DROPPING OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL:
AN EXPLORATORY AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

by

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Dropping out of High School: An Exploratory and Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Dropping out of school causes problems to those who leave schools prematurely and to the economic and social fabric of society. Dropouts earn less income and become more frequently unemployed than high school graduates, reducing tax revenues and increasing welfare spending. Investigating causes and reducing the incidence of dropping out can therefore serve both the interests of individual dropouts and societal needs.

This study aimed to find causes of student attrition by collecting data from those who had dropped out of school. It compared dropouts' perceptions of schools with the views of students in school. Such data facilitated consideration of factors of alienation from schools felt by dropouts, and were collected in questionnaires. Interviews with dropouts expanded on questionnaire data and included perspectives that dropouts considered important but which had not been foreseen in planning data collection.

The quantitative results showed statistically significant differences between dropouts and students in their views of school. Qualitative data supported quantitative findings.

For dropouts, the major factors causing them to leave schools originated within schools. They considered schools as institutions which had become unresponsive to individual needs, outlined a pervasive sense of boredom with teaching methods, saw the curriculum as irrelevant, and described school environments in which they felt physically and psychologically unsafe.
Recommendations from the study include developing specific criteria of effectiveness to improve retention. The study proposes three criteria as a basis for increasing retention: improving school climates by developing schools as 'communities of support', which includes treating each student individual learner with individual needs; improving teaching methods and teacher empathy for students; bridging the gap between school and work by making school more relevant to employment.

The study also considered external influences on school practices and suggests that purely school-based reform will fail to substantially reduce dropout rates unless policies governing such practices are also reformed.
To the many students who are ill-served by current structures and practices of educational institutions.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The problem and its background.

This study examines the problem of high school dropouts within the context of 'school improvement' in general and the 'effective school movement' in particular. The basic problem that this study aims to answer concerns why students drop out of school, and whether specific criteria of effectiveness in terms of school programs and practices will help or hinder retention of students in school.

In pursuing this question, the study will relate a number of criteria of effectiveness to incidences of students dropping out of school. Might accepting the criteria of what the literature claims constitute an effective school limit retention of students, and possibly increase the number of students who subsequently drop out of school? What alternative criteria of effectiveness can be developed in order that secondary schools might retain more students?

Linking of the dropout problem to the effective school movement and literature requires explanation. The effective school movement has attempted to improve schools by first defining criteria of effectiveness and subsequently by introducing reforms based on such criteria. School improvement has largely been

1 Dropouts in this study are defined as people who leave the secondary school system prior to graduation.
measured in terms of improved test scores, which represents a narrow definition of improvement. What if schools introduce reforms and improve test scores but substantially more of their students leave without taking tests? Are such schools more or less effective than before reforms were implemented? The likelihood of increased dropout rates as a result of effective school reforms is considered likely within the literature, and will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Collection of data within this study links criteria of effectiveness to the views of dropouts concerning their decisions to leave school. If they view the criteria of 'effectiveness' negatively, and if practices within schools reflect such criteria and influence decisions to drop out, then a case can be argued for developing alternative criteria of effectiveness which might improve retention, thereby making schools more effective but in different ways.

Historically, 'dropping out' of school has not constituted a problem. Fifty years ago, for example, only a small minority of students ever completed full secondary schooling. Even during the nineteen fifties and sixties, and particularly during periods of full employment, young school leavers encountered little difficulty entering unskilled labour markets in most western industrial economies. In periods of higher unemployment, such school leavers, by increasing the supply of workers, provided pools of cheap labour - a concept still apparently considered beneficial by the recent Reagan administration in the U.S.A.:
Teenage employment in central cities may be twice the unemployment rate of the Great Depression, but when an administration representative describes out-of-work youth as the "industrial reserve of America," it does not take too much imagination to understand that cheap labor, available to practically any enterprise, has its uses and so by extension does a system that emits undertrained youth. (Mann, 1986, p 315)

Whether full employment or high unemployment occurred, a common prevailing ethos within most western societies included popular beliefs that extended schooling served no useful purpose for those students whose future focused on areas of work which tended not to be academic, professional or managerial.

When, why and for whom is the incidence of dropping out of school a problem in 1990?

Many believe that significant numbers of dropouts from schools cause individual and societal economic, social and political problems. Such problems are significant now because of changing economic and social trends. While the numbers of dropouts may be no higher than twenty years ago, rapidly changing economies with different demands for labour necessitate increased efforts to reduce incidences of High School attrition rates in the expectation that higher educational levels will improve the supply of appropriately skilled labour for emerging post-industrial economies.
In such post-industrial economies, we frequently hear that fewer unskilled workers will be required because of changing technology and automation. This not only places greater emphasis on the need for more highly educated workers, but also reduces the avenues of employment which were once available within industrial economies for those who left school before graduation. Such views may, however, be perceptions rather than facts as they have been disputed by authors such as Collins (1977) who finds little evidence to link increased technical sophistication with improved educational outcomes.

In recent years a body of evidence has emerged suggesting that when corporate interests recognize that shortages of skilled labour limit profitability, and when numbers of school dropouts are considered high, then demands for changes to educational systems are initiated by corporate interests and supported by governments, both to improve the supply of appropriately skilled workers and to reduce dropout rates.

Socially, while some may argue that a single dropout becomes a problem, a common perspective from the literature holds that dropping out becomes problematic when too many people do it. Simply put, when one student drops out, the individual can be blamed, but when a third of the school population leaves before graduation, something is wrong with the system of schooling.

Large numbers of dropouts result in reduced average incomes across society as a whole, and arguably in the formation of a sub-group of former dropouts with significantly and permanently lower income generation when compared with those who graduate from
schools. This results in lower levels of government revenue from direct and indirect taxation, and increased expenditure on social services, particularly welfare and unemployment benefits.

Politically, increased numbers of dropouts may result in an increasingly marginalized and alienated sub-culture of those who have little or no stake in society. Should such alienation occur in densely-populated urban centres, and be experienced by groups of an identifiable class or ethnicity, then the potential for social unrest increases.

Economically, socially, and politically, therefore, it becomes detrimental to accept or ignore significant numbers of school dropouts. Most western governments, corporations and political parties of all hues profess to share such perceptions. Even within the narrow reference of societal self-interest, solving or at least reducing the dropout problem seems beneficial.

While the problem appears visible to all, no consensus exists in terms of a solution. Even within the literature relevant to school dropouts, widely disparate views exist concerning dropout definition, statistical accuracy concerning dropout counts, and whether the dropouts themselves or the various educational systems are to blame. Indeed, the problem of dropouts has generated a genre of research which has created a spirited debate and employment for social scientists but appears no nearer to solving the problem.

Many studies of the dropout problem, by focusing on school-related issues that cause students to drop out, assume or directly propose school-based reform as the definitive solution. While school-based reform appears crucial, it seems unlikely to solve the
dropout problem if student alienation results from factors outside the direct control of the institution. If, for instance, students who drop out claim that teaching practices are so boring that they leave, can such practices be changed purely within schools? Or are teaching practices driven by factors outside of the control of individual teachers or institutions such as provincial testing and assessment requirements? And, if so, how might proposed provincial initiatives such as those assessment practices proposed in British Columbia affect incidences of dropping out if implemented? (The proposed assessment requirements are outlined in "Year 2000: A Curriculum and Assessment Framework for the Future" which is discussed in Chapter 5.) While a more detailed discussion of the wider context of policy implications occurs in Chapter 5, these introductory remarks place the issue and problem of dropping out within a wider context than a simplistic relationship between alienated students and schools. The issue reflects wider societal issues, and the problem cannot be solved by purely in-school surgery.

The central question that this study aims to answer is why students drop out of school, and what can be done about it. Critiques of the 'effective schools' research suggest that including a consideration of such research may assist in identifying causes of student alienation from school which lead to incidences of dropping out. Hence the linkage between 'effective schools' research and the problem of dropouts.

After extensive reviews of the literature concerning school dropouts, it appears that no 'quick fix' exists which will provide an
easy solution to the problem of dropouts. The best that can be hoped for, and what this study aims to provide, is a greater understanding of the effects of school on those who drop out. This might then lead to the adapting of school practices within a framework of expanded criteria of effectiveness and new district/provincial policies - a potentially powerful and effective combination of reforms to reduce the troubling phenomenon of school dropouts.

The local context of the dropout problem.


Analysis of the vast majority of research studies into the dropout problem, none of which has taken place in British Columbia, suggests that students' school experiences are major factors influencing decisions to drop out. This study will therefore focus on the secondary school experiences of those students who fail to graduate from the secondary schools of Surrey. While data will be collected locally, the results of this research will be considered within a context of national and international research into the problem of dropouts.

Organization of the study.

The study consists of three phases of data collection:
1. An examination of available statistical data concerning Surrey's school dropouts in a context of other school districts' dropout rates.

The first phase of data collection involved examination of available statistical data collected by schools for provincial Ministry of Education requirements. These data show withdrawal, non-attendance and non-graduation rates for every school and for each school district in the province of British Columbia. Examination of such data allows comparison between schools and a consideration of Surrey School District within a metropolitan and provincial context. If the findings from this stage of the research indicate that Surrey School District's dropout rates are significantly different to other metropolitan school districts, then data from this study, while useful to Surrey, would have limited utility elsewhere. If, however, Surrey's dropout rates prove similar to rates in other comparable school districts, then the findings from this research might usefully be considered by other school districts.

2. Quantitative data collection comparing the perceptions of dropouts and current students concerning their experiences in Surrey's secondary schools.

During the quantitative phase of data collection, the perspectives of dropouts from Surrey's secondary schools concerning the following criteria were considered:
1. The nature of what constitutes a good or effective school.
2. Dropouts' experiences of schooling and whether the schools they attended were, in their view, good or effective.

These data have been collected by utilising a slightly adapted version of the 'Surrey High School Project' questionnaire, recently developed by the Simon Fraser University Surrey High School Project research team (See Appendix). Specific criteria of school effectiveness were generated within the questionnaire. These include teaching practices, teacher qualities/collegiality, students' feelings of safety, schools' respect for their weakest members (including how schools treated students with academic and other problems), student empowerment and the vocational relevance of schools. Thus, what might be considered as standard criteria of school effectiveness were included but additional criteria were linked to what the dropout literature has considered effective in retaining students.

Quantitative data were analysed prior to the collection of qualitative data. Analysis consisted of comparing the perceptions of dropouts regarding criteria of effectiveness and their school experience with the perceptions of students still in the Surrey secondary school system. Data concerning student perceptions have already been collected in the course of the Surrey High School Project and are available to this study.

3. Qualitative data collection, considering the views of dropouts in greater detail.
The items where clear differences in perceptions were identified formed the focus for qualitative data collection. Data were collected in structured interviews with dropouts regarding the particular qualities and/or experiences of school which alienated them. Such data provided a firmer basis for understanding what dropouts considered to be major factors of their alienation from schools.

**Contribution and limitations of this research.**

Research into dropouts occasionally appears either too parochial or too universal in nature. The parochial approach, which examines a highly localized and individual situation, is problematic because of limited generalizability. The universal approach assumes all incidences of dropping out are identical, and frequently fails to consider local conditions which makes utilization by practitioners or policy-makers unlikely. In this study, data were collected within one school district and were considered in a context of statistical data from other school districts within a single metropolitan area. Because the district appears statistically comparable (in terms of dropout rates) to other school districts within this area, it seems reasonable to suggest that subsequent localized data collection and analysis might usefully be considered by other school districts with similar dropout rates, at least within the same metropolitan area.

This research is also one of the few Canadian studies which builds on both Canadian and American investigations into the problem of secondary school dropouts. By closely linking discussion
of data from this study to the existing literature from both countries, it is intended to avoid narrowness through excessive localization, and to propose practical steps and consideration of policy issues which might effectively reduce dropout rates. As a contribution to existing research, it is hoped that this study blends local, national and international considerations, whether educational, economic, social or political, because all of these influence any resolution of the issue of dropouts.

In terms of linking research into dropouts to the existing research on effective schools, this study traces the development of changing criteria of effectiveness relevant to retention, and offers new criteria, upon which may be built reforms intended to reduce dropout rates. By discussing the concept of school effectiveness, the study identifies what might usefully be rejected, utilized or adapted from the existing research in order to improve retention. The effective schools research has also provided a focus for discussion of the combination of school-based and policy reforms, which is commonly believed crucial to improving retention.

In terms of limitations, the study is bound by its parameters, which are somewhat general, linking consideration of effective schools to the issue of dropouts. These comprise two considerable areas of literature. Examination and discussion of them necessitated some exclusion of issues that have an impact on dropping out. Such issues include gender equity, students with special needs, multiculturalism and the needs of First Nations Learners. This research also focuses on urban schools and their environment, and may have little relevance to rural school districts.
In defending its parameters, I would suggest that the exploratory nature of this research justifies such exclusion. This study represents a 'first base' of a research process that might usefully address the above issues rather than a definitive study which covers them all.
Chapter 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines three areas: the economic, social and political context of the dropout problem; profiles of dropouts and the reasons why they drop out of schools; 'effective schools' research and its relevance to dropout studies.

The economic, social and political context of the dropout problem.

Economic, social and political philosophies influence school purposes, structures and practices. When sufficient numbers of students drop out of public schools, it appears reasonable to believe that the intended purposes, structures and practices of schools are either failing or inappropriate. To understand why students drop out of schools it becomes necessary to consider the fundamental influences controlling the establishment, development and operation of state educational systems. To understand why students drop out, we need to understand what they reject.

Within the literature on schooling there exists a continuum, on one end of which theorists such as Freire (1973) and Illich (1979) argue that education should liberate, but that schools actually oppress. At the other end exists an extreme form of socialization, unsupported by theorists but perhaps exemplified by the educational systems of Nazi Germany, where schools reflected an oppressive ideology, and acted as agents of the state in transmitting such
ideology. Within the more moderate ranges of the debate Oakeshott (1962) argues against schools being the agents of socialization by stating that their role is to 'educate', by which he means that schools should develop critical rather than compliant attitudes in students. Durkheim (1956), in contrast, argues that schools should exist to mould students into the roles needed within society, thereby supporting socialization as a principal function of schools.

A number of authors have stated that schools exist as agents of socialization, whereby governments develop public schools appropriate to the economic needs of capitalist enterprises. By tracing the development of public education and its early twentieth century links to corporate structures, Karrier (1976) outlined the stratification of schools and the socialization of students into specific roles defined by the needs of the corporate industrial state. Supporting Karrier's view, Anyon (1981) also considers that such stratification exists within the educational system of today:

Class conflict in education is not dormant, nor a relic of an earlier era .... The hidden curriculum of corporate America is anything but hidden. (p 39)

Anyon believes that public schools reproduce gender, class, race and ethnicity stratifications that organize our society. The socialization process, she claims, leads to a differentiated, class-oriented curriculum in schools which 'sifts and sorts' students into occupational and class categories. This argument suggests that historically, public schools were created to provide adequate
supplies of appropriately skilled labour, and to ensure that people knew and accepted their economic and social station as a basis for economically and socially stratifying society. When industrial employers required minimum literacy skills from their workers, public schools were created to supply the demand.

Such views of 'sifting and sorting' may be traced back to Plato, who proposed different forms of schooling for different occupational and societal roles, a perspective echoed by Durkheim (1956), who believed that schools should prepare children for "the special milieu for which they are specifically destined". Plato and Durkheim's views supported such socialization, while Anyon and Karrier condemned it.

Le Compte (1987) described post-reformation secularization as the forerunner to economically-oriented influences over public education, as do Apple & Franklin (1979), who discuss the influence of industrialization on public school curriculum developers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

In developing the basic social role the school curriculum should play, the critical social and economic issues that concerned these formative theorists of the (school curriculum) field was that of industrialization and its accompanying division of labour. (p 68)
Such division required different levels of education as preparation for different skill levels and for levels of ownership, management and labour - an 'industrial model' of schooling which has been widely discussed. This describes schools as factories, students as raw materials, and methods of production similar in concept to factory production. Proponents of socialization, or Functionalists (perhaps best exemplified by Durkheim), who believe that schools should serve the needs of industrial society, see few problems with industrial models of schooling. The Functionalist claims to be neutral, non-ideological and non-political have been discussed by Feinberg & Soltis (1985), who state the Functionalist case and the opposing Marxist claim that Functionalism preserves and maintains specific class dominance. In contrast to the Functionalist perspective, Marxist and neo-Marxist authors claim that the mass-produced working-class output of state schools is intended to create the compliant fodder of industrial production. Althusser (1971), for instance, claims that schools are "ideological state apparatuses", reproducing social relations of production and inculcating class attitudes. Illich (1971) considers that schools function to 'domesticate' the population, while Freire (1973) states that schools act as agents of oppression. Le Compte (1987) traces the design of state education by an elite to control the social and moral behaviour of the middle and lower classes. She suggests that the elites of industrializing societies adopted existing educational 'control' to explicitly stress the virtues of hard work, cleanliness, thrift and punctuality - virtues of compliance and subservience.
deemed necessary for the effective operation of industry and commerce.

While supporting a Marxist analysis of schools being the agents of a dominant class, Carnoy (1974) outlines popular perceptions of schooling which view education in schools as developing a range of skills in preparation for a world of work. Education thus becomes a key to higher incomes and status. Carnoy warns that because access to education is open to all, implicit assumptions concerning equality of both access and outcomes are frequently made. Such assumptions include beliefs that all students can succeed within educational systems. Successful educational outcomes are seen by many to lead to lucrative and successful career paths, and the key to successful educational outcomes is testing. But an alternative Marxist perspective suggests that such equality of outcomes is a myth, and that testing merely provides a pseudo-scientific method of economic and social categorization.

Karrier (1976) outlined the origins and development of testing, and its links with corporate America. He provides evidence that the early developers of tests like Terman, Thorndike and Goddard were sponsored by the foundations of large corporations which then persuaded educational systems to stream and to test, thereby categorizing labour and rationalizing a social class system:

Terman's tests were based on an occupational hierarchy which was in fact the social class system of the corporate liberal state which was then emerging. The many varied tests, all the way
from IQ to personality and scholastic achievement, periodically brought up to date, would serve a vital part in rationalizing the social class system. The tests also created the illusion of objectivity, which on the one hand served the needs of the 'professional' educators to be 'scientific', and on the other side served the needs of the system for a myth which would convince the lower classes that their station in life was part of the natural order of things. (p 136)

In some ways the discussion appears dated. Marxist analysis of schooling reverberates with ideological terminology better suited to a previous cold-war era. Thus it appears easier to reject - an outdated philosophy, increasingly irrelevant in a world rapidly rejecting Communism/Marxism. But rejecting such arguments because of their terminology ignores substantial data and analysis. Rejection also implicitly supports a functionalist stance, which while claiming to be objective, scientific and non-ideological, serves to maintain the status quo. Analysis of this area of literature perhaps points to the conclusion that no neutrality exists. Analysis of literature within the debate on schools' roles requires careful scrutiny for potential biases within what is explicitly stated or omitted in the literature, and an awareness of one's own ideological stance. My sympathies lie close to the Marxist perspective.
That the discussion appears dated is worth further comment. Current debate appears to have lost the vitality offered by a wide continuum of perspectives, where differing and frequently oppositional philosophies stimulated analysis of the purposes of public schools. Terms such as 'liberation' and 'domestication', the extremes of the continuum, appear forgotten, and now analysis focuses on a narrower range of views towards the centre of the continuum, where degrees of 'education' and 'socialization' are debated like ingredients in a recipe for a cake that we all know to be acceptable but unexciting. Thus a tamer debate ensues between liberals, conservatives and social democrats, all of whom appear to uphold current societal structures because they never challenge them and only offer alternatives within a narrow middle range of options.

The importance of the historical and ideological debate to the dropout problem concerns the control and purposes of public schooling. If schools are intended to socialize, stratify and control based on an 'industrial model' of production, are such functions and controls influencing incidences of dropping out? Do some of the consumers of education (students) see little purpose in current modes of schooling and few rewards (notably employment in the industrial system) from continued participation in schools? Are schools still promulgating an increasingly irrelevant social stratification which some students reject by dropping out? Is the 'industrial model' of schooling out of date in what is frequently termed a post-industrial society, and dropouts symptomatic of the system's obsolescence? Such questions are prompted by a
consideration of the economic, social and political influences on
public educational systems.

More recent debate concerning economic influences places
discussion of education within an economic context that focuses on
developing a role for education which contributes to the national
economic interest. This differs little in concept from earlier views
linking education to what is deemed to be in society's best economic
interests, save for the type of economy, which is now described as
post-industrial and technologically advanced. Within this context,
the role of education is to provide appropriate labour to ensure
optimum production of the national economy, where everybody not
only gains employment but also sufficient education to be versatile
and changeable, so that individuals can adapt to 'high-tech' changes,
and theoretically maintain international competitiveness. Futrell
(1989) captures the essence of the context by describing the
language of current debate:

We are told with increasing regularity that
knowledge is a commodity; education an industry;
learning an asset; research an enterprise. Talk of
intellectual capital is rife. A stubborn consensus
holds that the business of education is business.
(p12)

Such a 'consensus' is not new, but an increasingly
sophisticated argument has developed internationally over the last
decade, which links education to a stated concept of 'the common
good' which is defined in terms of economic prosperity. Within this argument, educational systems must contribute to the common good by providing 'appropriate' labour. Such a concept is frequently found in a number of documents containing several western governments' proposals justifying changes to education:

It is vital to Britain's recovery and standard of living that the performance of manufacturing and industry is improved and that the whole range of government policies, including education, contribute as much as possible to improving industrial performance and thereby increasing national wealth.

(Finn, 1987, p 106)

The Prime Minister (of Australia) recognized that education alone could not solve labour market problems, but maintained that education had to be an integral part of his government's policy for economic growth. He argued that Australia needed a workforce that had the broad base of skills that were necessary to cope with and adapt to a rapidly changing world. (Rizvi et al, 1987, p 221)

(Canadian) Federal interest in education extends well beyond the issues of language and religion into
the realm of national economic development, for which a well-trained workforce is critical. (Lawton, 1987, p 17)

The economically-oriented education system is strongly favoured by business interests. Basically little has changed (in corporate perceptions) from the ideas described by Anyon (1981) save that now corporate interests more openly suggest that their and society's interests are inextricably linked. Individuals need employment and high incomes, and corporations need skilled labour. 'Better' and more appropriately educated people are what industry now claims to need, and it's the education system's job to provide them:

Canadian businesses, increasingly running into production difficulties because they can't find enough skilled employees, can expect the problem to get worse in the 1990's, unless education and training policies change. (Canadian Labour Market & Productivity Centre, Quarterly Review, January, 1989, reported in 'Vancouver Sun', 25 January.)

At the same time that corporate and government interests express concern with international competitiveness and supplies of skilled and adaptable labour, they view educational systems as not only failing to provide the necessary supplies of such labour, but also having low productivity demonstrated by high dropout rates.
Business and governments have clearly linked the issues of inadequate supplies of skilled labour with high numbers of school dropouts, and believe they have the right to propose reforms which are generally vocationally-oriented. While such reforms appear more sophisticated than the stratification described by Durkheim, they nevertheless continue a refined concept of socialization. Such an economically-oriented view contrasts with a more idealistic and wider ranging perspective outlined by Natriello et al (1986), which not only links the shortages of skilled labour to high levels of school dropouts, but considers the issue in a wider social context:

The individual and collective disadvantages that accrue when a significant portion of students fail to complete their high school education are impossible to ignore, particularly in a society which is committed to equality of opportunity, and to the full participation of all citizens in political, economic and social affairs. (p 430)

Schools reflect identifiable aspects of economic, social and political influences, particularly governmental. But what if such influences become inappropriate to different societal groups? Le Compte (1987) believes that while society has changed dramatically, schools have not. Le Compte believes that schools are losing their position of centrality in the lives of a number of students, for whom work has greater relevance, and who therefore drop out of school. And what happens if there occurs some
dichotomy between schools and society, where schools reflect an industrial model of learning and structure while society has progressed into a post-industrial model of production and social order? When the industrial model functioned well, supplies of early school leavers were absorbed into the unskilled labour market, but if such labour markets are in decline, then young school leavers are more likely to be unemployed, or working in permanently low-wage occupations.

Howe (1988) discussed the decline of traditional industries and how such decline affects young people in the U.S.A.:

In 1986, only 36% of male high school graduates found work in stable, high wage occupations, compared to 57% in 1968. Employment in manufacturing for males under 20 fell from 44% in 1973 to 22% in 1986. Between 1979 and 1985, the U.S.A. lost 1.7 million manufacturing jobs. Non-college youth have seen big increases in part-time work at low wages with no benefits in service sector jobs paying half the real wages of manufacturing.

(p 7)

Sheraden (1986) found that between 1961 and 1982, the proportion of unemployed 16 to 19-year-olds increased substantially in America, and that between 1982 and 1986, while 9.1 million new jobs were created, teenagers (who
comprised 18% of the unemployed) received less than 0.5% of the new jobs. He stated that:

Young people are becoming more economically irrelevant. Schools cannot indefinitely occupy and control an ever-larger segment of the youth population that's not needed in traditional labour markets. It is inaccurate to view these young people as dropouts - they never really dropped in. Schools have served primarily to occupy and control a large youth population that is not needed in the labour market. Because the schools have begun to fulfil this function less effectively in recent years, the nation has witnessed a cluster of negative trends on social indicators including dropout rates. (p24)

The role of school within a context of changing economic, political and social times is important to analysis of the dropout problem. Inappropriate roles or functions may alienate categories of consumers - students, and the 'consumers' of students - industry. Pacquette & Allison (1988) attempted to link changes in labour markets, provision of schooling and student alienation within a Canadian context:

If society as a whole refuses to recognize and deal with the crisis in access to meaningful and
reasonably secure employment which the microchip and the global labour market have brought, can we avoid the moral question posed by a system of compulsory education which constrains large numbers of alienated youth to mark time in an institutional setting that, for the most part, demeans rather than helps them? Might it not make more social, economic and moral sense to make attendance at secondary school entirely optional and strive to create more appropriate educational institutions? (p42)

The importance of Pacquette & Allison's comment to the question of school dropouts is the clear connection drawn between economic, social and political changes in society and the dropout issue. Considerations for developing the schools of the future are based upon analysis of historical development, economic, social and political, and whether the current structures and practices of schools are appropriate for the future. Schools, they clearly say, do not exist in a vacuum but must be considered in context, and an appropriate analysis developed. Fernandez & Shu (1988) suggest that corporate America has already made its analysis:

Recognizing that the nation cannot absorb the growing numbers of unemployed and unemployable youth that exit the public school system without basic literacy and numeracy skills, corporate
America has become worried about the country's future competitiveness in an increasingly inter-depandant world economy. Future prosperity depends in large measure on the nation's ability to educate all its students, especially minorities, so that they can be productive, contributing members to our social and economic order. (p 363)

This analysis reflects some progression in thinking by corporate interests. The narrow self-interest of capitalist enterprise has broadened to include at least a mention of society's social order, and a suggestion of equity by the inclusion of minority groups. However, it can also be argued that corporate America has belatedly realized that its own profitability might be increasingly linked to the employability and productivity of greater numbers of those who currently fail to complete school.

Within the economic, social and political context of the problem, the cost of school dropouts to society has been considered. Rumberger (1987) quoted Levin's study:

Levin identified seven social consequences of inadequate education, which he defined as the failure to complete high school:

1. Foregone national income.
2. Foregone tax revenues for the support of government services.
3. Increased demand for social services.
5. Reduced political participation.
6. Reduced intergenerational mobility.
7. Poorer levels of health.

Levin estimated that the foregone income from a cohort of males 25 to 34 in 1969 who failed to finish high school amounted to $237 billion, resulting in foregone government revenues of $71 billion. Based on the research literature and cost data available at that time, he estimated the social costs of providing social services and fighting crime associated with dropping out at $6 billion per year. (p 114-115)

Strother (1986) supports Levin's argument, stating that 60% of all American prison inmates are former high school dropouts. Bachman et al (1972) provide evidence that delinquency rates for school dropouts are higher than for those students who stay in schools.

These studies usually conclude that increased investment to reduce dropouts promotes society's self-interest, a quite different perspective to the conservative right's reluctance to invest public funds in the 'undeserving poor'.

Reforms to reduce dropout rates will most likely occur when economic pressures such as low productivity and reduced international competitiveness cause demand for change to educational systems. Sufficient evidence exists within the literature to suggest that the 'temperature gauge' of economic well-
being will be monitored and measured by corporate enterprises. When the gauge rises too high (inadequate supplies of skilled labour, and low productivity affecting profits) then reform will occur. This view is supported by Karrier's (1976) analysis of social reform prompted by corporate interests which traces the alignment of corporate America, government and social scientists in 'a dubious if not unholy alliance' which Karrier perceived to be firmly established by the end of the second world war:

The corporate liberal state emerged from the war stronger than ever. Progressive liberal reform did not come to an end with the war but rather became institutionalized. Henceforth, most social changes would be institutionally controlled and the interests of government, corporate wealth and labor more securely managed. (p130)

An alternative 'temperature gauge' considered in the literature identifies social unrest, notably in big cities and among disadvantaged populations. Such unrest might occur because drop out rates are highest in urban areas, identified by Hammack (1986), among ethnic minorities (discussed by Williams (1987) and Valverde (1987)), and in lower socio-economic groups (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986, Ekstrom et al., 1986). Causes for such concentration have been ascribed to factors like schools in such areas reflecting middle-class values inappropriate to their working-class clients, as claimed by Fine (1986), Le Compte (1987) and Larsen & Shertzer
(1987), or working class/ethnic students simply seeing schools as irrelevant to their futures. Alexander, Natriello and Pallas (1985) state:

A quite different question, and one not often posed, is whether schooling itself serves a useful purpose. (p410)

In the perceptions of many dropouts in inner city areas, the answer is clearly no. At some stage in their schooling, marginalized youth see little future economic benefit from participation in schools, and therefore leave them. Then the process of 'sifting and sorting' has gone beyond its intended parameters of defining economic units of labour and social class to create a sub-class of unemployed and potentially unemployable people, potentially threatening to the social fabric of society.

The temperature gauge of social unrest is initially measured by the climbing numbers of welfare and unemployment recipients, increased crime and policing, and potentially by larger-scale revolt, requiring accommodation or repression. Cost-benefit analyses of the dropout problem suggest that increased investment in drop out prevention is highly cost-effective in social terms, reducing social expenditure and limiting the expensive potential of social unrest.

Profile of dropouts and the reasons why they drop out of schools.
Who are the dropouts?

Wideen and Pye (1989), in a review of the literature on dropouts, described a profile of a typical American school dropout as being from a low socio-economic ethnic minority group. While Canadian research does not show ethnicity as a major factor in dropping out of school, the literature suggests that most Canadian dropouts are also from lower socio-economic groups.

Why students drop out, for some researchers, appears to be fundamentally linked to the social or economic environment in which dropouts live, or the actions or personalities of dropouts. Kaplan & Luck (1977) discuss the 'shabby and overcrowded homes' in which they claimed dropouts live, and the 'behavioral problems' that potential dropouts demonstrate in school. Similarly, a number of early studies examining the dropout problem analyzed the person who dropped out in order to propose remedial actions designed to enable the potential dropout to function within existing systems of schooling. Within this style of research, students who were failing courses were offered remedial programs to facilitate their progress in school. Thus the individual student was clearly identified as the cause of the problem, rather than the institution s/he attended.

Such approaches subsequently appeared somewhat patronizing or simplistic, and were criticized within the literature as 'blaming the victim' (Le Compte, 1987) rather than analyzing the system in which some students failed. An approach to the problem which considered both students' problems and educational systems'
failings was subsequently developed, and this progression in research focus has been described by Hargroves (1987):

Much of the early research literature on dropouts was concerned with characteristics or qualities of dropouts which caused them to fail in school. More recently, research and prevention efforts have shifted their focus from the reasons that students drop out to how schools and the community push youth out and what they can do about it. (p 309)

Hahn (1987) supported Hargrove's views, and widened the debate on causes of dropping out to include within a consideration of institutional aspects influencing the dropout problem, the governing policies which direct the practices of schools:

Our review of the dropout phenomenon showed it to be multi-faceted. It starts early, has many causes and grows instrumentally worse with each successive year. The problem has both supply-side (students with difficulties) and institutional aspects (schools, school boards, government policies). (p 256)

In a recent paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (April, 1990), the Los Angeles County Office of Education found that the characteristics of at-risk students who
enrolled in a special summer program were consistent with those described in the literature. Such characteristics included school-related, intrapersonal and family-related factors.

Finn (1989) describes two models which he believes encompasses the causes of dropping out. In the first, the 'frustration-self-esteem model', Finn outlines:

....the school's failure to provide an adequate instructional and/or emotional environment. An impaired self-view is seen as resulting from frustration or embarrassment. Self-view is operationalized either as general self-esteem, self-concept, academic self-concept or "personalized agency beliefs". (p 119)

In the second, the 'Participation-Identification Model', Finn argues that successful students develop a sense of identification with the school they attend. Such identification is internalized, and includes a general feeling of what he terms 'belongingness', where school is important and where a student's place in the school environment is assured. Unsuccessful students, on the other hand, fail to experience such bonding, and feel considerable insecurity within the school environment, thereby increasing the probability of dropping out. Finn's argument is supported by Holland & Andre (1987), whom Finn quotes, in their review of research on student participation in extra-curricula activities:
We believe that participation (in extra-curricula activities) has effects because of what happens as a result of participation. Participation may lead adolescents to acquire new skills (organizational, planning, time-management etc.) to develop or strengthen particular attitudes (discipline, motivation) or to receive social rewards that influence personality characteristics. (p 128)

Finn appears to stress the importance of participation of students in the community of school, not merely in academic tasks in classrooms. Such analysis extends the debate on dropouts from narrow concentration on teacher-student links, or academic activities, to organizational and structural considerations within schools as communities. Those students who can find their niche within such communities will be more successful than those who believe that they are excluded from participation in the community. Fine (1986) similarly extends the discussion by concentrating on systemic causes of dropping out - structural and social:

Looking for individual explanations is clearly inadequate and blames the victim. Looking for structural and social explanations of high dropout rates is obviously more fruitful. (p 407)

Fine argues the inadequacy of attempting to solve the problem of dropouts by just looking at the dropouts and ignoring the
educational system within which they have been classified as failures. While most current research accepts the concept of analysis of both dropouts and school systems, Fine goes further, challenging the boundaries of current research by clearly linking the problem to the wider function of schools as described by Anyon and Karrier, and analyzing the problem within an economic and social context:

But what would happen, in our present-day economy, to these young men and women (who drop out) if they all graduated? Would their employment and/or poverty prospects improve individually as well as collectively? (p 407)

Fine suggests not, and is supported by Mann (1986):

Saying that schools push out some young people is a harsh statement of a painful responsibility. When schools give everyone a diploma, employers are inconvenienced and will force schools to discriminate among, for example, young people who do and do not have basic academic skills. (p 309)

In the perceptions of Fine and Mann, therefore, a consideration of the dropout problem which only examines causes of dropping out linked to student or school failures, is inadequate because it omits
the wider political issues which they believe are inextricably linked to the problem.

In summary, one group of researchers suggests individual failure by students in school who subsequently drop out, and promotes individual remediation, while a second group discusses the failure of the system but barely intimates that political change is required. A third group epitomised by Fine and Mann suggests the inevitability of the occurrence of dropouts because society has accepted the 'sifting and sorting' processes of socialization demanded by employers. This group's analysis suggests that societal rather than institutional change is required. The three groups represent progressions in analysis of the dropout problem. The first group of researchers described within the literature now appears naive and patronising, and offered what now seems a clearly inadequate response to the dropout problem. The second offers a better basis of understanding because its perspective widens comprehension of institutional factors which influence individual decisions to drop out. The third group extends consideration of institutional influences to include societal pressures which control and delineate institutional influences.

Each progression described in the literature necessitates a reorientation in thinking about the problem but does not invalidate all aspects of previous research. Analysis of institutional factors, for instance, does not mean that all individual behavioural problems will disappear with institutional change, or that socio-economic factors will become irrelevant. An understanding of the political framework which controls schooling hardly suggests that political
change will remove all aspects of schools which alienate students, notably teachers and teaching practices. But understanding the progressions allows analysis at micro and macro levels, and facilitates the development of solutions which encompass the findings of each group.

The relationship between dropouts and schools.

While these areas represent much of the range of profiles and causes of dropping out described in the literature, important research has been conducted in examining the relationship between schools and their students who leave before graduation as a basis for explaining causes of dropping out.

This body of research clearly states that students leave schools because they are fundamentally dissatisfied with them:

Dropouts' complaints about school systems are justified and their reasons for leaving are valid. Many dropouts spend years in school feeling bored. Many also spend years in school feeling neglected and/or misunderstood. (Karp, 1988, p 15)

Karp outlined major, secondary and minor factors within schools that influence students who drop out. She describes three major factors. The first, academic frustration, included dropouts' perceptions that teachers did not care about slower learners, and that schools were geared to higher achievers. The second major
factor concerned the irrelevancy of school to 'real life' connections, notably jobs. The majority of teachers were, in the views of dropouts, generally unable to connect curriculum to students' futures although a small minority of teachers were able to make any subject interesting. Karp's third major factor influencing dropouts was the pull of the work environment, where the immediate rewards of work were sharply contrasted with the frustration of school, described by Karp in terms of "the workplace invites, the schoolroom disinvites".

Many researchers have identified school-related factors as the major reasons why students leave prematurely. Fine (1985) found that 33% of dropouts simply stated that 'school's not for me', and that 21% 'did not get on with teachers'. Barber & McClellan (1987) state that the dominant reason for dropping out of school, in the views of dropouts, was dissatisfaction with school.

In their summary of research on the dropout problem, Wehlage et al (1987) criticised what they believed to be many researchers' preoccupations with student characteristics which deflected attention from what they perceived to be the major factor causing dropouts - student alienation from school:

Standard labels for student characteristics do not capture the nature of the interaction between at-risk students and the school. It is this interaction between student and school that plays a crucial role in an individual's decision to drop out.

(p 73)
The results of the 1987 study built on the findings of a study conducted by Wehlage and Rutter (1986), when, using data from the 'High School and Beyond' study, they found that school factors contribute significantly to the reasons why some students drop out:

In summary, the picture of high school that emerges for most students is a place where teachers are not particularly interested in students, and the discipline system is perceived as neither effective nor fair. Dropouts are not satisfied with their schooling. For the dropout, school is a place where one gets into trouble; suspension, probation and cutting classes are much more frequent for this group. (p 385)

Wehlage and Rutter captured the sense of minimal interest in and alienation from school expressed by many dropouts. Farrell (1990) described passive resistance, most commonly dozing, by students who subsequently dropped out. Farrell suggests that the apparent passivity shown by such students masks their feelings of being subjected to considerable pressure in school:

Pressure and boredom go hand in hand. If a student, from past experience, believes that her output will be less than successful, she might well prefer to invest her energy outside of school and deal with
Ekstrom et al (1986) described dropouts as students who felt alienated from school life, believing themselves to be less popular and less important within the institution of school than students who were succeeding. This suggests problems within a community of school, an aspect infrequently discussed, though occasionally noted, within the literature:

Little attention has been given to influences of schools themselves - their organisation, leadership, teachers, on students' decisions to drop out. (Rumberger, 1987, p 110)

The school environment exists as a place where students who subsequently drop out feel considerable unease. To date, the reasons for such unease have been described within the literature in terms of the interactions between teachers and students, or by the more general use of phrases like 'a fundamental mismatch between students and school' (Pawlovich, 1986). While both descriptions find strong support within the literature, they appear limited. School communities are complex social organisations, with considerably more levels of interaction than those between teachers and students. One in particular appears noticeably lacking in the
literature on dropouts - the influence of peers within schools. One of the few who discussed peer influence in schools was Farrell (1990). He described a 'competing subculture' in schools, which rejects the culture promulgated by teachers. Dropouts embraced such a subculture because it provides what schools, in their view, fail to provide:

Can a competing subculture survive as part of a larger culture while rejecting some of the larger culture's values? More importantly, can the individuals in it survive? I believe that many of those individuals would not survive without it. The peer culture described here helps create what psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971) described as 'holding environments'. The members of the culture need caring environments that will help build up their self-esteem, social skills and self-understanding.

(p 59)

The language used in the literature surrounding the issue of peer influence among students requires comment. The most commonly used term to describe peer influences is 'peer pressure', which suggests negative influences - that pressure is exerted to influence an otherwise reluctant (to leave school) individual. Farrell avoids this terminology, but describes a 'competing subculture', which suggests inferiority to the dominant culture,
perhaps intimating that the inferior culture is deviant and should be eradicated. Farrell's exploration of peer cultures is generally neutral, recognizing the potential of both positive and negative effects on students who drop out of school. But by utilizing language which suggests negative influences, researchers align themselves with the dominant culture, which consciously or subconsciously seeks to eradicate or co-opt subcultures. As the dominant culture must take responsibility for having developed the dropout problem, such alignment is potentially counter-productive in terms of finding solutions. A more useful approach is that taken by Farrell. By (for the most part) maintaining neutrality of language he sets the stage for analysis of issues based on data rather than analysis covertly influenced by values. Such analysis allows the potential inclusion of alternative perspectives and respect for alternative cultures held by dropouts which to date have been largely ignored.

The consideration of peer influences, boredom and teacher-student alienation represent areas of concern within what the literature describes as 'school climate'. Widespread agreement exists that school climates are in dire need of their own 'greenhouse effect' to 'warm' and improve school atmosphere. For some, simplistic remedies suffice. Sheraden (1986), for instance, considers a return to a form of national service will produce the appropriate climate, a view that appears at best naive, and at worst oppressive. Within the effective schools literature, many described consistency of school rules and the fairness of their implementation as the basis for improved climate. Others have considered an
An expanded view of school effectiveness must be taken if we are to serve at-risk students well. (p 41) ... Yet the recommendations made here may sound curiously out of step; respect and relevance are more consonant with the innovations of the 1970's than those of the 1990's. The current policy environment projects a get-tough orientation, reflected in embodiments of high expectations. Such policies do introduce students to more academic content, but they risk driving out the marginal student. Firestone, 1989 (p 45).

Firestone's first recommendation concerns school climate, stressing the need for a positive relationship between teachers and students prior to the establishment of a curriculum that students can understand to be linked to future employment.

The need to improve school climates is supported by Wehlage, Rutter & Turnbaugh (1987), who believe the development of a positive social bond between teachers and students forms a vital part of improving the atmosphere of school as a pre-requisite to increased retention:

Schools are not likely to help at-risk students unless they can change fundamental school-student
interactions. For educators, the reform agenda requires a major effort to engage those who have become alienated. Reversing alienation starts with the establishment of a positive social bond between teachers and students. (p 71)

Consideration of school climate within the literature provides a view of the political swings which influence educational attitudes and policies. Climate occurs, according to conservatives, as a product of 'law and order' regimes in schools. The more 'law', the more 'order'. The swinging baseball bat of principal Joe Clark epitomised by Hollywood is perhaps an unconventional yet representative view of such conservative values. A problem school and its problem students can be turned around by tough but fair policies, carried through by a determined but fair militaristic commander who makes the school safe by literally locking the gates and driving away undesirable elements. Joe Clark's key educational concepts are leadership and consistency, while his baseball bat provides the symbolism of the folk hero, defending his realm in a way that Hollywood can understand and portray:

When a get-tough orientation is over-emphasized, safety is too often purchased at the price of personal freedom and self-respect. At a time when Patterson principal Joe Clark can gain national publicity for maintaining order with a baseball bat and a bullhorn it is important to recognize that
there is more than one way to create a safe school climate. (Firestone, 1989, p 42)

Hamby (1989) endorses this more liberal view of developing appropriate school climates:

We must make school a pleasant, relevant place that students find enhancing, and we must make school a place with which all students can identify and to which they can become committed. (p 23)

Such language appears woolly to conservative thinkers, who are less concerned with the 'pleasantness' of schools than with their conformity to recognizably ordered and structured environments, which conservatives believe to be the only institutions in which real learning takes place. If the principal focus of liberal thinking were to merely establish a pleasant social centre rather than a productive educational environment, then the conservatives would have some justification for their doubts. What conservatives consistently fail to recognize is that improvement of school climate becomes a necessary pre-requisite to increased educational participation by students which then leads to improved educational outcomes. In their recent book, 'Reducing The Risk', Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko and Fernandez (1989) stated the liberal argument but clearly linked school climate with improved educational outcomes:
The key finding from our research is that effective schools provide at-risk students with a community of support. School as a community of support is a broad concept in which school membership and educational engagement are central. School membership is concerned with a sense of belonging and social bonding to the school and its members. Educational engagement is defined as involvement in school activities but especially traditional classroom and academic work. (p 223)

Such a view explicitly develops the liberal argument in a way that recognizes conservative concerns. It also typifies a progression that blends the 'excellence' and 'equity' debate, by suggesting that promotion of concepts of equity can also promote excellence, and that the two need not be mutually exclusive. This progression will be further explored in the third section of this chapter.

**Effective schools research and its relevance to dropout studies.**

Few areas of research can match the controversy surrounding Effective Schools Research in the 1980's. It has been used as the theoretical basis for much attempted school improvement (Fullan, 1985), considered as a reactionary 'back to the basics' movement (Purkey & Smith, 1983), claimed to be the basis of reforms leading to significant improvements in students' academic
performances (Edmonds, 1979) and ridiculed as 'a bandwagon in search of a tune' (Sirotnik, 1985).

Within the literature, Effective Schools Research has been linked to the issue of dropouts because of the claims that many reforms which evolved from the research have influenced dropout rates. Such reforms are part of what McDill, Natriello and Pallas (1986) describe as an attempt 'to counteract a perceived deterioration in academic standards by (American) legislators who believed that such deterioration stemmed from earlier reforms promoting equity in schools. During the early 1980's, 'Effective School' reforms, intended to improve academic performance as measured by standardized tests, increasingly stressed 'excellence' and demoted 'equity' to a metaphorical backburner. Futtrell (1989) described 'waves of reform' in the 80's, initially liberal (stressing equity), then conservative (stressing excellence), and more recently blending aspects of both in attempts to avoid narrow dogmatic solutions to complex issues. The debate concerning 'effective schools' is therefore of considerable importance in terms of understanding the dropout issue. It has influenced philosophical, political and practical approaches to reforming schools. Some such reforms have resulted in unforeseen but unfortunate consequences, namely increasing incidences of dropping out. The history and influence of Effective Schools Research is therefore considered below.

Research into effective schools originated as a reaction to a report called "Equality of Educational Opportunity" (1966), more
commonly known as the "Coleman Report". The report was described by Bossert, in chapter 17 of Boyan (1988):

The EEOR became associated with the phrase "schools don't make a difference" because of its finding that school characteristics account for an extremely small proportion in student achievement once the social composition of students is statistically controlled. (p 342)

Subsequent effective schools research, aiming to counter Coleman's findings by proving that schools can make a difference, is often associated with the work of Edmonds (1979) who concluded that effective schools share certain essential characteristics. These included an emphasis on curriculum and instruction, clear goals and high expectations, an orderly and secure environment, collegiality on instructional matters and a system for monitoring performance and achievement. By emphasizing or developing such characteristics, Edmonds claimed that schools could improve student learning and raise levels of achievement demonstrated in standardized tests. Edmond's work was closely linked to issues of equity in that he aimed to improve the educational standards of the urban poor to levels achieved by middle-class students. The five essential characteristics of effectiveness identified by Edmonds were largely applied to school improvements in urban elementary schools.
Looking back over the development of Effective Schools Research, Edmond's work appears much like the model T Ford of the genre. It is basic and familiar, the forerunner of a proliferation of models. Educators have reacted to this proliferation as people do to cars: some are 'hooked' by new directions or impressive statistics; others ridicule perceived excesses and lack of utility.

The proliferation was documented by Purkey and Smith (1983), who outlined four expanded categories of research: Outlier Studies (statistically contrasting highly effective and ineffective schools), Case Studies, Program Evaluation and Other Studies. Most of these categories, though differing in methodology, reflect remarkable consistency in identifying a number of factors which positively influence student learning. Purkey and Smith, while suggesting that most of the categories share methodological problems which throw doubt on the generalizability of findings, strongly argue that:

Flaws in the original research should not discredit the notion of discovering effective school characteristics - seeds for school improvement that can be sown elsewhere. However, the opposite approach - blanket acceptance - would be dangerous. (p 439)

Expanded categories of Effective Schools Research were developed and described by a number of authors, including Rutter (1979), Farrar, Neufeld & Miles (1984), Fullan (1985) and Pink (1987). Such expanded categories developed a more sophisticated
approach of both definition and utilization of the research. A perspective common to several proponents described the concept of 'school culture'. This linked content (organizational structures, roles, norms, values and instructional techniques) with process (including the nature and style of political/social relationships within the school.) Schools, it was argued, were considered to be idiosyncratic organisations, each in a different context of practices, organization and community. Individual differences between schools necessitated selective utilisation of criteria of effectiveness. For some, notably Farrar, Neufeld & Miles (1984) the criteria of effectiveness included a consideration of retention rates: the more effective a school, the more students it retained. Their paper was one of many which proposed new criteria of effectiveness, ranging from ethnic pluralism to student empowerment. Many such criteria explicitly stated or implied that increased retention should be a category of school effectiveness. Thus, Edmond's initial base of five criteria of effectiveness was enlarged, adapted or replaced by criteria reflecting a wide range of philosophies concerning what constituted an effective school in general, and an effective high school in particular. One of the more interesting debates concerns the distinction between 'effective' and 'good' schools. Glickman (1987) and Lightfoot (1983) have discussed the concept of the 'goodness' of schools. By this they refer to a more holistic view of a good school, rather than what they consider to be the mechanical efficiency of an effective one. If schools are effective, but not good, Lightfoot and Glickman suggest that learning may occur but would not be enjoyed, more of a 'brave new world' for those who can
survive in it, rather than a safe and stimulating exploration of learning and knowledge for all students, including those most at risk of dropping out:

When we take an excursion into learning, we can choose to drive straight to our objective, keeping our eyes straight ahead, exerting steady pressure on the pedal, and stopping only when necessary. Or we can choose to make the drive part of the excursion, by slowing down to admire the scenery, visiting historical and cultural sights, and dining in restaurants off the beaten track. If we follow the second plan, we may not arrive at our objective as quickly - but we will have learned more and spent the time more pleasantly.

(Glickman, 1987, p 624)

While Glickman espouses a preferred and arguably pleasant philosophy of education, he fails to challenge the fundamental assumption of the proponents of effective schools research - that achievement can and should be measured in standardized test scores. He may prefer the meandering byways of learning, but his argument appears unlikely to sway more conservative forces who believe that schools have meandered enough and should be more narrowly focused in directions that can be made accountable by the use of standardized tests to measure achievement. But there exists ample evidence that such standardized tests are poor measures of
achievement, and in fact measure only narrow ranges of skills. Such evidence has been documented in the work of Stedman (1985), who provided a classic, almost farcical example of a narrowly focused, supposedly effective school and its reward systems:

The principal administered frequent practice tests modeled after the citywide competency tests, and continually raised the passing score. Students were formally tested four times a year, twice each fall and spring, with the city test and a standardized test battery. Popsicles were offered as a reward to all those who could pass the annual city test. (p 309)

Stedman, Glickman and Lightfoot imply that effectiveness has its price, notably increased risk of dropping out, because implementing reforms based on criteria of effectiveness causes alienation among some students who subsequently drop out.

When criteria of effectiveness include the raising of academic standards required for graduation, and when such standards are measured by test scores, the views of Stedman, Lightfoot and Glickman are strongly supported in the literature. McDill, Natriello & Pallas (1986) in a review of 1980's school reforms, state that increasing academic standards and narrowing curriculum will exacerbate the dropout problem:
Implementation of the recommended core curriculum will limit the instructional experiences of students to traditional academic subjects, severely restrict the number of dimensions of ability deemed legitimate within the school, and curtail student choice in constructing a program of study. Students with limited ability in traditional academic subjects may have to face repeated failure with little opportunity to engage in the broad range of activities valued in adult society that might afford them some success and encourage them to redouble their efforts to master academic content. (p 151)

In a follow-up to their '86 paper, the same authors stated in 1987:

Higher achievement standards are likely to present additional problems for potential dropouts, particularly when standards are raised without providing students with additional help. (p 106)

Fernandez & Shu (1988) supported this argument, suggesting that reports and subsequent reforms which increase academic requirements to promote 'excellence' simply ignored 'at risk' students:
Glaringly absent from these reports, however, is any real concern for the deletrious, even if unintended, impact that many of the initiatives may have on 'at-risk' students. (p 364)

Such students will, when faced with such increased requirements, be even more likely to drop out of school, a view shared by Strother (1986):

The 'excellence movement', in many instances, changed the rules for millions of minority and disadvantaged students. But it didn't change a system that was already practically incapable of motivating them. (p 325)

Even where schools have achieved success, costs are incurred, notably by what Stedman (1987) describes as 'teaching to the test' and in the narrowing of curriculum to exclude many liberal arts subjects and higher order thinking skills:

The original hopes for the effective schools research have gone largely unfulfilled, and success, where it has occurred, has too often come by a narrowing of the curriculum to what is measured by tests. (p 217)
Such 'original hopes' were based in the belief in equity proposed by Edmonds, but which were fundamentally changed by the incorporation of the early research into the later 'excellence' movement, with its narrow emphases on standards and tests, both of which further alienated students at risk of dropping out of school. Purkey & Smith (1983) linked such reforms to conservative educational philosophies:

Some reforms of high schools based on effective schools research closely resembled a highly conservative view of education - back to basics and the three R's. (p 440)

Reforms which supposedly promoted excellence based on effective schools research have increased dropout rates, largely because of their proponents' failure to recognise the problems faced by at-risk students in schools - problems largely exacerbated by an insistence that such students should do more of what they least like (core academic subjects) and be tested at higher levels than those which they currently fail to pass. Such reforms appear illogical, much like training a failing high-jump athlete by raising the bar over which she or he is already failing to jump.

While such reforms appear illogical, the effective school movement has something positive to offer to analysis of the dropout problem because of the development of differently defined categories of effectiveness and 'expanded conceptual frameworks' which specifically link effectiveness to retention. :
In the final analysis, indicators of school effectiveness have become more complex and less agreed on. Simplistic recipes for school improvement have been replaced by an expanded conceptual framework still being developed, within which individual school improvement might take place. (Contreras, 1988, p 406)

Freiberg & Stein (1990) present an example of such an expanded conceptual framework with their description of the 'lessons learned' from a three-year project to improve schools described as 'at-risk'. The lessons include consensus within the school community regarding school mission, inservice seen as appropriate by teachers, collegiality, parent participation and using nationally standardized achievement scores as a guide rather than an absolute measure of school success.

The evolution of Effective Schools Research from a narrowly defined area of research focusing on elementary schools to a more diverse consideration of high schools and their differing cultures, has led to the inclusion of schools' ability to retain students as a valid criteria of effectiveness. This allows for the development of both excellence and equity within frameworks of greater flexibility, as described by Futtrell (1989):

As the 1980's draws to a close, there is no excuse for believing that educational excellence for all
students necessitates a uniform structure for all schools. Solid evidence supports a variety of approaches to teaching, learning and the structure of schooling.

(p 14)

Futtrell suggests a move away from simplistic arguments and recipes towards varied structures and practices forged at local levels to meet local needs, an approach almost the polar opposite of uniformity enforced through legislation. Such an approach may well better serve currently disadvantaged students who have fared badly at the hands of centralist legislators and 'reformers'. Finally, the explicit statement of criteria of effectiveness encourages not only the inclusion of problems such as dropout rates into considerations of 'effectiveness', but also communication between members of school communities as a precursor to solving problems:

The procedures that characterize effective school programs can move schools in the right direction by bringing people together to talk about their interest and to forge a consensus on goals. This process - not research-based definitions of school effectiveness - may be the real contributions of effective school programs. (Farrar, Neufeld & Miles, 1984, p 706.)
In terms of the dropout problem, therefore, the selective utilization of Effective Schools Research has much to offer. The literature clearly states that reforms offering 'more of the same' curriculum and practices which currently alienate substantial numbers of students are counter-productive in terms of retention, and are likely to increase rates of dropping out. But where retention is specifically identified as a factor of school effectiveness, then the literature states that reforms aimed at increasing retention might usefully be developed.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The basic problem that this study confronts is why students drop out of schools and whether implementation of specific criteria of effectiveness in terms of school programs and practices will help or hinder retention of students in schools until graduation. Literature on the dropout problem points to a highly complex, multi-faceted phenomenon which exists within schools but appears linked to wider societal issues. Such issues include the purposes of schools and their links to rapidly changing economic and social structures. In considering an appropriate methodology to study the problem of dropouts I have chosen to focus on the collection of data which examines the relationship between dropouts and the schools they attended. In analyzing such data I have attempted to place school-based data within a context of the wider societal issues mentioned above, in order to arrive at conclusions and recommendations which recognize both school and societal issues. Because data were collected within one school district (Surrey), I have also collected the available dropout statistics in Surrey and compared them with available statistics from surrounding school districts, thereby intending to show Surrey's schools as either distinct from or similar to their neighbours in the metropolitan area's other school districts.

The methodology therefore aims to facilitate study of one school district's dropout problem within a variety of contexts, linking school-based data to district-wide data, connecting data
from the district within its regional context, and considering what happens in schools within a wider view of what society expects schools to be and to do.

The study consists of three phases of data collection and analysis: an examination of existing statistical data relevant to dropout rates; collection of quantitative data comparing the perceptions of dropouts with the perceptions of students concerning the schools they currently attend or which they used to attend; collection of qualitative data to expand on the areas where significant differences of perception occurred between dropouts and students.

1. An examination of existing statistical data showing withdrawal, non-attendance and non-graduation rates in the School District of Surrey.

Examining existing statistical data in Surrey, and comparing such data to similar data collected from neighbouring school districts allows some comparison of withdrawal and non-attendance rates between individual schools within the Surrey School District, and some consideration of the School District's dropout problem within a metropolitan and provincial context.

Each school collects withdrawal and non-attendance rates and every school district reports non-graduation rates because the provincial Ministry of Education requires such data. School administrators collect withdrawal and non-attendance rates and record them on form 1502 ("Year-End Report of School Operation and
which are subsequently forwarded to the British Columbia Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education then records each school district's withdrawal rate on Report 1572B ("Elementary and Secondary Withdrawals as a Percentage of Total September Enrolments"). Non-graduation rates for each school district are shown in the Ministry of Education's Report 1561 ("Public Schools Data - Grade 12 Graduates as a Percentage of September 30 Enrolment").

Non-graduation rates are calculated with reference to Grade 12 students only. Numbers of Grade 12 students enrolled on September 30 of a given school year are recorded, as is the percentage of those from this number who graduate in June of the same school year. Withdrawals are defined as 'students who ceased to attend any public school in B.C. between September 30 and June 30 of the same school year'. Withdrawals are not synonymous with dropouts. Statistics showing withdrawals may include some students who withdraw to attend private schools or who move to another province. A student who withdraws in October, goes back to school in January and withdraws again in March may be counted as withdrawing twice. But a student who fails to register at school in September after completing the previous year would not be included in withdrawal rates. While the data appear unreliable as exact indicators of dropping out, they nevertheless provide useful inter-school and inter-district comparisons. Between schools within the district, such data allow some consideration of whether individual schools have significantly different withdrawal rates or whether
such rates differ between the types of secondary institutions (senior, full and junior secondary) found within the school district.

Similarly, non-attendance rates were analyzed in order to compare individual schools and types of schools within the district. Within the literature, non-attendance is frequently considered an indicator or precursor of dropping out. Data collection in this area was aimed at discovering whether individual schools or type of schools have significantly different non-attendance rates.

Such inter-school comparisons are useful because they allow an examination of differences between schools. But they must be treated carefully. Because one school has a higher withdrawal or non-attendance rate than another does not necessarily mean that it functions less effectively than the other. A school with higher withdrawal rates may draw students from a disadvantaged socio-economic area, and/or may have a concentration of students of lower academic ability who are less likely to pass graduation testing requirements. Some schools within the school district of Surrey also host a number of programs for students at risk of dropping out. By removing these students from their original schools, such schools would expect reduction in withdrawal rates, while the schools to which such students transfer might expect higher withdrawal rates.

Withdrawal and non-attendance rates reflect a three-year period, and an average figure is shown for each of the sixteen secondary schools in Surrey. Non-graduation rates were collected from a single year's data - the 1988/89 school year.

In addition to the overall withdrawal rates, withdrawal by grade levels for the district as a whole were also collected. This
allowed the calculation of a dropout rate based on a combination of withdrawal and non-graduation rates. To calculate such a rate, a hypothetical 1000 students who started Grade 8 in Surrey's schools were established as a sample. Withdrawal rates were calculated for the sample group during their grade 8, 9, 10 and 11 years, and a non-graduation rate calculated in grade 12. While such an exercise fails to accurately reflect exact dropout rates, it offers some indication of incidences of dropping out based on available data. Such an indication is notably missing from current consideration of dropout rates in British Columbia.

Comparisons of withdrawal and non-graduation rates between the School District of Surrey and other School Districts in the Greater Vancouver area and within the province facilitate analysis of the dropout problem in a metropolitan and provincial context. Is Surrey typical or atypical of the dropout problem within such a context? If Surrey appears statistically similar (in terms of withdrawal and non-graduation rates) to other school districts, then the data found in the second and third phase of data collection may be relevant to other schools and to other school districts. If, on the other hand, Surrey schools' dropout problem appears significantly different to those of surrounding school districts, then the data from this study have strictly limited prospects of transferability.

2. Quantitative data collection and analysis.

In a recent research project conducted by a team from Simon Fraser University a questionnaire was developed to collect data
from secondary school students in the School District of Surrey. This questionnaire solicited students' views on the schools they attended, and was divided into sections which included school purposes, practices and the nature of what in the experience of students constituted a 'good' or 'effective' school. Questions relating to purposes were derived from Eisner's 'Orientations to Curriculum' described in "The Educational Imagination" (1979). Questions relating to school practices focused mainly on teaching practices within the classroom as seen by students. The 'Good School' section included diverse items derived from the literature on effective schools.

A sample of 1300 students completed questionnaires. Data were collected to show differences between individual schools and types of schools, and between students of different grade levels and of different grade averages. (See Appendix for the questionnaire used in this study.)

For this study, the same questionnaire was completed by a sample of eighty-three people who had dropped out of the regular secondary school system before graduation. Fifty-one of these (62% of the sample) attended an alternative program in the district called 'Work and Learn' which featured flexible attendance options and individualized learning. Seventeen people (20% of the sample) attended an 'Alternate' program. All of these seventeen students had either been suspended or expelled from the regular school system. Fifteen people (18% of the sample) had left any option within the secondary system prior to graduation.
By selecting a sample which included 'Work and Learn' and 'Alternate' students, there may be some limitations to the representative nature of the sample. Such students have not, after all, totally rejected secondary education. But they have all rejected, or been rejected by, the mainstream secondary schools in Surrey. Their views of such institutions are therefore of interest in any analysis of why students drop out of such schools. To ensure that data referred only to the mainstream schools that all respondents had attended, each respondent was instructed to refer only to such mainstream institutions when completing the questionnaire, and not to 'Work and Learn' or 'Alternate' programs.

Questionnaires for the three groups of dropouts were separately coded. Comparisons between the groups were made to check for significant differences, using Bartlett and Scheffe tests. These tests showed on which questions significant differences existed, and between which groups. Using a second test also confirmed significance identified in the first test. Had significant differences existed on most items then it might be possible to state that different categories of respondents drop out of school for different reasons. But if few or no significant differences appeared, then there exists a commonality of perspective between groups of dropouts (though not necessarily individuals) in this sample. In such a case, it becomes possible to compare the total sample of dropouts in this study with the sample of students in schools from the previous research project using T-tests, and to clearly distinguish the differences in the perception of the common experience of schooling between those who stay in school and those who drop out.
It was also possible to compare dropouts' views with specific groups of students in schools. A tentative hypothesis, based on the literature, suggests that the views of dropouts concerning schools would be the same as those students who are in school but failing academically. To test such a hypothesis, the responses of dropouts were compared to responses from students who were failing in school with a grade average below 50%. As a point of comparison, students with grades in the 80-89% range were included to demonstrate the range of opinion, as such students tended to respond most positively to items concerning school purposes, practices and effectiveness.

3. Qualitative data.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the three groups of dropouts described above. A total of forty people were interviewed in nine interviews, some individually but mostly in small groups. Of the forty, twenty-two (55% of the sample) were students in 'Work and Learn' programs, seven (17.5% of the sample) were enrolled in an 'Alternate' program, and eleven (27.5% of the sample) had completely left the secondary school system prior to graduation.

Some questions were designed to collect data which would allow elaboration on items in the quantitative phase of data collection, particularly where significant differences existed between students in school and dropouts. Other questions were intended to link the views of Surrey's school dropouts to what the
literature suggests are those criteria of school effectiveness which are most likely to either retain or alienate potential dropouts. In addition, a number of open-ended questions encouraged dropouts to discuss any other views of their school experiences which they considered to be of relevance to their decisions to drop out. Including such open-ended questions prevented the possibility that only data considered relevant by the researcher might be included, at the expense of data considered important by dropouts. These open-ended questions provided data additional to areas covered by the earlier structured format, thereby allowing the inclusion of unexpected but valid data.

During the collection of qualitative data interviewees were requested to follow the same instructions as provided during quantitative data collection, namely to answer questions with reference to their experience in the regular secondary schools they had attended rather than referring to 'Work and Learn' or 'Alternate' programs.

Initial analysis of qualitative data involved the noting of patterns and themes, as described by Miles & Huberman (1984, p 216.). Because data were collected from three groups of dropouts, the patterns and themes of responses were initially analyzed to identify any significant differences between and among the groups, and to find common patterns or themes stated by individuals in different groups. These data provided confirmatory and complementary data to those collected during the quantitative phase of data collection. Quantitative data may have shown, for instance, that students felt unsafe in school, but qualitative data identified
and differentiated between physical and psychological unease, and the environments and interactions that caused such unease.

In some cases, qualitative data collection identified differences between dropouts and students that analysis of quantitative data failed to identify. An example of this concerned teaching practices, where no statistically significant difference occurred between the results provided by students and the results provided by dropouts. However, in the collection of qualitative data dropouts reflected a consensus view that what they considered boring teaching practices influenced their decision to drop out of school.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

This chapter contains three sections of data. The first section outlines available statistical information which shows Surrey's dropout rates in a context of similar data from neighbouring school districts in the Vancouver metropolitan area. The second section contains quantitative data which compares students and dropouts' perceptions of the schools they currently attend, or which they used to attend. The third section contains qualitative data derived from interviews with dropouts.

Dropout statistics - Surrey's schools in context.

Data in this section were collected from three sources. The first is from the 'Year End Report of School Operation and Attendance' (form 1502) which each school completes for provincial Ministry of Education requirements.

Withdrawal rates provide at least some indication, if not exact incidences, of dropping out, and are shown for all 16 Surrey secondary schools in Table 1. Non-attendance rates, also shown in Table 1, are the total days lost as a percentage of the total possible attendance. Non-attendance rates are included because many dropouts reported that their dropping out of school was preceded initially by frequent skipping of classes and subsequently by periodic non-attendance at school. It was also of interest to discover whether any differences existed between senior, full and
junior secondary schools in regard to non-attendance. Table 1 shows that most withdrawals occur in senior secondary schools, and that there exists considerable variation in withdrawal rates between schools. Non-attendance is also generally higher in senior secondary schools than in either full secondary or junior secondary schools. Caution should be exercised when considering the 'full secondary' withdrawal rates, as these include the lower rates for grades 8 and 9. Table 2 provides a clearer picture of grade level withdrawals. This was derived from a second source of data--the Ministry of Education's 'Report 1572B — 1988/89 withdrawals as a percentage of total September enrolments'.

Table 2 shows the minimal withdrawal rates in grades 8 and 9, and the sharp increase of withdrawals in grades 10, 11 and 12. These data present only a 'snapshot' of a single year (1988-89), but nevertheless illustrate the withdrawal rates for different grade levels. A comparison of withdrawal rates was also made between full and senior secondary schools for grades 11 and 12. At the grade 11 level there is no pattern suggesting a higher withdrawal rate for either category of school, but at grade 12, withdrawal rates are lower in senior secondary schools.

Surrey's secondary schools' overall graduation rate was then considered — that is, the numbers of grade 12 students who graduate in June of a given year as a percentage of those who are enrolled on the previous September 30. Data were collected from a third source, the Ministry of Education form 1561 which provides a breakdown by gender for every school district in B.C., and are shown in Table 3.
### TABLE 1
Withdrawals/Non-attendance rates for Surrey's Secondary Schools.
(3 year average, 1987-1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Withdrawals (%)</th>
<th>Non attendance (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Schools:**
1-5  Senior Secondary  
6-8  Full Secondary  
9-16 Junior Secondary

1 Withdrawals: Total number of student withdrawals from school (September-June) as a % of student population in September.

2 Non-Attendance: Total number of student days lost as % of total possible attendance.
TABLE 2
Surrey’s secondary school withdrawals as a percentage of total September enrolments by grade level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Withdrawals (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>9.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>10.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3
Grade 12 graduates as a percentage of September 30 enrolment - Surrey in a metropolitan and provincial context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male %</th>
<th>Female %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Vancouver</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M Ridge/Pitt Meadows</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Vancouver</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vancouver</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURREY</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnaby</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coquitlam</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langley</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Westminster</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Province-wide</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary and discussion of existing statistical data

* There are considerable weaknesses in the available statistical data concerning dropout rates. No common and effective method of data collection which accurately reflects dropout rates has yet been developed in North America. The data provided should therefore be viewed as general indicators rather than precise measures.

* The highest incidence of withdrawal rates and non-attendance occurs in grades 10, 11 and 12.

* The cumulative total of students who withdraw from Surrey's secondary schools is alarming, but appears similar to a number of Greater Vancouver school districts. Starting with a hypothetical figure of 1,000 students starting grade 8 and calculating the withdrawals by grade level, 329 students withdraw from schools in Surrey. Such a figure does not include students who attend a school in June but fail to return to school in September. It may include some double counting of students who withdraw more than once.

* There are substantial differences among dropout rates in Surrey's senior secondary schools. However, some students at risk of dropping out of school transfer to schools with alternative programs. Such transfers will influence dropout rates.

* Surrey's secondary schools have similar non-graduation rates to other metropolitan school districts and this rate is close to the provincial average.
A substantial number of grade 12 students in Surrey do not drop out of school but fail to graduate. Data from 1988/89 show that 30% of Surrey's grade 12 students fail to graduate, but only 10% of students withdraw from school between September and June of their grade 12 year. Therefore 20% of the district's grade 12 students remain in school but fail to graduate.

Even while allowing for flaws in the data, the combined data of withdrawal and non-graduation rates leads to a conclusion that something is fundamentally wrong with an educational system in which so many of its students fail to graduate. This is not a problem unique to Surrey, but one that is common across the province. If we go back to our hypothetical 1,000 students who started grade 8 in Surrey, and follow this group through to the start of grade 12, we find 748 remaining in school. Of this number, 30.74% fail to graduate. Only 518 of 1,000 students who started grade 8 have therefore graduated, a dropout rate of 48.2%.

Quantitative Data

The questionnaire administered to students in schools was also used to gather data from dropouts. Data from the first section, "school purposes", allowed consideration of dropouts' perceptions of how their school fulfilled purposes like 'preparing students for jobs'. The second section was intended to collect data relating dropouts' views on teaching methods and practices, and the third section related to views of what constituted a "good" school. Of the 43 questions contained in these sections and which related to dropouts' perceptions of schools,
TABLE 4
Purposes of Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School:</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Mean</td>
<td>80-89% grade average</td>
<td>Below 50% grade average</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught students how to learn</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared students for jobs</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed each student's ability</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared students to make world a better place</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught everyday important skills</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught students to be good members of society</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taught students what to learn and showed them how to learn</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

there were significant differences between the three dropout groups (Work & Learn, Alternate, Dropouts) on only 5 questions.
The data for all dropouts were therefore amalgamated and data from a single group of dropouts were then compared to the data from students.
in school. Significant differences exist between the way that dropouts and students perceive schools.

In the above tables, items where significant differences occurred between students in school and dropouts are shown. Mean scores from students in schools with a grade average of 80-89% are included to demonstrate the views of students who are succeeding academically. Mean scores of the student group scoring less than 50% provide a contrast by showing an academically failing group.

In the 'purposes of schools' section significant differences occur in responses to seven out of nine questions. In all cases where significant differences exist, dropouts respond more negatively in terms of how they believed objectives were being achieved. The biggest differences occur in questions relating to schools preparing students for jobs, and in terms of schools developing each student's ability. The common perception of dropouts is that schools did not show them, as individuals, how to learn, nor did schools prepare them for their economic or social futures.

Fewer differences occurred in responses to the 'teaching methods' section of the questionnaire. In comparison to students in school, dropouts remembered more lecturing and use of textbooks, more limited discussion of topics with teachers, and less groupwork. But the practices of teachers are generally viewed in similar ways by both students in schools and by those who drop out of school.

The most startling contrast between students currently in school and dropouts occur in 'the good school' section where
significant differences occur in fifteen out of eighteen questions. The data suggest that dropouts have highly negative perceptions of teachers and school atmosphere. In comparison to students in school, dropouts do not believe that the teachers they knew in schools enjoyed teaching, nor do they consider that teachers believed in the importance of what was being taught or how it was taught. Dropouts are more negative than students in schools in terms of questions relating to teacher collegiality and teachers' caring for students. They neither believe that teachers worked together to make a good school nor that teachers cared about students.

In terms of school atmosphere, the data reflect a strong sense of unease among dropouts while they attended schools. In response to the statement 'I felt safe at school', students in school scored a mean of 3.48, (4 = agree with the statement, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree with the statement) compared to dropouts overall mean of 2.29. While this in itself is significantly different, a significant difference also occurred between the categories of dropouts. The group which had completely left the educational system (i.e. not attending any alternative program) scored a mean of 1.67 in response to this question (a score of 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree to the statement 'I felt safe in school'). This finding reflects the biggest statistical difference found in responses to any question in this research project. Simply put, as a group the dropouts felt distinctly 'unsafe' in the school environment.

Further supporting this reflection of unease was the fact that dropouts considered school a far from enjoyable place to be, did not
**TABLE 5**
The Good School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Students in school</th>
<th>Dropouts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overall Mean</td>
<td>80-89% grade ave</td>
<td>Below 50% grade ave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What/how was taught was important to teachers</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt safe in school</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers worked together to make a good school</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers enjoyed teaching</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most students felt successful in school</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were available to students</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers cared about students</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behaviour was good</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers expected me to give my best</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student opinions were important to teachers</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School was an enjoyable place to be</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were treated fairly in school</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had a problem, there was a teacher I could talk to</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
believe that they were treated fairly, and had more negative perceptions of student behaviour than did students currently in school. When the quantitative data are considered collectively, responses of dropouts clearly state that schools did not work for them. Of twenty-seven questions in the 'purposes' and 'good school' sections, significant differences exist in twenty-two responses between the ways that students and dropouts perceive schools.
Qualitative Data

Data were collected in individual and group interviews, which were taped and transcribed. Responses to each question were noted, and initially analysed to consider differences between categories of dropouts. Few differences emerged among the three categories of people ('Work & Learn', 'Alternate', 'Dropouts') who had dropped out of school. While individual differences existed within groups on specific issues, such as the use and influence of drugs, there appeared to be commonly shared views on many other subjects. In presenting the data, a series of statements are offered as illustrative of the general views of dropouts in relation to their experiences in schools.

# Dropouts feel that schools did not help them to learn.

A number of dropouts described schools as institutions with set recipes and fixed agendas, which they often saw as inappropriate to student needs. A strong and common view was that schools failed to treat students as individuals, and by failing to recognize individual differences, discouraged individual learning:

"It was too organized - at this time, do this, then that. It didn't seem like you were treated as kids, or students, but as something that's there to learn. School had
nothing to do with being on a person-to-person basis.
You weren't treated as an individual."

Those interviewees who missed school because of illness returned to schools facing what they saw to be pressure and teacher apathy, neither of which, in the perception of dropouts, facilitated learning:

"I was away a lot, sick. The school I went to - there was a lot of academic pressure. They always stressed the 'A' and 'B' students, but I was never an 'A' or 'B' student. I was away a lot and they never took the time to go back and say 'This is what you missed - I'll teach you this'. It was really hard. I just got to the point where I couldn't handle it any more because all the teachers were saying 'You're going to fail this if you don't do that,' and it's like, how can I do this if you don't teach me? So I just said, 'Well, I can't cope with it any more', and I left."

# Most of the interviewed dropouts had experienced at least part-time work, and considered their school experience negatively in comparison to work experience.

Almost all of those interviewed stated that they were treated differently at work than at school, and that they preferred work. Such a preference was rarely linked to the wages earned, but more closely connected to respect both for the individual and for adult
status that the workplace was seen to offer. Work was viewed as being relatively simple, with a minimum of rules that could be easily understood and adhered to. School, in comparison, failed to respect individuality, offered no adult status and imposed myriad rules, few of which appeared logical to dropouts:

"At work you have a basic set of rules but at school they have stupid rules that have nothing to do with education or anything."

"At school they treat you like you're in jail. School has so many rules. You can't do something without thinking 'Is that a rule?' But when you're in the workforce, you're treated like an adult."

"At work they treat you more mature. It doesn't matter how old you are, as long as you can do the job, and if you can do the job then you're a good person. You're treated more like an adult. You get more respect at work than at school."

"At work you come in and you don't feel like they hate you. There were certain teachers - I didn't even want to go to their class. They'd just look at me as if they hated me, so why be there?"
While in school, few dropouts considered their learning relevant to future employment.

Some dropouts linked both curriculum and teaching methods when discussing relevance, perhaps suggesting that even what might be perceived as an 'irrelevant' subject could be made interesting by a good teacher:

"They cram five subjects down your throat, four that you don't need or like. The teachers say 'You need this. You need Socials so you never make the mistakes that have been made'. But who cares about the past? This is NOW! We're worried about the future, so the past only tells you why you're here today. Even your electives can be screwed up because of the teachers who are teaching them. Some of them are there just to make money, not for anything else but that. But with some, hey, I've really enjoyed it."

"Did school help you get ready for work?" (Interviewer)
"No. Not at all. Learning about stuff I don't care about. And the way they taught it was not interesting. The same thing over and over again - every day. I started to become cynical after a while."

"Schools help you to read and write for resumés, but half the stuff we learn won't be any use. The English or Math
are relevant, but Socials? I don't see why I need to know who invaded Russia in 1849 or something. Where am I going to need that in my future job? I don't see the point."

Some dropouts expressed a strong preference either for electives that they considered more relevant to future employment than were core subjects, or for a more vocational education:

"For me, school did pretty well nothing to prepare me for work. There's only one class that did - a drafting class, and that was an elective."

"I come from a European family - they tell me people there go to trade schools. I mean, how many people can use 'socialization and human behaviour'? Trades are better. You learn all you have to - math and science (relevant to the job). I'd rather have a trade school set up than anything else. What we did in school wasn't much use in getting a job."

But if they had failed core subjects, such electives were less accessible, as an increasing proportion of school time was spent completing core material:

"I'd like to put more effort into something that's useful and relevant to a career. I'd like more electives. I hardly had any
electives because I had to do extra core subjects for the areas that I'd either missed or failed."

For at least some dropouts, therefore, there exists a fundamental difference between what schools demand as basic components of learning, core subjects, and what dropouts consider basic. Dropouts accept the need for literacy and numeracy, but fail to recognize the legitimacy of Socials. For them, vocationally-oriented electives are of greater importance than some core subjects, but such electives are less accessible, and count less towards graduation requirements.

# Dropouts believed that schools did not treat all students equally, and that they were not treated fairly.

Almost all those interviewed stated that teachers and school administrators categorized students into stereotypes and subsequently treated them according to such stereotypes:

"Students are not all equal to teachers. Once you're on their bad side, that's it."

"They (teachers) stereotype you. They pick out the students who work. They like them, but it's the ones who hassle them that they want to get rid of because it causes them inconvenience. But they should pay more attention to those ones because it means something's wrong."
"Anything happened in school, there'd be seven names called down the office. If it was a guy with short hair - one of the straight-A students that did it - we'd get hassled in the office for over an hour because they thought we looked like the types to do it. We looked different - I gave up in grade 9, and came here (Work & Learn)."

"I used to feel sick in the stomach thinking of going to school. I'd have homework, wouldn't do it but have to face the teacher. I'd have to listen to the b.s. again. Then I'd wonder why bother if nobody cares. Even when I did something good I'd get a low mark, because I was labelled."

Such comments reflect a strong sense of unease within schools and alienation from teachers and administrators. Some dropouts, like the person quoted second (above), and the student who fails to complete homework assignments, recognized their actions as contributing to confrontation, yet hoped that teachers might recognize a problem rather than initiate disciplinary action. The failure of teachers to recognize individual student problems (in the perceptions of dropouts) starts a series of events where students consider themselves labelled and categorized. Some then live up to the label, increasing the levels of confrontation, while others feel
victimized. Either way, academic performance suffers, disillusion grows, and students drop out of school.

Dropouts believed that the majority of teachers disliked teaching them, and did not enjoy teaching in general.

Dropouts described many teachers as "just there for the job". They described teachers who put in what dropouts considered to be the minimum effort, doling out work with inadequate instructions:

"Teachers were just there for the job. They'd just throw the work in front of you and tell you to do it, but not tell you how to do it."

"There was a small percentage of good teachers but most of them I didn't like at all. They didn't seem like they wanted to teach you. They seemed like they just wanted to do their job and go home."

For this group of students, the teacher who was seen not to enjoy teaching failed to generate any interest in the material being taught. A strong liking for his/her subject, and for teaching in general, were stated as basic pre-requisites for generating student interest. When subject/teaching apathy was perceived to be combined with antipathy towards individual student personalities, then at some stage students saw no reason to continue attending individual classes and started to skip them. Once skipping started, returning
to class became either difficult or humiliating. It was difficult because work had been missed. Students who previously didn't want to complete work in class time expressed unwillingness to compensate by increased efforts at this stage. The sense of humiliation was described in terms of teachers embarrassing individuals before the whole class. The easiest short-term solution to such problems was non-attendance, and this solution was most commonly adopted.

Dropouts were bored by the teaching methods used by the majority of teachers.

"It's not because teachers don't give extra help that causes people to drop out, it's just the way that teachers are, the ways that teachers taught and acted. I didn't like their way of teaching which was really boring, and I didn't really listen - I'd fall asleep."

"Eventually you don't listen (to teachers). You don't make notes, you don't come to class. One teacher who's really hard is Mr. X. All he does is he sits there, talks, reads out of the book, says 'Read Chapter 1. Do the notes. Do the questions'. Next thing he writes the answers on the board, doesn't even go through them. Then he starts again. Every couple of weeks he'd talk and talk and talk, really boring lecturing. You just got fed up, and you'd
stop going to class because you'd know what you're going
to do."

Some dropouts reported the same sense of boredom, but did not skip
out of class. They at some point decided that the whole school experience was a waste of time, and decided to leave:

"I didn't skip classes. My attendance was perfect. I
started bringing my walkman into school - it was the
only thing that kept me amused. I wouldn't even do my
work, just put my name on the sheet, and number 1. That
lasted until half way into the year. That's when I really
started giving up. Teachers would start to give up on me.
They'd get on my case so much I'd just say 'Forget it.
There's got to be some way out of this'. I wasn't kicked
out, I left. Not suspended, not in fights, not really that
disruptive. I don't know what happened - the teachers, I
guess, the situation. I was so far behind. No-one was
willing to help me, so I just gave up."

The sense of boredom with schools' teaching methods and the feeling of hopelessness among those who drop out is pervasive. It appears to be a major factor influencing students' decisions to leave, or to start one of a number of sequences of events leading to dropping out. Some students confront teachers and provoke suspension or expulsion. Some skip classes, preferring anything to what they claim to be the overwhelming tedium of the classroom. Others
passively ignore teachers and their means of instruction, until one day they simply give up and walk out.

Almost all dropouts described a number of teachers whom they considered to be excellent teachers.

A surprising yet constant image from almost all interviews with dropouts concerned teachers for whom they had great respect and admiration. They all remembered one or a few teachers who were special to them. As far as the dropouts were concerned, such teachers loved teaching, liked them as students, and treated them fairly. Their methods of teaching were varied, but involved little lecturing. They possessed a level of eccentricity, which was frequently revealed in offbeat humour. In their classes these students claimed that they succeeded, worked hard, and received not only good grades but also a strong interest in learning. Such teachers often motivated students in areas they considered 'irrelevant'. Their classes were eagerly anticipated:

"Most of the teachers have no imagination, no spark. But he did — he was cool. He was really into what he was doing, really enjoyed teaching. He'd come down on you when you were slacking off but he wouldn't judge you next time for what you did last class - he would give you a fresh start. He was fun, had a good sense of humour. I'd look forward to going to his Socials class. That year I got a 'B' in Socials, but had a 'D' in everything else. I enjoyed doing the work, and the homework."
"I'd like to explain Miss X (teacher). She was funny, but knew when to be serious. She knew how to blend it all together. We did all our work and we had fun doing it. Science with her was the only class I did well in. She would come in two minutes late and she'd say 'Sorry I'm late'. Other days she'd race us down the corridor to get to class first. She was the perfect teacher for me. If they (other teachers) were all like her, I'd be getting good marks, and I'd have stayed in school."

Such data suggests that dropouts believe that all students can be motivated by what students see as a combination of strong teacher interest in their subject, good teaching methods, and teacher care for students. However, dropouts believe that such teacher qualities are in very short supply in Surrey's secondary schools.

# Most dropouts felt at least uncomfortable and frequently unsafe in school.

"I felt so uncomfortable in class, feeling that teachers didn't like me."

"Safe in school? Are you kidding?"

For many who dropped out the feeling of discomfort stemmed from their relationship with teachers. Others hated the institutional aspects of school which they likened to prisons. But one of the
strongest and most frequently stated causes of discomfort stemmed from interactions between students:

"Different grades, personalities, types, these cause tensions."

"At school you're categorized (by other students) by how you look, how smart you are, if you're mentally retarded or whatever, you know. And there are a few different people, and others make fun of them. You want to hit people who do that. Then there's dumb jocks who think they're right on and you want to hit them across the face."

"There were a lot of snotty, stuck-up students. That's one reason I quit too — there's too much pressure — students putting you down."

Most of the dropouts we talked to described student stratification - the division into categories of 'jocks', 'preppies', 'rockers' and the like. But it seemed that few of the dropouts saw themselves as belonging to any particular group. The following exchange was typical:

(Interviewer) "Were you in a particular group?"
(Dropout) "No. But I knew them all. Students make me sick. They're always talking behind each other's backs
and there's different groups. Either you belong to the group or you're nothing."

Many of the dropouts forged casual and occasionally uneasy alliances with the 'rockers' or the 'skids', but maintained a healthy scorn for the 'preppies' and 'jocks'. They expressed strong anxiety about gangs, and gang activities in schools, which they see as increasingly prevalent. They described a sub-culture, with gangs increasingly dominant, of which they consider teachers either ignorant or unable to control, but in which they and others have to survive:

"There's a lot of people in gangs with short fuses. Everybody's got a tough-guy attitude. I got into seven fights this year before I skipped out. They'd start with tension in the halls, in class, and people would be going after people after school, going to places they'd hang out, to beat them up. Everybody's getting tense."
"If there weren't gangs, school would be a pretty safe place. If you dress a certain way, you can get beat up at school, you can get your head kicked in."

According to the people we interviewed, gangs are both selling drugs in school, and recruiting dropouts as drug-sellers. They also are seen to encourage or pressure some people into dropping out:

"Lots of my friends were forced out of school by the leaders of their gangs, so it's like one day they're there,
in school, and the next day they're gone, without skipping out any. You talk to them a couple of days later, they say 'He (gang leader) made me quit school'.

"I had lots of gang friends. It was like - they want you out of school. The gangs are selling drugs in school. If you walk through school you see people shaking hands, swapping drugs. They sell anything; you can buy dope, cocaine, crack, acid, smack. You can pick up anything, anywhere. I don't do drugs, but I know all the drug dealers. The students know them, but the teachers don't."

Half the people interviewed talked of 'doing drugs' in school, and said this influenced dropping out.

Exactly half the dropouts we interviewed claimed that drugs had been a factor in their dropping out. Most suggested that drugs relieved the boredom of school:

"In grades 9 and 10, school was so boring that for a whole bunch of us, the only thing we'd look forward to was going to the smoke hole at lunchtime. People would come in from outside, and we'd buy a joint from them. We'd smoke it and go to class. It got so bad we'd be smoking joints between classes. About 50 of us would get high all the time at school. Everything got screwed up. We didn't care any more; our school work would go
down. Most of us got kicked out of school, so we said 'screw it, school's not for me'."

"About 4 years ago I started cocaine. This year things got out of control a bit. I was up all night, couldn't get up for school, then I'd need a joint in the morning to take my hangover away after drinking all night. So I'd skip one day, then two days, and it keeps going on, and there's no point in going to school when you don't know what the hell's going on."

Taking drugs was almost always a social, group activity, an escape from boredom and a way to remove the power of the teacher. Students who were stoned didn't care what the teachers said or did in class:

"Being baked to some extent helped me get through. I functioned better in the classroom, like someone (teacher) just drones on, you hear nothing."

"I really got stoned at school. I could make it through Math a lot easier, could block the teacher out."

Drugs were easily accessible and affordable in school. Some students used drugs to help them cope with teachers in classes they didn't like, while initially ignoring the effect of taking drugs on their work and grades. Then the occasional smoke would become a
regular occurrence, and students would be so far behind that they'd drop out or be kicked out of school:

"Drugs really screw up people in school real bad. Some of the people who were doing drugs were really smart in school before (taking drugs). But now they don't care, they keep doing it. It's getting worse. That's the worst thing about school right now. It's so boring that people turn to drugs, and that makes things worse."

Only half the dropouts we talked to used drugs or considered them an influence in dropping out. For the rest, drugs were simply not an issue. They neither took, nor were interested in drugs. But if the half of our sample of Surrey's school dropouts who were taking drugs is representative, then this represents a considerable number of people, and the issue becomes a serious problem. It is not only the incidence of drug-taking by students who become dropouts, but also the prevalence of and the reasons for drug use in Surrey's secondary schools that might be considered serious grounds for concern.

# Dropouts were susceptible to peer pressure, and such pressures influenced dropping out.

The pressure exerted by gangs has already been mentioned, but a more general peer pressure appeared to exert strong influence over many of the dropouts:
"My two best friends left the school, that's why I left. So I said 'forget it, I don't want to hang around with other people, I want my own friends. Forget it. I might as well not go to school'."

"Me too. The friends I used to skip out with left school altogether. I couldn't skip out when they're gone. It's not much fun skipping out by yourself, so I thought 'I might as well drop out and I can be with them'."

In discussing schools, dropouts frequently referred to them as social places, where the company, opinions and pressure of peers was of considerable importance. One dropout described school as 'the best socialiser ever invented'. Such a 'socialiser' clearly has its pitfalls. School for many of the young people who dropped out was a competitive place in social terms, with some safety in groups and hazards for individuals who did not belong to groups. The peer pressure that was described to us consisted of pressure to skip or to quit school, to belong to a clique, gang or recognizable group, to smoke joints. Peer pressure for many became the antithesis of what schools and teachers were trying to accomplish, and for many of the dropouts became of greater influence and importance.

# "We're average people. If we can't make it through the school system, who can?"
This was the final, reflective comment during an interview with a group of students at one of Surrey School District's 'Work & Learn' centres. The students had all dropped out of regular high school, but were successfully completing grade 10 in this different environment.
Chapter 5

CONCLUSIONS

Introduction.

Just as beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder, so may the perception of school effectiveness depend on the theoretical, philosophical or political stance of whoever subjectively and selectively defines effectiveness. But effectiveness has also been narrowly measured by improved test scores, and it has been argued that 'teaching to the test' resulted in a narrowing of both curriculum and teaching methods. Criteria of effectiveness designed to improve test scores ignored retention of students, and evidence exists in the literature (Strother, 1986, McDill, Natriello, Pallas, 1987) to suggest that implementing reforms based on such standard criteria of effectiveness increased dropout rates. Because specific criteria of effectiveness appear inappropriate, they need not invalidate the possibility that improving schools using alternative criteria of effectiveness may aid retention.

From the literature and from the results of this study, it is possible to present a strong case that specific criteria of effectiveness relevant to the issue of retention might be developed and should influence the daily practice of schools if a primary aim of educational systems is retention of students within schools until graduation. It is also possible to argue from the results of this study that developing programs and practices based on criteria of effectiveness aimed at increasing test scores is counter-productive
in terms of increasing retention. The first area of discussion therefore considers why criteria of effectiveness linked to improved test scores are counter-productive to retention, and which specific criteria relevant to improving retention might be developed.

A second area of discussion, 'Policy, Politics and Dropouts', focuses on links between school-based reforms to increase retention, policy decisions and the wider social and economic considerations of schools' roles in society. Much of the literature tends to concentrate exclusively on either school-based reform or on societal issues, ignoring either the influence of governmental policy and legislation on school practice, or the adaptation of policy by practitioners. Discussion in this area will consider the relationship between these spheres of practice and influence and how they might act cohesively to reduce incidences of dropping out.

Conclusions.

Specific criteria of effectiveness relevant to retention must be developed in schools if a primary aim of educational systems is to retain students until graduation.

A strong case can be made that school practices based on the original narrow criteria of effectiveness do not aid retention. Within the literature, it has been shown that increased emphasis on improving test scores results in both curriculum and teaching methods that alienate 'at risk' students by increasing emphasis on those aspects of schools which are of minimal appeal to such
students. While there exists little proof to suggest that Surrey's schools focus purely on criteria of effectiveness linked to improved test scores, data from this study clearly identified dropouts' dissatisfaction with curriculum, teaching methods and the general atmosphere, or 'climate' of schools. These three areas of concern to dropouts are closely linked to two of the standard criteria of effectiveness, namely an emphasis on curriculum/instruction and an orderly and secure environment. Surrey's secondary school teachers, in a 1989 survey, reported in Wideen et al (1990), strongly endorsed the implementation of these criteria of effectiveness as desirable in schools. It appears feasible, therefore, to suggest that teachers' philosophies and practices in the High Schools of Surrey reflect some of the values found in Effective Schools Research.

Support for developing appropriate criteria of effectiveness to promote retention can be found in recent literature which focused on the needs of 'at-risk' students in schools. Firestone (1989) and Wehlage (1989) both stated that schools which were effective in retaining students developed criteria specifically linked to retention of students in schools.

Quantitative data from this study clearly show that students who drop out state significant differences in how they perceive their school experiences when compared with students still in schools. Many dropouts considered schools to be ineffective, irrelevant and unsafe. From analysis of such data and by linking the data to the literature, it is possible to propose criteria of effectiveness which, if implemented in school programs and practices, might reduce incidences of dropping out.
Some of the proposed criteria of effectiveness are also derived from qualitative data. In some areas, qualitative data confirmed quantitative findings. An example of this occurred in relation to the question of the relevancy of schools to future employment as perceived by dropouts. But in other areas, qualitative findings led to defining criteria of effectiveness which a purely quantitative approach would have missed. An example of this occurred in terms of data concerning teaching methods. Statistical data showed little difference in perceptions of teaching methods between students and dropouts. But in analysing qualitative data, it could be seen that dropouts stressed their dissatisfaction with teaching methods and stated that such methods contributed to decisions to drop out. Considering such data leads to a conclusion that while perceptions of methods may be similar, the effects and consequences of such methods prove radically different for different groups of students. A quantitative methodology which identified similarities of perception between groups failed to identify the different consequences that were shown by qualitative methods. If consequences include dropping out, and evidence from this study suggests that they do, then such data provide a basis for developing new criteria of effectiveness.

The confirmatory and complementary nature of combining quantitative and qualitative data has proved useful to this study. The utilization of quantitative methodology facilitated an initial focus on the causes of dropping out, based on the relevant literature. In focusing on what the literature claims to be the causes of dropping out, it became possible to determine whether such causes
were viewed similarly by the dropouts from Surrey's schools. By expanding the methodology to include qualitative research, the parameters of the study were expanded. Confirmation of statistical data provided greater understanding (into the different aspects of student unease, for example) while complementary data provided new insights into areas that had received little attention in the existing literature. An additional justification for widening the scope of the study from the literature base is that dropouts are not influenced by the literature on dropping out, and their statements included emphasis on problems in schools which rarely occur in the literature. A notable example was the strong emphasis placed by dropouts on the pressure of peers in schools, both in terms of how such pressure affected school climate and how it influenced incidences of dropping out. This example provides a contrast with what the literature mainly claims to be problematic teacher-student relationships as the dominant problem of dropouts' relating to other members of school communities, and is discussed later in this chapter.

Criteria of effectiveness to improve retention proposed here are based on either quantitative or qualitative data, or a combination of the two. While much of the data relates to existing literature on dropping out or effective schools, some data emphasize new causes of dropping out which are largely ignored in the literature but are considered important by Surrey's school dropouts.
Criteria of effectiveness that can be developed in schools to retain students.

Teachers should demonstrate a strong interest in their subject, have good and varied teaching methods, and show that they care for students.

The pervasive sense of boredom with schools among those who drop out is primarily caused by what dropouts claim to be the practices and attitudes of the majority of teachers. In their responses to questions about teaching methods, dropouts show a remarkable sophistication in terms of awareness of what teaching involves - the combination of academic knowledge, love of the subject, communication skills and caring for those who learn. What dropouts are saying about good teaching is identical to what many aspiring teachers hear when they train to be teachers. What dropouts are describing as their view of teachers in schools appears the polar opposite - a majority of jaded and bored teachers, uninterested in either the subject they teach or the students they are teaching, highly repetitive in their methods and apathetic about the alienation felt by students. What gives the data credibility is the description by dropouts of the minority of 'excellent' teachers. By offering a contrast, dropouts show that they can reasonably analyze and discuss teaching practices. They do not categorize all teachers as a single entity, but distinguish between what they consider to be positive and negative practices and attitudes. The
group of teachers that dropouts most positively describe can interest and motivate 'at risk' students, even in subjects for which such students profess no interest. According to the dropouts who were interviewed, such increased motivation resulted in improved grades and successful completion of courses. It appears logical, therefore, to develop this criterion of effectiveness based on the qualities of these most effective teachers.

In a sense, this recommendation reflects a 'back to the basics' of what teaching is all about. It represents a move back to the early idealism of new teachers, and those learning to teach, when teachers are enthusiastic and empathic. It asks teachers to learn again what some have probably forgotten.

The recommendation proposed above is closely linked to one of the original criteria featured in effective schools research, namely an emphasis on curriculum and instruction. However, its orientation is different, stressing teacher interest and motivation for the subject being taught and empathy for students.

In an American context, the initial emphasis on curriculum and instruction led to increasingly conservative teaching practices in schools, as many schools aimed for a general level of improved grades or higher test scores by concentration on core curricula, and by increased efforts to ensure minimum competency in such areas. Such practices were counter-productive to retention because they emphasized both curriculum and instruction which were of minimal interest to students most likely to drop out. British Columbian schools, while less driven by such narrow concentration, have nevertheless been required to prepare their students for provincial
assessment and graduation requirements. It appears reasonable to suggest that teaching practices will be influenced by such requirements and evidence from Wideen et al (1990) suggests that the influence of external assessment encourages conservative teaching practices in Surrey's High Schools. Consideration of these influences are further discussed in the 'Policy, Politics and Dropouts' section below.

An emphasis on curriculum and instruction may currently be encouraging conservative teaching practices but such outcomes need not prove inevitable. If teachers demonstrate to students that they possess a strong interest in the subjects they teach, develop teaching methods that more students appreciate, and demonstrate greater empathy for students, then the emphasis on curriculum and instruction might shift dramatically towards practices that could motivate more students to stay in school.

A further argument for such a shift in emphasis towards different teaching styles concerns outcomes as demonstrated by graduation rates resulting from present practices. If incidences of dropping out are high (and the combined data of withdrawal rates and non-graduation rates show a 48% dropout rate for the school district in which the data were gathered), then is it not possible to argue that the combination of current teaching practices and curriculum are failing to deliver the intended outcomes? Can greater emphasis on a style of teaching that combines new criteria of effectiveness (namely academic knowledge, love of subject, varied teaching methods and empathy for learners) improve retention in schools? Data collected in this study, in particular the
data concerning excellent teachers as described by dropouts, lead to a conclusion that such an emphasis can help retention.

Schools should relate more of what they teach to the world of work, and should aim to treat senior students similarly to the way they are treated in the workplace.

Both qualitative and quantitative data from this study reflected a view by dropouts that schools did not prepare them for employment. The literature states that most students, whether they drop out or remain in school, hold similar views but not all students drop out because of schools' perceived failure in this regard. Data collected in this study also showed that students who dropped out of school were able to enjoy courses totally unconnected (in their view) to the world of work if such courses were taught in ways which interested and motivated them. Qualitative data from this study also reveal that students who drop out prefer vocational courses. This somewhat mixed bag of results leads to a conclusion that greater consideration should be given to the vocational aspirations of students, but that such considerations need not dominate either curriculum or practices in schools. Teachers' recognition of students' vocational aspirations might be demonstrated by linking curriculum to employment when possible or appropriate and by changing their classrooms into recognizably more adult environments, closer to what many senior students already experience at work.
Dropouts are saying that, in their opinion, school has no connection with work. According both to the literature and the findings of this study, at the time when most dropouts are in the final phase of their schooling, immediately prior to dropping out, many are working part-time, and contrast the world of work with the world of school. If the lack of connection between school and work and the lack of relevance of school to work proves too great, then analysis of both the literature and the data from this study points to a conclusion that the likelihood of some students dropping out of school increases. If the young person is treated as an adolescent at school, but is treated like an adult at work, then the draw of the workplace becomes stronger. Not only does work have what dropouts see as a simple exchange (work for money), but the rewards of such an exchange are immediate, not only in terms of monetary remuneration but also in terms of respect. The employer respects the young adults enough to retain and reward their services, while schools, as seen by dropouts, offer little respect and no rewards. When what schools have to offer to such young adults is also perceived as irrelevant, then the likelihood of dropping out increases significantly.

Schools are in a quandry. They cannot offer the simple contractual exchange of work for wages, thereby replicating an environment familiar to their students who are also workers. Schools are also bound by provincial curricula requirements which may limit the introduction or the availability of vocationally-oriented electives. Some of the dropouts in this study spoke of being unable to join elective classes they considered interesting and
relevant to work because they were pressured by teachers or administrators to complete core requirements. In this respect the school is clearly following a mandate which states that some learning (core subjects) is of greater importance than others (vocational electives). In spite of such problems, schools might reasonably be expected to develop greater respect for the vocational aspirations of many non-academic students.

There exists a firm basis in data from this study to argue that schools should do more to link curriculum to future work if they wish to retain students whose primary goal is employment rather than further education. A more difficult question is whether current core curriculum requirements might be adapted or removed in favour of a more vocationally-oriented series of elective subjects. At a time when almost 50% of students who start Grade 8 fail to graduate from Surrey's secondary schools, this difficult question must be faced, and some challenges presented to a system which fails a substantial proportion of the school population. Consideration of this question involves discussion of policy and as such is discussed later.

Attempting replication of treating school students as they are treated in the workplace also presents schools with problems. The contractual agreement of the workplace includes a clear understanding that non-performance by the employee can result in dismissal. While some might argue for a similar understanding in schools, the reality currently exists that schools are unable to arbitrarily dismiss students. The relationship between school and student is therefore more complex than that between employer and
employee. But because the exact situation cannot be replicated does not mean that some aspects of the workplace cannot be introduced into a school environment. Dropouts contrasted the many and frequently complex rules at school with the far fewer and more simple rules of the workplace. They contrasted the respect they received at work from employers and co-workers with the lack of respect they claimed to have felt in school from teachers and other students. Dropouts felt that they could at least talk to an employer as an individual and be listened to. At school they experienced a sharply contrasting powerlessness. Simplifying rules and increasing student empowerment might be two ways to initiate improvements both within classrooms and at levels of school governance. Support for such proposals can be found in the literature, particularly from Alexander, Natriello & Pallas (1985), who provided evidence that schools which accepted students on their own terms, and operated schools in partnership with students, had lower dropout rates than schools without flexibility and with rigid codes of discipline.

Schools should aim to become 'communities of support' for all students.

The literature on effective schools discusses the basic need for an 'orderly and secure environment' in schools. But based on analysis of the data provided by dropouts in this study, it is possible to argue that developing such environments has tended to secure order through control. The appearance of order exists because of containment, but beneath the orderly surface appearance a starkly
different picture of schools is provided by those who drop out. Dropouts who provided data for this study felt physically and psychologically unsafe in school. Such unease was described within three areas: discipline, teacher-student relationships and peer pressure. Improvements in these areas would have a significant effect on school climates and potentially aid retention.

In terms of discipline, dropouts generally felt that students were categorized into stereotypes by teachers, and such categorization influenced discipline which was discriminatory and unfair. Dropouts suggested that the effects of such discipline were felt within classrooms (influencing interest in subjects and the desire to learn) and within the general school environment. What dropouts describe appears to them as an institutional conspiracy, where they are labelled by teachers and administrators who dropouts believe exchange information about students and develop a common, negative perception of them. Whether this represents reality, or dropouts' view of reality is debatable - the data merely reflects a common view among those who drop out. What may be of considerable importance is that this perceived or actual reality influences incidences of dropping out.

Dropouts who provided data for this study discussed generally appalling relationships between themselves and most teachers. They described teachers who did not like teaching in general and who disliked them as students. Some who eventually dropped out slept or listened to walkmans during class, took drugs to cope with what they saw as boring teachers, and claimed to be recipients or initiators of provocation from or towards teachers. This suggests
apathy and antagonism in the relationship between teachers and students who drop out. Farrell (1990) discussed passive resistance used by students who sleep or listen to music during classes. Such passive resistance is clearly tolerated by some teachers in unspoken agreements with students. Teachers accept the withdrawal of individual students in their class as preferable to disruption. A logical conclusion is that teachers also accept the total withdrawal of students who subsequently drop out. Teacher apathy is tantamount to the approach of 'blaming the victim' because teachers who ignore passive resistance are refusing to examine their own practice as it relates to those who passively resist and ultimately drop out. 'Blaming the victim' is a discredited area of research into the phenomenon of dropping out. Similarly, one might argue that teacher apathy should be a discredited area of practice because it contributes to the problem of student dropouts.

In the views of dropouts, peer pressures in school also contributed to negative school climates. This represents perhaps the main finding from this study which is rarely covered in existing research. When the dropout problem is discussed in the literature, school-based factors influencing dropout rates concentrate primarily on students with difficulties, on institutional factors such as the schools, or on government policies. Institutional factors covered in the literature include teacher-student relationships but rarely examine relationships between and among students as having any influence on incidences of dropping out. Dropouts who provided data for this study discussed not only their alienation from teachers but also their problems in relating to other students. The
Fragmentation was reflected in the dropouts' labelling of different groups of students such as 'preppies' and 'rockers'. This need not imply that all school students should form a homogenous mass, but suggests that those differences currently existing in schools cause conflict. Conflict also occurred because of the gangs which physically intimidated many students and controlled the sale of drugs on school premises.

Dropouts believed that students categorized each other in much the same way that teachers categorized students. Once grouped, many students despised other categories of students, hence the sense of fragmentation and conflict. Most dropouts experienced little long-term bonding with any particular group, thereby increasing their isolation within the community. Indeed, 'community' may be an inappropriately optimistic description of schools, in the view of many dropouts. Such a lack of a supportive community undoubtedly contributed to many decisions to drop out. Thus the development of supportive communities might be a useful step in increasing retention.

Support for improving school climate in order to improve retention can be found in the literature, notably from Firestone (1989), Wehlage, Rutter & Turnbaugh (1987), and Hamby (1989). Data from this study also support the key finding of Wehlage et al (1989), namely that schools should provide at-risk students with a 'community of support'. The authors found this concept so central to reducing dropout rates that they entitled their study of fourteen
institutions which had developed some success in reducing dropouts: "Reducing the Risk: Schools as Communities of Support". Wehlage addressed discipline and teacher-student relationships but included little debate concerning what dropouts in this study considered the minefield of peer pressure. Perhaps this occurred because Wehlage's study was carried out in institutions that had successfully developed the concept of 'school as community', thereby reducing the negative influence of peers.

To develop such communities necessitates communication and co-operation in schools. Wehlage suggests a pro-active role and responsibility by teachers and administrators in relating to 'at-risk' students:

One implication of our research is that schools are successful with at-risk students when the institution accepts a proactive responsibility for educating these youth. This responsibility derived in part from a teacher culture characterized by a moral obligation to serve youth other teachers were likely to reject as unworthy. This form of 'professional accountability' was sustained by certain attitudes and practices that fostered a positive school culture and caring approach, thereby making student success more likely. We believe it was the strength of teachers' sense of professional accountability that was the fundamental strength of these schools. Whatever
their technical features, schools without this basic commitment will remain ineffective with at-risk youth. (p 224)

Wehlage's 'community of support' represents a more appropriate concept of an effective school in terms of improving retention than the 'orderly and secure environment' of early effective school research. Wehlage specifically proposes improving school environments and making school climates responsive to the needs of at-risk students, rather than subsuming the needs of such students to the priority of creating a theoretically appropriate environment for all learning to take place.

Complementing but extending the views of Wehlage, Noddings (1988) discussed the ethic of caring in schools and suggested potentially radical implications for instructional arrangements. Noddings suggests:

If we were to explore seriously ideas suggested by an ethic of caring for education, we might suggest changes in almost every aspect of schooling: the current hierarchical structure of management, the rigid mode of allocating time, the kind of relationships encouraged, the size of schools and classes, the goals of instruction, modes of evaluation, selection of content.

A final consideration in terms of building supportive communities concerns the size of secondary schools. Are many
schools too large to facilitate a sense of community? Data from this study showed that competing sub-cultures, including gangs, thrived in large schools where nobody knew everybody. Competing sub-cultures in Surrey's schools reduce or negate any sense of community, and increase conflict between and among students, leading to a sense of alienation that makes dropping out more likely. A sense of community in such environments did not exist for students who dropped out. Wehlage also believes that small schools, or at least small units within schools, are fundamental to developing a sense of community which increases retention. While analysis of data from this study supports Wehlage's recommendations concerning school size and building communities of support, it should also be stressed that attitudes rather than physical structures are basic components of developing communities.

**Schools should develop each student's ability and treat each student as an individual learner with individual needs.**

Quantitative data from this study revealed significant differences between students in school and dropouts with respect to the question of whether schools develop individual ability. During qualitative data collection, dropouts described schools as places that failed to treat them as individuals. Dropouts were saying that school personnel had depersonalized dealings with them when they were students, so that they no longer felt respected as individuals.
Dropouts appear to be describing institutions rather than communities. Within such institutions, dropouts felt that schools had a fixed process of learning designed to suit institutional rather than learners' needs. Failure to comply with the process set out by the institution meant rejection by the institution.

The analogy might be made that such a process resembles factory production, with some units successfully produced (graduates) and others being rejected (dropouts). Data supporting such a claim include dropouts' stress on what they believed to be the overly organized aspect of schools, with fixed agendas which dropouts considered inappropriate to their needs, and statements like 'It didn't seem like you were treated as kids, or students, but as something that's there to learn'. The institutions that dropouts describe therefore process people in much the same way that factories process raw materials into manufactured goods, and, by failing to acknowledge individual differences, accept a failure rate as the norm of production techniques.

Accepting a failure or dropout rate suggests satisfaction with the methods of production. This may be a reasonable position when dropout rates are low but appears untenable in the context of current numbers of dropouts. Accepting any analogy of schools as factories also appears disturbing. Scrap materials in factories can be re-cycled in subsequent production but the literature on dropouts states that no such recycling takes place for those who drop out of school. Dropouts generally face lives of economic deprivation and incur significant costs to society. Even the most basic cost-benefit
analysis leads to the conclusion that prevention would prove beneficial to individuals and to society as a whole.

Treating students as individuals with individual needs necessitates rejection of conscious or unconscious adherence to schools as factories. It may also necessitate some consideration of balancing student-centred education with the needs of a modern society. Student-centred education may be traced to the ideas of Rousseau, and society-oriented education to Plato. Can the philosophies of Rousseau (student-centred) and Plato (society-oriented) co-exist in schools? It could be argued that schools are currently close to the Platonic philosophy because their programs require completion of standardized curricula for all students, with completion measured by testing which serves to stratify students into economic roles. Such practices conflict with what some students see as their quite different needs which they believe schools fail to recognize. Data from this study support the conclusion that because such individual needs remain unrecognized substantial numbers of students drop out.

The greatest irony of adhering to a philosophy intended to socialize students into a world of work is that practices reflecting such philosophy fail to produce intended outcomes of economic socialization, where the needs of society are met by the provision of appropriately skilled labour. It has been argued by organizations such as the Canadian Labour Market & Productivity Centre (see Literature Review) that schooling in Canada fails to produce sufficient graduates to form the basis of what many employers consider an appropriately skilled workforce for a developing post-
industrial economy. Traditional reliance in British Columbia on primary production, a large number of low-paying service-sector jobs and the ability to import skilled labour has tended to mask the problem of inadequate education and training at both secondary and post-secondary levels. But if bodies like the federal government and the Canadian Labour Market & Productivity Centre both express concern at actual and potential problems in the supply of adequately-educated labour, and if such concerns are justified, then such views support the case that the current system is failing to produce its intended outcomes.

In order to develop each student's individual ability and to treat each student as an individual learner, schools and policies governing practices in schools need more of the influence of Rousseau and less of the influence of Plato. More student-centred learning might better serve both the needs of the individual learner and the needs of society as a whole, thereby increasing retention and providing a better-educated population.

Policy, politics and dropouts.

School-based reform might improve but appears unlikely to solve the problem of dropouts unless accompanied by policy changes. Many school-based practices stem from policies developed at the level of government. As an example, the dropouts who provided data for this study stated that they preferred to study in areas that, in their perception, were related and relevant to employment. Such
study areas are largely electives and become available to students as options once the core curriculum has been completed. They are considered to be of lower value than core subjects by those who decide educational policies, namely the provincial government which mandates the policies controlling schools' daily practices. British Columbian students cannot graduate with trade or business credits alone, regardless of the levels of competency reached, because policy directives specify competency in core curriculum areas as a pre-requisite for graduation. To effect change that might encourage retention becomes therefore a matter partly outside the control of schools, which cannot change graduation requirements, core curriculum or assessment practices.

Policies should be developed to encourage more diverse forms of schooling. To argue for more alternatives in schooling is to propose pluralism in secondary education. Pluralism means that schools and society should move away from a narrow and uniform prescription of what all schools should be and what they must offer. Currently, secondary schools offer basically the same fare throughout the province of British Columbia and this provincial system appears similar to other provincial systems across the country where curriculum, teaching practices, school organization, and even the physical environments of schools are recognizably the same. Many school practices and environments are arguably similar to those of twenty or even fifty years ago. It appears that in our rapidly-changing society almost everything changes but our schools. But in terms of retention, our schools do not work. They are seen as so boring and so inappropriate that significant numbers of students
leave, failing to achieve adequate educational standards to equip themselves either for future employment or full participation in society.

Support for the idea of pluralism comes from Futrell (1989), who argued against uniform structures and for varied approaches to teaching, learning and the structures of schools. Discussing 'waves of reform' during the 1980's, Futrell predicted and argued in favour of a 'fourth wave' of reform:

The fourth wave envisions democratic, grassroots reform. It demands a return to schools that are organized to facilitate educational renewal and improvement from the bottom up. Because the fourth wave defines education as both an instrumental value and an intrinsic value, the goals of education become less parochial, more expansive, and less determined by economic forces. Fourth wave reform has as its focus an education that prepares tomorrow's adults to meet ethical as well as economic imperatives - that prepares them for a life of worth as well as a life of work. Fourth wave reform is predicated on the assumption that schools must offer both excellence and equity. It envisions schools that will enable every student - regardless of race, sex or socioeconomic status - to reach his or her full potential. (p 14)
Futtrell believes that educational systems should seek for alternatives and reject universality of schooling which neither respects differences in individual students nor recognises the validity of anything other than a common structure and a core curriculum for all students.

But how can educational systems 'seek for alternatives'? Educational policy is controlled within a political framework. Within such a framework individual searches for working alternatives are discouraged by withholding accreditation to anything that fails to conform to a single and dominant prescription of education. This perhaps implies that such a prescription is sacrosanct and of such basic value that it cannot be challenged. But what actually is it? In its basic form, the conception of education which currently influences policy appears to be as follows: a certain type of 'well-rounded' person is needed to function in society - educated in a number of key areas (found in core curriculum) and socialized in terms of being able to work and to function within a democratic society. The purpose of schools is to produce such 'well-rounded' people. Curriculum reflects the purpose and testing measures student mastery of the curriculum.

Support for this dual philosophy (promoting education and socialization in schools) can be found in the Mission Statement contained in the British Columbia Ministry of Education's document 'The Graduation Program' (1990):

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable learners to develop their individual
potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (p 7)

But does even a limited consideration of just the economic needs of British Columbia lead to a conclusion that our society requires conformity to the idea that school systems should produce 'well-rounded' people? A brief glance around any university faculty or industrial workplace provides ample evidence of apparently well-functioning but hardly uniformly 'well-rounded' people. Indeed both academic and economic specialization necessitates the development of some skills at the expense of others. It could be argued that schools may aspire to produce 'well-rounded people' but that, in reality, processes of socialization take precedence. Schools stratify and socialize by claiming to educate using curricula and practices with which many students have no affinity. Such students either fail or drop out. Hence the aspiration to produce 'well-rounded' people may in practice result in schools producing a small number of such beings within the total school population who are educated while the rest are socialized. It can also be argued that the production by schools of 'well-rounded' citizens appears untenable because the economic needs of modern society are best served by the availability of a specialized, adaptable and highly skilled workforce. A convincing argument could be made that policies which mandate a general education for all students are therefore becoming increasingly irrelevant in a modern post-industrial economy. This need not imply that general education is
irrelevant, or that all students should be vocationally-oriented. On a social level, the benefits of a general education are defensible. But it should not be mandatory for those who have no interest in it and who might prefer, and benefit from, an alternative vocational education were one available.

A major problem in developing alternative forms of education concerns the issue of equal opportunity, and particularly equality of outcomes in education. The outcome of a vocational education traditionally becomes employment defined within lower status occupations, while academic outcomes include university and career orientations. Should vocational education therefore be offered to students alienated from academic curriculum? If so, does economic socialization and social stratification inevitably result? Bourdieu (1974) discussed what he claimed to be problems with accessibility to an elite culture by the mass of the population. Bourdieu believed that schools work in biased ways by the imposition of what he described as 'cultural letters' - the dominance of a particular type of learning which only some children may access because of their cultural and class background. Because Bourdieu believed that working class students cannot gain access to such culture, he argues that separate curriculum, more accessible to working class students, should be developed. Bantock (1968) shares Bourdieu's belief, stating that separate and incompatible cultures, which he describes as 'elite' and 'popular', necessitate the development of separate curriculum which in part equates to education and vocational training. Opposing both Bourdieu and Bantock, Lawton (1975) considers the concept of a 'working class curriculum' harmful
and socially divisive, maintaining social and economic stratification.

If a separate vocational curriculum were developed, would its users be predominantly working class? Might such a development cause the growth of a two-tiered system, where students are streamed into appropriate channels, one academic and middle-class and the other vocational and working class?

Two possible solutions to the dilemma are offered here. The first concerns equality of outcomes, and necessitates improving the status of vocational courses so that taking such courses need not exclude students from later progression into academic or professionally-oriented study or employment. Policies could be developed to require universities to enrol a specific ratio of students from vocational high school courses, thereby raising the status of vocational curriculum and encouraging a greater diversity of students who opt for such courses. A second solution involves the implementation of mandatory vocational course for all students in secondary schools. These might be liberally defined, as in the Swedish school system, where all students take compulsory courses in practical skills such as Childcare, Home Economics and Woodwork. Such courses encourage affirmative action and appear classless and utilitarian, suggesting that all people need practical skills oriented to work or survival, not just the children of the working class. But to implement such changes requires significant policy shifts and political will. On the evidence of the above-mentioned mission statement, neither appears likely in the province of British Columbia.
Policies might usefully be developed based on greater respect for pluralism and diversity in schooling. Such policies would consider both the diverse needs of students, which current systems of secondary schooling fail to satisfy, and address the changing needs of both the economic and social environment of a modern society.

A further area for possible policy change to increase retention concerns testing and assessment practices which provide the basis of school credentialism. Such practices have remained standardized and conservative in senior secondary schools where most incidences of dropping out occur. It has been stated that testing often means that teachers 'teach to the test'. They aim to maximize their students' chances of success by a narrow focus on curriculum and by utilizing conservative teaching practices. There exists a wide acceptance of grading and testing within schools and society, which policies merely reflect. And yet the theoretical framework supporting testing is flimsy at best. Karrier's (1976) discussion concerning the development of testing outlines his belief that testing develops an industrial occupational hierarchy. While Karrier's views pose an ideological challenge to testing practices, other analyses of assessment practices in schools, which are discussed below, consider the educational utility of testing and find it wanting.

A number of researchers' claims that the influence of credentialism and competitive assessment dominates secondary schools (Chamberlain et al., 1942 and Hannan, 1983) have rarely been challenged in the literature. Perhaps this occurs because those who
contribute to the literature have themselves a considerable stake in maintaining the status of credentials they have spent many years obtaining. Chamberlain's 1942 study, which showed that students who were not subject to competitive assessment practices in schools performed better in colleges than college students who had been subject to such grading, has largely been ignored, as has any research which questioned the validity of competitive assessment practices.

Why is the belief in competitive grading and assessment so firmly entrenched and so rarely challenged when it rests on so flimsy a base? A reasonable conjecture might be that an alliance of academia, industry and government demands such practices. Such an alliance in part reflects popular belief, and in part has developed and nurtured such belief. Universities and employers prefer competitive assessment in schools because it makes selection of students and employees easier and less expensive than considering wider criteria of candidates' appropriate qualities.

If current practices of competitive assessment are maintained, then opportunities for increasing retention appear minimal. The very basis of current graduation requirements involves some winners who pass tests and losers who fail them. It could be argued from the literature and from the results of this study that some students in schools who know that they are unlikely to pass testing processes currently drop out and, in the absence of policy reform, will continue to do so.

But not all students who drop out do so because they are incapable of passing graduation requirements. While some of the
dropouts who contributed to this study considered the final hurdle of graduation insurmountable, others who dropped out considered approaches to graduation inaccessible because of inflexibility within the organization of schools and because schools were not empathic to their needs. This suggests a need for policy reform in terms of graduation requirements in conjunction with school-based reform in terms of organization and climate. Support for a combination of school-based and policy reform is also derived from data provided by one group of dropouts from the regular high school system. Most members of this group passed grade level assessment in an alternative environment where flexible hours, individual learning packages and highly empathic teachers were available to students. Such students clearly stated their view that the 'regular' system of secondary schooling was inappropriate to their needs but stressed that they participated and succeeded within a different organization and climate. Policy changes might make such centres more widely available or encourage their emulation within mainstream school environments.

**Proposed reforms to the British Columbia education system and their potential effects on retention.**

Any discussion of policy relating to the issue of dropouts within the province of British Columbia might usefully consider the relevance of reforms to graduation programs proposed by the provincial Ministry of Education in its document, 'The Graduation Program: Response Draft' (1990). The draft represents the latest
stage in planning reforms as a result of the 1988 Sullivan Royal Commission and a subsequent draft policy paper, 'Year 2000: A Curriculum and Assessment Framework for the Future' (1989). While the overall effects on retention of proposed reforms are difficult to estimate, it can be argued that, while they represent a useful but highly tentative first step, proposed reforms will do little to maximize retention unless they are further developed and extended.

The reforms encourage the provision of new and different 'pathways to graduation' by introducing five selected options of study to students in senior secondary schools. The vocational nature of two such options ('Passport to Apprenticeship' and 'Career') will strongly appeal to those students who drop out of school because of what they perceive as schools' lack of relevance to the world of work. However, selected options are only electives, and core curriculum is preserved within the 'General Studies' curriculum, which is mandatory. By reaching for new options, reforms are proposing curriculum that dropouts are likely to consider relevant. By maintaining core curriculum, proposed policies ensure that uniform learning and mandated testing will continue to dominate British Columbian secondary education.

The dual purposes of the proposed policy are reflected in the draft document's Mission Statement (see above) in which the needs of learners and the needs of the economy are given equal prominence. However it can be argued that in much of the document, individual learners' needs are subsumed to what are considered to be the economic and social interests of society. The maintenance of mandatory core curriculum clearly implies that mastery of such
curriculum will achieve desired ends, beneficial for individual students and for society as a whole. But data from this study, and from the literature, has exposed the fallacy of such an argument. Dropouts who contributed to this study clearly stated their dissatisfaction with core curriculum. Their evidence suggests that students already leave schools in droves because of core curricula they consider boring and irrelevant. Within the literature, McDill, Natriello and Pallas (1986) summarized the limitations of imposing core curriculum requirements, suggesting that the notion of 'core' in fact means compulsory and stresses the greater legitimacy of knowledge contained within the core, as compared to electives.

If substantial numbers of students leave schools prior to graduation, and if supplies of 'appropriate' labour are considered inadequate, then it could be said that an education system which purports to serve individual needs together with society's economic and social interests in fact fails to serve either. If current policies are failing to achieve desired ends, then maintenance of core curriculum and uniformity of schooling will not improve the prospects of increased retention. Justification for core curriculum has therefore been challenged, and found wanting, on both philosophical and utilitarian grounds.

Alternatives to both core curriculum and uniform structures should then be considered, perhaps within the spirit of Futrell's (1989) belief that:

....as the 1980's draw to a close, there is no excuse for believing that educational excellence for all
students necessitates a uniform structure for all schools. Solid evidence supports a variety of approaches to teaching, learning and the structure of schooling - as long as these structures are forged at the local level. (p14)

A useful extension of current reform proposals might usefully address the abolition of core curriculum as a pre-condition to graduation for all students. Might the purpose of the British Columbian school system as stated in the Mission Statement be realized by allowing some students to graduate through their individually-chosen pathways rather than over the hurdle of a centrally-initiated core curriculum? And might such pathways also produce citizens who will contribute to the development of the 'healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy' described in the Mission Statement?

The draft report proposes innovative organizational changes that are likely to interest many students who currently drop out and which may improve retention:

In terms of school organization, schools are encouraged to provide learning experiences in ways that facilitate student achievement of learning outcomes and that respond in the most effective manner to the needs of their students and their community. They are further encouraged to de-emphasize time as a determining factor in
completion of curriculum. It is anticipated then, that patterns of school organization will vary depending upon local circumstances. Extended days, flexible schedules, evening hours, and a year-round operation can be utilized and will increasingly characterize the organization of students' Graduation Programs. (p 18).

There exists ample data, both from this study, and from the literature, to support such changes. A number of young people interviewed for this study worked during the day but continued to study in the more flexible environment of Surrey School District's 'Work & Learn' program. Others provided data suggesting that their inability to complete studies within the time frame set by schools contributed to decisions to drop out. Young and often single parents, for instance, require flexibly and empathically-organized schooling if they are to continue in school.

The draft document also proposes school-based and policy reform, though the school-based reforms are merely to implement policy changes. Changes proposed in the 'Graduation Program' fail to identify or confront some of the problems considered important by dropouts and discussed in this study, such as teaching methods or school climates. Reforms are proposed without consideration of a number of fundamental issues which influence dropout rates, suggesting that the principal focus of the 'Graduation Program' does not include retention as a major priority.
In summary, by initiating alternative pathways to graduation and by proposing innovative organizational changes, proposed reforms represent a positive step towards improving retention. However, data from both this study and the literature lead to a conclusion that increased retention appears more likely through promoting alternative pathways as valid routes to graduation in their own right and through a recognition of the issues causing students to drop out of schools.

Options for resolving the dropout problem.

1. The Research Agenda.

This study was intended to be an exploratory investigation of the dropout problem in the School District of Surrey in British Columbia. The justification for the study's design and methodology rests on the fact that little research on this topic has been conducted in this province, and it was believed when planning the research that a useful first step might be to examine the views of a number of dropouts concerning their reasons for dropping out of school. Having completed such a task one finds considerable similarity of findings when comparing this to other studies. It can be argued that we now know why some students in Surrey drop out of school. But that does not mean that the research agenda is complete. It might be better argued that appropriate research has barely commenced. This study has provided little information that illustrates gender differences or considered issues of ethnicity that
might be factors in dropping out. No attempt was made to consider the dropout problem from a rural perspective, nor to consider the views of First Nation students who dropped out. To understand the phenomenon of dropping out in British Columbia's schools therefore requires an ongoing research agenda which might focus on some of the above groups and perspectives.

Methodologically, a longitudinal research study focusing on a group of students from Grade 8 through to completion or dropping out might usefully be considered. Such a study could document factors of student alienation from school as they develop and might provide richer data and a greater understanding of the dropout problem.

2. The Reform Agenda.

A strong case can be made that reforms to reduce school dropout rates need to combine school-based reform with policy changes. Proposed policy changes resulting from the Sullivan Royal Commission appear to offer adaptations of both curriculum and organization, but such changes are arguably insufficient to reduce dropout rates. Within the debate on educational change in British Columbia, the prevailing beliefs in core curriculum and testing survive unscathed. To graduate, all students must study the core curriculum and be tested on it. Yet many who drop out of school find no affinity with such a curriculum and drop out prior to testing. While curriculum and testing requirements remain so conservatively
stated and so firmly entrenched, the prospects for appropriate legislated reform to improve retention must remain slight.

But the case for policy reform must be made. Schools fail to serve the needs of substantial numbers of students. They fail to serve the needs of a rapidly changing social and economic order. They are out of date, with antiquated structures and practices more appropriate to an earlier industrial age. And they are all the same, because they are mandated to be the same by governments who appear fearful of difference and experimentation. There exists a need to remove legislation which constricts by mandating uniformity, and instead to initiate legislation which enables the development of pluralism in schools, so that new fulfilling pathways to graduation might satisfy the needs of learners who currently drop out. The prospects of such change in British Columbia appear slight.

In the likely absence of legislative reform, what are the chances of schools initiating reforms to improve retention? It is easy to state that teachers and administrators can and should change school practices and atmosphere. But actual change within the parameters that schools can control depends on the individual and collective will of school personnel, and the support or leadership of their District Office and School Board. Wideen et al's (1990) study of Surrey High Schools reported that 86% of Surrey's High School teachers agreed that significant numbers of students drop out of school, and 93% agreed that the issue of dropouts was important. However, in comments relating to the question of dropouts, few teachers questioned current teacher roles or curriculum requirements. While the problem has been acknowledged,
school-based factors which alienate many students who drop out may not be well understood by the School District's teachers.

Reform, whether school-based or legislative, depends first of all on acknowledging, then understanding a given problem and finally initiating change. Perhaps the dropout reform agenda and the needs of early school leavers might best be served by such a process to resolve the dropout problem in Surrey's High Schools.
APPENDIX

A Questionnaire to Sample the Opinions of Early School Leavers in the High Schools of Surrey
A Questionnaire to Sample the Opinions of Early School Leavers in the High Schools of Surrey

We do not know how you're feeling ....... but we want to know. Your opinions are important to us.

Please be kind enough to complete this questionnaire. Your cooperation means a lot.

Thank you!

Surrey Research Project

A study sponsored by Simon Fraser University and the School District of Surrey 1989
The Surrey High School Study

The Surrey school board has asked that an extensive study be conducted on secondary schools in Surrey. Through this study we hope to learn more about what teachers, students, former students, administrators and the public think about secondary education and how high schools can be made better places for teachers to teach and students to learn. In this part of the study, we ask for the opinions of those who do not graduate from Surrey's schools. Ultimately, it is the purpose of this research project to provide valuable information on the secondary schools of Surrey which will enable the district to better serve the students attending their schools.

This survey asks questions about many aspects of the school you attended. We welcome your written comments on the questions we ask or on any other issue important to you. The results of your questionnaire will be kept completely confidential.

We thank you for your cooperation.
## The Purpose of Schools

Secondary education means different things to different people. We need to know what you believe are the goals of your school. Please tell us how much you agree with the following: by placing a check mark in the box which accurately completes the statement for you:

**IN MY SCHOOL, TEACHERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taught students <strong>how</strong> to learn</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>taught mainly the basic subjects (Math, L.A., Science, Social)</td>
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<tr>
<td>prepared students for jobs</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>developed <strong>each</strong> students ability</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>prepared students to make the world a better place to live</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taught important, everyday skills necessary in life</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>taught students how to be good members of society.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>told students what to learn and showed us how to learn it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taught mainly the “facts”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments?
With regards to **how** my teachers taught:

The following items relate to different ways of teaching. Please indicate the general practice in the school you attended.

**IN MY school, MY TEACHERS.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Almost always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taught students by lecturing.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>discussed topics or issues with students</td>
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<tr>
<td>allowed students to work in student groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>organized field trips</td>
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<tr>
<td>dealt with topics of the students’ choosing</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstrated to the class using equipment, materials, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>helped us learn through role playing, debating and games.</td>
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<tr>
<td>used team teaching (teachers working together teaching your class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>had the students do seatwork</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>used a textbook while teaching.</td>
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<tr>
<td>brought in guest speakers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prepared students for Surrey exams or provincial exams</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
The Good School

Some people who have studied schools believe that the following are the characteristics of a good school. Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements.

SECTION ONE . . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What was being taught and how it was taught was important in my school.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers in school had high expectations of students.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I felt safe in school.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers knew how I was doing in my classes.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My school had a system which rewarded good student behaviour and punished poor behaviour.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers worked together to make a good school.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION TWO . . . .

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My teachers enjoyed teaching.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most students felt successful in school.</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers were available to students after class.</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers planned learning activities that filled the whole class period.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers cared about students in school.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student behaviour was good in school.</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers expected me to give my best effort in everything I did.</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I recognized good teaching when I saw it.</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In school, student opinions were important to teachers.</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School was an enjoyable place to be.</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students were treated fairly in my school.</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had a problem, I had a teacher I could talk to.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


