

1-1-1994

## Over-age middle school students : a study of and interventions related to school factors contributing to their being at-risk.

Jeanne M. Bonneau  
*University of Massachusetts Amherst*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations\\_1](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bonneau, Jeanne M., "Over-age middle school students : a study of and interventions related to school factors contributing to their being at-risk." (1994). *Doctoral Dissertations 1896 - February 2014*. 5041.  
<https://doi.org/10.7275/14756927> [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations\\_1/5041](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/5041)

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations 1896 - February 2014 by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).



UMASS/AMHERST



312066011059007



OVER-AGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS:  
A STUDY OF AND INTERVENTIONS RELATED  
TO SCHOOL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING  
TO THEIR BEING AT-RISK

A Dissertation Presented

by

JEANNE M. BONNEAU

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1994

School of Education

©Copyright by Jeanne Bonneau 1994

All Rights Reserved

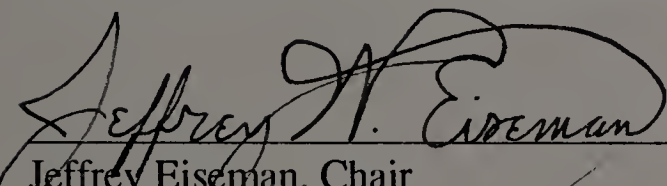
OVER-AGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS:  
A STUDY OF AND INTERVENTIONS RELATED  
TO SCHOOL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING  
TO THEIR BEING AT-RISK


A Dissertation Presented

by

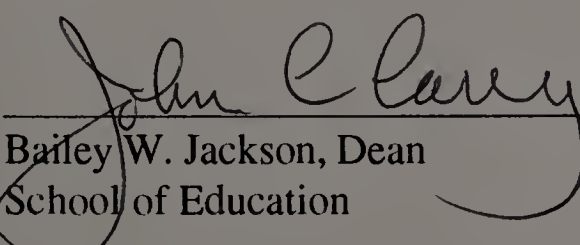
JEANNE M. BONNEAU

Approved as to style and content by:

  
Jeffrey Eiseman, Chair

  
Patricia Anthony, Member

  
Eleanor Vanetzian, Member

  
Bailey W. Jackson, Dean  
School of Education

## DEDICATION

Dedicated to those young people who left  
school without a good sense of self and their  
ability to succeed.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely and gratefully acknowledge a very special group of people who have in one way or another provided me with the support, encouragement, and guidance I needed to complete the research and the doctoral program.

First, for his advice, encouragement, and patience Dr. Jeffrey Eiseman, chair of my doctoral committee. My appreciation to Dr. Patricia Anthony: a positive influence to me throughout the program and Dr. Eleanor Vanetzian: who must have known I needed a boost when she called during the summer of 1993 to inquire about my progress. I shall be forever grateful for that call.

My children, Kathryn (28), Frank (26), and Michelle (21), who encouraged me in my work and demonstrated their understanding of the importance of my continuing to learn by staying in the educational process themselves.

The program and this study has come to completion through my employment in three school districts. I would be remiss if I did not thank my readers throughout this process.

My good friend Elaine Feingold who has been with me throughout and at Silver Lake Regional High School, Donna Brown, guidance counselor and former English teacher. In the Burrillville School District, Ruth Sunn, reading teacher, and Karen Ostroff, elementary school principal and a very special person with a wealth of knowledge about schools and kids. My typist Audrey Riddle, without whom I could not have reached my goal. Also in Burrillville: Peter Berthelette and Sandra Mathieu who assisted in gathering and formatting data from student files.

I would also like to thank Trina Hosmer from the University Computer Center for her technical assistance in analyzing the statistical aspects of the study.

I wish to thank Dr. Dennis Flynn, Superintendent of Schools for the Burrillville School District and Robert Morissette, Principal of Burrillville Middle School for their advice and encouragement. My sincere thanks to the faculty and students at the Middle School for their patience and participation.

I am especially grateful to Dr. Flynn and Audrey for their kindness, caring, and giving, during very difficult times. It is something I shall always remember. I continue to learn from them the importance and the value of people, foremost, children and those in need, as I live day-to-day.

Finally, to my good friend Dr. Jack Aherne, Superintendent of Abington Public Schools for believing in me and encouraging me throughout the program.

I shall be forever indebted to these and others who touched my life in a positive way that provided me with the motivation to learn and grow through the study and in the doctoral program.



## ABSTRACT

# OVER-AGE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS: A STUDY OF AND INTERVENTIONS RELATED TO SCHOOL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THEIR BEING AT-RISK

MAY, 1994

JEANNE BONNEAU, B. S. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

DARTMOUTH

M.Ed. BRIDGEWATER STATE COLLEGE

Ed.D. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Jeffrey W. Eiseman

In a study by a high school guidance counselor in the Burr School District, one factor identified as having a positive correlation with students leaving school before graduation is being over-age for grade as a result of being retained or participating in a pre-one program. This research on over-age middle school students in a rural community in Northwest Rhode Island: (1) identifies the 36% of the student population who are over-age for grade, (2) reports the reasons for not being grade appropriate in terms of being retained or having participated in a transitional program, (3) through school records, identifies which members of this population are not attending school regularly or succeeding academically and behaviorally, and (4) through responses from a questionnaire and interviews, gained insights from students as to their attitudes toward school and their perceptions of the relationship of school to success in later life. The information gained through this research assisted the District's Administrative Council and Middle School staff in identifying, developing, and implementing interventions. An evaluation of student academic and behavioral success indicates that some change is taking place. Additional strategies are being

developed to increase the extent to which all students feel cared about and have the desire and ability to succeed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
ABSTRACT .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	xii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background of the Problem.....	1
Definition of A Dropout .....	3
Significance of the Study .....	4
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Outline of the Study .....	8
II LITERATURE REVIEW .....	10
Introduction .....	10
A Complex Problem.....	10
Teachers and At-Risk Students.....	15
Retention and Transition Programs.....	17
Solving the Problem .....	23
III. RESEARCH DESIGN .....	30
District Background Data.....	30
Research Questions .....	33
Sample .....	33
Description of the Study/Data Collection Procedure .....	33
Burr Middle School 1992 - 1993.....	36
Data Analysis .....	37
Interventions .....	37
Curriculum/Training for Faculty.....	38
Retention of Students .....	38
Grade Configuration-Counselors.....	39
Scheduling.....	39
Building Blocks Sequence.....	40
Study Skills .....	41
Environment.....	41

IV	RESULTS .....	42
	Summary of Analysis of Data .....	72
	Summary of Tables .....	73
	Results of Middle School Interventions/Change.....	76
	After-School Program - Spring 1993 .....	76
	Retained Students - June 1993 .....	76
	Grade 7 Skills Program.....	77
	Grade 6 Building Blocks Sequence and Method of Class Placement.....	78
	Interviews .....	79
	Brendon .....	79
	Al .....	80
	Jay.....	80
	Mike.....	81
	Jocelyn .....	82
	Summary of Interviews .....	83
V	SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS .....	94
	Summary - Purpose.....	94
	Purpose of Data Collection Component.....	95
	Conclusions from Review of the Literature .....	95
	Conclusions from Study at Burr Middle School .....	97
	Recommendations for Practice .....	98
	Early Interventions .....	99
	District Interventions.....	100
	Limitations of the Study .....	102
	Recommendations for Future Research.....	102
	APPENDICES	
	A. PERMISSION FOR STUDY .....	104
	B. EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT TO STUDENTS.....	106



C. EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT TO PARENTS .....	107
D. QUESTIONNAIRE .....	109
E. DESCRIPTION OF FIELDS .....	110
F. MEMO TO TEACHERS .....	111
G. DESCRIPTION OF AT-RISK PROGRAM.....	112
H. RESULTS OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM .....	114
I. GRADE RECONFIGURATION .....	117
J. GRADE 9 TRANSITION TASK FORCE .....	118
K. INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	122
 REFERENCES .....	 128

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Burr High School Dropout by Gender September 1984 - June 1990 .....	21
2. Mean and Standard Deviations of the Ninth Grade Entrance Age Stated in Months for the Dropouts and the Completers in the Class of 1985 .....	22
3. Distribution of Participants and Non-Participants in Pre-one Program by Gender .....	42
4. Distribution of Retained or Non-Retained by Gender .....	43
5. Distribution of Grade Appropriate or not Grade Appropriate Because of Participation in a Pre-one Program or Being Retained in Grade Who Failed or Did Not Fail Two or More Subjects .....	44
6. Distribution of the Number of Students Who Were Retained in Grade and/or Participated In a Pre-one Program and Were Absent 10 or More Days as Compared With Students Who Were Grade Appropriate .....	45
7. Distribution of Grade Appropriate or not Grade Appropriate Because of Participation in a Pre-one Program or Being Retained in Grade As It Relates to Multiple Suspensions .....	46
8. Fair Testing .....	47
9. Fair Discipline Practices .....	48
10. Teacher's Trust .....	49
11. Classes Being Boring .....	50
12. Teachers Grade Fairly .....	51

13.	Students Participate in Extra-curricular Activities .....	52
14.	Most of My Teachers Are Nice .....	53
15.	Fair Testing .....	54
16.	Fair Discipline Practices .....	55
17.	Teachers' Trust .....	56
18.	Classes Being Boring .....	57
19.	Teachers Grade Fairly .....	58
20.	Students Participate in Extra-Curricular Activities .....	59
21.	Most of My Teachers Are Nice .....	60
22.	Fair Testing .....	61
23.	Fair Discipline Practices .....	62
24.	Teacher's Trust .....	63
25.	Classes Being Boring .....	64
26.	Teachers Grade Fairly .....	65
27.	Students Participate in Extra-Curricular Activities .....	66
28.	Most of My Teachers Are Nice .....	67
29.	T-Test Comparing Multiple Suspensions for Students Who Had Been Retained and Those Who Had Been in a Pre-one Program .....	68
30.	Distribution of Students Comparing Those Who Were In a Pre-one Program And Those Who Were Retained and the Number of Days Absent From School .....	69

31.	Distribution of Students Comparing Those Students Who Were in a Pre-one Program and Those Who Were Retained and the Number Who Failed Two Or More Subjects .....	70
32.	Distribution of Students Who Participated in Pre-one Programs and Are In Grade 6 Compared to Those Who Were in Pre-one Programs and Are in Grade 7 .....	71
33.	Students Who Were Retained in Grade 1993 - 1994 Academic and Discipline Results .....	76
34.	Grade 7 Skills Program Fall 1993 - Results Pertaining to Academics and Discipline .....	77
35.	Grade 6 Students Failing Two or More Subjects - Fall of 1993 .....	78



# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Problem

According to a National Center for Educational Statistics report dated 1989, each year approximately 430,000 students in grades ten through twelve in the United States leave school before graduating; annually, 4.5% of sixteen to twenty-four year olds in grades ten through twelve dropped out of school over the three year period between 1987 and 1989. For that same period, the annual dropout rate was higher in cities (6.2%) than in suburbs (3.7%). In addition, though high school completion rates vary across school districts and population groups, in 1989 approximately 4,000,000 persons in the United States, ages sixteen to twenty-four, had not completed high school and were not currently enrolled in school.

Similarly, Orr (1987) found that 14% to 24% of the population in national samples and population surveys did not have high school diplomas. The 1985 Current Population Survey (CPS) indicated that 4.3 million sixteen to twenty-four year olds were dropouts, representing 13% of all youth in that age group and including 14% of all eighteen and nineteen year olds. The figures, Orr states, were about the same in 1975.

Orr refers to three research studies:

1. High School and Beyond (1980), in which 30,000 tenth graders in public and private schools were surveyed (percentages do not include students who dropped out before grade ten). Fourteen percent of the students surveyed dropped out.
2. National Longitudinal Survey (1979), which included a group of 12,000 randomly sampled fourteen to twenty-one year olds. Fifteen percent who were twenty-one between 1979 and 1982 did not complete high school.

3. National Public School (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1986), which indicates that 25% of the students entering grade nine never graduated, and up to 50% of inner-city high school students don't graduate.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (1989, 1990), almost 14,000 students in grades nine through twelve in the public schools in Massachusetts dropped out each year. At that rate, their projections indicate that approximately 20% of each entering freshman class across the Commonwealth will not graduate.

More recent follow up studies of the dropout problem in Massachusetts show little change in the patterns of dropping out over the last three years. However, although comparisons with national statistics are not possible due to a lack of uniformity in the method of calculations, information released in October, 1990, by the Massachusetts Department of Education shows what the Department believes is a significant decrease in the annual dropout rate in Massachusetts, from 5.4% in 1988 to 4.9% in 1989. This can be attributed to state-wide efforts funded, in part, by Chapter 188 and Commonwealth Futures grants designed for schools eligible for dropout funding. These statistics translate into a projected four-year dropout rate decrease from 21.6% for the class of 1991 to 19.6% for the class of 1992.

While this decline in the average annual rate of dropping out throughout the state is a positive sign, the rates in some communities are still perceived, by the Massachusetts Department of Education, to be too high. For example, although more than half the high schools in Massachusetts had an annual dropout rate below 3%, in some thirty schools, annual dropout rates were greater than 10%. With a dropout rate of 10% each year, the projections in those thirty schools would be that between 30% and 50% of the class of 1992 may not graduate.

### Definition of a Dropout

Hammack (1986) concludes that there is no single standard definition of the term dropout. Both the description and the method of computation differ. Therefore, the extent of the problem on a national, state, or local level is difficult to assess.

Whelage (1989) finds a lack of agreement in the definition of a dropout. The Bureau of Census, for the purpose of its report, defines a dropout as any person who is not enrolled in school or who is not a high school graduate or the equivalent. Whelage feels this definition leaves too much room for interpretation. He raises these questions: If school districts are trying to keep their rate down, they report students who indicate they will go to a private school as a transfer. Does the student enroll and graduate? Schools tend not to count as dropouts, students under sixteen years of age who are habitual truants. Legally, they cannot be dropped and are recorded as absentees. Are they really dropouts?

Whelage (1989) provides us with additional categories of students leaving without a diploma:

1. Push-outs -- undesirable students who are encouraged to leave.
2. Disaffected -- students who for some reason or another no longer wish to remain.
3. Educational mortalities -- students who fail.
4. Capable dropouts -- those whose social skills do not match school demands.
5. Stop-outs -- those who drop out and return to school within the same year.

Orr (1987) concurs with Whelage and refers to a dropout as a student who withdraws from school without enrolling elsewhere. He also feels the number of dropouts nationally is determined by conflicting and inconclusive data because schools lack uniformity in their definitions. Orr suggests that a system be developed to track those students who leave school in order to determine actual numbers of dropouts.



### Significance of the Study

The consequences of dropping out of high school are far-reaching for the individual and society. Dropouts have more difficulty finding and holding jobs than do graduates; the estimated unemployment rate for dropouts is more than twice that of high school graduates of the same age. The earning power of those not completing high school is also less than that of high school graduates. For example, high school graduates twenty-five years of age and older earn \$4,000 per year more than those with eleven years or less of school. Further, estimated lifetime earnings of high school graduates with no college degree are \$200,000 higher than for those who do not complete high school (Orr, 1987).

The ramifications of the problem go far beyond the unemployment and earnings consideration for the individual. Society at large pays an untold cost through the loss of productivity and the drain on welfare and mental health systems, as well as that on the court system and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the profound effect on the general quality of life in our society cannot be calculated. Orr states that the dropouts of 1981 encountered a potential life earnings loss of \$228 billion and lost tax revenues of approximately \$68.4 billion.

The effects of a high dropout rate on society have changed with the availability and types of employment over the years. In Colonial America, a farming nation, dropping out of school had little or no effect on quality of life. With the growth of America as an industrial nation, under-educated youth found many opportunities for unskilled and semi-skilled jobs. In some manufacturing communities it was the norm for young students to leave at age thirteen or fourteen and enter the same factories where their parents worked. Education was neither valued nor necessary for youth to earn a living in most communities. However, in today's service-oriented and technical age it is thought that a person needs approximately thirteen years of school, or at least a year of college, to provide adequately for themselves and for their families.



On April 26, 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education, after assessing the status of the public school system, warned that the nation was at-risk. Kunisawa (1988) disagrees; he feels the nation is not at-risk but in crisis. He cites the following:

- 52% of dropouts are unemployed or receiving welfare.
- Cumulative cost of dropouts is \$75 billion in welfare benefits and lost tax revenues.
- 60% of prison inmates are high school dropouts costing us on average \$15,000 per inmate per year to house.
- 87% of pregnant teenagers are high school dropouts.

At-risk students represent a threat to a democratic society for economic reasons. According to Pressersen (1991), we are creating an ineradicable, untrained under-class, which will be plagued by joblessness, welfare dependency, and crime in the years to come. Thus, a growing number of youth in the United States will face economic consequences as a result of failure to obtain an appropriate education (Thompson, 1992). A history of school failure and low achievement is directly linked to high rates of unemployment, underemployment, low wages, and potential that is not realized. Our society, states Thompson, no longer values unskilled labor. Moreover, the nation, through lack of attainment of educational skills by its populace, is showing signs of racial and class segregation.

Kunisawa (1988) has provided supporting data. Listed are the ten states with the highest dropout percentages:

1.	Louisiana	43.7%
2.	Alabama	37.9%
3.	Florida	37.8%
4.	New York	37.8%
5.	Mississippi	37.6%
6.	Georgia	36.9%
7.	California	36.8%
8.	South Carolina	35.5%
9.	Arizona	35.4%
10.	Texas	35.4%

All have ethnic minority enrollments which exceed 25% of the student population: six of them have minority enrollments of more than 35%. Kunisawa further states that the three cities with the highest dropout rates are East Los Angeles, 60%; Boston, 50%; and Washington, D.C., 45%; all three cities have high minority population rates.

Similarly, Kunisawa lists the ten states with the lowest dropout rates. These states enroll fewer than 20% ethnic minority students, while six have minority enrollments of less than 10%. It is obvious that one of the keys to the economic future of our nation may be the education of minorities.

Economic and social factors, as well as issues of school management, contribute to the dropout rates of urban adolescents (Fine, 1986). Even with high school diplomas, minority students and females suffer economically and socially relative to the white middle-class. National statistics reveal that more than 50% of inner-city children never graduate from high school. Since many inner city students are also members of minority groups, their futures are doubly constrained.

Fine's (1986) research includes an interview with one sixteen year-old dropout who gave a negative appraisal of the relationship of school to labor market success. The youth, admitting to selling drugs, commented, "Where else am I going to make this money, even with a diploma?"

In fact, there is evidence to show that students leaving school before obtaining a high school diploma come primarily from minority groups of low socio-economic background (Levin, 1985). The severity of the problem is clear if one realizes that the United States school enrollment dropped from forty-six million to forty-one million from 1970 to 1980, while at the same time the minority population nation-wide has increased from 21% to 27%. It is not unrealistic to expect increased numbers of high school dropouts in future years.

Why do students leave school early? Obviously there are many school-related and non school-related factors which can have an impact on students' decisions to remain in school or to dropout. Whelage (1972), Random (1986) and Fine (1986), agree dropping out is a complex problem. One school related factor identified by these researchers is retention, or a student being over-age for grade as a result of being retained.

This research will focus on the Burr (pseudonym) School District, a rural community located in Northwest Rhode Island. Kay Liptack completed a research that identifies the characteristics of a dropout from Burr High School. A characteristic that repeated itself for dropouts is being over-age for grade.

Currently in the Burr Middle School, 257 students in grade six, seven, and eight are over-age for grade. This represents 36% of the total middle school population. If Ms. Liptack's conclusions hold true, the future of this population is in jeopardy of school failure. Have interventions met with success for this population? What is their current academic status, and their attitude about school?

This research identifies students who are or are not meeting with success and it will assist the school district in making decisions about the effectiveness of pre-one programs and retentions as they exist in the district. Beginning with its Administrative Council members, it has enabled the school district to unify and develop strategies which meet the needs of all students. The questions that guided this research are the same questions that guided the 1989 Phi Delta Kappa study of at-risk students: Which students are at-risk? What are they like? What are the schools doing to help at-risk students? How effective are these efforts?

### Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. Analyze the long term effect of the retention(s) and/or pre-one program on student performance, behavior patterns, and attendance.
2. Develop, implement, and evaluate strategies for Middle School students who appear to be at-risk of school failure.
3. Develop strategies to change practices in the district related to pre-one programs and retention.

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Did retention, for those identified middle school students, improve their academic achievement, or put them at further risk of school failure?
2. What effect did retention have on attitudes toward school?
3. Did a transition class, in this case pre-one, have a positive affect on these over-age students as they moved through the grades?
4. Is the school department's practice concerning transition classes and retention actually having a negative affect on students involved?
5. Can a school develop a plan for all students that will enhance their chance for success?

### Outline of the Study

A thorough review of the literature identifies school, personal, and family factors that create an at-risk student. Complex problems of dropout prevention as it relates to the individual, school, and family are further defined. Through school



records those students in the Middle School during the 1992 - 1993 academic year who are over-age for grade as a result of participation in a pre-one program and/or retention have been identified.

Students in the Middle School have been queried concerning their attitudes about school prior to interventions being implemented. School District and school-based strategies have been developed for at-risk students based on data of over-age, at-risk youth. An evaluation has been made through school records and from student interview responses to determine the success of some school interventions implemented during the spring of 1992 and the fall of 1993. A longitudinal study will further be planned to assess changes in student performance and behavior as a result of changes in curriculum and counseling practices.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

There is no scarcity of research regarding factors contributing to dropping out. As early as 1911, Van Denburg investigated the phenomenon of students who did not graduate even though they entered high school with the intention of completing. He concluded that graduating classes were so small in number, compared to the number who began school, that the matter needed serious consideration.

#### A Complex Problem

Gary Whelage, at a conference for the National Secondary Principal's Association in February of 1987 in San Antonio, Texas, using data obtained from research literature he had surveyed, summarized the factors leading to dropping out of school into three categories:

1. Personal factors
  - a. Low self-esteem
  - b. Social immaturity
  - c. Feel alienation toward school
  - d. Pregnancy
  - e. Drugs/Alcohol
  - f. Trauma (such as death)
2. Family factors
  - a. Minority status
  - b. Low socio-economic status
  - c. Single parent
  - d. Large family
  - e. Lower education of parent
  - f. Siblings dropped out
  - g. English not the primary language

3. School related factors
  - a. Dislike school
  - b. Truant
  - c. Retained in grade
  - d. Discipline
  - e. Conflict with peers
  - f. No extra-curricular activities

Whelage went on to cite data from the research, "High School and Beyond," a federally funded national study of high school sophomores in 1980. Of all the graduates responding to a survey in 1984 (two years after graduation date), 10% of the graduates had children and 58% of the dropouts had children. It was clear to Whelage that children were raising children and that these newborns were at increased risk of not graduating from high school themselves, thus perpetuating the cycle.

The National Commission report, "A Nation At-Risk" (1983), made recommendations to upgrade educational standards and high school graduation requirements. This report led to several studies designed to identify the population that dropped out of school and the reasons for it. Dale Mann (1986) suggests that we live in a complex world, and that the dropout problem calls for imaginative and multiple approaches. Mann cites William Morgan's, "The High School Dropout in an Over Educated Society," which identifies 51% of males and 33% of females leaving school for school-related reasons. Mann believes that the way young people experience school is the most frequently cited reason for their quitting early. He further queries whether this means that children fail to learn or that schools fail to teach. Are they dropouts or push-outs? Although 51% of the male dropouts cited school-related reasons for dropping out, they blamed the school less than he expected. Only one in five state that they dropped out because they could not get along with the teacher.

Fine (1986) conducted a cohort analysis in which 1,221 students in grade nine in 1978 - 1979 were tracked through school records. The analysis specified how many

of this cohort graduated, dropped out, or transferred, and characterized circumstances that led to these results. Thirty adolescents who dropped out in the preceding four months and another fifteen discharged over the preceding four years were interviewed. A survey was mailed to more than 350 students who were in grade nine during the 1978 - 1979 school year; some also participated in follow-up interviews.

Only 20% of the ninth grade cohort in this New York City high school graduated. Two-thirds did not graduate from any high school. Of the 1,221, 43.8% were discharged and no records were sent to another educational institution; 17.7% transferred to another educational facility to which records were sent; 6% enrolled in GED programs; 7% were considered "not found," and the remaining 5.7% were discharged with records sent to the military or a private business school.

One group of students who left was critical of schooling and/or had a negative views of the relationship of schooling to labor market success. Another group left because they were surrounded by unemployment and poverty, had experienced school failure in school, and had been held back at least once. A third group felt terrible about themselves, and saw little hope. Their words spoke mostly of disappointment of what school promised but did not deliver.

Fine (1986) also concluded there was a group of unspecified size that was literally thrown out of school. Fine made an observation about the discharge process. She feels that the students were not informed of their legal rights to an education until the age of twenty-two (22). Others, she feels, were passively discharged, dropped from the school register after twenty (20) consecutive days absent. The legal procedure was followed as to notification; however, there was no personal intervention to locate the student who was to be dropped. She also concludes that the attendance policy, maximum days absent prior to automatic failure, accounted for the disengagement of an unspecified number of students, and the school itself was at 144% of capacity, heightening alienation of students.



Fine believes that schooling is structured in such a way that student opinions and critical thoughts remain unspoken. Classes are organized around teacher control rather than student participation, and authority of teachers rather than autonomy of students. She gives no statistical data nor description to validate this statement but believes that there seems to be, "an organizational commitment to ridding the school of its presumably difficult students as soon as they can be released." This is a school where 65.6% of students drop out while the principal proudly declares that 80% of the graduates go on to college. As evidence she cites students who are push-outs for such reasons as wearing a coat in the hall, "chronic cutting," "mouthing off," or having been absent for twenty (20) consecutive, unexcused days. Fine summarizes: "Many economic and social factors, as well as structural features of schools, contribute to the dropout rates of urban adolescents."

In the period following the publication of "A Nation At-Risk," it became increasingly clear that the reasons for students leaving school were complex. Researchers question the raising of standards as the answer. They continue to study the reasons for dropping out and look for solutions that will lower the dropout rate. Earlier, we noted that Massachusetts did reduce its rate by two percent. This was accomplished, in part, through the use of supplemental funds and programs designed and implemented to meet the identified needs of just a fraction of the at-risk population.

Random (1986) suggests that factors that may identify a student at-risk of dropping out of school include: poor attendance, court involvement, pregnancy, drug and/or alcohol abuse or involvement, being retained in a grade, being in the bottom quartile in standardized testing results, suspension, expulsion, and failing two or more subjects.

School-based policies and practices may contribute to putting the student at-risk. Students, for different reasons, lose interest in school resulting in low grades and

excessive class absences. Conflicts with school authorities eventually may lead to negative behavior and suspensions.

These are clear signals that school personnel can utilize to intervene before the student makes a decision to leave. Conrath (1988) concludes that students drop out, not on spur-of-the-moment decisions, but because of serious conflicts, including peer influence and alienation from school.

In May of 1986, a research report, "A Working Document on the Dropout Problem in Boston Public Schools," gave the following reasons for students dropping out of school:

1. Poverty and lower socio-economic status.
2. School failure.
3. Early pregnancy, lateness and truancy, delinquency, probation and suspensions.
4. Alienation from school.

These reasons were discovered through a synthesis of the exit interview materials of students who had left school without a high school diploma.

Bearden (1989) conducted a two-phase study in order to identify factors contributing to dropping out. Forty students who withdrew from school during the three previous years aided in constructing the interview schedule in Phase II. The main sample included 400 dropouts, seventy-five (75) from the 1984 to 1985 school year and 325 from the 1986 to 1987 school year.

The forty dropouts were interviewed to assess perceived reasons for withdrawing from school. The responses were used for a standard interview schedule for 400 dropouts. An analysis of the data collected from the interviews determined that most of the dropouts had participated in extra-curricular activities (60%), primarily athletics. Eighty percent said they used no drugs at all which included the non-use of alcohol while in high school. Many of these students, because of

participation in extra-curricular activities and lack of involvement in drugs or alcohol, were not what would have been identified as high risk.

In the interviews, respondents were given sixteen factors found in past research to be related to dropping out of high school. They were asked to rate these as to importance as causative factors for their leaving school early.

Students were then asked to identify the single most important factor contributing to their dropping out of school. Students responded in the following order in terms of importance:

1. Problems with faculty.
2. Pregnancy.
3. Preferred work to school.
4. Bad grades.
5. Finances.
6. School was boring.
7. Absenteeism.
8. Expelled or suspended.
9. Teachers did not care.
10. Miscellaneous.

The problem, like other social problems, is complex, however, the data given by students seem to indicate that changes are needed within the school. The factors indicating the need for change are: bad grades, school being boring, absenteeism, being expelled or suspended, retention, and teachers not caring.

### Teachers and At-Risk Students

Youth can easily and quickly identify those who care about them. Every student has the right to feel when he/she goes to school that there is someone there who cares about him or her as a person. Our secondary schools are primarily subject-oriented and, therefore, less apt to provide the environment that exists in the earlier grades. Educators must work to change this.



Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) wrote about having the courage to care. In their research dealing with youth workers, they found that the most successful youth workers were those who were able to see beyond the problems of young people to a vision of their great potential. They cite many researchers who feel that people who are responsible for youth must have a genuine caring attitude about them, teach them to care about themselves, and finally, to care about others.

Shinn (1972) brought the issue back to school when he discussed reasons why teachers of students in low socio-economic school districts are not effective. He feels teachers are not adequately prepared to deal with disadvantaged students during their preparation for teaching. Disadvantaged students, by their nature, Shinn states, are astute appraisers and manipulators of their environment. They learn early what they can and cannot do with teachers, that teacher threats are usually ineffective, and that the teachers' authority is limited. They assess the person's caring qualities, not his/her ability to teach. If this assessment is negative, states Shinn, then the teacher will be subjected to ridicule and abuse. The result is that many teachers see students as adversaries and few see results of their hard work; they therefore feel little sense of accomplishment.

Shinn believes that teacher apathy then sets in as a way of coping with the situation. The teacher waits to be transferred or to retire. Teachers cannot do as administrators do, close the office door, because they are with the problem the entire day. Some administrators offer assistance, but this generally is in the way of being inspectors rather than mentors. Results of the cycle for some are a disengagement of both student and teacher from the educational process. Both are buying time until they can get out.

Each school also has a certain degree of autonomy and an educational climate (Wells, 1982) involving complex social systems. There are forces present to which individuals within each system respond. Learning about the manner in which members



within a school relate to each other is important in identifying why some students are at-risk of leaving.

Retention and Transition Programs

Clearly, students dropping out of school presents a complex problem identified by researchers as deriving from personal, family, and school factors. Teacher attitude and school culture have been cited as contributing factors. Another school related factor has been identified by Mann (1986), who concludes that students who are over-age when they enter high school are far more likely to drop out than are their classmates of normal entering age. School policies on retention and promotion, he believes, need to be examined for the negative effects they have on students.

Raynolds (1990), found that retention in grade may hinder, rather than help, low-achieving students' performance. Nationally, 2-8% of the K-12 public school population is retained in grade each year. (Massachusetts Board of Education) (MBE). National figures in 1986 estimated that 31% of males and 22% of females in public schools were at least one year behind their age appropriate grade (MBE).

The Massachusetts Board of Education's study in 1990 attempted to respond to five basic assumptions about grade retention:

Assumption One:	Grade retention improves academic achievement by focusing upon the mastery of sequential basic skills, and by giving students an extra year to master academic course work.
Assumption Two:	The self-esteem, personal adjustment, academic confidence, and motivation of retained students increases as they are placed in academic settings in which they become one of the high-performing students.
Assumption Three:	Enrolling children in kindergarten or first grade a year later than the eligible age enhances a child's academic achievement and ability to succeed,

and gives children a competitive advantage over other classmates.

Assumption Four:

Transition classes provide low-achieving students with a more appropriate learning environment in which to succeed and catch up academically with their grade-appropriate peers, while avoiding the stigma of being retained in class.

Assumption Five:

Schools that retain high numbers are effective schools because they have high standards for academic achievement, thus ensuring the value of the district's high school diploma.

After completing an extensive search of literature this study made the following conclusions. First, not one study found that grade retention was more beneficial to the low-achieving student than being promoted. In fact, the negative effect during the first year following retention was evidenced by less than a full year's gain in academic achievement. Further complicating the retention/promotion question was the identification of students to be promoted and students to be retained. In addition, there was a lack of identified predictors as to who would benefit from retention.

Second, there is a great deal of evidence indicating that the self-esteem of retained students may suffer. Retained students report having increased negative feelings about school. Students reported being teased and having feelings of anger, sadness, shame, inferiority and fears of parental reaction. Retention is viewed by students as punishment, not as an opportunity to acquire new skills, nor to enhance their school performance. This research also found that older students were less popular socially than their peers, indicating a further chance of lowered self-esteem.

Third, the Department's research suggests that there are no long-term benefits academically when a student begins school a year later than normal. Any difference in performance are leveled off in grade three. However, this study also acknowledges

that there is limited information available about social and emotional development and growth of children entering a year late.

One easily identified area of concern, though, was the widening of a socio-economic educational gap in as much as students from low socio-economic background are unable to delay school entrance due to child care costs. An admitted limitation to this study was the inability to locate and research low socio-economic students who were kept out of school for an extra year.

Fourth, this study concludes that transition classes, classes for low-achieving students as a step between two grades such as kindergarten and first, are not different from in-grade retention in that they both cause a student an extra year of schooling. Any short-term gains in achievement were found to disappear over a period of time. The research further indicates that only when first grade transition students were given a first grade curriculum designed to lead to promotion, and were promoted to grade two, did students perform well.

Lastly, the Massachusetts Department of Education's reports that there was no evidence to suggest that students in high-retaining schools fare better academically than those in schools who retained students at a lower rate. These conclusions were derived from examining the performance of students in homogeneously grouped schools (identified with high retention rates) and heterogeneously grouped schools (low retention rates). Schools with high retention rates were found to have the highest dropout rates.

It did not come as a surprise that students retained in grade came disproportionately from low income and minority backgrounds.

A further concern stated by the Massachusetts Department of Education was the high cost associated with retaining students. One estimate was that the national cost of all public school grade retention for the school year 1985-1986 was \$9.7

billion, based on an average retention rate of 6.0%, at an average cost of \$4,051 per pupil. Overall, this resulted in an increase of 8% in public education costs that year.

There is no mystery as to why students leave school. Ample documentation exists as to the complex nature of this problem. It remains for school personnel to identify early students at-risk of dropping out and to put in place intervention strategies that will maximize students' chances for success and completion.

In a longitudinal study conducted by Kathryn Liptak (1991) of school dropouts from September, 1984 through June, 1990, 257 students were identified as having dropped out of Burr High School. The Burr School System consists of three elementary schools (1500 students), one middle school (750 students), and one high school (760 students).

Liptak's data was taken from school records which includes age upon entrance into high school, attendance record, the level of each course in which the student was enrolled, grade point average, and reading and mathematical achievement test scores.

One of Liptak's hypotheses was:

Those students who later dropped out of high school have a higher mean age expressed in months at entrance into ninth grade than their classmates who completed the four years of high school. (Liptak, p 8)



Table 1

Burr High School Dropout by Gender September 1984 - June 1990

YEAR	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	TOTAL
MALE	12	9	15	25	21	26	20	9	4	146
FEMALE	6	11	18	18	14	17	15	11	1	111
TOTAL	18	20	33	43	40	43	35	20	5	257
ENROLL (Grade 9)	173	171	177	159	177	149	167	181	186	1540

In her study, Liptak formulated a null hypothesis that there would be no difference in the mean averages expressed in months at entrance into the ninth grade of those students in the classes of 1985 - 1990 who later dropped out of school as compared to their classmates who completed the four years of high school. She found, however, that the comparison of the mean scores for the entrance age in the class of 1985 for those students who later dropped out as compared to those who completed did show a difference.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations of the Ninth Grade Entrance Age Stated in Months for the Dropouts and the Completers in the Class of 1985

	N	Mean	S.D.
Dropouts	19	174.53	4.62
Completers	19	171.68	6.38
Mean Difference:	2.85		
Dropouts vs. Completers	t = 1.55	(Null Hypothesis retained)	P<.05

For:	
1982	t = -0.79 (Null Hypothesis retained)
1983	t = 2.62 (Null Hypothesis rejected)
1984	t = 2.89 (Null Hypothesis rejected)
1985	t = 2.83 (Null Hypothesis rejected)
1986	t = 2.84 (Null Hypothesis rejected)

The above chart, taken from Liptak's study, further documents that a statistical difference existed for the classes of 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 as well.

Based on this information, clearly one predictor of future success at Burr High School is age upon entering grade 9.

This study will focus on middle school students who are currently over-age as a result of participation in a pre-one program and/or being retained in grade. Data has been collected to determine which students were over-age for the grade, their current school achievement levels, academically and behaviorally, and their perceptions of their school experience to date.

## Solving the Problem

Dropouts, students who do not graduate from high school and do not become good employable citizens, are a societal problem that affects the economy of the nation. This problem and its causes need to be defined by individual schools and strategies developed to help lower the dropout rate and assist in stopping the continuation of the poverty cycle. Addressed next will be the literature dealing with prevention of dropouts and slowing the exit of our youth from school.

The principal as a leader is the beginning point in developing a vision as to the definition and solution of the problem. Lambert (1988) believes that the way to school effectiveness and administrative sanity is through the building of a healthy school culture. Culture is the set of beliefs, assumptions, and attitudes held by a given set of people during a given period of time. Communication patterns are important; they are guided by the leader's vision and mission of the school and a belief that adults must have continual feedback in order to develop and grow. The information given is power. The leader must continue to model, question, interview, show interactive patterns, process information, give feedback, speak a common language, build consensus, and facilitate.

Seldin (1988) addressed the issue of alienation of students in secondary schools - a negative school climate for some students? He theorized that the roots of alienation are complex, that alienation can be caused by poverty, ethnic discrimination, inadequate nutrition, physical and psychological child abuse, unemployment, and the availability of drugs and alcohol. To wait, Seldin infers, for a super-plan to eliminate all the factors would be to never begin to deal with alienation these students feel in their school environment.

Elementary teachers (Seldin, 1989) have recognized that children are happiest and perform best when there is genuine interest in and concern for them as individuals. School structure at the secondary level does not allow as easily for the development or

expression of effective concerns of students and staff. Staff is concerned with the curriculum and in their training there is little concern with the affective domain of their students.

Martinez (1986) developed the following recommendations:

1. Administrators recognize that the traditional school system negatively impacts students from lower socio-economic groups.
2. Local school district administrators need to systematically collect data on dropouts which will help to permit better comparisons between school districts.
3. School learning climate be perceived as one in which there are clear and fair rules for all.
4. Provide a learning climate with a multiethnic philosophy.
5. Provide tutors to potential dropouts.

Houston (1991), in his research on minorities in non-urban schools, arrived at some of the same conclusions as Martinez. These conclusions appear to meet the needs of all youth, in particular, those identified as low-socio-economic. He believes schools can better meet the challenge of educating these students by re-orienting the thinking of staff and developing strategies and programs that deal with cultural values, self-esteem, locus of control, and the way students process information.

Some successful strategies that are currently being used are cited by Houston:

1. Increase participation of students and role models as leaders in school activities.
2. Identify methods to reward students for their accomplishments.
3. Involve parents, teachers, and role models in concerns of students as they relate to school values and goals.
4. Provide teachers with workshops to increase minority culture awareness.
5. Encourage the more able students to assist their less able peers.



6. Develop staff development for teachers that will help all students master higher-order thinking skills.
7. Develop tutoring centers.

Fine (1991) identifies areas that need to be studied in individual schools to ensure that the needs of all students are met. Policies and practices that negatively affect students had to be transformed. These policies included issues of: attendance, suspension, retention, exit interviews, and tracking. She feels it is important to have members of the community participate in developing a congruent plan for educating the students and provide support financially and physically. She advocates early childhood programs such as Headstart and summer youth programs such as the Public/Private Venture STEP.

Fine also advocates transition programs that include parents, educators, and students to provide students with care and support as they go between layers in the educational system. She also sees the need of strong community support as students transition between the community and school and the need to develop consistent values to ease the transition also exists.

Kunisawa (1988) views the solving of the dropout problem as a multi-dimensional approach. He cites such programs as Cities in Schools, a national business and schools partnership; Cooperative Federation for Educational Experiences (COFFEE), a partnership of Digital Equipment Corporation and the Oxford, Massachusetts Public Schools; and Headstart Program, a pre-school program designed for low-income at-risk students. These programs, states Kunisawa, are exceptional because they did not place the entire responsibility for motivating dropouts on the schools. These programs involve the community in the effort to keep youth in school.

Kunisawa cites the following steps to establish a technological and multi-cultural educational system:

1. Ensure equity in per-pupil expenditures for all schools.
2. Identify what the functions of the schools should be.
3. Identify the skills required for full participation in a changing, technological society.
4. Utilize cultural demographic statistics to ensure cultural compatibility between education programs and student populations.
5. Establish professional requirements for teachers and administrators with commensurate salaries and benefits.
6. Ensure that cultural make-up of teachers and administrators is congruent with that of the student population.
7. Establish programs to identify sources to pay for higher education for all students.
8. Create proactive alternative programs.

These researchers appear to be consistent in their evaluation of the factors that may bring about positive results for all students. Indications are that we are unable to keep high percentages of youth in school until graduation and the problem will escalate if we do not identify the reasons for students dropping out within each school district and develop strategies to correct the problem. Failure to do so will serve to further enable students to leave school, perpetuating the poverty in which they live.

We cannot change the size of a student's family nor his ethnicity, the educational attainment of his parents, economic status of the family, nor other external factors that exist today. However, the school environment can be impacted by instructional programs that are responsive to negative social and economic circumstances. These changes must be brought about with the assistance of members of the community to ensure that the needs of all are met.

From this review of literature, I conclude that educators must continue to look at reasons that put students at-risk of dropping out of school. No matter what the

numbers are, each student who leaves the formal educational process reduces his/her chances of becoming a positive member of the community.

Each school district needs to identify who drops out of their schools and the school-related reasons for their dropping out. Staff, students, parents, and members of the community need to know the extent of the dropout problem and the ramifications when students leave before graduating. Social service groups and businesses need to know the extent of the problem to assist in developing strategies within the community and the school to reduce the number of students who leave before graduating.

School practitioners must be concerned with factors within the school structure that contribute to students leaving before graduation. A school-related indicator that is a predictor of a youth leaving school has been identified by researchers in the Burr School District; as being over-age for grade. Is being retained in grade or participation in a pre-one program a successful intervention that leads to later school success? If not, what strategies must be implemented to ensure success of all students in this district?

Strategies at the Burr Middle School and in the District should include:

1. Use data gathered for this study to determine the extent of the possibility of school failure for an identified group of students.
2. Help staff members understand and gain an ownership of the problem - does retention work, is a pre-one program a good option or is it another form of retention?
3. Learn from students who are identified as overage and at-risk and from those who are not, their feelings about reasons for students leaving or remaining in school.
4. Develop a method to communicate to staff the reasons for success and failure in schools as perceived by students.

5. Develop strategies to eliminate school factors which contribute to a student feeling alienated in school.
6. Develop strategies with community members to increase their awareness, input, and support of school curriculum.
7. Evaluate the current process employed to identify students who would benefit from a pre-one program.
8. Establish transition teams between levels, grades five to six and eight to nine, to ensure readiness of the receiving school to meet each child's needs.
9. Establish a program at the high school level for grade nine at-risk youth. The program should include students being taught by a team of teachers who share common planning time and who support a student centered curriculum.
10. Develop a system wide policy for retention. This policy should include provisions for a team to review student grades, behavior patterns, and maturity level for grade. Each student recommended for review, whether retained or promoted, should have developed for them a regular education Individual Education Plan.
11. Provide staff training at the middle school level to enhance staff awareness of appropriateness of discipline and consequences for all students.
12. Evaluate the newly created extended day programs at the school housing grades four and five and at the middle school.
13. Implement extended day programs for the 1993-1994 academic year for those over-age students not meeting with success.



Programs should reflect changes recommended through the evaluation of this year's program.

14. Continue to evaluate as a District, issues of Quality in relation to decision making at building levels and in transition between buildings.

There are common indicators quantitatively as to who is at-risk of school failure such as: being over-age, attendance, poor grades, suspension, and truancy and qualitatively students not feeling cared about. However, it is imperative for school staff in the Burr School District to identify the negative characteristics of each school to bring about systematic change pertinent to their school, change that will result in having a climate where all students feel they are cared about and can succeed.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### District Background Data

This research took place in the Burr School District located in the northwest portion of Rhode Island. According to the 1990 census, the District serves a population of 16,230 in an area of approximately 56 square miles. The population is 99% white with the remaining portion being black and Hispanic. Most residents find employment in places other than Burr; the largest employer in town is the school department. The educational level of the community shows that 51.7% of the population over age 25 have completed high school. This compares with the state where slightly over 61% of the residents in that same age category had completed high school. The 1989 Rhode Island Housing Mortgage and Finance Corporation estimated Burr's median family income at \$35,041, which is 29th of the 39 towns in the state. The median in the state for family income was \$36,700.

In years past the town operated under a charter, which provided for public referenda during open town meetings. Within the last five years, however, the town changed over to an elected town council and an appointed manager. The incumbent has been in office for those five years. In recent years there have been negative feelings between the town manager and the school department and the schools have not benefitted financially. It appears that each office advocates for its position, while the town's children are the financial responsibility of both. This lack of a partnership between both governmental groups has a negative impact on the availability of funds for needed student programs.

The schools are overseen by a School Committee comprised of five members who are elected by the towns people. All five of the current members have children or

have had children in the District's schools and are emotionally invested in seeing schools provide well for the town's children.

The October 1, 1992, K-12 enrollment of the Burr School District was 2,996 students who attend three elementary schools , one middle school, and one high school. Currently there is a committee in place to study grade configuration for the elementary schools (Appendix 1). One elementary school houses kindergarten, some grade ones and most third grades, while a second houses one kindergarten, some first, and all seconds. The third elementary houses one grade three and all grade fours and fives. The middle school houses grades six, seven, and eight while the traditional high school seats those students in grades nine through twelve.

The Burr School District has a large special education population. At the middle school there are, as of the 1993 - 1994 academic year: three resource teachers (one for each grade using a combination of collaborative and pull-out model), a teacher of the severely and profoundly handicapped students, a classroom for behaviorally disordered students, two self-contained classrooms with mixed grade levels, and two grade six special education teachers who have implemented an inclusion model.

The school district employs an administrative staff consisting of: Superintendent, Coordinator of Curriculum and Instruction, Business Manager, Facilities Manager, Director of Special Education, High School Principal and Assistant Principal, Middle School Principal and Assistant Principal, and three Elementary Principals. Each of the elementary schools has an administrative intern.

The Superintendent of Schools began his tenure in the district seven years ago, having previously been a Superintendent in a Massachusetts community and an Assistant Superintendent in another district prior to that. During his tenure he has hired two of the three elementary Principals, the High School Principal, the Middle School Assistant Principal, the Director of Special Education, and the Coordinator of

Curriculum and Instruction. All hiring was done after nation-wide searches advertised in "Education Week" and through multiple screening committees. The Superintendent feels he has hired very highly qualified people, and is most supportive of innovation and creative problem solving. The remaining three building administrators were in the District before the arrival of the current Superintendent. One of the Elementary Principals has been a Principal for 28 years. The Assistant Principal at the High School has been there for 13 years, the Middle School Principal was promoted from the Assistant Principalship of the Jr./Senior High School, and was involved in the design of the Middle School completed in 1989.

Burr Middle School is a beautiful, well-maintained physical plant completed and opened for students and staff in 1989. The school contains state of the art equipment in areas of technology, industrial arts, home economics, music, and physical education. The school reflects research on effective schools. Students are divided into two teams at each grade level and are placed on teams heterogeneously, each team having equal numbers of males, females, band members and gifted students.

Students' days are divided into seven blocks; five academic and two exploratory. Exploratory subjects include: art, industrial arts, home economics, physical education/health, music, band, chorus, and computer technology. Exploratory periods are offered daily during the same time period while academic subjects rotate to provide each student an opportunity to participate in learning at his/her optimum learning time.

Teachers' days are divided into four teaching and one S.C.O.R.E. period each day in the six day cycle. S.C.O.R.E., an acronym for Students in Classroom Opportunities for Resource and Enrichment, gives students an opportunity to meet with their teachers for extra help, make-up tests, work with groups on projects, and use of the media center, for example. Teachers' days also consist of one unassigned period daily and one duty period. Two duties during the six day cycle are reserved for



common meeting time with other members of their team. This time is well utilized by teachers for student and curriculum issues.

### Research Questions

1. Is there a relationship between participation in a pre-one program and/or being retained in grade and student feelings of alienation and isolation?
2. Is there a relationship between students' feelings about themselves and being successful in school: academic progress, attendance, and behavior?
3. Is there a relationship between student's feelings about the importance of schooling and students' being successful in school?

### Sample

For purposes of this study, records of 710 middle school students were studied. Of that number 375 were male and 335 were female, or 52.8% male and 47.2% female. Two hundred forty-two students (34%) were in grade 6; 234 (33%) were in grade 7; and 234 were in grade 8 (34%). Eighty-four (11.8%) had been retained at least once between kindergarten and grade eight and 626 students (88.2%) had not. In addition, 123 students (17.3%) participated in a pre-one program, while 587 (82.7%) had not. Included in the 123 students who had been in a pre-one program and the 84 who had been retained were 11 students who had been both in a pre-one program and had been retained in grade. In the population of 710 students, 14.9% were identified as special education students.

### Description of the Study/Data Collection Procedure

In the fall of 1992, I met with the Superintendent of Schools to focus on what appeared to be a problem in the district, namely, an extremely large number of children

who were over-age for grade as a result of retention and/or participation in the district's pre-one program. The Superintendent and I presented the description of the study to the members of the school committee during a regularly scheduled meeting. The committee gave permission for the study which would include gathering and analyzing data from school records and student responses. The study was also to be used at the Middle School to develop programs for at-risk youth, change existing practices at the Middle School, and for making recommendations to the Administrative Council for District-wide changes.

I met with the elementary reading specialist, an educator interested in pre-one as an intervention to ensure young students' readiness for grade two. This specialist administers the Gesell (1982) Developmental Examination and uses the results, along with teacher and parent recommendations to determine developmental readiness for promotion. The reading specialist assisted in identifying students in the Middle School who were previously in the district's pre-one program. (Approximately 15 students in the program have left the district and are not part of the research.)

Information in regard to: student number, date of birth, sex, participation in pre-one program, and whether a student had been retained in grade or had been receiving special education services was found in the students' permanent file. The administrative computer management system provided information about students' failing two or more subjects and their attendance. The administrative computer file also identified which students had been suspended, as a consequences for misbehavior, in-school or out-of-school. A matrix was developed for each grade, which included the following fields: student identification number, date of birth, sex, participation in a pre-one program, retained in grade, failing two or more subjects , attendance, incidences of suspension (Appendix E). Student responses from a questionnaire including information about their attitude toward school (Appendix D) were also put into the

matrix. Parents were advised of the study (Appendix C) and were given the opportunity to have their child participate or not participate.

Students completed the questionnaire in an extended homeroom period. Students were given the choice of participating or not participating (Appendix B). Students who did not participate wrote only their student identification number and did not respond to the questionnaire. Directions for answering the questionnaire were announced through the school's intercom system. Students were asked to write their student identification number in the top right hand corner of the questionnaire. Teachers assisted those who did not remember their number, although most did as this is their method of accessing the computer network in the school's Media Center and two computer rooms.

During the spring of 1992 the school's CAP/CAST (Classroom Alternative Program/Classroom Alternative Support Team) explored the concept of an extended day program for students who were not meeting with academic success. They developed an after school academic support program for approximately fifteen students in each of grades six, seven, and eight. This program was evaluated in June of 1992 using records identifying academic grades, attendance, and incidences of misbehavior.

Students who were over-age for grade, were having academic difficulty, and had negative attitudes about school were identified as possible candidates to participate in an interview. These interviews were held at the end of the second semester. An interview guide was used to gain student insights at to students' attitudes about school. Five students were selected based upon meeting the criteria above, representing a cross section of grade levels, having good verbal skills, and their willingness to participate.

### Burr Middle School 1992 - 1993

This research poses several hypotheses directly related to age in student completion/success. Those students who were studied are over-age for grade, and became over-age as a result of participating in a pre-one program and/or being retained in grade. The hypotheses relate to the identification of students who are identified as being at-risk using the identifiers: being over-age for grade, failing two or more grades, having multiple suspensions, and being absent more than 10 days per semester.

- |               |   |
|---------------|---|
| Hypothesis 1: | More boys than girls participate in a pre-one program .   |
| Hypothesis 2: | More boys than girls are retained in grade.   |
| Hypothesis 3: | More students who are not grade appropriate fail two or more subjects than those who are grade appropriate.   |
| Hypothesis 4: | More students who are not grade appropriate are absent ten or more days than those who are grade appropriate.   |
| Hypothesis 5: | More students who are not grade appropriate have multiple suspensions than those who are grade appropriate.   |
| Hypothesis 6: | More students who are not grade appropriate and are not failing two or more subjects have positive attitudes about school than those who are failing. |
| Hypothesis 7: | More students who had been in a pre-one program have more positive attitudes about school than students who had been retained in grade.               |
| Hypothesis 8: | More students who are grade appropriate have more positive attitudes about school than those who are not grade appropriate.                           |



- Hypothesis 9: More students who have been retained in grade have multiple suspensions than those who have been in a pre-one program.
- Hypothesis 10: More students who have been retained in grade have been absent ten or more days than those who have been in a pre-one program.
- Hypothesis 11: More students who have been retained in grade are failing two or more subjects than those who have been in a pre-one program.
- Hypothesis 12: More students in grade seven are failing two or more subjects than in grade six of those who participated in pre-one programs.

### Data Analysis

Chi-square analysis was used to test the hypotheses. For purposes of this research .01 was used to determine the probability of the relationship.

### Interventions

The Burr School District is currently in a state of change led by the Superintendent who is supported by the district's administrators, five of whom have been hired in the past two years. Change is also guided by a strategic plan prepared to move the district forward as it strives to meet the academic, social, and behavioral needs of the children in the district.

Administrators are continually evaluating their leadership style as the district moves toward site-based management. Administrators are playing a leadership role in the hiring of staff, and through a unified evaluation process, supporting and assisting teachers. To bring the district's evaluation process to one of continuity within the district and to enhance administrators' evaluation and supervisions skills, all administrators in the district (including the Superintendent), attended a five day

workshop facilitated by Jon Saphier, the author of The Skillful Teacher, during the summer of 1993.

The following are interventions within the Middle School that are expected to enhance learning, change attendance patterns, and reduce incidents of misbehavior and therefore reduce suspensions.

#### Curriculum/Training for Faculty

During the spring of 1993 staff training was instituted when three of the school's teachers attended a two day workshop dedicated to Cooperative Learning Strategies. After returning from the conference, one teacher facilitated the writing of a grant to bring a similar workshop to the Middle School. Twelve teachers attended the workshop and found skills learned enhanced their teaching to their heterogeneous classes. (Middle School classes are grouped heterogeneously, except for math.)

During the 1992 - 1993 school year, one of the school's Language Arts teachers chaired the Language Arts Curriculum Committee, which completed its work writing an integrated Language Arts Curriculum. This teacher continued to play a lead role in the school bringing a consultant to the school to work with reading and language arts teachers to assist in implementing the curriculum and to continue the school's commitment to process writing in all disciplines. Other staff members became more involved in changing the existing practices at the school to provide support and a sense of belonging to students and staff.

#### Retention of Students

Middle School staff recognized a need to change the process whereby students were either retained in grade or were sent to the next level. Prior to the spring of 1993, the school's principal made the decision based on academic success, age of the student, and Metropolitan Achievement Test results. In June of 1993, the individual

student's team of teachers (Burr Middle School is divided into two academic teams with five teachers per grade level), guidance counselor, and the principal came to a consensus on which students would be retained, which students would be allowed to attend summer school and, upon successful completion, be promoted to the next grade, which ones would begin the academic year at the same grade level and have the opportunity to be advanced to the next grade level based upon academic, behavioral, and social success, and which ones would be promoted. It was agreed that whether students were promoted or retained, additional support from his/her counselor was needed as well as academic support.

#### Grade Configuration - Counselors

Prior to 1992, the three counselors at the school served as counselors for a grade level. One counselor would stay continually with all grade 6 students and one seventh grade team, one with the second grade 7 team, and the third with grade 8. In the summer of 1992, the three counselors and two school administrators agreed it would be in the best interest of the students to continue servicing them through their years at the Middle School and that this practice would begin in the fall of 1993. For the comfort level of the students, a sense of belonging, knowledge of the student's ability to perform academically, knowledge of family and home problems, and knowledge of human service involvement with the student and/or family, it was felt that this practice would benefit the student and those adults involved in the student's life. In addition, it was decided that the counselor should play a lead role in placing students in heterogeneous classes.

h

#### Scheduling

The practice of placing students in classes was basically the responsibility of the school principal and the lead counselor (the counselor with one team of students



prior to the fall of 1993); however, a change needed to take place to have those people most knowledgeable about the student's ability and behavior placing the students into groups. In the spring of 1993, the grade six counselor and a teacher from each of the sixth grade teams placed the students into grade 7 classes for the academic year 1993 - 1994. In addition, the grade 7 counselors scheduled students into their grade 8 classes with the assistance of grade 7 teachers.

Additional efforts were implemented to provide a smooth transition from grade 5 at the Callahan School to grade 6 at the Middle School. The grade 5 school had developed and implemented an inclusion model for formerly self-contained special education students. All 10 sixth grade academic teachers visited the school housing grade five students and observed regular education classrooms containing students formerly taught in self-contained classrooms, as well as students promoted from traditional classrooms. In addition, the Middle School principal and the Director of Special Education provided these teachers with insights into implementation of such a model at the Middle School to provide continuity of education for those students. During this process, a need was identified to have sixth grade students receive additional counseling and academic support.

### Building Blocks Sequence

Additional support came in the way of a Building Block Sequence for sixth grade students who did not participate in band. (Band is an exploratory subjects offered every day of a six day cycle for those who select it.) Eighty percent of those students failing two or more subjects during the second marking period of the 1992 - 1993 academic year participate in band. This Building Block Sequence included: two days of 50 minute computer periods, one library skill period, one period of group counseling by the sixth grade counselor, one structured study period, and one period of group counseling by the substance abuse counselor. For three of the four school



quarters students participated in this sequence. The fourth quarter students participate in a study skills course offered by the school's reading specialist.

### Study Skills

This study skills program was also offered during the first quarter to 25 seventh grade students who had been retained in grade, had been promoted but needed assistance with the skills, or were not promoted and would have the opportunity of going on to grade 8 upon successful completion of the first quarter.

### Environment

Teachers identified grade 7 as having students who were most in need of support and assistance as they determined a grade 7 as a time where change is most evident. In order to group these students into a smaller environment, the decision was made to have grade 7 students in teams during lunch. Prior to the fall of 1993 there had been three lunch shifts: grade 6, grade 7, and grade 8. However, the fall of 1993 brought the creation of four lunch shifts, grade 6, grade 7B, grade 7M, and grade 8.

Results of these interventions and changes will be discussed in Chapter IV. Evidence will be presented to support the fact that the changes did benefit the students directly. Change has additionally increased participation of staff members in the decision making process and has raised staff morale in the building.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this quantitative/qualitative study is to identify the reasons why over-age middle school students are over-age for grade, and determine which of these students are at-risk of school failure using academics, behavior, attendance and negative attitudes as identifiers. In addition, this study helped to develop and implement programs and systemic changes to better meet the needs of these at-risk students and all students at the Middle School . This chapter reflects data analyzed for students enrolled in grades 6, 7, and 8 for the 1992 - 1993 academic year at the Burr Middle School and student responses to interview questions.

Table 3 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 1: More boys than girls participate in a pre-one program.

This hypothesis was supported at the .01 level.

Table 3

Distribution of Participants and Non-Participants in Pre-one Program by Gender

	Participants	Non-Participants
Male	77	298
Female	46	289
Totals	123	587
Chi-square	5.71562	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .01681		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0084		

Table 4 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 2: More boys than girls are retained in grade.

This hypothesis was supported at the .01 level.

Table 4		
Distribution of Retained or Non-Retained by Gender		
	Retained	Not Retained
Male	60	315
Female	24	311
Totals	84	626
Chi-square	13.24264	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00027		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .00013		

Table 5 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 3: More students who are not grade appropriate fail two or more subjects than those who are grade appropriate.

This hypothesis was supported at the .01 level.

Table 5

Distribution of Grade Appropriate or Not Grade Appropriate Because of Participation in a Pre-one Program or Being Retained In Grade Who Failed or Did Not Fail Two or More Subjects

	Did not fail 2 or more	Failed 2 or more
Grade appropriate	452	62
Not grade appropriate	150	45
Totals	602	107
Chi-square	13.38463	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00025		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0001		



Table 6 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 4: More students who are not grade appropriate are absent ten or more days than those who are grade appropriate.

This hypothesis was not supported at the .01 level.

Table 6

Distribution of the Number of Students Who Were Retained in Grade and/or Participated In a Pre-one Program and Were Absent 10 Or More Days As Compared With Students Who Were Grade Appropriate

	Absent less than 10	Absent 10 or more
Grade appropriate	459	55
Not grade appropriate	172	24
Totals	631	79
Chi-square	.34230	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.55851	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.2792	

Table 7 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 5: More students who are not grade appropriate have multiple suspensions than those who are grade appropriate.

This hypothesis was supported at the .01 level.

Table 7

Distribution of Grade Appropriate or Not Grade Appropriate Because of Participation in a Pre-one Program or Being Retained in Grade As It Relates to Multiple Suspensions

	No multiple suspensions	Multiple suspensions
Grade appropriate	480	34
Not grade appropriate	170	26
Totals	650	60
Chi-square	8.11193	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00440		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .00022		

Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 show that data bearing on Hypothesis 6: More students who are not grade appropriate and are not failing two or more subjects have positive attitudes about school than those who are failing.

Table 10 supports this hypothesis at the .01 level. Tables 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14 show that this hypothesis is not supported at the .01 level.

Table 8

Fair Testing		
Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	9	3
Disagree slightly	10	1
Neutral	35	14
Agree slightly	29	5
Agree	46	11
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	3.67693	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .45149		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .2257		

Table 9

Fair Discipline Practices

---

Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	16	7
Disagree slightly	24	7
Neutral	31	8
Agree slightly	31	7
Agree	27	5
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	2.00391	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.73504	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.3675	

---



Table 10

Teacher's Trust		
Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	13	7
Disagree slightly	10	9
Neutral	19	6
Agree slightly	34	6
Agree	53	6
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	15.57614	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00364		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0018		

Table 11

Classes Being Boring

Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	21	1
Disagree slightly	5	3
Neutral	14	5
Agree slightly	22	2
Agree	67	23
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	8.71497	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .06863		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0343		

Table 12

Teachers Grade Fairly

Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2-or more
Disagree	7	2
Disagree slightly	11	2
Neutral	11	8
Agree slightly	29	6
Agree	62	16
Totals	129	34

Chi-square            1.55349

Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .81713

Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .4085

Table 13

Students Participate in Extra-curricular Activities

Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	14	5
Disagree slightly	10	0
Neutral	13	7
Agree slightly	22	5
Agree	70	17
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	5.58234	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.23259	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.1162	



Table 14

Most of My Teachers Are Nice

Responses	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Disagree	14	3
Disagree slightly	7	5
Neutral	24	7
Agree slightly	24	9
Agree	60	10
Totals	129	34
Chi-square	5.96368	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .20188		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .1009		

Tables 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 show that data bearing on Hypothesis7: More students who had been in a pre-one program have more positive attitudes about school than students who had been retained in grade.

Table 17 supports this hypothesis at the .01 level. Tables 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 21 show that this hypothesis is not supported at the .01 level.

Table 15

Fair Testing		
Responses	Pre-One	Retained
Disagree	6	6
Disagree slightly	4	6
Neutral	25	21
Agree slightly	20	11
Agree	39	16
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	5.75283	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .21838		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .1091		

Table 16

Fair Discipline Practices

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	12	10
Disagree slightly	12	19
Neutral	26	12
Agree slightly	26	9
Agree	18	10
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	10.46692	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.03326	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.0166	

Table 17

Teachers' Trust

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	9	11
Disagree slightly	14	4
Neutral	8	16
Agree slightly	26	11
Agree	37	18
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	14.25530	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00652		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0032		



Table 18

Classes Being Boring

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	14	6
Disagree slightly	6	2
Neutral	9	9
Agree slightly	15	8
Agree	50	35
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	2.59762	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .62725		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .3136		

Table 19

Teachers Grade Fairly

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	4	5
Disagree slightly	8	5
Neutral	14	11
Agree slightly	19	16
Agree	49	23
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	3.47220	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.48212	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.2410	

Table 20

Students Participate in Extra-Curricular Activities

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	8	9
Disagree slightly	3	5
Neutral	14	5
Agree slightly	15	11
Agree	54	30
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	5.03336	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.28389	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.1419	

Table 21

Most of My Teachers Are Nice

Responses	Pre-one	Retained
Disagree	11	6
Disagree slightly	7	5
Neutral	18	12
Agree slightly	15	14
Agree	43	23
Totals	94	60
Chi-square	1.67412	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.79541	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.3977	



Tables 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 show that data bearing on Hypothesis 8: More students who are grade appropriate have more positive attitudes about school than those who are not grade appropriate.

Table 24 supports this hypothesis at the .01 level. Tables 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, and 28 show that this hypothesis is not supported at the .01 level.

Table 22

Fair Testing		
Responses	Grade appropriate	Pre-one/Ret.
Disagree	12	14
Disagree slightly	11	44
Neutral	50	105
Agree slightly	34	122
Agree	57	156
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	10.50175	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .03277		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0163		

Table 23

Fair Discipline Practices

Responses	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret.
Disagree	23	51
Disagree slightly	31	70
Neutral	40	126
Agree slightly	38	97
Agree	32	97
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	2.42993	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.65723	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.3286	

Table 24

Teachers' Trust

Responses	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret.
Disagree	20	41
Disagree slightly	19	23
Neutral	25	57
Agree slightly	40	81
Agree	60	237
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	17.618	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .00147		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0007		

Table 25

Classes Being Boring

Responses	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret
Disagree	23	55
Disagree slightly	8	29
Neutral	19	52
Agree slightly	24	87
Agree	90	218
Total	164	441
Chi-square	3.17815	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.52847	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.2642	

Table 26

Teachers Grade Fairly

Response	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret
Disagree	9	19
Disagree Slightly	13	41
Neutral	28	82
Agree Slightly	35	100
Agree	79	199
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	1.09961	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .89433		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .4471		



Table 27

Students Participate in Extra-Curricular Activities

Responses	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret
Disagree	19	55
Disagree slightly	10	14
Neutral	0	90
Agree slightly	27	84
Agree	88	198
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	9.46238	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .05053		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0252		

Table 28

Most of My Teachers Are Nice

Responses	Grade Appropriate	Pre-one/Ret
Disagree	17	27
Disagree slightly	12	51
Neutral	31	72
Agree slightly	33	104
Agree	71	187
Totals	164	441
Chi-square	6.15133	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.18813	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.0940	

Table 29 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 9: More students who have been retained in grade have multiple suspensions than those who have been in a pre-one program.

This hypothesis was supported at the .01 level.

Table 29

T-Test Comparing Multiple Suspensions for Students Who Had Been Retained and Those Who Had Been in a Pre-one Program

Group	Number	Mean	SD	T Value	Degrees of Freedom	2-tailed Prob.
Pre-one	112		.4643	1.926		
			-2.49		120.98	.014
Retained	84*		1.5119	3.469		

\*Includes 11 students who were both retained and in a pre-one program.

The degrees of freedom of 120. 98 indicates a statistical significance in the number of students who have been retained and have multiple suspensions and those who have participated in a pre-one program. Students who have been retained have more multiple suspensions than do students who participated in a pre-one program.

Table 30 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 10: More students who have been retained in grade have been absent ten or more days than those who have been in a pre-one program.

This hypothesis was not supported at the .01 level.

Table 30

Distribution of Students Comparing Those Who Were In a Pre-one Program and Those Who Were Retained and the Number of Days Absent From School

	Absent 10 or more days	Absent less than 10 days
Pre-one	96	16
Retained	76	8
Totals	172	24
Chi-square	1.01292	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large	.31420	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction	.1571	

Table 31 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 11: More students who have been retained in grade are failing two or more subjects than those who have been in a pre-one program.

This hypothesis was not supported at the .01 level.

Table 31

Distribution of Students Comparing Those Students Who Were In a Pre-one Program and Those Who Were Retained and the Number Who Failed Two Or More Subjects

	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
Pre-one	89	23
Retained	61	22
Chi-square	.95724	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .41995		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .2099		



Table 32 shows that data bearing on Hypothesis 12: More students in grade seven are failing two or more subjects than in grade six of those who participated in pre-one programs.

This hypothesis is supported at the .01 level.

Table 32

Distribution of Students Who Participated in Pre-one Programs and Are In Grade 6 Compared to Those Who Were in Pre-one Programs and Are In Grade 7

Grade	Failed 2 or more	Did not fail 2 or more
7	15	23
6	7	64
Chi-square	13.47523	
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large .0002		
Probability of obtaining Chi-square this large in the predicted direction .0001		

### Summary of Analysis of Data

The following characteristics about Burr Middle School students during the 1992 - 1993 have been revealed:

- Twenty percent of the male population and 13 percent of the female population had been in a pre-one program.
- Sixteen percent of the male population and 7% of the female population had been retained..
- Twelve percent of the students who were grade appropriate and 23% of those who had been retained and/or in a pre-one program failed two or more subjects.
- Seven percent of those students who were grade appropriate and 13% who had been retained and/or in a pre-one program had multiple suspensions for discipline referrals.
- Students who had been retained averaged 1.5119 suspensions while those who had participated in a pre-one program had .4643 suspensions; students who had neither been retained nor participated in a pre-one program averaged .0708 suspensions.
- Nine percent of those 6th grade students who participated in a pre-one program compared to 39% of those students in grade 7 who participated in a pre-one program failed two or more subjects during the second marking period in the 1992 - 1993 academic year.
- Eleven percent of those students who were grade appropriate compared to 13% of those who had been retained and/or participated in a pre-one program were absent 10 or more days.
- Twenty-one percent of those students who were in a pre-one program compared to 27% of those who had been retained in grade failed two

or more subjects during the second marking period of the 1992 - 1993 academic year..

- Of students who were not grade appropriate, those who failed two or more subjects had attitudes similar to those who did not fail two or more subjects in areas of: fair testing, fair discipline practices, teacher testing practices, their classes being boring,, grading being fair, student participation in extra curricular activities, and their teachers being nice. These two groups had reported having dissimilar attitudes about teachers' trust of them.
- Students who had been in a pre-one program had a more positive attitude about teachers' trust compared to similar attitudes of students who had been retained in grade about: testing practice, discipline being fair, classes being boring, grading practices, students participation in extra-curricular activities, and teachers being nice.
- Students who had been in a pre-one program or were retained in grade and those who were grade appropriate had similar attitudes about testing, discipline, and grading practices, student participation in extra-curricular activities, teachers being nice, and classes being boring. Students who were grade appropriate had more positive attitudes about teachers' trust.

Summary of Tables

Hypotheses	Table	Supported (S)/ Not Supported (NS)
1. More boys than girls participated in a pre-one program.	3	S

2. More boys than girls are retained in grade	4	S
3. More students who are not grade appropriate fail two or more subjects than those who are grade appropriate.	5	S
4. More students who are not grade appropriate are absent ten or more days than those who are grade appropriate.	6	NS
5. More students who are not grade appropriate have multiple suspensions than those who are grade appropriate.	7	S
6. More students who are not grade appropriate and are not failing two or more subjects have positive attitudes about school than those who are failing.		
Fair Test	8	NS
Fair Discipline	9	NS
Teachers' Trust	10	S
Classes Being Boring	11	NS
Teachers Grade Fairly	12	NS
Students Participate in Extra.	13	NS
Teachers Being Nice	14	NS
7. More students who have been in a pre-one program have more positive attitudes about school than students who had been retained in grade.		
Fair Test	15	NS
Fair Discipline	16	NS
Teachers' Trust	17	S
Classes Being Boring	18	NS
Teachers Grade Fairly	19	NS
Students Participate in Extra	20	NS
Teachers Being Nice	21	NS

8. More students who are grade appropriate have more positive attitudes about school than those who are not grade appropriate.

Fair Test	22	NS
Fair Discipline	23	NS
Teachers' Trust	24	S
Classes Being Boring	25	NS
Teachers Grade Fairly	26	NS
Students Participate in Extra.	27	NS
Teachers Being Nice	28	NS

9. More students who have been retained in grade have multiple suspensions than those who have been in a pre-one program.

29	S
----	---

10. More students who have been retained in grade have been absent ten or more days than those who have been in a pre-one program.

30	NS
----	----

11. More students who have been retained in grade are failing two or more subjects than those who have been in a pre-one program.

31	NS
----	----

12. More students in grade seven are failing two or more subjects than in grade six of those who participated in a pre-one program.

32	S
----	---



## Results of Middle School Interventions/Change

### After School Program - Spring 1993

Of the thirty- eight students who participated in this after-school homework-helper program, 36 students achieved the necessary skills to advance to the next grade. During the time they were enrolled in the program, no students were referred to the office for disciplinary reasons and student daily attendance was over 95%.

### Retained Students - June 1993

Teams of teachers identified three grade six, nine grade seven, and two grade eight students to be retained in grade following the 1992 - 1993 academic year if they had not met the criteria of the summer school program.

Table 33

### Students Who Were Retained in Grade 1993 - 1994 - Academic and Discipline Results

Students	Failed two or more subjects	Numerous suspensions
Grade 6		
A Male*	X	X
B Male*	X	X
C Male		
Grade 7		
A Male*	X	X
B Male		
C Female		
D Male	X	
E Male*	X	X
F Male		X
G Male		
H Male	X	X
I Female	X	
Grade 8		
A Male		
B Female	X	

\*Referred to Northern Rhode Island Mental Health Clinic for behavioral counseling - full day alternative placement.

Grade 7 Skills Program

Twenty-three students were selected to participate in a skills program on a daily basis. They were selected because of their poor academic performance in grade 6 or, in the case of three students, because of poor academic performance in grade 7 during the 1992 - 1993 academic year. The program was designed to assist them in organizational skills and provide additional academic support .

Table 34

Grade 7 Skills Program Fall 1993 - Results Pertaining to Academics and Discipline

	Failed two or more		Numerous suspensions	
	5 Wk	10 Wk	5 Wk	10 Wk
Male	X	X		
Male				
Female	X	X		
Male	X	X		
Male	X	X		
Female	X	X		
Male	X	X	X	X
Male*	X		X	
Female				
Female	X			
Male		X		
Male	X			
Male	X		X	X
Male				
Male				
Female				
Female	X			
Male	X	X		
Male				
Male	X			
Male		X		
Male	X	X		

\*During the first marking period, this student, who had been retained in grade, placement was changed to the Northern Rhode Island Mental Health Center.

In the first five week period, fourteen of the 23 or 61% of the students participating in the skills program failed two or more subjects. Three of the 23 or 13% of the students had numerous suspensions during the first five week period. Behaviorally, two of the twenty-three or 9% of the students had numerous suspensions. During the second five week period, ten of the 23 or 43% of the students participating failed two or more subjects.

Grade 6 - Building Block Sequence and Method of Class Placement

Grade 6 students were placed in heterogeneous classes with the assistance of grade 5 teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors. Over 100 of the grade 232 students participated in the Building Blocks Sequence.

Table 35

Grade 6 Students Failing Two or More Subjects - Fall 1993

	Failed two or more		Did not fail two or more	
	5 Wk	10 Wk	5 Wk	10 Wk
Grade appropriate	4	8	124	120
Ret.and/or Pre-one	12	9	92	95

Four of 128 or 3% of grade appropriate students failed two or more subjects for the first period of the 1993 - 1994 academic year, compared to 12 of 104 or 11% of those students who had been retained or participated in a pre-one program.

Of the five grade 6 students who have had multiple suspensions, four had been retained in grade; the fifth was a year older because of the parents' decision to delay entrance into school for a year. Of those students with multiple suspensions, one failed two or more subjects the first period of the 1993 - 1994 academic year. And two other students who had been retained in grade were referred to the Northern Rhode Island Mental Health Center for a 45 day placement.

### Interviews

Five students, who had been either retained in grade and/or participated in a pre-one program, agreed to be interviewed. All students were given the opportunity of selecting their own pseudonym and were told their responses would be kept confidential.

#### Brendon

Brendon was born October 1, 1980 and is repeating grade 6 at the Burr Middle School. Brendon participated in a pre-one program and followed a traditional progression through the grades until grade 6. Brendon did not attend summer school to correct deficiencies in language arts and math; therefore, acting on school policy for the 1992 - 1993 academic year, he repeated grade 6. Brendon stated in the interview that his mother did not have the money to pay for summer school and he did not want to tell anyone they did not have the money.

Brendon participated in a skills program during the fall of 1993 to assist him with organizational and study skills. His grades for science and social studies are the same as they were the first time he was in grade 6. He has actually dropped a letter grade in social studies, but has shown marked improvement in language arts and math.

Brendon had been an average student until grade 6. He tested low to average on the Metropolitan Achievement Test in all areas in grade 6. He is small in size for



his age, and at times displays immature behavior, however, he always has a sense of concern for others. Brendon participated in the homework program during the spring of 1992 which helped him to pass three of his five core courses. He continues to participate in the program for the 1993 -1994 school year to receive help with homework, classwork, and study skills.

## Al

Al was born August 19, 1980 and is in the 7th grade at Burr Middle School. Al began school in kindergarten in Vermont. His family moved during the year causing him to withdraw from school. He was not enrolled in school again until the fall of 1986, where he was again placed in kindergarten. He was promoted to grade 1 for the 1987 - 1988 school year. At the end of the term, the teacher indicated on the permanent records, "working at below appropriate level for grade." Al then repeated grade 1. Al had average to above average performance in grades 2 and 3. He was then promoted to grade 5, skipping grade 4. His school record indicates that he was a quite, polite boy, and that he was a visual learner.

His performance in grade 6 was in the C range except for language arts where he earned a B grade. He participated in the homework program for the last 10 weeks of the school year bringing three failing grades to passing. His grade 6 Metropolitan Achievement Test indicate he is below average in all areas.

His first report card for the 1993-1994 school year in grade 7 reports his failing 4 of 5 subjects. However, Al entered the after school program and quickly changed two failures to passing, while raising his average in the remaining two subjects.

## Jay

Jay was born August 29, 1980 and is in grade 7 at the Burr Middle School. Jay began school in 1985 as a kindergarten student and then went into a pre-one class.



In both grades, as well as the traditional grade one, no letter or numerical grades were assigned. Jay's records indicate he did satisfactory work during these three years. There is no indication in the records for the reason he was assigned to a pre-one class as opposed to first grade.

Jay was primarily a B student through grade 4, however, in grade 5 he failed social studies and spelling and received C grades in the rest of his subjects. In grade 6, his first year at the middle school, Jay received C grades in language arts, math, social studies and reading and failed science. Jay did attend the summer school to remediate science, but he was not successful.

Jay participated in the after-school program during the fall of 1993 to receive assistance with homework. Jay had been failing math and science when he began the program. Although he was receiving extra help in the program and participated in a skills program to help him with organizational and study skills, he failed language arts, math, and reading the second quarter.

Jay's Metropolitan Achievement scores in grade 5 indicated he was in the low average range in all areas: reading, math and language. His Metropolitan Writing Test score in grade 6 is an eight, compared to a state average of seven.

### Mike

Mike was born July 17, 1980 and is now a grade 8 student at Burr Middle School. Mike began school in kindergarten and was promoted each year while he was in elementary school. He was a marginal student throughout elementary school.

In grade 6 he failed the five core subjects, earned grades of 70 in math and language arts in summer school and was promoted to grade 7. Although Mike was at risk of failing because of his lack of success in grade 6 and his low scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, no plan for remediation or support was put in place.

In grade 7, Mike failed language arts, math, science, social studies and reading. He attended summer school for language arts and science. Mike was successful in language arts, but less so in science, which contained a mix of students who were seeking a grade change in high school level science courses as well as middle school science.

Mike was placed in grade 7 with the understanding that if he passed the first quarter he would be promoted at the end of the first marking period to grade 8. Mike, with the encouragement and support of his guidance counselor, the assistant principal, and his teachers, did pass and was promoted to grade 8.

At the end of the second marking period, Mike failed four of the five core subjects. Mike's new teachers indicated misbehavior as he transitioned into grade 8. In addition Mike, by virtue of his grade change, changed guidance counselors and was not seen again by the male counselor who had monitored, encouraged, and supported him. Finally, he had served as an office aide under the watchful eye of the assistant principal, but with the change in schedule, he was no longer able to do so. Mike had also been promised a science tutor for grade 8, but no tutor was assigned.

At the end of the term, teachers, counselors, Mike, and the assistant principal met to identify the reasons for Mike's lack of success to date in grade 8 and agreed to implement the following changes: Mike joined the after school program for help with classwork and homework. His exploratory subject was dropped and, on a daily basis, a high school student was assigned to work with Mike on his science assignments and preparation for tests. His new grade 8 counselor is involved with Mike on a regular basis to provide encouragement and support.

### Jocelyn

Jocelyn was born November 3, 1980 and is a 7th grader at the Burr Middle School. In school, Jocelyn completed kindergarten, was assigned to a pre-one class,

promoted to grade 1, then grade 2. Jocelyn's grade 2 teacher recorded that she was reading at the 2-1 level, continued to need 1-1 instruction and became easily confused with oral and written direction. The file also indicates the following parental statement, "Jocelyn is very sensitive. We want her to benefit from staying back and not become discouraged. It's our hope she will continue to be challenged in all subjects." Jocelyn repeated grade 2. In grade 3 Jocelyn received B+ and A- grades in all subjects and was then promoted to grade 5, skipping grade 4. Jocelyn was successful in grade 5 receiving 1 A, 2 B's and 2 C's in her core subjects.

In September, while she was a grade 6 student at the middle school, a team evaluation was held, and she was deemed eligible as a learning disabled student and began to receive resource assistance. Jocelyn received a B in reading , C's in social studies, science, and math and failed language arts. She did attend the summer school program and her grade was changed to a C. Jocelyn also participated in the after school program that spring which assisted her in bringing her grades up, with the exception of language arts.

Jocelyn continued to participate in the after school skills programs during the first quarter. Jocelyn received C's in all courses the first quarter and C's in all courses the second quarter except for math, which she failed. She is receiving resource help in math to try to remediate that deficiency. Her Metropolitan Achievement Test shows her to be of low average range in all areas, the highest being reading.

### Summary of Interviews

Four males and one female student participated in interviews for this study: one had been retained once, one had been retained twice, two had been retained and in a pre-one class, and one had been in a pre-one class.



Research Question: Is there a relationship between participation in a pre-one program and/or being retained in grade and students' feelings of alienation and isolation?

Interview Question: Who made the decision to retain or place you in a pre-one class? Why?

All five students blame themselves for being retained. Jocelyn comments that she did not understand the work, and would always get it wrong. Mike says he just didn't cooperate and do the work. Jay thinks the teacher met with his parents and they thought he was immature and they agreed pre-one would help him. Brendon said in both kindergarten and grade 6 when he was retained he just didn't understand the work. He said the grade 6 teachers made the decision to keep him back. Jay said his mother made a mistake in signing the form and they thought he was in the regular first grade and not pre-one.

Interview Question: How were your peer relationships after pre-one/retention?

Students relay their feelings of isolation, loneliness, and embarrassment about being with a new group of students who were younger than they. Jay feels it really bothered him in the pre-one class and he now still plays with the friends in the upper grade. He says he never did make good friends with this new group of students, and that he still finds it difficult to make new friends.

Brendon found it difficult to talk to kids he didn't know, but now feels comfortable. Al says he felt stupid when he stayed back and found it difficult to make friends. Jocelyn felt comfortable participating in the pre-one class because most of her friends also were in that class. However, when she was retained in grade 2, it was an uncomfortable experience for her as she was not with her friends anymore.

Mike worked hard to earn the right to be promoted to grade 8, because he wanted to be with his friends. When he did go to grade 8 there was a period of time that he had to adjust to his former classmates and not fall into the same misbehaviors he had shown previously.

Interview Question: If more successful in pre-one or repeated grade, why?

Jay found the work in pre-one to be very easy and had no difficulty adjusting to it. Brendon found by repeating grade 6 he has been able to move up a level in math and this group of teachers is more project-oriented and he does better learning like that. Al says the new grade teacher in the elementary school liked him and helped him a lot. She knew he had stayed back and wanted to help him learn so he did better. He comments he learns when someone takes the time to tell him "stuff" and the new teacher did, making it easier for him to learn.

When Jocelyn was retained she received A's and B's and made the honor roll because the teacher helped her more and explained better. Mike says he did better because he really worked hard and his teachers and counselor encouraged him.

Research Question: Is there a relationship between students' feelings about themselves and being successful in school: academic progress, attendance, and behavior?

Interview Question: When you get a good grade or a bad grade in a course, what goes well or wrong?

Mike does well in a course when he focuses on one course at a time, but this tends to make him do poorly in others. He feels it is really up to him to work harder to do better. Jocelyn does well if the teacher shows her, and doesn't do well if she doesn't ask the teachers for help. She must let the teacher know if she doesn't



understand and then must study. Jocelyn really feels it is her responsibility to ask the teacher to show her and then to study.

Al's comments are similar to those of Jocelyn and Mike. He feels it is his fault if he fails. However, he does say that when he gets a good grade, it is because of the way the teacher teaches him. Brendon gets good grades when he tries hard and participates in the after-school program getting extra help. "If I don't study, don't do my homework, then I get a poor grade."

Jay takes the responsibility for his successes and failures. He never thinks it is the teacher's fault if he fails. "I fail if I don't try to do the work or study."

Interview Question: What are the qualities of favorite/least favorite teacher?

All students describe their favorite teachers in terms of personal qualities and teaching style. Jay's favorite teacher is kind, nice and strict but helps out and does things for kids. He says they help him study and they have patience with him. Jay's least favorite teachers yell a lot, are very strict and mean, and don't help out much.

Brendon's favorite teachers were like Ms. Remington and Ms. Waterman. (Ms. Remington is his present grade 6 teacher and Ms. Waterman is a special education teacher in the inclusion model for grade 6. Ms. Waterman does not provide services for Brendon, but he receives her assistance as one of the adults in the classroom; also, she is his after school teacher.) He said both are nice and they understand him. His least favorite are those that just don't seem to care. "If you get an F, be that way, just fail."

Al's favorite teacher is one like Ms. Smith. (Ms. Smith is his grade 7 social studies teacher.) She breaks up the activities, it's not always work. (Ms. Smith teaches through projects and uses the project as an assessment tool.) His least favorite teachers give a lot of work and don't explain; he gets frustrated.

Jocelyn's favorite teachers are nice, helpful, and don't get upset if she does not understand. She doesn't like teachers who aren't helpful, who have teacher's pets, and who yell at kids when they can't figure out the work. Mike's favorite school people are those like the substance abuse counselor who understands him and who knows everything about him. His least favorite are those who are not helpful and who have favorite students.

Interview Question: Are there any rules in school that you think are unfair?

All five students reported that the school rules were fair. Two students also state that teachers were also fair with classroom rules. Brendon thinks the rule that is unfair is the one that prohibits chewing gum. He thinks students should be permitted to chew gum in school.

Interview Question: If you could change school to help you be more successful what would you do?

The five students' responses vary for this topic. All have interesting suggestions as to what would help them. Mike wants more tutors to be available for students to help with the work and to motivate them. Jocelyn thinks the after-school program is helpful, but wants to be able to go to the Media Center when she has a project to work on.

Al would like to have teachers make the work easier by explaining it more and by "doing different things". Brendon wants more teachers and more student tutors in the after-school program. He thinks the tutors are nice and he likes it that a few are on his bus to school. (Student tutors are high school students, some of whom may ride the same buses as middle school students.)

Interview Question: Do you think you do better when you have male or female teachers? Why?

Four students responded that the sex of the teacher did not matter. Mike said female teachers are more caring and male teachers are rude to both girls and boys.

Interview Question: Do you think you were prepared to go to this grade level? Why?

All students answered that they were prepared, however, Brendon said he was not prepared the first time in grade 6.

Interview Question: Have there been any surprises this school year in the following areas:

1. Difficulty or ease of school work?

Mike and Jocelyn are finding science very difficult. Mike now has a student tutor from the high school and is hopeful that this will help him. Brendon is surprised he is getting such good grades. Jay finds the test in all his classes difficult, but finds Ms. Smith's social studies class fun because they do activities.

2. Amount of Homework?

All students say they are not surprised by the amount of homework because they had the same amount the previous year.

3. School rules and regulations?

Only one student indicates any change from rules the preceding year. Brendon says he does not like the new in-house suspension rules, which hold students academically accountable for seven periods of work and a discipline packet.

#### 4. Behavior of other students?

The five students indicate their surprise at the change in behaviors of students at this level. They indicate students are more active and get others talking (although one student did admit it was his fault if he talked when he wasn't supposed to), talk back to teachers, try to show off, get into fights, and do a lot of stupid things.

#### 5. The ease or difficulty of making or keeping friends?

All students indicated it was difficult after being retained or in a pre-one class to make new friends. Jay continues for the most part, to have his original classmates as friends. All students seem to be socially accepted, and have regular friends whom they eat lunch with and sit with before school.

#### 6. Availability of adults willing to help?

Jay says he can always count on Ms. Smith to be available after school, but that other teachers are not always available. (The teachers' contract requires them to stay 10 minutes beyond the students' day.)

Jocelyn says teachers and student tutors are available for the after-school program, and that teachers are sometimes available, but not always. Mike says Mr. Cash, teacher in the after-school program is available as is Ms. Fontes, his math teacher and Ms. Creo-Kirshy a school counselor. Other teachers are not available regularly. Brendon feels that Ms. Waterman, the after-school program teacher, is available for him as is Ms. Remington, his language arts teacher. The rest of his teachers are not usually there after school.

Interview Question: Would you like your teachers to be more available?

All students answered yes, they would like teachers to be there after school when they want to ask for help. Jay adds that teachers are there if he asks them ahead of time, but he doesn't always remember to ask.



Interview Question: Do you think your teachers understand "kids" at the middle level?

Jay says his teachers are always there for kids, they are someone to talk to. Jocelyn thinks her teachers understand kids, but some expect too much. Brendon says his teachers make sure no one makes fun of anyone. They understand and listen to what kids have to say. Mike thinks that if teachers are scheduled to teach that grade then they must be the right people there.

Interview Question: Do you think your teachers care about you?

Mike says that, of his grade 8 teachers, one teacher Ms. Mospaw, his social studies teacher, always wants him to do better. He said he did not think his science teacher really cared because he does not answer his questions.

Brendon thinks his teachers care about him because they answer his questions and help him. Jocelyn also feels they care, in particular Ms. Smith who always helps her. Jay says teachers show they care by trying to "cheer me up," and try to help him get good grades. Al says his mother came to teacher conferences and told him that his teachers care about him.

Interview Question: Do you think your teachers trust you?

Mike says teachers show they trust him by letting him clean desks. Jay thinks they "sort of" trust him. Al responds that, "I haven't done anything wrong so they must trust me." Both Brendon and Jocelyn say that they felt teachers trust them.

Interview Question: Do you trust your teachers?

These students have differing perspectives of trust. Al says he trusts teachers because if he needs help they give it, while Jay says he trusts they will do what they say they will do. Jocelyn's response is that if you tell a teacher something in confidence they do not tell anyone. Brendon and Mike also say they trust their teachers.



Interview Question: Do your teachers call your home?

Mike says no one has called his home. Brendon and Jocelyn say the guidance counselor calls about "good and bad things." Jay says teachers call only when things are not going well, making him angry, but he believes that it shows that they care. Al expects teachers to call home when he does not do well in school.

Interview Question: Do you participate in school related activities after school?

All students report participating in the academic after-school program. Each would like to see other components included in the program: their suggestions include making available gymnastics, hockey, skiing lessons, media center, and instruction in study skills to help prepare for tests. The students further indicate that some of their teachers drop by the after-school program on occasion. The students seem pleased that their teachers show concern in this way.

Research Question: Is there a relationship between students' feelings about the importance of schooling and students' being successful in school?

Interview Question: Do you feel that what you are learning in school now will help you be successful at the next grade level?

All students feel what they were learning would help them at the next level. Only Jocelyn feels that somethings she was learning in math would not be helpful.

Interview Question: What could improve your chance of success?

Brendon thinks that having more classes but shorter periods would help him. He would like to see clubs added to the school day, and expressed an interest in science and chess. Jocelyn does not want to go to the after-school program, but

would rather go to the Media Center and have her dad help her more. Al and Jay think that if they studied more they would be more successful.

Interview Question: Do you ever think of what you want to do after you graduate from high school?

All five students have given thought to what they would like to do. Jocelyn would like to be an animal trainer, Brendon thinks about driving race cars, Mike would like to go into the army, Jay plans to be a lawyer, and Al would like to go to college.

Interview Question: Do you plan to graduate from high school?

All five students state strongly that they will graduate from high school. They further state that it is very important for them to graduate and get a good education. Mike believes it is important to graduate because he will not be able to get into the army without a diploma. Brendon says his parents want him to go to college after high school. All students seem to understand the relationship between a good paying job and an education.

Interview Question: What changes could we make to improve school for you?

Brendon believes a bigger cafeteria is needed, that there are too many kids for the short lunch period. Mike's suggestions relate to more time for students to go to their lockers, and the need for bathroom breaks. He would like to eat lunch earlier in the day. (Mike eats during the last lunch shift with grade 8 students.)

Jocelyn would like to see the Media Center more available to students and have S.C.O.R.E. periods used for extra help, not for teaching new material. Jay would like to have more activities added in the school day and after school. Al has no suggestions and says he really does not believe he has any input to what happens.

Briefly, these five students do know when a teacher is kind and caring and appear to work harder for those teachers. They do appreciate the opportunity to

participate in an expanded day program, however, would like to have activities in addition to the help they receive in their academics. Also, they understand the importance of an education in relation to employment and success after high school.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarizes the purpose of the research, its results, recommendations for practice and for future research in the district.

#### Summary - Purpose

A review of this literature indicates that in 1989 approximately 430,000 grade ten through twelve students in the United States left school before graduating. Orr (1989) found that between 14% to 24% of the population national samples and population surveys did not have high school diplomas. In general, statistics show that one-fourth or 25% of students entering high school do not graduate.

American society pays a price when students drop out. The earning power of those not completing high school is less than that of high school graduates. There are untold costs not only through the loss of productivity and the resultant drain on state supported welfare and mental health systems, but also as low-skilled and largely unskilled individuals experience a lack of success in societal interactions, and engage in behavior that ultimately results in a drain of the court system and law enforcement agencies. Clearly, school systems must do a better job preparing these individuals for success in a competitive, highly technical, information age. An effort to identify some of those factors that contribute to the failure rate in a relatively small rural school district in northern Rhode Island is the primary purpose for this study. I believe that such an in depth study could lead to a better understanding of some of the school district's shortcomings and that these results could be generalized to similar school districts elsewhere in the United States.

One of the commonalities of dropouts in the Burr School District is being over-age for grade as a result of participation in a pre-one program or being retained



in grade. This research has focused on middle school students. Identified were students who were over-age because they either participated in a pre-one program or were retained. They are compared with those who were grade appropriate. Student records provided information about academic success, attendance, and suspension for discipline problems. Students were asked to complete a questionnaire to learn about their attitudes concerning: schools being boring, participation in extra-curricular activities, teachers being nice, testing, grading, and discipline practices being fair, and teachers trusting them. Interventions specific to academic assistance and behavior management were developed, implemented, and reviewed after the first quarter of the 1993 - 1994 school year. Five students who were effected by interventions were interviewed to learn about their attitudes about school after the intervention and how that compared with feelings prior to the intervention.

#### Purpose of Data Collection Component

The purposes of the study, as outlined in Chapter I, were to:

- Analyze the long term effect of the retention(s) and/or pre-one program on student performance, behavior patterns, and attendance;
- Develop, implement, and evaluate strategies for Middle School students who appear to be at-risk of school failure;
- And, develop strategies to change practices in the district related to pre-one programs and retention.

#### Conclusions from Review of the Literature

Students drop out of school at an alarming rate. The cost to school districts and society as a whole is far-reaching. Although many school districts are developing programs to meet the needs of at-risk youth, the problem still exists. Schools must focus on what contributes to their students being at-risk. Partnerships are being



developed between schools, parents, and members of the community to identify what are the needs of at-risk youth and how these needs can be met.

Schools are being asked to expand their role in the lives of its students. Values, decision making, problem solving and conflict resolution are now a must as part of a curriculum that at one time was designed to teach reading, writing and arithmetic. Schools that are meeting with success are looking at factors within the school that contribute to students being at-risk and are expanding their outreach to further involve parents in making decisions with children about effective strategies for positive learning and growth.

Through research discussed in Chapter II, students identified factors that contributed to their leaving. Common school factors were: boredom, lack of school attendance, retention, lack of trust by teachers, lack of caring, no relevance to materials being taught, conflict with peers, suspensions, and conflict with teachers. Research in the Burr School District concludes that students who left the system without a diploma were over-age for grade. These students had become over-age for grade as a result of: parents delaying entrance for a year, retention(s), and/or participating in a pre-one program. These decisions were made for a variety of reasons which could include their perception of lack of maturity on the part of the student, a developmental delay in appropriate behavior and or ability to learn. From my review of the literature, I conclude that retention is not an effective strategy for at-risk youth, that they view it as a punishment, not as a way to increase skills and better prepare them for the next grade. Retention contributes to students feeling angry, being taunted by their peers, and a lowering of their self concept. I also conclude from the review of the literature that pre-one programs have the same effect as retention: students lose a year.

I reviewed literature that described effective schools and programs that contribute to students meeting with success and remaining in school. The predominate

factor is that students perceive their schools as places where someone cared about them; they felt comfortable. Teachers believed in them and had high expectations for them academically and behaviorally. Student opinions were heard and valued. Classes were taught with the student as the center and subject matter was made relevant to them as the learner. Teachers understood at-risk youth and were always willing to try something new to meet the needs of an individual student. Discipline was fair for all.

### Conclusions from Study at Burr Middle School

During the 1992 - 1993 academic year 710 students attending the Burr Middle School participated in this study. Listed below are results guided by research hypotheses and responses to student interviews that helped to identify the at-risk population at Burr Middle and their feelings about school.

During the 1992 - 1993 academic year, there was a larger percentage of males than females who had participated in a pre-one program and/or had been retained in grade. Students who had been retained in grade were suspended at a slightly higher rate than those who had participated in a pre-one program, however, students who were not grade appropriate were suspended at a higher rate than the rest of the student population. Students, whether grade appropriate or not grade appropriate, attended school at about the same rate.

Students who had been retained and/or had been in a pre-one program and were failing two or more subjects were more likely to perceive that teachers did not trust them and to rate their classes as boring. Students who had been retained and were not identified as having been failing also had negative feelings about teachers' trust compared to successful pre-one students who had positive attitudes. Compared to students who were grade appropriate, students who were not grade appropriate had negative attitudes about teachers' discipline practices.

The Burr School District must examine practices that label early male students as not being appropriate for grade level. Also, practices need to be examined that contribute to males being retained in grade. This research of students during the 1992-1993 academic year at the Burr Middle School concludes that pre-one and/or retentions did not serve to enhance student academic success but did contribute to feelings of isolation. It seems to have put them at further risk of school failure. Further, these at-risk students have indicated their feelings of lack of teachers' trust. Covey, in his works Principle-Centered Leadership (1990) and The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People (1989), focused on the importance of trust in relationships. Covey (1990) wrote, "People become great if you treat them in terms of their potential. The key to success with people is to believe in them, to affirm them." Students know when someone believes in them, cares about them, and/or trusts them.

### Recommendations for Practice

At the end of the 1992-1993 academic year, teacher teams recommended that fourteen students repeat their grade level if they had not met the established goals of the summer school program. Eleven of those fourteen students retained were males and at the end of the first marking period, eight of these students were not meeting with academic success and six were not meeting with behavioral success. Questions arise as to how they feel about themselves and their attitudes concerning why they are not meeting with success. As an observer, these students appear to be alienated from the population in which they now find themselves.

One of the retained students made great strides academically and behaviorally and was, as promised, promoted to grade eight. However, at the end of the second marking period as a grade 8 student he was failing four of his five core subjects and feels staff members neglected him. Two other students who had failed grade seven and two who had failed grade six exhibited negative behavior which began to seriously



impact the school environment. They were placed in a 45 day diagnostic program at the Northern Rhode Island Mental Health Clinic.

Results of the students participating in the grade 7 skills program indicate that skills taught and the personal attention of the reading specialist are positively impacting those students' success in the classroom.

In grade 6, more students who were not grade appropriate failed two or more subjects than did students who were grade appropriate and fewer grade 6 students failed than did grade 7 or grade 8 students. One major reason for this could be the existence of a special education teacher in ten academic classes a day, the teacher's participation at team meetings to discuss strategies to help students, and the activities implemented to provide for a positive transition for students from grade five to grade 6. Also, many teachers of grade 6 students have been trained in cooperative learning activities and use them in the classroom to a great extent. Students were also given the benefit of the Building Blocks Sequence to provide them with additional academic and emotional support.

Interventions such as cooperative learning, additional support through special education teachers, guidance counselors, expanded opportunities for learning in the after-school program and transition activities create a positive learning environment and increase student opportunity for success. It is however it is difficult to determine if academic gains being made by students participating in the Building Block Sequence will continue and if changes in attitude and behavior will be long lasting.

### Early Interventions

1. Expand Child Find program to identify early students and families who are in need of supportive assistance to increase the likelihood of student success in school and implement, with federal financial support, a Head Start Program. Students who participated in a pre-one program and/or were retained in grade

expressed feelings of isolation from their peers. Early assistance would expand their opportunities for success.

2. Provide training for teachers of students in pre-school programs, in grades K, 1, 2, 3, in the area of age-appropriate teaching practices and multi-age grouping.

### District Interventions

3. Provide teacher training to create awareness of effective strategies for at-risk youth. Training would include the difference between caring schools and schools that view punishment as the single most important element to bring students in line. All students expressed the importance of teachers caring about them and how they felt teachers showed they cared. Teachers need to understand the importance this plays to students as they become responsible for their own learning.
4. Continue to involve the community in reconfiguration of the three elementary schools. Students who graduate from Burr High School, and had been in the district since kindergarten, attended five different schools. The existing lack of a home base for students over a period of time does not lend itself to continuity for success in an environment where they are familiar with the facility itself and the adults in it.
5. Continue to provide training to all teachers in collaborative learning, which as a teaching tool bridges the gap among learners. In addition, investigate the appropriateness of advisor-advisee programs, peer helpers, and peer mediation. Research about these strategies indicate the importance they play in helping students relate to each other and develop life-long skills.
6. Implement recommendations of the Grade 9 Transition Committee that relate to high schools and middle schools. The committee's recommendations



expand opportunities for all grade 9 students and provides a support system for those students who are at-risk of school failure.

7. Implement parent training programs throughout the district to provide parents with skills to meet the needs of their children in areas such as: conflict resolution, problem solving, time management, and behavioral and academic skills. Parents of students who participated in the middle school's after-school program were involved in the program, and were told of the importance of their partnership to help their child in the program and in their school experience. Parents were given individual strategies to help their child at home and parents shared with school staff strategies that worked or didn't work at home. On going communication seemed to send a message to students that parents and school staff were working together and that they believed he/she could succeed and that they would do all they could to help.
8. Provide students with expanded learning opportunities through an extended day program. Components of the program should include peer tutors, use of the school's Media Center, and recreational activities.
9. Review the delivery of academic support in the existing summer school program for students in grades six through twelve. This program should have as its goal to expand learning opportunities in appropriate areas not lump like courses with high school and middle school students. In addition, develop a system to provide summer school teachers with special education students' Individual Education Plans. Through the research I identified that all students were placed in courses together and the same testing procedures followed. It was only toward the end of the program that teachers became aware of the student's identified learning disability.
10. Develop a summer enrichment program for students in the elementary grades to enhance students' knowledge and ability to use skills in areas of math and

reading. In addition, the program should expand student capabilities in the use of computers and provide activities that will develop of positive social skills, increase their ability to follow directions, and provide them with skills in conflict resolution, decision making, problem solving, and making choices.

### Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include:

- Only students in the Burr Middle School during the 1992 - 1993 school year were studied. Not studied were students who had been in a pre-one program and/or were retained and are no longer in the District.
- Students who were diagnosed as needing special education services were grouped in with those who were not in need of services.
- Only the fact that students were retained in grade was studied; not included was in which grade the retention occurred.
- Most important, students who entered pre-one programs or who were retained were not compared with students who had similar aptitude or achievement deficits but who were promoted with their classmates.

### Recommendations for Future Research

1. Study the success of students academically and behaviorally whose entrance to school had been delayed a year as a result of a parent(s) decision.

2. Study individual teacher effectiveness in heterogeneous and randomly assigned classrooms. Effectiveness would be measured by the number of student who met with success academically and behaviorally.
3. Query high school graduates over the past five years to identify what school factors they feel contributed to their meeting with success.
4. Evaluate to what extent special education is meeting the needs of at-risk youth in grades kindergarten through 8.
5. That decision makers study assessment instruments, methods, and/or processes that help teachers determine students' eligibility for pre-one programs. Should school districts continue to use the Gesell, a test not supported by the American Psychological Association for validity, reliability or normative information (Kaufman, 1985), or should the decision be based more on observation and portfolio assessment?

To close this document I draw your attention to Glasser's findings. Glasser (1990) asked students why they cut school, came late to class, or did not go to class. These students answered because: it is too hard to succeed in school, school is boring, and the teachers do not care. Of the three responses, "No one cares," seems to be the most important. Whether it is real that teachers do not care, or it is the students' perceptions that they don't care, schools must listen to students and their real or imagined feelings. Schools must be places where "kids" can learn, feel safe, and grow socially and emotionally in a caring and supportive environment.



APPENDIX A  
PERMISSION FOR STUDY

Jeanne Bonneau, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.  
54 Portland Street  
New Bedford, MA 02744  
(401) 568-1320

Superintendent  
Burr School District

Dear Dr. :

As a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts in the Department of Education and administrator in the Burr School District, I am writing to formally seek permission to conduct a research in the Burr Middle School. I am presently working on a research that examines dropouts, specifically over-age students, and school factors that contribute to their dropping out of school. I chose this area of research because I have been concerned through my thirty years in education with the at-risk student, the contributions of schools in making them at-risk, the ethical responsibility we have for educating these young people, and economic implications if they are unable to participate in society as productive citizens.

After reviewing a document by Ms. Kay Liptack of Burr High School, which concluded that over-age students at the high school are more likely to drop out than those who are not over-age, I have identified a population of students in grades 6, 7 and 8 in the middle school who are currently over-age for their grade and will be over-age when they enter high school.

I would like to further peruse school records of all middle school students and survey all students to ascertain knowledge of their attitudes about school. Information from records will provide data concerning: retention, participation in a pre-one program, grades, discipline, and attendance.

In order for youth to participate in the survey and for parents to understand the study, a notice will be given to each child to take home. In addition, prior to the survey students will be informed of their right not to participate. The information gained from this study will be shared with the school district. This researcher/administrator would seek input from other administrators and/or their representatives to develop strategies to decrease the likelihood that over-age students would eventually drop out of school.

I am hopeful you will feel that this research is useful and that our students can benefit from this study. Enclosed you will find a copy of a parent and student informational letter and a time line for the research.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Bonneau



## APPENDIX B

### EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT TO STUDENTS

Jeanne Bonneau M. Ed. C.A.G.S  
54 Portland Street  
New Bedford, MA 02744  
(401) 568-1320

Dear Student:

I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts in the Department of Education. I am presently working on a research that examines perceptions of students at the Burr Middle School and analyzes current and past data from school records of these students.

I have been in education for thirty years and have always had a concern for students who are at-risk of school failure. One factor repeatedly referred to by researchers that identifies at-risk students is being over-age for grade.

My study will focus on students who are over-age for grade at the Burr Middle School. It will include a data analysis of school records. Superintendent Dennis Flynn has agreed to allow students to participate. The results of this research will provide members of the school committee, myself, and other school administrators with appropriate information to assess the long term effects of pre-one programs and retention. School district and individual school interventions will be designed and implemented. An assessment will be made in the fall of 1993 to determine if the interventions are enhancing student self-image and academic success.

If you are willing to take part in this study, please complete the questionnaire. Your responses will be kept confidential.

I hope that you will participate in this study and see the benefit to all students in the district.

Respectfully,

Jeanne Bonneau

## APPENDIX C

### EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH PROJECT TO PARENTS

Jeanne Bonneau, M.Ed., C.A.G.S.  
54 Portland Street  
New Bedford, MA 02744  
(401) 568-1320

Dear Parents:

I am a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Massachusetts in the Department of education. I am presently working on a research that examines attitudes of students at the Burr Middle School and analyzes current and past data from school records of these students.

I have been in education for 30 years and have always had a concern for students who are at-risk of school failure. One factor repeatedly referred to by researchers that identifies at-risk students is being over-age for grade as a result of retention or participating in pre-one programs.

My study will focus on students who are over-age for grade at the Burr Middle School because of participation in a pre-one program and/or being retained in grade. It will include a data analysis of school records. Superintendent Dennis Flynn and the school committee have agreed to allow students to participate. The results of this research will provide members of the school committee, myself, and other school administrators with appropriate information to assess the long term effects of pre-one programs and retention. School district and individual school interventions will be designed and implemented. An assessment will be made in the fall of 1993 to determine if the interventions are enhancing academic success.

Please complete the appropriate statement below to indicate whether or not you give permission to have your child participate. All responses to the questionnaire will be kept confidential. Names of students will not be included on the questionnaire nor will they be referenced in any documentation in release of results to staff members, members of the Administrative Council or School Committee. Students may choose to: respond to all statements in the questionnaire, select only those statements they wish to respond to, or respond to none of the statements. There is no risk to any student who chooses to participate or not participate in this research. Students may withdraw at any time without prejudice from this researcher or other school staff member or official.

I hope that you will permit your child to participate in this study and see the benefit to the school district of gaining access from students their attitudes about school.

Respectfully,

Jeanne Bonneau

To: Jeanne Bonneau

☐ My child has permission to participate in this research at the Middle School.

☐ My child does not have permission to participate in this research at the Middle School.

# APPENDIX D

## QUESTIONNAIRE

Please tell how you feel about each of the items below by circling the number that indicates your feeling.

		1	2	3	4	5
		Disagree	Disagree	Neutral Slightly	Agree	Agree Slightly
1.	Teachers test fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Classroom teachers discipline fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Most teachers trust me.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	More than one of my classes is boring.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	My teachers grade fairly.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I participate in school activities.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Most of my teachers are nice.	1	2	3	4	5



## APPENDIX E

### DESCRIPTION OF FIELDS

Variable	Column	Name	Descriptors
1	1-5	Student I.D.	1-9999
2	6	#1	1 - Disagree
3	7	#2	2 - Disagree Slightly
4	8	#3	3 - Neutral
5	9	#4	4 - Agree
6	10	#5	5 - Agree Slightly
7	11	#6	
8	12	#7	
9	13	Gender	0 - male 1 - female
10	14	Grade	6,7,8
11	15	Pre-1	1 - yes 0 - no
12	16	Retained in grade	0 - no 1 - yes
13	17	Special Education	0 - no special education 1 - resource 2 - self contained 3 - monitor
14	18	Failed 2 or more	0 - no 1 - yes
15	19 & 20	attendance	1 - 99
16	21	In-house suspension	0 - no 1 - yes
17	22 & 23	# of in-house sus	1 - 99
18	24	Out of school sus	0 - no 1 - yes
19	25 & 26	# of out of school sus	1 - 99

## APPENDIX F

### MEMO TO TEACHERS

To: Staff Burr Middle School

From: Jeanne Bonneau, Assistant Principal

Re: Data Collection Survey

Date: June 3, 1993

This memo is written to clarify: (1) the reason for the survey, (2) data collecting process, (3) what will be done with the information.

This survey is being done in connection with research for my doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and the Burr School Department.

In her research, Kay Liptack (1990) identified a common characteristic of school dropouts in this district as being over-age for grade. The intent of this survey is to take some of the common factors given by dropouts and obtain from our Middle School students their perceptions in relation to these factors.

Comparisons will be made with students who are on grade level, students who have been retained, and students who have participated in a pre-one program. This analysis will be done with the assistance of Mr. Peter Berthelette. This information should help staff at this school, as well as other schools in the district, to identify feelings of students who are over-age for grade.

The information will be put in a matrix with other data: number of days absent from school, incidences of suspension, and academic performance.

Information that will be shared with the superintendent and the school committee will be in relation to those three categories: at grade level, pre-one, and retained in grade. There will be no data analysis done in regards to any particular teacher or team of teachers. The purpose of the research is to find out more about feelings of students who are over-age for grade.

If there are any further questions I will meet, upon request, with staff members privately, will meet with teams, will further clarify at today's in-house meeting, and/or will meet with other staff in general on Friday at 2:08 in room 201.

Hopefully, all questions will be answered and we will be able to give the survey to students.

## APPENDIX G

### DESCRIPTION OF AT-RISK PROGRAM

**Problem:** Currently, 9.4% of the student population at the Burr Middle School is failing 2, 3, 4, or 5 subjects.

**Goal:** To have all students obtain the academic, social, and behavioral skills to reach their potential.

**Objectives:**

1. To provide a school setting in an extended school day for students to:
  - Receive assistance in completing daily homework assignments.
  - Receive individual assistance in organization of time and study materials
  - Assist student with any work not completed in the regular academic day.
2. Through a parent workshop assist parents in providing a structured environment in which students can study.

**Student Participation:**

1. Through counselors, teams will recommend students in need of help and who will receive assistance in the program.
2. The ratio of students to teacher should be held to a maximum of fifteen to provide students with individual attention.

**Assessment:**

Each student's continued participation in the program will be assessed every five weeks. Counselors and team members will identify students in need of assistance and will be enrolled in the program.

**Evaluation:**

The program will be evaluated internally through a survey to be developed by CAP/CAST members. Students, parents, and staff members will respond to questions about:

- Student academic progress.
- Student's feelings about him or herself.
- Student's attitude toward school.
- Parents' attitudes toward school.

**Program Design:**

Based on need, students will receive instruction and assistance through a variety of teaching techniques.

- Group lecture by instructor.
- Collaborating with other students.

- Peer tutoring.
- Individual instruction.

Teachers in the program will receive data from students' classroom teachers regarding homework assignments, classroom assignments needed to be completed, and basic academic skills that need to be strengthened.

Time: 2:15 - 3:30

Teachers will continue to provide counselors with feedback regarding concerns or growth in areas of academic, social/emotional, and behavior.



## APPENDIX H

### RESULTS OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM

To: Robert Morissette, Principal  
From: Jeanne Bonneau, Assistant Principal  
Re: After-School Program/Spring 1993  
Date: August 15, 1993

---

Attached you will find a report of the Burr Middle School's After-School Program that will:

1. Review the goals of the program
2. Outline activities of the program initiated to meet the goals
3. Identify strengths of the program
4. Identify weaknesses of the program
5. Indicate the numbers of students who participated in the program
6. Discuss gains made by students
7. Conclusions
8. Recommendations

## GOAL

The primary goal of the Burr Middle School's After-School Program was to have students in an extended day setting improve their skills in areas of academic, organization, social, and increase their self-esteem.

## ACTIVITIES

In order to meet the established goal:

- Students at-risk of school failure were selected by their team of teachers working with his/her guidance counselor.
- Staff for the program were selected in a process acceptable to the school administration, following union guidelines, recommended the Superintendent, and approved by the School Committee.
- Parents were contacted by each student's guidance counselor. The goal of the program was explained and the program's activities were outlined to assist in ensuring the parents' support in their child's participation. In order to invest parents and students in the program a high standard of attendance was set in grade 6. For each absence, a student was required to stay an alternative day for three and one-half hours to work with his/her guidance counselor.
- The grade 7 component of the program included athletic activities, snacks and rewards.
- Each teacher in the program served as a resource for the student's teachers. Students were given instructions in organizational skills, assisted with homework, and completed class work referred by teachers.

## STRENGTHS

- Teaching staff: their care and concern for their students, ability to make the sessions informal and yet create an environment where students felt comfortable working in a variety of learning activities.
- Opportunity for students to receive assistance in a small group setting.
- Students had another adult to advocate for them.
- Use of high school students as tutors who served as role models.
- Reference point for teachers - person to give individual attention.
- Reference point for parents - person to speak with after work hours.
- Transportation was provided.
- Facilitation of study groups.
- Students not originally identified for the program self-referred.

## WEAKNESSES

- Late start: some students felt disenfranchised - felt there was no hope.
- Training period needed for peer tutors.
- Lack of expanded role of parent in the program.

## STUDENT PARTICIPATION

Grade 6	15
Grade 7	15
Grade 8	8

## GAINS

Of the thirty-eight students who were formally enrolled in the program, thirty-six students achieved what teachers believed to be the necessary skills to advance to the next grade. During the time they were enrolled in the program, no students were referred to the office for disciplinary reasons and student daily attendance was over 95%.

## CONCLUSIONS

The program was established as a reward for students who were working hard and, therefore, were privileged to be selected. Students for the most part saw this as an opportunity, enjoyed their teacher, and felt better about themselves. Classroom teachers indicated students made progress in their organization and completion of assigned work.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- An after school program should be established for the 1993-1994 academic year and should begin during the first academic quarter.
- The program should be open entry/open exit with students participating on a need basis.
- Provide student tutors with training to serve as tutors and role models.
- Provide funds for snacks.
- Provide funds for field trips and speakers.
- Select teachers who are warm and caring and who work well with other staff members.
- Include an exploratory activity such as art, home economics, etc.

## APPENDIX I

### GRADE RECONFIGURATION

#### BURR SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

##### Inter-Office Memorandum

TO: ALL STAFF MEMBERS

FROM: STEVE DRISCOLL, COORDINATOR OF INSTRUCTIONAL  
SUPPORT SERVICES/LITERACY DIRECTOR

DATE: SEPTEMBER 15, 1993

RE: RECONFIGURATION COMMITTEE

In an effort to include all elements of the school community in the process of considering the reorganizing of the elementary grade configuration, I am asking for teachers to indicate if they would be willing to serve on a Grade configuration Committee for the 1993-1994 school year.

This Committee promises to play an important role in developing recommendations for the grade structures at the elementary level for the future.

If you are interested in participating on this committee, please send a brief note of intent to me as soon as possible. We have arranged a plenary session for October 6, 1993 at 7:30 p.m. to be held in the Media Center of the Burr Middle School.

Thank you.

saj



## APPENDIX J

### GRADE 9 TRANSITION TASK FORCE

#### Recommendations Affecting Students

1. A Reading Specialist Teacher will be available to service grade nine students.
2. A committee should be formed to develop a spring/fall orientation program for grade eight students entering the high school in September.
3. A Study Skills Improvement Committee should be formed to assess the study skill needs of grade nine students and to recommend a mandatory program to be adopted in September, 1990.
4. Each grade nine student who fails one or more subjects during each quarter will be interviewed to establish the reasons for failure. The guidance counselors will be asked to conduct the interviews. Department chairpersons will be asked to interview the teachers of these students to establish the reasons for failure from the teacher's perspective.
5. An alternative learning program should be established for grade nine students who have failed two or more subjects during the first semester.
6. A study skills improvement course should be built into the schedule for each grade nine student.
7. A reading improvement course should be built into the schedule for each grade nine student who scores below an established percentile on his/her grade eight MAT 6 test.
8. A homework policy should be developed and communicated to students at the beginning of the school year.
9. Performance guidelines should be established for students enrolled in college and advanced level courses. Students who do not respond to the course guidelines and do not maintain an acceptable quarterly grade average will be dropped to a traditional program.
10. A high school newsletter for parents should be established.
11. Daily late buses should be established at the high school.
12. An intramural program for non-athletes (ineligibility will not apply for this program) should be established after school hours for all students.



13. Each grade nine student who has failed one or more subjects for the third quarter will be invited to spend a school day with a junior or senior college preparatory student. The grade nine student will attend classes with the upperclassman and join in a group discussion during the last period of the day with other grade nine students who participated in the program.
14. A humanities program should be established for grade nine students after regular school hours. All grade nine students will receive an invitation to attend the sessions.

Grade 9 Transition Task Force  
Recommendations Affecting Teachers

1. A common meeting time should be established for teachers with grade nine classes. The meeting time should be built into the master schedule and not replace a teacher's preparation period. Another scheduling possibility is to relieve teachers with homerooms to provide common meeting time during the weekly X period.
2. Teachers should establish a uniform set of classroom management expectations for grade nine classes. The information ("Survival Kit") should be shared with students on the first day of classes.
3. Grade nine teachers should be provided the opportunity to spend one or more days at the Middle School before the end of the school year to meet with grade eight teachers.
4. Student performance expectations and classwork guidelines should be established for all courses by teachers within each department. The information should be shared with both parents and students during the scheduling process.
5. One or more unassigned teachers per period should be identified to assist grade nine students in September with academic problems. The teacher will assume the role of "Student Advocate" for the small group of grade nine students. The teacher will monitor the students' academic performance for the remainder of the school year and work to eliminate subjects failures. Teachers participating in the program will receive a stipend.
6. Teachers with grade nine classes will be encouraged to spend two or more class period reviewing important study skills with their students.
7. A Grade Nine Transition Guidance Counselor position should be created at the high school.
8. Grade eight teacher course recommendations should weigh heavily in the kinds and levels of courses which grade eight students are permitted to select for their freshman year.

Teacher course recommendations should be placed on the student's Course Selection Form prior to parent orientation. Parents will be permitted to change course selection choices only following a conference with a guidance counselor.

Workshops for parents should be scheduled in the evening to increase their involvement in the scheduling process.

A study should be made to determine the number of grade eight students electing courses not recommended by their teachers.

Four additional comments should be included in the grade reporting comment file for each quarter. Each teacher will be required to select one of the four comments for each of his/her students. The information would assist guidance counselors in offering course selection choices to students.

- a. Recommended for advanced level work.
- b. Recommended for college level work.
- c. Recommended for traditional level work.
- d. Recommended for basic level work.

9. Teachers should be encouraged to contact parents by telephone to inform them that their son/daughter has been recognized for outstanding classwork or is experiencing academic difficulties requiring intervention.

## APPENDIX K

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Purpose of the Interview:

The purpose of this interview is to learn about your educational history, your feelings about school and yourself, how you think you will do in school the remainder of this year, and your plans after that. I will share the information of all interviews conducted with the Burr School District's Administrative Council. The information will guide us in making decisions about programs, policies and curriculum as they affect you and all our students. It is an opportunity to learn about your feelings toward schooling.

#### Ethics:

Your name will not be used in any report and only you and I will know that specific information you provide me relates to you.

#### Topics to be Covered:

Questions will include asking responses about your feelings toward school now and what they were during the 1992 - 1993 academic year "as well as you can remember." During the interview, if you feel you have a related comment, please make it. Do you have any questions?

#### School History:

1. Name.
2. How old were you when you began school?

3. In what grade did you begin school?  
(If you did not start at kindergarten, who made that decision and why?)
4. Did you go to first grade from kindergarten, if not, did you go to a pre-one program or did you repeat kindergarten?  
(If you did not go to first grade, who made that decision and why?)
5. What has been your progression through school since grade one?  
(Indicate the school district you were in for each grade.)
6. Were you ever retained in grade after grade one?
7. If you were retained in grade, why do you think you were retained?
8. Who decided you should be retained in grade?
9. Were you successful in that grade the next time?
10. If you were more successful, why?
11. If you were not more successful, why not?

Feelings about school and school staff:

12. When you get a good grade in a course, what goes well?
13. If you get a poor grade in a course, what goes wrong?



14. If you were to describe your favorite teacher, what qualities would you use?
15. What qualities would you use to describe your least favorite teacher?
16. Are there any rules in school that you think are unfair?
17. If you could change school to help you be more successful, what would you do?

Academic Performance 1992 - 1993:

18. Do you think you do better when you have a male or female teacher? Why?
19. Do you think you were prepared to go to this grade level? Why?
20. Have there been any surprises this school year in the following areas:
  1. Difficulty or ease of school work?
  2. Amount of homework?
  3. School rules and regulations?
  4. Behavior of other students?
  5. The ease or difficulty of making or keeping friends?
  6. Availability of adults willing to help?

7. Other?

Student/Teacher Relationship:

21. Are your teachers available after school to help you?
22. Would you like your teachers to be more available?
23. Do you think your teachers understand "kids" at the middle school level?
24. Do you think your teachers care about you?
25. Do you think your teachers trust you?
26. Do you trust your teachers?
27. Do any of your teachers call home when you aren't doing well with your school-work or you are having a problem with your behavior? If yes, tell me more.

Extra-Curricular Activities:

28. Do you participate in any school related activities after school?
29. Do any of your teachers attend any of these activities? If no, what do you think about that?

30. Are there any activities that you would like to see offered after-school that are not now offered?

Life After Middle School:

31. Do you feel what you are learning in school now will help you meet with success at the next grade level?
32. What could be done to improve your chance of success?
33. Do you plan to graduate from high school?
34. Do you think it is important to graduate from high school?
35. Do you think about what you want to do after you graduate from high school?
36. Do you think the kind of job you get and the amount of money you make is related to how well you do in school?

37. What changes could we make to improve school for you?

The interview has ended. I appreciate your taking the time to meet with me and giving me honest answers. If you think of something within the next week that you wish you had said, please share it with me. Thank you.

## REFERENCES

- Advocates for Children of New York, (1985). Our Children at Risk: The Crisis in Public Education. (Report of the New York Hearing on the Crisis in Public Education.) New York.
- Aherne, J.J. (1992). A case study of the educational, economic, operational, administrative, and social impact of the reorganization of a partial regional school district K-12, Unified Regional School District (1992) Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts (1992).
- American Psychological Association. (1987). Publication Manual (3rd ed.). Washington: American Psychological Association.
- Archer, E.L., Dresden, J.H. (1986). A New Kind of Dropout: The effects of minimum competency testing on high school graduation in Texas. (Report No. TM860 304), Paper presented at annual meeting of American Education Research Association. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269 454.)
- Baker, Janice and Sansone, Janet. (1990, March/April). Interventions with students at risk for dropping out of school: A high school responds. The Journal of Educational Research, 83(4), 181-186.
- Barber, L. & McClellan, M.C. (1987, December). Look at America's Dropouts: Who are they? Phi Delta Kappan 69(4), 264-267.
- Barre, S. & Kilstad, A. (1987). Who drops out of high school? Findings from high school and beyond. (Report No C8-87-397C). Washington D.C.: Center for Educational Statistics. (ERIC document Reproduction Service No. ED 284 134).
- Bearden, L., Spencer, W. & Moracco, J. (1989, November). A study of high school dropouts. The School Counselor, 37, 113-120.
- Beck, L. & Muia, J.A. (1980, November). A Portrait of a tragedy: Research findings on the dropout. High School Journal, 65-72.
- Bennis, W.G.; Beene, K.D., & Chin, R. (1984). The planning of change (4th ed.), New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Bennis, W. & Nanus, B. (1985). Leaders, the strategies for taking charge. Philadelphia: Harper & Row Publishers.



- Birdsall, I. (1977). Potential dropouts - why? New York: Vantage Press.
- Bos, D.T. and Visscher, A.J. (1990). Truancy, dropout, class repeating and their relation with school characteristics. Educational Research 32 (3), 175-185.
- Boston Public Schools: (1986). A working document on the dropout problem in Boston Public Schools. Research Report.
- Bredenkamp, S., Shepard, L. (1989). "How Best to Protect Children from Inappropriate School Expectations, Practices, and Policies." Young Children, 44 (3), 222-231.
- Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., & Van Bokern, S. (1990). Reclaiming youth at-risk: Our hope for the future. Indiana: National Educational Service.
- Burgess, T. & Adams, E. (1985). Records of achievement at 16. England: NFER-Nelson Publishing.
- Calabrese, Raymond. (1989, February). alienation: The secondary school at risk. NASSP Bulletin, 73 (514), 72-76.
- Calkins, T. (1992). "Off the Track." The School Administrator.
- Cervantes, Lucius, (1986). The dropout causes and cures. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press
- Colbrese, R.L. (1988, February). How schools can reduce alienation in adolescents: The Educational Digest 53 (6), 32-35.
- Conrath, J. (1986, February). Effective schools must focus on potential dropouts. NASSP Bulletin, 70, 46-50.
- Conrath, J. (1988, January). A new deal for at-risk students. NASSP Bulletin, 71 (504), 46-50.
- Cooper, H.M. (1988). Organizing knowledge synthesis: A taxonomy of literature reviews. Knowledge in Society. 104-126.
- Covey, S.R. (1990). The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. New York: Fireside.
- Covey, S.R. (1991). Principle Centered Leadership. New York: Summit Books.
- Cuban, L. (1989, February). What can be done for at-risk students? Educational Leadership, 46 (5), 29-32.

- Cullingford, D. (1988, February). School rules and children's attitudes to discipline. Educational Research, 30 (1), 3-8.
- Curwin, R.L. & Mendler, A.N. (1988). Discipline with dignity. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Cushman, K. (1990). "The Whys and Hows of the Multi-Age Primary Classroom." American Education.
- Dimidjian, V.J. (1989). Early childhood at-risk: Actions and advocacy for young children. A National Education Association Publication.
- Dunn, R., Beaudry, J.S., & Klavas, A. (1989, March). Survey of research on learning styles. Educational Leadership, 46 (6), 50-57.
- Earle, J., Roach, V. (1989). Female dropouts: A new perspective. National Association of State Boards of Education, Newton, MA: WEEA Publishing Center.
- Edmonds, Ronald. (1981, September-October). Making public schools effective. Social Policy, 56-60.
- Fine, Michelle. (1991). Framing dropouts: Notes on the politics of an urban public high school. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Fine, Michelle. (1986, Spring). Why urban adolescents drop into and out of public high school. Teacher College Record, 87 (3), 393-409.
- Gardner, John. (1988). Principals and leadership - an interview with John Gardner. The Journal for Middle Level and High School Administrators, 72. (509), 70-78.
- Glasser, W. (1984). Control Theory. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Glasser, W. (1986). Control Theory in the Classroom. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Glasser, W. (1992). The Quality School (2nd ex. ed.) New York: Harper Perennial.
- Goodlad, John I. (1984). A place called school. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company.
- Gottfredson, G.D. & Hollifield, J. H. (1988, March). How to diagnose school climate: pinpointing problems, planning changes. NASSP Bulletin, 72, 63-70.

- Grossnickle, D.R. & Thiel, W.B. (1988, January). Promoting effective student motivation in school and classroom. NASSP Bulletin, 72, 24-27.
- Hammack, F.M. (1986). Large school systems' dropout reports: An analysis of definition, procedures and findings. Teachers College Record, 87 (3), 324-340.
- Hersey, P. & Blanchard, K. H. (1988). Management of organizational behavior, (5th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Hodgkinson, H.L. (1991). The same client: The demographics of education and service delivery systems. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Education Leadership. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 757)
- Holmes, C.T. & Matthews, K.M. (1984). The effect of nonpromotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 54 (2), 225-236.
- Joiner, C.W., Jr. (1987). Leadership for change. Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing.
- Kerlinger, F.N. (1986). Foundations of Behavioral Research (3rd ed.). Chicago: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc.
- Kunisawa, B. (1988). A nation in crisis: The dropout dilemma. NEA - TODAY, 6 (6), 61-65.
- Lake, S. (1988). Instructional Practices for Middle Grade Students: Developing Self-Directed Learners. (Practitioner's Monograph N. 3). CA: California League of Middle Schools.
- Lake, S. (1989/1988). Supporting Middle Level Students Through Counseling and Teacher Advisor Programs. (Practitioner's Monograph N. 4). CA: California League of Middle Schools.
- Lambert, L.G. (1988). Building school culture: An open letter to principals. NASSP Bulletin, 72 (506), 54-62.
- Lichter, S., Raplen, E., Seibert, F., & Sklansky, M. (1962). The dropouts. New York: The Free Press of Glencoe.
- Lusignan, N.A. (1991). A psychological explanation for the differential effectiveness of selected dropout prevention program components, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts (1991).



- Mann, D. (1986, Spring). Can we help dropouts: Thinking about the undoable. Teachers College Record, 87 (3), 307-323.
- Martinez, R. (1986). Minority youth dropouts: Personal, social, and institutional reasons for leaving school (Report No. UD 025 461). Colorado Springs: Center for Community Development and Design. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 280 934.)
- Massachusetts Advocacy Center. (1988). Before it's too Late. Boston: Hart Printing.
- Massachusetts Board of Education. (1990). Structuring Schools for Student Success: A Focus on Grade Retention. (Available from Division of School Programs, Bureau of Student Development and Health, Quincy, MA)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (1982). Characteristics of At-Risk Students in National Education Longitudinal Study: 88. (NCES92-042. U. S. Department of Education.
- National Middle School Association. (1988). Improving School Success With At-Risk Middle School Students: Evaluating the Effects of a Decision-Making Course. (Research Rep.). University of North Carolina.
- Natriello, G. (1987). School dropouts. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Neill, S.R., St., J. (1989, February). Children's reported responses to teachers' and non-teachers' non-verbal communication. Educational Research, 31 (1), 71-73.
- Niehouse, Oliver. (1988, January). Leadership concepts for the principal: A practical approach. NASSP Bulletin, 72 (504), 50-60.
- Ogden, E.H., & Germinario, V. (1988). The at-risk student. Pennsylvania: Technomic Publishing Co., Inc.
- Orr, M.T. (1987). Keeping students in school. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Limited.
- Patton, M.Q. (1980). Qualitative Evaluation Methods. California: SAGE Publications.
- Paulu, N. (1987). Dealing with dropouts the urban superintendents call to action. U.S. Department of Education.
- Peng, S.S. & Tahai, R.T. (1980). High school dropouts: descriptive information from high school and beyond. National for Education Statistics Bulletin.

- Phillips, G., Rosenberger, T. (1983, November). Breaking the failure cycle in an inner-city high school. NASSP Bulletin, 67 (466), 30-35.
- Popkewitz, T., Tabachneck, R., & Whelage, G. (1982). The myth of educational reform. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Pressersen, B. (1991). At-risk students: Defining a population. In K.M. Kershner & J.A. Connolly (Eds.), At-risk students and school restructuring (pp. 5-13). Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools.
- Principals and Leadership - an interview with John Gardner. (1988, September). NASSP Bulletin, 72 (509), 70-78.
- Ranbon, S. (1986). School dropouts: Everybody's problem (Report). Washington, D.C.: The Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Report of the 21st Century Education Commission. (1992). Educating All Our Children (Research Report) Rhode Island: Begin, R.N. Susse, G.S., co-chair.
- Ruben, M. (1986). Minority youth dropouts: Personal social and institutional reasons for leaving school. Research Report.
- Sandoval, J.T. Fitzgerald. A high school follow-up of children who were non-promoted or attended a junior first grade. Psychology in the Schools, 22 (2), 164-170.
- Schreiber, D. (1968). Profile of the school dropout. New York: Vintage Books.
- Schweinhart, L. (1984, Spring). Dropping out among language minority youth. Review of Educational Research, 113-32.
- Seldin, C.A. (1989, February). Reducing adolescent alienation: Strategies for the high school. NASSP Bulletin, 73 (514), 77-84.
- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1986). "Synthesis of Research on School Readiness and Kindergarten Retention". Educational Leadership, 44 (3), 78-86.
- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1987). Effects of kindergarten retention at the end of first grade. Psychology in the Schools, 24 (4), 346-357.



- Shepard, L.A. & Smith, M.L. (1988). "Escalating Academic Demand in Kindergarten: Counterproductive Policies." The Elementary School Journal, 89 (2), 153-163.
- Slavin, R., Dariveit, N. & Madden, N. (1989). Effective programs for students at-risk. Massachusetts: Allyn & Bacon.
- Spradley, James P. (1980). Participant observation. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stern, D. (1986). Reducing the high school dropout rate in California: Why we should and how we may. Research Report.
- Taylor, S.J., Bogdan, R. (1984). Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Unesco Office of Statistics. (1986). A statistical study of wastage at school. Paris, France: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization/
- Wells, B.E. (1982). A study of school related variables as factors in the dropout rate of an urban high school. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Massachusetts, 1982.)
- Whelage, G. & Anderson, E. (1972). Social studies curriculum in perspective. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.



