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# At-Risk in South Carolina: The High School Dropout

*A Policy Paper of the  
Research and Training Center  
Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School*

by

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## Preface

*In the body of this paper, we report a cumulative high school dropout rate in South Carolina of nearly 40%, compared to a 25% to 30% national dropout rate. The "at-risk" children of this nation are leaving school prematurely at an alarming rate, and South Carolina ranks among the top 10 states in this regard. One way or another, we are not meeting the needs of our young people, and the cost to them, to society, and to the economic health of South Carolina and the nation is almost beyond calculation.*

*A child, youth, or adult who is "at-risk" is a person who is in danger of losing his or her opportunity to participate fully in the mainstream of American life. The designation of "at-risk" is most often the result of deficiencies in academic, social or vocational skills. An assumption made by educators, social agencies, and society in general is that these deficiencies can be removed or overcome through remediation and rehabilitation. It is these people and this assumption that guide us in presenting a variety of recommendations for South Carolina's response to the children of the State who are at-risk and who are likely to drop out of school.*

*The purpose of this paper is to offer policy recommendations to school districts and a variety of State agencies regarding at-risk and dropout youth in South Carolina, on behalf of the Research and Training Center of the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School. To this purpose, we first review a number of research studies and research syntheses that have appeared in the professional literature of the last several years. Second, we present statistical information on South Carolina dropouts that allows us to better understand the magnitude of the problem in this State. Third, we review current state-level policy recommendations to see better the direction in which South Carolina is headed in its response to at-risk and dropout youth. From these sources of information, then, we derive specific policy recommendations as well as many suggestions that can guide "probably preferable practice."*

*The specific policy recommendations offered in this paper are directed at various State agencies. We have recommended specific ways the school districts of South Carolina can identify at-risk and potential dropout youth and have suggested that the districts be specific regarding their commitment to these children. We have recommended policies to the South Carolina Department of Education that will help to gain accurate information on sheer numbers of dropouts so that we can evaluate our efforts in this area, and we have suggested ways the Department can further assist school districts in tracking, identifying, and helping at-risk youth. We have also recommended that the Commission on Higher Education support both basic and policy research that might guide us in the future and that the Clemson Dropout Center expand its services in disseminating information that might assist school staffs in working with at-risk and dropout youth. Finally, we have recommended that State leaders study the possibility of establishing in South Carolina a network of residential schools for at-risk and drop-out youth.*

*In many ways, reviewing information about at-risk and dropout youth and making recommendations regarding how our schools might better serve them is to critique the entire American educational system, and particularly many of the school reforms*

*that have come into being in the last few years. Dropping out of school is the culminating decision of at-risk children who have been in the process of withdrawing from school for some time. Sometimes the dropout is a "pushout," having been pushed out by academic failure. Sometimes the dropout is a "stopout," having taken a breather from the high school experience, but with every intention of returning to school. The dropout, however is always a child whose needs our schools are not meeting.*

*In our attempt to offer policy recommendations that we believe will help the schools and the State to meet better the needs of these children, we have organized the present paper around discussions of:*

- 1. The personal and societal costs of dropping out of school.*
- 2. Dropout rates as they define the extent of the problem.*
- 3. Why children drop out of school.*
- 4. Programs and policies aimed at recovering the dropout.*
- 5. Programs and policies aimed at keeping the potential dropout in regular day high schools.*
- 6. Schools that provide residential facilities for at-risk and dropout youth.*

*Finally, we leave the reader with Dale Mann's caution in the search for answers in this realm of the dropout problem: "People who believe in simple solutions here also believe that break dancing cures arthritis" (1987; p. 9).*

*M.D.R.  
June 1988*

## Dropping Out: What Does It Cost the Nation?

The personal and the societal costs of one fourth to one third of the nation's youth dropping out of school are enormous. Rumberger (1987) observes that dropouts experience, on average, an unemployment rate twice as high as those who graduate from high school. He notes that in 1950, this differential was only 20%. In fact, the dropout not only experiences a higher unemployment rate, but experiences more periodic unemployment in the general context of significantly lower-paying occupations (Catterall, 1987).

Social costs of dropping out manifest themselves in a wide range of factors, including a general lowering of tax revenues as a result of underemployment among dropouts. Additionally, dropouts are more frequently recipients of welfare and unemployment benefits, they are more likely to engage in criminal behavior which in turn increases the costs of maintaining the legal system, and they show a lower level of participation in the electoral process. But perhaps the highest societal cost of dropping out is the dropouts' transmittance of related values, attitudes, and patterns of behavior to their children.

Levin, in his classic 1972 assessment of the costs to the nation of dropping out of high school, estimated lost economic activity among 25- to 34-year-old males attributable to non-completion of high school. Levin's analysis suggested nearly a \$250 billion in total cost to the nation, based upon lost income, lost tax revenues, and increased social program and judicial system costs. Catterall (1987) attempted to update Levin's projections; analyzing the 1981 dropout class, he estimated \$229 billion in lost income and \$69 billion in lost tax revenues for only *one* year's dropouts (p. 24, Table 2). "Even in constant dollar terms," says Catterall, "the relative disadvantage of dropping out has increased" (p. 23). The U.S. Department of Commerce has recently estimated that males who drop out earn \$441,000 less during their lives than male high school graduates.

Catterall (1987) also conducted an analysis of the costs of dropping out of high school that emanate from just one school district. His analysis of the Los Angeles area dropout rate and its consequences indicated a yearly \$3.2 billion loss in economic activity. Rumberger (1987) cites research that concluded that "the costs of dropout prevention in Chicago would be less than 1% of the economic benefits derived from increased tax revenues, reduced welfare payments, and savings from the costs of crime" (p. 118). In fact, the Chicago schools spend less than 1% of their total budget on dropout prevention programs—a problem that will have a major impact upon nearly half of the students enrolled in the Chicago system. This level of prevention program support is not at all unusual. Natriello and others (1986) document the cognitive costs of dropping out and, with respect to the general loss of potential to the nation, they academically understate that "the aggregate long-term costs may be quite large" (p. 437). McDill, Natriello and Pallas (1987) sum up the overall costs of dropping out by paraphrasing Levin: "the national cost of keeping students in school can scarcely approach the costs to the nation of them dropping out" (p. 123).

The problem of 25% to 35% of the nation's and South Carolina's youth leaving high school before graduation is not just an educational problem that the schools must solve. It is a symptom of a **much larger problem that faces this nation—that the high schools in the United States are not, one way or another, meeting the needs of a large segment of the nation's youth.** And dropping out of high school has a huge effect

on not only the economic health of the nation and of South Carolina, but represents as well the fact that every year hundreds of thousands of teenagers are not being smoothly integrated into adult society and the world of work. To the purpose of creating a general awareness of these realities among all citizens, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #1: The South Carolina Department of Education and all State agencies concerned with education, K-12, propose and implement necessary strategies for alerting their constituencies to: (1) the nature and extent of the dropout problem in this State and nationally; and (2) the personal, societal, and economic consequences of students leaving school prematurely.**

### **Defining and Counting the Dropout: Who is He/She?**

“There are at least as many different definitions of a dropout,” says Mann (1987), “as there are school districts recording dropouts” (p. 9). Hammack (1987) refers to the problem of definition in trying to understand rates of dropout:

Some districts include special education students in their reports, while others do not; some include all students enrolled in any type of program offered by the district, while others include only those enrolled in regular day high schools (p. 23).

Counting “school leavers” is tricky business; those who transfer and do not inform the local district are often counted as dropouts, thus over-estimating the total number. Olson (1988) describes no fewer than 12 methods for counting (and therefore defining) dropouts that produce a range of rates from 7.1 to 64.7%. A dropout in South Carolina is defined as “a pupil who leaves school for any reason, except death, before graduation or completion of a course of studies and without transferring to another school.”

Hammack further points out the importance of considering reported dropout rates in the context in which they are reported, since how dropouts are defined bears a one-to-one relationship to the calculated dropout rate. He cites one school where principals were under pressure to reduce the dropout rate and reported an “official dropout rate” of 1.9% (this figure was probably accurate in view of the definition of “dropout” that was used). But the central office calculated the actual rate to be 58.3% (Hammack, 1987; p. 25).

Since the definition of “dropout” underlies the calculation of dropout rates, the implementation of identification and tracking systems, and even the importance we ascribe to the problem of our nation’s youth leaving school prematurely, it is imperative that we carefully define “dropout,” and to this end we offer Morrow’s (1987) definition:

*Definition of a dropout.* A dropout is any student, previously enrolled in a school, who is no longer actively enrolled as indicated by fifteen days consecutive unexcused absence, who has not satisfied local standards for graduation, and for whom no formal request has been received signifying enrollment in another state-licensed educational institution. A student death is not tallied as a dropout. The designation of “dropout” can be removed by proof of enrollment in a state-licensed educational institution or by presentation of an approved high school graduation certificate. (p. 49)

The example of the school district, whose “official dropout rate” of 1.9% was recalculated by the district office to be 58.3%, points up the importance of encourag-

ing both accurate counting and clear reporting. To this purpose, we offer the following policy recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #2: The South Carolina Department of Education institute a procedure for accurately and quickly validating student transfers between school districts in the State and out of State, and that school districts examine the accuracy of reporting between school transfers within the school district.**

## **Counting Dropouts: South Carolina and the Nation**

Nationally, the dropout rate for high school students is approximately 25% (Mann, 1987) and census figures show that in the 1985-86 school year alone, 682,000 teenagers, dropped out of school. In 1900 no one cared and the dropout rate was 90%, declining to 76% by 1940 (Mann, 1987).

Rumberger (1987) cites U.S. Department of Education 1984 high school attrition rates (the number of students who graduate subtracted from the total number enrolled in 9th grade). The 1984 "figures show an average attrition rate of 29.1% for the high school class of 1984 in the U.S.," says Rumberger, "with state-level attrition rates varying from a low of 10.7% in Minnesota to a high of 43.3% in Louisiana" (p. 104). According to these data, South Carolina ranks among the top 10 states with respect to high attrition rates; 35.5% of S.C. students who enter 9th grade do not graduate four years later. This figure is up from the 30.8% S.C. figure reported in 1972.

Hammack (1987) reports city-by-city dropout rates, which tend to be quite high relative to the rates reported nationally (see Appendix D for S. C. Urban/Rural Dropout Rates). New York, for instance, reports a yearly dropout rate of 11.4%, with a projected four-year rate of 38.4%. Chicago reports a dropout rate of 42.8% in the early 1980's. Boston reports a yearly dropout rate of 7%; if extrapolated to a four-year rate, Boston's rate of dropout would be very close to that reported nationally. Each of these urban school districts defines "dropout" differently and calculates dropout rates in a different manner, making comparisons difficult. A very disturbing statistic is reported by Rumberger (1987), who cites a study of California dropouts that showed that "half of the dropouts interviewed did not discuss their decision with anyone at school before they left" (p. 117).

The South Carolina Department of Education reports dropout rates in three different ways. First, the yearly dropout rate is reported as the percent of dropouts to total grade 1-12 school enrollment. This method reveals a 1.8% dropout rate for South Carolina for 1982-83, for example. Second, the Department reports the yearly State dropout rate relative to two grade ranges: grades 1-8 and grades 9-12. This second method shows a 1982-83 dropout rate of 0.3% and 5.0%, respectively. Third, the Department reports the yearly State dropout rate for each high school grade level, 9-12. This third reporting method shows a 1982-83 dropout rate at each of these respective grades of 6.0%, 5.9%, 4.8%, and 2.9%. The third method reveals substantially higher dropout rates at grades 9 and 10 than grades 11 and 12 for the period 1981-1987. These three reporting methods show a range of yearly dropout statistics from 0.2% to 6.9%; Appendix A presents these State data for the period 1981-1987 as reported yearly by the South Carolina Department of Education. Examination of these rates over this period of time reveals an apparent decline in the dropout rate for the State between 1979 and 1987. However, four-year high school attrition rates paint quite a different picture.

A fourth method for calculating dropout rates is cumulative in nature and is used by the Division of Public Accountability, South Carolina State Board of Education (see Appendix B). This method reports a “longitudinal” or attrition rate (otherwise known as the “graduating year cohort” rate) by calculating the difference between the number of South Carolina students who enter 9th grade in a given year and the number who graduate four years later. For the South Carolina 1982-83 9th grade class which graduated in 1986, this rate was reported to be 27.5%. “Calculating the number of dropouts experienced by a particular senior class,” says the Division of Public Accountability, “provides a clearer picture of the rate at which students are estimated to be leaving school before graduation” (*What is the penny buying for South Carolina?*, 1987, p. 25).

The four-year cohort or attrition rate reported by the Division of Public Accountability appears to be at odds (see Appendix B) with other 9th and 12th grade enrollment statistics reported. Table 9 in Appendix B presents four-year dropout rates extrapolated from other State data sources. It is presented here, as well as with additional information in Appendix B, since we believe it represents the most accurate estimate available of the cumulative high school dropout and attrition rate in South Carolina:

**Table 1**  
**(Table 9 From Appendix B)**

**Dropout Rate — Comparing 9th Grade Enrollments  
to Number of Dropouts at End of 12th Grade**

Year Entering 9th Grade	9th Grade Enrollment	Graduating Class Year	Number of Dropouts	% Dropout**
1979-80	57,155	1982-83	19,585	34.3
1980-81	55,954	1983-84	19,853	35.5
1981-82	54,413	1984-85	19,409	35.7
1982-83	53,367	1985-86	18,952	35.5
1983-84	53,445	1986-87	20,345*	38.1*

\*Projected.

\*\*Obtained by subtracting number of graduates from total 9th grade enrollment figures from Table 8 in Appendix B.

The high school attrition rates reported in Table 1 over-estimate the true dropout rate for South Carolina due to (1) problems in accurately verifying student transfers between districts, (2) exclusion of students who graduate but not with their class, and (3) exclusion of students who obtain diplomas through alternate routes. But according to these data, there appears to be a general rise in the overall South Carolina dropout rate between 1979 and 1987.

So, what is the dropout rate in South Carolina? The rate depends upon many factors and can obviously be reported in a variety of ways. As best we can conclude, the percentage of students who enter 9th grade but do not graduate four years later—the high end of the dropout estimate—is around 35%. Yearly dropout rates reported by specific grade levels and grade level ranges can reveal fluctuations, but do not give accurate estimates of the magnitude of the dropout problem in the State. We think it important that the South Carolina Department of Education report cumulative dropout rates on an annual basis, and we offer the following recommendation to that end:

**RECOMMENDATION #3: The South Carolina Department of Education, in its annual dropout reports, report not only yearly dropout rates by grade level(s) but also report annually the four-year graduating high school class attrition rate.**

The South Carolina dropout rates reported in this section have ranged from 0.2% to 38.1% and reveal contradictory trends over time, depending upon definition and method of calculation. All in all, none of these statistics really provides a truly accurate index of the "holding power" of the State's high schools; that is, the amount of time a high school is able to keep a student in attendance. We encourage the South Carolina Department of Education, the school districts of the State, and individual high schools to develop better indices of their "holding power" using the kinds of information reported here and any additional data or data sources that might tend to reveal overall improvements in high school attendance and grade levels completed. Only with valid and accurate information in this regard can school improvement efforts be properly evaluated. (See Appendix C for "Urban/Rural" and "White/Non-white" S. C. dropout rates.)

### **Reasons and Causes for Dropping Out**

The reasons as to why students drop out of high school are many and varied. Some of these causes and reasons reside primarily in the student, some in the student's economic and family situation, and some in the nature of the high school as a social and educational institution. Table 2 presents a brief overview of some of these causal categories as reported by dropouts, themselves.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons for Leaving High School Without a Degree; Percentage Responding by Gender.**

	% Male	% Female
A. School-related	51	33
B. Work-related	21	9
C. Family-related	5	37
D. Other	23	21
Totals	100	100

Source: William R. Morgan, 1984 (cited in Mann, 1987).

According to 1979 data reported by Rumberger (1987), high school students who dislike school, want or need to work, and who become pregnant account, overall, for at least 60% of all dropouts.

Academic achievement is, of course, highly related to dropping out. Hammack's (1987) report of an early 1980's Chicago system analysis showed that, in the context of an overall four-year dropout rate of 42.8%, entering 9th graders with average or above reading levels dropped out at a rate of 23%. Students whose reading scores were in the 4th to 6th grade level range dropped out at a rate of 49.9%, while those with reading scores lower than 4th grade level left high school at a rate of 67.8%. It would be interesting to know if reading scores were also related to *when* students make the decision to drop out.

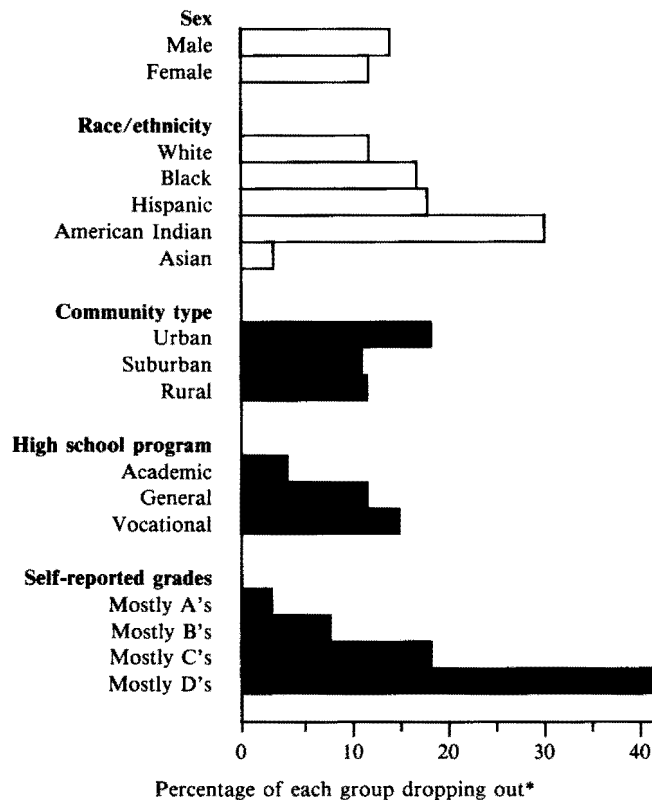
Wehlage and Rutter (1987) note that truancy is the primary discipline problem among potential dropouts. But they warn against simplistic notions of causation in the business of trying to understand why students leave high school. Dropouts, they say, see high

school as a “place where teachers are not particularly interested in students, and the discipline system is perceived as neither effective nor fair” (p. 81). The typical high school grading and student evaluation system is also seen by these students as capricious. As Ekstrom and others (1987) concluded, based on the High School and Beyond data, “It is clear having behavior problems and having low grades are the major determinants of dropout” (p. 63).

In fact, dropout research has focused on the identification of a variety of factors that tend to predict who will dropout (see Figure 1), and causal status—rightly or wrongly—has been attributed to many of these factors. For example, Hammack (1987) has noted that boys who enter high school overage (15 years or older) drop out with very high frequency; being overage as a freshman or sophomore, then, is highly predictive of dropout potential. But being overage upon entering high school reflects, in most instances, a student’s achievement and grade retention history and does not *cause* one to drop out of school. Most of the dropout “characteristics” and “predictors” are interrelated in this way.

**Figure 1**

**Percentages of various groups of 1980 high school sophomores who dropped out before graduation**



\*1980 sophomores who by 1982 had dropped out of high school.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education. Center for Education Statistics. High School Dropouts: Descriptive Information from High School And Beyond, 1983.

While effective intervention depends to large extent on the early identification of the potential dropout, the underlying causes for why students leave school early often remain obscure. Rumberger (1987) calls for a more comprehensive model of the dropout process that first uncovers underlying processes and interrelationships among factors in an attempt to separate causes from correlates. Second, these models must measure long-term cumulative effects of various influences on dropping out and describe different dropout types and causes. Such models would allow earlier identification of

potential dropouts when intervention strategies are more likely to be effective (Rumberger, 1987; pp. 111-112). To the purposes of extending our understanding of how children and schools interact to create a high dropout rate and enhancing our ability to deal more effectively with potential dropouts, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #4: The South Carolina Department of Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with K-12 education, propose and support the development of a comprehensive causal model of the dropout process.**

Studying who drops out of high school and why has important implications for first identifying potential dropouts and, second, for designing effective intervention strategies (see Appendix E for Future Research Questions). Ultimately, however, the close monitoring of students' academic and social progress and identifying those who are not profiting from traditional school programs is a key and effective intervention strategy, in and of itself.

Remedial and compensatory program interventions have a long history of being more effective the earlier they are begun. The earlier we identify students who have problems in school, the earlier we "treat" those problems and the more likely we and they will achieve success. Tracking students' progress, then, lays the groundwork for the early identification of potential dropouts, as well as for helping us understand some of the characteristics of suitable and effective alternative programs.

To the purpose of monitoring and tracking students to identify potential dropouts, we offer the following three recommendations:

**RECOMMENDATION #5: The school districts of South Carolina immediately implement procedures for the early identification of at-risk and potential dropouts (at the elementary grades) and for late identification of at-risk and potential dropouts (at the middle and high school grades). (See Appendix D for example identification procedures.)**

**RECOMMENDATION #6: The South Carolina Department of Education modify the OSIRIS data base within the Pathways Project to include a subset of student tracking data that is highly predictive of at-risk and potential dropouts; this tracking data should include student personal characteristics, school performance information, and attitude information. (See Appendix D for listings of possible tracking characteristics.)**

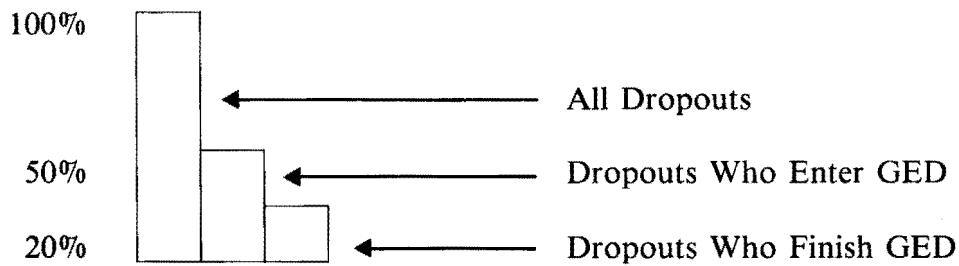
**RECOMMENDATION #7: The South Carolina Department of Education increase its assistance to schools in implementing the Pathways Project, particularly with regard to its use in the early identification of at-risk and potential dropout youth, and set a target date for August 1, 1989 for full implementation of the Project.**

### **Alternate Diploma Programs: Recovering the Dropout**

What happens to students in the months and years after they have dropped out of high school? Ekstrom and others (1987) observe, in their analysis of the High School and Beyond student survey data, that 47% of recent dropouts indicated they were working full- or part-time, while 29% were looking for work. Just 10% were enrolled in some form of education or job training.

Rumberger (1987) cites follow-up analyses of students who dropped out of high school in their sophomore year in 1980. These data indicate that 38% had received a high school diploma by 1984. Another study Rumberger reports showed that in 1985, 50% of the dropouts surveyed had participated in the GED program, and 40% of them (20% of the total) had received the high school equivalency certificate; these data are graphically portrayed in Figure 2:

**Figure 2**  
**Estimated Relative Percentages of All Dropouts**  
**Who Enter and Who Finish GED Programs**



Rumberger suggests that the current 30% high school attrition rate in California, for example, would be reduced to 20% if adjustments were made concerning those who do ultimately receive a regular or equivalent high school diploma by the age of 30. In South Carolina, 17-, 18-, and 19-year-olds are the largest age groups who have taken the GED between 1984 and 1987. On average, approximately 75% of the people who take the GED in South Carolina are awarded an equivalent high school diploma. Table 3 presents this information.

**Table 3**  
**Results of GED Testing in S.C. 1984-1987.**

Year	Number of Test Administrations	Number and Percentage of Persons Who Passed
1984	6488	4922 (76%)
1985	6559	4745 (72%)
1986	6616	5208 (79%)
1987	7728	5375 (70%)

Source: High School Certificate Office,  
 S. C. Department of Education, April 1988.

The GED and a range of adult education programs available in the school districts of South Carolina represent viable "alternative" programs and routes toward obtaining a high school diploma. In South Carolina, we can expect the number of students who seek admission to GED and adult education programs to increase dramatically if the key 1987 Dropout Prevention Task Force recommendations are implemented, namely:

1. The revision of regulations that would "permit sixteen-year-old students to take the Test of General Education Development (GED) in special circumstances."
2. The revision of "the admission criteria for participation in adult education programs to allow seventeen-year-olds to enroll in the diploma program."

3. The revision of the S. C. Compulsory Attendance Act, which would require “children or wards who are five years old and until their seventeenth birthday to regularly attend a public or (approved) private school.”

These three recommendations represent substantial educational policy changes that have potential to significantly alter the very structure, function, and face of high schools and the high school experience in South Carolina. Therefore, we are compelled to offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #8: The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with high school, adult, and post-secondary education, propose and support a careful, data-based analysis of the short-and long-term implications of State-wide policy changes in the Compulsory Attendance Act and the availability of GED/adult education program services to children who drop out of high school.**

There are a number of policy provisions and regulations in effect in South Carolina that also have great potential for increasing the number of students who drop out from regular day high school programs and who enroll in alternate diploma programs. The Dropout Prevention Task Force recommended in 1987 that the “following Sections of the EIA be evaluated to determine what effect, if any, the provisions have in increasing the number of dropouts:”

1. Section 59-5-65- Promotion Policy
2. Section 59-30-10 (f.)- Exit Examination
3. Section 59-65-90- Student Absence
4. Section 59-39-60- Interscholastic Activities

We fully support this Task Force recommendation and, in view of the likely effects these EIA provisions have upon student enrollment in post-secondary and adult education programs, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #9: The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with high school, adult and post-secondary education, propose and support a careful, data-based analysis of the short- and long-term effects on dropout rates and GED/adult education program participation of the following Sections of EIA: Section 59-5-65 (Promotion Policy), Section 59-30-10 (f. Exit Examination), Section 59-65-90 (Student Absence), and Section 59-39-60 (Interscholastic Activities).**

The Dropout Prevention Task Force recognized the causal connection between school achievement and dropping out and how State policies can influence students’ decisions to drop out or remain in school. The larger problem here is that of defining “success” in a school context. Wehlage and Rutter (1987) observe that success in school is far too “narrowly defined and restricted to the few at the top of their class ranking who are destined for college” (p. 87). We encourage all teachers and educators to reflect upon the meaning of “success” in their schools and how the possibility of being “successful” might be extended to a broader student constituency.

## **Alternate Day-School Programs: Holding the Potential Dropout**

“By whatever name,” says Mann (1987), “the public school dropout field has no data linking programs to outcomes” (p. 13). He goes on to say that, “conclusive evidence documenting significant program effects is even more rare than careful evaluation in this field” (p. 9). Mann further cites Morrow’s content analysis of 12 school districts’ program efforts for dropouts in which more than 360 entries, descriptive of the districts’ programs, were examined. He states that, “Without even addressing the outcomes question, the only thing that is clear is that most districts are doing lots of things. From the program-improvement perspective, this is a very weak finding” (p. 8).

The lack of “hard” evaluation information regarding the effectiveness of dropout intervention/prevention programs may well underly a similar lack of information about the extent of the schools’ financial investment in such programs. Catterall (1987) observes that where such data do exist, spending appears meager (e.g., the Los Angeles Unified School District in 1985 devoted just 0.5% of its resources toward a problem that eventually affects half of its entire pupil population). Catterall goes on to say that analyzing dropout prevention programs gives the “general impression of . . . ideas [being allocated] to the problem, but little in the way of added resources” (p. 28). This is particularly curious given the fact the school funding formulas are driven by student head counts. “Schools,” says Catterall, “are not known for their tenaciousness” (p. 28). We are, therefore, highly supportive of the Dropout Prevention Task Force recommendation to increase the number of attendance supervisors in South Carolina.

Wehlage (1983) reports that successful efforts for “marginal” high school students are typically characterized by (1) programs that are small, allowing for a great deal of personal contact; (2) teachers who hold high expectations for students, who care about students, and who employ a wide variety of instructional strategies; and (3) students who are challenged by tasks at which they can be successful and who are encouraged to show initiative and responsibility. Rumberger (1987) echoes the importance of individualized instruction, sensitive teachers, and adds that programs providing a mix of academic and vocational studies are more often successful. These elements of successful instructional programs are not specific to dropout prevention programs, but are generic to effective programs and schools in nearly any context.

With respect to dropout intervention/prevention programs in particular, Rumberger’s (1987) suggestion that different programs be designed for different types of dropouts takes specific form in Ekstrom’s and others’ (1987) recommendations regarding the importance of paralleling programs to student characteristics. They suggest focusing efforts on:

1. Programs to help pregnant teens remain in school,
2. Programs to help youth with economic needs combine work and education, and
3. Programs directed toward students who perform poorly because they are dissatisfied with the school environment (p. 67).

According to information reported earlier in this paper, programs directed toward these three general dropout types will encompass at least 60% of all dropouts. Therefore, we offer the following recommendation for encouraging program development of this type at the district level:

**RECOMMENDATION #10: The South Carolina Department of Education establish review panels to evaluate district program proposals (see Ekstrom, 1987, p. 67) for at-risk and dropout youth to the purpose of awarding promising programs "seed" monies for development.**

Rumberger (1987) goes on to report that successful programs for dropouts and potential dropouts employ an appropriate mix of educational and non-educational services to students. Non-educational services of particular importance in this context would necessarily include those related to alcohol and drug abuse treatment and education programs. Inter-agency coordination of these types of services is crucial to making effective use of the funds provided by the Education Improvement Act. In view of the importance of state agency and school collaboration, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #11: The South Carolina Human Services Coordinating Council authorize and support a study to determine feasible methods for offering, coordinating, and delivering educational and non-educational services to at-risk and dropout youth on local district and county levels.**

With respect to the timing of identification, Rumberger suggests "3-tiered programs" that focus upon (1) early intervention and prevention, (2) late intervention and prevention, and (3) recovery of students who have dropped out. The South Carolina Dropout Prevention Task Force recommended in 1987 that Regulation 43-301 of the Education Improvement Act (EIA) be amended, "to require local school districts to submit annual improvement plans (objectives and strategies) within District improvement Reports when district-level dropout rates for grades 7-8 or grades 9-12 exceed statewide dropout rates." We fully support such a reporting plan, so long as the statewide average dropout rate is properly calculated (See Appendix B), and we offer a recommendation for standardizing these district dropout reports:

**RECOMMENDATION #12: South Carolina public school district dropout reports (assuming amendment of EIA Reg. 43-301) emphasize (1) a specification of what types and categories of dropouts or potential dropouts the improvement strategy is focused upon, (2) a specification of the general criteria and data sources that could be used in the evaluation of the improvement strategy, and (3) a specification of the resources being committed to the improvement strategy.**

As South Carolina school staff go about the task of specifying plans for working with at-risk youth, they should keep in mind that there are many types of intervention strategies and programs being implemented with potential dropouts in South Carolina. The following characteristics, according to a survey by the Wil Lou Gray Opportunity School, dominate these programs and strategies:

1. A strong and effective reading and mathematics remediation component.
2. Intensified individual and/or group counseling of students.
3. Involvement of the parents of at-risk students.
4. Creative course scheduling and extension of the school year.
5. Provision of work-study experiences.

The general program content observations offered earlier are sound ones and can guide decision-making to some extent. The ultimate success of such programs, however, is in large measure dependent upon the extent to which their designers take into ac-

count the students for whom the program is designed. And while it is tempting to make specific recommendations regarding the content and character of intervention programs for dropouts and at-risk youth, it is our belief that teachers, counselors, and school administrators are in the best position to match specific program and intervention strategy characteristics to the characteristics and needs of the students. We do suggest, however, that it is important for teachers, counselors, and administrators to be afforded opportunities to visit and study innovative intervention programs outside their home districts.

The program visitation suggestion cited above relates to the broader issue of providing school personnel with the information and the experiences they require to the purpose of implementing effective intervention strategies and programs.\* We suggest that all school districts in South Carolina review and revise their multi-year staff development plans to ensure provision for teachers, counselors, and administrators to acquire current information regarding programs and techniques for use with at-risk and dropout youth. To assist school district personnel in these efforts, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #13: The Clemson University National Dropout Prevention Center be encouraged to prepare and disseminate to their professional constituencies periodic syntheses of research and promising practices with respect to effective methods and programs for use with at-risk and dropout youth. Further, the Center should be encouraged to prepare informational documents for a wide range of additional community groups (e.g., business leaders, church groups, parents, etc.).**

**\*The reader is advised to see the following three State and national publications for additional discussion and description of dropout prevention programs:**

- *Dealing with Dropouts: The Urban Superintendent's Call to Action.* (1987, November). U. S. Department of Education, 75p.
- *Programs and Activities to Reduce School Dropouts.* (1988). South Carolina Department of Education, 50p.
- *South Carolina Directory of Contacts and Programs in Dropout Prevention.* (1988, January). Clemson University National Dropout Prevention. 87 p.

### **Residential Facilities: Living with the Dropout**

Beyond alternate diploma programs and within-district alternative programs for at-risk and dropout youth, residential, live-in educational facilities represent the third level of institutional response to these kinds of youngsters. Removing students from the home and family setting, for whatever reason (except in cases of severe handicapping conditions), has not been popular in South Carolina. On the other hand, the need for residential school services can be expected to increase if, as the Dropout Prevention Task Force has recommended, "The Department of Social Services and Family Court . . . examine the issue of educational neglect to ensure that parental responsibilities regarding school attendance are satisfied."

This Task Force recommendation is but one response to the changing face of the family in this nation. The increases in single-parent families, latch-key children, child abuse, drug abuse, and so on, dominate a host of family-related indicators of at-risk and dropout youth according to a recent survey co-sponsored by the Wil Lou Gray

Research and Training Center and by the National Dropout Prevention Center at Clemson University. In fact, these indicators are becoming, day-by-day, more predictive of at-risk and potential dropout youth. In turn these factors are placing stresses upon the nation's educational system to the extent that traditional schools cannot effectively respond to these children's problems, resulting in a pervasive loss of confidence in the schools, teachers, and our general ability to educate our youth.

We believe that with what is known of the positive effects of the services that can be offered in a comprehensive residential facility, a comprehensive study of the residential school community as an option for at-risk youth in South Carolina is necessary. Such facilities can prove viable not only for serving certain types of at-risk youth, but as research and training facilities to extend our knowledge of and effectiveness with at-risk youth.\* Therefore, we offer the following recommendation:

**RECOMMENDATION #14: The Office of the Governor of South Carolina authorize and support a study of the feasibility and utility of developing a network of independent residential facilities in the State for educating selected at-risk youth.**

A network of several residential schools could form a concerted, third-level institutional response to the children of South Carolina; and the schools of the network could:

1. Function as research facilities for learning more about at-risk youth—who they are and what intervention strategies are effective with them.
2. Function as day-school facilities for the community in which the residential school is set, while also enrolling at-risk youth from around the State.
3. Function as training facilities (for preservice teachers and those in allied professions) in working with at-risk youth.
4. Function as staff development facilities for those (in service teachers, counselors, administrators) who seek extended expertise in working with at-risk youth.

\*See Appendix E for "At-Risk Youth: Research Questions for the Future."

## **Recommendations in Summary**

The recommendations presented throughout the body of the paper are repeated below for the convenience of the reader.

**RECOMMENDATION #1:** The South Carolina Department of Education and all State agencies concerned with education, K-12, propose and implement necessary strategies for alerting their constituencies to: (1) the nature and extent of the dropout problem in this State and nationally; and (2) the personal, societal, and economic consequences of students leaving school prematurely.

**RECOMMENDATION #2:** The South Carolina Department of Education institute a procedure for accurately and quickly validating student transfers between school districts in the State and out of State, and that school districts examine the accuracy of reporting between school transfers within the school district.

**RECOMMENDATION #3:** The South Carolina Department of Education, in its annual dropout reports, report not only yearly dropout rates by grade level(s) but also report annually the four-year graduating high school class attrition rate.

**RECOMMENDATION #4:** The South Carolina Department of Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with K-12 education, propose and support the development of a comprehensive causal model of the dropout process.

**RECOMMENDATION #5:** The school districts of South Carolina immediately implement procedures for the early identification of at-risk and potential dropouts (at the elementary grades) and for late identification of at-risk potential dropouts (at the middle and high school grades). (See Appendix D for example identification procedures.)

**RECOMMENDATION #6:** The South Carolina Department of Education modify the OSIRIS data base within the Pathways Projects to include a subset of student tracking data that is highly predictive of at-risk and potential dropouts; this tracking data should include student personal characteristics, school performance information, and attitude information. (See Appendix D for listings of possible tracking characteristics.)

**RECOMMENDATION #7:** The South Carolina Department of Education increase its assistance to schools in implementing the Pathways Projects, particularly with regard to its use in the early identification of at-risk and potential dropout youth, and set a target date for August 1, 1989 for full implementation of the Project.

**RECOMMENDATION #8:** The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with high school, adult, and post-secondary education, propose and support a careful, data-based analysis of the short-and long-term implications of State-wide policy changes in the Compulsory Attendance Act and the availability of GED/adult education program services to children who drop out of high school.

**RECOMMENDATION #9:** The South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, in cooperation with other State agencies concerned with high school, adult, and post-secondary education, propose and support a careful, data-based analysis of the short- and long-term effects on dropout rates and GED/adult education program participation of the following Sections of EIA: Section 59-5-65 (Promotion Policy), Section 59-30-10 (f. Exit Examination), Section 59-65-90 (Student Absence), and Section 59-39-60 (Interscholastic Activities).

**RECOMMENDATION #10:** The South Carolina Department of Education establish review panels to evaluate district program proposals (see Ekstrom, 1987, p. 67) for at-risk and dropout youth to the purpose of awarding promising programs "seed" monies for development.

**RECOMMENDATION #11:** The South Carolina Human Services Coordinating Council authorize and support a study to determine feasible methods for offering, coordinating, and delivering educational and non-educational services to at-risk and dropout youth on local district and county levels.

**RECOMMENDATION #12:** South Carolina public school district dropout reports (assuming amendment of EIA Reg. 43-301) emphasize (1) a specification of what types and categories of dropouts or potential dropouts the improvement strategy is focused upon, (2) a specification of the general criteria and data sources that could be used in the evaluation of the improvement strategy, and (3) a specification of the resources being committed to the improvement strategy.

**RECOMMENDATION #13:** The Clemson University National Dropout Prevention Center be encouraged to prepare and disseminate to their professional constituencies periodic syntheses of research and promising practices with respect to effective methods and programs for use with at-risk and dropout youth. Further, the Center should be encouraged to prepare informational documents for a wide range of additional community groups (e.g., business leaders, church groups, parents, etc.)

**RECOMMENDATION #14:** The Office of the Governor of South Carolina authorize and support a study of the feasibility and utility of developing a network of independent residential facilities in the State for educating selected at-risk youth.

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## APPENDIX A

### Reports of Yearly Dropout Rates for South Carolina, 1979-1987

The dropout rate is inherently a function of how dropouts are defined. Using the definition currently used by the South Carolina Department of Education ("a pupil who leaves school for any reason, except death, before graduation or completion of a course of studies and without transferring to another"), the following yearly State dropout rates are presented:

**Table 4**

#### **Dropout Calculation Method #1**

The Yearly Dropout Rate as the Percentage of Total  
(Grades 1-12) School Enrollment (1979-87).

Year	Number of Dropouts	Dropout Rate (%)
1979-80	13,700	2.3
1980-81	13,365	2.2
1981-82	12,076	2.1
1982-83	10,550	1.8
1983-84	10,784	1.9
1984-85	9,659	1.7
1985-86	9,170	1.6
1986-87	8,375	1.4

Source: Yearly Dropout Reports issued by the  
S. C. Department of Education, 1981-87.

**Table 5**

#### **Dropout Calculation Method #2**

Yearly Dropout Rates as the Percentage of Total School Enrollment  
between Grades 1-8, and between Grades 9-12 (1981-87).

Year	Grades 1-8 Dropout Rates (%)	Grades 9-12 Dropout Rate (%)
1981-82	0.4	5.6
1982-83	0.3	5.0
1983-84	0.3	5.3
1984-85	0.3	4.7
1985-86	0.3	4.4
1986-87	0.2	4.0

Source: Yearly Dropout Reports issued by the  
S. C. Department of Education, 1981-87.

**Table 6**  
**Dropout Calculation Method #3**

Yearly Dropout Rates as the Percentage of Total School Enrollment  
at Grade 9, Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12 (1981-87).

Year	Dropout Rate (%) at Grade Levels			
	9	10	11	12
1981-82	6.9	6.2	6.0	3.7
1982-83	6.0	5.9	4.8	2.9
1983-84	6.8	6.5	5.3	3.4
1984-85	4.9	5.2	5.2	3.4
1985-86	4.6	4.9	4.6	3.2
1986-87	5.0	4.4	4.0	2.1

Source: Yearly Dropout Reports issued by the  
S. C. Department of Education, 1981-87.

## APPENDIX B

### Reports of Cumulative Dropout Rates for South Carolina 1979-87.

**Table 7**

#### South Carolina Graduation Rate and Cumulative Dropout Rate for High School Grades, 1983-87.

Graduating Class	Number of Graduates	Cumulative # of Dropouts	% Graduating with Peers
1983	37,570	11,163	70.3
1984	36,101	10,476	71.0
1985	35,004	9,780	72.1
1986	34,415	9,463	72.5
1987	33,100*	8,181*	75.3*

\*Projected

Source: Division of Public Accountability, S. C. State Board of Education. (1987). *What is the penny buying for South Carolina?* (Table 1-3, p. 25).

**Table 8**

#### Graduation Rate — Comparing 9th Grade Enrollments to High School Graduate Numbers Four Years Later.

Year 9th Grade	9th Grade Enrollment	Graduating Class	Number of Graduates	% Graduating with Peers
1979-80	57,155	1982-83	37,570	65.7
1980-81	55,954	1983-84	36,101	64.5
1981-82	54,413	1984-85	35,004	64.3
1982-83	53,367	1985-86	34,415	64.5
1983-84	53,445	1986-87	33,100*	61.9*

\*Projected

Source: Division of Public Accountability, S. C. State Board of Education, (1987). *What is the penny buying for South Carolina?* (Table 1-5, p. 26).

Tables 7 and 8 represent the fourth calculation method cited previously and have been used by the Division of Public Accountability to reflect graduation and dropout rates. Table 7 reflects the dropout rate experienced by a particular senior class for which the dropout rate was calculated by dividing the cumulative number of dropouts by the number of graduates and multiplying it by 100 to convert to a percentage. Subtracting the dropout rate from 100 gives the percent “graduating with peers.” For example, a graduation rate of 72.5% was obtained in 1986, thus giving a dropout rate of 27.5%.

Table 8 treats the data quite differently. A percent of “graduating with peers” is calculated by dividing the number of graduates by the total 9th grade enrollment four years earlier and multiplying the quotient by 100. The dropout rate is obtained by subtracting this figure from 100. For example, in 1986, only 64.5% of the entering 9th

graders four years earlier (in 1982) graduated. This shows a dropout rate of about 35.5%. Table 9 shows dropout data extrapolated from Table 8.

**Table 9**  
**Dropout Rate — Comparing 9th Grade Enrollments**  
**to Number of Dropouts at end of 12th Grade**

Year Entering 9th Grade	9th Grade Enrollment	Graduating Class Year	Number of Dropouts	% Dropout**
1979-80	57,155	1982-83	19,585	34.3
1980-81	55,954	1983-84	19,853	35.5
1981-82	54,413	1984-85	19,409	35.7
1982-83	53,367	1985-86	18,952	35.5
1983-84	53,445	1986-87	20,345*	38.1*

\*Projected.

\*\*Obtained by subtracting number of graduates from total 9th grade enrollment figures from Table 8.

A comparison of the total number of dropouts in Table 7 and the cumulative number of dropouts in Table 9 clearly shows a large discrepancy, the difference being approximately 9,500 in 1986. Why this large discrepancy? What happened to these 9,000 or so students? Obviously such a discrepancy is a function of how dropout is defined and how the dropout rate (or graduation rate) is calculated. The issue is not that any one procedure is right or wrong, but rather that using various procedures can result in misleading and confusing information.

## APPENDIX C

### Yearly Urban vs. Rural Dropout Rates and Yearly White vs. Non-white Dropout Rates for South Carolina

In Table 10, the dropout rates in Grades 9-12 for rural and urban school districts are shown. Urban school districts include Charleston, Greenville, Richland 1 and 2, Lexington 2 and 5. Rural school districts include the other 85 school districts of South Carolina. Rural school districts appear to have higher dropout rates than do urban school districts.

**Table 10**  
**Yearly Dropout Rates by Urban/Rural School Districts**  
**Grades 9-12**

Yearly	Urban %	Rural %
1981-82	5.0	5.8
1982-83	4.6	5.2
1983-84	4.5	5.8
1984-85	3.7	5.1
1985-86	3.7	4.6
1986-87	3.5	4.2

Source: Yearly Dropout Reports issued by  
S. C. Department of Education, 1981-87.

Table 11 displays dropout rates for white and non-white student population in Grades 9-12. Except for some differences during the 1983 to 1985 school years, dropout rates between the two groups have gradually decreased to a low of approximately 4% during the 1986-87 school year.

**Table 11**  
**Dropout Rates by Ethnic Groups**  
**Grades 9-12**

Year	White %	Non-White %
1981-82	5.5	5.6
1982-83	5.0	4.9
1983-84	5.0	5.6
1984-85	4.5	5.1
1985-86	4.3	4.5
1986-87	4.0	4.0

Source: Yearly Dropout Reports issued by the  
S. C. Department of Education, 1981-1987.

## APPENDIX D

### A Checklist and Tracking Characteristics for the Early Identification of Potential Dropouts

Most who research dropout issues agree on a number of variables that characterize the dropout-prone student (see Wheelock, 1986; Mann, 1987; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education, 1987; National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1986; Ekstrom, Goertze, Pollack, and Rock, 1987; Wehlage and Rutter, 1987; and Brown, 1988). According to these studies, school-related factors such as academic performance and behavior problems constitute the most critical determinants of the decision to drop out of school. In fact, according to the Office of Research and Improvement, U. S. Department of Education (1987), poor academic performance is the single most important predictor of who drops out. Other factors include work and family related variables (Mann, 1987).

Based on these research studies, a simple checklist has been developed which classroom teachers, counselors, and other relevant school/school district personnel can use to identify potential dropouts so that necessary action can be taken to assist these students. This checklist is by no means exhaustive. Other criteria which are deemed relevant to the school or district can certainly be added to this checklist. And the user should keep in mind that those variables are typically interrelated (e.g., "frequent absences" can be due to out-of-school suspension for behavior problems).

### Potential Dropout Identification Checklist

#### Demographic Information

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnicity: (1) White (2) Black  
(3) Hispanic (4) Asian  
(5) American  
Indian  
(6) Other

Sex: (1) Male (2) Female

**Direction:** Check all that apply.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Falls considerably below grade level in reading.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Repeated a grade at least once.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Had disciplinary problems in school during last year.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Has been suspended or put on probation in school.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Overage for grade level enrolled.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Above average absences for reasons other than illnesses.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ Cut classes or school often.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ Frequently tardy.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Works more than 15 hours a week.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ Takes vocational courses rather than college preparatory courses.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ Participates in little or no extra-curricular activity.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ From a single parent family.

13. \_\_\_\_\_ Has older siblings or parents who left school without graduating.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ Is a teenage parent.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ Has a poor attitude toward teachers and school.

### **Suggested Methods for the Early Identification of Potential Dropouts**

The three identification methods offered here build upon one another, becoming more highly predictive and, therefore, more accurate.

#### **Method 1: Teacher Checklisting of Basic Criteria**

The first method is rather a simple one and serves primarily as an initial effort toward early identification of the dropout-prone student. And it can easily be done in little time by a classroom teacher or a counselor. It involves checking if a student might meet a majority of the first five criteria (i.e., falling below grade level in reading, repeated a grade at least one, etc.). If the student does meet these criteria, he or she should be red-flagged as a potential dropout.

#### **Method 2: Teacher Checklisting of Extended Criteria**

The second method builds upon the first. Instead of using only the first five criteria, it is suggested that all the criteria be employed. Using all the criteria provides more information about the student and, therefore, increases predictive power. Again, any classroom teacher or counselor can easily do this without taking too much time. Much of this information is perhaps already in the student record. If it is, the checklist will serve to collate the information so that it is more revealing.

#### **Method 3: Computerized Tracking Using Extended Criteria**

Again, this method builds upon the first two methods. However, this method calls for a more concerted and systematic procedure for identifying potential dropouts. The same checklist or other instrument can be used. With the current ease in the availability of personal computers and powerful databases, schools and school districts can develop with little difficulty a tracking system in which each student is tracked in terms of school attended, academic performance, behavior and attitudinal characteristics, transfers, etc. Such a system can provide information in at least two ways. First, it provides a computerized system for identifying potential dropouts. Secondly, the information can be used to develop models for early prediction of potential dropouts and graduates. Such a model could be useful in assisting school and school district personnel in the development of policies regarding the dropout problem.

The Pathways Project, in which many public schools in South Carolina participate, provides great potential for a computerized tracking system of students. There are other data bases available which can also be used.

## APPENDIX E

### At-Risk Youth: Research Questions for the Future

*Questions Posed by Urban Superintendents.* Educational policies and practices must be guided by what we know about teachers, schools, children, and the contexts in which they interact. Yet, there is much we do not know about at-risk and potential dropout youth, and the factors that have led to their being identified in this way. The U. S. Department of Education 1987 publication, *Dealing with Dropouts: The Urban Superintendents' Call to Action*, presents 17 research and policy questions, the answers to which can assist school staff in working with at-risk youth:

1. Why do students from poor families drop out more often than students from middle-class families? Why do some poor youngsters succeed while others do not? What in their backgrounds and school experiences helps them to succeed?
2. How does the structure of a school affect the dropout rate? For example, is it better to have elementary, junior high, and high schools? Or is it preferable to have just two school levels—an elementary school extending through the 8th grade and a high school accommodating 9th through 12th grade?
3. Are students whose parents can choose the school they attend and the type of academic program in which they enroll less apt to drop out?
4. What impact does raising academic standards have on at-risk students?
5. Do we have suitable education assessment systems in place, including those that tip us off to youngsters with a higher-than-average likelihood of dropping out?
6. Does counseling as it is now structured in most schools help the dropout problem?
7. What tactics can help ease the transition of an at-risk student who is moving from school to school?
8. How can peer pressure to fail in school be overcome?
9. How can peer pressure be used to help at-risk students succeed in school?
10. Is it better to separate at-risk students from classmates in special "pull out" programs or keep them in the same classes?
11. What effect does establishing magnet schools have on the dropout rate?
12. What effect does grouping students according to academic ability have on the dropout rate?
13. What aspects of the student-teacher relationship are most influential in keeping students in school? For example, how important are teachers' expectations? Or teachers' spoken and unspoken messages?
14. What effects do various instructional and school management strategies have on keeping youngsters in school?
15. What are the best ways to draw dropouts back to school? What characteristics do those who return share? What programs can best serve those who return?
16. What discipline policies affect the dropout rate?
17. What are the effects of longer school days and school years?

*Questions Posed in South Carolina.* A substantial number of relevant research and policy questions were raised by professionals and laymen at an at-risk forum during March 1988. The forum, *Youth At Risk: South Carolina's Search for Direction*, was co-sponsored by the Wil Lou Gray Research and Training Center and the National Dropout Prevention Center, South Carolina Network. Eighty-four persons attended the forum and among the more provocative research questions agreed upon in small group discussions were the following:

- 1. What South Carolina programs which target at-risk students are successful?**
- 2. What can we do to identify at-risk children at an early age?**
- 3. Why are there not more specialized, trained teachers/staff for at-risk youth?**
- 4. When, how, and with whom can we intervene most effectively?**
- 5. What are the primary causal factors of dropping out?**
- 6. Should programs be aimed at overcoming social/family problems or behavioral/performance problems?**
- 7. What percentage of children (dropouts) are from alcoholic families?**
- 8. What type of educational programs can meet the needs of a majority of at-risk children and still fulfill State requirements?**
- 9. Are current State funding levels sufficient? Is money available to solve problems?**
- 10. Are all children "at-risk" or just those with identified problems?**
- 11. What impact is early childhood education having in South Carolina?**
- 12. What can be done to strengthen the family? What models have worked?**