DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 851 UD 027 455

AUTHOR Dougherty, Van; And Others
TITLE Current Practice: Is It Enough?
INSTITUTION Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
SPONS AGENCY Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Jun 89
NOTE 36p
AVAILABLE FROM ECS Distribution Center, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, CO 80295 (AR-89-1; $6.00).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Black Students; *Cooperative Programs; Coordination; Disadvantaged Youth; Dropout Prevention; Educational Change; Educational Strategies; *High Risk Students; Parent School Relationship; School Effectiveness; *School Policy; *School Restructuring; Secondary Education; Services; Social Status; Staff Development; *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current practice for youth at risk of not successfully making the transition to adulthood in six urban secondary schools. It describes the major elements of at-risk policies and programs and raises concerns about the strategies currently in place at the sites. The following strategies are discussed: (1) curriculum and instruction intervention; (2) social and support services; (3) staff development; (4) world-of-work experiences; (5) collaboration with other agencies; and (6) district leadership. This paper also questions whether the current "state of the art" thinking about youth at risk is enough to meet the challenge these students provide. The following areas of particular concern are discussed: (1) lack of information on outcomes, use of data, program evaluation, and student monitoring; and (2) lack of coordination of at-risk programs and strategies with links to school curricular and social support programs. Finally, this paper examines secondary school characteristics and their impact on at-risk youth, and suggests a framework for thinking about restructuring schools for academic success and achievement for all students. The following topics are discussed concerning this issue: (1) time; (2) curriculum; (3) pedagogy; (4) staffing; (5) location; (6) social organization of instruction; (7) social control; and (8) school-family interaction. A list of 18 references is included. (JS)

Current Practice: Is It Enough?

YOUTH AT RISK

CURRENT PRACTICE:

IS IT ENOUGH?

by

Van Dougherty

Richard de Lone

Allan Odden

Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

June 1989

Copies of this book are available for $6.00 from the ECS Distribution Center, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295, 303-830-3692. Ask for No. AR-89-1.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295. The Washington office is in the Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, Suite 248, Washington, D.C. 20001.

It is the policy of the Education Commission of the States to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Acknowledgments

Van Dougherty, project director, Richard de Lone and Allan Odden would like to thank the team of researchers -- Diane August, Andrea Baker, Carol Lincoln, David Marsh, Bob Palaich, Esther Rodriquez, Bernardine Watson and Mark Weston — who helped plan the study design, conducted the school interviews and prepared the information which led to this working paper and provided invaluable advice throughout this effort. The authors would also like to express appreciation to Rex Brown, Kent McGuire, Frank Newman and Judi Nicholes for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper and to Sherry Freeland Walker and Anna M. West for their skilled editing of the paper.

Special appreciation is expressed to district and school staff and students in each of the sites visited for their time and information so willingly shared with the researchers.

Finally, we would like to thank the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation whose interest and support made this work possible.

Contents

Foreword

This paper is the ninth of an Education Commission of the States (ECS) series focusing on the problems of youth at risk of not successfully making the transition to adulthood - the dropout, the underachiever and far too many others of our young people who end up disconnected from school and society. This paper examines current practice for youth at risk in six urban secondary schools. It describes the major elements of "at-risk" policies and programs and questions whether the current paradigm governing services for youth at risk can meet the challenge these students provide. The paper concludes by inviting policy makers to encourage schools to provide academic success and achievement for all students.

Van Dougherty is a policy analyst at ECS. Most recently, while continuing her involvement on issues of school finance and school improvement, she has focused her efforts on the commission's Youth At risk and Re:Learning projects. She directed the case study research the results of which are reported in this paper. Richard De Lone is a private consultant with a long history of concern for the problems of youth at risk. Most recently he has worked with the Philadelphia Public Schools on restructuring and redefining several of the city's comprehensive high schools. Allan Odden, formerly director of the ECS finance center, is a professor at the University of Southern California School of Educational Administration and is director of the Southern California Policy Analysis for California Education Center.

Finally, we would like to thank the foundations that made this study and the working paper series possible. The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation directly supported the case study research and the preparation of this report. In addition, publication of the working paper series was made possible by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Frank Newman
ECS President

Bob Palaich
Project Director

Introduction

One of the major responsibilities of American society is the education of its youth. A crisis currently exists: the undereducation of its youth and the implications that brings to both youth and the future of the society.

In the mid-1980s, the problems of school dropouts and "youth at risk" emerged as national concerns. Too many youngsters were dropping out of school, graduating with inadequate academic competencies, not becoming employed and at risk of being lost to society as productive individuals. To counter these trends, solutions appeared that were fairly straightforward. Decreasing the numbers of students who drop out of school became a priority across the nation and schools responded. They initiated dropout prevention strategies primarily aimed at remediation of basic skills, truancy prevention, part-time work opportunities and a plethora of social service programs that were designed to help students with personal issues such as drugs, pregnancy, gangs or family stress.

These strategies, when well implemented, can yield modest improvements in school attendance and retention rates and they may help the student feel better about coming to school. However, they reflect the philosophy that it is the student who must be changed to fit the prevailing culture of the education system, a system that persists in its inability to examine seriously and to change the structures of schooling that promote failure and alienation.

Service providers who work within individual programs soon realize that students enrolled in these efforts have several common characteristics: low-self esteem, no sense of accomplishment, no sense of the future and an inability to connect to society — all products of failure and alienation — none of which is easily amenable to a programmatic response. What started out as a simple view of the problem, largely cast as dropping out and solvable through a variety of independent and fragmented programs, turned out to be much larger, more complex and more intransigent than first thought.

Policy makers and educators need to understand that academic success is a powerful tool in combating many of the symptoms that the dropout prevention programs treat. So far, a connection has not been made between student academic failure and the structure of education. Something more is needed. Academic success for all youth will not occur absent a commitment to restructure the system to provide high-quality, equitable education for all students in order to eliminate achievement gaps across groups of students, to decrease the percentage of students from poor and minority backgrounds who have low academic performance and to help all students obtain higher-order thinking skills. Fundamental restructuring means some far-reaching changes in the governance, curriculum, pedagogic strategies and organization of schools, as opposed to efforts to add services or separate programs. For youth at risk of education failure, restructuring school policy and practice is critical.

The first half of this paper is based on a study conducted in 1988 to examine and describe current practice in six urban secondary schools with respect to youth at risk. It describes the major elements of at-risk youth policies and programs found in the six sites and raises

concerns about the strategies currently in place in the sites. The remainder of the paper questions whether the current "state of the art" thinking about youth at risk is enough, examines secondary school characteristics and their impact on at-risk youth, and suggests a framework for thinking about restructuring schools for academic success and achievement for all students.

Practice and Policy in the Six Sites

In the spring of 1988, researchers visited six mid-size and large urban secondary schools in Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; Portland, Oregon; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Racine, Wisconsin; and Raleigh, North Carolina. Each had high populations of poor and black students and were targeted by state and district officials as schools successful in working with youth at risk. Rather than focusing on individual programs and their structures, the study team examined the schools' definitions of youth at risk, philosophies regarding these students, the major intervention and prevention strategies used and how well these strategies were integrated within the regular school structure. (The site descriptions contained in this paper refer only to the particular school studied and do not reflect activities of other schools within the district or of the district itself.)

From research on schools, studies of youth at risk and their own experiences, the researchers began by identifying several guiding hypotheses they considered necessary for schools to work effectively with youth at risk.

These included:

1. Needs are defined based on sophisticated definitions and understandings that encompass student needs and characteristics, school or system inadequacies and environmental/social factors outside the school.

2. Strategies evolve from a careful process of analysis, planning and development of efforts in which all the school's personnel are involved and share a common commitment.

3. Strategies include curriculum, pedagogical and supportive services specifically tailored to the particular needs of the school's clientele.

4. Strategies are not marginal programs but are imbedded within a clear school agenda. Furthermore strategies are consciously and substantively integrated into and coordinated with the school's core programs.

5. Strategies have clear goals and expectations that integrate the academic, world-of-work and personal arenas.

6. Strategies have effectiveness, efficiency and evaluation measures based on appropriate and varied feedback mechanisms.

7. Strategies include comprehensive collaborations with a variety of agencies outside the school.

8. Strategies include a focus on improved student self-esteem, increased student locus of control, greater social bonding and participation in shared values of society.

9. Strategies have visible, ongoing support and leadership from both school and district administrators.

Using the hypotheses as a guide, the researchers set forth to find out how many of these strategies were present in the schools studied and whether they made a difference in how successful schools were in working with the educationally at-risk student.

In brief, the six schools that were studied generally:

- Assumed that the "problem" was with the student and designed strategies to change student behavior
- Did not target the school for major change, particularly restructuring of curriculum and pedagogy that emphasized thinking, problem-solving and communication skills, or the fundamental social organization of the school
- Assumed that psychological supports will help students in their academic endeavors and therefore provided a wide array of social and personal support services to address the personal problems faced by many of their students
- Offered small amounts of staff development focused on the major intervention strategy
- Provided world-of-work experiences, most strongly focused on improving vocational education, and worked with the business community to provide part-time and summer jobs for youth
- Collaborated, to some degree, with an array of agencies outside the school, including community, neighborhood, educational and governmental agencies
- Benefited from both initial and ongoing district administrative leadership and program funding

The Individual School Philosophies

One of the more interesting findings was how school staff viewed the causes of students being "at risk," the problems these students face and the schools' responses to those problems. How staff defined and perceived the causes and symptoms of being educationally at risk were directly linked to types of strategies schools employed.

All but one site perceived that the problems stemmed from social, economic and family factors rather than problems with the school or the education system. Only one site — Pittsburgh — targeted school factors such as instruction and designed its strategy around certain improvements in that area. The Pittsburgh program bet that "the best at-risk program strategy was the best overall school improvement strategy" by focusing on teaching strategies, pedagogical skills and providing staff development aimed at those activities.

With the exception of Pittsburgh, all the schools studied provided intensive counseling, concentrating on pregnancy, drug abuse, career exploration and family problems. All tried

to improve the school climate through better discipline and higher expectations. Three of the schools — Miami, Los Angeles and Portland — emphasized eradicating gang activities. Two schools stressed improved school spirit and student involvement in the school.

Four of the six sites targeted all students in the school, not just those students specifically labeled by the school as "at risk." This strategy, while not targeting the academic program for change, included several schoolwide initiatives for improving the academic and personal conditions of at-risk students.

In Los Angeles, school staff viewed the problems of youth at risk as community problems, including substance abuse and fractured family life with poor family support networks. They saw students as having the innate cognitive abilities needed to succeed if they had the support necessary to come to school and meaningfully engage in classroom learning.

The school's goal was to provide the psychological and social support services needed for the students to achieve academically. The staff also believed that it was important to integrate all students into the regular academic program and to hold high academic expectations for all. While remedial work was offered to assist students with poor skills, the intent was to help them work within a regular core curriculum, to graduate from high school, with a heavy emphasis placed on postsecondary attendance following high school.

Another important focus of this school's strategy was to make the school climate safe and orderly by improving discipline policies, eradicating gangs and drugs, raising student expectations and involving students in their school.

In Miami, the school identified poverty, lack of legitimate economic opportunity and insufficient support from parents as placing a large number of the school's population at risk. The primary goal of the school was to help the student through various social supports and to improve the school climate. A large part of the effort was counseling and mentoring to help students realize that adults at the school cared about them — an attempt to make up for what was missing in the students' lives outside of the school.

Another key effort in Miami was a student monitoring system designed to provide information on the school's at-risk population. The system was designed to help the principal, assistant principals and counseling staff identify students in need of various services and to coordinate services. The philosophy behind this strategy was to ensure that, while not labeling certain students as being at risk, no student was allowed to fall through the cracks.

In Portland, school staff and administration were united in their assessment that their students' problems were caused by a society that fosters dysfunctional families. Because of this, their efforts were geared toward improving student achievement and attendance, changing inappropriate behavior and improving interpersonal relationships.

Again, the primary efforts directed toward those at risk were outside the academic realm. Staff believed that the barriers many students face — poverty, drug abuse, child abuse, teen pregnancy, gangs — must be broken down before learning can take place. However, staff members attempted to operate on a daily basis without making distinctions between "regular" and "at-risk" youth.

Like Portland, Racine had multiple programs designed to reach at-risk youth. Unlike Portland, however, the school staff and administration believed the causes of risk are twofold: students were not motivated to do the work required to graduate, and they generally did not accept the responsibility for their own education.

For this reason, Racine emphasized remediation and counseling to help students learn basic skills and graduate from high school. Students were selected for such programs based on the state definition for being at risk: dropout, absent/truant, school-age parent or adjudicated delinquent. Students who fit one of the above four criteria and were one or more years behind their peers in math or reading were considered at risk.

Raleigh's school personnel cited low self-esteem and social, economic and familial factors, such as being from single-parent families, as contributing to students being at risk. In general, the school tried to reach those potentially at risk through its three-part magnet program concentrating on mathematics and science, performing arts and humanities.

The school also focused on the students' emotional needs. Counseling was a high priority as it was in the other sites visited. However, unlike those schools, Raleigh complemented its efforts with the magnet curriculum, available to all students. The school did not attempt to target certain students for certain courses, but rather to place all students in appropriate classes and provide additional academic, social and psychological supports for the students who need them.

Additionally, a long-term school-improvement program recently was initiated to focus on three areas: school/community communications, school climate and diversity of student population.

The Pittsburgh strategy was unique in its emphasis on a systemwide approach. This philosophy encompassed staff development in effective teaching strategies, monitoring of all student performance with individual feedback to teachers, and outstanding vocational education programs. Students in this school were not targeted as being at risk and, thus, the school had no specific programs for at-risk students.

The school's philosophy was that in order to keep all youngsters in school and achieving, the overall quality of instruction needed to improve. This involved three strategies, along with the effective schools program: an emphasis on vocational education and work experience, the use of magnet programs in international studies and high technology and a major investment in staff development.

The Major Strategies

The comments that follow are not intended to provide in-depth descriptions or analyses of the sites or individual programs. They are, however, designed to provide an overall picture of what could be considered typical urban secondary schools' approaches to students who are at risk of failure.

The information covers topics such as: overall characteristics of the strategy and how the strategy fits into the general school structure; specific elements of academic program initiatives, curriculum, instruction and staff development; social support services and

counseling; world of work, vocational education and experiential learning; and collaborations with outside agencies.

1. Curriculum and instruction intervention

Changing instruction and curriculum were not strong components of the intervention strategies in the sites studied. The regular academic program generally was not a target of change in these schools' at-risk student initiatives, although the academic intent of all programs was to help students learn basic skills and graduate from high school.

However, certain academic elements were present in the programs. First, there was a strong remedial emphasis in Miami, Raleigh and Racine. In Miami, that emphasis was tied directly to passage of the state competency examination given in the 10th grade, and instruction focused on the particular test questions.

Racine's Standards Program provided remedial courses and summer school for students who did not pass competency tests in reading, English, math and American government. Providing remedial instruction to students experiencing difficulty in learning was a major thrust of the school's attempt to reduce the number of students at risk of not graduating from high school.

Raleigh provided remediation for all students who failed to meet state promotion standards or who were identified as in danger of failing to meet the standards. Students attended state-funded summer school, and those in grade 10 and up could enroll in remedial work during the school year.

At the same time, remedial reading and mathematics laboratories, often key strategies in the past, were not characteristic of the academic interventions in these schools. Rather, these schools sought to engage students in the regular academic program and to provide the extra counseling and emotional supports students needed to achieve. This clearly is a change from many strategies of the past, when at-risk students were programmed into new remedial programs and courses which usually had lower academic expectations and less academic rigor.

With the exception of Raleigh, the schools generally did not seek to restructure the curriculum. Only the Raleigh program could claim an emphasis on curriculum restructuring because of its magnet programs in three core curricular areas — math, science and humanities. In addition, no school sought to change its curriculum to one that more directly addressed thinking, problem solving and communication skills, skills increasingly needed for successful participation in the labor force.

While Pittsburgh emphasized instructional improvement overall, it did not try to restructure its curriculum. However, Pittsburgh is dropping the "general" curriculum track and will require students to select an academic/college-bound program or its high-quality vocational education program. The rationale behind this decision is that the general curriculum does not provide the focus or direction students need to continue their education after high school or to go into the job market with marketable skills.

The Portland school is also seeking to abolish multiple tracks by eliminating the lower and remedial paths. Only two tracks would be left — intermediate and advanced.

2. Social and personal support services

In contrast to the lack of attention they paid to curriculum and instructional components, most schools focused on social and personal support services. Except for Pittsburgh which emphasized academic program improvement, all schools provided a high level of individual and group counseling to youth at risk.

The reasons for this emerged in discussions with many school staff. Time after time, staff indicated that they can't even begin to focus on academics because so many students bring long lists of personal needs to school with them. Education becomes less than a number one priority when students are hungry, alienated, on drugs, abused or have no family or community support outside the school. So, these efforts have focused on making at-risk students comfortable with coming to school.

In keeping with that analysis, these schools tended to provide both a variety and an intensity of personal and social support services for their at-risk students. These program elements clearly reflected their philosophy that the underlying problems of at-risk students have economic, social and family roots. They also reflected the reality that many at-risk students in urban, inner-city neighborhoods live in difficult family situations, have above-average health needs, lack emotional support and benefit from peer and adult role models.

The most intensive personal supports were found in Los Angeles, where this was the prime intervention and seen as one of the school's strongest aspects. Students received psychological and college counseling and family therapy. Peer counselors and faculty mentors provided an atmosphere of support within the school. Outreach counselors made home visits, helped students link up with community social-service agencies, provided tutoring and complemented these activities with monitoring of grades, attendance and behavior problems.

While most of the at-risk counseling activities were imbedded into the schools' existing counseling programs, the Raleigh guidance program gave each counselor responsibility for specific groups of students, e.g., one for each grade level, two counselors for at-risk youth, one for academically gifted and a dean of students. Staff felt that assigning a group of students with similar needs to one particular counselor allowed them to attend more effectively to the needs of that group.

Although many counseling activities existed in these sites, they were usually relegated to the traditional form of counseling, one-on-one meetings in the counselor's office, small-group counseling or a component of counseling within a small "at-risk" program. Classroom teachers also provided counseling help to students in many cases.

However, according to one researcher, school staffs were not very creative in providing advanced classroom management strategies that incorporated positive behavioral management, use of cooperative learning or other innovative approaches. Consequently, students were counseled in a way not necessarily linked to support for academic achievement in the class. For example, in Miami, counseling was viewed as a stand-alone activity, focusing primarily on employment opportunities, self-esteem and trouble-shooting, having little to do with academics and not integrated into other school activities.

3. Staff development

Staff development related to at-risk issues was not a major element in any of the sites visited. Five of the six sites provided only small amounts of special staff training on how to work with the academic needs of students at risk. Most sites, however, did tie staff development activities to their primary intervention activity.

In Los Angeles, Miami and Portland, staff development was linked to social supports issues, the primary intervention strategy. The Raleigh school, which used magnet programs as its primary strategy, emphasized considerable staff development in curriculum content. In Pittsburgh, which focused on instructional improvement, staff development dealt with instruction and the school structures that facilitate staff training.

Most interesting was the lack of staff development devoted to instructional skills, although most at-risk students had poor grades and test scores. The assumption, again, seemed to be that poor academic performance was an affective problem of the student rather than an instructional problem of the school. This was the case even though the schools in this study — like most schools everywhere — tended to use only one form of instruction — teacher lecture. Alternative grouping of students, cooperative academic teams, project-oriented learning, i.e., instructional strategies other than those normally used in schools, received little attention.

Portland and Pittsburgh were the exceptions. In Portland, a staff position was created to help teachers assist at-risk youngsters in becoming more successful in school. Knowing that regular teachers might not have the skills or knowledge to work with some students, this special teacher provided resources in the form of effective teaching strategies, new curricular ideas and technical assistance for teachers working with students at risk.

In Pittsburgh, staff development activities supported the pedagogical strategies being implemented in the school. Teachers received a mini-sabbatical away from regular classrooms to try new teaching strategies and receive feedback from clinical resident teachers. Although staff in the school felt that the activities were valuable, some observers have questioned whether it has had much impact on the way teachers teach. They cited the difficulty in transferring knowledge from the training setting to the classroom and the need for peer and supervisory support and peer reinforcement in the school. Accordingly, the system is beginning to move toward a school-based model of instructional improvement.

4. World-of-Work Experiences

The variety and intensity of world-of-work experiences was similar to that of social and personal support services. In Pittsburgh, the vocational education program was used widely to help keep students at risk of dropping out interested in continuing their education. In fact, more than half of the students received vocational education (Skills Center) diplomas. Each student had to meet the requirements of the general curriculum in addition to a state requirement calling for completion of at least two years in one vocational area. The areas included machine operation, printing, food service, child development and drafting design. Because of concern over the lack of academic preparedness of some vocational students, Pittsburgh is looking at teaming vocational and academic teachers.

In Racine, the vocational classes, work experience and employment readiness programs targeted students who were failing two or more courses. One program used a school-within-a-school concept to provide modified English, social studies and employment readiness training to these students. Additionally, junior high school students served as elementary school teachers' aides and were placed in work programs as seniors.

The usual complement of vocational education classes was offered in Raleigh, along with a joint school/industry effort to give students opportunities to learn an occupation through on-the-job training. Students received credits for both the classwork and the work experience (for which they were paid). An industry coordinator at the school helped students make a smooth transition from high school to the work place by offering aid in job placement, career counseling, job-seeking skills, etc. Another on-site teacher provided job readiness training, including personal growth and development.

A three-year program in Portland focused on employability for at-risk youth. The Financial Services Academy provided practical training in financial services and coordination with basic academic studies. In addition to regular high school studies, students took courses integrating English, math, social studies and business and relating them to labor-market needs. School staff recruited to the program 9th-grade students who were not working up to potential, who had low self-images, who were identified as potential dropouts or who had poor attendance.

The Miami school used the Cities-in-Schools approach, providing a multi-year sequence of job training, employment, remedial instruction, intensive counseling for both the student and his/her family and human/social services to at-risk students. Participants were guaranteed enrollment in summer work-experience programs and part-time work during the school year.

5. Collaboration with other agencies

While there was a mixture of types of collaborations with agencies outside the school, the general trend was for the school to collaborate with several agencies. These ranged from welfare and juvenile correction agencies, to the media, to welfare offices, community and junior colleges and the Urban League. While these collaborations were not that typical a decade ago, they are being increasingly seen as an important part of an overall strategy today.

The most prevalent form of collaboration took the form of business/school collaborations to provide work experiences and job training for students. This was the case in Racine, Pittsburgh and Miami. In Los Angeles, one program targeted 150 students to receive coordinated services from the school and community agencies, including group, individual and family counseling; crisis intervention; drug-abuse counseling and intervention; job preparation and referral; emergency shelter; tutoring; pregnancy case work; parenting groups and parenting programs. These services were brought to the school whenever possible through an on-site coordinator who worked with the school and other agencies.

However, in many instances, collaboration amounted to only a token effort and remained an informal, *ad hoc* relationship between school and agency. At one site, top school officials indicated a great deal of reluctance to suffer through the growing pains of

collaboration with outside agencies. It was seen as an irritant, another set of guidelines and expectations that complicated daily life in the school.

6. District leadership

Districts have taken strong leadership roles in implementing and carrying out the at-risk strategies examined in the schools. Districts generally have not let schools fend for themselves in improving the condition of students at risk. They also have not abandoned the at-risk problem after initial program development. Rather, districts continued to provide leadership and play an active role for these school initiatives.

Specific district efforts have included helping schools develop at-risk student programs, developing and helping to implement student identification and tracking mechanisms, requiring schools to use a case-management approach to the array of services provided to individual at-risk students, providing funding (especially for magnet programs), providing staff development and improving general district support services. No district provided all of these services, but several provided many.

Racine's district leaders have continued to support staff ideas for new programs. They have found local money to support these programs through a very active and large research department at the central office, provided technical assistance to help the high school develop pilot projects and continued to support the programs over the long term.

On the down side, there have been problems. Perhaps because of the multiplicity of programs operating within the district, program management has been fragmented, there has been little integration among programs within the district, and the roles for teachers, administrators, counselors and parents have not been clearly defined or articulated. Nonetheless, district leadership clearly has been the impetus for continued school focus on the at-risk issues.

In Raleigh, the district leaders provided the resources, both staff and materials, necessary for the magnet school to function. This included additional teachers, curriculum, teacher inservice training and assistance in writing grants. The district also developed a model guidance program to enable counselors to organize the counseling components in the school.

Pittsburgh's superintendent and staff involved teachers and other local school personnel in planning staff-development programs and instructional improvement. Consequently, there was widespread acceptance and approval among teachers for these initiatives.

In conclusion, the schools studied clearly were concerned about their student population — the majority are at risk of educational failure. Evidence from the six sites in this study substantiated the strong attention paid to programmatic strategies. But will the program's small size, decisions about who should participate in the programs and relative isolation within the school be barriers to reaching a growing number of students in need of these services? Indeed, staff in all the schools reported that there are far more students who need these special programs than there is available space.

Is something more needed? Are dropout prevention programs, social supports programs, more counseling and basic skills remediation enough to eliminate achievement gaps across

groups of students, to decrease the percentage of students from poor and minority backgrounds who have low academic performance, to increase the numbers of students who acquire higher-order thinking skills and engage in meaningful employment or postsecondary experiences after high school?

What Was Missing and What It Means

While the strategies used by the six schools conformed to recent research on dropout prevention and programmatic characteristics that practitioners say works, researchers found several elements troubling and other elements missing.

While helping the student with social and personal issues and making the school a pleasant place to be are both laudable goals, the researchers were concerned that, with the exception of Pittsburgh, little attention had been paid to the academic needs of the students or to factors related to the school or education process. This tends to excuse a school from responsibility for academic success of all of its students. As one researcher remarked, "These kids may feel better about coming to school, but it is not clear that they feel better about learning."

What the lack of focus on academic, curricular and structural decisions represents is not clear. Schools may believe the regular academic program is good enough, even high quality, and that at-risk students simply needed additional non-academic help to perform more successfully. Or, school systems may be more comfortable focusing on student change rather than curriculum, instruction or school change as primary ingredients of at-risk student programs.

But the inescapable conclusion is that regular instructional and curriculum programs generally are not considered major targets for change. And it is ironic that the students who are most in need of social services are most often those students who also need the most intensive academic services.

Second, the focus on vocational education and work experience raises questions about many state education reform programs, which tend to increase academic and decrease vocational programs without offering extra academic aid for students at risk of school failure.

It also raises questions about the school's ability to provide quality work-experience programs and academic interventions when the major incentive for many students is simply the job, most of which are part-time and pay minimum wage. Some school staff said they believe that some students who want to work should not do so because of their poor academic standing.

Third, the lack of more comprehensive collaborative relationships with outside agencies may prove fatal in the long term. If school personnel are as overwhelmed by social, health and psychological needs of students as they indicated, in the long term they must find ways to work collegially with outside agencies. These agencies can provide the expertise and variety of services that many students need in order for the schools to focus on academics and learning.

In addition to questions about some of the strategies used, researchers were concerned about what they didn't find. Two areas of particular concern, given the programmatic approach used widely in five of the six sites, were: (1) lack of information on outcomes,

use of data, program evaluation and student monitoring and (2) lack of coordination of at-risk programs and strategies with links to school curricular and social supports programs.

Data, Evaluation and Monitoring

In many cases, the combination of state and district mandates is creating increasingly sophisticated data bases that make it possible to identify at-risk students and to track both their academic and nonacademic (social/behavioral) progress in school. However, few schools in the study were using these data. Fewer individuals in the specific schools were aware that these data even existed.

Most local educators interviewed felt that the strategies they were using were "working" and, indeed, the dropout rate was down in nearly all schools. But information on why the dropout rate had decreased simply was not available. Data on how certain groups of students were faring academically and what courses they tended to take were equally unavailable.

Site administrators had not worked out a strategy for feeding such data into program planning activities. District staff had not created mechanisms for injecting these data and their implications into school developmental activities. And, while individual students continued to be evaluated using common techniques such as standardized test scores, scant attention was given to how groups of students involved in special programs or activities fared over time.

In Miami, however, a computerized system to monitor student interactions with administrative and counseling staff has been implemented. The system is maintained districtwide, but reports are generated in each office within each school. The amount of detail is left to the discretion of the staff person interacting with the student. The district office guarantees the overnight input of school forms that are turned in to the district. Any administrative or counseling staff person who needs to work with a particular student will have access to their complete record of interactions for the past three years. It is hoped that by collecting this information over time and making it available to school staff, better decisions will be made on behalf of all students, especially those at risk.

Likewise, program evaluation was virtually nonexistent. These schools simply did not know if their programs were working. While they tended to have some type of outcome data, the data often were not linked to the targeted at-risk students. Even if they had been, schools would have had a difficult time determining cause and effect because of the lack of data. If the programs were working, schools and districts would have been hard put to say why.

Evaluative data are important, and schools need conceptual models — if not causal models — of cause and effect. For example, in Raleigh, achievement data were available on a schoolwide basis for the magnet programs, but neither the school nor district could provide data on the neighborhood at-risk students who were attending the school. The study, therefore, was unable to determine whether the schoolwide data available indicated improvements for all students or just for those "bused in" for the magnet school programs.

As researchers have indicated, much time, effort and money will be wasted unless there is evidence that (1) certain prevention or intervention programs are effective when compared to regular school programs; (2) certain program components actually reduce dropout rates or improve student learning; and (3) costs of programs are reasonable in light of measured outcomes.[1]

Data use and program evaluation clearly are areas for future improvement. While schools and states have begun collecting data, they have taken only the first steps — if that many — toward fully using the data to evaluate programs.

Coordination of Efforts

Although several sites had varying numbers of "programs" designed to serve student needs, few had direct links to what was happening in other areas of the school. Teachers were often astonished to hear that certain programs existed within their school. The programs themselves were isolated and not designed to provide a continuum of services to the students. Sometimes it seemed by chance that a student would "find" a service, academic or social, that he or she needed.

This issue is closely related to the lack of relevant information and data on students as they move through school. Schools generally don't know how to use information about any student, much less those who may be most at risk. Additionally, there is seldom an infrastructure in place to collect, analyze, coordinate and use information on students, especially those who are enrolled in isolated programs. This type of shared, schoolwide information is vital if schools are to coordinate their responses to student needs.[2]

Another issue related to program coordination is the lack of time for staff members to share information and knowledge about students and how to translate that knowledge into practice. Most commonly staff who work in the specialized at-risk programs are isolated from staff in the regular programs, not only physically but also with respect to planning and administrative functions. Each has his or her own limited time to provide instructional and other supports to students and very seldom time to coordinate and support each other's activities.

In the final analysis, educators and policy makers must be constantly checking to see if all students are learning. Better assessments of students and more robust information on students are necessary to pinpoint existing and potential problems a child may experience. Likewise, better information about program and student outcomes will assist schools and teachers to plan and fund effective prevention and intervention strategies. Additionally, given the large numbers of "at-risk programs" within a school, coordination of these programs both across the programs and the entire school is essential to ensure that the strategies are linked to student needs.

The State of the Art: Is It Enough?

The schools studied were, for the most part, undertaking serious efforts that accorded well with the current state-of-the-art thinking on youth at risk and the rather limited research base supporting it.

These efforts could generally be characterized as:

1. Efforts to provide at-risk students extra supports so that they could succeed in school (social services, work experience, incentives, remedial education, etc.)

2. Modest efforts to modify school environments to accommodate the needs of at-risk students (school climate, discipline, school spirit, etc.)

3. Efforts to blend overall school-improvement strategies with combinations of the above

Research shows that such efforts, well implemented, can yield modest improvements in school attendance and retention rates. There is also evidence to suggest they can lead to some improvements in academic performance, post-high school employment and/or postsecondary educational enrollment. But, for the most part, these efforts reflect the idea that it is the student, not the school, who is deficient. They assume it is the at-risk student who must be changed to fit the prevailing culture of the education system.

Some research questions the rhetoric surrounding at-risk youth and asks how educators and policy makers can continue to describe certain students as "at risk." Researcher Michelle Fine[1] notes that "prevailing structures, ideologies and practices of public education have rendered most adolescents at education risk through the nuances of institutionalized inequity." They also, she says, describe the current call for programmatic reform as if the problems of educationally at-risk youth are "located inside the heads or wills of students, isolatable and remediable without massive structural change."

In assessing the virtues of fundamental change in the structure of schools, one is to some extent flying blind. There are few examples of schools that have been "fundamentally transformed" and even fewer methodologically sound assessments of their effectiveness. However, research offers fragments, at least, for buttressing an argument to restructure schools to have a more dramatic impact on at-risk students.

The basic design of the high school epitomizes bureaucracy, with its reliance on departmentalization, routinization and chain of command. Every one of these characteristics is problematic in its impact on "at-risk" youth. The bureaucratic ethos complicates what is already a very complex challenge for schools: fulfilling a commitment to educate all students equitably while honoring the diversity of student needs, preferences and abilities. The difficulty is that bureaucracies lean to universal standards which tend to drive out diversity. Rather than celebrating differences, the bureaucracy judges them in invidious terms. Students who score poorly on standardized tests, for example, are judged to be dumb; students who don't learn well sitting at a desk working in silence are often

judged disruptive. Programs meant to serve students with limited aptitude for or interest in precollegiate academic studies become "dumping grounds."

Criticism of the bureaucratic and hierarchic mode of governance that characterizes schools is not new, but it has swelled to a crescendo in recent years, especially in the large urban districts where students at risk are concentrated.

A Nation Prepared, the report of the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy,[4] promoted and legitimized the view that the governance system of schools applies an outmoded industrial model of education which breeds slow and hidebound decision-making, treats teachers like assembly-line workers, thwarts the development of accountability and professionalism in the teacher force, and ultimately leads to a mechanistic form of education that is insensitive to the developmental and intellectual needs of most students.

Others have argued that the bureaucratic mode is particularly harmful to the education of those youth who are highly at risk of school failure, creating an impersonal — or even hostile — environment in lieu of a supportive community.[5] Radical critics of education have long argued that the bureaucratic structure of schooling serves to sort, select and socialize students in ways that tend to perpetuate their social-class status.[6,7]

By definition, many so-called "at-risk" students don't stack up well against the norms of school. Hence, for many teachers they become undesirable, just as for many of these students, school — a place that sends them myriad negative messages about themselves — becomes undesirable.

The question remains: is the state of the art good enough? Or will a substantial reduction in dropout rates and a substantial increase in the achievement of low-income, minority and other at-risk students require a fundamental change in the structure of schools? The basic format of today's high school simply may not work for many students.

Problems of Current School Practice

The following discussion describes many fundamental characteristics of secondary schools, suggests why each is especially problematic for youth at risk and indicates possible directions for change.

- Time. Typically, 180-185 days a year, exclusive of summer months, for six to seven hours, with the day divided into seven or eight periods for purposes of studying various subjects.

- Curriculum. Discrete academic or vocational subjects divided into disciplines, trades, sometimes arrayed over three-to-four grade levels in a progression of difficulty, and further differentiated within grades by degree of difficulty.

Time and curriculum are the basis for organizing instruction. The division of time allotted to each subject, however, is quite arbitrary, based neither on pedagogic considerations nor on student learning needs but on administrative convenience. This structure results in a fragmented approach to curriculum because it is insensitive to how subjects relate to each

other — mathematics to science or basic skills to virtually all vocational subjects, for example.

It's arguable whether the standard schedule and curriculum are optimal for any group of students. But for at-risk students who may lack the basic reading or mathematical skills needed to succeed in other subjects, they are especially problematic. Fixed and rigid allocations of time, combined with the imperative many teachers feel to "cover" certain topics, limit teacher creativity and all but guarantee student alienation.

By contrast, less rigid definitions of subject matter (which may require less rigid definitions of teacher certification), combined with more flexible uses of time, open up possibilities to determine what works for students. For example, mixtures of independent study, small-group collaborative learning, individual coaching or tutoring, projects, simulation games, field trips and interdisciplinary courses become much easier to plan and execute when time and subject matter are both flexible.

Flexibility is not the only issue, however. For at-risk youth, quantity is also an issue. It is well documented that over the summer disadvantaged students lose much of what they learned during the school year. Some studies suggest, in fact, that most of the achievement gap associated with differences in socioeconomic status of pupils can be accounted for by the "two steps forward, one step back" effect of summer learning loss.[8] And, there is growing evidence that summer learning loss can be prevented by carefully structured programs combining summer jobs with remedial education.

Simply adding time to do more of the same is not the answer, however. The addition of more time to the school day and the school year should be viewed and taken as an opportunity to experiment with the basic format of instruction in all dimensions.

- Pedagogy. Primarily lectures, teacher-led discussions and/or demonstrations and teacher-selected assignments.

As researcher John Goodlad has documented,[9] the vast majority of school instruction occurs through lecture dominated by the teacher, with students only rarely talking, learning or doing. While such instruction limits achievement of all students, evidence suggests that it is particularly ineffective for at-risk students, for whom active and interactive, hands-on, experiential styles of learning are often the best mode.

Moreover, when students are grouped or tracked by ability, there is evidence suggesting that teachers in low-track classes spend more time on noninstructional classroom management activities and a greater proportion of instructional time on rote learning.

Because time, teacher training, curriculum content and the nature of teacher supervision and student assessment all influence instruction, changing how teachers teach may entail other system changes. Curriculum planning, teacher development and supervision should strive to provide all teachers with a broad repertoire of approaches. The repertoire could include:

- Collaborative learning techniques in which students work in heterogeneous groups to solve a problem or complete an assignment. The teacher serves as the coach or facilitator and the students are co-teachers.

- Peer tutoring which draws on the potential of students to teach each other

- Experiential education, ranging from community service to field-based research, which can be structured to provide both active learning experiences and reflection (writing, analysis, discussion) in the classroom

- Computer-based instruction ranging from remediation to simulation to problem solving

- Interdisciplinary approaches that employ a language-rich (reading, writing and speaking) approach to instruction in all subjects and efforts to integrate vocational and academic subject matter

These and other pedagogic approaches share some common elements missing from the "lecture-and-listen" form of instruction. They enhance motivation to learn, engage students as active learners and help at-risk students become a community of learners. The particular pedagogy used is not the issue. Rather, the key is the search for a way to get students involved in their learning.

- Staffing. Primarily by tenured, state-certified teachers whose credentials at the secondary-school level are usually limited to a specialty area (English, social studies, machine trades, etc.).

- Location. Within a school building, subdivided into classrooms and shops for various special purposes.

By definition, most dropouts are students who did not thrive in the classroom setting. They may find the subject matter, the teacher and/or the sedentary mode of learning boring, alien, frustrating or otherwise inimicable to their learning styles, abilities and interests. The classroom itself reinforces reliance on traditional teachers and limits the opportunity for "hands-on," action-oriented, experiential learning.

Proposals to modify teacher training requirements by emphasizing academic courses in the undergraduate years and to restructure the teaching profession to create career ladders and give teachers more say in decision making have much to commend them. But they do not challenge the basic definition or orientation of who constitutes a teacher. The importance of "role models" and teachers who can "relate" well to at-risk youth has been widely recognized. One promising strategy for multiplying the availability of role models who relate well to students is to expand the definition of who can teach to include, for example, youth workers, leaders of community-based organizations, union journeymen, corporate trainers, professionals outside the school and others.

The idea would not be to abandon professional standards or to take responsibility for teaching core academic subjects away from certified teachers, but rather to broaden and diversify the range of adults who have sustained and regular contact with "at-risk" students in instructional and quasi-instructional modes.

Co-op education programs, schools-without-walls and some other alternative schools, and some business-run enrichment programs exemplify education programs that have used persons other than regular certified teachers in instructional roles. Community service, student leadership projects, apprenticeship, on-the-job training and independent study are

other possibilities that are rarely central to the instructional program and tend in many cases to be reserved for the "best" students.

Extramural, experiential education, using nontraditional staff also has been shown to benefit "at-risk" youth. While many high schools offer students some opportunities for experiential learning, relatively few maximize the opportunities for students to learn outside the classrooms from teachers other than certified subject-matter specialists.

Examples of well-documented successes include Rich's Academy, an alternative school run in an Atlanta department store; Ventures in Community Improvement, a multi-site program in which unions provide dropouts with on-the-job training and basic education while rehabilitating houses and other buildings; the Philadelphia High School Academies, a vocationally oriented series of "schools within a school" serving 1,600 students, jointly run by industry and the Philadelphia School District and emphasizing work experience; and a number of youth service and conservation corps around the country.[10]

Breaking the Class System

Changes in pupil-assignment and grouping practices offer one approach to breaking the class system of instruction, although other issues of curriculum and instruction must be addressed if it is to have major benefits. Cross-age classrooms offer opportunities to reduce the stranglehold of negative peer influence, to expose students to motivated older persons who may serve as informal mentors or role models, and to offer students the chance to serve in those capacities to younger persons.

Providing greater student choice of school, program or even of instructor is another way to alter prevailing patterns. Whether choice plans — from interdistrict choice to more modest plans for school and program selection — improve the education of at-risk students is an open question. But as a matter of equity, limiting choices available to slow achievers may be detrimental to their self-esteem as well as their intellectual development. Yet, this sometimes is the case because access to some curricula and many magnet schools depends upon achievement.

- Social organization of instruction. Students grouped by course of study or tracks (e.g., academic, vocational, general), by age (grade), by subject and, often, by performance level in classes typically ranging anywhere from 22 to 35. Many students have but limited choice of curriculum, no choice of teacher and little choice of school. Generally, the scope for choice is least for the "at-risk" student.

School life is a substantial part of the social experience of young people. Most students attend neighborhood schools where they are assigned in age-homogenous groups to curriculum tracks, courses and teachers — with relatively little say about any of those assignments. Like the time arrangement, the assignment process is basically an administrative convenience.

At-risk students generally are assigned to the lower class of the education system. In large urban systems with well-developed magnet school programs, this means assignment to the neighborhood school. Within most neighborhood comprehensive high schools, the system further subdivides students into classes demarcated by curriculum tracks. While schools

often give educational rationales for such practices, the evidence is that they have no instructional benefits and may have some deleterious effects for at-risk youth.[11]

The consequences are manifold:

- Placement in the lower track sends negative images about the student's ability to learn.

- Many teachers, who tend to measure their own success by the success of their students, often adopt attitudes ranging from resignation to despair about teaching "low achievers." This not only de-energizes teachers, but may further stigmatize students.

- Many students who are at risk come from disadvantaged backgrounds which, by definition, constitute limited learning environments. Student assignment and grouping patterns tend to lock them into those environments, confining them to their peer group and depriving them of interaction with a diversity of students and exposure to other views. That is, much of what constitutes educational disadvantage in the student's everyday environment gets reinforced in the school's social environment.

- Age, ability and peer-group stratification make it less likely that at-risk students will participate in the types of instruction — e.g., peer tutoring, collaborative learning and certain types of accelerated, enriched instruction — that research and theory suggest are most effective for them.

In short, the chance of at-risk students closing the gap which separates them from higher-achieving and more advantaged students is diminished.

- Social control. Conforming to the bureaucratic and hierarchic mode of governance with the teacher as "front-line" enforcer of rules and restrictions governing punctuality, attendance and various forms of behavior, with back-up from disciplinarian or principal. Progressive sanctions from detention to suspension to expulsion.

It is not surprising when students who are failing in school, who receive negative messages about themselves from school and who are grouped together with similar students most of the day in a place they are not eager to be, act out. Nor is it surprising, therefore, that the emphasis on order, control and silence can become stifling in low-track classrooms — reinforcing the prevalence of passive instructional modes.

In many schools, the social organization of the school couples with expectations that the teacher serve as traffic cop or enforcer. Preferable strategies such as self-discipline or positive peer pressure lose out to externally imposed controls. The result is that instruction becomes confused with control, limiting student learning and teacher options. Unless the school's basic structure and norms permit the teacher and students to share responsibility for social control, students are likely to remain in an almost feudal relationship with teachers and are unlikely to develop the self-discipline that is a prerequisite to effectiveness in so many adult roles — parent, citizen and worker among them.

- Assessment. Primarily grades and test scores that measure individual students against universal standards or group norms and culminate in a system of credits, promotion, diplomas.

In some schools, there appears to be a deadly correlation between the use of standardized tests to measure school and/or student "quality" and a narrow approach to instruction. When test scores are low, the knee-jerk response is to emphasize drill, rote learning and teaching to the test. Such approaches may succeed in raising test scores modestly, at least when the same or similar tests are used over and over again, but their educational merit is dubious for all students and positively meretricious for at-risk students.

Standardized tests certainly have a role to play, but they tend to drive out all other measures of assessment (save for teacher grades, which often are little but a subjective, homespun variety of the standardized test). In the process, they not only reinforce failure, but they also send another negative message to students about themselves. A broader, more diverse set of measures could provide more positive and helpful feedback to students as well as to teachers, while helping free teachers from the strictures imposed by "teaching to the test."

Such measures would include standardized tests and teacher grades, as well as reviews of student portfolios and exhibitions, measures of gain rather than absolute or norm-referenced scores, peer evaluations and multiple forms of testing designed to profile the strengths, as well as the weaknesses, of individual students.

- School-family interaction. Takes form of PTA-type meetings, occasional conferences with parent/student, oral or written reports on student behavior or performance. Tends to be governed by implicit assumption that parent support is critical to student success and should affirm school staff.

The importance of parental involvement in the education of at-risk youth is well accepted but more honored in the breach than the observance. Parents generally are viewed as supplemental instructors or disciplinarians. But when parents themselves have limited educational backgrounds, did not do well in school or lead lives disorganized by poverty and its insults, this model is not likely to be effective. When it fails, educators are quite likely to decide that the family is a hindrance, and sometimes the cause of student failure. Schools, while not abandoning traditional forms of parent-school communication and cooperation, should seek new models and modes of interacting with families. For example:

- Offering continuing education opportunities to bring parents into the schools as learners — possibly even as classmates of their own children — so that the school itself becomes more "family-like"

- Engaging parents and other adults from the community — especially in the case of students with dysfunctional families — in after-school, supplemental or even for-credit activities which build on the strengths of students

- Assigning a vice principal full time to develop and organize as many ways to involve parents in the life of the school as possible: as tutors, classroom aides, advisers to extracurricular activities, supervisors of small-group or independent study,

participants in school-improvement focus groups, ombudsmen, curriculum reviewers, as well as more traditional roles.

Conclusion

Because all of the above aspects of schooling are interrelated, changing one without changing others seems unlikely to produce much benefit. Indeed, it may be difficult to sustain piecemeal changes without changes in the basic structure. This is not to suggest that any or all of these changes "must" be made before schools can provide intervention or prevention services to at-risk youth. But with considerable evidence pointing to restructured schools as an essential ingredient for working with youth at risk, it is time for schools to address that issue and to raise very fundamental questions about the students' school experience.

Can today's education adequately prepare students to find meaningful employment, increase their creativity and problem-solving capacity, enable them to find meaning in their lives and in their communities and become responsible citizens? Does the nation have the will and commitment to tackle both school and student problems and restructure the system to provide high-quality education for all youth?

These questions are only beginning to be explored, despite a national concern about numbers of youth who are not successfully participating in the education process. Schools have not yet made a connection between student failure and the structure of education. True, many discrete programs are in place to aid at-risk youth, and many are somewhat successful with the small numbers of students who participate in these programs. But these efforts are not enough to keep up with the growing number of students who need these services.

Current thinking from many educators, researchers and policy makers has centered around notions that involve a fundamentally different way of thinking about school reform — restructuring the system across all phases of education from the top state leader to the school site. However, many of these discussions tend to revolve around issues of school-site management, authority, teacher professionalism and waivers of requirements — changes in administrative functions — rather than on changes in how children are educated.

Fundamental restructuring means some far-reaching changes in the governance, curriculum, pedagogic strategies and organization of schools, as opposed to efforts to add services or modify some aspects of the program for at-risk youth, which characterize most of the cases reviewed in this study. Without a change in how curriculum and the school day are organized, accompanied by changes in instructional strategies and student grouping arrangements, it is unlikely that administrative or governance changes will increase student achievement, especially for those who need it the most.

A primary focus on student learning cannot succeed without the support of state and district policy makers and leaders. States have been leaders in the at-risk youth issue and have enacted a variety of new programs. However, they did so by using traditional policy tools such as mandates and funding. They did not go beyond the programmatic approach either with their legislation or with incentives for schools to move away from the "treat-the-symptom" approach.

Restructuring for student learning means believing in the diversity of students and schools, support and authority for principals and teachers to experiment with a variety of curricula and pedagogy, time to experiment and plan and time for the experiment to work. Far-reaching improvements in student achievement cannot be realized using short-term goals. State and district policy makers should forge new relationships with schools and work together on changes in administration and policy that respond to and support the work of the schools. They should examine policy areas such as school and student assessment, teacher certification and training, resource allocation, school-site management, graduation requirements, state requirements for the structure of curriculum, the structure of the school day and support systems for teachers. They should also pave the way for bringing schools, community organizations and other family and youth-serving agencies into a comprehensive plan for providing coordinated services for youth.

However, the possibility remains that whole-scale restructuring of schools will not occur or will fail to yield substantial differences in the learning of at-risk youth. Indeed, formal schooling, however structured, may not work for everyone. Another alternative is to redefine the problem. A fundamental redefinition of the dropout "problem" means viewing the decision to leave school as a rational and appropriate choice for some young people were *bona fide* alternatives available. Instead of leading to a high risk of social/economic exclusion, dropping out could be viewed as leading to a different set of educational opportunities and new routes to adult membership in the society.

The problem is that in today's economy, the primary alternatives to staying in school are welfare, crime and/or other personal deterioration. Because high-wage, low-education jobs are not going to be reinvented, the challenge is to create alternative paths that lead to social and economic well-being for students for whom school just doesn't work. Some states and cities have experimented with "second-chance" alternative education programs designed for dropouts, but for the most part these efforts have had limited success. Either they are too much like "regular" school, they occur too late (ages 17-21) to hold students who have settled into irregular lifestyles or they fail to address economic needs of students who face a Hobson's choice: continue working full-time at an inadequate wage or go back to school and work part-time at an inadequate wage.

Other societies offer alternatives. The near-universal system of apprenticeship in Germany, for example, involves industry in creating state-subsidized education, training and employment opportunities for youth who opt not to continue academic education from the age of 16 on.[12] Adaptations of this German system, possibly stimulated by wage or training subsidies, offer one alternative. Letting basic education dollars follow students who opt out of local school systems to enter job-training programs is another possibility.

Combining funds from a number of sources, such as basic education entitlements, the Job Training Partnership Act and welfare, into voucher-like funding mechanisms is a third approach. Such steps can help stimulate combinations of education, training and subsidized employment which neither existing education or job training programs nor welfare agencies can do on their own. Such enhanced programs could be managed by traditional providers, such as industry, unions, community organizations or proprietary schools. Alternately, individual beneficiaries might, with some assistance, design and manage their own programs of education and training.

As currently conceived, however, such alternatives are not considered valid. For example, many proprietary schools have reputations for creating false promises of jobs and wages for dropouts. Similar alternatives could prove harmful to certain groups of students if they are "allowed" to drop out more easily than other students.

Creating a whole new system is enormously complex. It is difficult to achieve large-scale, effective coordination among such systems as education, training and welfare because of barriers such as interest-group conflicts, turf rivalries and legal or regulatory impediments.

The creation of valid alternatives is certainly no easier than restructuring schools. Without committed, long-term leadership and action by federal, state and local authorities, neither is remotely likely. What is likely is that the issues surrounding youth at risk will prove relatively intransigent in coming years unless schools and other institutions are willing and able to engage in very basic, bold, and fundamental experimentation and change. More important than any of the suggestions outlined above is the adoption of an empirical mindset, a willingness to try, carefully evaluate and try again, in the classroom, the school, the local education agency and the state. The facts are that the state of the art is not definitive, and the solutions to the problem remain obscure. In such circumstances, bold innovation is likely to prove the most prudent policy.

References

The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century.* New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, May 1986.

Catterall, James, and Eugene Cota-Robles. "The Educationally At-Risk: What the Numbers Mean," Accelerating the Education of At-Risk Students Conference papers. Stanford, Calif.: University of Stanford, November 17-18, 1988.

Clark, Terry A., and Ruddie A. Irizarry. "Identifying School-Based Dropout Prevention Strategies: A Survey of High School and Middle School Programs in Nine Cooperating Districts," Consortium on Dropout Prevention, paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, April 1986.

Cuban, Larry, and David Tyack. "Dunces, 'Shirkers,' and 'Forgotten Children': Historical Descriptions and Cures for Low Achievers," Accelerating the Education of At-Risk Students Conference Papers. Stanford, Calif.: University of Stanford, November 17-18, 1988.

Dougherty, Van. *The First Step: Understanding the Data*, Report no. AR-87-3. Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1987.

Fine, Michelle. "De-institutionalizing Educational Inequity: Contexts That Constrict and Construct the Lives and Minds of Public-School Adolescents," from *School Success for Students At Risk, Analysis and Recommendations of the Council of Chief State School Officers.* Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1988.

Gintis, Herbert, and Samuel Bowles. *Schooling in Capitalist America.* New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Glatthorn, Alan A. "Curriculum Reform and 'At-Risk' Youth," paper for the Research for Better Schools, Inc., Conference, "The Education Reform Movement: Impact on At-Risk Youth," Philadelphia, May 9-10, 1985.

Goodlad, John. *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future.* New York: McGraw Hill, 1984.

Katz, Michael B. *Class, Bureaucracy and the Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America.* New York: Praeger, 1971.

Levin, Henry M. "Accelerated Schools for At-Risk Students." Center for Policy Research in Education, September 1988.

Oakes, Jeannie. *Improving Inner-City Schools: Current Directions in Urban District Reform*, Report no. JNE-02. New Jersey: The Rand Corporation, Center for Policy Research in Education, October 1987.

Sipe, Cynthia L., Jean Baldwin Grossman and Julita A. Milliner. *Summer Training and Education Program (STEP), Report on the 1987 Experience.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, Summer 1988.

Slavin, Robert. "Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools," *Educational Leadership*, September 1988.

Smith, R.C., and Carol A. Lincoln. *America's Shame, America's Hope, Twelve Million Youth At Risk.* Chapel Hill, N.C.: MDC Corporation, 1988.

Smith, Thomas J., Mary Moorhouse and Carolyn Trist. *A Practitioner's Guide, Strategies. Programs and Resources for Youth Employability Development*, rev. ed., 1988. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, 1988.

Spring, William J. "Youth Unemployment and the Transition From School to Work: Programs in Boston, Frankfurt and London," *New England Economic Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, March-April 1987.

Wilensky, Rona, and D.M. Kline III. *Renewing Urban Schools: The Community Connection*, Report no. AR-88-2. Denver: Education Commission of the States, July 1988.

Notes

1. Terry A. Clark and Ruddie A. Irizarry, "Identifying School-Based Dropout Prevention Strategies: A Survey of High School and Middle School Programs in Nine Cooperating Districts," Consortium on Dropout Prevention, a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, April 1986).

2. Van Dougherty, *The First Step: Understanding the Data*, Report no. AR-87-3 (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1987).

3. Michelle Fine, "De-institutionalizing Educational Inequity: Contexts That Constrict and Construct the Lives and Minds of Public-School Adolescents," from *School Success for Students At Risk, Analysis and Recommendations of the Council of Chief State School Officers* (Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1988).

4. The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, May 1986).

5. Rona Wilensky and D.M. Kline III, *Renewing Urban Schools: The Community Connection*, Report No. AR-88-2 (Denver: Education Commission of the States, July 1988).

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

7. Herbert Gintis and Samuel Bowles, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

8. Cynthia Sipe, Jean Baldwin Grossman and Julita A. Milliner, *Summer Training and Education Program (STEP), Report on the 1987 Experience* (Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures, Summer 1988).

9. John Goodlad, *A Place Called School: Prospects for the Future* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984).

10. For more detail on these and other models, and brief summaries of the research on their effectiveness, see Public/Private Ventures, *A Practitioner's Guide: Strategies, Programs and Resources for Youth Employability Development* (Philadelphia, 1988).

11. Robert Slavin, "Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools," *Educational Leadership* (September 1988), pp. 67-77.

12. William J. Spring, "Youth Unemployment and the Transition From School to Work: Programs in Boston, Frankfurt and London," *New England Economic Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston (March-April 1987), pp. 3-16.