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ABSTRACT

Many rural youth in Russell County, Virginia, are at risk of becoming dropouts due to economic and social factors seen throughout Appalachia. These influences include high levels of unemployment and poverty, adult illiteracy, low self-esteem, and lack of role models that demonstrate the value of educational attainment. United Way of Southwest Virginia and Russell County Public Schools have taken a two-pronged approach in dealing with at-risk students: enhancement of self-esteem and partnerships for educational excellence. The Youth Experiencing Success (YES) program consists of 16 formatted sessions that teach life skills to youth in an informal group setting, thereby enhancing self-esteem and making possible a positive transition into adulthood. Following a successful pilot implementation in four remote communities, YES entered the public schools and has served 1,245 seventh graders to date. Town meetings were held to raise public awareness of the problems of at-risk youth and to identify community concerns. At an overnight retreat for school administrators and community and business leaders, corporate executive officers from leading industries outlined increasing educational qualifications for employment by the year 2000 and pointed out some of Russell County's specific problems. These executives offered corporate in-kind support. Activities undertaken by these partnerships and by community groups, local agencies, and a nearby university are described. Tables detail quality of life indicators, dropout rates, unemployment, and educational attainment in southwest Virginia. (SV)

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THE CIRCLE FOR  
EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

An Educational Partnerships Program  
designed to meet the needs  
of at-risk students  
in rural Russell County, Virginia

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## INTRODUCTION

The terminology "at-risk youth" has been used to describe "those individuals whose circumstances -- whether economic, social, or cultural -- increasingly preclude the attainment of the social and educational skills necessary to successfully function at full capacity in this society as workers, parents, or citizens." Included in this definition are those young adolescents, ages 10-17, who lack financial and/or parental support; those who are behind their peers in academic performance by at least one year; those who are sexually active and/or have become parents; those who have dropped out of school or entertain the idea of dropping out; and those who have been legally declared delinquent. During program development, however, the members of the Circle For Educational Excellence realized, through research of various studies, identification of at-risk youth can formally be conducted during the kindergarten years. As a result, the group of targeted youth changed from grades 4-8 to K-12 with the premise that early identification and intervention in the lives of at-risk youth will produce more positive results.

Research entitled "National Study Regarding At-Risk Students" was conducted in 1989 by the National Rural Development Institute. The statistics compiled in this study indicate that rural youth are in more danger of failure due to detrimental life situations than are their urban counterparts. Like their urban counterparts, rural areas experience problems with drug/alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, teen suicide, and crime; however, these problems are compounded by remote location and isolation.

In addition to these life situations, culture may contribute to the problems faced by youth in the rural areas the Appalachian "coal region" of far southwestern Virginia, including Russell County. Observation of rural youth in Russell County, Virginia shows that many appear to lack a strong sense of self-worth. These young people do, however, exhibit ambition, strength of character, and a strong sense of community. Nonetheless, they are insecure in their abilities and often lack direction.

Statistical comparison of quality of life factors in this region - the counties of Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Tazewell and Wise along with the City of Norton -- as compared to the state of Virginia as a whole provide evidence of poverty and poor educational levels, both contributing factors to the designation of youth as "at-risk" (Table 1). Socio-economic conditions in Virginia's Appalachian region provide an environment that fosters at-risk youth. Traditionally, the region's major industries -- coal mining, agriculture, and forest products -- have provided employment opportunities for individuals with a minimum amount of education. Unfortunately, because many of these jobs (especially in the mining industry) were high paying, the local employment market has not traditionally provided incentive to pursue education.

National economic conditions have caused employment opportunities in natural resource industries to decline. The region's major employer, the coal industry, is aggressively implementing technologies that improve labor productivity in order to survive in the international marketplace. The result has been sharp cutbacks in the numbers of people employed (Table 2). Hence, high levels of unemployment and

poverty remain in the coal counties in spite of the "economic recovery" of the mid-1980's that has reduced unemployment in the nation's mainstream (Table 3).

Strong family ties and strong communities nurture citizens with a desire to stay within the Appalachian region. In-migration by those without local family ties to this isolated, mountainous area has been minimal. Educational levels are low within the adult population, as are local employment opportunities for those who go on to college. Those who educate themselves to succeed generally make their mark elsewhere. Thus, children growing up in the communities of Virginia's coal counties do not have role models to demonstrate the value of educational attainment. Given this situation, the low levels of educational achievement in Virginia's coal counties (Table 1) are hardly surprising.

Poor economic conditions breed stress, within families and within communities, as witnessed by the 1989-90 labor unrest in Russell County, Virginia between the United Mine Workers of America and the Pittston Coal Company. The children are often those most seriously affected. Recent studies have shown that income is less-evenly distributed in the coal counties than in the rest of the state, and that it is more variable. Both of these factors contribute to the stresses felt by families at the lower end of the economic ladder. The region's generally poor housing conditions also contribute to family stresses.

Cultural barriers, the nature of the economy, and family dysfunction are prevalent factors which promote participation in detrimental life situations among youth in Southwest Virginia. Unfortunately, few statistics are available to quantify the problem of at-risk youth in Virginia's Appalachian communities. Local social

service agency personnel, however, are aware of the fact that at-risk youth are often the product of at-risk parents giving rise to the continuing intergenerational problems of functional illiteracy in Appalachian.

Due to the fact that physical development in the adolescent portrays the attributes of adulthood, adolescents are often asked to make decisions they are incapable of making. Before an adolescent has found his own identity, he is asked to make decisions that will affect his entire future. Without knowing his own interests, attributes, skills and capabilities an adolescent may enter a state of crisis -- an "identity crisis".

As an adolescent experiences the search for self, he is subjected to adult analysis -- an investigation that does not always produce positive outcomes. Adults may see an adolescent as rebellious, antisocial, or even incorrigible. The adolescent's search for self may lead to experimentation with drugs or alcohol, premarital sex, uncommon lifestyles, dropping out of school, or other detrimental life situations. While the period of adolescent transition is temporary, proper guidance and direction are necessary for creating a positive transition into adulthood. No child is expendable; therefore, drop out prevention is a necessary and vital element of economic development within the Appalachian area.

## DROPOUT PREVENTION

A dropout can be defined as a student who withdraws from school without a high school diploma and without enrolling elsewhere. While the dropout rate in the United States has been relatively constant for almost twenty years, society is now being faced with a major problem as the result of youth dropping out of school without a diploma. Technological advancement requires more knowledge, skill, and expertise in the workplace. As the result of an inadequately educated work force, businesses and industry have been forced to absorb the cost of more extensive training and losses in production. In addition, society often finds itself supporting increasing numbers of those who cannot support themselves.

While the dropout rate in Russell County has been inconsistent beginning with the 1980-81 academic year through the 1988-89 academic year (Table 4), the problems associated with dropping out of school are now being compounded by the fact that corporate executives in the area surrounding Russell County and other counties in this Appalachian region have begun taking measures to reduce the costs of training and losses in production. For the most part, employers are refusing to hire employees who are unable to read above a ninth-grade reading level, who do not possess effective communication skills and who are not computer literate. The proposed outcome of this situation is an increase in unemployment in the Appalachian region if the quality of education in this area does not improve.

Lack of academic success and poverty are cited as determining factors of a student dropping out of school. While these factors are



often present in the life of a dropout not all students who perform poorly in school and/or live in conditions of poverty drop out. Those who have dropped out give varying reasons as to why they left school. Although many of these reasons are superficial -- poor grades, personality conflicts with educators, pregnancy, employment -- they are justifiable in the mind of the dropout. Schools often play a role in discouraging would be dropouts from staying in school. Inflexibility in policy -- attendance and discipline -- in conjunction with personal problems and the lack of alternatives often influence the decision to drop out.

Various studies have offered a choice of reasoning as to who drops out of school. Some of these reasons include:

- Youth who are least prepared economically and educationally are most likely to drop out.
- Twenty-two percent of students from low-income families will drop out, in contrast to only seven percent of those from upper income families.
- Students who drop out are about 4 times as likely as those who do not to have a parent who never completed high school.
- Students who score low on achievement tests are six times as likely to drop out as are those who score higher.
- Twenty-seven percent of students who repeat one or more grades never complete high school, in contrast to only twelve percent of other students.
- Being below average for grade level substantially increases a student's chances for dropping out.
- Urban youth are fifty percent more likely to drop out of school than are rural youth.

National statistics estimate:

- Fourteen to twenty-five percent of students entering high school will not finish.

- Of the fall ninth-grade class of 3.3 million, 470,000 to 830,000 students will drop out before graduating.
- Of 16.8 million youth aged eighteen to twenty one in 1983, as many as four million had been or still were high school dropouts.

In reviewing these statistics, the Russell County Public Schools Advisory Board determined that most of them apply to the rural youth of the Appalachian region of Southwest Virginia during the current year and that most appeared to be a direct reflection of the lack of a strong self-concept, resulting in low self-esteem.

Self-esteem is comprised of two major elements: an awareness of individual capabilities (self-concept) and an awareness of individual importance (self-worth). It measures one's absolute belief in his personal competence in enduring the difficulties faced by mere existence and of one's prerogative to feel contented with life.

A person with high self-esteem displays a sense of confidence in both personal ability and worth. Low self-esteem indicates a feeling of personal inadequacy in personal ability and worth.

The concept of self is learned, not inherited. From the moment of birth, impressions and attitudes about self are formulated from one's individual experiences. In addition, one's concept of self is consistent. Interpretation of self is the basis of one's acceptance or rejection of any new experiences. Acceptance of a positive experience enlarges one's concept of self; however, negative experiences are either ignored or rejected and one's concept of self is maintained intact.

United Way of Southwest Virginia and Russell Public Schools have taken a two-pronged approach in dealing with at-risk youth in this area: Enhancement of self-esteem in youth and educational excellence involving

not only the public school system but also business/industry, community volunteers, parents, and educators.

### ***SELF-ESTEEM ENHANCEMENT***

Youth Experiencing Success (Y. E. S.) is a special interest program designed to teach life skills to youth. The program seeks to help youth establish a sense of self and self-worth, resulting in a more positive transition into adulthood. An essential component of program delivery is the establishment of a comfortable atmosphere and an informal setting. There are no right or wrong answers; no tests are given. Group interaction allows at-risk participants to realize that they are normal adolescents. A cohesive support group is formed, thus promoting individual/group growth as well as enhancing self-esteem. The Y. E. S. Program is designed to help youth learn about themselves and each other.

Delivery of the Y. E. S. Program provides a setting and interactions that help children develop a positive self-concept. The original program consists of seven formatted sessions, each addressing a particular life skill. An additional nine sessions have been formatted and now await printing as the Y. E. S. II segment of the program. Session delivery may be conducted either daily or weekly with each session lasting one to one and one-half hours. Y. E. S. is flexible. It has been proven to be effective in both a day

camp setting and as a weekly program. It has been successfully delivered in informal community group settings and in school classrooms.

Implementation of the Y. E. S. Program in Russell County was based on the premise that a large proportion of all adolescents in this area are potentially "at-risk" due to the remoteness of communities, low average academic achievement rates, and poor economic and social conditions.

During the summer of 1988, Y. E. S. was conducted in four remote communities of Russell County. Six volunteer adult facilitators and six 4-H teen leaders were trained in program delivery. A total of fifty-five adolescents, ages 10-17, took part in this pilot program. Facilitator evaluations indicated that while the program was a definite success there was a concern that adolescents who would most benefit from the program did not attend community meetings. It was suggested that the Russell County Public Schools be approached as a target area in order to better serve all adolescents of Russell County. The Superintendent of Russell County Public Schools was most impressed with the content of the Y. E. S. Program. As a result, the Y. E. S. Program entered the seventh-grade classes of the Russell County Public Schools in the fall of the 1988-90 academic year. The decision to conduct the program with seventh-grade students was made due to an overwhelming consensus (facilitators, school personnel, and the project coordinator) that seventh-grade is indeed a critical year of

transition as children become adolescents. To-date a total of 1,245 adolescents have been reached through program delivery.

## EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

"Making the Grade," is an innovative, joint project of the National Collaboration for Youth and the Roosevelt Center for American Policy Studies, which is designed to raise public awareness and stimulate action on behalf of youth at local, state, and national levels. "Making the Grade" seeks to : (1) educate the public about the critical problems affecting a significant number of America's young people, and (2) provide opportunities for citizens to come together at the community level to find collaborative solutions to those problems.

On Friday, September 29, 1989, United Way of Southwest Virginia sponsored three town summit meetings designed to raise public awareness and to stimulate action on behalf of youth at local, state, and national levels. The goals of these town summit meetings were:

1. To explore the current dimensions of at-risk youth problems in each community; assess the effectiveness of current programs; and, identify possible new, broad-based efforts to meet the needs of all youth in each community.
2. To provide an opportunity for committed people to explore new program ideas and improve communication networks to meet the needs of at-risk youth.
3. To encourage all members of each community to solicit all available resources in an effort to improve the standard of living for all at-risk youth.

Attendance and group interaction within each of the town summit meetings indicated a definite interest in meeting the needs of all at-

risk youth in each community. Problems and concerns were targeted by individual groups and then compiled into a listing of overall needs of at-risk youth. Those problems and concerns identified included:

1. Large numbers of academically at-risk students in public school systems;
2. Need for improvement of school policies and curriculum;
3. Need for early identification of at-risk youth
4. Need for interventive plan of action to prevent dropping out of school;
5. Lack of a strong self-esteem in at-risk youth; and
6. Lack of communication skills necessary to function in today's society.

Utilizing group interaction and input, the following priorities in dealing with at-risk youth were established for the seven-county service area of United Way of Southwest Virginia:

1. Early identification;
2. Interdisciplinary Action Plan for each child;
3. "Wholistic" approach in working with student and his/her family;
4. Establishment of cooperative effort among agencies;
5. Community awareness;
6. Policy reform within school systems that allows for more direct participation by agencies, communities, and parents.

Following the "Making the Grade" town summit meetings and publication of the priorities for community teams, the Superintendent of Russell County Public Schools approached the Russell County community team in an effort to secure assistance with bringing about a program designed to meet the needs and priorities established by the town summit

meetings.

The first step taken toward establishing community involvement was an overnight retreat held for school administrators, superintendent, and central office staff along with a number of identified community leaders in which corporate executive officers from leading industries presented a "round table" discussion of the needs for the work force in the year 2000. Basically, CEO's informed this elite group that technological advancement was not the only culprit where a lack of quality employment for a majority of the populace is found. Lack of a strong educational background is a definite contributive factor. During the round-table presentation, administrators and central staff learned that remedial education efforts on the part of leading corporations is quickly becoming a thing of the past. It is no longer feasible for corporations to supplement classroom education upon employment. Therefore, industries of this area have adopted policies which forbid the hiring of individuals who read below a ninth-grade level and by the year 2000, many entry level positions will require at least a two-year college degree.

As the result of this forum, Russell County Public Schools were more aware of the academic needs of at-risk students. Corporate executive officers, while portraying a bleak future for Russell County unless educational reforms were instituted, offered assistance to the educational process -- assistance in the form of corporate in-kind support. From this initiative, the Educational Partnerships Program for Russell County was developed.

Primary objectives of the Educational Partnerships Program are as follows:

1. To establish a partnership between the Russell County Public Schools, area businesses and major industries in order to promote development of academic curriculum necessary for Work Force 2000, including altering the negative emotional climate in the public schools;
2. To offer incentives to educators in the form of graduate credit, and recertification credit;
3. To involve non-professional employees in the development of positive attitudes toward education through emphasis of their daily roles in education and its importance;
4. To apply the resources of the nonprofit sector in Russell County to the literacy development needs of students enrolled in the Russell County Public Schools, grade 4-8;
5. To encourage businesses with ties to Russell County to work with educationally disadvantaged students;
6. To apply the resources of the Russell County community to improve the literacy skills of students, enrolled in grades 4-8 of the Russell County Public Schools.

As a means of effectively implementing such a diverse and innovative program, a series of activities to be addressed was formulated by the Making The Grade Committee.

#### ACTIVITIES ADDRESSED BY

#### THE PROJECT

- A. Activity #1 - Model cooperative projects designed to apply the resources of the private and nonprofit sectors of the community to the elementary (K-7) and secondary (8-12) schools of the local educational agency or institutions of higher education in the community.

\* The Educational Partnerships Program includes



two nonprofit agencies, four institutions within the structure of Virginia's system of higher education, and two state agencies (JTPA

also represents an association with the federal government.)

B. Activity #2 - Projects designed to encourage business concerns and other participants in the eligible partnership to work with educationally disadvantaged students and with gifted students in the elementary and secondary schools of local educational agencies or institutions of higher education.

\* Tutors and mentors were recruited from corporate partners, civic organizations, the local community college, and through the Russell County Literacy Council.

\* The Chamber of Commerce has organized a Speakers Bureau to promote career awareness in the county schools and coordinate the efforts of many partners in the career-oriented, "Student Day" at the Russell County Fair.

\* The staff of the Russell County jobs training program (JTPA) provides career counseling and awareness time to the system's 4th-8th grades.

C. Activity #3 - Projects designed to apply the resources

of the community to the elementary and secondary schools of the local educational agency or institutions of higher education in that community to improve the education of students in such schools.

\* The resources of United Way's computer literacy van, VISTA volunteers through the United Way and the Russell County Literacy Council, the Christian Center, the Ministerial Association, Dominion Bank, the Russell County Public Library, members of 4-H clubs and Extension Homemaker Clubs, and the Y.E.S. Program are just some of the community resource persons and programs that have been committed to the Literacy Partnerships Program.

D. Activity #4 - Projects designed to enrich the career awareness of secondary or post-secondary school students through exposure to officers and employees of business concerns and other agencies and organizations participating in the eligible partnership for education.

\* Seventh-grade students have benefitted through educational tours conducted by Russell County Vocational School in an effort to introduce students the choice of educational opportunities available within the county.

\* Eighth-grade students have benefitted through educational tours conducted by Southwest Virginia Community College in an effort to further introduce students to the availability of educational opportunities within commuting distance of homes in Russell County.

\* Eighth-grade students have benefitted from a mentoring program offered by Pittston Coal Group and the Russell County Rotary.

E. Activity #5 - Special training projects for staff designed to develop skills necessary to facilitate cooperative arrangements between the private and nonprofit sectors and the elementary and secondary schools of local educational agencies or institutions of higher education.

\* Teachers have an opportunity to gain grantsmanship skills through 1) in-service training conducted by the Director of United Way and 2) a chance to use this training through a grants competition that will award ten, \$100 grants each year for materials to carry out an innovative idea developed by a classroom teacher, grades 4-8. Dominion Bank has committed \$1000/year for four years for this program.

F. Activity #6 - Academic internship projects, including

where possible academic credit, involving activities designed to carry out the purpose of this program.

\* Southwest Virginia Community College will offer an academic internship program to its students who are enrolled in the human services curriculum. They will be assigned as tutors in grades 4-8 of the Russell County Public Schools.

G. Activity #7 - Projects encouraging tutorial and volunteer work in the elementary and secondary schools of local educational agencies or institutions of higher education by personnel assigned from business concerns and other participants in the eligible partnership.

\* Bristol Compressors will recruit tutors from its work force to volunteer to work with students in grades 4-8. The Pittston Coal Group will recruit mentors from its work force to volunteer to work with students in grade 8.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on partnership agreements that have been developed, the following methodology has been implemented in order to address the needs of all students enrolled in the Russell County Public Schools, grades 4-8. Limited resources relating to certain aspects of this methodology (i. e. availability of computer time) will be allocated at the discretion of the individual classroom teacher.

1. Use of the Computer-Assisted Instruction System (CAI), produced by Computer Curriculum Corporation is used to encourage the development of literacy skills. Providing the ability to "track" individual progress, this system allows accurate assessment of student achievement.

\* The Director of the Cities In Schools Program, a program which is currently operational in Honaker High School (8th and 9th grades), serves as the technical consultant for the computer program.

2. Silent reading activities are encouraged through the use of a reading enrichment series produced by Silver Burdett/Ginn. This series is designed to supplement the reading program currently being used throughout the Russell County Public Schools. Use of these materials will be documented through a check-out procedure similar to that used by libraries.

3. Tutors are to be recruited according to the following schedule of needs:

* First year	28
* Second year	46
* Third year	78
* Fourth year	Maintained at 78

NOTE: Tutor recruitment will continue as necessary during the third and fourth years in order to compensate for attrition. Literacy partners have committed to the following levels of tutor recruitment:

- 1) Bristol Compressors - As a corporate partner, this industry has obligated from its work force fourteen (14) tutors for the first year, twenty-eight (28) tutors for the second year, fifty-six (56) tutors for the third year, and will maintain 56 tutors for the fourth year.
  - 2) Southwest Virginia Community College - This state agency provides a minimum of ten (10) tutors per year who will be recruited through an academic internship program offered for credit to college students enrolled in the human resources curriculum.
  - 3) Phi Theta Kappa - This academic honors organization, which is based at Southwest Virginia Community College, pledged four (4) tutors for the first year, eight (8) tutors for the second year, twelve (12) tutors for the third year, and maintenance at twelve (12) tutors for the fourth year.
4. Mentors for targeted "at-risk" youth were recruited according to the following schedule:

*	First year	9
*	Second year	18
*	Third year	Maintenance at 18
*	Fourth year	Maintenance at 18

The following literacy partners committed mentors at these levels:

- 1) Pittston Coal Group - This corporate partner agreed to commit six (6) mentors for the first year and twelve (12) mentors for the second year. Maintenance of twelve (12) mentors will be sustained through the third and fourth years.

will be maintained during the third and fourth years.

5. The United Way Literacy Van which was provided through a grant from the Virginia Department of Education contains computerized, literacy development materials. Two VISTA volunteers staff the van and conduct a mobile literacy outreach program in the outlying communities of Russell County where lack of transportation often deters residents from participating in literacy programs.
6. The Russell County Literacy Council and Southwest Virginia Community College (SVCC) will coordinate and conduct training sessions for all volunteer tutors and mentors. Those volunteers who complete requirements by SVCC will be issued continuing education credit.
7. The Christian Center will coordinate the following literacy program that has been adopted by the Russell County Ministerial Association:

The Ministerial Association has designated one Sunday each quarter as Literacy Sunday". The sermon in all churches centers on literacy issues. Individual churches plan enjoyable, family-oriented programs that promote literacy development.
8. Each school conducts an annual field trip for 4th-8th grade students to the Russell County Public Library. The computerized job search program (EDJOSC) and the interactive video equipment is demonstrated in order to enhance career awareness information for each student. As a source of learning and personal enrichment, students will also learn how to use all the resources available in the library.
9. The Virginia Cooperative Extension Service promotes literacy awareness through its endeavors with 4-H clubs, Extension Homemakers Clubs, its network of volunteers, and newsletters. In addition, the Russell County Cooperative Extension Service continues to provide an "organizational home" for the Youth Experiencing Success (Y. E. S.) Program.
10. Career awareness is promoted through the following:

Student Day at the Russell County Fair -

partners provide career-oriented displays and booths to educate visitors to the relationship of literacy skills and career development. The Russell County Chamber of Commerce will coordinate this event. The Virginia Employment Commission (Russell County Office) will set up the EDJOSC (job search) system as an added attraction to these displays.

11. The Chamber of Commerce has organized a Speakers Bureau from its membership. Members are available to visit schools to discuss the relationship of career development and literacy skills.
12. The media presentation developed by Consolidation Coal Company, Work Force 2000, is available to teachers for classroom use. This presentation describes what is known about the work place in the year 2000, what characteristics and skills workers will need to possess in order to compete for jobs of the future, and the necessity for strong literacy skills in obtaining those jobs.
13. Consolidation Coal Company has involved Swords Creek Elementary School in its "Adopt-A-School" program. Swords Creek Elementary was chosen because of the low scores received by its 6th graders on the Virginia Literacy Passport Exam in the Spring of 1990. Special activities include recognition awards for the student with the most improved reading performance. In addition, Consolidation will consider purchasing computer software or other similar educational tools selected by the school for the improvement of reading skills.
14. The Jobs Training Partnerships Act (JTPA) staff provides career counseling services to students in grades 4-8 at the request of individual teachers. Staff development activities for educators are a necessary component to any program designed to develop literacy skills. The following methods have been developed in order to meet this need:
  - 1) Two in-service programs are required of all educators of students in grades 4-8. The first of these programs includes one-half day of in-service at the Russell County Public Library in order that educators can be advised as to the resources available for use in the development of literacy skills. Secondly, educators have spent one full day of in-service visiting the Tennessee Eastman



plant in order to view their IBM PALS (Project on Adolescent Literacy) Program and Learning Lab.

- 2) Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University plans to conduct a graduate course that emphasizes literacy skills development. This course will be offered twice. Educators can use this course to satisfy state recertification requirements and will receive graduate credit.
- 3) The grantsmanship skills of educators are developed through the use of incentive funds made available through Dominion Bank. The Director of the United Way of Southwest Virginia has conducted training sessions for educators in preparation for the development of a competitive grant program funded by Dominion Bank. Ten (10) \$100.00 grants are being awarded each year for four years to educators who propose creative, innovative strategies for the development of literacy skills. The funds are to be used for program-related expenses only. A committee chaired by the Program Director and staffed by classroom teachers with literacy development experience will make the awards. This fund has been established due to the fact that only .015% of the Russell County Public Schools budget is available for instructional materials. The goal of this program is to provide incentive for educator creativity.
- 4) The Center for Volunteer Development (CVD) of Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University plans to provide ten (10) days of consultant time. Dr. Jane Asche plans to work with the Literacy Partnerships Program advisory board which will consist of the superintendent of Russell County Public Schools, the Literacy Partnerships Program Director, the Program Coordinator, and a representative of each of the literacy partners. Ms. Asche will also administer the Evaluation Plan of the Literacy Partnerships Program.

The Educational Partnerships Program as outlined above is currently in place in Russell County, Virginia. Substantial funding has not to-date been acquired; however,

corporate pledges are being honored and implemented as efficiently and expediently as possible. School administrators, central office staff, business and industry representatives, non-profit and service agency representatives, and United Way staff serve as members of an advisory council known as The Circle For Educational Excellence.

In addition to The Circle For Educational Excellence, a community task force has been appointed by the Superintendent of Russell County Public Schools to more effectively address the needs of at-risk youth in Russell County. This task force is comprised of members of the central office staff, business and industry representatives, the Regional Literacy Specialist, non-profit and service agencies, and the Executive Director of United Way of Southwest Virginia. This task force has formulated policy which will be used when dealing with at-risk students in the Russell County Public Schools. This policy has been adopted by the Russell County School Board as a pilot program [CARE (Community Assistance, Resources, and Education) For The Children] during the 1991-1992 academic year. (Appendix B)

At-risk students have been identified as required by the CARE For The Children proposal, school teams have been established, and orientation for school administration, corporate representatives, and agency representatives has been held. Russell County Public Schools is now ready to implement this innovative and progressive program with a

positive attitude toward the elimination of the term  
"at-risk" youth.

It is imperative that education represent a "wholistic"  
approach in working with at-risk children and their  
families. Until the needs of life are met, learning seems  
somewhat unimportant. As educators, we do not teach  
subjects, we teach children.

Table 1: Quality of Life Indicators, the seven Appalachian "coal counties" of far southwestern Virginia (including the city of Norton), and state averages.

Quality of Life Indicator	Appalachian Counties	Virginia Averages
Families below poverty level	18.4%	9.0%
Per capita income	\$8893	\$12733
Unemployment Rate	11.0%	4.1%
Labor Force Participation Rate	51.8%	68.6%
Persons age 25 and over who have a high school education	38.3%	62.4%
Persons age 25 and over with a 4-year college degree	6.3%	19.1%
School Drop out rate, grades 8-12	4.5%	4.8%
Eighth grade reading scores	43.0%	55.9%
Eighth grade mathematics scores, national percentile	53.8%	68.0%
Percentage of total housing units built before 1939	23.9%	17.7%
Percentage of total housing units consisting of mobile homes	17.4%	4.7%
Percentage of total housing permits that are for mobile homes	72.4%	14.2%
Percentage of total housing units with no piped water	6.0%	2.7%
Suicide rate (per 1000 population)	18.8%	12.6%

Notes: Virginia state averages include coal county statistics; therefore, contrasts are not as dramatic as would be a coal counties vs. non-coal counties comparison.

**Table 2: Employment and productivity, Virginia's coal industry, 1977- and future projections**

Year	Production (million tons)	Production Workers	Productivity (tons/man-shift)
1977	38	15,700	11.0
1982	40	14,000	12.1
1987	45	13,600	14.0
1990	50	13,000	19.3
1995	52	13,000	19.5

**Table 3: Unemployment Rates in Virginia's Coal Counties and the City of Norton (April, 1991)**

County	Unemployment
Buchanan County	14.9%
Dickenson County	17.2%
Lee County	8.8%
Russell County	11.9%
Scott County	6.6%
Tazewell County	9.8%
Wise County	10.4%
City of Norton	9.1%

RUSSELL COUNTY SCHOOL DIVISION

Academic Year	September 30 Enrollment	End-Of-Year Enrollment	Number of Dropouts	Percent Dropouts
1980-81	6,606	6,408	154	6.8%
1981-82	6,514	6,387	139	6.0%
1982-83	6,500	6,324	127	5.5%
1983-84	6,394	6,225	120	5.0%
1984-85	6,251	6,152	133	5.5%
1985-86	6,158	6,038	112	4.6%
1986-87	6,038	5,875	122	5.1%
1987-88	5,773	5,639	117	5.2%
1988-89	5,610	5,509	111	4.3%

**EDUCATION ATTAINMENT  
ADULTS 25 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER**

County	Total Population	Population 25 and Over Less than 9th grade education	% of Population 25 and Over Less than 9th grade education
Buchanan	31,333	10,101	51.4%
Dickenson	17,620	5,528	50.7%
Lee	24,496	7,698	50.2%
Russell	28,657	7,924	43.2%
Scott	23,204	7,456	48.1%
Tazewell	45,960	11,137	36.1%
Wise	39,573	10,799	43.7%
City/Norton	4,247	1,058	37.5%
<b>VIRGINIA*</b>	<b>6,137,358</b>	<b>667,368</b>	<b>21.6%</b>

Table 5. \* NOTE: Virginia statistics include counties of southwest Virginia. Elimination of these statistics would make the statistics for Virginia (overall) lower.

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE, RESOURCES  
AND EDUCATION  
FOR  
THE CHILDREN

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Larry Massie, Russell County Public Schools  
David Garland, Russell County Medical Center  
Marty Schoenbachler, Russell County Medical Center  
Aleta Spicer, United Way of Southwest Virginia  
Susan Copeland, Pittston Coal Group  
Nancy Ascue, Virginia Cooperative Extension  
Geneva Munsey, Clinch River Elementary  
Herb Dankert, ASAA Technologies  
Danny Bush, St. Paul Apparel  
Lawrence Slate, Honaker Representative  
Nancy Breeding, Regional Literacy Specialist  
Katie Hess, Russell County Chamber of Commerce  
Lorraine Turner, Russell County Public Schools  
The Honorable Susan Bundy, Juvenile and Domestic Relations  
Barbara Fuller, Southwest Virginia Community College  
Mike Lowdermilk, Russell County Public Schools



## Factual Information

### Purpose:

Drop-out prevention

### Recommended Sites for Pilot Program Implementation:

- Clinch River Elementary
- Lebanon Middle School
- Honaker High School
  
- \* based upon need, school/program cooperation, socio-economic criteria, and test scores

### Program Implementation:

- Teachers at the pilot schools will use key, researched-based, characteristics of children described as more likely to be at-risk of dropping out of school to identify program participants;
  
- Once students are confidentially identified, an individual needs assessment will be conducted in order to determine the assistance needed to help prevent the student from dropping out of school;
  
- A community team, comprised of the student's respective principal, guidance counselor, and teacher, a parent, a corporate representative, and a human services agency representative will use a "case management" approach to providing whatever assistance is needed by the student;
  
- The CARE for the Children Task Force will coordinate and monitor the program.

### Justification for Program Implementation:

- Children in dysfunctional families cannot learn successfully;
  
- Human service agencies and schools alone cannot resolve the problems dysfunctional families encounter;
  
- School-based comprehensive models of service delivery for children at risk, "wrap-around models", are becoming necessary;
  
- "Wrap-around services" is an innovative concept for delivering human services where a flexible blanket of supportive services is wrapped around a person with multiple needs, instead of wedging that person into a rigid program slot;

- The bottom line must be that the project will be driven by the child's needs instead of the needs of the service agency or organization in order for the program to operate effectively;
- Only through a comprehensive partnership will the project's goal of significantly reducing the number of at-risk students, and ultimately, the number of dropouts be achieved;
- This approach will give the child and family access to a broad range of services with minimal red tape.

Revised 9/4/91

## FOREWORD

An estimated 30 million Americans cannot read a daily newspaper, write at the fifth-grade level, or compute basic information well enough to function successfully in today's world. Perhaps as many as one-third of school age children have developmental and social needs that affect their ability to learn. More than a half-million children drop out of school every year.

These are frightening statistics in an age of increased need for education. We are creating a huge underclass in this country, widening the rift between the haves and the have nots. This does not have to be the future, however. In fact, the wake-up call has been sounded and Americans are beginning to make the effort to assure a more promising future.

This is exactly what is happening now in Russell County with a group of concerned school officials, members of public organizations, and representatives of the business and industrial community coming together to generate ideas to identify and help children who are at-risk of becoming anything less than their full potential.

This group will have a key role in developing a plan to bring together schools, public and private human service agencies, businesses, and other partners in identifying the needs of at-risk children and assembling the resources to meet those needs. This is the only cost effective method of assuring a trained work force in the future. If these children are not educated now, the cost in the future to feed, house, and sometimes incarcerate these people will mean an even larger drain from business profits and individual incomes. The bottom line is to develop a "wrap around" approach, bringing together all that society has to offer, to provide the individual with what he or she needs. The child's needs will have to drive the school's, service organization's, or agency's involvement, not the other way around.

Within this context, the CARE for the Children Committee wishes to express its mission statement, which reads as follows:

We recognize the fact that the United States has a huge dropout problem with more than half a million children dropping out of school each year;

We recognize the major contributing factors to this problem are that 40 percent of the poor in America are children; that in 1987 almost half a million teenagers had babies; that three out of 10 children have a drinking problem; that 1,000 young people attempt suicide every day; that 30 percent of all children are latchkey children; and that more than nine million American children have no health care;

We recognize that Russell County is not immune from these types of problems and it will

take an intense local effort to provide solutions. These solutions will have to be preventative in nature, rather than remedial, in order to be cost effective;

We believe this effort should combine the knowledge and resources from the private and public sector, including the school system, human-service agencies, businesses and industries, to solve this large and complex problem;

We believe that a solution will come about only when all the factors involved in the development of at-risk children, such as social and economic issues, parental responsibilities, schools, and child care, are addressed. Solutions must take into account that children at an early age must be recognized as at-risk and a course of action can be developed to keep the child from becoming a dropout;

We believe we must not breach confidentiality, because it is a part of being a professional and it shows respect and support for the child. We also believe in flexibility, wrapping a blanket of protection around the child, fitting programs to the child's needs, not fitting the child into programs which may not address his or her needs. The child is our only customer;

We believe that only through a comprehensive partnership will our goal of significantly reducing the number of at-risk children, and, ultimately, the number of dropouts be achieved."

There cannot be a sector of society that will not become a part of this program. In fact, without the assistance of everyone, there will continue to be children who fall through the cracks and the result will be an entire society that is at-risk.

## SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

School for children is as necessary and normal as a job is for an adult.

At-risk children don't see it that way, however, and these children are the most expensive and labor-intensive school children to serve.

The numbers of school children who drop out or fail academically because of personal, family, or social problems are significant and sobering. In the United States, 550,000 children drop out of school each year. In Russell County, an average of 110 students make the decision to drop out of school each year.

Forty percent of the poor in America are children. Thirty-six and one-half percent of the poor in Russell County are children.

In 1987, 470,000 American teenagers had babies. In Russell County, 61 teenagers had babies that year.

Three out of every ten adolescents have drinking problems. In Planning District II, one in two, in the 12 to 17 age group, has an alcohol abuse problem. (Statistics taken from the "Making the Grade: Local Report Card." Data Source: Virginia High Risk Indicator Report.)

One thousand young people attempt suicide every day. In Russell County in 1988, one youth attempted suicide and succeeded. (Statistics taken from Statistical Profile of Children's Problems in Virginia.)

Thirty percent of all children are latchkey children.

More than 9 million American children have no health care.

In Russell County, 43.2% of the population over age 25 have less than a ninth-grade education. (Statistics taken from the 1980 U. S. Census.)

In Russell County, there were 383 reports of child abuse. One hundred and twelve (112) of these reports were founded or had reason to suspect. Percentage of cases reported are as follows:

Public Schools	20.4%
Friends & Neighbors	12.0%
Anonymous Reports	9.4%
Non-offending Parent	8.1%
Other Relatives	7.8%
Law Enforcement	6.8%
Hospital	5.9%
Other Social Service Agencies	4.7%
Mental Health Agencies	3.0%
Court Probation Services	1.7%

(Statistics taken from State Department of Social Services Child Protective Annual Report, September 1989-1990)

These are glaring statistics, both on the national level and in Russell County. There is a growing awareness that schools, on their own, cannot resolve problems that are rooted in dysfunctional families and distressed communities.

Education and human-service problems are interrelated; therefore, the solutions to these problems must also be interrelated. Human-service providers are already overwhelmed by the demands placed on them by the children who use their systems successfully. Many higher risk children, however, fall between the cracks and do not receive adequate attention.

School-based comprehensive programs, an innovative approach involving several different service groups from the public and private sector, can be a way to deal with the children who are at-risk in Russell County. This approach is referred to as "Wrap-around" Services. Any Wrap-around Service Program should be:

- \* Driven by the child's needs, not targeted to the needs of the agency or school;
- \* Designed to bring together multiple agencies, organizations, or businesses;
- \* Able to give the child and family access to a broad range of services with minimal red tape;
- \* Designed to bring about changes in service delivery such as coordination, cooperation, different approaches or ways of doing business;
- \* Designed to provide services that are coordinated with one another, as well as with the individual child's instruction program.

## DEFINITIONS

**AT-RISK STUDENTS:** Those students identified as having certain characteristics indicating the potential for dropping out of school, physically or mentally. Consistent characteristics are included in eight categories: Achievement, attendance, health concerns and pregnancy, substance abuse, behavior, attitude, economic, social, and family-related causes, child abuse or neglect.

**WRAP-AROUND SERVICES:** The services driven by the child's needs, provided cooperatively by the school system, non-profit organizations, businesses, human-service organizations, and community volunteers to meet the needs of those students identified as at-risk by the set criteria.

## PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

Students will be identified through the use of identification instruments included as Appendix A and Appendix B. Classroom teachers at each of the pilot schools will be asked to complete an identification instrument for each student by the end of the first six-weeks of school. These instruments will then be evaluated by the respective school team with regard to need and services available for the student.

## RESOURCE IDENTIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAM

A child who is impoverished, hungry, sick, depressed, abused, neglected, involved with drugs or alcohol, or homeless cannot learn successfully. There is a growing awareness that schools on their own cannot resolve problems that are rooted in dysfunctional families and distressed communities. Nor can human-service agencies by themselves successfully assist children who do not remain in school. School for children is as necessary and normal as a job is for an adult. Education and human-service problems are interrelated, and the solutions to these problems must also be interrelated.

There is a growing consensus that traditional approaches to resolving such problems have not been working. Human-service providers are already overwhelmed by the demands placed on them by the children who use their system successfully. Many higher risk children, however, fall between the cracks and do not receive adequate help. In addition, when they receive help, children tend to be segmented according to the problems they exhibit. They are frequently divided between the educational or social-service institutions which have responsibility for addressing those particular problems. These institutions usually have their own separate locations, regulations, treatment philosophies, and professional specialists. Even when services are available, children and families do not necessarily use them if they are not conveniently located.

For reasons such as these, school-based comprehensive models of service delivery for children at risk -- wrap-around models -- are becoming a necessity. "Wrap-around services" describes an emerging concept for delivering human services. The term comes from the metaphor of wrapping a flexible blanket of supportive services around a person with multiple needs, instead of wedging that person into a rigid problem slot. The bottom line in the wrap-around approach is providing the individual school child with what he or she needs to succeed.

While wrap-around approaches vary in components and intensity, a well-rounded approach should include:

- \* Comprehensiveness
- \* Targeted to the needs of the student (NOT THE AGENCY OR SCHOOL)
- \* School-based or focused.
- \* Bringing together multiple agencies, organizations and businesses.
- \* Ability to give the child and family access to broad range of services with minimal red tape.



- \* Bringing about changes and new approaches in the way service delivery is offered.
- \* Following a case-management approach.
  - well-being of child as focus
  - based on confidentiality
  - with flexibility as its strength
- \* Providing coordinated services

Programs currently available in the Russell County Public Schools as prevention/intervention programs for at-risk youth include the following:

McGruff Program	Grades K-4
SODA (Students on Developing Attitudes)	Grade 4
DARE	Grade 5
Quest (Skills for Adolescents)	Grade 6
All About Me	Grade 6
Y. E. S. (Youth Experiencing Success)	Grade 7
Cities In Schools	Grades 8-10
Dating Violence Prevention Program	Grades 8 and 10

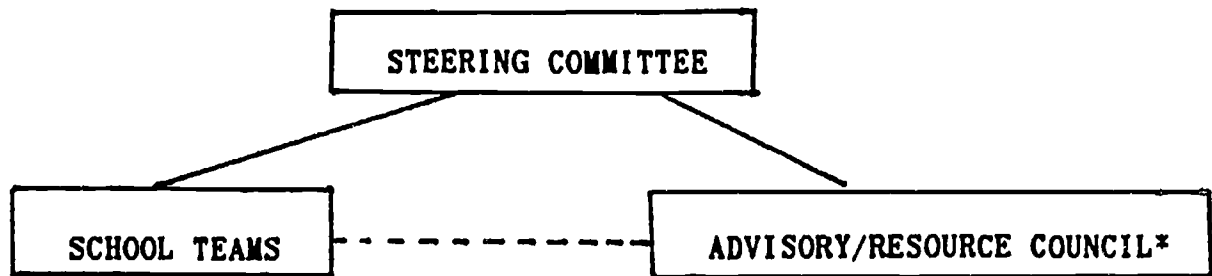
In addition to this list, available services include, but are not limited to:

Counseling - Peer, Guidance, Cumberland Mountain Mental Health Referral - United Way of Southwest Virginia  
 Health Services - RCMC, Health Department, CHIP, Speech and Hearing, Eyeglasses  
 Tutoring and Mentoring - Pittston, Bristol Compressors, Rotary  
 Academic Enrichment - Olympics of the Mind, Scholastic Bowl, Science Fairs, Forensics, Tutoring, etc.  
 Self-Esteem/Assertiveness - Y. E. S. Program  
 Parenting Education - Resource Mothers  
 Nutrition and Clothing - Breakfast/Lunch Program, Russell County Extension Service, Bread Box, Social Services, Christian Center, United Way of Southwest Virginia  
 Services for Disabled Children - Bureau of Crippled Children, Easter Seals  
 Career Guidance - Guidance Counselors, Chamber of Commerce, Career Day  
 Substance Abuse and Prevention - Office on Youth, DARE  
 Dropout Prevention/Intervention - S. T. O. P., Cities In Schools, Circle for Educational Excellence

## PROPOSAL

A community team, hereto known as CARE (Community, Assistance, Resources, and Education) for the Children, will be established in one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school as a pilot program beginning with the 1991-1992 academic year. These teams will be composed of the school principal, the guidance counselor, a parent, a teacher, ~~one~~<sup>two</sup> corporate representative, and two representatives from the human services field. This team will be developed with the well-being of the child as its focus and founded on the concepts of confidentiality and flexibility.

### PROGRAM ORGANIZATION



\* **GROUPS AVAILABLE AS RESOURCES:**

Parents Anonymous	JTPA
Multi-Discipline	SVCC
Interagency Youth Council	United Way
Virginia Cooperative Extension	CADRE
Cumberland Mental Health	
Cities In Schools	
S. T. O. P.	
Discovery	
Resource Mothers	