DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 723 TM 017 914

TITLE	National Dropout Statistics Field Test Evaluation. Statistical Analysis Report. Contractor Report.
INSTITUTION	American Institutes for Research, Washington, DC.
SPONS AGENCY	National Center for Education Statistics (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	NCES-92-051
PUB DATE	Jan 92
NOTE	222p.
PUB TYPE	Statistical Data (110) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC09 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Persistence; *Data Collection; Definitions; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Enrollment; Evaluation Methods; *Field Tests; *National Surveys; Research Methodology; School Holding Power; *School Statistics; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Students; Student Attrition
IDENTIFIERS	*National Dropout Statistics Field Test

ABSTRACT

In 1988, a National Dropout Statistics Task Force (comprised of representatives from 27 states, 3 U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia) was created to work with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to develop procedures for uniform counting of dropouts and dropout rate reporting. A standard definition was constructed for "dropout," and three alternatives for dropout rate definitions were considered, dividing full-year dropout counts by: (1) initial fall membership; (2) spring membership plus fall-to-spring dropouts; and (3) following fall membership plus fall-to-fall dropouts. A field test involving 26 states, the District of Columbia, and 2 outlying areas was conducted to determine whether these definitions could be consistently and uniformly applied. Data submitted during fall 1989, spring 1990, and fall 1990 provided memberships by race, ethnic category, and sex for students in grades 7 through 12. All participating areas (ranging from a high of 232 to a low of 223 districts) responded to surveys about practices affecting dropout rates. Data for 187 districts supported the analyses. Focus was on data for 456 transfer and 192 dropout cases. Only negligible differences were found among the three alternatives. Data show a clear increase in dropout rates from about 1% in grade 7 to about 6% in grades 10, 11, and 12, with a typical synthetic cohort dropout rate for grades 7 through 12 of 23%. Accuracy of dropout rates was generally good, and states agreed on the necessity of consistent reporting and valid dropout statistics. Twelve figures and 28 tables are provided. Seven appendixes present the surveys used, site visit guides, a school leaver status validation form, a tracker's guide, and an additional six tables. (SLD)

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Statistical Analysis Report January 1992

National Dropout Statistics Field Test Evaluation

Contractor Report

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement NCES 92-051

NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS

Statistical Analysis Report January 1992

National Dropout Statistics Field Test Evaluation

Contractor Report

Prepared by
American Institutes for Research

for the National Center for Education Statistics
National Dropout Statistics Task Force

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement NCES 92-051

U.S. Department of Education
Lamar Alexander
Secretary

Office of Educational Research and Improvement
Diane Ravitch
Assistant Secretary

National Center for Education Statistics
Emerson J. Elliott
Acting Commissioner

National Center for Education Statistics

"The purpose of the Center shall be to collect, and analyze, and disseminate statistics and other data related to education in the United States and in other nations."—Section 406(b) of the General Education Provisions Act, as amended (20 U.S.C. 1221e–1).

January 1992

Contact:
Lee Hoffman
(202) 219–1621

TABLE OF CONTENTS

APPENDICES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The National Dropout Statistics Field Test was designed and implemented by many individuals who recognized the need for a systematic approach to addressing an urgent data need. The project originated under the direction of Acting Commissioner Emerson Elliott and Associate Commissioner Paul Planchon of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The leaders in this effort were Lee Hoffman of NCES and the members of the National Dropout Statistics Task Force (listed below). In addition, hundreds of staff members in local school districts took the time to keep thorough records on their school leavers, to prepare reports of counts, and to respond to surveys.

Dropout Statistics Task Force Members

Floyd Johnson, Alabama
Barry Kincl, Arkansas
James Fulton, California
Rick Cloud, Connecticut
Kathy Tuck, District of Columbia
Lavan Lukes, Jr., Florida
Marilyn Beck, Georgia
Bill Humm, Illinois
Edward Ranney, Iowa
Barbara Andrepont, Louisiana
Frank Antonucci, Jr., Maine
Mark Moody, Maryland
Jeffrey Nellhaus, Massachusetts
Carol Hokenson, Minnesota
Louise Ginn, Mississippi
Bertha McClaskey, Missouri
Howard Bookin, New Jersey
Anna Ulrich, New Mexico
Elizabeth Wright, North Carolina
Ronald Torgeson, North Dakota
James Daubenmire, Ohio
Zoe Leimgruebler, Oklahoma
Walter Koscher, Oregon
Donley Taft, Rhode Island
Hal Robins, Utah
Donald Russell, Wisconsin
D. Leeds Pickering, Wyoming
Brenda Epati-Tanoi, American Samoa
Fenmin Atalig, Northern Marianas
Victor Santiago, Puerto Rico

This evaluation would not have been possible without the efforts of these people and of staff at the American Institutes for Research who recorded the information provided by field test participants. We are especially grateful for the contributions of Ms. Phyllis DuBois, who coordinated data collection operations and made site visits, and of Mss. Mary Anne Arcilla, Ixtlac Due as, Beth Friedman, and Alesia Montgomery, who gathered information from school staff and many others about the field test and about the school leavers whom they tracked.

Donald H. McLaughlin
Roger E. Levine

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

In 1988, a National Dropout Statistics Task Force, comprised of representatives from 27 States, 3 U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia, was created to work with the National Center for Education Statistics to develop procedures for uniform dropout counting and dropout rate reporting. The definition of a dropout adopted was:

A dropout is an individual who: (1) Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; (2) Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; (3) Has not graduated from high school or completed a State- or district-approved educational program, and (4) Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: a) transfer to another public school district, private school, or State- or district-approved education program, b) temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness, or c) death.

Rates of dropping out are definable in many ways; and the typical values for dropout rates depend on the definitions used. For any single year, a district can report a separate dropout rate for each grade, commonly called an "event rate." Alternatively, it may report the total dropout rate for a group of students entering a starting grade (e.g., seventh grade) over the period until normal graduation (e.g., six to eight years), commonly called a "cohort rate." A "synthetic cohort rate" can be constructed by combining event rates across grades in a single year.

To construct even a single-year event dropout rate requires both a count of dropouts and a count of the number of students served during the year. Ideally, each student in the nation's public schools would be counted exactly once: if a student transferred in the middle of a year, then dropped out, only one school should be responsible for counting the student as a dropout; and therefore, only one school should count the student as among those served. Three alternative event dropout rate definitions were considered for empirical study: full-year dropout counts divided by (a) initial fall membership, (b) spring membership plus fall-to-spring dropouts, or (c) following fall membership plus fall-to-fall dropouts.

National Dropout Statistics Field Test

Before adding dropout statistics to national data collection efforts, NCES and the Task Force conducted a field test to determine whether these definitions could be consistently and uniformly applied. A Dropout Statistics Field Test Participant Handbook was prepared; and in the summer of 1989, State-level field test coordinators used these materials to train local district staff in procedures needed to provide information on the accuracy of dropout reporting during the 1989-90 school year. The field test involved 26 States, the District of Columbia, and 2 outlying areas.

Approximately ten randomly selected school districts in each participating State were: (a) to collect data and submit reports for three time points, fall 1989, spring 1990, and fall 1990; and (b) to cooperate with staff studying the implementation process. Each of the three reports called for memberships by racial/ethnic category and sex, and by grade, for grades 7 through 12. In addition, the spring 1990 and fall 1990 reports called for dropout counts by racial/ethnic, sex, and grade categories, for the period from the beginning of the fall 1989 term to the time of the report. Dropout counts were to be generated from School Leaver Lists, maintained at school or district levels, to which the name of every child leaving school (without being graduated) was to be added.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR), was selected to conduct an evaluation of the Field Test to assess the accuracy of dropout counts, the effects of variations in definitions, the effectiveness of Field Test training, and barriers and incentives for implementation of uniform dropout reporting procedures.

Methods

The information to address the evaluation objectives was obtained from: (a) surveys of State and Local Education Agency (LEA) representatives responsible for local implementation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test and of representatives of Education Agencies in States that chose not to participate in the Field Test; (b) site visits; (c) an independent validation of the educational status of school leavers in participating LEAs; and (d) analyses of dropout and membership counts submitted to NCES by participating LEAs.

All participating and nonparticipating States responded to survey interviews conducted in May and June 1990, identifying factors that might affect their dropout rates and indicating barriers that might interfere with their implementation of uniform dropout reporting procedures. At the local level, 232 districts participated in the initial stages of the Dropout Statistics Field Test evaluation, 229 continued through the 1989-90 school year and 223 responded to a survey in May and June, 1990.

Of the participating districts, 187 provided sufficiently complete membership and dropout counts to support analyses. These included 8 districts serving large cities, 37 districts serving urban fringe areas, 28 districts serving mid-size cities, 56 districts serving towns, and 58 districts serving rural areas. Although these districts do not represent a probability sample of the nation, they cover the range of types of districts.

To assess the accuracy of dropout counts, 790 individual school leavers, in 47 of the participating districts, were randomly selected from submitted School Leaver Lists for validation. The statuses of a total of 733 of the 790 school leavers were independently determined, of which 20 were removed from analyses because schools had, it turned out, not labeled them as either transfers or dropouts, and of which 65 were found, upon validation, to be neither transfers nor dropouts (most turned out to be active students in their original schools). Estimates of error rates focused on the remaining 648 cases, 456 classified as transfers by schools and 192 classified as dropouts.

Results

Dropout rates. The first step in the evaluation was to determine the actual variation of dropout rates computed using three proposed definitions. The clear conclusion arrived at was that there are only negligible differences among the three versions of the dropout rates. Not only were mean dropout rates virtually indistinguishable, the intercorrelations were all greater than .99.

The submitted dropout and membership counts showed a clear pattern of increasing dropout rates from about one percent in grade seven to about six percent in grades ten, eleven, and twelve. The typical synthetic cohort dropout rate was 23 percent for grades 7 through 12. Within this general pattern, average rates in large school districts were noticeably higher (32 percent) than in small districts (16 percent). It should be stressed that the sample of participating districts was not statistically representative of the participating States or the nation as a whole, and that the field test data do not give estimates of State or national dropout rates.

Error rates. The second step in the evaluation was to assess the accuracy of schools' classifications of school leavers as transfers and dropouts. Only 37 of 456 cases (7.5 percent) called transfers by schools were actually dropouts, whereas 46 of 192 cases (24.0 percent) called dropouts by schools were actually transfers. In addition to the 46 cases called dropouts that turned out to be transfers and the 146 correctly classified dropouts, 25 cases called dropouts by schools turned out to be neither dropouts nor transfers. The accuracy of dropout rates was generally very good because the two kinds of error tended to cancel each other out. Overall, based on the classification errors observed, average reported synthetic cohort dropout rates were roughly one percentage point higher than they would have been had there been no errors. Variation between districts in reported dropout rates was found, however, to be correlated (r=.62) with the types of misclassifications they made, based on the independent validation.

Training. Generally, participants were very favorably impressed with the training materials and methods. Of all the training materials, the Participant Handbook was most highly evaluated and most frequently used, followed by the Trainer's Guide.

Barriers and Incentives. The need for valid dropout statistics was found to be widely accepted. Nearly every State indicated that implementation of the uniform dropout reporting procedures was both desirable and feasible; however, two types of problems were mentioned frequently. First, differences in State policies, such as in private school approval, may bias dropout rates, although no significant relations were found in the Field Test. Second, the need to modify existing State-level definitions and procedures may hinder some States' implementation.

SECTION 1. INTRODUCTION

Completing twelve or thirteen years of school is seen increasingly as a basic educational requirement. Most recently, six broad national goals have been set for our nations's education by the year 2000. One of these is:

> *"By the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%."*
> ***(National Governors' Association, "Educating America: State Strategies for Achieving National Education Goals, Report of the Task Force on Education," 1990).***

Achieving a goal such as this requires efforts at each school in the country, and States have been working with the federal government on the task for several years. Measurement of school graduation rates is necessary to identify effective ways of meeting this goal. Because of the very complex nature of measuring graduation rates, (e.g., how are students who switch schools between 10th grade entry and graduation counted in computing the rate? which school is responsible if the student graduates? which school is responsible if the student drops out?), a more easily measured indicator, the **per-year dropout rate**, has been proposed as a measure of the school's ability to retain students until they have acquired the skills necessary for graduation.

Information about dropouts must come from the States. Since all of the States complete an annual Common Core of Data (CCD) Survey, the addition of dropout items to this survey appears an efficient way to collect this information. However, the inclusion of new items in the CCD Survey would provide accurate and comparable information only if:

(1) the new items are unambiguously defined, and in a way that is fair to all States, so that a consistent definition of all the components necessary for the calculation of dropout rates can be applied by all the reporting jurisdictions and so that the reported rates are equally meaningful in all States,

(2) key staff of the reporting agencies are adequately informed about and trained in the application of these definitions,

(3) data collection procedures can be designed that provide information in a way that is compatible with the schools' and districts' needs, and

(4) data collection procedures do not significantly increase the administrative burden on schools and districts.

The National Center for Education Statistics has been given the formidable task of collecting accurate national dropout statistics and adding them to the base of information used to set and evaluate the nation's educational policies. Their first step in the process was the definition of critical terms. In 1988, a National Dropout Statistics Task Force, comprised of representatives from 31 States, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia was created. The Task Force developed and agreed upon a set of definitions.[1] Basically, a school district is responsible for all young people in its membership until they either graduate or transfer to another district or approved educational program. Obtaining the appropriate denominator for a "dropout rate" is also difficult. Ideally, a denominator would include all students for whom a district is responsible; however, in the context of daily transfers into and out of school districts, excused and unexcused absences, suspensions, inconsistencies of parental communication, delays in transcript requests from other districts, and calls for fewer administrative personnel in schools, this ideal can only be approximated. A reasonable approximation might be the membership count on a particular day, but which day?

The second step in the process was determining whether these definitions could be consistently and uniformly applied. NCES contracted with the University Research Corporation for the development of training materials, including a Dropout Statistics Field Test Participant Handbook; and in the summer of 1989, State-level field test coordinators were given these materials for training local district staff in procedures (a) to implement the definitions and (b) to provide the information needed during the 1989-1990 school year for

[1] The standard definition of a dropout that was developed is: "A dropout is an individual who: (1) Was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; (2) Was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; (3) Has not graduated from high school or completed a State- or district-approved educational program, and (4) Does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: a) transfer to another public school district, private school, or State- or district-approved education program, b) temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness, or c) death."

accurate dropout counting. These procedures were then field tested in 229 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in 26 States, the District of Columbia, and 2 outlying areas.

Each local school district was to collect data and submit reports for three time points: fall 1989, spring 1990, and fall 1990, and to cooperate with staff studying the implementation process. Each of the three reports called for membership counts, by racial/ethnic category and sex, and by grade, for grades 7 through 12. In addition, the spring 1990 and fall 1990 reports called for dropout counts by racial/ethnic, sex, and grade categories, for the period from the beginning of the fall 1989 term to the time of the report. Dropout counts were to be generated from School Leaver Lists, maintained at school or district levels, to which the name of every child leaving school (without being graduated) was to be added. Dropout counts were to include all individuals on the School Leaver Lists, except those verified as transfers, as temporary absences, or as deaths. That is, the "default" status of any school leaver was considered to be "dropout."

Finally, an independent organization, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), was selected to conduct an evaluation of the Field Test and of different ways of combining the data collected to calculate dropout rates. This evaluation was designed to address four main questions:

(1) What is the accuracy of dropout rates produced by different formulas, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of these different formulas?

(2) How accurate are the dropout counts — what error rates are associated with the application of the proposed definition?

(3) Were the training and other support activities and materials provided to the States and school districts adequate for producing accurate data?

(4) What factors external to those examined in the Field Test will affect the collection and reporting of dropout statistics through the CCD Survey?

The first objective was to evaluate three different formulas for calculating dropout rates. Even when there is agreement about the definition of the term "dropout," there are

many different ways of calculating dropout rates. Ligon et al. (1990)[2], employing 22 dropout rate formulas currently in use and a standardized definition of dropout, calculated dropout rates for Austin, Texas public schools that ranged from 10.1 percent to 57.0 percent. Comparisons of 3 proposed formulas are presented in Section 3. Factors associated with variations in dropout rates are also presented in that section.

The second objective involved estimating the error rate that would be associated with the application of the proposed definition of "dropout." This estimate applies only to the LEAs participating in the Field Test. Since LEAs were selected purposively and were restricted to States that volunteered to participate, generalizations cannot be made beyond the sample. Estimates of error rates are presented in Section 4. Different types of errors were analyzed. Factors associated with these errors and with error rates were investigated and are also reported in this section.

The third objective was an evaluation of the training and support that were provided to the participating States, LEAs, and schools. This task was accomplished through surveys and site visits. In addition, analyses of classification errors helped to identify effective procedures and to develop recommendations for further improvements. These are presented in Section 5.

The fourth objective was to identify barriers and incentives for the provision of uniform dropout statistics by State Education Agencies. This was accomplished by surveying State Education Agency representatives (in all 50 States and the District of Columbia) and through site visits. AIR's analyses and recommendations are contained in a separately submitted report[3] and are summarized in Section 6. Section 7 summarizes AIR's conclusions and provides recommendations for implementation of dropout rate reporting.

---

[2] Ligon, G., Stewart, B., and Wilkinson, D. (1990). *Making Dropout Rates Comparable: An Analysis of Definitions and Formulas.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, Massachusetts.

[3] Levine, R., and McLaughlin, D. (1991). *Barriers and Incentives for the Provision of Uniform Dropout Statistics by State Education Agencies.* Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research.

The information to address these objectives was obtained in four evaluation efforts:

(1) A survey of State and Local Education Agency representatives responsible for local implementation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test and of representatives of Education Agencies in States that chose not to participate in the Field Test;

(2) Site visits to fifteen participating LEAs;

(3) An independent validation of the educational status of 790 school leavers in 47 participating LEAs; and

(4) Analysis of individual grade, sex, and racial/ethnic group dropout and membership counts submitted to NCES by participating LEAs.

The procedures employed in these data collection efforts are discussed in Section 2. In addition to these efforts, dropout reports were requested from participating States and reviewed.

Caveat. Because current interest in dropout statistics is so high, it is important to note that the numbers in this report do not provide an unbiased estimate of any State or national dropout rates. The intent is to evaluate the success of a Field Test of proposed uniform dropout data collection and reporting procedures. The findings cannot be interpreted as accurate estimates of the total number of students dropping out of school during the 1989-90 school year.

SECTION 2. METHODOLOGY

Overview. Three major surveys were conducted in order to address the Field Test evaluation objectives: a survey of States participating in the Field Test (Participating SEAs), a survey of States not participating in the Field Test (Nonparticipating SEAs), and a survey of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) participating in the Field Test. The instruments employed, their administration procedures, and response rates are discussed for each of these surveys. Similarly, the materials and procedures employed in site visits and in validation of School Leaver List classifications are discussed in this section. Finally, analyses of dropout counts submitted to NCES by participating districts are discussed. Since each evaluation objective required the integration of results from these different data collections, only a general overview of analysis procedures is provided here. Results, as presented in subsequent sections, are organized by evaluation objectives rather than by survey.

Two hundred and thirty-two districts in 30 States and territories participated in the initial stages of the Dropout Statistics Field Test evaluation. Of these, 229 continued to participate through the end of the 1989-90 school year, of which 223 responded to a survey in May and June, 1990. Of these districts, a total of 187 also provided sufficiently complete membership and dropout counts to support analyses. These included 8 districts serving large cities, 37 districts serving fringe areas, 28 districts serving mid-size cities, 56 districts serving towns, and 58 districts serving rural areas. Although these districts do not represent a probability sample of the nation, they cover the range of types of districts.

The central instrument of the Field Test itself was the School Leaver List. Participating districts were to maintain a cumulative list of school leavers throughout the twelve month period, or an equivalent record, from which they would generate dropout counts by classifying each school leaver as a transfer, a dropout, or a specific exclusion. For cases of unknown status, the presumption was to classify each as a "dropout." As a part of the evaluation of the Field Test, AIR validated the classifications of a sample of individuals on School Leaver Lists, in a subsample of the participating districts. The primary concern of all

aspects of the evaluation, including the surveys of State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies, the site visits, and the School Leaver Classification Validation, was to identify the burdens and problems involved in maintaining School Leaver Lists and the accuracy of the information contained in School Leaver Lists.

Survey of Participating SEAs

Survey instrument. A representative of each participating State was surveyed to (a) identify factors that would influence the State's dropout rates, (b) identify incentives for participation, (c) identify barriers to participation, (d) identify State and local factors that might influence dropout rates, (e) evaluate the training received, and (6) elicit suggestions for increasing the accuracy of dropout data collections. Since some of the information collected was for qualitative assessments and was not intended to provide population estimates, several survey questions were open-ended. Items designed to permit comparisons between SEAs were closed-ended. A copy of the survey instrument is included as Appendix A.

Administration procedures. The respondent for the Participating State Survey was the State's Dropout Statistics Field Test Coordinator. In nearly every State, the Field Test Coordinator was also the State's "Dropout Coordinator."[4] Ten Participating State Survey respondents also served as the CCD Coordinator and four served as the National Cooperative Education Statistics System Liaison.

A copy of the Participating State Survey was mailed to each respondent in preparation for a telephone interview. All interviews, with one exception[5], were conducted by telephone or in person, by AIR senior staff. Telephone interviews were conducted and responses entered via a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. Telephone and personal interviewing permitted interviewers to elicit more extensive responses to open-ended

[4] As listed in "Directory, State Education Agency Coordinators and Chief State School Officers, April 1990" compiled by Elaine J. Price, National Center for Education Statistics.

[5] Northern Marianas, which responded by mail to the survey.

items, as well as permitting the elaboration of unclear responses. These interviewing modes are also seen as being less burdensome for the respondent than self-administered mail questionnaires. Surveys were administered from 11 May 1990 to 25 June 1990. Every State participating in the Field Test responded to this survey.

The 30 entities (States, territories, and the District of Columbia) that agreed to participate in the Field Test (referred to hereafter as "Participating States") and the 24 States that chose not to participate in the Field Test (referred to hereafter as "Nonparticipating States") are listed in Table 1, and are presented pictorially as Figure 1.

Survey of Nonparticipating SEAs

Survey instrument. Representatives of all of the nonparticipating States were surveyed to identify their reasons for not participating in the Field Test, the barriers to employing the definitions and procedures for dropout accounting that were field tested in the participating States, and incentives for producing accurate and comparable dropout statistics. Since the purpose was not to produce quantitative estimates of the frequency of occurrence of these factors, survey items relating to barriers and incentives were predominantly open-ended. Whenever possible, survey items about barriers and incentives were designed to permit comparisons between participating and nonparticipating States. A copy of the instrument used for this purpose is presented in Appendix B.

Administration procedures. Respondents for the Nonparticipating State Survey were individuals serving either as State Dropout Coordinator or, where this position was unassigned, CCD Coordinator.

All Nonparticipating State Surveys were conducted via AIR's CATI system. The CATI system enabled interviewers to record directly into the database complete answers, including extended responses to open-ended questions. These surveys were administered from 19 July 1990 to 13 September 1990. Every nonparticipating State responded to this survey.

Table 1. List of Participating and Nonparticipating States

A. Participating States

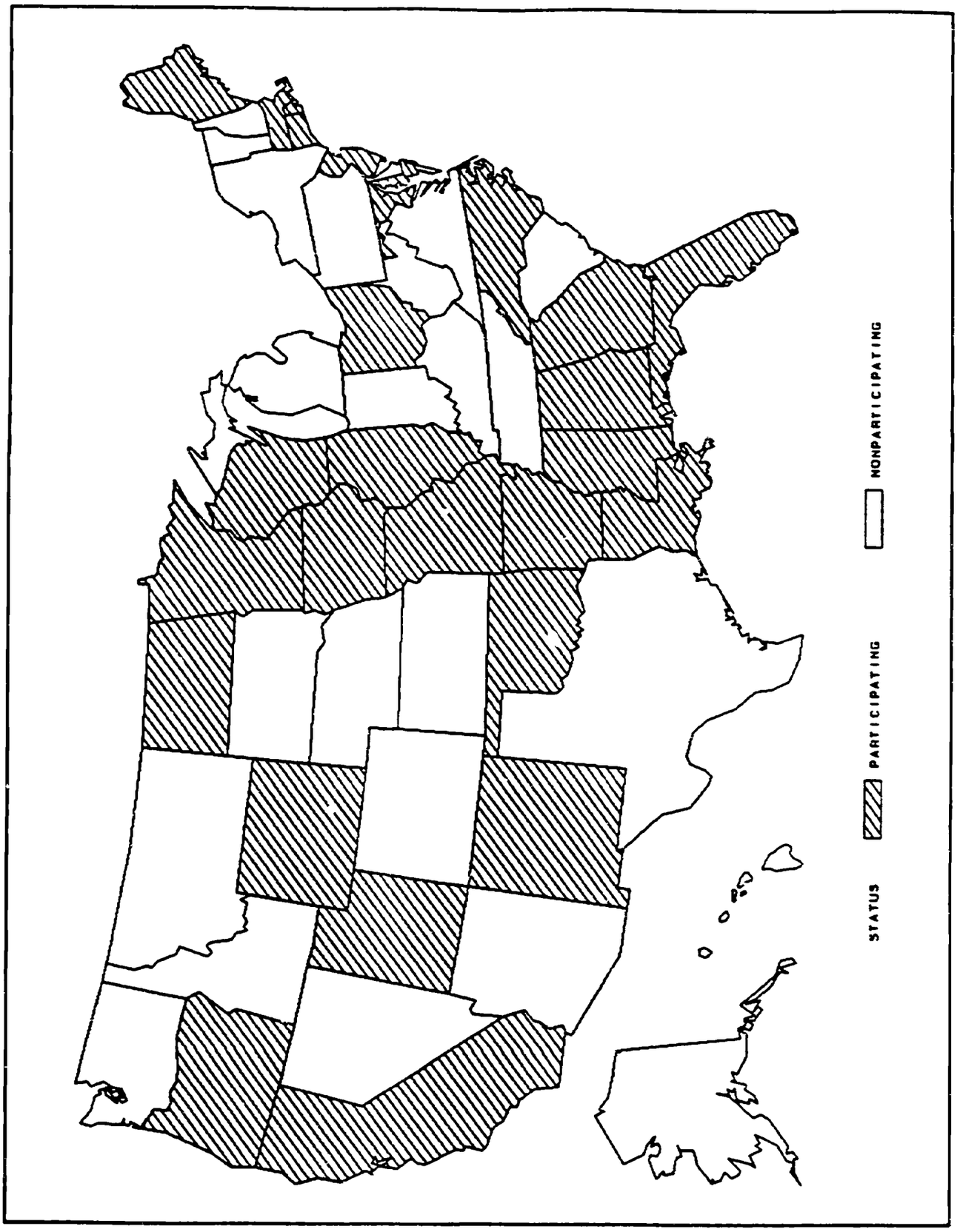
Alabama	Iowa	New Jersey	Rhode Island
Arkansas	Louisiana	New Mexico	Utah
California	Maine	North Carolina	Wisconsin
Connecticut	Maryland	North Dakota	Wyoming
D. C.	Massachusetts	Ohio	American Samoa
Florida	Minnesota	Oklahoma	N. Marianas Islands
Georgia	Mississippi	Oregon	*Puerto Rico
Illinois	Missouri		

B. Nonparticipating States

Alaska	Indiana	Nevada	Tennessee
Arizona	Kansas	New Hampshire	Texas
Colorado	Kentucky	New York	Vermont
Delaware	Michigan	Pennsylvania	Virginia
Hawaii	Montana	South Carolina	Washington
Idaho	Nebraska	South Dakota	West Virginia

*Puerto Rico withdrew from the Field Test after some data collection had been completed.

FIGURE 1. MAP OF PARTICIPATING AND NONPARTICIPATING STATES



Survey of Participating LEAs

Survey instrument. Representatives of all of the participating LEAs were surveyed to provide information about (a) the procedures employed in producing membership counts, (b) the procedures employed in maintaining lists of school leavers, (c) the availability of information about dropout risk factors, and (d) the effectiveness of the training and materials provided, and to elicit suggestions for increasing the accuracy of dropout data collections. The survey instrument included both open-ended and closed-ended questions, and is presented as Appendix C.

Administration procedures. The respondent for the LEA Survey was the LEA's Field Test Coordinator. A copy of the survey was mailed to the coordinator in preparation for a telephone interview. In all but one of the States,[6] Field Test Coordinators were provided with the option of responding to the questionnaire in writing or waiting for an AIR staff person to interview them by telephone. Sixty-five (29%) of the respondents returned questionnaires by mail; 158 were interviewed entirely by telephone. When critical information was omitted from a self-administered (mail) questionnaire, the respondent was recontacted by telephone.

Telephone interviews were conducted via AIR's computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. Telephone interviewing permitted interviewers to elicit more extensive responses to open-ended items, as well as permitting the probing of vague responses. Surveys were administered from 11 May 1990 to 29 June 1990. Of 232 originally participating districts, three were found to have dropped from the Field Test prior to the survey, due to staff changes or district restructuring. Of the 229 active participants, 223 (97%) responded to this survey.

[6] In one State, questionnaires were administered through the State Coordinator. Participating LEAs in that State were asked to respond by completing the questionnaire and mailing it back to the State Coordinator's office.

Site Visits

Data collection guides. Site visits were conducted in the spring of 1990 and in the winter of 1990-1991. The purpose of the spring site visits was to observe the range of procedures employed in counting dropouts; to monitor implementation; to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection and reporting procedures employed; and, at a subsample of sites, to pilot test the School Leaver Classification Validation procedures. Since these site visits were conducted prior to the submission of the spring 1990 membership counts and prior to the preparation of the dropout report forms, additional site visits were conducted in the winter of 1990-1991. The latter site visits also permitted observation of the range of procedures employed in dropout accounting, as well as identification of strengths and weaknesses of the procedures and definitions. In particular, the completeness of School Leaver Lists was examined. Errors detected in AIR's validation of school leaver classifications were investigated and further tracking of school leavers took place during these latter visits.

The guides that were prepared for these visits (see Appendix D) served as reminders of the areas that were to be discussed and investigated in conversations with SEA, LEA, and local school staff. They led to many fruitful and forthright discussions; many areas not explicitly mentioned in the guides were the topic of discussions and demonstrations.

Site visit procedures. The nine sites for the spring 1990 visits were selected purposively, to insure that a heterogeneous group of LEAs would be visited. There were five strata of LEAs (large city, medium city, fringe area, town, and rural). At least one LEA of each stratum was visited. Geographical diversity was another criterion for site selection. LEAs were selected in eastern, southern, central, and western States. In each LEA, conversations were conducted with district staff. In addition, anywhere from two to eleven different schools were visited. During these school visits, discussions were held with all staff associated with the preparation of membership counts and the school leaver accounting system. Whenever possible, discussions were also conducted with SEA staff involved with the Field Test. These site visits typically lasted two full days.

Five LEAs were visited in the winter of 1990-1991. These sites were also selected purposively, to include some LEAs in which there were high error rates (in their classification of school leavers) or in which there were problems conducting the validation. Geographical and strata diversity were also considerations. During these visits, discussions were conducted with the LEA coordinator and other district and school staff involved in dropout counting and reporting. In addition, School Leaver Lists were checked for accuracy and completeness by comparison with fall 1989 and fall 1990 membership lists: anyone listed on the fall 1989 membership list and not on the fall 1990 membership list should have been on the School Leaver List. Inconsistencies noted in AIR's validation effort were also resolved. These visits lasted two days each.

Validation of School Leaver Classification

Data collection instruments. Several different forms and materials were employed in validating school leaver classifications. Information required for tracking school leavers and for additional analyses was obtained through a School Leaver Information Form (SLIF). All contact attempts and the results of these attempts were recorded on Contact Attempt Record Sheets. Forms requesting validation information from schools and from school leavers (or members of their immediate family) were also employed. Copies of these materials are included as Appendix E.

Sample selection. AIR attempted to validate the status of 18 school leavers in each of 53 different LEAs across the 27 participating States (including the District of Columbia). Whenever possible, two LEAs in each participating State were chosen as sites for conducting validation efforts. These LEAs were selected so that one in each State would be a large or medium sized city, and the other would be in a fringe area, a town, or a rural area. Two States had only a single participating LEA, and that LEA was selected. A third State only had town or rural LEAs, so only a single LEA was selected in this State. It was subsequently discovered that one of the selected LEAs in another State did not have a total of 18 school leavers, so an additional rural LEA was selected within this State to complement the smaller rural LEA.

After the sample of LEAs was selected, the SEA Field Test coordinator was contacted by AIR to review the selection of LEAs. In a few cases in which selected LEAs had dropped out of the Field Test, replacements were selected. Within each LEA, two or three schools were randomly chosen. Whenever possible, two high schools and one middle/junior high school were selected. (If an LEA had only a single high school, only one high school and one middle school were selected.) Next, LEA coordinators were contacted and the proposed sample of schools was reviewed. In some cases, a selected school had been closed, necessitating selection of a replacement.

Selecting a sample of eighteen school leavers in each district required that copies of the School Leaver Lists from each selected school be obtained. In some cases, SEA coordinators preferred that all requests for School Leaver Lists and other information be handled by them; in other cases, LEA coordinators preferred that all requests be handled through them; in still other cases, LEAs permitted AIR to request this information from the schools directly. If participating schools (or, if the record keeping was centralized, participating LEAs or SEAs) had been maintaining these lists, their provision should have been a straightforward task. Several schools and several LEAs were unable to provide school leaver information in a timely manner (i.e., within two months of the initial request, and after repeated follow-up attempts), suggesting that maintenance of these lists was not universal among all participants. Schools and LEAs that did not provide school leaver information were excluded from the validation effort; time did not permit the selection of replacements.

Four LEAs in four different States were totally excluded from the validation because they failed to provide School Leaver Lists or to provide **any** information requested on the SLIF.[7] In four other LEAs, the sample size was reduced because of failure of specific

[7] One of these LEAs was site visited to determine the reasons for failure to provide information in a timely fashion. In this LEA, dropout counts were prepared from the schools' attendance record books and other school records. The School Leaver List and School Leaver Information Forms (which they eventually provided) were compared with these attendance records and other records and with the dropout counts they provided for the Field Test. Their accuracy was quite good. Error rates were estimated to be about 5 percent. Failure to provide this information in this case did not mean the information was unavailable; staff were merely unwilling to provide it to the evaluators in a timely manner.

schools to provide the information needed for tracking in a timely manner.[8] The final sample was comprised of 790 school leavers in 47 LEAs in the 27 participating States.

Within each LEA selected for the validation, stratified random sampling was used to select twelve school leavers labeled as transfers and six school leavers labeled as dropouts. These leavers were stratified by grade and sex so that equal numbers of males and females and equal numbers of 7th-8th, 9th-10th, and 11th-12th graders were selected. Table 2 shows this breakdown for a typical school district. The oversampling of transfers qualitatively reflected the proportions of different categories on the submitted School Leaver Lists, with the major exception that very few seventh and eighth grade dropouts appeared on typical School Leaver Lists. That exception undoubtedly reflects the fact that compulsory attendance laws in most States strongly discourage dropping out from these grades.

Table 2. Number of School Leavers Selected for Validation in a Typical LEA

Grade	Identification as Transfers by School		Identification as Dropouts by School	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
7 - 8	2	2	1	1
9 - 10	2	2	1	1
11 - 12	2	2	1	1

Validation procedures. After a sample of school leavers was selected, information provided on the School Leaver Lists was used to prepare School Leaver Information Forms (SLIFs). These SLIFs were returned to the coordinators or to the schools for completion. The SLIFs provided the information at the school (or district) that was available for tracking these school leavers and for verifying their school leaver status.

[8] One of these schools was visited as part of another site visit. A School Leaver List was provided the day of the site visit. There was a new principal at this school who was not informed of the Field Test until late in the evaluation. She was very concerned about record keeping matters, but gave the Field Test a low priority. The accuracy of her school's Leaver List was comparable to the other schools in the LEA that provided lists.

In order to validate the classification of a school leaver (i.e., to determine whether students labeled as transfers were really transfers and to determine whether leavers labeled as dropouts were really dropouts), LEAs, schools, leavers, and members of the leaver families were contacted by phone, mail, or in person. Cases were considered validated when the following criteria were met:

If the leaver had transferred to an approved school or program, a representative of that school or program verified the leaver's membership during the 1989-1990 school year or at the beginning of the fall 1990 term and verified that the school or program was approved.

If the leaver had dropped out, the leaver or a member of the leaver's immediate family (who was at least 14 years of age) verified that the leaver (a) had dropped out from the specified school, (b) had not enrolled in any other approved school at any time subsequent to dropping out (during the 1989-1990 school year) and (c) was not enrolled on October 1, 1990 (or the date on which fall membership counts are prepared).

Accordingly, if a student who had transferred was mislabeled as a dropout and informed the tracking staff that (s)he had transferred, the staff would have to verify this transfer with the new school before considering the case validated. Dropouts would **not** be considered validated merely from statements by teachers or friends of the school leaver. The only exceptions to these criteria were for deceased school leavers. When this status was indicated on the School Leaver List, there was no attempt to contact the leaver's family for validation purposes. Local police or bureaus of vital statistics were contacted to verify the status of these school leavers.

Validation efforts were performed primarily by AIR staff. A bilingual staff member prepared Spanish translations of all materials. In cases in which AIR staff exhausted all potential leads, attempts were made to identify local people to be hired as consultant-trackers. Once hired, these individuals could obtain information about school leavers from the leavers'

friends or teachers and could conduct validation interviews in person. (SEA, LEA, and local school staff were asked to identify candidates for these positions.) Special training materials were prepared and sent to the consultant trackers. A copy of the Tracker's Guide is included as Appendix F.

Validation rates. Before interpreting the "error rates" estimated in the validation, planners must take into account the validation rates, or "find rates." "Validation rates" are defined as the percent of cases that were successfully found in the evaluation and could be checked. An "error rate," on the other hand, refers to the percent, among those validated, for which the classification by the school and the classification by the evaluator did not match. AIR staff in Palo Alto, California, were able to validate the status of 695 of the 790 leavers (88.0%) without traveling on-site. On-site trackers were to be hired to follow-up the 95 unresolved cases. However, because it was not possible to identify consultant-trackers in every LEA and because it was determined that some cases--for instance, when a student had left the United States--would be unresolvable even by a knowledgeable native, only 58 cases were sent to local on-site trackers. The trackers were able to resolve 38 of these 58 cases (65.5%), producing **an overall validation success rate of 92.8 percent (733 of 790).**

Because the relative cost of cases requiring on-site tracking was substantially higher than other cases, it is important in planning for tracking resources to be aware of the overall "find rate" of the validation effort, as well as differences between the kinds of cases that could be verified at long distance (e.g., by AIR staff in Palo Alto) and those that required on-site investigation. Of the 790 school leavers, 521 were classified by the schools as transfers, and 249 were classified as dropouts. Twenty were classified as (non-dropout) exclusions. These were students who should not have been included in the initial sample lists, for instance, those who had died or were still in school. Validation rates for leavers initially labeled as transfers were higher (496 of 521, or 95.2 percent) than validation rates for dropouts (217 of 249, or 87.1 percent).

The difference in validation rates reflects the fact that validating the status of transfers was easier than validating the status of dropouts. First, as will be discussed in Section 4, the

error rate for transfers was lower; and therefore, relatively less time was necessary for tracking transfers. Second, school officials were easier to contact than school leavers or members of their families. Cases that were easily resolved by phone or mail were resolved by AIR staff. Only after several contact attempts had failed and all reasonable leads were exhausted, would a case be sent to an on-site tracker. Because on-site trackers were assigned the most difficult-to-locate cases, and because nearly two-thirds of the cases they were assigned were students who were school leavers listed as dropouts (who were more difficult to track), their lower success rate was expected and easily understandable.

Comparison of error rates on cases completed by AIR staff in Palo Alto with cases completed by on-site trackers. Because the 57 cases whose statuses were not successfully determined were more similar to those assigned to and found by local on-site trackers than to those found by AIR telephone staff, comparison of error rates for these two sets of cases will provide indications of the error rates of those not found. Of the 733 verified cases, 20 were not classified as either transfers or dropouts by the schools, and an additional 65 were not classified as either transfers or dropouts by AIR (the majority of these were returners to the same school). The remaining 648 cases were classified as either dropouts or transfers both originally and finally (612 of the 695 validated by AIR staff in Palo Alto and 36 of the 38 validated by on-site trackers). Based on these 648 "transfer/dropout" cases, error rates in school reports for leavers listed as transfers and dropouts were calculated and are presented in Section 4.[9]

It should be noted that classification error rate was based on the proportion of validated cases for which the school district and the evaluator disagreed on a school leaver's status, for both dropouts and transfers. An alternative approach, comparing the total numbers of reported and validated dropouts, would not have excluded all of the cases that were other than dropouts or transfers, and would have produced somewhat different rates.

---

[9] A leaver listed by a school as a transfer who turned out to be a dropout was considered an error. Similarly, a leaver listed by a school as a dropout who transferred to an approved school or program was also labeled an error. Error rates for incorrectly labeled transfers were calculated by dividing the number of incorrectly labeled transfers by the number of incorrectly labeled + the number of correctly labeled transfers. Error rates for incorrectly labeled dropouts were calculated in an analogous manner.

Because consultant trackers worked on difficult cases, it was not surprising to find that classification error rates in the cases validated by AIR trackers and by consultant-trackers differed. Of the 612 transfer/dropout cases which AIR staff in Palo Alto checked, 444 (73 percent) were originally listed as transfers and 168 (27 percent) as dropouts; of the 36 transfer/dropout cases which on-site trackers checked, 12 (33 percent) were transfers and 24 (67 percent) were dropouts (as classified by schools). Of the 57 unverified cases, 25 (44 percent) had been classified as transfers by the participating schools and 32 (56 percent) had been classified as dropouts.

The error rate for leavers listed as transfers who were verified by AIR trackers was 7.2 percent (32 of 444); on the other hand, on-site trackers found that 41.7 percent (5 of 12) leavers listed as transfers were actually dropouts. The error rate for leavers listed as dropouts who were verified by AIR trackers was 26.2 percent (44 of 168); for those verified by on-site trackers, only 8.3 percent (2 of 24) were actually transfers. Overall, error rates for leavers verified by AIR trackers were 12.4 percent (76 of 612); for on-site trackers, 19.4 percent (7 of 36).[10] The combined error rate was 12.8 percent. Tables 3 and 4 compare error rates for cases checked by AIR staff with cases checked by on-site trackers; results of the evaluation with respect to error rates are discussed in Section 4. The information on error rates was used to assess the potential accuracy of a national dropout statistic and to identify means for increasing the accuracy.

[10] Approximately 10 percent of the cases validated by on-site trackers were independently verified by AIR staff. No inconsistencies were noted.

Table 3. Comparisons of Initial Classifications and Final Classifications of School Leavers Validated by AIR Staff

Initial Status	Final Status			Grand Total
	Transfers	Dropouts	Total	
Transfer	412 (92.8%)	32 (7.2%)	100%	444 (72.5%)
Dropout	44 (26.2%)	124 (73.8%)	100%	168 (27.5%)
Total	456 (74.5%)	156 (25.5%)	100%	612 (100%)

Note: Only leavers listed as transfers or dropouts are included in this table.

Table 4. Comparisons of Initial Classifications and Final Classifications of School Leavers Validated by On-site Trackers

Initial Status	Final Status			Grand Total
	Transfers	Dropouts	Total	
Transfer	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	100%	12 (33.3%)
Dropout	2 (8.3%)	22 (91.7%)	100%	24 (66.7%)
Total	9 (25.0%)	27 (75.0%)	100%	36 (100%)

Note: Only leavers listed as transfers or dropouts are included in this table.

Resolution of the statuses of the final 25 leavers listed by schools as transfers and 32 leavers listed as dropouts could alter the error rates which were calculated. If all of these leavers were correctly classified by the schools, the overall error rate (12.8%) would decline to 11.8 percent; if all were misclassified, it would rise to 19.9 percent. Because the unresolved cases were the most difficult, the error rate for the unresolved cases may be more

like the error rate for cases resolved by on-site trackers than by AIR trackers. If the on-site tracker error rates were applied to the unresolved cases, the overall error rate would be 13.6 percent.

Validation effort. Both AIR trackers and on-site trackers recorded time spent for the various steps in the validation process for each case, in order to provide estimates of the burden in school leaver tracking. The average total time spent, for the 770 of the 790 cases that were classified by schools as either transfers or dropouts, is presented in Table 5. It should be noted that these figures do not include training time or administrative time, such as preparing weekly progress information, completing pay vouchers, or attending meetings.

Table 5. Average Total Time (in Minutes) Spent Validating School Leavers' Status, by Initial and Final Status

Initial Status	Final Status			
	Transfer	Dropout	Graduate or in Same School	Unverified
Transfer	21.2 min. (*n*=419)	55.3 min. (*n*=37)	22.4 min. (*n*=40)	85.7 min. (*n*=25)
Dropout	29.7 min. (*n*=46)	36.6 min. (*n*=146)	24.5 min. (*n*=25)	80.8 min. (*n*=32)

Generally, verifying the status of (actual) transfers and of school leavers who turned out to be active students or returners to the school they left required about a third of an hour. Of successful cases, most time was required, on the average, for finding (actual) dropouts

who had been classified as transfers by the school district. As expected, even more time was spent, on the average, on the unsuccessful cases.

Analyses of Submitted Counts

As a part of the Dropout Statistics Field Test, dropout counts were submitted to NCES on trial forms for spring 1990 and fall 1990. The form called for separate dropout counts for each sex in each of 5 racial/ethnic groups (Native American, Asian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black-not Hispanic, and White-not Hispanic) in each grade from 7 through 12, a total of 60 counts. The spring dropout counts were for the period from the beginning of the fall term to near the end of the spring term, and the fall counts were for the full year, from one fall to the next. The form also called for membership counts, for fall 1989, for spring 1990, and for fall 1990. Membership counts were to be submitted separately for each grade (7 through 12 for the first two time points and 8 through 12, plus graduates, for the third time point) and for each combination of sex and racial/ethnic grouping.

In a few cases, complete dropout counts were submitted, but with incomplete membership data. When fall 1990 membership counts were the only missing component, linear regression was used to impute counts for each grade ($R^2 > .98$ for each grade); and when fall 1989 membership counts were the only missing component, linear regression was used to impute counts for each grade ($R^2 > .99$ for each grade). In cases in which breakdowns of membership by race/ethnic group and sex were missing for one time period, the percentages were set equal to the other time periods.

The data were checked for outliers, and individual cases were investigated. In some cases membership counts in one grade would differ from the counts in adjacent grades by a factor of more than two. These could be accounted for by the existence of "feeder" districts or schools or by the occurrence of district restructuring.

The States and districts participated in the Field Test on a voluntary basis; and therefore, as noted in the Introduction, **it is not appropriate to draw conclusions about national dropout rates from the field test evaluation.** In order to correlate variations in dropout rates with policies across districts in the sample, however, it is important to control for the associations between demographic variations and dropout rates. To do this, the dropout rate in each district in the sample was compared to an aggregate dropout rate for similar districts. For this purpose, participating districts were divided into nine categories, based on fall 1989 membership counts submitted as a part of the Field Test: numbers of seventh through twelfth grade students (three categories: fewer than 1,000; 1,000 -- 4,999; 5,000 or more)[11], and percentages of students who were either black or Hispanic (three categories: less than 10%; 10% -- 39.9%; 40% or more).

Furthermore, to test whether various characteristics of individual State policies were correlated with dropout rates in the sample, it was necessary to take into account demographic variations between the sample districts in a State and the State as a whole. To accomplish this, in each State, poststratification case weights were constructed to match the sample of districts to the totality of districts in that State, across the nine categories specified above, based on 1989-90 CCD information. The case weight for each sample district was the ratio of the total grade 7 to 12 membership in that category in the State to the total grade 7 to 12 membership in that category in the sample.

Using these poststratification weights, dropout rates could be combined across categories in each State to provide a figure that could be correlated with State-level factors. In cases in which one of the nine categories was present in a State but not represented in the sample in that State, the aggregate dropout rate based on the entire participating sample (across all participating States) in that category was used. For example, if a State had some

---

[11] Analyses to address training issues and issues related to computerization of processing were carried out prior to the receipt of the fall 1989 membership counts for the Field Test. For those analyses, a different district size variable, based on total student counts from the 1989-1990 Common Core of Data, was used. Total counts were divided into four categories: 1 -- 1,000; 1,001 -- 5,000; 5,001 -- 10,000; and more than 10,000. The rank correlation between the two size measures, total student counts from CCD and grade 7 -- 12 membership counts from the Field Test, was .98895. Therefore, it was decided not to reexecute those analyses merely to provide the same size breakdown for all tables.

small school districts with a mid-level of black and Hispanic membership, but none of these participated in the Field Test, the aggregate figure was used for this category.

The statistical significance of certain relations was tested in this report. These tests were based on the sample of participants, which were not selected as a probability sample and may or may not be quantitatively representative of the nation. Furthermore, statistical tests of relations between student background characteristics and dropout status treated individual school leavers as independent observations. To the extent that variance in these relations was primarily a district level phenomenon, the statistical significance may be over-stated.

SECTION 3. DROPOUT RATES

Dropout rates in current use are defined in many ways and the typical values for dropout rates in American schools depend on the definition used. They also vary as a function of the grade levels at which transitions from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school occur. Because of the variety of grade level distinctions among schools across districts, attempts to develop comparable definitions across districts must be limited to single-year dropout rates, reported separately for each grade level. Thus, a district has a seventh grade dropout rate, an eighth grade dropout rate, a ninth grade dropout rate, and so on. These are commonly called "event rates," to distinguish them from a "cohort rate," which is the total dropout rate for a cohort of students entering a starting grade (e.g., seventh grade) over the period until normal graduation (e.g., six to eight years). Although a cohort rate is more informative of a school district's success in holding the number of dropouts down, it requires keeping track of and merging data over several years.

As an approximation to a true cohort dropout rate, a synthetic cohort dropout rate across several grades can be constructed from single-grade event dropout rates for a single year. To accomplish this, one uses the complement of the dropout rate, the retention rate: a 5 percent single-year event dropout rate and a 95 percent single-year retention rate are equivalent. Because retention rates are cumulative, one can multiply the corresponding single-year retention rates to produce a composite retention rate: single-year event dropout rates of 1 percent, 2 percent, 3 percent, 5 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent, for seventh through twelfth grades, correspond to single-year retention rates of 99 percent, 98 percent, 97 percent, 95 percent, 94 percent, and 95 percent, yielding a synthetic cohort retention rate of (.99 x .98 x .97 x .95 x .94 x .95), or .798, or 79.8 percent. The corresponding synthetic cohort **dropout** rate for the six grade levels is 100.0 percent - 79.8 percent, or 20.2 percent. Seen in these terms, a 10 percent dropout rate is either very good (as a cohort rate) or very poor (as a single-year event rate). It must be noted, of course, that to the extent that dropouts re-enroll and complete school, any method of computing a cohort dropout rate that relies

completely on single-grade dropout rates will overestimate the proportion of a cohort of students (e.g., seventh graders) who never complete high school.

To construct even a single-year event dropout rate requires both a count of dropouts and a count of the number of students served during the year. The Dropout Statistics Field Test involved a systematic procedure for keeping track of all school leavers over the course of a year, from which dropouts could be counted. However, defining the number of students served during the year as a denominator is also problematic. Ideally, each student in the nation's public schools would be counted exactly once: if a student transferred in the middle of a year, then dropped out, only one school should be responsible for counting the student as a dropout; and therefore, only one school should count the student as among those served. Which school should this be: the one at which the student started the year, the one that served the student for the longest time, or the one at which the student was last enrolled? If we were to assume that all transfers are to an initial "good standing" in the receiving school, then the logical procedure would be to attribute the student outcome to the school of last enrollment. This alternative is also attractive from the perspective of implementation, because it reinforces schools' tracking of school leavers - the school that "loses" the student is the one that must call the student a dropout.

One other alternative to avoid missing or double-counting students in the aggregate would be to use Average Daily Membership. Attributing the student fractionally to each school might seem a possibility, but in practice it would be a virtual impossibility. Thus, it is important to find out just how much difference the measure of number of students served makes. In the Field Test, in order to determine the extent to which different definitions of students served might affect computed dropout rates, three approximations to the "denominator" were compared: (1) fall membership counts for the beginning of the school year during which dropouts were to be counted, (2) spring membership counts of the same school year, plus the dropouts up to the time of the spring membership counts, and (3) following fall membership counts for the next grade (or for the twelfth grade, graduates), plus the total dropout counts for the year. Each of these measures is affected differently by

transfers into and out of a school district, and the question for the evaluation was the nature and size of the effects.[12]

To understand the conceptual differences in these alternatives, it is necessary to consider eight overlapping categories of students in grade (g) in school year (y):

MF(g,y) students who are **members** in grade g at the beginning of the **fall** term of year y (e.g., y=89-90)

TIFS(g,y) **transfers-in** into grade g after the beginning of the **fall** term of year y but before the end of the **spring** term

TOFS(g,y) **transfers-out** from grade g after the beginning of the **fall** term of year y but before the end of the **spring** term

TISF(g,y) **transfers-in** into grade g+1 (over the **summer**) at the beginning of the **fall** term of year y+1

TOSF(g,y) **transfers-out** from grade g after the end of the **spring** term, who enroll elsewhere at the beginning of the **fall** term of year y+1

DFS(g,y) students who **drop** out from grade g between the beginning of the **fall** term and the end of the **spring** term of year y

DFF(g,y) students who **drop** out from grade g between the beginning of the **fall** term of year y and the beginning of the **fall** term of year y+1

R(g,y) students **retained** in grade g from year y to year y+1

[12] In addition to the alternatives considered here, several other alternatives were also considered, based on spring-to-spring dropout counts. These are described in Appendix G.

A full-year dropout rate for grade g in year y can be estimated as:

DFF(g,y) / (number of students served in grade g in year y).

The **three alternative measures of numbers of students served,** NSS(g,y), can be reasonably well-approximated by combinations of the categories listed above. The **closest** to the ideal of attributing each student's enrollment to just the school from which he or she would be called a dropout, conceptually, is the **second** alternative, which barring suspensions and deaths, is:

$$NSS_2(g,y) = MF(g,y) + (TIFS(g,y) - TOFS(g,y));$$

that is, all students who were enrolled in grade g some time during year y, except those who became the responsibility of another district through transfer. The **first** alternative, $NSS_1(g,y)$ = MF(g,y), is larger (resulting in a **lower dropout rate**) to the extent that there is **net out-migration** during the fall and spring terms. The **third** alternative is more complicated:

for grades 7 through 11:

$$NSS_3(g,y) = MF(g,y) + (TIFS(g,y) - TOFS(g,y)) - (TOSF(g,y) - TISF(g,y)) - (R(g,y) - R(g+1,y));$$

for grade 12:

$$NSS_3(g,y) = MF(g,y) + (TIFS(g,y) - TOFS(g,y)) - (R(g,y)).$$

This alternative will be (a) smaller (resulting in a **higher dropout rate**) to the extent that there is **retention in grade g** (more than in grade g+1), or (b) larger (resulting in a **lower dropout rate**) to the extent that there is **net in-migration** into grade g+1 at the beginning of the fall term of year y+1. The latter factor is most prominent in grades and districts in which many students transfer from parochial to public schools at the beginning of the year.

The first question for the analysis was the extent to which the three denominators might lead to different dropout rates. The results comparing the three methods for computing single-year event dropout rates and a synthetic cohort rate are displayed in Table 6. Note that here, and in following tables, analyses are based on validated dropouts.

Table 6. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates for Participating School Districts, Using Three Methods (n=187 Districts)

	1. Dropouts / First Fall Membership	2. Dropouts / (Spring Membership + Spring Dropouts)	3. Dropouts / (Second Fall Membership + Full-Year Dropouts)
Single-Grade Event Rates			
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.5%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.3%	5.5%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.4%	6.6%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.5%	6.5%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.9%
Synthetic Cohort Rate			
Mean	23.2%	23.1%	23.4%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 58.4%	0% -- 60.9%

Note: Field test data are not representative of national totals.

The obvious conclusion to be reached is that there are only negligible differences between the three versions of the dropout rates, compared to the systematic variation between grades. In addition to demonstrating the insensitivity of the observed rates to the method of approximating the numbers of students served, Table 6 shows a clear pattern of increasing dropout rates from grade 7 to grade 10 and a decreasing dropout rate at grade 12. Also, Table 6 provides an initial bench mark for the range that may be expected in single-year dropout rates, among the 187 school districts participating in the Dropout Statistics Field Test evaluation that provided counts needed for calculating these rates.

It should be noted that the figures presented in Table 6 are unweighted averages of individual school district dropout rates. Because, as will be shown below, larger districts were characterized by higher dropout rates on the average, any **aggregate dropout rate**, computed as the ratio of the sum of districts' dropouts to the sum of districts' memberships, is higher than the corresponding **average dropout rate**. For example, the synthetic cohort dropout rate for the aggregate of all participating school districts is about 30 percent, not 23 percent. This distinction, which exists no matter which of the three computation methods is used, is important in assessing progress toward goals of reducing dropout rates.

Beyond the similarity of means shown in Table 6, the intercorrelations among the three synthetic cohort rates across districts were all greater than .99. Because differences between the three methods of computing dropout rates were small, the choice between methods can be based on other factors. First, the cost of collecting spring membership data in addition to fall membership data is significant, so Method 2 is relatively more costly. Not every LEA or SEA collects spring membership data. Second, because the denominator for Method 3 involves next year enrollments of those served in a prior year, it is necessary to compute the number of graduates for the twelfth grade dropout rate. That number is apparently more difficult for some districts to provide, as evidenced by the fact that this figure was missing on many districts' reports. Therefore, the dropout rate based on Method 1 appears preferable; and the remainder of the analyses presented below are based on Method 1.

Simple comparison of a particular district's dropout rates to the benchmarks does not take into account various sources of variation in dropout rates. The standard deviations for between-district variation in single-year dropout rates (Method 1) were 1.7 percent, 2.6 percent, 5.2 percent, 5.2 percent, 4.4 percent, and 4.3 percent, for grades 7 through 12, and the standard deviation on the synthetic cohort dropout rate was 13.5 percent. (Standard deviations for the other two methods of computation were virtually the same.) Roughly one district in seven had a synthetic cohort dropout rate less than 9 percent, and roughly one in seven had a dropout rate greater than 38 percent.

Correlates of Dropout Rates

The field test examined the relationship between the incidence of dropouts and selected school district and pupil characteristics. The purpose of this examination was to determine whether such characteristics (for example, dropout's sex and race/ethnicity) were associated with enough variation in dropout rates to warrant the additional burden of reporting them.

The use of a uniform definition allows us to ask: What kinds of districts are characterized by high and low dropout rates? The results in Table 7 address a major source of variation: size of district. In this comparison, it is clear that average dropout rates in participating districts with more than 5,000 membership in grades 7 through 12 were higher, and in districts with fewer than 1,000 were lower, than in mid-size districts.

Table 7. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates for Small, Mid-Size, and Large Participating School Districts

Grade Level	Small Districts (7-12 Membership < 1,000) (n=56)	Mid-Size Districts (7-12 Membership 1,000 - 4,999) (n=94)	Large Districts (7-12 Membership > 4,999) (n=37)
7	0.7%	0.7%	1.7%
8	1.2%	1.7%	2.5%
9	3.2%	5.5%	8.3%
10	4.4%	6.5%	9.3%
11	4.8%	6.8%	8.7%
12	3.8%	6.2%	7.6%
Synthetic Cohort Rate	16.3%	23.8%	32.0%

Note: Field test data are not representative of national totals.

It should be emphasized that the results in Table 7 are based on an unweighted average of districts participating in the Dropout Statistics Field Test, and although these districts were in over 20 States, they are subject to various sources of potential confounding. For example, there was a significant correlation ($r=.34$, $p<.001$) in the sample between district membership and the percentage of students who were black. To the extent that dropout rates for black students are higher than for other students, it is necessary to separate these two effects.

Dropout and membership counts were collected by race and sex, as well as by grade, during the Dropout Statistics Field Test, to enable computation of separate dropout rates for these groups. The results are in Table 8, which shows average single-year dropout rates for separate race/ethnicity and sex groups. These figures, unlike those presented in Tables 6 and 7, are averages aggregated across grades 7 through 12. As in Tables 6 and 7, these are unweighted averages across participating districts. Although dropout rates for blacks were higher than for whites, the differences were not as dramatic as the differences between large and small districts. The major feature shown in Table 8 is the relatively high dropout rate among Hispanics.

Table 8. Average Single-Year Event Dropout Rates for Male and Female Students in Different Race/Ethnicity Groups

Race/Ethnicity Group	Males	Females
Native American	6.3% (*n*=116)	6.0% (*n*=112)
Asian and Pacific Islander	4.1% (*n*=143)	2.5% (*n*=151)
Hispanic	9.2% (*n*=143)	7.6% (*n*=140)
Black	5.9% (*n*=158)	6.1% (*n*=154)
White	4.6% (*n*=185)	4.1% (*n*=186)

Note: *n*=Number of districts on which rate is based

Although the Field Test did not systematically gather data on the full range of activities being undertaken by States and LEAs to reduce dropout rates, several questions were asked whose responses might be correlated with dropout rates. Indeed, comparison of the answers to these questions with reported dropout rates provides a test of the meaningfulness of those rates, since the questions addressed practices, such as passing laws to discourage dropping out of school, that would logically affect dropout rates.

Comparisons at the State level require an aggregate figure for each State. An aggregate State dropout rate for each grade (using Method 1) would be the ratio of the total number of dropouts in the State to the total beginning fall membership. Although the Dropout Statistics Field Test, which was based on a voluntary sample, was not designed to produce State or national population estimates, it is possible to combine local dropout rates in the sample into State aggregate rates, using case weights based on information from the 1989-90 Common Core of Data (CCD).

Aggregate estimates for the entire sample of districts participating in the Field Test, using case weights to represent demographic categories as described in Section 2, are shown in Table 9. The results presented in Table 9 differ from those presented in Table 6 primarily in that the large districts are given more weight in Table 9. Differences between Methods 1 and 2 for approximating numbers of students served are virtually non-existent, because in- and out-migration from the entire sample of districts in the field test is balanced. The figures for Method 3 are slightly different, indicating (a) a net in-migration to public schools at the beginning of ninth grade (1.9% < 2.2%), and (b) a small net out-migration (or retention in grade) of students at the end of grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 (7.2% > 7.0%, etc.).

Table 9. Weighted Aggregate Sample Estimates of Single-Year Dropout Rates for Participating School Districts, Using Three Methods (n=187)

Grade Level	1. Dropouts / First Fall Membership	2. Dropouts / (Spring Membership + Spring Dropouts)	3. Dropouts / (Second Fall Membership + Full-Year Dropouts)
7	1.3%	1.3%	1.4%
8	2.2%	2.2%	1.9%
9	7.0%	7.0%	7.2%
10	8.0%	8.0%	8.2%
11	7.5%	7.5%	7.6%
12	6.6%	6.6%	6.8%
Synthetic Cohort Rate	28.7%	28.6%	29.0%

Note: Field test data are not representative of national totals.

The next step in relating State aggregate dropout rates from the sample to answers to State-level policy questions is to find the difference between those rates and the rates that

would have been expected, based on the demographic distribution of students. A comparison of State aggregate dropout rates to "expected rates," for 20 States from which stable rates were obtained, is shown in Table 10. "Expected rates" are the rates that would have been obtained if the States' rates were exactly the same as the whole sample aggregate rate, within each of the nine demographic categories on which case weights were based. Because these data are based on a voluntary sample, their use as State dropout rates is not appropriate. Accordingly, States are not identified in Table 10.

Clearly, States' aggregate dropout rates are highly related to demographic factors. For example, State #1, which obtained the lowest dropout rate, would have been expected to obtain a low rate. The overall correlation between actual and expected rates is .81 ($n=20$, $p<.001$). Although schools in each State must address the needs of the students in that State, whatever their demographics, it might be argued that comparison of State dropout rates with the expected rates puts each State on an equal footing, absent any other intervention to affect dropout rate. Therefore, in analyses designed to identify policy correlates of high and low dropout rates, the criterion was the differential between the actual and expected dropout rates: whether the factor was correlated with a dropout rate higher or lower than what would be expected solely on the basis of students' demographic characteristics.

At the **State** level, correlations were computed between this differential dropout rate and:

- whether the State had passed law(s) to discourage dropping out
- whether approval of private schools was required
- whether home schooling was acceptable
- whether institutions other than high schools were allowed to grant diplomas
- whether those who passed courses but not a competency test were graduated, and vice versa
- whether "age-outs" were considered successful completions, and
- whether GEDs were considered equivalent to high school graduation.

No significant correlations or meaningful patterns were found. This suggests that some of the definitional issues, such as GED categorization, may not have had an important impact on reported dropout rates.

Table 10. Actual Dropout Rates and Demographically Expected Dropout Rates, for (Unnamed) Participating States

State (Coded)	Actual Dropout Rate	Expected Dropout Rate	Difference
1	14.2%	19.9%	-5.7%
2	15.6%	19.0%	-3.4%
3	18.5%	17.7%	+0.8%
4	18.6%	22.2%	-3.6%
5	18.8%	24.3%	-5.5%
6	19.2%	21.6%	-2.4%
7	20.2%	26.8%	-6.6%
8	21.9%	24.9%	-3.0%
9	25.2%	21.4%	+3.8%
10	25.7%	22.1%	+3.6%
11	26.0%	27.8%	-1.8%
12	26.2%	24.5%	+1.7%
13	26.6%	22.3%	+4.3%
14	27.3%	32.4%	-5.1%
15	27.5%	26.3%	+1.2%
16	28.1%	33.0%	-4.9%
17	29.7%	32.4%	-2.7%
18	32.9%	37.4%	-4.5%
19	42.7%	35.9%	+6.8%
20	43.0%	34.1%	+8.9%

At the **local** level, correlations were computed between the dropout rate differentials and various descriptors of the reporting process, collected in the spring 1990 survey of participating LEAs. Again, no significant correlations or meaningful patterns were observed. (Unfortunately, the question of whether a district had dropout prevention programs that were considered effective was not asked.)

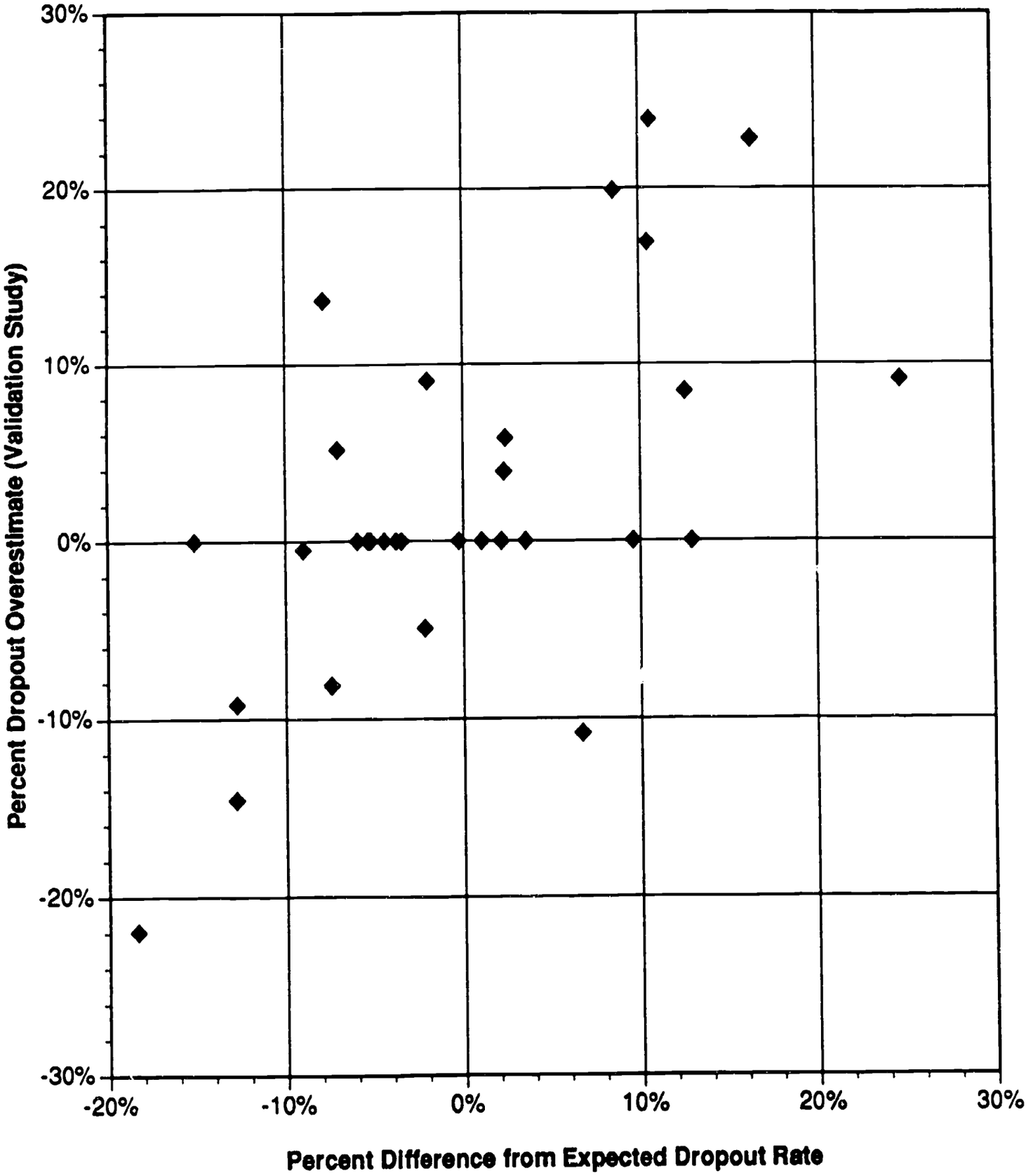
One possibility, of course, is that higher and lower than expected dropout rates might be a result of over- and under-estimates by school staff. This possibility was tested by correlating the over-estimate inferred from the validation of school leaver status, in those districts selected for the validation, with differential dropout rates. The resulting correlation, based on reliable data in the 31 districts that remained after deletion of outliers, was .62 ($n=31$, $p<.001$). The plot of overestimates by actual minus expected dropout rates is shown in Figure 2. **Apparently, those districts in which AIR found a tendency to count too many school leavers as dropouts were districts that tended to report higher than expected dropout rates, and vice versa.**

In-term dropouts and summer dropouts. Dropout counts were submitted by participating districts at the end of the spring 1990 term and again in the fall 1990 term. The numbers reported in the fall were to be the full-year dropouts, including those who dropped out during the previous fall and spring (in-term dropouts) as well as dropouts over the summer. A few participating districts misinterpreted instructions and only reported those who dropped out over the summer on the fall 1990 form. In these districts, AIR estimated a full-year dropout count by adding the numbers reported in the spring and fall.

In 187 participating districts for which information on counts was available, there were a total of 33,407 reported dropouts over the fall-to-spring period and a total of 39,471 reported dropouts over the full fall-to-fall period. There is an important question about when dropouts occur, in-term or over the summer, which can be addressed through comparisons of these two sets of counts. The results, presented in Table 11 as the ratios of the total count of **in-term** dropouts reported in a category to the total count of **full-year** dropouts in the same category, show definite patterns. Overall, between 40 percent and 50 percent of dropouts

Figure 2

Differences in Expected Dropout Rates and Predicted Dropout Overestimate Effects in Validation LEAs



from seventh and eight grades were over the summer, compared to only 10 percent to 20 percent of dropouts in subsequent grades. A substantial number of dropouts were attributed to the summer after twelfth grade; these may have been dropouts after the dropout counts were submitted in May 1990 or they may have been students slated either to complete requirements in the summer or to return to twelfth grade in the fall.

Table 11. Ratios of Total In-term Dropout Counts to Full-Year Dropout Counts, for Participating Districts (n=187)

Grade	Ratio	Race/Ethnic Grouping	Ratio for Males	Ratio for Females
7	.54	Native American	.87	1.03
8	.59	Asian and Pacific Islander	.81	.77
9	.79	Hispanic	.82	.78
10	.87	Black	.74	.72
11	.89	White	.86	.85
12	.78	Total	.81	.80

More important: the proportion of black dropouts that were over the summer was double the proportion of white dropouts that were over the summer. When counts were broken down by type of district, the results were even more divergent. As can be seen in

Table 12, in the twelve (sampled) large districts serving more than 40 percent blacks and Hispanics, 32 percent of all dropouts were over the summer. Moreover, in the 50 small districts serving fewer than 40 percent blacks and Hispanics and the 63 mid-size districts serving fewer than 10 percent blacks and Hispanics, there were actually more in-term dropouts than full-year dropouts. In these latter districts, a substantial number of in-term dropouts were apparently reached over the summer and enrolled in educational programs at the beginning of the following fall term. Dropout prevention efforts aimed at reducing in-term dropouts may well need to be different from efforts aimed at reducing over-the-summer dropouts, and these efforts would benefit from targeting particular populations and districts.

Table 12. Ratios of Total In-Term Dropout Counts to Full-Year Dropout Counts, for Small, Mid-Size, and Large Participating School Districts Serving Different Minority Percentages

Percentage of Black Plus Hispanic Students in 7-12 Membership	Small Districts (7-12 Membership < 1,000)	Mid-Size Districts (7-12 Membership: 1,000-4,999)	Large Districts (7-12 Membership > 4,999)
40 Percent or Greater	.87 (n=6)	.83 (n=13)	.68 (n=12)
10 Percent to 39.9 Percent	1.11 (n=8)	.79 (n=18)	.84 (n=18)
Less than 10 Percent	1.00 (n=42)	1.01 (n=63)	.95 (n=7)

SECTION 4. ERROR RATES AND THEIR CORRELATES

Overview. A major task for the evaluation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test was the verification of the status of a stratified randomly selected sample of school leavers. School leaver lists were obtained from 47 participating districts, and samples were selected by AIR staff. Two potential sources of error in dropout counts were (a) that the individuals listed on school leaver lists were misclassified and (b) that some school leavers may have been omitted from the lists. Because the field test procedures for deciding when to add a student's name to the school leaver list were straightforward and relatively easy to implement, this evaluation focused primarily on the first of these two sources of potential error.

The latter source of potential error, incomplete school leaver lists, was investigated on a small scale in the Field Test evaluation. Site visits were made to five districts in winter 1991, four of which were selected because of concerns about record-keeping and reporting processes. During these site visits, school leaver lists were compared with membership lists for fall 1989 and fall 1990, to identify cases in which a student was present in fall 1989, not present in fall 1990, and not on the school leaver list. The results were that in three of the five districts visited, these omissions could only account for less than a 1 percentage point underestimate of the dropout rate (i.e., the omissions that could have been dropouts were fewer than 1 percent of the membership); and in one district, they might account for up to a 4 percentage point underestimate. In the remaining site, there were significant problems with the computerized record-keeping system, and potentially large numbers of school leavers were being missed. Based on available evidence, that site was the most problematic among the field test participants, and was an exception to the general finding that participants were able to implement the uniform dropout recording procedures successfully.

The more serious issue concerns the potential misclassification of individual school leavers. To address this issue, AIR tracked 790 school leavers in 47 participating districts in

order to verify their school leaver status. Initially, AIR's design called for selection of twelve school leavers identified by districts as transfers and six school leavers identified as dropouts, in each district. However, some districts could not provide basic information needed for the verification effort and analyses (i.e., name and last known address, as well as racial/ethnic group, sex, and grade). Furthermore, a number of the selected school leavers proved to be neither transfers nor dropouts. The results of the verification are summarized in Table 13, which includes a variety of outcomes not originally planned for: active students, dropouts and transfers who returned within the school year (and should have been excluded from dropout counts), graduates, and others (deceased or individuals not served for the whole school year). Of the 790 school leavers to be verified, 733, or 93 percent, were successfully verified.[13]

Calculation of error rates. To estimate error rates and to address issues concerning correlates of error rates, the categories in Table 13 were simplified in two stages. First, all cases not initially categorized by schools as either transfers or dropouts were excluded, along with all cases not verified by the evaluator. Second, the final statuses of "returner," "active student," "graduate," and "other" were combined into a single category of "other non-dropout" statuses. These "other" statuses could be accurately determined (with the exception of deaths) merely by verifying the school's attendance records and therefore would not require tracking a student outside the school system. This reduced data set is summarized in Table 14, which shows error rates for school leavers classified by schools as transfers and as dropouts.

[13] Comparisons of the 695 verifications by AIR telephone interviewers and the 38 verifications by on-site trackers are described in Section 2.

Table 13. Comparison of Initial Classifications of School Leavers by Schools and Final Classifications by Evaluator

Initial Classificat'n	Final Classification							Total
	Verified						Not Verified	
	Drop-out	Trans-fer	Retur-ner	Active Student	Grad-uate	Other		
Dropout	146	46	17	4	2	2	32	249
Transfer	37	419	28	4	3	5	25	521
Returner	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
Active Student	1	0	0	5	0	0	0	6
Graduate	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Other	0	2	0	0	1	7	0	10
Total	184	467	47	13	8	14	57	790

Table 14. Reduced Comparisons of Initial and Final Classifications of School Leavers

Initial Classification	Final Classification				Total
	Dropouts	Transfers	Sub-total	Other Non-Dropouts	
Dropouts	146 (67%)	46 (21%)	88%	25 (12%)	217 (100%)
Percent of Final Dropouts+Transfers	(76%)	(24%)	100%		
Transfers	37 (7%)	419 (84%)	92%	40 (8%)	496 (100%)
Percent of Final Dropouts+Transfers	(8%)	(92%)	100%		
Total	183	465		65	713

Only 37 of 496 cases (7.5%) called transfers by schools were actually dropouts, whereas 71 (i.e., 46 + 25) of 217 cases (32.7%) called dropouts by schools were actually not dropouts. Overall in the sample, 85 percent of the school leavers were correctly classified by the schools.

Differentiation between the 465 non-dropouts who were transfers and the 65 other non-dropouts is important because, except for a very small number of deaths, **errors in the category of "other non-dropouts" could be removed without tracking students outside the local school district.** The essential issue for the accuracy of school leaver classification concerns the accuracy of categorizing those who are dropouts or transfers. The error rates for this two-by-two classification are also given in Table 14.[14] Of leavers called transfers, only 8.1 percent were dropouts, whereas of leavers called dropouts, 24.0 percent were actually transfers. The samples were selected, to the extent possible, to include two transfers for each dropout. Because there were also roughly two transfers for every dropout on the school leaver lists submitted, the finding in the sample that 37 dropouts called transfers and the 46 transfers called dropouts roughly balanced each other suggests that in the aggregate no substantial bias in dropout rates arose from these classification errors.

In the reduced set of leavers -- initially labeled as either dropouts or transfers, who turned out to be dropouts or transfers -- there was an overall error rate of 12.8 percent (83 of 648). All analyses investigating correlates of error rates were performed on this set. Errors, unless otherwise stated, refer to the 37 dropouts called transfers and the 46 transfers called dropouts.

[14] Error rates calculated in this fashion are highly correlated with other descriptive error rates. LEA error rates, in which all individuals in Table 13 were classified as either dropouts or other leavers are strongly correlated with error rates presented in the two-by-two classification, $r = .92$, $p < .0001$.

Analysis of Specific Classification Errors

Overview. The identification of State and local correlates of high and low error rates permitted inferences to be drawn about factors that would affect the accuracy of dropout accounting. In order to learn how and why these errors occurred, all misclassifications were thoroughly investigated. This information was used to develop recommendations for the development or modification of procedures that will lead to the elimination of the errors most likely to occur in future application of the dropout definition.

Easily removable errors. In addition to looking at transfers misclassified as dropouts and at dropouts misclassified as transfers, AIR investigated all of the different types of misclassifications (e.g., dropouts who were labeled as active students; other leavers who were labeled as dropouts) and calculated error rates for these types of misclassifications. Many of these classification errors noted could be easily resolved by the school, using available records. For example, when AIR staff requested information for tracking students **labeled as dropouts**, they were sometimes informed (by school staff) that the student had transferred to another school. School staff could provide the name of this new school, as well as information that transcript requests had been received. Nonetheless, such cases were treated as errors: if dropout counts were prepared directly from the School Leaver Lists, without further checking, the student would have been labeled as a dropout.

Underlying the validation of the School Leaver List statuses was the assumption that dropout counts would be prepared from these School Leaver Lists without additional checking or modification. In at least one LEA (that was visited in the winter of 1991), the School Leaver List was an afterthought, produced independently of dropout counts, solely for Field Test evaluation purposes. It is not known to what extent Leaver Lists were reviewed and cleaned prior to the preparation of dropout counts in any of the 224 LEAs that were not visited in the winter of 1990-1991. **It is therefore quite possible that the Leaver List classification error rates reported are overestimates of the actual error rates.** Even a

cursory review of school records for each student labeled as a "dropout" would have been able to reduce a significant number of the errors observed. Accordingly, AIR estimated error rates excluding these "easily removable" errors for students incorrectly labeled as dropouts and who were actually still in the same school.

Adjusted error rates for students incorrectly labeled as dropouts. The percentage of those leavers classified as dropouts by schools who were really transfers was 24.0 percent (46 of 192). An additional 25 leavers classified as dropouts were "other non- dropouts." Overall, of the 217 school-labeled dropouts whose status was verified, 71 (32.7%) were not dropouts. Of the 71, 21 were still students in the same school and two were graduates. School officials directly involved in the dropout accounting process knew these students' status. Moreover, of the 46 cases listed as transfers, school officials directly involved in the dropout accounting process knew that nearly half (22 students) were confirmed transfers to an approved school or program. (It is not known whether these students listed in error as dropouts were actually counted as dropouts.) Since these errors could be nearly completely eliminated by referral to school records, they are considered "easily removable" errors. The frequencies of these "easily removable" errors are presented as Table 15.

The fact that someone at a school knows the true status of a school leaver does not mean that the staff completing dropout report forms are aware of the school leaver's true status. AIR's validation process entailed collecting copies of School Leaver Lists from schools; selecting a sample of leavers labeled as dropouts and transfers from these lists; and recontacting the school to obtain detailed information on each sampled school leaver for tracking and analysis. If the person completing the form providing tracking information indicated that the so-called "dropout" had graduated, was an active student, had returned to school, or had transferred to another school (which had requested a transcript), it could be said that someone directly involved with the school's (or LEA's) dropout accounting process knew the leaver's true status. If this person was associated with the preparation of dropout counts and if this person had to verify the status of all alleged dropouts prior to counting them as such, he or she could easily eliminate these errors.

Table 15. Students Incorrectly Labeled as Dropouts: Frequency of Easily Removable Errors

True Classification	Easily Removable Errors		Other Errors		Total Errors	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Transfers	22	47.8	24	52.2	46	64.8
Returners	15	88.2	2	11.8	17	23.9
Active Student	4	100.0	0	0.0	4	5.6
Graduate	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	2.8
Other	1	50.0	1	50.0	2	2.8
Total	43	60.6	28	39.4	71	100.0

If the 43 "easily removable" errors had not been included on the School Leaver Lists, the error rate for counting the percentage of those classified as dropouts who were actually not dropouts would have been just 16.1 percent (28 of 174). Of the remaining errors, there is further evidence that the school knew that four students labeled as dropouts had transferred and the LEA offices knew that another two of these "dropouts" were within-district transfers. **Strongly encouraging districts and schools to review their lists of "dropouts" before using them to produce counts can significantly reduce the numbers of students incorrectly labeled, with minimum burden to the schools and districts.** In one LEA, the superintendent refused to believe the district's 7th and 8th grades' dropout rates were 10.8 percent and 11.3 percent, respectively. So he had all the 7th and 8th grade dropouts listed and had the intermediate schools follow-up on all of these "dropouts." As a result of the follow-up, the LEA's 7th and 8th grade dropout rates were reduced to 1.7 percent and 4.2 percent, respectively.

Adjusted error rates for students incorrectly labeled as transfers. The percentage of leavers classified as transfers who were really dropouts was 8.1 percent (37 of 456). This rate is about one-third the error rate of students incorrectly listed as transfers. Overall, of the 496 school leavers listed as transfers and whose status was validated, only 37 were dropouts. This error rate is 7.5 percent (37 of 496). Misclassifications between transfers and active students have no impact on dropout rates, but classifications of true dropouts as transfers are critically important.

Transcript requests. According to the Field Test's guidelines, students should be considered transfers *"if there is evidence of transfer to another school (e.g., a transcript request)."* AIR investigated all of these incorrectly labeled transfers, to determine whether transcripts had been requested, and to also try to determine the reasons for these misclassifications. Results are summarized in Table 16.

The requirement of evidence of transfer, as indicated by a transcript request, was intended to permit proper classification of leavers who claim (or whose parents maintain) they are going to transfer to another school but do not enroll. Transcript requests were universally viewed by Field Test participants as an excellent indicator that a student did enroll in an approved program. The validation supports this belief. If a transcript was requested, 97.2 percent of the time the leaver enrolled in an approved program. Transcripts were also requested by some adult education GED programs, other educational programs (community college non-degree programs and correspondence courses), other State or Federal programs, and by some medical and drug treatment programs. Even if the school indicated that no transcript request had been received, still 90.9 percent of the time the leaver actually was enrolled in an approved program. In this sample, the existence of a transcript request lowered the classification error rate from 9.1 percent (100% - 90.9%) to 2.8 percent (100% - 97.2%). On the other hand, mandating an absolute requirement for a transcript request or other formal notification for all transfers could cause misclassification of some of the 90.9 percent of the transfers for whom there was no indication that a transcript request was received.

Table 16. Stude ..s Incorrectly Labeled as Transfers Who Were Actually Dropouts: Frequency of Transcript Requests

True Status	Transcript was Requested		Transcript was not Requested		Total Errors	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Enrolled in GED (Adult) program	4	50.0	4	50.0	8	21.6
Enrolled in unapproved educational program	2	66.7	1	33.3	3	8.1
Enrolled in other programs (Job Corps, Youth Services)	1	16.7	5	83.3	6	16.2
Medical (Drug Rehab, pregnant)	2	50.0	2	50.0	4	10.8
Other	5	31.2	11	68.8	16	43.2
Total	14	37.8	23	62.2	37	100.0

In five cases, schools indicated that transcript requests were received from a school which (when contacted by AIR staff) had no record that the student had ever been enrolled. In one of these cases, there was clear evidence of a bureaucratic mix-up: the school alleged to have requested a transcript was the student's former school. The other four cases are probably administrative errors.[15]

Two of the eleven incorrectly labeled transfers, for whom no transcript request was received, had transferred out-of-State. During site visits, AIR staff were informed by several people that procedures for out-of-State transfers are different from those employed for within-State transfers. Parents who are moving do not always know where they will enroll their child, and they want to enroll their child in a new school as soon as possible. Furthermore,

[15] It is possible that some of these students have enrolled under a new or different surname. It is also possible that the person contacted at the school "requesting" the transcript erred in denying that the student had enrolled.

they want the new school to have a complete set of their children's records. We were told that some parents therefore request copies of their child's school records to carry with them. This request is particularly reasonable for military parents who transfer abroad. Although no participating school ever said it would provide complete records to a parent, staff would typically provide vaccination records. (It is not unreasonable to assume that, in some cases, unofficial "cum" folders would also be provided.) For seventh and eighth graders, who have yet to accumulate any Carnegie credits, "cum" folders are not always requested by the student's new school. Vaccination records suffice for enrollment.

About one-third of the students incorrectly labeled as transfers were enrolled in nonapproved educational programs. Most of these were enrolled in adult education GED programs. Students transferring to secondary education GED programs, according to Field Test definitions, were to be considered transfers; those transferring to adult education GED programs, as dropouts. This distinction was appreciated by most, but not all, participating LEAs and schools. In some cases, schools to which a student transferred offered both secondary and adult education GED programs. Feedback from their new schools would be necessary for adequate determination. In other cases, the distinctions demanded by the definition were either not appreciated, not understood, or deliberately ignored.[16] Additional training could reduce this type of error in some LEAs. However, without significant changes in the record-keeping processes in other LEAs, elimination of this problem is not likely. States and LEAs with record-keeping systems that do not draw such distinctions will have to be persuaded of the value of distinguishing between adult and secondary GED programs.

Of critical importance in classifying transfers is the ability to distinguish between students enrolled in secondary education programs and students enrolled in other programs.

---

[16] During one site visit, AIR staff were informally informed by a guidance counselor that he would classify students who drop out of his school to enroll in a GED program as transfers, regardless of the Field Test guidelines. (In this state, most GED programs are adult education.) His strongly held belief that someone pursuing a GED is not a dropout was not to be compromised by Field Test Guidelines. To address these concerns, a special category for transfers to GED programs could be employed.

Programs such as Job Corps, sheltered workshops, custodial services, and Division/Department of Youth Services placements were considered as transfers in some small, noncomputerized districts. (Transfers to unapproved educational programs were also considered transfers in these types of districts.) The provision of a set of simple rules and guidelines, or the use of any of the adjunctive training procedures and informational aids discussed in Section 5 could help to reduce these errors.

A source of some errors in the Field Test, and an area of significant concern to many school and LEA staff, is the classification of students enrolled in drug treatment programs. Several staff interviewed during site visits were very uncertain whether students in treatment programs should be considered as hospitalized students or as dropouts. Employing a medical model, addiction can be viewed as an illness, and a student is *"not counted as a dropout if the illness is verified as legitimate."*[17] On the other hand, *"students who are in other institutions (such as ... drug rehabilitation clinics) are listed as dropouts — even if the student is involved in an educational program within that institution."*[18] The strong emotional responses elicited suggest that some educators will strongly avoid labeling this type of student as a dropout **during enrollment in a drug rehabilitation clinic**. Since involvement with drug treatment programs tends to be short-term (28 days), it does not seem unreasonable to treat students involved in such programs as students with a legitimate illness. Students who do not return to school after the program's end (or perhaps after 30 days in a program) can still be counted as dropouts.

Dropouts incorrectly labeled as transfers comprise a class of errors that are not easily removable at the school level. Modifications of basic record keeping, so that explicit categories consistent with Field Test definitions are created and used, are critical for the reduction of this type of error. If distinctions could be drawn between verified transfers and

---

[17] Trainer Guide for the Dropout Statistics Field Test, page 3-10.

[18] *ibid*, page 3-12.

nonverified transfers, and if procedures could be developed for classifying certain of these nonverified transfers as probable transfers and others as probable dropouts, this error could be reduced significantly.

Predictors of School Leaver Status

Overview. Several indicators were collected to explore the extent to which precision in error rates could be increased by employing predictors. In particular, the evaluation examined the relations of (a) being a year or more overage, (b) being absent more than five days in the last month of enrollment, and (c) obtaining low grades to errors in classification. The results are presented in Tables 17, 18, and 19. The total sample sizes are smaller than in other tables because some school districts could not provide birth dates, attendance data, or grades needed to produce the tables.

Table 17. Comparison of Initial and Final Classifications of School Leavers Who Were and Were Not Overage

	Not Overage		Overage	
	Transfers	Dropouts	Transfers	Dropouts
Initial Transfers	236 (98%)	5 (2%)	116 (80%)	29 (20%)
Initial Dropouts	24 (38%)	39 (62%)	14 (14%)	89 (86%)
Total	260	44	130	118

Table 18. Comparison of Initial and Final Classifications of School Leavers Who Were and Were Not Absent More Than Five Days in Last Month

	Not Absent		Absent	
	Transfers	Dropouts	Transfers	Dropouts
Initial Transfers	115 (95%)	6 (5%)	50 (75%)	17 (25%)
Initial Dropouts	9 (39%)	14 (61%)	9 (14%)	54 (86%)
Total	124	20	59	71

Table 19. Comparison of Initial and Final Classifications of School Leavers Who Were Above and Below Median Performance

	Above Median		Below Median	
	Transfers	Dropouts	Transfers	Dropouts
Initial Transfers	120 (94%)	7 (6%)	84 (86%)	14 (14%)
Initial Dropouts	16 (39%)	29 (64%)	7 (13%)	45 (87%)
Total	136	36	91	59

In all three cases there were significant relations between the indicator and final dropout classifications, based on a full-model log-linear analysis. The values of chi-square for that relation were: for relative age, chi square=37.0, df=1, p<.001; for attendance, chi square=18.4, df=1, p<.001; and for grades, chi square=10.8, df=1, p<.01. In the same analyses, the relations between the indicators and schools' initial classifications were insignificant.

Information on school leavers can significantly reduce uncertainty about their enrollment status, even if these individuals cannot be located to verify that status. Only one in seven school leavers who were not overage was a dropout, compared to half of those who were overage; and only one in six school leavers with good attendance prior to leaving was a dropout, compared to nearly half of those with excessive absences. Finally, grades indicated the status of school leavers: fewer than one in four school leavers with high grades was a dropout, compared to two in five of those with low grades. This kind of information can be used in the future both to reduce errors in dropout rates due to lost school leavers and to check the reasonableness of dropout classifications.

The same predictions can be used to shed light on the 57 school leavers who were not successfully found and validated. In particular, in the 32 of those cases classified as dropouts by schools, age information was available for 29, of whom 22 were overage by a year or more. Similarly, in the 25 cases classified as transfers by schools, age information was available for 23, of whom only 14 were overage by a year or more. Applying the percentages from Table 17 to these cases, the expected number of dropouts among the 57 cases would be between 26 and 31, compared to the 32 reported by the schools.

State and Local Correlates of Error Rates

Overview. Both State and local factors that might be associated with error rates were investigated. Although few statistically significant relationships were observed, trends were noticed. If no probability level is provided when comparisons are made, the reader can assume that differences between groups were not found to be statistically significant.

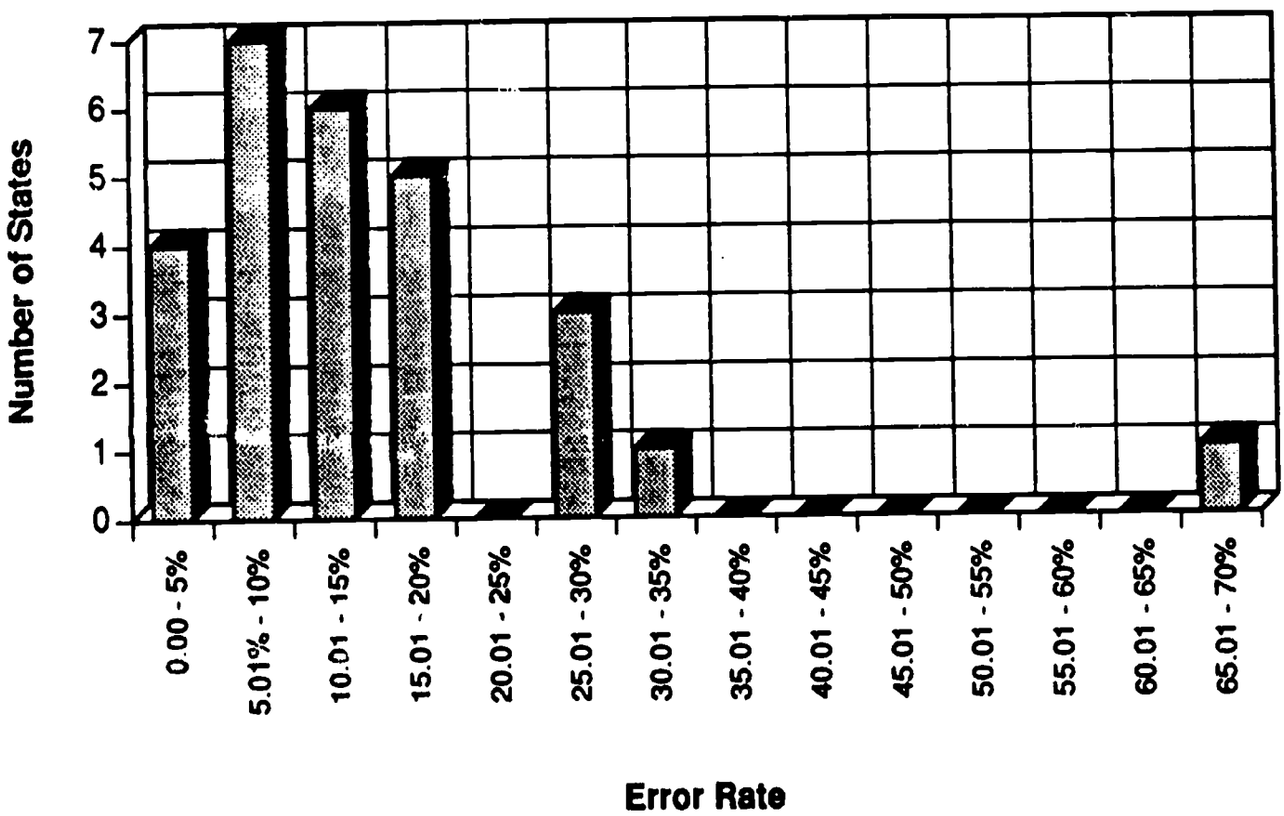
State-level factors. Aggregate error rates combining the districts in the validation subsample in each participating State were calculated. These unweighted rates ranged from 0 percent (in three States) to 66.7 percent[19]. The average State's error rate was 14.9 percent, with a standard deviation of 13.5 percent. This distribution of error rates is presented as Figure 3. To gain insights into the factors associated with high and low error rates, the relationships between error rates and a number of State characteristics, as measured in the Survey of Participating SEAs, were investigated. These factors included the type of training the State provided to the LEA and the types of problems anticipated.

Training and error rates. Four States did not feel training was necessary since the information required in the Field Test would be obtainable through their normal, fully computerized data management systems. Accordingly, LEA staff were not trained. The average error rate in these four States (26.7%) was much higher than the average error rate in the other States (12.9%). This difference was attributable to the fact that one of these States had an error rate of 66.7 percent. The exclusion of this State would lower the error rate in States that did not train their LEA staff to 13.4 percent.

[19] The largest error rate, which was more than double the next largest error rate, occurred in a State in which only a single district participated in the validation effort. In most other States, the State aggregate was the average of two districts' error rates.

Figure 3

Frequency Distribution of State Error Rates



Nine States reported they used additional materials in training (typically, their own State's forms). These States had a lower error rate (9.8%) than the others (17.5%). All of the States with 0 percent error rates reported the use of additional materials. This suggests that supplementing the Field Test training materials with additional, customized materials should be strongly encouraged. (It can be argued that the use of additional training materials had little effect by themselves, and their use is an indicator of a greater experience in dropout reporting or a greater commitment to training. Nonetheless, additional training effort will probably increase the accuracy of the dropout accounting process.) SEA representatives' use and evaluation of specific training materials employed were seemingly independent of error rates.

Other factors. SEA Field Test Coordinators were asked to estimate the frequency with which different types of serious problems would arise in the Field Test. Several of these problems related to School Leaver Lists. Field Test results were consistent with the coordinators' predictions. If coordinators thought Leaver List problems would arise very frequently, their State's error rates tended to be higher than if the coordinators thought such problems would arise occasionally, rarely, or never. These results are presented in Table 20. The coordinators were not "crying 'Wolf!'". If they anticipated problems, there were sound reasons for their fears. Being able to anticipate problems is an excellent first step towards their solution.

Local-level factors. Error for individual LEAs ranged from 0 percent (in ten of the 47 LEAs) to 66.7 percent. The mean error rate was 14.0 percent, with a standard deviation of 13.2 percent. The distribution of error rates is presented as Figure 4. One LEA is clearly an outlier, with an error rate 3.9 standard deviations above the mean. Several analyses were performed excluding this LEA, which was clearly an "outlier."

Table 20. Error Rates in States in Which the Coordinator Thought Leaver List Problems Would Arise Frequently or Infrequently

Problem	Will happen very frequently	Will not happen very frequently
High rate of School Leavers with unknown or unverified status	19.5% (*n*=9)	12.5% (*n*=16)
Incomplete or inaccurate School Leaver lists*	33.7% (*n*=5)	10.9% (*n*=19)

* Differences in error rates approach statistical significance, t = 2.55, p = .06.

To gain insights into the factors associated with high and low error rates, the relationships between error rates and a number of LEA characteristics were investigated. These factors included community type, LEA membership size, the degree of student records computerization in the LEA, and the amount of training received.

Community Type. The highest error rate (66.7%) occurred in one large city; the average error rate in other large cities was 11.7 percent. Lower error rates were associated with fringe areas (10.7%) and towns (10.2%). These error rates are presented as Figure 5.

LEA Size. LEAs were also categorized by enrollment size, using 1989-90 CCD total student counts. The association between error rates and district counts is presented as Figure 6. The highest error rates were again noted in the largest LEAs (15.7%; 13.4% deleting the outlier); the lowest in LEAs with enrollment of 1,001-5,000 (11.0%) and 5,001-10,000 (10.9%). We had previously observed that computerization is associated with the larger LEAs. Larger LEAs tend to be fully computerized, smaller LEAs are less likely to be computerized. This factor was investigated as a possible correlate of error rates.

Figure 4

Frequency Distribution of LEA Error Rates

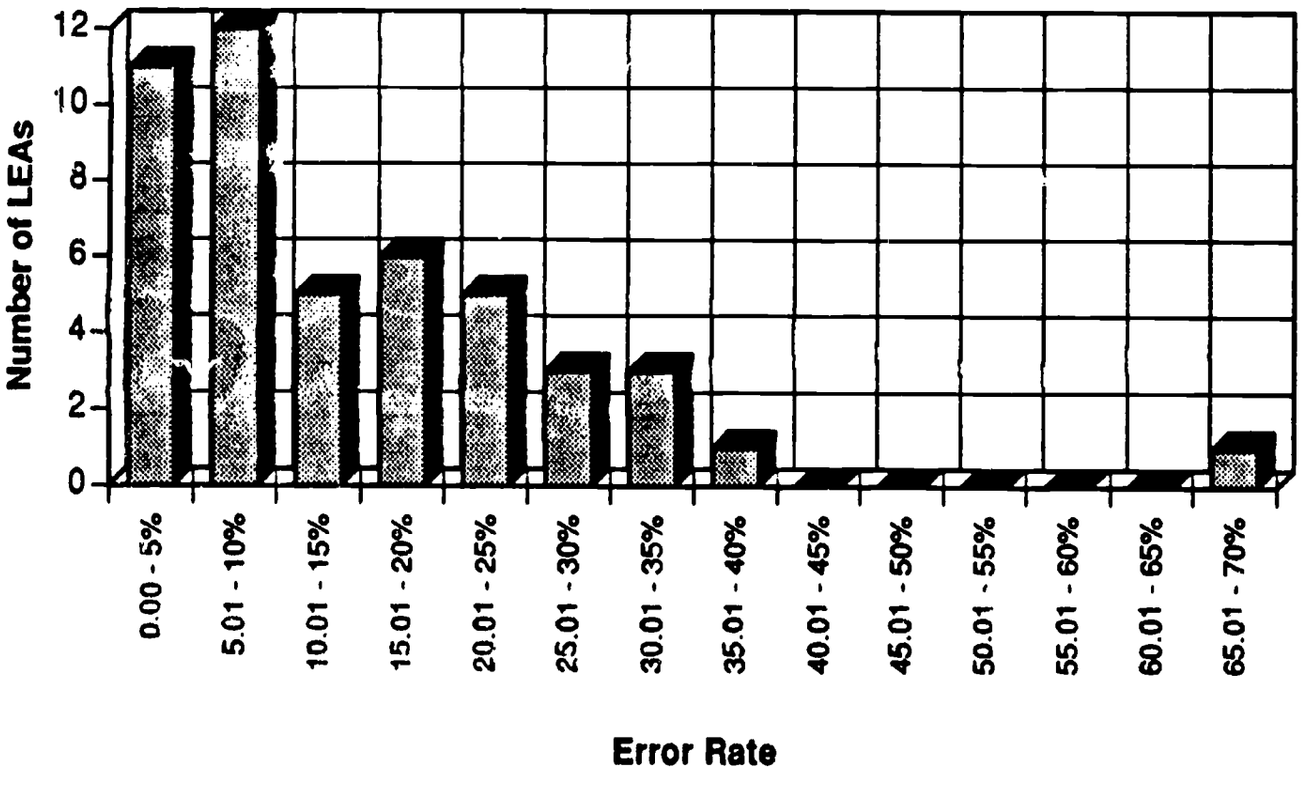


Figure 5

Error Rates in Different Types of LEAs -- Excluding one Large City LEA

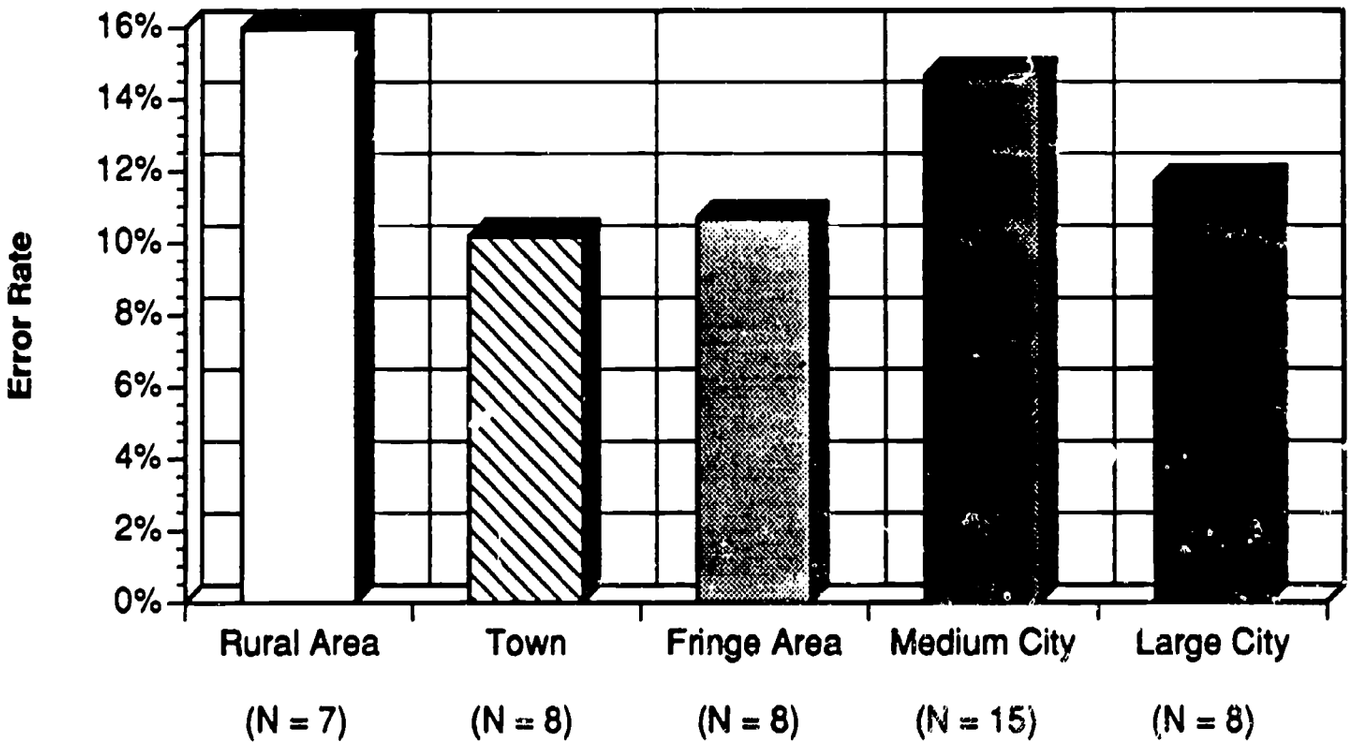
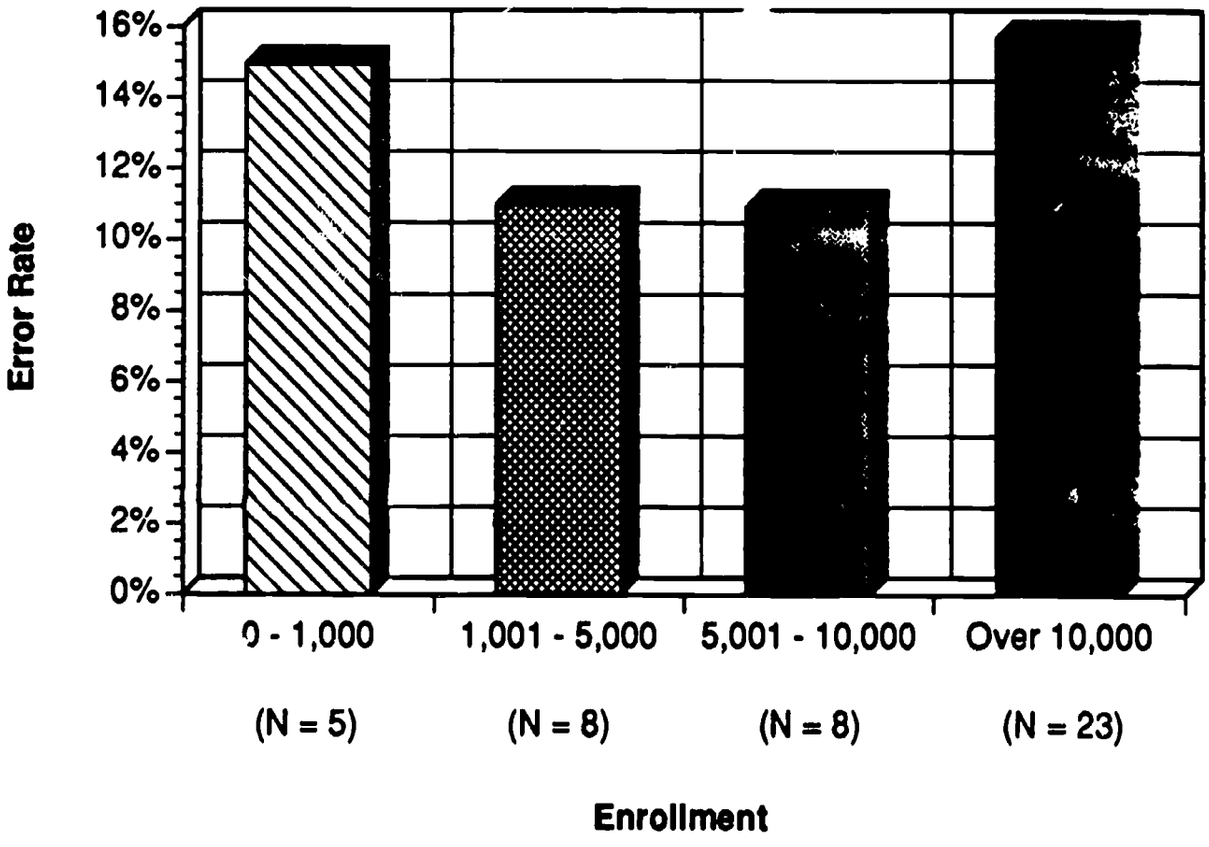


Figure 6

Error Rate in LEAs of Different Sizes

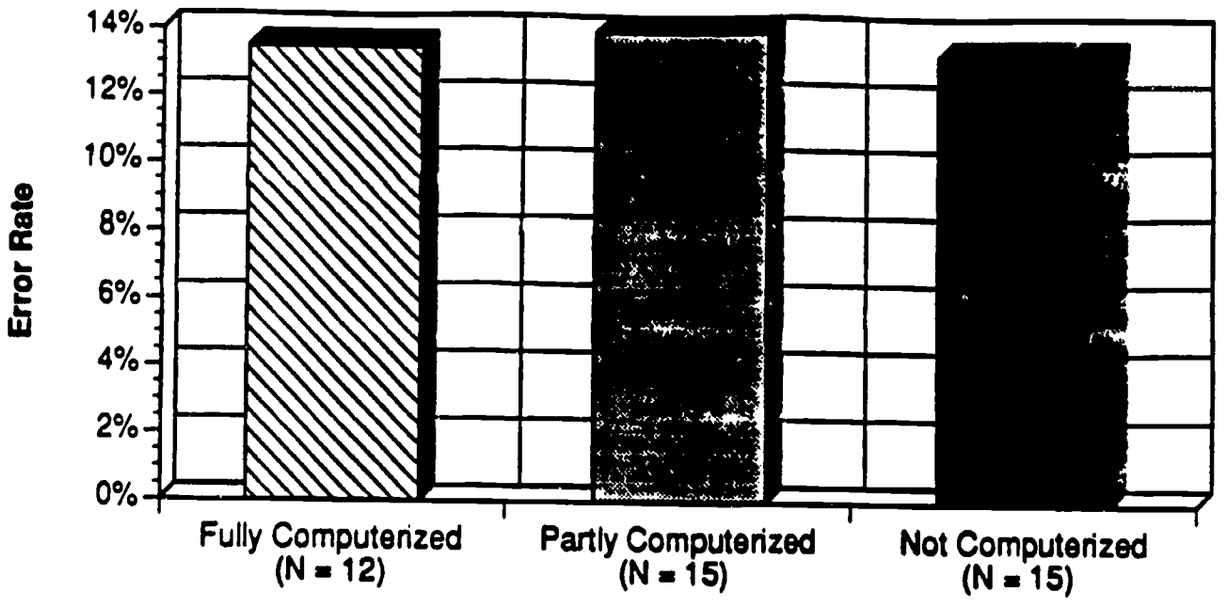


Degree of computerization of School Leaver List preparation. As part of the LEA survey, respondents were asked how their School Leaver Lists were prepared. Their responses were used to categorize LEAs as either fully computerized (indicating that a computer was used to identify School Leavers and/or produce lists of School Leavers); partly computerized (indicating that a computer was used sometime during the process but that manual data collection also characterized the process); or not computerized (indicating that no computers were used in the process). No apparent relationship between this degree of computerization and error rates initially emerged. Error rates in fully computerized LEAs were 13.5 percent (or 8.7 percent, removing the "outlier" district); in partly computerized districts, 14.0 percent; and in noncomputerized LEAs, 13.3 percent. These data are presented in Figures 7A and 7B.

Overall computerization of membership and attendance records. Accurate dropout accounting is more than simply maintaining lists of School Leavers. Computerized systems are also used for maintaining attendance and enrollment records. The LEA Survey included items about the degree of computerization of the enrollment count production process. As with degree of computerization for Leaver List production, LEAs were similarly categorized with respect to their level of computerization for the preparation of enrollment counts. To categorize LEAs with respect to their overall degree of computerization, LEAs that were fully computerized for both enrollment count and Leaver List production were classified as fully computerized; those that were not computerized for either process, as not computerized; and all the others as partly computerized. Similar relationships between degree of computerization and error rates were again observed. When the LEA with the highest error rate was excluded, error rates were closely related to overall degree of computerization. The fully computerized LEAs had the lowest error rates (7.5%); the partly computerized districts, an intermediate rate (12.8%); and the noncomputerized districts, the highest error rates (15.4%). These data are presented as Figure 8.

Figure 7 A and B

Error Rates in LEAs that are Fully Computerized, Partly Computerized, or Not Computerized for Leaver List Production



Error Rate in LEAs that were Fully Computerized, Partly Computerized, or Not Computerized for Leaver List Production - Excluding One Fully Computerized LEA

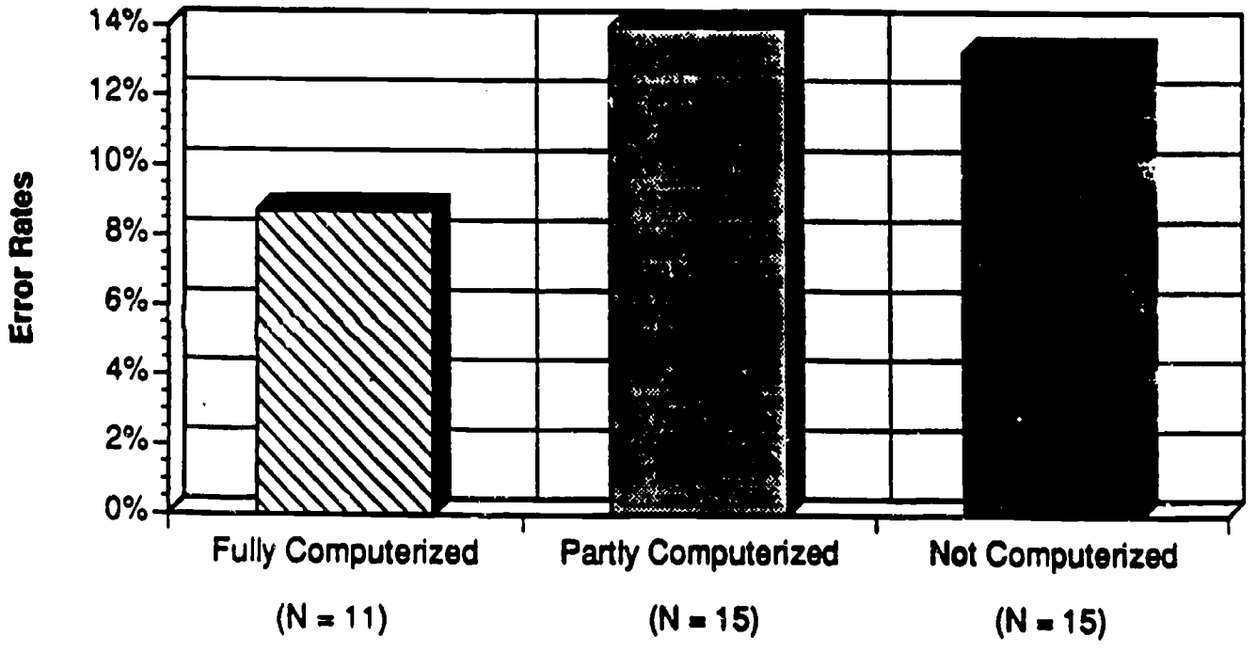
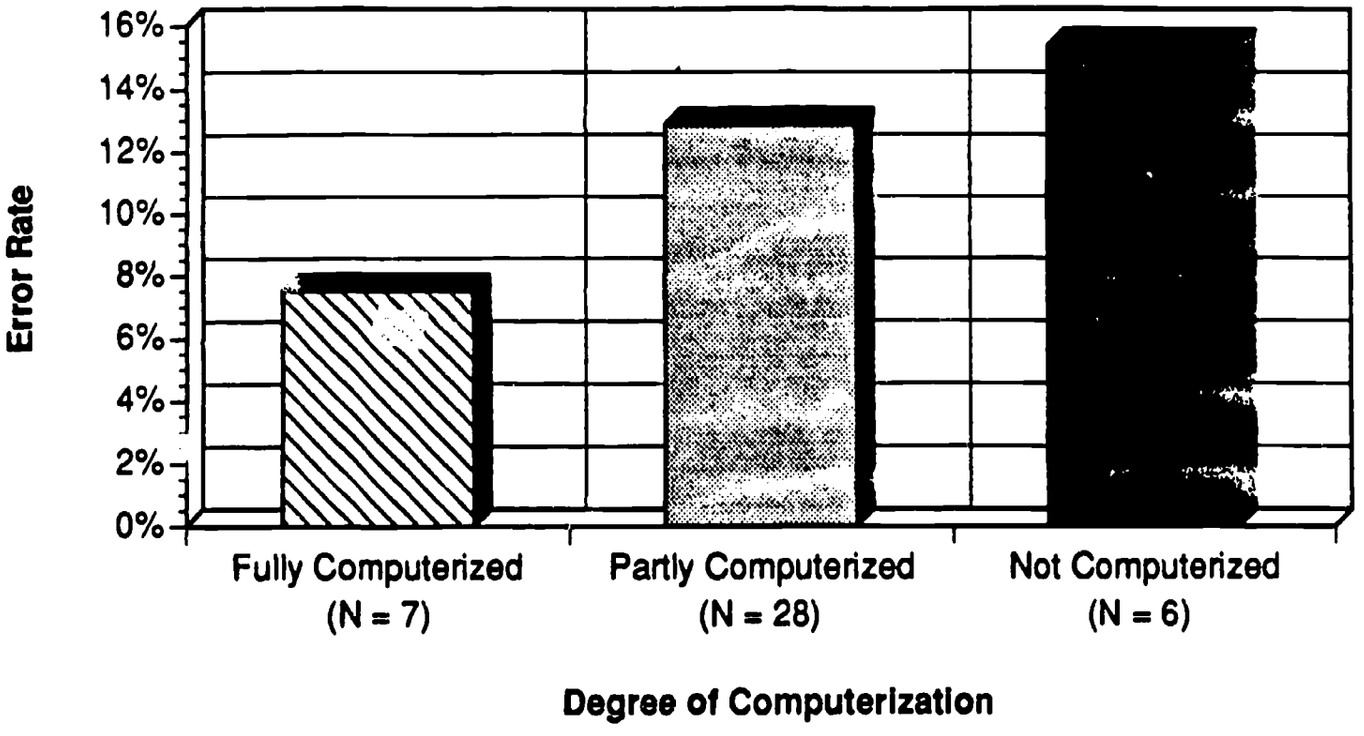


Figure 8

Error Rates in LEAs that were Fully Computerized, Partly Computerized, or Not Computerized -- Excluding One Fully Computerized LEA



As previously mentioned, there is a relationship between computerization and LEA size. To determine whether these apparent relationships might be artifacts of size, LEAs were dichotomized on the basis of as being either small (total student counts under 5,000) or large (counts over 5,000) and additional analyses were performed. In the 29 large and the twelve small LEAs, the same computerization relationships were observed. In small LEAs, the three fully computerized districts had the lowest error rates (7.1%); the five partly computerized districts, an intermediate error rate (9.4%); and the four noncomputerized districts, the highest error rates (15.9%). In large LEAs (when the outlier LEA was excluded), the four fully computerized districts had the lowest error rates (7.8%); the 23 partly computerized districts, an intermediate error rate (13.6%); and the two noncomputerized districts, the highest error rates (14.3%). These results are presented as Figures 9A and 9B.

None of these computerization findings are statistically significant. Nevertheless, knowledge and insights gained during site visits, combined with the finding, albeit non-significant, that error rates appear to be inversely related to the degree of computerization in an LEA, suggest certain conclusions. Computer systems are tools that can be used to keep and process enrollment and dropout accounting records accurately and efficiently. However, this is true only when:

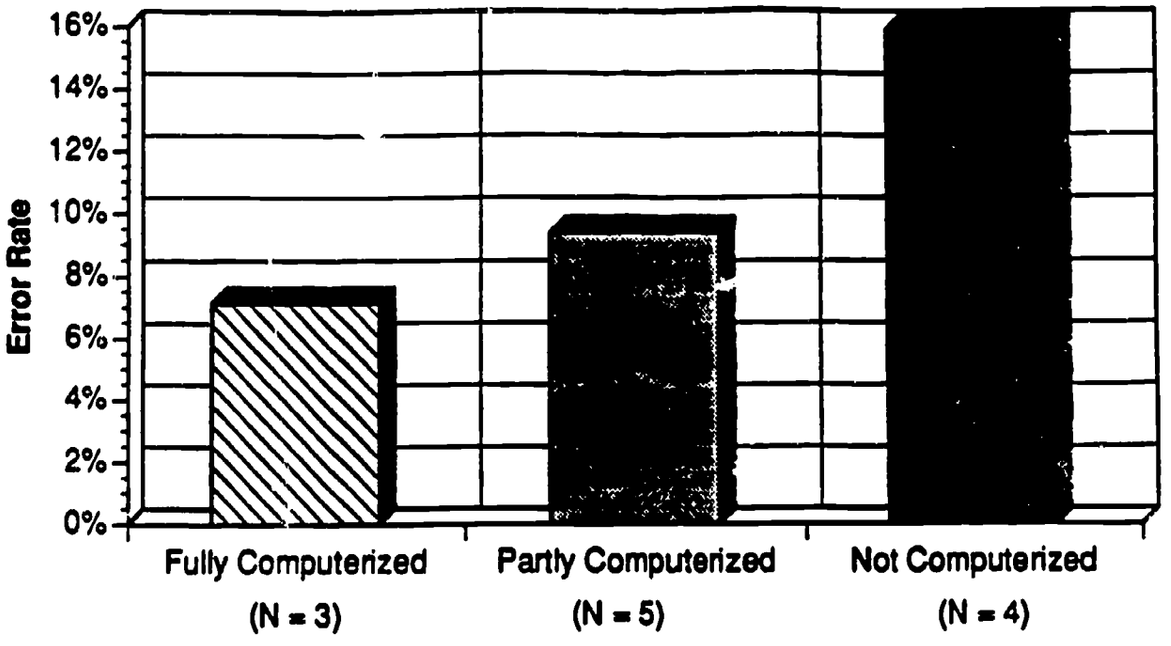
(1) Staff are well-trained in the rules for the assignment of codes to specific transactions and are motivated to follow these rules; and

(2) Transaction codes permit unambiguous labeling of leavers as either dropouts or other leavers (i.e., nonverified transfers, who would be counted as dropouts, must be distinguishable from confirmed transfers; transfers to nonapproved programs must be distinguishable from transfers to approved programs).

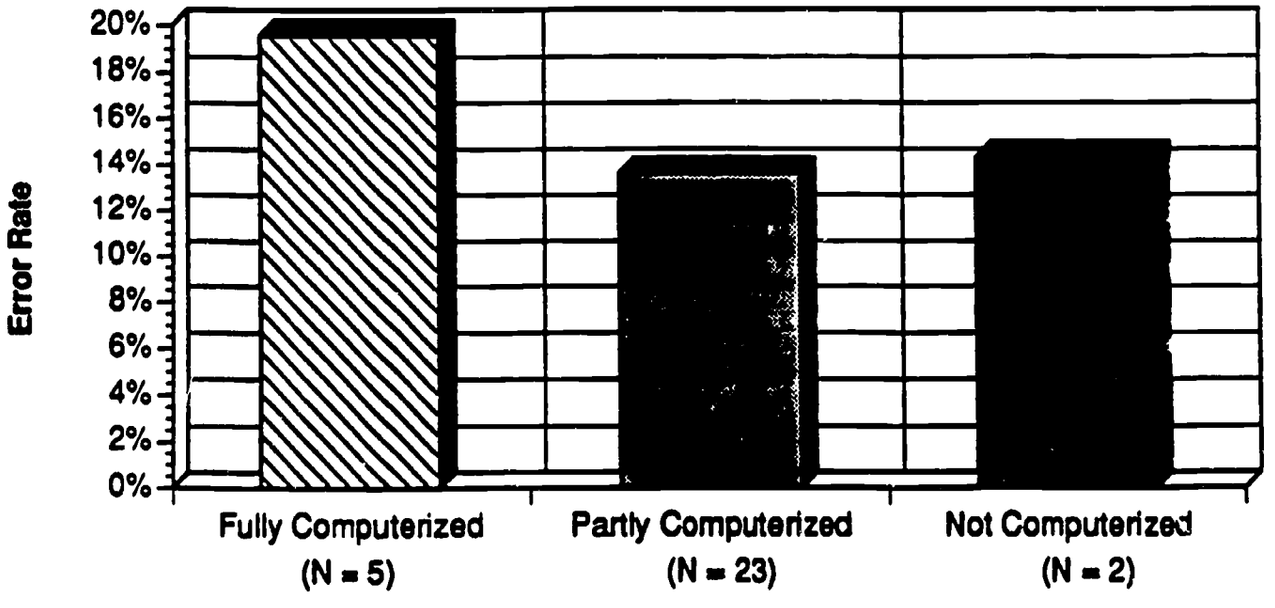
Otherwise, computer systems can be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the creation of errors. One of the problems noted in the LEA with the highest error rate was a consistent misinterpretation of leaver codes by a staff person responsible for

Figure 9 A and B

Error Rates in Small (Enrollment Under 5,000) LEAs that are Fully Computerized, Partly Computerized, or Not Computerized



Error Rates in Large (Enrollment Over 5,000) LEAs that are Fully Computerized, Partly Computerized, or Not Computerized



data entry. In this LEA, students over a particular age could withdraw from their school and transfer to any other school within the system. Staff were as likely to label these movements as "voluntary withdrawals" as they were to label them "within district transfers." Since school staff were **not** trained in Field Test definitions, students enrolled in adult education programs were labeled transfers and incarcerated students (who receive LEA-provided secondary education during their incarceration) were labeled dropouts because that seemed reasonable -- and "because that's how things have always been done." The presence or absence of transcript requests made no difference as to whether a student was labeled a transfer or dropout; many students without transcript requests were considered as transfers.[20]

Training and Error Rates. The number of staff trained in each LEA, the total time spent in training, and the average time a staff member spent being trained were calculated from LEA survey responses. There were no statistically significant relationships between the number of staff trained and error rate ($r = .06$, $p = .73$) nor between the total time spent in training and error rate ($r = -.02$, $p = .90$). The correlation between **average** amount of time spent by staff in training and error rate was slightly negative, but still attributable to chance ($r = -.12$, $p = .48$). The lack of correlations between reported training time and error rates **may** signify either that LEAs with more difficult record keeping situations trained more to match the difficulty of the problem or that the reported training time is an unreliable measure of the effectiveness of training.

The perceived necessity for training district staff and school staff was investigated in two items on the LEA Survey. Six LEAs did not feel it was necessary to train district staff.

---

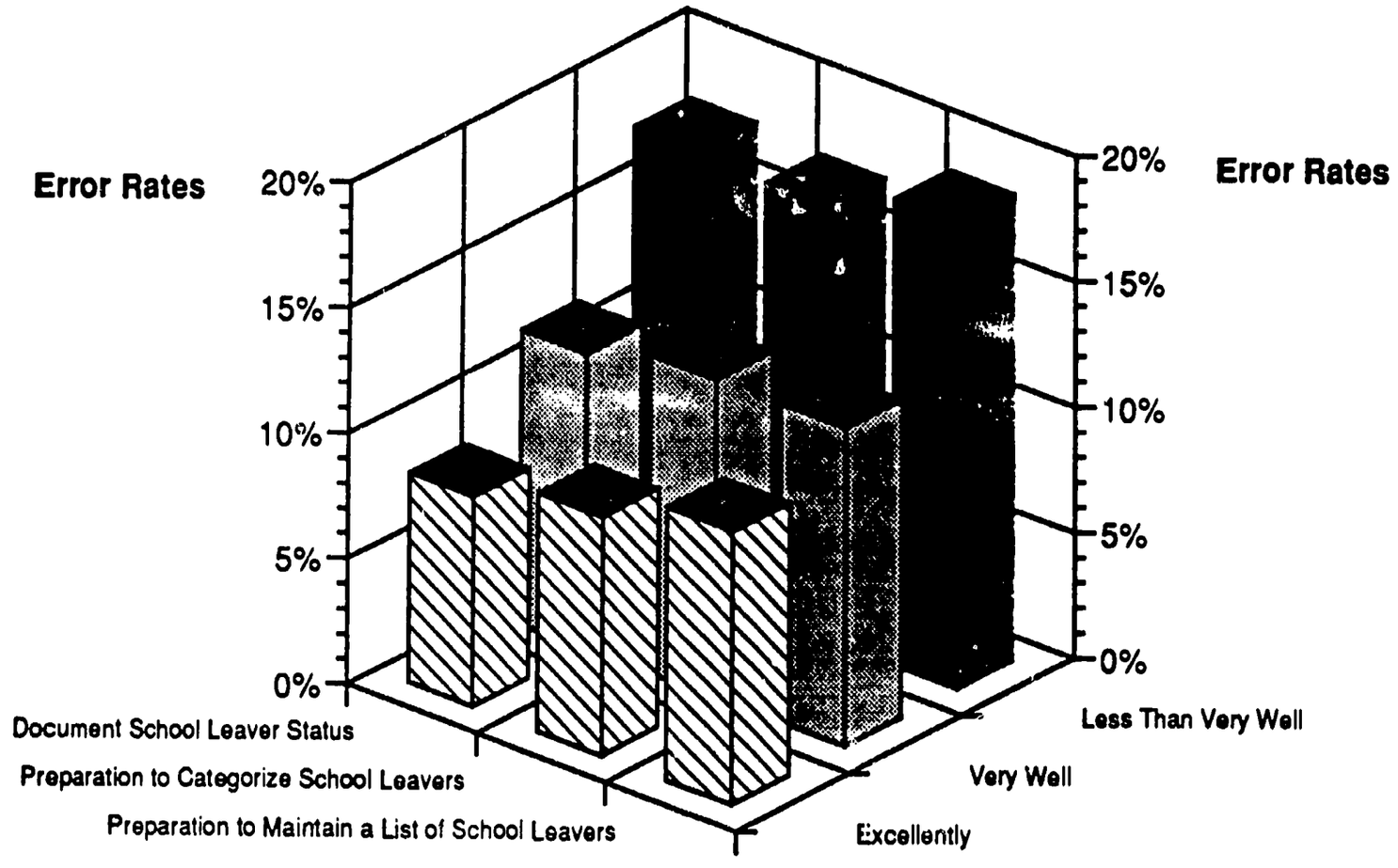
[20] For the Field Test, this LEA explicitly instructed its school to " ... list the name of the school .... and the date the student's records were transferred to the receiving school. The new school name and record transfer date are critical in that they provide verification that the student actually enrolled in the new school." This instruction, included as part of a memo request asking schools to reconcile a centrally generated list of school leavers, to which barely half of the district's schools responded, was all of the "training" the schools in this LEA were provided for the Field Test. Complying with this request was the extent of involvement at the school level.

Unfortunately, the record transfer date was interpreted to mean the date on which the transfer was entered into the computer system. Few staff apparently bothered to check, or had adequate records to check, to determine whether transcripts were requested.

Their mean error rate (4.7%) was significantly lower than the error rate (15.1%) of districts who felt that training district staff was necessary ($t = 3.16$, $p = .005$). Similarly, LEA respondents who did not feel training school staff was necessary had lower error rates (9.0%) than districts who felt that such training was necessary (13.8%) ($t = 1.70$, $p = .10$). LEA coordinators were apparently accurate estimators of the need for training.

Other factors. LEA Field Test Coordinators were asked how well their districts were prepared to carry out various Field Test tasks. Several of these tasks related to School Leaver Lists: maintaining a record of school leavers, categorizing school leavers, and documenting school leaver status. Responses to these items were categorized as indicating the coordinator felt the district was excellently prepared, very well prepared, or less than very well prepared (i.e., not very well prepared). Results were consistent with the coordinators' assessments: The better prepared the coordinators thought their districts were, the lower their districts' error rates. These results are presented in Figure 10. Like their SEA counterparts, the LEA coordinators proved to be knowledgeable respondents. If they anticipated problems, there were sound reasons for their fears.

Figure 10
Error Rates and Perceived Preparedness to Perform Tasks Related to School Leaver Lists



How well prepared did the LEA feel they were?

School Leaver Lists could either be maintained at each school or prepared at a central district office. No clear benefits in reduced error rates were associated with either practice. Lists were prepared centrally in eleven of the LEAs in which the status of school leavers was validated. Omitting the outlier among these (the district with a 66.7% error rate), the average error rate of 7.7 percent was somewhat lower than the 13.4 percent error rates in the 29 LEAs which prepared Leaver Lists at each school. On the other hand, there was not much difference if district or school staff coordinated the preparation of the School Leaver Lists. (In the 19 LEAs in which district staff coordinated the preparation of School Leaver Lists, the error rates were 12.1 percent; in the 23 school staff coordinated LEAs, the error rates were 14.8 percent.) Nor was there a significant difference if decisions about listing individuals as school leavers were made by district employees or school employees. Error rates in the eight LEAs making this decision at the district tended to be lower (6.7%) than the error rates (15.2%) in the 34 LEAs making this decision at the school level, ($t = 1.63$, $p = .11$). There are no clear guidelines for recommending that decision making authority be at the school, district, or State level.

For some LEAs, the process of maintaining School Leaver Lists did not differ from what they had been doing previously. The 15 LEAs so reporting, as expected, had a lower error rate (11.0%) than those reporting that the process was different from what had been done previously (15.2%). However, the fact that maintaining a School Leaver List is no different from what has been done previously is no guarantee of accuracy.

SECTION 5. TRAINING

Overview. All SEA Field Test Coordinators attended a special training session. In addition to this training session, they were provided with a variety of materials, to be used as deemed appropriate, for training LEA staff in the (approximately) ten participating LEAs in each State. In most States, SEA coordinators conducted training sessions, using some or all of these materials. Occasionally, these materials were supplemented with materials of their own. Training sessions were typically attended by district staff and frequently by school staff. In some LEAs, further training of school staff was conducted by the LEA Field Test Coordinator. The survey of Participating State Education Agencies included questions on perceptions of the training. In general, the materials and the training were evaluated as excellent and were perceived to be very effective tools.

As discussed in Section 4, no statistically significant relationship between training or the training materials employed and error rates was found. Discussions of training burden, participants' evaluation of the training materials and the training they received, and recommendations for improvements are provided in this section. In some cases, perceptions of training requirements were different in large and small districts. To present these results, participating districts were divided into those with total student counts, based on the 1989-90 CCD: of 1 -- 1,000; 1,001 -- 5,000; 5,001 -- 10,000; and more than 10,000.

Training burden. Not surprisingly, the largest LEAs (those with total student counts over 10,000) required significantly more person hours of training than smaller sized districts. These results are presented in Table 21. Districts with more than 10,000 students devoted a total of about 46 person hours of staff labor to Field Test training, as compared to averages of about 21 person hours, 18 person hours, and 9 person hours for districts with 5,001-10,000, 1,001-5,000, and 1-1,000 students respectively. These person hours included the training time

of the district coordinators, the time they spent training others, and the time other LEA staff spent in training.

Table 21. Average Number of Person Hours Required for Training in LEAs of Different Sizes

LEA Size (Membership)	Person Hours of Training
Over 10,000 (*n*=54)	45.73[a]
5,001 - 10,000 (*n*=34)	20.98
1,001 - 5,000 (*n*=78)	18.40
1 - 1,000 (*n*=33)	9.24

[a] **The number of person hours of training time in the largest LEAs was significantly greater than the number of person hours of training time in any of the other LEAs, $p < .05$ (Scheffe's test).**

Type of staff trained. Average amounts of time (per person trained) spent in training and training related activities for LEA and school staff are presented in Table 22. Since LEA professional staff were often responsible for the training of school staff as well as training their own staff, it was not surprising to find their involvement in training was always greater than the involvement of school staff. In small districts, there was relatively little difference among the amounts of training for various levels of staff. In large districts, however, district professionals spent more time training than any other staff spent. The training burden for school level staff (both professionals and clerical) was relatively low in large districts — in some cases they were not even told about the Field Test. In these LEAs, participation in the

Field Test sometimes represented no additional burden — centralized record-keeping was employed to try to transform the information normally provided into the information required for the Field Test.

Table 22. Average Hours of Training (Per Type of Person) in LEAs of Different Sizes

Level of Staff	Over 10,000 (*n*=54)	5,001-10,000 (*n*=34)	1,001-5,000 (*n*=78)	1-1,000 (*n*=33)
District Professionals (e.g., superintendents, pupil personnel officers, computer technicians)	6.24	6.08	4.71	3.94
District Clerical Staff (e.g., secretaries, data entry clerks)	3.93	5.57	6.83	2.00
School Professionals (e.g. principals, teachers, counselors)	1.97	2.30	3.76	3.30
School Clerical Staff (e.g., secretaries, attendance clerks)	2.34	1.80	4.05	3.32

The total training burden, especially when viewed at the level of the individuals being trained, is quite low. Part of this undoubtedly reflects the fact that none of the materials necessary for training had to be developed by LEA staff. Without the provision of these materials, it seems very probable that much more time would have had to be devoted to training. The necessity for training was investigated in another pair of questions asked of the LEA coordinator: Was training necessary for school staff? Was training necessary for district staff?

Perceived necessity of training for school and district staff. Most LEAs (about 64%) reported that both district level and school level staff need to be trained. (See

Table 23). Smaller LEAs were more likely to feel that training only school staff would suffice. This is partly because in some of the smaller LEAs there are only one or two secondary schools. So, there is not much need for district staff to coordinate the process. As one respondent who felt that no district level training was necessary in his LEA explained, *"We have only one school here, so it's not necessary to train district level staff."* On the

Table 23. Percentage of LEAs in Which Training School and Training District Staff Were Believed to be Necessary, in Large (Membership Over 5,000) and Small (Membership Under 5,000) LEAs

Who needs training?	Large LEAs (n=88)	Small LEAs (n=107)	Total (n=195)
Neither District nor School Staff	1.1%	8.4%	5.1%
Only School Staff	3.4%	29.9%	18.0%
Only District Staff	19.3%	7.5%	12.8%
Both District & School Staff	76.1%	54.2%	64.1%

Note: Overall differences are significant (chi squared = 32.8, p < .0001)

other hand, in the larger LEAs, respondents were more likely to recognize a need for training district staff.

Larger LEAs tend to be computerized. Fully computerized LEAs were less likely to perceive a need to train school staff than noncomputerized LEAs. Participation in the Field Test for some fully computerized districts involved only central modifications of the way normally collected data were organized and output. One respondent explained, *"We could have done it (participated in the Field Test) without even telling the schools. We told them so they'd try to keep the data accurate that they send in."*

Although the LEA coordinators in many large and computerized districts reported that school staff do not need to be trained, they may have overlooked the importance of training school staff to categorize and document school leaver status. The school staff in these districts have little or no involvement in compiling the data and preparing the reports, but they are instrumental in classifying and verifying leavers — activities crucial to the implementation of uniform dropout reporting. In many of these large LEAs, AIR found that transcript requests or the type of program to which a student transferred were not employed as classification criteria. Pre-existing guidelines were employed. These guidelines were not always in perfect accord with the proposed uniform guidelines. As noted in a previous section, validation rates in the large and computerized LEAs indicate both the highest error rates (reflecting these inconsistencies) and the lowest error rates (excluding the most error-prone district). To minimize errors in districts with centralized record-keeping procedures, it may be necessary to provide training in basic classification and verification rules and procedures to school staff in these districts.

Training materials. A variety of training materials was provided. These materials were evaluated by respondents as being essential, very useful, fairly useful, or not useful. Numerical scale values were assigned to each of these categories, with 4 = essential, 3 = very useful, 2 = useful, and 1 = not useful, to permit the calculation of comparative rating scores. These results are presented in Table 24.

Of all the training materials, the Participant Handbook was most highly evaluated and most frequently used. Over 30 percent of the districts felt the Participant Handbook was essential. The average rating assigned to the Participant Handbook was significantly higher than the rating assigned to any other material (Duncan's Multiple Range Test, $p < .05$). The Trainer's Guide was next most highly evaluated, and it was rated significantly higher than the transparencies and the videotape. The transparencies and the videotape receive the lowest ratings for usefulness. Only about 8 percent of the districts that rated the transparencies felt they were essential, and only about 27 percent stated they were very

useful. Similarly, only about 8 percent of the districts that rated the videotape described it as essential, and only about 29 percent rated it very useful.

Table 24. Respondents' Evaluation of Training Materials

Materials	Average Rating Score	# Rating Material	
Participant Handbook	3.08	200	(89.7%)
Trainer's Guide	2.85	145	(65.0%)
Training Exercises	2.68	152	(68.2%)
Transparencies	2.54	124	(55.6%)
Videotape	2.50	135	(60.5%)

The fact that 90 percent of the respondents evaluated the Participant Handbook suggests that at least 90 percent of the respondents were familiar with this material. (Respondents would occasionally omit items.) In contrast, only 56 percent rated the transparencies.

Although most districts give the Participant Handbook high ratings, about 16 percent of the districts offered suggestions for improving the Handbook. These suggestions were mostly concerned with the provision of specific information about a variety of factors. These included requests for more specific information about how to:

- count students who are outplaced (Are they transfers or in membership?)
- count night students
- classify biracial students
- classify foreign exchange students
- classify GED students
- classify retained students and in-year promotions

- classify students schooled at home
- classify special education students
- track summer withdrawals and re-entries

Since some of this information was provided in the Handbook, the failure of respondents to assimilate it suggests the potential for improvement. An index could help the Handbook become a more useful reference manual. Additional charts and graphics, as well as additional examples, could also help fill these informational needs. Respondents generally wanted a "nuts and bolts approach" — brief, to-the-point answers to specific questions about categories, procedures, tracking, deadlines, and forms.

One respondent suggested that the Handbook include a question and answer section that addresses specific problems and situations in a concise, easy-to-read format. Another respondent, acknowledging the difficulty of anticipating all of the questions that districts have, encouraged *"revisions [in the Handbook] based on input from the survey."* Some respondents also suggested that the Handbook provide procedures in a hypothetical district and include completed forms as examples. All of these suggestions should be considered.

Possibility for reducing training. Respondents were asked what could be omitted from training. Most felt that nothing could be eliminated. Only about 9 percent of the districts mentioned any items that they thought could be omitted from the training. The most frequently suggested item for deletion was the videotapes — but only two percent of the respondents suggested that this be deleted. About two percent of the respondents felt the training session was too long in general and should be condensed. Miscellaneous suggestions (with less than 1 percent frequency) included omitting the transparencies and eliminating the training session.

The districts that suggested things to omit often commented that little or no training was necessary for them because their own procedures were effective and similar to Field Test

procedures. To reduce the training burden, some of them suggested the amount of training be tailored to the needs of individual districts. One respondent suggested, *"Make better use of that book. The training manual is written pretty well. Send the book out, and make follow-up phone calls....I wasted a lot of travel time and money [going to the session]."*

Perceived training effectiveness. The LEA's perceived ability to perform various tasks associated with the dropout accounting process is an indicator of training effectiveness. If districts do not feel they are well prepared in a certain area, their training may have been inadequate. LEAs' assessments of their preparedness to perform various tasks is presented as Table 25. Clearly, most respondents considered themselves to be very well prepared, the main area of concern being the classification and documentation of school leavers' status.

Table 25. Percentage of LEAs Who Said They Were Excellently Prepared, Very Well Prepared, or Less Than Very Well Prepared to Perform Field Test Activities

Preparedness for ...	Excellently Prepared	Very Well Prepared	Less than Very Well Prepared
Membership Data Collection (*n*=216)	50.5%	38.9%	10.6%
Enrollment Form Completion (*n*=215)	49.3%	42.3%	7.9%
Maintaining Record of Leavers (*n*=215)	39.1%	39.1%	21.9%
Categorizing Leavers (*n*=215)	29.8%	44.2%	26.0%
Documenting Leaver Status (*n*=214)	26.2%	36.9%	36.9%
Completing Dropout Report (*n*=213)	38.5%	46.0%	15.5%

Although a majority of the districts stated they felt excellently or very well prepared to carry out each of the Field Test activities, this cannot be interpreted as assurance of training's effectiveness. These LEAs might have been well prepared independently of any training provided. For this reason, it is more informative to focus on areas in which LEAs did not feel they were very well prepared. The areas in which respondents felt less well prepared all related to School Leaver and Leaver List record keeping. These deficiencies were more likely to be reported in larger LEAs than in smaller ones. (See Table 26.)

Table 26. Percentage of LEAs of Different Sizes Who Said They Were Less Than Very Well Prepared to Perform Field Test Activities

LEA Memb'ship	Collect Membership Data	Complete Enrollment Report	Maintain Leaver Records	Categorize School Leavers	Document Leaver Status	Complete Dropout Report
1 - 1,000	12.2%	7.3%	14.6%	17.1%	22.0%	12.2%
1,001 - 5,000	8.1%	4.7%	19.0%	21.4%	27.7%	10.6%
5,001 - 10,000	6.1%	9.1%	20.6%	26.5%	47.1%	20.6%
Over 10,000	16.1%	12.5%	32.1%	39.3%	55.4%	22.6%

The respondents in larger districts are more likely to feel less than well prepared to maintain leaver records, categorize school leavers, document leaver status, and complete dropout reports. Since error rates were associated with the respondents' assessments of how well prepared their districts were to carry out various Field Test tasks (see Figure 10), one should attend to these perceptions. To ameliorate these problems, training, particularly in the larger LEAs, should focus on, in order of importance, (a) documenting school leaver status, (b) categorizing school leavers, (c) maintaining leaver records, and (d) completing dropout reports.

SECTION 6. BARRIERS AND INCENTIVES

The collection of dropout counts from all school districts in the nation must be a cooperative venture, serving the needs of educators in all States for better information on which to make programmatic decisions. Therefore, a Task Force of State Dropout Coordinators played a key role in the design of procedures, and a comprehensive Field Test was undertaken to assess the feasibility of calculating comparable dropout rates using uniform procedures. A major task in the evaluation of the Field Test was the collection of information on both the barriers and incentives involved in (a) participation in the Field Test, in the short run, and (b) producing reports of uniform dropout counts across the nation, in the long run.

Staff of AIR interviewed all 30 participating State Dropout Coordinators (including DC and three territories), as well as all 24 Nonparticipating State Coordinators, during the Field Test, to assess barriers to participation (e.g., burden) and incentives for participation (e.g., State needs for acceptable comparable dropout data), and to identify State-level differences in the meaning and interpretation of terms used in the Field Test (e.g., "approval" of private schools). Only a single participating State representative thought the uniform procedures were not feasible for Statewide implementation in that State. The reason given in that case was the existence of unspecified local policy issues that were interfering with Field Test activities. Furthermore, only five nonparticipating States felt there would be insurmountable barriers to their State responding to a new Common Core of Data (CCD) Survey item on dropouts. However, merely having procedures that are feasible for implementation is no guarantee that such procedures will be implemented.

Theoretical framework

The successful implementation of a new procedure requires a commitment of resources for system development (or modification), staff training, motivation, and management. Without sufficient incentives for the States, adequate resources will not be allocated, and successful implementation is highly improbable. With sufficient resources, there still will be problems associated with the modification of existing systems, the training and motivating of staff, and the management of the procedure — independent of any problems associated with the procedure itself. To the extent that these problems (barriers) can be minimized or eliminated, the procedure will be properly implemented.

The need for valid dropout statistics is widely accepted. Local and State Agencies are continually asked for information on dropout rates; they have frequently been embarrassed or harmed by lack of uniformity of dropout definitions. With the help of NCES, the Dropout Statistics Task Force has addressed this need by developing a uniform definition of dropout rates and a training program to ensure that school staff have the specific knowledge needed to implement the uniform definition.

In developing the uniform definition, NCES and the Task Force addressed key issues, including the need for definitions that take into account racial/ethnic and sex differences among schools and the need for a definition that covers students who drop out in the summer, as well as those who drop out while school is in session. By specifying a definition that forms a basis for computing **fall-to-fall** dropout rates for **each racial/ethnic group and sex**, in **each grade from 7 to 12**, the Task Force provided a measurable unit that is meaningful for all districts, that can be used to pinpoint targets for dropout prevention efforts, and that can be aggregated to provide valid, comparable outcome indicators to be reported alongside graduation rates.

Nevertheless, in developing the definitions and procedures, the Task Force was faced with clear differences in educational systems among States, as well as differences in current dropout data collection efforts. To the extent that different State policies and procedures affect apparent dropout rates, and to the extent that the uniform procedures cause duplication of data collection efforts, it will be difficult to implement a nationwide data collection effort. Thus, an important objective of the Dropout Statistics Field Test Evaluation was to assess the barriers to providing uniform data. A number of specific policy differences were addressed in the definitions, of which three might prove problematic for States if these policies have large effects on computed dropout rates.

First, because States differ in their policies on private school approval, the attempt to close the loophole of transfer of potential dropouts to unapproved private schools was compromised. It was decided, for the Field Test, that transfers to private schools would be acceptable (i.e., not counted as dropouts) except when they were within-State transfers to unapproved schools in States that required approval of private schools. Second, because the publisher of the GED typically administers the test only to dropouts, the decision was to count transfers to GED programs as dropouts if the GED program was an adult education program or if the GED program was not State- or district-approved. Third, some States and districts have special programs to bring dropouts back into schools, and under the proposed definition, these individuals, who almost by definition are at higher risk for dropping out again, could be counted repeatedly as dropouts. The objective for this section is to address the importance of problems such as these in determining barriers to participation in the Field Test and barriers to ultimate implementation of uniform nation-wide procedures for dropout reporting.

Another potential barrier exists because many States and districts already have formal procedures in place for dropout reporting. To the extent that the uniform procedures are incompatible with existing systems, implementing them will increase the burden. Either duplication of data collection will occur, if existing procedures cannot be superseded, or special staff preparation for the conversion must be undertaken. In any case, a substantial

amount of training must be undertaken to ensure that all staff providing the basic data have the required understanding of the definitions and rules for counting special cases. The Field Test has demonstrated the value of well-designed training of local staff by State Dropout Coordinators, but moving from the training of fewer than a dozen staff in each State to the training of staff in every LEA represents a significant increase of State-level effort. It is important for this study to assess the effort required at the State level for uniform dropout reporting and to analyze the perceived incompatibilities with existing dropout reporting systems.

The requirement for submission of dropout counts as a part of the Field Test was, itself, a source of information about these barriers to implementation. Only 187 districts submitted required counts, and breakdowns of the submission rate by characteristics of the districts provides valuable information concerning the kinds of districts likely to have trouble implementing the uniform procedures. As shown in Table 27, districts serving large cities were less likely to be able to submit the counts than other districts participating in the Field Test. These are the districts that require the most significant investments when modifications of procedures are imposed.

Table 27. Percentage of Participating Districts Submitting Dropout Counts, by Community Type

	Community Type				
	Large City (n=14)	Fringe City (n=40)	Mid-City (n=33)	Town (n=65)	Rural (n=75)
Percent Submitting Counts	57%	92%	85%	86%	77%

The sources of the problems that participating districts found in submitting counts may have been differences between their normal requirements and requirements of the Field Test. In fact, as shown in Table 28, the submission rate was lower for districts that indicated that the Field Test membership reporting requirements went beyond their normal procedures. The rates of non-submission were roughly doubled in districts for which additional fall membership counts, additional grade breakdowns, or different racial/ethnic categories were required.

Table 28. Percentage of Participating Districts Submitting Dropout Counts, by Types of Differences in Requirements for Membership Counts.

Different Procedures Required?	Type of Requirement		
	Additional Fall Membership Counts	Grade Breakdown of all Students	Ethnic Categories Different
Yes	72% (*n*=40)	70% (*n*=27)	78% (*n*=36)
No	89% (*n*=131)	88% (*n*=144)	87% (*n*=135)

In spite of need for investment to solve implementation problems, the value of comparable and accurate dropout statistics was obvious to SEA officials whether or not their State is participating in the National Dropout Statistics Field Test. Dissemination of information about problems caused by inaccurate or noncomparable data will help further motivate an already motivated group.

Potential Implementation Problems and Suggestions for Addressing Them

The following problems were noted by respondents to the Surveys of Participating and Nonparticipating States and by individuals met during site visits. Each problem is followed by a suggested approach to facilitate the addition of dropout rate items to the CCD and to facilitate consistent and valid responses to these items. Since a variety of factors constrains the setting of dropout counting procedures, many of these suggestions may be impossible to implement. Nevertheless, they represent knowledge gained from the surveys and Field Test and should be considered.

There are costs associated with uniform data. In spite of the objections of many education officials, such data will be used for comparative purposes. A comparative instrument, the State Education Performance Chart, or "Wall Chart," which was distributed by the United States Department of Education during a period that included the Field Test, was reported by many respondents as having an impact in their States. Recognition of the impact and limitations of existing State-by-State comparisons can encourage accurate and comparable dropout reporting.

> **SUGGESTIONS: To eliminate fears of unfair comparisons, actual and adjusted dropout rates can be reported for every State that employs the standardized definitions and procedures. (There are demonstrated relationships between demographic factors and dropout rates. Procedures to normalize State data can be developed.)**

There are barriers associated with the implementation of any new procedures. The first of these barriers is motivational: the organizational entity should be aware of the benefits of change. Although it is possible to implement unpopular policies and procedures, it is much simpler to implement policies and procedures that are seen as meritorious by the involved party.

SUGGESTIONS: To emphasize the value of uniform definitions and procedures, disseminate information about problems associated with the former procedures for keeping track of dropouts and advantages of standardized definition. Use anecdotes and data gathered from the Field Test.

The degree to which an SEA's or an LEA's past and current record-keeping system is compatible with the proposed informational needs will be a crucial factor in assessing the costs and other barriers of implementation. Individuals are accustomed to classifying school leavers in categories and may not know how these categories correspond to Field Test definitions. A mere transformation of school leaver status codes currently in use in an SEA or an LEA may be all that is required.

SUGGESTION: Whenever possible, ask for the required information in formats with which the reporting units are familiar, and then convert this information into the type needed.

In other cases, a simple transformation may not be possible. The reporting unit will need to obtain additional information. (For example, an LEA might customarily report the number of students transferring into GED programs to the State. For future dropout reporting, the LEA might be instructed how to classify these GED transfers as "GED - secondary programs" and "GED - adult education programs.")

SUGGESTION: NCES should assist SEA and LEA representatives in conducting a review of their present reporting categories; identifying categories that are not completely subsumable into Field Test categories; determining and defining the information required for classification into Field Test categories; and devising procedures for the acquisition and reporting of this information. (This suggestion applies to LEAs and SEAs that find it problematic to alter their record keeping system to employ nationally consistent categorical definitions.)

Development of training procedures and materials to permit the modification of existing systems is a burden that will be distributed unevenly among the States and LEAs, depending on the degree of similarity of their present school leaver classification system with systems compatible with Field Test definitions.

SUGGESTION: NCES should assist SEAs (and LEAs) in developing procedures and in preparing training materials to permit the reporting of uniform dropout data. Extra assistance will be required by some States. These States should be identified objectively.

Information required for the classification of school leavers is not always centralized at one location. The development of training materials and procedures must take this into account.

SUGGESTION: When record-keeping is the responsibility of two or more groups, a team approach is critical. For example, the records office may handle transcript requests; the guidance office, transfers and dropouts; the attendance office may monitor "No shows" (i.e., students expected to enroll who never showed up). Reporting requires integration of all of this knowledge, as well as motivating the various actors to coordinate their work.

In order to be labeled a "transfer," a student must transfer to a public school or an approved private school and the "sending" school must receive a formal notice (usually a transcript request) to verify this. The "sending" school often does not know if the "receiving" school is approved. If formal notice that the student is attending the new school has not been received (which is not unusual in the case of seventh and eighth graders), sending schools must determine why this has not occurred if the leaver is to be categorized as anything other than a dropout.

SUGGESTION: To facilitate schools' communications with each other for keeping track of school leavers, provide names and phone numbers of all LEAs and all public schools in the nation to every school (on diskettes). Provide lists of phone numbers of all private schools (and their approval status) to all school districts.

Respondents recognized the need for and the importance of training. Nonparticipating State respondents who did not have the benefit of training were more likely to anticipate certain kinds of validity problems than participating State respondents.

SUGGESTION: Information about the effectiveness of the training materials that have been prepared, the positive evaluation these materials have received, and their effectiveness in reducing the expected frequency of certain types of serious errors, should be disseminated.

Changes in definitions will render new data noncomparable with previously collected data. The loss of longitudinal data is the loss of a significant resource and can represent a serious barrier to participation.

SUGGESTION: To remove the barrier of loss of longitudinal data series in some States, collect two sets of data (using both old and new definitions) for a period of two years for a sample of schools, using different definitions. Develop transforming algorithms.

Other recommendations are based on responses of nonparticipating States to the question, "Is there anything else you feel is crucial to address in planning for reporting of uniform dropout rates?" The most frequent type of response to this item dealt with technological issues (5 States) -- the need for ID tracking systems; and the need to computerize or automate the present system to provide the capabilities for dropout accounting.

SUGGESTION: Certain States and districts have developed or are developing dropout reporting software. Dissemination of this software and of information about computer systems for dropout and attendance accounting should be facilitated. The use of electronic bulletin boards for dissemination and networking purposes is an attractive alternative. (It will be particularly appealing to the technologically oriented who will be responsible for the development and modification of these systems.) Conferences and presentations at meetings of professional societies can also be considered as a means of disseminating this information.

It is of interest that the Field Test evaluation was mentioned by respondents in three nonparticipating States. They felt that the evaluation results should be seriously considered and expressed a concern that decisions not be made in advance of the evaluation. One respondent was concerned that the reliability of racial/ethnic data was not being addressed in the evaluation. He felt this was very important.

SUGGESTION: Present results of the Field Test evaluation at either a special conference or add a results presentation to the agenda of a meeting of CCD Coordinators.

There were several concerns about specific aspects of the proposed dropout accounting procedures. In some cases, directly dealing with a specific concern might be sufficient to elicit the cooperation of recalcitrant States or LEAs. For example, the use of an October to October reporting cycle was a concern of respondents in three nonparticipating States. The addition of a spring count was felt to be unduly burdensome by another respondent.

SUGGESTION: Allowing the use of alternative reporting cycles might be considered by NCES. Although not perfectly comparable, a June to June cycle is likely to provide information comparable to the proposed October to October cycle.

One state was concerned with 7th and 8th grade dropout rates. Since schools in that State don't request transcripts for 7th and 8th graders, it was feared that many transfers would be labeled as dropouts. (It seems improbable that no information is requested for incoming students. At a minimum, vaccination histories or other student records should be requested.)

SUGGESTION: Since the dropout rate among 7th and 8th graders is low, vaccination record requests (by either the child's parents or by the receiving school) could be considered as evidence of transfer to another school for 7th and 8th graders. Also, a procedure for eliciting parents' cooperation in notifying schools of transfers could be recommended to schools.

Several States were concerned about the extent of the demographic breakdowns requested. *"I also have some concern about the level of detail -- the 60 cell matrix. The volume of record keeping and reporting is a matter of some concern. Individual record systems also differ in some districts."* This factor was a major reason for the nonparticipation of at least one State. In fact, the 60-cell requirement is important only if there are three-way interactions of race, sex, and grade on dropout rates.

SUGGESTION: The calculation of adjustment factors is dependent on the provision of demographic information by the States. If analyses of Field Test data show that dropout rates for each race, sex, and grade on the margin (13 cells) are sufficient to obtain comparable rates, the data requirement can be reduced.

SECTION 7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview. The National Dropout Statistics Field Test evaluation was designed to assist the National Center for Education Statistics and the National Dropout Statistics Task force in planning for the implementation of uniform dropout reporting procedures. To accomplish this, the evaluation addressed four main questions:

(1) What is the accuracy of dropout rates produced by different formulas, and what are the advantages and disadvantages of these different formulas?

(2) How accurate are the dropout counts — what error rates are associated with the application of the proposed definition?

(3) Were the training and other support activities and materials provided to the States and school districts adequate for producing accurate data?

(4) What factors external to those examined in the Field Test will affect the collection and reporting of dropout statistics through the CCD Survey?

The results of the evaluation can best be summarized in terms of answers to these questions and recommendations for improving the proposed procedures, facilitating their implementation, and reducing error rates.

(1) Evaluation of dropout rate formulas. The Field Test evaluated three different formulas for calculating dropout rates and found no noticeable differences among them. Accordingly, AIR recommends adoption of the formula imposing the least additional data collection burden on the States and LEAs:

Dropout Rate = (Number of Full-Year Dropouts) / First Fall Enrollment.

In an indirect analysis, AIR found that counting full-year dropouts from one fall to the next or one spring to the next would yield virtually the same dropout rates. However, inclusion of the summer period in the dropout accounting is essential: in districts serving large numbers of black and Hispanic students up to one third of dropouts were estimated to be over the summer, whereas in districts serving small numbers of black and Hispanic students, summer dropouts were relatively rare.

Dropout rates from the Field Test generally confirmed previous findings, even though they were based on a nonprobability sample. On average, full-year single-grade event dropout rates increased from about 1 percent in grade 7 to 6 percent in grade 10, then decreased from 6 percent in grade 11 to 5.5 percent in grade 12. Dropout rates were somewhat higher for Hispanic students than for others; and they were somewhat higher for large districts than for small districts. In fact, the correlation across 20 States for which reliable data were reported, between reported dropout rates and rates predicted purely on the factors of ethnicity of the students served and size of the school district membership, was greater than .80. These are clearly powerful factors to be considered in dropout prevention planning.

(2) **Accuracy of dropout counts.** Based on findings for 733 successfully tracked school leavers, of 790 sampled school leavers, the overall validation error rate was 12.8 percent. However, this should not be interpreted as indicating that if the Field Test procedures were employed, estimates of dropout rates are going to be off by 12.8 percent. Different classification error rates were noted for students listed as transfers and dropouts on their schools' Leaver Lists. Only 8.1 percent of the students listed as transfers were not transfers to an approved school or program. Twenty-four percent of those listed as dropouts were really transfers. These errors are in opposite directions and tend to cancel out, particularly since there are more transfers to classify than dropouts. In fact, the dropout/transfer misclassifications roughly balanced each other from the ninth grade on.

Further, the field test results show sufficient variation across grade levels, among the various racial/ethnic groups, and between male and female students to warrant including these characteristics in the dropout collection.

On the average, schools made errors that would tend to overestimate their synthetic cohort dropout rate across grades 7 - 12 by 1.1 percent (e.g., a reported dropout rate of 21.1 percent would, on the average, be adjusted to 20.0 percent). There was no significant tendency to underestimate dropout rates, using the uniform procedures, and there were no clear patterns of overestimation or underestimation in different types of districts. However, comparisons of actual dropout rates to dropout rates predicted based on demographic factors revealed a significant relation between (a) a district's relative frequency of errors that would undercount dropouts (determined from the validation), and (b) that district's differential dropout rate relative to demographic factors (based on counts submitted to NCES).

It should be noted that the error rate estimates were based only on the 733 validated cases. If the on-site tracker error rates (i.e., the error rates for the most difficult to resolve cases) were applied to the 57 unresolved cases, the overall error rate would be slightly higher, 13.6 percent. Also hypothetically, if the error rate for the 57 unverified cases were twice the error rate for the verified cases, the overall error rate would be 16 percent. The unresolved cases included 25 transfers and 32 dropouts according to school records. Therefore, even a very large, unbalanced error rate for these cases would not alter the conclusion that there was no pattern of underestimation of dropout rates.

The evaluation examined the sources of classification errors that did occur. Many of the errors, it was found, could easily have been removed by local school staff, using available records. A school (or district) employee involved with the dropout accounting process is frequently cognizant of the fact that a student listed as a dropout really transferred to an approved school or program and that a transcript for this student was requested. A simple review of Leaver Lists prior to their use for the production of dropout counts can significantly lower the error rate.

Verification of transfers can be usually be accomplished by telephone. Accordingly, a national listing of public and private schools, with their telephone numbers, could be employed very effectively. Much of this information can be extracted from CCD data files and distributed by diskette.

The definition of dropout as tested and the proposed procedures for determination of leaver status presented few problems. The major difficulties were concerned with verification of the status of transfers, classification of students in drug/alcohol rehabilitation programs, and GED classification issues.

The importance of receiving a transcript request before finally classifying a student as a transfer was clearly demonstrated. If a transcript request was received for a student labeled as a transfer, the probability of his or her actually being a dropout was less than three percent, one-third that of a student labeled as a transfer for whom no transcript request had been received. Even though there are cases in which students transfer to approved programs and no transcript requests are made, the requirement for formal notification should not be weakened.

It is feasible to dichotomize "transfers" into verified and nonverified categories and develop prediction rules (based on characteristics associated with true transfers) for the assignment of nonverified transfers into probable transfer and probable dropout categories. For example, measures of relative age-grade discrepancy, unexcused absences, and grades strongly predicted which school leavers were actually transfers and dropouts.

Students transferring to nonsecondary GED programs were the source of several classification errors. Distinctions between transfers to adult and secondary education programs will, in many cases, require modification of existing record keeping systems. If classification definitions could be sharpened, so that the individual responsible for categorizing a student would know how to appropriately classify these leavers, this type of error could be minimized. (In some systems, it might be advisable to create explicit

categories for transfer to adult GED programs so that the categorizer not be tempted to simply label such leavers as transfers.)

Students enrolled in drug/alcohol treatment programs, according to procedures tried out in the Field Test, are considered dropouts. This decision should be reconsidered for two reasons. The first is that some staff in participating districts expressed an unwillingness to stigmatize such students further by labeling them as dropouts and will creatively interpret rules to avoid doing so. The second is that, from a medical perspective, addiction is an illness. Since most programs are of finite and relatively short duration, it seems reasonable to treat students in drug rehabilitation programs as hospitalized students. Of course, if a student does not return to school after the end of the treatment period, he or she would still be considered a dropout.

Finally, the level and type of computerization within a school district or school are factors that will affect the collection and reporting of dropout statistics through the CCD Survey. Error rates appear to be inversely related to the degree of computerization in an LEA. Computer systems are tools that can be used to keep and process enrollment and dropout accounting records accurately and efficiently. However, this is true only when:

(1) Staff are well-trained in the rules for the assignment of codes to specific transactions and are motivated to follow these rules; and

(2) Transaction codes permit unambiguous labeling of leavers as either dropouts or other leavers (i.e., nonverified transfers who would be counted as dropouts, must be distinguishable from confirmed transfers; transfers to nonapproved programs must be distinguishable from transfers to approved programs).

Otherwise, computer systems can be responsible, either directly or indirectly, for the creation of errors. The development of computerized record keeping systems at State levels that will automatically generate all requested CCD Survey data should be encouraged. In many cases, with minor modifications of forms and existing procedures, the raw information required for these reports is available and is being collected.

Several States and LEAs are in the process of automating their record-keeping systems. They should be encouraged to define the generation of CCD Survey data as a need which this system must meet. The independent evaluation of existing systems and software, with respect to this factor and to other dimensions is a resource that was requested by at least one large, urban LEA.

(3) Training. The materials and training provided were rated by participants as excellent. Nonetheless, there is nothing that cannot be improved further. The following revisions could further enhance the quality of these materials:

(1) The provision of simple guidelines and decision rules to be used in the classification of school leavers.

(2) Clarification of what is meant by the requirement for formal notification that an individual has transferred.

(3) A listing of programs that are considered as approved and unapproved. (Such a listing, particularly at a local level, would eliminate many errors.)

It must be remembered that many different people are involved with different aspects of dropout record keeping. A team approach, where all individuals participating in relevant record keeping recognize the critical nature of their involvement and see their impact on the accuracy of the process, is to be strongly encouraged. Similarly, the development of customized training materials is also strongly encouraged.

(4) Barriers to implementation. The most serious barrier to successful implementation of the Field Test definition occurs in States and in LEAs whose current data collection systems do not permit the classification of school leavers into categories compatible with the definition. Small modifications in their systems — such as categorizing leavers as either verified transfers (i.e., those for whom a transcript request has been received) or unverified transfers would permit the imputation of dropout statistics whose accuracy would approach those of the other States and LEAs.

Most nonparticipating States also felt they could provide dropout statistics, using definitions identical with or very comparable with the proposed definitions. There was near consensus about the importance and value of being able to provide accurate, consistent, and easy-to-interpret dropout statistics. The biggest concerns were the anticipated burden this task would impose. Dissemination of information about the Field Test in general, and dissemination of information about the minimal training burden in particular, should facilitate reporting. (Additional suggestions for reducing the perceived burden were provided in a previous report and were summarized in the preceding section.)

The empirical results of the Field Test evaluation indicated that the collection of uniform and accurate dropout statistics in participating LEAs was feasible. Due to the purposive (and voluntary) sampling employed in selecting LEAs, feasibility of implementation within nonparticipating LEAs could best be assessed by the SEA Field Test Coordinators. With but a single exception, all SEA Field Test Coordinators felt there would be no serious barriers to implementation in their State. (The exception was a State in which unspecified political issues were presenting problems.)

Nonetheless, certain procedures presented problems or could be the source of potential artifacts. The Field Test procedure that was the source of the most criticism was the timing of the counts and reports. Numerous school and LEA staff reported that it takes weeks to determine which no-shows (i.e., students expected to enroll but who do not show up at the beginning of the year) are really dropouts and which are transfers. Since some schools begin their school year much later than others, it may be two months after the school year begins before a transcript request is received. Combined with the fact that the start of the school year is a particularly hectic time for school staff, the proposed 1 October reporting date (for schools to report their counts to the LEA) was frequently criticized.

Other procedures were noted that could introduce artifact into dropout rates. In particular, the denominator of the dropout rate equation should include all students who could drop out, and only students who can drop out. Some schools permit "graduate" study — that

is, a student can continue taking vocational education courses after his or her graduation. Such students should not be included in the denominators of dropout rates.

The use of telephone hot-lines (preferably toll-free) was suggested by several people interviewed. Such systems are probably most effective if they are organized within States or within LEAs, so that individuals knowledgeable about the State and local record keeping forms and procedures can be the source of consistent information. These individuals should be encouraged to regularly communicate problems to their State's CCD Coordinator, for eventual transmission to NCES.

Generally, both State and local survey respondents considered the Field Test a very worthwhile step in the development and refinement of a new national data collection requirement. The Field Test offered an opportunity to try out definitions, training materials, and training methods. Moreover, it offered an opportunity for districts and States to explore solutions to problems in dropout data collection and reporting without the political pressure that surround public reporting of dropout rates.

OMB #1850-0636
Exp. Date: 3/31/91

APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF PARTICIPATING STATES FORM

SURVEY OF PARTICIPATING STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES

Survey of Participating State Education Agencies

State Name: _____

Respondent: _____

Role (in Field Test): _____

This survey is a part of the Dropout Statistics Field Test evaluation. Its objectives are (1) to assess the effectiveness of the training component of the Field Test, (2) to identify sources of variation in dropout rates due to State-level definitions, (3) to assess the State-level burden in uniform dropout reporting, and (4) to collect data on usage of dropout rate information.

TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

1. Do you feel the training of district staff in the Dropout Statistics Field Test was necessary?
   [ ] YES
   [ ] NO

2. Who was responsible for training district staff in Dropout Statistics Field Test procedures?

   _____

   _____

3. How could the State and district-level Dropout Statistics Field Test training have been improved? Have any problems arisen that were not covered by training?

   _____

   _____

   _____

4. How useful were the Dropout Statistics Field Test training materials for Field Test training?

	Essential	Very Useful	Fairly Useful	Not Useful	[Not Used]
Dropout Statistics Field Test Participant Handbook	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Dropout Statistics Field Test Trainer Guide	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Transparency masters	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Training exercises (problems)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Dropout Statistics Field Test Videotape	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Other (PLEASE DESCRIBE) _____

_____

_____

5. What, if anything, that was included in this training could have been omitted?

_____

_____

VARIATIONS IN DEFINITIONS

6. What is your State's position on approval of nonpublic schools?

[ ] Our state does not exercise approval or nonapproval of public schools

[ ] Determination of status is voluntary and nonpublic schools may request an evaluation that could lead to approval

[ ] Determination is required. Nonpublic schools must be approved or unapproved

7. In your State, are public and private secondary schools the only institutions authorized to give students a high school diploma?

(Bureau of Indian Affairs and Section 6 schools offering a secondary degree are within this definition of public and private secondary schools.)

[ ] YES

[ ] NO ---> Please describe the other institutions:

_____

_____

8. How are the following school completers classified in your State? About how many of each type of completer were there in your State last year?

	Graduate	Dropout	Other/na (Please Specify)	Number of Completers
Someone who completes coursework requirements but is not successful on a high school exit test	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who does not complete coursework requirements but is successful on a high school exit test	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who completes an alternative set of requirements (excluding special education)	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who does not meet a specific set of requirements (excluding special education) but persists through a specified number of years or to a specified age	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who completes special education IEP but does not meet coursework or exit test requirements of regular curriculum	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who receives a passing score on the GED	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____

9. How are students experiencing home schooling to be categorized by school districts?

[ ] As transfers
[ ] As transfers, only if home schooling is approved
[ ] As dropouts

BURDEN OF UNIFORM DROPOUT REPORTING PROCEDURES

10. What problems (if any) are you (at the State-level) and the participating LEAs having with the Dropout Statistics Field Test?

_____

_____

11. What types of errors do you expect in the Field Test dropout data reported in your State? Please rate the following in terms of expected <u>frequency of serious problems</u>.

	Every LEA Report	Very Frequent	Occa-sional	Rare	Never
High rate of School Leavers with unknown or unverified status	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Incomplete or inaccurate School Leaver lists	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Duplicate counting of students in membership and dropout lists	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Typing and arithmetic errors on report forms	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Misinterpretations of School Leaver status definitions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Omission of dropouts under the legal age for leaving school	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Other	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Please describe: _____

_____

_____

<u>USES OF DROPOUT INFORMATION</u>

12. Some States have laws to discourage dropping out. (For example, one State restricts driver licenses for students with a specified number of unexcused absences. Others may withdraw public assistance funds from parents or take parents to court.) Does your State or do any participating LEAs have any such laws concerning dropouts?

[ ] YES ---> Please describe:

[ ] NO _____

_____

13. How are dropout data used in your State? (For example, decisions on funding dropout prevention programs are based on dropout data. Other States use dropout measures as indicators of school district success.)

_____

_____

14. Can you think of a time when dropout data (or the lack of such data) had an impact in your State?

[ ] YES ---> Please describe:
[ ] NO

_____
_____

15. Can you think of a time when inaccuracies or inconsistencies in dropout data caused a problem in your State?

[ ] YES ---> Please describe:
[ ] NO

_____
_____

SUMMARY

16. Is there anything else you feel should be learned from the Field Test? Do you have any suggestions for increasing the efficiency or accuracy of the dropout data collection at the school, district, State, or national level?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

17. What tasks would uniform dropout reporting require at the State-level, in your State?

_____
_____
_____

18. Do you think the Dropout Statistics data collection you are field testing is feasible for Statewide implementation in your State?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO ---> What would make it feasible?

_____
_____

An AIR staff member will be phoning in the next two weeks to ask you these questions. If you would prefer to respond to these items in writing, please return the completed questionnaire to: Dr. Donald McLaughlin, American Institutes for Research, P.O. Box 1113, Palo Alto, CA 94302. If you need additional space to respond, please use extra sheets of paper.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF NONPARTICIPATING STATES FORM

Survey of Non-Participating State Education Agencies

State Name: _____

Respondent: _____

Title: _____

This survey is a part of the evaluation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test. In that Field Test, procedures for reporting comparable dropout rates are being tried out in 30 States. Although your State has not chosen to participate in the tryout, it is essential to obtain your perceptions of the value, and the problems, for your State, if uniform dropout reporting is adopted on a nationwide basis. The survey's objectives are: (1) to collect data on usage of dropout rate information, (2) to assess the State-level burden in uniform dropout reporting, and (3) to identify sources of variation in dropout rates due to State-level definitions.

DROPOUT DATA COLLECTION

1. Do all LEAs in your State now report dropout counts and rates to the State Education Agency, using the same definitions?

   [ ] YES ----> Please describe the process and the definition of
   [ ] NO dropout used in your State:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

USES OF DROPOUT RATE INFORMATION

2. Some States have laws to discourage dropping out. (For example, one State restricts driver licenses for students with a specified number of unexcused absences. Others withdraw public assistance funds from parents or take parents to court.) Does your State or do any participating LEAs have any such laws concerning dropouts?

   [ ] YES ---> Please describe:
   [ ] NO _____
   _____

3. How are dropout data used in your State? (For example, in some States decisions on funding dropout prevention programs are based on dropout data in some States. Other States use dropout measures as indicators of school district success.)

   _____
   _____

4. Can you think of a time when dropout data (or the lack of such data) had an impact in your State?

[ ] YES ---> Please describe:
[ ] NO

_____

_____

5. Can you think of a time when inaccuracies or inconsistencies in dropout data caused a problem in your State?

[ ] YES ---> Please describe:
[ ] NO

_____

_____

BURDEN OF UNIFORM DROPOUT REPORTING PROCEDURES

The procedures being field tested are (1) the systematic recording of all School Leavers in grades 7 through 12, by racial/ethnic status and sex; (2) systematic determination and verification of the status of School Leavers (e.g., dropouts, transfers); and (3) reporting of counts of dropouts, as well as membership, by sex and racial/ethnic grouping, for grades 7 through 12.

A common definition of dropout is being employed in the field test. A dropout is an individual who:

(1) was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year;

(2) was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year;

(3) has not graduated from high school or completed a State- or district-approved educational program; and

(4) does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: a) ransfer to another public school district, private school, or State- or district-approved education program; b) temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness, or c) death.

6. What types of errors would you expect to occur in dropout rate data reported by LEAs in your State? Please rate the following in terms of expected frequency of serious problems.

	Every LEA Report	Very Frequent	Occasional	Rare	Never
High rate of "school leavers" with unknown or unverified status	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Incomplete or inaccurate lists of "school leavers"	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Duplicate counting of students in membership and dropout lists	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Typing and arithmetic errors	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Misinterpretations of dropout status definitions	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Omission of dropouts under the legal age for leaving school	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Other	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Please describe: _____

_____

_____

7. What (if any) are the major barriers for you in asking LEAs to report data to compute comparable dropout rates?

_____

_____

_____

_____

8. Why didn't your State participate in the Dropout Statistics Field Test?

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. What serious barriers exist to your State's participation in providing dropout statistics using a standard definition and reporting format if such an item were added to the Common Core of Data (CCD) Survey in 1991?

[ ] None
[ ] Barriers of: _____

_____

VARIATIONS IN DEFINITIONS

In evaluating the feasibility of reporting uniform dropout rates across all States, it is necessary to know about variations in State education policies that might distort dropout rates. The following questions relate to definitions being used in the Field Test that vary among the participating States. To assess the breadth of each variation, we are also asking non-participating States to answer these questions.

10. What is your State's position on approval of nonpublic schools?

[ ] Our state does not exercise approval or nonapproval of public schools
[ ] Determination of status is voluntary and nonpublic schools may request an evaluation that could lead to approval
[ ] Determination is required. Nonpublic schools must be approved or unapproved

11. In your State, are public and private secondary schools the only institutions authorized to give students a high school diploma?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO ---> Please describe the other institutions:

_____

_____

12. How are the following school completers classified in your State? About how many of each type of completer were there in your State last year?

	Graduate	Dropout	Other/na (Please Specify)	Number of Completers
Someone who completes coursework requirements but is not successful on a high school exit test	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who does not complete coursework requirements but is successful on a high school exit test	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who completes an alternative set of requirements (excluding special education)	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who does not meet a specific set of requirements (excluding special education) but persists through a specified number of years or to a specified age	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who completes special education IEP but does not meet coursework or exit test requirements of regular curriculum	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____
Someone who receives a passing score on the GED	[ ]	[ ]	_____	_____

SUMMARY

13. Is there anything else you feel is crucial to address in planning for reporting of uniform dropout rates?

An AIR staff member will be phoning in the next two weeks to ask you these questions. If you would prefer to respond to these items in writing, please return the completed questionnaire to: Dr. Donald McLaughlin, American Institutes for Research, P.O. Box 1113, Palo Alto, CA 94302. If you need additional space to respond, please use extra sheets of paper.

OMB #1850-0636
Exp. Date: 3/31/91

APPENDIX C

SURVEY OF PARTICIPATING LEAS

SURVEY OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Survey of Participating School Districts

Name of School District _____

The purpose of this survey is to assess aspects of the collection and reporting of membership and dropout data for the Dropout Statistics Field Test. It covers variations in definitions, processes, problems, and burden, related to your participation in the Field Test. The survey is also designed to assess the training procedures for the Dropout Statistics Field Test.

1. Are ALL public schools serving grades 7 through 12 in your district participating in the Field Test? If NO, please list those that are.

   [ ] YES
   [ ] NO _____

   _____

MEMBERSHIP COUNTS

According to the Dropout Statistics Field Test Participant Handbook, membership data are to be collected at three points:

Fall 1989 and Fall 1990, on the school date closest to October 1
Spring 1990, the last day of classes in the 1989-90 school year

Membership is to be defined as the count of students on current roll. This can be arrived at by either:

A) Adding the original student entries and reentries, and subtracting total student withdrawals; or
B) Adding the total students present and total students absent.

2. How did your district define membership for the Fall 1989 count?

   [ ] A)
   [ ] B)
   [ ] Some variation of A) and B) (Please describe)

   _____

   _____

3. For which days are you collecting membership data in your district?

Fall 1989		Spring 1990		Fall 1990	
_____ (month)	___ (day)	_____ (month)	___ (day)	_____ (month)	___ (day)

4. Were any students <u>enrolled and attending your schools not included</u> in these membership counts (e.g., special education students in self-contained classes)?

[ ] YES ------> Please list categories and rough counts per grade
[ ] NO (include ungraded as a separate category)

_____

_____

5. Were any students <u>enrolled but not attending public schools included</u> in these membership counts (e.g., hospitalized students receiving hospital/homebound services)?

[ ] YES ------> Please list categories and rough counts per grade:
[ ] NO (include ungraded as a separate category)

_____

_____ _____

6. Who (job title) coordinated the preparation of the Fall 1989 membership counts for the district? Was the coordinator a district or school level staff member?

_____ [ ] District [ ] School

7. How did that person prepare these counts? (Please check all that apply.)

[ ] Used computer to generate counts
[ ] Requested computer staff to produce counts
[ ] Prepared lists of students by hand
[ ] Prepared counts by hand from lists
[ ] Collected counts prepared at schools
[ ] None of the above (Please describe process) _____

_____

_____

_____

8. In what form, if any, was the information on race/ethnicity, sex, and grade level needed for the Fall Membership counts already available?

Race/ Ethnicity	Sex	Grade Level	
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	On the computer files used for counts
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	On the paper lists used for counts
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	In student folders used for counts
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	Known or apparent to staff counting students
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	Required information on a separate computer file
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	Required information in separate student records
[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	Required additional information from students

9. In what ways do the membership counts for the Dropout Statistics Field Test differ from your normal procedure? (Please check all that apply.)

For the Dropout Statistics Field Test:

[ ] Additional Fall Membership Counts are required
[ ] Additional Spring Membership Counts are required
[ ] Grade breakdown of all students is required
[ ] Ethnic breakdown is required for both Males and Females
[ ] Ethnic categories are different
[ ] Grade definitions are different
[ ] Other --> Please describe:

_____

_____

10. Were the same definitions and procedures for Fall 1989 membership counts used at all participating schools in your district?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO ---> How did the definition(s) and procedures differ?

_____

_____

11. Will the same definitions and procedures for Fall 1989 membership counts be used this spring and next fall?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO ---> How will the definition(s) and procedures differ?

_____

_____

SCHOOL LEAVER LISTS

To evaluate the Dropout Statistics Field Test, it is necessary to gather data on the lists of School Leavers being compiled by participating districts. If you have a list of School Leavers for the participating schools, please send a copy. A post-paid pre-addressed envelope is enclosed. We will remove names from these lists after we receive them; however, if you want to remove the names before sending the lists to us, please do so.

If you cannot send a School Leaver list copy, please answer Question 12. Otherwise, please proceed to Question 13.

12. As of 1 April 1990, how many of each of the following types of people were on the School Leaver lists in your district?

	Status Classification			
	Dropouts	Transfers	Not Yet Known	Other
7th Graders	____	____	____	____
8th Graders	____	____	____	____
9th Graders	____	____	____	____
10th Graders	____	____	____	____
11th Graders	____	____	____	____
12th Graders	____	____	____	____
AmerIndian/Alaskan Native	____	____	____	____
Asian/Pacific Islander	____	____	____	____
Hispanic	____	____	____	____
Black, not Hispanic	____	____	____	____
White, not Hispanic	____	____	____	____
Males	____	____	____	____
Females	____	____	____	____

The next items deal with the preparation of School Leaver lists at schools in your district. If procedures for preparing these lists are different at different schools, please describe the procedures employed at the largest participating school in your district.

13. Who (job title) coordinated the preparation of the School Leaver lists? Was the coordinator a district or school level staff member?

_____ [ ] District [ ] School

14. How did that person prepare these lists? (Please check all that apply.)

[ ] Used computer to identify School Leavers
[ ] Requested computer staff to produce lists of School Leavers
[ ] Identified School Leavers by hand from attendance lists
[ ] Obtained descriptive information from students' records
[ ] Collected names from other school or district staff
[ ] None of the above (Please describe process) _____

_____

_____

15. Is a separate School Leaver list prepared at each school or is a single list prepared at the district's central office?

[ ] Separate list maintained at each school
[ ] Single list prepared at a central office

16. Who (job title) decides when an individual should be put on the list? Is that person a district or school level staff member?

_____ [ ] District [ ] School

17. How often is the School Leaver list updated? _____

_____

18. For what reason(s) is a name put on the School Leaver list? (Please check all that apply and indicate numbers of days.)

[ ] Unexcused absences for _____ consecutive school days
[ ] Unexcused absences for _____ total school days in year
[ ] Other --> Please describe: _____

_____

_____

19. Are there any types of students included in membership counts who would not be added to the School Leaver lists after meeting the ordinary conditions noted in Question 18 (e.g., those in a special outreach program)?

[ ] YES ----> What students could not be called School Leavers?
[ ] NO

_____

_____

20. Some School Leavers may return. Would these students or would any other types of students be removed from your School Leaver lists?

[ ] YES ----> What students could be removed from School Leaver list?
[ ] NO

_____

_____

21. Are transfers within your district recorded on your School Leaver lists?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO

22. How many students on the School Leaver list were not included in the Fall 1989 membership counts (i.e. were transfers in)?

_____ students

23. What categories of School Leavers' status are recorded in your district?

If you have written procedures, please send them and omit items B), C), D).

A) indicate each status code
B) define each status category (if different from definitions in the Dropout Statistics Field Test Participant Handbook)
C) describe the process for verifying the status
D) identify the person (position) responsible for verifying the status
E) estimate how long it takes, on average, to verify this status (average amount of effort, not elapsed time)

A) Status B) Definition C) Process

___ ______________________ ______________________________

______________________ ______________________________

D) Verifier: ______________________ E) Time Needed: ________

A)___ B)______________________ C)______________________________

______________________ ______________________________

D)______________________________ E)______________

A)___ B)______________________ C)______________________________

______________________ ______________________________

D)______________________________ E)______________

A)___ B)______________________ C)______________________________

______________________ ______________________________

D)______________________________ E)______________

A)___ B)______________________ C)______________________________

______________________ ______________________________

D)______________________________ E)______________

24. How does this process (of maintaining School Leaver lists) differ from what your district has been doing to keep records of School Leavers?

____

____

TRAINING FOR THE FIELD TEST

25. Did you attend a training session for the Dropout Statistics Field Test?

[ ] YES
[ ] NO

26. Who in your district is involved in the Dropout Statistics Field Test? How are they being trained for it? (Please use the following codes: [G]=Group Instruction; [I]=Individual instruction; [M]=Training Materials only.) How much time is spent in preparing, conducting, and receiving training?

	Person (Position)	How trained	Time spent in training
Trainers:	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Trainees:	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

Total Number Trained: _____ District Staff _____ School Staff

27. How well is the district prepared to carry out each of the following Field Test activities?

	Excellently	Very well	Fairly well	Not very well	Badly
Collecting data for membership counts/reports	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Completing enrollment report form	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Maintaining a record of School Leavers	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Categorizing School Leavers	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Documenting School Leaver status	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Completing dropout report form	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

28. How useful were the Dropout Statistics Field Test <u>training materials</u> for Field Test training or as a continuing resource?

	Essential	Very Useful	Fairly Useful	Not Useful	[Not Used]
Field Test Participant Handbook	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Field Test Trainer Guide	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Transparency masters	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Training exercises (problems)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Field Test Videotape	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

Other (Please describe) _____

_____

29. Was the training for the Dropout Statistics Field Test necessary

for district staff?	for school staff?
[ ] YES	[ ] YES
[ ] NO	[ ] NO

30. What, if anything, that was inc'uded in this training could have been omitted?

_____

_____

31. How could the training provided in the Field Test have been improved? Have any problems arisen that were not covered by training?

_____

_____

_____

DROPOUT RISK FACTORS

Certain factors such as grade point average, attendance during the previous year, fluency in English, and age have been shown to be associated with dropping out. Information about these factors could improve the accuracy of reported dropout rates when the status of some School Leavers cannot be determined.

32. Is academic achievement, attendance record, language proficiency, or age information already linked to School Leaver lists (that is, already associated with each student), or would it be easy or hard to link?

	Already linked	Easy to link	Hard to link	Information does not exist
A measure of academic achievement (e.g., GPA)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Previous year's attendance	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
English fluency (LEP/FEP)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]
Age (or birth date)	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]	[ ]

SUMMARY

33. Is there anything else you feel we should know about the Field Test? Do you have any suggestions for increasing the efficiency or accuracy of the data collection?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

An AIR staff member will be phoning in the next two weeks to ask you these questions. If you would prefer to respond to these items in writing, please return the completed questionnaire to: Dr. Donald McLaughlin, American Institutes for Research, P.O. Box 1113, Palo Alto, CA 94302. If you need additional space to respond, please use extra sheets of paper.

APPENDIX D

SITE VISIT GUIDES

Site Visit Guide -- Spring 1990 Site Visits

Preparatory Contacts

I) Make initial contact with SEA

A) Invite Field Test Coordinator to attend site visits
   1) Find out what we can do to help when we're in field

B) Purposes of visit are to:
   1) Observe range of procedures in counting dropouts
   2) Monitor implementation - to determine strengths and weaknesses of collection and reporting procedures
   3) (At Pilot Sites) Pilot Test Classification Validation Procedures

C) Selection of LEAs: "We want to go where we can learn the most."

D) Identify Coordinator at LEA level
   1) Contact LEA level coordinator; schedule visits
   2) Get copies of school leaver lists in advance, if possible

II) Contact with LEA Coordinator

A) Identify all individuals in LEA who have anything to do with Field Test
   1) Names, titles, addresses, phone numbers

B) Choose sample of these people; schedule appointments
   1) Schedule visits at both school district and at local schools, if appropriate

Site Visit Agenda

I) Items for LEA district level coordinator

A) How & why did district ci.. se to participate?

B) How & why were you chosen as coordinator?
   1) Expectations of burden
   2) Any problems, surprises?

C) How were staff at local schools chosen to participate?
   1) Training
   2) Communication/problem resolution procedures
   3) Turnover
   4) Subjective assessment of staff's motivation and commitment

D) Determine if all public schools with 7th-12th graders are participating
   1) If not, why & how selected

II) Items for LEA Coordinator and District/School Staff involved in Field Test

A) Fall 1989 membership counts
   1) Identify all individuals responsible for provision of information and production of counts
   2) Procedures - in excruciating detail
      a) Determine source(s) of all data elements requested
   3) Differences from previous membership counts (i.e., Was addition of demographics a problem?)
   4) Exceptions
      a) Are any students enrolled & attending, but not included in counts? (i.e., special ed in self-contained classes)
      b) Are any students enrolled but not attending included in counts (i.e., hospitalized students receiving homebound services)
   5) Differences in procedures and definitions at different schools
   6) How will procedures differ for Fall 1990 membership counts
   7) Problems
      a) Actual, and how resolved or attempted to resolve

B) Spring 1990 membership counts

1) Plans
2) Identify all individuals responsible for provision of information and production of counts
3) Procedures - in excruciating detail
    a) Determine source(s) of all data elements requested
4) Differences from previous membership counts (i.e., Was this ever done before?)
5) Differences in procedures and definitions at different schools
6) How will procedures differ from Fall 1989 membership counts
7) Problems anticipated

C) Fall 1990 membership counts

1) Plans
2) Identify all individuals responsible for provision of information and production of counts
3) Procedures - in excruciating detail
    a) Determine source(s) of all data elements requested
4) Differences from Fall 1989 counts
5) Differences in procedures and definitions at different schools
6) Problems anticipated

D) Review School Leaver Lists

1) Determine criteria used for listing an individual
    a) When are names added?
    b) Why are names added?
    c) What kinds of leavers are not added to list?
    d) What happens if an individual drops out and returns?
    e) Are intra-district transfers included on list?
    f) Are individuals not included in Fall 1989 counts listed?
2) Determine what other criteria (and codes) will be used in future
3) Get copies of definitions and instructions provided
    a) Find out what sort of tracking occurs
    b) Estimate of tracking burden
    c) What was done previously?
    d) Identify problems and determine how they are resolved
4) Problems
    a) Actual, and how resolved or attempted to resolve
    b) Anticipated

E) Miscellaneous

1) Availability of variables correlated with dropping out

2) How are attendance/membership lists produced at the beginning of school year (Can summer dropouts slip through "cracks?")

3)Suggestions/comments/feedback

Classification Validation Pilot Test

I) Develop/refine procedures for identification of trackers

A) Identify candidates

B) How to compensate

C) How to motivate

D) Confidentiality

II) Attempt tracking (that could not be accomplished at AIR)

A) Contact schools (for transfers)

B) Attempt contacts of leavers

C) Send unresolved cases to trackers

III) Test Training materials and tracking procedures

A) Hire tracker

B) Give materials and brief

1) Get feedback on materials

C) Send into field with cases

1) Feedback on procedures

Site Visit Agenda - Winter 1991 Site Visits

Preparatory Contacts

I) Review materials received from LEA and progress of validation effort

A) Leaver lists - review thoroughly

B) Determine number of dropouts (and enrollment counts) provided to SEA for Field Test reporting

1) This may require contact with SEA

C) Review LEA (and SEA) questionnaires

D) Review progress of validation effort; speak with staff person who conducted the tracking

E) Select schools to be visited

1) Select at least one middle school/junior high school (to check on how "graduates" who do not show up at their new school are recorded) and at least one high school

II) Initial contacts with SEA, LEA and Local schools

A) Purposes of visit are to:

1) Check accuracy of dropout and enrollment data reported
2) Monitor implementation - to determine strengths and weaknesses of collection and reporting procedures
3) Elicit feedback about the Field Test -- problems and suggestions for improvement (at LEA and at school levels)

B) Explain reason for our selection of LEA

C) Set up schedule for Site Visit (SEA contact)

1) Set up procedures for contacting LEA Coordinator and scheduling visit

2) Invite State Coordinator to attend site visits -- but be sure to explain that much of our work will involve record checking (and therefore will be a suboptimal use of their time)
3) Find out what we can do to help when we're in field
4) Elicit their feedback about the Field Test - problems and suggestions for improvement

D) Set up schedule for Site Visit (LEA contact)
1) Identify contact person at each school
2) Set up procedures for contacting personnel at each school and scheduling visit
3) Invite LEA Coordinator to attend site visits -- but be sure to explain that much of our work will involve record checking (and therefore will be a suboptimal use of their time)
4) Find out what we can do to help when we're in field
5) Elicit their feedback about the Field Test - problems and suggestions for improvement
6) (IF NOT IN OUR FILES): Get copies of enrollment counts, dropout counts, and leaver lists provided to LEAs by schools that we will be visiting.

E) Set up schedule for Site Visit (School contacts)
1) Schedule visit
2) Explain purpose of visits
3) We will need the following materials:
a) Beginning of school year 1989 enrollment lists
b) Beginning of school year 1990 enrollment lists
c) Lists of all graduates/school completers for the 1989/1990 school year
4) Arrange for interviews/meetings with all staff involved in keeping track of dropouts and transfers
5) Explain that we want to be as minimally burdensome and obtrusive as possible

Site Visit Agenda

I) Items for LEA district level coordinator and school staff

A) How & why did district choose to participate?

B) How were staff at local schools chosen to participate?

1) Training
2) Communication/problem resolution procedures
3) Turnover
4) Subjective assessment of staff's motivation and commitment

II) Items for LEA Coordinator and District/School Staff involved in Field Test

A) Membership counts: Select sample and verify that all in Fall 1989 membership are either listed in Fall 1990 membership, are on Leaver List, or graduated

1) Reconcile problems and inconsistencies

B) Review School Leaver Lists

1) Determine criteria used for listing an individual
2) Problems
    a) Actual, and how resolved or attempted to resolve
    b) **BE SURE TO DETERMINE IF THE NUMBER OF DROPOUTS REPORTED TO THE LEA WAS CALCULATED FROM THESE LISTS.**
        1) IF NOT: How was the # of dropouts determined?
        2) IF YES: Resolve inconsistencies, if they exist.

C) Validation

1) Resolve errors and inconsistencies
2) Track leavers, if necessary

D) Miscellaneous

1) Availability of variables correlated with dropping out
2) How are attendance/membership lists produced at the beginning of school year (Can summer dropouts slip through "cracks?")
3) Suggestions/comments/feedback

APPENDIX E

SCHOOL LEAVER STATUS VALIDATION FORMS

Student's Full name _____ Name of school left _____

Grade level ____ Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ] Race/ethnicity _____

years in school district _____ Status: _____ Date of birth ___ /___ /___

Date last attended this school ___ /___ /___ Academic Achievement Measure _____

Days absent in month preceding date last attended your school _____

LEP Status _____ IEP Status: Yes [ ] No [ ]

Street Address City State Zip Telephone

Last known address (1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Social Security # ____ - ___ - _____ Other name(s) used _____

Driver's License # _____ Memberships in: _____

Parent/Guardian's name(s) _____

Address (if different) _____

Other person's name(s) _____

Address/phone _____

_____

Information about transfers

Transcript request received? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Name and address of new school: _____

Time required to complete form: _____

E-2

School Leaver Contact Attempt Log

LEAVER ID# _____ NAME _____

School Leaver Status Assigned by AIR: _____

Phone Log

Tracker	Date	Phone #	Person Contacted	Result

Letters mailed

Date	Type of Letter	Person/Org	Address	Result

If Status is transferred: Name of School _____

Verified attended: Yes [ ] No [ ] Verified School Approved: Yes [ ] No [ ]

For everyone: Time required to verify: _____

OMB #1850-0636 Exp. Date: 3/31/91

Student's Name: (FILL IN)

Name of school previously attended: (FILL IN)

Student's school related activity after leaving this school:

Not attending any school [ ]
Transferred to another school [ ] ---> Name & address of new school

_____
_____
_____

Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

Your relationship to the student listed above:

I am the person listed above [ ]
I am the parent or guardian of the person listed above [ ]
I am the brother or sister of the person listed above [ ]
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

Return completed forms to: Dropout Statistics Project, American Institutes for Research, Box 1113, Palo Alto, California 94302.

Date

The (NAME OF LEAVER) Family
Street Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Leaver Family:

We are verifying (NAME OF SCHOOL's) records for the United States Department of Education. Would you please complete the enclosed form and return it to us as soon as possible? Thanks.

Your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

If you have any questions, please call either me, Phyllis DuBois, or Roger Levine at (415) 493-3550. You can call collect.

Once again, thanks very much for your help.

Sincerely yours,

Your name
Research Associate

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1913
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

Date

The (NAME OF LEAVER) Family
Street Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Leaver Family:

About two weeks ago, we sent you a letter asking you to verify (NAME OF SCHOOL's) records as part of a study we are doing for the United States Department of Education. Since we have not yet received a response from you, we are enclosing another copy of this form. Would you please complete it and return it to us as soon as possible? Thanks.

As we mentioned before, your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

We would be very happy to answer any questions you have about this study or about the American Institutes for Research. Please call us collect at (415) 493-3550. Ask for me (Roger Levine) or for Phyllis DuBois. We will pay for the cost of the phone call.

Thanks very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Roger Levine, Ph.D.
Deputy Project Director

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1913
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH
P.O. BOX 1113
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

TRANSFER VERIFICATION FORM

STUDENT'S NAME: NAME OF STUDENT
BIRTHDATE: STUDENT'S DATE OF BIRTH

Name of High School informed us that the student listed above transferred to your school on DATE. Please verify this information by making a check mark below:

_____ Yes, the student transferred to this school and is currently enrolled.

_____ Yes, the student transferred to this school but is not currently enrolled.

_____ No, the student never transferred to this school.

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

DATE

NAME OF PERSON
SCHOOL NAME
SCHOOL ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear PERSON:

The American Institutes for Research is conducting an evaluation of procedures employed to keep track of school leavers (i.e., dropouts, transfers, mid-year graduates) for the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. I am enclosing a brief description of this project.

As part of this evaluation, we are verifying the status of 1,000 randomly selected school leavers. This will permit us to assess the accuracy of the procedures different states, school districts, and schools are using to calculate dropout rates. NAME OF LEAVER is one of these 1,000 randomly selected school leavers. NAME OF SCHOOL informed us that NAME OF LEAVER transferred from their school to your school on DATE. In order to verify the accuracy of their records, we need to know if this is correct.

I am also enclosing a copy of a letter from the Department of Education's Family Policy and Regulations Office. This letter states that releasing the information we are requesting for the study is permissible under Federal Law.

Would you please complete and return the enclosed form indicating whether or not NAME OF LEAVER is enrolled in your school? Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at (415) 493-3550.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME
Research Associate

Enclosures

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1113
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

Date

The (NAME OF LEAVER) Family
Street Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Leaver Family:

We are verifying (NAME OF SCHOOL's) records for the United States Department of Education. Would you please complete the enclosed form and return it to us as soon as possible? Thanks.

Your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

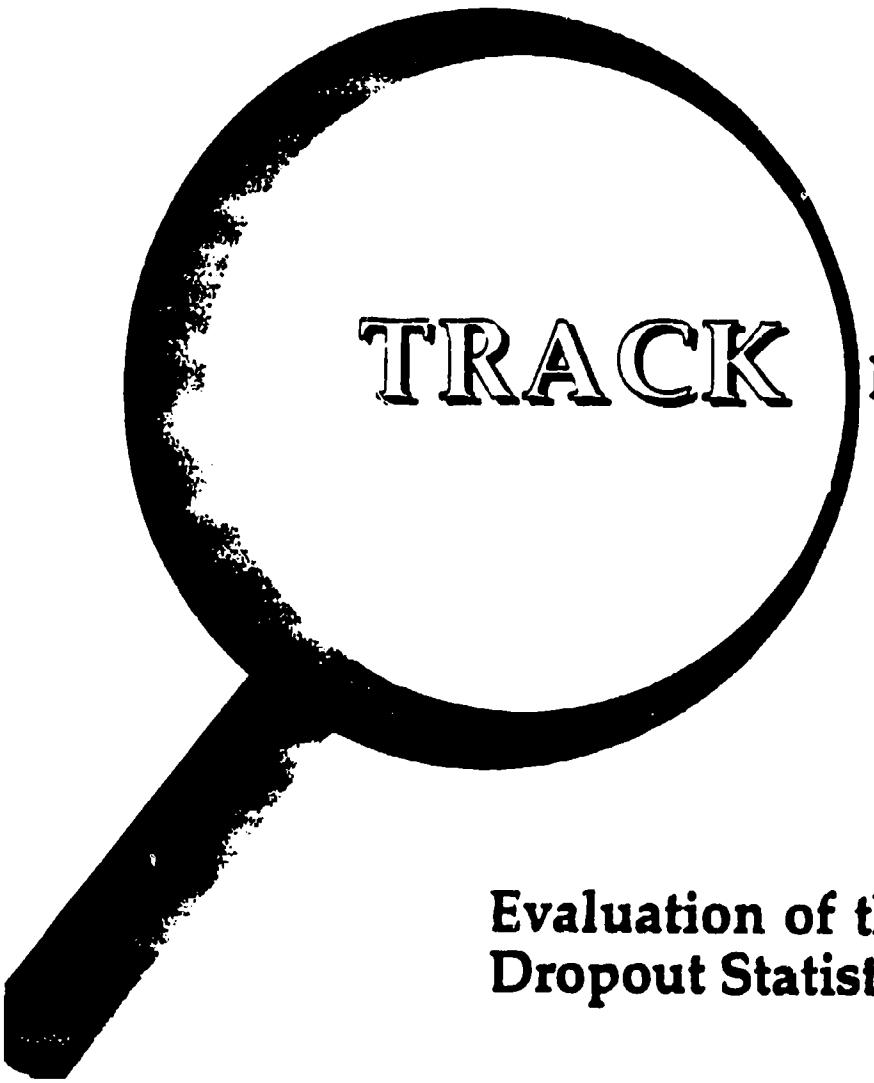
If you have any questions, please call either me, Phyllis DuBois, or Roger Levine at (415) 493-3550. You can call collect.

Once again, thanks very much for your help.

Sincerely yours,

Your name
Research Associate

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX [illegible]3
PALO ALTO, C 94302
(415) 493-3550



Evaluation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test

American Institutes for Research
P.O. Box 1113, 1791 Arastradero Road
Palo Alto, California 94302
(415) 493-3550

Contents in Brief

Contents in Detail

Illustrations:

1. Project Overview

Description of the Dropout Statistics Field Test

Everyone agrees that dropping out of school is a serious problem among American teenagers, but no one really knows the severity of the problem. Accurate and comparable data on dropouts are difficult to find. The dropout figure cited by one school district may be calculated in a completely different way from the figure used by another school district. For example, a student who is absent for 60 consecutive days might be labelled a truant in one school; a dropout in another; and not labelled as anything special and kept on the attendance rolls in a third school. Because of these differences, no one is sure what the dropout rate really is.

To address this problem, Congress passed the Hawkins-Stafford Education Amendments of 1988 (P.L. 100-297). These Amendments directed the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to report to Congress each year the number of school dropouts in each State. In response NCES, a part of the U.S. Department of Education, developed procedures to define the number and rate of school dropouts in a consistent manner. To evaluate these definitions and procedures NCES is sponsoring a Field Test. Twenty-seven States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, and the Northern Marianas are participating in the Field Test. Within these states and territories nearly 250 school districts are using the same definitions and procedures to report dropout data. The Field Test's goal is to ensure that the most efficient, accurate, and least burdensome method is selected for collecting and reporting the dropout statistics to NCES. With these data, NCES can report State-by-State dropout counts and rates by sex and ethnic categories for grades 7-12.

NCES contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to direct and manage an independent evaluation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test. AIR will support the efforts of the participating State agencies and school districts and will validate the statistics that they report.

You are a critical part of this validation. As part of their dropout statistics, schools have reported data on their "**school leavers**"—students who leave their school for any reason. The schools have indicated the reasons they think the students have left. In many cases, the schools know only what the students told them. Your job is to track down those school leavers and find out the truth: where the leavers are and what they are doing. Without your verification, we rely on the numbers someone reports; with your help, we gather real-world evidence to support (or refute) those numbers.

Two types of trackers are involved in this project:

- **AIR trackers** work in the Palo Alto office. They are mainly involved in long-distance tracking: telephone and mail contacts and special searches of records and databases.

- **On-site trackers** work in the districts that prepared the lists of school leavers and are primarily concerned with face-to-face contacts.

AIR—Who We Are, What We Do

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) has a 44-year history of research in the behavioral and social sciences. We have research offices in Palo Alto, California; Washington, D.C.; and Bedford, Massachusetts; and we employ approximately 160 research, technical, administrative, and clerical personnel.

AIR has conducted many research projects involving disadvantaged teenagers and the evaluation of educational programs. The "AIR approach" combines the best theories and methods available in the behavioral and social sciences, extensive real-world experience, and pragmatism with a strong quantitative orientation.

Coordination of the Evaluation

The evaluation is being carried out by AIR's Palo Alto office. The Project Director is Dr. Donald J. McLaughlin; the Associate Project Director is Dr. Roger Levine; the Data Collection Coordinator is Ms. Phyllis DuBois. Because your work involves data collection, your supervisor will be Phyllis DuBois.

Ms. DuBois will monitor the data you submit. She will either meet with you at work or, if you're working off-site, ask you to call her periodically. (The frequency will depend on the number of school leavers you are assigned and the level of difficulty in verifying their status.) She will want to know

- the progress you make (so we can plan ahead),

- the problems you encounter (so we can help solve them), and

- the strategies that prove especially useful (so we can share them with other trackers).

Any time you have questions or need assistance, call Phyllis DuBois first (Extension 227, 415/493-3550). If she's not available, call Roger Levine or Don McLaughlin.

In each school district, we will identify a person who can help you meet school staff and offer suggestions for leads in the community. This "local

contact" will give you a name to cite, lending legitimacy to your "hunt." For example, if you are tracking Sarah George, a high school student, your local high school contact might be Mr. Woods, the Vice Principal. He might be able to refer you to Sarah's counselor, tell you which clubs or activity groups she participated in, direct you to a teacher who knew Sarah especially well, or identify Sarah's former employer. Then when you contact any of these people, you can say, "Mr. Woods at the high school said that you might be able to give me some information about Sarah George." A good local contact can point out useful paths for you to follow.

2. Role of the Tracker

You, the Tracker, are the person who gathers information about a school leaver and says, in effect, "Yes, the information that the school reported about the student is accurate," or "No, the information is not accurate. What really happened to that student is....." You will not only find out what happened to the student; you'll cite the source or sources for that information—who told you about the school leaver and why we can believe them.

Students leave school for many reasons. The most common are:

- transfer to another public school
- transfer to a private school
- attendance at an institution that is not primarily educational (military, corrections, hospital)
- extended absence due to illness
- enrollment in an alternative education setting (homebound instruction, residential special education, community or technical college, adult education)
- dropping out
- death

Your job will be to help us see if the reasons that the schools provide are really accurate. Although schools report what they know, they often lack the resources to see if students actually do what they say they are going to do when they leave.

For example, suppose that Kennedy High School reports that Scott Jones transferred to Lincoln High School. Scott told the counselor at Kennedy that he intended to transfer, but he may have decided not to—he could have enrolled somewhere else or dropped out instead. You would contact Lincoln High to see if Scott actually enrolled. If he did not, you would track him further to see what he did do. You will be tracking other school leavers in the same way, gathering accurate information on where they went and what they are doing. You'll need to be imaginative, clever, and persistent!

Tracking Procedures

The importance of confidentiality

In all of your work as a tracker, it is critically important to maintain confidentiality. If you are an on-site tracker, you probably remember signing a Non-Disclosure Agreement as a condition of employment. By signing this form you agreed to keep the information you obtain about leavers confidential. You may learn quite a lot about the students you are tracking; you may have access to school records or other private information. Keep all information about individuals to yourself and report it only to designated AIR project staff or in project reports. Do not talk to others, even members of your family, about your findings. The individuals with whom you have contact must feel confident that they can trust you and that any information they provide will not be used for any purpose except research. AIR will follow our usual procedures for limiting access to files and will provide data only in summary form, without identifying individuals. Be sure to do your part to honor confidentiality.

Who can verify a leaver's status?

If you are trying to locate a school leaver, you may have to contact people who cannot verify a leaver's whereabouts but can provide useful information. For example, a neighbor may give you a phone number that helps you to track a leaver. This type of lead is valuable, but remember: to successfully resolve a case, you must verify the leaver's status with a reliable source. Transfers must be verified by confirming the status with the school that the leaver transferred to. Dropouts, on the other hand, must be verified by confirming the status with the leaver or a family member over the age of fourteen. A chart listing the people or institutions that can verify a leaver's status is presented on the next page (Box 1).

In some cases you may discover that the reported status is not accurate. For example, an alleged dropout may tell you that she did not dropout -- she just failed to notify her old school that she transferred to a new school. You must contact the new school to verify that she enrolled there. Similarly, you may discover that a reported transfer did not enroll at the school he originally said he'd attend. You should contact the leaver to find out his status. If he verifies that he's a dropout, you've resolved the case. If he tells you that he transferred to a different school, you must verify his status with the new school.

Box 1. Verification Sources for Transfers and Dropouts

Type of School Leaver	Acceptable Verification Sources
Transfers	- a school that has an approved educational program - a correctional institution with an approved educational program. - a hospital or treatment center with an approved educational program
Dropouts	- the school-leaver - a member of the school-leaver's family over the age of fourteen - a private school or other educational institution in which the student is enrolled which does not have an approved educational program

Does the current status of a leaver need to be verified?

No. The purpose of the tracking is to determine whether or not the schools accurately reported what their leavers did at the time they left. Example: You're assigned to check the accuracy of School A 's leaver records. School A reports that Susan Smith is a transfer. You find out that she transferred to School B. School B says she enrolled there around the time she left School A then dropped out. Do you need to continue tracking Susan? No. You've verified that she did transfer from School A to School B around the time she left School A. Currently she may be a dropout, but School A accurately listed her as a transfer from their school.

How to begin tracking a leaver

Let us imagine that you need to verify the status of Alexander Milner, a school leaver who left Northside High School and is listed as a transfer. How do you begin?

If you are an **AIR Tracker**, you'll begin by attempting to verify Alex's status over the phone. The basic procedures for telephone tracking are outlined below. If you are an **On-Site Tracker**, there are usually no telephone numbers available for the leavers you must track. You'll probably begin tracking by attempting to contact the leaver at his last known address. The procedures for on-site trackers are described on page 17. However, even if you are an on-site tracker it is important to glance through the sections describing AIR trackers' procedures. These sections will give you a general idea of tracking procedures. They also provide background information about the types of methods that were tried by AIR trackers before you received the case and describe special procedures at AIR such as database searches that may help you locate a leaver.

Basic Telephone Tracking Procedures

Things you'll need:

School Leaver Information Form

Provides information about the student given by the school that he or she left. Name, birthdate, grade level, and last known address are some of the items listed on the form.

School Leaver Contact Record

Needs to be filled out by the tracker. You must complete a contact record sheet for each leaver you track, describing your attempts to locate the leaver and verify his or her status.

Steps for Telephone Tracking:

Step 1: **Glance at the data on the School Leaver Information Form.**

(A sample information form for our imaginary Alexander Milner is presented in Box 2 on page 11.) Determine the type of information you'll need to obtain to verify his status.

Step 2: **Obtain locator information.**

In our example, you're lucky -- the school that Alexander reportedly transferred to, High Tech High, is listed on the School Leaver Information form. The only locator information you need is a phone number for the school, which you can get by dialing directory assistance. You should note the phone number on your School Leaver Contact Record (Box 3; page 12).

Step 3: **Attempt to verify the leaver's status with the appropriate source.**

(Sample telephone scripts are provided in Box 4 on page 13.) To verify Alex's status you'll need to call Northside High. Ask for the name and job title of the person who handles enrollments, e.g., Mrs. Green, a clerk in the office. When Mrs. Green is on the line, use the School Contact Phone Script to give you an idea of what you need to say.

When you call schools, it helps to present your request as being based on information from another school -- it indicates you already have access to school information and are therefore making a valid and reasonable request. If Mrs. Green says that Alex has enrolled, verify that it is the same student who used to attend Northside High School (e.g., check birthdate, prior school attended, or social security number), find out the date he enrolled, and thank her for her assistance. If she

find out the date he enrolled, and thank her for her assistance. If she refuses to give out the information and demands verification that you have a legitimate right to know, you can do one of two things:

- arrange to have an authorization letter and a project abstract sent to her
- suggest that she call you (or another member of the project staff) collect at AIR – Palo Alto so that she will know that we are a valid organization

If you can get the information without the extra red tape, all the better.

If Mrs. Green verifies that Alex enrolled there, you're finished with Alex Milner! However, if she says that no student named Alex Milner has enrolled, the student is not a transfer (at least not to that school), so you'll have to continue tracking him.

Step 4: **Fill in the call result on the School Leaver Contact Record.**

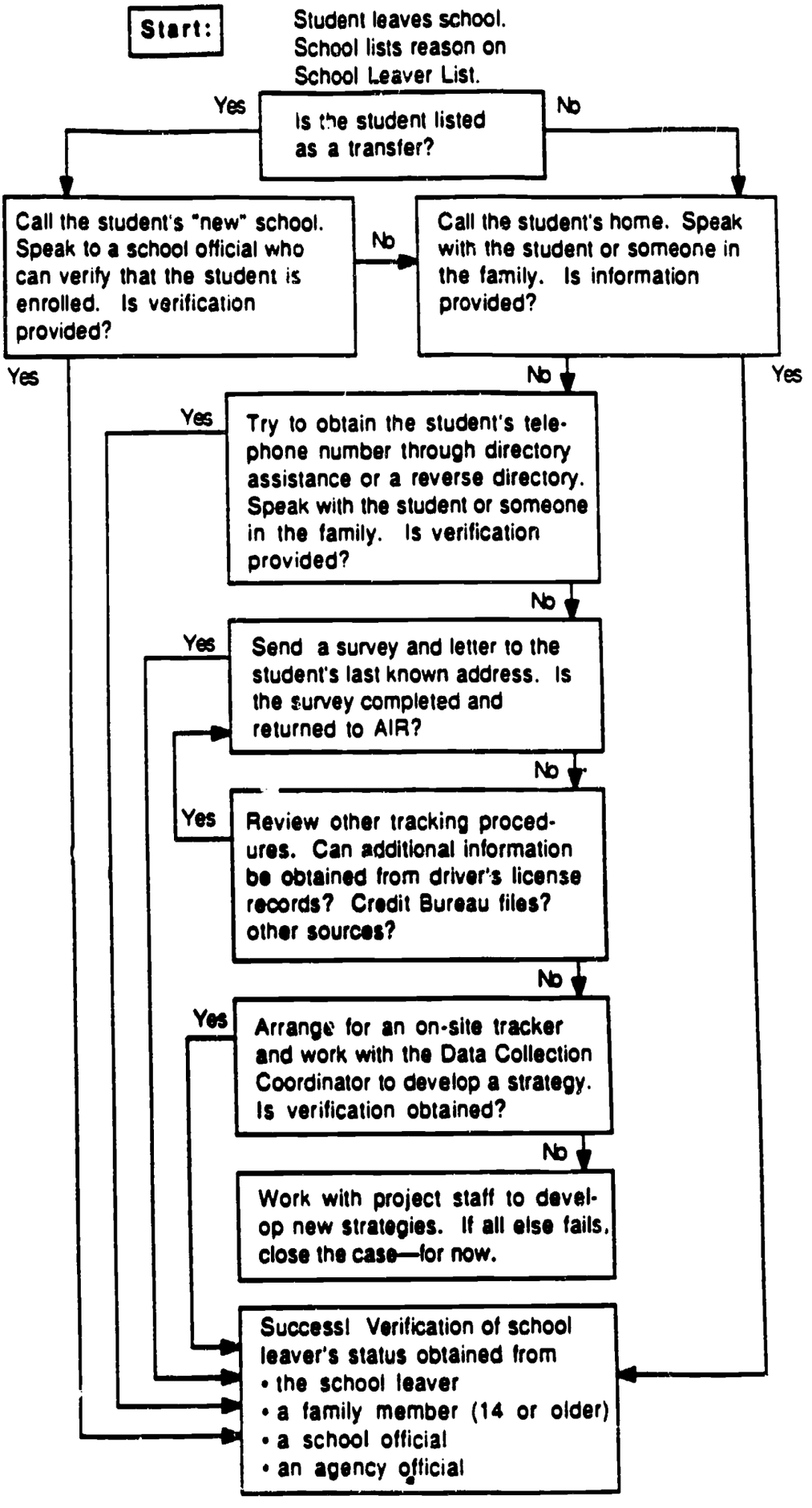
If you verified that Alex is a transfer, complete the bottom section of the School Leaver Contact Record (Box 3) that asks for information about the school that Alex transferred to.

In our example, Alex was a reported transfer. How do you track a reported dropout? In general, you follow the same basic procedures outlined above but the type of person who can verify the status is different (as shown in Box 1). Tracking procedures are illustrated in a flow chart on the next page.

If you were unable to verify Alex's status, you'll need to make additional contact attempts. Re-trace the steps outlined above: Once again, glance at the School Leaver Information form and determine the type of additional information you'll need to verify his status; attempt to obtain locator information such as a phone number or mailing address; use the locator information to make a contact attempt; and finally, describe the result of your contact attempt on the School Leaver Contact Record.

If you run out of ideas on ways to track Alex, read the section on "Methods for tracking hard to locate leavers" on page 14.

Overview of Tracking Procedures



Box 2. Sample Completed School Leaver Information Form

School Leaver Information Form OMB # 1850-0630, Exp. Date 3/31/91

Student's Full name ALEXANDER MILNER Name of school left NORTHSIDE HIGH

Grade level 10 Gender: Male [X] Female [ ] Race/ethnicity WHITE

years in school district 9 Status: TRANSFER Date of birth 10/12/74

Date last attended this school 5/12/90 Academic Achievement Measure B-

Days absent in month preceding date last attended your school DK

LEP Status N/A IEP Status: Yes [ ] No [X]

	Street Address	City	State	Zip	Telephone
Last known address (1)	1492 COLUMBUS STREET;	NY	NY		(514)666-1934
(2)					
(3)					

Social Security # 555-44-3333 Other name(s) used _____

Driver's License # _____ Memberships in: _____

Parent/Guardian's name(s) WINCHELL & GLADYS MILNER

Address (if different) SAME

Other person's name(s) _____

Address/phone _____

Information about transfers

Transcript request received? Yes [ ] No [X]

Name and address of new school: NORTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL; ACACIA, NY

Time required to complete form: _____

Box 3. Sample Completed School Leaver Contact Record

School Leaver Contact Attempt Log

LEAVER ID#: _____ NAME: ALEXANDER MILNER

School Leaver Status Assigned by AIR: T

Phone Log

Teacher's NAME	Date	Phone #	Person Contacted	Result
	1/10/91	(518)555-1212	OPERATOR	RECEIVED PHONE# FOR NORTHSIDE HIGH. (518)666-1334
	1/10/91	(518)666-1334	MRS. HYDE, CLERK AT NORTHSIDE HIGH	VERIFIED TRANSFER

Letters mailed

Date	Type of Letter	Person/Org	Address	Result

If Status is transferred: Name of School NORTHSIDE HIGH SCHOOL

Verified attended: Yes [✓] No [ ] Verified School Approved: Yes [✓] No [ ]

For everyone: Time required to verify: 5

Box 4. Sample Telephone Scripts

Use the School Contact Phone Script when calling the school that you believe the leaver transferred to.

Use the Leaver or Family Member Phone Script when calling the leaver or a member of the leaver's family.

School Contact Phone Script:

"Hello. (name of school official), this is (tracker's name) of the American Institutes for Research. I'm working on a research project sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Education. (Name of high school) told us that (name of school leaver) transferred to your school. Could you tell me if he/she did enroll?"

Leaver or Family Member Phone Script:

"Hello, is this (name of school leaver) ? I'm working on a research project sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Education, and I just want to ask you a few short questions. (Name of high school) reported that you left there. Are you in school now?"
[If Yes] "Where?" (Get school's name, address, and date student enrolled, if possible.)
[If No] "What are you doing?" (Offer assurance that you're just checking to see if the school's records are correct.) "Okay, that's all I want to know. Bye."

Methods for tracking hard-to-locate leavers

If your first attempt to verify Alex Milner's status was unsuccessful, be sure that you have all of the information that the first school (Northside High, which listed him as a school leaver) can provide. For example, check with the attendance clerk and see if all of the known information is listed. You might also check with a school counselor or a vice principal. If the information is complete and you still don't have the name of a school that Alex supposedly transferred to, you should try telephoning Alex's last known phone number.

Telephone Contact with the Leaver or a Family Member

Northside High should have been able to provide Alex's last known address and telephone number. First try calling the number. If there's no answer, try again at a different time. For example, if no one answered during the day, try during the early evening hours. If the number results in a referral to a new number, then try the new number.

If you are able to reach someone, ask if Alex Milner is there, and if he is, use the Leaver/Family Member Phone Script to give you an idea of what you should say (Box 4; p. 13).

If Alex Milner is not there but an adult answers the phone, ask if the person is related to Alex (note the relationship on your Tracking Contact Record), and say something like this:

"I'm working on a research project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, and I'm verifying some school records. I have only two short questions. Northside High School reported that Alex left school. Is he going to school somewhere else?" [If Yes] *"Where?"* [Try to identify the school name and city accurately.] [If No] *"What is he doing?"* [Again if the person seems hesitant, offer assurance that you're just checking to see if the school's records are correct and that the information is just for research. The student's name won't be used anywhere. If the person doesn't know, ask if anyone else in the house knows or how you might reach Alex some other time.] *"OK. That's all I need to know. Thanks for your help. Bye."*

If the person can't answer your questions, at least try to get some information about the student's whereabouts. (*"Can you tell me where I might reach Alex?" [If No] "Do you know anyone who might know where Alex is?"*)

If you can't reach the person by telephone, try mail contact (described in detail below).

If Alex Milner's telephone number has been disconnected and you know his parents' names, try finding the new number by calling directory assistance.

If the city is not too large, and you have access to its telephone book, search the telephone directory for other Milners (i.e., potential relatives) who live nearby. (If these individuals are knowledgeable, they can provide verification of Alex's whereabouts and school status.)

If you know Alex's address but not the telephone number, see if you can track him through reverse directories, which list telephone numbers by address.

If you have the name of a school to which Alex supposedly transferred but don't have a telephone number, check the *QED Books* in the library. They list private and public schools and should include information for the school you need. If you can't tell exactly which school it is—for example, if Alex said he was transferring to "the Academy" and the list for that city doesn't show any schools with that name, try calling the county Office of Education and see if they can identify the school.

If you are unable to reach Alex or his family by telephone, see if you can get neighbors' telephone numbers, using AIR's database. (See the information on Credit Bureau under Special Tracking Procedures below.) If you still have no luck, try mail contact.

Mail Contact

At AIR, we will send a School Leaver Survey and a letter to the last address we have for Alexander Milner, along with a return envelope. (Copies of these documents are in the "Forms" section of this manual.)

There are two form letters to be sent out to the families of school leavers: (1) An initial letter and (2) a follow-up letter. Enclose the School Leaver Survey with the form letter.

Use "pretty" stamps when you send out these letters. Research indicates that these stamps can enhance response rates.

The initial letter should be sent out to the Leavers' Family at their last known address. Post-paid return envelopes addressed to you should be included in this mailing.

The follow-up letter should be mailed out two weeks after the initial letter (assuming that we have received no response). This follow-up letter should be sent to the Leaver's Family at their last known address. The envelope used for this mailing should have "Address Correction Requested" typed under our return address. Post-paid return envelopes addressed to Dr. Roger Levine should be included.

If Alex (or a member of his family) responds to either of these mailings, terrific! You are finished with Alex.

If Alex's family has moved and has not responded to either mailing, the Post Office will inform us of their new address. Hopefully, we will then be able to contact them by phone. If not, we will be able to provide our on-site trackers with the information they need to locate these people.

If you are unable to get a new address for Alex, it's time to try some special tracking procedures.

Special Tracking Procedures at AIR

Several tracking procedures can be carried out at AIR to help lead you to the school leaver. Each of these is described below.

Driver's licence information. If you have two pieces of information about a school leaver—birthdate and social security number, you may be able to track the student to a new address. If you have that information for one of the student's parents, you may be able to track them down.

If Alex is old enough to have a driver's license and you have his birthdate and social security number, try asking the vehicle registration office in his State to provide his current address. (We have a listing of procedures required for requesting that information from each state.) Don't assume that because Alex is not yet 16, he can't have a driver's license. In some States, students can get restricted licenses when they are 14 years old. Some States have laws that limit access to this information—for example, Georgia and Washington State do not release this information— so you'll need to find out what the laws and minimum age are in Alex's State.

Call the vehicle registration office and arrange to receive a request form for Alex. You may be charged a fee or required to give additional information. If you are able to obtain a new address, try to get a phone number and attempt to make contact by phone. If this fails, send a School Leaver Mail Survey and explanatory letter. If that does not result in a completed Survey, we can arrange to have an on-site tracker visit the new address. In any case, keep track of the information you obtain on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record.

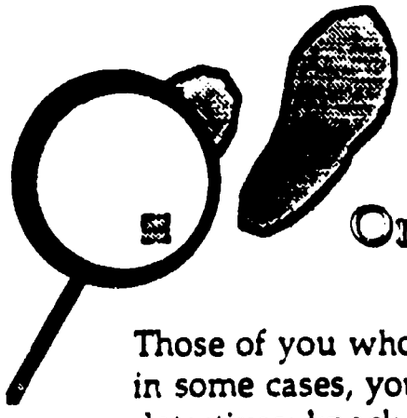
Credit Bureau. If you are able to obtain either Alex's social security number or his street address and telephone number, or his parent's social securtity number, try to track Alex or a member of his family through the Edge system, a database that provides information about individuals. AIR trackers will receive training in how to use this database, and it may result in a recent address or the names and phone numbers of neighbors who may assist with your tracking. After the database is checked, record any new information on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record. If you get new telephone numbers to call (e.g., of neighbors), try those. If you get a new address for

Alex, try sending a survey form there. If you get a new telephone number for him, call him!

Military Locator Service. If you have reason to believe that Alex enlisted in the military service but you cannot get verification from a knowledgeable adult, contact the world-wide locator service in Ft. Benjamin, Indiana, and see if they can verify that Alex is in the military. (To use this service you need either a social security number of military identification number.) If the locator service can verify that Alex is in military service, you have the information you need and you're through with Alex. Whatever you learn from them, record the information on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record, so we'll know the attempt has been made.

Marriage Records. A county's lists of persons applying for marriage licenses can be sources of information about school leavers. This source is seldom useful, however, because it's hard to know which county's records to check. There are many places where a person can be married, even within a fairly small geographic area. It's even more difficult to track females because the records for marriage licenses are filed under the name of the male. If you think that Alex has gotten married, it's worth a try to check the records of the nearest county seat or a place that someone suggests he may have gone. Record any calls and contacts you made in checking this out on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record.

Other sources. If none of these possibilities leads you to Alex, try to work with the contact person at Alex's first school (the one that listed him as a school leaver) to obtain more information about him. Through the contact or your own calls to the school, find out who the school leaver's counselor and teachers were. Try to identify those who can provide additional information, particularly about the school leaver's friends, special interests, and participation in clubs. Leave messages so that staff can call you back after school; try to keep disruptions to a minimum. Record all of this information on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record, and arrange for an on-site tracker who can follow up on the leads.



On-Site Tracking Procedures

Those of you who are on-site trackers will have only a few students to track; in some cases, you may have only one student. It will be your job to be real detectives: knock on doors, get leads, and keep trying until you locate the student and get verified information about what he is doing.

In general, you follow the same basic tracking steps that AIR telephone trackers use (pages 8 - 9): 1) You need to glance at the School Leaver Information form and determine what type of information you'll need to verify the leaver's status; 2) use Box 1 to identify appropriate verification sources; 3) attempt to obtain locator information (e.g., an address) if the information is not provided on the form; 4) use the locator information to attempt contact; 5) describe the result of your contact attempt on the School Leaver Contact Record.

Let us imagine that you are assigned to locate Alex Milner after the AIR trackers exhausted all of their methods to locate him. First, if possible, go to Alex's house or apartment and try to get the information you need, either from him or from an appropriate respondent. If you are able to obtain the information from Alex or an appropriate respondent, that's wonderful. Complete your School Leaver Contact Record and you're finished with him.

If Alex isn't there, try to find out about him from someone in his family (or whoever answers the door). If a child under 14 years of age answers the door, ask if you can speak to someone else about Alex. If a person at least 14 years old is able to tell you something about Alex, ask how the person knows him ("Are you related to him?"). It's probably better not to ask about the relationship directly if you can help it -- a question like, "Are you his father or stepfather?" may give the impression that you're being nosy or questioning the legality of the living arrangements.

If you strike out -- no one answers the door or no one will provide any information -- you'll need to look for other leads. Try knocking on a neighbor's door or ask anyone else in the neighborhood: an apartment building manager, or the clerk in a nearby store. Just say something like this in a friendly way: "I'm trying to locate Alex Milner, the kid who used to live in Apartment 4B. Do you know where he moved?" Follow up with questions like, "Do you know someone who might know where he is?" and "Do you know where his parents worked?" Some possible sources of information provided by an AIR tracker may be listed on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record sheet; follow up on these leads first.

Possible sources for tracking information

If you run out of leads and can't think of anyone else to contact, glance through the following list of possible information sources:

School Employees. School employees may be able to provide useful information that will help you track Alex. Attendance clerks may be able to provide updated information about Alex's whereabouts. School counselors and teachers may help identify Alex's friends and his employer. They may also be able to tell you about popular hang-outs for teen-agers such as a club, pinball arcade, or gym where you may be able to locate Alex or someone who knows him.

Students or Community Members. If you can identify some of Alex's friends, relatives, or neighbors, you may be able to get some leads from them. Other possibilities are former employers, employees of places where Alex liked to spend time (e.g., a local coffee house or donut shop), or public officials such as social workers, police officers, or juvenile justice officers who may know him.

Some residential areas have informal "block parents," individuals who know most of the kids in the neighborhood because they provide daycare, are active in school activities, or simply like to know what's going in the neighborhood. If you can identify persons like this, ask them about Alex. Talk to people who had contacts with Alex, emphasizing that you just need to know what he is doing—for research purposes, not for any other reason.

Others. If you think that Alex may be in jail, visit the local Police Department and ask to check the police records.

As the work progresses, AIR will share with you the strategies that other trackers have found effective. (We hope that some of them will come from you.) You can try those strategies and see if they work for you. If all else fails, call Phyllis DuBois or Roger Levine at AIR. Be prepared to describe everything you have attempted and ask for their ideas on additional strategies.

General Rules for Tracking

As you track the school leavers, it's important to remember the points described below.

1. Be sensitive to the school leaver's situation.

School leavers who transfer to other schools are relatively easy to find. However, much of your tracking efforts will focus on students who have dropped out of school. This generally means that they have had problems at school or in their personal lives that made school intolerable for them. Keep in mind that many of these students (and often, their parents) feel resentment toward the school system for not meeting their needs, so they may not be eager to cooperate with a study that is indirectly connected with the school. It's important to convey to the school leavers that you are not making judgments about their reasons for leaving; you're merely trying to verify the fact that they have left and identify their present status.

2. Try to emphasize the positive—staying in school, not the negative—dropping out.

Schools try to keep all kids in school; few succeed, but most people agree that education is important. If you use the word dropout too much, you may give the impression that some students are expected to drop out, that school is not the place for them. For example, when you call to verify the status of a student, it's better to ask, "Is Alex in school?" as though that's logical, than to begin with, "Has Alex dropped out of school?" as though you thought he wouldn't stay in school. It's a small distinction, but try to assume the best about the school leaver until you have information to the contrary.

3. Make sure that the information you obtain is for the right student.

When you speak to someone about one of the students you're tracking and they give you information, verify that you are talking about the same person. There are thousands of people who share the same name, e.g., Juan Romero or Jim Smith. Mention the birthdate or street address of the person you're tracking to ensure that the information is correct, e.g., "We're talking about the Alex Milner who was born on April 10, 1975, right?"

4. Don't let the trail cool down.

Try to do your tracking as soon after the student leaves the school as possible--the longer you wait, the less likely you are to find the school leaver. Follow up on all leads as soon as possible.

5. Give people a chance to respond.

Don't be afraid to wait after you ask a question, e.g., "Can you tell me where Alex is?" Sometimes people will overcome their reluctance and respond, if only to fill the silence. If you ask a question, then rush right in, they will take the easy way out and let you do all the talking, telling you nothing. Sometimes it also helps to begin a question but make it open-ended, so people want to finish it, e.g., "I'm just wondering whether Alex left school, transferred, or..... [trailing away]."

6. Try a variety of approaches.

A number of strategies are described above. Don't just try one and wait for results; you will probably need to try several simultaneously. For example, if you have a possible address, try sending a letter, calling the school leaver, and contacting a teacher or counselor who may have additional information: one of those approaches may pay off. At the same time, make additional inquiries among students and community members.

7. Establish good relationships with people who can help you.

A number of people be able to give you information, among the most likely are school personnel. Requests for transcripts for transfer students are usually handled by specific office staff (e.g., school secretary, attendance clerk). Find out who these staff persons are at the school that prepared your School Leaver List and ask for their assistance. Counselors, school psychologists, homeroom teachers, and other students at the school are also likely to have information.

An important part of establishing good relationships is being sensitive to other people's needs. When you work with school personnel, try to limit your contacts to times when they do not have other pressing concerns. For example, school attendance clerks are usually extremely busy early in the morning and until at least mid-day with attendance records for that day. School offices are likely to be busy during passing periods, snack and lunch periods, and just after school because students have the opportunity to go there at those times. Try to determine the best times to contact people ("What's a good time to call you or to stop by the office? I know you're busy.")

Another useful practice is to call people by name, e.g., Alex Milner, Ms. Smith, Mr. Jones, or Dr. Thompson. (Don't call adults by their first names unless they have given you permission to do so.) When you call a school, agency, or business for information, find out the name of the person who responds. You'll need it for your tracking record, and it's also useful to have for any follow-up calls you need to make.

Another useful—and obvious—practice is to express your appreciation. Be sure to give verbal thanks to people who have been helpful.

8. For on-site tracking, keep personal safety in mind at all times.

If you are involved in face-to-face contacts with people, your personal safety is the primary consideration. If you feel that a neighborhood, building, or situation is not safe, don't enter it. Don't take any risks—you are more important than the data.

Here are several pointers that can help ensure your personal safety.

- Make inquiries in residential neighborhoods as unobtrusively as possible. If you feel you need any study materials (like the project description, or ED letter) when you go, keep them out in plain sight, for example attached to a simple clipboard. Don't carry a briefcase or other package that might be regarded with suspicion or considered of possible value.

- Develop a quick summary of your purpose so that you can reassure people that you aren't there to create problems for the student or to sell anything. People are usually reluctant to provide information if they believe that it may cause trouble or embarrassment for themselves or someone in their family. Be friendly and prepared to convince that your intentions are good. Emphasize that you only want to know what the student is doing as far as school is concerned—you aren't passing any judgments on whether that it's good or bad.

- Use common sense. You'll need to be inventive to find some of the school leavers, but don't let your imagination go too far. Maintain your good common sense.

9. Maintain on-going communication with the Data Collection Coordinator.

Phyllis DuBois, the Data Collection Coordinator, will ask you to contact her periodically about how your work is going, but you should see or call her, Roger Levine, or Don McLaughlin any time you have any questions and need help. (If you are an on-site tracker, your telephone expenses will be reimbursed or, if necessary, you can call collect.)

If a problem arises, don't wait for the Data Collection Coordinator to contact you—telephone her immediately. If you can't reach Phyllis DuBois at AIR (415/493-3550) and the office is not open, you can either reach her or leave a message at her home (408/286-9082).

10. Maintain confidentiality at all times.

When you talk with AIR staff, share what you've learned; don't share it with outsiders. If you gain information that you think should be conveyed to school staff, check with Phyllis DuBois, Roger Levine, or Don McLaughlin first.

11. Submit reports and materials as directed.

As you obtain verification of a school leaver's status, complete the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record and submit it to AIR immediately. If you are an on-site tracker, send all materials by first class mail or FAX. (Be sure to photocopy the materials before you send them so you'll have a copy if the original data is lost in the mail.)

Quality Control

To ensure that high standards are maintained, AIR staff will review the School Leaver Tracking Contact Records carefully and, if data are missing, may call you for additional information. In addition, we will verify the accuracy of a sample of items on the Student Leaver Tracking Contact Records. For example, if a tracker submits Tracking Contact Records on 3 school leavers, we might check on 1, calling the schools to which they reportedly transferred or contacting the person who provided validating information about the school leaver.

3. Forms and Materials

Types of Forms

AIR has developed four forms for this evaluation:

- **School Leavers Information Form** – a form providing information about the school leaver for tracking and analytic purposes

- **School Leaver Contact Attempt Log** – the document on which you record your efforts to track the school leaver

- **School Leavers Survey** – a questionnaire administered to the school leaver, either in person or by telephone, to determine what the school leaver is doing

- **Transfer Verification Form** – a questionnaire sent to the school to which the leaver allegedly transferred, to determine whether the leaver really enrolled at this school

As the names indicate, these forms are designed to obtain information about a school leaver—a student that a school reports as having left. Samples of these foms and information on how to complete them follow.

School Leaver Information Form

Throughout the 1989-90 school year, the schools participating in the Field Test completed School Leaver Lists that included all students who had left for reasons other than graduation or promotion. The lists typically have each student's name, identification number, date last in class, grade level, sex, race or ethnic group, and status (whether the student is a dropout or left the school for some other specified reason such as transfer to another school).

Initial Information. From a sample of 57 schools, AIR drew 1,026 names from the School Leaver Lists, and we prepared School Leaver Information Forms for each of those 1,026 students, filling in all the items already known in the Initial Information section.

Other Information. The School Leaver Information Forms were sent to the school reporting the students' departure, with instructions to complete missing items, verify items already filled out, and return the form to AIR. In many cases, the schools could not complete all of the Locator Information section.

For some students—for example, a student who is merely listed as having left, with little locator information, you'll need to find out more. Any additional information you can add to this section will provide leads for you and for an on-site tracker, if needed.

The school also lists any known "school-enrollment-related activity" for the student. If the student has transferred to another school or to a special program, the school notes that plus "sources of information" on that activity, such as a request for transcript received from another school. Those cases are easy—a student is listed as a transfers, you call the school to which they transferred and obtain verification that the student has enrolled. You note "Yes" on the form, check to see whether the school is approved (i.e., accredited by the State), and the validation is complete for that student.

In other cases, either the student has no enrollment-related activity or the school does not know about it. These are the harder cases that require more sleuthing.

Student's Full name _____ Name of school left _____

Grade level ____ Gender: Male [ ] Female [ ] Race/ethnicity _____

years in school district _____ Status: _____ Date of birth ___/___/___

Date last attended this school ___/___/___ Academic Achievement Measure _____

Days absent in month preceding date last attended your school _____

LEP Status _____ IEP Status: Yes [ ] No [ ]

Street Address City State Zip Telephone

Last known address (1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

Social Security # ____ - ___ - _____ Other name(s) used _____

Driver's License # _____ Memberships in: _____

Parent/Guardian's name(s) _____

Address (if different) _____

Other person's name(s) _____

Address/phone _____

_____

Information about transfers

Transcript request received? Yes [ ] No [ ]

Name and address of new school: _____

Time required to complete form: _____

School Leaver Contact Attempt Log

When you make any contacts to locate a student (school leaver)—by telephoning and mailing surveys, or by speaking to anyone in person— you must document this on the School Leaver Contact Attempt Log. (This is true for both AIR trackers and on-site trackers.) Because you will probably be tracking several students at once, the form will help you keep them straight. It will also help you document the results so that you can report them to AIR supervisors.

For each contact you make in regard to a school leaver, you fill in each column:

- Tracker—your initials, the person making the contact. This column helps the Data Collection Coordinator know who to contact if questions arise about a specific contact.

- Date—enter both the date and the time of each contact or contact attempt. This column helps you plan your strategy; if morning contacts are unsuccessful, try to contact the person at other times of the day.

- Phone #—enter the phone number you dialled. If you made a personal visit, enter the address in this column.

- Person contacted—the name of the person you are contacting. Indicate their title and an identifying organization, if appropriate.

- Result—the result of your contact or what happened. Examples include "Provided forwarding address," "Suggested lead: owner of yogurt store at 10th and Main," or "Has no knowledge of student."

School Leaver Contact Attempt Log

LEAVER ID# _____ NAME _____

School Leaver Status Assigned by AIR: _____

Phone Log

Tracker	Date	Phone #	Person Contacted	Result

Letters mailed

Date	Type of Letter	Person/Org	Address	Result

If Status is transferred: Name of School _____

Verified attended: Yes [ ] No [ ] Verified School Approved: Yes [ ] No [ ]

For everyone: Time required to verify: _____

School Leavers Survey

To obtain this information about the students, use the Locator Information from the School Leaver Information Form and either telephone the student, send the School Leavers Survey to the last known address, or do both.

If it is necessary to send a School Leavers Survey to the last known address, be sure to enclose a stamped, self-addressed return envelope. The first cover letter should be used for initial mail contact attempts.

If no response is received after two weeks, another copy of the Survey should be sent. The second cover letter (from the Deputy Project Director) should be enclosed, along with another stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

OMB #1850-063(Exp. Date: 3/31/91

Student's Name: (FILL IN)

Name of school previously attended: (FILL IN)

Student's school related activity after leaving this school:

Not attending any school [ ]
Transferred to another school [ ] ---> Name & address of new school

_____
_____
_____

Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

Your relationship to the student listed above:

I am the person listed above [ ]
I am the parent or guardian of the person listed above [ ]
I am the brother or sister of the person listed above [ ]
Other (PLEASE SPECIFY) _____

Return completed forms to: Dropout Statistics Project, American Institutes for Research, Box 1113, Palo Alto, California 94302.

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

Date

The (NAME OF LEAVER) Family
Street Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Leaver Family:

We are verifying (NAME OF SCHOOL's) records for the United States Department of Education. Would you please complete the enclosed form and return it to us as soon as possible? Thanks.

Your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

If you have any questions, please call either me, Phyllis DuBois, or Roger Levine at (415) 493-3550. You can call collect.

Once again, thanks very much for your help.

Sincerely yours,

Your name
Research Associate

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1913
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

Date

The (NAME OF LEAVER) Family
Street Address
City, State, ZIP

Dear Leaver Family:

About two weeks ago, we sent you a letter asking you to verify (NAME OF SCHOOL's) records as part of a study we are doing for the United States Department of Education. Since we have not yet received a response from you, we are enclosing another copy of this form. Would you please complete it and return it to us as soon as possible? Thanks.

As we mentioned before, your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

We would be very happy to answer any questions you have about this study or about the American Institutes for Research. Please call us collect at (415) 493-3550. Ask for me (Roger Levine) or for Phyllis DuBois. We will pay for the cost of the phone call.

Thanks very much for your cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Roger Levine, Ph.D.
Deputy Project Director

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1913
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

Transfer verification form

To obtain transfer verification information from schools that refuse to provide this information over the telephone, send the Transfer Verification Form and the following cover letter to an official at the school.

If you do not feel it is necessary to send a copy of the FERPA letter and a Project Description, you do not have to do so. You should customize the letter to indicate the omission of these materials.

Be sure to enclose a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH
P.O. BOX 1113
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

TRANSFER VERIFICATION FORM

STUDENT'S NAME: NAME OF STUDENT
BIRTHDATE: STUDENT'S DATE OF BIRTH

Name of High School informed us that the student listed above transferred to your school on DATE. Please verify this information by making a check mark below:

_____ Yes, the student transferred to this school and is currently enrolled.
_____ Yes, the student transferred to this school but is not currently enrolled.
_____ No, the student never transferred to this school.

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

DATE

NAME OF PERSON
SCHOOL NAME
SCHOOL ADDRESS
CITY, STATE ZIP

Dear PERSON:

The American Institutes for Research is conducting an evaluation of procedures employed to keep track of school leavers (i.e., dropouts, transfers, mid-year graduates) for the United States Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. I am enclosing a brief description of this project.

As part of this evaluation, we are verifying the status of 1,000 randomly selected school leavers. This will permit us to assess the accuracy of the procedures different states, school districts, and schools are using to calculate dropout rates. NAME OF LEAVER is one of these 1,000 randomly selected school leavers. NAME OF SCHOOL informed us that NAME OF LEAVER transferred from their school to your school on DATE. In order to verify the accuracy of their records, we need to know if this is correct.

I am also enclosing a copy of a letter from the Department of Education's Family Policy and Regulations Office. This letter states that releasing the information we are requesting for the study is permissible under Federal Law.

Would you please complete and return the enclosed form indicating whether or not NAME OF LEAVER is enrolled in your school? Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at (415) 493-3550.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME
Research Associate

Enclosures

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P O BOX 1113
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493 3550

Other Materials

Four other materials will be useful to you in carrying out your work:

- **FERPA letter**

—(See copy on next page.) This letter from the U.S. Department of Education (ED) informs schools that the information you seek does not violate the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, otherwise known as "FERPA." FERPA protects the privacy of students' educational records. The letter indicates that AIR is authorized to gather this information and that the person can provide the information without violating the requirements of FERPA.

Send the letter to schools or individuals that request (or demand) additional information and evidence of your right to gather these data. If you are an on-site tracker, take the letter with you when you contact schools or other agencies for information about school leavers. It should facilitate your contacts and help establish your credibility as a data collector.

- **Project Director's letter**

—(See copy.) This letter from Dr. Donald McLaughlin, the director of this evaluation identifies you as a staff member for this project. It too can lend legitimacy to your mission.

- **Evaluation description**

—(See copy.) The description is a brief overview of the study and provides information about the sponsor, AIR, and our tasks. Send or give these to individuals who wish additional information; take several if you plan to have face-to-face contacts individuals about the school leavers.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY UNDER SECRETARY FOR MANAGEMENT

MAY 21 [illegible]

TO APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) is under contract with the Department of Education to evaluate the National Dropout Statistics Field Test. This project, which is congressionally mandated, is intended to identify the most accurate, comparable, and least burdensome procedures for collecting and reporting dropout statistics. For this study, AIR will need to be provided with information about the educational status of certain individuals.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a Federal law which protects the privacy of students' education records. One of the provisions of FERPA is that, except in certain specified instances, an educational agency may not disclose information contained in the education records of a student without the parent's prior written consent. However, sections 99.31(a)(3)(ii) and 99.35 of the FERPA regulations (34 CFR Part 99) permit an educational agency to disclose to authorized representatives of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, without parental consent, records which may be necessary in connection with the audit and evaluation of Federal- and State-supported education programs.

Since AIR is under contract to the Department to evaluate the National Dropout Statistics Field Test, it would function as an authorized representative of the Secretary for that purpose. Therefore, an educational agency would be permitted to disclose to AIR information contained in students' education records that is needed for the study without violating FERPA. Educational agencies must comply with the recordkeeping requirements of section 99.32 of the FERPA regulations with respect to any disclosures to AIR.

LeRoy S. Rooker
Director
Family Policy and
Regulations Office

AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH

4 January 1991

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

(NAME OF TRACKER) is an employee of the American Institutes for Research and is working on a United States Department of Education sponsored project to evaluate the National Dropout Statistics Field Test. As part of this evaluation, the educational status of 1,000 randomly selected students must be verified.

We are requesting that you assist (NAME OF TRACKER) by providing (him/her) with information that might be useful for locating these students and for verifying their educational status.

Your cooperation is voluntary. We are requesting this information to determine the accuracy of school attendance record-keeping procedures. Your responses will be confidential.

If you have any questions, please call either me, Dr. Roger Levine, or Ms. Phyllis DuBois at (415) 493-3550.

Once again, thanks very much for your help.

Sincerely yours,

Donald McLaughlin, Ph.D.
Chief Research Scientist

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P O BOX 1913
PALO ALTO CA 94302
(415) 493 3550

Evaluation of the Dropout Statistics Field Test

Project Description

The large number of young people dropping out of school is a major problem for the nation's educational system; yet accurate figures on dropouts are difficult to find. In order to focus attention appropriately on the dropout problem, it is essential to have valid, comparable dropout rates. Then such rates can be posted on "wall charts" to add impetus to programs to prevent dropping out. To fill this need, NCES has proposed to add dropout rates to the Common Core of Data collected annually from all school districts. As an initial step, NCES is carrying out a 30-State study of the feasibility of collecting valid public school dropout information. This project will validate reported statistics by following up 1,000 school leavers; and it will assess the training requirements and administrative barriers to collecting these data as a part of the Common Core of Data.

NCES has selected AIR, a firm with a long history of evaluation research, statistical expertise, and a commitment to education, to carry out the evaluation. AIR will support the efforts of 30 State Education Agencies and 300 School Districts to implement operations for gathering and reporting accurate counts of school dropouts.

The major tasks include surveys of the participating SEAs and LEAs, review of training materials, and a validation of the classification of 1,000 school leavers (as either dropouts or non-dropouts). Finally, there will be a survey of States that did not participate in the field test to identify barriers to be removed in moving to an operational setting. AIR's work will be carried out over a 21-month period, from October, 1989, to June, 1991, with roughly a four person-year allocation of effort.

AIR has put together a senior research team, headed by Dr. Donald McLaughlin, Chief Scientist, to carry out this important project. He will be assisted by Dr. Roger Levine and Ms. Phyllis DuBois. The project will also benefit from the advice of Dr. Floyd Hammack, of NYU, a noted expert on the problems of dropout data collection; Dr. Mary Wagner, of SRI, director of a major project involving the follow-up of dropouts from special education; and Dr. Robert Rossi, director of the evaluation of a major Federal intervention to address the dropout problem. Ms. Mary Anne Arcilla will provide administrative support for the project.

PALO ALTO OFFICE
1791 ARASTRADERO ROAD
P.O. BOX 1113
PALO ALTO, CA 94302
(415) 493-3550

4. Compensation

This section applies only to on-site trackers. Trackers who work at AIR-Palo Alto are regular AIR employees and follow procedures outlined in the *AIR Employee's Handbook*.

Employee Daily Time Record Forms

On-site trackers for this study are Group III employees of AIR. You will need to fill out a Employee Daily Time Record Form to receive payment. Instructions for filling out the Daily Time Record Form are on page 41.

As a Group III employee, you will be paid up to $50/case, at a rate of $10 per hour. (You can work a maximum of five hours to verify a student's leaver status.) For example if you took five hours to successfully verify student A's leaver status, you may charge five hours on your Employee Daily Time Record Form for this case. If you worked three hours to verify student B's leaver status, but reached a dead-end, you may claim three hours on your Employee Daily Time Record Form and stop looking for student B.

If you verify a student's leaver status in less than five hours, you may charge up to five hours of work on your Employee Daily Time Record Form. You will not be reimbursed separately for any expenses incurred in the tracking of these leavers. However, you may call AIR, collect, at any time.

Instructions for Completing the Employee Daily Time Record Forms

1. Record your hours worked on the Employee Daily Time Record Form. (A sample form is provided on page 42.)

2. Prepare a Daily Time Record Form for each student you are tracking.

3. After a case is completed (successful resolution or no verification possible), sign your Employee Daily Time Record Form and send it to the Research Assistant with whom you have been working. You will be provided with self-addressed stamped envelopes for this purpose. Completion of Time Record forms is required. You will be paid when these forms are received.

If you have any questions about these enclosed forms or procedures, feel free to contact the Research Assistant with whom you have been working or to contact Ms. Phyllis DuBois at (415) 493-3550.

EMPLOYEE DAILY TIME RECORD

EMPLOYEE NAME: Smith, John A. SOCIAL SECURITY #: 760 - 48 - 7[illegible]

Please print: LAST, FIRST, MIDDLE INITIAL

Date	Description of Work Performed	Hours Worked From	Hours Worked To	Total Hours
Student: Jane Doe				
12/01/90	Made calls to friends and relatives of Jane Doe	8:00 am	9:30 am	1.5
12/02/90	Visited former teacher of student	12:30 pm	1:00 pm	.5
12/03/90	Went to Jane's grandmothers house and determined her School locator status	2:00 pm	3:00 pm	1.0
	(A successful case - Although John Smith found Jane Doe in			
	3 hours, he can charge 5 hours)			5 hours
Student: Jack Mill				
12/01/90	Visited relatives of Jack Mill	9:30 am	10:30 am	1.0
12/02/90	Visited neighbors at last address of Jack Mill	11:00 am	12:30 pm	1.5
12/02/90	Checked records for any parent or student information	2:00 pm	2:30 pm	.5
12/04/90	Spoke with Jack's former teachers and friends	2:00 pm	4:30 pm	2.5
	(An unsuccessful case Although John Smith spent			
	5.5 hours on tasks to verify Jack Mill's locator status, he can only charge 5 hours)			5 hours
Student: Bill Lee				
12/02/90	Spoke with Bill's former teacher	12:30 pm	1:00 pm	.5
12/03/90	Visited a friend of Bills and got a new address	9:00 am	9:30 am	.5
12/03/90	Visited new address, but couldn't verify his status Attended	4:30 pm	6:00 pm	1.5
	(An unsuccessful case After 2½ hours John Smith was			
	attacked and assaulted but verify Bills locator status, he can only charge 2½ hours)			2.5 hours

I certify that the information on this time record is true and correct.

EMPLOYEE SIGNATURE: John A. Smith DATE: 12/6-1/90

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

E-48

Successful Resolution

When you have successfully verified the status of a school leaver, mail the completed School Leaver Tracking Contact Record and your Employee Daily Time Record Form(s) via first class mail to

(The Research Assistant with whom you have been working)
American Institutes for Research
P.O. Box 1113
Palo Alto, CA 94302

(You should make a copy of your Employee Daily Time Record Form(s) before you mail them in case they get lost.)

You will be given a supply of Employee Daily Time Record Forms and envelopes for mailing. If you need more, contact Mary Ann Arcilla at (415/493-3550).

No Verification Possible

If you have cases in which you have followed every lead, documented every contact, and reached a dead end, submit your School Leaver Tracking Contact Record and your Employee Daily Time Record Form for this student for review. If the Data Collection Supervisor agrees that you have done everything possible to track down the student, you will be paid for the case.

For example, if you have received reports that Alex Milner has moved to Saudi Arabia but are unable to make contact with anyone there, write the information on the School Leaver Tracking Contact Record and attach a memo explaining why you can't go any farther. This memo should be directed to Phyllis DuBois at AIR, and enclosed with the previously mentioned materials.

References

Clarridge, B. R., Sheehy, L. L., and Hauser, T. S. "Tracing Members of a Panel: A 17-Year Followup" in Social Methodology, K.F. Schuessler, ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978.

Flanagan, J. C., Davis, F.B., Dailey, J.T., Shaycoft, M.F., Orr, D.B., Goldberg, I., and Neyman, C.A., Jr. The American High School Student. Palo Alto: American Institutes for Research, 1964.

Otto, L. B., "Alternative Tracking Methods in Panel Studies: Their Costs and Relocation Rates." Boys Town, NE: The Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development. Paper presented at Alternative Design Conference, National Institutes of Education, Washington, DC, October 1978.

Teele, J.E., Mastering Stress in Child Reading: A Longitudinal Study of Coping and Remission. Lexington, MA: Heath, 1981.

APPENDIX G

FURTHER ALTERNATIVE DROPOUT RATE DEFINITIONS

APPENDIX G

Further Alternative Dropout Rate Definitions

For logistic reasons, it is appropriate to evaluate the alternatives of counts collected on a spring-to-spring basis. The issue of concern is whether dropout rates based on such data would be different from those which guided the Dropout Statistics Field Test design. This appendix presents tables comparing alternative dropout rate statistics based on hypothetical spring-to-spring dropout counts to the standard, Method 1. Because spring-to-spring dropouts were not counted directly in the Field Test, it is necessary to approximate these counts from the available data (fall-to-spring dropouts, fall-to-fall dropouts, and fall and spring membership counts). Tables G-1 through G-5 are to be compared with Table 6, from Section 3 of the report. These tables are identical, with the exception that they are based on alternative approximations to estimate the number of summer dropouts.

In each of the five tables of rates, there are four columns, corresponding to the four combinations of numerators and denominators. The first combination is the standard, DFF(g,y)/MF(g,y)[1]; that is, full-year (fall-to-fall) dropouts, DFF(g,y), divided by beginning fall membership, MF(g,y). Because it involves no separate estimate of summer dropouts, it is identical in all five tables.

The second column contains the ratios of fall-to-fall dropouts to the membership estimated before the preceding summer. Although spring membership counts were collected in the field test, they were deemed inappropriate for this use (1) because they were based on

[1]MF(g,y) = fall membership in grade g in school year y, DFF(g,y) = fall-to-fall dropouts from grade g in school year y, and DFS(g,y) = fall-to-spring dropouts from grade g in school year y. Refer to Chapter 3 for further discussion of the notation for rates.

a different grade cohort, and would thus confound dropout rates with population growth or decline and (2) because membership counts have traditionally been collected in the fall. Thus, the spring membership count for grade g was estimated by adding together fall membership for grade g and an estimate of the dropouts over the preceding summer: DFF(g,y)/(MF(g,y)+SDO(g,y)). "SDO(g,y)" is the estimated number of dropouts over the summer between grades g-1 and g, preceding the school year, y, of concern. It cannot be assumed to be the difference between the fall-to-spring (in-year) dropout count and the full-year dropout count because a substantial number of in-year dropouts return to school the following fall, especially, according to Table 12 in Section 3, in districts serving relatively low numbers of black and Hispanic students. The number of dropouts over the summer, SDO(g,y), is estimated in a different manner in each table in this appendix.

The third column compares the spring-to-spring dropout count to fall enrollment: (DFF(g,y)-SDO(g+1,y)+SDO(g,y))/MF(g,y). The numerator represents the full-year fall-to-fall dropouts from grade g, omitting those who drop out during the summer after grade g, plus those who drop out during the summer before grade g. (It was arbitrarily assumed that the number of dropouts in the summer between sixth and seventh grades, SDO(7,y), is zero.) Although fall-to-spring dropout counts were collected in the field test, they were not used directly in computing the numerator of the rate (i.e., DFS(g,y)+SDO(g,y)) because of substantial variation between districts in defining the fall-to-spring counting period. That variation would, for the most part, be cancelled out by using the difference between SDO(g,y) and SDO(g+1,y).

The fourth column compares estimates of spring-to-spring dropouts and initial spring membership: (DFF(g,y)-SDO(g+1,y)+SDO(g,y))/(MF(g,y)+SDO(g,y)). Basically, the figures in columns 1 and 4 have equivalent time-periods in the numerator and denominator of the rate, whereas the figures in columns 2 and 3 have time periods offset by three months.

In Table G-1, SDO(g,y), the estimated number of dropouts during the summer before grade g, is estimated as 10 percent of the reported full-year dropouts reported for grade g-1.

In Table G-2, SDO(g,y) is estimated as DFF(g,y)-.95*DFS(g,y), the reported full-year dropouts minus .95*the reported fall-to-spring dropouts. The rationale for this estimate is an assumption that 5% of the fall-to-spring dropouts show up at the beginning of the following fall. Table G-3 is similar to Table 6b, using .90 rather than .95. In Table G-4, SDO(g,y) is estimated as a fraction of the reported full-year dropouts in grade g-1, where the fraction, c_{ig}, is computed separately for each grade and category of district size, based on the results of the field test. The fraction is .25 for grades 7 and 8 in large districts, .15 for grades 7 and 8 in small and moderate size districts, .15 for grades 9 through 12 in large districts, and .05 for grades 9 through 12 in small and moderate size districts. In Table G-5, the values for small and moderate size districts are used for all districts.

On the final page, the district-by-district correlations for the synthetic cohort rate are shown in Table G-6. The correlations are quite high, suggesting that the choice of time period for dropout counting, **if it is a full twelve months**, is not critical for the comparability of dropout rates. On the basis of these results, it would seem that collecting dropout data on a spring-to-spring basis and dividing by the (included) fall membership counts would not introduce noticeable bias into dropout rate comparisons. Moreover, comparing rates based on spring-to-spring dropout records in one district with rates based on fall-to-fall dropout records in another district may not generally be problematic: results in Table G-5, especially, indicate that fall-to-fall dropout data can be used to estimate spring-to-spring dropout rates fairly accurately.

Table G-1. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates, Using 10 Percent of Full-Year Dropouts as a Summer Dropout Estimate (n=187 Districts, 183 for Grades 7 and 8)

	Fall to Fall Dropouts		Est. Spring to Spring Dropouts	
	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership
Single Grade Event Rates				
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.4%	5.0%	5.0%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.3%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.5%	6.6%	6.6%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.9%	5.8%
Synthetic Cohort Rate				
Mean	23.2%	23.1%	22.9%	22.8%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 56.1%	0% -- 57.5%	0% -- 56.7%

Table G-2. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates, Using Full-Year Dropouts minus 95 Percent of Fall-to-Spring Dropouts as a Summer Dropout Estimate (n=187 Districts, 183 for Grades 7 and 8)

	Fall to Fall Dropouts		Est. Spring to Spring Dropouts	
	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership
Single Grade Event Rates				
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	1.4%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.3%	5.0%	5.0%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.3%	6.6%	6.4%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.5%	6.8%	6.6%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.6%	5.4%
Synthetic Cohort Rate				
Mean	23.2%	23.0%	22.9%	22.6%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 55.8%	0% -- 57.2%	0% -- 55.1%

Table G-3. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates, Using Full-Year Dropouts minus 90 Percent of Fall-to-Spring Dropouts as a Summer Dropout Estimate (n=187 Districts, 183 for Grades 7 and 8)

	Fall to Fall Dropouts		Est. Spring to Spring Dropouts	
	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership
Single Grade Event Rates				
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	1.4%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.3%	4.8%	4.8%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.3%	6.6%	6.4%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.4%	6.8%	6.6%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.6%	5.5%
Synthetic Cohort Rate				
Mean	23.2%	23.0%	22.8%	22.4%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 55.5%	0% -- 57.3%	0% -- 55.1%

Table G-4. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates, Using Field Test Results for Grade Level and District Size to Determine Percent of Full-Year Dropouts as a Summer Dropout Estimate
(n=187 Districts, 183 for Grades 7 and 8)

	Fall to Fall Dropouts		Est. Spring to Spring Dropouts	
	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership
Single Grade Event Rates				
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.7%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.4%	5.2%	5.2%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.5%	6.6%	6.6%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.9%	5.8%
Synthetic Cohort Rate				
Mean	23.2%	23.1%	23.0%	22.9%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 55.8%	0% -- 57.8%	0% -- 56.5%

Table G-5. Average Single-Year Dropout Rates, Using Field Test Results for Grade Level to Determine Percent of Full-Year Dropouts as a Summer Dropout Estimate (n=187 Districts, 183 for Grades 7 and 8)

	Fall to Fall Dropouts		Est. Spring to Spring Dropouts	
	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership	Fall Membership	Estimated Spring Membership
Single Grade Event Rates				
Grade 7	0.9%	0.9%	0.7%	0.7%
Grade 8	1.7%	1.7%	1.6%	1.6%
Grade 9	5.4%	5.4%	5.4%	5.3%
Grade 10	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%	6.4%
Grade 11	6.6%	6.5%	6.6%	6.6%
Grade 12	5.8%	5.7%	5.8%	5.8%
Synthetic Cohort Rate				
Mean	23.2%	23.2%	23.1%	23.0%
Range	0% -- 56.8%	0% -- 56.4%	0% -- 57.1%	0% -- 56.7%

Table G-6. Synthetic Cohort Rate Correlations across Districts with Standard Definition (Fall-to-Fall Dropouts/Fall Membership).

Time Period for Count Reporting		Estimate of Summer Dropout Count Used in Alternative Definition				
Dropouts	Membership	D/10	D-.95S	D-.90S	$c_0 D$	$c_1 D$
Fall-Fall	Spring	.99999	.99938	.99942	.99996	1.00000
Sprg-Sprg	Fall	.99967	.98363	.98392	.99975	.99991
Sprg-Sprg	Spring	.99972	.98191	.98250	.99972	.99993

Note: D is Fall-to-Fall Dropout Count and S is Fall-to-Spring Dropout Count.

☆ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE:1992-311 [illegible]7/53027

United States
Department of Education
Washington, D.C. 20208–5651

Official Business
Penalty for Private Use, $300

Postage and Fees Paid
U.S. Department of Education
Permit No. G–17

FOURTH CLASS BOOK RATE