ABSTRACT
                A review of studies of at-risk students is presented
in this document. Two recurring themes that occur in the studies
reviewed are structured involvement and high expectations of
students. The following items are reviewed: "Sex, Race, and Grade
Differences in the Locus of Control Orientations of At-Risk
Elementary Students," by Beverly D. Payne and David A. Payne; "School
Children At-Risk," by Virginia Richardson, Ursula Casanova, Peggy
Placier, and Karen Guilfoyle; "Effective Programs for Students At
Risk," by Robert E. Slavin, Nancy L. Karweit, and Nancy A. Madden;
"At-Risk, Low-Achieving Students in the Classroom," by Judy Brown
Lehr and Hazel Wiggins Harris; and "Accelerated Schools: A New
Strategy for At-Risk Students," by Henry M. Levin. (LMI)

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Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students

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Over the years, children who do not do well in school have been variously labeled as "underachievers," "low performers," "disadvantaged," "culturally deprived," "educationally handicapped," and, more recently, "at risk." No matter which label is applied to them, the fact remains that if these children's needs are not addressed, both the individuals themselves and society will reap the harvest.

Who are these children who consistently perform poorly in school? A disproportionate number are from poor and minority households. They tend to be easily distracted, have short attention spans, and often violate the norms of school discipline. They also may exhibit an inordinate fear of failure, low self-esteem, a narrow range of interests, and a general lack of motivation.

Yet such a range of descriptors gives us little help in responding to the educational needs of these children. Regardless of their cultural background, psychological make-up, or behavioral profile, current research suggests that at-risk students need not have the kind of negative school experiences being reported nationwide.

Two recurring themes appear in the studies of at-risk students reviewed here: structured involvement and high expectations. At-risk students need to be maximally engaged in an educational program that is carefully structured to meet their individual needs, and they must be taught by people who firmly believe that these children can and will succeed. These seem to be the two core requisites for a successful program serving at-risk children.

Beverly and David Payne argue that at-risk children differ from their peers along a critical variable: locus of control. The Paynes' study suggests that at-risk students tend to have an external locus of control, attributing their

success or failure in school to luck rather than to their own effort. The Paynes add that heightened teacher expectations of at-risk students may help those students develop a greater sense of control over their own lives.
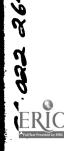
In an indepth sociological study of twelve at-risk students, Virginia Richardson and her colleagues found that students who fared best were not necessarily those who had been exposed to a number of specialists. Students with a consistent, stable environment over a long period (that is, the same teacher, all day, for the entire year or more) performed better than students whose day was fragmented into a series of brief exposures to various specialists.

In what is perhaps the most extensive and thorough synthesis to date of the research on effective programs for at-risk students, Robert Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Nancy Madden confirm and expand upon the findings of Richardson and her colleagues. Slavin and his fellow researchers point out that prevention and early intervention programs are far superior to remedial programs.

The role of the principal is explored by Judy Lehr and Hazel Harris. An effective principal is one who tries to ensure that the school day is primarily dedicated to teaching and learning. Such a principal also recognizes the achievements of at-risk students and utilizes specific curricular strategies to help these students succeed.

Finally, Henry Levin makes explicit the one essential ingredient common to all effective remedial programs: they must accelerate the progress of at-risk students, so the students can catch up with students in the school's regular program. This can only happen if all the adults involved—teachers, administrators, and parents—raise their expectations of the at-risk student. The students themselves must be convinced that they can succeed in school, otherwise even the most Herculean efforts by educators will be fruitless.

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(1) Payne, Beverly D., and David A. Payne. "Sex, Race, and Grade Differences in the Locus of Control Orientations of At-Risk Elementary Students." Psychology in the Schools 26, 1 (January 1989): 84-88. EJ 391 810.

The Paynes attempted to isolate an affective variable—the locus of control—as a predictor of a student's at-risk status. They reasoned that those students who attribute success or failure to their own efforts (internal locus of control) as opposed to luck or fate (external locus of control) are much more likely to succeed in school. Their sample was the student body of a lower-middle-class elementary school in the Southeast. Each of the 643 students was classified "at-risk" or "not-at-risk" by homeroom teachers using a list of seven variables. Two hundred sixty-six students—or 41 percent of the school population—were classified at-risk. Locus of control was assessed with the forty-item Nowicki-Strickland Locus of Control Scale (NSLOCS), which asks for yes-no responses to such questions as, "Do you believe that most problems will solve themselves, if you just don't fool with them?"

NSLOCS scores were analyzed for the following variables: Condition (at-risk, not-at-risk), Sex, Race, and Grade Level (K, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5). Significant differences were present for only two of the variables: Condition and Grade Level The external locus-of-control mean score for at-risk students was significantly higher than for students not at risk. In addition, the differences by grade level suggest gradual movement toward a more internally based locus of control with age: as a child gets older, he or she exercises more control over personal behavior.

Thus, it appears that at-risk students may simply be slower than their peers in developing a more internally based locus of control. This suggests that an effective educational program for at-risk students must include a strategy for orienting them away from an external and toward an internal locus of control. If teachers expect their at-risk students to succeed, this in itself may encourage them to adopt a more internally based locus of control and, hence, strengthen their will to succeed.

(2) Richardson, Virginia; Ursula Casanova; Peggy Placier; and Karen Guilfoyle. School Children At-Risk. Philadelphia, PA: The Falmer Press, Taylor and Francis, Inc, 1989. 283 pages. ED 306 343.

The authors adopt a decidedly sociological perspective in their analysis of at-risk children. They view at-risk status as a function of the interaction between the behavioral norms that the child brings to the school and the behavioral norms of the school setting. The school norms, in turn, are shaped by teacher values and expectations, school climate, and district policies, programs, and procedures. This interaction yields four basic at-risk types: (1) readily identifiable—students with sight, hearing, speech, emotional, or cognitive processing problems; (2) severe—students who are from highly mobile families, are victims of abuse, or are affected by other circumstances that make it difficult for the school to provide an adequate instructional program; (3) context dependent—students seen as at-risk in one classroom context but not necessarily in another; and (4) masked—students who exhibit good classroom skills but who, in reality, are not learning.

Based upon their indepth observations of twelve at-risk students from two very different schools, the authors draw these conclusions:

First, fragmenting at-risk students' school day into a series of brief encounters with specialists appears to be counterproductive. Students who stay in a single classroom for several years with a single teacher or set of teachers appear to fare much better. Second, if specialists are required, they should be brought into students' classroom, rather than pulling the students out.

Third, peer tutoring and cooperative learning groups appear to be highly beneficial. Fourth, principals need to be aware not only of the knowledge that the schools are mandated to impart to students but also of the knowledge that at-risk students, many of whom are culturally different, bring to the school setting.

Finally, administrators should promote staff development programs that address teacher beliefs and expectations regarding at-risk students. Further, they should actively develop programs (for example, Teacher Assistant Teams) that provide immediate and ongoing guidance to teachers working with at-risk students.

(3) Slavin, Robert E.; Nancy L. Karweit; and Nancy A. Madden. Effective Programs for Students At Risk. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1989. 376 pages.

In their synthesis of research on prevention and remedial programs for at-risk students, the authors found a number of features common to the most effective programs regardless of grade level and setting. For example, prevention and early intervention programs, which identify at-risk students based on nonacademic factors, stand a much better chance of reducing the at-risk population than do remedial programs tailored for students who demonstrate academic deficits.

The authors also suggest that the best remedial programs, whether operated within the regular classroom or as pullout programs headed by a resource teacher, have certain key features in common:

• Direct instruction or one-on-one tutoring is used extensively.

• The instruction is tailored to individual needs and is structured according to a hierarchy of skills.

• Assessment is frequent, and instructional strategies

are adjusted accordingly.

• Classroom programs follow either the "continuous progress" or "cooperative learning" models.

• Pullout programs are brief, intensive (for example, one-to-one tutoring and/or computer-assisted instruction), and designed to quickly bring a student's progress up to the regular classroom level.

• Open lines of communication exist between regular and remedial education programs to maximize staff collaboration and curricula consistency.

• Finally, teaching practices that are effective with at-risk students are equally effective with all students, suggesting that regular classroom teachers might use approaches found effective with at-risk students.

With these conclusions in mind, during the 1987-88 school year the authors instituted a pilot model program for at-risk students at a Baltimore elementary school. A major element of the program, called Success for All, is the replacement of Chapter 1 and special education resource teachers with tutors who are certified teachers with previous experience teaching at-risk students. The tutors perform two functions: they pull students out of homeroom classes (other than reading or math) for twenty minutes of intensive one-on-one instruction. They also serve as in-class tutors during the daily ninety-minute reading period that is part of the Success for All program. During the reading period all students in the school are regrouped by reading level into classes of no more than fifteen students each. Placements are revised regularly on the basis of assessments made every eight weeks.

Other features of the Success for All pilot program include a highly structured language arts and writing program, a full-day kindergarten, and a Family Support Team consisting of at least one full-time social worker and one paraprofessional parent liaison who involve parents in their children's education.

First-year evaluation of the Success for All program indicates that it has great potential. The mean reading scores for the first three grade levels were significantly higher than those of a matched control school. Furthermore, grade retentions were drastically reduced compared

to previous years. While the cost of the Success for All program is high, given the large number of personnel involved, it does not significantly exceed the costs of the Chapter 1 and special education programs it is replacing.

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(4) Lehr, Judy Brown, and Hazel Wiggins Harris. **At-Risk, Low-Achieving Students in the Classroom.** Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1988. 107 pages. ED 298 232.

Of particular interest to elementary and middle school principals is Lehr and Harris's chapter Organizing the Learning Environment for Low Achievers." Their analysis of the effective schools research indicates that the principal "is a key element in determining success for at-risk students."

Chief among the factors that promote an effective learning environment is the obvious, but often neglected, obligation of the principal to protect the school day for teaching and learning. Effective principals reduce classroom interruptions and teachers' administrative chores to a minimum. Building morale among teachers is also a high priority for effective principals. Providing vigorous instructional leadership, promoting collegiality among teachers, and ensuring a safe and orderly environment are a few of the ways principals work to maintain high morale.

Lehr and Harris also suggest that the "invitational education" approach may be ideal for schools with a high proportion of at-risk students. Developed by William Purkey, the "invitational education" model creates an educational environment that acknowledges, in a variety of ways, both the potential and the accomplishments of every student. Among the "inviting practices" that principals might use to foster involvement with at-risk students are the following:

• **Principal's "Pick of the Week":** Recognize students for academic and behavioral improvements.

• **Student Lunch Table:** Have lunch with students, especially those who need a boost.

• **Good Citizen:** Ask teachers to send one student to your office every day for a Good Citizen of the Day award.

• **Bus Ride:** Show that you care by learning where your students live and joining them on the bus route.

Lehr and Harris point out that schools too frequently place at-risk students in low ability classes, where time is employed less efficiently, texts are often watered down, students are less academically accountable, and discipline is lax. To correct these weaknesses, the authors suggest rotating teachers so that those with more experience provide instruction to at-risk students; requiring homework and making students accountable for its completion; introducing a mandatory summer school program for students who fail; using texts appropriate to the background of the students, many of whom are from culturally different environments; implementing an effective study skills pro-

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gram; and, most importantly, having high expectations of at-risk students and pushing them to excel.

Finally, getting the parents of at-risk children involved will significantly improve the chances of success. In some cases, a home visit by the teacher, during which the importance of parental encouragement and support for the child's academic growth is emphasized, may be all that is needed to generate greater involvement by parents. Principals from effective schools often work with teachers to arrange release time for home visits.

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(5) Levin, Henry M. **Accelerated Schools: A New Strategy for At-Risk Students.** Bloomington, IN: Consortium on Educational Policy Studies. *Policy Bulletin* 6 (May 1989): 1-6. ED 309 534.

Many programs for at-risk students are tacitly based on a set of lowered expectations. While paying lip service to the goal of returning students to the regular program, actually such programs provide the student with a less demanding curriculum, virtually ensuring permanent isolation from the regular classroom. No one really believes that at-risk students have the capacity to perform at the level required in the regular program. The Accelerated Schools Program at Stanford University is an effort to counter this trend. "At its heart," writes Levin, "is the notion of doing for at risk students what has been done for many gifted and talented students—striving to accelerate their progress rather than lowering expectations for their advancement."

The Accelerated Schools Program (ASP) is based on three core principles:

• **Unity of purpose**, to achieve agreement among parents, teachers, and students that a major goal of the school is to return at-risk students to the mainstream

• **Empowerment**, to transfer curriculum and instructional decision-making power to the instructional staff

• **Building on strengths**, to utilize "all of the learning resources that teachers, administrators, students, parents and communities can bring to the educational endeavor"

Instead of viewing at-risk students as inherently lacking in academic talent, the ASP staff see them as possessing certain assets, such as a delight in oral and artistic expression and the ability to become involved in intrinsically interesting tasks that may be utilized to accelerate their learning. The instructional program places a heavy emphasis on language skills, since many at-risk students exhibit delayed development in this area. Students receive much of their instruction from volunteer tutors and engage in peer tutoring and cooperative learning. Another unique feature of the instructional program is its extended day, including rest periods, recreational activities, and time to complete homework assignments.

Parents affirm their own involvement in ASP by signing an agreement outlining their role. They agree to make sure their children get enough sleep and arrive at school on time, talk to them regularly about the importance of school, see that homework is completed, encourage them to read daily, and, in general, take an interest in and set high expectations for their children's education.

Students are instructed not only in academic skills but also in other areas, such as the arts and social skills.

The Accelerated Schools Program has been implemented in two California elementary schools with a very high concentration of disadvantaged students. After a year and a half of operation, these pilot schools "have experienced notable gains in parental involvement, student behavior, and staff decision-making and responsibility." Pilot programs have also been initiated by state agencies in Missouri and Illinois, as well as by the Salt Lake City School District. While it is too early to formally assess these pilot programs, early reports suggest that they hold great potential for meeting the educational needs of at-risk students.

Meeting the Needs of At-Risk Students