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ABSTRACT

This report analyzes a set of interlocking placement and labeling practices that heavily influence access to educational opportunities in the nation's largest urban school systems. The practices analyzed include high school admission, within-school tracking and grouping, and grade promotion and retention. Study conclusions and related recommendations are based on data-gathering and analysis in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. The study focuses on low-income, minority, limited-English-proficient, handicapped, and low-achieving students, termed students at risk. Results underscore the need for comprehensive school restructuring and express major concerns about how restructuring will be implemented. Will restructuring benefit high-risk students or institutionalize new custodial arrangements for them? Following a study overview, the second chapter presents basic facts about the four school systems. Chapter 3 discusses student placement and labeling practices for all school levels, and chapter 4 examines high school admissions policies and practices. Chapter 5 explores tracking and grouping within high schools, showing that options schools and programs represent a newer, more sophisticated student categorization system. Chapter 6 examines student promotion and retention practices and "reforms" in the four school systems. Chapter 7 discusses schooling outcomes, based on dropout rates and reading achievement indicators. Chapter 8 presents major conclusions and recommendations concerning deficient and unequal schooling outcomes. Included are numerous tables, chapter references, and four appendices. (MLH)

# THE NEW IMPROVED SORTING MACHINE

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Designs for Change



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## A WORD OF THANKS

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Donald Moore had overall responsibility for the design and supervision of the research plan and wrote the final report together with Suzanne Davenport. Suzanne Davenport carried out the field research, and supervised the research team in data collection, analysis, verification, and preparation of the final report. The research team included Jennifer Jones, Jean Newcomer, Mark Paul, Cheryl Pomeroy, and Jennifer Westerberg.

Marilyn Lewis Morriss coordinated the design and production of the final report. Kathy Blair Yates assisted in the design and production. Jean Newcomer supervised production of the tables. Phil Miller and Mike Martin assisted in the computerization of our data base.

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# CHAPTER 1. STUDY FOCUS AND METHOD

*The New Improved Sorting Machine* analyzes a set of interlocking placement and labeling practices that profoundly shape the nature of the educational opportunities available to students in the nation's largest urban school systems. Those placement and labeling practices analyzed include high school admission, within-school tracking and grouping, and practices employed in promotion from grade to grade. Data-gathering and analysis in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston formed the basis for study conclusions and related recommendations.

The research team analyzed the nature of these various placement and labeling practices for all students, but had a particular focus on low-income, minority, limited English proficient, handicapped, and low-achieving students—which we refer to collectively in this report as "students at risk." Our concern about the impact of placement and labeling on these students was spurred by a perspective that was well-stated in a recent lead article in *Education Week,* which observed that "many consider the most pressing concern facing American education" to be "the growing number of students 'at risk' of leaving school prior to graduation or without the skills to get a job."[1]

This study was carried out during a time when "excellence was the watchword in education, and the study is being completed at a time when the call for "restructuring" has become increasingly prominent. Our study results underscore the need for comprehensive restructuring of the public schools, but also call attention to some major concerns about how restructuring will be carried out, and whether restructuring will benefit those students most at risk of school failure or will merely create new institutional arrangements for providing an essentially custodial education for most of these at-risk students. The study's title, which was chosen after key study data had been analyzed, provides an indication of the disturbing concerns raised by study results.

The initial overview of the study presented in Chapter 1 has four parts. First, we describe the focus of the study and explain its rationale. Second, we preview a few major study findings, so that the reader will approach the detailed presentation of study data and analysis concerning various aspects of placement and labeling presented in the balance of the report with an initial understanding of some of the key (and often unsettling) things that we found. Third, we describe the specifics of research design and method employed in the study. And fourth, we briefly outline the topics addressed in the remaining chapters.

## Study Focus

### High School Placement and Labeling: A Holistic Analysis

Researchers studying American public schools have long noted that public school students are constantly being classified in a variety of formal and informal ways. The set of overt and covert labels thus attached to students profoundly shape both the educational services available to them and the impact of these services on their educational progress, in ways that are both intended and unintended, both helpful and harmful. As Nicholas Hobbs has noted:

> The magnitude and complexity of the problem faced by policy-makers and practitioners can hardly be overstated, for the effects of classification can be both beneficial and harmful. For example, children who are categorized and labeled as different may be permanently stigmatized, rejected by adults and other children, and excluded from opportunities essential for their full and healthy development. Yet, categorization is necessary to open doors to opportunity, to get legislation, funds, service programs, sound evaluation, research, and even effective communication about the problems of exceptional children.[2]

Hobbs is speaking here of special education programs for handicapped students, but his observations apply equally to the full range of placement and labeling decisions made about all students. The traditional organization of American public schools has changed little in the past 100 years, classifying students in an age-graded structure and labeling them for placement in schools, tracks, groups, and classes. Major issues of enormous importance to the operation and improvement of secondary schools in general and big city secondary schools in particular arise from the variety of placement and labeling practices employed by these schools. These practices interact to create a set of categories that have a decisive impact on the way students are taught, disciplined, and counseled, what teachers expect of them, and their opportunity to benefit from schooling. While these practices have a major impact on all students, they often have an even greater impact on those urban high school students at risk of school failure.

Previously, Designs for Change studied these placement and labeling practices in two small cities in Illinois, Elgin and Oak Park.[3] The present study focuses on placement and labeling of high school students in four large cities: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. In the initial planning for the study, we identified four major areas of placement and labeling practice that we wished to analyze:

- Admission to high school
- Tracking and grouping within high schools, including programs and services intended to address special learning needs
- Promotion and non-promotion from grade to grade
- Student attendance and discipline

These four interrelated areas of high school placement and labeling practices are represented by the diagram in Table 1-1. As the study was implemented, it became clear that we did not have sufficient resources to analyze placement and labeling practices related to student attendance and discipline. Thus, while the other three areas are each treated in separate chapters, placement and labeling for student attendance and discipline are only discussed briefly in Chapter 8.

The four areas of placement and labeling presented in Table 1-1 fit into the larger picture of the varied influences that shape students' school experiences and the outcomes of schooling, which are presented in a highly simplified form in Table 1-2. As the diagram reflects, students' high school experiences and final attainments at the point they exit from high school are influenced by:

- Past and present non-school influences, such as experiences in their families and neighborhoods and the availability of employment in the larger community.
- Previous school performance and experience in elementary and junior high school.
- High school placement and labeling practices in the four areas listed above.
- Other high school practices and student experiences in high school, such as the high school's instructional practices and the student's interactions with other students at school.

Of course, sorting out the present and potential impact of these various school and non-school influences has been a major preoccupation of educational researchers for the past 25 years.[4] In the various chapters of this study, we explain the contribution that we have attempted to make to this debate, as well as the limitations of our data in illuminating these issues.

Table 1-1. HIGH SCHOOL PLACEMENT AND LABELING PRACTICES

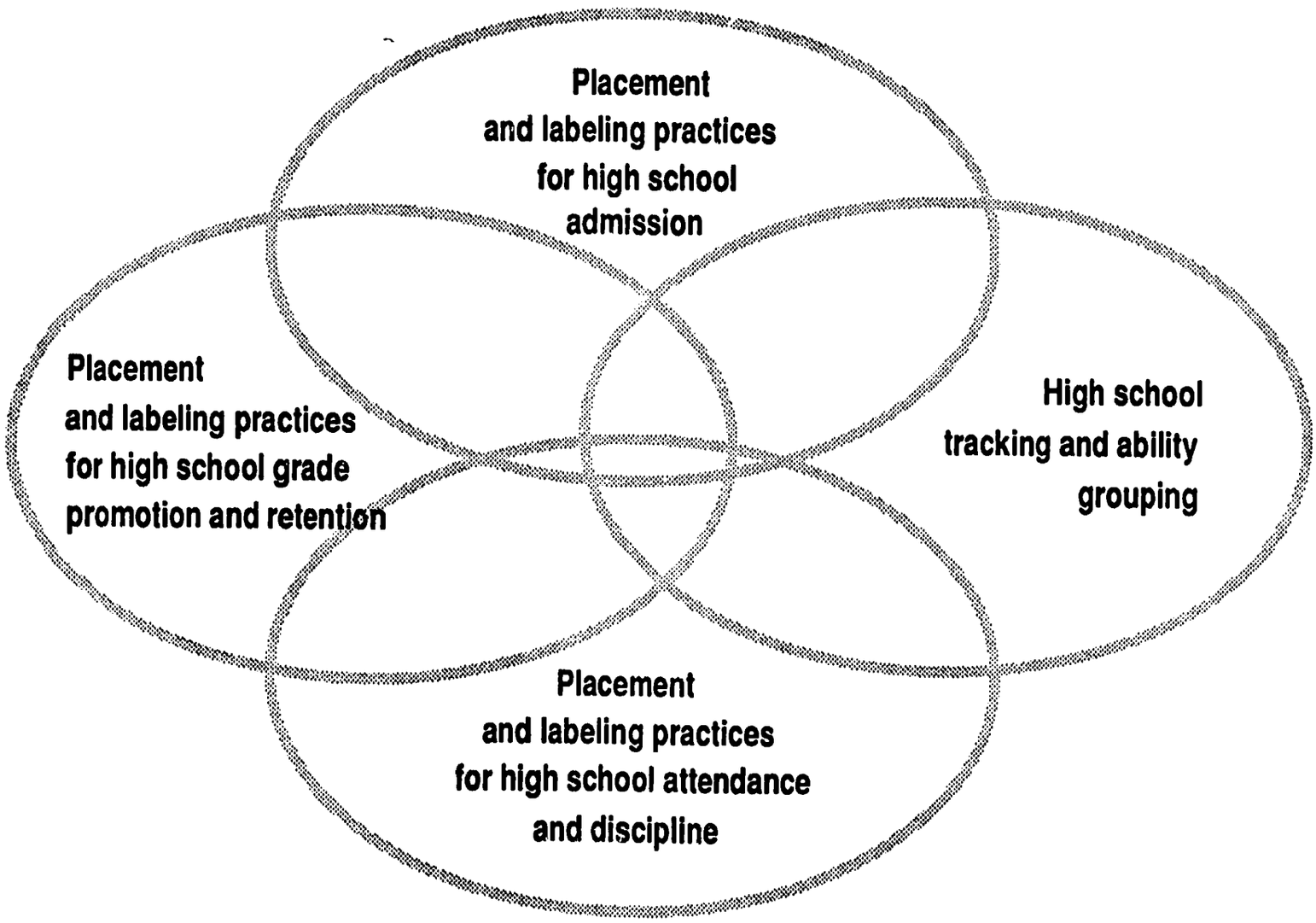
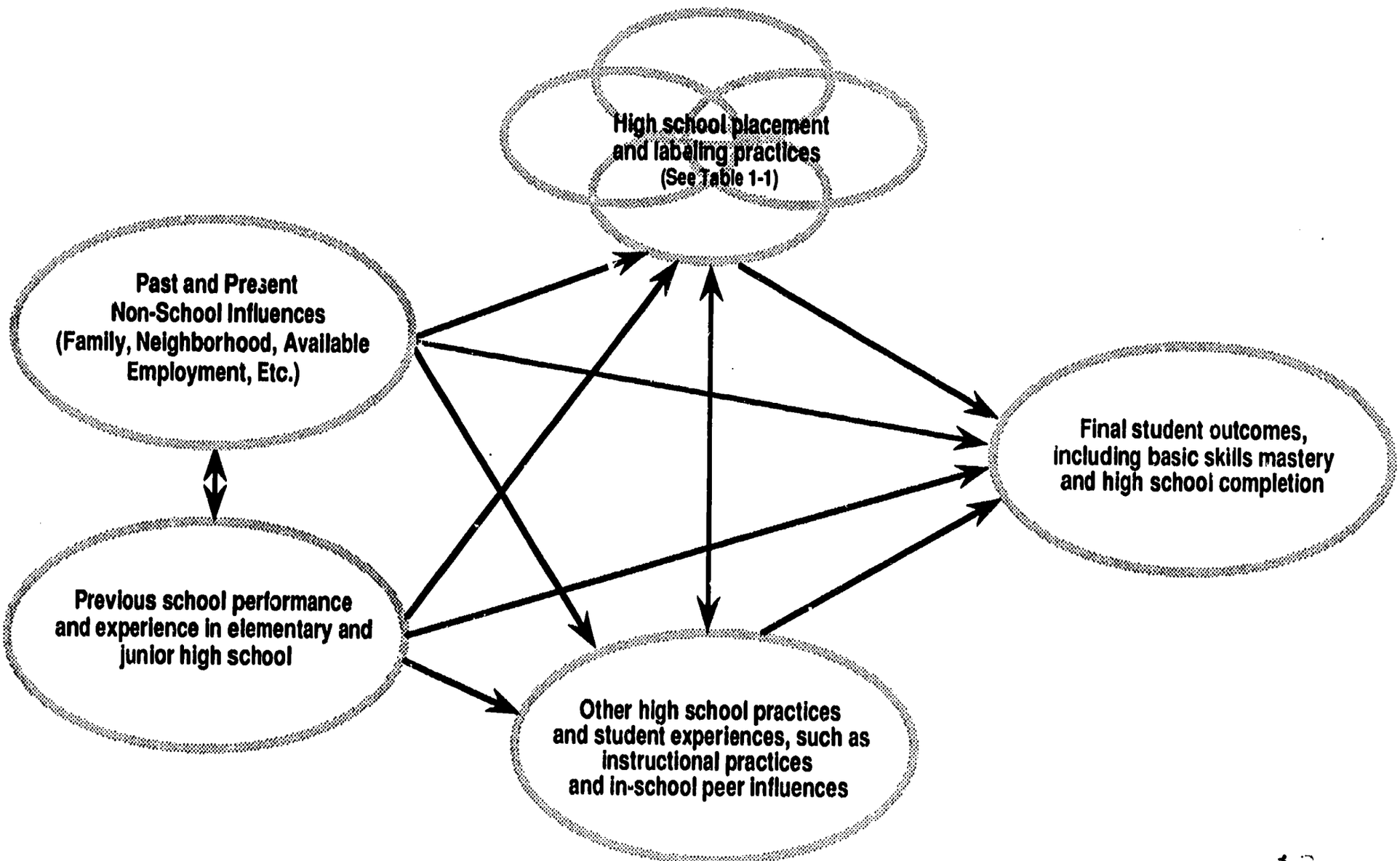


Table 1-2. FACTORS AFFECTING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT OUTCOMES



## Recent Debates About Placement and Labeling

Clearly, an intricate set of placement and labeling practices have been employed in these school systems throughout their history. No large organization that provides services to clients can function without a complex set of placement and labeling systems.[5] Over time, many of the important placement and labeling practices employed in these four cities have been taken for granted and become part of the institutional woodwork. Thus, it is difficult to get educators and others involved in these school systems to reflect consciously about them.

Periodically, certain aspects of these placement and labeling practices become the focus of intense controversy. Such controversy has arisen in each of these four school systems in the past ten years as policy makers, educators, and the public have weighed the proposals of the educational excellence movement, particularly their implications for educational equity. For example:

- Magnet schools and programs within schools have increased dramatically in all four school systems and have been praised by proponents of educational choice as a potent means for improving educational quality.[6] Yet other researchers and analysts have argued that the admissions practice of many of these magnet schools are stacked against the average urban student and have created a set of virtually private schools within public school systems.[7]

- Tracking and ability grouping within schools have been defended as a way to give the most able students, especially able minority and low-income students, access to a challenging academic curriculum that will prepare them for college.[8] Yet such grouping has been criticized as leaving lower track students with a school experience characterized by low expectations and rote learning.[9]

- Special education has been expanded dramatically and advocated as a means for meeting special needs of students heretofore neglected by public schools.[10] Yet its critics charge that special education often needlessly separates students from the mainstream educational program and that many of the placement and labeling decisions made about students who are supposedly mildly handicapped are capricious and do not lead to improved student performance.[11]

- Many school systems have declared social promotion to be a root cause of poorly prepared high school graduates and have instituted stricter promotion policies, basing promotion from grade to grade on standardized tests measuring progress through system-wide curricula.[12] Yet critics of retention conclude that there is overwhelming evidence that increased use of retention fails to improve student achievement and greatly increases the likelihood that students will drop out.[13]

The present research study has analyzed some enduring placement and labeling practices employed by these school systems at the high school level and examined how recent reforms have affected these established placement and labeling practices. This research is wide-ranging, designed to provide an initial overall understanding of how these major placement and labeling systems function and how they interrelate. Our primary emphasis is on generating a wide-angle overall snapshot: what are the major slots into which students are placed, how do students end up in these slots, and what are the characteristics of these students? We have also analyzed the origins of these placement and labeling systems and some of their consequences both for students and the schools.

We fully recognize that some researchers have spent a lifetime studying one specific aspect of the systems analyzed in the current study. Our previous work on these issues convinces us that it is helpful to get the "big picture," as the basis for focusing subsequent analysis of these placement and labeling practices and for thinking about how these practices can be improved. One key reason for this holistic approach is that individual students do not experience the effects of placement and labeling decisions in isolation, but in concert. For example, an elementary school student who fails to win a place in an "advanced work class" or who becomes a discipline or attendance problem for a year in sixth grade may find herself with virtually no chance for admission to an academically selective magnet high school at the end of junior high. Or a high school student who is in danger of failing the minimum competency test needed for promotion to the next grade may find himself referred for special education, whether or not he is handicapped, since handicapped students in his school system are exempt from promotion requirements. Despite these interrelationships, school systems seldom take a comprehensive view of placement and labeling, either in collecting data or in formulating policy.

We also seek an overall understanding of interrelationships among policies and practices in several areas because many placement and labeling practices are potentially more amenable to administrative control by school boards, central office administrators, and principals than other practices with important effects on students' learning experiences, such as instructional methods. School systems and schools can decide to systematically alter school admissions policies, tracking and grouping procedures, promotion policies, and the like, if they determine that such changes will benefit students and have the determination to press for appropriate implementation. Thus, changes in the placement and labeling policies and practices under study represent an important leverage point for secondary school improvement.

## Focus on Students At Risk

One important further emphasis of the study, noted earlier, deserves special attention. We were particularly concerned with understanding the ways in which placement and labeling practices affected those students at greatest risk of school failure, including low-income, minority, limited English proficient, handicapped, and low-achieving students.[14] The practices under study affect students at risk during the period in their school careers when a high percentage of these students either drop out of high school or fail to acquire basic skills essential for future employment or success in further education. While recent proponents of higher standards have argued that increased standards will benefit all students, including such students at risk, others have argued that these new standards, as they are translated into a more stringent set of placement and labeling practices, further undermine the educational opportunities of these vulnerable students.[15] The effect of placement and labeling on educational opportunities for students at risk was thus a key focus of the study.

## A Preview of Some Key Study Results

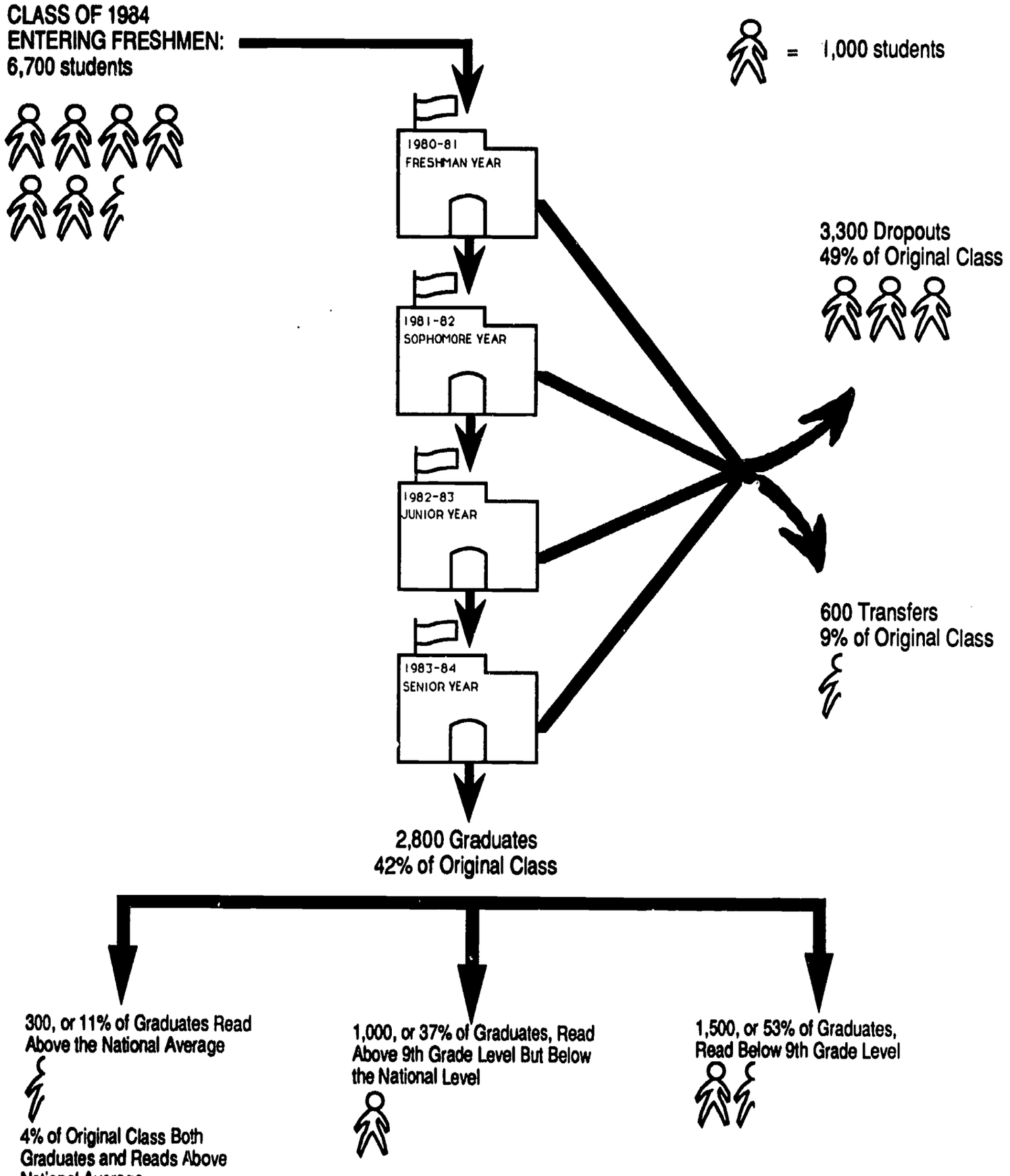
The subsequent chapters in this report detail a series of data analyses, conclusions, and specific recommendations concerning various systems for student placement and labeling described earlier. In this introductory chapter, we provide a preview of a few key study results as an initial orientation for the specifics that follow.

### Deficient and Unequal Outcomes of Schooling

As documented in Chapter 7, current placement and labeling practices are being carried out in high schools whose outcomes are both deficient system-wide and unequal among schools—if one assumes that urban public schools should, at the least, prepare a high percentage of students to complete twelve years of schooling and that most of these graduates should be able to read with at least minimum competency. The nature of current outcomes is illustrated in Table 1-3, which indicates the high school graduation rates and reading achievement levels of those students who entered the eighteen Chicago high schools with the school system's largest percentages of low-income students in fall 1980 and should have graduated in spring 1984.

As Table 1-3 indicates, 6,700 students comprised the original entering class, but only 300 of them (4% of the original class) both graduated and could read at or above the national average. Among the rest, 3,300 dropped out and 1,500 of those who graduated

## Table 1-3. CLASS OF 1984, CHICAGO NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME HIGH SCHOOLS




Data Sources: Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line*, and Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools.*

were reading below the ninth grade level even though they were high school seniors; combining these two groups, 4,800 students (about 71% of the original class) either lacked a diploma or earned a diploma but lacked the ability to read with minimum competency.

Available data for the other three cities indicate that achievement and graduation rates there were quite similar to those found in Chicago. Thus, the current educational system in these big cities is producing tens of thousands of high school students each year who lack the basic skills needed to even qualify for most permanent jobs in the rapidly changing economies of their cities.

## Some Key Findings about Placement and Labeling

Given such disturbing levels of student performance, what contribution do placement and labeling practices make to them? Focusing primarily on the 1984-85 school year, the study documented a set of mutually reinforcing disincentives for good school performance and school completion in the major areas of placement and labeling that we investigated. For example:

- Since 1970, a steadily growing set of options high schools and high school programs has been established in each of the four cities. Yet only a small percentage of students in these cities actually ended up in an options school or program to which they applied. In New York, for instance, 90,000 students in eighth grade in 1984-85 were given a 300-page catalogue listing 261 different options that they could theoretically attend for high school. However, although 380,000 choices of options schools were made that year, only 32,000 applicants received and accepted a choice.

- In the years studied, academically selective options schools and programs in the four cities typically ended up with percentages of low-income students, minority students, handicapped students, limited English proficient students, students with reading and attendance problems, and students who had previously been held back that were substantially lower than system-wide averages, while such students at risk were heavily concentrated in neighborhood schools.

- The striking differences in the student compositions of many academically-selective options schools, as compared with system-wide averages, can be traced directly to formal and informal practices that were part of the high school admissions process, including: admissions requirements that screened out low achievers and students with a record of absences, selective recruiting of students fitting a desired student profile, and favoritism to middle-class families who had political influence or were willing to make major commitments to volunteer to help the selective school.

- The high concentrations of students at risk who remained in non-selective neighborhood high schools faced a array of disincentives to achieve and to

graduate. For instance, they often were required to take remedial basic skills courses that used the types of workbooks and programmed learning systems in which they have previously failed; however, as a result of the increased graduation requirements in their school systems, they did not receive full academic credit even if they successfully completed this remedial work.

- As a result of increased graduation requirements, students in all four school systems were expected to complete more demanding work, yet teachers were not retrained, for example, to teach algebra to students with serious deficiencies in math. A high level of academic failure resulted. For example, in the seven neighborhood high schools in Philadelphia with the largest percentage of low-income students, 50% of ninth graders failed English and 58% failed math in 1985-86.

- Within the last decade, all four school systems instituted more stringent requirements for promotion from grade to grade, despite the consistent findings of educational researchers that retention does not improve student achievement and significantly increases the likelihood that students will subsequently drop out. Boston, for example, has recently reported that its dropout rate increased from 36% before a strict retention policy was instituted to 46% after it was instituted. Taken together, recent studies in New York, Chicago, Boston, and other cities indicate a direct relationship between retaining students and a greatly increased likelihood that they will drop out, yet Boston and Philadelphia continue to adhere to strict retention policies.

As is documented in detail in later chapters, the cumulative effect of current placement and labeling practices in these school systems is to place students at risk who are already at risk in greater and greater jeopardy, in the face of clear evidence that these practices are not working and are producing the kinds of achievement and graduation results described above.

## The Appearance of Fairness

Although the research team documented the types of inequities indicated above, the design of the study did not enable us to determine with certainty whether students at risk were significantly worse off as a result of the recent excellence movement. In fact, the major school-level reality that we documented was the persistence of enduring and inequitable patterns of school-level practice for sorting students in the face of new policies and reform initiatives. One change, however, was clear. Recent reforms in placement and labeling provide the appearance of greater fairness, despite their inequitable impacts on students. For example:

- In 1965, all four school systems had a rigid tracking process in which most students were assigned to a track that defined all of their courses. Subse-

quently, such formal tracks were abolished, but the reality of tracking has been preserved in many schools through a variety of new mechanisms that appear on the surface to be more equitable. These include the development of options programs within schools that function essentially as tracks and the assignment of students to a set of classes that all have the same "ability group" label, despite the fact that students are in theory eligible to take classes with a variety of ability group labels (a practice called "block-rostering").

- In 1970, these four school systems were all substantially segregated by race. Except for Boston, a high percentage of black and Hispanic high school students in these school systems continue to attend schools that are overwhelmingly black and Hispanic. However, since these students in theory have the opportunity to choose among a variety of options high schools and programs, their racial isolation is no longer a public policy concern.

It is because of dynamics like these that we have entitled this study *The New Improved Sorting Machine*. Many earlier analysts of the public schools have characterized the schools as a "sorting machine."[16] We have dubbed the current educational systems in these large cities "new and improved sorting machines" not because the research indicates conclusively that these schools are more inequitable than in the past, but because the current systems maintain stark inequities in their practices and results with an appearance of increased opportunity and fairness.

The research team has come to such strong conclusions only after a systematic analysis of quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the four cities. Below, we describe the research design and methods employed to reach the conclusions and recommendations spelled out in the balance of this report.

## Research Design and Methods

### Research Strategy

In developing a research plan for this study, Designs for Change employed a research strategy that has been refined through five previous studies of urban education issues that the organization's research staff have carried out. These previous studies have focused on the development of an urban alternative high school and its impact on its students,[17] the nature and impact of on-site assistance to school staffs attempting to improve specific urban schools,[18] the nature and costs of staff development programs in large urban school systems,[19] the classification of elementary students in two small city school systems and the impact of student classification on the nature of students' instructional experiences,[20] and the impact of of parent and citizen reform groups on educational policy and practice.[21]

Through these past research projects, Designs for Change has developed a research strategy that is particularly useful in analyzing urban education practices and reform efforts in a manner that yields helpful information for both practitioners and policy makers. Briefly, some key features of this research strategy, as it has been applied in this study, are as follows:

- A focus on understanding school-level practice as the key to assessing the implementation and impact of particular policies. It is through school-level practice that educational policies impact student outcomes. Previous research about student placement and labeling had indicated that there were wide variations in the implementation of placement and labeling policies at the school level, where, in various schools, these policies might be implemented as intended, modified, used to accomplish other objectives, circumvented, or ignored.[22]

- A focus on analyzing how policy and practice at higher levels in the educational system influence school-level practice. The local school does not exist in a vacuum, but is affected in both intended and unintended ways by policy and practice at the school system, state, and federal levels. Since the sources of placement and labeling standards recently implemented in urban high schools have often been highly explicit school district or state policies, it was particularly important to investigate these interrelationships between various levels of the educational system. In doing so, the research team draws on the extensive research literature that has accumulated during the past twenty years concerning the implementation of reforms in large bureaucratic systems like urban school districts.[23]

- The use of structured qualitative methods for studying the implementation of reforms in large school systems. Structured qualitative methods are useful in illuminating complex relationships between policy and practice and between the local school and other levels of the system. The structured qualitative approach employed by Designs for Change emphasizes the specification of a limited number of key research questions, data-gathering through structured and semi-structured interviews and through direct observation focused on answering key research questions, systematic recording of qualitative data, development and refinement of propositions that answer key research questions by employing carefully-specified qualitative data analysis procedures, and a cycle of data-gathering, proposition generation, and further data-gathering to test propositions.[24]

- The use of quantitative data to test and refine research propositions. Quantitative data provide a potent check on the accuracy of propositions developed through qualitative investigation, as well as an important source of propositions. With respect to the implementation and impact of placement and labeling practices, there are a wide range of pertinent published and unpublished data and data analyses available concerning New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston.

- The use of three standards for judging the adequacy of educational practice: the Access Standard, the Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard, and the Research-Based Practice Standard.[25]

- The use of alternative social science perspectives to illuminate study results. These perspectives include the Systems Management Perspective, the Conflict and Bargaining Perspective, the Economic Incentives Perspective, the Organizational Patterns Perspective, the Subculture Perspective, and the Professional Participation and Development Perspective.[26]

- The analysis of multiple sites to illuminate similarities and differences in policy and practice. In the present study, multi-site analysis of the New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston school systems allowed us to analyze a range of policy choices and implementation practices. Multi-site analysis forms the basis for more confident generalization about current realities and promising methods for improving placement and labeling.

Below, we explain further how these basic features of the Designs for Change research strategy were applied in this study.

## Key Research Questions

For each of three areas of placement and labeling that we analyzed intensively (admission to high schools, within-school tracking and grouping, and promotion and non-promotion), the research focused on the following specific questions:

1. How and why was the placement and labeling system under study established?

2. What are the categories or "slots" into which students are placed?

3. Through what practices are students placed in these categories?

4. What are the numbers of students placed in these various categories and what are their background characteristics?

5. What types of services do students receive who are placed in particular categories?

6. What school-to-school variations exist in the practices being studied?

7. How do students in various categories differ in terms of key outcomes of schooling, including basic skills achievement and graduation rates? To what extent is it legitimate to conclude that particular placement and labeling practices helped cause particular outcomes?

8. What implications do study results have for defining exemplary school-level practices that incorporate generally accepted standards of equity or that lead to increased school-level effectiveness?

9. What implications do results have for defining exemplary practices at the school district, state, and federal levels that incorporate generally accepted standards of equity or that lead to increased school-level effectiveness?

10. What interrelationships does a particular area of placement and labeling have with other areas of placement and labeling studied?

The three areas of placement and labeling listed above and these ten questions create a matrix that was the focus of the study. As noted earlier, we placed particular emphasis on analyzing the set of categories or slots into which students were placed, the practices through which this placement occurred, and the distribution of students with various background characteristics within this set of categories (Questions 2, 3, and 4). Further, while the major focus of this analysis was on high schools, we found it essential to analyze some key policies and practices in junior high and elementary schools, since they were critical to understanding high school policy and practice. The main features of the resulting design and method are described below.

## Site Selection

In implementing the basic research strategy of studying an issue at multiple sites, Designs for Change chose New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston for investigation. They were among the 25 largest urban school systems in the nation, ranking respectively first, third, fifth, and twenty-first. Each had made important changes in placement and labeling practices over the past decade. Further, Designs for Change had previously conducted research in all four cities and thus was familiar both with a wide range of research and data available in each school district, and with individuals both inside and outside these school systems who had analyzed pertinent issues.

## Network of Key Consultants

To advise the study, we identified three key consultants in each city. In each city, these consultants included a present or former middle school or high school principal, an academic researcher who had studied issues relevant to the study, and a researcher from an independent child advocacy group who had studied such issues. (Key consultants are listed in Appendix A. In Chicago our use of consultants was somewhat different, as noted in Appendix A.) These consultants served a number of useful functions as the study progressed: they helped the research team plan site visits, they identified and obtained pertinent documents and data, they analyzed data for us, they provided detailed information for the study through our in-depth interviews with them, they responded to and refined the

initial propositions that we framed in response to key research questions, they identified key individuals for us to interview and sites to observe, and they reviewed drafts of study reports.

One important activity carried out with the consultants was an analysis conference in which they participated midway through the study. At this conference, they reviewed initial study propositions, provided recommendations for focusing subsequent data-gathering and data-analysis, and suggested sources of pertinent data.

### Gathering Qualitative Data

The study's research associate spent between four and eight days in each of the four cities interviewing key consultants, school principals at the various types of schools identified through the research, central office administrators, independent researchers, and advocacy group members. The research associate asked questions to fill in the matrix described above. These on-site visits were followed up with extensive telephone interviews. In all, the research team conducted more than 300 face-to-face or telephone interviews. Interviews and meetings were recorded through qualitative field notes collected on a standardized field data form.

### Gathering Documents and Quantitative Data

The research team identified numerous school district policy statements, school district data summaries, research and evaluation studies carried out by the school systems, and research and evaluation studies carried out by independent researchers and advocacy groups that contributed to the qualitative and quantitative data base that was employed in the study. The effort to pull together such existing information unearthed numerous data sources that had not received wide attention, had been gathered for another purpose and not used to analyze the issues of interest in this study, or had been developed to analyze an issue in a particular city but had not been employed in multi-city analyses.

In addition to drawing on existing data, the research team compiled and analyzed selected statistical data about the four school systems and about the characteristics of various types of schools in these systems.

Whenever possible, the research team employed data from the 1984-85 school year, and we describe the operation of the school system in that year. This year was chosen because it was the most recent year for which a wide range of data were available for all four school systems about issues of interest in the study. Because of variability in the availability of data, it was sometimes necessary to draw on data from other school years

(either earlier years or later years) and these variations are explained in related footnotes when data are presented. However, because we analyze the four school systems as they were operating in 1984-85, we do not systematically discuss changes that have occurred since then.

## Generating Research Conclusions

Drawing on these qualitative and quantitative data sources, the research team developed and refined propositions addressing key study questions. Propositions that held up became study conclusions. In developing these conclusions, the research team took into account available quantitative data, documentary evidence, and information and viewpoints provided in interviews with study consultants and others. For example, the research team concluded that students who entered high school with learning problems (such as low reading skills, handicaps, poor attendance records, and limited English proficiency) were underrepresented in magnet high schools and that this underrepresentation resulted in large part from certain formal and informal practices employed in the high school admissions process. This conclusion was based on such evidence as available school system data about the characteristics of students in various types of high schools; studies of the high school admissions process that had been carried out by independent advocacy groups and, in the case of New York, by the school system itself; the admissions requirements spelled out in course catalogues describing magnet high schools; interviews with junior high and high school principals and counselors; and interviews with our consultants.

Weighing available qualitative and quantitative data, each conclusion presented in this report has been subjected to the kind of scrutiny employed in careful qualitative research.[27] Two points should be emphasized about this qualitative research process and about the way that its conclusions are presented in this report.

First, the school systems studied did not consistently produce quantitative analyses that generate basic information about the topics of interest in this study. For example, they typically did not produce a complete list of all magnet schools and magnet programs and of the numbers and characteristics of students in enrolled in them. Thus, it has often been necessary for us to piece together quantitative data from multiple sources within a school system. Or it has been necessary to rely more heavily on quantitative data from one or two cities about a particular topic. However, we do not offer conclusions unless they were supported by the full spectrum of qualitative and quantitative evidence available from all four cities, with any important differences among cities noted in the text or footnotes.

Second, we sometimes offer examples to illustrate study conclusions. However, these examples are not intended to "prove" these conclusions, which are based on the total pattern of evidence available. Were we to fully explain the evidence and reasoning process behind each conclusion, the research report would be several times its current length.

## Three Standards for Judging Educational Practice

In judging the equity of the educational practices that were studied, the research team applied three equity standards, drawn from the legal and ethical tradition of equal educational opportunity in U.S. public education, as well as from pertinent research evidence. Thus, we judged the appropriateness and equity of educational practices in light of the following standards:

- Increasing students' opportunities for access to school itself and access to particular school services (Access Standard).
- Increasing students' opportunities to receive services that reflect a coherent effort to respond to special needs that limit progress toward high priority educational objectives (Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard).
- Increasing students' opportunities to receive services shown through research to enhance student progress toward high priority educational objectives (Research-Based Practice Standard).

Viewed from the perspective of students at risk, these standards suggest that:

- Specific practices of the educational system should facilitate, for students at risk, access to school itself and to the types of specific school services available to other identifiable groups of students, unless there is a compelling reason supported by systematic evidence to provide different services to these other groups.
- If special needs of students at risk stand in the way of their educational progress toward high priority educational objectives, the schools should be making a coherent effort, reflected in their specific practices, to meet these special needs. Such a coherent effort should be attempted even if there is no compelling research indicating that a particular approach to meeting special needs has proven effective in enhancing students' educational progress.
- If educational research has identified specific practices for providing services to students at risk shown to enhance students' progress toward high priority educational objectives, the schools should be employing these practices.

## Applying Alternative Social Science Perspectives

Allison was the first to suggest that individual social science theories were at present inadequate to explain human behavior fully, but could be applied successively, as alternative "conceptual lenses," in examining an event or issue.[28] Allison's method has been applied to the study of educational reform by several researchers.[29] Designs for Change has employed six such alternative social science perspectives in its interpretation of data in this study and previous studies:

> Systems Management Perspective. From this perspective, the educational system is viewed as a single hierarchical system in which persons with formal authority at various levels define basic policies, develop plans for carrying them out, and then insure compliance with these plans through systematic use of various rewards and sanctions.[30]
>
> Conflict and Bargaining Perspective. From this perspective, the educational system is shaped by a constant process of conflict and bargaining, as individuals and formal and informal groups strive to maintain and/or increase their power and resources.[31]
>
> Economic Incentives Perspective. From this perspective, the practices of the educational system are shaped by the way money is spent and the incentives or disincentives that finances create to carry out programs in particular ways.[32]
>
> Organizational Patterns Perspective. From this perspective, the educational system is comprised of hundreds of semi-autonomous work units that exercise substantial discretion in the way they carry out their jobs day-to-day. Within these units, members develop informal work routines that may be at variance with formal procedures.[33]
>
> Subculture Perspective. From this perspective, people in various parts of the educational system develop substantially different ways of looking at the world, different frames of reference about what schools are like and what changes are possible.[34]
>
> Professional Participation and Development Perspective. From this perspective, reforms will be carried out at the school and classroom levels only if those that have the ultimate responsibility for implementing them are permitted to participate in their formulation and receive supportive assistance in acquiring new skills needed to do things differently.[35]

## Study Report Outline

The resulting study report deals with the following topics:

- Chapter 2. Pertinent information about the characteristics and history of the four school systems.

- Chapter 3. Kindergarten through twelfth grade policies and practices that shape high school placement and labeling.
- Chapter 4. Selective and non-selective high school admissions.
- Chapter 5. Within-school tracking and grouping, including programs designed to meet students' special learning needs.
- Chapter 6. Student promotion and non-promotion.
- Chapter 7. Outcomes of schooling, including basic skills achievement and graduation, dropout, and transfer.
- Chapter 8. Major conclusions and recommendations.

In each chapter that discusses a specific aspect of placement and labeling, the final section of the chapter presents recommended improvements in policy and practice. Key recommendations from individual chapters are also presented in Chapter 8.

# NOTES

1 "Despite Years of Rhetoric, Most Still See Little Understanding, Inadequate Efforts," *Education Week*, 21 September 1988, p. 1.

2 Nicholas Hobbs, *The Futures of Children: Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences, A Summary* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975), 6-7.

3 Donald R. Moore et al., *Student Classification and the Right to Read* (Chicago: Designs for Change, 1981).

4 See, for example, Frederick Mosteller and Daniel P. Moynihan, *On Equality of Educational Opportunity* (New York: Vintage, 1973); Stewart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *The Elementary School Journal* 4 (1983): 24-31.

5 Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision, Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1971).

6 Mary Anne Raywid, "The Choice Concept Takes Hold," *Equity and Choice* 2 (Fall 1985): 7-14.

7 Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., *Public High Schools, Private Admissions: A Report on New York Practices* (New York: Author, 1985).

8 Gary Orfield, foreword to *Metropolitan Chicago Public High Schools: Race, Poverty, and Educational Opportunity* by Jim Garrett (Chicago: University of Chicago Metropolitan Opportunity Project, 1987), v.

9 Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

10 Frederick J. Weintraub and Alan Abeson, "New Education Policies for the Handicapped: The Quiet Revolution," in Frederick Weintraub et al., eds., *Public Policy and the Education of Exceptional Children* (Reston, VA: The Council for Exceptional Children, 1977), 8.

11 Maynard C. Reynolds, Margaret C. Wang, and Herbert J. Walberg, "The Necessary Restructuring of Special and Regular Education," *Exceptional Children* 53 (1987): 391-398; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, *Out of the Mainstream: Education of Disabled Youth in Massachusetts* (Boston: Author, 1987), 23-25.

12 Boston Public Schools, *Promotion Policy Grades 1-12* (Boston: Author, 1984); Board of Education, School District of Philadelphia, *Systemwide Student Promotion Program, Policies and Procedures* (Philadelphia: Author, 1985).

13 C. Thomas Holmes and Kenneth M. Matthews, "The Effects of Nonpromotion on Elementary and Junior High School Pupils: A Meta-Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 54 (Summer 1984): 225-235; Illinois Fair Schools Coalition, *Holding Students Back: An Expensive School Reform That Doesn't Work* (Chicago: Author, 1985); Massachusetts Advocacy Center, *The Way Out: Student Exclusion Practices in Boston Middle Schools* (Boston: Author, 1986).

[14] There is significant evidence in various circumstances in these school systems that girls receive inequitable treatment and are placed at risk. In other circumstances certain groups of boys are placed at risk. We have not systematically examined the impact of each placement and labeling system on students based on gender.

[15] Gary G. Wehlage and Robert A. Rutter, "Dropping Out: How Much Do Schools Contribute to the Problem?" *Teachers College Record* 87 (Spring 1986): 374-392.

[16] Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Joel Spring, *The Sorting Machine: National Educational Policy Since 1945* (New York: McKay, 1976).

[17] Donald R. Moore, Principal Investigator, *A Multi-Method Study of the Development of an Alternative High School Learning Environment*, final report to the National Institute of Education and National Institute of Mental Health, 1975.

[18] Donald R. Moore et al., *Assistance Strategies of Six Groups that Facilitate Educational Change at the School/Community Level*, final report to the National Institute of Education, Grant 74-0052 (1977).

[19] Donald Moore and Arthur Hyde, *Rethinking Staff Development: A Handbook for Analyzing Your Program and its Costs* (New York: The Ford Foundation, 1978).

[20] Donald R. Moore et al., *Student Classification and the Right to Read* (Chicago: Designs for Change, 1981).

[21] Donald R. Moore et al., *Child Advocacy and the Schools: Past Impact and Potential for the 1980s*, final report to The Carnegie Corporation of New York (1983).

[22] Moore et al., *Student Classification.*

[23] See, for example, Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian, *The Implementation of Regulatory Policy: A Framework for Analysis* (Davis, CA: Institute of Governmental Affairs, 1979).

[24] Moore et al., *Child Advocacy*, 29-56.

[25] Moore et al., *Child Advocacy*, 101-115.

[26] Moore et al., *Child Advocacy*, 126-160.

[27] George J. McCall and J.L. Simmons, eds., *Issues in Participant Observation: A Text and a Reader* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969); Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1977); Pertti J. Pelto, *Anthropological Research: The Structure of Inquiry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

[28] Allison, *Essence of Decision:*

[29] See, for example, Richard P. Elmore, "Organizational Models of Social Program Implementation," *Public Policy* 26 (Spring 1978): 185-227.

[30] Elmore, "Organizational Models," 191-199.

[31] Frederick M. Wirt and Michael W. Kirst, *The Political Web of American Schools* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972); Joel Spring, *American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects* (New York: Longman, 1978); Mary Frase Williams, ed., *Government in the Classroom: Dollars and Power in*

*Education* (New York: Academy of Political Science, 1978); Murray Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964); Stuart A. Scheingold, *The Politics of Rights: Lawyers, Public Policy, and Political Change* (New Haven: Yale University, 1974); Elmore, "Organizational Models," 217-226.

[32] John Pincus, "Incentives for Innovation in the Public Schools," in *Review of Educational Research* 44 (1974): 113-144; H. Thomas James, James A. Kelly, and Walter I. Garms, "The School Budget Process in Large Cities," in Michael W. Kirst, ed., *The Politics of Education at the Local, State, and Federal Levels* (Berkeley: McCutchan, 1970), 74-89; Aaron Wildavsky, *The Politics of the Budgetary Process, 3rd ed.* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Donald R. Moore and Arthur A. Hyde, *Making Sense of Staff Development: An Analysis of Staff Development Programs and Their Costs in Three Urban School Districts* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education, 1981).

[33] Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociaological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Howard Becker, "The Teacher in the Authority System of the Public School," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 27 (November 1953); Ann Lieberman and Lynne Miller, "The Social Realities of Teaching," *Teachers College Record* 80 (September 1978): 54-68; Seymour B. Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971).

[34] Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1967); Hugh Mehan and Houston Wood, *The Reality of Ethnomethodology* (New York: John Wiley, 1975); Muzafer Sherif and Carolyn W. Sherif, *An Outline of Social Psychology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956); Harry F. Wolcott, *Teachers vs. Technocrats* (Eugene, OR: Center for Educational Policy and Management, 1977).

[35] Elmore, *Organizational Models*, 209-217; Richard Schmuck et al., *The Second Handbook of Organization Development in Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1977); Gene E. Hall and Susan Loucks, "Teacher Concern as a Basis for Facilitating and Personalizing Staff Development," *Teachers College Record* 80 (September 1978): 107-125.

# CHAPTER 2. THE FOUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS: BASIC FACTS AND RECENT HISTORY

Our approach to analyzing placement and labeling practices emphasizes the importance of understanding the larger organizational and political context that shapes these practices. Thus, Chapter 2 presents the following information:

- Some basic data about the size and structure of each school system.
- Some key events in the recent history of each school system, focusing on events of particular relevance to the topics studied.
- Some key similarities and differences in these histories.

## Basic Information About Each School System

### City and School System Size

In Table 2-1, we present some basic information about each school system. U S. Census data from 1982 placed all four of the cities studied among the 25 largest in the nation, with New York being the nation's largest city, Chicago the third largest, Philadelphia the fifth largest, and Boston the twenty-first largest. Roughly proportional to the relative sizes of their overall resident populations were the student populations of these school systems. In the 1984-85 school year (which served as the preferred year for our analysis of school system data whenever possible, as explained in Chapter 1), New York enrolled 936,000 students. Chicago's student enrollment of 431,000 was less than half that of New York, while Philadelphia's enrollment of 197,000 was less than half that of Chicago. Boston's student enrollment of 55,000 was less than a third the size of Philadelphia's and only one-seventeenth the size of New York's. Thus, even though these four school systems ranked among the nation's 25 largest, the student enrollment differences among them were substantial and should be kept in mind when study results are discussed.

There were a total of 1,881 schools in these four cities, of which 228 were high schools and 294 were junior highs or middle schools. Focusing on the four-year high schools that were the major focus of the study, New York had 98 high schools, Chicago 63, Philadelphia 35, and Boston 16.

### Student Racial Composition

As Table 2-1 indicates, the largest racial or ethnic group enrolled in each district was black students, who comprised between 38% and 64% of total student enrollment in

## Table 2-1. BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT THE FOUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS[1]

| Types of High Schools | New York | | Chicago | | Philadelphia | | Boston | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **ENROLLMENT TOTAL** | **931,768** | **100.0%** | **432,226** | **100.0%** | **196,660** | **100.0%** | **55,411** | **100.0%** |
| Black | 355,763 | 38.2% | 261,386 | 60.5% | 124,790 | 63.5% | 26,440 | 47.7% |
| White | 212,137 | 22.8% | 64,430 | 14.9% | 48,752 | 24.8% | 15,175 | 27.4% |
| Asian | 54,287 | 5.8% | 11,421 | 2.6% | 5,521 | 2.8% | 4,339 | 7.8% |
| Hispanic | 308,906 | 33.2% | 94,246 | 21.8% | 17,362 | 8.8% | 9,194 | 16.6% |
| Native American | 675 | 0.1% | 743 | 0.2% | 235 | 0.1% | 263 | 0.5% |
| Other | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **SCHOOLS** | **911 schools** | | **559 schools** | | **242 schools** | | **121 schools** | |
| High Schools | 111 schools | | 64 schools | | 35 schools | | 17 schools | |
| Junior High/Middle Schools | 178 schools | | 6 schools | | 39 schools | | 28 schools | |
| Elementary Schools | 622 schools | | 489 schools | | 168 schools | | 76 schools | |
| **DISTRICT ORGANIZATION** | 32 community districts. K-8/9, geographic; within boundary lines of the five boroughs (elected boards). 1 high school division 9-12 city-wide, with borough subdistricts. | | 20 districts K-8, geographic. 3 high school districts, geographic. | | 7 districts K-12, geographic. | | 5 districts, K-12. 4 geographic districts. 1 city-wide district containing all magnet and selective schools. | |
| **SCHOOL COMMITTEE** | 7 members, 2 appointed by mayor and 5 by borough presidents. | | 11 members, appointed; nominating committee recommends to mayor. | | 9 members, appointed; nominating panel recommends to mayor. | | 13 members, elected; 4 at-large and 9 from geographic districts. | |

the four cities. New York, Philadelphia, and Boston had a white student enrollment of about 25%, while the white student enrollment in Chicago was 15%. In New York and Chicago, the second largest ethnic group enrolled was Hispanic. Hispanics comprised 33% of New York's student population and 22% of Chicago's, while Philadelphia and Boston had smaller but significant percentages of Hispanic students. Asian enrollment ranged from about 3% in Chicago and Philadelphia to 8% in Boston.

Table 2-2 indicates racial enrollment trends over a sixteen-year period for each of the four districts. In this table, the following trends are evident over the period from 1970 to 1986:

- The percentage of black student enrollment remained steady or increased moderately in the four cities.
- The percentage of white student enrollment in each school district declined significantly, and was only one-third to one-half of its 1970 level by 1986 in Chicago and Boston.
- The percentage of Hispanic student enrollment increased significantly in all four cities, as did the much smaller enrollment of Asian students.

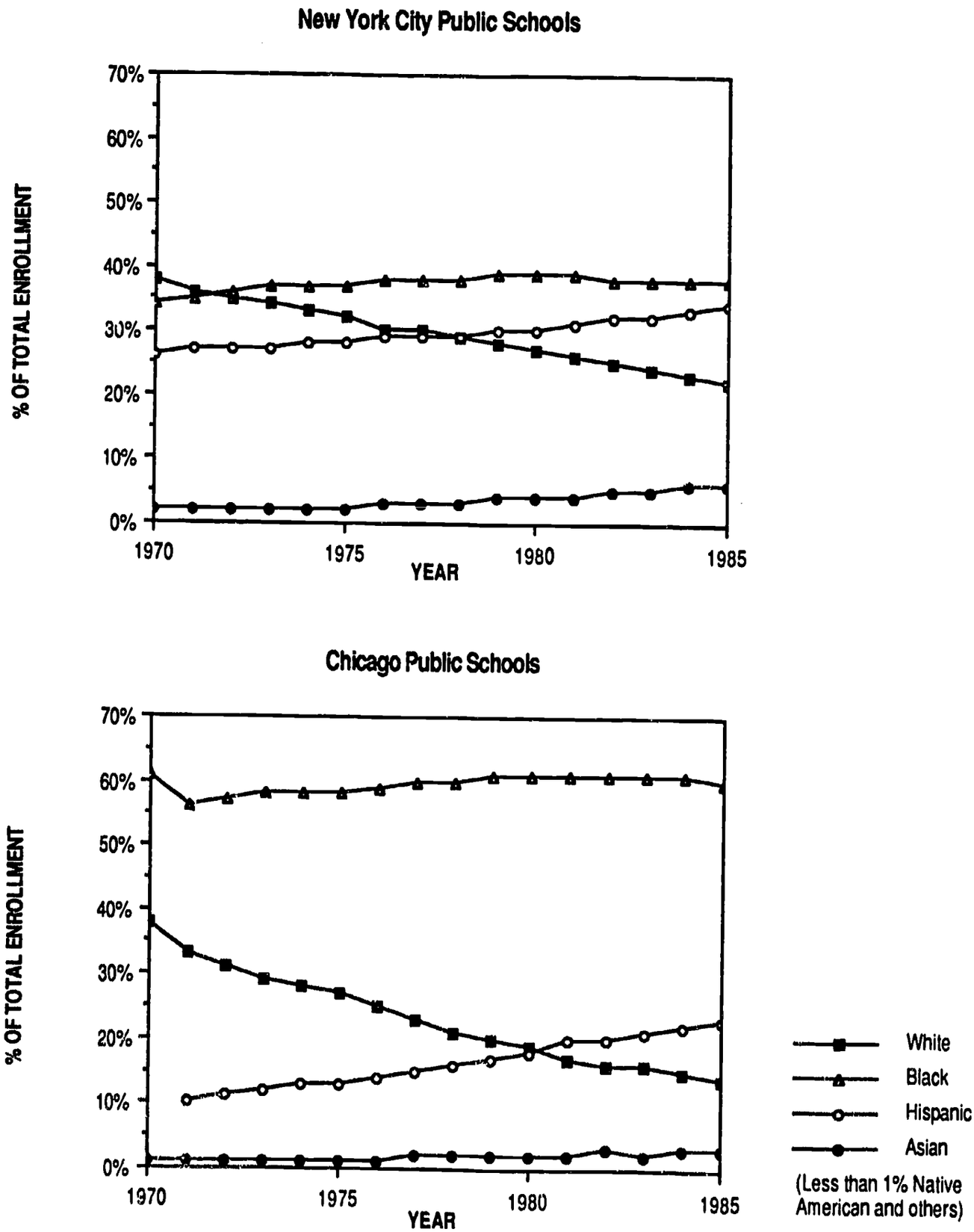
## School District Organization

While New York was in many important respects a single school system in 1984-85, students of elementary and junior high ages were educated in 32 community school districts with elected school boards that had some significant powers of independent decision making. Community school district boundaries lay within the five boroughs that make up the city. New York high schools were still administered centrally by a single high school division, with an administrative subdivision for each of the five boroughs.

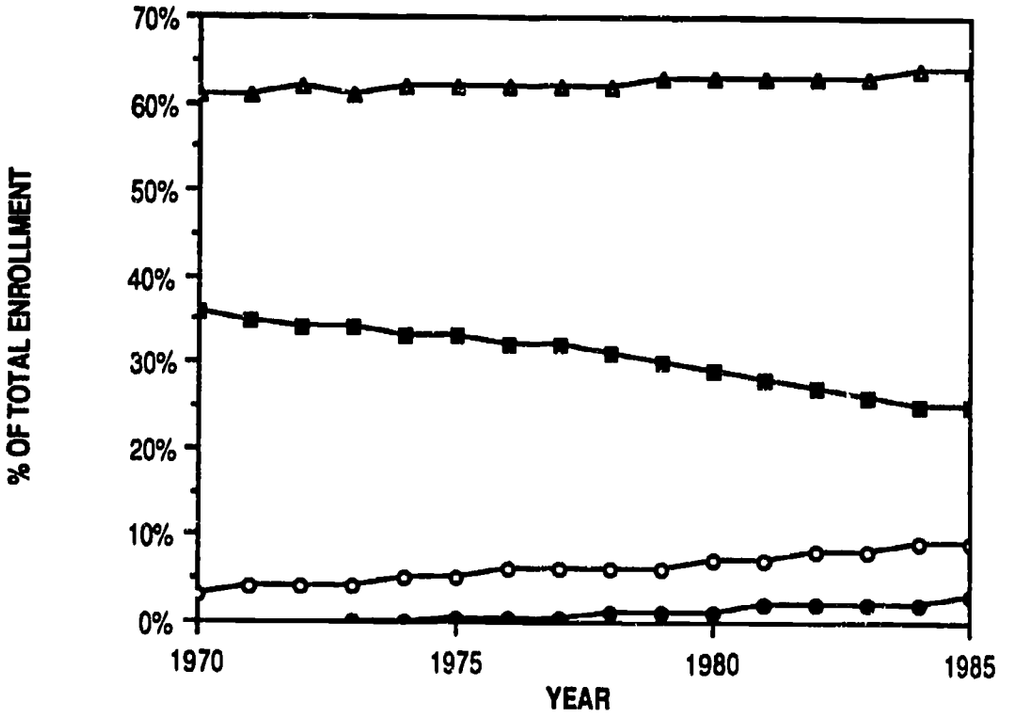
Chicago was divided into twenty geographic elementary school subdistricts (grades K-8) and three high school subdistricts (grades 9-12). However, these subdistricts were essentially layers in the school system's administrative hierarchy, and no significant citizen or parent board had any decision-making authority to oversee the actions of subdistrict administrators. Philadelphia was divided into seven subdistricts with a similar administrative function, and these were organized on a K-12 basis.

Finally, Boston, had five administrative subdistricts, K-12. Four of them were geographic, and the fifth city-wide subdistrict contained all magnet and selective schools.

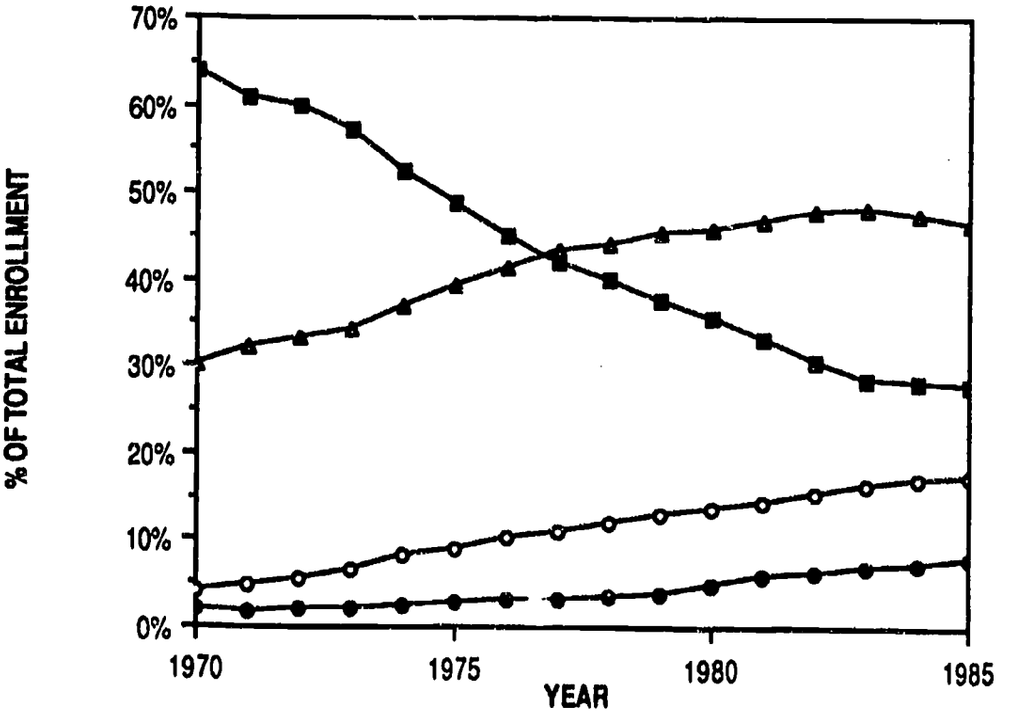
## Table 2-2. CHANGES IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT BY RACE, 1970-1986[2]



## Philadelphia Public Schools




## Boston Public Schools




White
Black
Hispanic
Asian

(Less than 1% Native American and others)

### Central School Boards

In 1984-85 New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia all had central school boards that were appointed by elected officials. In New York, two members of the central board were appointed by the mayor and one by each of the five borough presidents. In Chicago, an eleven-member school board was appointed by the mayor, as was the nine-member school board in Philadelphia. In both Chicago and Philadelphia, a citizens' screening committee proposed slates of names to the mayor from which board members were chosen. Only Boston had an elected board, with four members elected at large and nine members elected from geographic districts.

## Key Events in Recent History

The four school districts introduced above each experienced a series of turbulent events and major changes in the period from 1970 through 1985. Below, we describe some key events in the history of each school system during this fifteen-year period that are particularly relevant to the current study. These events involved the actions of a set of key individuals and organized groups with a major stake in school system operations, including school boards, teachers' unions, school superintendents, central administration bureaucracies, business leaders, parent and citizen activists, and state departments of education. All four systems have responded to the growth of teacher unionism, fiscal crises, school desegregation, changes in city political leadership, heated public debate about the quality of public schools, and the imposition of higher standards in the effort to "turn around" school systems generally agreed to be failing.

### New York City

Even more than the other three systems, the New York public schools have been at the heart of intense highly public political struggles since 1970. All of the players have been well-organized and unafraid to participate aggressively in public policy debates.

During the late 1960s, the New York City school system suffered an accelerating erosion of public confidence. While the central administration and the school board had been able, from time to time, to reflect concern about pressing problems through citizen task forces, detailed reports, and plans for action, concerted follow-through had been rare. According to research studies about the fate of such reform plans, new policies were not carried out effectively at the school level. The resistance to change by the many sublevels of the central administration and the organizations representing administrators, teachers,

and other personnel prevented substantial reform, in ways common to large bureaucratic organizations.[3]

**Decentralization Creates Community Districts.** During the 1960s, a major conflict arose about the quality of New York City education as an outgrowth of the civil rights movement. Black and Hispanic community leaders expressed intense anger because the quality of schools and results of schooling were so inadequate for their children, yet they had no decision-making leverage for changing this situation with a school system bureaucracy dominated by whites. Initially, these black and Hispanic leaders fought for desegregation, focusing on such issues as school location and construction, overcrowding, and student assignment.[4] The failure of the school system to initiate significant desegregation led to the next major reform drive, in which community control advocates and opponents struggled over the decentralization of decision making.[5] A key dispute that emerged during this period was between community control advocates active in several community control demonstration projects funded by The Ford Foundation and the United Federation of Teachers, which had emerged during the 1960s as a powerful trade union.[6]

With many well-organized players using all their political ties, the school system decentralization act, crafted in the state legislature, was passed in 1969.[7] Political compromise led to a decentralization act that spelled out a complex power-sharing arrangement between community school boards and the central administration. As described above, the decentralization plan that was finally accepted created 32 community school districts with elected school boards for the elementary and middle schools.[8] Each community district was intended to serve an average of about 25,000 students. High schools were, in contrast, kept under centralized control. While the central office retained basic fiscal powers for the school system and oversaw budgetary expenditures, the community boards had the power to appoint district superintendents, principals, and assistant principals; to set curriculum within state guidelines; and to exercise some budgetary discretion, within system-wide funding formulas for staff allocation.

**Varied Responses to Decentralization.** Response to decentralization has varied markedly among the 32 subdistricts. A study of decentralization completed by Rogers and Chung in 1983, based on data gathered from a cross-section of subdistricts, concluded that some districts have improved significantly, in situations where a common focus for reform was achieved within the community school board and between the board and its chief administrator, while some districts had not improved because they had failed to achieve

such consensus and had been preoccupied with issues of political control and patronage.[9] Decentralization did not produce a large number of parent school board members, an initial hope of the decentralization reformers. Established interest groups, including local political organizations, community organizations, the teachers union, other city-wide unions, and some churches had used their organizational base to win control of the majority of local boards.[10] However, the Rogers study concluded that, on balance, decentralization had brought a significant improvement in quality of instruction, student achievement, and responsiveness to parent and community concerns. Similar conclusions have been reached in two more recent analyses of decentralization, which view it as having brought significant benefits, but also as having significant shortcomings that needed to be remedied through additional reforms.[11]

**Responding to Fiscal Crisis.** In the mid-1970s, just as decentralization was beginning to take hold, New York City experienced a financial crisis that forced major cutbacks in all public services. This financial crisis was triggered by the failure of tax policy to generate the revenue to pay for increased city services (including education) in the 1960s and 1970s. The ballooning debt that resulted eroded the city's financial stability, but massive borrowing and creative bookkeeping in the school system and elsewhere masked the debt until the banks called a halt to the city's financial practices. For the school system and the community school districts, this crisis meant reduced budgets; major cuts in teachers, support staff, and administrators; larger classes; and deferred maintenance and repair.[12]

In 1978, Frank Macchiarola was appointed chancellor of the school system. With a background in public administration and experience as an elected member of a community school board, he attempted to press for better use of scarce resources and to introduce modern management and financial practices to the system. He imposed spending restrictions on community school districts, requiring them to use funds in line with system-wide mandates, and reorganized the high school division, replacing many high school principals.[13]

**Promotion GATES Introduced.** A major educational change that Macchiarola advocated and implemented was the adoption of the GATES testing program, under which students who failed to reach a cut-off score on a system-wide achievement test at the fourth and seventh grades were retained in grade and received extra help in small classes.[14] Through this initiative, he was the first superintendent in the four cities studied who intro-

duced one of the key excellence reforms which became increasingly popular during the 1980s.

The GATES program proved controversial, with parents divided about its merits and some advocacy organizations in strong opposition. Issues raised in this debate were repeated subsequently in each of the other cities. Some defended the reform as essential to restoring standards to the school system and increasing student achievement and teacher expectations. Others cited research about the negative effects of retention and argued that the testing cutoffs were arbitrary.[15] While the school system claimed that initial results showed a positive impact of the GATES program, subsequent research indicated that it did not substantially benefit retained students, even in instances where the promised special classes were in fact provided.[16] Macchiarola further argued that a major benefit of the GATES program was to lift expectations for all students, and indeed fewer students failed the GATES tests as time passed; critics rejoined that this was merely because teachers were teaching to the test.[17]

**Developments through 1985.** Macchiarola resigned in 1982, and he was replaced in April 1983 by the system's first minority superintendent, Anthony Alvarado. In subsequent years, some reform trends have been consistent with the priorities of the educational excellence movement and some have moved in other directions.

The New York State Board of Regents has had a tradition of standard-setting and activism. The Regents examination and diploma create a two-level graduation system for New York City students, and the standards for attaining a Regents diploma were increased significantly beginning in 1984. Another state board initiative spotlights the lowest achieving schools in the state, most of which are in New York City. Schools that make the Comprehensive Assessment Report (CAR) list are, in theory, subject to monitoring, requirements for remedial action, and eventual closing if they fail to improve. Critics of the CAR list argue that it has, to date, merely stigmatized schools without offering them any useful help in improving.

Macchiarola's successors through 1985, first Anthony Alvarado and then Nathan Quinones, have continued the GATES standards for student promotion, but reduced resources for implementing the policy and deemphasized its strict enforcement. Alvarado introduced all-day kindergarten, created a superintendency for alternative schools and programs, and initiated a central board office to redesign the worst high schools. In several instances, these high schools have been closed and then reopened with new leadership, new staff, and a distinctive curriculum focus. In some cases, these high schools reopened

as neighborhood schools, but in others as selective schools with a magnet theme program. Similar magnet schools and magnet programs had been created since the early 1969 with such stated aims as increasing racial integration and improving educational opportunity for minority students.

Quinones's leadership focused on creating the Chancellor's Commission on Minimum Standards for the improvement of high school achievement in answer to the Regents' imposition of standards. The commission's goal was to set minimum standards for all high schools, such as graduating at least 15% of their students with Regents endorsed diplomas, to encourage accountability. He modified the redesign of low-achieving high schools so that it was done only internally by the existing high school staff. Quinones endorsed the rethinking of admissions standards for selective schools, whose admissions procedures had come under increasing scrutiny and supervision. Dropout prevention and alternative schools received less attention while he was chancellor.

Questioning of the impact of selective high school admissions has resulted, in part, from research by Advocates for Children, an independent children's advocacy group that studied the high school admissions process and then pressed recommendations for change.[18] Other active advocacy groups that conducted research about the system and pressed positions on policy issues included Educational Priorities Panel, a coalition of 20 parent and citizen groups, and Public Education Association, a long-time watchdog and research organization that was founded in 1896.

The central board of education members are appointed by the mayor and the borough presidents with some emphasis on balancing various racial and ethnic groups. Traditionally, the board has not been forceful in moving the school system, given the lack of cohesion among board members and the strength of various bureaucratic departments and labor organizations. The most recent president, Robert Wagner, Jr., who was appointed in 1986, is the son of a former mayor. He has had strong support from the present mayor, and has taken a more active role in formulating school system policy and overseeing its implementation.

## Chicago

Chicago's public school enrollment is roughly half the size of New York's. The racial composition of the school system shifted dramatically from 1970 through 1986. In 1970, the school system's students were 50% black, 40% white, and 10% Hispanic, while by 1986, white enrollment had dropped to 13% and Hispanic enrollment had risen to 23%.

**Ties to City Hall.** Historically, the school system and the Democratic political organization that controlled city government have been closely linked. For example, it was the custom, through the Richard Daley years and until the election of Harold Washington as mayor, for the non-teaching positions in the school system to be filled by city hall, with the school system merely certifying these decisions.

Through the middle 1960s, the second source of power in the school system was Superintendent Benjamin Willis. He and the core of central administrators surrounding him had decisive control over key aspects of the system's operations, with the school board, which was appointed by the mayor, exercising little independent initiative. One of Willis's priorities was maintaining neighborhood schools at a time when Chicago was judged to be the most racially-segregated big city in the country. A strong civil rights movement in the city organized for Willis's ouster and was finally successful in bringing about his exit in 1966.[19]

**Reform Initiatives in the 1970s.** However, the practices of Willis's two successors in the period up to 1981 did not represent a major break with the past. Superintendents James Redmond and Joseph Hannon both had significant prior histories as administrators in the system and were allied with various internal factions within the central administration. The mayor's office, both under Richard Daley and his successors Michael Bilandic and Jane Byrne, continued to exercise substantial influence over job appointments and contracts. Through 1979, the school boards appointed by mayors Daley, Bilandic, and Byrne always included a few reform-minded appointees, but clear majority control was retained in the hands of appointees loyal to the mayor.

During this period, no decisive educational reform thrust was adopted and implemented city-wide. A few alternative schools were started, for example, but they received little internal support, and there was never a cluster of such schools operating, as was the case in Philadelphia. Some subdistrict administrative offices were created, and parent advisory councils were established at each school, but these changes did not represent the kind of significant power shift that took place under New York City's decentralization plan.

For almost fifteen years, civil rights organizations contemplated filing a major school desegregation lawsuit against Chicago, but they were deterred by the costs that would be entailed. Finally, in 1980, the U.S. Justice Department began to take preliminary steps toward filing such a desegregation lawsuit, and in response the school system

established a number of magnet schools that were intended to increase desegregation through voluntary student transfers.

**Responding to Fiscal Crisis.** In late 1979, a major fiscal crisis disrupted the school system. During the 1970s, the Chicago Teachers Union had become increasingly well-organized, and had frequently struck or threatened to strike over wages and benefits. Settlements during the 1970s had resulted in pay raises that were not fully funded, and the finances of the system were kept afloat through shifting money between fiscal years and through using funds from restricted accounts to balance shortages in other accounts. When the system's large underlying deficit was brought to light, a series of changes were made through state legislation and subsequent school board action in 1979-80. Money was borrowed to balance the budget through the sale of bonds, a School Finance Authority was created to insure that lenders would receive their money and that the system would adopt acceptable fiscal procedures, a new board of education was appointed by the mayor, and the superintendent of schools resigned. Except for demanding a new board, however, the legislature did not impose any structural or programmatic change on the school system beyond stricter financial oversight.

**Outsider Introduces Reform Plans.** After a national search, an outsider, Ruth Love, was named superintendent in 1981. She was the system's first minority superintendent and the first superintendent in the recent history of the school system without past experience as a Chicago school system administrator.

Love had the ability to generate enthusiasm for her ideas, and she initially gained support from a substantial number of business leaders and from the media for her plans. With the new school board, she moved to settle the desegregation lawsuit that had by then been filed by the federal government. The settlement focused on encouraging voluntary desegregation through magnet schools, voluntary busing of minority students into white neighborhoods, and "effective schools" reforms designed to improve the great majority of public schools, which remained segregated.[20]

A second reform direction championed by Love was to institute city-wide a curriculum called Chicago Mastery Learning, a locally-developed curriculum for reading and math instruction that divided competence in these basic skills into several hundred subskills and featured multiple choice exercises to lead students to mastery of these subskills. The mastery learning curriculum became the subject of local and national controversy. While stoutly defended by some as a way to insure that students would learn

basic skills and to compensate for the deficiencies of the system's teachers, the curriculum was criticized by others as stifling teacher creativity, being poorly written, boring for students, and based on assumptions about learning not substantiated by research.[21] Reading achievement failed to improve significantly under mastery learning, as reflected in the achievement scores of entering high school students. The curriculum was dropped shortly after Love's departure in 1985, in part because of protests from advocacy groups, teachers, and academics about its alleged inadequacies.

A third reform direction during Love's tenure, this one focused on the high schools, was a planning process for high school improvement called High School Renaissance. The Renaissance plan, developed largely by administrators within the school system, called for increased skill requirements for entry into high school, additional course requirements for graduation, remedial non-credit classes for low-achieving high school students, and dozens of other specific changes designed to improve the high school program.[22] During summer 1984, when the first stages of the program were slated for implementation, the school board postponed all but a few of the proposed Renaissance reforms. Some of the new course requirements were implemented, but almost no additional funds were allocated to provide services for low-achieving students. Subsequently, there was never a serious effort to implement the program.[23]

**Developments through 1985.** In 1983, Harold Washington was elected the city's first black mayor. He was pressed both to do something to improve the schools and not to "interfere" in the schools in the manner of his predecessors. His main school reform initiative during his first term in office was an effort to appoint better school board members, screened and recommended to him by a citizens' nominating committee. As some of these appointees attempted to exercise more leadership, they came increasingly into conflict with Superintendent Love, who viewed herself as having wide decision-making discretion. In summer 1984, the board refused to renew her contract beyond its February 1985 expiration date.

The school board majority then moved quickly to appoint as the new superintendent Manford Byrd, a long-time administrator in the school system who had been an unsuccessful candidate for the job several times before. No striking initiatives were undertaken by Byrd in his first year as superintendent. He expressed the view that the quality of education could be improved within the existing school system if "seasoned" people from within the school system were elevated to key administrative posts.

An important trend during the period from 1980-85 was the emerging influence of Hispanics in the school system, as reflected by increases in the numbers of Hispanic school board members, principals, and central office administrators. During this period, Hispanic parent and community groups pressed vigorously for expanded bilingual education, an end to overcrowding in predominantly Hispanic schools, accurate reporting of dropout statistics, and the appointment of school principals responsive to Hispanic concerns.

**Other Important Actors.** Historically, the Illinois State Board of Education has emphasized the autonomy of local school districts and has been reluctant to intervene aggressively in local school districts. This has been particularly true for Chicago, which has its own section of the state school code. Similarly, the state legislature had confined itself primarily to debating about how much money Chicago should receive. In spring 1985, however, the legislature passed a school reform bill affecting all of the state's school districts, which established a state-wide achievement testing process and gave additional funds for early childhood education.

Chicago has a tradition of neighborhood and city-wide activism on such issues as housing and education. One long-existing school reform group, Citizens Schools Committee, pressed during the Daley years for a school board independent of city politics. In the 1980s, two city-wide advocacy groups have aggressively monitored school system performance and advocated various educational reforms. Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, a coalition modeled on New York's Educational Priorities Panel, has monitored the school system's budget and analyzed such issues as the high school dropout rate. Designs for Change has organized low-income and minority parents to press for school-level improvements and advocated system-wide changes in such areas as reading instruction and special education.

## Philadelphia

In the past twenty years, the four educators who have held the superintendency of the Philadelphia Public Schools have had remarkably different philosophies and styles—Mark Shedd, Matthew Constanzo, Michael Marcase, and Constance Clayton. Mark Shedd arrived in 1966 charged with a dramatic reform mission to revitalize the Philadelphia Schools. Shedd was the choice of a coalition of civic reformers who had been trying for nearly fifteen years to oust an administrative leadership group controlled by the system's business manager.[24]

Shedd sought to initiate sweeping changes in curriculum, teaching style, race relations, and school organization. Philadelphia became known nationally for such innovations as its clusters of alternative schools, including the Parkway Program, the first high school without walls; first steps in a conversion to a K-4-4-4 system of school organization; team teaching; and an affective education program intended to foster emotional development along with academic learning. School Board meetings were televised, and the meetings themselves were heavily attended. Shedd was more responsive than his predecessors to demands by black leaders for a greater voice in setting system policy, for affirmative action, and for increased community involvement, although many black leaders thought his actions were insufficient.[25]

**New Mayor Shifts Priorities.** As Shedd attempted to deal with this dissatisfaction, city politics pitted him against Frank Rizzo, the Philadelphia chief of police, who became a candidate for mayor. After Rizzo won the mayoral race in 1972, Shedd was moved out, and Dr. Matthew Constanzo, an educator from within the system, was promoted to superintendent. Costanzo sought to preserve some of the legacy of the Shedd years, and to blunt Mayor Rizzo's efforts to influence educational policy, personnel appointments, and contracting. However, extended conflict over these matters led to Costanzo's resignation and to the appointment of Michael Marcase, Rizzo's choice for superintendent. The Marcase years saw a reemphasis on traditional educational programs, the dismantling of many of Shedd's innovations, and extensive use of the school system for patronage and contract rewards to political allies of the mayor.

The decade of the 1970s was marked by a series of financial crises and lengthy teachers' strikes. From 1974 on, a projected fiscal shortfall almost annually led to a teachers' strike or threatened strike, engendering public debate about whether schools would open, whether additional money should be borrowed to keep schools open, and whether the state legislature would provide last minute funding or possibly take over the school system. This period was often characterized by bitter conflicts between teachers and parents.

Meanwhile, efforts to integrate the Philadelphia Public Schools had been dragging on since the early 1970s. The Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission rejected several plans for voluntary desegregation, but the school system was able to delay any enforcement action through engaging in protracted negotiations.

Dissatisfaction with Marcase led to an extended campaign for his ouster, which was finally accomplished after Rizzo was defeated in 1979. By 1982, the new mayor, William Green, was able to appoint enough new school board members to move Marcase out.

**New Period of Reform.** With the departure of Superintendent Marcase in June 1982, the political and business leadership was committed to supporting a reform superintendent. Dr. Constance Clayton, long-time early childhood educator and administrator in the system, was appointed the new superintendent in October 1982, with a clear mandate from the business community and the school board to restore financial integrity and improve educational quality. In October 1983 the Human Relations Commission agreed to monitor her three-year voluntary desegregation plan, which emphasized a system of magnet schools and magnet programs to encourage voluntary desegregation. Further, the desegregation plan was intended to improve education in those schools that remained segregated. For example, the 26 lowest-achieving elementary schools were designated as Priority One schools under their own district superintendent to provide them with additional resources and support. Clayton eliminated many political appointees from the payroll and instituted improved business practices and financial management. She also made a concerted effort to gain and maintain the support of the city's foundations, media, and business community.

Clayton called attention to the fact that schools in different neighborhoods had different course offerings and sought to ensure that all students were taught all major subjects. Further, consistent with the strategies of the educational excellence movement, she sought to raise standards and expectations for all Philadelphia's school children by instituting a standardized curriculum, city-wide mandatory testing, and a strict promotion policy.

City-wide tests were developed with an outside test development company to measure mastery of the standardized curriculum. A new promotion policy rejected social promotion and required retention in grade for failure to pass specified courses. Remedial help was to be available to students who were retained through after-school tutoring and summer school.

**Other Important Actors.** Parent and citizen groups have been active in school reform efforts in Philadelphia since the 1950s, when a civic reform coalition emerged to challenge the system's control by its business manager. Early advocates included the Citizens Committee on Public Education in Philadelphia and the Public Education Association. The Parents Union for Public Schools, the Council on Educational Priorities, and the Powalton-

Mantua Education Fund were organized in the 1970s and had a major focus on issues arising from the school strikes and the system's financial crises and irregularities. With foundations and corporations heavily supporting the reform initiatives of Superintendent Clayton, such advocacy groups have found it difficult to raise funds. Further, several of these groups have been unable to obtain information about achievement, retention, dropout rates, and transfer and disciplinary actions needed to evaluate the reforms instituted under Clayton's leadership.

Historically, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has resembled the Illinois state department in its reluctance to play a vigorous role in overseeing local school districts, particularly big city districts. For instance, while the state gave mandatory state-wide tests in recent years, school districts were at liberty to decide whether they would publicize the scores.

### Boston

While the entire Boston school system is roughly the size of two subdistricts in the other systems, the Boston schools have been structurally and politically similar to the others in many ways. The centralized bureaucratic organization of the Boston Public Schools was an historical creation well underway in the nineteenth century, as was the case with the other three systems.[26] In the twentieth century, Irish political control of the school system grew in lockstep with overall Irish control of the city's political system, so that in 1960, most key school board and administrative positions were held by a group whose ethnic and family ties wove them closely together. For this reason, one writer described the school system of that time as the "village school downtown."[27]

**Impact of School Desegregation.** The major catalyst that changed this situation was Judge W. Arthur Garrity's decision in the Boston School desegregation case in 1974, in which he mandated the extensive integration of every Boston public school, except in East Boston, through mandatory busing.[28] The judge took a strong activist role in pressing for his order to be implemented, including a requirement that a Department of Implementation, with 25 monitors, oversee the process.[29]

The period from 1974 to 1982 was one of turbulence in the school system on many levels. The implementation of desegregation brought numerous battles between parent and citizen groups opposing and supporting desegregation, between old-line administrators and new ones brought in through the desegregation process, and between the school board, the court, and school staff. Incidents of violence in desegregated schools were widely

publicized. Enrollment in the school system dropped precipitously, with a disproportionate number of white students and middle-class black students leaving the system, so that it became increasingly poor and minority.[30] At the same time, desegregation improved many individual schools substantially, brought new staff into the system, and created partnerships between the schools and local universities and businesses that were to be important in subsequent events.[31]

By the late 1970s, the system was suffering from a major leadership crisis. The system had had three superintendents in the period from 1978-80, and two school board members had been indicted for their alleged involvement in steering contracts to their friends.

**Outsider Initiates Changes.** In 1981, Robert Spillane was named superintendent of schools. Unlike his predecessors, he was an outsider with a reputation as a tough administrator, experienced in the tactics needed to make bureaucracies change. He brought an administrative team with him to carry out his program, and signalled that he intended to shake up the system when he reassigned a large number of principals and central office staff.

A cornerstone of his reform program was the Boston Compact, a widely-publicized agreement between Boston's business leaders and the school system, through which business guaranteed jobs to all graduates of the public schools who met certain skill requirements and, in return, the school system committed itself to make measurable improvements in student attendance, student test scores, and dropout rates.[32] Following the precepts of the excellence movement, the school system chose to implement its side of the compact through a standardized curriculum in grades 1–12, a new testing program, and a strict promotion policy that required students to meet minimum standards for academic progress and attendance or be retained. Despite this strong initiative to centralize the system in crucial respects, Spillane also created clusters of schools that carried out school-based planning and improvement efforts.

Spillane presided over a major budget cutting process during his tenure that represented his response to the previous period of fiscal mismanagement. During this process, more than 1,000 staff positions, including over 700 teachers, were terminated. Spillane oversaw the first steps in modernizing such administrative activities as payroll, accounting, and budget planning. For example, when he came into office, most financial accounting was done by hand and there was no master list of school system employees.

Meanwhile, the Boston School Committee, accustomed to intimate involvement in matters of policy, hiring, and the awarding of contracts, was often at loggerheads with the new superintendent. Further, the five-person committee, elected at-large, had long been under attack for its unrepresentativeness. After several independent studies and public discussion of alternative proposals, a plan was adopted in 1982 to make the school committee a thirteen-member group, with four members elected at-large and nine elected from geographical districts.

**Developments through 1985.** When Spillane chose to leave the superintendency, the reorganized school committee, in concert with the Boston Compact leadership, selected Dr. Laval S. Wilson, superintendent of the Rochester Public Schools, to succeed Spillane. Arriving in 1985, at the height of the "educational excellence" movement nation-wide, Wilson affirmed his commitment to the higher standards reflected in the Boston Compact, eliminated school-based management activities, and created eighteen task forces to investigate teaching and learning conditions in the school system that were to culminate in a Boston Educational Plan that would guide Wilson's administration.

**Other Important Actors.** The politically liberal state legislature in Massachusetts has responded positively to advocates representing various at-risk groups by passing state laws that advocates have then used as leverage for educational reform efforts in Boston. The Massachusetts special education law, Chapter 766, became a model for the subsequent federal law, PL 94-142. Massachusetts also passed the first state law mandating bilingual education and the first state law banning sex discrimination in schools. A notable example of the use of such laws to press for changes in Boston is the long-term campaign by Massachusetts Advocacy Center to press for reform of special education in the Boston school system. A lawsuit that was part of this advocacy effort led to strict monitoring of the Boston special education system, and a substantial movement toward compliance with the law that included bringing in well-regarded outsiders to monitor and report to the court on the administration of the school system's special education program.[33]

## Some Historical Similarities and Differences

In analyzing the histories of these four school systems, one is struck first by some important similarities during the period from 1970 through 1986.

**Growing Minority Student Enrollment.** Each system experienced an exodus of white and middle-class families and saw the black, Asian, and especially the Hispanic student population of the system increase substantially.

**Increasing Black and Hispanic Power.** Demographic shifts in these cities and the increasing political organization of black and Hispanic citizens gave rise to significantly increased political power for these groups, both in the cities in general and in the school systems and on school boards in particular. Before 1980, none of the four school systems had had a non-white superintendent. By 1988, all four had black superintendents, Chicago and Philadelphia had elected their first black mayors, and a strong mayoral challenge had been mounted by a black candidate in Boston.

**Stormy Labor Relations.** Labor relations in each school system were highly contentious during this period, as teachers' unions that had consolidated their power by the early 1970s negotiated very explicit contracts addressing wages, benefits, and working conditions, and did not hesitate to strike to support their positions.

**Acute Financial Crisis.** Each system suffered an acute financial crisis that called into question long-standing patterns of hiring, awarding contracts, fiscal management, and the influence of the city's political system in the schools.

**Reform Superintendents.** Each system responded to its financial crisis by either bringing in a superintendent who was an outsider to the school system's bureaucracy (New York, Chicago, and Boston), or a well-respected insider not tied to the previous administration (Philadelphia). In each case, the business community played an active role in supporting this choice and/or provided a support group for the new leader once he or she was in office.

**Rapid Leadership Turnover.** Neither these reformers nor the others who held the superintendency typically stayed in office very long. Macchiarola in New York, Love in Chicago, and Spillane in Boston stayed in office for only four to five years.

**Independent Advocates Spotlight Problems.** Independent parent and citizen groups have played an important role in spotlighting the inadequacy of the public schools and of attempts to reform them, as well as pressing their own proposals for improvement.

**Reforms Focus on Educational Excellence and Improved Management.** Although the mix of reforms instituted by these new leaders varied, they typically attempted to decrease interference in the school system by the city's political structure and instituted some modern management and financial techniques. Their

educational reforms commonly included increased course requirements, stringent promotion standards, system-wide curricula, and more frequent student testing.

**Student Performance Remains Poor.** All through this period, the best objective evidence indicated extremely low levels of academic achievement and high dropout levels. Claims made intermittently that results were improving were discredited by subsequent data. This continuing evidence of academic failure was a major impetus for dissatisfaction with the schools on the part of the public in general, of parents, and of the business community.

**Coping with Desegregation.** All four cities came to grips with the desegregation issue in some fashion during this period. Three systems (New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia) were able to avoid a court-imposed desegregation plan and to negotiate desegregation agreements that relied primarily on voluntary measures, including magnet schools and magnet programs. The magnet school concept proved very popular, and the number of such schools and programs grew rapidly in each city.

Although there are many differences among the cities, perhaps the one that stands out most, especially as it affects the issues of primary interest in this study, is the fact that Boston, unlike the other three cities, experienced a strict court-ordered school desegregation plan that mandated student transfers carried out through mandatory busing and instituted centralized and often external control of many aspects of the system's operation.

# NOTES

1 Board of Education of the City of New York, Office of Student Information Services, "Annual School Census—Oct. 1984, Pupil Ethnic Composition Report," computer printout generated 19 July 1985; Chicago Public Schools, *Racial/Ethnic Survey--Students as of October 31, 1984* (Chicago: Author, 1985); School District of Philadelphia, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, *Superintendent's MIC Management Information Center, 1985-1986* (Philadelphia: Author, 1986); Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles 1984-85* (Boston: Author, 1986).

Each of the four systems has an additional category of "special schools," which are not included either in this chart or in the analysis in the report. The diversity of the special schools varies widely from city to city, and makes data gathering and analysis more complex than the dimensions of this study required. The special schools vary both in grade levels served and in the kind of schools.

At the high school level alone in the school year 1984-85, New York, for example, had 13 alternative high schools and a range of auxiliary services (e.g., Pregnant Teenagers program, Offsite Educational Services, and Rikers Island Educational Facility). Together they served 16,022 students, or 6.4% of the total high school enrollment. In 1986-87 Chicago Public Schools counted 37 special schools and programs serving 8,060 students at elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. The programs included physically and mentally handicapped students, students with special needs, bilingual education, adult education, and apprentice programs. They enrolled 1.9% of the student body.

In 1985-86 the School District of Philadelphia had 11 special education schools and three programs for students with behavioral problems, including the Youth Study Center, the Behavioral Adjustment Center, and the Alternative Placement Center. The total enrollment for these special schools was 2,517, or 1.3% of the total system enrollment.

In 1984-85 Boston's three special city-wide schools were the William Carter Center providing developmental day care, the Horace Mann School for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired, and the McKinley Schools for special education students. The composite enrollment for these three schools was 571, or 0.9% of the total system enrollment.

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Chicago: Chicago Public Schools, *Annual Desegregation Review 1986-87, Part I: Student Assignment* (Chicago: Author, 1987), 20-23.

Philadelphia: Photocopies of City Summary sheets for each year, 1970-1974, obtained from The School District of Philadelphia, Office of Administrative and Survey Resarch Services: The School District of Philadelphia, Office of Research, Planning, and Evaluation, *1981-1982 Enrollment, Philadelphia Public Schools* (Philadelphia: Author, February 1982), 2. The School District of Philadelphia, Office of Research and Evaluation, *Enrollment 1987-1988* (Philadelphia: Author, January 1988), 4.

Boston: Boston Public Schools, photocopy of data prepared by Record Management Unit, Department of Implementation, "Boston Public Schools Enrollment Statistics, 1967-1987," obtained from Department of Health, Education and Welfare, OCR Report and Massachusetts State Department of Education October Report.

3 David Rogers, *110 Livingston Street: Politics and Bureaucracy in the New York City Schools* (New York: Random House, 1968); Richard F. Elmore, "Organizational Models of Social Program Implementation," *Public Policy* 26 (Spring 1978): 185-228; Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976): 1-19.

4 Ibid., 15-29.

5 Ibid., 29-35.

6 Ibid., 198-201, 364-67.

7 Ibid., xvi.

8 Originally the law created 31 districts and the 32nd district was added some years later.

9 David Rogers and Norman H. Chung, *110 Livingston Street Revisited* (New York: New York University Press, 1983); Ibid., 203-4.

10 Ibid., 20, 42-43, 70, 90-91, 110-13, 133-140, 153-59, 175-185.

11 Nancy M. Lederman et al., *Governing the New York City Schools: Roles and Relationships in the Decentralized System* (New York: Public Education Association, 1987); The Manhattan Borough President's Task Force on Education and Decentralization, *Improving the Odds: Making Decentralization Work for Children, for Schools, for Communities* (New York: Author, 1987).

12 Roger Alcaly and David Mermelstein, *The Fiscal Crisis of American Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977); Jack Newfield and Paul DeBrul, *The Abuse of Power* (New York: Viking, 1977).

13 Joseph P. Viteritti, *Across the River: Politics and Education in the City* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1983), 14-23.

14 Ibid.,119-123.

15 Eugene Radwin et al., *A Case Study of New York City's Citywide Reading Testing Program* (Cambridge, MA: The Huron Institute, 1981), VII16-VII22.

16 Office of Educational Assessment, *Evaluation Update on the Effects of the Promotional Policy Program* (New York: New York City Board of Education, 12 November 1986).

17 Radwin et al., *A Case Study*, V40-V50.

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19 Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 59, 259.

20 United States v. Chicago Board of Education, 80 C 5124, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

21 Patrick Shannon, "Mastery Learning & Reading: Instructional System or Management Straight Jacket for Teachers?" address given to International Reading Association, September 1982, as reprinted in *Substance* 7 (September 1982): 5-7.

[22] Chicago Board of Education, *High School Renaissance: A Plan for Implementation* (Chicago: Author, November 1983).

[23] Marty Gartzman, "Renaissance Flips, Flops Once Again," *Substance* 10 (May 1985): 13.

[24] Henry S. Resnik, *Turning on the System: War in the Philadelphia Public Schools* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 4-5.

[25] Ibid., 6-25.

[26] Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy and Schools, The Illusion of Educational Change in America.* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

[27] Peter Schrag, *Village School Downtown: Politics and Education, A Boston Report* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967).

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[29] Morgan et al. v Kerrigan et al., 401 F. Supp. 216, (DMA 1975).

[30] J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Knopf Publishers, distributed by Random House, 1985).

[31] Allen, "Segregation and Desegregation in Boston's Schools," 128-130.

[32] Compact Planning Group, *The Boston Compact: An Operational Plan for Expanded Partnerships with the Boston Public Schools*, n.p., 1982.

[33] Allen v. McDonough, Superior Court, Civ. No. 14948 (1976).

# CHAPTER 3. PLACEMENT AND LABELING: THE K-12 CONTEXT

The primary focus of this study is on analyzing placement and labeling policies and practices in the high schools of large urban school systems, with a major emphasis on assignment to schools, assignment to tracks or groups within schools, and assignment to grades. To understand these high school policies and practices, it is important to review briefly some key characteristics of placement and labeling from grades kindergarten through twelve in these school systems, including their elementary and junior high schools.

As noted in Chapter 1, all large organizations that provide services to clients inevitably develop complex placement and labeling systems. Whatever benefits such systems have for the client (for example, in matching client needs with appropriate services), these placement and labeling systems are absolutely essential simply to keep the organizations running from day-to-day.[1] A complex organization that serves 55,000, 195,000, 430,000, or 935,000 clients (as do the school systems that we studied) must match client groups of manageable size (in this case students) with those employed to serve them (in this case teachers and other educators) simply to avoid chaos. A vivid illustration of this bedrock organizational need is the frenetic activity of the assistant principal or teacher called the "programmer" who struggles to juggle class schedules for 2,000 students and 100 teachers in a typical Chicago neighborhood high school as the first day of school nears.

Certain solutions to the basic organizational imperative to place and label students have endured in the American educational system for decades and are perceived by most of its participants as natural and inevitable.[2] Thus, a student who moved into a particular school system almost anywhere in the United States would quickly find herself assigned to a school, a grade level within that school (typically determined by the student's age), and some form of track, instructional group, or set of instructional groups within that grade or within a classroom in that grade. The near universality of school assignment, grade assignment, and track or group assignment persists despite the often exasperated observations made by educational critics that many alternatives are possible that would be more beneficial to children.[3]

While our primary interest is in the ways that school assignment, track or instructional group assignment, grade assignment, and other important placement and labeling practices get played out within the high schools in large urban school districts, placement and labeling practices at the high school level are decisively shaped by the

placement and labeling practices that students experience throughout their school career, beginning in preschool and kindergarten. Thus, it is essential to provide a context for understanding high school placement and labeling practices by emphasizing a few key points about the placement and labeling that are consistent throughout the students entire K-12 school experience.

## Assignment to a School

A small number of students in the four school systems studied received instruction at more than one school (for example, they attended a neighborhood school in the morning and a vocational training center in the afternoon). However, almost all students from the youngest to the oldest in these four school systems were assigned to a particular school where they received all of their instructional experience. Thus, assignment to a school determined the scope and nature of the educational program available to them.

The most frequent determinant of which school a child attended in three of the four school systems was simply the child's place of residence. Neighborhood elementary, middle or junior high, and high schools that accepted all students who lived within a certain geographic area and who were at a grade level served by the school were by far the most common types of schools in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. In Boston, the school desegregation court order had resulted in a modification of this residence-based approach to school assignment that is aimed at increasing racial integration, by creating larger and more racially diverse geographic districts. Each student in grades one through twelve was assigned a "geocode" for their neighborhood, which determined the district school the student would attend, unless the student was admitted to a magnet or other special school. Thus, even the geocode system created a modified form of school attendance assignment based on residence, since desegregation planners attempted to increase integration while minimizing the distances that students were transported from their homes.

Of course, basing the school assignment process on a student's place of residence meant that students whose family moved were often required to attend a different school. Some students changed schools several times during their elementary school years, and others changed schools more than once during one school year. Such students experienced the various placement and labeling systems each time they changed schools. Given poor system-wide coordination of records and information, and wide variability in school-to-school implementation of system-wide policies, some observers argued that the transfer process put students further at risk of not receiving appropriate services. Methods for minimizing the detrimental impact of mobility, such as standardization of curriculum and

allowing students more latitude in remaining at one school, have been an important topic for public debate in these school systems.

In all four school districts, a student attended the school determined by her place of residence unless either the family, the student, or school authorities took the initiative to have the child assigned to another school, based on a set of formal and informal procedures that were a major focus of analysis in this study. The neighborhood or district school thus became the school that a student attended by default, absent initiative to change this decision. A student ended up attending a non-neighborhood or non-district school if, for example, the student applied for and gained admission to a selective elementary, junior high, or high school with a special admissions test and other entrance requirements; if the student applied for an alternative school to which students were admitted by lottery from among applicants; if the student applied for a permissive transfer under the school system's voluntary desegregation plan; if the student was judged to have an educational handicap that could not be dealt with in the neighborhood school; or if the student was judged to need a bilingual educational program not offered in his neighborhood school.[4]

While the focus of this study was on high school placement and labeling practices, we found many of the same procedures for admission to non-neighborhood elementary and middle schools in these four school systems that were operating at the high school level:

- Example: In 1986-87, the four junior high schools in New York City's District 13 were organized into seventeen semi-autonomous program subunits called "houses." Eight of the seventeen had selective admissions requirements, (for example, one year above grade level in reading and math). Admissions to all seventeen were decided by the district administration staff. Each of the programs had a target student population, such as "gifted," "potentially gifted," "late bloomers," "bilingual," "academically achieving," and "students with strong interests in the performing arts." Each unit had its own learning objectives and teaching strategies, but all were required to implement a basic skills standardized curriculum and testing program based on the five effective schools principles developed by Ronald Edmonds.[5]

- Example: In 1985-86, Chicago operated 37 selective elementary magnet schools to which families had to apply in the spring before the child wished to enter. They included Academically Accelerated and Gifted Classical Schools, Regional Gifted Centers, International Baccalaureate Programs, Academic Magnet Schools, Humanities Programs, and Foreign Language Programs and Academies. Most of these magnet schools required students to achieve high scores on readiness or achievement tests to be judged eligible to apply. Frequently, these schools admitted only one child in ten from among those judged eligible.[6]

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, school assignment at elementary and junior high levels often played a decisive role in determining whether a student would be eligible to attend a particular selective high school later on, since selective high schools often recruited students from particular selective elementary and junior high schools and/or required prior coursework that was primarily available at these schools.

The brief recent histories of the four school systems presented in Chapter 2 note the growth of various types of options to the neighborhood school in these school systems from 1970 through 1985. The proliferation of such options, which we analyze in detail at the high school level, has been paralleled by similar growth at the elementary and junior high levels.

The neighborhoods in the four cities were substantially segregated by race, ethnic group, and income. The use of residence as the most frequent basis for school assignment typically meant that neighborhood schools were substantially segregated along these same lines, except in Boston with its mandatory busing program. The growth of schools requiring special admission, illustrated above, has the potential either to exacerbate this segregation (for example, if magnet schools drain off most of the middle-class or high-achieving students from the neighborhood school in a predominantly low-income neighborhood) or to ameliorate this segregation (for example, if students regardless of social background gain admission to schools of choice that are more diverse in terms of race and income). The actual impact on race segregation, income segregation, and other equity concerns that resulted from creating various alternatives to the neighborhood school has been the subject of intense controversy and was a major focus of this study.

## Assignment to Grade

Another near universal practice in the four school districts, as widely accepted as the practice of assigning students to a particular school, was assignment to a particular grade, typically by age. Each school system allowed children to enter kindergarten voluntarily and required children to enter first grade if they met a specified minimum age requirement on the opening day of school. From that point on, the child who made normal progress advanced one grade level each year until graduating from high school at the end of twelfth grade. If a student transferred into a school after kindergarten or first grade, the school system evaluated the student for grade placement, typically by considering the student's age, by reviewing the student's transcript from previous schooling, and/or by testing the student.

Elementary and junior high students judged not to have made adequate progress were often held back for a year and required either to repeat the grade or to complete a special remedial program for a year. In later grades and particularly in high school, students whose progress was inadequate were often able to secure promotion by passing particular courses that they had previously failed, rather than being required to repeat an entire grade or participate in a full-year remedial program.

As noted in Chapter 2 and as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, each of the four systems have instituted strict grade promotion policies at some time in the past decade, but these policies have been inconsistently implemented at the school level.

The costs and benefits of various policies for promoting students from grade to grade have been a major issue in all four school systems at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, proponents of strict promotion requirements argued that "ending social promotion" was essential for raising student and staff expectations and insuring that students graduated with an adequate mastery of basic skills. Opponents of such strict promotion policies cited research indicating that students who were held back did not achieve better and were more likely to drop out.

## Grade Ranges Within Schools

The practices of assigning students to particular schools and particular grade levels have given rise to debate about the grade span appropriate for different types of schools. It was a consistent practice in all four school systems to instruct students in grades 9-12 in separate high schools (in New York City, some junior highs extend through ninth grade so that some students did not enter high school until tenth grade).

For younger students, three of the four systems (New York, Philadelphia, and Boston) had created elementary schools (which typically served students in grades K-4, K-5, or K-6) and either junior highs (which typically served students in grades 7-8) or middle schools (which typically serve students in grades 5-8 or 6-8).

- In Boston, the desegregation court order created uniform K-5 elementary schools, grade 6-8 middle schools, and grade 9-12 high schools. However, the court order also allowed two city-wide exam high schools and one city-wide magnet high school to create special grade 7-8 programs.

- In Philadelphia, there were 23 junior highs serving grades 7-8 and 16 middle schools serving grades 5-8 in 1985-86. Philadelphia is currently making a complete transition to middle schools.

- In New York, the community school boards have created a wide variety of grade patterns for schools serving young adolescents, including grades 7-9, 7-8, 5-8, and 6-8.
- In Chicago, most students attend a single "elementary school" from grades K-8. Exceptions to this predominant pattern included six middle schools, three "upper grade centers" for grades 7-8, seven special schools for slow learners in grades 6-8, and three academically-selective grade 7-8 programs operated at three academically-selective high schools.

Differences in the grade structures of junior highs and middle schools arise, in part, from concerns about the best ways to educate young adolescents. Policy makers and researchers concerned about these students have debated whether schools serving them should be more like elementary schools (for example, with one teacher instructing students during most of the day), more like high schools (for example, with students moving from teacher to teacher), or should instead have unique characteristics that respond especially to the needs of students in this age group. Those who favor responding to adolescent needs have often pushed for separate middle schools that serve young adolescents ages 11-15 with a developmentally appropriate curriculum. However, many advocates for these children argue that the precise grade configuration is less important than how programs and classes are organized.[7]

As noted above, the middle school grade structure has been adopted on a wide scale in Boston and Philadelphia and on a more limited basis in New York, but has not taken hold in Chicago, despite a small-scale experiment with six "model" middle schools in the 1970s. As with other educational reforms, it has proved easier to adopt the basic institutional structure of the innovation (in this case the middle school grade structure), than to implement the instructional practices that go with it. Thus, our consultants reported that schools in the four cities with a middle school grade structure were often indistinguishable in their instructional approach from schools with the junior high grade structure.

As will be discussed in Chapter 4, the growth of selective high schools and the perception on the part of parents and educators that a student's future life chances may depend heavily on securing admission to a selective high school program exerted great pressure on middle schools and junior highs in these four cities to view their task as one of preparing students for high school admissions tests and courses, rather than dealing with the immediate developmental needs of their students.

### Assignment to Tracks and Groups

In Chapter 5, we analyze practices of tracking and grouping within the high schools in the four school districts. These practices typically include assigning students to classes

with such labels as Advanced Placement, Honors, College Preparatory, Bilingual, General, Basic, Remedial, or Special Education. Assignment to these classes, in turn, influenced the course sequences that students could complete by graduation (for example, college prep or vocational sequences).

The pervasiveness of these various forms of "ability grouping" at the high school level was echoed by similar practices in elementary, junior high, and middle schools, where such grouping was also in evidence in numerous forms in virtually every school.

- Example: In Boston, students in third grade were invited to apply for admission to "Advanced Work Classes" for grades 4-6. Admission was based on second grade standardized test scores. The course content and teaching practices of the Advanced Work Classes prepared students to apply to the city's academically selective exam high schools later on, including special seventh and eighth grade programs offered by two exam high schools.

- Example: In all four cities, individuals interviewed were aware of elementary schools that began grouping students as early as kindergarten, based on their reading readiness test scores.

Further, just as attendance at a selective elementary or junior high school was often key to gaining admission to a selective high school, participation in a particular track or group within an elementary or junior high school was often necessary to participate in a desired track or program in high school. Proponents of early grouping and tracking argue that it prepares able students, including minority and low-income students, for later academic success. Critics view these practices as a premature narrowing of opportunities that is particularly detrimental to minority and low-income children.

## School-to-School Variability

Despite the pervasiveness of assignment to school, assignment to grade, and assignment to track and group at all levels of the school systems studied, there was enormous variability in the ways in which these and other placement and labeling practices were implemented in local schools. For example, one might expect that the development of selective elementary schools, junior highs, and high schools and the admissions standards and procedures that governed access to them would be carried out based on a detailed system-wide plan with strong school board and central administration leadership and oversight. Except in Boston, however, the reality was that local school principals had considerable discretion in responding to a generally-stated policy authorizing magnet schools and programs. In response, they have set up a wide variety of "options" that have

operated with very little central administration or school board oversight of their program focus and admissions procedures. (And even in Boston ways were often found to circumvent central administration oversight.)

- Example: In the third year under the school desegregation consent decree in Chicago, after a large network of magnet schools had been established, the central administration admitted that it did not have a comprehensive list of the admissions requirements for these schools and proposed to do a study to determine what these requirements were.[8]

Similar patterns of school autonomy and variability among schools can be seen in elementary, junior high, and high schools in such areas as setting and implementing student promotion standards and in establishing and implementing practices for tracking and grouping inside individual schools.

- Example: In 1982, Boston adopted a strict system-wide promotion policy. Yet in 1984-85, the percentage of students not promoted in Boston's 24 middle schools ranged from 3.6% to 34.0%; the percentage of black students not promoted ranged from 3.7% to 33.6%; the percentage of white students not promoted ranged from 2.6% to 42.7%; and the percentage of Hispanic students not promoted ranged from 4.9% to 42.9%.[9] Such observations are consistent with the body of research about organizations in general and schools in particular that has characterized them as "loosely-coupled" and has emphasized the wide gap that often exists between policy and its implementation.[10] For example:

  > Over the past decade social reformers have come to feel much like T.S. Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock: their accomplishments are a pale reflection of their intentions. The big ideas that have shaped social policy . . . seem to have become caricatures of themselves the moment they ceased to be ideas and began to be translated into action. . . . A large collection of carefully documented case studies—in education, manpower, housing, and economic development—points consistently to the same pattern: grand pretensions, faulty execution, puny results.[11]

In subsequent chapters, we provide many examples of this loose coupling at the high school level that shapes the nature of placement and labeling. These same dynamics are also predominant in elementary and junior high schools.

## NOTES

[1] Nicholas Hobbs, *The Futures of Children: Categories, Labels, and Their Consequences, A Summary* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1975); Nicholas Hobbs, *Issues in the Classification of Children, Volumes I and II* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975).

[2] Dan C. Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Seymour B. Sarason, *The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change, Second Edition* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982).

[3] Sarason, *The Culture of the School*, 9-28.

[4] There is considerable student movement between the public and private/parochial schools, which typically peaks at certain grades. For example, in a city where public schools offer kindergarten and parochial schools do not, many students will enter public school for kindergarten then leave at the end of kindergarten to attend parochial schools. Another common time for movement is at the end of the eighth grade, when students move in both directions, from public to private and from private to public, for high school.

[5] Board of Education of the City of New York, Community School District 13, "Junior High School Programs Fact Sheets" (New York: Author, 1986).

[6] Chicago Public Schools, Department of Equal Educational Opportunity Programs, "Options for Knowledge Programs" (Chicago: Author, November 1986).

[7] Gayle Dorman, *Improving Middle-Grades Schools: A Framework for Action* (Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence, 1987); Norm Fruchter, *Meeting Adolescent Need: Four Effective Middle Schools* (New York: Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., 1986); Joan Lipsitz et al., *Grade Organization: Is There a "Best" Solution?* (Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence, Summer 1984); James M. McPartland, "Balancing High Quality Subject-Matter Instruction with Positive Teacher-Student Relations in the Middle Grades: Effects of Departmentalization, Tracking and Block Scheduling on Learning Environments" (Baltimore: Center for Research on Elementary and Middle Schools, The Johns Hopkins University, June 1987); Anne Wheelock and Gayle Dorman, *Before It's Too Late, Dropout Prevention in the Middle Grades* (Boston: Massachusetts Advocacy Center and Carrboro, NC: Center for Early Adolescence, 1988).

[8] Chicago Public Schools, Office of Equal Educational Opportunity, *Annual Desegregation Review 1983-84, Part II: Recommendations on Educational Components* (Chicago: Author, September 1984), 485-489.

[9] Massachusetts Advocacy Center, *The Way Out: Student Exclusion Practices in Boston Middle Schools* (Boston: Author, 1986), 38.

[10] Richard F. Elmore, "Organizational Models of Social Program Implementation," *Public Policy* 26 (Spring 1978): 185-228; Paul Sabatier and Daniel Mazmanian, *The Implementation of Regulatory Policy: A Framework for Analysis* (Davis, CA: Institute of Governmental Affairs, 1979); Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976): 1-18.

[11] Elmore, "Organizational Models," 186.

# CHAPTER 4. ADMISSION TO HIGH SCHOOL

The four school systems operate a variety of high schools, ranging from some that have the reputation of being dangerous and offering inferior education to some that are considered among the nation's very best. Some of the high schools in these four cities are neighborhood high schools serving neighborhoods that range from extremely low-income to middle- and upper-middle income. And as described in Chapters 2 and 3, all four school systems have since 1970 created a range of schools and programs that represent an alternative to these neighborhood high schools, which are variously called magnet high schools, magnet programs, educational options, alternative high schools, and schools of choice. We use the term "options high schools and programs" as a general label to cover these schools and programs in this chapter.

Chapter 4 analyzes the crucial placement decisions in the four school systems that determine which high school a student will attend, dealing with the following topics:

- The recent history of high school admissions, highlighting changes from 1970 through 1985.
- Six different types of high schools that were operating in the four cities and the characteristics of students who attended them.
- The growing number of options programs that were being established within high schools.
- The characteristics of the high school admissions process through which students ended up in different types of high schools and programs within high schools.
- The impact of options high schools and programs on neighborhood high schools and on junior highs.
- The quality of options high schools and programs.

Finally, we make policy recommendations based on study findings about admission to high school.

## High School Admissions: Recent History

During their eighth grade year, most students in the four cities had the opportunity to apply to any one of a large number of high schools and high school programs. As explained in Chapter 3, a student ended up in a neighborhood or district high school that served her place of residence unless she pursued and secured admission elsewhere.

Historically, most big city students have not faced the extensive menu of options for high school that they do today; before 1970, most students simply moved from their neighborhood junior high to their neighborhood high school.

However, long before the movement for school choice began in the 1970s, many big city school systems operated a few schools whose seats were filled through special application, typically schools that served their highest achieving students.

- Example: The city of Boston established the Public Latin School in 1635 as a school open to any male student with adequate training in Greek and Latin, classical literature, history, and philosophy. Funded by public money and by student tuition, the Latin School became a training ground for the colony's ministers, teachers, and governors. Later known as the Boston Latin School, it has continued for over 350 years as the premier selective admissions high school within the Boston Public Schools.[1]

Similarly, the other three cities studied have "exam schools" with long histories, such as Bronx High School of Science in New York, Lane Technical High School in Chicago, and Central High School in Philadelphia.

A second long-standing alternative to the neighborhood high school was the vocational high school. These high schools were typically established as a result of the vocational education movement in the early twentieth century or the substantial federal funding available for vocational education in the 1960s.[2] They were intended to prepare students for the world of work who did not plan to attend college. In all four cities, two different types of vocational schools emerged: schools that were academically selective and schools that were non-selective or had very minimal selection criteria. The academically selective vocational high schools typically had modest academic admissions requirements as compared with the academic exam schools. However, their usual combination of basic skills achievement, course grades, behavior, and attendance requirements nevertheless excluded a significant portion of the school system's total enrollment from securing admission.

- Example: In 1987-88, the application material for Bok Area Vocational-Technical School in Philadelphia indicated that successful applicants had to pass a reading test administered by the school, complete a personal interview, have a grade of C or higher in behavior in junior high school, and have a good attendance record.[3]

In 1970, students entering high school in the four cities chose from a limited menu of options, with most automatically attending their neighborhood high school and a few entering an exam school or vocational school. Given the racial segregation of

neighborhoods in all four cities, this student assignment pattern meant that most students attended racially segregated neighborhood high schools. Further, most exam schools were disproportionately white, and most vocational schools were either predominantly white or predominantly black.

Beginning in about 1970 and continuing into the 1980s, all four school systems steadily established more options high schools and programs (or "options" or "magnet schools" or "schools of choice") as alternatives to the neighborhood high school. Such options, for example, focused on higher achievers (as did the long-existing exam schools), embodied a particular educational philosophy, addressed an area of student interest (such as the arts), or emphasized preparation for a particular occupation. They were either entirely separate schools or separate programs within existing neighborhood high schools. Among these options programs within schools, some were operated as entirely separate schools that were simply housed at the neighborhood school and some were simply course sequences within the existing neighborhood high school program.

Although these high school options sprang from multiple sources, a major impetus for establishing them on a substantial scale was the effort of urban school systems to develop a less controversial alternative to mandatory student busing to remedy racial segregation. The proponents of options (or magnet schools, as they have been most frequently called in connection with school desegregation) argued that students could be enticed to attend integrated schools if they voluntarily chose to attend because the school offered an attractive educational program.

Other arguments for dramatically expanding optional schools and programs that were frequently voiced in the four cities were the following:

- Options keep white students in the school system and attract back white students who have left.[4]
- Options keep black and Hispanic students from middle-class and blue collar families in the school system and attract back such students who have left.[5]
- Options provide an opportunity for talented low-income and minority students to gain access to quality courses and instruction that are not available in their neighborhood high school, so that they will have a better chance to pursue higher education.[6]
- Options create competition among schools and thus lead to overall school improvement.[7]
- Options improve the morale of school system staff and the public image of the school system by demonstrating that the system is capable of

establishing high quality educational programs that successfully prepare students for employment and higher education.[8]

The net result of the movement for options has been a dramatically increased array of such options at the high school level in each of the four cities:

- Example: In New York, eighth grade students in 1984-85 were given a catalog over 300 pages long describing options schools and programs. They chose from 261 different schools and programs that were listed on their high school application. Their choices included, for example, Edward R. Murrow High School for Communications, Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics, Aviation High School, and Academy of Finance.[9]

- Example: In Chicago, eighth grade students could apply to 76 high school Options for Knowledge programs for fall 1986, including Lindblom Technical High School, the International Baccalaureate Program at Kenwood Academy, Word Processing and Typesetting at Amundsen High School, and Allied Health Preparatory at DuSable High School.[10]

- Example: In Philadelphia, the school district's *Options* booklet for 1987-88 listed 44 high school choices, including the Parkway Program, Bodine High School for International Affairs, Motivation Program at Edison High School, Bartram Business Magnet Program, the Roxborough/Randolph Skills Hi-Tech Magnet Program, and the Saul High School of Agricultural Sciences.[11]

- Example: In Boston, eighth grade students could apply to 25 magnet high school programs for 1984-85, including Boston Technical High School, Music Magnet Program at Madison Park High School, Umana School of Science and Technology, and Urban Retrofit at Dorchester High School.[12]

If one charts the growth of high school options from 1970 through 1985 in these four cities, it has typically occurred in three (sometimes overlapping) stages.

- First, a limited number of options schools and programs within schools were established, typically as part of a school desegregation plan.

- Second, well-organized parent groups and enterprising school principals pressed to establish options programs in their own local high schools, to have their high school designated an options school with special admissions criteria, or to establish an entirely new options high school. Often, they used previously-established options as their model for curriculum and admissions criteria.

- Third, the number of options grew rapidly as various organizational incentives (for example extra staffing, extra funds, or greater control over staff selection) were made generally available for schools that established options programs.

At first glance, catalogs of available options might suggest that the typical entering high school student in these school systems had a substantial opportunity to attend a school tailored to his or her interests and needs. Critics of the movement to increase options in these four cities have argued that, in actual practice, options have failed to live up to their promise and have undermined, rather than improved, the quality of education for the average urban high school student. Among their charges are the following:

- Many options employ sanctioned and unsanctioned admissions criteria and procedures that screen out the majority of urban students, especially students at risk. Often, entrance criteria have no proven relationship to subsequent program success.[13]

- Options cater to and compete for the highest-achieving students. Thus, they do not create incentives for overall educational improvement, but rather encourage schools to recruit and serve high achievers and thus neglect the majority of students.[14]

- Options are of varying educational quality. However, their quality and impact on their students' performance are seldom evaluated.[15]

- Options undermine those neighborhood high schools that must deal with the highest percentages of students at risk; they siphon off the best students and best teachers from these schools and receive a disproportionate share of school system resources. Thus, they undermine rather than improve overall student and teacher morale in the school system.[16]

Underlying the controversy about the pros and cons of options high schools and programs, at least in these big cities, is a basic question about who is educable and whose interests should be served first, if there is a conflict between the education of low-income children and of middle-class children. Some proponents of options high schools and programs argue that they can benefit all students, and point to smaller cities where the objective of making options open to a full spectrum of students is being seriously pursued.[17] In the four cities studied, however, some of their proponents express doubts that the majority of low-income children can be educated or that middle-class parents (whether black, Hispanic, or white) will allow their children to attend schools with low-income children; they see the magnets as a way to keep the middle class in the city and to recompense middle-class parents for the contribution that they make to the schools through property taxes.[18] This chapter presents evidence about several of the key controversies surrounding high school admissions.

## Six Types of High Schools

In studying the high schools in the four cities, we sought the perceptions of educators, researchers, and child advocates about the characteristics of those high schools that were most desirable and least desirable to attend. In response to our inquiries, schools were described and sorted in a variety of ways: academically selective schools that offered a high quality academic program, vocational schools that in fact provided useful training, schools that were safe and pleasant but weak academically, schools that were physically dangerous to attend, schools in middle-income neighborhoods that were strong academically, schools in middle-income neighborhoods that were poorly run, schools in low-income neighborhoods considered "schools of last resort," schools in low-income neighborhoods that were "succeeding against the odds."

Partly based on such assessments of school quality and partly on our interest in analyzing the impact of high school admissions on students at risk, we divided high schools into six types. The first step in distinguishing these six types was to separate those high schools that had significant academic admissions criteria from those that did not. Included in the group of academically selective schools were the academically selective magnet schools of recent vintage, the traditional exam schools, and the academically selective vocational schools.

Most of the second group of schools (those that were academically non-selective) were neighborhood or district high schools to which students were assigned based on their place of residence. Also included in this group of academically non-selective schools were those schools that required a special application process, but that either chose students through a lottery, used some other admissions standard besides academic achievement to screen applicants (such as past attendance or behavior record), or had very minimal academic requirements that didn't rule many of the system's students out.

We divided the academically non-selective high schools into three groups based on the percentage of low-income students who attended them. We did so both because this three-fold division among the academically non-selective schools was useful in exploring our concern about at-risk students, and because it was roughly consistent with the kinds of subgroupings into which many of those interviewed divided the academically non-selective high schools. Many of those interviewed grouped the neighborhood high schools in their city into: a set of high schools that served extremely low-income neighborhoods, a set that served more middle-class neighborhoods, and a set that fell in between.

To sort non-selective schools based on their low-income enrollment, we employed data that the school systems gathered to qualify for the federal Chapter 1 program. Using

somewhat different criteria, each school system classified a percentage of its students as "low-income." In New York, Chicago and Boston, the system identified those students who were eligible for free or reduced lunch as low-income. In Philadelphia, the system identified those students whose families received Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) as low-income.[19]

There are several methodological limitations associated with using this federal Chapter 1 eligibility data as an indicator for the social composition of a school. First, as noted above, the criteria for defining a low-income student were somewhat different among the four school systems. Second, individual schools applied these criteria in different ways, depending on the interest of the school principal or other key staff in offering free lunches to students and the staff's stringency in verifying student eligibility for free and reduced lunch. Third, there was a significant drop in the reported percentage of students eligible for free and reduced lunch in high schools, as compared with grades K-8. According to our consultants, this dropoff occurred primarily because high school students were less inclined to sign up for the lunch program. Fourth, because Chapter 1 eligibility data merely divided the students in a school into two discrete groups, these data did not give a picture of the distribution of income in the school.[20]

Despite these methodological limitations in using these Chapter 1 data as indicators of a school's social composition, they provide an adequate basis for placing schools that are not academically selective in three major categories (Low-Income, Low- to Moderate-Income, and Moderate-Income). However, these data are not useful for making precise distinctions among individual high schools. Further, the data are most useful for making relative comparisons among types of schools within school systems, and comparisons across school systems using these data should be made with great caution.

Because there were no consistent breaks in the school-by-school distribution of low-income students within the four cities, we merely divided all the schools in each city that were not academically selective into three equal groups, based on their reported percentage of low-income students.[21] The process of grouping schools that we employed resulted in six major school types (the short titles in parenthesis are used subsequently in the text and in tables):

- Academically Non-Selective Low-Income High Schools (Non-Selective Low-Income Schools)
- Academically Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income High Schools (Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income Schools)

- Academically Non-Selective Moderate-Income High Schools (Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools)
- Academically Selective Vocational High Schools (Selective Vocational Schools)
- Academically Selective Magnet High Schools (Selective Magnet Schools)
- Academically Selective Exam High Schools (Selective Exam Schools)

In Tables 4-1 and 4-2 we present some summary information about the six types of high schools in each of the four school systems, indicating the number of schools of each type in these systems, the numbers and percentages of students who attended schools of each type, and the name of a typical high school of each type in each school system. As Table 4-1 indicates, each school system had at least one school of each type, except that Boston had no Selective Magnet Schools and no Selective Vocational Schools, since such schools were not permitted under the Boston desegregation order.

Of particular interest in Table 4-1 are the percentages of students in the four cities who attended academically selective high schools versus academically non-selective high schools. As Table 4-1 indicates, three of the four systems (New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia) ended up with close to 20% of their high school students in academically selective high schools. Further, although Boston's desegregation plan did not permit them to establish academically selective magnet or vocational schools, Boston had a substantially greater percentage of students in academically selective high schools overall (28%) than the other three cities, all of them enrolled in exam schools.

Conversely, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia each had about 80% of their students in academically non-selective high schools, while Boston enrolled 72% of its students in non-selective schools. These percentages underscore the fact that the vast majority of students in these school systems attended non-selective high schools.

## Student Characteristics in the Six Types of High Schools

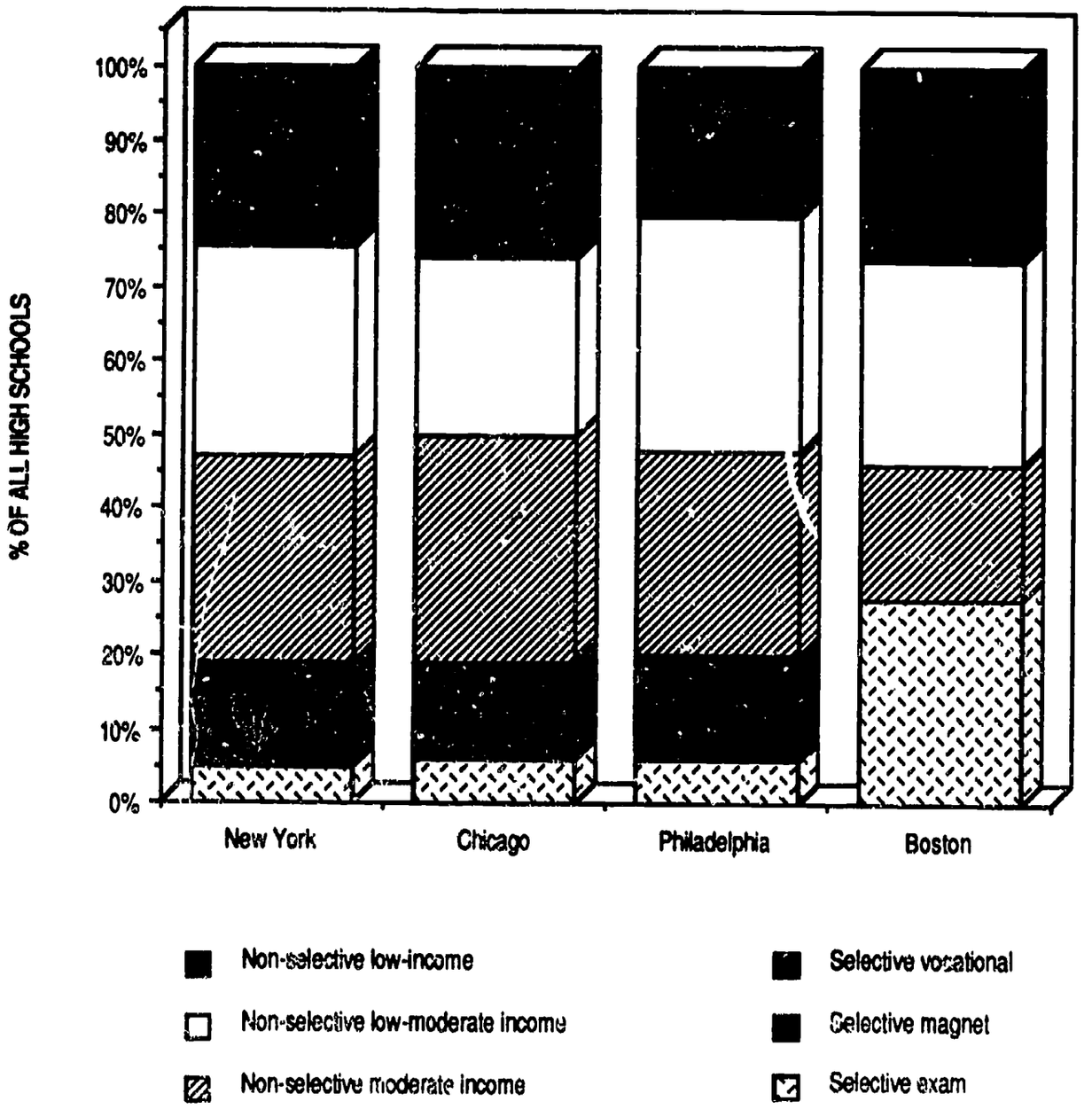
Considerable effort was expended by the research team to identify and analyze data about the characteristics of students attending the six different types of schools. Consistent with our research plan, we were interested in documenting the social background and other characteristics of students who attended these different types of schools, including characteristics that have been shown through past research to put students at risk of school failure. Below, we present and discuss data about these six types of schools in light of the following student characteristics: percent low-income, percent white, percent black,

## Table 4-1. SIX TYPES OF HIGH SCHOOLS[22]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 25 schools | 18 schools | 7 schools | 5 schools |
| Student Enrollment | 62,391 students | 28,614 students | 11,718 students | 4,[illegible]56 students |
| % Total System Enrollment | 24.4 % | 25.[illegible] % | 20.4 % | 26.4 % |
| Example | Theodore Roosevelt High School | DuSable High School | Franklin High School | Charlestown High School |
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 25 schools | 18 schools | 7 schools | 4 schools |
| Student Enrollment | 73,069 students | 27,109 students | 18,294 students | 4,576 students |
| % Total System Enrollment | 28.5 % | 24.5 % | 31.9 % | 27.7 % |
| Example | Louis D. Brandeis High School | Lakeview High School | Overbrook High School | South Boston High School |
| *NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 26 schools | 18 schools | 7 schools | 4 schools |
| Student Enrollment | 71,968 students | 33,910 students | 15,955 students | 3,014 students |
| % Total System Enrollment | 28.1 % | 30.6 % | [illegible]7.8 % | 18.3 % |
| Example | Benjamin Cardozo High School | Kenwood Academy | [illegible]rtheast High School | West Roxbury High School |
| **NON-SELECTIVE SCHOOL TOTALS** | | | | |
| **Number of Schools** | **76 schools** | **54 schools** | **21 schools** | **13 schools** |
| **Student Enrollment** | **207,448 students** | **89,633 students** | **45,967 students** | **11,946 students** |
| **% Total System Enrollment** | **81.0 %** | **80.9 %** | **80.1 %** | **72.4 %** |
| *SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 9 schools | 6 schools | 4 schools | not |
| Student Enrollment | 16,555 students | 11,870 students | 6,072 students | applicable |
| % Total System Enrollment | 6.5 % | 10.7 % | 10.6 % | |
| Example | Aviation High School | Chicago Vocational High School | Dobbins Voc-Tech High School | |
| *SELECTIVE MAGNET* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 9 schools | 1 school | 3 schools | not |
| Student Enrollment | 19,295 students | 2,497 students | 1,977 students | applicable |
| % Total System Enrollment | 7.5 % | 2.3 % | 3.4 % | |
| Example | Edward R. Murrow High School | Whitney Young High School | Carver High School for Engineering & Science | |
| *SELECTIVE EXAM* | | | | |
| Number of Schools | 4 schools | 2 schools | 3 schools | 3 schools |
| Student Enrollment | 12,689 students | 6,775 students | 3,363 students | 4,545 students |
| % Total System Enrollment | 5.0 % | 6.1 % | 5.9 % | 27.6 % |
| Example | Bronx High School of Science | Lane Technical High School | Central High School | Boston Latin School |
| **SELECTIVE SCHOOL TOTALS** | | | | |
| **Number of Schools** | **22 schools** | **9 schools** | **10 schools** | **3 schools** |
| **Student Enrollment** | **48,539 students** | **21,142 students** | **11,412 students** | **4,545 students** |
| **% Total System Enrollment** | **19.0 %** | **19.1 %** | **19.9 %** | **27.6 %** |
| **TOTAL CITYWIDE** | | | | |
| **Number of High Schools** | **98 schools** | **63 schools** | **31 schools** | **16 schools** |
| **Student Enrollment** | **255,987 students** | **110,775 students** | **57,379 students** | **16,491 students** |

*Note: For a list of individual schools in each category, see Appendix B.*

## Table 4-2. COMPOSITION OF SCHOOL SYSTEMS BY HIGH SCHOOL TYPE[23]



percent Hispanic, percent of students receiving special education, percent of students receiving bilingual or English-as-a-second-language instruction, percent of students absent each day, percent of entering students with low reading scores, and percent of entering students who have previously been retained in grade. Related data appear in Tables 4-3 through 4-13.

To the extent possible, we attempted to portray all four school systems at a particular point in time. For New York, Chicago, and Boston, most data presented came from the 1984-85 school year. For Philadelphia, the 1985-86 school year was chosen, since the available data for that year were much more extensive.[24] The basic sources of data for each city were school-by-school data reports that each school system published.[25] This information was supplemented by data drawn from other data analyses and research prepared by the school systems and by data from independent researchers. Data sources and any problems associated with particular data sources are indicated in footnotes.

Because we focused on 1984-85 as a base year for analysis, statements made below in analyzing these data may not reflect the current situation. In some instances, school systems have, since that time, made changes that address some of the issues raised by these data.[26]

## Percentage of Low-Income Students

Table 4-3 indicates the percentage of low-income students in each type of high school in each city, based on the federal Chapter 1 eligibility data discussed earlier. For example, the upper-left entry in Table 4-2 indicates that 58% of the students enrolled in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in New York City were low-income students. Typically, it is useful to compare the percentage of students who had a specific characteristic and were enrolled in a specific type of school with the percentage of students who had that characteristic in the school system as a whole (the last row in the table). For example, the percentage of low-income students in Selective Vocational Schools in New York City (48%) was substantially greater than the percentage of low-income students in the school system as a whole (37%).

An initial point requires clarification in examining Table 4-3. Since the three types of non-selective high schools were defined based on their percentage of low-income students, it is hardly surprising that Table 4-3 indicates that these different types of high schools have differing percentages of low-income students. What is of interest is the extent of the differences among the various types of high schools in their percentage of low-income students.

## Table 4-3. PERCENTAGE OF LOW-INCOME STUDENTS[27]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 36,141 / 62,391 = 58% | 17,999 / 28,614 = 63% | 6,773 / 11,718 = 58% | 1,548 / 4,356 = 36% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 25,331 / 73,069 = 35% | 11,312 / 27,109 = 42% | 6,647 / 18,294 = 36% | 1,118 / 4,576 = 24% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 13,462 / 71,998 = 19% | 7,038 / 33,910 = 21% | 3,248 / 15,955 = 20% | 436 / 3,014 = 14% |
| Selective Vocational | 7,901 / 16,555 = 48% | 5,037 / 11,870 = 42% | 2,093 / 6,072 = 34% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 8,265 / 19,295 = 43% | 712 / 2,497 = 29% | 378 / 1,977 = 19% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 3,518 / 12,689 = 28% | 1,249 / 6,775 = 18% | 369 / 3,363 = 11% | 1,063 / 4,545 = 23% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 94,618 / 255,987 = 37% | 43,347 / 110,775 = 39% | 19,508 / 57,379 = 34% | 4,165 / 16,491 = 25% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of low-income students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 58% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are low-income students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 37% of all high school students are low-income stude..."*

*For a list of individual schools in each category, see Appendix B.*

Further, it is important to emphasize a point made earlier in the chapter: because the four school systems defined and identified low-income students in somewhat different ways, the primary focus of comparison should be on differences among types of high schools within a specific school district, rather than on comparisons across school districts. In particular, consultants familiar with the Boston schools believe that the lower reported percentage of low-income students in Boston as compared with the other three school districts (as indicated in Table 4-3) reflected the lack of initiative taken in some Boston high schools to identify students eligible for free and reduced lunch programs and not the fact that there was a significantly smaller percentage of low-income students in Boston than in the other three cities.

Taking these considerations into account, it is possible to make a series of generalizations about the distribution of low-income students in the six types of schools in the four cities:

- There were very large differences between Non-Selective Low-Income Schools and Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools in the four cities. In all four cities, the percentages of low-income students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools were about three times as great as the percentages in Moderate-Income Schools.

- Selective Vocational Schools enrolled percentages of low-income students that met or exceeded the system-wide averages for low-income students in the three cities that had such schools.

- In New York, the percentage of low-income students in Selective Magnet Schools exceeded the system-wide average, while in Chicago and Philadelphia, they were substantially less than the system-wide averages.

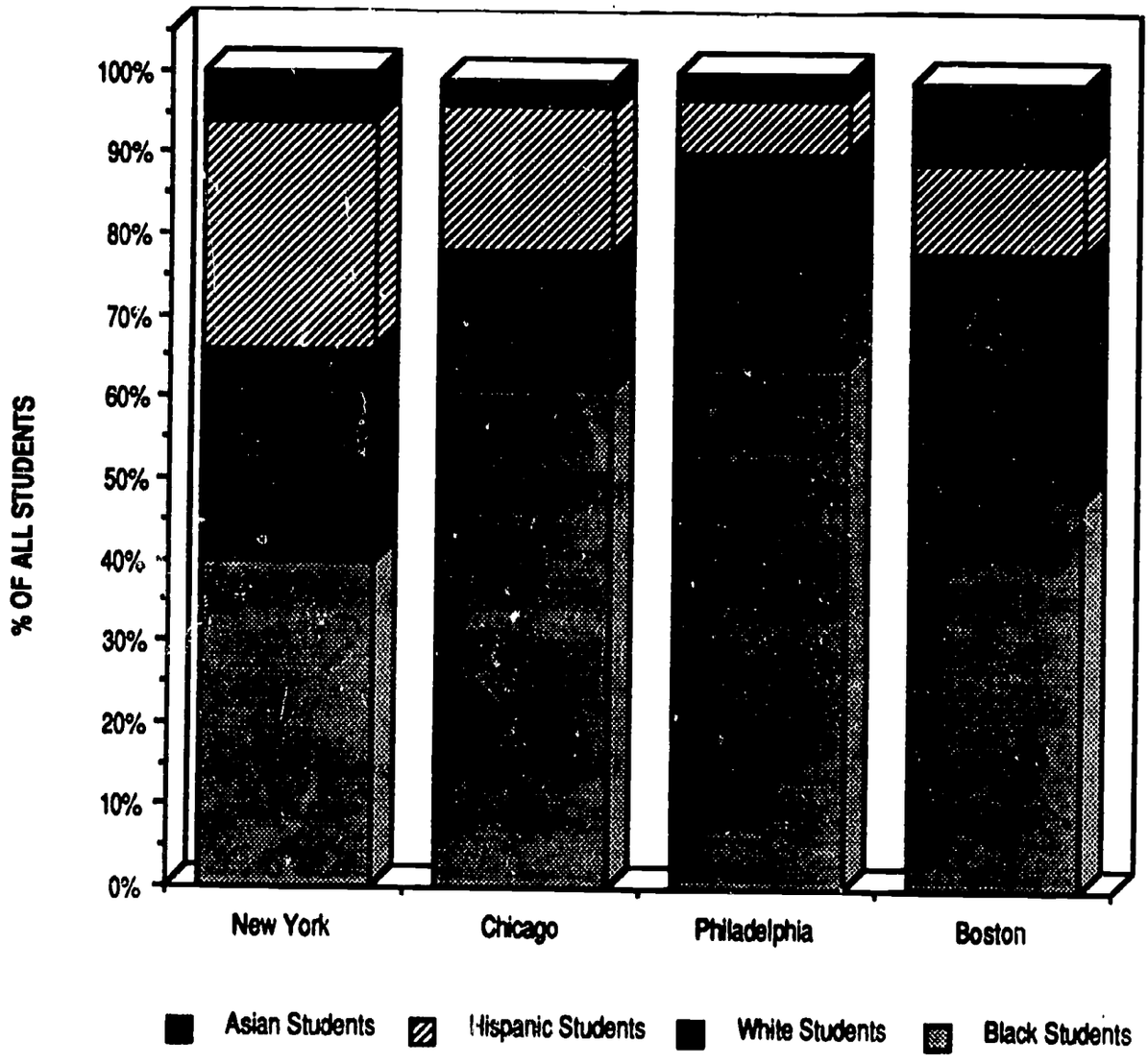
- In New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, the percentages of low-income students in Selective Exam Schools were substantially less than the system-wide averages. In Boston, the percentage of low-income students in Selective Exam Schools met the system-wide average.

### Percentage of White Students

Table 4-4 indicates the overall racial composition of the high schools in each school system while Table 4-5 presents the percentages of white students in each type of high school, and indicates the following:

- Except in Boston, very few white students attended Non-Selective Low-Income Schools. The significant percentage of white students in this category in Boston stemmed primarily from the fact that one predominantly white low-income high school in Boston was exempted from the school integration court order.

## Table 4-4. RACIAL COMPOSITION OF HIGH SCHOOLS[28]



## Table 4-5. PERCENTAGE OF WHITE STUDENTS[49]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadephia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 5,143 / 62,391 = 8% | 755 / 28,614 = 3% | 363 / 11,718 = 3% | 1,276 / 4,356 = 29% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 14,911 / 73,069 = 20% | 4,948 / 27,109 = 18% | 2,105 / 18,294 = 12% | 866 / 4,576 = 19% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 32,300 / 71,988 = 45% | 10,168 / 33,910 = 30% | 8,683 / 15,955 = 54% | 736 / 3,014 = 24% |
| Selective Vocational | 4,423 / 16,555 = 27% | 479 / 11,870 = 4% | 1,524 / 6,072 = 25% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 3,495 / 19,295 = 18% | 434 / 2,497 = 17% | 723 / 1,977 = 37% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 5,311 / 12,689 = 42% | 2,361 / 6,775 = 35% | 1,317 / 3,363 = 39% | 2,123 / 4,545 = 47% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 65,583 / 255,987 = 26% | 19,145 / 110,775 = 17% | 14,715 / 57,379 = 26% | 5,021 / 16,491 = 30% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of White students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 8% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are White students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 26% of all high school students are White students."*

- White students were heavily concentrated in Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools, except in Boston. In New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, the percentages of white student enrollment in these schools were almost double the system-wide averages for white students.

- The percentages of white students in Selective Vocational Schools in New York and Philadelphia mirrored their system-wide enrollment, while in Chicago few white students were enrolled in these schools.

- In New York, the percentage of white students in Selective Magnet Schools was less than the system-wide average. In Chicago, it mirrored the system-wide average. In Philadelphia, it exceeded the system-wide average.

- In all four cities, the percentage of white students in Selective Exam Schools was 1 1/2 to 2 times the system-wide average.

### Percentage of Black Students

Table 4-6 presents the percentages of black students in each type of high school and indicates the following:

- In all four cities, black students were significantly represented in all three types of non-selective high schools, although they were disproportionately attending Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools in Chicago and Philadelphia.

- The percentages of black students attending Selective Vocational Schools in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia met or exceeded their system-wide averages. In Chicago, black students made up almost 90% of the enrollment in these schools.

- In New York, the percentage of black students in Selective Magnet Schools exceeded their system-wide average enrollment. In Chicago, it matched their system-wide average. In Philadelphia, it was less than their system-wide average.

- In all four cities, the percentages of black students in Selective Exam Schools were significantly less than their system-wide average enrollment.

### Percentage of Hispanic Students

Table 4-7 presents the percentages of Hispanic students in each type of high school and indicates the following:

- Except in Boston, Hispanic students were significantly overrepresented in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, as compared with their system-wide enrollment.

- Except in Chicago, Hispanic students were significantly underrepresented in Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools, as compared with their system-wide enrollment.

## Table 4-6. PERCENTAGE OF BLACK STUDENTS[30]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 23,347 / 62,391 = 37% | 19,372 / 28,614 = 68% | 9,201 / 11,718 = 79% | 1,780 / 4,356 = 41% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 31,351 / 73,069 = 43% | 16,504 / 27,109 = 61% | 14,336 / 18,294 = 78% | 2,649 / 4,576 = 58% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 27,075 / 71,988 = 38% | 17,199 / 33,910 = 51% | 6,647 / 15,955 = 42% | 2,028 / 3,014 = 67% |
| Selective Vocational | 6,978 / 16,555 = 42% | 10,589 / 11,870 = 89% | 4,079 / 6,072 = 67% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 9,876 / 19,295 = 51% | 1,528 / 2,497 = 61% | 1,075 / 1,977 = 54% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 3,407 / 12,689 = 27% | 2,854 / 6,775 = 42% | 1,530 / 3,363 = 45% | 1,499 / 4,545 = 33% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 102,034 / 255,987 = 40% | 68,046 / 110,775 = 61% | 36,868 / 57,379 = 64% | 7,956 / 16,491 = 48% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of Black students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 37% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are Black students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 40% of all high school students are Black students."*

## Table 4-7. PERCENTAGE OF HISPANIC STUDENTS[31]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 29,832 / 62,391 = 48% | 8,499 / 28,614 = 30% | 1,781 / 11,718 = 15% | 645 / 4,356 = 15% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 23,050 / 73,069 = 32% | 4,293 / 27,109 = 16% | 1,278 / 18,294 = 7% | 800 / 4,576 = 17% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 9,647 / 71,988 = 13% | 5,276 / 33,910 = 16% | 334 / 15,955 = 2% | 188 / 3,014 = 6% |
| Selective Vocational | 4,428 / 16,555 = 27% | 774 / 11,870 = 7% | 431 / 6,072 = 7% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 4,154 / 19,295 = 22% | 337 / 2,497 = 13% | 77 / 1,977 = 4% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 1,342 / 12,689 = 11% | 796 / 6,775 = 12% | 97 / 3,363 = 3% | 260 / 4,545 = 6% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 72,453 / 255,987 = 28% | 19,975 / 110,775 = 18% | 3,998 / 57,379 = 7% | 1,893 / 16,491 = 11% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of Hispanic students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 48% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are Hispanic students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 28% of all high school students are Hispanic students."*

- Hispanic enrollments in Selective Vocational Schools matched their system-wide enrollments in New York and Philadelphia, but Hispanics were markedly underrepresented in the Selective Vocational Schools in Chicago.

- Hispanics were underrepresented in Selective Magnet Schools in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.

- Hispanics were markedly underrepresented in Selective Exam Schools in all four cities, where their rate of enrollment in these schools was about one-half of their rate of city-wide enrollment.

### Percentage of Asian Students

Table 4-8 presents the percentages of Asian students in each type of high school. The most striking result in Table 4-8 is that the percentage of Asian student enrollment in Selective Exam Schools substantially exceeded the system-wide percentage of Asian enrollment in all four school systems. In New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, the percentage of Asian enrollment in Selective Exam Schools was three times their percentage of enrollment system-wide.

### Percentage of Special Education Students

Table 4-9 presents data concerning the percentage of students in the four cities who were classified as handicapped for each type of school. Please note that the Chicago school system would not provide data for all handicapped students, but only for handicapped students in self-contained special education classrooms. Data about the four cities indicate the following patterns:

- In New York, the percentage of handicapped students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools was substantially greater than the system-wide average. In the two other types of non-selective schools and in the Selective Vocational and Selective Magnet Schools, it roughly mirrored the system-wide average.

- There were 49 handicapped students among the 12,689 students who attended the Selective Exam Schools in New York.

- In Chicago, where data was only available about students in self-contained special education classrooms, the one Selective Magnet School in the district had 6.6% of the students who attended the school in self-contained special education programs. However, these children were part of a separate program for deaf and hard of hearing students that was housed at the school, and its students had only very limited involvement with the magnet school's regular academic program. Aside from this school, the highest percentage of students in self-contained special education was in the Non-Selective Low-Income Schools (5.3%), and each type of school listed in

## Table 4-8. PERCENTAGE OF ASIAN STUDENTS[32]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 4,024 / 62,391 = 6% | 133 / 28,614 = 0% | 366 / 11,718 = 3% | 647 / 4,356 = 15% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 3,676 / 73,069 = 5% | 1,330 / 27,109 = 5% | 558 / 18,294 = 3% | 223 / 4,576 = 5% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 2,907 / 71,988 = 4% | 1,211 / 33,910 = 4% | 263 / 15,955 = 2% | 50 / 3,014 = 2% |
| Selective Vocational | 710 / 16,555 = 4% | 21 / 11,870 = 0% | 25 / 6,072 = 0% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 1,020 / 19,295 = 5% | 187 / 2,497 = 7% | 96 / 1,977 = 5% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 2,582 / 12,689 = 20% | 749 / 6,775 = 11% | 415 / 3,363 = 12% | 653 / 4,545 = 14% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 14,919 / 255,987 = 6% | 3,631 / 110,775 = 3% | 1,723 / 57,379 = 3% | 1,573 / 16,491 = 10% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of Asian students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 6% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are Asian students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 6% of all high school students are Asian students."*

## Table 4-9. PERCENTAGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS[33]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 5,653 / 62,391 = 9.1% | 1,505 / 28,614 = 5.3% | 1,703 / 11,718 = 14.5% | 793 / 4,356 = 18.2% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 5,469 / 73,069 = 7.5% | 1,089 / 27,109 = 4.0% | 2,268 / 18,294 = 12.4% | 892 / 4,576 = 19.5% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 5,310 / 71,988 = 7.4% | 825 / 33,910 = 2.4% | 1,910 / 15,995 = 11.9% | 633 / 3,014 = 21.0% |
| Selective Vocational | 1,207 / 16,555 = 7.3% | 70 / 11,870 = 0.6% | 174 / 6,072 = 2.9% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 1,209 / 19,295 = 6.3% | 165 / 2,497 = 6.6% | 39 / 1,977 = 2.0% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 49 / 12,689 = 0.4% | 0 / 6,775 = 0.0% | 13 / 3,363 = 0.4% | 63 / 4,545 = 1.4% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 18,897 / 255,987 = 7.4% | 3,654 / 110,775 = 3.3% | 6,107 / 57,379 = 10.6% | 2,381 / 16,491 = 14.4% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of special education students in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 9.1% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are special education students." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 7.4% of all high school students are special education students."*

Table 4-9 had a progressively smaller percentage of students in self-contained special education programs.

- In Philadelphia, all three types of non-selective high schools had percentages of special education students that exceeded the system-wide average, while selective high schools had virtually no special education students.

- In Boston, handicapped students constituted between 18% and 21% of all students enrolled in Non-Selective Schools, but only 1.4% of students enrolled in Selective Exam Schools.

### Percentage of Students in Bilingual/ESL Programs

The percentages of students who were served in either bilingual or English-as-a-second-language programs (called ESL in New York, Chicago, and Boston, and ESOL in Philadelphia) are presented in Table 4-10. These data indicate the following:

- Students who were being provided with bilingual or ESL programs were heavily concentrated in the Non-Selective Low-Income and Low-to Moderate-Income Schools.

- Very few students in any of the four districts who were enrolled in Selective Vocational, Selective Magnet, or Selective Exam Schools were receiving bilingual or ESL services. Among the 85,803 students in the four cities enrolled in these academically selective schools, there were only 105 students listed as receiving bilingual or ESL services.

- System-wide, Philadelphia had smaller percentages of students enrolled in bilingual and ESOL programs than did the other three districts, with the highest percentages served in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools. In one Selective Exam School, 48 limited English proficient students with a variety of national origins and with high tested abilities were enrolled in English-as-a-second-language classes.

### Percentage of Student Absence

Data about the percentage of daily student absence were obtained on a school-by-school basis for the four cities. These data were obtained to help indicate whether students entering the different types of schools were more prone to be absent. (Other data that would have been useful in exploring this issue would have been data about the previous attendance histories of students at the time that they enrolled in the different types of schools, but these data were not available.)

The available data are primarily useful in indicating the relative levels of absence in different types of schools within a given school system. Different methods for calculating attendance rates among the four school systems and documented irregularities in collecting

## Table 4-10. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS IN BILINGUAL OR ESL PROGRAMS[34]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 4,245 / 62,391 = 6.8% | 1,567 / 28,614 = 5.5% | 323 / 11,718 = 2.8% | 768 / 4,356 = 17.6% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 3,196 / 73,069 = 4.4% | 1,438 / 27,109 = 5.3% | 323 / 18,294 = 1.8% | 974 / 4,576 = 21.3% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 615 / 71,988 = 0.9% | 1,056 / 33,910 = 3.1% | 83 / 15,955 = 0.5% | 35 / 3,014 = 1.2% |
| Selective Vocational | 2 / 16,555 = 0.0% | 13 / 11,870 = 0.1% | 15 / 6,072 = 0.2% | ——— |
| Selective Magnet | 0 / 19,295 = 0.0% | 2 / 2,497 = 0.1% | 14 / 1,977 = 0.7% | ——— |
| Selective Exam | 0 / 12,689 = 0.0% | 11 / 6,775 = 0.2% | 48 / 3,363 = 1.4% | 0 / 4,545 = 0.0% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 8,058 / 255,987 = 3.1% | 4,087 / 110,775 = 3.7% | 806 / 57,379 = 1.4% | 1,777 / 16,491 = 10.8% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of students in bilingual or ESL programs in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 6.8% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools are in bilingual or ESL programs." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 3.1% of all high school students are in bilingual or ESL programs."*

## Table 4-11. PERCENTAGE OF STUDENT ABSENCE[35]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 13,466 / 57,490 | 4,912 / 28,614 | 3,235 / 11,718 | 762 / 4,356 |
| | = 23% | = 17% | = 28% | = 17% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 14,614 / 68,768 | 3,787 / 27,109 | 4,627 / 18,294 | 873 / 4,576 |
| | = 21% | = 14% | = 25% | = 19% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 12,605 / 68,708 | 4,211 / 33,910 | 2,755 / 15,955 | 531 / 3,014 |
| | = 18% | = 12% | = 17% | = 18% |
| Selective Vocational | 2,635 / 15,571 | 1,232 / 11,870 | 880 / 6,072 | ——— |
| | = 17 % | = 10% | = 14% | |
| Selective Magnet | 2,425 / 18,637 | 240 / 2,497 | 226 / 1,977 | ——— |
| | = 13% | = 10% | = 11% | |
| Selective Exam | 1,250 / 12,444 | 600 / 6,775 | 252 / 3,363 | 321 / 4,545 |
| | = 10% | = 9% | = 7% | = 7% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 46,995 / 241,618 | 14,982 / 110,775 | 11,975 / 57,379 | 2,487 / 16,491 |
| | = 19% | = 14% | = 21% | = 15% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of student absence in that type of school in that city. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In New York, 23% of the students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools were absent on a typical day. The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left call can be read as follows: "In New York, 19% of all high school students were absent on a typical day."*

this information in Chicago make it inappropriate to compare absence percentages across cities.[36] Data about student absence in Table 4-11 indicated the following:

- The most severe absence problems occurred in non-selective schools, and, with the exception of Boston, the higher the percentage of low-income students, the higher the absence rate.
- Absence rates in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia were lower in every type of selective school, as compared with the non-selective schools.
- In Boston, the absence rates in the various types of non-selective schools were almost three times the absence rate in the Selective Exam Schools.

### Percentage of Entering Students with Reading Deficiencies

Data were available from New York and Chicago concerning the reading levels of ninth grade students entering high school; these data are presented in Table 4-12. Because the nature of the data was different for the two cities, the type of data that we analyzed for each city is explained in footnotes accompanying Table 4-12.

In New York, percentages of ninth-grade students at each high school who entered ninth grade reading below the national average were analyzed. Because the numbers of students enrolled in individual grades were not available and thus the overall percentages of students who scored below the national average in the six types of high schools could not be calculated, we rank-ordered the schools according to the percentage of ninth graders who scored below the national average and then identified the school or schools with the median rank for each type of high school. As indicated in Table 4-12, each type of school listed—from Non-Selective Low-Income to Selective Exam Schools—had a progressively lower percentage of entering students who read below the national average, except that Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools were ranked slightly better than Selective Vocational Schools. In Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, about 85% of entering students read below the national average; in Selective Vocational Schools, about 60%; in Selective Magnet Schools, about 50%; and in Selective Exam Schools, 0%.

In Chicago, reading achievement data previously analyzed by Designs for Change indicated the percentage of students enrolled in ninth grade who were reading below the national average and who were reading below the "minimum competency level" designated by the test developers. The Chicago data presented in Table 4-12 indicate that 90% of the students in Chicago's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools entered ninth grade reading below the national average, with 48% reading below the minimum competency level. However, the percentage of poor readers was substantially less in the other types of

## Table 4-12. 9TH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT[37]

| Types of High Schools | NEW YORK* % 9th Graders Reading Below National Average Apr. '85 | | CHICAGO % 9th Graders Reading Below National Average Fall '83 | | CHICAGO** % 9th Graders Reading Below Minimum Competency Fall '83 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | Highest school percent: | 92.2 % | 9,367 / 10,373 | | 5,000 / 10,373 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 58.4 % | | | | |
| 25 schools | Median school percent: | 83.6 % | = 90% | 18 schools | = 48% | |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | Highest school percent: | 86.6 % | 6,628 / 8,229 | | 2,777 / 8,229 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 48.7 % | | | | |
| 25 schools | Median school percent: | 73.3 % | = 81% | 18 schools | = 34% | |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | Highest school percent: | 88.5 % | 6,847 / 10,284 | | 2,118 / 10,284 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 13.5 % | | | | |
| | Median schools | 55.8 % | | | | |
| 26 schools | percents: | 56.7 % | = 67% | 18 schools | = 21% | |
| Selective Vocational | Highest school percent: | 75.3 % | 2,850 / 3,757 | | 621 / 3,757 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 35.0 % | | | | |
| 9 schools | Median school percent: | 62.4 % | = 76% | 6 schools | = 17% | |
| Selective Magnet | Highest school percent: | 68.2 % | 102 / 602 | | 6 / 602 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 0.9 % | | | | |
| 9 schools | Median school percent: | 51.1 % | = 17% | 1 school | = < 1% | |
| Selective Exam | Median of 0% assumed by school system. | | 259 / 1,635 | | 9 / 1,635 | |
| 4 schools | | | = 16% | 2 schools | = < 1% | |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | Highest school percent: | 92.2 % | 26,054 / 34,880 | | 10,531 / 34,880 | |
| | Lowest school percent: | 0.9 % | | | | |
| | Median schools | 69.8 % | | | | |
| 97 schools | percents: | 69.9 % | = 75% | 63 schools | = 30% | |

*For New York, each cell shows the range of school scores and the median school score for that type of high school.
**For Chicago, the number of freshmen reading below minimum competency is divided by freshman enrollment for the percent reading below minimum competency.

Note: For school-by-school reading achievement data for New York and Chicago, see Appendix C.

schools. In Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools 67% read below the national average and 21% were below the minimum competency level, in Selective Vocational Schools 76% were below the national average but only 17% were below the minimum competency level, and in the Selective Magnet and Selective Exam Schools about 16% of students were below the national average but less than 1% were below the minimum competency level. Thus, Non-Selective Low-Income Schools admitted almost three times as many students who were below the minimum competency level as did Selective Vocational Schools and 50 times as many of these poor readers as Selective Magnet and Exam Schools.

For both cities for which data were available, the patterns were consistent. Selective Exam, Magnet, and Vocational Schools admitted very few students with serious reading problems. However, in non-selective schools in general and in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in particular, a substantial majority of students entered with serious reading problems.

### Percentage of Entering Students Previously Retained in Grade

Data concerning the percentage of students who entered high school overage (and thus had in most instances been retained in previous grades) were available only for Chicago, and the most recent data that were available were for the class that entered high school in fall 1981. These results are presented in Table 4-13. Table 4-13 indicates that the percentages of overage students were progressively smaller for each type of high school listed in Table 4-13, from Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to Selective Exam Schools. While 51% of all students entering Non-Selective Low-Income Schools were overage, the percentage for Selective Vocational Schools was 27%, for Selective Magnet Schools was 18%, and for Selective Exam Schools was 12%.

An analysis of overage students for an earlier Chicago ninth grade class indicated a .81 correlation between entering high school overage and having low reading scores.[38] Thus, schools with many entering students who were overage were also likely to have many entering students with serious reading problems, while schools with few students entering high school overage were likely to have few students with serious reading problems.

### Student Stratification Among the Six Types of High Schools

Data about the characteristics of students attending the six types of high schools indicate that students with markedly different background characteristics and previous

## Table 4-13. PERCENTAGE OF ENTERING OVERAGE STUDENTS, 1981[39]

| Types of High Schools | CHICAGO Percentage of Overage* Entering Freshmen |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 3,500 / 6,810 = 51% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 2,876 / 5,923 = 49% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 2,886 / 7,311 = 39% |
| Selective Vocational | 747 / 2,737 = 27% |
| Selective Magnet | 98 / 558 = 18% |
| Selective Exam | 203 / 1,746 = 12% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 10,310 / 25,085 = 41% |

*Note: The number of freshmen entering high school in fall 1981 is divided by the total 1981 freshman enrollment, which gives the percentage for each type of high school.*

**Students older than 14 years of age by December 1st of their freshman year were considered overage.*

school histories frequently predominated in the different types of schools. For example, the percentage of low-income students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools was three times as high as the percentage of low-income students in Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools. A substantial majority of students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools were black or Hispanic and had serious reading problems. These low-income schools also typically had the highest concentrations of handicapped and limited English proficient students. Thus, they were serving extremely high concentrations of students at risk. At the other end of the continuum, Selective Vocational, Magnet, and Exam Schools screened out students with some or most of the characteristics correlated with school failure.

- Example: Selective Vocational Schools accepted significant percentages of minority and low-income students, but few students with serious reading problems, handicaps, or limited English proficiency.

- Example: Selective Exam Schools accepted smaller percentages of blacks, Hispanics, and low-income students than were enrolled in their school systems as a whole. And Exam Schools enrolled virtually no students with serious reading problems, handicaps, or limited English proficiency.

Implications of such data will be discussed later in this chapter after additional relevant information about high school admissions have been presented.

## Other Options Schools and Programs

The academically-selective high schools discussed above are a subset of the set of options high schools and programs that have proliferated in the four cities in the past fifteen years; the ones just discussed are all separate high schools that have significant academic selection criteria. However, as noted in summarizing the recent history of high school admissions, there are also other kinds of high school options that have grown up in these four school systems:

- Separate high schools to which students must apply for admission, but which do not have substantial academic admissions criteria. These options high schools may admit students by lottery from among applicants, or they may have other kinds of admissions criteria than academic achievement (for example, previous attendance or behavior).

- Academically selective and non-selective options programs housed within neighborhood or district high schools, some operating essentially as separate schools and some as course sequences within the existing school program.

In Table 4-14, we present examples of the variety of options schools and programs that have grown up in the four cities, in addition to the academically selective separate schools. The programs listed in Table 4-14 are grouped according to whether the student body of the school where they operated was low-income, low- to moderate-income, or moderate-income.

Options programs within schools were initiated from a variety of sources within these school systems (including desegregation departments, separate optional education departments, vocational education departments, subdistrict superintendents, and school principals), without any one department or individual providing system-wide coordination or even being aware of all the programs being established. Although this uncoordinated pattern of development might be surprising to some readers, it is consistent with the organizational patterns perspective discussed in Chapter 1, which emphasizes the loose coupling that exists among various parts of a school system.[40] Designs for Change has previously documented similar dispersion of responsibility for staff development programs in large school systems.[41]

Often enterprising neighborhood high school principals established several options programs within a particular school.

> Example: Chicago's Morgan Park High School operated three academically-selective options programs in 1986-87,including a grade 7-12 college prep program for "academically talented students," an international studies program, and a foreign language program.

Although the research team invested considerable energy in seeking systematic information about options programs within schools (for example, complete lists of all such programs in each school system, program enrollment totals, and data about characteristics of enrolled students), we were not successful in obtaining such comprehensive information. Data about the numbers and characteristics of students enrolled in these programs were especially difficult to come by, since such information was typically available only for separate options schools (when it was available at all), not for options programs housed within schools.

Nevertheless, partial information from the four cities gave us an initial picture of the nature and scope of these programs.

- Example: Data about a substantial number of New York's options programs within high schools, compiled by New York's High School Division, indicated that in 1984-85, 25 high schools operated 52 options programs. These programs enrolled between 1% and 40% of a school's

## Table 4-14. EXAMPLES OF OTHER OPTIONAL SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS[42]

| Types of High Schools | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | Practical Nursing Program (Julia Richman High School) | Paideia Program (Austin Community Academy) | Philadelphia Business Academy (William Penn High School) | Medical Technology Program (Umana School of Science and Technology) |
| | Model Urban School (Morris High School) | Air Transportation Program (Kelvyn Park High School) | Motivation Program (Franklin High School) | Automotive Program (Brighton High School) |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | Health Services Institute (Sheepshead Bay High School) | Inter-American Studies Program (Lakeview High School) | Academy of Applied Electrical Science (Bartram High School) | Fenway School Program (English High School) |
| | Agricultural Careers (John Bowne High School) | Information Processing Center (Kennedy High School) | Fine Arts Program (Overbrook High School) | Urban Retrofit (Dorchester High School) |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | DaVinci Science-Math Research Institute (Benjamin Cardozo High School) | Word Processing Program (Amundsen High School) | The Parkway Program | International Studies Program (Copley Square High School) |
| | Midwood Music Program (Midwood High School) | Academic High School (Kenwood Academy) | Environmental Studies Program (Lincoln High School) | Music Magnet Program (Madison Park High School) |

students, with the typical program or set of programs within an individual school enrolling about 10% of the school's students. By 1986-87, the number of options had grown dramatically, with 54 schools operating 121 options programs. These programs enrolled between 1% and 34% of the students in the high schools where they were located, with the typical options program enrolling about 7% of a school's students.

The options high schools and programs being operated in these school systems (in addition to the separate academically-selective high schools discussed earlier) were of four major types:

- College preparatory options. Operating as programs within schools, these options typically had academically-selective admissions criteria and either provided a comprehensive college preparatory curriculum or placed special emphasis on particular curriculum areas, such as math and science or foreign languages. They sometimes mirrored the characteristics of the Selective Exam and Selective Magnet Schools. Examples: Chicago's International Baccalaureate Program at Lincoln Park High School; New York's DaVinci Science-Math Research Institute at Benjamin Cardozo High School.

- Options with distinctive educational philosophies. These separate schools and programs within schools embodied a particular educational approach, such as the school without walls, inquiry learning, or back-to-basics. Examples: Philadelphia's Parkway Program; Chicago's Paideia Program at Austin Community Academy.

- Career exploration or vocational education options. These schools and programs provided general exposure to a broad career field such as the health professions or specific vocational training in an area like automobile repair or data entry. Some were modeled on the Selective Vocational Schools. Examples: Philadelphia's Academy of Applied Electrical Science at Bartram High School; Boston's Urban Retrofit at Dorchester High School.

- Dropout prevention and recovery programs. These schools and programs provided special help (generally in a small setting) to potential dropouts and to students who had dropped out and wished to return to school. Examples: Philadelphia's Motivation Program at Franklin High School; New York's High School Redirection.

## The Process of High School Admissions

Students ended up in the various types of high schools and programs described to this point as the result of a complex admissions process. Our analysis of the high school admissions process was based on interviews with principals, guidance counselors, and child advocates in all four cities; analysis of documents prepared by the four school systems that explained the admissions process; independent research studies about the

admissions process in Chicago and New York; and data about the characteristics of students who ended up in various kinds of high schools and programs presented earlier in the chapter.

### Steps in the Process

As explained earlier, students in all four school systems ended up in neighborhood or district high schools determined by their place of residence unless they made special application for admission to an options school or program. The admissions process for these options schools and programs in the school systems studied had five often-overlapping parts: (1) recruitment and information gathering, (2) application, (3) screening, (4) selection of students offered places, and (5) decisions by students. These parts of the admissions process were carried out in a variety of ways, both within and among individual school systems. And consistent with the organizational patterns perspective for analyzing organizations, they had complex informal procedures often at variance with officially-stated policy.[43]

**Recruitment and information gathering** included the steps taken by the school system, by individual sending schools (i.e., the junior high schools or middle schools), and by individual receiving schools (i.e., the options high schools or programs) to familiarize parents and students with available options and to interest students in attending them. This step also included the initiatives that individual parents and students took to gather information about various options and about the admissions process. Characteristic activities included:

- The school system or individual sending or receiving schools disseminated written information about available options. These materials included booklets describing the array of high school options available in the school system or materials describing individual schools. Information about individual schools was sometimes mailed or passed out selectively to the kinds of students that the receiving school wanted to recruit.

- Staff of receiving schools visited prospective sending schools to make presentations to groups of students and parents and to meet or to interview prospective students and their parents. In some instances, representatives of the receiving school visited all eligible sending schools. In others, they concentrated on contacting particular schools and particular students.

- Receiving schools held open houses and tours. Sometimes these were generally publicized; sometimes selected students and parents were invited to attend; sometimes, interested parents and students set up appointments to visit a school on their own initiative.

- Interested parents and students gathered information about the formal and informal process of securing admission to a desired school, drawing on school system staff and on others familiar with the admissions process.

- Junior high counselors and other junior high staff advised individual students about available options and sometimes encouraged or discouraged them from applying to particular options.

**Application** entailed fulfilling all the necessary requirements to become eligible for consideration at a school. Application information that, based on our analysis, was requested and used in various application processes included student's place of residence, race, ethnicity, age, sex, previous courses completed, previous standardized test scores, previous course grades, previous course notebooks and work samples, attendance records, behavior records (as reflected in grades for deportment or past history of disciplinary infractions), participation in special education, previous retention in grade (which can be ascertained by looking at the students' birthdates), and need for bilingual instruction. In addition to supplying this information, students were sometimes asked to come to the receiving school for an interview, take special tests at the receiving school, or audition. Further, parents were sometimes asked to come to the receiving school for an interview, so that the school could obtain further information about the student and so that the school could assess the parents' willingness to cooperate with and assist the school.

**Screening**, which may overlap with the first two steps in the process, entailed identifying a pool of eligible candidates from whom the final selections were made. In the initial recruitment and information-gathering step, representatives of receiving schools sometimes screened students by questioning them about their past school history and encouraging, discouraging, or barring them from pursuing application. And junior high counselors from sending schools often screened students by deciding to make information available to some and not others or deciding to encourage or discourage students from pursuing application, based on the counselor's review of the student's record.

In one critical screening activity that often took place, staff from the receiving school reviewed student applications to weed out those who didn't meet certain minimum requirements. Student applicants were eliminated, for example, if their applications were incomplete, if they scored below a required minimum cutoff in reading, if they had more than a specified number of junior high absences, if they had a record of discipline problems, or if they had not completed particular courses in junior high.

**Selection of students offered places** entailed choosing students who were offered places in the receiving school from the pool of candidates who survived the initial screening process.

- Some schools chose randomly from all students who applied, with no intervening screening process.
- Some schools chose randomly from among students who survived their screening process.
- Some schools rated all applicants (for example, based on students' reading test scores) and chose the highest rated candidates.
- Some schools reviewed applicants on a case-by-case basis, deciding which ones were "right" for the receiving school.

Whatever method of final selection was used, the students selected were often chosen within certain strata (for example, specified percentages of black, Hispanic, and white students were chosen to insure that a class had a certain racial make-up). Further, there were often different selection procedures for picking different portions of a school's entering class. For example, options programs housed within neighborhood schools frequently had different criteria for students from outside the school's attendance area than they had for students from inside it. Or the principals of options schools chose a percentage of the entering class based entirely on their discretion, however the rest of the class was chosen.

**Final decisions by students** were sometimes quite simple, sometimes complex. In the four cities studied, the majority of students who applied for an options school or program weren't admitted to any option (a point discussed in more detail below), so they were assigned to attend their neighborhood high school by default. At the other extreme, a small percentage of students were offered places in a number of schools and had to decide which offer to accept. In New York, for example, there were several rounds to this final step in the selection process, as students were placed on a school's waiting list and then later admitted after students who had originally been offered places selected another school.

## Key Conclusions about the Admissions Process

Laying out the steps in the admissions process highlights the many points at which formal requirements, informal requirements, staff discretion, and parent or student initiative can affect the final result. Below, we present key conclusions about how this complex

admissions process worked and how it affected students, with a particular focus on its impact on students at risk.

## Most Families Did Not Understand the Process

An interview study conducted in New York[44] confirmed an observation that we heard consistently: most students and parents did not understand the high school admissions process. The majority of students either did not apply or filled out an admissions form with little understanding of the complexities that would determine their chances of success. They did not know much about the quality of the specific options available, about the previous course work they should have taken to qualify themselves for a particular option, about the odds of admission to particular programs, or about the strategies that brought success in the admissions process.

- Example: Interviews with those making admissions decisions in New York indicated that many popular schools would not consider a student unless she listed the school as her first choice. However, most students were not aware of this fact.[45]

Given this lack of understanding of the process on the part of most families, those families who took the time and had the connections to master its intricacies were at a major advantage. They could help students prepare for admission to a desired high school beginning in elementary school by insuring that the student took the proper courses, master the written and unwritten rules of the application process, and exert influence to secure their child's admission to a desired school.

- Example: Even though recent reforms have tightened up admissions procedures somewhat in Chicago, the school system still reserves 5% of spaces in the options programs for students chosen at the discretion of the school's principal, and these spaces were often filled by students whose parents had influence either in the school system or the larger community or who promised to do extra work for the school in such areas as fund-raising.[46]

Study consultants characterized the admissions process as one in which the successful parent often had to serve as "advocate and negotiator." An article by a magnet school parent knowledgeable about Chicago's admissions process described how parents succeeded in securing magnet school admissions for their children:

> Magnet hunting has turned into the great middle-class trauma, and this time of year, as applications fall due, parents around the city gather to swap theories, network, bewail their fate, and to listen once again to the tales of

> parents who beat the system. . . . Some go through the official lottery system, but others improve their odds by applying personal clout, by inventing nonexistent siblings and minority ancestors for their kids, or by mortgaging their souls to the PTA.[47]

Those families who were poor, had themselves failed in school, or didn't speak English were unlikely to be among those who could help their children complete the admissions process successfully.[48]

### Junior High Counselors Played a Critical Role

Given the complexity of the admissions process, junior high counselors and other junior high educators who took a special interest in a student played a critical role in determining who was admitted to high school options. Urban student/counselor ratios are often as high as 500 to 1, giving counselors little time to spend with individual students.[49] Counselors spend time disproportionately on higher-income and higher-achieving students.[50] In New York, for instance, junior high school students were estimated to receive an average of twenty minutes of guidance counseling about their application to high school.[51] Since junior high counselors were among the few people who fully understood the admissions process, their decision to help a student whom they viewed as promising gave that student a major advantage. Such counselors could encourage a student to apply to particular options, set up interviews with representatives from the options high school when they visited the junior high, aid the student in completing his application, and use their personal influence with the options school to help secure admission.

Frequently, junior high counselors developed working ties with particular receiving high schools, and junior highs attempted to build their reputation through their success in placing students in high status options schools and programs. Thus, it was in the interest of junior high staff to recommend and encourage students to apply to high school options who had a good chance to succeed and to discourage "risky" students from applying.

### Selective Recruitment

Options high schools and programs often engaged in selective recruiting at moderate-income neighborhood junior high schools, at selective junior high options schools and programs, and at parochial and other private schools, whether the recruiting schools had selective admissions criteria or not. These practices, often based on a network of established relationships between junior high counselors and high school recruiters, worked to the disadvantage of schools serving many students at risk.

- Example: At the high school level, Philadelphia's Selective Exam Schools and Selective Magnet Schools had substantially fewer low-income, black, and Hispanic students than the school district as a whole (see Tables 4-3, 4-6 and 4-7). They recruited heavily in parochial and other private junior high schools, with the rationale that an important part of their mission was bringing white and middle-class students back into the school system.

- Example: The selective magnet schools and programs in Chicago (such as the International Baccaulareate high school programs) recruited heavily from selective elementary school programs, favoring students who had completed previous coursework that was available only in these selective schools. Thus, students who failed to secure places in selective magnets in kindergarten had greatly decreased opportunities for admission to magnet high schools later on.

### Unclear and Questionable Admissions Standards

In three of the four cities, the admissions process for high school options were not subject to strong management and policy setting from top school system administrators and from the school board during the period we studied. Rather, as noted earlier, individual schools were able to exercise a great deal of discretion in setting admissions standards. This lack of a coherent set of system-wide policies and protections led to significant inequities.

First, admissions standards formally advertised by options schools and programs were often different from those actually employed in the student selection process:

- Example: In 1986, all but 6 of Chicago's 44 magnet schools were supposed to have non-selective admissions criteria. However, telephone interviews with guidance counselors and assistant principals at these schools indicated that many of them had instituted additional unstated admissions standards, such as grade level reading achievement.[52]

Second, operating without central guidance about their admissions criteria, options schools and programs used subjective judgment about what admissions criteria were appropriate. The Access Standard for judging educational equity that was described in Chapter 1 suggests that students should be provided equal access to educational programs unless there is a compelling reason, supported by systematic evidence, that criteria for access that are detrimental to students at risk are necessary. Further, a basic principle of equity in a number of areas of the law (one that is well-established, for example, in the employment field) is that entry-level test procedures must be shown to be related to subsequent success. Further, even when some selectivity is justified, selection methods and criteria employed in identifying qualified applicants must be no higher than the minimum needed for adequate performance.[53] However, widely used selection methods for options schools and programs,

such as reviews of past work, student and parent interviews, locally-devised tests, and reviews of behavior records and attendance records have almost never been empirically justified by options schools and programs as necessary for adequate student performance, but have been adopted based on the subjective judgment of the school's staff.

- Example: Admissions criteria for similar programs within a school system often varied widely (for example, among programs that taught computer skills), seemingly based primarily on the numbers of students who applied versus space available and not on the skills needed for adequate performance in the program.[54]

Third, as part of the admissions process, great weight was attached to achievement scores on standardized tests of achievement, with a student's high school admission often hinging on small differences in tested achievement. Yet in many instances, the achievement tests employed to make these individual placement decisions were not initially developed by the test-makers with this intention, and they did not have reliability and validity appropriate for this task.[55]

Fourth, we consistently found that whether or not an option had significant academic admissions standards, much importance was placed on screening out students with previous attendance problems:

- Example: In a New York study of admissions, the researchers reported that "Good attendance is unquestionably the single most common admissions criterion. Of the 50 schools interviewed, 43 said that they considered absences or lateness in evaluating student applications."[56]

- Example: In Table 4-11, all categories of academically selective schools in all four cities had significantly better attendance statistics than any category of non-selective school. It is reasonable to infer that these superior attendance records resulted in large part from the fact that these selective schools admitted few students with previous attendance problems, especially since most academically selective schools had a "sink or swim" attitude toward students and did not make efforts to bring truant students back into school.

Fifth, academically selective schools typically did not admit handicapped or limited English proficient students during the years studied. As Tables 4-9 and 4-10 show clearly, academically selective schools typically provided virtually no services for these students. Only in New York, where child advocacy groups had pressed for more admission of handicapped students to Selective Vocational and Selective Magnet Schools did the percentages of handicapped students in these schools approach system-wide averages.[57]

### A Consistent Bias Toward Choosing the "Best" Students.

In 1984-85 only Boston provided clear administrative oversight over optional schools and programs (see additional comments about Boston below). Given the discretion exercised in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia in recruitment, screening, and selection, there was an overwhelming bias toward establishing procedures and standards at each step in the admissions process that screened out "problem" students and admitted the "best" students, with "best" being defined as students with good academic records, good attendance, good behavior, a mastery of English, and no special learning problems.

- Example: In 1984-85, New York's "educational options" programs were required to admit 25% of their students from among applicants testing more than six months below grade level in reading, 25% from students testing more than six months above grade level, and 50% from those testing in between. However, these schools consistently ended up with student bodies ranking well above the city-wide reading average, since they consistently chose the students scoring the highest in each of the three required achievement ranges.[58]

The student stratification resulting from the bias toward selecting "the best" was apparent from the data presented earlier in this chapter in Tables 4-1 through 4-13.

Three main explanations for this selection bias were indicated by our interviews and by relevant research. First, research about teacher preferences indicates that, given a choice, most teachers preferred to work with high-achieving students and to avoid "problem" students.[59] The rapid uncoordinated development of options programs has given educators a chance to exercise this preference.

- Example: A Chicago journalist developed extensive evidence that options programs in Chicago that were supposed to be non-selective employed unstated selection criteria. Asked to respond, Dr. Frank Gardner, a former school system administrator who became president of the Chicago Board of Education replied, "If you have four positions and ten students apply, [principals] naturally tend to choose the highest achievers."[60]

Second, schools in all four cities were publicly recognized as "good schools" if their achievement scores were high compared with other schools; they are not judged in light of the progress that they made with their students.[61] Thus, the easiest way to build a reputation as a good school and avoid a reputation as being a bad one was to recruit high-achieving students and avoid admitting low-achieving students.[62] As the president of the New York City Principals' Association put it, the present system encourages schools "to

seek excellence through a selection process rather than through the effectiveness of an educational program."[63]

Third, white and middle-class families, who were best positioned to exert political influence in these cities and who grew to see options high schools and programs as an avenue for providing a good education for their children, worked diligently to structure the options system in a manner that gave their children a competitive advantage in securing options admissions and to resist or to blunt changes in the admissions system that would open them up to a broader range of students. For example, proposals for modest changes in the admissions requirements for New York's popular education option schools led to a well-organized vocal campaign against these changes.[64]

### Most Students Were Turned Down

As the selection process unfolded, with parents and students expressing a strong desire to attend options schools and programs that greatly exceeded available places, the end result was that most applicants were not admitted to any options high school or program.

- Example: In 1984-85, 90,000 students entered New York high schools. They made a total of 380,000 choices of schools that they would like to attend. Yet only 32,000 applicants received and accepted a choice. A school system committee established to investigate the high school admissions process concluded, based on student interviews, that typically, "After submitting an application, the next thing applicants heard was a letter of rejection."

- Example: In 1983-84, the following percentages of applicants were accepted at some of Chicago's selective high schools: Lane Tech (55%), Young Magnet (9%), Prosser Vocational (21%), Dunbar Vocational (48%).[65] At selective elementary school magnets, acceptance percentages of 3% to 5% have been typical.[66]

The small percentage of students accepted and the fact that few or no students were accepted from many low-income neighborhood junior high schools meant that many students entered high school with a feeling that they had failed. A teacher at one of Boston's district high schools echoed the words of teachers in the other three cities' neighborhood high schools when he said:

> Kids find it tremendously depressing not to be picked for the school of their choice, so they enter high school with the feeling of being "secondhand goods." Not only do they enter a school they feel is second best, but it may not have what they were choosing—the kinds of courses, atmosphere, people they wanted to be with, or the resources and options they wanted to

> choose. The kids feel cheated, found not to be worthy or special. It certainly can cripple their interest in high school, and some give up.[67]

Further, as students from low-income junior highs became aware that their older siblings and friends had not been able to win seats in high school options, teachers report that the possibility of gaining admissions to these options was viewed with increasing cynicism from year to year.

### Selective Admissions in Boston

We have repeatedly noted that in some important respects the process of high school admissions in Boston was different from the admissions process in the other three cities. While Boston operated both vocational schools and options schools with a particular educational philosophy, these schools were required to fill all slots by lottery among applicants and could not employ selection criteria. However, the system's three exam schools were still permitted to use a modified set of academic selection criteria spelled out in the desegregation court order. All students applying to these schools were ranked using a composite of their score on a special admissions test and their previous grades. Those black and Hispanic students who scored above a minimum cutoff were admitted to the exam schools in sufficient numbers to insure that each school was 35% black and Hispanic. Then, other students (including additional black and Hispanic students) were admitted based on their composite rankings, starting with the highest ranking students on the list. In 1984-85, this procedure resulted in a 39% black and Hispanic enrollment in the exam schools, compared with the 59% black and Hispanic enrollment in the school system as a whole.

As describe earlier in the chapter, a largely separate feeder system for these Exam Schools had been developed over time, a system that included Advanced Work Classes that began in the fourth grade but admitted students based on second grade test scores and early admissions to the exam schools through special seventh and eighth grade divisions that two of the exam schools had established.

Overall, as was noted earlier in this chapter, Boston had a higher percentage of its students enrolled in separate academically selective schools than did the other three cities (28% in Boston, as compared with about 20% in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia), even though Boston did not operate academically selective magnet and vocational schools, because Boston had such a large percentage of its high school students enrolled in exam schools. Overall, we conclude that the percentages of high school students in academically selective schools were about the same in the four cities, because New York, Philadelphia,

and Chicago also operated academically selective programs within neighborhood schools that were prohibited in Boston.

Thus, despite the strict desegregation requirements in Boston, Boston operated a selective academic program at the high school level that was of about the same scope as the selective academic program in the other three cities. And the students in this academically selective program had many of the same features observed in the other cities—they were disproportionally white and virtually none were limited English proficient, handicapped, or had serious reading or attendance problems. The situation documented in Boston is consistent with propositions derived from both the organizational patterns perspective and the conflict and bargaining perspective described in Chapter 1. Although formal policies have been introduced in Boston that are supposed to insure equitable access to schools, these policies have been circumvented over time because of the power of the best-organized interest groups (that is, white and middle-class parents) and the school-level discretion of educators who have responded to these organized interests.

## Impact on Other Schools

Beyond the impact of options high schools and programs on the students who attended them, the development of options had important impacts both on the rest of the high schools in these systems—high schools that were required to accept all students who resided within their attendance area—and on the junior high schools whose programs and allocation of limited resources were shaped by the junior high's need to prepare students for high school admissions process. Several conclusions about these impacts are discussed below.

### High Concentrations of Students At-Risk

Tables 4-3 to 4-13, along with other data reviewed above, vividly illustrate the high concentrations of students who were at-risk of school failure in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools. Focusing on Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in the four cities:

- The majority of the students in these schools came from low-income families (except in Boston, if one takes reported data at face value).
- Only a small percentage of the students in these schools were white (except in Boston). In New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, more than 90% of the students attending these schools were black and Hispanic.

- These schools had the highest percentages of students receiving special education and bilingual or ESL programs, as compared with the five other types of high schools.

- These schools had the highest absence rates in their respective school systems, suggesting that the students attending these schools came to them with high rates of absence earlier in their school careers.

- These schools had the highest percentages of entering students who had serious reading difficulties and had previously been retained in school.

Given the extremely difficult school population that these schools were attempting to educate, impacts of selective schools and programs that made this job more difficult deserve careful analysis.

### Siphoning Off the "Best" Students, Parents, Teachers

To the extent that the most capable students who lived in the attendance area of a non-selective high school gained admission to options high schools and programs, these options drained the neighborhood school of their most capable, successful, and well-behaved students, leaving the non-selective schools to deal with even higher concentrations of the students with the most serious learning problems.

Further, selective schools often were often granted special prerogatives in selecting staff that worked to the disadvantage of neighborhood schools.

- Example: Heads of options schools and programs established in Chicago were initially given the right to select their teachers, drawing off the best staff from other schools in the system and transferring out those teachers currently teaching at the school whom they didn't want. These unwanted teachers were then able to exercise their seniority rights to take positions in non-selective high schools, sometimes "bumping" popular teachers in these neighborhood schools who had less seniority.

- Example: A number of failing neighborhood high schools in New York have been closed and reopened as options schools under the leadership of a new principal who had substantial discretion in choosing her staff. As in Chicago, the teachers who had previously worked at the school were dispersed to other neighborhood high schools.

Thus, the neighborhood school often lost some of its best teachers to a selective school and received in return those teachers that the selective school didn't want.

Finally, neighborhood high schools often lost those active and well-connected parents who could have worked to improve and aid their children's neighborhood high school. The parent advocacy skills, negotiation skills, political connections, and

willingness to work for the school that were often so helpful in securing admission to options were lost to the neighborhood high school. And the principals of options schools and programs fully recognized the benefits of having aggressive and well-connected parents in their school and frequently admitted students based on their parents' qualities.

### Sending Back Students Who "Don't Work Out"

Frequently, high school options formally or informally sent students who didn't meet their expectations back to their neighborhood schools.

- Example: The official policy of such option schools in Philadelphia as Bok Area Vocational-Technical High School, Carver High School of Engineering and Science, and Central High School was that students who seriously violated the discipline code or failed two or more major subjects for a second year were transferred back to their neighborhood high school.[68]

Similar policies have previously been in force in Chicago and New York. Although they have been revoked, those interviewed reported that the informal practice of sending students back to their neighborhood school who "didn't work out" continued.

Further, when seats opened up in options schools and programs as a result of such student transfers, the options often recruited the outstanding students who had remained in non-selective schools. Thus, a non-selective school might have an experience similar to a neighborhood high school in Chicago, which lost a number of its top students, its newspaper editor, and its several of its best musicians to magnet schools in the middle of the school year.

### Resource Allocation

In dealing with the most difficult students, neighborhood schools faced a host of obvious and not-so-obvious problems that ideally required additional resources to be properly addressed. As the President of the New York City Principals' Association stated about the neighborhood high school that he headed:

> Money is always in short supply, but particularly in those schools which service needs unfamiliar to educational option programs. For example, during the 1981-82 school year we had 2,700 un- or under-immunized youngsters. . . . Additional guidance and health services are required to overcome the potential and actual problems found in young people whose families are struggling not for prosperity, but for survival.[69]

Yet neighborhood schools frequently came off second best in the allocation of school system resources, as compared with options schools and programs. Sometimes, there were sizable differences in per pupil expenditure favoring the selective school.

> Example: In 1988-89, the Chicago Public Schools spent an average of $2,304 per pupil on those schools with less than 30% low-income students (the schools where most of the options programs to promote integration were housed), but only $1,995 on schools with between 90% and 99% low-income students. Further, a portion of the funds received by individual schools were state compensatory education funds that were supposed to be distributed based on the percentage of low-income students in a school and to be supplementary to other funds the schools received. However, these compensatory funds were in fact being used to supplant (replace) other funds, rather than being used for supplementary purposes.[70]

At other times, the differences were much smaller and subtler, but the cumulative effect was great. The selective school might, for example, receive small amounts of discretionary funding not available to the neighborhood school, first priority in getting its boiler repaired, first priority in receiving its allotment of supplies and in putting in its orders for new books.

### Over-the-Counter Admissions

Options schools and programs typically had definite enrollment limits, and they could make clear plans for the coming year because their teaching staff and student body were essentially set by early summer. In contrast, neighborhood schools dealt with a constant process of student enrollment and withdrawal (called "over-the-counter admissions" in New York). As the schools of last resort, they were required to admit whomever came in the door in September or any subsequent month. Thus, the neighborhood school acted as a buffer to the selective school, allowing it to escape any obligation for dealing with fluctuations in enrollment.

- Example: As a result of integration requirements in New York, some options schools could not, in 1984-85, admit more than 50% minority students. Because they were able to attract fewer white students than would allow them to use their building to capacity, they had empty classrooms. Meanwhile nearby neighborhood schools were operating at well over 100% capacity because they had to enroll minority students who could have been served in the option school's empty classrooms.[71]

### Pressure in Neighborhood Schools to Focus on Serving High-Achieving Students

Because selective high schools and programs created a major system-wide focus on high-achieving students, both neighborhood high schools and junior highs that wished to build a good reputation were frequently forced to do so by competing for and catering to high-achieving students, rather than by upgrading the quality of education for the majority of their students. Principals of neighborhood high schools who wished to build a good reputation often concentrated on creating selective magnet programs or advanced tracks and courses appealing to the high-achieving students. And school principals and guidance counselors then spent a large proportion of their limited time in a recruitment battle with selective schools.

Further, as noted earlier, junior highs sought to build their reputations by preparing some students to attend selective high schools, rather than dealing with the majority of their students' needs as young adolescents, and then they had to allocate scarce counseling resources in seeking to place their top students in selective schools.

- Example: A leaflet for King Magnet Middle School in Boston advertised: "Join a Winning Team—The King! High % of Students Admitted to: Boston Latin School, Boston Technical School, Boston Latin Academy."

Thus, the development of options indeed introduced competition into these urban school systems, but the incentives that the options schools and programs created have typically not been to achieve overall school improvement, but rather to focus more attention on top achievers.

### Impact on Student and Staff Morale

Most abstract but extremely important, the growth of high school options created a prevalent feeling among educators and students across these urban school systems that students who didn't make it into a selective high school program (unless they attend an exceptional neighborhood high school) were second-rate and that the notion that the bulk of these students could master high school work was "unrealistic," even though they constituted the clear majority of students attending these big city school systems. These sentiments were reflected in a letter written by a New York parent to a local student advocacy organization, which said, in part:

> I have two children. One (my son) attends an elite (public) school. . . . My daughter, on the other hand, must spend her days at a (public) school for throw-aways. An emotional crisis caused her to have poor attendance in the ninth grade. She did not make an elite school. She didn't even make an

"op ed" school. . . . So now, she is in a school where all the kids have serious attendance and academic problems. While the kids are "enrolled," they have really dropped out. Everyone in the place has problems—and I think the worst problem is that these kids are totally isolated from kids who will stay in school and achieve. My son says that when kids misbehave in his school, the threat is that they have to go to my daughter's school. . . . Maybe someone might care about "holding pens for rejects!" Maybe kids who need help should be in a viable institution and occasionally see an achieving kid. I wish I lived in the suburbs where both my kids could go to the same school. My daughter's shame about herself, her classmates and her school are a problem that no better teachers, better curriculum, and more accountability can overcome.[72]

### Quality of Selective Schools

Without question, there are dozens of high school options of outstanding quality in these four school systems, options that are providing students with a top quality educational experience:

- Example: DaVinci Science-Math Research Institute at Benjamin Cardozo High School in New York in 1987-88 won more Westinghouse Science Awards than any other public high school in the country. This magnet program not only admitted outstanding science students but also a like number of students who were below-average in past achievement, but who benefited from the inquiry-oriented science program at the school.

- Example: Whitney Young High School in Chicago is an Academically Selective Magnet School whose racial composition mirrored the school system. It has consistently competed on an equal footing in academic contests with suburban Chicago high schools that are, by reputation, among the best in the nation.

### Limited Evidence of Program Effectiveness

Despite such clearcut examples of effectiveness, however, few studies have been done in any of the four cities to assess the quality of the educational options that have been established and especially to determine whether they have brought their students to higher levels of achievement than they possessed when they entered these schools.[73] As noted earlier, schools gained reputations in these systems primarily by exhibiting above-average achievement results as compared with other schools, even if these results were an artifact of the school's selectivity. Systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of the various options schools and programs had not occurred in these four cities.

Evaluation of program effectiveness is especially pertinent given the selective admissions practices of these schools (which violate established equity principles of equal access) and the allocation of good teachers and extra resources to them. If any case at all can be made for giving options schools and programs higher-achieving students and extra

resources, it should begin with clear evidence that these schools and programs are achieving significant results. But these issues have not been systematically investigated as the basis for continuing and expanding high school options.

### Opportunistic Implementation

In his national study magnet schools, Rolf documented a wide variation in their educational quality.[74] In a widely-cited study of the implementation of reforms, Berman and McLaughlin distinguished between a "problem-solving" approach to implementing an innovation (in which the focus is on improving educational quality for students) and an "opportunistic" approach to implementation, in which the innovation is adopted primarily to receive added funding or to gain some other prerogative.[75] As has been the case with other types of innovations, options schools and programs have been established with both orientations. Further, consultants observed that, as the number of options has grown, an increasing percentage are of doubtful educational quality and appear to have been established primarily for opportunistic reasons.

In the four school systems studied, establishing an option school or program may offer the following kinds of advantages: additional funding, opportunity to appoint a program coordinator, opportunity to hire additional staff, opportunity to transfer existing school staff judged unacceptable, opportunity to screen out difficult students, opportunity to screen students applying to the school who come from outside the school's neighborhood attendance area, extra funds for staff development and planning, improved physical facilities and equipment, and priority in obtaining books, supplies, and repairs.

Study consultants and child advocates whom we interviewed described a number of specific schools in which the establishment of an educational option consisted primarily of renaming an existing school program or department, with no significant change in its methods of operation. Further, such instances of opportunistic implementation with few or no increased benefits to students were proportionally more frequent in those programs housed in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools, as compared with options programs housed in Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools and with Selective Vocational, Magnet, and Exam Schools. Thus, having a Science-Math Institute in a both a low-income and a moderate-income high school can provide the appearance of equal opportunity, but not its reality.

## Recommendations

Our analysis of high school admissions and of the role of high school options in these four school systems provides many examples of the positive contributions that high quality options schools and programs can make in improving the education for the students that they serve and, in some instances, for improving the educational experiences of students at risk. Consistent with the systems management perspective on organizations described in Chapter 1, the development of options indicates that the top administrators of large school systems can, in some cases, provide coherent assistance in creating the conditions under which high quality programs can emerge. The study documented the success of school system leaders in changing collective bargaining agreements to give options schools the ability to select top teachers, in orchestrating the timely delivery of supplies and repair of physical plants, in providing competent consulting help for school-level staff, in insuring sufficient planning time, and the like.

The experience of successful options schools also indicates another important factor in their success, which is consistent with the professional participation and development perspective on organizational change. When high quality options schools and programs were developed, school-level staff were frequently given the opportunity to make major decisions about how the option would operate and the opportunity to obtain relevant training and assistance.

Yet the present study also makes it clear that high school options have great potential for increasing educational inequality. An important insight into the dynamics of the inequities that we documented comes from the conflict and bargaining perspective for analyzing organizations, and specifically from the political scientist Murray Edelman, who argues that decision makers provide tangible benefits to well-organized interests actively attempting to influence them, while carrying out symbolic activities to placate unorganized groups affected by their decisions.[76] Through such a process, a reform strategy with its roots in school desegregation that was officially intended to benefit the large numbers of minority students in racially isolated schools has, in the cities studied, frequently ended up bringing disproportionate benefits to white students and to selected middle-class students whose families have mastered the intricacies of the high school admissions process. While these skilled and well-organized groups received tangible benefits through their children's participation in options high schools and programs, the benefits to most minority students were symbolic; in theory, but not in practice, they had a chance to choose the high school they would attend. And this often illusory opportunity for choice obscured the

shortcomings of the educational experience that they actually received and the detrimental effects of options schools and programs on the functioning of neighborhood schools.

The impact of well-organized interest groups in shaping the choice process intermeshed with the dynamics highlighted by the organizational patterns perspective. This perspective emphasizes the discretion that decision makers exercise at various levels of a large educational system and the process by which these decision makers often develop organizational routines that are at variance with official policy.[77] The analysis of the high school admissions process in this chapter underscores the ways in which this process has been shaped and circumvented at the school level so that options schools and programs could assemble student bodies unrepresentative of the school system as a whole.

The first impulse of many reformers confronting such inequities is to call for clearer system-wide policies and strict enforcement—the sorts of reforms consistent with the systems management perspective on organizations described in Chapter 1. Information gathered in the study indicates both the potential and the limitations of such an approach. For example, Boston's experience in developing options programs, and particularly the history of the Selective Exam Schools in Boston, indicates that well-organized interests maintain and expand highly selective schools, even when the fairness of admissions to them is the focus of detailed court orders and outside monitoring.

Recent experiences in New York and Chicago, which occurred after the years that were the major focus for our analysis, are also instructive about the impact of top-down leadership in insuring equity in options schools and programs in large school systems. In New York, child advocacy groups have mounted a sustained data-gathering and advocacy effort aimed at increasing the access of students at risk to options schools and programs. They have documented irregularities in the admissions processes of these schools and the lack of data available to the applicant about the schools and their admissions procedures. They have documented the lack of availability of services for handicapped and limited English proficient students in these schools, and the resulting low levels of participation of these students in educational options. In response, the school system required options schools and programs to publish their admissions criteria, made some changes in admissions standards that increased the percentage of low-achieving students who would be admitted to some of their options schools, prohibited school-devised entrance examinations or interviews to screen candidates, and set aside a percentage of seats in some options schools and programs for handicapped and limited English proficient students.[78]

Nevertheless, these reforms only addressed <u>some</u> of the formal and informal inequities that limit the participation of students at risk in these options; those not addressed

include the lack of meaningful knowledge that most students and their parents have about the admissions process and the characteristics of various options programs and schools, and the continuing opportunities that exist for excluding students at risk from a fair chance for admission, even within the tighter standards for permissible admissions practices.[79]

In Chicago, questions about the fairness of the options admissions process have been raised primarily by periodic newspaper articles, but there has not been sustained advocacy on these issues. In response to one such expose, the school system initiated a lottery process for admission to magnets. However, a recent report on this lottery indicates that its intent is still being circumvented in many instances by the use of screening tests to determine who will be placed in the lottery pool, collusion among principals and parents who are encouraged to misrepresent their racial background and claim non-existent siblings to gain admission to the options schools, and manipulation of waiting lists.[80] And although such irregularities have periodically been brought to light, there have never been sanctions against school system staff who engaged in them, which is regarded by many as a signal that the lottery process is largely a public relations response to complaints about inequity.

## Recommendations: Strengthening Interest Groups Who Support Equity

The most important change that will improve the fairness of the high school admission process in these school systems is also perhaps the most difficult to make. Unless the interests of students at risk are represented in the policy-making and in the implementation of policy that shape the admissions process, many of the other changes recommended below are not likely to affect the day-to-day experiences of students. Active parents of students at risk and advocates for these students must reach some parity of involvement with the well-organized middle-class parents who are already active in shaping the admissions process to benefit their children.

**Recommendation:** Mechanisms should be established through which active parents of students at risk can participate in decision making about the quality of their children's educational experiences, including the design and implementation of high school admissions.

**Recommendation**: Independent parent and citizen advocacy organizations should make the admissions process for options schools and programs a major focus for investigation and advocacy, and foundations and other independent funders should be willing to support such activities.

## Recommendations: Assessing the Equity and Effectiveness of Options

Our analysis indicates that options have typically grown up under loose mandates that give wide discretion for the school-level design of their admissions procedures. Further, with a few exceptions, such discretion has consistently been used to the detriment of the students with the greatest learning needs. More systematic and equitable alternatives to the development of options have been spelled out in some detail based on experience in smaller cities, as well as the lessons of New York,[81] and these serve as the basis for recommendations below.

**Recommendation:** School districts should institute moratoriums on the development of additional options schools and programs, pending a review of systematic data about their characteristics and their impact and pending the development of comprehensive procedures for monitoring their operation and expansion that include strong safeguards to promote equity. Parents of students at risk and advocates for these students should have a decision-making role in this reappraisal.

In general the school systems studied have significant research and evaluation capabilities and regularly collect data about many key issues pertinent to assessing high school options, such as the characteristics of students attending various types of schools and programs, the staff and financial resources allocated to these schools and programs, and the performance gains of students attending them. Yet none of the four school systems has regularly analyzed such key issues, used the results for planning and policy-making, and made such results public. Most of the data presented in this chapter have been pieced together from a variety of school system reports whose purpose was not to illuminate such key issues.

**Recommendation:** Through analyzing data already available and through inexpensive sampling studies, these school systems should provide themselves and the public with information useful in further illuminating such key issues as the characteristics of students attending various types of selective and non-selective high schools and programs, the resources allocated to such schools and programs, and their impact in boosting student achievement. Such data should be collected and analyzed both in the moratorium period recommended above and on an ongoing basis.

A systematic analysis of of existing options should form the basis for making decisions about the future of individual schools and overall school system policy toward

the subsequent development of options. Despite the serious equity problems documented in this study, it would not be educationally useful nor politically feasible merely to abolish options or to immediately open them all up on a lottery basis. A portion of them—both those that admit a diverse range of students and those that are highly selective—offer a coherent high quality education, and school systems can build on their experiences while moving aggressively to create equity in these schools and programs.

**Recommendation:** Options that are effective, but have selective admissions requirements, should be moved toward increased diversity of admissions, making changes in admissions procedures spelled out below. Options that, based on evaluation, are ineffective should be placed on probation and closed if they do not improve.

**Recommendation:** School systems should give top priority to developing new options schools and programs that meet the needs of a representative cross-section of a school system's students, including an equitable percentage of students with handicaps, limited English proficiency, past academic failure, and attendance and behavior problems.

### The Admissions Process

The reality of admissions to high school options in the four cities studied bears very limited resemblance to ideal espoused proponents of public school choice, who envision school systems where high quality options are available to all students. School-level discretion in the admissions process has consistently been used to introduce inequities into the high school admissions process.

**Recommendation:** All aspects of the admissions process for high school admissions should be subject to strong system-wide rules and aggressive enforcement, with parents of students at risk and their advocates having decision-making roles in the design and oversight of these systems. Key steps in the process should be administered centrally, rather than left to school-level discretion.

**Recommendation:** The basic assumption of the admissions process for options schools and programs should be that students have a right to apply based on interest and that the school or program has a positive responsibility to insure a student body representative of the school system as a whole (for example, through a stratified random selection process).

**Recommendation:** Options schools and programs should be required to justify any restrictive admissions requirements as essential for performance in their program and should keep these requirements to a minimum, choosing students randomly from among minimally qualified applicants. Admissions procedures and requirements that are

inherently unreliable as predictors of program success and/or inequitable, such as student and parent interviews, behavior records, school-developed tests, and requirements for previous coursework should be prohibited system-wide.

The high school admissions process entails a complex mixture of formal and informal procedures, and bias at a number of specific points along the way can nullify improvements at other points in the process. For example, a random lottery procedure for admission will not insure equitable admissions if information dissemination about the option has been carried out selectively or if many applicants have been eliminated from the final selection pool through a preliminary screening process.

**Recommendation:** School systems should develop clear standards and aggressively monitor all parts of the admissions process, including recruitment and information gathering, application, screening, selection, and final student decision-making to insure fairness. This oversight should pay particular attention to informal, as well as formal, aspects of the process. The process should include specific initiatives to reach out to students and parents traditionally underrepresented in options programs and their advocates.

### Impact on Other Schools

Our analysis indicated a number of detrimental impacts of high school options on non-selective schools, as well as some strategies for school improvement tested in options programs that could be productively employed in strengthening non-selective schools.

**Recommendation:** As part of a comprehensive review of the role of options in a particular school district, the school district should identify and eliminate or minimize detrimental impacts of high school options on non-selective schools in such areas as loss of capable students, loss of capable staff, resource inequities, formal or informal procedures for sending students back to their neighborhood school, and creation of undesirable incentives for neighborhood schools to place undue emphasis on recruiting and educating high-achieving students.

**Recommendation:** Prerogatives historically granted to options schools and programs that have proven useful in their efforts to build an effective school program (such as flexibility in staff selection, staff training, upgrading of facilities, and discretionary funding) should be identified and applied to the improvement of neighborhood schools.

## NOTES

[1] Howard Husock, prod., *America's First School: 350 Years at Boston Latin* (Boston: WGBH-TV, 1985), videotape.

[2] National Institute of Education, *The Planning Papers for the Vocational Education Study* (Washington, DC: Author, 1979), vi.

[3] The School District of Philadelphia, Desegregation Office, "Special Admissions Schools for September, 1988, Use of Form EH 38" (File N. 400), Memorandum issued 13 October 1987.

[4] Harriet Rabb, et al., *Promoting Integration in the New York City High Schools* (New York: Education Law Project, Columbia Law School, July 1987), 1-40; Janet R. Price and Jane R. Stern, "Magnet Schools as a Strategy for Integration and School Reform," *Yale Law and Policy Review* 5 (Spring/Summer 1987): 302, 308-309.

[5] David A. Bennett, "Magnet School Desegregation Plans: Elements of the Architecture," paper given at the National Conference on School Desegregation Policy, 14 November 1986, p. 37; Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 296-299.

[6] Gary Orfield, Foreword to *Metropolitan Chicago Public High Schools: Race, Poverty, and Educational Opportunity* by Jim Garrett (Chicago: University of Chicago, Metropolitan Opportunity Project, 1987), v.

[7] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 309-312; Rolf K. Blank, "Survey of Magnet Schools: Analyzing a Model for Quality Integrated Education," Final Report of a national study for the U.S. Department of Education (1983).

[8] Bennett, "Magnet School Desegregation Plans," 28.

[9] New York City Board of Education, *1986-87 Directory of the Public High Schools* (New York: Author, 1986).

[10] Chicago Public Schools, Department of Equal Educational Opportunity Programs, *Options for Knowledge Programs* (Chicago: Author, 1986).

[11] School District of Philadelphia, *Options for Learning* (Philadelphia: Author, 1986).

[12] The School Committee of the City of Boston, Department of Implementation, *Student Assignment Information, Boston Public Schools 84-85* (Boston: Author, 1984).

[13] Advocates for Children of New York, Inc., *Public High Schools, Private Admissions: A Report on New York City Practices* (Long Island City, NY: Author, 1985), 1-2, 39-42.

[14] Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools*, 35-39; Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 296-297.

[15] Rolf K. Blank, "The Effects of Magnet Schools on the Quality of Education in Urban School Districts," *Phi Delta Kappan* (December 1984): 270-272.

[16] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 298-299, 303-309, 319-320.

[17] Blank, "The Effects of Magnet Schools," 270-272.

[18] Marj Halperin, "The Lottery," *Chicago* 37 (December 1988): 159-161ff.

[19] Board of Education of the City of New York, ODPC/Student Information Services, "1987-88 Poverty Components Listing," computer printout generated 17 June 1987; Chicago Public Schools, "Plan for the Improvement of Instruction for Disadvantaged Students in the Chicago Public Schools, Seventh Year (1985-1986) Statistics," Report No. GF719, computer printout generated 8 October 1986; School District of Philadelphia, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, *Superintendent's MIC Management Information Center, 1986-1987* (Philadelphia: Author, 1987); Massachusetts Department of Education, Bureau of Data Collection, "Individual School Report October 1, 1984, Table 6 Disadvantaged Students," computer printout generated 24 July 1985.

For New York, Chicago, and Boston, the percent low-income used was simply the percent of students reported in the relevant document as eligible for free and reduced lunch. Philadelphia used a "matched address" method to calculate the percentage of AFDC children at a particular school. That is, the central office matched the addresses of students enrolled in each public school with the addresses of AFDC families in the attendance area for that school, deriving a low-income percentage for that school.

[20] For example, School A and School B might both report that 35% of their students were low-income. However, those students in School A who were not low-income might be primarily just above the poverty level, while those students in School B who were not low-income might be primarily upper-middle class.

[21] In instances where the total number of academically non-selective high schools in a school district was not divisible by three, a question arose as to what category a few schools should be placed in that fell on the boundary between two categories. Such schools were placed in a category depending on whether their percent low-income was closer to the percent low-income of the school below them in the rank ordering of schools or above them in the rank ordering of schools.

[22] Board of Education of the City of New York, Division of High Schools, *Comparative Analysis of the Organization of the High Schools, School Year 1984-85* (New York: Author, 1985); Chicago Public Schools, *Fall 1984 Test Scores and Selected School Characteristics, High Schools* (Chicago: Author, 1985); School District of Philadelphia, *Superintendent's MIC, 1985-86* ; Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles 1984-85* .

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.

[26] In New York, admissions to the eight selective magnet, or "Educational Option," high schools has been modified to create a more randomly stratified and representative student body. Whereas in the past, the Ed Op high schools had been able to choose all of their students, within certain limits of the distribution of low, average, and high scoring students, as of fall 1987, the Ed Op schools were permitted to choose only one-half of their entering student body within such limits, and the other half were randomly selected from among all applicants. This reform followed recommendations made in Frank Smith et al., *High School Admissions and the Improvement of Schooling: A Report of the University Consultants* (New York: Author, 1986).

[27] Board of Education of the City of New York, Office of Student Information Services, "Annual School Census—October 1984, Pupil Ethnic Composition Report," computer printout generated 19 July 1985; Chicago Public Schools, *Racial/Ethnic Survey-Students as of October 31, 1984* (Chicago: Author, 1985);

School District of Philadelphia, *Superintendent's MIC 1985-1986* ; Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, *School Profiles, 1984-85.*

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Board of Education of the City of New York, *Comparative Analysis 1984-85* (March 1985 data); Chicago Public Schools, *Fall 1984 Selected School Characteristics;* School District of Philadelphia, telephone interview with Department of Research and Evaluation, 10 October 1988; Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles, 1984-85.*

New York reports four categories of special education students, including Modified Instructional Services I, Modified Instructional Services II, Low Incidence, and Resource Room. There may be some overlap between the categories, thereby double counting some students. However, given the available data, the sum of these categories is an accurate estimate of the special education enrollment of the New York City high schools.

[34] Educational Priorities Panel, *Ten Years of Neglect: The Failure to Serve Language-Minority Students in the New York City Public Schools* (New York: Author, 1985), Appendix Table 6C; Chicago Public Schools, *Fall 1984 Selected School Characteristics;* School District of Philadelphia, *Superintendent's MIC, 1985-1986*; Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles 1984-85.*

Since the 1984-85 school year the percentage of bilingual students served in the New York high schools has increased, under pressure from advocacy groups and state monitoring of LEP student access to occupational programs. The High School Division agreed that in each high school the percentage of LEP students receiving services would reach at least the city-wide average proportion of LEP students, estimated to be between 6% and 7%. The Division agreed that all high schools must have at least one bilingual program, and that there must be at least one bilingual program established in each major college prep/career area. The three exam schools who give their admissions test in English (Bronx High School of Science, Brooklyn Technical, and Stuyvesant) are exempted from these changes in policy.

[35] Chicago Public Schools, *Fall 1984 Selected School Characteristics*; School District of Philadelphia, *Superintendent's MIC, 1986-1987*; Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles 1984-85.*

[36] Joyce Sween, Charles L. Kyle, and Olga Reyes, *Chicago Public High Schools: How Their Students' Low Income, Reading Scores, and Attendance Rates Relate to Dropout Level and Type of School* (Chicago: DePaul University, Department of Sociology, Chicago Area Studies Center, 1987), 37-52.

[37] Rabb et al., *Promoting Integration* , Exhibit M, pp. 2-3. This was verified in a telephone interview with Dr. Jane Canner, Assistant Director, Testing, Office of Educational Assessment, New York City Board of Education, 6 October 1988. For New York the % 9th Graders Reading at or Above Grade Level is based on the scores of 9th graders on the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), administered in April 1985.

Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line: Chicago's Failing Schools and How to Save Them* (Chicago: Author, 1985), 108. For Chicago the % 9th Graders Reading Below Minimum Competency is based on the scores of 9th graders on the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency (TAP) given in the fall of 1983.

[38] Chicago Panel on Public School Finances, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools: An Analysis of the Class of 1982-1983-1984*, Second Edition (Chicago: Author, 1986), Addendum to Second Edition, p. 5.

[39] Chicago Public Schools, Department of Research and Evaluation, *School Level Dropout Analysis: 1981 Entering Class* (Chicago: Author, 1987).

[40] Karl E. Weick, "Educational Organizations as Loosely Coupled Systems," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 21 (March 1976): 1-18.

[41] Donald Moore and Arthur Hyd., *Making Sense of Staff Development: An Analysis of Staff Development Programs and Their Costs in Three Urban School Districts*, Final Report, National Institute of Education Grant G-79-0070, Chicago, 1981.

[42] See Notes 9-12.

[43] For analysis of similar contradictions between official policy and school-level practice in the area of special education, see Richard A. Weatherley, *Reforming Special Education: Policy Implementation from State Level to Street Level* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1979).

[44] Smith et al., *High School Admissions*, 9-13.

[45] Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools.Practices*

[46] Halperin, "The Lottery."

[47] Ibid., 159-160.

[48] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 299-300; Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools*, 61-62.

[49] College Entrance Examination Board, *Keeping the Options Open: An Overview, Interim Report of the Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling* (New York: Author, 1986), 15; Valerie E. Lee and Ruth B. Ekstrom, "Student Access to Guidance Counseling in High School," *American Educational Research Journal* 24 (Summer 1987): 287-310; Adria Steinberg, "Guidance and Counseling: Too Little, Too Late?" *The Harvard Education Letter* 4 (June 1988): 1-5.

[50] College Entrance Examination Board, *Keeping the Options Open*, 7-10.

[51] Educational Priorities Panel, *Lost in the Labyrinth: New York City High School Admissions* (New York: Author, 1985), 45.

[52] Martha Allen, "Nonselective Magnet Schools Use Selective Criteria," *The Chicago Reporter* 15 (April 1986): 6-8.

[53] Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools.*

[54] Ibid.

[55] Eugene Radwin et al., *A Case Study of New York City's Citywide Reading Testing Program* (Cambridge, MA: The Huron Institute, May 1981), V16-V40.

[56] Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools.*

[57] Ibid., 4.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Adam Gamoran and Mark Berends, *The Effects of Stratification in Secondary Schools: Synthesis of Survey and Ethnographic Research* (Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1987).

[60] Allen, "Nonselective Magnet Schools," 7.

[61] High School Principals Association, *High School Principals Association Issues Paper: High School Admissions* (New York: Author, 1986), 1.

[62] Noel N. Kriftcher, Principal, Seward Park High School, to Arthur Auerbach, Superintendent in Charge of Operations, Division of High Schools, New York Board of Education, 5 March 1986, p. 1.

[63] Ibid., 3.

[64] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools."

[65] Chicago Board of Education, *Annual Desegregation Review 1983-84, Part II: Recommendations on Educational Components* (Chicago: Author, September 1984) p. 491.

[66] Halperin, "The Lottery," 160.

[67] Smith, "High School Admissions," p. 7.

[68] School District of Philadelphia, "Special Admissions Schools."

[69] Kriftcher to Auerbach, 2.

[70] Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, *"Illegal Use of Chapter 1 funds by the Chicago Public Schools*, 8 November 1988 (Mimeographed.).

[71] Rabb et al., *Promoting Integration*, 10-22.

[72] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools," 291.

[73] Even nationally, there is limited data available about the impact of options schools. Blank, "Survey of Magnet Schools," concludes that magnet schools that implemented high quality programs were not necessarily selective and that magnet schools in general had higher levels of achievement than did non-magnets. However, in making the latter observation, the researchers were not able to separate out the impacts of the magnet school programs from the impacts of initial student selection.

[74] Blank, "The Effects of Magnet Schools."

[75] Paul Berman and Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, *Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. VIII: Implementing and Sustaining Innovations* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1978), 15-18.

[76] Murray Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1964), 44-72.

[77] Weick, "Educational Organizations"; Weatherley, *Reforming Special Education*; Richard M. Cyert and James G. March, *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

[78] Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools."

[79] Ibid.

[80] Halperin, "The Lottery."

[81] Smith, *High School Admissions*; Advocates for Children, *Public High Schools;* Bennett, *Magnet School Desegregation Plans;* Price and Stern, "Magnet Schools."

# CHAPTER 5. TRACKING AND GROUPING WITHIN HIGH SCHOOLS

Once a student was admitted to a high school through the process described in Chapter 4, the entering student (typically a ninth grader) was assigned to a set of courses. Enrolling in these courses represented the first step towards fulfilling high school graduation requirements, such as the following requirements spelled out for Chicago high school students:

| Subject | Annual Units |
|---|---|
| English | 4 |
| Social Studies | 3 |
| Mathematics | 2 |
| Science | 1 |
| Art | 1 |
| Music | 1 |
| Physical Education | 2 |
| Electives | 6 |
| Total | 20 |

In some cases, students taking classes in such subject areas were grouped heterogeneously, so that the composition of their class was representative of the full range of students within a particular grade level at a particular school. This heterogeneous grouping was most likely to occur in such courses as physical education and introductory art and music. In other cases, the individual courses to which the student was assigned in such academic subjects as English, math, science, and social studies had a "group" label attached to them.[1]

- Example: In Philadelphia, most high school courses had one of the following group labels: Advanced Placement, Honors, Star, Rapid, Regular, Modified, Slow, Chapter 1, TELLS, Special Education, Bilingual Education, or ESOL.

- Example: In Boston, most high school courses were designated Advanced Placement, Honors, Grade Level, General, Basic, Chapter 1, Special Education, Bilingual Education, or ESL.

In the customary terminology of education, these group labels are called "ability group" labels. It is clear that there is no general agreement about the meaning of the term "ability" and that students ended up in courses with particular "ability group" labels for a variety of reasons unrelated to their "ability," however "ability" was defined by the school system. Nevertheless, the term "ability group" is so widely used that we have employed it in the rest of this report to refer to these grouping labels.

Twenty years ago, students in these four school systems were assigned to "tracks" (for example, honors, college preparatory, general, vocational), in effect giving all of their academic courses the same ability group label. In 1985, some students in these school systems were still considered (officially or unofficially) to be part of such a track, although the use of such track labels had been deemphasized, as explained below.

The usefulness and effectiveness of tracks and ability groups have been the subject of intense controversy among educators and among academics. Proponents of tracking and grouping have argued, for example, that:

- Tracking and ability grouping allow high ability students to develop their abilities and skills to the maximum, especially if appropriate instruction is provided.[2]

- Tracking and ability grouping allow low ability students and students with special learning needs to receive instruction tailored to their particular needs and skill levels.[3]

- Tracking and ability grouping allow teachers to deal with a manageable range of students within a single classroom.[4]

Critics of tracking and grouping argue that:

- Tracking and ability grouping depress the academic achievement of low-track students while failing to benefit high-track students.[5]

- The quality of instruction and level of teacher expectation is inferior in low-track classes as compared with high-track classes.[6]

- Participation in low-track classes depresses student expectations and effort.[7]

- Tracking and ability grouping are inequitable because minority and low-income students are overrepresented in low-track classes and underrepresented in high-track classes.[8]

Below, we discuss tracking and ability grouping practices in the four school systems, analyzing the following topics:

- The recent history of tracking and ability grouping within the four school systems, highlighting key changes from 1970 through 1985.

- The structure of tracks and ability groups within the four school systems.

- Some key conclusions about tracks and ability groups in the four school systems, especially concerning their impact on students at risk.

Finally, we make policy recommendations based on study findings.

## Tracking and Ability Grouping: Recent History

As has been pointed out by researchers who have studied tracking and ability grouping, various forms of tracking and grouping have been a standard feature of most elementary, junior high, and high schools for decades.[9] And as has been discussed in Chapter 3, this has been the case in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. However, there have been several important shifts since 1970 in the way these practices have been carried out at the high school level, and these changes are summarized below.

### Down-Playing Formal Track Designations Within Schools

In each school system, placing students in a track that determined all their academic courses had been the predominant practice until some point between 1965 to 1975.

- Example: Chicago high school students in 1970 were separated into tracks labeled Honors, Regular, Essential, and Basic. Based on data from a representative sample of Chicago high school students in 1970, most students knew exactly where they fit into this tracking scheme. Further, white students were disproportionately enrolled in Honors and Regular tracks, while black students were disproportionately enrolled in Essential and Basic tracks.[10]

Responding to the equity movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, educators in these four cities began to move away from track designations and, at least officially, to drop the notion that a student was enrolled in a track. For example, when the movement for open admissions to New York's city colleges grew up in the early 1970s, New York's public schools dropped formal tracking labels, since it was argued that almost all students should be considered capable of attending college. Thus, in each of the four school systems, such labels as Honors, Regular, and Basic began to be applied only to individual courses. This practice was more publicly acceptable but, in many schools, did not significantly change actual practice, since a student's academic classes typically all continued to have the same ability group label.

Coupled with the effort to eliminate formal tracks was a movement to eliminate the ability group distinction between those courses offered to college prep students and to non-college prep students, if these students were considered to fall within the "normal range" and not considered either academically gifted or in need of major remedial instruction. Many advocates for minority students argued that all students within the normal range of achievement within the school system should receive college prep courses. This same theme was later picked up in the 1980s by the excellence movement, with its criticism of electives and "watered-down" courses. In all four school systems, these criticisms led to

the elimination of separate ability group labels for "regular" college as opposed to "regular" non-college courses, although as will be documented later in the chapter, these distinctions continued to be made in a number of other ways.

### Options Schools and Programs as New Forms of Tracking

At the same time that assigning a student to a track that determined all the student's courses was being formally deemphasized within high schools, the movement for options schools and programs began to grow, as described in Chapter 4. To the extent that these options selected students based on their past achievement, attendance, and behavior (a widespread practice based on the information presented in Chapter 4), options schools and programs functioned essentially as tracks. They singled out a particular group of students based on past performance and created a separate school program for them. Only students who had been admitted to the options school or program could enroll in its courses, as was the case with traditional tracks. And these new options often provided the types of course content characteristic of traditional tracks, such as college and vocational preparation.

Thus, as it has been implemented in actual practice in the cities studied, the movement for options schools and programs that took place from 1970 through 1985 has, in part, allowed the development of a new form of tracking at the same time that the practice of official tracking within schools was being deemphasized.

### Raising Standards

In response to the concerns emphasized by the excellence movement about the low achievement levels of high school graduates, each of the states in which these four school systems were located, as well as the school systems themselves, increased high school graduation requirements in the period since 1980. These changes have been instituted in response to increased graduation requirements spelled out in state law, increased requirements for admission to public and private universities, and the school systems' own initiatives to increase standards. These changes are summarized in Table 5-1, which indicates that the various states and school systems began to require more credits to be earned in academic subjects, such as English, math, social studies, and science.

The push for a more rigorous curriculum also led to two somewhat contradictory approaches to helping low achievers meet new standards. In some instances, remedial courses were deemphasized and almost all students were encouraged to take "regular" level courses. In other instances, the number of remedial courses was increased, since such remedial courses were seen as the best way to help students meet the new requirements. In

# Table 5-1. STATE/CITY HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS[11]

(Changes 1984-1987)

| STATE/CITY | SUBJECT | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | | Math | | Social Studies | | Science | | Electives | | Other |
| | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | |
| ILLINOIS<br>Total units to graduate=16 | 3 yrs. | same | 1 yr. | 2 yrs. (1 yr. may be computer science) | 1 yr. | 2 yrs. | 1 yr. | same | 1 yr. opt.<br>Choice of language, music, art, or vocational education | 1 yr. req. | 1/4 yr. consumer education<br>4 yrs. physical education<br>Driver's education: 30 hrs. classroom, 6 hrs. behind-the-wheel, 6 hrs. observation |
| Chicago:<br>Total units to graduate=20 (up from 16 in 1984) | 4 yrs. | same | 1 or 2 yrs. to total 3 yrs. of math & science | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | same | 1 or 2 yrs. to total 3 yrs. of math & science | 1 yr. | 1 yr. art<br>1 yr. music | | 4 yrs. physical education |
| MASSACHUSETTS<br>No total units mandated for graduation | --- | --- | --- | --- | 1 yr. of American history | same | --- | --- | | | 4 yrs. physical education<br>Reg. students must take 2 yrs foreign lang. College course students must take & pass 2 yrs. foreign lang. (3 yrs. recommended) |
| Boston:<br>Total units* to graduate=21 (105 pts.) (up from 19 [95 pts.] in 1984) | 4 yrs. enrolled | 4 yrs. passed | 2 yrs. | 2 yrs. for regular students, 3 yrs. for college course | 2 yrs. including 1 yr. of American history | same | 2 yrs. including 1 yr. of lab science | same | Computer course optional | Required 2-1/2 pts. computer, 2-1/2 pts. health | 4 yrs. physical education<br>Must score 64 or higher on Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) |

(Changes 1984-1987)

| STATE/CITY | SUBJECT | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | English | | Math | | Social Studies | | Science | | Electives | | Other |
| | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | original | subsequent change | |
| NEW YORK STATE<br>Total units to graduate=<br>16 local diploma, 18 Regents diploma | 4 yrs. | same | 1 yr. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 4 yrs. | 1 yr. | 2 yrs. | One 3 yr. sequence<br>Choice of math/science, language, occ. education, music or art | Two 3-yr. sequences | Foreign language required for Regents |
| New York City:<br>Total units to graduate=<br>18-1/2 overall (up from 16 local, 18 regents in 1984) | 4 yrs. | same | 2 yrs. | same | 3-1/2 yrs. | 4 yrs. | 2 yrs. | same | 4 yrs. | 4 yrs. but must have one 5-unit or 2 3-unit sequences | 1 yr. language (Local)<br>3 yrs. language (Regents)<br>1/2 yr. art, 1/2 yr. music, 1/2 yr. health, 2 yrs. physical education** |
| PENNSYLVANIA<br>Total units to graduate=21.5 | 3 yrs. | 4 yrs. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 1 yr. | 3. yrs. | 5 yrs. | same | Art/Humanities new requirement 2 yrs.<br>2 yrs. physical education reduced to 1-1/2 yrs. Voc. ed. students must meet additional requirements that vary by type of program |
| Philadelphia:<br>Total units to graduate=<br>21-1/2 (up from 18 in 1985) | 3 yrs. | 4 yrs. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 1 yr. | 3 yrs. | 5 yrs. | same | See state requirements |

Table 5-1, continued

*5 pts. = 1 unit; only Boston uses points and here they have been converted to units.
**All students must pass (with score of 65 or better) Regents Competency Tests in reading/writing and math. Regents diploma requires additional exams in English and social studies. Subject area exams will be required in science (9th grade, 1988), social studies (10th grade, 1989), and American history (11th grade, 1989) for all students.

NOTE: "Unit" refers to the standard measure of academic contact time; in general, 120 hours of class time/year=1 unit. For major subjects, i.e., English, math, science, social studies, one unit = one year. Electives usually count for 1/4 - 1/2 unit per year.

New York and Chicago, these two approaches were reconciled in a policy that required low-achieving ninth graders to take remedial courses (sometimes courses that met longer than regular courses), but that gave students only elective credit for completing them, rather than credit toward their graduation requirements in English and math.

### Mandates to Address Special Learning Needs

Campaigns in the 1960s and 1970s for schools to do a better job of addressing special learning needs resulted, among other things, in the establishment of new educational programs to meet these needs, including compensatory education, special education, and bilingual education. In the high schools in the four systems studied, these new programs characteristically took the form of new tracks and ability groups:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established a federal compensatory education program to serve low-income students, now called Chapter 1.[12] Many states then followed suit and established state-funded compensatory education programs (including Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, and Illinois).[13] At the high school level in these four cities, these compensatory education funds were typically used to create separate remedial classes in math and reading specifically identified with a particular state or federal program (for example, Chapter 1 classes), to support the school system's existing remedial classes, or to support new remedial programs of the school system's own design.

- The federal Education for All Handicapped Children's Act (passed in 1975) and similar state laws required school districts to provide a "free appropriate public education" for handicapped children.[14] At the high school level, these requirements were translated into full-time special education programs for some students judged to be handicapped, and these programs functioned like traditional tracks. Part-time special education classes were established for other handicapped students who continued to participate in the regular school program for the balance of their school day, and these classes were, in essence, ability grouped classes that fit into the student's high school schedule as other ability-grouped classes did.

- The federal court decision in *Lau vs. Nichols* in 1974 established the rights of students who lacked a mastery of English to receive some form of special instruction and assistance in making the transition into the mainstream school program, although the court decision did not specify the exact form for this help.[15] In some instances, states have taken further legislative action to aid limited English proficient students by mandating and funding bilingual education or English-as-a-second language (ESL) programs. Both Illinois and Massachusetts have state-mandated bilingual education programs.[16] In other instances, the federal government and private plaintiffs have used the *Lau* decision as the basis for compelling individual school districts (such as New York City) to provide bilingual education or ESL instruction.[17] As with the compensatory education and special education mandates, legal obligations to assist limited English proficient students

have, in the main, resulted in separate tracks and groups within the four school systems.

Many discussions of tracking and ability grouping do not consider compensatory education, special education, and bilingual education as a part of the overall configuration of tracks and ability groups within school systems; however, our own research and the research of others indicates that efforts to meet these special learning needs are typically incorporated into the school system's established track and ability group structure.[18]

## Ability Group Labels in the Four Cities

### Five Major Categories

Most academic courses offered in the four school systems had one of the ability group labels attached to them that are listed in Table 5-2. These group designations fell into five major categories: Advanced College, Regular College, Regular Non-College, Remedial, and Bilingual.

**Advanced College.** Each school system offered ability-grouped courses for a small number of students to prepare them to take the Advanced Placement Examinations set by the College Board. Courses in this "Advanced Placement" ability group were usually offered only in Selective Exam Schools, in Selective Magnet Schools, and in a few Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools. For example, in 1985-86 Philadelphia listed a total of 229 high school students system-wide who were enrolled in Advanced Placement in English and 176 in math.

Also providing advanced college preparation were ability-grouped classes labeled "Honors" in all four school systems. Unlike the Advanced Placement courses, which were offered in only a few schools, courses with the Honors label were offered in almost every high school in the four cities.

- Example: Considering the six types of high schools described in Chapter 4, the following percentages of Chicago students were enrolled in Honors English in each type of high school in 1987-88: Selective Exam Schools (13.8%), Selective Magnet Schools (12.2%), Selective Vocational Schools (6.9%), Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools (11.7%), Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income Schools (8.6%), Non-Selective Low-Income Schools (4.8%).

Each school system also offered a variety of other ability grouped classes for advanced college preparation. Philadelphia had "Star" and "Rapid" groups, which were

## Table 5-2. ABILITY GROUP LABELS IN THE FOUR SCHOOL SYSTEMS[19]

| | New York | Chicago | Philadelphia | Boston |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Advanced College Prep** | Advanced Placement | Advanced Placement | Advanced Placement | Advanced Placement |
| | Honors | Honors | Honors | Honors |
| | Others: International Baccalaureate, College course collaboration, etc. | Others: International Baccalaureate College course collaboration, etc. | Others: International Baccalaureate, College course collaboration, | Others: College course collaboration, etc. |
| | | | Star | |
| | | | Rapid | |
| **Regular or Grade College Prep** | Academic Regents and Academic Non-Regents Classes | Regular | Regular | Grade Level |
| **Regular Non-College** | Academic Regents and Academic Non-Regents Classes | Regular | Regular | Grade Level |
| **Remedial** | Modified | Essential | Modified or Slow | General |
| | | | | Basic |
| Federally funded | Chapter 1 | Chapter 1 | Chapter 1 | Chapter 1 |
| State funded | PSEN | Chapter 1 | TELLS | Chapter 188 |
| | Special Education | Special Education | Special Education | Special Education |
| **Bilingual** | Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language (ESL) | Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language (ESL) | English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Bilingual Education | Bilingual Education, English as a Second Language (ESL) |

below the Honors level, but above the Regular College ability group intended for regular college preparation. Also, all four systems participated in such programs for advanced college preparation as the "International Baccalaureate" and "College Course Collaboration," and made varied uses of state and federal funds designated for the "Mentally Gifted" or "Gifted and Talented."[20]

In New York, all Advanced College Prep ability groups were classified as "Regents Courses." The New York State Department of Education has long offered state-wide Regents Exams in a range of high school subjects. Students who passed a specified number of Regents Exams then qualified for a Regents Endorsed Diploma or a Regents Endorsed Diploma with Honors.

**Regular College.** Within the Regular College Preparation category, three of the four school systems used a similar ability group label: "Regular" in Chicago, "Regular" in Philadelphia, and "Grade Level" in Boston. Almost all high schools offered courses with these labels, and this ability group were the largest in each of these school systems.

New York employed two ability group designations at the regular college prep level: "Academic Regents" courses and "Academic Non-Regents" courses. Academic Regents Courses at the regular college prep level were designed to prepare students to pass the state-wide Regents Exams, described above.

**Regular Non-College.** Courses in this category were for students who did not have extreme skill deficits (at least given the range of student achievement in their school system), but who were probably not going to attend college. In all four school systems, these courses had the same labels as the regular college prep courses: Academic Regents and Academic Non-Regents in New York, Regular in Chicago, Regular in Philadelphia, and Grade Level in Boston.

Some New York educators insisted that they had done away with the college/non-college distinction entirely, and that they were pressing all students within the regular range to take either Academic Regents or Academic Non-Regents courses. Others indicated that there were still courses in many New York high schools that were labeled "Academic" but were intended primarily for non-college students. In the other three school systems, those interviewed were clearer that there was still a well-defined set of courses that were intended for regular non-college students, even though both college and non-college courses bore the same ability group label. For example, Regular Biology, Regular Earth Science, Regular Chemistry, and Regular Physics were considered college preparatory courses in Chicago, but Regular Physical Science and Regular General Science were not. Further the

four college prep science courses were always laboratory courses, but the non-college prep courses typically were not.

**Remedial.** Within the Remedial Preparation category, school systems offered some ability-grouped courses that they had developed on their own and not in response to state or federal mandates; as indicated in Table 5-2, these courses bore such labels as "Modified," "Essential," "Slow," and "General." These remedial courses never existed in Selective Exam schools and seldom existed in Selective Magnet and Selective Vocational Schools. They were more prevalent in non-selective schools and particularly in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools; however, as will be discussed later in this chapter, the number of students enrolled in such courses system-wide in these four school systems had declined, as school systems responded to the recommendations of the excellence movement by emphasizing courses that, officially at least, offered "regular" high school instruction.

Responding to state and federal mandates and funding, the four school systems had also established additional remedial courses to address academic or psychological learning needs.

- Example: In New York in 1984-85, ninth and tenth grade students were eligible for remedial classes under a state-funded program called Pupils with Special Education Needs (PSEN). Eligibility was based on students' scores on the California Test of Basic Skills.[21]

- Example: As Table 4-9 indicates, 14.4% of Boston high school students, 10.6% of Philadelphia high school students, and 7.4% of New York high school students were enrolled in special education.

**Bilingual.** Each school system offered some form of program for students with limited English proficiency. Typically, students were assigned to these programs based on testing designed to determine their degree of mastery of English. Services offered ranged from an English-as-a-second-language classes (ESL or ESOL classes), to classes in major academic subjects offered in the student's native language plus an ESL class. The latter option was typically referred to as "transitional bilingual education." New York, Chicago, and Boston officially aimed to provide transitional bilingual education for all students with limited English proficiency, although the adequacy of their efforts had been questioned through critical reports by independent advocacy groups and through litigation.[22] Philadelphia limited itself to offering ESOL classes to a small number of students (as Table 4-10 reflects) and a pilot bilingual education program.

Because students in bilingual classes were grouped only according to the extent of their familiarity with spoken and written English, the classes tended to be grouped heterogeneously in terms of conventional measures of ability to learn. Teachers, counselors, and advocates reported that many school staff assumed that bilingual students ready to enter English-only classes should enter non-college courses. Two exceptions occurred. Some middle-class bilingual students, assumed to be headed for college, were given brief intensive bilingual programs. Further, a few non-selective high schools (such as Juarez High School in Chicago and English High School in Boston) have created college prep bilingual programs.

### School-to-School Variability in Using Ability Group Labels

Principals, department heads, and other school-level staff typically exercised considerable discretion in setting up courses within their school that bore their school system's official ability group labels. For example, almost every school had an Honors program, although students in one school's Honors program could be engaged in advanced college preparation, while students in another could be doing regular non-college level work. Or, as will be discussed later in this chapter, students in particular schools could be taking a course labeled Regular Algebra that was actually remedial arithmetic. In the push to raise standards, there have been efforts by central administrative leadership to decrease such variability. For example, Philadelphia established a system-wide curriculum and a set of system-wide admissions requirements for classes labeled Honors. However, Philadelphia's criteria for Star and Rapid courses (also considered to be in the category of Advanced College Prep) have not been as strictly enforced, so that many schools have established more Star and Rapid courses when their best students could not meet the Honors requirements.

## The Student Assignment Process

As noted above, placing students in tracks and ability groups within individual high schools was typically carried out with substantial school-based discretion within a loose set of system-wide policies. (In this respect, it closely resembled the process of placing students in options schools and programs discussed in Chapter 4.) The reality of tracking and grouping within individual schools depended heavily on the preferences, priorities, and competence of the school's principal, department heads, counselors, and other staff involved. Logistical considerations entailed in operating a complex organization strongly influenced the student assignment process.

## Logistical Considerations

The process of developing students' schedules and thus assigning them to courses with various ability group labels was typically carried out by guidance counselors and/or "programmers" in each high school. In many schools, logistical consideration were preeminent in assigning students to courses. Staying within budget; maintaining required class sizes; and juggling available classrooms and available teachers became the overriding administrative preoccupation. These logistics were harder in non-selective schools with high student turnover, where it was difficult to predict the number of teachers needed before the opening of school, and central administrations sought to hire only as many teachers as a school's enrollment justified. According to school staff in all four cities, certain expectations about student behavior also guided these programming decisions. For example, remedial classes were often over-programmed because staff expected a high rate of dropout.

The principals and staff of some non-selective schools fought aggressively to overcome these problems and get students assigned to classes smoothly and quickly. The leadership in other schools showed less initiative. Study consultants described individual schools in two of the four cities where the process of student assignment to courses went on for most of September, as the school shifted students from one class to another or waited for needed teachers to arrive so that classes could be formed. In such instances, students were sometimes assigned to study halls for several weeks while their schedule was clarified and sometimes told, "Come back in a week, and we'll have something for you." In contrast, when Diane Scott became principal of Overbrook High School in Philadelphia in 1984, one of her first priorities was to speed up the "rostering" process in the opening weeks of school, so that students and teachers would waste less time waiting for classes to start. Scott reallocated staff to the roster office, with the goal of having all students programmed within the first two weeks of school.

The position of programmer, which has become vital in the course assignment process, has emerged with the advent of computer technology. The programmer is an administrator or teacher (often a math teacher) who has become familiar enough with computer programming to aid the school in the student scheduling process. As one study consultant observed:

> When an administratively efficient program has been worked out, it becomes a "monument," so that the staff feels that they can't change it. The program develops its own inertia, and the assumed difficulty of changing it kills innovation.

This process exemplifies the development of the kinds of school-level routines for carrying out tasks that are highlighted by the organizational patterns perspective discussed in Chapter 1.

Programmers, however, were typically not trained in the educational implications of their procedures and often approached student scheduling primarily as a technical task. In some schools, the programmer worked closely with the principal and guidance staff in implementing the school's educational philosophy and in reviewing student information to make course assignments. However, in other schools programmers made most course assignment decisions themselves, with logistical considerations predominant and limited analysis of information about individual students.

### Student Information Used in Decision Making

To the extent that information about the student was used in course placement, high school staff drew on junior high school achievement test results, school grades, and courses completed; the recommendations of junior high teachers and counselors; testing and interviews carried out by high school staff; and student and parent preferences. For entering students, information supplied by the junior high was often incomplete or lacking, especially in non-selective high schools. Further, high school staff often expressed a distrust of the accuracy of test results and other data supplied by junior highs, claiming, for example, that there was substantial coaching and cheating on eighth grade tests because of the attention focused on these test scores as a measure of the school's quality.[23]

The process of assigning a student to particular ability levels is typically as important in determining the nature of the student's subsequent educational experience as the process of assigning a student to an options school versus a non-selective neighborhood school. However, these critical ability grouping decisions were usually carried out with broad discretion by the high school programmer, guidance counselor, and/or department head, often based on limited information. Typically, no written procedures explained how decisions were to be made, and students and parents had limited understanding of the nature and significance of these ability grouping decisions.[24]

### Informal Tracking Maintained

As noted earlier, there has been a movement away from the consistent tracking of students within a particular school, and some schools had indeed increased the number of students who were enrolled in individual classes at different ability group levels. However, there were several procedures employed within schools that maintained students

in what were, in essence, separate tracks. First, in many schools, students were simply assigned at the same ability group level for all their academic classes, a common practice known as block programming or block rostering, even though these placement decisions were allegedly made based on an analysis of where the student should be most appropriately placed in each subject. Second, schools and departments established or maintained requirements that certain courses and course sequences could be taken only by students who had passed or had earned a specified grade in a prerequisite course. Thus, what had formerly been a distinct track (such as a vocational track to train auto mechanics) became a course sequence with a set of prerequisites. These examples illustrate how school-level discretion was used to comply with formal school system policies without changing school-level practice significantly. Later in the chapter, we will discuss similar accommodations that have been made to the effort to place more students in college prep classes.

## Characteristics of Students in Various Ability Groups

The research team sought data to determine the numbers and characteristics of students who ended up in various ability grouped classes. However, data addressing these questions were almost never generated and released by the four school systems. Further, the research team found that schools and school systems almost never wrote down their policies and procedures for tracking and grouping students, but based their actions on informal shared understandings. Other researchers who have studied tracking and ability grouping have also noted the scarcity of available data and linked this problem to the potential volatility of the tracking issue and the reluctance of school systems to publish information that might raise questions about the equity of tracking and grouping practices.[25] However, the research team was able to identify some data that helped clarify the make-up of various ability groups within the four school systems.

### Low-Track Students in Non-Selective Schools

We were particularly concerned to identify the characteristics of students enrolled in the lowest ability group classes within non-selective high schools, especially Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools. These students were at the bottom of the status hierarchy within the four school systems, having both failed to enter a selective options school or program (as discussed in Chapter 4) and having failed to secure a place in their neighborhood school's high ability group classes.

Although separate data about the characteristics of students in these low ability groups could not be obtained, we gained a good picture of these students through the school-wide data about non-selective schools presented in Chapter 4 and through school-level interviews. For example, among the students in New York's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools as a whole, 58% were low-income students, 92% were minority students, 8% were special education students, and about 75% were reading below the national average upon entering high school, and 23% were absent on a typical day. Among the students in Philadelphia's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, 58% were low-income, 97% were black and Hispanic, 15% were enrolled in special education, and 28% were absent on a typical day.

To the information about the characteristics of students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in Chapter 4 can be added information concerning student course failure, presented in Chapter 6. For example, in Philadelphia's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, 50% of ninth-grade students failed English in 1985-86 and 58% failed math. In Chicago's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in 1983-84, 39% of ninth-grade students failed English in 1984-85 and 47% failed math.

These data indicate that Non-Selective Low-Income Schools served high percentages of students at risk of school failure. Our interviews about the ability grouping process in these schools indicated that low ability group classes in these schools concentrated and isolated students at risk even further, since students achieving at grade level were often placed in options programs or honors classes. Weighing all the evidence about the four cities, the low ability group classes in these schools were almost entirely composed of of low-income students, black and Hispanic students, students with serious basic skills deficiencies, students with poor attendance records, students who had previously been held back, and students who had failed or would fail several academic subjects early in high school.

### Ability Group Enrollment by Type of School: The Chicago Example

The research team obtained Chicago data indicating the numbers of high school students enrolled in every ability-grouped course in every school in the school system. After computerizing these data, we determined how many students in Chicago were enrolled in courses with different ability group labels in the six different types of high schools identified in Chapter 4. Naturally, this information cannot be generalized to all four school systems. However, it both illuminates the nature of ability grouping in

Chicago and provides concrete illustrations of some of the key practices that, based on our interviews, were also employed in the other three cities.

Table 5-3 analyzes the number of students enrolled in math classes with five different ability group labels within the six different types of high schools described in Chapter 4.

As Table 5-3 indicates, Advanced Placement math students were concentrated in Selective Exam and Selective Magnet Schools, although the percentages of these students even in these selective schools were very small. Those Advanced Placement math classes offered in non-selective schools were all offered in academically selective options programs housed within these non-selective schools.

Table 5-3 indicates that a significantly higher percentage of students took Honors math courses in Selective Magnet Schools (13.87%) and in Selective Exam Schools (13.63%) than the system-wide percentage of students taking these courses (7.08%). However, Selective Vocational Schools and all three types of non-selective schools also offered Honors math courses. For example, Table 5-3 indicates that 3.96% of students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools were enrolled in courses labeled "Honors."

The overwhelming percentage of students taking math in all six types of high schools were enrolled in classes designated "Regular," and the percentages of students enrolled in such courses did not differ substantially among the six types of high schools. For example, the percentage of students enrolled in regular math classes in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools (62.31%) was virtually identical to the percentage in Selective Exam Schools (64.19%). In large part, these data reflect the fact that all students in high school are required to take one year of high school math, and students are strongly encouraged to take algebra.

As Table 5-3 indicates, virtually no students in Selective Vocational, Magnet, and Exam Schools were enrolled in Essential (remedial) Math or Special Education Math courses. Students enrolled in these courses within the school system were almost all students at Non-Selective Schools, with the highest percentages of students taking these remedial math courses in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools (10.40%).

Table 5-4 indicates student enrollment in the math courses that are normally taken by college-bound students in their third and fourth year, such as college algebra, analytic geometry, and trigonometry. As Table 5-4 indicates, 50.9% of Exam School students and 60.4% of Selective magnet Students are taking these courses, as compared with 16.4% of Selective Vocational School students and 16.1% of Non-Selective Low-Income School students.

Types of Courses

| Types of High Schools | | SPECIAL # enroll'd | % enroll'd | ESSENTIAL # enroll'd | % enroll'd | REGULAR # enroll'd | % enroll'd | HONORS # enroll'd | % enroll'd | ADVANCED # enroll'd | % enroll'd | TOTAL # enroll'd | % enroll'd |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW INCOME* 18 Schools Total enrollment: | 27990 | 763 | 2.73 % | 2910 | 10.40 % | 17439.5 | 62.31 % | 1109 | 3.96 % | 29 | 0.10 % | 22250.5 | 79.49 % |
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW TO MODERATE INCOME* 18 Schools Total enrollment: | 27187 | 497 | 1.83 % | 2189 | 8.05 % | 17398 | 63.99 % | 2006.5 | 7.38 % | 190 | 0.70 % | 22280.5 | 81.95 % |
| *NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE INCOME* 18 Schools Total enrollment: | 35088 | 328 | 0.93 % | 1621.5 | 4.62 % | 21996 | 62.69 % | 3140.5 | 8.95 % | 375 | 1.07 % | 27461 | 78.26 % |
| *SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL* 6 Schools Total enrollment: | 11814 | 32 | 0.27 % | 43 | 0.36 % | 6911.5 | 58.50 % | 431 | 3.65 % | 0 | 0.00 % | 7417.5 | 62.79 % |
| *SELECTIVE MAGNET* 1 School Total enrollment: | 2098 | 44 | 2.10 % | 0 | 0.00 % | 1626 | 77.50 % | 291 | 13.87 % | 38 | 1.81 % | 1999 | 95.28 % |
| *SELECTIVE EXAM* 2 Schools Total enrollment: | 6133 | 0 | 0.00 % | 0 | 0.00 % | 3937 | 64.19 % | 836 | 13.63 % | 84 | 1.37 % | 4857 | 79.19 % |
| TOTAL | 110310 | 1664 | 1.51 % | 6763.5 | 6.13 % | 69308 | 62.83 % | 7814 | 7.08 % | 716 | 0.65 % | 86265.5 | 78.20 % |

Table 5-3. CHICAGO MATH CLASS ENROLLMENT, 1987-88[26]

## Table 5-4. COLLEGE PREP MATH ENROLLMENT, CHICAGO, 1987-88[27]

| Types of High Schools | Total Junior/ Senior Enroll't | Jr./Sr. College Prep. Math # enrolled | % enrolled |
|---|---|---|---|
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW INCOME* 17 Schools | 8772 | 1411 | 16.09 |
| *NON-SELECTIVE LOW TO MODERATE INCOME* 18 Schools | 9502 | 2716 | 28.58 |
| *NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE INCOME* 17 Schools | 13927 | 3550.5 | 25.49 |
| *SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL* 6 Schools | 4991 | 818 | 16.39 |
| *SELECTIVE MAGNET* 1 School | 874 | 528 | 60.41 |
| *SELECTIVE EXAM* 2 Schools | 3188 | 1621 | 50.85 |
| **TOTAL** | 41254 | 10644.5 | 25.80 |

*NOTE: Half students listed on this table are a result of one-semester classes held sequentially over two semesters. Every two students enrolled in those classes were counted as one, since the same students would technically be enrolled in both semesters.*

The meaning of these results is further illuminated by the data in Table 5-5 concerning the achievement scores in mathematics for eleventh grade students attending the six types of high schools. Table 5-5 presents the results of the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency for math for 1987-88, indicating the percentile rank of the average student in each type of high school. Eleventh grade was chosen because we wished to determine the math achievement levels of Chicago high school students after most of the students who were going to take first-year algebra had completed it, particularly in light of the fact that uniform percentages of students were reported as taking first-year algebra in all six types of schools. Table 5-5 indicates, for example, that the average eleventh grade student in a Non-Selective Low-Income High Schools only achieved better than 21% of eleventh graders nationally, while the average student in the highest-ranking Selective Exam School achieved better than 75% of students nationally.

## Students At Risk and Ability Grouping

Building on the information presented above, we discuss several conclusions about the current impact of ability grouping on students at risk.

### The Impact of Higher Standards

As noted earlier, an important impact of the excellence movement in these four cities as it affected ability grouping was to move more students into courses with ability group labels indicating that they were college preparatory or at least "regular" or "grade level" courses. The end result of this process is reflected in Chicago data indicating that most Chicago high school students take a course labeled algebra. However, principals and teachers in low-income neighborhood high schools in all four cities reported that their schools were almost never given the additional training, staff, and opportunity to plan that would allow them to carry out new policies in a way that would benefit students ar risk.

> Example. In 1984, the Chicago Board of Education required all high school students to take algebra under the system's High School Renaissance Plan, yet they eliminated all funds for implementing this change from the school system's budget. In the first year of implementation, teachers complained about insufficient, out-of-date, and poor quality materials and lack of staff retraining.

The lack of assistance provided in implementing this particular reform was in strong contrast to the effort, for example, that went into establishing academically selective magnet schools, which received extra resources, the best staff, planning time, and administrative

## Table 5-5. CHICAGO 1987 MEDIAN MATH TAP SCORES, 11th GRADE[28]

| Types of High Schools | | CHICAGO Median Math TAP* percentile scores 1987-88 |
|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | Highest median : | 32 |
| | Lowest median : | 18 |
| | Median school score: | 21 |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | Highest median: | 50 |
| | Lowest median: | 21 |
| | Median school score: | 28 |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | Highest median: | 60 |
| | Lowest median: | 21 |
| | Median schools scores: | 37<br>32 |
| Selective Vocational | Highest median : | 40 |
| | Lowest median : | 21 |
| | Median school score: | 32 |
| Selective Magnet | Highest median: | 75 |
| | Lowest median: | 75 |
| 1 school | Median school score: | NA |
| Selective Exam | Highest median: | 75 |
| | lowest median: | 60 |
| 2 schools | Median school score: | NA |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | Highest median: | 75 |
| | Lowest Median: | 18 |
| | Median all schools: | 28 |

*Note: For school-by-school math TAP scores, see Appendix D.*

**Tests of Achievement and Proficiency*

assistance in cutting red tape. The failure of the central administrations in these school systems to provide adequate help in implementing higher standards reinforced the cynicism that many school-level staff in neighborhood high schools felt about reforms emanating from the central office. This lack of central administration leadership also did nothing to alter the low expectations that many school-level staff held for students at risk.

The data presented above, along with our interviews, indicate what has happened in implementing the shift toward placing more students at risk in higher ability group courses. School-level staff were confronted with a mandate to teach courses like algebra to students with major skill deficiencies and a history of school failure, usually without additional teacher training or resources. As the Chicago data in Table 5-3 suggest, school staff responded by placing more students in classes with the appropriate labels. And some went further and struggled with the the task of teaching the more demanding academic coursework to students with learning deficits. However, according to our interviews, two other responses were more prevalent. The first was simply to teach the traditional remedial math course but call it "algebra." The second was to allow students at risk to take algebra and to teach it the traditional way, flunking a high percentage of students. That this second strategy was widely followed is suggested by the data presented in Tables 5-5 and 6-8, which indicate the extremely high levels of course failure in math for ninth graders in Chicago's and Philadelphia's Non-Selective Schools. It is further indicated by the fact that the average eleventh grader in Chicago's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools only achieved better than 21% of eleventh graders nationally after the shift toward placing more students in algebra had been implemented for several years (Table 5-5).

Thus, raising standards by enrolling more students at risk in academic courses without serious commitment to providing the planning, training, talent, and resources to implement this policy has not benefitted these students.

### Instructional Quality

Research about the nature of instruction in high-track versus low-track classes consistently indicates that teachers in high-track classes have more positive expectations for students, offer more challenging work at a faster pace, expect regular homework, expect more creative work, and expect more critical writing and discussion. Students in low-track classes, in contrast, are more likely to spend time completing worksheets and other exercises that teach discrete skills, listening to lectures, and doing individual seatwork.[29]

Our interviews strongly confirmed that such expectations and practices were characteristics of the classes for students in low ability group classes in the four cities. Teachers of low ability group classes in English and math reported that they were under

extensive pressure from school administrators to demonstrate student progress on system-wide achievement tests, criterion-referenced tests, or state minimum competency tests. Thus, they made extensive use of test-like workbooks and programmed learning materials of a type that students with major skill deficiencies had used repeatedly in elementary and junior high school. In Philadelphia, for example, teachers responded to an English curriculum mandated for the high schools by the central administration:

> I'm uncomfortable with it. Things are fragmented, don't relate. . . .no continuity, central motivating idea, spiral curriculum, progress and development of a concept. . . .It's just isolated skills and no relationship to other things. This curriculum can't be implemented without staff input. It should be made by the department heads and staff working together. The needs of individual schools should be considered.[30]

The classroom experiences of students under this curriculum contrasted sharply with those of students in selective options schools and programs who had been given the opportunity to attend an educational program that linked the mastery of skills with a curriculum designed to appeal to students' interests (for example, an interest in science or in preparing for a particular occupation). In contrast, students in low ability group courses in non-selective high schools were expected to master skills that they had not learned in their previous educational experience using materials and methods that typically taught these skills in isolation. Not only were low ability group students in non-selective schools locked out of the high-interest course offerings of options schools and programs, such students were also frequently ineligible for the more interesting courses offered by their non-selective school (such as vocational sequences), because these courses were reserved for students with higher achievement scores or for juniors and seniors who had completed certain prerequisites.

### Triage: Saving a Few

The study interviews underscored the plight of those students in most non-selective schools who had major skill deficiencies and were assigned to low ability group courses. Given the low priority accorded to helping these students and the extent to which logistical priorities determined scheduling, the overall course schedules of these students at risk was frequently a hodgepodge that did not reflect any clear direction for them set either by the school or by the student. Extensive course failure (as documented in Chapter 6) did not trigger special help for most of these students, beyond a few who were admitted to small dropout prevention programs. Many staff members expressed the view that they were coping with social forces beyond their control in non-selective schools, that it was unrealistic to think that major advances could be made in boosting the performance of most

of their students, and that the best that they could do was to "save a few." While some schools did not accept this mindset and struggled to create a coherent program for their entire student body, the evidence indicates that, as one school principal observed, many non-selective schools had opted to wait for a sizable percentage of the students who were assigned to low ability classes to "age out," that is, to reach the legal age for dropping out of school and leave.

> Example: A detailed portrayal of such a high school by a team of Chicago reporters indicated, for example, that the school's teachers regarded assignment to instructing freshman and sophomore classes "as punishment," that one-half to one-third of students were absent from a typical class although the school reported an 83% attendance rate, and that the school had the second highest teacher transfer rate in the city.[31]

## Recommendations

Our analysis of high school tracking and grouping practices, particularly as they are implemented in the lower ability group courses in Low-Income and Low- Moderate-Income Non-Selective Schools, documented a series of mutually-reinforcing disincentives for students to become engaged in the educational program and to remain in school. For example:

- Because of the high school admissions process described in Chapter 4, merely attending a low-income neighborhood school had a major impact on student motivation. As one counselor observed, "This whole school is a remedial track."

- At the crucial point of entry into ninth grade, when many students were deciding whether high school was for them, these students confronted a course scheduling process that was often disorganized and dominated by the school's administrative needs.

- In-school tracking and grouping practices further concentrated the students in these schools with the worst records of school failure and the greatest likelihood of dropping out into separate "ability group" classes.

- Once students were placed in these classes, they were typically cut off from almost all high-interest learning experiences available to other students, and much of their instruction emphasized drill, lecture, and seatwork that made heavy use of test-like instructional materials.

- Although teachers who worked with these students were asked to implement such reforms as teaching all students algebra, teachers did not get needed materials, training, and planning time to implement these changes, in contrast to the assistance frequently given their colleagues in magnet schools and programs. These inequities heightened teacher cynicism.

- Even though students at risk in low-track classes were often enrolled in courses labeled "regular" or "grade level," these students were usually either given more remedial work with a new name or taught the regular level course in a traditional way, which they failed. High rates of course failure among these students, provided further disincentives for these students to stay in school, as did the characteristic lack of intervention by staff, even when, for example, 50% of ninth graders in Philadelphia's Non-Selective Low-Income Schools failed English and 58% failed math.

- Although some individual teachers and principals struggled to provide coherent instruction in these situations, many non-selective schools by and large gave up up on those students who ended up in low ability group courses within their school, and staff simply accepted the fact that most of them would drop out or graduate without minimal basic skills.

What set of changes can be recommended that might bring about basic improvement in this bleak situation? While it is beyond the scope of this report to present a detailed treatise on altering the social organization and curriculum of inner city secondary schools, we conclude that necessary changes fall into five areas discussed below.

## Strengthening Interest Groups Who Support Equity

Through a detailed critique of the practices described above, one can make a strong case that many of them violate the Research-Based Practice Standard for assessing educational equity described in Chapter 1. For example, an important feature of an instructional effective school is that the school has clear goals and high expectations for student performance that are incorporated into its daily interactions with students.[32] Yet these low-track classes reflect almost the extreme opposite. These classes also fail to meet another equity standard described in Chapter 1: the Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard. Under this standard, schools are expected to attempt in a coherent planful way to meet students needs, and even in the absence of research clear enough to direct their actions, they are under an obligation to carry out an instructional strategy, assess its results, and modify their approach. The instructional process documented reflects almost the extreme opposite of this approach. In the face of massive evidence that the present strategy is not working—in the form of course failure rates, retention rates, dropout rates, and reading achievement statistics—school staff persist with present practice.

A concept useful in understanding this situation is characterized by William Boyd as the "zone of tolerance."[33] According to Boyd, school district leaders are aware of what the public will tolerate (for example, in terms of student achievement and placement of school system graduates in various kinds of colleges) and operate within this "zone of tolerance." For low-track classes in these schools, there appears to be an unlimited zone of tolerance

for student academic failure. Put differently (to return to a point made in Chapter 4), there is no organized interest group focused on the education of low-track students in these low-income schools that exerts effective pressure on them to improve present performance or to even attempt to improve it. Thus, we again refer to the conflict and bargaining perspective on changing organizations, and conclude that other changes described below are not likely to affect day-to-day student experiences unless the interests of these students at risk are aggressively represented in policy making and implementation.

**Recommendation:** Mechanisms should be established through which active parents of students at risk, as well as independent parent and citizen advocacy organizations representing the interests of these students, can participate in decision making about the modification of current school-level tracking and grouping practices and associated instruction.

### Making Information Public

School system and school-level administrators almost never produce written policies describing grouping and tracking policies. Nor do they analyze and make public quantitative data and data analyses concerning these practices, despite the fact that computerized student record-keeping makes such analysis simple and inexpensive.

**Recommendation:** School systems should develop and make public written policies about the rationale and objectives for various ability groups and tracks, the process through which students are to be placed in these groups and tracks, the procedures by which students can move from one track or group to another, the outcomes that are expected as a result of these grouping practices, and the methods by which the effectiveness of tracking will be evaluated.

**Recommendation:** School systems should carry out and make public data analyses illuminating such key issues as the characteristics of students placed in various groups and tracks (for example, their race, sex, tested achievement, absence record, previous promotion history), the educational outcomes for students in these tracks (for example, reading achievement and dropout rates), and the characteristics of teachers assigned to teach different ability groups. These data should then be used in restructuring ability grouping policies and practices.

### Serious Implementation of Reforms

In subsequent recommendations, we focus on desirable changes in school organization and instruction. However, no reform proposals for changing specific educational practices will have an appreciable effect unless the past cycle of paper

implementation of reforms related to ability grouping can be broken. The professional participation and development perspective on organizational change indicates a series of characteristics for the effective implementation of reforms.[34] And as noted above, many of these characteristics have been apparent in magnet school implementation in these school districts. Without a basic change in the strategy for implementing change, no specific reform idea—whether it be establishing mini-schools or implementing accelerated learning—will have any chance for success.

**Recommendation:** Any reforms initiated to address tracking and ability grouping issues must couple new policies with such essential ingredients as a commitment of extra resources, a commitment of skilled staff, ongoing commitment to implementation by school-level leadership, sufficient planning time, and a willingness to cut red tape. School systems should analyze their experience with establishing successful magnet schools in identifying some ingredients needed for success.

**Recommendation:** As a key aspect of supporting reform, school systems must analyze and alter factors that constrain school-level change, such as pressures exerted by high-stakes testing programs that constrain the content of instruction.

### Rethinking School Organization

The low-track educational programs that we have analyzed represent patterns of social organization within the school that systematically undermine student engagement in learning. New teaching methods or course content are unlikely to be effective unless such patterns are altered. Among those options for changing social organization to increase student engagement in school and to facilitate other reforms, reorganization strategies like the following have shown promise:

- Dividing schools into smaller, more personalized units of about 200 to 300 students who have regular contact with a single team of teachers.[35]
- Creating ninth grade houses or groups of mini-schools to provide students with a more personalized transition to high school that is better articulated with their previous school experience.

**Recommendation:** Schools should implement changes in their social organization aimed at creating a more heterogeneous and smaller grouping of students within the school, utilizing such promising approaches as mini-schools and ninth grade houses.

**Redesigning the Educational Program**

The learning program we analyzed in most non-selective high schools, particularly for students at risk, blocked students from participating in high interest learning experiences, maintained low expectations for students despite a pretense that they were being offered challenging academic work, emphasized an approach to remediation that had previously been tried with these students and had failed, and offered no support or guidance to students at risk of academic failure and of dropping out. Yet there are a number of approaches to restructuring an urban school's educational program that represent promising alternative to current practice. For example:

- Establishing a core learning program that teaches basic liberal arts content to all students. The Essential Schools concepts developed by Sizer represent one of several promising approaches to establishing such a learning program.[36]

- Cooperative learning methods proven to facilitate student progress in heterogeneously grouped classes.[37]

- Intensive time-limited strategies for bringing students up to adequate achievement levels represent an alternative to permanent fragmented remedial education.[38]

**Recommendation:** Schools should implement promising practices for redesigning their educational programs to provide academic challenge to students aimed at bringing their performance up to standards that will allow effective participation in further employment and education.

## NOTES

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[3] National Institute of Education, *Administration of Compensatory Education* (Washington, DC: Author, 1977); National Institute of Education, *The Effects of Services on Student Development* (Washington, DC: Author, 1977), 19; J.M. Kauffman, M.M. Gerber, and M. Semmel, "Arguable Assumptions Underlying the Regular Education Initiative," *Journal of Learning Disabilities* 21 (1988): 10.

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[7] Oakes, *Keeping Track*, 137-149.

[8] James E. Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality* (New York: Wiley, 1976); Oakes, *Keeping Track*, 64-67.

[9] Caroline H. Persell, *Education and Inequality: A Theoretical and Empirical Synthesis* (New York: Free Press, 1977); Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality*.; National Coalition of Advocates for Students, *Barriers to Excellence*.

[10] Donald R. Moore, Principal Investigator, *A Multi-Method Study of the Development of an Alternative High School Learning Environment*, final report to the National Institute of Education and National Institute of Mental Health, 1975, pp. 54-56.

[11] Interviews with boards of education in all four cities and the state department of education in each state.

[12] Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, P.L. No. 89-10, Title II, 79 Stat. 27.

[13] N.Y. Ed. laws, sec. 3602.1 (McKinney, 1981); 122 IL Rev. Stat., sec. 14B (1988); 24 PA Ann. Stats., secs. 15-1511.1 (Purdons, 1981); Ann. Laws Mass. 71 sec. 1 (Lawyers Co-op, 1983).

[14] Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P.L. No. 94-142, 89 Stat. 773 (1975).

[15] Lau v. Nichols, 414 U.S. 563 (1974).

[16] Massachusetts Transitional Bilingual Education Act, Mass. Acts, Ch. 1005 (1971).

[17] Aspira of New York, Inc. v. Board of Education of the City of New York, 394 F. Supp. 1161 (1975).

[18] Donald R. Moore et al., *Student Classification and the Right to Read* (Chicago: Author, 1981). Nicholas Hobbs, ed., *Issues in the Classification of Children* (Washington: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1975).

[19] See Note 1. Telephone interviews with high school principals and guidance counselors in all four cities.

[20] Mentally Gifted is a funded category in the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act, P. L. 94-142, and as such has federal eligibility requirements and program guidelines. The minimum federal eligibility requirement is an I.Q. test score of 130; grade point averages or standardized test scores may not be used, but some cities use additional guidelines, such as teacher recommendation. The four systems also differ in the design and administration of Mentally Gifted programs. Philadelphia, for instance, has changed from a program administered by district offices to a school-based program, where each school with Mentally Gifted students is assigned the appropriate number of staff to run a supplemental program. The students may be in any level courses, though rarely are at the remedial level. Chicago, on the other hand, uses Gifted and Talented funds to support certain Advanced College courses and programs, such as the International Baccalaureate program.

[21] New York City Board of Education, *Sample High School Profile* (New York: Author, 1985); Information verified in a telephone interview with Dr. Jane Canner, Assistant Director, Testing, Office of Educational Assessment, New York City Board of Education, 6 October 1988.

[22] Educational Priorities Panel, *Ten Years of Neglect: The Failure to Serve Language-Minority Students in the New York City Public Schools* (New York: Author, 1985); Educational Priorities Panel, *Monitoring Report: Services to Limited English Proficient Students in the New York City Public Schools* (New York: Author, 1987); Gomez v. Illinois State Board of Education, 811 F. 2d. 1030 (1987), filed by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Chicago; Task Force on Children Out of School, *The Way We Go to School: The Exclusion of Children in Boston* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 15-26.

[23] For a review of empirical evidence indicating that the use of standardized tests in evaluating school quality consistently results in coaching and cheating, see George F. Madaus, "The Influence of Testing on the Curriculum," in Laurel N. Tanner, ed., *Critical Issues in Curriculum, 1987 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: University of chicago Press, 1988), 83-121.

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[25] Oakes, *Keeping Track*, 43-44.

[26] Chicago Board of Education, "Curriculum Subject Code."

[27] Ibid.

[28] Chicago Public Schools, *Fall 1987 Test Scores and Selected School Characteristics: High Schools* (Chicago: Author, 1988).

[29] Rosenbaum, *Making Inequality;* Mary H. Metz, *Classrooms and Corridors: The Crisis of Authority in Desegregated Secondary Schools* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978); Oakes, *Keeping Track.*

[30] Gail B. Raznov, *High School Teachers' Needs, Attitudes, and Actions in Response to Comprehensive Change: The Standardized Curriculum Policy of the School District of Philadelphia,* Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1987.

[31] Ann Grimes and Laura Washington, "Education at South Shore High: A $4.5 Million Flop," *Chicago Reporter* 13 (September 1984), 1-5.

[32] Stewart C. Purkey and Marshall S. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *Elementary School Journal* 4 (1983): 427-451.

[33] William Boyd, "Local Influences on Education, in *Encyclopedia of Educational Research*, 5th ed., Vol. 3, Harold Mitzel et al., eds. (New York: The Free Press: 1982).

[34] See, for example, Richard Schmuck et al., *The Second Handbook of Organizational Development in Schools* (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield, 1977).

[35] R. Budde, *Education by Charter: Restructuring School Districts.* (Andover, Ma.: Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 1988); Gary Wehlage et al., *Reducing the Risk: Schools and Communities of Support* (Philadelphia, PA: Palmer Press, forthcoming).

[36] Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984); Grant Wiggins, "Creating a Thought-Provoking Curriculum," *American Educator* 20 (Winter 1987): 10-17.

[37] Robert Slavin, "Cooperative Learning: Applying Contact Theory in Desegregated Schools," *Journal of Social Issues* 41 (1985): 45-62; Robert Slavin, "Cooperative Learning: Where Behavioral and Humanistic Approaches to Classroom Motivation Meet," *The Elementary School Journal* 88 (1987): 29-37; Helen Featherstone, "Cooperative Learning," *The Harvard Educational Letter* 2 (September 1986): 4-6; Elizabeth G. Cohen, *Designing Groupwork: Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986); Fred M. Newmann and Judith A. Thompson, *Effects of Cooperative Learning on Achievement in Secondary Schools: A Summary of Research* (Madison, WI: National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1987).

[38] Henry M. Levin, *Accelarating Elementary Eduction for Disadvantaged Students* (Stanford, CA: Center for Educational Research at Stanford, 1988.

# CHAPTER 6. STUDENT PROMOTION AND RETENTION

Along with admitting students to particular schools (discussed in Chapter 4) and placing them in courses with various ability group labels (discussed in Chapter 5), a third critical placement and labeling practice is to determine whether or not students will be promoted to the next grade. As discussed in Chapter 3, students in earlier grades were typically either promoted or retained at the end of the year, and if they were retained, they had to repeat an entire year of schooling. In contrast, students in the later grades, including high school, were typically promoted from grade to grade when they had earned a specified number of credits, and older students who failed individual courses usually had to repeat those courses rather than an entire year's work. However, even in high school, the failure to earn enough credits to be promoted to the next grade could have additional negative consequences (such as assignment to a homeroom with younger students or ineligibility to take certain courses or participate in sports).

A critical part of the reform agenda of those committed to raising standards in each of the four school systems was their critique of "social promotion" and their commitment to insure that students were promoted from grade to grade only if they had achieved certain competencies a policy called "merit promotion."

Proponents of stricter promotion policies argue, among other things, that:

- Promoting students from grade to grade without regard to their mastery of the curriculum is a major cause of low achievement, leading to such problems as high school students reading at the fourth grade level.[1]
- Such social promotion perpetuates low teacher expectations for minority and low-income students, which could be raised through instituting merit promotion policies and making other related reforms.[2]
- System-wide promotion standards, coupled with a new system-wide curriculum, can bring about more equitable student access to challenging academic content and to courses not being offered in predominantly minority and low-income schools.[3]
- Merit promotion policies motivate students to learn more, since students know that they must perform to advance from grade to grade.[4]

Opponents of stricter promotion policies advance a variety of arguments, including the following:

- Research indicates that students retained in grade do not show improved basic skills achievement and are more likely to drop out of school.[5]

Alternative reforms, shown through research to increase achievement and graduation rates, should instead be instituted.[6]

- Retention puts the burden for change primarily on the student, rather than focusing the responsibility on educators and their obligation to change the way schools function.[7]

- Retention decisions are typically based heavily on standardized test results. The tests employed are often inappropriate for making these retention decisions. Further, these tests soon lead to an undesirable narrowing of the school's curriculum, which becomes focused on teaching to the test.[8]

- Retention is inequitable, since those retained are disproportionally low-income and minority students.[9]

- Adequate remediation is seldom provided to students who are retained.[10] Further, there is no evidence that even retention with remediation has beneficial results.[11]

- Retention with or without remediation is extremely expensive, since at minimum it involves providing an extra year of schooling.[12]

The pros and cons of retention became a visible public issue in each of the four school systems during the past decade, as reform-minded superintendents in each city made strict system-wide promotion standards a key component of their plans for improving the schools. Below, we discuss promotion and retention in the four school systems, analyzing the following topics:

- The recent history of promotion and retention in the four school systems.

- Data concerning the nature of promotion and retention in the four school systems.

- Some key conclusions about high school promotion and retention.

Finally, we make policy recommendations based on study findings.

## Promotion and Retention: Recent History

The debate about promotion and retention in all four cities was spurred by disagreement about the best way to remedy low achievement and high dropout levels. Proponents of strict promotion policies characteristically linked promotion reform to other changes that they felt were necessary to improve achievement, including a precisely-specified city-wide curriculum and a system of regular student testing tied to that curriculum. Thus as reflected in Table 6-1, superintendents in the four cities introduced reform packages made up of related changes in curriculum, testing, and promotion.

Table 6-1. 4-CITY PROMOTION POLICIES[13]

THE PROMOTION POLICY PACKAGE: INTEGRATED STRATEGIES FOR STUDENT IMPROVEMENT

| CITY | DATE PROMOTION POLICY BEGUN | STANDARDIZED CURRICULUM | REQUIRED TESTS | PROMOTION/RETENTION STANDARDS | STUDENT REMEDIATION OPTIONS | SCHOOL REMEDIATION PLANS | OTHER |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New York | 1981-82<br><br>1982-83 | K-9 standardized curriculum "Minimum Teaching Essentials" | California Achievement Test at each grade level<br><br>Citywide Criterion Referenced Tests (CRTs) in major subjects | "Promotional Gates" :<br>Gr 4: students reading one year below level to be retained<br><br>Gr 7: students reading/math one and a half years below level to be retained | Summer school<br><br>Small classes with retrained teachers and special materials (choice of 4 Chapter 1 exemplary reading programs) | None | None |
| Boston | 1984-85 | New K-8 standardized curriculum objectives in all major subjects | Citywide CRTs in major subjects<br>Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) test | DRP score cutoffs in<br>Gr 5<br>Gr 8<br>Gr 12 | Summer school<br>Local school optional programs: e.g., after school tutoring; Chap 1<br>Local school teams to plan individualized remediation | None | 85% attendance required each quarter |
| Philadelphia | 1985-86 | New K-12 standardized curriculum in major subjects (language arts, math, social studies, science) | Citywide CRT with nationally normed items | Gr 1-8: Passing marks in major subjects and on CRTs; Gr 9-12: passing grades to attain sufficient credits | Summer school<br>Chapter I<br>Local school optional programs<br>Pupil Support Cmte to review & recommend some indvl remediation | None | None |
| Chicago | 1985-86 | K-8 Comprehensive Mastery Learning Reading, Comprehensive Mastery Learning Math | CRTs on curriculum<br>Iowa Test of Basic Skills | Retained if below stanine 5 on Iowa's or one year below grade level | Summer school<br>individualized remediation plan<br>Local school optional programs | None | None |

Below, we describe the major events related to the development and implementation of stricter promotion policies and of related reforms in each city. Because new promotion policies were often introduced across the board from grades K-12 and because changes in elementary and junior high school policies affected high schools, these brief histories do not focus only on the high school level. The cities are discussed in chronological order, based on the time at which each city's new promotion policy was implemented.

**New York**

In New York City, Chancellor Frank Macchiarola, appointed in 1978, worked closely with Ron Edmonds, a leading black educator and pioneer of the effective schools movement, to develop a five-part reform strategy that included city-wide curriculum standards, a testing program, clearly-defined promotion standards at all grades, promotional "gates" at grades four and seven, and a remediation program for students who were retained at grades four and seven.

In June 1980, the school board adopted Macchiarola's proposed promotion policy, which came to be known as the "GATES" program. It required, beginning in spring 1981, that any student who scored more than one year below the national norm at fourth grade or one-and-one-half years below the national norm at seventh grade on the California Achievement Test (CAT ) be held back. This was the most tightly-defined test-based promotion policy implemented in any of the four cities; the policy initially allowed no room for teacher or principal judgment to override the test score results, although an appeal process was instituted during the program's second year. In all, 25,000 students scored below the GATES cutoffs. In Macchiarola's view, the GATES program was not focused only on assisting these 25,000 low-achieving students, but was also intended to stimulate a system-wide commitment to bring all students above the GATES cutoffs, so that in subsequent years, fewer and fewer students would need to be retained.

Students who failed the GATES test in spring 1981 could attend summer school and be promoted if they retook the test and passed. Otherwise, they were placed in smaller remedial classes with specially-trained teachers for an extra year of fourth or seventh grade. Macchiarola was strongly committed to implementing the remedial aspect of the GATES program and threatened to resign when Mayor Koch sought to eliminate funding for this remediation from the school system's budget. Subsequent evaluations showed that the promised remediation was in fact provided, with teachers in smaller classes using one of four compensatory education strategies that had previously been carried out in New York.[14]

Also under GATES, eighth and ninth graders were denied entrance to high school if they scored more than eighteen months below national norms in reading. Unlike other students retained under GATES, they simply repeated a grade with no special program. Further, GATES students who failed to meet testing requirements after a year in the program were held back again and placed in classes of 15 students.

From the time that Macchiarola introduced his ideas for the GATES program through the first few years of its implementation, GATES was the subject of public controversy. Critics of the program argued that the use of a single test was an inappropriate basis for making this promotion decision, that the CAT test was not designed for this purpose, that research had shown retention to be ineffective, that the majority of GATES students had been previously retained and were unlikely to benefit from being held back again, and that the GATES program was narrowing the curriculum to a test preparation course, both for the GATES students and for the system as a whole.[15]

Although the school system's internal research department initially claimed that GATES students benefited slightly from the program, later evaluations, which were audited by an independent research team, concluded that there was no substantial achievement gain for students who had been held back as compared with similar students who had been promoted in the years before Gates was carried out.[16] In 1986, a longitudinal study of Gates students carried out by the school system's research department concluded:

> The promotional policy has had a small, short-term effect on student achievement which is not sustained three years after program participation. The short-term effects are achieved at the expense of an increase in the proportion of students who subsequently drop out of school.[17]

Although hoped-for results were not achieved for retained students, proponents of the GATES program cited increased achievement test scores system-wide as evidence that the program focused additional teacher attention and effort on helping low-achieving students. Basic skills achievement scores rose steadily in New York after GATES was instituted (a trend that began well before the inception of GATES).[18] Thus, many fewer students scored below the GATES cutoffs in the years after its implementation. Critics of GATES argued that these test results did not reflect real skill gains, but merely the increased focus that had been placed on teaching students to pass the annual achievement tests.

Macchiarola resigned to take another position in 1982, during the second year of GATES implementation, and Macchiarola's successors deemphasized GATES. Although

the program was left in place, central administration pressure for strict implementation of the promotion policy diminished, funds for remediation were eliminated, and implementation became a local school and community school district responsibility.

### Boston

As described in Chapter 2, Robert Spillane came to Boston in 1981 as an outsider with a reputation as a tough administrator, at a time when the system was in a state of disarray. As the cornerstone of his educational reform efforts, he reached an agreement with the business community in September 1982 (the Boston Compact) through which the business community guaranteed a hiring preference to Boston public school graduates, and the school system, in return, agreed to increase graduation rates and reading and mathematics skills for its students.[19] Spillane chose to implement this commitment to improved educational results through a school system-wide standardized curriculum from kindergarten through twelfth grade, a related set of system-wide tests in various subject areas, and a strict promotion policy. This K-12 promotion policy, adopted in November 1983, tied student promotion to successful completion of a specified number of courses (with success judged in part by students' scores on system-wide curriculum tests), an 85% attendance rate, and (in the second year of implementation) promotion gates at fifth, eighth, and twelfth grade based on a standardized reading test (Degrees of Reading Power or DRP). Students were to be tested with the DRP annually, and students who fell below specified minimums were to receive "special small-group reading instruction," whether or not they had been retained. The promotion policy further stated that once the basic curriculum restructuring had taken place, "it should follow that fewer students will require supplementary assistance in order to perform at levels required for their promotion."[20]

Despite the specificity of the promotion requirements, principals were given the discretion to waive the retention requirements in instances where they felt there were extenuating circumstances or that promotion was in the student's best interest. As will be clear from data presented later in the chapter, these waivers were used extensively by school principals.

Over the next four years, system-wide attendance rates rose, and reading and math test scores fluctuated, rising at first and then dropping again in 1985-86 when reading tests were renormed. Improvements were cited as indicating the success of the reform strategy initiated by Spillane.[21] However, the stricter promotion requirements led to a system-wide increase in the retention of students. In Boston middle schools, for example, retention rose from 13.5% in 1982-83 to a high of 16.8% in 1984-85. Furthermore, the four-year high school dropout rate (as reported by the school system) for the classes graduating in 1981-

82 as compared with 1985-86 rose from 36.2% to 46.1%.[22] And a recent study of the relationship between retention and dropout in Boston indicated that students who were held back at the ninth grade were three times more likely to drop out than ninth graders who were promoted.[23] Based on such data, advocates for students at risk in Boston have questioned the wisdom of several key components of the reform package, arguing, for example, that the new attendance and achievement test requirements for promotion have fostered continuing high levels of student retention, which have, in turn, caused a dramatically increased dropout rate.[24]

Spillane left the Boston superintendency in 1985, and was succeeded by Dr. Laval Wilson. However, unlike Macchiarola's successor in New York, Wilson has not deemphasized the promotion policy instituted by his predecessor, but has supported it and made its requirements even more stringent.[25]

## Chicago

From 1980 to the present, Chicago adopted many of the same policies related to retention that the other three districts did. However, these changes were made in a more piecemeal fashion.

Although most of the reforms in Chicago were instituted during the term of Superintendent Ruth Love, one key policy change took place shortly before her arrival. In spring 1980, Chicago adopted and consistently implemented a strict promotion policy for students graduating from eighth grade. Almost no students were allowed to move into high school in 1980 unless they scored no more than 15 months below the national average on the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills in reading and math. As a result, approximately 2,000 low-achieving students who would normally have been promoted to high school were retained. However, the retention policy stated that students could not be held back more than one year at the eighth grade level.

Unlike the GATES students in New York, retained students did not receive any well-defined remediation program; they merely repeated eighth grade. And since they could only be retained once, most were promoted into high school in fall 1981, still with severe skill deficiencies. As a result of this experience, which many school-level staff regarded as a failure, school system administrators eased up in implementing the eighth grade promotion standard. A subsequent school system research study, which followed the careers of those students retained in 1980, concluded that retention contributed to a significant increase in the dropout rate for these students: "Retaining students increases the likelihood that they will drop out."[26]

As Chicago's initial experience with strict retention was unfolding, Dr. Ruth Love became superintendent of schools. She instituted city-wide a grade K-12 curriculum in reading and math called Chicago Mastery Learning. The reading curriculum (CMLR) divided competence in reading into more than 500 subskills, which were to be taught through an integrated set of instructional materials and curriculum tests. As part of the Mastery Learning program, the school system adopted a promotion policy in which students' progress on the Mastery Learning tests and their scores on the annual Iowa achievement tests were supposed to be the primary basis for student promotion. However, teachers and principals were still allowed considerable discretion in deciding which students would be promoted.

While the Mastery Learning curriculum and associated promotion policy were stoutly defended by some as a way to insure that students would learn basic skills and as a way to compensate for the deficiencies of the system's teachers, the Mastery Learning curriculum was criticized by others as stifling teacher creativity and being poorly written, boring for students, and based on assumptions about learning not substantiated by research.[27] Reading scores failed to improve significantly under Mastery Learning, as judged by the reading scores of entering high school students who had experienced the program for several years. The curriculum was dropped shortly after Love's departure in 1985, in part because of protests from advocacy groups, teachers, and academics about its alleged deficiencies.[28]

A second reform thrust during Love's tenure aimed at the school system's promotion policy, this one focused on the high schools, was a planning process for high school improvement called High School Renaissance. The Renaissance plan, developed largely by administrators within the school system, called for minimum reading and math achievement scores for entry into high school (similar to those that Chicago had employed in the 1980 experiment with strict eighth grade promotion), additional course requirements for graduation, remedial non-credit courses for low-achieving high school students, and dozens of other specific changes in the high school program.[29] During the summer of 1984, when the first stages of the plan were slated for implementation, the school board postponed all but a few of the Renaissance reforms. The school board responded in part to complaints that insufficient preparation had been made for carrying out increased high school course requirements and stricter promotion requirements for eighth graders. For example, high school teachers publicly complained that they lacked sufficient typewriters to teach typing and laboratory equipment to teach lab science to those who were already taking it; yet without allocating funds for additional equipment, the school board was requiring high schools to teach typing and lab science to everyone.[30] Also a factor in the school

board's rejection of the Renaissance plan was the fact that they were on the verge of dismissing Superintendent Love and did not wish to make a major commitment to a program that had been developed under her leadership.

In the end, only a few of the recommendations of the Renaissance program were adopted by the school board, and the rest of the program was largely forgotten. Under Love's successor, Dr. Manford Byrd, the system adopted an official promotion policy that continued to allow considerable school-level discretion and stated that retention should be used only as a last resort.[31]

**Philadelphia**

Philadelphia was the last of the four school systems to officially sanction a stricter promotion policy and a detailed system-wide curriculum, but the Philadelphia reform program, formally adopted in May 1985 through the leadership of Superintendent Constance Clayton, had many of the features of the New York, Boston, and Chicago initiatives. Philadelphia introduced a strict city-wide curriculum spelling out what should be taught in reading, math, science, and social studies in grades K-12, the instructional materials that should be used, and the pace at which material should be covered. The school system then worked with an outside test development organization to prepare City-Wide Curriculum-Referenced Tests (CRTs) in grades K-8, and specified "mastery levels" at each grade in each subject. Students who did not achieve the mastery level on the CRTs in a particular subject and who did not receive a passing course grade from their teacher were to be retained.[32]

The student retention aspect of the policy was to be carried out beginning in spring 1985, when students who did not meet promotion standards were to be held back. However, a statistical projection of the percentage of students who were likely to be retained indicated that as many as two in five students could be held back if the proposed policy were strictly enforced.[33] As a result, implementation of student retention was delayed for a year, while the school system rethought its cut-off criteria and the nature of the remedial services that it would provide to retained students. In spring 1986, the new promotion policy was implemented.

As in the other three cities, the set of reforms instituted in Philadelphia had vocal critics. Parent and citizen groups objected to the strict promotion standards, citing evidence from elsewhere, including the New York evidence, in arguing that retention would not benefit students and would lead to increased dropouts.[34] These groups subsequently complained that the school system refused to release data that would allow them to analyze the impact of the new policies.[35] Teachers and the teachers' union strongly objected to

some aspects of the centralized curriculum, particularly the pacing requirements, and these were eased in June 1986 after an instructional review day between teachers and the superintendent.[36]

However, as in Boston, official commitment by the school system's leadership to stay with these policies was, as of spring 1988, still strong.

The history of student promotion reform in the four school districts embodied some important similarities, as well as some important differences. We will draw on these similarities and differences later in this chapter in reaching some key conclusions about the implementation and impact of strict promotion policies, after we review some pertinent data.

## Promotion and Retention: Some Relevant Data

The most complete data about promotion and retention came from Boston. After discussing these Boston data, we present some additional information from Philadelphia and Chicago and discuss research results from school systems other than the four studied concerning the impact of retention.

### Retention in Boston

Although K-12 retention data were not available for school years prior to the implementation of the strict promotion policy, data that indicate the impact of the new policy were available for the middle schools (grades 6, 7, and 8). (Substantial data analysis concerning retention in Boston middle schools has been carried out by the Massachusetts Advocacy Center, using school system data.[37]) These middle school data provide some indication of the policy's impact:

- In 1982-83, before the retention policy was adopted, 13.5% of middle school students were retained.
- In 1983-84, after the policy had been formally adopted but before schools were required to implement it, the middle school retention rate rose to 15.5%. School staff observed that some schools began to toughen up on promotion immediately after the policy was adopted in anticipation of its system-wide implementation.
- In 1984-85, the first year in which the retention policy was in force system-wide, 16.8% of middle school students were retained.
- In 1985-86, the middle school retention rate dropped to 13.7%, but it rose again to 14.5% in 1986-87.

Please note that for these and other Boston retention data, we only know that certain percentages of students were retained in a particular year, but we do not know how many times these students had been retained during their school careers.

Table 6-2 analyzes school-to-school variations in these middle school retention rates over a four-year period, both for all students and for black, white, Hispanic, and Asian students. For example, the upper left hand cell in Table 6-2 indicates that the overall percentage of black students retained in Boston middle schools in 1985-86 was 14.9%; however, one school retained only 7.2% of its black students, while another retained 35.7% of them. The following results stand out in Table 6-2:

- For students overall and for the individual racial and ethnic groups, there were large variations in the retention rates among individual schools. For black, white, and Hispanic students, it was typical for the schools with the lowest retention rates to retain 3% to 5% of students in a particular racial or ethnic group, while schools with the highest retention rates retained between 25% to 35% of their students in these groups.

- The 1982-83 data indicated the range of school-level retention rates before the new promotion policy was implemented; the 1985-86 data indicated school-level retention rates after the policy had been fully implemented. There was no reduction in the wide range of school-level retention rates after implementation of the new promotion policy, either for students as a whole or for black, Hispanic, or white students.

Table 6-3 presents grade-by-grade K-12 retention data for 1984-85, 1985-86, and 1986-87, the first three years in which the new policy was in effect system-wide. These data indicate the following:

- Retention rates varied markedly from grade to grade; the peak grade levels for retention were first, seventh, and tenth grades, where retention rates were about 20%, and ninth grade, where the retention rate was about 25%.

- After first grade, retention dropped off in grades two through five, but then increased substantially and remained high through eleventh grade.

- When one considers the cumulative effect of retention from year to year, it appears that more than half of Boston's students were retained at least once, while significant numbers of students were retained two or more times.[38]

Table 6-4 analyzes Boston retention data at each grade level for 1985-86 and 1986-87 for black, white, Hispanic, and Asian students:

- For grades K-12 during each of these two years, the retention rates were about one-third higher for black and Hispanic students than for white stu

## Table 6-2. BOSTON: RETENTION RATES IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS OVER FOUR YEARS[39]

| | Percentage of Students Retained | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Black | White | Hispanic | Asian | Total |
| 1985-86: Range of School Retention Rates: | 7.2-35.7% | 2.3-30.0% | 4.2-28.7% | 0.0-7.2% | 6.3-29.2% |
| Mean: | 14.90% | 13.30% | 15.20% | 3.90% | 13.60% |
| 1984-85: Range of School Retention Rates: | 3.7-33.6% | 2.6-42.7% | 4.9-37.8% | 0.0-14.6% | 3.6-34.0% |
| Mean: | 17.70% | 16.50% | 15.80% | 7.80% | 16.20% |
| 1983-84: Range of School Retention Rates: | 3.4-29.6% | 0.0-32.6% | 1.5-24.3% | 1.3-11.9% | 4.2-27.7% |
| Mean: | 16.70% | 14.60% | 12.10% | 6.40% | 15% |
| 1982-83: Range of School Retention Rates: | 2.5-25.8% | 0.8-34.0% | 2.5-25.8% | 0.0-6.7% | 1.8-24.0% |
| Mean: | 14.70% | 14.90% | 12.10% | 2.60% | 13.30% |

## Table 6-3. BOSTON: GRADE BY GRADE RETENTION, 1984-1987[40]

| GRADE: | Percentage of Students Retained 1984-85 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elementary Schools | | | |
| K-1 | 0.3 | 1.4 | 2.3 |
| K-2 | 3.9 | 3.5 | 4.1 |
| 1 | 20.1 | 21.1 | 19.4 |
| 2 | 8.9 | 8.0 | 8.4 |
| 3 | 7.7 | 7.1 | 5.9 |
| 4 | 5.3 | 4.3 | 4.5 |
| 5 | 3.7 | 3.6 | 2.4 |
| Middle Schools | | | |
| 6 | 15.5 | 11.2 | 11.9 |
| 7 | 20.2 | 16.9 | 18.5 |
| 8 | 15.0 | 12.8 | 14.2 |
| High Schools | | | |
| 9 | 26.8 | 26.5 | 24.8 |
| 10 | 19.9 | 15.8 | 18.4 |
| 11 | 13.7 | 11.4 | 12.8 |
| 12 | 2.8 | 4.6 | 5.2 |
| **All Grades:** | 12.8 | 11.3 | 11.4 |

## Table 6-4. BOSTON RETENTION BY RACE AND GRADE, 1985-1987[41]

| | | Black | | White | | Hispanic | | Asian | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1985-86 | 1986-87 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 | 1985-86 | 1986-87 |
| **Elementary Schools** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| K1 | % Retained | 0.7 | 1.5 | 1.9 | 2.8 | 0.5 | 2.0 | 3.5 | 3.9 | 1.4 | 2.3 |
| K2 | % Retained | 3.7 | 4.3 | 2.8 | 3.7 | 5.0 | 5.2 | 3.1 | 2.2 | 3.5 | 4.1 |
| 1 | % Retained | 24.4 | 21.9 | 14.8 | 12.6 | 22.3 | 22.3 | 9.4 | 12.5 | 21.1 | 19.4 |
| 2 | % Retained | 8.8 | 9.2 | 4.7 | 5.2 | 9.8 | 11.1 | 8.9 | 5.0 | 8.0 | 8.4 |
| 3 | % Retained | 7.1 | 6.9 | 4.0 | 2.8 | 9.7 | 6.6 | 9.2 | 6.1 | 7.1 | 5.9 |
| 4 | % Retained | 4.7 | 5.3 | 3.2 | 2.4 | 4.5 | 5.5 | 4.2 | 3.1 | 4.3 | 4.5 |
| 5 | % Retained | 3.8 | 2.4 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 3.3 | 2.8 | 8.1 | 3.2 | 3.6 | 2.4 |
| **Middle Schools** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | % Retained | 12.1 | 13.2 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 11.8 | 13.4 | 4.6 | 3.2 | 11.2 | 11.9 |
| 7 | % Retained | 19.8 | 21.2 | 14.5 | 15.7 | 19.0 | 22.1 | 3.9 | 3.4 | 16.9 | 18.5 |
| 8 | % Retained | 14.5 | 15.2 | 11.4 | 15.2 | 13.8 | 12.9 | 5.7 | 7.4 | 12.8 | 14.2 |
| **High Schools** | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 | % Retained | 27.7 | 26.3 | 25.9 | 25.0 | 30.0 | 27.1 | 11.3 | 9.9 | 26.5 | 24.8 |
| 10 | % Retained | 16.9 | 21.0 | 16.0 | 16.9 | 15.5 | 19.2 | 9.8 | 7.4 | 15.8 | 18.4 |
| 11 | % Retained | 12.1 | 16.0 | 11.1 | 10.3 | 10.5 | 10.0 | 10.1 | 6.7 | 11.4 | 12.8 |
| 12 | % Retained | 5.0 | 6.6 | 4.2 | 3.1 | 6.2 | 8.2 | 2.6 | 1.0 | 4.6 | 5.2 |
| K-12 | % Retained Overall Rate | 12.7 | 13 | 9.4 | 9.4 | 12.3 | 12.7 | 6.8 | 5.5 | 11.3 | 11.4 |

dents. The white retention rate for both years was 9.4%, while the black and Hispanic retention rates were between 12.3% and 13.0%.

- The higher retention rates for black and Hispanic students, as compared with white students, were found at almost all grade levels. For example, black student retention was higher than white student retention at twelve of the fourteen grade levels analyzed in 1986-87, and higher for Hispanic students than for white students at eleven of fourteen grade levels.

- While exact data were not available, it is clear that if an average of one-third more black and Hispanic students were retained each year, the percentage of black and Hispanic students entering ninth grade who had been previously retained greatly exceeded the percentage of white ninth graders who had previously been retained.

- At the high school level, black student retention rates exceeded white student retention rates at all four high school grade levels, although the difference was small at the ninth grade level, where the rates were extremely high for all groups of students except Asians. For Hispanic students at the high school level, their retention rates exceeded those for white students at three of the four grade levels.

Table 6-5 focuses on retention in Boston high schools, analyzing retention rates for the types of high schools described in Chapter 4. Table 6-5 indicates that the level of ninth grade retention was highest in Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income Schools (33%), but was also high in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools (27%) and Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools (27%). The retention rate was considerably lower in Selective Exam Schools (16%) than in any of the three types of non-selective schools, although the retention rate was still substantial even in the exam schools. Further, school-by-school retention rates for Boston high schools (not presented in Table 6-5) showed major variations in retention rates among non-selective high schools of the same type. For example among Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, retention varied from 21.4% at Jamaica Plan High School to 34.5% at East Boston High school. Among Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income Schools, retention varied from 25.4% at English High School to 46.5% at South Boston High School.

## Retention and Course Failure in Philadelphia

Table 6-6 presents data about the retention rates by grade level in Philadelphia for 1985-86 and 1986-87:

- The overall percentage of students retained was 10.7% in 1985-86 and 9.2% in 1986-87. Overall retention rates in Philadelphia were substantially lower than those documented in Boston, both before and after Boston's new retention policy was implemented. Data available from a research study analyzing Philadelphia retention rates in years prior to the implemen

## Table 6-5. BOSTON: PERCENT OF 9TH GRADERS RETAINED BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1984-85[42]

| Types of High Schools | Percent of 9th Graders Retained |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 342 / 1,283 = 27% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 502 / 1,516 = 33% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 266 / 983 = 27% |
| Selective Exam | 168 / 1,032 = 16% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 1,278 / 4,814 = 27% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is calculated by dividing the total number of 9th graders in each type of high school by the total 9th grade enrollment for each type of high school.*

## Table 6-6. PHILADELPHIA STUDENTS RETAINED BY GRADE[43]

| Grade | Retained in Grade for 1985-86 School Year | Retained in Grade for 1986-87 School Year |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2,496 / 17,099 = 14.6% | 2,498 / 17,478 = 14.3% |
| 2 | 1,417 / 14,613 = 9.7% | 1,405 / 15,859 = 8.9% |
| 3 | 1,012 / 13,504 = 7.5% | 952 / 14,114 = 6.7% |
| 4 | 740 / 12,123 = 6.1% | 696 / 13,400 = 5.2% |
| 5 | 820 / 12,140 = 6.8% | 726 / 11,897 = 6.1% |
| 6 | 463 / 11,595 = 4.0% | 454 / 11,619 = 3.9% |
| 7 | 1,595 / 13,364 = 11.9% | 1,525 / 13,445 = 11.3% |
| 8 | 1,411 / 13,202 = 10.7% | 1,361 / 12,688 = 10.7% |
| 9 | 3,323 / 18,759 = 17.7% | 2,906 / 17,410 = 16.7% |
| 10 | 3,129 / 19,047 = 16.4% | 2,180 / 16,191 = 13.5% |
| 11 | 1,294 / 13,578 = 9.5% | 708 / 13,726 = 5.2% |
| 12 | 383 / 10,646 = 3.6% | 156 / 10,860 = 1.4% |
| TOTAL | 18,083 / 169,670 = 10.7% | 15,567 / 168,687 = 9.2% |

tation of the new policy indicated that the rate of retention increased about one-third after the new policy was instituted, but that the rate of retention prior to the new policy's implementation had been substantial.[44]

- The grade levels at which retention rates were highest in 1985-86 and 1986-87 were the first, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grades, with the first and ninth grades having the highest retention rates of all. On a relative basis, these patterns of retention by grade were very similar to those in Boston, except that Boston's rates at these various grade levels were consistently higher than Philadelphia's.

Table 6-7 analyzes retention rates for ninth graders in the six different types of high schools (described in Chapter 4) for the 1985-86 school year, indicating the following:

- Student retention rates were highest in non-selective schools. Non-Selective Low-Income Schools and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools had the highest ninth grade retention rates (21%), while Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools (17%) were somewhat lower.

- All categories of selective schools had significantly lower student retention rates, with Selective Vocational Schools retaining 11% of ninth graders, Selective Magnet Schools retaining 3% and Selective Exam Schools retaining 3%. The retention rate at Non-Selective Low-Income Schools was seven times the retention rate at Selective Exam Schools.

- Retention rates in schools serving similar student bodies varied widely. For example, among Non-Selective Low-Income high schools, Strawberry Mansion retained 12% of its ninth graders, while Edison retained 53%.

Since obtaining course credit was the basis for high school promotion in Philadelphia, information about course failure was relevant to understanding the dynamics of promotion and retention. Table 6-8 analyzes the percentages of Philadelphia high school students in the six different types of high schools who failed ninth-grade English or math:

- System-wide, 35.5% of ninth graders failed ninth-grade English and 44.3% failed ninth-grade math.

- Failure rates in English varied significantly among the six types of high schools, ranging from 50.4% for students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to 8.3% for students in Selective Exam Schools. Failure rates in math showed similar variations, ranging from 58.4% in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to 20.0% in Selective Exam Schools.

- Failure rates varied widely among individual schools serving similar student bodies. For example, among Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, 26% failed ninth-grade English at Penn, while 52% failed ninth-grade English at University City. (Data not shown on Table 6-8.)

## Table 6-7. PHILADELPHIA: PERCENT OF 9TH GRADERS RETAINED BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1985-86[45]

| Types of High Schools | Percent of 9th Graders Retained |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 399 / 1,879 = 21% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 794 / 3,787 = 21% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 661 / 3,832 = 17% |
| Selective Vocational | 183 / 1,647 = 11% |
| Selective Magnet | 18 / 575 = 3% |
| Selective Exam | 36 / 1,102 = 3% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 2,091 / 12,822 = 16% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is calculated by dividing the total number of 9th graders in each type of high school by the total 9th grade enrollment for each type of high school.*

## Table 6-8. CHICAGO AND PHILADELPHIA 9TH GRADERS FAILING ENGLISH AND MATH[46]

| Types of High Schools | CHICAGO 1983-84 English | CHICAGO 1983-84 Math | PHILADELPHIA 1985-86 English | PHILADELPHIA 1985-86 Math |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 6,190 / 15,889 | 7,022 / 14,939 | 1,094 / 2,170 | 889 / 1,522 |
| | = 39.0% | = 47.0% | = 50.4% | = 58.4% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 4,251 / 13,073 | 4,609 / 12,206 | 1,492 / 3,303 | 1,785 / 3,076 |
| | = 32.5% | = 37.8% | = 45.2% | = 58.0% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 4,476 / 19,775 | 6,103 / 19,114 | 1,184 / 3,542 | 1,360 / 3,335 |
| | = 22.6% | = 31.9% | = 33.4% | = 40.8% |
| Selective Vocational | 1,927 / 7,884 | 2,350 / 7,764 | 577 / 2,053 | 499 / 1,523 |
| | = 24.4% | = 30.3% | = 28.1% | = 32.8% |
| Selective Magnet | 147 / 1,213 | 180 / 1,213 | 74 / 553 | 161 / 556 |
| | = 12.1% | = 14.8% | = 13.4% | = 29.0% |
| Selective Exam | 573 / 3,821 | 743 / 3,817 | 89 / 1,068 | 213 / 1,064 |
| | = 15.0% | = 19.5% | = 8.3% | = 20.0% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 17,564 / 61,655 | 21,007 / 59,053 | 4,510 / 12,689 | 4,908 / 11,077 |
| | = 28.5% | = 35.6% | = 35.5% | = 44.3% |

*NOTE: The percentage in each cell is calculated by dividing the total number of 9th grade students failing English or Math by the total number of students enrolled in those courses. The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In Chicago, 28.5% of all freshmen enrolled in English classes in the entire school system failed those classes."*

## Course Failure in Chicago

Data were available about the extent of course failure for ninth graders in Chicago similar to the data just presented about course failure in Philadelphia: Chicago data are presented in Table 6-8:

- System-wide, 28.5% of ninth graders failed ninth-grade English and 32.5% failed ninth-grade math. (Similar failure rates were also reported for science and social studies, but were not analyzed in detail.)
- Failure rates in English varied significantly among the six types of high schools, ranging from 39.0% for students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to 15.0% for students in Selective Exam Schools. Failure rates in math showed similar variations, ranging from 47.0% in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to 19.5% in Selective Exam Schools.
- Failure rates varied widely among individual high schools. (Data not shown in Table 6-8.) At Orr High School (a Non-Selective Low-Income School), 56.0% of students failed ninth grade English and 63.6% failed ninth grade math. At Young Magnet High School (a Selective Magnet School), 12.1% of students failed ninth grade English and 14.8% failed ninth grade math.
- Considering data about all four academic subjects, more than 40% of Chicago ninth graders failed two or more courses, and the failure rate was substantially higher in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools.

## Other Relevant Research

A considerable body of research about the impact of retention existed prior to the decisions that these four school systems made to implement stricter student promotion policies, and much additional research has been carried out in the interim, some of which has already been cited above. Research findings about the impact of many educational practices are ambiguous; however, key conclusions about the impact of retention have been highly consistent.

First, the best comparative studies (typically studies in which the subsequent achievement of retained students was compared with the achievement of similar students who had not been retained in previous years) indicates that retention does not improve subsequent achievement on a long-term basis. Of five major reviews of the impact of retention, not one concluded that there was any consistent evidence that retention brought about superior achievement for the retained student, whether retention was done in the early grades or the later grades, whether retention was accompanied by remediation or not.[47] Research carried out concerning the GATES program in New York, cited earlier, provides evidence from one of the four cities studied that echoed the conclusions of other studies.[48]

Second, research about the impact of retention consistently indicates that retaining a student is strongly correlated with an increased likelihood that the student will drop out, and there is a growing network of evidence suggesting that retention is a cause and not merely a statistical correlate of dropping out. For example:

- Based on analysis of a large national sample of data about high school students, Mann cites evidence that "being retained one grade increased the risk of dropping out later by 40-50 percent, two grades by 90 percent."[49]

- Studies already cited from New York and Chicago indicate that students who were held back through gates programs at the seventh grade (in New York) and eighth grade (in Chicago) were at significantly increased risk of dropping out, as compared with similar students who had been promoted in previous years.[50]

- Additional research about dropout and retention carried out in Chicago indicated that students who entered high school one year overage were about 50% more likely to drop out than students who entered high school at the appropriate age, while students who entered high school two or more years overage were almost twice as likely to drop out. Further, the study indicated that students who entered high school overage were significantly more likely to drop out than students who entered high school at the appropriate age, even when the overage students had substantially higher levels of reading achievement than did the normal age students.[51]

This national research evidence about the negative impact of retention on achievement and dropout rates is cited later in the chapter in discussing key conclusions about retention policies in the four cities.

## The Student Retention Process

### Policies and Practices Before Reform

In all four school systems, there was a well-established procedure for making retention/promotion decisions long before new promotion polices were introduced in the 1980s. In the earlier grades where students were likely to have a single teacher, this teacher made a decision about whether the child should be retained or promoted, which was then submitted to the principal. Some principals merely ratified teacher recommendations, while others sometimes overruled them. Some principals were strong proponents of strict promotion, some strongly opposed it, and others had no strong preferences. Thus, principals who felt intensely about the issue affected the number of retentions in their schools by communicating their stance on the issue to teachers, as well as by overriding teachers' individual retention/promotion recommendations.

In junior high and high school, where students typically had several teachers, the number of courses passed or failed was traditionally the major official criterion for promotion. In junior high, students who failed specific courses were sometimes required to repeat those individual courses, and sometimes to repeat an entire grade. As in elementary schools, principals (and sometimes counselors) had substantial discretion in determining whether students would be retained or not.

In high school, official promotion policies were based primarily on the number of credits accumulated. (For example, to be promoted from ninth to tenth grade in Chicago, a student was required to have at least three credits, with each half-credit representing one semester of satisfactory work in a particular course.) High school students who were not promoted were typically not required to repeat a whole year's work, but only to take again courses that they had failed. However, failure to be promoted in high school typically often had additional consequences. The ninth grader who was retained in high school was often not eligible to take certain courses reserved only for tenth graders, was sometimes assigned to a ninth-grade homeroom, and often prohibited from participating in sports or other extracurricular activities. Thus, high school retention often carried with it a limitation on options and a social stigma that went beyond having to repeat courses previously failed.

As at elementary and junior high school levels, high school administrators and counselors had substantial discretion in determining whether a student should be retained or not, and could modify system-wide policy to fit either their general attitude about retention or their assessment of the individual student.

Two points should be underscored about the nature of retention practices before the institution of stricter system-wide policies. First, there was a significant level of retention being employed before stricter policies were introduced:

- As indicated by Table 6-2, Boston retained 13.3% of its middle school students system-wide, before the strict promotion policy was introduced.
- In 1982, Philadelphia retained 7% of its students system-wide, before the strict promotion policy was introduced.[52]
- When the GATES program was implemented in New York, it was discovered that 67% of the 10,000 fourth graders retained and 68% of the 14,000 seventh graders retained had been retained previously.[53]

Second, there were large variations in rates of retention among individual schools, which cannot be explained based on variations in the composition of their student bodies. This variation is reflected by data about Boston middle schools in Table 6-2, which show,

for example, that individual schools retained as few as 2.5% or as many as 25.8% of their black students and as few as .0% or as many as 34.0% of their white students.

## Policies and Practices After Reform

Superintendents who instituted strict promotion policies sought to insure that students promoted from grade to grade met minimum standards for achievement. They pursued this goal by seeking to standardize the school curriculum city-wide and to require minimum scores on standardized achievement tests or on tests tied to the school's curriculum, as the basis for promotion. In Boston, promotion was also made contingent on 85% attendance in each of the four marking periods; the official Boston promotion policy currently states that high school students who pass all their courses must take them all again if they fail to meet the 85% attendance requirement, although exceptions are frequently made to this policy.

Given the emphasis that school superintendents placed on the adoption of these new policies and the specificity with which they were stated (in contrast, for example, to the ability grouping policies discussed in Chapter 5), one might expect that they would have led to considerable school-level change. However, data about the impact of new retention policies indicated that their impact was often different from what was officially predicted; below we reach some key conclusions about the actual impact of implementing new retention policies and some reasons for this impact.

## Impact on Retention Rates

Data reviewed earlier indicated that retention rates rose about one-third system-wide in both Boston and Philadelphia after new retention policies were introduced. In the case of New York and Chicago, strict test-based retention policies at particular grade levels produced significant increases in retention at these particular grade levels for one or two years, but these increases did not last, as the original policies were deemphasized.

Further, wide school-to-school variations continued to occur in retention rates and in the related course failure rates even after the implementation of new retention policies:

- As Table 6-2 indicates, the wide range of school-to-school retention rates in Boston observed for black, white, and Hispanic students before the school system changed its retention policy had not diminished several years after the new policy was implemented.

- As data used to construct Table 6-7 indicate, there was wide variation in ninth-grade retention among schools serving similar student bodies. And as data used to construct Table 6-8 indicate, the same wide variation occurred

for Philadelphia's course failure rates in English and math, even though a key aspect of the reform plan in Philadelphia was to standardize the curriculum.

These data suggest that, although the policy changes did have measurable impact, past school-level practices continued to be more potent in determining retention rates than these policy changes. Schools that had retained and had flunked a high percentage of students in the past continued to do so; schools that had not, by and large, continued to do so.

A major factor that facilitated the continuation of past practice was that all retention policies either had loopholes from the beginning or soon developed them. New York developed an appeal process after the first year of GATES. Chicago enforced a strict test-based promotion policy in eighth grade for one year, then unofficially backed off from enforcing it. Boston principals could apply for waivers for individual students, which were routinely granted. Philadelphia principals had similar discretion.

And to a significant extent, school staff simply ignored the new promotion policies and the other reforms associated with them. For example, an interview study of 70 high school teachers in Philadelphia indicated that 40% of teachers ignored the new curriculum for their subject area, 61% ignored its mandated pacing schedule, and 79% ignored its grading requirements.[54]

## School Level Problems in Implementing Retention

One reason that school principals not strongly committed to retention backed off in implementing the new policies was that strict retention made operating the school considerably more difficult. Except in New York for a short period, major new resources for setting up comprehensive programs for retained students were not forthcoming. School staff were forced to improvise in educating retained students. Furthermore, school staff experienced firsthand what the research about the impact of retention indicates. Retained students failed to make significant academic progress and became more alienated from school. Older students, particularly those who had been retained more than once, became a disruptive force in the school.

The strict retention policies developed in all four systems placed limits on the number of times a student could be retained. For example, students in Philadelphia and Boston could not be retained more than once at any one grade level.[55] Students in Chicago could not be retained in the eighth grade in June if they were fifteen years old by the following December first.[56] The effect of these policies, when they were coupled with significant rates of retention in junior high schools, was to send substantial numbers of

overage students with major skill deficiencies into the high schools. High school staff complained about the problems associated with dealing with these students, and pressured junior high schools not to retain large numbers of students who were ultimately passed along for the high schools to deal with.

Thus, when new retention policies were adopted, serious practical problems soon contributed to wide variations in implementation, with some schools backing away from strict retention through the use of their discretion about whether to retain or promote a student.

### Impact on the High Schools

Retention in the elementary and junior high schools produced high percentages of overage students entering high school. For example, as Table 4-10 indicates, 41% of all students who entered Chicago's high schools in fall 1981 were overage, and estimates cited earlier indicate that approximately 50% of entering high school students in Boston were overage. Further, the burden of dealing with overage students fell disproportionately on Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools, as Table 4-10 further indicates. Research evidence cited earlier from the four cities and elsewhere strongly indicates that increasing retention rates in elementary and middle schools increases the high school dropout rate.

Retention-related practices of the high schools themselves also have a major impact on students, particularly on students at risk. In Chapter 5, we described the difficulties that ninth grade students at risk encountered upon entering high school, such as low staff expectations and low-interest remedial coursework. On top of these disincentives, Table 6-8 indicates that a high percentage of ninth graders in those schools with the most students at risk failed basic academic subjects. This course failure, sometimes coupled with failure to meet standardized testing requirements and attendance requirements for promotion, resulted in a high percentage of students at risk being retained. Table 6-5 indicates a ninth-grade retention rate in Boston of 27% in June 1986, while Table 6-7 indicates a ninth-grade retention rate in Philadelphia of 16% in June 1986. And as these tables further indicate, both school systems had significantly higher retention rates in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools. For many students, ninth-grade course failure and retention in grade, frequently coupled with the lack of any guidance for the failing student, provided the final influence that pushed students out of school. Thus, it is not surprising that ninth-grade course failure in Boston was associated with a tripled likelihood that the retained student would drop out.[57]

## The Politics of Strict Promotion

In reviewing the history of strict promotion policies in the four cities, it is clear that instituting such policies has been pivotal in the efforts of school superintendents to build political support for themselves and their school systems, quite apart from the educational impact of strict promotion. For school superintendents charged with turning around large urban school systems that were widely perceived to be failing, instituting a strict promotion policy proved extremely popular with business leaders, taxpayers, and many parents.[58] In Boston, for example, it helped win support for a sizable revenue increase for the public schools. Although critics have opposed strict promotion policies by marshalling the type of research evidence reviewed in this chapter and proposing reasoned alternatives to retention, they have seldom been able to sell their critique to the public. Supporters of stricter promotion have typically been successful in portraying their opponents as not believing that minority students can learn and as coddling students in the short-term to their long-term detriment.[59]

Understanding the political benefits of adopting a strict retention policy helps clarify some characteristic patterns in the implementation of these policies. First, school systems have seldom initiated carefully-designed evaluations of these policies, except under strong outside pressure.[60] And it has often been outside critics of these policies themselves who have analyzed data about their impact. Second, school systems have stuck with these policies despite mounting evidence from across the country and often from their own system that strict promotion was harmful. Third, school system leadership has permitted substantial school-level discretion in implementing promotion policies, even while creating the public impression that these policies were being vigorously adhered to. This approach allowed them to take public positions about promotion that were essential for maintaining political support, while tolerating deviations from the policy by those school-level staff who opposed it or who found that its vigorous implementation created problems in their school.

## Recommendations

The policy of implementing strict promotion standards has been harmful to students. It does not boost student achievement, and it increases the dropout rate. Its negative impact falls disproportionately on students at risk. It is also extremely expensive. At a minimum, it involves the cost of an extra year of school. If special remedial help is provided in addition, the cost increases further. Clearly, alternative methods for spending this money would be more beneficial to students.

Strict promotion policies affect high schools in three major ways. First, when they are carried out in elementary and junior high schools, strict promotion policies lead to higher percentages of previously retained students entering high school, thus making the high school's task much more difficult. Second, as they are carried out in high schools themselves, strict promotion policies fail to improve student achievement, and increase the dropout rate, with negative impacts falling most heavily on students at risk. Third, strict retention policies and their accompanying high stakes testing programs create pressures to focus instruction on narrow test preparation, as described in Chapter 5.

Despite the documented harms caused by strict promotion, school systems have a strong incentive to adopt and maintain such a policy because it serves as a potent political symbol of their commitment to turn their school system around. Strict promotion policies have great popular appeal because they seem to many people to be a logical response to low student achievement.

**Recommendation**: Given its documented negative impacts, student retention should be used only as an absolute last resort, after other interventions have been developed and carried out, working in collaboration with the student's family, and have failed.

**Recommendation**: Schools systems should carry out and make public data analyses illuminating such key issues as the rates of retention over time at various schools and for various grade levels, the characteristics of students who are retained (for example, their race, sex, income level, and previous promotion history), the nature of the services provided to retained students, the costs of retention, and the impact of retention on student achievement and dropout.

**Recommendation**: To insure that higher percentages of students enter high school both at the appropriate age and with essential skills sufficient to benefit from a secondary school program, school systems should implement reforms at earlier grade levels that have been shown to boost student achievement, such as high quality early childhood education and the implementation of effective schools practices in elementary and junior high schools. Money spent on retention should instead be invested in such alternative reform strategies.

**Recommendation**: At elementary and junior high school levels, the use of multi-grade classrooms with overlapping grade structures can make most promotion/retention decisions unnecessary.

**Recommendation**: Although well-planned remediation is often not provided to retained students, advocating retention with remediation is not justifiable, based on

evidence that even students who are provided with well-planned remediation do not benefit from retention.

**Recommendation**: For the low-achieving student who is a candidate for retention, the alternatives of promotion with a requirement to attend summer school or promotion with remedial help and such additional supports as employment and social services in the next school year, will provide more benefit to the student than retention.

**Recommendation**: Promising alternatives to retention at the high school level have already been described in Chapter 5 in discussing the restructuring of the existing ability grouping system. Problems that lead to retention in high school should be addressed through implementing such promising practices as the development of mini-schools with heterogeneous enrollment, a core college preparatory curriculum, and cooperative learning.

## NOTES

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# CHAPTER 7. OUTCOMES OF SCHOOLING

The research team sought data about the outcomes of schooling in these four school districts. We searched for school-by-school data (1) about graduation, transfer, and dropout rates and (2) about reading achievement or some other indicator of the academic accomplishments of high school students, especially graduating seniors. We were successful in obtaining some form of data about each of these topics for each city. However, these data had important limitations, which are discussed in the text and accompanying footnotes. The best data available were from Chicago; thus, we present the Chicago data first and then clarify the nature of the data available for the other three cities with reference to the data from Chicago. Finally, we present conclusions based on the outcome data from the four cities.

## Chicago

### Dropout Rates

The most desirable way to assess the high school graduation and dropout rates in a school or school system is to follow the progress of a particular entering high school class over a period of years to determine whether they graduate, drop out, or transfer (the cohort method).[1] In our analysis in Chicago and elsewhere, we applied the following generally accepted definitions of a graduate, a dropout, and a transfer:

- Graduate: A student who was enrolled in the regular day school program of a school system and who subsequently graduated from that school system by attending one of its regular day-school programs.
- Dropout: A student who left the regular day-school program of the school system before receiving a high school diploma and who did not enter another public or private day-school program.
- Transfer Out of the System: A student who left the regular day-school program of the school system before receiving a high school diploma and whose enrollment in another public or private day-school was verified (for example, through receipt of a request for the student's transcript).

Data collected in a research project carried out by the Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance provided an appropriate cohort analysis for Chicago high schools.[2] The project tracked all students who entered ninth grade in the Chicago Public Schools in September 1980, through analyzing their computerized student records. We used this study's school-by-school totals for graduates, transfers, and dropouts at each school to

determine the four-year dropout rates in the the six types of schools identified in Chapter 4. Table 7-1 presents the results of this analysis.

As Tables 7-1 and 7-3 indicate, 35% of the original class dropped out of school. Also, 9% of the class transferred to other school systems, and 56% of the original class graduated.[3] However, as Table 7-1 indicates, dropout rates varied substantially among the six different types of schools. In Selective Magnet and Selective Exam Schools, 13% of entering students dropped out, while in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, 49% of the entering students dropped out.

Note that the calculation of these dropout rates is affected by the number of transfers in the class. Recommended standard practice in calculating dropout rates using the cohort method is to eliminate transfers from the analysis, so that the dropout rate is calculated as the number of dropouts divided by the sum of dropouts and graduates.[4] Calculated in this way, the dropout rate for Chicago's Class of 1984 was 40%. Note that this dropout rate percentage only includes students who enrolled in high school and subsequently dropped out. It does not include students who dropped out, for example, after graduating from eighth, although community organizations working on dropout prevention in Chicago indicate that a substantial number of students drop out at that point; the school system has, to date, declined to release data about this issue.

## Reading Achievement

Data had previously been obtained and analyzed by Designs for Change about the reading achievement of seniors in Chicago's Class of 1984.[5] These results were based on detailed information about the distribution of scores at each school on the reading achievement section of the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency.[6] As indicated in Table 7-2, we divided the data for each individual school into three categories, determining the percentage of seniors reading at or above the national average, the percentage of seniors reading below the national average but at or above the ninth grade level, and the percentage of seniors reading below the ninth grade level. The test makers defined seniors reading below the ninth grade level as reading below the "minimum competency level." Table 7-2 indicates that city-wide, 34.5% of seniors were reading at or above the national average, as compared with 50% nation-wide. Further, 37.8% were reading below the national average but above the minimum competency level, while 27.7% were reading below the minimum competency level.

As Table 7-2 further indicates, each type of school, moving from the Selective Exam Schools to the Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, generally had a smaller percentage of students reading at or above the national average and a higher percentage of

## Table 7-1. CHICAGO: 4-YEAR DROPOUT RATE BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, CLASS OF 1984[7]

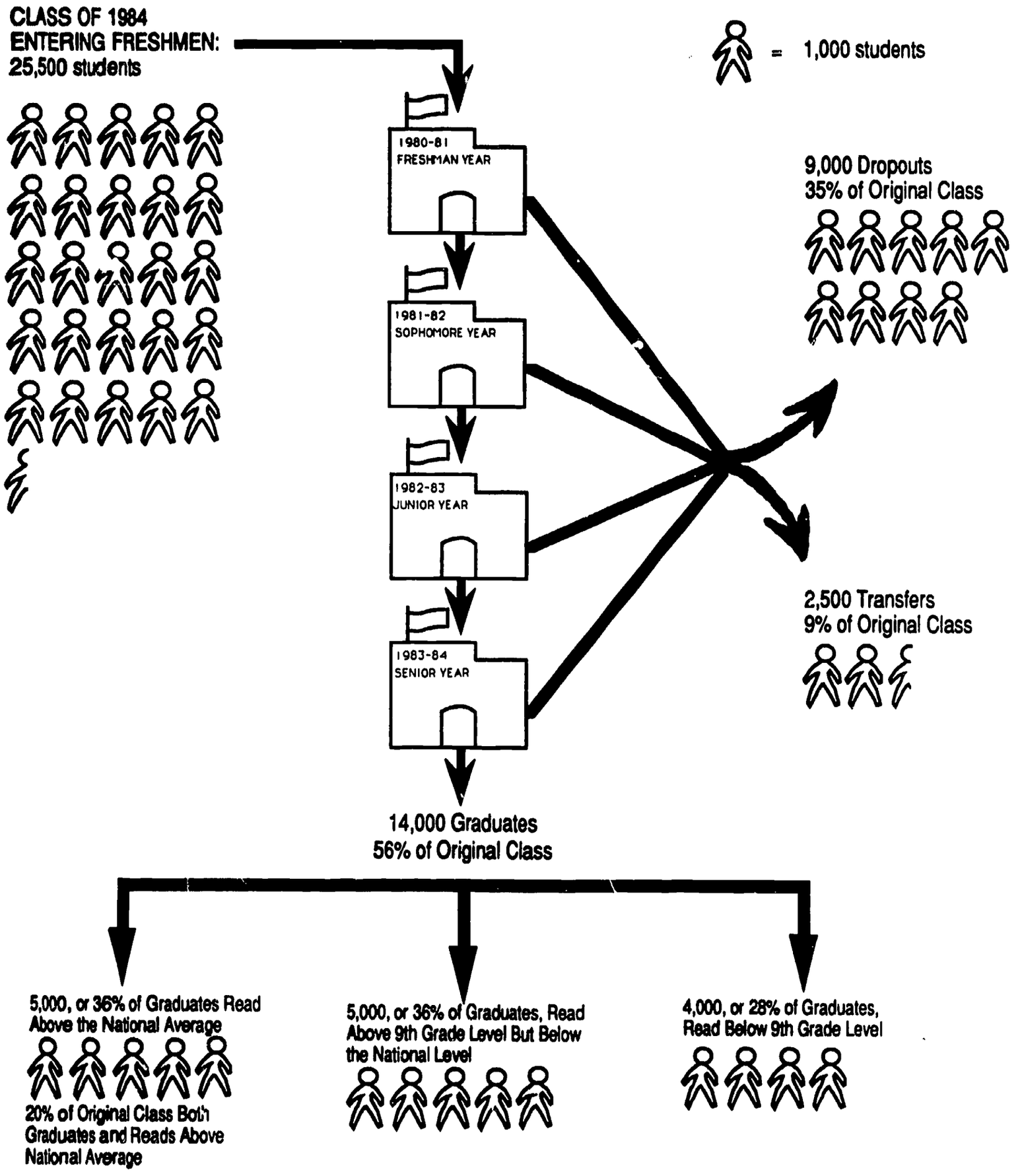
| Types of High Schools | CHICAGO* Percentage of Dropouts Class of 1984 |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 3,272 / 6,689 = 49% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 2,540 / 6,522 = 39% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 2,164 / 7,391 = 29% |
| Selective Vocational | 717 / 2,889 = 25% |
| Selective Magnet | 59 / 471 = 13% |
| Selective Exam | 205 / 1,633 = 13% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 8,957 / 25,595 = 35% |

## Table 7-2. CHICAGO: 12TH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1983-84[8]

| Types of High Schools | Seniors Reading At or Above National Average | Seniors Reading Average | Seniors Reading Below Minimum Competency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 300 / 2,789 = 10.8% | 1,017 / 2,789 = 36.5% | 1,472 / 2,789 = 52.8% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 895 / 3,288 = 27.2% | 1,334 / 3,288 = 40.6% | 1,059 / 3,288 = 32.2% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 1,771 / 4,521 = 39.2% | 1,751 / 4,521 = 38.7% | 999 / 4,521 = 22.1% |
| Selective Vocational | 592 / 1,979 = 29.9% | 1,019 / 1,979 = 51.5% | 368 / 1,979 = 18.6% |
| Selective Magnet | 269 / 367 = 73.3% | 84 / 367 = 22.9% | 11 / 367 = 3.0% |
| Selective Exam | 1,075 / 1,269 = 84.7% | 168 / 1,269 = 13.2% | 26 / 1,269 = 2.0% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 4,902 / 14,213 = 34.5% | 5,373 / 14,213 = 37.8% | 3,935 / 14,213 = 27.7% |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is the percentage of seniors reading at the three levels for each type of high school divided by the total senior enrollment for that type of high school. Thus, the upper-left cell can be read as follows: "In Chicago, 10.8% of the seniors in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools read at or above grade level." The last row on the table presents system-wide averages. Thus, the lower-left cell can be read as follows: "In Chicago, 34.5% of all high school seniors read at or above grade level."*

## Table 7-3. CLASS OF 1984, CHICAGO CITY-WIDE[9]




Data Sources: Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line*, and Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools.*

students reading below minimum competency. In the Selective Exam Schools, 84.7% of students read at or above the national average, but in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools only 10.8% read at or above the national average. In Selective Exam Schools, only 2.0% of students read below minimum competency, but in the Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, 52.8% read below minimum competency. A single Exam School (Lane Technical High School) had more than twice as many seniors reading at or above the national average (762 seniors) as did all eighteen Non-Selective Low-Income Schools combined (300 seniors).

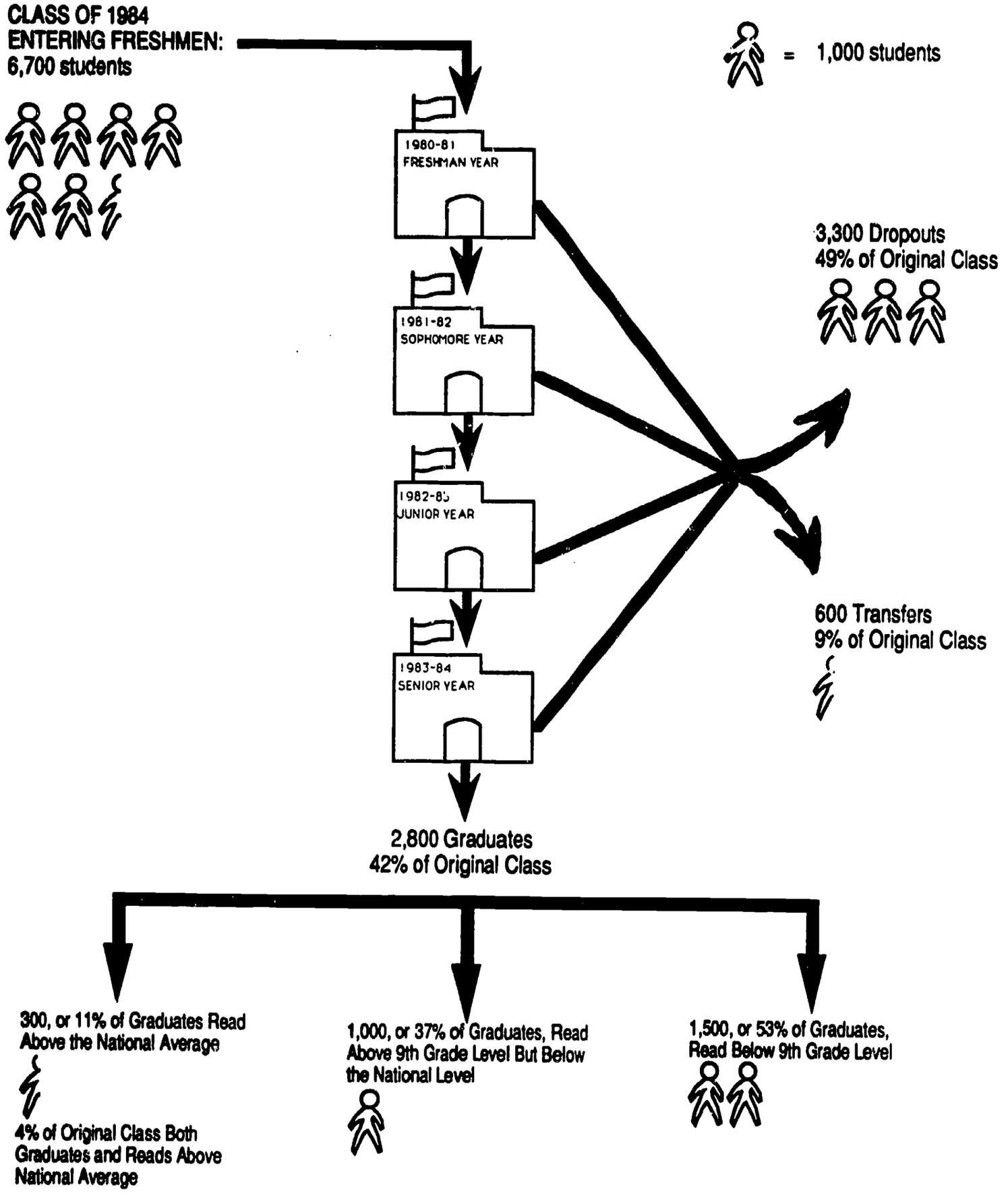
While a comparison of the six different types of high schools indicated that the Non-Selective Low-Income Schools had very low levels of reading achievement, a review of the scores for individual schools indicated that only 7 of the 62 high schools in the school system had more than 50% of their seniors reading above the national average, including two Exam Schools, one Selective Magnet School, and four Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools.

### Combined Analysis of Dropout and Achievement Data

Tables 7-3 and 7-4 present a combined analysis of the dropout and achievement data discussed above, following the progress of the Class of 1984 through high school. Table 7-3 presents data for the school system as a whole, which indicate that 20% of the original entering class both graduated and could read at or above the national average. Further, if we combine the class's dropouts and those students who graduated but were reading below minimum competency level, we identify a group of 13,000 students system-wide (about 50% of the entering class) who either lacked a diploma or the ability to read at the minimum competency level.

Table 7-4 provides this same information for students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools. As Table 7-4 indicates, only 300 students (or 4% of the original entering class in these schools) both graduated and could read at or above the national average. Further, if we combine the dropouts from these schools and the students who graduated but were reading below the minimum competency level, we identify 4,800 students (about 71% of the original class) who lacked either a diploma or earned a diploma but lacked the ability to read with minimum competency.

## Table 7-4. CLASS OF 1984, CHICAGO NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME HIGH SCHOOLS[10]




Data Sources: Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line*, and Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools.*

## Dropout Rates

A system-wide cohort analysis of the dropout rate from Boston's Class of 1986 was recently completed that employed the same methods as those used in the Chicago cohort analysis discussed above. This study indicated that 49% of the original class graduated, 17% transferred, and 34% dropped out. If transfers are removed from the analysis, the resulting four-year dropout rate was 41%.[11]

Boston has not released a school-by-school cohort analysis. Instead, it has published a school-by-school analysis of the "annual dropout rate" for 1986-87. This statistic was obtained by dividing the number of students who had been recorded as dropping out during the school year, by the average school enrollment during that school year.[12] The results are presented in Table 7-5, which indicates a reported annual dropout rate of 14% system-wide. As Table 7-5 indicates, dropouts were concentrated in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools, and to a lesser extent in Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools. The three types of non-selective schools reported annual dropout rates from seven to ten times the rates reported in the Exam Schools.

## Reading Achievement

Twelfth grade reading achievement data were not available; however, summary reading achievement data were available for the eleventh grade class in each school on the reading section of the Metropolitan Achievement Test. These data, presented in Table 7-6, indicate the percentile score of the average student in a given school. Thus, a percentile score of 36% indicates that the average student in a particular school is reading better than 36% of the students in the country, based on the test's national norms. The data indicate that eleven of the thirteen non-selective schools had school reading percentiles of 36% or below. The two schools scoring above this level that were non-selective schools were both non-selective options schools. In contrast, the reading percentiles for the three Selective Exam Schools indicated that their average student was reading better than 49% of students nationally (Boston Tech), 78% of students nationally (Boston Latin Academy), and 92% of students nationally (Boston Latin School). Considering all 16 high schools in Boston, only three of them had their average student reading above the national average—two Exam Schools and one non-selective options school.

## Table 7-5. BOSTON: ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1984-85[13]

| Types of High Schools | BOSTON Percentage of Dropouts 1984-85 |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 792 / 4,356 = 18% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 924 / 4,576 = 20% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 439 / 3,014 = 15% |
| Selective Exam | 80 / 4,545 = 2% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 2,235 / 16,491 = 14% |

## Table 7-6. BOSTON: 11TH GRADE READING ACHIEVEMENT BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1984-85[14]

| Types of High Schools | BOSTON 11th Grade Reading Percentiles 1984-85 | |
|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | Highest school score: | 52.0 % |
| | Lowest school score: | 18.0 % |
| | Median school score: | 34.0 % |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | Highest school score: | 28.0 % |
| | Lowest school score: | 22.0 % |
| | Median school score: | 26.0 % |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | Highest school score: | 44.0 % |
| | Lowest school score: | 26.0 % |
| | Median School Scores: | 30.0 % 36.0 % |
| Selective Exam | Highest school score: | 92.0 % |
| | Lowest school score: | 48.0 % |
| | Median school score: | 78.0 % |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | Highest school score: | 92.0 % |
| | Lowest school score: | 18.0 % |
| | Median school score: | 34.0 % |

## Philadelphia

### Dropout Rates

Philadelphia had not released any cohort study of dropouts either for individual schools or for the school system as a whole. Like Boston, they reported annual dropout rates for individual schools, which are summarized in Table 7-7 for the 1985-86 school year. As Table 7-7 indicates, the system reported an annual dropout rate of 10%.[15] Further, the reported annual dropout rate was progressively lower for each type of school listed, from a high of 16% in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools to virtually 0% in Selective Magnet and Selective Exam Schools.

### Reading Achievement

No standardized achievement test data were available for high school students in Philadelphia. However, the school system did report the verbal scores of the students from each high school who took the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), which are presented in Table 7-8 for those students who were seniors in 1985-86. As Table 7-8 indicates, the percentage of students who took the SAT test varied sharply among the six types of schools, with 17.7% taking the test in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools, but 81.3% taking the test in Selective Magnet Schools, and 96.1% taking the test in Selective Exam Schools. These different test-taking rates among the six types of schools reflected the fact that the lowest-achieving students typically did not take the SAT. Among the six types of schools, only Selective Exam Schools (with an average SAT Verbal score of 489) scored above the national average score for the test (431). Students in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools achieved an average score of 292 (as compared with the lowest possible score of 200 on the exam). Examining the scores for individual schools, only 4 of the 31 high schools in Philadelphia had average SAT Verbal scores above the national average—three Exam Schools and one Selective Magnet School.

## New York

### Dropout Rate

Like Chicago and Boston, New York has carried out a four-year cohort study of dropouts, which analyzed the dropout rate for the Class of 1986.[16] New York's research department made decisions in classifying students that were contrary to the standard definitions and procedures for calculating dropout rates employed in the Chicago and Boston studies (for example, they counted students who dropped out of regular day-school and completed a high school equivalency program as graduates, when they should have

## Table 7-7. PHILADELPHIA: ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1985-86[17]

| Types of High Schools | PHILADELPHIA Percentage of Dropouts 1985-86 |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 1,851 / 11,718 = 16% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 2,386 / 18,294 = 13% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 1,208 / 15,955 = 8% |
| Selective Vocational | 302 / 6,072 = 5% |
| Selective Magnet | 9 / 1,977 = 0% |
| Selective Exam | 0 / 3,363 = 0% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 5,756 / 57,379 = 10% |

*Note: The number of dropouts in each type of high school is divided by the total enrollment for that type of high school to derive the percent of dropouts for each type of high school.*

## Table 7-8. PHILADELPHIA: SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST (SAT) SCORES BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1985-86[18]

| Types of High Schools | Percent of Seniors Tested | Average Verbal SAT Score |
|---|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 345 / 1,944 = 17.7% | 292 |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 706 / 3,293 = 21.4% | 317 |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 1,273 / 3,074 = 41.4% | 373 |
| Selective Vocational | 263 / 1,153 = 22.8% | 336 |
| Selective Magnet | 326 / 401 = 81.3% | 411 |
| Selective Exam | 494 / 514 = 96.1% | 489 |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 3,407 / 10,379 = 32.8% | 359 |

*Note: The percentage in each cell is calculated by dividing the total number of students tested in each type of school by the total number of seniors enrolled in each type of high school.*

been counted as dropouts). However, a recalculation of the New York data applying the definitions and procedures employed in the Chicago and Boston studies indicates a graduation rate of 47%, a transfer rate of 16%, and a dropout rate of 34%. If transfers aren't considered part of the cohort, the resulting dropout rate for the Class of 1986 was 42%.

New York reports annual dropout rates for individual schools. In Table 7-9, we present the reported annual dropout rate by type of high school for 1984-85. A dropout rate of 9% was reported system-wide, with the dropout rate being progressively lower in each type of school listed in Table 7-9. Non-Selective Low-Income Schools reported an annual dropout rate of 13%, while Selective Exam Schools reported a dropout rate of 1%.[19]

### Reading Achievement

While twelfth grade reading achievement data are collected in New York, they are not compiled, but must be copied from individual school reports kept at the central administrative offices. Since we were unable to conduct this analysis, we instead analyzed the percentages of students at each school receiving some form of Regents Diploma. (As described in Chapter 5, a Regents Diploma is awarded to students who pass state-wide Regents Tests.) As Table 7-10 indicates, 40% of New York high school graduates received Regents Diplomas. However, the percentage of Regents Diplomas awarded varied markedly by type of school, with 21% of seniors in Non-Selective Low-Income Schools receiving Regents Diplomas, while 91% of seniors in Selective Exam Schools received them.

## Conclusion

The data available about achievement and dropout rates for the four cities varied from city to city. Yet patterns across cities were consistent in significant ways. Cohort studies of the four-year dropout rates in three of the cities indicated dropout rates of 40% in Chicago, 41% in Boston, and 42% in New York, when the data were analyzed in the same way. While four-year dropout data were not available for Philadelphia, the annual dropout data available did not indicate that the four-year dropout rate in Philadelphia was significantly different from the rates in the other three cities.

With respect to system-wide reading achievement, the available data were even more variable, with standardized reading achievement data being available for twelfth graders in Chicago and eleventh graders in Boston, while 12th grade SAT Verbal scores

## Table 7-9. NEW YORK CITY: ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1984-85[20]

| Types of High Schools | NEW YORK CITY Percentage of Dropouts 1984-85 |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 8,375 / 62,391 = 13% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 7,207 / 73,069 = 10% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 5,430 / 71,988 = 8% |
| Selective Vocational | 868 / 16,555 = 5% |
| Selective Magnet | 495 / 19,295 = 3% |
| Selective Exam | 167 / 12,689 = 1% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 22,542 / 255,987 = 9% |

*Note: The number of dropouts in each type of high school is divided by the total enrollment for that type of high school to derive the percent of dropouts for each type of high school.*

## Table 7-10. NEW YORK: PERCENT REGENTS DIPLOMAS AWARDED BY TYPE OF HIGH SCHOOL, 1984-85[23]

| Types of High Schools | NEW YORK CITY % of Regents Diplomas Awarded 1984-85 |
|---|---|
| Non-Selective Low-Income | 1,066 / 5,158 = 21% |
| Non-Selective Low- to Moderate-Income | 2,111 / 7,198 = 29% |
| Non-Selective Moderate-Income | 4,069 / 9,346 = 44% |
| Selective Vocational | 642 / 1,588 = 40% |
| Selective Magnet | 1,368 / 2,650 = 52% |
| Selective Exam | 2,210 / 2,427 = 91% |
| ALL HIGH SCHOOLS | 11,466 / 28,367 = 40% |

were available for Philadelphia and the percentage of seniors awarded Regents diplomas was available for New York. For Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston, where the available achievement data could be compared to the relevant national norms, the patterns were similar. City-wide, students were far below national averages, and only a handful of Selective Exam, Selective Magnet, and Non-Selective Moderate-Income Schools in each city scored above pertinent national averages.

Low achievement levels should be considered in light of the high overall dropout rates in these school systems. Juniors and seniors failed to approach national averages on standardized tests even after 35% of the original class had dropped out. The combined impact of high dropout rates and low reading achievement are emphasized in Table 7-3, which indicates that only 20% of Chicago's entering class both graduated and could read at or above the national average.

While overall results in the four cities indicated system-wide patterns of substantial dropout rates and low achievement rates, the results reveal particularly high levels of dropout and low levels of achievement for Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools. This pattern of inequality was underscored most graphically by the data from Chicago, which allowed us to analyze the combined effect of dropping out and low achievement in various types of schools. Although the varying nature of the data available from city to city did not allow us to do such an analysis for the other three cities, the patterns of the results presented in Tables 7-5 through 7-10 suggest that similar coordinated analyses of dropout and achievement rates for Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston would yield results similar to the ones documented in Chicago.

The implications of these data about the outcomes of schooling in these four cities are discussed further in Chapter 8.

## NOTES

[1] George Morrow, "Standardizing Practice in the Analysis of School Dropouts," *Teachers College Record* 87 (Spring 1986): 432-355.

[2] Chicago Panel on Public School Finances, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools: An Analysis of the Classes of 1982-1983-1984*, Second Edition (Chicago: Author, May 1986).

[3]The Chicago Panel study from which dropout data was taken for this analysis was a three-year study that analyzed the Class of 1982 in greatest detail and the Class of 1984 in less detail. For 1984, the study did not indicate transfer rates for individual schools, only noting that "system-wide there was virtually no change in the Transfer rate," and indicating the transfer rates for individual schools in 1984 in instances where they had changed more than 5%. Thus, the present analysis employed individual school transfer rates for the Class of 1982, modified to include those seven schools that had had a change of more than 5%. We concluded that this was a sufficiently reliable method for calculating transfer rates when the units of analysis that we were interested in were the six types of high schools.

[4] Morrow, "Standardizing Practice."

[5] Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line: Chicago's Failing Schools and How to Save Them* (Chicago: Author, 1985).

[6] Ibid., 115-117.

[7] Chicago Panel , *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools*, pp. 77, 79.

[8] Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line*, pp. 103-104.

[9] Chicago Panel, *Dropouts from the Chicago Public Schools*; Designs for Change, *The Bottom Line*, pp. 103-104.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Gregory A. Byrne, *High School Dropouts in Boston*. Masters Thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1988. An earlier study carried out by the school system's research department arrived at a higher four-year dropout rate, because this study did not distinguish between newly entering ninth graders and ninth graders who had been retained in ninth grade. See Yohel Camayd-Freixas, *Dropouts in 1987* (Boston: Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, September 1987).

[12]Annual dropout rates have frequently resulted in the underreporting of the number of dropouts, as dropout was defined earlier in this chapter, since students who have left the school system and should have been counted as dropouts were placed in other categories. Annual dropout reporting has opened the door to such distortions because it has historically been based on each school's accounting of those who leave, rather than on a central computerized register of all students enrolled in the school system.

[13] Yohel Camayd-Freixas, *A Working Document on the Dropout Problem in Boston Public Schools* (Boston: Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, 1986), 67; Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, *School Profiles 1984-85* (Boston: Author, 1986).

[14] Boston Public Schools, *School Profiles 1984-85*.

[15]These data are subject to the limitations described in Note 12.

[16] New York City Board of Education, Office of Educational Assessment, Analytic Studies Unit, *Cohort Dropout Study: The Class of 1986* (New York: Author, October 1987).

[17] School District of Philadelphia, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, *Superintendent's MIC Management Information Center, 1986-87* (Philadelphia: Author, 1987); School District of Philadelphia, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, *Superintendent's MIC Management Information Center, 1985-86* (Philadelphia: Author, 1986).

[18] School District of Philadelphia, *Management Information Center.*

[19]As the current report was being prepared, it was pointed out by a study consultant that the appendix to a report prepared by the New York school system contained school-by-school cohort dropout data for the Class of 1986 in an appendix. However, it was too late at that point to analyze this cohort data. See New York city Board of Education, Office of Educational Assessment, Analytic Studies Division, *The Cohort Report: Four-year Results for the Class of 1987 and an Update on the Class of 1986* (New York: Author, June, 1988.

[20] New York City Board of Education, Office of Educational Assessment, Analytic Studies Unit, The 1984-85 Dropout Report (New York: Author, February 1986).

[21] Board of Education of the City of New York, Division of High Schools, Office of D.A.T.A., "School Year 1984-1985," computer printout of school-by-school data.

# CHAPTER 8. MAJOR CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 8 draws together analysis from the previous chapters to present major conclusions and recommendations. This chapter emphasizes conclusions and recommendations that cut across the specific areas of placement and labeling described in Chapters 4 through 7, and does not repeat each conclusion and recommendation presented in these earlier chapters.

## Major Conclusions

In Table 1-1, we pictured four interlocking systems of student placement and labeling that decisively affect the educational opportunities available in public high schools in large cities:

- Placement and labeling practices for high school admission
- High school tracking and ability grouping
- Placement and labeling practices for high school grade promotion and retention
- Placement and labeling practices for high school attendance and discipline

As explained in Chapter 1, we were only able to analyze the first three areas of placement and labeling in this study, although there is considerable research evidence about the importance of the fourth (i.e., practices for high school attendance and discipline).[1] Below, we summarize major study conclusions about those systems for high school placement and labeling in the four school systems that we investigated.

### Deficient and Unequal Outcomes of Schooling

Current placement and labeling practices are being carried out in high schools whose outcomes in terms of student graduation and achievement are both deficient system-wide and unequal among schools. Chapter 7 presented key conclusions about dropout rates and reading achievement in the four cities. While available data varied in quality, these data are cause for great concern, both about the effectiveness of these school systems in general and about the effectiveness of those high schools within these school systems serving high concentrations of low income, minority, limited English proficient, handicapped, and low-achieving students (students at risk).

With respect to system-wide results, the three systems for which four-year dropout rates were available had dropout rates of about 40%, when the dropout rate was calculated according to generally-recognized procedures. And in the three systems for which standardized achievement test results were available for juniors and seniors, most of their high schools were far below national norms. Low levels of average achievement occurred system-wide for juniors and seniors even though a significant percentage of students, including many of the lowest achieving students, had already dropped out. In Chicago, about half of the original entering class either dropped out or remained to graduate but had junior high reading achievement levels as graduating seniors.

Such dropouts and inadequately prepared graduates did not meet minimum skills requirements for most permanent jobs in the changing economies of these four cities, which have lost tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs in the past twenty years. Good entry-level jobs in such emerging occupations as finance, health, and specialized manufacturing typically require a high school degree and at least ninth grade basic skills achievement. Thus, system-wide results in these four cities indicated a severe mismatch between student attainments, on the one hand, and minimum skills needed for stable employment and further education, on the other.

While system-wide results indicated serious deficiencies in student outcomes, deficiencies were by far the worst in those schools serving the largest percentages of low-income students. In each school system, such schools showed the highest dropout rates and lowest achievement rates. The combined impact of these results is shown most dramatically through Chicago data, indicating that of 6,700 students who entered Chicago's eighteen Non-Selective Low-Income high schools in fall 1980 only 300 both graduated and could read at or above the national average. While data about the other three cities did not allow a combined analysis of dropout and achievement results for various types of schools, the data from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston suggest similar patterns to the Chicago results. Reported annual dropout rates for Non-Selective Low-Income Schools in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston were at least nine times the rates for the Exam Schools in these same cities. And almost all Non-Selective Low-Income Schools for which data were available had reading achievement levels for eleventh and twelfth graders far below national averages.

It was in the context of these dropout rates and reading achievement results that we assessed the nature and the adequacy of key student placement and labeling practices in these school systems.

## Sorting Practices Fail to Meet Equity Standards

In Chapter 1, we described three reasonable standards for judging educational equity that are based on the legal and ethical tradition of equal educational opportunity in U.S. public education, as well as on pertinent research evidence about the relationships between educational practice and student outcomes. When judged against these standards, current placement and labeling practices are clearly functioning to increase educational inequities in the urban school systems studied.

The Access Standard requires that specific practices of the educational system should facilitate, for students at risk, access to school itself and to specific types of school services available to other identifiable groups of students, unless there is a compelling reason supported by systemic evidence to justify providing different services to these other groups. Clearly, the evidence reviewed in Chapter 4 about high school admissions indicates that the systems of options high schools and programs that have grown up in these cities and their associated admissions practices violate this standard.

The Coherent Response to Special Needs Standard requires that if special needs of students at risk stand in the way of their educational progress toward high priority educational objectives, the schools should be making a coherent effort, reflected in their specific practices, to meet these special needs. Such coherent efforts should be attempted even if there is no compelling research indicating that a particular approach to meeting special needs has proven effective in enhancing students' educational progress. Clearly, the evidence reviewed in Chapter 5 about within school tracking and ability grouping indicates that these sorting practices, which persist despite multiple objective indicators that they are failing, violate this standard.

The Research-Based Practice Standard requires that if educational research has identified specific practices for providing services to students at risk shown through research to enhance students' progress toward high priority educational objectives, the schools should be employing these practices. Clearly, the evidence reviewed in Chapter 7 about student retention and promotion indicates that promotion policies implemented in these school systems violate this standard.

In Table 1-2, we presented a diagram indicating possible relationships among non-school and school factors (including placement and labeling practices) in determining student outcomes. The study has clearly documented that (1) these four school systems are employing placement and labeling practices that violate basic standards of fairness and principles of sound educational practice supported by research in their treatment of students at risk and (2) high percentages of these students at risk are leaving high school without the

credentials or skills that would enable them to qualify for permanent employment or future education. Clearly, the study has not proven a causal connection between placement and labeling practices and student outcomes, or established the extent to which student outcomes would be changed by changes in sorting practices. However, those concerned about the education of students at risk do not need to wait for these causal relationships to be fully clarified, when current placement and labeling practices violate reasonable standards for judging the acceptability of educators' treatment of students, and when promising practices consistent with these standards are clearly feasible.

## Sorting Practices Resist Change

Despite the fact that beneficial alternatives to current sorting practices are clearly feasible, the most important reality documented by this research was not a positive or negative change resulting from the impact of various reform initiatives (such as the excellence movement or the movement for educational choice), but rather the persistence of inequitable patterns of school-level practice for sorting students in the face of such new policies and reforms.

> Example: While the four school systems all abolished formal tracks, they retained many of the essential features of tracking through the use of block rostering by ability group, the relabeling of courses without changing their content, the expansion of full-time special education programs, and the development of selective high schools and programs that functioned essentially as tracks.

> Example: While new promotion policies were presented to the public as moving school systems from social promotion to merit promotion, data about retention practices indicated that substantial student retention was employed before these policies were implemented, that major school-to-school variability in retention rates persisted among schools serving the same types of students after these new policies were implemented, and that loopholes were created in retention policies that allowed many schools to blunt the impact of new policies.

The persistence of such practices over time, as well as strategies that might be adequate to change them, are suggested by a series of social science perspectives for understanding the operation of large organizations that were described in Chapter 1, including the systems management perspective, conflict and bargaining perspective, economic incentives perspective, organizational patterns perspective, subculture perspective, and professional participation and development perspective. These perspectives suggest that inequities like rigid tracking have persisted, for example, because they have benefited certain interest groups, because they have reflected well-established

organizational routines at the school level maintained because of the discretion exercised by decision makers in a fragmented organization, and because they were buttressed by powerful frames of reference that shaped educator's conceptions of what was possible. The six social science perspectives have been used throughout the study to analyze various findings, and we refer to them again below in highlighting key results and recommendations.

### The Role of Well-Organized Interests

As noted in Chapter 4 and elsewhere, the study highlighted inequities experienced by students at risk that would be unthinkable in a middle-class suburban school system, such as recurring failure rates of 50% in the crucial ninth grade transition from junior high to high school. An important insight into such dynamics comes from the conflict and bargaining perspective, and specifically from the political scientist Murray Edelman, who argues that decision makers provide tangible benefits to well-organized interests actively attempting to influence them, while carrying out symbolic actions to placate unorganized groups affected by their decisions. Through such a process, for example, the growth of magnet schools, a reform strategy with its roots in school desegregation that was officially intended to benefit the large numbers of minority students in racially isolated schools has, in the cities studied, frequently ended up bringing disproportionate benefits to white students and to selected middle-class students of all races whose families have mastered the intricacies of the high school admissions process. While these skilled and well-organized groups received tangible benefits through their participation in options high schools and programs, the benefits to most minority students were symbolic; in theory, but not in practice, students at risk had a chance to choose the high school that they would attend. This often illusory opportunity for choice obscured the shortcomings of the educational experience that students at risk actually received and the detrimental effects of options schools and programs on the functioning of the neighborhood schools they actually attended.

The impact of well-organized interest groups in shaping the placement and labeling is further intensified by the dynamics highlighted in the organizational patterns perspective. That perspective emphasizes the discretion that decision makers exercise at various levels of a large educational system and the process by which these decision makers often develop organizational routines that reflect their particular interests, but are at variance with official policy.

## Weak Central Oversight and Leadership for Reform

With well-organized interest groups and strongly-established organizational routines shaping school-level placement and labeling, we found that both ongoing central administration oversight of school-level practice and centrally-initiated reform efforts were typically weak or transitory. For example, options schools and programs sprang from multiple sources within school systems, typically without coherent planning, monitoring, and standard-setting by central administrations. Individual schools and programs decided what their admissions standards would be and had free reign in student recruiting and selection. Other examples of weak central administration oversight of placement and labeling have been cited above, such as the circumvention of central administration initiatives that were supposed to eliminate rigid tracking.

To the extent that these various reforms or the protections that were part of them were intended to benefit students at risk, we found a consistent lack of central administration follow through to provide the support and oversight necessary to make these reforms work. Reform initiatives affecting children at risk frequently lacked thorough central administration planning, allocation of additional funds for implementation, assignment of able school-level staff to implementation, and adequate school-level planning time and staff training.

Weak implementation strategies were insufficient to overcome powerful school-level regularities and the sets of beliefs that supported them. In fact, reform initiatives that lacked followthrough strengthened the school-level perception that these reforms were not meant seriously and strengthened the dichotomy that existed in the minds of school-level staff between the way that things are supposed to work (i.e., the new policies mandated as part of the reforms) and the way that they really work.

While some might cite these experiences as evidence that central administrations of large school systems are incapable of supporting reform efforts that have a significant impact at the school level, this conclusion is not warranted. In establishing a number of the selective options schools we studied, central administrations in all four cities demonstrated the ability to provide the support necessary for implementing significant school-level change. They obtained and allocated new resources, changed teacher union contracts to exempt options schools from teacher seniority requirements, assigned top staff to teaching and leadership positions in these schools, insured time for school-level planning and training, and cut administrative red tape in such areas as providing books and supplies and improving physical facilities. Thus, while there are major constraints placed on the implementation of reforms by the characteristics of large bureaucratic school districts, the

histories of the options schools in these districts indicates that they are capable of implementing coherent school-level reform when there is a strong commitment to do so.

### Lack of Research and Evaluation about Placement and Labeling

In Chapters 4 through 6, we have provided numerous examples of the lack of research and evaluation concerning the implementation and impact of placement and labeling practices and of reform initiatives intended to change them. Without external pressure from a child advocacy group, business leaders, or another governmental entity (such as the state or federal government), school systems almost never carried out and publicized such analyses. During the years that were the primary focus of this study:

- School systems did not compile complete lists of options schools and programs, determine how many students were attending them, or analyze the background characteristics of these students. They did not evaluate the adequacy of program implementation. Nor did they assess the impacts of participation in various options schools and programs on the performance of their students to determine whether these programs brought students to higher levels of performance.

- School systems did not analyze the composition of tracks and ability groups, including the background characteristics and prior school history of students in various groups. Nor did they analyze the impact of tracking and ability grouping on student performance.

- School systems did not accurately analyze the implementation and impact of retention policies during the time period in which they were being implemented. Analyses of retention that were carried out by school systems were done primarily in response to external pressure and were typically released only after the superintendent who initiated strict retention had left the school system.

- School systems resisted releasing accurate analyses of dropout rates. Despite the fact that dropping out has been a much-debated public policy issue in these school systems for five years, Philadelphia and Boston have yet to release school-by-school four-year dropout rates based on cohort analyses.

- School systems typically did not gather, analyze, or release accurate data about the academic performance of high school students that would be helpful in assessing the impact of their high school experience.

This lack of pertinent research and evaluation occurred despite the fact that all four school systems had developed computerized student record-keeping systems and other data bases that would make such research and evaluation a reasonably simple and inexpensive undertaking.

## The Larger Politics of Reforms in Placement and Labeling

Aside from their educational impacts, the adoption of reforms related to student placement and labeling brought major political benefits to school system leaders who advocated them. The development of options schools and programs was critical in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia in heading off mandatory busing, and the establishment of a set of exemplary options schools and programs was extremely useful in convincing the public that these public school systems were making progress and were capable of excellence. The adoption of strict promotion policies and associated testing programs lay at the center of the reform programs of superintendents who were hired in times of crisis, and helped these superintendents convince the public that a serious effort was underway to turn these school systems around.

Thus, reforms in placement and labeling practices were typically presented as symbols of the system's commitment to improvement and used to aid the system in building the confidence of business leaders, elected officials and the public, but implementation of these reforms was not consistently supported or even monitored centrally, nor were the implementation and impact of reforms systematically evaluated.

## Resulting Practices Disable Students at Risk

Strong school-level beliefs in these four school systems have long justified placement and labeling practices that work to the detriment of students at risk. And centrally-initiated reforms in these practices that were implemented without strong central administration leadership and monitoring were typically refashioned at the school level to conform with existing school-level practice and belief. In Chapters 4 through 6, we analyzed school system practices for admission to high school, placement in tracks and ability groups, and promotion from grade to grade. The cumulative impact of practices in these three areas had a major impact on the educational opportunities available for students at risk, including minority, low-income, handicapped, and limited English proficient students. Cummins provides a useful frame of reference for thinking about the impact of these practices, when he suggests that various school practices can be considered either "empowering" or "disabling" for students at risk, with the effect of a series of disabling practices making it increasingly unlikely that students will succeed in school.[2] Viewed in this light, Chapters 4 through 6 document a potent set of disabling practices that unfolded as these students moved through the schools, including the following:

- Students at risk were less likely to gain admission to selective elementary and junior high schools, both because they were less likely to meet selective admissions requirements and because their parents were less likely to know about how to apply successfully.

- Many students at risk received less attention in junior high because their schools focused disproportionate resources on preparing high achieving students to apply to selective high schools and high school programs.

- Students at risk were more likely to be held back in elementary school and junior high school, which substantially increased the prospects that they would later drop out of high school.

- Students at risk were less likely to gain admission to selective high schools and programs, since they were less likely to have attended schools offering appropriate coursework, less likely to have attended schools whose staff had informal cooperative relationships with the decision makers at selective high schools, less likely to meet the formal and informal admissions requirements for these high schools, and less likely to understand the tactics for successfully applying to these schools or to have parents who understood them.

- Students at risk were likely to be assigned to Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools with high concentrations of low-income students, minority students, handicapped students, students with limited English proficiency, students with serious reading problems, students who had been previously retained, and students who were prone to be absent.

- Upon entering high school, many students at risk were likely to experience a chaotic process of enrollment in ninth grade because of communication problems between junior highs and high schools and logistics problems in the ninth grade enrollment process common in Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income High Schools.

- Students at risk were more likely to be assigned to high school classes that in name or in fact were remedial classes where staff exhibited low expectations about students' abilities to achieve. Teachers in these classes typically would have preferred to teach in selective options schools or in high ability group classes. Classes for students at risk typically emphasized teaching skills in isolation, workbooks, and seat work, and thus taught basic skills in a manner that had previously failed for these students in elementary and junior high school. Sometimes, these remedial courses did not offer full credit.

- Within Non-Selective Low-Income and Low- to Moderate-Income Schools, low ability classes were likely to have even higher concentrations of low-income students, minority students, handicapped students, students with limited English proficiency, students with serious reading problems, students who had been retained, and students prone to be absent than these schools as a whole.

- Students at risk were unlikely to participate in an educational program with an overall theme or focus, such as that offered by options schools and

programs. Further, because they lacked prerequisite course work or test scores, students at risk were unlikely to be eligible for potentially high interest learning experiences in their own school, such as vocational education course sequences.

- Students at risk had almost a 40% to 50% chance of failing two or more courses in ninth grade. However, after having failed these courses, they were unlikely to receive any special counseling or program modification, unless they were able to gain admission to one of the dropout prevention programs available to serve a small percentage of students at risk.

- Students at risk had roughly a 20%-25% likelihood to be retained in ninth grade, which was associated with a greatly increased likelihood of dropping out.

This set of disabling placement and labeling practices represented an unstated and often unrecognized policy of triage. Rist, who studied the process of ability grouping in kindergarten through second grade in the St. Louis public schools, summarized conclusions similar to ours about the mindset behind such triage as follows:

> Throughout the various levels of the St. Louis educational system we found commonly shared assumptions about "how things really are." Middle class students can learn, lower class students cannot; . . . teachers can save a few, but will lose many; the school tries, the home does not; and finally, only the naive would dispute these beliefs, as the wise know. The outcome of this set of attitudes, assumptions, and values is that the school as an institution sustains, in myriad of ways, the inequalities with which children first come to school. The school's response to issues of color, class, and control all mesh together to make two nets—one to catch winners and one to catch losers.[3]

## Changes in Placement and Labeling Practices: 1970-1985

As noted above, the major school-level reality that we documented was the persistence of enduring patterns of school-level practice for sorting students in the face of new policies and reform initiatives. However, given these basic patterns of continuity, there have also been some important changes in the period from 1970 through 1985.

First, the philosophy articulated by proponents of "higher standards" in these four cities (including those who pressed these ideas before the publication of *A Nation at Risk*) has legitimated existing practices that work to the detriment of students at risk and in some cases increased the use of these practices. For example, while the school systems studied had high student retention rates before new promotion policies were introduced and the implementation of these policies was variable, student retention rates did rise after the

policies were introduced, and those who strongly believed in student retention had official sanction to employ it.

Second, policies that were, on their face, inconsistent with the view that the public schools are a meritocracy were brought into conformity with this viewpoint. For example, school systems that were formally segregated by race based on place of residence now offer a system of options schools and programs that, in theory, allow students and families to choose the school that the student will attend. And tracking systems that permitted students only to attend classes with a single track designation have been replaced by placement systems based on ability groups, in which the student can, in theory, be taking classes with a number of different ability group labels. As documented in this study, the reality of school-level practice has changed little. For example, the percentage of Chicago students who attended all-black schools in 1986 was virtually the same as the percentage before Chicago's voluntary desegregation plan was instituted.[4] Yet such new concepts as options schools and flexible ability grouping appear on their face to be consistent with the American ideal of meritocracy, and it is only by analyzing detailed realities of school-level practice that one can determine that these new concepts have not in reality removed barriers to a better education for students at risk.

Third, placement and labeling practices introduced since 1980 have introduced more "high stakes" decision points into the lives of students in these school systems, with many of these decision points coming early in the student's life. For example, admission to a magnet program in high school may hinge on knowing how to gain admission to the right magnet school at the kindergarten level. And a grade on a standardized achievement test in elementary school may determine whether students will be promoted or retained and thus decisively affect the likelihood that they will graduate from high school.

## Major Recommendations

### Strengthening Interest Groups Who Support Equity

The most important change that will improve the fairness of high school placement and labeling in these school systems is also perhaps the most difficult to bring about. Unless the interests of students at risk are represented in the policy making and in the implementation that shape these sorting processes, many of the other changes recommended in this report are not likely to affect the day-to-day experiences of students. Active parents of students at risk and advocates for these students must reach some parity of organization and access to decision making with the middle-class parents and school

system decision makers who are already highly-organized and well-positioned for the purpose of shaping the placement and labeling process.

**Recommendation:** Mechanisms should be established through which active parents of students at risk can participate in decision making about the quality of their children's educational experiences, including the design and implementation of placement and labeling practices.

**Recommendation:** Independent parent and citizen advocacy organizations should make placement and labeling practices a major focus for investigation and advocacy, and foundations and other independent funders should be willing to support such activities.

## Assessing the Equity and Effectiveness of Placement and Labeling Practices

Large urban school systems typically have significant research and evaluation capabilities and regularly collect data about many key issues pertinent to assessing the equity and effectiveness of current placement and grouping practices. Yet during the period that we studied intensively, none of the four school systems has regularly analyzed current selective and non-selective high schools and their associated admissions practices, within-school tracking and grouping practices, or student promotion practices and used the results for planning and policy-making.

**Recommendation:** Through analyzing data already available and through inexpensive sampling studies, school systems should provide themselves and the public with information useful in further illuminating such key issues as:

- The characteristics of students attending various types of selective and non-selective high schools and programs, the resources allocated to such schools and programs, and their impact in boosting student achievement.
- The characteristics of students placed in various groups and tracks (for example, their race, sex, tested achievement, absence record, previous promotion history) and the educational outcomes for students in these tracks (for example, reading achievement and dropout rates).
- The rates of retention over time at various schools and for various grade levels, the characteristics of students who are retained (for example, their race, sex, income level, and previous promotion history), the nature of the services provided to retained students, the costs of retention, and the impact of retention on student achievement and dropout.

## Immediate Action by School District Policy Makers

Our analysis indicates that high school admission practices, tracking and grouping practices, and retention practices have typically been implemented with wide discretion being granted to school principals and other school-level staff. Further, with a few exceptions, such discretion has consistently been used to the detriment of the students with the greatest learning needs. Below, we make recommendations for immediate action concerning high school admissions, tracking and grouping, and retention as first steps in insuring that the benefits of practices in these areas are maximized and the harms minimized.

**Recommendation:** School districts should institute moratoriums on the development of additional options schools and programs, pending a review of systematic data about their characteristics and their impact and pending the development of comprehensive procedures for monitoring their operation and expansion that include strong safeguards to promote equity.

**Recommendation:** School systems should develop and make public written policies about the rationale and objectives for various ability groups and tracks, the process through which students are to be placed in these groups and tracks, the outcomes that are expected as a result of these grouping practices, and the methods by which the effectiveness of tracking will be evaluated.

**Recommendation:** Given its documented negative impacts, school districts should adopt the policy that student retention can be used only as an absolute last resort, after other interventions have been tried and have failed and should begin to plan for the implementation of alternatives to retention.

## Effective Strategies for Implementing Changes in Current Practices

No reform proposals for changing specific educational practices will have an appreciable effect unless the past cycle of ineffectual implementation can be broken.

**Recommendation:** Any reforms initiated to alter current placement and labeling issues must couple new policies and vigorous efforts to enforce them with such essential ingredients of effective implementation as a commitment of extra resources, a commitment of top staff at both the central administration and school levels, ongoing central administration leadership and monitoring, sufficient school-level planning time, and a willingness to cut red tape. School systems should analyze their experience with establishing successful magnet schools in identifying some ingredients needed for success.

## Key Directions for Reforming Specific High School Practices

For school systems that have thoroughly analyzed current practices and are committed to seriously implement more equitable sorting practices, Chapters 4 through 6 provide specific recommendations for key changes in high school admissions, tracking and grouping, and retention.

## NOTES

[1] Michelle Fine, "Why Urban Adolescents Drop Into and Out of Public High School," *Teachers College Record* 87 (Spring 1986): 393-409; Gary Wehlage and Robert A. Rutter, "Dropping Out: How Much Do Schools Contribute to the Problem?" *Teachers College Record* 87 (Spring 1986): 374-392.

[2] Jim Cummins, "Empowering Minority Students: A Framework for Intervention," *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (February 1986): 18-36.

[3] Ray C. Rist, *The Urban School: A Factory for Failure* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1973), 241-2.

[4] G. Alfred Hess, Jr., *Who Benefits from Desegregation? A Review of the Chicago Desegregation Program 1980-1986* (Chicago: Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, December 1987), 14.

## Appendix A.

## UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN PROJECT CONSULTANTS

### New York

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*Because of our familiarity with the Chicago Public Schools we drew on a variety of different individuals, both at local schools and within the district and central administration, and did not identify a single consultant from within the school system.

## APPENDIX B.
## NEW YORK: High Schools Listed by School Type, 1987-88

| Types of High Schools | School | % Low-Income* | School | % Low-Income | School | % Low-Income |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 25 schools | Irving | 82.9 | Richman | 60.2 | Maxwell | 49.4 |
| | Dodge | 77.6 | Jefferson | 58.8 | Walton | 48.9 |
| | South Bronx | 75.0 | T. Roosevelt | 58.4 | Seward Park | 48.8 |
| | Washington | 72.6 | Monroe | 57.7 | King | 47.0 |
| | Addams | 69.7 | Smith | 57.1 | Newtown | 45.3 |
| | East New York | 66.8 | Morris | 55.6 | Curtis | 41.4 |
| | Bacon | 66.7 | Richmond Hill | 55.3 | Bushwick | 41.3 |
| | East District | 66.2 | Taft | 52.4 | | |
| | F.D. Roosevelt | 60.9 | Automotive | 51.6 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 25 schools | Gompers | 41.1 | Kennedy | 37.4 | Long Island City | 28.5 |
| | Clinton | 40.4 | Fort Hamilton | 36.7 | Sheepshead Bay | 27.9 |
| | Brandeis | 40.0 | Lincoln | 36.4 | Van Buren | 27.2 |
| | Whitney | 40.0 | Columbus | 36.3 | Jackson | 27.0 |
| | Hale | 39.5 | Chelsea | 36.2 | Wingate | 26.7 |
| | Bowne | 39.5 | Jay | 34.9 | Park West | 26.6 |
| | Stevenson | 39.4 | Erasmus Hall | 34.6 | Flushing | 26.5 |
| | Hillcrest | 38.8 | Childs | 31.1 | | |
| | Bryant | 38.7 | New Utrecht | 28.7 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 26 schools | New Dorp | 25.4 | Prospect Heights | 21.0 | Lehman | 16.5 |
| | H.S. Humanities | 25.3 | Lewis | 20.7 | Lafayette | 16.5 |
| | Forest Hills | 25.1 | Boys & Girls | 20.6 | Cardozo | 15.5 |
| | Springfield Gardens | 23.4 | Tilden | 20.4 | Truman | 15.2 |
| | Jamaica | 23.0 | Canarsie | 20.3 | South Shore | 14.2 |
| | Far Rockaway | 22.7 | Port Richmond | 20.2 | Cleveland | 13.9 |
| | Midwood | 22.0 | Bayside | 18.3 | Lane | 13.3 |
| | Madison | 21.6 | Beach Channel | 17.9 | Tottenville | 7.3 |
| | Wagner | 21.5 | Adams | 17.8 | | |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 9 schools | Fashion Industries | 67.6 | Queens | 39.9 | | |
| | Aviation | 55.4 | Edison | 38.1 | | |
| | Westinghouse | 53.6 | McKee | 37.2 | | |
| | Graphic Comm. Arts | 49.4 | Grady | 33.4 | | |
| | Art & Design | 47.8 | | | | |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 9 schools | Manhattan Center | 86.2 | Bergtraum | 39.9 | | |
| | Barton | 50.7 | Murrow | 32.5 | | |
| | Thomas | 48.9 | Martin | 28.6 | | |
| | Randolph | 44.9 | Harris | 24.3 | | |
| | Dewey | 44.7 | | | | |
| EXAM 4 schools | Brooklyn Tech | 40.1 | Stuyvesant | 20.6 | | |
| | LaGuardia | 24.3 | Bronx Science | 20.3 | | |

**The number of students receiving free or reduced lunches was used to determine the percentage of low-income students.*

*Appendix B lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 2-1, showing the breakdown of individual schools in each type of high school for each city. The schools are listed within each type of high school in descending order of percentage of low-income students.*

*SOURCE: NYC Board of Education, ODPC/Student Information Services, "1987-88 Poverty Components Listing," computer printout generated 06/17/87.*

## APPENDIX B.
## CHICAGO: High Schools Listed by School Type, 1984-85

| Types of High Schools | School | % Low-Income* | School | % Low-Income |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 18 schools | Kelvyn Park | 74.1 | Orr | 59.9 |
| | Clemente | 73.7 | Marshall | 58.8 |
| | Collins | 72.1 | Flower Vocational | 56.9 |
| | Wells | 68.1 | DuSable | 56.0 |
| | Crane | 67.1 | Cregier Vocational | 54.2 |
| | Juarez | 66.7 | Harper | 54.2 |
| | Manley | 65.0 | Near North | 54.1 |
| | Phillips | 64.0 | Tilden | 53.7 |
| | King | 62.6 | Farragut | 53.6 |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Carver | 52.8 | Senn | 39.1 |
| | Robeson | 51.9 | Gage Park | 37.3 |
| | Bowen | 51.8 | South Shore | 36.8 |
| | Englewood | 49.2 | Sullivan | 36.4 |
| | Hirsch | 47.9 | Kennedy | 35.9 |
| | Lakeview | 45.7 | Washington | 35.1 |
| | Lincoln Park | 44.9 | Foreman | 34.1 |
| | Jones Metro | 43.6 | Calumet | 33.8 |
| | Roosevelt | 41.4 | Corliss | 33.2 |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Austin | 32.6 | Amundsen | 19.5 |
| | Fenger | 31.1 | Hubbard | 17.3 |
| | Schurz | 30.7 | Mather | 16.7 |
| | Von Steuben | 30.5 | Taft | 15.2 |
| | Hyde Park | 26.8 | Morgan Park | 14.7 |
| | Kelly | 26.2 | Bogan | 13.9 |
| | Harlan | 25.9 | Curie | 12.8 |
| | Metro Magnet | 24.1 | Julian | 12.7 |
| | Steinmetz | 21.8 | Kenwood | 10.2 |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 6 schools | Westinghouse | 71.7 | Simeon | 39.6 |
| | Richards | 62.2 | Dunbar | 35.9 |
| | Prosser | 40.1 | Chicago | 33.3 |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 1 school | Young | 28.5 | | |
| EXAM 2 schools | Lindblom | 23.2 | | |
| | Lane | 16.2 | | |

**The number of students eligible to receive Title I services was used to determine the percentage of low-income students.*

*Appendix B lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 2-1, showing the breakdown of individual schools within each type of high school for each city. The schools are listed within each type of high school in descending order of percentage of low-income students.*

*SOURCE: "Plan for the Improvement of Instruction for Disadvantaged Students in the Chicago Public Schools, Seventh Year (1985-1986) Statistics," Report No. GF719, computer printout generated 8 October 1986.*

**APPENDIX B.**
**PHILADELPHIA: High Schools Listed by School Type, 1985-86**

| Types of High Schools | School | % Low-Income* | School | % Low-Income |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 7 schools | Strawberry Mansion | 65.6 | Edison | 57.7 |
| | Franklin | 64.3 | University City | 50.9 |
| | Penn | 62.4 | Gratz | 47.0 |
| | Kensington | 60.8 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 7 schools | West Philadelphia | 42.1 | Germantown | 33.9 |
| | South Philadelphia | 39.6 | Franklin Learning Center | 32.3 |
| | Bartram | 36.9 | Overbrook | 32.0 |
| | Olney | 36.2 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 7 schools | Parkway Alternative | 31.0 | Lincoln | 18.9 |
| | King | 30.6 | Washington | 13.7 |
| | Roxborough | 30.1 | Northeast | 10.9 |
| | Frankford | 22.1 | | |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 4 schools | Bok | 44.7 | | |
| | Dobbins | 37.5 | | |
| | Mastbaum | 31.0 | | |
| | Saul | 12.8 | | |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 3 schools | Creative & Performing Arts | 25.1 | | |
| | Bodine | 21.5 | | |
| | Carver | 14.0 | | |
| EXAM 3 schools | Masterman | 13.7 | | |
| | Girls | 11.3 | | |
| | Central | 10.4 | | |

**The number of AFDC recipients was used to determine the percentage of low-income students.*

*Appendix B lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 2-1, showing the breakdown of individual schools within each type of high school for each city. The schools are listed within each type of high school in descending order of percentage of low-income students.*

*SOURCE: School District of Philadelphia, Office of Planning, Research & Evaluation, "Superintendent's MIC, Management Information Center, 1986-87."*

## APPENDIX B.
## BOSTON: High Schools Listed by School Type, 1984-85

| Types of High School | School* | % Low-income** |
|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 5 schools | Charlestown | 45.5 |
| | Brighton | 36.2 |
| | Umana Tech | 33.3 |
| | East Boston | 31.8 |
| | Jamaica Plain | 28.3 |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 4 schools | Madison Park | 26.3 |
| | South Boston | 26.1 |
| | English High | 24.0 |
| | Dorchester | 19.7 |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 4 schools | Burke | 18.9 |
| | Copley Square | 17.6 |
| | West Roxbury | 13.7 |
| | Hyde Park | 10.7 |
| EXAM 3 schools | Boston Latin Academy | 30.5 |
| | Boston Tech | 22.9 |
| | Boston Latin School | 19.6 |

**Boston High School is missing as a nonselective school. Complete data were not available for this school, which is a half-day vocational work experience program.*
***The number of students receiving free or reduced lunch was used to determine the percentage of low-income students.*

*Appendix B lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 2-1, showing the breakdown of individual schools within each type of high school for each city. The schools are listed within each type of high school in descending order of percentage of low-income students.*

*SOURCE: "Massachusetts Department of Education, Bureau of Data Collection, Individual School Report October 1, 1984, Table 6 Disadvantaged Students," computer printout generated 07/24/85.*

## APPENDIX C.
## NEW YORK CITY: Percent of 9th Graders Reading Below National Average, School-by-School, 1984-85

| Types of High Schools | School | % | School | % | School | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 25 schools | Morris | 92.2 | East New York | 86.0 | Irving | 78.7 |
| | Monroe | 91.4 | Washington | 85.9 | Richman | 78.7 |
| | South Bronx | 90.4 | Addams | 83.8 | Smith | 78.3 |
| | East District | 89.7 | Dodge | 83.6 | Newtown | 77.5 |
| | T. Roosevelt | 88.7 | Bushwick | 82.9 | F.D. Roosevelt | 67.2 |
| | Jefferson | 88.4 | Walton | 82.7 | Richmond Hill | 58.9 |
| | Taft | 88.2 | Automotive | 80.6 | Curtis | 58.4 |
| | Maxwell | 86.4 | King | 80.4 | | |
| | Seward Park | 86.2 | Bacon | 79.8 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 25 schools | Hale | 88.6 | Jackson | 77.1 | Columbus | 68.4 |
| | Wingate | 87.4 | Flushing | 74.5 | Lincoln | 67.0 |
| | Erasmus Hall | 86.7 | Kennedy | 74.2 | Long Island City | 66.0 |
| | Whitney | 85.6 | Bryant | 73.3 | Hillcrest | 54.8 |
| | Brandeis | 84.5 | Park West | 72.1 | Bowne | 53.6 |
| | Clinton | 82.9 | Stevenson | 71.1 | Sheepshead Bay | 50.4 |
| | Childs | 79.8 | New Utrecht | 70.7 | Van Buren | 48.7 |
| | Gompers | 79.1 | Jay | 70.6 | | |
| | Chelsea | 78.5 | Fort Hamilton | 69.8 | | |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 26 schools | Prospect Heights | 88.5 | Madison | 66.1 | Lewis | 52.0 |
| | Boys & Girls | 87.5 | Adams | 64.4 | South Shore | 51.8 |
| | Tilden | 80.9 | Canarsie | 57.6 | Port Richmond | 50.2 |
| | Lane | 76.9 | Bayside | 56.7 | Tottenville | 47.9 |
| | Far Rockaway | 76.7 | Forest Hills | 55.8 | Cardozo | 46.5 |
| | Lafayette | 75.0 | Lehman | 54.5 | Wagner | 42.7 |
| | Springfield Gardens | 69.5 | Truman | 54.4 | H.S. Humanities | 34.3 |
| | Jamaica | 68.9 | New Dorp | 52.5 | Midwood | 13.5 |
| | Cleveland | 67.7 | Beach Channel | 52.3 | | |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 9 schools | Queens | 75.3 | McKee | 47.1 | | |
| | Graphic Comm. Arts | 69.9 | Aviation | 43.7 | | |
| | Fashion Industries | 64.9 | Edison | 42.7 | | |
| | Grady | 63.4 | Art & Design | 35.0 | | |
| | Westinghouse | 62.4 | | | | |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 9 schools | Barton | 68.2 | Bergtraum | 44.5 | | |
| | Thomas | 66.8 | Randolph | 40.4 | | |
| | Martin | 61.3 | Manhattan Center | 20.6 | | |
| | Dewey | 53.6 | Harris | 0.9 | | |
| | Murrow | 51.1 | | | | |
| EXAM 4 schools | Brooklyn Tech | (Median of 0% assumed by school system.) | | | | |
| | LaGuardia | | | | | |
| | Stuyvesant | | | | | |
| | Bronx Science | | | | | |

*Appendix C lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 4-12.*

*SOURCE: Harriet Rabb, et al., "Promoting Integration in the New York City High Schools" (New York: Education Law Project, Columbia Law School, July 1987), Exhibit M, pp. 2-3.*

**APPENDIX C.**
**CHICAGO: Percent of 9th Graders Reading Below National Average, School-by-School, Fall 1983**

| Types of High Schools | School | % | School | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 18 schools | Orr | 96 | Tilden | 93 |
| | Phillips | 95 | Crane | 91 |
| | Flower | 95 | King | 91 |
| | Cregier | 95 | Farragut | 91 |
| | Harper | 95 | Kelvyn Park | 87 |
| | Collins | 94 | Wells | 87 |
| | DuSable | 94 | Near North | 87 |
| | Manley | 93 | Clemente | 86 |
| | Marshall | 93 | Juarez | 76 |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Calumet | 95 | Sullivan | 83 |
| | Englewood | 94 | Senn | 79 |
| | Robeson | 93 | Foreman | 78 |
| | South Shore | 90 | Lakeview | 77 |
| | Carver | 87 | Roosevelt | 72 |
| | Bowen | 86 | Kennedy | 70 |
| | Hirsch | 86 | Washington | 63 |
| | Gage Park | 86 | Lincoln Park | 51 |
| | Corliss | 86 | Jones | |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Austin | 94 | Steinmetz | 67 |
| | Harlan | 86 | Bogan | 63 |
| | Fenger | 85 | Metro | 61 |
| | Kelly | 80 | Curie | 60 |
| | Schurz | 78 | Morgan Park | 57 |
| | Hubbard | 76 | Taft | 55 |
| | Julian | 76 | Mather | 51 |
| | Amundsen | 72 | Kenwood | 37 |
| | Hyde Park | 67 | Von Steuben | 34 |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 6 schools | Richards | 87 | Chicago | 77 |
| | Westinghouse | 83 | Dunbar | 73 |
| | Simeon | 78 | Prosser | 59 |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 1 school | Young | 17 | | |
| EXAM 2 schools | Lindblom | 26 | | |
| | Lane | 12 | | |

*Appendix C lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 4-12.*

*SOURCE: Designs for Change, "The Bottom Line: Chicago's Failing Schools and How to Save Them" (Chicago: Author, 1985).*

**APPENDIX D.**
**CHICAGO: 11th Grade TAP Median Percentiles for Math, School-by-School, Fall 1987**

| Types of High Schools | School | % | School | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW-INCOME 18 schools | Phillips | 18.0 | Marshall | 21.0 |
| | King | 18.0 | Flower | 21.0 |
| | Orr | 18.0 | Cregier | 21.0 |
| | DuSable | 18.0 | Tilden | 21.0 |
| | Harper | 18.0 | Farragut | 21.0 |
| | Clemente | 21.0 | Kelvyn Park | 25.0 |
| | Collins | 21.0 | Wells | 25.0 |
| | Crane | 21.0 | Near North | 28.0 |
| | Manley | 21.0 | Juarez | 32.0 |
| NON-SELECTIVE LOW- TO MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Englewood | 21.0 | Senn | 28.0 |
| | South Shore | 21.0 | Gage Park | 28.0 |
| | Carver | 25.0 | Hirsch | 32.0 |
| | Robeson | 25.0 | Jones | 32.0 |
| | Bowen | 25.0 | Roosevelt | 32.0 |
| | Foreman | 25.0 | Sullivan | 32.0 |
| | Calumet | 25.0 | Kennedy | 32.0 |
| | Corliss | 25.0 | Washington | 32.0 |
| | Lakeview | 28.0 | Lincoln Park | 50.0 |
| NON-SELECTIVE MODERATE-INCOME 18 schools | Austin | 21.0 | Hubbard | 37.0 |
| | Harlan | 21.0 | Metro | 40.0 |
| | Fenger | 25.0 | Curie | 40.0 |
| | Schurz | 25.0 | Mather | 43.0 |
| | Kelly | 28.0 | Morgan Park | 43.0 |
| | Julian | 28.0 | Bogan | 43.0 |
| | Steinmetz | 32.0 | Hyde Park | 50.0 |
| | Amundsen | 32.0 | Von Steuben | 60.0 |
| | Taft | 32.0 | Kenwood | 60.0 |
| SELECTIVE VOCATIONAL 6 schools | Richards | 21.0 | Dunbar | 32.0 |
| | Westinghouse | 28.0 | Chicago | 32.0 |
| | Simeon | 32.0 | Prosser | 40.0 |
| SELECTIVE MAGNET 1 school | Young | 75.0 | | |
| EXAM 2 schools | Lindblom | 60.0 | | |
| | Lane | 75.0 | | |

*Appendix D lists school-by-school data summarized in Table 5-5.*

*SOURCE: Chicago Public Schools, "Fall 1987 Test Scores and Selected School Characteristics: High Schools" (Chicago: Author, 1988).*