GAO

Report to Congressional Requesters

July 1987

SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Survey of Local Programs

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The Honorable Augustus F. Hawkins
Chairman, Subcommittee on Elementary,
Secondary, and Vocational Education
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

The Honorable William F. Goodling
Ranking Minority Member,
Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary,
and Vocational Education
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

The Honorable Charles A. Hayes
Member, Subcommittee on Elementary,
Secondary, and Vocational Education
Committee on Education and Labor
House of Representatives

This report, being issued at your request, is the second part of a two-phase review of the nature and extent of the school dropout problem. The first part (School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem, GAO/HRD-86-106BR, June 1986) was an overview based on national survey data and the literature. In the second phase, GAO surveyed local school dropout programs to identify the approaches being used to prevent or overcome dropping out, and to obtain views of local program administrators about dropout problems and program elements important for effectiveness. This report should assist the Congress in its deliberations on pending legislation to fund local demonstration programs aimed at reducing dropout rates.

As requested, we did not obtain official comments from the Departments of Education or Labor. We did, however, discuss matters described in this report with officials in these agencies, and their comments have been incorporated where appropriate. We are sending copies of the report to the Departments of Education and Labor and other interested parties and will make copies available to others upon request.

William J. Gainer
Associate Director

Executive Summary

Purpose

The individual and social costs of dropping out of school, and the fact that about half of the youth in some school districts become dropouts, have resulted in legislative proposals in both Houses of Congress that would provide funds for local demonstration programs aimed at reducing school dropout rates. At the request of Representatives Augustus F. Hawkins, William F. Goodling, and Charles A. Hayes, GAO examined who is being served by local dropout programs, the assistance being provided that local program officials believe is important for success, and how the dropout problem at the local level is being addressed. GAO also reviewed the quality of local dropout data, including definitions, data collection, and reporting procedures.

Background

The bills pending before the Congress (H.R.5 and S.1420) call for the Secretary of Education to competitively fund local dropout demonstration programs and to identify and generate information on the best approaches to reducing dropout rates. They also call for the systematic collection (and reporting) of information on school dropouts.

The information in this report is based largely on responses to a mail survey from administrators of 479 local dropout programs nationwide that were in operation in the 1985-86 school year and were reported continuing in 1986-87, and on visits to 14 dropout programs. Although the data GAO obtained are not necessarily representative of all dropout efforts, GAO believes they reflect the patterns followed in many local programs in the United States.

Most of the surveyed programs have not been independently evaluated and, therefore, there is a lack of definitive evidence to prove what works. Nonetheless, the survey's results provide information about programs that almost all local administrators perceive as effective.

Results in Brief

The school dropout programs GAO surveyed show several basic patterns:

1. They are targeting poor and minority teenagers who have multiple problems (pp. 14-16).

2. The programs customarily provide multiple services, with most youth at risk receiving some type of basic education, counseling, and social service assistance (pp. 16-18).

3. Local program administrators cite several program elements, seemingly obvious but often absent to these youth in their regular schools, as strongly influencing dropout reduction: a caring and committed staff, a safe and secure learning environment, individualized instruction, and school hours and support services that respond to individual needs. Factors that inhibit program effectiveness include youth's troubled homes and overcrowded classes (pp. 19-21).

GAO's review of the quality of school district dropout data showed that the data are often difficult to interpret and lack comparability across jurisdictions. Data from national surveys provide reliable estimates of the dropout problem nationwide, but not by locality (pp. 38 and 40-41).

GAO's Analysis

Characteristics of Youth Served

About three-fourths of the youth served by the 479 local programs surveyed are potential dropouts, and one-fourth already had dropped out. The program administrators reported that the youth served are primarily poor teenagers, age 16 or younger, who tend to lag behind in grade level and have records of many absences. Slightly over half of the youth are Hispanic and black. Data from national surveys funded by the Departments of Education and Labor and the literature on dropouts also associate such characteristics with the likelihood of youth dropping out of school. Therefore, the surveyed programs seem appropriately targeted (pp. 13-16).

Typical Program Objectives and Services

Most local administrators indicated that the primary objectives of their programs are to improve youth's academic performance and change their attitudes toward school. Over 90 percent of the programs provide basic education and personal counseling, about 75 percent encourage parental involvement, and about 70 percent offer assistance in searching for a job and in obtaining social services, such as health care. Almost half help youth prepare for a General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency certificate. More than one-fifth offer child day care services, with indications that more youth need such services than are available (pp. 16-18).

Programs for youth who already had dropped out differ from programs for potential dropouts. For example, they are geared to an older population, and place more emphasis on employment-oriented services and GED preparation (pp. 22-25).

Program Elements Influencing Program Success

At least 90 percent of the surveyed program administrators said that a caring and committed staff and a nonthreatening environment are important to make a program effective. About three-fourths or more indicated that a low student-teacher ratio, individualized instruction, and flexibility in curriculum and school hours are important to prevent dropping out by students unable to progress in the standard school setting (pp. 19-20).

Conversely, notable obstacles to program effectiveness include: (1) inadequacies in schoolwide conditions, such as school and class overcrowding, a "culture" of skipping classes, and a poor physical plant; (2) difficulties outside the school environment, such as troubled homes with apathetic parents who have lost influence over their children; (3) poor academic preparation of youth before high school; (4) the negative image of some dropout programs; and (5) problems in program implementation, such as inadequate coordination between school program staff and social service agencies (pp. 21 and 32-37).

Dropout Statistics Are Inconsistent

State and local dropout definitions and data collection practices vary widely. For example, according to a 1986 Department of Education-sponsored study by the Council of Chief State School Officers, included in the definition of dropouts by some states, but not others, are military enlistees (included by 34 states), completers of a GED certificate (21 states), and educated-at-home students (8 states). Also, among 41 states, dropouts are reported for grades 9-12 by 12 states, and 15 states count grades 7-12, with most of the others reporting dropouts for kindergarten through grade 12 (pp. 39-40).

The Department of Education currently is reviewing recommendations by the Council of Chief State School Officers for a standard state and local dropout definition and uniform data collection procedures. In addition, the congressional bills call for development of a dropout information data collection and reporting system among the dropout demonstration programs (pp. 38 and 39).

Recommendations

GAO is making no recommendations; however, the data collection initiatives in the congressional bills offer an opportunity to improve local and national data on school dropouts.

Agency Comments

GAO did not obtain agency comments on this report, but discussed the matters described in the report with officials from the Departments of Education and Labor, and their views have been incorporated where appropriate.

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GAO	General Accounting Office
GED	General Educational Development

Introduction

Historically the responsibility for educating youth rests with state and local governments; however, the federal government also has exerted national leadership in the pursuit of educational excellence. A persistent educational problem of national interest--one that also affects the U.S. welfare system and the strength of the economy—is the problem of youth who drop out of school, especially among poor and minority youth. School dropouts are often forfeiting their ability to earn a decent wage, raise an economically secure family, and enjoy a comfortable standard of living.

The social costs of the dropout problem include an underskilled labor force, lower productivity, lost taxes, and increased public assistance and crime. Addressing the problem through dropout prevention programs for at-risk youth still in school, and programs for return and continuation in school for youth who dropped out, may be less costly than allowing the problem to go unattended.

Proposed School Dropout Legislation

Legislation is being considered in both Houses of Congress that seek to reduce the school dropout rate by (1) establishing a federal focal point for a dropout reduction strategy and (2) identifying and generating information on the best techniques for dropout reduction. They also encourage the systematic collection and reporting of information on school dropouts.

Specifically, the proposed legislation (H.R.5 and S.1420) authorize the Secretary of Education to competitively fund programs at the local level to establish and demonstrate effective programs to prevent potential dropouts from leaving school and to get dropouts to reenter and continue to graduation. Their provisions also include the development of model systems for collecting and reporting information on the number, ages, and grade levels of dropouts, and their reasons for dropping out.

Department of Education Support for Dropout Prevention

The federal funding of local dropout prevention and reentry demonstrations is not new. The 1967 amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 established local demonstration projects aimed at reducing the dropout rate. From 1969 through 1976, some 30 projects received $46 million in grants from the Department of Education (then the Office of Education) to develop and demonstrate educational practices that showed promise in reducing the numbers of youth who failed to complete their secondary education.

The funded projects provided a range of services, including work-study programs involving private industry and nonprofit agencies, staff training, improved pupil personnel services, reading laboratories, community involvement, and special classes for students considered to be dropout prone. An estimated 60,000 students participated in the program at its peak. The Office of Education reported in 1976 that the projects were well focused on the target population and that most were effective in reducing the dropout rate.

In 1974 the Congress again amended the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, consolidating the dropout prevention program with other federal elementary and secondary school programs. States were given the discretion to decide what financial support dropout prevention projects would receive through state-administered consolidated grants.

Since 1976 there has been no explicit federal legislative authority for specific categorical assistance to dropout prevention projects. Such projects may receive financing from block grant funds under Chapter 2 of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act. The head of the Department of Education's Chapter 2 programs said, however, that because information on such practices is not collected, it is not known to what extent the states are specifically supporting dropout prevention projects with Chapter 2 funds.

Department of Labor Support for Dropout Programs

The Department of Labor funds dropout projects as part of its Job Training Partnership Act block grant program (the nation's major federally funded employment and training effort). Forty percent of the program's funds to the states are required to be spent on youth, and, by law, eligible dropouts are to be served "on an equitable basis." The 1986 amendments require the department to emphasize dropout prevention under the 8-percent "set aside" for education and coordination grants, and require local service providers to assess the basic education skills of participants in the summer youth employment portion of the program and develop remediation assistance goals. Also, under the Job Training Partnership Act, the department funds national programs, such as the Job Corps for educationally and economically disadvantaged youth, which provides basic education, occupational skill training, counseling, and other services primarily in centers where the participants reside.

The department supports, too, demonstration and pilot projects on school dropouts, and shares information with state and local Job Training Partnership Act officials on promising dropout programs. The administrator of the department's Office of Job Training Programs said that data currently are not collected to pinpoint expenditures for dropouts.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

On April 29, 1986, Representative Augustus F. Hawkins, Chairman, William F. Goodling, Ranking Minority Member, and Representative Charles A. Hayes, Member, of the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, Committee on Education and Labor, asked us to conduct a two-phase review and report on school dropouts. Phase one was to survey the current state of knowledge of the school dropout problem from existing data and the literature. Phase two was to be a more detailed examination of local programs, particularly the interventions employed at the local level.

Phase 1 Report

GAO completed phase 1 of the review in June 1986, issuing a briefing report, School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem (GAO/HRD-86-106BR). This report pointed out, among other things, that:

- For the last decade, the overall dropout rate for youth age 16 to 24 has remained roughly the same, about 13 to 14 percent; as of October 1985, this rate translated into 4.3 million dropouts.
- The dropout rate is higher among Hispanics, blacks, and economically and educationally disadvantaged youth; in some inner city schools about half of the students drop out.
- Among other predictors of which young people drop out are being 2 or more years behind grade level, coming from a home where the father dropped out, and being pregnant.
- Labor market opportunities, as measured by employment and earnings, are poor for youth who have not completed high school.
- It is not generally known "what works" in terms of specific programs that prevent students from dropping out of school or encouraging actual dropouts to reenter school and achieve a high school diploma.

Phase 2 Report

GAO's phase 2 effort was intended to build on the base of national research data on school dropouts. The objectives of this phase were, through a mail questionnaire, to (1) survey local dropout programs to identify the approaches being used to prevent youth from dropping out

of school or to encourage reentry of youth who had dropped out; and (2) obtain views of local program administrators about problems and program elements important for effectiveness. We also reviewed dropout definition and data collection and reporting procedures.

To identify local school dropout programs for our survey, we conducted telephone interviews with representatives of principal education and employment and training organizations, foundations, and research groups for information on actual programs and other organizations which should be contacted. For example, we contacted the Department of Education and each of its nine regional educational laboratories, Department of Labor, Council of Chief State School Officers, National Education Association, Council of Great City Schools and each of 37 member school districts in 1986 (the largest in the country), National Governors' Association, National Urban League, Appalachian Regional Commission, and National Alliance of Business. We also conducted a literature review through the Department of Education's Educational Resources Information Center to identify dropout programs. Although not comprehensive, our data base consisted of a broad range of 1,015 programs nationwide. The number was increased by 67 when we received responses to our initial mailing of the questionnaire from programs not originally identified. (We had asked the survey recipients if they coordinated different types of programs to forward a copy of the questionnaire to the other responsible persons.)

For detailed information on how these programs address local dropout problems, we developed a mail survey questionnaire, asking program administrators for data on such factors as the target population, program objectives, program services, and perceptions of effectiveness. We analyzed 479 responses from program administrators whose local programs were in operation in school year 1985-86 and were reported to be continuing in 1986-87. We used several steps to verify, where possible, the accuracy of the information obtained in the questionnaire. (For a technical description of the survey methodology, see app. I.) Although the responses are not necessarily representative of all dropout activities, we believe they reflect the patterns that are being followed in many local programs in the United States.

To get a more detailed picture of the operations and variety of local school dropout programs, we visited the sites of 14 programs selected judgmentally to include, for example, several different size cities and minority population groups (based on suggestions by knowledgeable individuals): 5 programs in New York City; 3 in Atlanta, Georgia; and 1

each in Columbus, Ohio; Prince Georges County, Maryland; Miami, Florida; Dalton, Georgia; Gadsden, Alabama; and Houston, Texas. We talked with school officials, program administrators, staff, and students, and we examined overall program approaches, such as services provided, service delivery features, and management strategies, as well as information on the programs' effectiveness in preventing dropouts or returning dropouts to school.

Our work was carried out in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Nature of Local Dropout Programs

We surveyed local dropout programs for information on the nature and patterns of local services. Although the survey responses offer neither detailed guidelines for additional efforts nor conclusive evidence for what works, they do provide information about dropout programs that local administrators see as effective.

The survey showed that most of those served are poor, urban, minority youth, age 16 or younger, who are at risk of dropping out. (About one-fourth of those served had already dropped out.) Problems associated with at-risk youth (as well as actual dropouts) include excessive school absences, being behind in grade level, and inappropriate (e.g., disruptive) behavior. Data from national surveys of dropouts and the research literature also associate such characteristics and problems with the likelihood of youth dropping out of school.[1] Therefore, the surveyed programs seem appropriately targeted.

The youth typically are provided a wide range of services to meet their needs. These usually include basic education, counseling, and assistance in obtaining social services.

Caring and committed staff, secure classroom environments, a low student-teacher ratio, and personalized instruction are factors rated by about 80 percent or more of local administrators as critical to program success. Factors perceived as inhibiting program effectiveness include budgetary constraints and influences outside the school setting, such as a troubled home. Such factors indicated by program administrators also are highlighted in the literature on dropouts.[2]

[1]School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem (GAO/HRD-86-106BR), June 1986 (pp. 9-11, 13-16); "On the School Dropout Problem," Statement of William J. Gainer, Associate Director, Human Resources Division, General Accounting Office, Before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, May 20, 1986; also see, e.g., Michael E. Borus and Susan A. Carpenter, "Choices in Education," Chapter 4 in Youth and the Labor Market, Analyses of the National Longitudinal Survey, Michael E. Borus, Editor, The W. E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1984; and Anthony Cipollone, Research Program and Policy Trends in Dropout Prevention: A National Perspective, Education Matters, Inc., Cambridge, Massachusetts, July 30, 1986.

[2]See, e.g., Dale Mann, "Can We Help Dropouts: Thinking about the Undoable," in Teachers College Record, Vol. 87, No. 3, Spring 1986; Gary Natriello, Aaron M. Pallas, and Edward L. McDill, "Taking Stock: Renewing Our Research Agenda on the Causes and Consequences of Dropping Out," in Teachers College Record, Vol. 87, No. 3, Spring 1986; A Working Document on the Dropout Problem in Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, Boston Public Schools, May 1986; Karen Reed Green and Andrea Baker, Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth in the Northwest Region: Initial Search, Northwest Region Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, June 1, 1986; Final Report of the Center for Dropout Prevention, School of Education and Allied Professions, University of Miami, submitted to Bureau of Compensatory Education, Division of Public Schools, Florida Department of Education, January 1, 1987; and Cipollone, op. cit.

Youth Served

Overall, it appears that about three-fourths of the youth in the programs were potential dropouts and one-fourth had been dropouts at some point. About 47 percent of the 479 programs surveyed were directed principally to potential dropouts, seeking to help them continue in school; 22 percent were expressly targeted for youth who had dropped out to return and continue their education; and the other 31 percent were made up of both potential dropouts and dropouts.

The causes of youth dropping out are often difficult to isolate and classify, because the factors associated with dropping out are usually interrelated. But the program officials indicated that the problem youth were principally in two broad categories (with some in both): over half were behind in grade level, and over half had problems of truancy or excessive absence. Also, nearly 40 percent displayed troublesome behavior (disruptive, withdrawn). Other problems included pregnancy or early parenthood, and limited English facility. (See fig. 2.1.)

A somewhat similar picture of problems of dropout youth is seen in data from national surveys. For example, following are data from the High School and Beyond survey[3] on selected reasons for dropping out of school and the percentage of dropouts who reported each reason.[4] (Some youth reported more than one reason.)

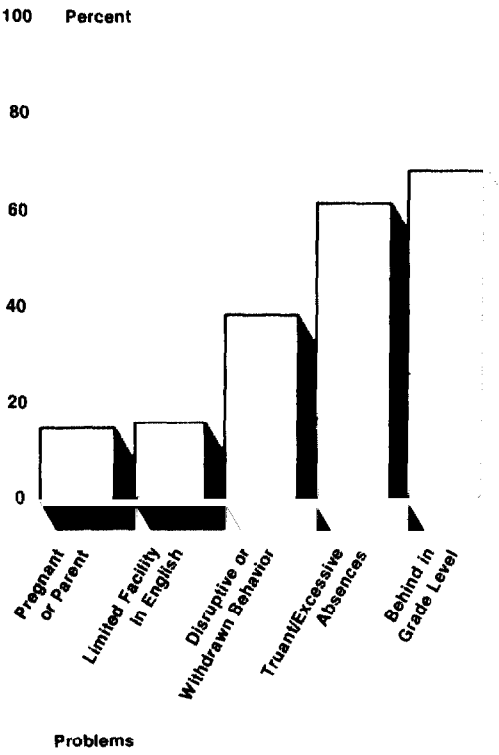
- Had poor grades (66%)
- School was not for me (66%)
- Could not get along with teachers (31%)
- Expelled or suspended (18%)
- Married or planned to marry (38%)
- Was pregnant (23%)
- Offered job and chose to work (38%)

Young men constituted about 54 percent and young women 46 percent of those in the GAO-surveyed programs. More than three-fourths of the youth were from families of low socioeconomic status, but about one-fifth came from middle-class families, and 4 percent from families of high-socioeconomic status. This conforms with information from

[3]High School and Beyond is an ongoing national survey, sponsored by the Department of Education, of a sample of students who were enrolled in the 1980 senior and sophomore classes in 1,000 public and private high schools in the United States. The youth are followed up periodically to obtain information on their educational, occupational, personal, and social development.

[4]School Dropouts, op. cit. (p. 14).

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Dropout Youth Having Problems



national surveys. For example, data from the Current Population Survey[5] show somewhat higher dropout rates for young men than young women (16 percent of males age 18-19 in October 1985, compared to 12 percent of females), and data from High School and Beyond show that the dropout rate for youth from low socioeconomic households was about three times larger than for youth from high socioeconomic households.[6]

A slight majority of the youth in the surveyed programs were from minority groups: About 34 percent were black, 17 percent Hispanic, and 4 percent from other racial/ethnic groups. The remaining youth served, about 45 percent, were white. Relatedly, data from national surveys

[5]The Current Population Survey, conducted by the Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is a monthly survey of the population which is representative of the working-age civilian noninstitutional population of the United States. In addition to the basic monthly information, the survey is used for a program of special supplemental questions. For example, each October special questions are asked on the characteristics of students, graduates, and dropouts.

[6]School Dropouts, op. cit. (pp. 5, 9, and 10).

show relatively high dropout rates for black and Hispanic youth. For example, among young men and women age 18 during the period 1979-82, about 15 percent of whites, 17 percent of blacks, and 31 percent of Hispanics failed to complete high school or obtain a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. For youth age 21, the comparable percentages for whites, blacks, and Hispanics were 12 percent, 23 percent, and 36 percent, respectively.[7]

The age distribution of youth receiving program services was tilted to the younger years: Thirty percent were under age 15, and nearly 30 percent were 15 to 16. Close to 30 percent were age 17-18, and slightly over 10 percent were 19 or older. Two-thirds of the youth involved were from urban areas, nearly 20 percent were from suburbs, and 14 percent were from rural areas. (See fig. 2.2.)

Program Objectives

Most programs reported multiple objectives. Almost all listed one or more of the following among their primary objectives: Improved academic performance (78 percent cited it as a primary objective), attitude change (77 percent), and reduced absenteeism (69 percent). Some of the programs had more specialized objectives: Over one-fourth reported job training and placement as a primary objective, about one-third listed return to school as a prime objective, and 14 percent had as at least one primary objective the provision of prenatal care and parenting support services. (See table 2.1.)

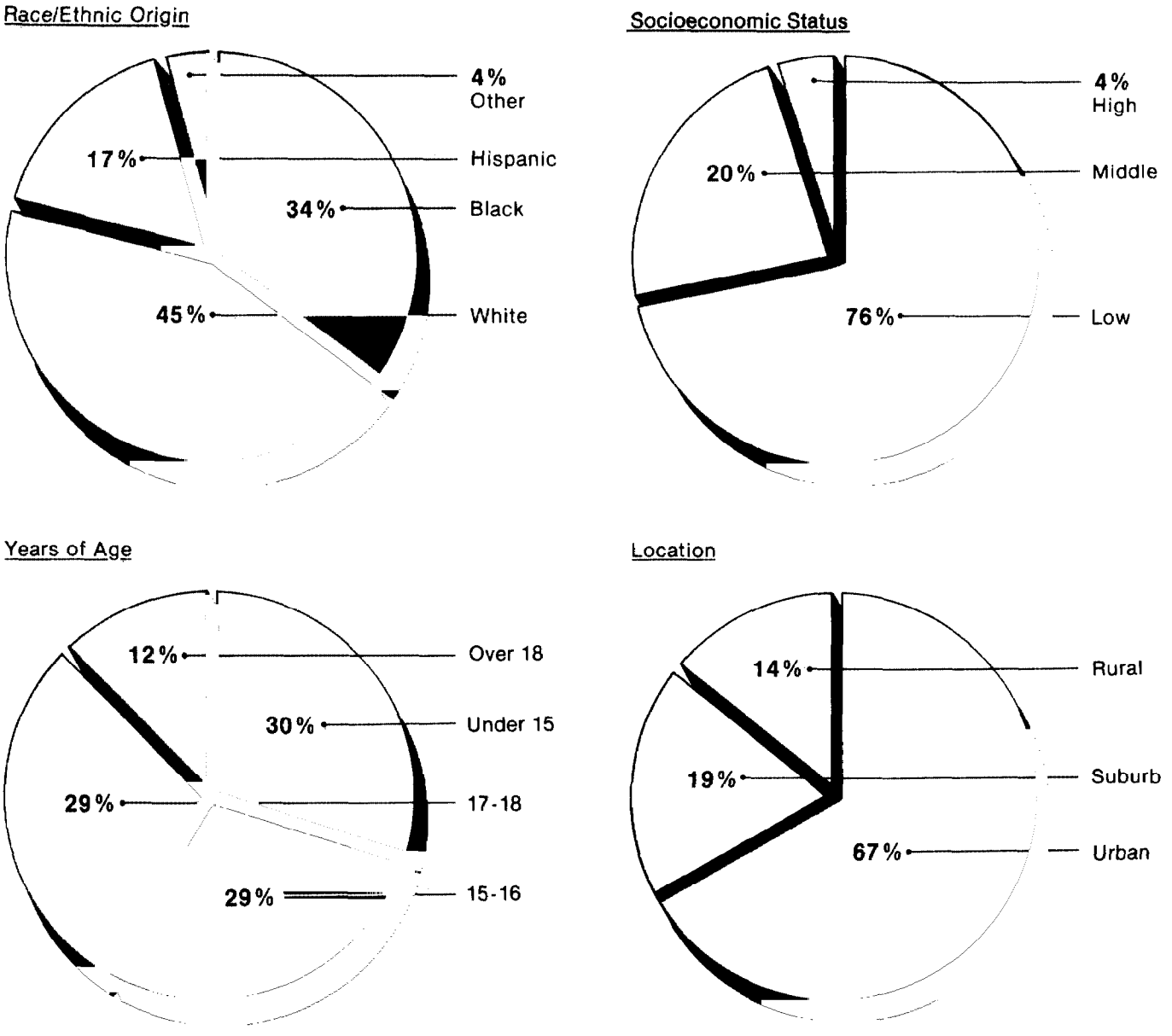
Table 2.1: Program Managers Reporting Primary Objectives of Their Dropout Programs[a]

Primary objective	Number	Percent
Improve academic performance	374	78
Attitudinal change	368	77
Reduce absenteeism	331	69
Placement back in school	163	34
Job training/placement	131	27
Prenatal care/parenting support services	69	14

[a]Programs can have more than one primary objective.

[7]Ibid. (p. 11). These findings are from the National Longitudinal Surveys of Labor Market Experience. These surveys, sponsored by the Department of Labor, include a nationally representative sample of over 12,000 young men and women ages 14-21 when first interviewed in 1979. The youth are surveyed annually on such topics as their education, training, and employment.

Figure 2.2: Characteristics of Dropout Program Participants



Program Interventions

It was not feasible for us to determine the intensity of services or the relative emphasis on each, but it is apparent that multiple services are the rule, with variation in activities required for differing needs.

Two types of intervention activity were reported by over 90 percent of the programs: personal counseling and basic education. Also common were career counseling, efforts to obtain parental involvement, assistance in obtaining social services, job search assistance, job skills training, and obtaining part-time employment. Frequent, too, were several activities for special subgroups: over half of the programs offered pregnancy/parental counseling, and almost half offered assistance for dropouts preparing for the GED high school equivalency certificate. More than one-fifth offered child day care services. (See table 2.2.)

Not all participants in a program need each service. Some services, however, appear to be in short supply. For example, according to program administrators, more youth need child day care assistance than is available.

Table 2.2: Services Provided to Dropout Program Participants

Services	Programs that provided services		Percent of program participants served
	Number	Percent	
Personal counseling	452	94	74
Basic education	437	91	84
Career counseling	363	76	67
Parental involvement encouraged	352	74	62
Assistance in obtaining social services	333	70	48
Job search assistance	329	69	41
Job skills training	298	62	45
Part-time employment placement	270	56	31
Pregnancy/parental counseling	260	54	31
GED preparation	220	46	28
Day care	109	23	18
English as a second language	67	14	16

Other Program Features

In about 70 percent of the programs, the youth in need of services were generally identified through referrals by school staff. But programs also cited many from other sources as well: Some 6 to 16 percent of the programs reported that most referrals were from parents, the judicial system, or social service agencies or that the youth themselves were applying for services.

Service delivery took place in several settings. Almost three-fifths of the surveyed programs indicated that at least some of their activities were conducted in the regular public school, and roughly the same proportion reported providing services in an alternative school setting (i.e., a special setting with departures from customary practices of the school system generally, such as class size and time schedules). About one-fifth of the administrators said they used a community-based site (e.g., YMCAs, half-way houses).

Regarding funding, about a third of the surveyed programs were conducted wholly with regular school district operating funds, while the other two-thirds were supported at least in part by funds targeted expressly for the dropout effort. The specially targeted funds were obtained from varied and often multiple sources, with federal funds playing a prominent role: Close to half (47 percent) of the projects reported receiving some funding from federal sources, such as the Job Training Partnership Act. About 64 percent had special state allocations, and 46 percent had special local district funding. Far fewer projects with special funds got them in grants or donations from foundations (20 percent), companies (13 percent), or unions (1 percent).

Most of the local programs kept records. About 87 percent had special enrollment forms, 78 percent used a data collection form to monitor individual participants' progress, and 71 percent said they had reporting requirements on "program effects."

Program Effectiveness

Respondents were asked to send any available information on their programs' effectiveness. Few submitted such material, and of those who did, only about 20 sent rigorous evaluations. Therefore, our information essentially is limited to respondents' perceptions of effectiveness (which was one of the survey questions).

The surveyed officials saw their programs as effective. In the opinion of about three-fourths, their programs were effective to a "very great" or

"great" extent. Only 15 percent regarded their effectiveness as "moderate," and only one respondent said the program was ineffective.

When asked to rate various factors influencing their programs' effectiveness, the administrators overwhelmingly (90 percent or more) cited two factors as very helpful—namely, a caring and committed staff and a nonthreatening classroom environment. Three-fourths or more of the respondents regarded a low student-teacher ratio, individualized instruction, and program flexibility, such as in curriculum and hours, as important elements of effective programs. Also important in responding to youth's individual needs were links to social service agencies. (See table 2.3.) (Such program characteristics often are absent from the school experiences of at-risk youth.)

The strong agreement among practitioners regarding factors critical to program success is buttressed by research literature on helping dropout youth, and therefore provides a clearer picture of how dropout programs should generally be structured.[8] However, since most of the surveyed programs have not been independently evaluated, there is a lack of evidence to establish definitively the approaches that are effective in reducing the numbers of dropouts.

Table 2.3: Factors Reported by Program Administrators as a Great or Very Great Influence on Program Effectiveness

Factors	Number	Percent
Caring and committed staff	452	95
Nonthreatening environment for learning	425	90
Low student-teacher ratio	385	81
Individualized instruction	374	79
Program flexibility	347	74
Links with social service agencies	173	37
Involvement of parents in students' development	142	30
Links with employers	127	27

[8]"Education's Chapter 1 and 2 Programs and Local Dropout Prevention and Reentry Programs," Statement of William J. Gainer, Associate Director, Human Resources Division, General Accounting Office, Before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, March 3, 1987.

Additional Perceptions of Program Officials on Effectiveness

We asked the surveyed program officials, through open-ended questions, to identify the most significant barriers to further program success and methods for overcoming such barriers. Among the problems the respondents noted are difficulties outside the school environment, such as a troubled home. Parents are sometimes "apathetic," have severe problems themselves, or are unable to change youth's attitudes.

Budgetary constraints were also cited as a barrier to effectiveness. About 25 officials said they had "waiting lists" of applicants, and about 45 thought that the needs of the at-risk youth population exceed available resources. Others pointed to particular needs, such as day care, smaller classes, and computers associated with instructional software.

Five respondents also expressed concern that job training and jobs for those in school interfered with youth's education. But 30 program administrators saw a need for more vocational education and work experience.

Seven program officials commented on the need for better follow-up services to assure that effective short-term efforts are sustained. Youth apparently respond well to special assistance, but then return to the regular school program to encounter difficulties again. One respondent noted, for example, that students may be returned to their school with prescriptions for individual or remedial assistance, but if help is not made available to them, progress is lost.

In their comments on effective methods for overcoming these barriers, respondents reiterated the importance of personalized attention and caring. Specific services cited as important were readily accessible health clinics, and the availability of child care arrangements without which some teenage mothers are forced to drop out.

Fifteen officials also emphasized the need to intervene at younger ages. They felt that the high school years were too late to deal successfully with at-risk youth and that the appropriate time for intervention was before behavior problems were set—in the preteenage years.

Programs for Distinctive Groups

We examined surveyed programs to determine whether and how programs directed to distinctive youth groups differed from the programs overall. We focused this analysis on (1) reentrants (youth who had dropped out and went back to school), (2) students who are pregnant or have children, and (3) predominantly Hispanic populations.

Reentry Programs

Twenty-two percent of the programs surveyed primarily served dropouts. (At least 75 percent of the youth in each of these programs had dropped out of school.) Such programs contrast in some respects with the programs that are primarily "preventive," that is, the 47 percent of the programs surveyed that were directed principally (at least 75 percent) to potential dropouts. (The remaining programs, roughly one-third, were "mixtures," which worked with sizable proportions of both potential and actual dropouts.)

The predominantly dropout-reentry programs differed from the "prevention" programs in the following respects: The reentry programs were geared to an older population that more often had fallen behind in grade level, were pregnant or already had children, or had limited facility in English. These programs put more emphasis on employment-oriented services than did the prevention programs for youth who had not left school; they were more likely to prepare youth for a GED certificate (rather than a high school diploma); and they frequently were in an "alternative" school setting. Specifically:

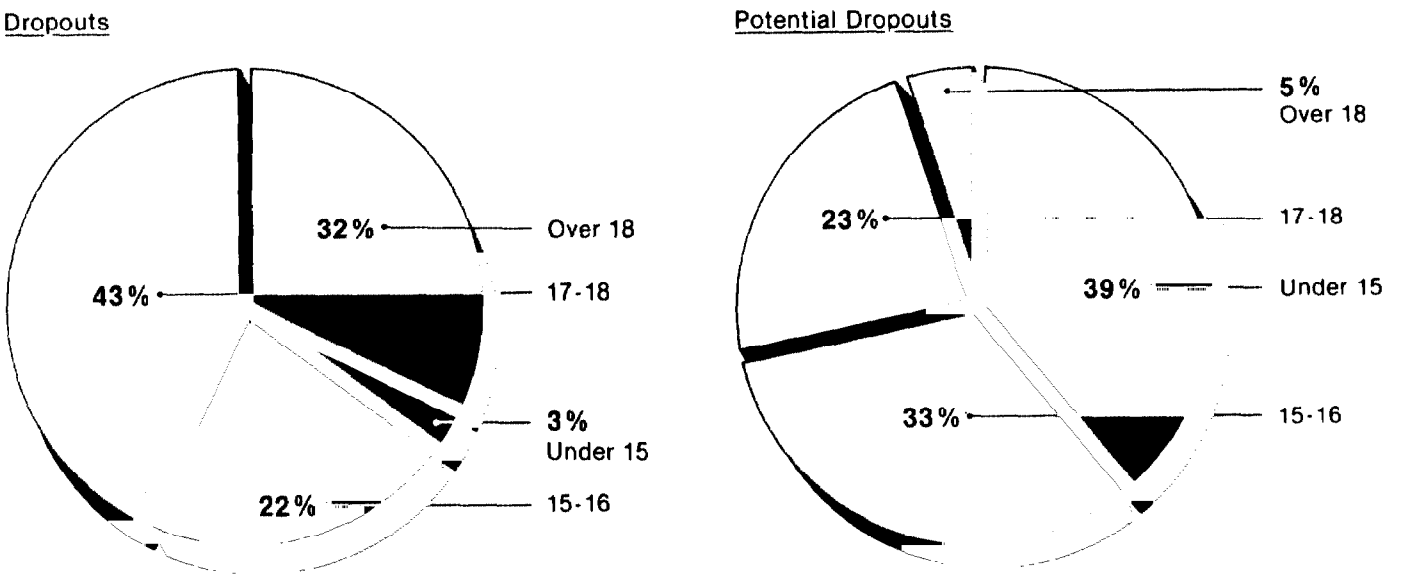
1. In the reentry programs, three-fourths of the participants were age 17 or older, with nearly one-third being 18 years or older. The prevention programs only had 28 percent in the 17 and older age group. (See fig. 2.3.)

2. The reentry program youth were more often behind in grade level (99 percent compared with 63 percent in the prevention programs), and were more often pregnant or already parents (22 percent versus 13 percent). The reentry program youth also more often had problems of limited English language facility (22 percent versus 11 percent). (See fig. 2.4.)

3. The reduction of absenteeism was cited as a primary objective far less often by the reentry programs than by the prevention programs (39 percent versus 84 percent, respectively). Another indicator that the reentry program youth may be more motivated is that fewer of the reentry than prevention program officials (66 percent versus 81 percent) identified changes in youth attitudes as a primary program objective.

4. Nearly three-fourths of the reentry programs offered GED preparation, serving 36 percent of the participants. In contrast, about one-third of the prevention programs had a GED preparation component, serving about 13 percent of the youth. In addition to the prevention programs' goal of having the youth achieve a high school diploma, GED preparation

Figure 2.3: Age of Dropouts and Potential Dropouts

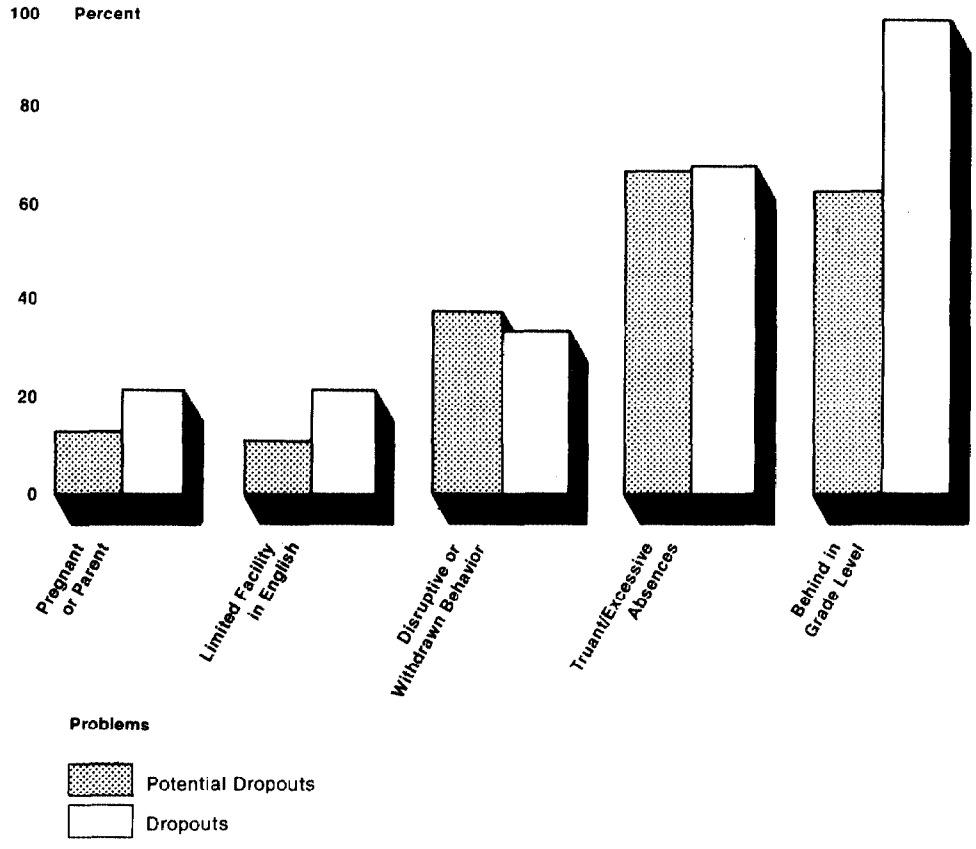


may be offered relatively infrequently in prevention programs because age restrictions keep some potential dropouts from applying for a GED. Regarding youth in reentry programs, because of their age and limited schooling, many who dropped out would not be able to accumulate the credits needed for high school graduation in a reasonable time or would be unlikely to succeed in the regular school program they had left.

5. Most of the reentry youth were enrolled in an alternative school setting rather than a regular school. Seventy percent of the reentry programs, as opposed to 46 percent of the prevention programs, used some alternative setting.

6. The reentry programs undertook more employment-oriented services. About 40 percent of their administrators considered job training and placement as a primary objective, compared to about 20 percent of the prevention program administrators. About 70 percent of the reentry programs included some job skills training activity (versus 55 percent in the prevention programs), about 80 percent offered job search assistance (versus 62 percent in prevention programs), and 62 percent had a part-time employment placement component (versus 51 percent in prevention programs).

Figure 2.4: Percentage of Dropouts and Potential Dropouts Having Problems



In addition, the reentry programs offering such services tended to provide them to more of their enrollees. Job search components in the reentry programs served 50 percent of their enrollees, while such components in prevention programs served 39 percent of the enrollees. However, part-time job placement assistance was provided to about the same percentage of the reentry youth as to the youth in prevention programs (about 35 percent).

7. Parental involvement in program efforts was sought less often by the reentry programs (56 percent) than the prevention programs (78 percent). Moreover, among those seeking parental involvement, the reentry programs estimated they sought this for over one-half of their youth, while the prevention programs reported they sought this for close to three-fourths of their youth. The difference may be due largely to the

younger age of the youth in the prevention programs and the assumed greater role of parents in their lives. (See table 2.4.)

Table 2.4: Services Provided to Dropouts and Potential Dropouts

	Potential dropouts		Dropouts	
Services	Percent of programs	Percent served	Percent of programs	Percent served
Personal counseling	94	83	95	81
Basic education	89	84	95	72
Career counseling	68	70	85	77
Parental involvement encouraged	78	72	56	56
Assistance in obtaining social services	68	57	73	43
Job search assistance	62	39	79	50
Job skills training	55	50	71	56
Part-time employment placement	51	36	62	35
Pregnancy/parental counseling	53	36	53	29
GED preparation	32	13	72	36
Day care	21	10	30	26
English as a second language	9	18	15	19

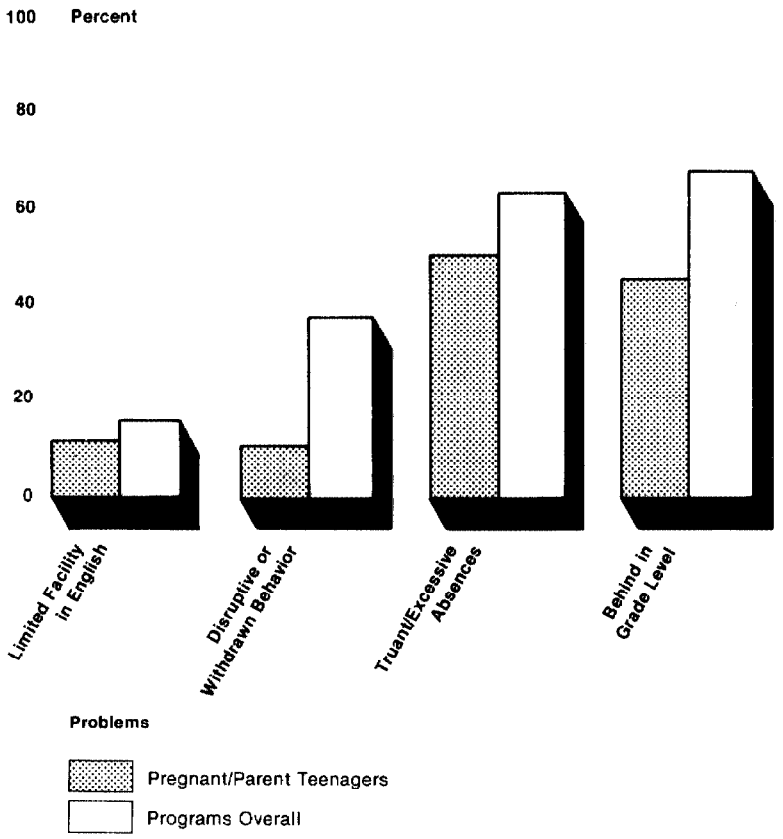
Programs for Pregnant or Parent Teens

Pregnancy or early parenthood is a major reason for young women dropping out of school. Twenty-five of the dropout programs we surveyed were directed almost wholly to youth who were pregnant or already parents. Over 4,100 youth were served in the 1985-86 school year by these specialized programs. The average enrollment size—over 170—indicates they were established where there were sizable groups of pregnant youth or teen parents.

Not surprisingly, the problem most cited by the program administrators was the youth's pregnancy or child care responsibilities. However, the youth in the pregnancy/parent programs were less often behind in grade level (46 percent versus 67 percent in the programs overall), less often marked by disruptive or withdrawn behavior (11 percent versus 39 percent), and less often reported truancy or excessive absences (51 percent versus 62 percent). (See fig. 2.5.)

The key feature of the specialized pregnancy/parenthood programs is, of course, that most provided prenatal guidance and parenting support

Figure 2.5: Percentage of Pregnant/ Parent Program Teenagers Having Problems vs. Youth in Programs Overall



service as a principal focus. Most also provided assistance in obtaining needed social services.

More than three-fourths reported offering some type of child day care assistance. Six program administrators commented that the day care they could arrange did not wholly meet the need for such services. The administrator of one program that did not provide day care stated that many of the pregnant young women leave school after delivery because care for their child is not available, that the availability of such care would improve the school continuation rate for such young women, and that the presence of on-site child day care enables monitoring of the parenting skills of the young mothers and the development of their children. Other program administrators noted that their programs also sought to improve the well-being of the student's child and decrease repeat pregnancies.

About 60 percent of the pregnancy/parenthood programs provided GED preparation, compared with 46 percent for the programs overall. About 60 percent also offered job skills training (roughly the same percentage as in the programs generally). (See table 2.5.) Four program administrators reported that their program experience was leading them to plan greater emphasis on job skills training for parents or prospective parents.

Table 2.5: Services Provided by Pregnant/Parent Teenager Programs vs. All Programs

Percent of programs

Services	Pregnant/ parent teens	All dropout program participants
Personal counseling	96	94
Basic education	80	91
Career counseling	76	76
Parental involvement encouraged	64	74
Assistance in obtaining social services	92	70
Job search assistance	64	69
Job skills training	60	62
Part-time employment placement	36	56
Pregnancy/parental counseling	92	54
GED preparation	60	46
Day care	76	23
English as a second language	24	14

Programs for Hispanic Youth

The dropout rate is higher among Hispanic youth than among other major ethnic/racial groups. As noted previously, national survey data indicate that 31 percent of Hispanic 18-year-olds had not completed high school or obtained a GED certificate, compared to 17 percent for blacks and 15 percent for whites. Research findings show that many Hispanic youth come from low socioeconomic status families, have limited facility in English, and experience academic failure in school—all powerful predictors of dropping out.

We analyzed survey responses from 26 dropout programs that served at least 50 percent Hispanic youth, to see if they were markedly different from the surveyed programs overall. (Almost 80 percent of the youth in these 26 programs were Hispanic; most of the others were black.)

We found that 86 percent of the Hispanic program youth were from low socioeconomic status families compared to 76 percent in all the surveyed

programs. And more of the Hispanic program youth lived in rural areas (22 percent versus 14 percent of youth in the overall survey), including Hispanic youth from migrant farm families. (See figure 2.6.)

In terms of special problems, limited facility in English was, of course, more common: 23 percent of the Hispanic program youth were estimated to have such difficulty, compared to 16 percent in the programs overall. Only slightly more of the Hispanic youth were behind grade level: 70 percent versus 67 percent in the programs generally. Fewer of the Hispanic program youth (25 percent versus 39 percent) were reported as displaying inappropriate behavior. (See fig. 2.7.)

Regarding program services, the Hispanic youth programs placed far more emphasis on instruction in English as a second language (50 percent versus 14 percent in programs overall). They provided assistance in obtaining social services at about the same proportion (69 percent versus 70 percent in programs overall) and sought the involvement of parents more often (89 percent versus 74 percent).

The Hispanic programs sought to place more of the youth in part-time jobs (43 percent versus 31 percent). (See table 2.6.) Comments from two program administrators pointed up the youth's need for employment income. One noted that some of the youth in her program were illegal aliens, complicating efforts to obtain part-time employment (or social services). One also cited poor local economic conditions as limiting the availability of part-time employment to help financially needy youth stay in school.

Figure 2.6: Characteristics of Hispanic Program Participants

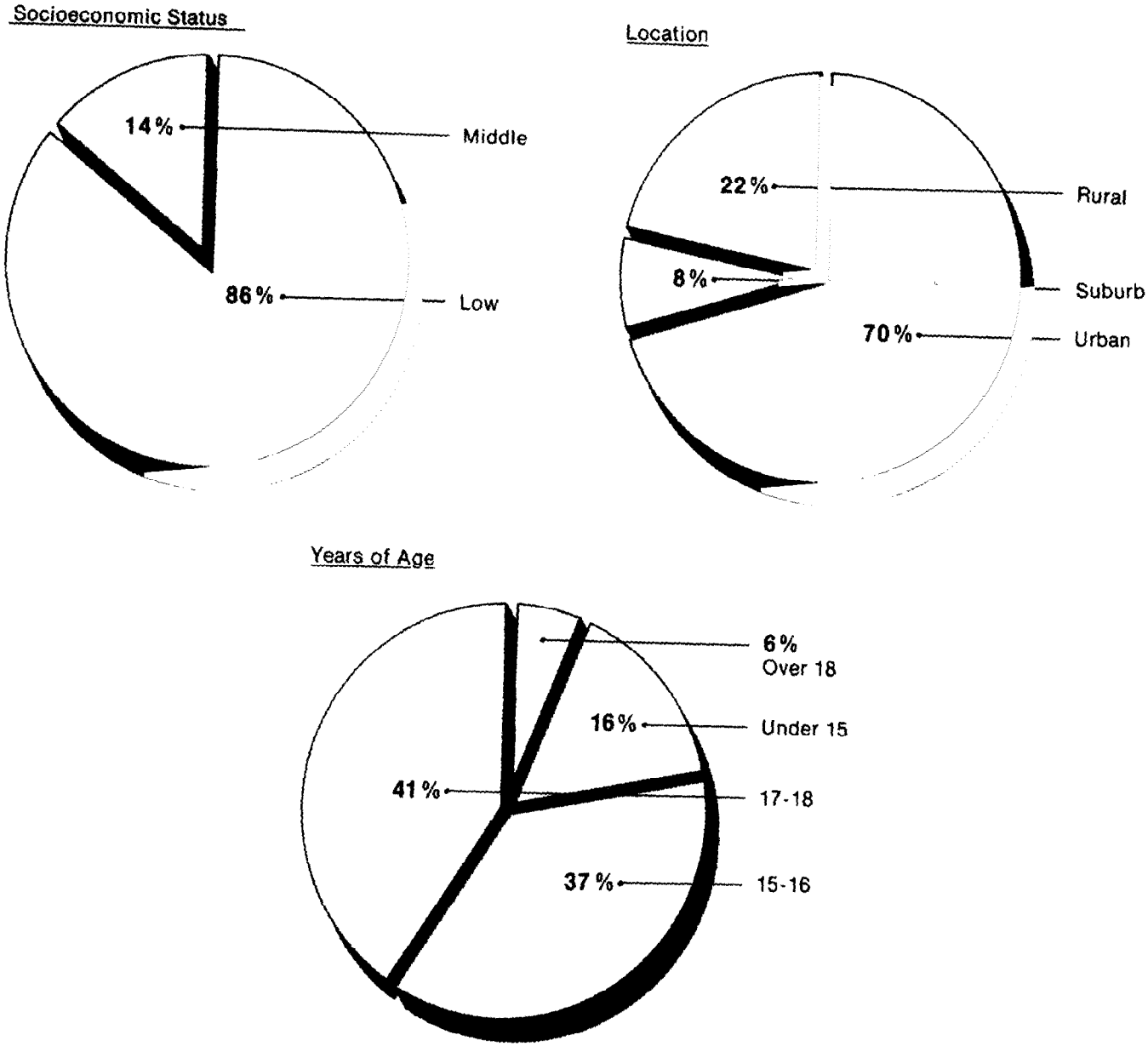


Figure 2.7: Percentage of Hispanic Program Youth Having Problems vs. Youth in Programs Overall

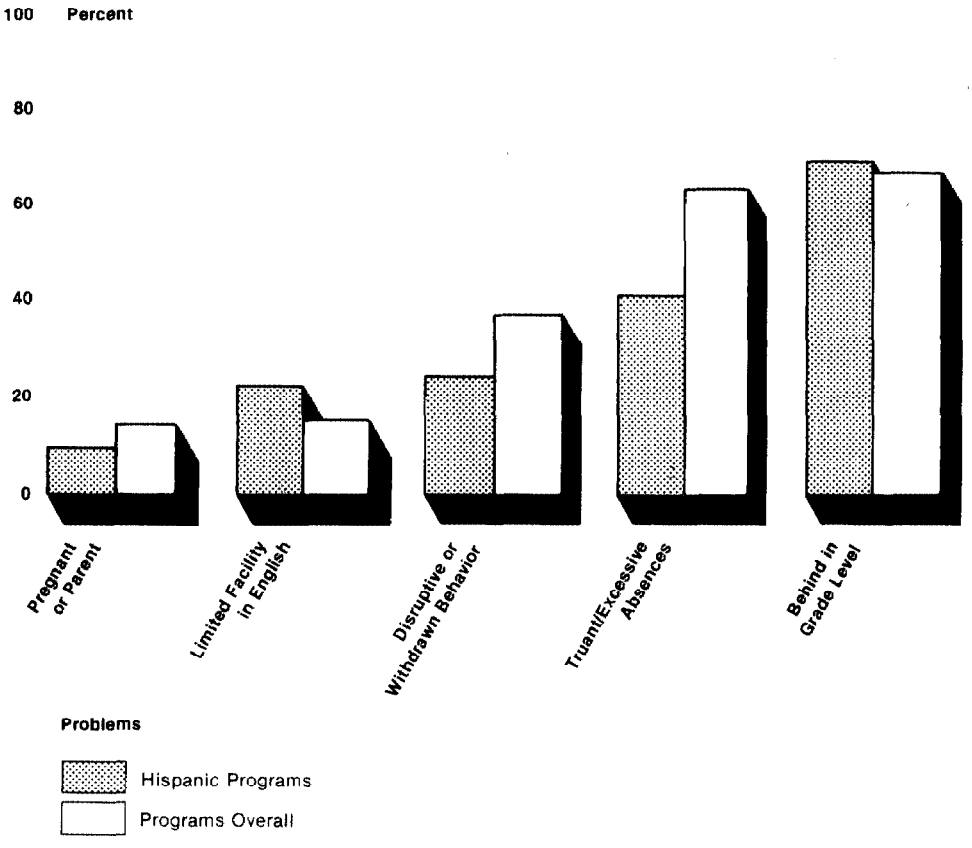


Table 2.6: Services Provided to Hispanic Youth

Service	Percent of programs that provided services	Percent of youth served
Personal counseling	100	46
Basic education	92	87
Career counseling	85	46
Parental involvement encouraged	89	65
Assistance in obtaining social services	69	75
Job search assistance	77	43
Job skills training	65	43
Part-time employment placement	69	42
Pregnancy/parental counseling	50	60
GED preparation	39	10
Day care	23	32
English as a second language	50	11

Conclusions

Program operators we surveyed overwhelmingly regarded their programs as having positive results. However, given the diversity of the programs and lack of definitive data proving effectiveness, there is no single model that can be prescribed or adopted for differing localities or for youth with differing problems. Still, certain program ingredients appear to be basic requisites of effective programs. They include the following:

- Because most youth have multiple problems, programs must offer multiple services.
- Not every youth needs the same interventions, but most of those at risk apparently require some type of basic education, counseling, and other support services.
- For youth who already had dropped out and are unlikely to earn a high school diploma, offering GED preparation seems appropriate.
- As local program administrators indicated, certain program elements are strongly related to program success—namely, a caring and committed staff, a safe and secure learning environment, personalized instruction, a low student-teacher ratio, and program flexibility, such as in hours and curriculum.

Special Obstacles Facing Programs

The previous chapter, on the questionnaire survey results, showed customary practices among local dropout programs and factors that local practitioners believed were critical for effectiveness.

This chapter presents some perspective on why dropout programs should avoid unrealistic expectations. The information relates primarily to large inner city schools. It draws on data from site visits and evaluation materials, principally on the sizable dropout prevention efforts undertaken in New York City.[1]

Among the problems discussed are: (1) youth may lag so far behind in academic skills before entering high school that they may not catch up in a reasonable time to graduate or may become discouraged and drop out; (2) inadequacies in schoolwide conditions, such as large size and overcrowding, hamper dropout prevention programs, so that dropout programs may be necessary but still insufficient alone to prevent youth from dropping out; and (3) implementation difficulties initially restrain program effectiveness, so it is unrealistic to expect effective outcomes until a program becomes fully operational.

Youth Are Behind Before Entering High School

Because problems indicating that youth are likely to drop out are often evident before high school, dropout program officials (and other education experts) stress the need for more services in earlier school years.[2] Entering unprepared for high school work, the youth have the double problem of catching up and then keeping up with the more demanding school work at the high school level. They may be so far behind that without highly intensive remediation assistance they may not catch up in a reasonable time to attain a high school diploma or they may become discouraged and drop out. For example, a study of Chicago dropouts found that the most important factors determining the dropout rate at individual high schools were the numbers of students who were overage or reading below normal level as entering freshman.

[1]Although most of the citations are from a New York City evaluation, similar observations were made by school officials we contacted in Atlanta, Houston, Columbus, and Miami.

[2]For example, Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (and former U.S. Commissioner of Education) believes that dropout prevention must begin in elementary school. He suggests ". . . special emphasis on language, with continuous assessment of student progress, and with skilled counseling." He recommends, too, that an assessment of students' language proficiency be made the year before the youth enter high school; for students with deficiencies, an intensive remedial program should be provided over the summer and, if needed, the first term of high school, with assistance thereafter. (High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America by Ernest L. Boyer, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Harper and Row, 1983, pp. 88 and 245.)

High-risk youth often have substantial educational difficulties (and related problems, such as high absentee rates) when they reach high school. For example, in New York City's Attendance Improvement/ Dropout Prevention Program in 1985-86, among the 5,800 youth targeted in 26 high schools, 85 percent had failed at least three courses the prior year and nearly half were reading at least 2 years below grade level. Also, almost 60 percent of the 4,300 middle school youth targeted in New York's Dropout Prevention Program failed two or more courses the preceding year.[3]

Although at-risk youth may respond to and benefit from social services and employment assistance, such aid alone does not automatically translate into success in school. Nor may the addition of just minor educational efforts be adequate. The Public Education Association[4] evaluation of one of New York City's dropout programs concluded that the program would have to devote more attention to strengthening the academic component. The program undertook educational alternatives (e.g., course enrichment activities), but, the evaluation concluded, "few [of the schools] developed academic interventions with sufficient potency fundamentally to affect students' classroom performance."[5]

In addition, at-risk students well behind in grade level need positive (academic) evidence that they can make it to graduation. The evaluation said:

"Interventions are needed that will enhance students' rate of credit accumulation. Such strategies include (a) minischools, (b) transitional programs to enable youngsters who enter high school in the middle of the term to catch up, (c) breaking semesters into shorter cycles which reduce the time between students' efforts and reward (credits), and (d) a system of banking points toward credits, rather than a hit or miss/all or nothing approach toward credit accumulation."

[3]The Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention Program (AIDP) operates in 26 high schools and 68 middle schools. The 1985-86 school year was its second year of operation, but it was substantially changed from the program in 1984-85. AIDP is one of New York City's two major dropout prevention programs initiated in the last few years. The other is the Dropout Prevention Program, operating in 10 high schools and 29 middle schools feeding into those high schools. The 1985-86 school year was its first year of operation.

[4]An independent, nonprofit organization working for better public education in New York City.

[5]Effective Dropout Prevention: An Analysis of the 1985-86 Program in New York City, by Eileen Foley and Diana Oxley, Public Education Association, November 1986.

Schoolwide Problems Hamper Dropout Prevention

Dropout programs may be affected by basic inadequacies in some schools, so that improvement in school settings may often be needed if special efforts to keep at-risk youth in school are to make effective headway. In some troubled urban schools, for example,

"Students . . . often jam into battered buildings . . . . Neighboring residents complain of noise, vandalism, and drugs . . . . Once inside the classroom, students pay little attention to the teachers, who, in turn, expect little from the students."[6]

The Public Education Association evaluation of the New York City dropout programs concluded that the difficulties of dropout prevention were

"aggravated by several school-wide conditions [notably], the immense size of the schools, the large proportion of below-grade-level students, the bewildering array of academic programs which flow from these [circumstances, and] the glaring inadequacy of space for programs in school buildings."

It added, "Ironically, the introduction of dropout prevention programs into the schools worsens these conditions," and the stress of handling returning truants and new program staff members in overcrowded schools is a "powerful countervailing incentive" not to accommodate such additions.

Dropout prevention must be pursued in concert with general school improvement, the report stated, since the effectiveness of dropout prevention

"is ultimately dependent on the schools' directing resources and attention to their overall instructional policies and considering how those policies interact with their specific dropout prevention programs . . . . If the at-risk are to succeed in mainstreamed academic programs, a host of issues from school and class size, admissions, credit, and security policies, to the focus on instruction and quality of staff development activities must be addressed."

Regarding the issue of instruction, another study—observing eight high schools in Chicago—has documented that some schools are short-changing students on instructional time.[7] The researchers found in each school a "culture of cutting," a clear pattern of skipping early morning and late afternoon classes. Toleration of this pattern "trains young people to be irresponsible," results in their falling further behind in their school

[6]Boyer, High School, op. cit., p. 16.

[7]"Where's Room 185?" How Schools Can Reduce Their Dropout Problem, Chicago Panel on Public School Policy and Finance, Chicago, Illinois, December 1986.

work, and makes them unprepared for demands for regular attendance in later employment, the researchers said.

The study also found students assigned to "fictional" study halls—nonexistent rooms to which assignment meant that students were not really expected to attend at that time. The researchers urged that "study periods" not be used simply as time fillers; that they be in a place conducive to learning; and that arrangements be made to maintain order, have monitors who can help the students with their work, and have teachers take attendance. Finally, the researchers estimated that the average student received less than 10 minutes a day of individual attention from instructors.

Implementation Difficulties Restrain Program Effectiveness

Whatever the plans or design, dropout programs will flounder if they do not effectively confront the practical problems of implementation. Indeed, it may be unrealistic to expect much successful program outcome until a program becomes fully operational, a process that may require more than a year or two. The two New York programs (mentioned previously) offer several examples of the problems of getting started.

The dropout prevention programs planned to draw on, and had earmarked resources for, community-based organizations to provide counseling, employment-oriented services, and other support. However, the plans stumbled on contract delays, so that the planned services were not in place in many schools when the school year started. Evaluations by the Office of Educational Assessment[8] noted that the results of the programs were poorer in schools where some services were not provided in the earlier months of the year than where full-year services were provided.[9]

Also, according to a Columbia University Teachers College evaluation report, schools that had no role or control in the selection of community-based organizations tended to have more difficulty in getting over the obstacle of regarding them as "outside" organizations. They had more operational problems in deciding each other's responsibilities and in cooperating with each other (e.g., in scheduling or release of students

[8]Part of the New York City Board of Education.

[9]Middle School Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention (AIDP) Programs, 1985-86, Evaluation Summary; and High School Attendance Improvement/Dropout Prevention (A.I./D.P.) Program, 1985-1986, Evaluation Summary.

for activities during the school day and sharing information on particular youth).[10]

There were similar problems in efforts to provide multiple support services requiring the collaboration of several staff. Specifically, youth in middle school dropout programs were "pulled out" of their regular classes for support services, thereby disrupting their instructional time. Meshing of multiple support efforts was poorly implemented, the Public Education Association evaluation found, because "no planning time was allocated to allow staff to integrate and orchestrate their activities."

Similarly, plans for involving the parents of students made little headway. "Despite staff's general claims that families are more implicated in student failure than schools," the Public Education Association evaluation noted, "no means of involving them in the solution of the dropout problem was found." Relatedly, the Teachers College evaluation pointed out that home visits on truancy problems were considered of particular value, but scheduling difficulties, the time involved, and other problems led to their not being pursued extensively.

Recruitment and retention of instructional staff interested in working with truants and in after-school hours activities proved difficult. The truant group was "viewed as unmotivated and extremely difficult to teach" and, the Public Education Association evaluation suggested, staff will seek other assignments unless special staff development, including use of school psychologists, guidance counselors, and instructional staff experienced in meeting the problems, is conducted to obtain the commitment and skills needed to reach truants.

Image of Program Is Significant

How a dropout program is perceived—its "image" or reputation in the eyes of students and staff—can be an influential negative or positive force. For example, a program regarded to be for "dumb kids" may be shunned by needy youth.

The Public Education Association evaluation of New York programs found that

[10]Evaluation of the New York City Dropout Prevention Initiative, Final Report For Year One, by Joseph Grannis et al., Teachers College, Columbia University, January 23, 1987.

"labeling played a negative role . . . . It was obvious that students were receiving special help because they were often pulled out of class to see counselors . . . . Dissatisfaction was intensified . . . moreover, because the students felt not only that they were being labeled 'retarded' but that they were also forced to miss needed instructional time."

In two dropout programs regarded as effective by their program administrators, an important element has been some feature that is a positive attraction. The North Education Center school in Columbus, Ohio, has adults attending some nonacademic classes (e.g., job training) with the youth. The Middle College alternative high school in New York is housed at a community college, and its facilities and some courses are available to the youth. Middle College high school receives far more applications than it has openings.

Dropout Reporting Systems

As part of their April 29, 1986, request, Representatives Hawkins, Goodling, and Hayes asked us to review dropout definitions and data collection practices. This chapter looks at the significance of dropout data problems, reviews principal difficulties, and discusses how they might be overcome.

There are reliable national dropout estimates from national surveys, providing information on the extent of the dropout problem overall and among major population groups. Local data are needed to measure the extent of local dropout problems and to gauge how relatively well or poorly individual school systems are performing in reducing the numbers of dropouts. However, because school district dropout statistics vary widely, they often are difficult to interpret and lack comparability across jurisdictions. The availability of standardized data is a prerequisite for measuring the relative effectiveness of dropout programs, such as the proposed federally funded dropout demonstration projects.

Importance of Quality Data on Dropouts

At present, state and local dropout definitions and data collection and reporting practices vary widely. The data they produce are often difficult to interpret and lack comparability across states and localities.[1] Reported dropout rates and changes in rates over time are likely to be understated or overstated, perhaps reflecting the data methods for identifying and counting dropouts as much as the actual experience.

Development of standard definitions and uniform data collection and reporting procedures would provide better bases for state and local officials and the public to gauge how well or poorly their schools are doing compared to similar schools elsewhere. It also would enable better identification and targeting of efforts for particular problem schools and groups, and provide more valid and acceptable measures for evaluating outcomes of programs for dropout youth.

The proposed dropout legislation for demonstration programs (H.R.5 and S.1420) are intended, in part, to encourage the collection and reporting of better dropout information. Specifically, they authorize the Secretary of Education to provide funding to local school districts so that

[1] According to a study of high school dropout rates in Appalachia, the dramatic differences in how the dropout data were reported among the Appalachian states prohibited meaningful comparisons. "By varying the grade level of dropouts reported (the numerator) and/or the pupil population at risk (the denominator), the reported rates for a given school district could vary more than ten-fold (e.g., 2 percent to 32 percent)." (Study of High School Dropouts in Appalachia, by J. Lamarr Cox, Judy Ann Holley, R. Hayman Kite, and Wanda Y. Durham, Research Triangle Institute, May 22, 1985, prepared for the Appalachian Regional Commission, p. 59.)

they can establish a model system for collecting and reporting information on the number, ages, and grade level of children not completing their elementary and secondary education and the reasons why they had dropped out. The Senate bill also calls for the Secretary of Education to establish a standard definition of a school dropout within 60 days of enactment of the legislation.

The Department of Education's Center for Education Statistics and the Council of Chief State School Officers[2] have been working together since late 1984 to improve the comprehensiveness, comparability, and timeliness of data reported to the Center for Education Statistics by the state education agencies. In September 1986, in a report sponsored by the Department of Education entitled Collecting National Dropout Statistics, the council presented recommendations to the Department of Education designed to help the states create meaningful and comparable data on school dropouts (as well as other education data). These recommendations are currently being reviewed by the Department of Education.

The Council of Great City Schools[3] also has looked into the standardizing of dropout statistics, focusing on the urban school systems that make up the council. The council had several concerns, including the need for

> " . . . greater public awareness of the dropout [problem] and the concomitant need by individual school districts to know whether their situation was better or worse than other cities, and whether the nature of the problem differed from place to place and group to group."[4]

In our June 1986 report, (School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem, GAO/HRD-86-106BR), we observed that it probably would be useful to the school districts themselves if they used a standard definition for dropouts and uniform collection and reporting procedures, thus providing directly comparable data. Such changes also would help measure the effectiveness of programs in reducing the number of dropouts.

[2]The Council of Chief State School Officers is a nonprofit educational association representing the chief education administrator in each state and U.S. territory.

[3]A nonprofit educational organization that represents the interests of the 43 largest school districts in the United States in 1987.

[4]"Preliminary Technical Analysis of Dropout Statistics in Selected Great City Schools," compiled by Michael Casserly, Council of Great City Schools, January 1986 (p. 1).

Deficiencies in Current Data

The limitations of existing data on school dropouts include differences at the state and local level in (1) definitions of a dropout, (2) time periods during the school year that dropout data are collected, (3) methods of data collection, (4) tracking or follow-up of youth no longer in school to determine if they continue or complete secondary education elsewhere, and (5) methods used to calculate the dropout rate. It should be recognized, however, that even with uniform dropout definitions and standard data collection and reporting procedures, dropout statistics based on school district administrative data will be "approximate." While national surveys measure the educational progress of youth (particularly longitudinal surveys that track the same individuals over time)[5], school districts are inherently limited in the extent to which they can follow-up on youth who have left their school systems. They cannot be expected to follow the youth beyond a certain period of time (or age of the youth). To the extent that school districts lose track of the youth, uncertainty will be injected into dropout rate calculations.

In the Council of Chief State School Officers' report, Collecting National Dropout Statistics, the differences in dropout data collected at the state level are well illustrated. The report, which was based on information provided by 49 states (including the District of Columbia; Alaska and Montana did not respond to the request for information), pointed out that 41 of the 49 states count students who drop out of school and that states vary in their definition of dropout. One state includes a transfer to a nonpublic school, 34 states include military enlistees, 21 states include persons completing a GED, 8 include educated-at-home students, and 32 include expelled students.

The council's report also pointed out the variations in the states' criteria for determining when a student has dropped out. For example, 11 states use the lack of a school transcript request as the factor that classifies a student as a dropout, and 10 states use number of days absent—ranging from 5 to 45.

The report noted that most states report dropout statistics by grade level with some variations in the range of grades included. Among 41 states, 12 states report dropouts for grades 9-12 and 15 states count

[5]One of the provisions in H.R.5 is for the Department of Education's Center for Education Statistics to conduct a national longitudinal survey of students enrolled in elementary and secondary school concerning their educational progress. Relatedly, the Department of Education has been supporting a national longitudinal survey of 1980 high school sophomores and seniors, and the Department of Labor has been funding a national longitudinal survey of youth ages 14-21 when first interviewed in 1979.

grades 7-12, with most of the others (12) reporting dropouts for kindergarten through grade 12.

In January 1986, the Council of Great City Schools reported on its analyses of dropout statistics in selected urban school systems. The council found variations among school districts in the definition of a dropout and calculation of a dropout rate. Regarding the latter, the council found that generally three types of enrollment calculations were used to compute dropout rates: (1) average school enrollment over time, with school districts using different lengths of time; (2) enrollment on a fixed date, with variations on the date used; and (3) a cumulative enrollment count over the school year. The council's report stated that no one method seemed better than the others. As the report also noted, each can result in inflated or deflated dropout rates, making comparability difficult.

Proposals for Standardized Data

In the proposed dropout legislation to authorize demonstration programs, the Secretary of Education is to provide grants to local school districts to establish and demonstrate model systems for collecting and reporting information on the number, ages, and grade levels of children not completing their elementary and secondary education and the reasons why such children dropped out. A related House Committee on Education and Labor report accompanying a bill for dropout demonstration programs (H.R.3042) introduced in the 99th Congress acknowledged the limitations in the data on school dropouts and indicated the need to improve national and local data collection and reporting procedures. The report explained the need for a federal dropout prevention program, in part, on the need to standardize the collection and reporting of dropout information.

In its 1986 report, Collecting National Dropout Statistics, the Council of Chief State School Officers made several recommendations to the Department of Education for improving dropout statistics. The report stated that

"The major strategy recommended for improving dropout statistics is to agree on data elements to be collected across all states; and to establish definitions and specific criteria to be used by all states in collecting these elements. Without a national system for tracking all students, it is not possible to collect dropout data and be certain that no students have fallen through the statistical cracks. We believe that the quality of dropout statistics can be significantly upgraded by rigorously specifying who should and should not be counted as dropouts, by defining who should and should not be counted in the base population, by determining what co-statistics and

contextual statistics should be counted, and by collecting all data comparably across states."

The chief of the General Surveys Branch at the Department of Education's Center for Education Statistics said that the department is continuing its work with the council on developing dropout definitions and procedures for collecting dropout statistics, as well as on strategies for implementation.

Conclusions

The magnitude and composition of the dropout problem in individual localities is blurred by the wide variations in definitions and data collection and reporting practices. We believe that the availability of more uniform school district data is a prerequisite for gauging how well or poorly schools are doing in comparison with similar schools elsewhere, and for measuring the relative effectiveness of dropout programs such as the proposed federally funded dropout demonstration projects. Standardized dropout definition and data collection procedures such as those developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers would improve the measuring of relative school performance and progress. In this regard, we believe that the proposed dropout demonstration programs provide an opportunity to test the feasibility of using the Council of Chief State School Officers' recommendations or alternatives determined by the Secretary of Education.

National surveys provide reliable national measures of the extent of the dropout problem overall and among major population groups. In particular, national longitudinal surveys (which follow the same individuals over time) can keep better track of youth who move from one locality to another than can school districts. Therefore, we believe that the proposed national longitudinal survey of youth, as called for in H.R.5, could provide valuable information on the dropout problem nationally.

Technical Description of GAO's Survey Methodology

During October and December 1986, we sent a mail questionnaire to a judgment sample of program administrators identified as serving youth at risk of dropping out of school or youth who had already dropped out. This appendix contains the technical description of our survey design, pretest procedures, sample selection, and overall response rate.

Survey Design

The questionnaire was designed to elicit the respondents' experiences and opinions concerning the operation of programs during school years 1985-86 and 1986-87 that were intended to reduce the number of youth dropping out of school or, for youth who had already dropped out, to assist them returning to school. Specifically, we asked program officials about

- sources of funding for their program,
- characteristics of the populations served by their program,
- the program objectives and the methods of intervention used to achieve those objectives,
- factors associated with effective programs, and
- barriers to achieving further program effectiveness and methods for overcoming such barriers.

Pretesting the Questionnaire

Before the questionnaire was used, it was pretested with program officials at local dropout and dropout prevention programs in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. In all cases, the individuals represented the types of respondents likely to be found in the group surveyed.

During the pretest, respondents completed the questionnaire while GAO staff noted the time the respondents took to complete each question and any difficulties they experienced. We used a standardized procedure to elicit the respondents' descriptions of the various difficulties and considerations encountered as they completed each item. The procedure involved only nondirect inquiries to ensure that we did not ask the respondents leading questions.

Based on the pretest results, we revised the questionnaire to ensure that (1) the intended respondents could and would provide the information requested and (2) all questions were fair, relevant, easy to answer, and relatively free of design flaws that could introduce bias or error into the study results. We also tested to ensure that completing the questionnaire would not be too burdensome a task for the respondent.

Sampling Plan and Response Rate

We identified 1,015 school or community-based dropout and dropout prevention programs nationwide. We used the following methods to compile the listing of programs. First, we conducted a telephone survey of 103 education and employment and training organizations, foundations, and research groups knowledgeable about at-risk youth, asking them for information on actual programs and/or other organizations that should be contacted. For example, we contacted the Department of Education and each of its nine regional educational laboratories; Department of Labor; Council of Chief State School Officers; National Education Association; Council of Great City Schools and each of 37 member school districts in 1986 (the largest in the country); National Governors' Association; National Alliance of Business; National Urban League; Appalachian Regional Commission; Ford, Danforth, Carnegie, Exxon, and Edna McConnell Clark Foundations; and Columbia and Brandeis Universities, and the Universities of Wisconsin and California at Los Angeles and Berkeley. Second, we reviewed the existing literature on dropout programs through the Department of Education's Educational Resources Information Center to identify programs. Finally, we asked our survey recipients if they coordinated programs with different objectives, methods of intervention, and/or populations served, to copy the questionnaire and forward it to the person responsible for that other program. The final list surveyed is a judgment sample and does not represent the universe of all dropout programs in the United States.

An initial mailing of the questionnaire was made in October 1986, followed by a second mailing to nonrespondents in December 1986. We received responses from 658 programs, including 67 not identified in the original 1,015. Of the 658 responses, 179 were excluded from the final analysis. Programs excluded were those serving populations not identified as being either at high risk of dropping out of school or already dropouts, or programs not in operation in both school years 1985-86 and 1986-87.

Much of the information we obtained through the survey questionnaire were the views or opinions of program administrators. To this extent, no verification of the data could be made. However, we did conduct an extensive set of internal checks to locate inconsistencies or extreme values that indicated inaccurate information. These included follow-up telephone calls to respondents. We also edited a sample of cases for keypunch errors.

Highlights of Selected Programs

Survey findings have shown that certain interventions are common, such as providing basic education, job training, counseling and other support services. While we did not probe for detailed descriptions of the programs, the descriptive material sent to us by some survey respondents and our site visits demonstrate that there is considerable variation in scope and emphases of programs. The following brief descriptions of 20 of these show this diversity—as well as certain commonalities. These programs were selected to be illustrative of the range of dropout programs, not because they had proven effectiveness.

Project COFFEE

Program	Project COFFEE (Cooperative Federation for Educational Experiences), Oxford, Massachusetts
Thrust	Multi-services training program for dropouts and potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Regional, largely rural program • "Hands-on" occupational training • Training includes student-operated businesses • Strong school/industry partnership • Individualized education linked to occupational training • Flexible hours
Services	• Academic skills training • Occupational training • Counseling • Preemployment activities • Physical education
Target Group	Youth at risk of dropping out and dropouts
Reported Cost	About $3,500 per student

Program Summary

Project COFFEE is a regional occupational training, instruction, and counseling program serving predominantly rural youth near Worcester, Massachusetts. The program objectives are to increase basic skill achievement, decrease absenteeism, and help students acquire occupational skills appropriate for entry-level employment in industry.

The program has five components: occupational training, academic skills instruction, counseling, preemployment education, and physical education. The occupational component is the program's core. Each student is placed in one of five training areas: computer maintenance, word processing, horticulture/ agriculture, distributive education (e.g., preparation in marketing and merchandising), or building/grounds maintenance. Each training area emphasizes simulated work experiences and student-managed, student-operated business. The student-operated businesses teach interpersonal as well as technical skills. In addition to participation in these businesses, some students also work as interns in part-time jobs.

In the academic component, individualized education plans are prepared for each student. Instruction in basic skills is integrated with the student's occupational program. Where possible, students also take courses at a regular high school.

As part of the counseling component, a full-time counseling staff offers individual and group counseling sessions. Independent specialists and community counseling services are also utilized. A nurse on staff counsels pregnant and parenting teens in the program in family and parenting skills.

The preemployment component seeks to strengthen students' value systems, communication skills, decisionmaking, conflict resolution, and interpersonal relations. A physical education program is the fifth major component.

Project COFFEE uses a contract system to encourage students to take responsibility for their own actions. When serious discipline problems occur, the project uses an in-school, rather than out-of-school suspension, in order not to interrupt the learning process.

In the 1985-86 school year, 80 percent or more of the project youth were potential rather than actual dropouts. Most were from rural areas and from lower socioeconomic status families; most were male and virtually all were white. Enrollment was about 120 students.

The project claims effectiveness on three measures: (1) For 3 consecutive years, students increased their scores more than a comparable population on all subtests (reading, language, math) of the California Achievement Test. (2) Students increased the number of days they attended school compared to their attendance rate prior to the program. (3) Students in the program had a higher job placement rate than a national sample of dropouts (however, regarding the last, Project COFFEE youth primarily were not dropouts and, therefore, the comparison sample on job placement is not comparable).

Enterprise High

Program	Enterprise High, Macomb County (also expanded to St. Clair and Livingston Counties), Michigan
Thrust	Educational courses and job skills training
Unique Aspects	• Students form small businesses • Basic skills taught in context of work experience
Services Provided	• Basic education • Job skills training • Training in business operations
Target Group	School dropouts and potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$4,000 per pupil

Program Summary

Enterprise High emphasizes basic education, life skills, and job skills training within the context of student-operated businesses. In the small businesses, students make decisions on products/services, how to produce or provide them, when they will be sold, and the selling price. Students sell the products or services, return to the school the costs of materials, and decide how to divide the profits among themselves. Reading, writing, mathematics, communication skills, and life skills are taught within the context of the work experience.

The project served about 400 youth during 1985-86. Ninety percent were dropouts, an estimated 90 percent had excessive absences, and 70 percent had displayed inappropriate behavior. Ninety percent were white, and 80 percent were from lower socioeconomic status families.

According to the program codirector, 67 percent of the youth had either completed high school, gotten jobs, or enrolled in further training (the

percentage of students in each of these outcomes is not stated). Also, the enrollees had shown gains in attendance and self-esteem, compared to their previous measures in these areas.

The Enterprise High project was implemented jointly by the Macomb Intermediate School District and Oakland University. It was initiated in one high school in Macomb County and by 1986 was expanded to at least eight locations, including programs in nearby Livingston and St. Clair Counties.

Street School, Inc.

Program	Street School, Inc., Tulsa, Oklahoma
Thrust	Alternative school for dropouts and potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	Emphasizes mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment
Services	• Drug/alcohol treatment • Personal counseling • Academic remediation • Regular high school subjects • Life skills and career development
Target Group	High school dropouts and potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$1,631 per pupil

Program Summary

Street School is an alternative school providing education and counseling services for about 200 high school dropouts and potential dropouts. Each student negotiates a treatment plan with the educational and counseling staff. The plan outlines individual objectives, including behavioral goals and implementation steps.

Street School provides counseling, behavior modification intervention, and drug/alcohol treatment services. Staff counsel students individually at least once a week and refer students to social service agencies when needed.

The program provides academic remediation through individualized instruction and also provides continued education in science, social studies, mathematics, and communication. Street School also provides career-related development. Staff instruct students in life skills and

appropriate work habits. The school provides counseling on career goals and places some of its students in part-time or full-time jobs.

Street School's executive director regards the program as very effective. Data in 1985 indicate that one-third of the students returned to public school, 20 percent went on for further employment or training, and 16 percent completed the GED. Thirteen percent returned to Street School, 5 percent were institutionalized, and the other 13 percent had outcomes not listed.

Street School receives funds from many sources: the state department of education, the local school system, the United Way, and foundations and corporations.

School-to-Work Action Program (SWAP)

Program	School-to-Work Action Program (SWAP), Denver, Colorado
Thrust	Basic skills and job readiness program for potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Business cosponsorship • Business mentors
Services	• Instruction in basic skills subjects • Job placement • Speakers and field trips provide career information
Target Group	Potential dropouts, primarily Hispanic youth in 10th and 11th grades
Reported Cost	Not stated
Program Summary	SWAP was developed by the Colorado Alliance of Business and is conducted in cooperation with the Denver public schools and business community. Its purpose is to decrease the dropout rate and provide job readiness and work experience to potential dropouts in two Colorado high schools that have large Hispanic populations and high dropout rates. Students attend three or four core classes each day (e.g., reading and math), including a class on career exploration and job search skills. Students also hear guest speakers and go on field trips to learn more about career options. Each student spends time with a volunteer mentor from the business community. The mentor works in an area that the student has identified

as a career interest. The student learns about the career through observation (job shadowing), discussions with the mentor, and attending professional meetings.

The program is directed primarily at youth in the 10th and 11th grades. In the 1985-86 school year, most (about 80 percent) of the approximately 180 youth served were Hispanic. Virtually all were behind in grade, and 60 percent were truant or had excessive absences.

SWAP places youth age 16 years who have completed at least the 10th grade in summer jobs and in part-time jobs during the school year. Students who have had no unexcused absences, have passed all courses, and have attended all field trips are guaranteed a summer job. SWAP also encourages participation by parents.

A summary of its first 2 years of operation (1984-85 and 1985-86) states that SWAP students increased their grade point average and daily attendance rate above their earlier performance. They also did better in these measures than counterparts not in the program.

SER/Jobs for Progress Learning Center

Program	SER/Jobs for Progress Learning Center, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Thrust	Basic skills remediation for dropouts and potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Individualized, self-paced, competency-based instruction • Development of software to teach English as a second language • Computer-assisted learning
Services	• Preparation for GED • Basic skills remediation • Counseling
Target Group	Dropouts and potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$2,000 per pupil

Program Summary

In 1985, SER/Jobs for Progress initiated a Comprehensive Competencies Program (CCP) Learning Center. Located in a renovated warehouse, the program provides an individualized, self-paced, competency-based approach to basic skills remediation.

Instruction in mathematics, reading, and language skills is provided by a learning system (in part, computer software) developed by Remediation and Training Institute of Washington, D.C. The learning system allows students to proceed at their own pace and receive instant feedback. The learning center and the institute are also developing and testing a software package teaching English as a second language.

About 160 youth were served during 1985-86. More than two-thirds were dropouts, 90 percent were 17 years or older, and 40 percent were Hispanic.

The project reports that CCP students made rapid increases at basic competency levels in reading, language skills and GED subjects compared to previous instructional methods at SER. (Mathematics was not included in this analysis.)

Work-In Program

Program	Work-In Program, Cleveland, Ohio
Thrust	Academic instruction and work experience for potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	Jobs offered based on youth's improving and maintaining academic performance
Services	• Job placement • Personal counseling • Career guidance
Target Group	9th and 10th grade potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$834 per pupil

Program Summary

The Work-In Program is a joint effort by Youth Opportunities Unlimited and the Cleveland public schools. It serves about 125 ninth and tenth grade potential dropouts.

The program's primary goal is to encourage potential dropouts to improve in three areas: school attendance, academic performance (passing grades in all subjects), and behavior and attitude. Students are given 8 weeks of initial academic instruction. If they improve in academic performance, they are placed in a community agency job for 8 to 10 hours weekly at $3.35 per hour.

The staff monitor students' performance at prescribed grading periods and encourage them to maintain their academic progress and remain in the program. Youth who do not maintain the required level of performance are counseled, warned, and finally terminated from the program. Project staff also provide personal counseling as well as guidance in career planning.

Data from the 1985-86 school year show that 90 percent of the program participants were minority youth. All were from low socioeconomic status families. About four-fifths of the youth were behind in grade level, and about half were truant or had excessive absences. Typically, students participate in the program about 20 months.

The Cleveland public schools and Youth Opportunities Unlimited have recently introduced a follow-up program funded by a local foundation. The new program will help place youth in jobs after graduation and provide counseling for the following 9 months.

The Peninsula Academies

Program	The Peninsula Academies, Redwood City, California
Thrust	School-within-a-school, with focus on job skills training in electronics or computers
Unique Aspects	• Focus on electronics/computer technology • Career planning integrated into academic curriculum • School-within-a-school
Service Provided	• Basic education • High school courses • Students matched with mentors from industry • Placement in part-time jobs
Target Group	Potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$3,500 per pupil
Program Summary	The Peninsula Academies are operated by the Sequoia Union High School District in Redwood City, California. The two academies are vocationally oriented schools-within-a-school (located in a regular high school, but mostly in separate classrooms). One specializes in electronics and the other in computer technology. Other courses are also career oriented. The academies offer some basic high school courses in grades 10 through 12. Classes are small and tutoring assistance is available. All juniors and some sophomores and seniors are matched with volunteer mentors in industry. Most students are placed in full-time summer jobs after their junior year, and in part-time jobs in the second half of their senior year.

Most of the youth are potential dropouts, and most are minority youth. In the 1985-86 school year, 50 percent were behind in grade level, and almost 50 percent displayed inappropriate behavior.

According to an evaluation (by the American Institutes for Research in the Behavioral Sciences) of the academies during the 1984-85 school year, most of the approximately 185 academy students tended to stay in school and graduate at a higher rate than comparison students. Also, the academy students' performance in reading, writing, and mathematics (but not science) was superior to that of the comparison group.

Des Moines Alternative High School

Program	Des Moines Alternative High School, Des Moines, Iowa
Thrust	Alternative high school for dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Entry throughout the school year • Individualized instruction • Day care for children of students
Services Provided	• High school diploma program • Individualized self-paced learning • Counseling • Job supervision
Target Group	High school dropouts
Reported Cost	$2,500 per pupil
Program Summary	Des Moines alternative high school offers a full curriculum leading to a high school diploma. Students may enroll at any time during the school year. Classes are small and organized so that students can work at their own pace. They often work individually with the teacher. Basic education, required high school courses, and electives are taught. The students may also enter a vocational internship program, where they are trained at an employer work site (and may receive up to two units of school credit). A work experience coordinator at the school also helps place students who seek part-time jobs.

The alternative high school has several other services, including personal counseling, employment counseling, and referral to needed community services. There is also a follow-up procedure in which students and their parents (or guardian) are notified weekly of the student's progress and attendance. Day care services are available for students with children.

During the 1985-86 school year, 480 students were enrolled in the alternative high school. All were school dropouts, 80 percent were behind in grade level, and 20 percent were pregnant or parents. Most students were white and all were from urban areas.

Among the findings of a follow-up survey of the program for 9th grade school reentrants (conducted by the project) are the following: About 60 percent of the 60 responding students completed the 1984-85 or 1985-86 school years or returned to the home high school (however, of the latter, about 70 percent left school again); and the best liked feature of the 9th grade program was seen to be student-teacher relationships.

Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Project (TAPP)

Program	Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Project (TAPP), Mill Valley, California
Thrust	Comprehensive services for pregnant teens and teen parents to keep them in or return them to school
Unique Aspects	• Continuous teen/counselor relationship for up to 3 years or until youth are age 19
Services	• TAPP and social service agency staff located at same site • Personal counseling • Pregnancy/parental counseling • Counselor identifies needed services • Counselor assists in attaining services • Counselor conducts follow-up
Target Group	Pregnant teenagers and teen parents
Reported Cost	$1,200 per person for case management
Program Summary	TAPP provides a range of services to youth who are pregnant or parents. The program's most important feature is its "case manager" approach, in which a counselor maintains a relationship with the youth for up to 3 years or until they are age 19. Another important feature is that TAPP and some social service agency staff are located at the same site. The case manager has two roles—brokering and counseling. In the brokering role, the case manager helps clients identify needed services, arranges for those service, and follows up to insure that the services are

received. The types of services available to TAPP participants include child care (teen well-baby clinic and infant day care), housing, employment, health/obstetrical services, and nutrition and food supplement programs.

In its counseling role (which is often related to the brokering role), TAPP counselors provide several types of assistance, helping the teenagers solve their problems. Counselors also contact members of the student's family to encourage their involvement.

TAPP is coordinated by the Family Service Agency of San Francisco and the San Francisco Unified School District. It served about 600 dropouts and potential dropouts in 1985-86; 95 percent were minority youth; virtually all were low income.

The TAPP project is reportedly successful on several measures. About two-thirds of TAPP participants were enrolled in school 1 year after giving birth, a far higher proportion than for teenage mothers nationally. Fewer had babies with low birth weight compared to weights of babies of all San Francisco teens. TAPP-assisted students also had fewer repeat pregnancies.

The Community Intensive Treatment for Youth (CITY) Program

Program	Community Intensive Treatment for Youth (CITY) Program, Gadsden, Alabama
Thrust	Academic, vocational, and social skills training for youth offenders, who also are dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Instruction based on an individual treatment plan • One-on-one instruction with teacher • Program effectiveness is measured by the number of participants remaining law-abiding while enrolled in the program
Services	• Academic remediation/GED training • Basic employment skills training • Counseling • Social skills training • Consumer education • Behavior modification
Target Group	Youth ages 12-18 on probation from criminal justice system (all are dropouts)
Reported Cost	Per pupil cost is $2,510
Program Summary	The CITY program, begun in 1981, is a day-treatment center that provides an alternative to the institutionalization of youth convicted of unlawful behavior. The youth offenders in the program are school dropouts age 12-18.

About 100 youth are served each year, with about 30 attending CITY at any one time. In March 1987, there were 37 youth on the waiting list. The CITY program identifies the individual strengths and weaknesses of the youth and prescribes an individualized instruction plan for each.

The program provides the following individualized services and training:

- Academic remediation/GED training.
- Basic employment skills training.
- Individual, group, and family counseling.
- Social skill training.
- Behavior change program.

Each student receives one-on-one instruction from a teacher; there is no classroom group setting. The learning system is based on such approaches as self-paced instruction, competency-based rather than time-based learning, frequent feedback, and a structured and supportive learning environment.

One counselor provides guidance and assistance for every 10 students. Each week, every student has a private counseling session; each month, the counselor is required to make a home visit to encourage parental involvement in the student's activities.

Program effectiveness is based on the number of students who remain law abiding after enrolling in the program. According to the program director, the success rate was 90 percent as of December 1984.

SUCCESS

Program	SUCCESS, Prince Georges County, Maryland
Thrust	Academic instruction and attendance monitoring for potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Mini-school setting • Interdisciplinary approach to classroom instruction • Daily staff meetings on youth's progress • Assigning and monitoring extra work as disciplinary technique
Services	• Individualized instruction • Intensive attendance monitoring • Counseling • Computer-assisted instruction • Education enrichment programs • Special incentive awards
Target Group	Potential dropouts
Reported Costs	About $1,400 per student
Program Summary	SUCCESS is a dropout prevention program targeted to 100 at-risk youth—mainly ninth graders—in each of five schools. The county's requirements for youth to maintain a 2.0 average (on a 4-point scale) before they are allowed to participate in athletic or extracurricular activities served as a catalyst in developing the program. Another major contributing factor was the presence of many youth who could not meet the state mandated reading or skills competency requirements for their grade levels. Program officials believe they have enrolled youth with great need for services, but that perhaps three times that number in the county are in

as much need. County officials hope to more than double the budget for the program next year.

The program's objectives are to improve youth's academic performance, attendance, and attitudes toward school. SUCCESS includes the following services:

- Individualized classroom instruction with no more than 20 students in each class. The classes are in a mini-school setting within the regular high school. Students study four major subjects, and the teachers are encouraged to develop lesson plans collaboratively and present the material with an interdisciplinary approach.
- Computer-assisted instruction that supplements regular classroom work.
- Education enrichment activities (e.g., field trips).
- Tutorial assistance.
- Counseling in connection with academic and behavior problems.
- Intensive monitoring of attendance.
- Regular contact with parents by teacher aides to inform them of youth's progress.
- Special incentive awards.
- Staff meetings daily to discuss youth's progress and problems, and suggest methods for improvement.
- Discipline involving "an intensive care unit." This is a room set aside for SUCCESS youth in which the student to be "punished" is assigned extensive amounts of work and closely monitored to see that it is done. (This disciplinary technique is a substitute for school suspension.)

An internal evaluation of SUCCESS indicated that in comparison to a group consisting of similar at-risk youth who were not provided services, SUCCESS youth had better grade point averages and fewer "tardies." Although SUCCESS students also had fewer absences than the other group, the difference was not significant. Youth enrolled in the program cite the program's individualized instruction and caring instructors as principal reasons why they were able to improve academically.

Stay-In-School Task Force

Program	Stay-In-School Task Force, Dalton, Georgia
Thrust	Local business focus on dropout problem
Unique Aspects	• Local business/community-based effort to address the dropout problem • Agreement made by employers not to hire dropouts • Employer inducements for parents to obtain a GED
Services	• Businesses encouraged not to hire dropouts • A public awareness campaign • Parents encouraged to get GED and promote education
Target Group	Dropouts, potential dropouts, and parents
Reported Cost	Total program cost estimated at $77,000
Program Summary	The Stay-In-School Task Force is an industry and community-based project whose objective is to lower the local dropout rate, which was considered to be the highest in Georgia. The task force, supported by the community, local industry, and a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, has worked with local businesses to stop hiring dropouts, and to encourage their employees both to obtain GEDs and to encourage their children to stay in school. The dropout problem, ironically, is related to the area's positive economic climate. The major industry (the carpet industry) is locally owned, historically has been the major source of employment, and has grown steadily. Since high school graduation has not been required for

jobs in the carpet factories, many youth quit school to obtain employment. The Stay-In-School Task Force was created to try to reverse the dropout trend.

The task force has run a major public awareness campaign to point up the school dropout problem. It also set up an "Education is Essential" Committee that asked employers to sign an agreement that they would

- encourage job applicants under 19 to continue their education before seeking work (giving priority to high school graduates);
- hire high school students on a part-time basis only, while ensuring these students maintain their attendance and grades;
- promote education through publicity and communication with employees;
- give special recognition to employees who achieve a GED and to children of employees who finish high school; and
- participate in a continuing program to encourage students to complete their education.

As of March 1987, 207 businesses, representing about two-thirds of the employment base in the area, have signed the agreements. These businesses in essence have stopped hiring dropouts.

Also, the businesses have promoted attaining GEDs, including paying for GED classes. One carpet manufacturer, for example, has established 17 classes with 268 people who attend on a voluntary, no-cost basis. Other companies have paid for their employees to attend classes. These employees now apparently are encouraging their children to stay in school.

Two other major committees in the task force are the Public Schools Committee and the Adult Basic Education Committee. The goals of the Public Schools Committee include developing programs to identify potential dropouts and provide dropout prevention services, including establishing alternate school programs. The Adult Basic Education Committee is involved with learning programs within both the adult literacy centers in the area and in special GED programs; its goal is to improve the education of adults as well as improving the educational environment for their children.

The work of the task force is still underway. The task force does not have statistics to show who is being served or how much assistance is

taking place. However, the dropout rate in the area has fallen, and the task force takes credit for it.

Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention Program (AIDP) and Dropout Prevention Program (DPP)

Program	Attendance Improvement Dropout Prevention Program (AIDP) and Dropout Prevention Program (DPP), New York City
Thrust	Programs for potential dropouts aimed at improving school attendance, in order to reduce dropout rates
Unique Aspects	• Small classes in a "mini-school" setting • Attendance outreach • Experimental service delivery techniques • Middle school to high school transition activities • Ties with business community • Ties with social service agencies • Special incentive awards • Use of paraprofessionals from community • Job training/services by community-based organizations
Services	• Regular school curriculum • Job training • Counseling • Remedial education • Health care • Educational enrichment programs
Target Group	Youth at risk of dropping out
Reported Cost	About $1,200 per student for AIDP or DPP

Program Summary

Two major programs that address New York City's dropout problem are AIDP and DPP. AIDP, implemented in school year 1984-85 and substantially redirected in 1985-86, is funded primarily by New York State, at a cost of about $20 million a year. DPP, implemented in school year 1985-86, is funded primarily by New York City, at a cost of over $10 million a year. The programs combined provide services to about 27,000 students.

Schools are eligible to receive program funds depending on poor attendance rates (as well as on high dropout rates and other factors). Within each school, students are targeted for the programs based largely on their poor attendance, but also on limited reading ability, course failure, and other "high-risk" indicators. In addition, in DPP high schools some interventions were made available to all ninth and tenth graders, reflecting a schoolwide approach to the dropout problem.

Both AIDP and DPP require the following six components:

- A site facilitator, coordinating program activities at each participating school.
- An attendance outreach program involving contacts with parents.
- Guidance and counseling services.
- A health service program, providing diagnostic screening and referral for appropriate follow-up services.
- A school level linkage program, to ease the transition of students from middle or junior high school to high school.
- An alternative education program involving basic skills instruction and individualized attention.

AIDP operated in 26 high schools and 68 middle schools in school year 1985-86. Sixteen of the AIDP high schools operated a mini-school program, called SOAR, primarily for overage ninth graders. SOAR consists of groups of about 20 students who attend classes together, are provided strong academic support, and have the services of a guidance counselor as part of the program. Seven of the high schools developed a program called Strategies, based in part on SOAR, while the three other AIDP high schools contracted with a community-based organization to provide counseling, work experience, and skill training. The AIDP middle schools generally aimed to improve youth's performance in the standard classroom by providing external support activities.

In 1985-86, DPP operated in 10 high schools and 29 middle schools feeding into those high schools. The DPP approaches include contracting with community-based organizations for support services, reorganizing

a school around "interest clusters" for youth in the 9th and 10th grades, adding special security, offering tutorial assistance and education enrichment activities, and providing awards for attendance improvement. (As with the AIDP programs, these special efforts were undertaken within the scope of the six required components.)

According to an evaluation of AIDP and DPP in 1985-86, conducted by the Public Education Association, program staff

"widely endorsed the services they were currently providing; no single type of service was identified as misguided or lacking in potential usefulness . . . . [However] no single type of program was fully adequate . . . . The services that typified one program were often cited as a missing element of another. For example, . . . [the programs that were] classroom-based models [such as SOAR], lacked social services and vocational training, in a word, CBO [community-based organizations] type services; [while] high school DPP programs often evidenced the notable absence of specific academic/curricular interventions . . . ."

Also, all the AIDP and DPP high school principals and about half of the middle school principals felt that their budgets did not meet the needs of all the students needing assistance.[1]

[1]Effective Dropout Prevention by Foley and Oxley, op. cit. (pp. 27-28).

Middle College High School

Program	Middle College High School, Long Island City, New York
Thrust	Alternative high school for potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Youth enrolled directly after junior high school • School located on community college campus • Small classes • Intensive group counseling • Some community college courses available • Community college facilities available
Services	• High school curriculum • Counseling • Internships
Target Group	Primarily youth age 16 with absentee rates greater than 20 percent in the ninth grade.
Reported Cost	• About $5,400 per student • Same cost as regular New York City school of similar size

Program Summary

Middle College High School is an alternative school for students at risk of dropping out. It is targeted to junior high school students who have an absentee rate greater than 20 percent in the 9th grade and who are about 1 year behind grade level. According to an assistant school principal, the school receives many more applications than it has openings.

The 3-year program at Middle College high school contains special features, such as: (1) a trimester system, which includes internships with government or the private sector for a third of each of the student's

sophomore, junior, and senior years; (2) a daily group counseling component; and (3) small classes. Another important feature is the school's location on the campus of LaGuardia Community College. The high school students receive a college identification card, which permits them to use the college facilities, and they also may take some college courses for both high school and college credit. School officials feel that associating the high school with the college gives students a better vision of the future, which they believe is critical to developing successful academic and work attitudes.

According to the school's principal, Middle College High School has a low dropout rate, and about three-fourths of its youth go on to college.

North Education Center

Program	North Education Center, Columbus, Ohio
Thrust	Alternative high school for potential dropouts and dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Youth and adults together in some classes • School hours 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. • 1.5-2 hours per class • 5 terms per year • No "frills" (e.g., no extracurricular activities) • Attendance outreach
Services	• High school curriculum • Counseling • Computer-assisted reading program • Job placement
Target Group	Youth at risk of dropping out and dropouts
Reported Cost	About $1,600 per student
Program Summary	The North Education Center is an alternative school for potential dropouts and those who had already dropped out and want to return to school. It offers the following special features: • School hours are from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., permitting students to work or take care of other responsibilities. • Courses are 7-1/2 weeks long, with 1-1/2 to 2-hour classes. Thus, students can progress more quickly toward a high school diploma. • For students with very poor reading skills, a computer-assisted reading program is offered.

- The youth receive intensive career counseling and job placement services.
- The students attend some nonacademic (e.g., job training) classes together with adults (some age 40 and over) who are returning to school to complete their secondary education or to obtain job training. This gives the school a more adult-like atmosphere and may increase the youth's sense of responsibility.
- Attendance is checked in every class period. Absences are followed by a phone call home, a home visit, or a letter to the students' parents.
- The youth receive personalized attention on the part of committed staff.
- This is a "no-frills" school, e.g., no extracurricular activities are offered.

Enrollment of dropout youth at the North Education Center is regularly increased as a result of advertising campaigns by the Columbus public schools to encourage dropouts to return to school. The center is credited by school board officials as being the chief contributor to the recent reduction in Columbus's school dropout rate.

George I. Sanchez High School

Program	George I. Sanchez High School, Houston, Texas
Thrust	Alternative school for dropouts and potential dropouts
Unique Aspect	• An alternative school for Hispanic youth, focusing on cultural identity • Pupils formulate school rules • Culturally sensitive staff
Services	• Individualized instruction • Intensive counseling • GED program
Target Group	Hispanic youth at risk of dropping out or who have dropped out
Reported Cost	$2,350 per pupil

Program Summary

About 40 percent of the school population in Houston is Hispanic, and reports from Houston school officials show that Hispanics are more likely to drop out than other race/ethical groups. The George I. Sanchez High School was established as an alternative high school for Hispanic dropouts who wanted to reenter school and for Hispanic youth who for various reasons could not succeed in the regular school setting.

The school is run by a Hispanic community-based organization. It provides individualized instruction, intensive counseling, and job orientation programs to 120 youth in grades 7 through 12. GED preparation classes are offered as well as a regular program for a high school diploma.

The school's atmosphere is relaxed. Students address their instructors by their first names, and the youth participate in deciding on school

rules. The staff are sensitive to Hispanic culture and emphasize cultural identity.

Although there are no evaluations of the school, its administrators believe they have been effective in improving the youth's attitudes towards school, their self-esteem, and their educational aspirations.

Project Trio

Program	Project Trio, Dade County, Florida
Thrust	Counseling and support services for potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Focus on improving youth's motivation to stay in school • Team approach, including counselors, teachers, and job placement specialist • Emphasis on career awareness • Parental involvement
Services	• Academic, personal, and job counseling • Education enrichment • Employability skills classes
Target Group	Youth at risk of dropping out
Reported Costs	$304 per pupil
Program Summary	Project Trio is a dropout prevention program operating in 11 senior high schools and 7 junior high schools in the Miami district. Each school has modified the basic design of the program to accommodate individual school characteristics and the perceived needs of the students; however, all the schools include counseling, some form of academic enhancement, and an emphasis on career awareness (including employability skills classes). Project Trio's primary intent is to help students enjoy and remain in school. A team (for example, of counselors, teachers, and an occupational placement specialist) work with the students. Evaluation results indicated that, across all schools, the dropout rates of Project Trio participants were essentially the same as those of a control

group of students. However, a small number of Project Trio schools had projects that seemed "successful." These projects routinely scheduled individual or group tutoring and counseling and had at least monthly contact with the students' parents. In contrast, in most of the other Trio projects, the services were provided "as needed" or otherwise not regularly scheduled.

Adopt-A-Student

Program	Adopt-A-Student, Atlanta, Georgia
Thrust	Guidance by business consultants to potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• A joint business and school-based effort • Business community volunteers provide one-on-one career guidance
Services	• Academic assistance • Job preparation workshops • Career guidance
Target Group	Youth who are not achieving well academically and who in their junior year have no particular career aspirations.
Reported Cost	About $625 per student
Program Summary	The Adopt-A-Student program encourages academically low achievers to stay in school. The program accommodates 10 students from each of Atlanta's 21 high schools. The students selected are low achievers with no particular career aspirations at the midway point in their junior year in high school. The program is jointly operated by a group of about 40 local businesses and the Atlanta public school system. Business people from the community volunteer to work as consultants one-on-one with the students, and provide social, motivational, and educational activities, with a focus on career guidance. (At each school, the consultants are organized under the direction of a coordinator, who also is a business volunteer.) The students also attend job preparation workshops and receive some academic assistance. Parental involvement is encouraged.

According to the program's evaluators, the effectiveness of the program is directly related to the amount of attention the business consultants provide to the students. (Consultants are expected to meet with the students at least twice a month.)

Cities in Schools

Program	Cities in Schools, Atlanta, Georgia
Thrust	An alternative high school for dropouts and potential dropouts
Unique Aspects	• Run by a national corporation and the Atlanta public schools • Staff available on daily basis for legal, financial, and other assistance
Services	• Standard academic courses • Employment-oriented services • Tutoring • Assistance for social services • Counseling • Leadership training • On-the-job training
Target Group	School dropouts and potential dropouts
Reported Cost	$2,300 per student

Program Summary

Cities in Schools is an alternative high school designed to assist youth dropouts and potential dropouts. The program is operated jointly by a national corporation (Exodus Incorporated) and the Atlanta public schools.

Cities in Schools provides regular academic courses, counseling, and tutoring assistance, as well as a broad range of services, including medical, legal, food, housing, and day care assistance. Support staff and volunteers are available on a daily basis to help students directly or refer them to outside agencies. Other services for the participants include job search assistance, on-the-job training experiences, and leadership training. Jobs are found for the youth who need to work.

The program serves youth in grades 9 through 12 in four satellite centers (called academies) throughout Atlanta. One center, Rich's Academy, is located in Rich's department store, thus enhancing youth's knowledge of the business environment.

The program operated on a budget of $1.2 million during school year 1985-86, with most of the funding from the Atlanta public school system and Exodus Incorporated.

A 1986 evaluation showed improved attendance, annual retention rates of 70 percent, and reduced recidivism rates of prior juvenile offenders.

Recent GAO Reports and Testimony Related to the Education and Training of Youth

Job Training Partnership Act: Summer Youth Programs Increase Emphasis on Education	GAO/HRD-87-101BR	6/30/87
Education's Chapter 1 and 2 Programs and Local Dropout Prevention and Reentry Programs (Statement of William J. Gainer, Associate Director Human Resources Division, General Accounting Office, Before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, Committee on Education and Labor, House of Representatives)	GAO/T-HRD-87-2	3/3/87
Youth Job Training: Problems Measuring Attainment of Employment Competencies	GAO/HRD-87-33	2/11/87
Compensatory Education: Chapter I Participants Generally Meet Selection Criteria	GAO/HRD-87-26	1/30/87
Job Corps: Its Costs, Employment Outcomes, and Service to the Public	GAO/HRD-86-121BR	7/30/86
School Dropouts: The Extent and Nature of the Problem	GAO/HRD-86-106BR	6/33/86
The School Dropout Problem (Statement of William J. Gainer, Associate Director Human Resources Division, General Accounting Office, Before the Subcommittee on Elementary, Secondary, and Vocational Education, House Committee on Education and Labor)		5/20/86

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