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ABSTRACT

This report examines current practices in defining, identifying, documenting, and tracking school dropouts in Ogden City School District (Utah), as well as demographic and personal characteristics of Ogden's high school dropouts. Data collection included a review of school and district records, interviews with administrators and staff, and telephone interviews with students identified by the school district as potential dropouts. Of the 722 students identified as potential dropouts, 123 students were interviewed and thus verified as dropouts. The majority of students dropped out during their junior and senior years, and slightly more than half of dropouts were female. While most students who dropped out were White, Hispanic students dropped out at a much higher rate in proportion to their enrollment. The most common reasons given for dropping out of school included academic failure, negative experiences with teachers and staff, personal problems, and negative experiences with other students or the school atmosphere. For Hispanic and low-income students, the perception of violence at school contributed greatly to their reasons for leaving school. More than half of students interviewed reported the desire to complete high school, and many expressed the desire for further education and training in order to fulfill career aspirations. The results suggest that students have multiple reasons for dropping out and that dropping out is a process. Recommendations are offered for improving administrative procedures to monitor student attendance; educational programming for at-risk students; the responsiveness of teachers and staff to student needs; and the schools' relationship with parents, the community, and other service agencies. Appendices include student interview protocol, summaries of attendance and tracking procedures for the district and individual high schools, and reasons for dropping out grouped by category. (LP)

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Dropping Out in Ogden City Schools: The Voice of the Students

November 1996

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Dropping Out in Ogden City Schools:
The Voice of the Students

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Final Draft
November 1996

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ABSTRACT

Dropping Out in Ogden City Schools: the Voice of the Students is a study commissioned by the Ogden City School District. The purpose of the study was several fold: to describe school and district practices in defining, documenting, and tracking dropouts; to identify the population of students that is dropping out of the city's high schools; to provide student accounts of their reasons for and circumstances around dropping out of school; and to offer implications and recommendations for improving administrative and educational practices in order to ultimately reduce the number of students who drop out of Ogden's schools.

The team of researchers from WestEd (San Francisco, CA) used several methods to obtain information for this study. The team collected and reviewed a variety of district and school documents, and conducted on-site and telephone interviews with administrators from the district's Student Services Office and the three local high schools. In addition, district student record data were collected and analyzed. Finally, all 722 students identified by the district as potential dropouts during the 1995-1996 school year were called by interviewers, yielding a total of 123 completed interviews. Students were asked a variety of questions designed to help create a portrait characterizing the circumstances around which students left school, the reasons they dropped out, and their feelings about having left school. Students were also asked about their future plans and aspirations.

In analyzing data collected from the 123 students interviewed, as well as the 722 students considered potential dropouts, the following portrait emerges. The majority of students dropped out during their junior and senior years, although there were a substantial number of students who dropped out earlier. Slightly more than half of the students who dropped out were female; among them, pregnancy and parenthood contributed greatly to their dropping out. While the majority of students who dropped out were Caucasian, Hispanic

students dropped out at a much higher rate proportional to their enrollment. Hispanic students made up only 17.2% of the district's high school enrollment; they accounted for 34.1% of the dropout sample.

Ogden's high school students appear to drop out of school for multiple reasons, which were sorted into eight general categories. The most common reasons pertained to students' failure to advance academically (77.2%); negative experiences with teachers and staff (68.3%); personal problems such as frequent moves or pregnancy (57.7%); and negative experiences with other students or the school atmosphere (48.8%). Among different demographic subgroups, certain reasons for dropping out are more prevalent than others. For example, pregnancy was cited by about 40% of the girls as contributing to their dropping out of school; while the fear of violence on campus contributed more to Hispanic students' reasons for leaving school. Many students, particularly lower income students, reported feeling discriminated against by other students and staff. The most frequently-cited reason students gave for dropping out was their perception that teachers did not care about them.

Despite their having left school, more than half of the students interviewed reported the desire to complete high school, and many expressed the desire for further education and training in order to fulfill career aspirations. While some students appeared to know what they needed to do to get back in school, most students expressed the need for guidance in determining their future options.

This study has many implications. These include: students have multiple reasons for dropping out; dropping out is a process, not a single event; current administrative procedures are not adequate; Hispanic students are dropping out at a much higher rate than are other students; students report having negative experiences with school staff, feeling alienated from school due to perceived prejudice, and being concerned about violence; student work schedules often interfere with school; and students often left school when they had fallen far behind academically. On a positive note, the majority of students wanted to complete their education

The study concludes with several general recommendations: 1) The district should review its procedures for monitoring and tracking student attendance. This should include a review of the use of the "Transfer to District" code, which has resulted in under-reporting the number of school dropouts; the improvement and standardization of communications to students and their families; and a review of the efficacy of suspensions and community service. 2) Examine and improve educational programming for students at risk of dropping out. This should include identifying needs among students who are falling behind academically as well as those who are not sufficiently challenged. 3) Evaluate and work toward improving the responsiveness of teachers and other school staff to the needs of all students. This should include ensuring that pre-service and inservice training prepare staff to work effectively and sensitively with diverse populations. 4) Extend the work of the school to include parents, the community and other service agencies. Comprehensive solutions to addressing the needs and improving the educational prospects of students should result from an inclusive process of all key stakeholders.

I. INTRODUCTION

Does Ogden, Utah have a dropout problem? Which students are dropping out, and what are their reasons? What can be done to determine the magnitude and characteristics of the dropout problem in Ogden, and, more importantly, reduce the number of students dropping out?

According to official sources, Ogden's dropout rate is very low, well below the national average. The dropout rate among secondary students within the Ogden City School District was reported as 2.63% for school year 1994-1995 (Utah State Office of Education, Annual Report 1995). Yet recent media reports suggest a very different story. According to one account (Standard-Examiner, 12/20/95), as many as one in four high school students in the district fail to graduate.

The administrative leadership of the Ogden City School District has been concerned about the issue of school dropouts for some time. Of particular concern is whether current practices are effective in defining, identifying, tracking, and reporting school dropouts. Some district staff have expressed the concern that current procedures are inadequate, causing a systematic under-reporting of dropouts within the district and a deceptively low dropout rate. Further, each high school in the district uses different procedures. As a result, the district may not be identifying dropouts in a timely manner, and students may not be getting the assistance they need to stay in school.

In addition to wanting to establish the magnitude of the dropout problem, the Ogden City School District wishes to develop a picture of which students are dropping out and why they are doing so. Different subpopulations of students may be dropping out of school for different reasons, and may need different types of assistance. For example, district leaders are concerned that inordinately large numbers of Hispanic students may be dropping out of school, and that Ogden's school system

may not be adequately equipped to educate large numbers of Hispanic English-language learners.

Understanding which students are more likely to drop out and the reasons for which they drop out will enable the district to more effectively identify and help students who are at risk. Before the leadership at the school district moves to revise prevention and intervention policies and procedures, it is felt that objective information about the nature of the problem as well as guidance in addressing dropout issues is needed.

In the fall of 1995, the Ogden City School District commissioned Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, a non-profit, educational research agency located in northern California, to conduct a study to depict high school dropouts in Ogden schools. Far West Laboratory later merged with the Southwest Regional Laboratory in Los Alamitos, CA in December 1995 and became WestEd. As an independent public agency, WestEd is committed to improving education in the western states (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah) through research, development and service.

This report is the culmination of nearly a year of investigation of the high school dropout problem in Ogden. What follows is a description of the objectives of the study, the methodology and data sources employed, and the results of the study, including key findings on district and school procedures, a profile of the students dropping out, and the reasons students give for dropping out. This report concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY.

This study provides objective data with which district policy makers can develop strategies to address the local dropout problem. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

1. To describe current practices in defining and documenting school dropouts;
2. To describe the population of students in the Ogden City School District who are dropping out of high school;

3. To determine the circumstances and reasons why students drop out of school;
4. To describe implications of the study data and provide recommendations to the district for improving district and school practices related to defining, documenting and ultimately preventing school dropouts.

DEFINING SCHOOL DROPOUTS

For nearly a decade, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), U.S. Department of Education, has taken a leadership role in working with dropout coordinators from the 50 states and the District of Columbia to develop, pilot test and implement standards for determining and reporting dropout statistics for the nation. The definition which NCES has developed in conjunction with state and local school representatives contains the following elements (NCES 1995, p2).

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 educational program;
 - b. temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or
 - c. death.

The dropout count, using this definition of a dropout, is an "event" count¹ of the number of students who have dropped out

¹ There are three different ways to define and calculate dropout rates: event dropout rates, status dropout rates, and cohort dropout rates. *Event dropout rates* measure the proportion of students who drop out in a single school year without completing high school. *Status dropout rates* measure the proportion of the population who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at one point in time, regardless of when

of school during a 365-day period from the first day of school (set as October 1) to the day preceding the beginning of the next school year (September 30). Furthermore, "summer dropouts" or students who completed one school year but failed to enroll for the next, are counted as dropouts from the year and grade for which they fail to report.

The state of Utah has largely adopted the NCES definition of a school dropout (Administrative Rule R277-419-5). In Utah, October 1 is used as the cut-off date for determining whether students are enrolled for that school year. Students who drop out of school during the summer are counted as dropouts for the grade in which they fail to enroll; students who re-enroll before the end of the school year in which they drop out are not counted as dropouts (this element is different from the NCES definition); students who transfer to a school or district-approved alternative program, including home schools, are not considered dropouts; students who drop out of school and are enrolled in an adult GED program are considered dropouts; and finally, students who complete the 12th grade without receiving a diploma are considered dropouts.

they dropped out. The status dropout rate is a cumulative rate; therefore, it is much higher than the annual event rate. *Cohort dropout rates* measure what happens to a single group (or cohort) of students over a period of time. In this report, as it is in the state guidelines for reporting dropouts, we employ the concept of event dropout and the year-to-year event dropout rates as indicators of student dropout.

II. METHODOLOGY

The focus of this study was to investigate 1) current practices in defining, identifying, documenting and tracking dropouts; 2) demographic and personal characteristics of Ogden's high school dropouts; and 3) reasons reported by students for dropping out of school. Thus, our research design emphasized interviewing district and school-level administrators and staff, and individual students identified by the district as potential dropouts. Our data sources and methods included a combination of semi-structured in-person interviews with district and school administrators, telephone interviews with students, document review of district and school documents and forms, analysis of district student record data, and semi-structured interviews with students and several parents. Table 2.1 below depicts the major research questions we explored, as well as the associated data sources and data collection methods employed to answer them.

Research Questions	Primary Data Sources	Collection Methods
1. How does the Ogden City School District define, identify, document and track its high school dropouts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District Personnel • School Personnel • District Documents • School Documents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews • Document Review
2. Who are the students that drop out of Ogden's high schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Record Data • Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data Analysis • Interviews • Telephone Interviews
3. Why do students drop out of Ogden's high schools before graduating? What are students' attitudes, concerns and aspirations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone Interviews

The primary data sources of the study were 1) a document review of the records from the Ogden City School District and from the three high schools in the district; 2) interviews with administrators and staff at the district and school levels; and 3) telephone interviews with students identified by the district as potential dropouts. Data were collected through document review and interviews, both in person and telephone.

DATA AND DOCUMENT COLLECTION, REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

The Ogden City School District Office and the individual high schools provided a variety of documents and data central to this study. The district office sent researchers monthly listings of potential high school dropouts, which were used to contact students for telephone interviews. We gleaned demographic and school enrollment data from the student rosters provided by the school district. The district office also provided information about its student tracking procedures, its coding scheme for student attendance, and provided documents and forms containing a variety of related data. Individual schools provided copies of forms and correspondence used to communicate with students and parents in regard to enrollment and attendance issues. These documents helped researchers develop an understanding of how the district and each school identifies, documents, and tracks student enrollment and deals with attendance issues.

INTERVIEWS WITH DISTRICT AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF

The research team visited the Ogden City School District on several occasions between November, 1995 and March, 1996 to formulate and revise the research design and to collect data for this study. We conducted individual and group interviews with administrators and staff from the Student Services Office, which is responsible for monitoring school dropouts district-wide. In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with district and school personnel in January, February and June of 1996. These interviews provided information on current district policies and procedures regarding the definition, identification, documentation, reporting and tracking of potential school dropouts. Our team of researchers also visited all three high schools in the district; two visits each to Ben Lomond and Ogden

High Schools and one visit to Washington High School. At each school site, interviews were conducted with the principal, the vice principal(s), the student record coordinator, the attendance officer, and the community coordinators, when appropriate. During these site visits, documents and forms used by the schools to track dropouts were collected.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS WITH STUDENTS

After consulting with representatives of the Ogden City School District, it was decided that the primary source of information concerning the reasons students drop out of Ogden high schools should be the students themselves. Obtaining information directly from students who had dropped out of school would be critical to our understanding of the issue. Therefore, students suspected by the district of having dropped out of school became the central focus of this study.

Different methods for collecting data from student dropouts were considered. The idea of conducting a mail survey was rejected because students, particularly those who have dropped out of school, would be unlikely to respond to such an impersonal and ostensibly official form of collecting information. The resulting data would thus likely be skewed by an overrepresentation of respondents who were comfortable reading and completing surveys. We also rejected the idea of conducting in-person individual or small group interviews of students, due to the inherently difficult logistics of scheduling interviews with this population. Moreover, in-person interviews with students would be highly time consuming and therefore expensive to conduct. Such time and resource constraints would severely limit the total number of students included in the study, which would result in research findings based entirely on the opinions of a relatively small number of students who might be willing to meet with us in person to discuss their school experiences.

After much deliberation among members of the research team and in consultation with representatives of the Ogden City School District, we decided to conduct telephone interviews with students identified by the district as potential dropouts during the 1995-1996 school year. It was felt that telephone interviews would provide the most cost-effective means of obtaining both the depth and breadth of student interview data required to answer the research questions.

Initially, our strategy was to select a random sample from the total of 722 students who were regarded by the Ogden City School District as potential dropouts during the 1995-1996 school year. However, an insurmountable obstacle inherent in studying this hard-to-reach population was soon encountered. Almost by definition, high school dropouts are a highly mobile and consequently hard-to-locate population. Members of the research team started to call the homes of this carefully defined sample and had a low "hit" rate of just under 15 percent. If the original random sampling plan was followed, there would be too few students interviewed, and the results would be statistically unreliable. Thus, we decided to replace the random sampling plan with a 100% sampling strategy. Returning to the original monthly rosters provided by the district office, between January and June 1996 members of the research team attempted to call each of the 722 potential dropouts listed.

All calls were placed at different times of the work day (sometimes in the early evenings), Monday through Friday. As expected, we found that many of the telephone numbers had been disconnected or reassigned, possibly indicating that the students or their families had moved. In addition, there was no answer at many households even after placing repeated calls. (As a rule, we called each household three times before giving up; in some cases we called more than three times, particularly if there was some indication, such as an answering machine message, that the student's home had in fact been reached.) In other cases, we were informed by the person answering that the student (or his or her family) had moved.

When we were successful at contacting students, we attempted to conduct telephone interviews. If students indicated that they did not have the time to be interviewed, we offered to schedule telephone interviews for a more convenient time for the student.

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A student interview protocol, developed in English and Spanish, was field-tested during the first month of this study with 24 students. The protocol was revised based on the results of these initial interviews. The final (English) student interview protocol, which includes a description of how the study was presented to potential interviewees, appears in Appendix A.

Several questions were designed to collect data that would help in developing a profile of Ogden's high school dropouts. They pertained to demographic and personal characteristics such as students' living situations, the languages spoken at home, employment experience, and the education level of parents. The remainder of the interview protocol focused on the reasons students had left school² and their experiences with school. Open-ended questions were designed to encourage students to tell interviewers, in their own words, about the circumstances surrounding their dropping out of school. (In some cases, students described more than one episode of dropping out of school.) Students were also asked to evaluate their decision to leave school and to discuss their concerns and future plans. In order to solicit responses from less vocal students, interviewers gently prompted for more information by asking follow-up questions following the major survey questions.

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

All student interviews were conducted by four staff interviewers using a common telephone interview protocol described above. Once contacted on the telephone by one of the interviewers, students were told about the study and why they were being asked for an interview. Students were immediately informed that their participation was voluntary and that information obtained through the interview would be kept confidential. Interviewers explained that WestEd's report to the school district would contain only aggregate (as opposed to individually identifiable) student information. Students were also told they would be sent a coupon redeemable for a McDonald's sandwich as a token of appreciation for their participation.³ Almost all of the students contacted consented to

²Many of the students we interviewed did not describe themselves as "dropouts", because they still attend occasionally or plan to start attending again soon. Others have returned to school or have started at a new school or program, but technically are being counted as dropouts by district standards because of failure to attend. For the purpose of understanding why students leave school before graduating, the responses of students that have re-enrolled are considered just as valid as those who have not, because their experiences with school and the issues that led to their leaving school are the same. Therefore, we have made no distinction between those that are technically enrolled or not enrolled in tabulating the reasons students drop out of school.

³ The McDonald coupons were donated by Mrs. Alice Finley of Immigrant Enterprises, proprietor of several McDonald franchises in Ogden.

an interview; only a small fraction (1.4%) declined to be interviewed.

Each telephone interview lasted between twenty and forty-five minutes, depending on the eagerness of the student to engage in conversation. Interviews were conducted in English, unless it became clear that the student would be more comfortable being interviewed in Spanish, at which point the interviewer would continue the interview in Spanish. The protocol employed an open-ended approach in order to encourage students to describe their experiences in their own words. One of the advantages of this approach is that interviewer bias was minimized because questions were not leading; students were not offered a prefabricated array of possible choices. While this approach made later coding more laborious, we felt that this was the best strategy for capturing the authentic voice of the students.

OTHER DATA COLLECTION ACTIVITIES

In addition to these primary data sources and collection methods, two other data collection opportunities were utilized during the study. First, during the second site visit to the school district in March, we happened to meet several students who were enrolled in the district's home study program. With permission granted by district personnel and the students, we conducted a focus group discussion with seven students using essentially the same questions contained in the telephone interview protocol, such as the students' reasons for dropping out, their current activities, and their future plans. While the responses of this group were not included in the sample of 123 students for analysis purposes, this interview opportunity provided some additional context and perspective on this population.

Interviewers also had an unexpected amount of contact with the parents of students when calling students for telephone interviews. When students were not home, parents were often instrumental in helping interviewers contact the student at another number, or in providing information about a good time to call back. In many cases, the parent or guardian provided information researchers needed to assign status codes to students. For example, researchers learned from a number of parents that their child had moved out of state to live with

another parent, or that their child had been incarcerated and was therefore unavailable for an interview.

As expected, many parents wanted to know who was calling their child and what the interview was about. Most parents were satisfied with a short explanation and proceeded to assist researchers in making contact with their child. In quite a few cases, the parent offered their own opinions about why their child had dropped out of school and recounted their experiences with the schools. We never explicitly requested interviews with parents or solicited their opinions. However, in about eight cases, parents had so much to say that interviewers asked them follow up questions pertinent to this study. Because they often provided sensitive information, we provided them the same promise of confidentiality given to the students who were interviewed. In several cases, the opinions offered by parents or guardians added context to the student interviews and provided points of concurrence.

These impromptu conversations with parents, while not part of the study design, provided us with a feeling for the perspective of parents. It is important to note, however, that because of the small number of parents interviewed, and the voluntary nature of their participation, it cannot be assumed that their opinions are representative of the larger population of parents. To the contrary, it is highly likely that the parents who spoke with interviewers at length were particularly distressed about their children's experience or critical of the school system's procedures or actions. Therefore, comments from parents are not assumed to be representative of other parents' views but rather used in this study to provide additional context and perspective.

LIMITATIONS OF THIS APPROACH

While the approach of this study provides rich data about the multiple reasons students left school, it also has its limitations. We were successful in conducting in-depth phone interviews with a relatively large number of students (N=123), but there is no way to ascertain whether these students were entirely representative of the larger pool of 722 students identified as potential dropouts by the district. It is possible that the sample of students interviewed by the research team were in some respects different from the population of students that

were not possible to contact. For example, evidenced by their ability to be contacted by telephone, students who were interviewed for this study were less likely to be homeless or incarcerated compared to the larger population of students that could not be reached. This represents a systematic bias that, although unavoidable, must be acknowledged.

In addition, while this study was successful in generating a wealth of student responses, it is not possible to compare the relative importance of any single response. Some students provided a greater number of responses to a specific questions than did other students. Since the data analysis employed included all responses and weighed them equally, it is likely that the views of some students were over-represented in the data. While a greater number of responses may reflect the reality that some students actually had more reasons for leaving school than others, it might also reflect a difference in how talkative students were, or how much each interviewer probed during the interviews.

Furthermore, students who gave multiple responses to a question were not asked to rank order such responses according to the relative importance of each response. It is not possible to determine, therefore, the importance of a single response compared to other responses generated by the same student in response to a single question.

Finally, there is a problem with relying heavily, as this study does, on self-report data. It can be argued that students who have dropped out of school may have negative feelings about the school system that would interfere with their ability to provide objective accounts of their experiences.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the methodology employed by this study allows the student perspective to be heard. While it is not possible to state that this study accurately reflects the experiences of all students who have dropped out of high school in Ogden, we believe that it sheds light on prevalent issues of concern to the 123 students interviewed.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Data from interviews with district and school administrators, together with copies of their forms and correspondence, were used to develop a depiction and understanding of the procedures used by the district and schools to identify and track potential dropouts.

Student interview data were coded in order to conduct a number of different quantitative analyses. A coding scheme was developed to consistently and systematically code students' open-ended responses to interview questions. These codes were entered into a database, which also included school and demographic data on each student. Demographic profiles of the students in our sample (as well as the larger number of 722 potential dropouts and the 3,447 students enrolled in the three high schools) were computed using a variety of descriptive statistics. Frequency counts were run on all survey questions. Further quantitative analyses included cross-tabulations of student school, demographic, and survey data, which allowed us to analyze the relationships between various student populations and their experiences related to dropping out of school.

SUMMARY

In order to understand high school dropout issues in the Ogden City School District, the design of the study involved collecting and analyzing data from multiple sources. These included site visits to the district office and individual schools during which research team members collected existing district and school records and conducted interviews with key administrators and school staff to learn about procedures for identifying and tracking potential dropouts. Additional interviews with district and school administrators were conducted over the telephone. The mainstay of the research design was extensive telephone interviews with 123 of the 722 students identified by the district as potential dropouts, to learn about who they were and why they left school. Data were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. An analysis of district and school staff interviews, together with a review of forms and student tracking data, allowed the research team to develop an understanding of

existing identification and tracking procedures. Student interview data were coded in order to run quantitative analyses, primarily in the form of frequency counts and cross tabulations to analyze the relationships between various student populations and their reasons for dropping out of school.

III. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In this section, the procedures used by the high schools as well as the district to identify, track, and report dropouts are described. Following this is a description of the characteristics of students dropping out of school in the Ogden School District, both the total population of suspected dropouts and those students who were interviewed for this study. Finally, there is a discussion of what was learned about why students are dropping out of high school in Ogden.

PROCEDURES FOR IDENTIFYING, TRACKING AND REPORTING SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Dropping out of school is typically not a single, precipitous event. It is a function of repeated poor attendance over time. In the Ogden City School District, the school site staff are responsible for monitoring student attendance. The principal or vice principal, together with the school's attendance officer and counselor implement procedures for recording student attendance, notifying parents or guardians about poor attendance, and intervening to change poor attendance behavior. Students who miss ten consecutive days of school without valid reasons are subject to being dropped from the school roll. Parents or guardians are notified to come to the school site to meet with the staff to discuss reasons for prolonged absences, to work with faculty and staff to improve student attendance, and if necessary, to develop alternative education plans or placements for the students. If and when these efforts fail to produce the desired improvements, school staff typically refer the student's case to the district office for disposition with a Transfer to District (TD) code or, in some cases, designate the

student as a dropout with a Drop (D) status code. In both cases, the student is then removed from the school's attendance roll.

SCHOOL PRACTICES

Each of the three high schools — Ben Lomond, Ogden and Washington — implements its own student attendance tracking and notification procedures. The type of school (whether it is an alternative high school or a comprehensive high school), the overall culture and history of the school, and the philosophy of the site administrator contribute to the differences in attendance procedures. For a detailed description of attendance and tracking procedures at each of the high schools, see Appendix B.

At Ogden High School, a series of actions are taken to notify parents and try to find remedies before suspension actions are taken. Students missing seven or more days of any period within a 60-day trimester are notified and given a failing Citizenship grade. These students must attend Advocacy Group classes every Monday; and they can make up the work either by completing packets of homework and passing a "competency test", or, in some cases, by performing twenty hours of community service or school work. Ninth graders who have been repeatedly absent are placed in a reduced afternoon session (3-5 p.m., Monday-Thursday) until they show improvement in their attendance and work. At that point, they are permitted to return to regular classes. Tenth through twelfth graders can take make-up classes in the evenings or in the summer. If attendance does not improve, the school sends a letter home. After ten consecutive days of absence, the school sends a second letter notifying parents of the student's suspension from school. If the school does not receive a response from the parent, a third letter is sent home, notifying parents of the student's suspension. At this point, the district office is notified of the suspension and the student is "transferred to the district" (TD). The school registrar then calls the District Office on a bi-monthly basis for an update on the student's status.

At Ben Lomond High School, parents or guardians are called by a pre-recorded phone message when a student has one unexcused absence from any class. After three unexcused or consecutive absences without explanation, the teachers place a call to the home. If the teachers are unable to reach parents or guardians, or after four unexcused absences, a postcard

notification goes to the home, asking for a return call to the teacher. At this point, parents who respond usually participate in a student-parent conference. Often at the conclusion of the conference, the parent and student sign an Attendance Contract that specifies strict attendance and performance requirements with clearly defined consequences (including suspension and dismissal) for non-compliance. If these efforts fail to elicit a response after ten consecutive days of absence, the attendance secretary sends another letter home informing the parents or guardians of impending "transfer to the district" office unless they come in for a meeting with the counselor and school administrator. If no appointment is made within five days, the secretary notifies the district (which, after conducting its efforts, may notify the secretary to assign a "transfer to district" or TD code). At this point, the student is withdrawn from the school enrollment.

Since Washington High School is the district's alternative high school as well as the alternative high school for Weber County, there is much more transfer mobility (mostly students transferring into Washington) than at either Ogden or Ben Lomond high schools. For the Ogden City School District, students enter Washington on a referral basis from either Ogden or Ben Lomond High Schools. Washington High School has a large number of students who are transferred to the school but who fail to register there (school officials estimate fifty "no-show" transfer students per month). For these cases, a "no-show" letter is sent home alerting parents or guardians that the student is being "released from the school roll at this time" unless the student re-enrolls by a certain date. Students are assigned to the district (TD code) if this effort to contact the home fails.

Most of the students at Washington attend the competency-based day school program. When a student is absent for five consecutive days, the school sends a request home to contact the school. If there is no response after ten days (or a total of ten consecutive absences), the student is transferred to the district. Students are hereafter given thirty days to make an appointment with their parent or guardian, after which the school assigns a Drop (D) code in the district files and refers them to the District Attendance Officer. Students who fail to complete work as contracted while at Washington are given ten-day "interventions" (i.e. suspensions). If the student does not return after the suspension or has three suspensions in a school

year, he or she is referred to the district and dropped from the school roll. Washington operates a total of seven different programs for students with different needs, such as the Young Parents Program, the Directed Study Program and the Youth in Custody Program. These programs have somewhat different attendance policies from the day school program where over half of the students are enrolled. In the Young Parents Program, for example, if the student fails to earn credit in classes or if the student is absent six or more days per six-week block, he/she is transferred to the district and required to complete 50 to 100 hours of community service in order to re-enroll.

DISTRICT PRACTICES

At the district office, the Student Services Coordinator receives either a suspension or an attendance referral notice from the schools, usually with supporting documentation of attempted home contacts and interventions the school sites have made. The district attendance officer then attempts to locate the parents or guardians by phone and by personal visits to the home. If parents or guardians are located, they are advised of legal requirements, given social services referrals and urged to contact the Student Services Coordinator to develop alternative plans for the student's educational placement. If no contact is made, the Student Services Coordinator sends a certified letter to the student's last known address to inform parents or guardians that the student has been referred to the district for non-attendance. Parents or guardians have fourteen days to bring the student to meet with the Student Services Coordinator. If the certified letter is undeliverable, the school registrar is notified and the student is dropped from the school roll. If the receipt for the 14-day certified letter is returned to the district office (indicating that the student's family has received the letter) and no contact is initiated by the family, the Student Services Coordinator completes the necessary documents and refers the case to the Attorney General's Office or Juvenile Court for actions pertaining to educational neglect. Students stay in the Transfer to District (TD) status, often for several months, until actions are taken by the Attorney General's Office or Juvenile Court.

The Transfer to District (TD) case load at the Student Services Office is substantial. For example, from January 19, 1996 to February 26, 1996, the office received a total of 119 TD referrals. The office is hampered by the shortage of staff,

especially those who speak Spanish, as well as by its lack of access to district-wide student record databases.

ISSUES IN SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PRACTICES

There are several noteworthy attendance procedures used by the district and the three high schools. All the high schools in the district have procedures for monitoring student attendance and for contacting parents and guardians to involve them in planning steps to help students stay in school. Each school attempts to comply with the ten-day rule under the state guidelines; that is, when students are absent without valid reasons for ten consecutive days, actions are taken to suspend the student from school.

There are, however, several important differences among the three high schools in the particulars in tracking student attendance. First, the schools vary in the number of consecutive days students can be absent from school before calls are made or letters are sent home. Second, the content of the letters vary somewhat in underscoring the urgency of the matter, next steps to be taken, or "make up" requirements. Finally, the consequences for long absences vary from school to school. While these differences, on the surface, may not be important for students who stay in the same school throughout their high school careers, they can be confusing for parents and students who transfer or are transferred from one school to another in the district and who are not aware of different rules operating in another school environment. This is especially important given the high rates of intra-district transfer among high school students likely to have attendance problems. Moreover, there are no (or in some cases, poor) translations of letters for non-English-speaking families. This is also important as there is a growing number of limited-English-proficient families in Ogden who may be unfamiliar with school and district policies and practices.

It is clear, however, from interviews with school administrators that the use of the Transfer to District (TD) code is an issue. The relatively low count of school dropouts in the district is, for the most part, a function of the way the TD code is being used. A TD code is assigned to three types of students: 1) those who are transferring from one school to another inside the district; 2) those who, for a variety of reasons, are referred to the district office for non-attendance; and 3) those students who are

pending juvenile court or Attorney General's Office actions. Currently, the use of the TD code is resulting in probable under-reporting of dropouts. During the 1995-1996 school year, 722 students were designated as potential dropouts. Of these students, only 124 students (17.0%) were designated as confirmed dropouts. Three quarters of the students (546 students, or 75.6%) were transferred from the schools to the district, and assigned a TD code. These students are awaiting further district actions to effect transfers within the district or for the district to contact the family by mail and through home visits in an effort to keep the students in school. As a result, most of the students who have been assigned a TD code are not counted as dropouts; they are simply considered to be in transition, or as one school staff described them, "in limbo".

It is acknowledged that schools activate the Transfer to District process for non-attendees only after repeated efforts to locate the family and bring the students back to school. These efforts usually take place over a period of several weeks. However, strictly speaking, many of the students who are "transferred to the district" meet the definition of dropouts: the students are not enrolled in a district-approved program, have been absent without cause for at least ten consecutive days, and they have no request from other schools for transcripts indicating a transfer to another district. Use of the "transfer to district" (TD) code instead of the drop (D) code maintains school and district attendance counts and at the same time under-reports the number of dropouts.

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS

An essential part of understanding why students drop out of high school in Ogden, and ultimately, determining what can be done to prevent them from dropping out in the future, is to identify which students are dropping out. Therefore, a key goal of this study was to develop a portrait of Ogden's dropout population. In order to investigate and examine which demographic and personal characteristics were most predictive of dropping out, key data contained in district student records as well as information obtained through our telephone interviews with students were analyzed. As will be further described below, these factors included gender, ethnicity, family income level, parental education levels, and English language abilities — all of which are associated with increased risk of failing to complete

school. This study looked at such characteristics in relation to the frequency with which students dropped out and the reasons they provided for doing so.

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STATUS

In order to develop a sense of the magnitude of the dropout problem in Ogden, the research team attempted to categorize the attendance status of students who were considered by the district to be potential dropouts. For School Year 1995-1996, there were a total of 722 such students, almost all identified as either dropouts (D) or Transfers to District (TD) status. Monthly lists of potential school dropouts were provided by the district's Student Records Office. Starting in January and continuing through June 1996, the research staff attempted to reach all 722 students by telephone to request interviews and to verify their attendance status. Information obtained from making these phone calls, in combination with student enrollment and demographic data contained in student records kept by the Ogden City School District, allowed the research team to categorize the 722 potential dropouts as "confirmed dropouts", "unconfirmed dropouts", and "non-dropouts". Table 3.1 below shows the results of this analysis.

	N	%
Confirmed Dropouts		
Interviewed	123	17.0
Non-Dropouts		
Attending School	59	8.2
Death	2	0.3
Early Graduation	5	0.7
Total	66	9.2
Unconfirmed Dropouts		
Moved	57	7.9
No Answer	114	15.8
No Phone/Disconnected/ Wrong Number	299	41.4
Refused Interview	10	1.4
Unavailable for Interview	53	7.3
Total	533	73.8
Total	722	100.0

As discussed in the Methodology section of this report, and shown in Table 3.1, we were unable to establish contact with a large number of students. Of the 722 students considered potential dropouts, 123 (17.0%) students were ultimately interviewed and thus verified as dropouts. These students were categorized as “confirmed dropouts” because they described having dropped out of school, even though a considerable number described having subsequently re-enrolled. An additional 66 students (9.2%) were categorized as “non-dropouts”, because they appeared not to have dropped out of school. This category includes the 59 students (or their parents) who claimed they were still enrolled and attending, as well as five who had graduated early and two students who had died.⁴ The largest category, 533 students (73.8%) were categorized as “unconfirmed dropouts”. This category includes those students who were not successfully contacted, as well as those who refused to be interviewed or were unavailable for an interview⁵. This category includes the 299 students who either did not have a phone number listed in school records, or the listed phone number had been disconnected or reassigned. There were also 114 homes at which the phone was not answered after three or more calls were placed. Finally, this category includes 57 students who had moved, according to the person who answered the telephone.

Using the state’s definition of a dropout, and given the schools’ efforts to contact the students’ families, it is likely that a large number of the 533 “unconfirmed dropouts” were indeed school dropouts. The fact that 299 of these students had phone numbers that were disconnected (without forwarding numbers), wrong, or reassigned indicates that many students had moved

⁴It was not possible for interviewers to absolutely confirm or deny students’ enrollment or dropout status. Interestingly, while 66 of the students contacted insisted that they were still enrolled in and attending school (and categorized accordingly), there were also a considerable number of the 123 students interviewed who claimed to have re-enrolled in school since dropping out. This underscores part of the difficulty in determining an exact dropout rate; not only were interviewers unable to reach and therefore account for all of the 722 potential dropouts, but even among those who were interviewed, many had disagreements with district records as to their enrollment status. It is possible, therefore, that there were, by the district’s definition, high school dropouts among the 66 who are categorized as “non-dropouts” and enrolled students among the 123 “confirmed dropouts”, despite best efforts to categorize students within this study.

⁵Common reasons for which a student was unable to be interviewed included: work schedule precluded an interview time to be scheduled, the student consistently failed to be home when called for an interview, the student was in a correctional or residential treatment facility, and the student was away for a long period of time and could not be reached prior to the end of the data collection period.

from the area. These students, along with the 57 students who were described by the person answering the phone as having moved, apparently had not had their transcripts requested, indicating that they had not enrolled in a new school. Among the 114 households at which there was no answer, it is likely that at least some of the students had moved or had dropped out. Finally, it is likely that some of the students refusing or unavailable for interviews had in fact dropped out. This is especially true for the latter, who in some cases were working full time (and thus not able to attend school). In addition, several of these students were described as being incarcerated or in a residential treatment program, which would make school attendance impossible. However, it is difficult to accurately estimate the portion of the 533 students who have actually dropped out of school without engaging in labor-intensive investigative activities, including home visits.

Among the 123 students interviewed by telephone, most if not all are in fact dropouts by state definitions. (However, as noted before, a significant percentage of these students said that they had re-enrolled in school since dropping out.) Assuming for now that the 123 students are bonafide dropouts, that means that at least 17.0 % of the 722 potential dropouts did in fact drop out during the school year. In all likelihood, the actual number of dropouts is much higher than that. If all 533 of the unconfirmed dropouts are in fact dropouts, then there would be a total of 656 dropouts among the 722 suspected dropouts. This enables us to create a range for a district-wide dropout rate of between 3.6% (123 out of 3,447) and 19.0% (656 out of 3,447). While it is not possible to pinpoint where the actual dropout rate is within this range, the evidence we collected points to it being closer to the higher end.

Many readers are likely to find it hard to conceive that the dropout rate could be as high as this given the 2.63% dropout rate for secondary students (grades 7-12) published by the state. However, this discrepancy is consistent with research findings that reported dropout rates are typically drastically lower than reflected by on-time graduation rates. While there is a nation-wide trend of decreasing dropout rates, there is evidence that on-time graduation rates are decreasing in many states and cities (Fossey, 1996). One of the main reasons is the common practice of inaccurate and non-standardized reporting. Often driven by unrealistic pressure on districts to reduce their dropout rates, districts and states have adopted formulas for

calculating dropouts that under-report or obscure the fact that many students fail to complete high school.

Obviously, calculating that Ogden's high school event dropout rate for this year is between 3.6% and 19% is not precise enough to be useful. What it suggests is that if the district's goal is to compute a more accurate dropout rate, it will need to: (1) adhere to the State's definition of dropout and count students who have been "transferred to district" for further dispositions as dropouts, or (2) devote a considerable amount of time and resources to determining the status of many hard to reach students. This would involve visits to homes, extensive interviews, and tracking new addresses and phone numbers for students who have moved. We suggest that instead of devoting a large amount of time and resources to confirming the status of many hard to reach students, the district would find it more cost effective to direct its resources at determining why students drop out of school and helping to create procedures, programs and conditions that reduce the frequency with which students drop out.

To this end, we suggest that the more useful findings of this study are the reasons that students drop out of school. While unable to contact the majority of potential dropouts, interviewers were successful in engaging students in meaningful conversations about the various issues that contributed to their leaving school before completion. This information, and the analysis that follows, should help the Ogden City School District to ultimately develop strategies that will enable a larger proportion of the city's high school students to graduate in the future.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

As explained above, a portrait of Ogden's high school dropout population was developed by analyzing data contained in student records as well as information obtained through student interviews. As a framework for developing this portrait, the research team looked at risk factors commonly associated with poor school completion rates. These include demographic characteristics such as ethnicity and gender, as well as family characteristics such as languages spoken at home (non-English proficient families), parental educational attainment, and socio-economic status (SES). A specific concern, raised by district leadership, was to determine whether Hispanic students were

more likely than others to drop out, and whether this was due to language barriers or other factors. Exploring these assumptions would provide the information to better identify which student populations are most at risk of dropping out of school in Ogden, equipping the district to intervene earlier and provide extra support for students.

For the purpose of this study, the group of students interviewed (N=123) is considered the sample of school dropouts. Tables 3.2 to 3.5 display how this sample compares to the 722 potential dropouts identified by the district and the district's 3,447 high school students enrolled during school year 1995-1996 (enrollment count as of October 1, 1995) in terms of school affiliation, gender, grade level and ethnicity, respectively. These comparisons help to draw conclusions about how similar the students defined as dropouts are to the larger population of potential dropouts, and how these groups compare to Ogden's total high school enrollment.

	Study Sample		Potential		Enrollment	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Ben Lomond	28	22.8	257	35.6	1,538	44.6
Ogden	28	22.8	170	23.5	1,581	45.9
Washington	67	54.5	295	40.9	328	9.5
Total	123	100.0	722	100.0	3,447	100.0

Among the 123 students who were interviewed, an equal number of students (22.8%) dropped out of Ben Lomond and Ogden High Schools. More than half of the students interviewed (54.5%) dropped out of Washington High School.

Among the population of potential dropouts (722), Washington High School continues to contribute the largest number of potential dropouts (40.9%); however, there appears to be a higher percentage of students dropping out of Ben Lomond (35.6%) than out of Ogden (23.5%). Overall, the distribution of the "sample" dropouts by school is roughly similar to that of the "potential" dropouts.

For district-wide enrollment figures, about 90% of the population is split between Ben Lomond and Ogden High

Schools (44.6% and 45.9% respectively) and only 9.5% of high school students enrolled at Washington. The data shows that while Washington enrolls fewer than ten percent of the district's students, it accounts for over half of the dropouts. There is a compelling reason why Washington's dropout rate would be so much higher than expected. Since Washington is the district's alternative high school, it enrolls students who have left or dropped out of the two comprehensive high schools. As a student body, the students at Washington are therefore more at risk of dropping out; many if not most of them have previously experienced difficulty in school.

Table 3.3 shows the gender distribution of the 123 students interviewed, compared to that of the 722 potential dropouts and the total district enrollment.

TABLE 3.3 DROPOUT BY GENDER						
	Sample		Potential		Enrollment	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	55	44.7	367	50.8	1,766	51.2
Female	68	55.3	355	49.2	1,681	48.6
Total	123	100.0	722	100.0	3,447	100.0

The sample group consists of slightly more female students (55.3%) than male students (44.7%). This contrasts with the gender distribution among the 722 potential dropouts and the total district high school enrollment, where males constitute just over one-half (50.8% and 51.2%, respectively) and females constitute just under one-half (49.2% and 48.6%, respectively) of the population. This difference can likely be attributed to a relatively large number of female students who dropped out of school due to pregnancy and parenting responsibilities. Nearly 40% of all female students interviewed described pregnancy or parenting as one of their primary reasons for dropping out of school. It is likely that this population is over-represented in the telephone survey sample due to the greater likelihood of young mothers being home with young children.

Table 3.4 depicts the distribution among grade levels of the 123 students in the sample, compared to that of the 722 potential dropouts and the total district enrollment.

Grade Level	Sample		Potential		Enrollment	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
9th	10	8.1	149	20.6	935	27.1
10th	23	18.7	174	24.1	846	24.5
11th	47	38.2	225	31.2	816	23.7
12th	43	35.0	174	24.1	705	20.5
Other	0	0			145	4.2
Total	123	100.0	722	100.0	3,447	100.0

While total enrollment for school year 1995 among high school students in Ogden declined steadily between the ninth and twelfth grades (935 to 705 respectively), the distribution of the sample indicates that dropout rates increase steadily between the ninth and eleventh grades (and remain more or less level in the twelfth). Among the 123 students interviewed for this study, almost three quarters (73.2%) dropped out during their junior and senior years. About equal numbers of juniors and seniors in the sample dropped out of school in 1995 (38.2% and 35% respectively). For potential dropouts, the rates also increased from ninth to eleventh grades (20.6% to 31.2%) and dropped somewhat in the twelfth grade (24.1%). Slightly more than half of the students (55.3%) dropped out in their junior and senior years.

While Caucasian students represented 76.7% of the high school enrollment in the district, only 61.0% of the 123 sample dropouts and 62.2% of the 722 potential dropouts in the study were Caucasians. Conversely, Hispanic students constituted 17.2% of the enrollment but 34.1% of the students in the sample and 30.6% of the potential dropouts. Proportionately, twice as many Hispanic students appear to have dropped out of school than their enrollment would suggest. There are no similar discrepancies between enrollment and dropout rates among the other ethnic groups. (Moreover, since so few students of other ethnic groups were interviewed in this study, these percentages cannot be considered reliable representations of the total populations.)

Table 3.5 below shows the distribution of the 123 students in our sample by ethnicity, compared to the 722 potential dropouts and the total district enrollment.

TABLE 3.5
ENROLLMENT AND DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY

	Sample		Potential		Enrollment	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Asian	1	0.8	8	1.1	50	1.5
Black	3	2.4	26	3.6	106	3.1
Caucasian	75	61.0	449	62.2	2,645	76.7
Hispanic	42	34.1	221	30.6	594	17.2
American Indian	2	1.6	17	2.4	42	1.2
Pacific Islander	0	0	1	.1	10	0
Total	123	100.0	722	100.0	3,447	100.0

Given that Hispanic students are over-represented by large margins in both the sample of 123 and the potential population of 722 students, there is a strong indication that Hispanic students are dropping out of Ogden's high schools at a much higher than expected rate.

This finding is consistent with other research that has examined high school dropout rates by ethnicity. For example, in a recent study issued by the National School Boards Association (NSBA, 1996), the nation-wide Hispanic dropout rate was reported to be 35% in 1991, the most recent year for which there are statistics. The same report concludes that while the overall dropout rate has decreased during the past two decades, when analyzed by ethnic groups, the rate among Hispanic students is the only one which is rising instead of decreasing .

In order to determine how stable students' living situations were, interviewers asked students to describe their living situation both during the time they were enrolled in school and to describe with whom they were currently living. Responses were then coded to incorporate and categorize all of the student responses. Table 3.6 displays these results. The results showed 95.1% lived at home before they dropped out of school, usually with one or both parents (39.0% and 45.5%, respectively). However, at the present time, only 83.4% were living at home. While 4.8% of the students were not living at home when they last attended school, this number grew to 16.2% who did not live at home at the time they were interviewed. Further, the number of students living with both parents declined from 45.5% to 33.3% between the time they last

attended school and the present. This indicates that there was a significant degree of change in the living situations for many students interviewed. It is impossible to assume any causal relationships between dropping out of school and changes in living situations.

TABLE 3.6
STUDENT LIVING SITUATION
WHILE IN SCHOOL AND AFTER DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL
(N=123)

	In School		After Dropping Out	
	N	%	N	%
Living at home with one parent	48	39.0	45	36.3
Living at home with both parents	56	45.5	41	33.3
Living at home with guardian	6	4.9	5	4.1
Living at home with parents/guardian and child	5	4.1	11	8.9
Living at home with other adults	2	1.6	1	.8
Total	117	95.1	103	83.4
Living with friends	1	.8	1	.8
Living with spouse/partner	0	.0	7	5.7
Living with spouse/partner and child	2	1.6	9	7.3
Living with child	1	.8	0	.0
Living in juvenile facility	1	.8	0	.0
Other	1	.8	3	2.4
Total	6	4.8	2	16.2

Many students interviewed had children between the time they last attended school and the time they were interviewed for this study. The percentage of students who had children and remained living at home more than doubled, increasing from 4.1% to 8.9%. In addition, many students were no longer living at home; among them, 13.0% were living with a spouse or partner, and more than half of them had had children.

Students were also asked about their employment status, in order to understand how working related to their school attendance. Students were asked if they had jobs and how many hours per week they worked. Table 3.7 displays students' employment status. Among the 123 students interviewed, 41.2% were working, most of them more than 20 hours a week. Another 7.3% had recently stopped working or had lost a job, while 10.6% were currently seeking work. The remaining 43.9% said they were not working; many because they were not old enough. For many students working is an economic necessity but has interfered with their ability to remain in school.

TABLE 3.7 EMPLOYMENT STATUS (N=123)		
	N	%
Working <= 20 hours/week	9	7.3
Working >= 20 hours/week	38	30.9
Seeking work	13	10.6
Recently stopped work or lost job	9	7.3
Not working	54	43.9

In order to understand what role peer influence plays in school attendance, interviewers asked students about the attendance status of their friends. Table 3.8 displays data on school attendance status of friends. More than one-third (38.2%) of the 123 students interviewed indicated that most of their friends had dropped out of school. Another 11.4% indicated that "about half" of their friends had dropped out. These findings are consistent with the comments from many of the students interviewed that they left school so as to be with friends who were no longer attending, or felt lonely in school after friends had dropped out. Table 3.8 displays data on school attendance status of friends.

TABLE 3.8 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE STATUS OF FRIENDS (N=123)		
	N	%
Most friends attend school	60	48.8
Most friends do not attend school	47	38.2
Equal numbers of friends attend & do not attend school	14	11.4
Other	2	1.6

Given the concern that Hispanic students were dropping out in large numbers and that this might be at least in part attributable to language barriers, students were asked several questions about language. Namely, students were asked which languages were spoken at home, which languages they used with their siblings and peers, and which languages they felt most comfortable using. Table 3.9 displays data on student language use.

TABLE 3.9
STUDENT LANGUAGE USE
(N=123)

	Home Language		Language with Peers		Language Most Comfortable	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Spanish only	4	3.3	3	2.4	4	3.3
English only	95	77.2	115	93.5	116	94.3
Spanish and English	22	17.9	5	4.1	3	2.4
English and other language	2	1.6	0	0	0	0

Among the 123 students interviewed, more than three quarters (77.2%) indicated that English was the only language spoken at home, and even larger proportions stated that English was the language they used with siblings and peers and felt most comfortable using (93.5% and 94.3%, respectively). While a significant number of students stated that both Spanish and English were spoken at home, most of these students apparently were able to speak English, as evidenced by the fact that only a small number of students described speaking only Spanish with peers (2.4%) or feeling most comfortable with Spanish (3.3%).⁶ Before concluding that language barriers are not a major issue among Hispanic dropouts, it should be noted that the Hispanic students interviewed may not be entirely representative of the total Hispanic student population enrolled in (or dropping out of) the district's schools. It is likely that many Hispanic students declined or were unavailable for interviews because of their limited English proficiency and that many of the households with unlisted or disconnected telephone numbers included Hispanic families with limited English speaking abilities.

Students were asked where they were born in order to help ascertain whether particular populations of foreign-born students might be experiencing language barriers. Among the students interviewed, 91.8% were born in the United States. Only ten students (8.2%) were born outside of the United States. They included four students born in Mexico, one student born elsewhere in Latin America, and five students born in other countries. It is again possible that the sample does not

⁶Among the students in the sample of 123, no languages other than Spanish or English were spoken exclusively.

accurately reflect the proportion of foreign-born students in the dropout population.

Research shows that one indicator of a student's likely educational attainment is the educational level attainment of the student's mother. Accordingly, all students were asked to describe the highest education level completed by their parents or guardian. Among the 123 students interviewed, just over one-third (35.8%) indicated that their mother (or stepmother) did not complete high school. A somewhat larger percentage (39%) had mothers who graduated from high school. While just over one-fifth (21.1%) of the 123 students interviewed indicated that their mother had gone onto college, only about half of them graduated or went on to graduate school. While these findings indicate that a large proportion of students had mothers who failed to complete high school, there is also encouraging evidence that many of their parents did succeed in school.

In order to ascertain the relationship between socio-economic status (SES) and school completion among the students interviewed, student family income levels were sought. Interviewers asked students to describe their family's income as low, middle or high. Because of the typical unreliability among teenagers to accurately report family financial information (due to lack of income knowledge as well as the tendency to report oneself as being middle class), students were asked additional questions that related to SES. These included questions regarding parental employment, including the type of work and the numbers of hours worked. Based on this information and the student's assessment of income level, interviewers followed a formula to systematically code each family as "lower", "middle", or "high" income.

According to the students' own assessments of their family income level, 39.0% reported as low income, 54.5% reported as middle income, and 3.3% reported as high income. In contrast, by the interviewers' assessments, among the sample of 123 students, about two-thirds (66.0%) of the students interviewed were low income and the other third (33.6%) were middle income. None of the students appeared to come from "high income" families. Therefore, income levels in the analyses that appear later in this report are referred to as either "lower" or "higher."

SUMMARY

Analyzing data on the 722 students considered to be potential dropouts as well as the interview data collected from the sample of 123 students, this study attempted to describe the demographic and personal characteristics of the students who drop out of high school in Ogden. Among the students in the sample interviewed, equal numbers dropped out of Ben Lomond and Ogden High Schools, and students dropped out at approximately twice that rate from Washington High. This is at least partially explained by the fact that Washington, as the alternative high school, enrolls students who have already, or are at risk of, dropping out of the other two high schools.

Slightly more than half of the students in the sample of dropouts were female, although this might be due to the large number of young mothers contacted by telephone. Of the female students who drop out, nearly 40% cited pregnancy or parenting as one of their reasons for dropping out. While the 123 students represented each high school grade level, the majority of students dropped out during their junior and senior years. The population interviewed were disproportionately Hispanic; while Hispanic students account for 17.2% of the district's high school enrollment, 34.1% of the students interviewed and confirmed as dropouts were Hispanic. Caucasian students represented 76.7% of the district's high school enrollment, but only 61.0% of the students in the sample. While English language proficiency did not appear to be a major issue in regard to high school, it is suggested that the sample of Hispanic students interviewed might not be completely representative of Ogden's immigrant and/or English Language Learner population.

Changing family and living arrangements appear to be an issue for many of the 123 students interviewed. Many students went from living from two parents to one parent around the time they dropped out of school. A large number of students had children. Many moved from living with their families to starting households of their own. More than half of the 123 students were in the labor market; almost a third of them were working full time. About half of the students in the sample reported that at least half of their friends did not attend school. The majority of the students interviewed came from low income families, and about a third of them reported that their mothers did not graduate from high school.

REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

OVERVIEW

The results of this study include findings on the reasons reported by students for dropping out of school, as well as their feelings, concerns, and aspirations related to completing their education. Forty-seven specific reasons reported by students for dropping out of school are grouped into eight broad categories for analysis. Within the eight categories, the most frequently reported specific reasons students gave for dropping out are listed. Also presented are differences among demographic sub-groups — gender, ethnicity, income-level — with respect to why students dropped out of school. Following the analysis of the reasons students reported for dropping out of school is a brief summary of the comments made by parents on this issue. Finally, this section concludes with findings on student attitudes, concerns, and aspirations regarding their education.

REASONS FOR SCHOOL DROPOUT

As explained earlier, each student was asked by an interviewer to provide, in their own words, their reason(s) for dropping out of school. Responses were coded and tabulated, resulting in a list of forty-seven distinct reasons given by students for dropping out. The forty-seven specific reasons were then grouped into eight general categories, each composed of several related reasons cited by students to explain why they left school. Appendix C lists all of the specific reasons, grouped within the eight general categories. The number and percentage of the 123 students who cited each reason is listed.

The analysis in this section includes two different types of statistics. First, in order to understand the relative importance of each category in explaining why students dropped out of school, the research team looked at the number of students who gave at least one reason for dropping out contained within a given category. Each category thus is “endorsed” by a percentage of the 123 students in our sample. (Note that the percentages do not add up to 100%. Since students on average gave seven reasons for dropping out — rarely encompassed by a single category — each student is typically represented by more than one category.)

Second, within each general category are highlighted some of the most frequently-reported specific reasons for dropping out. These are reported under each general category as percentages of students who cited the specific reason. Note that the two types of percentages cannot be compared, because one describes the percentage of students "endorsing" each category and the other describes the percentage of students citing a specific reason (contained in the given category). In addition, like the "category" percentages, the "reason" percentages do not add to 100% because students gave multiple reasons for dropping out.

Table 3.10 shows that the most frequently endorsed category is Failure to Advance Academically. This is followed, in descending order of magnitude, by Negative Experiences with Teachers and/or Staff, Personal Problems, Negative Experiences with Other Students or School Atmosphere, School/District/System Issues, Perception that School Lacks Relevance, Disagreement with School Policies or Procedures, and Family Problems. The "N" column shows the number of students who reported one or more reasons for dropping out in the given category. The "%" column reflects the percentage of students out of the total of 123 who are represented within each category. Since students provided multiple reasons and are typically represented by more than one category, the total "N" is higher than 123 and the total "%" is greater than 100%.

The reasons given for dropping out of school tended to vary by demographic subpopulations of the students interviewed. Table 3.10 compares the frequency with which different subgroups endorsed each category. The table displays the percentages of students represented within each category of response, according to gender, ethnicity and income level. From this table, it is possible to see the relative importance of each category of reason for dropping out within each subgroup, and compare it to the entire sample of students interviewed. Notable differences within demographic subpopulations are highlighted in the discussion below.

TABLE 3.10
MOST FREQUENTLY EXPRESSED REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT,
BY CATEGORY FOR ENTIRE SAMPLE AND
BY DEMOGRAPHIC SUBPOPULATIONS⁷
 (Except for Overall column, all numbers reported in percents.)

Category	Overall		Gender		Ethnicity		Income Level	
	N	%	M	F	W	H	Lower	Higher
Failure to Advance Academically	95	77.2	81.8	73.5	84.0	66.7	77.5	80.5
Negative Experience with Teachers or Staff	84	68.3	76.4	61.8	74.7	57.1	66.3	75.6
Personal Problems	71	57.7	36.4	75.0	62.7	54.8	60.0	51.2
Negative Experience with Other Students or School Atmosphere	60	48.8	49.1	48.5	45.3	54.8	55.0	39.0
School/District/System Issues	57	46.3	54.5	39.7	41.3	52.4	48.8	43.9
Perception that School Lacks Relevance	54	43.9	56.4	33.8	48.0	35.7	47.5	39.0
Disagreement with School Policies or Procedures	38	30.9	30.9	30.9	30.7	31.0	27.5	39.0
Family Problems	38	30.9	25.5	35.3	32.0	23.8	35.0	24.4

The following discussion describes each category of reason for dropping out of school. It also highlights some of the most frequently-cited specific reasons given by students within each category. Also included for each category are any notable⁸ differences found among the three demographic groups — gender, ethnicity, and income-level. Due to the non-random selection of the sample, it is not possible to make definitive conclusions about the reasons different sub-populations dropped out of school. However, there are a number of notable differences that emerge from this analysis.

⁷ Note: In the "Overall" column, each number represents the total number of individual students who reported at least one reason for dropping out within the given category. Percents represent the portion of the 123 students in the sample represented by the number in each category. In the columns corresponding to demographic subgroups, all numbers are shown in percentages; namely, the percentage of the subgroup within the sample of 123 who are represented within each category.

⁸ As a rule, differences of 10.0% or more have been highlighted. However, these are not necessarily statistically significant differences.

1) Failure to Advance Academically

More than three quarters (77.0%) of the 123 students interviewed provided one or more reasons for dropping out that related to a failure to advance academically. This category includes seven specific reasons cited by students for dropping out. The most common reasons given by students within this category were “did not attend class or school regularly” (47.2%), “did not receive the academic help needed or asked for” (31.7%), and “did not or would not have enough credits to graduate” (27.6%). This item also includes those students who found academic work too difficult (15.4%) as well as those who described not being sufficiently challenged academically (13.8%).⁹ It appears that Caucasian students may be more likely than Hispanic students to drop out of school due to failure to advance academically; this category was endorsed by 84.0% of the Caucasian students interviewed, compared to 66.7% of the Hispanic students. This may be related to another finding, described below, that Caucasian students perceived school as lacking relevance more often than Hispanic students.

“I don’t do well in school. I get poor grades because I don’t attend regularly or do my homework. I have a weak spot for immediate thrills.”

2) Negative Experiences with Teachers and/or Staff

More than two-thirds (68.3%) of the students interviewed described having had negative experiences with teachers and/or staff. This category includes five specific reasons cited by students for dropping out of school. The most frequently cited reasons included “teachers and/or staff did not care” (48.8%), “teachers and/or staff were incompetent” (22.8%) and “teachers’ and staff’s behavior was rude, offensive, or threatening” (22.8%). More male students than female students described having negative experiences with teachers or staff; this category was endorsed by 76.4% of the males compared to 61.8% of the females interviewed.

“Teachers don’t pay enough attention to the students and the principal is aloof.”

3) Personal Problems

More than half (57.7%) of the students interviewed described having had personal problems which resulted in their missing a lot of school or dropping out of school all together. This category contained eight specific reasons cited by students

⁹It is important to recall that, as explained above, students often reported multiple reasons within a given category. Therefore, within categories, the percentage figures (describing the frequency with which each specific reason was cited) often add to more than 100%.

for dropping out of school. The most frequently mentioned reason within this category was “student moved one or more times during high school” (26.8%). Other personal problems included getting pregnant (22%)¹⁰, parenting responsibilities (11.4%), serious illness (11.4%), or emotional problems such as depression (9.8%). Personal problems were cited more than twice as often by female than male students (75.0% and 36.4%, respectively) as a primary reason for dropping out of school; this is primarily due to pregnancy and parenting issues.

4) Negative Experiences with Other Students or School Atmosphere

Almost half (48.8%) of the students interviewed reported dropping out of school due to negative experiences with other students or the school atmosphere. This category includes five specific reasons students cited for dropping out of school. Within this category, the most frequently-cited reason was that school premises felt unsafe due to actual or perceived violence (27.6%). While receiving substantially fewer responses, this category also includes such items as “had negative experiences with other students”(17.1%), “felt alienated or unwelcome at the school” (14.6%) and “student was a victim of violence at school” (14.6%). There appears to be some difference within this category based on socio-economic status; lower-income students¹¹ reported more negative experiences with other students and with school atmosphere than did higher income students. This finding is consistent with comments made by students during their interviews. Many described having felt looked down upon by other students (and in some cases teachers) because they were poor, did not wear trendy or expensive clothes, or were not involved in activities viewed as the domain of higher income students, such as cheerleading. It is also worth noting that there was a difference between Hispanics and Caucasians in this category. While it does not quite meet the 10% criterion, Hispanic students cited more negative experiences with other students than did Caucasian students (54.8% compared to 45.3%). In particular, Hispanic students interviewed were more

“I got kicked out for not going to school. I didn’t go to school because I was afraid of all the violence. I didn’t feel safe at school.”

¹⁰ This percentage reflects a large response rate, given that it includes only girls. Pregnancy was a reason for dropping out of school given by 39.7% of the girls interviewed.

¹¹ As described earlier, for purposes of analysis, students were categorized as “lower” and “higher” income using a formula based on several factors, such as parental education and employment. Because this categorization is based on student self-reported data, it is not considered entirely reliable.

likely than Caucasians to experience their school as “unsafe” due to actual or perceived violence.

5) School/District/System Issues

Almost half (46.3%) of the students interviewed described one or more systemic reasons for leaving school. This category includes seven specific reasons cited by students for dropping out of school. In many cases, students had been suspended one or more times for attendance or behavior problems (28.5% and 16.3%, respectively), or had been expelled altogether (15.4%). In other cases, students described having to wait for a long time before they were able to enroll in another school or not being able to attend school until after completing a community service requirement (5.7% and 5.7%, respectively). This category of reasons was cited by more male students than female students (54.5% compared to 39.7%) and more Hispanic than Caucasian students (52.4% compared to 41.3%).

6) Perception that School Lacks Relevance

Almost half (43.9%) of the students interviewed described finding school irrelevant or less important than other activities in their lives. Included in this category are four reasons cited by students to explain why they dropped out of school. Within this category are students who “felt school was a waste of time” (17.9%) or “found other activities more compelling” (16.3%). This category also includes those students whose work schedule interfered with attending school (13.8%). Among the 123 students interviewed, males were more likely than females to describe school as less relevant (56.4% compared to 33.8%), and Caucasian students were more likely than Hispanic students (48.0% compared to 35.7%) to feel this way.

7) Disagreement with School Policies or Procedures

Almost a third (30.9%) of the students we interviewed described their disagreement with school policies or procedures as a reason for dropping out of school. This category includes four specific reasons cited by students as contributing to their decision to drop out of school. Within this category, 13.0% of the students reported feeling that administrative procedures having to do with such things as attendance and community service requirements were unreasonable or unfair. Students were divided on their feelings about school safety and discipline

“What’s the point of going to school and getting a diploma if you’re not learning anything? I’m the kind of person that, if there’s not a reason to do something, I won’t do it.”

“It’s stupid that they punish you for not attending by giving you a ten-day drop; then punish you for falling behind.”

policies and procedures; while 10.6% said they were too strict, another 8.9% described them as too lenient. School policies and procedures appear to be more problematic for higher income level students than for lower income level students. Among the higher income level students, 39.0% disagreed with school policies and procedures, compared to 27.5% of the lower income level students interviewed.

8) Family Problems

Almost a third (30.9%) of the students interviewed described having family problems that resulted in their leaving school. This category included six specific reasons cited by students to explain why they dropped out of school. Many students who responded within this category alluded to family problems but did not specify the precise nature of the problem (17.1%). This category also includes the 8.1% of students who said they left school because they had to work to help support themselves or their families financially. A number of students described having family members (or close friends) who died (4.1%) or were seriously ill (3.3%), while others needed to care for ill or disabled family members (6.5%).

"I needed to have a car to help drive my [blind] mother around. With car insurance rates so high, I have to work a lot to pay for insurance and expenses. I work full time, which made it impossible for me to be in school."

PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON WHY STUDENTS DROP OUT OF SCHOOL

As described in the methodology section above, it was not part of the study design to systematically interview parents. In the course of contacting students at home, however, we did have the opportunity to speak with quite a few parents. Typically, the information they provided helped us locate students to request interviews, or supplied the information we needed to apply status codes to students we could not reach directly. However, in about five cases we engaged in extensive conversations with parents. Because their views were pertinent, these perspectives are included in this study. However, it is important to note that, unlike the student interviews, there was no effort to reach a broad or representative sample of parents, nor did we ask them a standardized set of questions. Interviewers did not ask parents for interviews; these interviews resulted from encountering parents who were eager to discuss their experiences with the schools. Thus, it should be assumed that the parents who were interviewed had particularly strong (and likely relatively negative) feelings about the schools.

Several of the parents said that their attempts to get involved in the schools failed because the schools and the district do not welcome parent involvement. One woman, a mother of a student at Ogden High, said that she has had several children enrolled in the district's schools and has tried over the years to talk to individual teachers, school administrators and even district personnel. One of her concerns was that some of her children have learning disabilities and need special help. She described teachers as unwilling to accommodate her children's academic needs, even when she did research and brought materials into the classroom. This parent described school administrators as similarly unwilling to help. She said that some of her children ultimately dropped out because they fell so far behind academically. Similarly, another parent said that her son was very bright and started skipping school because he was bored by unchallenging classes. She said that she had spoken with teachers and administrators about his need for more challenging work, but they were unwilling to accommodate him. According to her, the school was not geared to give kids a challenge. She lamented that "the teachers act like baby-sitters, not teachers".

Several of the parents were frustrated by school practices in regard to dealing with student attendance and truancy. One parent said that although her son was repeatedly failing to go to school, school personnel never contacted her. She questioned whether teachers took attendance regularly, and suggested that they were discouraged to do so because of potentially losing ADA revenue. She expressed dismay that, although her son was missing school chronically, her only notification was an automated recording left on her answering machine stating that her son had been late or absent from school. She described being distressed that such calls were computer generated with no personal follow-up, and that the call (or phone message) could be picked up by anyone, including the student.¹² She said she wanted the school or district to do something about her son's truancy. According to her, after repeated conversations with

¹²This parent described being exasperated with the phone system at Ben Lomond School. An apparent bug in the system caused the line to disconnect almost every time she called, necessitating five or six calls before she successfully got through. She said this was extremely frustrating, and added to her sense that the school was not interested in hearing from parents. She also speculated that a parent who was not highly motivated to contact school personnel would probably have given up before actually making contact with the school.

school administrators in which she continually urged them to take disciplinary action, they finally did — by suspending him.

Several parents said that gang activity at the schools had impeded their children's ability to attend school regularly. In one case, a mother said her son was constantly being harassed by rival gangs attempting to get him to join. According to her, the only way he found to avoid this harassment was to stay away from school. This parent described feeling that the schools were not doing enough to suppress gang activity at the schools. This sentiment was expressed by other parents who spoke of their children's involvement with or harassment by gangs

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, CONCERNS AND ASPIRATIONS

In addition to asking students why they dropped out of school, we also asked students how they felt about their decision to drop out. Students were also asked about what would have helped them stay in school and what assistance, if any, they might need to re-enroll in school. Students were also asked to describe their concerns and to discuss their short-term goals.

We found that more than half (52%) of the 123 students interviewed regretted their decision to drop out of school. An additional 6% said that they had mixed feelings about leaving school, and another 5% had a different response, most frequently that leaving school had not been their own decision. Almost all of these students explained that they regretted not completing high school because they felt an education was necessary for enhancing or being successful in life.

While over a third (36.6%) of the students interviewed said that leaving school had been a good decision for them, most of these students (68.9%) explained that this was because they had subsequently enrolled in another school or education program that they liked better. (Most commonly, this response was given by students who had dropped out of Ogden or Ben Lomond, and had gone on to Washington, where they favored the smaller class sizes and competency-based instruction.) Another 26.7% responded that what they were doing now — typically working or raising a family — was more practical or relevant at this time in their lives. A small percentage of these students (13.3%) described being better off not being in school. This response was given by a number of students who felt

"The younger kids don't understand the importance of school; I'm worried about my cousin and brother who are following in my footsteps."

unsafe due to violence or gang activity and felt that leaving school was a necessity.

When asked what could have helped them stay in school in the first place, the majority of students expressed the desire for changes in school personnel or pedagogy. Almost half the students (48.0%) stated that "better teachers" would have prevented them from dropping out. About a third of the students (34.1%) also suggested that "better teaching methods" would have helped. Another 31.7% of the students suggested that "better administrators or staff" would have made a difference for them.

Students were also asked what help, if any, they would like from the schools to re-enroll. Surprisingly, one out of three (32.5%) students stated that they have re-enrolled since dropping out: either at their original school, a different high school in the Ogden School District, a high school outside the district, or a different type of educational program. As stated earlier, there was no way to verify student enrollment. An additional 22.8% of the students said that they were hoping or planning to re-enroll in the future. Thus, over half (56.3%) of the students said they had either re-enrolled or wished to do so in the future. Almost a quarter (23.6%) of the students interviewed said that they would like help from the school or district to enroll or learn about options for enrolling.

When asked to describe their greatest concern, 42.3% of the students interviewed said that it was getting a good job. For many of these students, part of this entailed first completing their high school education and even getting more education or training. Almost a quarter (23.6%) of the students said that their primary concern was finishing their education. One out of five (20.3%) said that their biggest concern was violence, including or especially gang violence.

Finally, students were asked two questions about their short-term aspirations: what they hoped to accomplish by the end of the current year and what they hoped to accomplish within two years. Education and employment were the most common goals. Almost half (42.%) of the students interviewed stated that they want to get a job (or a better job) by the end of this year, while 30.9% stated a desire to complete high school by the end of this year. As for two years from now, 43.9% said they hoped to get a job (or a better job), and 20.3% hoped to complete

high school. Almost a quarter (22.0%) of the students hoped to start a career or technical training program; a similar number (22.8%) hoped to enroll in a college or university program.

SUMMARY

In summary, the findings above suggest that high school students in Ogden drop out of school for multiple, often interrelated reasons. Among the sample of 123 students interviewed, each student provided an average of seven reasons for dropping out of school. The most common reasons pertained to students' failure to advance academically, negative experiences with teachers and staff, personal problems, and negative experiences with other students or with the school atmosphere itself. Among different demographic subgroups, certain reasons for dropping out are more prevalent than others. For example, pregnancy was cited by a large proportion of the girls as a factor in their dropping out of school, while the perception of violence at school contributed greatly to the reasons that Hispanic and lower-income students left school. More than half of the students we interviewed regretted having dropped out of school, and most of these students reported wanting to complete high school and further their educations.

IV. STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

By examining the issues around why students are dropping out of high school, the Ogden City School District is tackling a difficult and contentious issue. There are many different perspectives to be looked at when exploring the issue of school drop out and what should be done about it. This study, by focusing on students who have dropped out of school, offers a perspective not commonly viewed. This section discusses the implications that emerge from the findings presented above and suggests potential policy, administrative, instructional, and programmatic actions that might be considered in addressing the high school dropout problem in Ogden.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF STUDY RESULTS

Students have multiple reasons for dropping out.

This study shows that high school students in Ogden drop out of school for multiple reasons. On average, the 123 students we interviewed each gave seven reasons for dropping out of school. Reasons students gave for dropping out of school are consistent with those described in the research literature. For example, the students surveyed as a part of a national dropout study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (1993) gave as primary reasons for dropping out such issues as not liking school, not being able to keep up with school work, pregnancy and parenting, not getting along with teachers, and conflicts between job and school schedules. In addition, the results of this study show that the reasons students drop out are typically interrelated. For example, students who work long

hours tend to miss a lot of school days; this often leads to falling behind academically (or getting suspended), and eventually to dropping out. This implies that efforts to remedy the dropout problem should themselves be comprehensive strategies that address the multiple needs of students at risk of dropping out of school.

Dropping out is a process, not a single event.

Students do not drop out of school “overnight”; rather, dropping out is a phenomenon that occurs over time. Often, dropping out is the culminating point of a long downward spiral that occurs over months or even years. Most of the students we interviewed were not able to pinpoint an exact moment at which they left school; more typically, they described attending school less and less regularly. In fact, many of the students still do not consider themselves “dropouts”; rather, they explained that they just haven’t been going to school lately. Typically, students who eventually dropped out of school had been having trouble with school for a long time. “Sloughing”, or skipping classes, appears to be symptomatic of entrenched problems that have developed over time. Addressing the problem early on, and focusing on the root causes rather than the symptoms, is likely to be more effective at preventing such students from dropping out of school. In addition, early intervention approaches are bound to be far more cost-effective than devising and implementing interventions later in the process.

Current administrative procedures are not adequate.

Several administrative issues emerge from this study. The use of the Transfer to District (TD) needs to be reviewed. The apparent overuse of TD codes has led to the systematic under-reporting of actual dropouts. Standardizing and streamlining the procedures the schools and district office use to monitor and track attendance would help to track students and reduce the confusion students experience when they transfer from one school to another. In addition, scant staff resources at the district office to process transfers from the schools have created a large backlog of students who are in “limbo”. More staff are needed to contact families, make home visits and file notifications with the Attorney General’s Office or the Juvenile Courts to follow up on students who have stopped attending school.

Hispanic students are dropping out at a much higher rate than are other students.

Proportionately, there were twice as many Hispanic students in the sample of student dropouts as their enrollment in the district would suggest. This reflects a similar overrepresentation of Hispanic students in the larger sample of 722 potential dropouts district-wide. Among the Hispanic students interviewed, the most common reasons cited for dropping out related to their failure to advance academically, negative experiences with teachers, and problems with other students and at school, especially concerns about violence. While language barriers did not appear to be a large factor with the sample of students who were interviewed, there is reason to believe that this issue needs further investigation by the district.

Students describe having negative experiences with teachers and/or staff.

The most frequently cited specific reason students gave for dropping out of school was that teachers “don’t care”. Many students reported that they were discouraged with school and dropped out because they did not get the help they needed or asked for from teachers. Many described their teachers as seemingly uninterested in teaching, even incompetent. At worst, teachers and administrators were described by many students as “offensive” and “prejudiced”. While some students sympathetically explained that teachers were overworked and class sizes were too large for teachers to give adequate individual attention to students, the majority of students reported that having “better teachers” would have prevented them from dropping out in the first place.

Students feel alienated from school, particularly as a result of perceived class or ethnic prejudice.

Among their peers, interestingly, more students described feeling discriminated against for being poor or “unpopular” than for being non-white. They described this discrimination in terms of not being part of the “popular” crowd, not being an athlete or a cheerleader or not having the right “look” or clothing. Quite a few of the Hispanic students, however, said that they felt teachers and administrators were prejudiced against Mexicans or made assumptions about their behavior on the basis of their

ethnicity. Ogden High School was described as particularly intolerant of ethnic and income differences, whereas Washington High School was repeatedly described by students as a place where they were accepted regardless of race or ethnicity or socio-economic status.

Students drop out of school as a result of falling behind academically.

More than a quarter of the students interviewed reported dropping out of school because they fell behind in credits and realized that they would not be able to catch up in time to graduate. In many cases, students described learning from their guidance counselors during their senior year that they would not be able to graduate due to insufficient credits. Frequent "sloughing" or extended absences caused students to get behind in class, making it harder for them to catch up.

Students who dropped out had a history of suspensions for poor attendance.

More than a quarter of the students interviewed described having been suspended at least once in the past for poor attendance. Many described having been suspended a number of times. For many of these students, this apparently did not get noticed or acted upon by their parents. Rather, students described suspensions as helping to perpetuate their habit of non-attendance. Several of the students we interviewed commented that getting suspended as a punishment for "sloughing" was not an effective method for getting them to return to school. Rather, they reported that it increased their alienation from school, contributed toward their getting further behind, ultimately and made it harder for them to return.

Students are concerned about violence at or near the school campus.

More than a quarter of the students interviewed said that school premises felt unsafe because of violence. The majority of these students described feeling unsafe due to seeing or hearing about incidences of violence or gang activity. One out of seven students interviewed reported personally having been a victim of violence at their school, which in some cases led directly to their decision to leave school. Concerns about violence and

safety were more frequently cited as a reason for dropping out among Hispanic students than among Caucasian students.

Work schedules often interfere with being successful students.

More than a third of the students interviewed reported having jobs. Even when work hours did not directly conflict with school schedules, students reported that working in the afternoon and in the evenings impeded their ability to complete homework assignments. In addition, many said that working evening shifts left them too tired to get to school early in the morning. Moreover, a substantial number of students interviewed described needing to support themselves or their families financially. This was particularly true for students from lower income families.

Students report wanting to complete their educations; many require assistance in doing so.

The majority of the students we interviewed described regretting their decision to leave school and reported wanting to finish high school or somehow further their education. While many students appeared to know what they needed to do to return to school or enroll elsewhere, about one quarter of the students we interviewed described needing help from their school or district to learn about options and procedures for enrolling or re-enrolling. Many of these students appeared to lack the knowledge or parental support and guidance they need to help them take the needed steps.

Comprehensive and community-based prevention and intervention strategies are needed.

As noted above, the reasons for dropping out of school are many. Some are related to the school environment; such as academic performance; others pertain to students' personal and family lives, such as students' need to care for family members or support themselves or families by working. Still others involve larger community issues, such as school safety. Therefore, school-based solutions alone are not enough. Broad-based community planning is necessary. Such efforts should include parents and community members, as well as agencies that provide services to or have jurisdiction over students and their families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the title suggests, this study attempts to represent the student perspective on their experiences with school as well as their reasons for leaving school. Before venturing to offer recommendations based on these findings, it is important to reiterate that the vast majority of our data came directly from students. This study does not attempt to present all sides of the issues; we did not interview teachers or guidance counselors, we did not interview a randomly selected group of parents, and we did not conduct classroom observations to observe instructional practices. Rather, the only claim made here is that the findings presented in this report accurately reflect the voices of the 123 students we interviewed during the 1995-1996 school year.

Our recommendations are bounded by the same limitations. As a whole, these recommendations consist of several lines of inquiry or next steps the district can take. They are heavily influenced by what we heard from the students we interviewed. Further, these recommendations do not include any specific programmatic responses for dealing with the issue of school dropouts; such an undertaking should be planned and developed collaboratively, with the involvement of key stakeholders including teachers, administrators, parents, students, service providers, and community representatives.

1. Review administrative procedures in monitoring and tracking student attendance.

A thorough review of the administrative procedures used by the district and the individual schools to monitor and track student attendance and to report dropouts is in order. This review process should include all key attendance and student records staff in the district as well as at the building level. This review should include the way Transfer to District (TD) codes are assigned and used, communications to students and parents, suspensions for unexcused absences, and the use of community service as a punishment.

The widespread use of the Transfer to District (TD) code has resulted in under-reporting of school dropouts. If schools are unable to contact a student's family after repeated attempts and if the student has been absent without cause for more than ten consecutive days, the State rule should be applied to designate the student as a dropout. In addition, current efforts in

processing TD students at the district level exacerbates the problem because of the delay. In part, lack of staff resources is an issue; in part, the legal processing by the judicial agencies creates further delays.

The communications schools and the district office send to students' homes should carry concise and consistent messages with clearly stated required actions and consequences for failure to respond. All communications should be available in Spanish as well as English. It is essential that documents and correspondence are translated carefully to ensure that communications and instructions are clear and consistent.

A review of the efficacy of the ten-day suspension rule should be conducted. It appears that suspending students for poor attendance might be contributing to the dropout problem, rather than improving attendance, which is presumably its underlying intent. Since many students do not have parental supervision at home during the school day, their parents might not even be aware that their child has been suspended.

Finally, the practice of using community service as a penalty for absenteeism needs to be reviewed. In many cases, performing community service at the expense of attending school and keeping up with coursework has resulted in students' falling further behind academically. In addition, the difficulty students have finding community service opportunities, or arranging and paying for childcare to undertake it, appears to be generating negative feelings about and undermining the goals of community service. Parents and students, as well as school and district staff, might be included in this review and in exploring alternative methods for discouraging absenteeism.

2. Examine and improve educational programming for students at risk of dropping out.

There is sufficient evidence from this study to suggest that while the school system is succeeding in educating a majority of students in Ogden, there are many students who are at risk of dropping out because their educational needs are not being met. For example, the fact that twice as many Hispanic students drop out of school as their ranks in the school system would suggest is an alarming statistic. If the system is indeed failing these students, the solution to the problem does not lie solely in the development of various intervention programs such

as those currently offered in the school system (e.g. Youth in Custody, Afternoon Classes, Young Mothers Program). While these programs offer an invaluable service to students in need, they are apparently not sufficient to prevent large numbers of students from dropping out. The district must look into regular classrooms to evaluate how instruction is accommodating individual differences; how coursework can be made more relevant to the lives of the students and be better integrated across subject matter; and made more student-centered and inquiry-based.

3. Evaluate and work toward improving the responsiveness of teachers and other school staff to the needs of all students.

The most frequently stated issue among students interviewed was their negative experiences with teachers and staff. Among each demographic subgroup (e.g., ethnicity and gender) students felt that teachers did not care about them. The necessity of having caring adults in their lives if they are to succeed in school and other endeavors is well documented in the research literature. The district should evaluate how well school administrators, teachers and staff are tending to students' needs for positive, respectful and caring guidance and instruction. The district might examine the content of pre-service and inservice programs to evaluate whether administrators and teachers are being adequately trained and prepared to work with Ogden's students. In addition, the district should consider providing training district-wide to prepare administrators, counselors, teachers and other staff to work with an increasingly diverse student population, and to increase intercultural sensitivity.

4. Extend the work of the school to include parents, the community and other service agencies.

The findings of this study suggest that the solutions to the school dropout problem do not lie entirely within the walls of the school system. Student accounts of feeling alienated in school; of violence in and around school; of dealing with pregnancy and parenting; of having to work to support their family; and of overt or covert accounts of prejudice they experience suggest that the responsibility for developing solutions should be shared with agencies that provide services to children and their families. The schools may need to take a

leadership role in coordinating the efforts of parents, community groups, a variety of social service agencies and the judicial system to develop more aligned and child-centered programs for students and their families.

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APPENDIX A STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Draft Interview Protocol
Ogden City School District Drop Out Study
1/31/96

Place Student information here

Interviewer:	Time & Date:
Interview Location:	

Introduction to Interview

Verify participant identity: name, age, phone number, address, exit date; school.

Introduce yourself.

"My name is __, I work for WestEd, a non-profit organization in San Francisco, CA. We're doing a survey for Ogden City School District. We want to learn from students themselves what schools can do to help students stay in school. We are interviewing students who might have left school during this current school year."

"We're calling you because your name was selected at random."

Do you have 15 minutes or so to be interviewed?. Participating in this survey is totally voluntary and completely confidential. We won't make any reference to your name, and you won't be able to be identified. We can't pay you for the interview, but we can give you a gift certificate from McDonald's for taking part in the survey.

The results of this study will be used by the Ogden schools to try to improve school programs for students.

If participant agrees, continue. If time is not convenient, schedule another time for telephone or in-person interview.

Next Interview Time/Date:	
Location of Interview:	

Please feel free to express your opinions (tell it like it is); that's the only way for us to get good information to help future students stay in school.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we get started?

Section 1:

Comments

1. While you were in school, where were you living and whom were you living with?

At Home:

- with only one parent
- with both parents
- with a guardian
- with another person or people who were not guardians

Not at home:

- alone
- with a friend/friends same age
- with spouse/partner
- with spouse/partner and child
- with child

Other: _____

2. Where do you now live and with whom?

At Home:

- with only one parent
- with both parents
- with a guardian
- with another person or people who were not guardians

Not at home:

- alone
- with a friend/friends same age
- with spouse/partner
- with spouse/partner and child
- with child

Other: _____

3. Are you currently working?

- Yes, less than 20 hours/week
- Yes, 20 hours or more/week
- No.

4. Are more of your friends in school?

- Yes
- No

If they are not in school:

5. Are more of your friends working?

- Yes
- No

6. Where were you born?

- In the US - State _____
- Other Country - Country _____

7. How old were you when you came to the US?

Age: _____

8. How long have you lived in the US?

- Less than one year
- Between 2 and 4 years
- More than 4 years

9. What language or languages are spoken at home?

- Spanish
- English
- Spanish and English
- Other(s): _____

10. What language(s) do you speak with brothers, sisters, and friends?

- Spanish
- English
- Spanish and English
- Other(s): _____

11. Which language do you feel more comfortable using?

Comments

- Spanish
- English
- Spanish and English
- Other(s): _____

12. What is the highest level of school completed by your mother, father or your guardian?

	Level of Schooling	Mother	Father	Guardian
1	Elementary School			
2	Middle School			
3	High School			
4	Attended college without graduating			
5	Graduated college			
6	Postgraduate studies			

7 other
8 NA

13. Does your mother, father, or guardian work outside the home?

- Mother does not work outside the home
- Mother works less than 30 hours
- Mother works 30 hours or more

Kind of job _____

- Father does not work outside the home
- Father works less than 30 hours
- Father works 30 hours or more

Kind of job _____

- Guardian does not work outside the home
- Guardian works less than 30 hours
- Guardian works 30 hours or more

Kind of job _____

14. If you had to describe your family's income level, what would you choose?

- Low income level
- Middle income level
- High income level

Section 2:

15. Now I'd like to you to tell me a bit about why you decided to leave school. What were your reasons for leaving?

- Failure to Advance Academically / Linguistic Difficulties (I wasn't doing well in school) -**
(e.g.: failing grades; language difficulty; not enough units to graduate)

- Lack of Positive Experiences/Connectedness with Peers and Adults in School (I didn't feel comfortable in school) -** (e.g.: no one cared, all the kids and the teachers picked on me, I didn't feel that I belonged; no one helped me)

- Lack of Relevance of School to Student's Current Needs and Perceived Future (I didn't see how finishing school will help me)** (e.g.: I don't see what school is going to do for me, why am I learning about Algebra)

- Personal Problems (I had some personal problems)** (e.g.: pregnancy, personal tragedy, drugs and alcohol,)

- Family Problems (I had some family problems)** (e.g., Parental/guardian illness or disability; work to help support family, care for siblings)

- Other Reasons:**

Section 3
Suggestions for Improving School Programming

16. Do you think that leaving school has been a good decision for you?

- Yes
- No

Could you tell me a little more about why you believe that?

17. Looking back, what would have helped you to stay in school?

18. Now that you are out of school, is there anything the schools can do to help you re-enroll?

19. [If participant has re-enrolled in school], What caused you to decide to re-enroll?

Section 4
Current Concerns and Future Plans

20. What are you most concerned about (worried about) these days?

21. What do you hope to be doing by the end of the year?

- Returning to high school
- Going back to another school: _____
- Completing a GED
- Looking for Work/ developing a career
- Starting a family
- Other: _____

22. What do you hope to be doing in 2 years?

- Returning to high school
- Going back to another school: _____
- Completing a GED
- Looking for Work/ developing a career
- Starting a family
- Other: _____

23. **Other Comments:** Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about?

Thanks for sharing your time with me, and once again, rest assured that your answers will be kept completely confidential.

Where would you like us to send the McDonald's coupon to?

Address:

APPENDIX B ATTENDANCE AND TRACKING PROCEDURES

Key Elements:

- Ben Lomond is located in older, working-class neighborhood of Ogden
- Enormous physical plant has three buildings with two independent wings and 72 external doors, on 48 acres with no fences separating adjoining residential properties
- Principal and two Assistant Principals are new as of 1995-96 school year; staff of 75 teachers and 25 non-teaching employees serve 1,556 students
- School has had traditional college prep format (including senior year term paper) and a strong vocational program (some ATC faculty on-site)
- School leaders working hard to change school culture, involve community, and deal effectively and openly with attendance and dropout challenges (see Key Issues below)

Key Issues:

- School currently undertaking significant changes in policies, curriculum, and master schedule to deal with critical issues:
 - 500-550 freshmen enter/year, while 250 graduate 4 years later; only 15-20% attend college; ATC option greatly underutilized
 - BL (under-enrolled) forced to accept 200-300 transfer students per year (generally the area's "problem students") via state's School Choice policy
 - Previous school policies and efforts regarding attendance and performance (e.g., slow-track School within school, school-offered Home Study Program, automatic transfers to alternative high school) maintained artificially low dropout count and isolated/off-loaded poor attendees; these policies/programs have been changed/removed
 - Changes have generated resistance from some teachers who now must deal with these students (appears to them like school "has gone to seed"), while some students reel as they face new realities
- Approx. 50-100 students "play the system": full-time BL students who attend 1-2 times/week in order to avoid transfer to district
- Other issues include gang activity and weak parent support on attendance problems

Procedures:

1. Preliminary intervention: if student is absent from *any class once*:
 - Automated, pre-recorded phone message (multiple redial if no answer) automatically sent to student's home if he/she misses one period or more
 - Assistant Principal, parent volunteer, 5th period teacher, part-time staff assistant also call homes of absent students
2. After student has **three unexcused** absences or three *consecutive* absences without explanation:
 - Teacher calls parent/guardian directly

- Note: Each of the student's teachers is expected to call, implying that a parent/guardian could receive multiple calls if absent from multiple classes
3. After student has **four unexcused** absences or four *consecutive* absences without explanation:
 - If teacher has not yet been able to reach parent/guardian by phone, completes Postcard (Attachment A.) and forwards to Attendance Secretary, who addresses and mails to student's home
 4. If response to postcard or phone calls is received, Assistant Principal schedules Student Conference or Student-Parent Conference:
 - **Attendance Contract** usually discussed and agreed to (Attachment B.)
 - Contract includes strict attendance and performance requirements, with clear consequences defined up front
 5. If no response to postcard is received within 5 school days, teacher forwards Attendance Referral Form (Attachment C.) to Attendance Secretary.
 6. Attendance Secretary prepares and sends TD Warning letter (Attachment D.):
 - "[student] was referred to the office for TEN CONSECUTIVE DAYS OF ABSENCE."
 - "We must have a meeting with a parent/guardian, the student, counselor, and a school administrator"
 - "If no appointment has been made by the indicated date, state law requires that we TRANSFER your student to the District Office."
 7. If no response to letter within 5 days from date letter sent, Attendance Secretary completes Ogden CSD Referral to Attendance Officer (Attachment E.) and forwards to District Office Attendance Officer:
 - Attendance Secretary awaits word from District Office before assigning TD code on system (this could be a 2-4 week wait period)
 - Once TD placed on student's system record, secretary transfers student's paper file from Active to "Dead" File, and notifies teachers to withdraw student from roll book
 7. If student's attendance is spotty rather than absent 10 days consecutively, Assistant Principal tracks each of these students:
 - 50 students spoken to each Friday
 - 20 students spoken to Monday-Thursday
 - This may lead to use of Attendance Contract (see Step #4 above)

Key Elements:

- Ogden High School has a striking, Art Deco facility; projects a tradition of preparing its students for college
- Strict attendance policy: student missing more than 7 days of any class within trimester (=3 months) is given failing Citizenship grade (Attendance Unsatisfactory), which can preclude graduating
- Students with attendance issues must attend "Advocacy Group" one hour every Monday, where each student's attendance is reviewed individually by the advocacy teacher; students also given opportunity on Monday from 1:30-2:35 PM to receive tutoring from any teacher in whose class they may need additional assistance
- Advocacy teacher is also T.A.G. (tracking attendance groups) teacher; this teacher will call at least once per 30-school-day period to inform parents/guardian of any academic or attendance issues
- Approx. 35 9th-grade students placed in PM School for poor academic performance or non-attendance: Reduced schedule (3-5 PM M-Th), one teacher, smaller class; students "earn the right to return to regular program" through at least 3 weeks of good attendance and completed work; if not, student could spend rest of year in PM school
 - Note: Student tardy in PM school is considered automatically absent for day
- 10th-12th graders with poor academic performance or non-attendance must take make-up classes outside of regular curriculum (from 3-5 PM, M-Th)
 - Can take make-ups as elective classes
 - Required to take English and pre-algebra as night class or summer school (\$35 /qtr.credit at Ogden or Ben Lomond, \$15/qtr.credit at Washington Alternative)

Key Issues:

- Principal reports significant attendance problems with 9th graders
- Ogden allowed to transfer 133 students to Washington Alternative per year (have sent 109 this year as of 1/8/96); "95% of these students have failed to a point that they cannot graduate from Ogden High at this point."
- Significant gang activity on campus; about 45 students identified; two gang-intervention counselors conduct home visits, conflict resolution training, group work with students

Procedures:

1. Attendance taken at beginning of class, and collected 10 minutes later by student aides:
 - If student recorded absent and is actually tardy, must receive documentation from teacher and effect change him/herself at office
2. Attendance credit report (Attachment A) sent home at mid-trimester (6th week) to document absences and tardies (3 tardies =1 absence)
 - Students with poor attendance must complete "packet" of 7 hours of homework and pass a "competency test" on material to receive credit for course

- 20 hours of community service (or school office work) sometimes used in lieu of packets to make up for missing more than 3 of 12 Advocacy classes per trimester
 - Student Contract (Attachment B) and Short Form Progress Report (Attachment C) used to track students with attendance difficulties
3. Excessive Consecutive Absences Report (#105) printed daily based on parameters set by Vice Principal and distributed to Tag teachers
4. T.A.G. teachers (assigned 24 students each) call absentees at their homes:
- Document on Ogden High Phone Contact Record (attachment D)
 - Additional calls made by Attendance Officer, 4 Counselors, Vice Principal and Principal
5. If in 10 days no contact is made (e.g., no phone, no answer), or student's attendance does not improve (more than 5 but fewer than 10 absences), First Letter is mailed to home (Attachment E):
- Per site visit interview, parent must visit school with student within 3 days
 - Note: Letter only indicates number of absences and suggests parent contact office "if you have any questions concerning this notification"
 - Note: Spanish version (Attachment F) of First Letter does not correspond to English version; speaks of an "alarm level" that the student has been placed at.
6. If no response or successful contact occurs within 10 days of sending First Letter, Second Letter is mailed to home notifying parent of student's suspension from school
- Annotation on First Letter suggests that the only difference between first and second letter is addition of handwritten note "asking the parent to contact Mr. Wilcox within 5 days after receiving this letter"
 - Vice Principal notes that a student is never suspended without school staff first notifying the parent
7. If no response or successful contact occurs within 5 days of sending Second Letter, Third Letter (Attachment G) is mailed to home notifying parent of student's suspension to District Office:
- "According to our records, student has been absent ten or more consecutive days"
 - "In order to be in compliance with Utah State Law, we must remove from the roll any student who has missed ten or more consecutive days"
 - Parent told to make appointment with District Office "in order to reinstate your student"
 - Note: Letter does not explicitly state that student has been suspended; annotation indicates that "yellow suspension notice is attached to this letter for parent" (i.e., Notice of Suspension Form #B-104, Student Copy, Attachment H)
8. "TD" code assigned on Attendance Screen (and efforts documented on memo screen)

9. Attendance Aide fills out Notice of Suspension (B-104, above) and District Office's Student Services Due Process Summary Form (Attachment I) and forwards to District Office

10. At end of Trimester, School Registrar calls District Office to receive update of student status:

- If no word by end of school year, student file transferred to "Inactive" status

17/17

Key Elements:

- Washington Alternative is a by-referral-only school, either from district office or from area high schools; serves Ogden CSD and Weber County SD; has open entry/exit
- Has seven programs (Attachment A); Day School program is based on demonstrating competencies, not on completing credits.
- Competency system based on assessed performance in key skill areas (communication, critical work skills, math, state-required occupational skills known as SEOP, and core lab) regardless of credits accumulated to date (Attachment B)
- Students must sign referral form agreeing that placement at Washington is permanent (Attachment C)

Key Issues:

- Students transferred out of source school before transferring into Washington, at discretion of Counselor of sending school; 3-week backlog in orientation schedule increases risk of students being no-shows or falling through cracks
- Counselors sometimes must do group orientations instead of individual orientations due to backlog
- Approximately 50 transferred students per month are "no-shows" (see Step 1. below)
- Competency system is not easily convertible to credit system; conversion required for students who "roll over" into Adult Education program
- Students come with low-level literacy skills (75% below 9th grade level); those previously passing with low grades are shocked by new, competency approach
- "Intervention" for missing competency production deadline: 10-day suspension. Up to 3 of these possible before student is "dropped for the rest of the year."
- English language learner population growing; gangs are present on campus

Procedures for Day School Program (approx. 250 students, or 53% of population), **ATC Program** (approx. 60 students, or 13% of population) and **PM School Program** (approx. 30 students, or 6% of population):

1. If student does not appear once they are transferred:

Parent/guardian sent **No-Show** letter (Attachment D):

- "Being released from the school rolls at this time"
- Must contact school to be assigned re-enroll date
- If no contact within 30 days, consider dropout, assign "TD" code, complete District Referral Form (Attachment E), attach documentation of contacts with copy of transcript, and send to District Office

2. If student is absent 5 consecutive days:

At the request of teacher, parent/guardian sent **5-Day absence** letter (Attachment F):

- Requests valid excuse or doctor's note
- Must contact school within 3 days of receipt of letter

- If no response in 5 days (i.e., 10 days total), assign "TD" code
- After TD assigned, student given 30 days to make appointment at school w/ parent
- If no reply after 30 days, and 18 years or older, reassign to Adult Education Center in district
- If no reply after 30 days, and under 18 years, assign "D" code, complete District Referral Form (Attachment E), attach documentation of contacts with copy of transcript, and send to District Office
- If student reappears after 30-day limit, Principal and District Office person decide whether re-enrollment via District office is necessary

3. If student missing production deadlines (i.e., not getting work done, including spotty attendance):

- Student receives a "10-Day Intervention": i.e., required to leave school for 10 days, and parent asked to visit school with student upon return (no letter sent home)

4. If student does not return after 10 days:

Parent/guardian sent **10-Day Return** letter (Attachment G):

- "Your son/daughter did not return for his/her parent teacher meeting after their 10 day intervention"
- "Being released from the school roles at this time."
- Must contact school to be assigned re-enroll date
- If no contact within 30 days, consider dropout, assign "D" code, make copy of transcript and send to District Office

5. If student goes through three 10-day "interventions" without improvement:

Parent/Guardian sent **Third Intervention** letter (Attachment H):

- "We feel at this time your son/daughter will not be successful at Washington High School"
- May re-enroll in Fall of following year or if 18, might consider Adult Education
- "Refers [student] back to their respective district office" (lists contacts for Ogden and Weber Co.)
- Consider dropout, assign "D" code, make copy of transcript and send to District Office
- If student returns, school will usually reinstate student, removing "D" code from computer file
- Note: District office may not receive word of this recovered dropout

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Procedures for Young Parents Program: (60 students, or approx. 13% of population)

Note: High demand to enroll in this program, with waiting list

1. If student fails to earn credit in all four classes, or if student is absent 6 or more days per block (= six weeks):

Parent/Guardian sent **YPP Community Service** letter (Attachment I):

- Letter states that “X is being released from school”
- “TD” code is assigned
- Required to complete 50, 75, or 100 hours of community service in order to re-enroll
- Given .5 credit for documented completion of community service
- Placed on waiting list for re-enrollment, and allowed to participated for the interim in Directed Studies Program (see below)

Procedures for Directed Studies and Night School Programs: (70 students or about 15% of population, evenly split between the two programs) Off-site study; students meet with teacher one hour per week)

1. If student misses appointment with teacher and does not reschedule,

Parent/Guardian is sent **Directed Studies Program** letter (Attachment J):

- “Your son/daughter has not met the requirements for the DSP”
- “Being released from the school rolls at this time”
- May contact school “for change of placement or process for re-enrollment”
- If no contact within 30 days, consider dropout, assign “D” code, make copy of transcript and send to District Office

Summary of Procedures: District Office of Student Services September 4, 1996
Ogden City Unified School District

Key Elements:

- Student Services Coordinator and District Attendance Officer follow up on students referred by schools to District Office as potential dropouts
- Student Services Coordinator works on potential dropouts part-time; also supervises school counselors, coordinates student support programs, and writes grants
- Attendance Officer is currently a part-time (.5 FTE) position; he conducts 5 to 10 home visits per day, 2 days per week
- Spanish-speaking Community Liaison assists with phone calls and home visits to non-English speaking families on a part-time basis

Key Issues:

- During period August - December 1995, District Attendance Officer position was eliminated; his duties were not assumed by others during this period
- Available staff have very large number of attendance referrals to investigate: e.g., 119 referrals made from period January 19 to February 26, 1996
- Attendance Officer and Student Services Coordinator have no access to district-wide student database; maintain record of activities on non-interfaced, stand-alone database
- Attendance Officer and Student Services Coordinator face significant language barrier in working with non-English speaking families
- No Spanish-version of official letters (e.g., 14-day certified letter) is provided to non-English speaking families
- Long delays by state agencies (e.g., Attorney General's Office, Juvenile Court) in resolving educational neglect referrals leave many students in unclear "Transfer to District" status

Procedures:

1. Student Services Coordinator (SSC) receives one of the following from referring high schools, usually with supporting documentation of attempted contacts and interventions:
 - Referral to Attendance Officer form (Attachment A.), or
 - Notice of Suspension form (Attachment B.)
 - Note: if no supporting documentation is included, SSC calls school to request it
2. SSC passes referrals to District Attendance Officer (DAO)
 - DAO will log activities undertaken in Steps 3 - 9 below
 - Office Secretary logs activity outcomes on stand-alone computer system not interfaced with district-wide system
3. DAO or Community Liaison (CL) attempts to phone residence (usually unsuccessful)

4. If phone contact unsuccessful, DAO/CL visits last available known address of student:
 - Note: DAO or CL makes three attempts to contact family
 - Note: DAO or CL may receive new information from school on family location, as school is sometimes contacted by student or family
5. If DAO/CL succeeds in locating parent: Advises parent of need to contact SSC to make appointment; emphasizes legal requirement that student attend school, assesses social service needs and makes appropriate referrals
6. If DAO/CL learns that family has moved to other location within District: Attempts to obtain new address and visit that location
7. If DAO/CL learns that family has moved to other location outside District: notifies referring school and/or SSC
 - SSC notifies school registrar, who enters "D" code on system and withdraws student from school roll
8. If DAO is not successful in locating or contacting family or student, he notifies SSC, who sends "14-day Certified Letter" (Attachment C.) to last known address:
 - Family member notified of student's referral to district for non-attendance
 - Family member given 14 days to visit SSC's office with student
 - If family member does not contact SSC, student "will be referred to the Division of Family Services/Juvenile Court"
9. If 14-day Certified Letter is returned to District Office as undeliverable, DAO *may* re-deliver Certified Letter by hand to new address identified in Step 6., or to original address if family is later confirmed to be living there.
10. If 14-day Certified Letter is still undeliverable, SSC notifies school registrar, who enters "D" code on system and withdraws student from school roll
11. If receipt from 14-day Certified Letter is returned to District Office (indicating family member has received letter) and family member does not make contact with SSC:
 - SSC, in collaboration with school, completes Educational Neglect Intake Screening form (Attachment D.) and Request for Juvenile Court Action/Educational Neglect forms (Attachments E1-E4.) and once completed, forwards with full documentation to Attorney General's Office or Juvenile Court
 - SSC calls Attorney General's Office or Juvenile Court for updates and notifies school of any pending actions
 - Note: Student stays in "TD" status until action taken by AGO or JC, which often takes several months

12. If family member and student respond to "14-day Certified Letter", student given options appropriate to his/her case:

- Is placed in Home and Hospital Study Program if student out on long-term illness (2 weeks or more), or judged unable to study in school setting (e.g., emotionally traumatized, suspended for school safety violation)
- Is placed in one of several Washington Alternative High School programs
- If 16 or older, is allowed to officially withdraw from school if Release Form (Attachment F.) signed by parent, student and SSC
- Is referred to Juvenile Court/Family Services for educational neglect
- Note: Involvement of or referral to appropriate social service or juvenile justice agency often used in consultation with school site counselors, to support or compel student's return to educational system

**APPENDIX C
REASONS STUDENTS GAVE
FOR DROPPING OUT
OF SCHOOL,
GROUPED BY CATEGORY**

Reasons for Dropping Out of School, by Category

	N	%
<u>Failure to Advance Academically</u>		
1. Student experienced general or unspecified academic or linguistic difficulties	19	15.4
2. Student did not attend class or school regularly; frequent "sloughing"	58	47.2
3. Student did not (or would not by graduation time) have enough credits to graduate	34	27.6
4. Student found academic work too difficult/was not comprehending academic material	19	15.4
5. Student experienced language barriers to full comprehension/participation	6	4.9
6. Student did not receive the academic help needed (or asked for) from teachers	39	31.7
7. Student was not sufficiently challenged academically	17	13.8
<u>Negative experiences with Teachers or Staff</u>		
8. Student had general/unspecified negative experiences with school teachers/staff	20	16.3
9. Student felt that teachers and/or staff did not care (staff didn't know/like/help student)	60	48.8
10. Student felt that teachers and/or staff were incompetent	28	22.8
11. Student found teachers' and/or staff's behavior rude, offensive, or threatening	28	22.8
12. Student felt discriminated against by teachers and/or staff (on the basis of class/ethnicity/appearance)	12	9.8
<u>Negative Experiences with Other Students or School Atmosphere</u>		
13. Student had general negative experiences with other students	21	17.1
14. Student felt discriminated against by other students (on the basis of class/ethnicity/appearance)	9	7.3
15. Student felt that school premises felt unsafe due to actual or perceived violence	34	27.6
16. Student was a victim of violence at the school	18	14.6
17. Student felt alienated/unwelcome; did not "belong"; did not have friends at the school	18	14.6
<u>Disagreement with School Policies or Procedures</u>		
18. Student felt that school safety/discipline policies and procedures were too strict	13	10.6
19. Student felt that school safety/discipline policies and procedures were too lenient	11	8.9
20. Student felt that school safety/discipline policies and procedures were unfair	7	5.7
21. Student felt that school administrative policies and procedures (attendance, tardiness, community service, etc.) were unreasonable or unfair	16	13
<u>Perception that School Lacks Relevance</u>		
22. Student felt that school lacked relevance (in general or unspecified)	13	10.6
23. Student felt that school was a waste of time; student was bored	22	17.9
24. Student found other activities (e.g. working, "hanging out") more compelling	20	16.3
25. Student's work schedule interfered with attending school	17	13.8

Personal Problems		
26. Student had general/unspecified personal problems	6	4.9
27. Student missed or left school due to changes brought about by pregnancy	27	22
28. Student missed or left school due to parenting responsibilities	14	11.4
29. Student experienced (serious) illness that resulted in missing lots of school	14	11.4
30. Student had (serious) drug/alcohol/substance abuse problem	6	4.9
31. Student moved one or more times during high school	33	26.8
32. Student moved out of area or too far from school to continue	4	3.3
33. Student experienced emotional problems that resulted in missing lots of school (depression, grief, various mental disorders)	12	9.8
Family Problems		
34. Student had general/unspecified family problems	21	17.1
35. Student had a family member or close friend who died/was killed/committed suicide	5	4.1
36. Student had a family member or close friend who was seriously ill or disabled	4	3.3
37. Family members had (serious) drug/alcohol/substance abuse problem	1	.8
38. Student needed to care for ill or disabled family member (e.g. parents, siblings)	8	6.5
39. Student needed to work to help support self or family financially	10	8.1
School/District/Systemic Issues		
40. Student left school for general or unspecified system/policy reasons	2	1.6
41. Student was suspended one or more times for attendance problems	35	28.5
42. Student was suspended one or more times for behavior problems	20	16.3
43. Student was expelled	19	15.4
44. Student was not allowed or able to re-enroll or enroll in a different school	8	6.5
45. Student had to wait before being allowed to start attending a new school	7	5.7
46. Student had difficulty getting or completing community service	7	5.7
Other Reasons		
47. Student dropped out for other reason	14	11.4

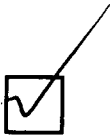


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