school student groups were responses that they, "Did not spend time in extra curricular activities" (item 6), that, "Neither parent had completed college" (item 19) and that they, "Are seldom supported (by their parents) in what they want to do" (item 26), "Were truant more than two days last term" (item 20), "Expected to be absent more than three days the next three months" (item 24), "Cut class more than once a week" (item 21), "Had met with a counselor regarding absences" (item 23), and

"Consider D an acceptable grade" (item 22). On the other hand, the three groups were very similar in reporting that "Their school was strict in enforcing skipping and cutting rules" (item 11), that they were "Not bothered about skipping" (item 9) "or cutting" (item 10), were "Enrolled in college prep courses" (item 14), "Had no post high school plans" (item 15) or "Had parents who wouldn't cover for their truancies" (item 25).

Some of the Table 6 data perhaps merits special mention in that it tends to run counter to general expectations of high school youth. Eighty three percent of the dropout students and 91 and 94 percent of the non graduating and graduating students, respectively, agreed (as freshmen) that high school learning is "relevant to what they would do afterwards in their life" (item 2). Only three of the 163 dropouts, none of the 86 non graduates, and only five of the over 1700 graduates reported (as freshmen) that they "Did not expect to graduate" (item 1). However, a fifth of these first two non graduating groups and an eighth of the graduates agreed that "If they had a choice they would not go to school at all (item 4). All 163 dropout students apparently exercised that choice, most of them within their next two years of school.

TABLE 6.

Freshman Questionnaire Responses for Dropouts, Non Graduates, and Graduates Further Divided by At-Risk and Not-At-Risk

Item Response	Dropouts			Non Grads			Grads		
	At Risk N=96	Not-At-Risk 67	All 163	At Risk 36	Not-At-Risk 50	All 86	At Risk 305	Not-At-Risk 1410	All 1715
*1--Do not intend to graduate	2 (4)	1 (3)	3 (4)	0	0	0	3 (2)	2 (<1)	5 (1)
2--H.S. Learning is not relevant	19 (20)	8 (12)	27 (17)	3 (8)	5 (10)	8 (9)	28 (9)	79 (6)	107 (6)
3--Not easy to earn passing grades	47 (49)	15 (22)	62 (38)	15 (42)	16 (32)	31 (36)	99 (32)	175 (13)	274 (15)
4--Choose not to go to school	24 (26)	9 (14)	33 (21)	5 (14)	10 (21)	15 (18)	57 (19)	140 (10)	197 (12)
5--Friends have dropped out	19 (20)	13 (20)	32 (20)	5 (14)	6 (12)	11 (13)	45 (15)	126 (9)	171 (10)
6--Do not spend time in extra-curricular activities	64 (67)	34 (52)	98 (61)	15 (44)	23 (46)	38 (45)	177 (59)	569 (41)	747 (44)
7--Parents don't keep track of me	24 (25)	9 (13)	33 (20)	1 (3)	4 (8)	5 (6)	44 (14)	137 (10)	181 (11)
*8--Don't relate to parents	19 (42)	6 (15)	25 (29)	2 (17)	6 (23)	8 (21)	20 (13)	67 (9)	87 (10)
9--Not bothered by skipping	24 (37)	8 (12)	42 (26)	7 (20)	14 (29)	21 (25)	87 (30)	224 (17)	311 (19)
10--Not bothered by cutting	60 (63)	29 (44)	89 (55)	13 (37)	24 (48)	37 (44)	169 (57)	498 (36)	667 (40)
11--School not strict regarding cutting & skipping	41 (43)	29 (44)	70 (44)	14 (39)	26 (53)	40 (47)	127 (42)	582 (43)	709 (43)
12--Teachers don't help me	48 (52)	29 (43)	77 (48)	18 (50)	19 (38)	37 (43)	146 (49)	498 (36)	644 (38)
14--Main classes as college prep	15 (16)	19 (28)	34 (32)	9 (25)	11 (22)	20 (24)	60 (20)	507 (37)	567 (34)
15--Post H.S. plans:									
4 year college	31 (34)	28 (41)	59 (37)	16 (46)	19 (40)	35 (43)	140 (47)	975 (71)	1115 (67)
2 year college	11 (12)	15 (22)	26 (16)	6 (17)	5 (11)	11 (13)	44 (15)	148 (11)	192 (11)
Job/other plans	39 (43)	22 (32)	61 (38)	11 (31)	19 (40)	30 (37)	90 (30)	185 (13)	275 (16)
No plans	10 (11)	3 (4)	13 (8)	2 (6)	4 (9)	6 (7)	25 (8)	68 (5)	93 (6)
16--More than 10 hrs. part-time work	28 (31)	22 (33)	50 (32)	12 (33)	7 (15)	19 (23)	73 (24)	237 (17)	310 (19)
*17--Part-time job is very important	9 (22)	12 (31)	21 (26)	4 (31)	7 (29)	11 (30)	13 (15)	103 (18)	116 (19)
Part-time job is not important	5 (12)	4 (10)	9 (11)	3 (23)	4 (17)	7 (19)	15 (23)	138 (25)	153 (25)
*18--Most best friends are out of school	2 (5)	0	2 (2)	0	0	0	6 (4)	12 (2)	18 (2)
19--Parent's Education:									
H.S. not completed	6 (7)	3 (5)	9 (6)	1 (3)	1 (2)	2 (3)	17 (6)	21 (2)	38 (2)
H.S. completed	34 (42)	19 (31)	53 (37)	13 (41)	14 (30)	27 (35)	77 (27)	256 (20)	333 (21)
Attended college	13 (16)	15 (25)	28 (20)	3 (9)	12 (26)	15 (19)	64 (22)	278 (21)	342 (21)
Completed college	28 (35)	24 (39)	52 (37)	15 (47)	19 (41)	34 (44)	133 (46)	777 (58)	910 (56)
20--Days truant:									
>2 days this term	19 (45)	11 (28)	30 (37)	5 (39)	1 (5)	6 (17)	47 (27)	75 (11)	122 (14)
>5 days since Christmas	12 (26)	3 (11)	15 (21)	3 (14)	1 (4)	4 (9)	16 (11)	18 (3)	34 (4)
21-->1 class cut/week	46 (52)	15 (22)	61 (39)	9 (28)	12 (26)	21 (27)	57 (27)	130 (11)	187 (13)
22--Lowest acceptable grade:									
A or B	10 (13)	15 (24)	25 (18)	6 (18)	6 (14)	12 (15)	44 (22)	539 (45)	583 (42)
C	46 (58)	40 (65)	86 (61)	22 (65)	31 (70)	53 (68)	127 (64)	599 (50)	726 (52)
D	24 (30)	7 (11)	31 (22)	6 (18)	7 (16)	13 (17)	29 (15)	60 (5)	89 (6)
*23--Have met with counselor about cutting	21 (45)	9 (33)	30 (41)	3 (14)	6 (25)	9 (20)	38 (26)	39 (6)	77 (10)
*24-->3 days anticipated abs.	24 (51)	8 (30)	32 (43)	5 (28)	5 (21)	10 (24)	71 (48)	163 (25)	234 (30)
*25--Parents don't cover truancies	36 (75)	21 (78)	57 (75)	21 (95)	14 (58)	35 (76)	101 (71)	500 (76)	601 (75)
*26--Parents seldom support my plans	13 (26)	12 (44)	25 (32)	3 (14)	6 (25)	9 (24)	36 (24)	98 (15)	134 (16)

Note: Asterisked items were only administered to either Class of '87 or to Class of '88 students.

3. Self Reports of Freshmen and Upperclassmen:

Two questions arise with respect to the freshman questionnaire data presented in the preceding sections. The first has to do with possible "maturational" changes in student responses, differences between freshmen and upperclassmen in their school related attitudes and expectations. The subsample of students completing questionnaires as freshmen and again two to three years later provides a ready analysis sample for this inquiry. The second question, to some extent similar to the first, concerns a possible leveling effect of continued years in high school; do the early identified at-risk students become more like their non-at-risk classmates in subsequent grades? Of particular interest are the possible changes in attitudes and expectations of the dropout students as they continue in school. Unfortunately few of this school leaving group were still in school at the time of the later questionnaire administration. The comparisons of changes between at-risk and not-at-risk students, in effect, is limited to those students from both groups electing not to quit school prior to that administration date.

As noted earlier (Table 1) 557 Class of '87 students and 582 Class of '88 students completed questionnaires as freshmen and again nearly three or two years later, as seniors or juniors. One hundred and sixty-six of these 1139 freshmen students had been identified as at-risk of not completing high school. Subsequent to their final questionnaire completion 1065 were graduated or were expected to have sufficient credit hours to

graduate, 48 were expected not to graduate and 26 had quit school. Table 7 presents the frequencies and percentages (in parentheses) of the freshmen and upperclassmen responses to the 20 items appearing on both questionnaires. The two sets of three columns report responses for students classified in their freshman year as at-risk and not. The entries in the last set of columns report the responses of the total student sample. The third column in each set reports the differences between the two sets of percentages of students choosing the response cited at the left. The numbers at the column headings are the maximum numbers of students responding to each item. For asterisked items administered to only one student group, either only the class of '87 or only the class of '88, this number of responding students would need to be approximately halved.

As may be seen from the left most column of Table 7, few of the 27 comparisons reported for the total 1139 students were substantive. Responses to "Parent's Education" (item 19) would, of course, not be expected to change even as little as it did.[12] Only one student reported that he did "not intend to graduate" (item 1) on both administrations. Student responses such as "A lot of my friends have (or will) dropped out of school" (item 5), "My parents don't keep track of me" (item 7), and "Truant more than three days" (item 20) also remained the same for the two administrations.

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[12]The discrepant totals for the two administrations for this and some other items is accountable by different numbers of non responders and occasional marking errors.

TABLE 7.

Questionnaire Item Responses of At-Risk and Not-At-Risk Students Completing Questionnaires as Freshmen and Again as Upperclassmen

	At Risk			Not-At-Risk			Total		
	Fr. N=166	Jr/Sr	Change %	Fr. N=973	Jr/Sr	Change %	Fr. N=1139	Jr/Sr	Change %
*1--Not intending to graduate	0	0	0	1 (<1)	1 (<1)	0	1 (<1)	1 (<1)	0
2--H.S. learning not relevant	10 (6)	30 (18)	-12	48 (5)	92 (9)	- 4	58 (5)	122 (11)	- 6
3--Not easy to earn passing grades	54 (33)	24 (15)	18	103 (11)	50 (5)	6	157 (14)	74 (7)	7
4--Choose not to go to school	21 (14)	13 (8)	6	81 (8)	71 (7)	1	102 (9)	84 (7)	2
5--Friends have dropped out	19 (12)	24 (15)	- 3	68 (7)	68 (7)	0	87 (8)	92 (8)	0
6--Not much time in extra-curricular activities	74 (46)	86 (54)	- 8	369 (38)	322 (33)	5	443 (39)	408 (36)	3
7--Parents don't keep track of me	21 (13)	19 (11)	2	77 (8)	85 (9)	- 1	98 (9)	104 (9)	0
*8--Don't get along with parents	6 (9)	2 (3)	6	36 (7)	34 (7)	0	42 (8)	36 (7)	1
9--Not bothered by skipping	36 (22)	50 (30)	- 8	140 (14)	213 (22)	- 8	176 (16)	263 (23)	- 7
10--Not bothered by cutting	73 (44)	86 (52)	- 8	320 (33)	435 (45)	-12	393 (35)	521 (46)	-11
11--School lax regarding cutting & skipping	64 (39)	46 (28)	11	315 (32)	258 (27)	5	379 (33)	304 (27)	6
12--Teachers don't spend extra time with me	68 (41)	55 (33)	8	337 (35)	211 (22)	13	405 (36)	266 (23)	13
14--Main classes:									
As college prep	34 (20)	52 (31)	-11	365 (38)	513 (53)	-15	399 (35)	565 (50)	-15
No special subjects	83 (20)	46 (28)	- 8	225 (23)	152 (16)	7	258 (23)	198 (17)	6
15--Post H.S. plans:									
4 year college	84 (51)	59 (36)	15	686 (71)	636 (65)	6	770 (68)	695 (61)	7
2 year college	25 (15)	36 (22)	- 7	87 (9)	120 (12)	- 3	112 (10)	156 (14)	-4
Job/Other	39 (23)	53 (32)	- 9	118 (12)	146 (15)	- 3	157 (14)	199 (19)	-5
No plans	5 (3)	6 (4)	- 1	35 (4)	24 (2)	2	40 (4)	30 (3)	1
16--10 hrs. or more/wk part-time work	46 (28)	64 (39)	-11	144 (15)	325 (33)	-18	190 (17)	389 (34)	-17
*17--Part-time job is important	39 (71)	45 (82)	-11	296 (74)	294 (73)	1	335 (60)	339 (61)	-1
19--Parent's education:									
Didn't complete H.S.	8 (5)	4 (2)	3	18 (2)	12 (1)	1	26 (2)	16 (1)	1
Completed H.S.	37 (22)	35 (21)	1	167 (17)	170 (17)	0	204 (18)	205 (18)	0
Attended college	23 (14)	29 (17)	-3	192 (20)	167 (17)	3	215 (19)	196 (17)	2
Grad. from college	82 (49)	82 (49)	0	540 (56)	565 (58)	- 2	622 (55)	647 (57)	-2
20--3 days truant this term	23 (14)	19 (11)	3	44 (5)	45 (5)	0	67 (6)	66 (6)	0
21--More than 1 class cut/week	10 (6)	8 (5)	1	26 (3)	18 (2)	1	36 (3)	26 (2)	1

Note: Asterisked items were only administered to either Class of '87 or to Class of '88 students.

Most responses initially chosen by very small proportions of students as freshmen such as, "I don't get along well with my parents" (item 8), or "I have no post school plans" (item 15), or "A part-time job is important to me" (item 17), or "Cut class once or more per week" (item 21) were selected by even fewer students as upperclassmen. Somewhat more substantive changes may be noted in a decreasing proportion of upperclassmen choosing such negative or non favorable school responses such as "High school learning is not relevant to later life" (item 2), "I find it difficult to earn passing grades" (item 3), "If I had a choice I would chose not to go to school at all" (item 4), "I take no special subjects" (item 14), "I don't spend much time in extracurricular activities" (item 6), and "I'm not bothered by skipping" (item 9). The largest changes were more upperclassmen reporting that they "were employed 10 or more hours per week" (item 16) and now "mainly were in college prep courses" (item 14), "were not bothered by cutting" (item 10), and that they "receive help from teachers who spend extra time with them" (item 12).

To some extent the changes for the at-risk and not-at-risk students were similar, particularly with respect to those low frequency responses which were responded similarly by the two student groups as freshmer such as "having no post school plans" (item 15) and "cutting class at least once a week" (item 21). However, for a number of other items, the response choices of upperclassmen in the at-risk group became less negative and at

the same time more similar to those for the not-at-risk students. For example, fewer at risk students as upperclassmen reported they would "chose not to go to school at all if given the choice" (item 4) or be "truant three or more days" (item 20), whereas increased numbers of both groups of upperclassmen in general reported it easier to earn passing grades (item 3).

Similar shifts are also evident in Table 7 for higher frequency responses such as more upperclassmen in both the at-risk and non-at-risk groups reporting "receiving more extra teacher help" (item 12), being "less bothered by skipping" (item 9), or "by cutting" (item 11), finding their school "not strict" in these regards (item 11), "taking more college prep courses" (item 14), and "being employed 10 or more hours a week" (item 16). This last item yielded the largest response change for the not-at-risk upperclassmen. Positive shifts were largest for the at-risk students reporting that "passing grades are easy to earn" (item 3), and that "high school learning is relevant" (item 2). At the same time an increasing proportion of at-risk students reported "not spending time in extra curricular activities" (item 6). This latter increase was somewhat unique in that, at the same time, a larger proportion of not-at-risk upperclassmen now reported spending time in these activities. The largest almost singular "negative" shift by the at-risk upperclassmen was a third less at-risk students reporting plans to attend a four year college (item 15) compared to a much smaller (six percent) reduction by non-at-risk students. Somewhat paradoxically, a

larger percentage of both groups of upperclassmen reported now taking mainly college prep courses. Consistent with their reduced plans for college, an increased percentage of at-risk students reported post school job plans.

The general pattern of change that emerges from the foregoing is one of increased positive attitudes and perhaps "comfortableness" by both at-risk and not-at-risk upperclassmen, less problems earning passing grades, more college prep courses, more support from teachers, less concerns about attendance, but lowered expectation of attending a four year college accompanied by perhaps more employment awareness. In response to an added question on their last questionnaire (not in Table 7) only three percent of all upperclassmen stated that graduation from high school is <u>not</u> important in finding a good job. At the same time, less than one in twelve of either freshmen or upperclassmen report "a lot of their friends <u>not</u> finishing high school." Nor did the proportion of students reporting their parents "<u>not</u> keeping track of them" or that they "don't get along with them" increase over the past two or three years. What does appear to have occurred for those students continuing in school is a reduction of our earlier distinction between at-risk and not-at-risk students. At the same time it has become an increasingly inappropriate distinction as both groups of students are much nearer graduating.

D. Findings: Reports of Dropout Friends:

The preceding sections have described differences and similarities in the expectations and school attitudes, and concerns and selected family related descriptions by "at-risk" and "not-at-risk" students. These comparisons were based on their self reports on questionnaires, administered to them as freshmen. Differences and similarities between dropouts, non graduates and graduates have also been described. Comparisons were also made of changes in self report questionnaire responses by at-risk and non-at-risk students made as freshmen and again as juniors or seniors.

This section of findings deals with more immediate behaviors and incidents leading to early school leaving, reasons why students were quitting school and what personnel interventions or actions may or may not have been taken. Other than from incomplete school records (most students don't bother to return to complete exit interviews) such information is typically taken from follow-up studies conducted several years later and, again, from only that small portion of traceable and cooperative former students. The likelihood of a respondent's inaccuracies and bias in his or her recall is an added problem in interpreting this data.

The present study attempted to obtain more recent, probably less prejudicial (since respondents were less personally involved) data by asking current students about friends who had quit school. These questions were asked at the end of their third

questionnaire. Students were encouraged to be honest since no identification of their dropout friends was required.[13] Six hundred and sixty six (42 percent) of the 1582 students returning the third questionnaire reported that they had a friend who had quit school[14] and responded to all or most of the five questions about them. Tables 8A through 8E present summaries of their responses. The first of the questions, regarding their friend who dropped out of school and soliciting reasons why he or she did so, was answered by 468 of these students. Table 8A presents a distribution by school of the 575 reasons provided by these students. As may be seen, few school differences are apparent. A principal difference is the larger number of dropout friends with pregnancies in school A. Also somewhat fewer School A students cited peer or school pressures as reasons for leaving. In terms of general student population, school A drew heavier from the blue collar families than did the other two schools and also had a less academically focused school atmosphere. Also, as reported earlier in Table 3, School A had slightly higner percentages of dropouts and of non graduating seniors than did the other two schools. Another difference was the more frequent mention of peer or school pressures as reasons for friends

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[13]On the other hand, this same anonymity permits replicative reports of the same dropout student by more than one of our respondents.

[14]This total (1582) includes all Juniors and Seniors completing the third questionnaire and includes 419 students transferring in to their high school subsequent to administration of the earlier questionnaires.

leaving school cited by students in School B, the most academically oriented school with some 80 percent of parents reported to be college graduates and 61 percent of their freshmen starting in a college prep program. However, as can be seen in Table 8A school differences were minor. In all schools the major known reason for their friends quitting school was "poor attitude, not caring" cited for a third of their drop out friends followed by "poor grades" cited for one out of six dropout students. An interesting sidelight here is that 186 students with friends who had dropped out (28% of all responders) reported not knowing why their friend had left school. It might also be noted that drugs, a major concern of most school and lay groups, was reported as a reason for early school leaving for under 10 percent of their friends in all three schools.

The second, third and fourth questions about their dropout friends dealt with counseling or advice given them. Tables 8B and 8C refer to advice to stay in school given by school and non school persons. Less than a third in each school were known (by the student informant) to have been advised to stay in school; nearly as many were known not to have been so advised. Parents appeared as prevalent in advising their sons and daughters to stay in school as were school personnel. Other adults apparently also offered similar, "stay in school," advice to students in a fourth of the known cases. However, in all schools, students were clearly the most prevalent "positive" advisors; over half of the dropout students about whom the informant was knowledgeable had received encouragements to stay in school from other

students. Comparing Tables 8B and 8C, it is apparent that twice as many students were advised to stay in by non school persons than by school personnel.

TABLE 8A

Reasons for Dropping Out of School as Reported by Friends Still in School

Reasons for Dropping Out	School A N (%)	School B N (%)	School C N (%)	All N (%)
Poor Attitude--lazy, didn't care	53 (34)	57 (33)	41 (30)	151 (32)
Poor grades	24 (15)	24 (14)	25 (18)	73 (16)
Family problems	21 (14)	16 (9)	19 (14)	56 (12)
Pregnancy, marriage	27 (17)	6 (3)	13 (9)	46 (10)
Social-peer pressure	11 (7)	21 (12)	12 (9)	44 (9)
Drugs	14 (9)	14 (8)	11 (8)	39 (8)
Preferred job over school	14 (9)	10 (6)	14 (10)	38 (8)
Preferred finishing at LCC, OC, other	6 (4)	13 (7)	7 (5)	26 (6)
School structure, increased pressure	2 (1)	17 (8)	6 (4)	25 (5)
Teachers, administrators	7 (5)	10 (6)	8 (6)	25 (5)
Finances	5 (3)	8 (5)	3 (2)	16 (3)
Health	1 (1)	4 (2)	1 (1)	8 (2)
Expulsion	3 (2)	3 (2)	1 (1)	7 (2)
Learning difficulties	1 (1)	0	3 (2)	4 (1)
Trouble with the law	2 (1)	1 (1)	0	3 (1)
Other	1 (1)	6 (3)	7 (5)	14 (3)
No. of S's providing reasons	155	175	138	468
No. of reasons reported	192	210	173	575
No. of S's reporting "don't know"	79	56	51	186
No. of S's reporting friends who dropped out	234	231	189	654

TABLE 8B

Numbers and Percentages (in parentheses) of Dropouts Who Were Advised by School Personnel NOT to Quit School (as reported by friends still in high school)

No. of Dropouts:	School A	School B	School C	All
Advised not to quit	69 (30)	69 (30)	58 (31)	196 (30)
Not advised not to quit	52 (22)	72 (31)	61 (32)	185 (28)
Unknown	113 (48)	90 (39)	70 (37)	273 (42)
No. S's reporting friends who dropped out	234	231	189	654

TABLE 8C

Numbers and Percentages (in parentheses) of Dropouts Who Were Advised by Parents, Fellow Students, or Other Persons NOT to Quit School (as reported by friends still in high school)

Advised NOT to Quit	School A	School B	School C	All
By parents	61 (37)*	49 (28)	43 (30)	153 (32)
By fellow students	84 (51)	84 (49)	78 (54)	246 (51)
By other person	43 (26)	41 (24)	38 (26)	122 (25)
Not advised	22 (13)	35 (20)	20 (14)	77 (16)
Total no. advised NOT to quit**	142	138	125	405
Unknown	70	58	44	172
No. S's reporting friends who dropped out	234	231	189	654

*Percent of dropouts for whom informants were knowledgeable.

**Not equal to column totals since multiple advisers were possible and don't know's are not counted.

It should be noted that since all of the friends referred to by student informants did subsequently dropout, non of these various advisors were successful.

Apparently, students also received advice to quit school. Table 8D indicates that over a fourth of those dropping out were known by their friends to have been encouraged to quit school. Again, these figures are similar for the three schools. These "encouragements" were about as frequent by school persons as by parents or school friends, but the "non school friend" was reported as the most common known "negative" advisor.

Students were also asked to propose possible school actions which might have kept their friends in school. Their various recommendations, offered by a fourth of the 654 upperclassmen, are listed in Table 8E.

Though students were diverse in their recommendations, the two principal recommendations, together accounting for 38 percent of all suggestions made, referred to more encouragement and better counseling from school personnel. Suggestions citing needs for curriculum diversity and less punitive structure, though representing another 27 percent of suggestions made, actually were only expressed by 43 students, less than one student in 15; the previously cited counseling recommendation also was hardly a popular response being made by one student in eleven. Three out of four students reported they didn't know of anything which their school might have done to keep their friend in school.

TABLE 8D

Numbers and Percentages (in parentheses) of Dropouts Who Were Advised by School Personnel, Parents, Other Adults, Fellow Students, or Non-School Friends to Quit School (as reported by friends still in high school)

Advised to Quit	School A	School B	School C	All N (%)
By school personnel	13 (22)*	11 (17)	12 (19)	36 (19)
By a parent	11 (19)	13 (20)	7 (11)	31 (17)
By another adult	9 (15)	2 (3)	5 (8)	16 (9)
By a school friend	9 (15)	19 (29)	11 (18)	39 (21)
By a non-school friend	28 (47)	24	28 (45)	80 (43)
Total no. S's reporting negative advising**	59	65	62	186
Unknown	175	166	127	468
No. S's reporting friends who dropped out	234	231	189	654

*Percent of dropouts for whom informants were knowledgeable.

**Not equal to column totals since multiple advisers were possible.

TABLE 8E

School Actions Recommended by Upperclassmen (H.S. Students) Which Would Have Kept Their Friend in School

Recommendations	School A	School B	School C	All N (%)
Better counseling	8	11	12	31 (19)
Encouragement from counselors and teachers	9	12	10	31 (19)
Classes to meet individual needs	3	8	7	18 (11)
Less punitive structure	6	6	4	16 (10)
Provide facts on graduating/ not graduating	1	3	5	9 (6)
Encourage alternative programs, e.g. night school	3	1	5	9 (6)
Stricter skipping policies	3	2	0	5 (3)
Provide drug education	1	2	1	4 (3)
Better school staff	1	1	0	2 (1)
Other	8	19	11	38 (24)
No. of S's providing reasons	42	65	53	160
No. of recommendations reported	43	65	55	163
No. of S's reporting "don't know"	192	166	136	494
No. of S's reporting friends who dropped out	234	231	189	654

This latter report is consistent with an earlier survey of dropout students from the same school district which reported most respondents saying that they "could not think of anything the school might have done" to keep them in school. (deJung, 1987)

The final question, asked of the total sample of 1582 upperclassmen, inquired about events or conditions which might cause them to quit school. Twenty-eight percent of the students provided various answers. These are listed in Table 9. The principal reasons given concerned reversals in their family's (or their own) health or finances. Less than a fourth of all conditions which they imagined might cause them to quit school appeared to be school related. Again, only minor school differences were evident. And again, most students reported that they could think of nothing which would make them quit school.[15]

[15]Thirty two of those students responding to this item subsequently did quit school. None of them had projected any reason they would do so.

TABLE 9

Conditions Reported by Students Which Would Cause Them to Drop Out of School

Conditions	School A	School B	School C	All N (%)
Death in family	16	20	23	59 (13)
Finances-family of self	21	18	20	59 (13)
Health-family or self	14	22	12	48 (11)
Job or career without schooling	12	21	10	43 (10)
Grades, credits	13	19	9	41 (9)
Pregnancy-self or girlfriend	14	14	8	36 (8)
Increased school structure	12	16	8	36 (8)
Unexpected affluence	11	18	6	35 (8)
Teachers, administration	6	15	11	32 (7)
Boredom, discouragement, better alternatives	9	12	5	26 (6)
War, world disaster	7	8	9	24 (5)
Family, problems (parent divorce, abuse)	6	8	8	22 (5)
Deteriorating social atmosphere	5	6	3	14 (3)
Personal problems	2	3	4	9 (2)
Drugs	2	0	4	6 (1)
Loss of good classes	0	1	3	4 (1)
Expulsion	2	0	1	3 (1)
Mandatory drug testing	1	1	0	2 (<1)
Other	8	13	8	29 (6)
No. of S's providing reasons*	138	171	131	440
No. of reasons provided	161	215	152	528
No. of S's reporting "don't know"	374	439	329	1142
No. of S's responding	512	610	460	1582

*Not equal to column totals since multiple reasons were possible and don't know's are not counted.

E. Identification of At-Risk Students:

An earlier section of this report examined differences and similarities between the questionnaire responses of students identified either as at-risk or not-at-risk. This present section focusses on the early identification of high school students as at-risk and not-at-risk and the relationship of this classification to four subsequent high school conditions: students who quit school; students who transfered to another school; students who graduated or were assured of graduation; and students who remained or remain in school without graduation.

The earlier tables reporting the questionnaire responses of freshmen (Tables 4, 5, and 6) cited samples of 437 at-risk and 1517 not-at-risk students. An additional 111 students lacking usable freshman questionnaires had also been classified as either at-risk (53) or not-at-risk (58). This total of 490 at-risk students represents 24 percent of the total freshman sample. Nearly one third of these at-risk students came from each of the three high schools.

As described in section B, the classification rule for calling a student "at-risk" was a grade point average for their freshman year of below 1.60 and/or 15 or more days of absences that year. In terms of the two criteria, half of the 490 students were included because of high absence rates alone, another sixth because of low GPA's alone and a third had exceeded both the absence and grade cut off values. Altogether, 83

percent of the 490 students classified as at-risk had 15 or more days of absence and 50 percent had GPA's below 1.60.

Table 10 presents the subsequent school status of these 2065 at-risk and not-at-risk students, whether they had graduated, were in school but had not or would not graduate with their class, had transferred to another school, or were formally listed as dropouts. The graduate group includes Class of '88 seniors assured of graduation (as of March, 1988). The non graduate group includes both Class of '87 seniors not graduating in June of '87 and Class of '88 seniors with insufficient credits to possibly graduate in June, 1988. An additional subsample of 419 "transferring in" students has been added to the 2065 at-risk/not-at-risk students to complete the school's enrollment patterns. These 419 students transferred to the project schools after their freshman year and consequently lacked an at-risk classification which was based on freshman year grades and absences.

TABLE 10.

Student Sample Identified as Dropout, Non Graduating, Transferring Out and Graduating Within the At-Risk/Not-At-Risk and Transferring In Categories

	At-Risk N (%)	Not-At-Risk N (%)	Trns. In N (%)	Total N (%)
Dropouts	111 (23)	68 (4)	9 (2)	188 (8)
Non Graduates	42 (9)	52 (3)	27 (6)	122 (5)
Transfers (out)	151 (31)	192 (12)	100 (24)	442 (18)
Graduates	186 (38)	1263 (80)	283 (68)	1732 (70)
Total	490	1575	419	2484

As may be seen from the Table 10 data, proportionately five and a half times as many at-risk students dropped out of school after their freshman year as did not-at-risk students. An additional 31 percent of these at-risk students (compared to only 12 percent of the not-at-risk students) transferred to other schools, with most probably, a higher proportion of them never completing high school. The transferring student is especially troublesome in considering dropouts. For the Table 10 data they represent 18 percent of the total three school sample and 31 percent of all at-risk students. One hundred, or 24 percent of the students transferring out, were students who had transferred into one of the three project schools after February of their freshman year.

Overall, the freshmen identified as at-risk have a decidedly more negative school outcome than their not-at-risk classmates.

A fourth of them dropout, nearly a third transfer to other schools, and another nine percent haven't earned enough credits to graduate with their class. With the deletion of the transferring students whose eventual school status is problematic, and the combining of the non graduates with dropouts (neither group likely to complete high school), the percentage of non high school graduates among students classified as at-risk rises to 45 percent. The comparable figure for the not-at-risk group is 9 percent. Thus, the odds of an at-risk student graduating with his or her class are 55 in 100; for the not-at-risk student they are 91 in 100.

Another related way to consider the at-risk identifications used in this study is in terms of the false-positive and false-negative errors used in prediction studies. The false-positive error predicts a certain outcome which does not occur; in effect it is a false classification. The false negative fails to predict a certain outcome when it does indeed occur; another false classification. For the Table 10 data the false-positive error correspond to the proportion of at-risk students who graduate (at least 55 percent) and the false-negative error to the proportion of not-at-risk students who do not (no more than 9 percent).[16]

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[16]Though a convenient way of examining classification procedures, it is not quite appropriate in the present situation since, if procedures are followed, the at-risk designation is always correct. Error enters in only with the obvious insupportable assumption that all at risk persons will indeed not graduate. (See Section F, Discussion.)

Different cut off scores would, of course, yield different error rates as would different criteria. Tables 11 and 12 present a pair of matrices developed to examine the effects of varying the GPA and absence cut off scores. The first matrix is for the same two criteria used in this project to classify students as at-risk/not-at-risk for subsequent analyses of their questionnaire responses. The second matrix retains the same GPA variable but replaces "days absent" with average class period absence. In both tables the pair of frequencies within each cell is the number of non graduates (dropouts plus seniors lacking sufficient credits to graduate with their class) and the number of graduates. The marginal categories for GPA (at the right) and for absences (below the matrix) identify the GPA and absences for both non-graduates and graduates within each cell of the matrix. For example, the entry in the lowest cell at the right indicates there were 67 students with GPA's below 1.60 and fifteen or more days absence, of whom 41 did not graduate and 26 did.

The number or proportion of non graduates identified by different possible pairs of cut off scores and the extent to which any particular cut off leads to false identifications may be determined by summing the appropriate cell frequencies for those cells included either above or below the cut off scores. Using the cut off values defining the at-risk students (freshmen) for the questionnaire response analyses, (namely GPA less than 1.6 and days absent greater than or equal to 15) the appropriate

Table 11 cell entries would include 115 (or 53 percent) of the 218 of the non graduates.[17]

TABLE 11.

Matrix of Frequencies of Non Graduating (N) and Graduating (G) Students with Various Combinations of Freshman GPA and Number of Days Absent

GPA		ABS Days/YEAR							
		<1	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10-14	>15	Σ
>3.5	N	1	2	1	2	2	2	0	10
	G	50	93	66	46	38	24	10	327
3.1-3.5	N	0	3	2	0	1	2	2	10
	G	25	72	56	57	39	42	17	308
2.6-3.0	N	1	5	4	3	5	8	5	31
	G	14	49	46	38	57	51	31	286
2.1-2.5	N	0	6	1	7	4	11	14	43
	G	9	20	36	29	36	27	32	189
1.6-2.0	N	1	4	3	8	6	8	14	44
	G	6	11	16	15	22	27	14	111
<1.6	N	2	4	3	3	9	18	41	80
	G	0	5	6	13	13	12	26	75
	ΣN	5	24	14	23	27	49	76	218
	ΣG	104	250	226	198	205	183	130	1296
	ΣΣ	109	274	240	221	232	232	206	1514

Inspection of Table 11, however, reveals that a considerably larger proportion of non graduates may be included by moving the days absent cut off one column to the left, from "15 days or more" to "10 days or more". This extended cut off value now

[17]These Table 11 totals differ from those of Table 3 and Table 10 since only students with both recorded end-of-year GPA's and absences are admissible to the matrix.

includes 146 (or 67 percent) of the non graduates. At the same time, this cutoff includes 350 students (71 percent of 496 students below these revised cut off values) as at-risk who did graduate (false-positives) and exclude 72 non graduates (false-negatives). This latter false identification group, however, is only 7 percent of the 1118 students above the cut off values and translates to odds of one in fourteen of a non graduate having such poor GPA and absence scores.[18]

It perhaps also should be noted that it is reasonably efficient to define freshmen as at-risk only in terms of their absences. The 10 or more days cut off, for example, without considering GPA, would have identified 125 (57 percent) non graduates and yielded false-positive and false-negative classifications of 71 and 9 percent, respectively. The/se error rates are only slightly higher than those for the dual cut-off criteria. Since the added criterion also increases the proportion of eventual non graduates in the at-risk group, it appears to be an all around gain with no loss in precision.

As was noted earlier in this report, an alternative absence measure defined as the student's average class absence had been recorded for the Class of '87 and '88 freshmen as part of a prior study (deJung and Duckworth. 1986). This class absence measure was introduced in that study as considerably more

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[18]Further inspection of the different row and column frequencies supports this second selection of cut off values as most efficient in terms of inclusion of eventual non graduates and false-positive and false-negative classifications.

accurate than the full day/half day reporting which is used presently in most schools. The Table 12 matrix permits an examination of at-risk classifications using the class average measure in place of the full-half day absence measure of Table 11. The slight differences in sample size are due to occasional missing data. Since the class absence measure was computed as a term average (based on the trimester system operating in the three project schools) instead of a school year average, the class average categories at the top of the matrix are accordingly smaller.

TABLE 12.

Matrix of Frequencies of Non Graduating (N) and Graduating (G) Students with Various Combinations of Freshman GPA and Average Period Absences

		Average Period Absences/Term							
GPA		≤1	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-9	10-14	>15	Σ
>3.5	N	1	7	2	0	0	0	0	10
	G	82	179	49	19	5	0	1	335
3.1-3.5	N	1	4	0	2	1	1	0	9
	G	52	143	80	31	8	1	0	315
2.6-3.0	N	1	7	13	7	6	0	0	34
	G	26	129	70	47	18	4	0	294
2.1-2.5	N	0	7	10	10	12	4	0	43
	G	14	63	44	34	26	7	2	190
1.6-2.0	N	1	6	9	10	9	6	3	44
	G	8	38	26	20	15	4	1	112
<1.6	N	1	3	10	11	11	25	19	80
	G	1	11	17	11	12	13	10	75
	ΣN	5	34	44	40	39	36	22	220
	ΣG	183	563	286	162	84	29	14	1321
	ΣΣ	188	597	330	202	123	65	36	1541

One possible pair of at-risk cut off values similar to those for the full-half day absence measure are values of GPA below 1.60 and an average class absence (per term) of more than six periods. Separately summing the upper and lower frequencies in the appropriate cells above these cut off values reveals 122 non graduates and 167 graduates included in the at-risk portion of the matrix. These numbers represent 55 percent of all 220 non graduates and a false-positive rate of 58 percent indicating more than a 40 percent chance of students in this category not graduating. On the other hand, only 98 (8 percent) of the 1252 students outside the two cut-off values failed to graduate. Not using the GPA criterion would have further reduced the percentage of non graduates in the at-risk category to 44 percent with a corresponding minor (1 percent) reduction of misclassifications. Again, the use of GPA in addition to absences is indicated.

A further consideration, however, is lowering the absence cut-off from "above six periods" to "above four periods." This change would now identify 69 percent of non graduates as at-risk with the percents of the false-positives and false negatives increasing to 68 percent and lowering to 6 percent, respectively. These values are slight improvements over those based on a 66 percent non graduate inclusion using full day-half day absences. Either absence measure appears serviceable when used with GPA.

F. Summary, Discussion, and Recommendations:

1. Recapitulation: This study undertook to examine the school experiences and concerns of high school youth at risk of not finishing high school. The study sample included freshmen entering three, four year high schools in the Fall of 1983 and Fall 1984 and who had completed a self report questionnaire.

These schools, part of a large Oregon school district, enrolled students from a population with a diversity of blue collar/white collar middle class families, but with less than a six percent enrollment of minority students. A revised questionnaire was administered to these students as juniors or seniors and to additional new transfer classmates in December 1986. The two questionnaires principally dealt with student attitudes, expectations, and difficulties and included a small number of questions regarding their parent involvement and their peers. A final set of questions dealt with friends who had quit school. School records of end-of-term grades, absences and enrollment changes were maintained for all project students through February, 1988.

The students were divided into at-risk and not-at-risk groups on the basis of their freshman year GPA and days absent record. The cut-off values for the at-risk classification were GPA below 1.60 and 15 or more days absent (in a 174 day school year). These criteria were met by 490 or 24 percent of the freshman students. Examination of student questionnaire responses revealed few differences between schools or between

responses by the '83 and '84 freshman classes. These various subsamples were combined for comparisons between responses of at-risk and not-at-risk students.

a) For the large majority of questionnaire items, larger proportions of at-risk students selected negative or non school oriented responses. One exception was that practically no responding students in either group said they would not graduate. Though only minor proportions of either student group reported that they found high school learning not relevant, would not go to school if given the choice, or that they did not get along with their parents, the at-risk proportions tended to be double those of the not-at-risk students. More at-risk students also reported it was difficult for them to earn passing grades, that "D" was an acceptable grade for them, that they had no special post high school plans and were not spending much time in extra curricular activities. At-risk students also reported higher truancy and class cutting rates and indicated they were less bothered by these absences. More not-at-risk students reported that they were taking college prep courses and were planning to go to college and that one or both parents were college graduates. Other items referring to parents' relations or to peers or to outside of school activities tended to be answered similarly by at-risk and not-at-risk students.

b) Response comparisons made within the at-risk student group revealed repeated distinctions between the dropout student

and classmates who remain in high school, either not graduating or graduating. For nearly every item, responses with negative, non school orientations, were selected by a larger proportion of at-risk students who subsequently quit school than any other student grouping. Distinctions between the graduating and non graduating at-risk students were much less apparent as were comparisons within the not-at-risk dropout student group. Clearly, as a group, those at-risk students who later dropped out are the more "negative" with respect to their questionnaire responses. Considering them separately within the at-risk subgroup accentuates the already pronounced differences between at-risk and not-at-risk students.

c) Further, more direct comparisons (ignoring the at-risk/not-at-risk classification) of dropouts with in-school non graduates and graduates simply highlighted the previous differences. For nearly all items the differences between dropouts and non dropouts were larger than those between at-risk and not-at-risk students. Larger proportions of dropouts, than of at-risk, or of non graduating seniors evidenced negative school attitudes and behaviors and less satisfactory parent interaction and support.

d) Comparisons of responses by students as freshmen with their responses as upperclassmen revealed few substantive changes over the two to three year period. Most responses initially chosen by small numbers of these students as freshmen

such as, "finding high school learning not relevent to later life," "finding it difficult to earn passing grades," reporting that, "if given a choice they would not go to school at all," "not getting along with parents," "having no post school plans," or "having higher class cutting rates" were selected by even fewer of these students as upperclassmen. Similar shifts away from the negative were also evident for more popular responses such as receiving "extra teacher help" and taking more "college prep courses."

The general pattern of change that emerges from the foregoing is one of increased positive attitudes and perhaps "comfortableness" by both at-risk and not-at-risk upperclassmen, less problems with attaining grades through more college prep courses, more support from teachers, less concerns about attendance, but lowered expectation of attending a four year college accompanied by perhaps more employment awareness. More of these changes appear to have occurred for the at-risk students continuing in school as upperclassmen. The effect is a reduction of distinctions between at-risk and not-at-risk students.

e) The questions dealing with friends who had quit school were examined separately for the three high schools. Few differences between schools were found either with respect to reasons for leaving school or encouragements to keep them in school.

In all schools the major known reason for their friends quitting school was "poor attitude and not caring" cited for a

third of the dropout friends. The second most mentioned reason was "poor grades" cited for one out of six dropout students. Drug problems were mentioned for 8 percent of dropout friends, and pregnancy for 10 percent. Over one fourth of all responders reported not knowing why their friend had left school.[19]

School counseling to persuade their friend to stay in school was reported for less than a third of the dropouts in each school, nearly as many were known not to have been so advised. Parents appeared as prevalent in offering advice; other adults nearly as frequently. However, in all schools students were clearly the most frequent "positive" advisors, encouraging over half of the dropout students (in the known cases) to stay in school.

On the other hand, over a fourth of those dropping out were known by their friends to have been encouraged to quit school; in almost half of the known cases by some "non school friend," but in one fifth of known cases by school persons, by parents, and by school friends.

Possible school actions that might have kept their friend in school were proposed by only a fourth of respondents. Improved counseling services, nominated by a fourth of respondents, was clearly the most mentioned. When asked about possible reasons they themselves might quit school, nearly three fourths of the

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[19]This fourth is in addition to the 58 percent of all upperclassmen who elected not to complete this section of their questionnaire, quite possibly because they lacked friends who quit school.

students provided no reasons. The principal reasons for those who gave them were family health and finances; less than a fourth of the offered reasons for possibly quitting school appeared to be school related.

f) The pair of criteria for identifying at-risk students--freshman GPA and days absent--was examined in terms of alternate cut-off values and a substitute absence measure. The cut-off values of GPA below 1.60 and more than 10 days absence (rather than the 15 days or more used in the project's at-risk identification) appeared the most efficient for the project sample of over 1500 freshmen in terms of inclusion of eventual non graduates (67 percent) and limited false-positive and false-negative classifications (71 and 7 percent, respectively). However, it was also evident that very nearly the same ratios of misclassification would be achieved using the absence measure alone. The major damage would be a substantive loss of 10 percent less eventual non graduates included as at-risk.

Using the student's average number of class periods absent instead of numbers of full days absent and cut off values of more than four absences per class yielded slightly "improved" identification of at-risk students, an increase in the inclusion of eventual non graduates from 67 percent to 69 percent. Misclassifications were generally stable at 68 percent false-positives and 6 percent false-negatives. These latter percentages translate into a one in three chance that a student

classified as at-risk would not graduate and odds of 15:16 that a student classified as not-at-risk would graduate.

2. Discussion: This project set out to describe students at risk of dropping out of school in terms of their self report school attitudes, expectations, involvements, and successes and failures. It proposed to contrast at-risk students who subsequently graduate with those who, in a sense, validate their at-risk status by leaving school. The project also proposed to consider the identification of at-risk students in terms of available data and predictive strengths.

The descriptions summarized in the preceding pages, though they repeatedly anticipate more "negative" responses by the at-risk student group, fall far short of any clear separation of at-risk and not-at-risk students. The same lack of separation may be said of distinctions between the more error free classifications of students who really do quit school and those who graduate. The frequent ten to twenty percentage point differences between either group's choice of item responses, though highly significant in terms of these being non chance differences, leave an immense residual of group overlap or commonality.[20] Whereas we may accurately report that at-risk students

[20]Summative scores were not considered because of the multidimensionality and non additivity of the item pool and because what was sought was description, not a global score interpretable only in terms of positive/negative continuum. The typically, very low inter-item correlations and low item validities (correlations of item response with the dropout-non dropout criteria) also mitigate against developing a serviceable profile of the dropout or potential dropout in terms of a multiple combination of item responses.

are more likely than not-at-risk students to respond, "passing grades are hard to earn" or that, "if they had a choice they would not go to school at all" or that, "their teachers don't spend extra time outside of class helping them," we could at the same time report that for these, and indeed for nearly every item, more of both groups responded the same way. The former reporting suggests larger group separations than actually exist; the latter rescinds that separation. Though our previous data reporting has sought differences to highlight, the overall conclusion must be that the groups are more similar than different.

Of course, it is common knowledge that persons are more alike than different and that the more homogeneous we make our subgroups in terms of culture, ethnicity, socioeconomic leveling, age, etc, (as with cohorts of high school freshman) the more alike they will be. At the same time, (possibly more so as researchers), we remain rooted in our interest in differences. Perhaps in continued looking for significant differences, we have become programmed to overlook the significance of similarities.

Our findings that practically every freshman and later nearly all upperclassmen strongly assert their intention to graduate (though approximately one in seven didn't), that very large proportions of students from all subgroups report that "if given a choice they would not discontinue school," that "high school learning is relevant to what they will be able to do in later life," and that they "get along well with their parents"--

but that "their parents seldom support their plans."...these findings of similarities surely merit our attention.

The summary is that at-risk and not-at-risk students aren't so different from one another except with respect to the criteria for their initial classification[21] and that, furthermore, they become even more alike as upperclassmen. The similarities between students who subsequently drop out and those who graduate are almost as great. We could fault these findings in terms of the limitations of the particular items used. They could have been constructed or scaled to force more even handed response splits. But even given this a posteriori scale development, it seems most unreasonable to expect truly sharp group differentiation.

It appears unavoidable that some large proportion of students classified by any one set of non esoteric behavioral or self-report items would also have overlapping distributions of responses to other sets of items. In particular it would be expected that any description which applies to a large proportion of the at-risk group (unless it is definitionally independent of the at-risk/not-at-risk identifications) will also apply to even more students in the not-at-risk group.[22] The fact is

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[21] In the present study, most of the larger differences between at-risk and not-at-risk students involved attendance and grade achievement which were built in as basis for their initial classifications.

[22] Disparate proportions of the dichotomized subgroups do affect probabilities for reducing intergroup overlap, but the more important requirement is for very large group differences on the response continuum, such as nearly all of one group chosing

that persons similar on many counts may, and do, chose different actions.

This project summarization highlighting the very considerable similarity between at-risk and not-at-risk students and between those who graduate and those who drop out, speaks to the large excess of false identifications among persons classified as at-risk. This perspective suggests a lesser importance, if not a futility, in searching for differences between subgroups of succeeding and non succeeding high school students, at least in terms of their attitudes, expectations, aspirations, and social and family interactions.

The preceding observation does not deny the importance of knowing the demographics of failure groups. Currently such figures indicate rather stark social-cultural inequities and appropriately serve as sponsor for political action and more general educational response. However, alone they provide a poor basis for intervention grouping. Coupled with more directly related educational records such as attendance and academic progress and with the knowledge and insight that program managers may be expected to have regarding their particular program, appropriate student selection will usually result. Knowing a particular student's responses on a survey of attitudes, expectations, and the like is not likely to improve that selection.

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one response and nearly all of the other group chosing the alternative response. But this doesn't happen.

The second project objective--to consider the identification of at-risk students--was examined in terms of average freshman student grades and two absence measures, one based on school attendance (number of full days absent) and one based on class attendance (average number of period absences). As summarized in the previous subsection, the cut off scores available for the latter proved slightly superior to the full days absence categories in terms of inclusion of more dropouts (69 percent) in the at-risk category. Both sets of criterion variables served well in terms of allowing relatively few dropouts (approximately one in fifteen) within the much larger group of graduates, but at the same time both seriously erred in including a relatively high proportion of graduates (two thirds) within the at-risk group. This latter problem simply reflects the facts that: most students in our sample do graduate (86 percent of those in the classification analysis); many freshmen with poor attendance and/or grades (particularly the latter) do continue in school and graduate.

This latter "fact" of at-risk students subsequently graduating introduces a more general problem in assessing at-risk classification rules. To begin with, there is no "given" way to identify students "at-risk" of not completing high school. Any procedure or set of guidelines for doing so is perforce arbitrary and, in effect, operationalizes the identifier's definition of what constitutes "risk." Any procedure which follows its guidelines is correct according to those guidelines; a procedure

which identified a higher percentage of students subsequently not completing their schooling may be more useful but not more correct.[23]

Usefulness is a practical, not a theoretic condition. It depends on the employment of the classification information for some selected end. If the end is to reduce dropouts or the proportion of non graduating students, an early warning identification of eventual dropouts is useful if a) we decide before their dropping out not to "waste" further school resources on vainly trying to keep them in school or b) we follow up with an intervention which causes some otherwise eventual dropouts to stay on and complete school. If we have no successful programs, our identification is inconsequential, cannot be put to use, and therefore useless, except perhaps to point up a need.

But given possible "programs," usefulness must also be examined or assessed in terms of its competitors, in terms of outcomes, not dependent on the classification. The only defense for choosing a particular selection or identification procedure is that it serves a desired end. It is a better procedure if it promotes that end better than an alternative procedure. It can never be called the best procedure; only the best among its tried competitors. (Other yet untried procedures may work better.) And since, in the context of education at least, we

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[23]To suggest that classifying a non dropout student as "at-risk" say in his or her freshman year is incorrect because he or she later graduated is logically no different than declaring that a returning soldier was not at risk on the battlefield.

are speaking of persons and locations, a procedure which works best in one place with one group of persons may or may not work best in other places or with other persons. Where it is important to have the best, comparison data relevant to the alternative needs to be specially obtained. Where an identification procedure is to be used for selection into a varied set of programs, it well may be recommended for some, but inappropriate for others.

In the real world of the school there is rarely, if ever, only one identification stage. Only one stage may be formalized but individual recommendations and added pieces of student information almost inescapably enter. In other words, the process of screening and ultimate selection of a student into a program will be a complex input, not the least of which are the unspecified beliefs and prejudices of the person making the decision. Typically, satisfaction and agreement among users becomes the criterion of whether a classification and selection process is "working" or not. Consensus may assure support but not efficacy. It may well be a necessary but hardly a sufficient test of "working well."

As has been stated earlier, not only are the project schools employing a myriad of very different programs aimed at dropout reduction for their at-risk students, but data is lacking regarding the efficacy of these various programs. The problem is then to assess a classification procedure with data as to its use.

A popular alternative validation of classification procedures in the absence of subsequent program placement data is to consider classification as prediction: do the future behaviors or states of the persons classified conform to their classification? In our present context, this is to ask whether persons identified as being "at-risk of quitting school," subsequently do. This essentially is the assessment approach used in this report.

There is, however, a basic logical problem in [redacted] evaluating classifications in terms of predictions, namely the implicit assumption that the student hasn't changed since his or her classification data was current. If at-risk students do change to reduce their risk, (or not-at-risk students to increase their risk) the prediction model would fault the classification procedure. The prediction approach is appropriate only for intransigent, non changing students. To the extent a school is successfully turning about its at-risk students, its early identification of potential dropouts will appear not to be working. The examination reported for the "at-risk" identifications in this project--reporting false-positive and false-negative rates--includes error due to student change. Documentation, individually, for each "misclassified" student would be necessary to remove that error.

3. Recommendations: The present project was developed to examine differences between at-risk and not-at-risk students in terms of their school attitudes, expectations, and involvements.

The project summary, however, has instead emphasized the extensive similarity between these student groups, including those who dropout. How does this finding translate to guide or enable the schools to get on with their job of offering education to the citizenry?

The project data revealed little substantive differences in the school attitudes, expectations, and involvements between at-risk/not-at-risk and between the graduating and dropout students. Indeed, at-risk and not-at-risk freshman students are much more alike in all these areas than they are different. Groups of eventual dropouts and graduates (as freshmen) were only slightly more different. Those at-risk and not-at-risk students remaining in school into their junior or senior year become even more alike. Whereas attitudinal and other self-report of student subgroups may be of interest (and perhaps of value in individual instances), these surveys add little to distinctions between graduates and early school leavers. We cannot recommend collecting such data for subgroup description.

On the other hand, reasonably definitive groupings of future dropouts and graduates can be formed by freshman data, particularly by student absences and enhanced by student grades. In the present study these commonly available variables led to the inclusion of two thirds of eventual dropouts into at-risk groupings in which the probability of the student not graduating approached one in two. Student at-risk identification procedures along the lines of those used in this project should, in

most schools, be easy to develop as a first stage screening. Unless already in place, such at-risk identification is to be recommended along with collection of follow-up data monitoring the school careers of the at-risk student. Different at-risk cut off scores may well prove more appropriate for some schools or some student subgroup than for others. Further student selection criteria for entry into particular schools' dropout prevention programs needs to be more "tailor made" for each program. No student identification program should be l. . in place without continual feedback and monitoring.

Freshman absences appear to be a singularly strong predictor of early school leaving. Even used alone this measure is not an indefensible classification criterion. The predictive strength of early high school absences[24] suggests that schools promptly attend to student attendance, closely monitor it, and consistently enforce school rules about class cutting and absence.

Probably the most readily available strategy schools have for reducing dropouts is reducing absences. Whether through individualized attention and encouragement by classroom teachers, through administrative persuasion and harassment, or through increased parent awareness of the actuarial inevitability of absence habits closing the door to a high school and its diploma--however the argument and emphasis is made, attendance

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[24]Similar predictive strength has been reported for earlier junior high absences (Schellenberg, 1985)

should be of central importance at least for the student body as a whole.

A final researcher's observation may be allowed here. The schools' attention to the "at-risk" student has been impressive to this writer, both first hand and as described in the literature.[es] Immense energies and efforts have been made to keep the potential dropout from leaving school. Less heard about is the quality of learning and whether staying on in school has benefited the at-risk stayer educationally. Being persuaded to attend school rather than the streets or accept marginal work is surely not all we want. It is quite possible that little additional learning is "forced" on the at-risk stayer. If that is the situation we might question "Is the game worth the candle?" I am not suggesting that it isn't. My complaint is about the lack of corresponding data on the school achievement or learning of "born again" students. I should like to see more about the educational advantage of staying in school. Perhaps, if there is continued gain by staying in school we shouldn't feel worse (as I think we do) at the loss of a senior to the world of dropouts than at the loss of a freshman.

[es]See, for example, the ERIC clearing house annotated bibliography on Dropout Prevention (1987).

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Appendix A

School Dropout Study
Student Questionnaire

SCHOOL DROPOUT STUDY--STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE (December 1980)

This questionnaire is about your feelings toward your high school. Two years ago, many of you answered questions like this about absences. Because we need to match these two questionnaires, we are asking you to print your name on the line at the top of this page. After we match your questionnaires, we will tear off your name and use it for a drawing. No one at your school will ever see your answers, so please answer honestly and completely. Your answers will be part of a Federally supported project to help high schools work with students who are thinking of quitting school. Thank you.

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Questions are printed on both sides of this page. For questions 1-13, decide how much you agree or disagree and circle the letter to the right of each statement that best matches your feeling.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	I fully intend to graduate from high school.	A	B	C	D
2.	What I learn in high school has a lot to do with what I will be able to do afterwards in my life.	A	B	C	D
3.	I generally find it easy to earn passing grades.	A	B	C	D
4.	If I had a choice, I would not go to school at all.	A	B	C	D
5.	A lot of my friends have either dropped out of high school or probably will drop out before graduating.	A	B	C	D
6.	I spend a lot of time at school in sports, music activities, clubs, or crafts.	A	B	C	D
7.	My parent(s) or guardian(s) keep track of what and how I am doing in high school.	A	B	C	D
8.	I get along well with my parent(s) or guardian(s).	A	B	C	D
9.	I am not much bothered if I skip school some days.	A	B	C	D
10.	I am not much bothered if I cut a class sometimes.	A	B	C	D
11.	School rules about skipping or cutting classes are strictly enforced.	A	B	C	D
12.	My teachers spend extra time outside class helping me if I have trouble with school work.	A	B	C	D
13.	Graduating from high school is important for finding a good job.	A	B	C	D

****

For questions 14-21, please choose the answer that fits you best, and then circle the letter next to that answer.

14. My main classes are in:

    a. College prep subjects
    b. Business
    c. Industrial arts or home economics
    d. Other subjects
    e. No special subjects

15. Right after high school, I expect to:

    a. Get a full time job or join the military
    b. Go to a four-year college
    c. Go to a two-year college or voc. program
    d. Other plans
    e. No special plans

16. If you have a parttime job, how many hours a week do you work?

    a. More than 20 hours a week
    b. About 20 hours a week
    c. About 10 hours a week
    d. Fewer than 10 hours a week
    e. I don't have a parttime job

17. A parttime job is important to me now:

    a. To pay for basic needs, like clothing
    b. To pay for special things like a car
    c. To save up for after high school
    d. For other reasons
    e. It is not important

18. Most of my best friends:

    a. Are in some classes with me
    b. Go to my school but are not in my classes
    c. Go to another high school
    d. Have completed high school
    e. Have dropped out of school

19. How far did your parents or guardians go in school?

    a. Neither graduated from high school
    b. One or both graduated from high school
    c. One or both attended college
    d. One or both graduated from college
    e. Do not know

PLEASE CONTINUE ON THE OTHER SIDE WHEN YOU FINISH THIS SIDE

20. How many full days do you remember being absent without an accepted excuse last term?

a. No days
b. One or two days
c. Three to four days
d. Five or six days
e. More than six days (How many? ____)

21. Not counting full-day absences, about how often would you say you cut a class?

a. Never
b. Less than once a week
c. Once or twice a week
d. Three or four times a week
e. Five or more times a week (How many? __ _)

****

The next five questions have to do with a friend who has dropped out of this school in the last year or two. (If none of your friends has quit school, skip to the last question.) Answer each of these questions about your friend by circling as many answers as are true. If you had more than one friend quitting school, answer only for the friend you know best.

22. Do you know of any special thing that made your friend decide to quit school when he/she did?

a. Yes. What was it? _____

_____

b. No, nothing special.
c. Don't know.

23. Do you know if any teachers, counselors, or other school persons tried to persuade your friend NOT to leave school when she/he did?
a. Yes.
b. No, I don't believe any school persons tried.
c. Don't know.

24. Did anyone else encourage your friend NOT to quit school?
a. Yes, a parent.
b. Yes, a fellow student.
c. Yes, someone else.
d. No, I don't believe anyone tried.
e. Don't know.

25. Did anyone encourage your friend to quit school?
a. Yes, a school person.
b. Yes, a parent.
c. Yes, another adult.
d. Yes, a school friend.
e. Yes, a friend who is not in school.
f. Don't know anyone who did.

26. Do you know of anything your school might have done that would have kept your friend in school?
Yes _____. No_____. If "yes," please explain.

_____

_____

LAST QUESTION

27. Can you think of anything which may happen which would make you quit school?
Yes_____. No_____. If "yes," please explain.

_____

_____

Thank you for your help with these questions. Please place this paper in the envelope that your teacher has which will be returned to us.

APPENDIX A (continued)

Five Items Appearing Only on Freshman Questionnaires

22. The lowest grade I would be satisifed with in most of my classes is:

a. A
b. B
c. C
d. D
e. Don't know

23. How many times since school started in September has a school counselor or administrator called you in to talk about skipping or cutting?

a. No times
b. Once
c. Twice
d. Three times
e. More than three times

24. There are approximately 65 school days left till the end of school in June. Approximately how many days would you guess you would be absent for any reason between now and then?

a. None
b. 1-3 days
c. 4-5 days
d. 6-7 days
e. More than 8 days

25. My parents or guardians would cover for me if I took a day off from school.

a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Disagree
d. Strongly disagree

26. My parents or guardians nearly always support me in things I want to do.

a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Disagree
d. Strongly disagree

Appendix B

Listing of In Place School Programs for At-Risk Students

As noted in stating the project objectives, the considerable variations and adaptability that are seemingly endemic to the multitude of programs offered by our three participating high schools, together with the lack of firm student selection or outcome criteria or of records of comparison groups, preclude formal statement of program effectiveness. This listing of brief descriptions of ongoing programs is included here to document the various support and interventions simultaneously active in the project schools. The listing first describes district level activities and then continues school by school. The inclusions are based on interviews and written input to the project staff. Some are more directly or exclusively related to at-risk students than others. Some that appeared to the writer more unique are described more expansively. None are evaluated in this report.

District Programs:

The school district encourages diversity. Although there are some similarities in the high school programs, each school offers a different mix and emphasis. There are preventive aspects to the programs, but remedial efforts are more common. It is characteristic to choose a group of students who, without additional assistance, seem likely to drop out.

1. Open Transfer Policy: For many years, the school district has operated an open transfer policy. That is, any student who wishes to transfer to another school may do so if they have their parents' permission, if they can provide their own transportation to the new school, and if the receiving school has vacancies in that class or grade. Nearly all of these transfers occur at the beginning of a school year. or term. In unusual circumstances students are allowed to transfer at other times. Transfer requests are processed through the elementary and secondary Directors of Education.

2. Night School: This program is an alternative for students who must work or care for children, but is most often used in combination with day school for students attempting to make up credit deficits so they can graduate on time. The two night school programs--housed at School A and School B--serve students from the entire district. During the '86-'87 school year 420 students enrolled in night school.

3. Home Instruction: The home instruction program is state-mandated and operates to assist homebound or hospitalized students. Pregnant students (usually those with some unusual medical risk or especially young teen mothers) are eligible for this service with a doctor's statement. Students are registered in their home school and in their regular classes. The home teacher's role is to continue the instruction offered in the regular classroom so that the student is prepared to re-enter

regular classes when they are able. During the '86-'87 school year, 42 students were served by this program; 25 were of high school age.

4. In-Hospital Adolescent Recovery Program. The school district also provides an educational program for students in drug/substance treatment at the largest local hospital. Students from out-of-district who are part of the treatment program may also receive these services with consent from their local district. Home schools are contacted for assignments and some instruction is designed to fit into the treatment program offered at the hospital. Teachers see students two hours each day. Upon discharge, transcripts are prepared for each student and the home school is encouraged to add these credits to the student's regular classes. Some transition assistance is offered as students re-enter their home school. During the '86-'87 school year, 158 students were served by this program; 70 were district students.

5. Summer School: A very small summer school has usually been offered by the school district for high school students who have failed a particular class during the regular school year. Tuition has previously been required for these classes. During the summer of 1987 the district offered a free and expanded summer school for high school students to alleviate the credit deficits caused by the spring (1987) teachers' strike. (However, only ten percent of the students indicated this was their reason for attending.) The typical summer student was one who had credit deficits and/or had failed classes. An extensive offering of classes, each four hours long, was available at each of the high schools. Two separate sessions, each lasting two weeks, were available at each site, and students could choose one or both sessions. A total of 660 students participated in the program that was taught by regular district teachers.

6. Alternative High School: The Alternative School serves about 110 students from age 13 through age 21. After age 16, students are able to complete their education more quickly than in the regular high school program; they earn a high school completion certificate rather than a high school diploma. Each staff member is responsible for a small group of students and provides monitoring, support, and advocacy services for them. Though the whole program at the Alternative School can be said to be for at-risk students, there are several "sub" programs especially relevant to a smaller portion of these students such as the young parent program, a substance abuse program, vocational classes involving on the job placement and teaching of independent living skills.

School A

1. Project Success: First funded through a job training program in 1985-86, and subsequently by the district, the program was initially written by two high school counselors at School A. The program involved a school counselor/teacher working with identified students to complete their high school program and to support their participation in job readiness activities such as placement on a job-training site or a job readiness program. A wide range of students having a perceived need for special attention and positive reinforcements were targeted for this program, including students who were pregnant, had credit deficiencies, a poor grade point average, or poor attendance. Extensive supportive services were offered these students, both individually and in groups. Group activities emphasized self-esteem, interpersonal communication, effective decision-making and physical well-being skills. Students' development of intense family-like relationships with one another and the teachers was encouraged. The project was initiated at the same time in School A and School C. Presently the program is continuing not only at these two schools, but has begun in a third district high school. Though there have been one or two freshmen in the program, sophomores, juniors and seniors are the main participants. Approximately 20 students per school have been enrolled in the project each year for varying lengths of time.

2. Substance Abuse: The substance abuse program at School A is provided through the Student Assistance Program--a partnership between Drinking Decisions and the school district. The Student Assistance Program counselor is an employee of Drinking Decisions and provides awareness and education services as well as interventions with individual students when needed. Like the other high schools, School A has a core of trained staff which assists in keeping the whole staff informed and aware about substance abuse and identifying particular students who are in need of help.

3. School-Based Adolescent Clinic: Though all of the district high schools have the services of a school nurse, School A is the only one which has an adolescent clinic which is school-based. The clinic is the result of a grant from the State Health Division. It is staffed by a full-time pediatric nurse practitioner and a certified school nurse. In operation for three years, it was designed to meet the special needs of middle and high school youth in the School A attendance area. Students with financial capabilities are referred to their own doctors. The clinic is primarily concerned with prevention and intervention through student education. Though staffed by two and a half full time persons, over 4,500 student visits have been already made this school year (1987-88). The state funding for the program will continue another year, but at only 75% of its present level.

With parent permission, impoverished students can receive complete physical exams (including those required for athletic competition), treatment, and even necessary prescriptions. School A students are most often seen, but middle school students and elementary students are also served throughout the district on an emergency basis. The clinic has a direct connection to the Young Parent Program at the Alternative School and provides prenatal and well baby checks. In addition, the clinic has seen some of the babies and parents who are part of School C's Teen Parent Project. Various laboratory tests including those for strep throat, pregnancy, and drug and alcohol screens are available.

The staff works closely with the Student Assistance Program counselor, as well as the counseling staff housed in the building. A consulting pediatrician with a background in adolescent medicine is available to the clinic to provide back-up for the nurse practitioner when needed and reviews cases on a regular bases. Community physicians have been supportive and helpful to the clinic staff and the program in general.

Recently, the staff has become aware of the large number of students affected by physical and sexual abuse and by grief and loss. They have been instrumental in starting support groups for such students.

4. Mentoring Transition Project: School A received a Governor's Student Retention Initiative grant for its mentor program for the present school year. Students targeted for the program are those whose GPA fall below 2.00, have attendance problems, and/or are referred by the staff. Students are matched with community volunteers who spend special time with the student--a minimum of once a week to a maximum of once a day. Coordination is provided by a part-time staff member who identifies the students for the program, screens volunteers, matches volunteer to student, and monitors student progress.

School B

1. Attendance: In response to what many viewed as a counterproductive permissive student absence policy, School B initiated an aggressive attendance monitoring and follow-up program several years ago. After setting in place a computerized attendance system that supplied classroom teachers with hourly feedback regarding class absences, the school added two supporting components. The first is a commercially designed device which automatically telephones parents to notify them of student absences. The second component of the program is known as the Saturday School. Students are assigned to this extra half or full day of school as an alternative to suspension for unexcused absences. While in attendance students are required to seriously

attend to class work; socialization or frivolity is not tolerated. If students do not make up their unexcused absences in Saturday School, they are formally suspended the Tuesday and Wednesday of the following week.

2. Transition: All high schools have initiated programs that especially attend to its incoming students. School B works with its "feeder" middle schools each spring to provide a transition for the 8th graders who will move to the high school in the fall. An interesting component to School B's program is a middle school class taught by the School E at-risk coordinator. This class, called "Starting at School B," acquaints students with the high school. Transition activities are provided for parents as well, with parent nights provided in the spring and fall. Parents are also encouraged to participate in the Freshman Advisory Board which helps to plan freshman activities and deals with concerns which arise during the year.

3. Teen Outreach: The Teen Outreach program is co-sponsored by School B and the city Junior League. The program targets 20 ninth graders who are "reclassified" (they have not earned the credits necessary to move to the 10th grade). Students are placed in community agencies as volunteers and attend a twice-weekly class designed to provide a support group for these students. The Junior League provides assistance in the form of money for snacks, and personnel to assist in the class meetings. The program was very active in the past, but it is less so currently.

4. Substance Abuse Program: Though each high school has a substance abuse program, School B is the only one with a district-funded Substance Abuse Specialist. The primary goals of the specialist are to identify, assess and refer students with chemical abuse problems and to work with the core team of Impact trained staff on individual students' problems and on building-wide information and awareness. A support group is also available for students who are recovering, as well as a parent sponsored education and support group focusing on issues of substance abuse and the impact on the family members.

5. Ninth Grade Support: School B's program for 9th graders includes a required study hall for those with a GPA of 2.0 or less. This class period gives such students a structured opportunity to complete class work and also provides elective credit towards graduation. General supports for 9th graders within the regular school program include such things as partners provided in 9th grade English classes, variable credit available in foreign language classes, a math resource center staffed 8 periods a day, and a science resource center.

6. City Police/District Liaison: School B and School C participate in the Police/District Liaison Project. The project started in the '86-'87 school year and has as its goals interruption of substance buying and selling, decreasing delinquent behavior, providing community resource to the schools and improving the relationship between the community and the school system. Officers are assigned to the buildings; they do not wear a uniform, but do carry a gun.

School C

1. Transition: School C, like the other high schools, has a spring transition program for middle school 8th graders in its feeder schools. One special event in this transition is a visit by all 8th graders to the high school for an orientation assembly put on by staff, administrators, and associated student body officers.

2. New Students: The student government group has designed a program to welcome newcomers. School C students adopt new students and attempt to include them in extracurricular activities as well as orienting them to information about the school and its classes, programs and special events. In addition, a parent volunteer makes a contact with each new student after a week or two on campus to make sure that the student is acclimatizing to the new school. The parent volunteers also organize social activities for new students and prepare a packet of informational materials about School C.

3. Substance Abuse Program: Like School A, School C also has a Student Assistance Program counselor who provides substance awareness information, directs support groups (intervention/prevention, children of alcoholics and recovery) and works cooperatively with the Impact-trained core of staff members.

4. Project Success: (See description above, School A.)

5. On Leave: School C is the only school actively using the On-Leave option for students. This program was designed to provide at-risk students with a "structured time away from school for reassessment of their personal, educational and career goals." Introduced last year, the On-Leave program was run on a district-wide basis with one staff person assigned to supervise all the students from all the high school. The home high school specifies individual activities and requirements for the students on leave from school. The district counselor monitors the accomplishment of each student's goals and meets with all the students on a weekly basis to provide support and encouragement. In addition, regular parent meetings are required and parents are encouraged to support their student's successful completion of the on leave experience. At the end of the term

that the student was on leave, a meeting with the counselor from their home school was planned so that re-entry into the regular program was assured. Approximately 20 students per term were served by the program last year.

6. Teen Parent Program: School C received one of the Student Retention Initiative grants through the Governor's office for their new teen parent program. Students who are pregnant, or already parents are targeted for this program which gives them an opportunity to attend a special parenting seminar in addition to attending their regular high school classes.

There is also an Infant/Toddler center at School C where babies can receive care while their parent(s) attends classes. Ten children are served between the ages of 1 month and 2 years. Their parents assist in the child care center and are encouraged to feed their child during lunch when possible.

7. School C Development Program: The School C Development Program for children 2 to 5 years has been in operation for several years. This program provides child care for area children and also serves as a training program for high school students interested in learning about young children.

8. Choices and Challenges: This program is designed for 9th grade students who were identified by their feeder schools as being at risk of not completing high school. The students meet as a group for two periods a day with one counselor/teacher and an aide. They work on setting goals, improving relationships within and outside of the family, and career and nutrition awareness. The counselor and teacher assigned to the program are mentors for the students in the program. Students meet first period in the home economics room to prepare and eat breakfast together. The program served 19 students last year.

9. City Police/4J Liaison Officer: This is a twin of the program at School B described earlier.

10. Incentives and Rewards: School C has started a program of rewards for a variety of school successes. These rewards might be for excellence in academic work for some students, or improvement in attendance and tardies for others.

Together the foregoing descriptions comprise an extensive listing of school efforts. Even so, this listing possibly omits some smaller, less visible organized efforts in the three project schools. As discussed earlier, the district high schools in this district insist on and are given considerable individual autonomy in deciding, developing and conducting their own programs.