DROPPING OUT, LOSING OUT:
THE HIGH COST FOR CALIFORNIA

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DROPPING OUT, LOSING OUT:

The High Cost for California

Prepared by
Assembly Office of Research
September 1985

at the request of
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

California has an enormous high school dropout problem which crosses all ethnic and geographic barriers. If left unchecked, the large numbers of high school dropouts entering adult life with poor basic academic skills will undermine the economic growth of California.

In September 1984 the Assembly Office of Research (AOR) began to study the California dropout problem at the request of Assembly Members Gloria Molina and William Leonard. AOR conducted two seminars in which 51 academic, school, and community experts discussed the dropout problem and legislative solutions. The seminars were co-sponsored by the Tomas Rivera Center at the Claremont University Center and Graduate School and the University of California Policy Center. The names of seminar participants are listed in Appendix B.

Using the statewide graduating class of 1983, this report describes California's dropout problem and its consequences for the individual and the state, suggests some factors contributing to the problem, and recommends legislative actions.

Dimensions of the Problem

Three out of ten high school students who entered ninth grade did not graduate from high school with the class of 1983. California's high school

attrition rate has doubled since 1970.* The largest increase in statewide high school attrition occurred between 1978 and 1979, a period when summer school course offerings were drastically reduced. Prior to Proposition 13, summer school provided students with a rich variety of academic, vocational, and fine arts courses. Forty percent of high school students took one or more summer school classes in 1977.

While California's dropout rate accelerated in the 1970's, the grade level at which dropouts left school shifted: in 1977, 9 percent of dropouts left in the 12th grade, in 1983, 34 percent of dropouts left in the 12th grade.

California's dropout problem is more severe than the national dropout problem. In the 1970s the national dropout rate increased somewhat, while California's dropout rate rose from below the national average to well above the national average. In 1980, 74 percent of all 17-year olds in the United States had a diploma. In 1980, only 64 percent of California's 17-year olds had a diploma.

California dropouts are not confined to inner city school districts in one geographic region of the state. Counties with high countywide attrition in the class of 1983 are found in every region: of the 14 counties whose attrition rates exceeded 30 percent, five were in northern California, five were in central California, and four were in southern California. High schools whose attrition rates for the class of 1983

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*This 30 percent statewide attrition rate compares the number of students in the class who were enrolled in the ninth grade in 1979-80 to the number who graduated four years later in 1983.

exceeded 40 percent were not confined to large urban districts. Statewide 119 high schools had attrition rates greater than 40 percent: 80 were in medium to small school districts having fewer than 40,000 students.

In the Class of 1983, three out of ten white students did not graduate, four out of ten black and Hispanic students did not graduate, five out of ten American Indian students did not graduate. While Hispanic, black, and American Indian students drop out at a greater rate, white students drop out of school in much larger numbers than do minority students. In the Class of 1983, 56.4 percent of dropouts were white.

Of the roughly 98,000 students who dropped out of the Class of 1983 in California, 38,000 youth furthered their education in the subsequent year by either receiving a diploma equivalent or by entering trade school or a community college. The remaining 60,000 entered adult life without a diploma, diploma equivalent, or further education.

Why Students Leave School

Students drop out because they are not succeeding in school, they want to work, or they are pregnant. Dropouts tend to be overage for their grade: they have run out of time to pass required courses. Some dropouts fail district proficiency tests or courses required to graduate. Of the 100,000 dropouts in the class of 1983, 41,000 left in twelfth grade due to failure of proficiency tests or the courses needed to graduate. Many students leave high school via continuation school: 19,000 left the class of 1983 from continuation schools. Most dropouts are in the remedial or general "track," are chronically truant, and feel alienated from school.

Dropping out to go to work is a major reason for males to leave school. The connection of schooling to work and adult life has not been achieved for the dropout despite a variety of school programs designed to forge that connection. Pregnancy is a major reason for females to leave school. We estimate that 20,000 females dropped out of the class of 1983 due to becoming teen mothers. California has the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the United States and serves less than 10 percent of eligible females in programs designed to help teen parents earn a diploma.

Consequences

School dropouts pay a heavy personal price for their decisions to leave school. Opportunities are remote for earning a college degree, employment prospects are dim, unemployment a lifelong threat, and lifetime earnings of the dropout are lower than those of high school graduates. The economic penalty for being a high school dropout is increasing as employers use the high school diploma as a screening device for potential employees. Society pays a high price for the dropout in increased public dependency, especially for teenage mothers, and in increased functional illiteracy in the adult population. The dropout problem threatens California's economic growth because of projected changes in the state's population. California's population will be half minority by the year 2000, and if minority dropout rates remain at the current high levels, the state will lack a sufficiently skilled workforce to compete in the world economy.

High Risk Schools

School factors contribute to the academic failure of dropouts. Counseling is inadequate for all students in California high schools, but

especially for the students in the general track. California high schools assign more students to the general track than do high schools in other states. Many forces including legislated mandates for proficiency testing, increased graduation and college entrance requirements, and financial pressures have created a narrow curriculum with reduced course offerings in vocational education, fine arts, and other electives. The result is a curriculum which offers students fewer chances to succeed. Despite all the forces which contribute to a high dropout rate in California, there are effective schools which have reduced their dropout rate. Changes in curriculum, counseling, and school organization have resulted in improved academic performance of students who entered high school with low reading skills.

The dropout rate is a symptom of deeper underlying problems in the high school. To understand why students "vote with their feet" and drop out of school, policy makers should examine the high school of the 1980s in California.

Ineffective Existing Laws

Students who leave school before graduation or before attaining the age of 18 are in violation of the state compulsory school attendance law. If dropouts work, they are in violation of child labor laws which require school attendance as a prerequisite for a work permit. Parents of chronic truants can be fined or jailed or both. In practice, neither school attendance nor child labor laws are enforced with uniform rigor throughout the state. Financial incentives in state law for school districts to increase attendance are flawed in their administration. Taken as a whole

the laws designed to encourage youth to stay in school are ineffective in stemming the flood of dropouts.

Alternatives

Large numbers of students dropout of high school in spite of the many programs designed to provide them with alternative means to complete a high school education. The fragmented set of alternative programs, such as continuation schools, independent study, or Regional Occupational Programs, do not constitute a systematic safety net for dropout prevention or reentry into school. The effectiveness of each of the major alternatives cannot be assessed due to inadequate program performance information at the state level.

Recommendations

To reduce California's dropout rate, we recommend a three-part plan. First, enforce the laws to keep youth in school under age 18. Second, improve the secondary schools to correct the factors which contribute to dropout's academic failure. Third, strengthen the safety net of dropout prevention and recovery programs.

To enhance the enforcement of current laws we recommend:

- School districts report to the state annually by school the number of dropouts and why they left school.
- Tighten administration of the average daily attendance system by limiting the counting of excused absences for funding purposes and require period by period attendance reporting in high school.

- Provide more organized programs of work experience to insure that working students attend school regularly and progress satisfactorily in their schoolwork.

To improve secondary schools in areas which contribute to students academic success, we recommend:

- Expansion of the SB 813 10th grade counseling to grades 4 through 9.
- Expansion and revision of the secondary School Improvement Program as a means to improve curriculum, counseling, and student assessment.
- Restore summer school to its pre-Proposition 13 level as a frontal attack on the overage problem and to enrich the narrow high school curriculum with more fine arts and vocational education courses.
- Strengthen accountability in the accreditation of high schools by requiring dropout rates to be considered in a school's accreditation and by providing extensive review once every three years for high schools with very high dropout rates.
- The Superintendent of Public Instruction should review junior high and middle schools in California and make recommendations to the Legislature for their improvement.

To strengthen the safety net of existing dropout prevention and recovery programs, we recommend:

- Initiate school-based consolidation of existing alternative and categorically funded programs to focus them on improving the graduation rate of high schools and to increase attendance in grades K through 12.

- An independent evaluation of the structure and effectiveness of continuation schools contracted by the Legislative Analyst.
- An evaluation of the independent study program under contract with the Legislative Analyst.
- Systematic expansion of pregnant minors programs and adult literacy programs. Evaluation by the Legislative Analyst of potential consolidation of separate teen pregnancy programs.

Implementation of this three-part plan will require state level commitment in legislation and additional state funds, and renewed efforts on the part of educators, parents, and youth. This commitment to reduce the dropout rate is vital to California's future because if allowed to continue unabated, the flood of high school dropouts will undermine California's capacity for economic growth.

Chapter I

THE DROPOUT PROBLEM IN CALIFORNIA

California has an enormous high school dropout problem: three out of ten students do not graduate. The dropout problem in California is not limited to inner cities; it crosses all geographic and ethnic barriers. If left unchecked, the large numbers of high school dropouts entering adult life with poor basic academic skills will undermine the economic growth of California. This report describes California's dropout problem and its consequences for the individual and the state, suggests some factors contributing to the problem and recommends legislative action.

In Chapter I, we present the dimensions of California's dropout problem: its growth over time, overall size, geographic distribution, and California's position relative to other states. The characteristics of dropouts are described: their sex and ethnicity. In this chapter we will illustrate California's dropout problem using the statewide high school graduating class of 1983.[1]

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[1] As used in this report, these terms have the following meaning: "Dropout" is a student who leaves high school prior to graduation. "Attrition" is the number of students who leave school prior to graduation in a single age cohort or class. Attrition is measured for a cohort of students in a high school graduating class by deducting the total number of graduates from the students in ninth grade four years earlier.

Size of the Dropout Problem

Statewide Attrition

California's dropout rate has been estimated by using attrition, that is, by comparing the number of students in a class who were enrolled in the ninth grade in a given year to the number who graduate four years later. California's high school graduating class attrition rate has doubled since 1970. In the early 1950's a typical high school class lost 26 percent of its enrollment. This rate declined to a low of 11 percent attrition in the class of 1965. The attrition rate stabilized from 1965 to 1970. The statewide high school graduating class attrition rate doubled from 14 percent to 32 percent between 1970 and 1981.[2] Figure 1 shows California's public high school attrition rate from 1976-77 to 1983-84. The attrition rate peaked at 32 percent in 1981 and has remained stable or declined slightly since 1981.

Figure 1

Statewide Public High School Graduating Class Attrition Rate 1976/77 to 1983/84

Year	High School Graduates	Ninth Grade Enrollment 4 Years Earlier	Decrease	Percent Decrease
1976/77	278,596	357,817	79,221	-22.2
1977/78	278,553	364,701	86,148	-23.7
1978/79	262,967	368,831	105,864	-28.7
1979/80	249,217	364,665	115,448	-31.7
1980/81	242,172	356,094	113,922	-32.0
1981/82	241,343	350,186	108,843	-31.1
1982/83	236,897	335,209	98,312	-29.3
1983/84	232,199	327,029	94,830	-29.3

Source: California Department of Education, California Basic Education Data System.

[2] California Department of Education, High Risk Youth (Sacramento, August 10, 1984), p. 9.

Impact of Summer School Reductions

The largest increase in statewide high school graduating class attrition occurred between 1978 and 1979: 19,716 more students dropped out in the class of 1979 than in the class of 1978. This abrupt decrease in enrollment occurred in the 12th grade after the massive reduction of summer school classes following the passage of Proposition 13. In the summer of 1978, there were 79,832 students in average daily attendance (ADA) in summer school. In the summer of 1979, summer school ADA dropped to 4,554. The only summer school funded by the state in the summer of 1979 was for graduating seniors who needed to retake courses they had failed in order to earn their diploma. In the summer of 1980, summer school ADA dropped to 849 statewide. In 1983, summer school ADA remained 88 percent below pre-Proposition 13 levels. Figure 2 shows ADA between 1977 and 1984 for summer school and for all high school students in grades 9 through 12.

Figure 2

**Summer School Average Daily Attendance*
1977 to 1984**

Year	Summer School ADA	High School ADA Grade 9-12	Percent of Summer School ADA to Total High School ADA
1977	75,909	1,272,996	6.0%
1978	79,832	1,259,338	6.4%
1979	4,554	1,217,701	0.4%
1980	849	1,177,490	0.1%
1981	7,178	1,143,105	0.7%
1982	7,845	1,114,353	0.7%
1983	9,383	1,103,964	0.9%
1984	10,154	1,112,604	1.0%

*Includes regular classes, excludes special education.

Source: California Department of Education, Local Assistance Bureau, Sacramento, California.

Reduction in summer school opportunities for high school students may have contributed to the sharp increase in statewide high school attrition which occurred from 1979 to 1983 because summer school provides a second chance for students to pass courses they have failed during the regular school year. When high school students fail courses, they fall behind the expected pace for accumulating the credits needed for graduation. They become "overage for grade" and are at great risk of dropping out. In Chapter III we describe the school related reasons students drop out including being overage for grade and academic failure.

Summer school also provided opportunities for students to take a wide variety of courses other than those required for graduation. In 1977, the summer before the passage of Proposition 13, 40 percent of all high school students took one or more summer school courses. Figure 3 shows the rich variety of summer courses offered in 1977.

Figure 3

Enrollment in Summer School Courses by Students in Grades 9 to 12 in 1977 by Subject Area

Subject Area	Total Summer Enrollment	Percent of Total
Academic	(412,058)	38.0%
English	106,950	
English as a Second Language	11,947	
Foreign Language	5,651	
Mathematics	105,861	
Science	49,587	
Social Science	132,062	
Vocational Education	(212,351)	19.5%
Agriculture	7,002	
Business	62,957	
Homemaking	28,113	
Industrial Arts	53,817	
Work Experience	60,392	
Arts	(88,479)	8.0%
Arts and Crafts	55,022	
Music	33,457	
Other	(377,029)	34.5%
Driver Education	92,717	
Physical Education	204,402	
Other	79,910	
TOTAL	1,089,847	100.0%

Source: California Department of Education, Selected Statistics 1977-78, (Sacramento, 1979), p. 15

Attrition Loss by Grade Level

The greatest attrition from a graduating class occurs at two points: between 11th and 12th grade and between the start of 12th grade and graduation. In the class of 1983, of the 98,312 total attrition, 76 percent of the loss occurred in the 11th or 12th grade. Since 1977, the attrition in 12th grade has increased dramatically. In the class of 1977,

nine percent of attrition occurred in the 12th grade. In the class of 1983, 34 percent of attrition occurred in the 12th grade. Acceleration of attrition in the 12th grade suggests that a significant number of California dropouts are students who persist in school until the twelfth grade and then do not graduate. Figure 4 shows when attrition occurred from 1977 to 1983.

Figure 4

Public High School Attrition By Grade Level
1977 to 1983

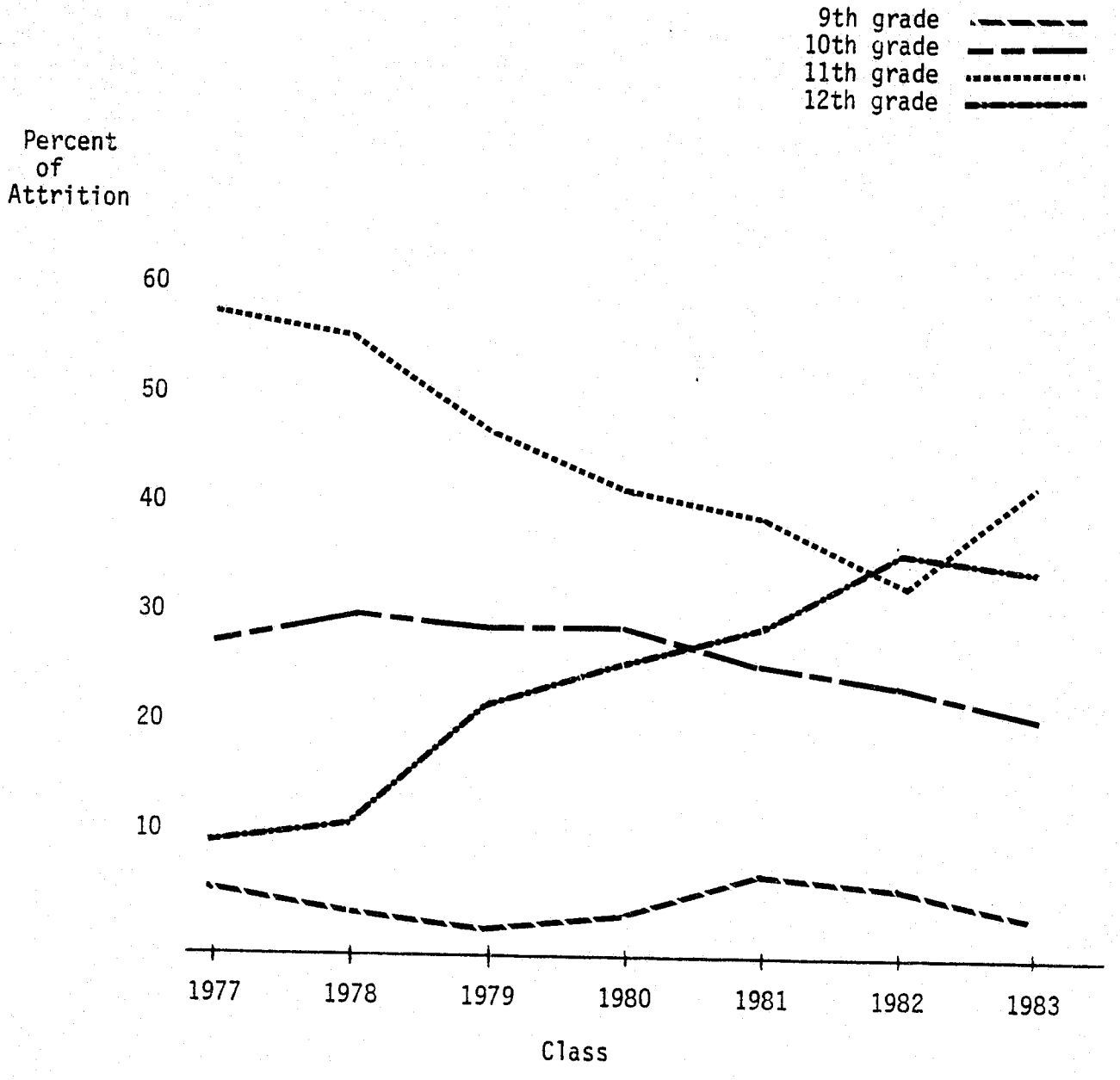
	9th Grade Loss		10th Grade Loss		11th Grade Loss		12th Grade Loss		Total Enrollment Loss	
Class	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1977	3,961	5%	22,223	28%	45,765	58%	7,272	9%	79,221	100%
1978	2,583	3%	26,051	30%	47,950	56%	9,564	11%	86,148	100%
1979	2,532	2%	30,320	29%	49,300	47%	23,712	22%	105,864	100%
1980	3,407	3%	33,003	29%	48,711	42%	30,327	26%	115,448	100%
1981	8,253	7%	29,227	26%	43,783	39%	32,659	29%	113,922	100%
1982	6,539	6%	26,506	24%	36,323	33%	39,475	36%	108,843	100%
1983	2,720	3%	20,971	21%	40,818	42%	33,803	34%	98,312	100%

Source: California Department of Education, California Basic Education Data System

Figure 5 depicts in graph form the percentage of attrition by grade level between 1977 and 1983. In contrast to the statewide attrition figures, recent urban school district studies show that most dropouts have 10th or 11th grade status. In the Los Angeles study, researchers found

Figure 5

Percent of Total Attrition
9th Grade to Graduation By Grade Level
1977 to 1983



75 percent of dropouts left school in 10th and 11th grade.[3] San Diego found that 87 percent of dropouts left school prior to entering 12th grade.[4]

The pattern of when students leave school in the greatest numbers varies by ethnic group. The San Diego study found that 55 percent of white dropouts left school at ages 16 and 17, whereas 58 percent of Hispanic dropouts and 61 percent of black students left school at ages 17 and 18.[5] Despite the somewhat lower age of white dropouts, the grade level status of white, black and Hispanic dropouts did not vary dramatically.[6] White dropouts leave school earlier than minority dropouts in San Diego, but all dropouts, regardless of ethnic group, have similar grade level status based on accumulation of high school credits. This pattern illustrates the "overage problem": dropouts tend to be students who are overage for their grade, or older than their grade level peers. Overage as a reason for leaving school is discussed in Chapter III.

California Compared with Other States

California has a relatively high dropout rate compared with other states. California's relatively severe high school dropout rate is clear in statewide attrition rates, national dropout studies and comparisons of the percentage of California 17-year-olds with high school diplomas to 17-year-olds with diplomas in the nation as a whole.

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[3]Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of Student Dropout in the Los Angeles Unified School District (Los Angeles, January 16, 1985), p. 56.

[4]San Diego Unified School District, Planning, Research and Evaluation Division, The 1982-83 School Leaver Study of the San Diego Unified School District (San Diego, April 9, 1985), p. 10.

[5]Ibid, p. 21.

[6]Ibid, p. 24.

In 1984, California ranked 34th among the states in the percentage of 9th graders who graduated from high school. Three Western states (Nevada, Oregon and Arizona), two Eastern states (New York and Michigan), the District of Columbia and ten Southern states had higher attrition rates than California in 1984.

Figure 6

Attrition Rates for the Class of 1984 by State

Rank	State	Graduation Rate	Attrition Rate
1	North Dakota	94.8	5.2
2	Minnesota	90.7	9.3
3	Delaware	88.9	11.1
4	Iowa	88.0	12
5	Vermont	85.0	15
6	South Dakota	85.0	15
7	Utah	84.5	15.5
8	Nebraska	84.1	15.9
9	Wisconsin	84.0	16
10	Montana	83.1	16.9
11	New Jersey	82.7	17.3
12	Kansas	82.5	17.5
13	Ohio	82.2	17.8
14	Hawaii	82.2	17.8
15	Wyoming	81.7	18.3
16	Maryland	81.4	18.6
17	Pennsylvania	79.7	20.3
18	Oklahoma	79.6	20.4
19	Colorado	79.2	20.8
20	Indiana	78.3	21.7
21	Connecticut	77.9	22.1
22	Idaho	77.9	22.1
23	Alaska	77.8	22.2
24	Massachusetts	77.5	22.5
25	West Virginia	77.4	22.6
26	Illinois	77.1	22.9
27	Maine	76.7	23.3
28	New Hampshire	76.5	23.5
29	Arkansas	76.2	23.8
30	Missouri	76.2	23.8
31	Virginia	75.7	24.3
32	Washington	75.5	24.5
33	Rhode Island	75.2	24.8
34	**California**	**75.1**	**24.9**
35	Nevada	74.6	25.4
36	Michigan	73.4	26.6
37	Oregon	73.0	27
38	New Mexico	71.4	28.6
39	Texas	69.4	30.6
40	North Carolina	69.3	30.7
41	Arizona	68.4	31.6
42	Kentucky	68.4	31.6
43	Alabama	67.4	32.6
44	New York	66.7	33.3
45	South Carolina	66.2	33.8
46	Georgia	65.9	34.1
47	Florida	65.5	34.5
48	Tennessee	65	35
49	Mississippi	63.7	36.3
50	District of Columbia	58.4	41.6
51	Louisiana	57.2	42.8

The national study, High School and Beyond, compared the number of 10th grade sophomores in the spring of 1980 to the number of 12th grade seniors in the spring of 1982. California's dropout rate was 25 percent higher than the national average.[7]

Another comparison of California's dropout rate to the national rate showed that in 1980, 74 percent of 17-year-olds had a high school diploma in the United States. In California, 64 percent of 17-year-olds had a diploma in 1980. Nationally, the dropout problem has increased somewhat since the early 1970s. California's dropout problem has accelerated more rapidly than the dropout problem in the nation as a whole. The percentage of 17-year-olds with a high school diploma has declined 2.4 percentage points since 1972 in the nation. In California, the percentage of 17-year-olds with a high school diploma has dropped 13.1 percentage points.

Figure 7

High School Graduates a Percent of All 17-Year-Olds 1971-72 to 1979-80

Year	California	United States	Difference
1971-72	77.5%	76.0%	1.5
1973-74	76.6%	75.2%	1.4
1975-76	72.7%	74.9%	-2.2
1977-78	68.1%	74.5%	-6.4
1979-80	64.4%	73.6%	-9.2

Source: California Department of Education, Selected Statistics, 1982-83, Table 14.

[7]David Stern, James Catterall, Charolette Alhadeff, and Maureen Ash, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California: Why We Should and How We May, Report to the California Policy Seminar (Berkeley, February 1985), p. 17A.

Dropouts Who Further Their Education

California offers a high school dropout a variety of means to further their education. An examination of the alternatives used by the class of 1983 immediately after leaving school reveals that of the 100,000 dropouts from this class, an estimated 38,758 either received a diploma equivalent or entered trade school or community college immediately after leaving high school.

Figure 8

Dropouts from the Class of 1983

Passed diploma equivalency tests	
General Education Development (GED)[a]	12,680
California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE)[a]	6,447
Entered private trade school[b]	6,675
Entered community colleges in fall 1983[c]	12,956
Total	38,758

[a]Estimate derived from data from California Department of Education.
[b]AOR Estimate. See Appendix A.
[c]Chancellor's office estimate of 18-year-olds without a high school diploma or equivalent enrolled in community college in the fall of 1983.

These 38,758 young people, while not high school graduates, improved their educational status immediately after leaving high school. Roughly 60,000 dropouts from the class of 1983 entered the adult world without the benefit of a diploma, diploma equivalent or further education.

Geographic Distribution of the Dropout Problem

The dropout problem in California is not confined to inner city school districts; it is widespread in urban, rural and suburban areas. An analysis of the geographic distribution of attrition in the class of 1983 by county and by size of school district demonstrates the widespread dropout problem.

Countywide Attrition

Between the 10th grade and graduation the attrition rate for the high school graduating class of 1983 was 28.5 percent. The attrition rate is high in virtually all counties in California; from Del Norte at 32 percent to Imperial County at 31 percent. Some counties experiencing rapid population growth, such as Riverside and San Bernardino, have attrition rates above the state average. Figure 9 shows the attrition rate by county for the class of 1983.

Figure 9

Attrition Rates by County for the Class of 1983*

County	Attrition Rate	County	Attrition Rate
Alameda	27%	Plumas	18%
Butte	23%	Riverside	34%
Calaveras	17%	Sacramento	26%
Contra Costa	26%	San Benito	23%
Del Norte	32%	San Bernardino	32%
El Dorado	32%	San Diego	24%
Fresno	25%	San Francisco	31%
Glenn	20%	San Joaquin	38%
Humboldt	29%	San Luis Obispo	27%
Imperial	31%	San Mateo	19%
Inyo	29%	Santa Barbara	24%
Kern	34%	Santa Clara	22%
Kings	24%	Santa Cruz	28%
Lake	31%	Shasta	27%
Lassen	20%	Siskiyou	23%
Los Angeles	34%	Solano	27%
Madera	38%	Sonoma	24%
Marin	13%	Stanislaus	34%
Mendocino	22%	Sutter	27%
Merced	27%	Tehama	25%
Monterey	25%	Tulare	30%
Napa	21%	Tuolumne	17%
Nevada	27%	Ventura	27%
Orange	25%	Yolo	21%
Placer	18%	Yuba	40%

Source: California Department of Education, California Basic Education Data System.

*Counties in which the 1980/81 10th grade class was smaller than 200 students are omitted.

Figure 10

Countywide Attrition Rates for the Class of 1983*

Attrition Rate in the Class of 1983	Number of Counties
40% or above	1
30 to 39%	13
20 to 29%	30
less than 20%	6
Total	50

*Counties with 10th grade enrollments in 1980 of less than 200 were omitted.

Fourteen counties had countywide attrition rates of over 30 percent. Some of these counties were in rural areas (Del Norte, Kern, Stanislaus, Yuba); others were urban (Los Angeles and San Francisco); some have large suburban areas (Riverside and San Bernardino). Of the 14 counties with attrition rates which exceeded 30 percent: five were in northern California, five were in Central California and four were in southern California.

Countywide attrition rates show that California dropout problem is widespread in urban, rural and suburban areas and affects almost all geographic regions of the state.

Size of District

Public high schools with very high enrollment losses in the class of 1983 are in urban, suburban and rural areas. In all, 119 high schools representing 14 percent of the high schools in the state, had attrition rates in the class of 1983 of 40 percent or more. A total of 75 of the 119 high schools whose attrition rates exceeded 40 percent were in counties with countywide attrition rates of 30 percent or more.

Figure 11

Number of High Schools in which Attrition Rates for the Class of 1983 Exceeded 40 Percent

	40-50%	50.1-60%	60%	Total
Urban districts (40,000 or more ADA	25	11	3	39
Suburban districts (10,000 to 40,000 ADA)	33	8	2	43
Rural/Suburban Districts (9,999 or less ADA)	29	8	0	37
TOTAL	87	27	5	119

Source: Assembly Office of Research analysis of California Department of Education's California Basic Education Data System.

High schools with high attrition rates are found in districts of all sizes. Eighty schools with attrition rates of 40 percent or more in the class of 1983 were located in school districts with fewer than 40,000 students in average daily attendance. California's large urban districts, such as San Diego Unified School District or Los Angeles Unified School District, have total average daily attendance in excess of 40,000. California's dropout problem is large, widespread and not confined to inner city school districts. In the next section we describe two of the characteristics of dropouts: their sex and ethnicity.

Characteristics of Dropouts

Sex

More males drop out of high school than females. Most national studies of dropouts report that male students leave school at a higher rate than

female students.[8] Los Angeles Unified School District found that males represent 60 percent of school leavers; females were only 40 percent.[9] San Diego Unified School District found that males comprised 53 percent of dropouts and females were 47 percent.[10]

Ethnicity

Statewide, there was a 29 percent attrition rate in the class of 1983. Black, Hispanic, and American Indian students dropped out at a higher rate than did white or Asian students. Figure 12 shows attrition rates by ethnicity for the class of 1983.

Figure 12

Attrition Rates by Ethnicity for the Class of 1983

	Enrollment in Ninth Grade 1979/80	High School Graduates 1982/83	Decrease or Increase	Percent Decrease or Increase
American Indian	3,232	1,658	-1,574	-49.0%
Asian	13,067	14,688	+1,621	+12.0%
Black	34,936	21,084	-13,852	-40.0%
Filipino	4,335	3,790	-545	-13.0%
Hispanic	69,748	42,404	-27,344	-39.0%
White	209,291	153,272	-56,019	-27.0%
Total	335,209	236,897	-98,312	-29.4%

[8]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Population Characteristics on School Enrollment, October 1981, Series P-20, No. 373, February, 1983.

[9]Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of Student Dropout in the Los Angeles Unified School District, p. 56.

[10]San Diego Unified School District, The 1982-83 School Leaver Study, p. 11.

Two urban school districts, Los Angeles and San Diego, have recently published detailed dropout studies. Los Angeles Unified School District researchers found that the Hispanic dropout rate was 70 percent higher than that of white students, and the black dropout rate was 30 percent higher than that of white students.[11] A study of dropouts by San Diego Unified School District showed that the Hispanic dropout rate was almost twice that of white students, and black dropout rate was 30 percent higher than the white dropout rate.[12]

Figure 13 shows the relative composition by ethnic group of 9th graders, high school graduates and public school dropouts in the statewide class of 1983. Between 9th grade and graduation, steep black and Hispanic attrition altered the ethnic makeup of the class of 1983. The percentage of white students in the high school class increased 2.2 percentage points between 9th grade in 1979/80 and graduation in 1983. The percentage of black and Hispanic students in the class, however, declined between 9th grade and graduation.

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[11]Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of School Dropout in the Los Angeles Unified School District, p. 57.

[12]San Diego Unified School District, 1982-83 School Leaver Study, p. 13.

Figure 13

Relative Proportions of Youth by Ethnic Group in the Class of 1983

	Percent of 9th Graders Fall 79	Percent of High School Graduates 1982/83	Percent of Dropouts
American Indian	1.0%	0.7%	1.6%
Asian	3.9%	6.2%	--
Black	10.5%	8.9%	14.0%
Filipino	1.3%	1.6%	0.6%
Hispanic	20.8%	17.9%	27.6%
White	62.5%	64.7%	56.4%

Source: California Department of Education, California Basic Education Data System.

California's dropout rate is not just a minority problem. While Hispanic, black, and American Indian youth drop out at a greater rate than their white peers and are over-represented in the dropout population, white students drop out of school in much larger numbers than do black or Hispanic students. In the class of 1983, four times more whites dropped out than blacks, and twice as many whites dropped out as Hispanics. Figure 13 shows than 56.4 percent of students leaving high school were white. San Diego researchers found 46 percent of dropouts in 1982-83 were white.[13] Sacramento City Unified School District researchers found that white students represented 40 percent of district enrollment and 40 percent of district dropouts in 1982/83.[14]

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[13] Ibid, p. 17.

[14] Sacramento City Unified School District, Administrative and Evaluation Services Offices, "District-wide Multi-year Status Report on High School Level Dropout Measurement for Years Ending June 30 of 1981, 1982 and 1983." No. 6. (Sacramento, November 13, 1984), p. 7.

Summary

California has an enormous school dropout problem which affects three out of ten high school students. The statewide attrition rate in high school graduating classes has doubled since 1970. The largest increase in attrition occurred when summer school courses were sharply reduced after Proposition 13. Summer school had offered high school students a rich variety of courses and an opportunity to make up courses they had failed in the regular school year.

Since the mid1970's attrition has accelerated in the 12th grade. In 1977, nine percent of dropouts left in the 12th grade, while in 1983, 34 percent of the dropouts left in the 12th grade. This trend suggests that a significant number of California dropouts are students who persist in school until 12th grade and then do not graduate.

The high school dropout problem in the United States worsened between 1970 and 1980. California's dropout problem has grown more rapidly than the national average and now exceeds the national average: 64 percent of 17-year-olds in California report having a diploma while 74 percent of 17-year-olds in the nation report they have a diploma.

California's dropout problem is not confined to one geographic region. Of the 14 counties in which attrition exceeded 30 percent, five were in northern California, five in central California, and four were in southern California. High schools with high attrition rates are found in districts of all sizes; of 119 schools whose attrition rates exceeded 40 percent, 80 schools were in small to medium-sized districts.

California's dropout problem is not just a minority youth problem. While Hispanic, black, Filipino and American Indian youth dropout at a higher rate than white or Asian peers, most dropouts are white.

California offers dropouts high school diploma equivalents. While 19,000 students in the class of 1983 took advantage of this opportunity, another 19,000 dropouts entered private trade schools or community college without a diploma.

The dropout problem in California is large. It crosses all geographic and ethnic barriers and is worse than the dropout problem in the United States as a whole. In Chapter II we describe the high cost of dropping out to the individual and to the state.

Chapter II

CONSEQUENCES OF THE DROPOUT PROBLEM

Dropouts pay a high price for the premature termination of their formal education; they cannot enter four-year colleges, their education preparation is insufficient for any but the lowest wage employment and they have a high long-term risk of unemployment. Society pays a price for the dropout's decision. Low educational attainment and the functional illiteracy of large numbers of youth endangers California's long-term economic growth and increases the public cost of welfare dependency. In this chapter, we present a summary of the personal and social consequences of California's dropout problem.

Educational Consequences

Students who drop out of high school have greatly diminished chances of ever entering a four-year college. Students who do not complete high school but are over 18 may re-enter the educational system through the community colleges. In 1984, 34,528 full-time and 94,658 part-time community college students had not graduated from high school.[15]

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[15]Office of the Chancellor, California Community Colleges, Analytical Studies Unit. Student Socioeconomic Profiles: Spring, 1984 (Sacramento, December 1984), Table 21.

The low academic skills of high school dropouts who enroll in community colleges add to the problem of academic preparation of community college students.[16] Central to the school reform in SB 813, the Hughes-Hart Education Reform Act of 1983[17], are increased course requirements for high school graduation and higher curriculum standards. Students who drop out of high school and reenter the formal education system via community college effectively bypass the higher academic standards for graduation contained in SB 813.[18] A total of 12,956 dropouts from the Class of 1983 entered community college in the fall of 1983.[19]

Low admission rates of minorities into public universities is a growing concern at the state level. The dropout problem should be examined as a cause of low minority college admissions because severe black and Hispanic high school attrition seriously reduces the number of youth eligible for college.[20]

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[16]Thirty-nine percent of the high school class of 1983 entered community colleges as first-time freshmen in the fall of 1983. Large numbers of students were not prepared to do college level work and as a result needed remedial courses. In 1980/81, 45 percent of enrollments in community college English courses were remedial and 57 percent of math enrollments were remedial. (Commission on Postsecondary Education, Director's Report, Sacramento, April 1985, pp. 21-23).

[17]Chapter 498, Statutes of 1983.

[18]California Postsecondary Education Commission, Reaffirming California's Commitment to Transfer (Sacramento, March 1985), p. 12.

[19]Office of the Chancellor of the Community Colleges, Analytical Studies Unit, Sacramento.

[20]California Postsecondary Education Commission, Eligibility of California's 1983 High School Graduates for Admission to the State's Public Universities (Sacramento, April 1985), p. 36.

Employment

Most dropouts work in low-paying jobs in the years immediately after they leave school. California dropouts were interviewed two years after they left school in the study High School and Beyond.[21] Figure 14 shows the categories of employment of California dropouts two years following their decision to leave school.

Figure 14

Employment of California Dropouts by Sex, 1982

Activity	1980 Sophomore Dropouts	
	Male	Female
Lawn or odd jobs	8.3	0.6
Restaurant job	18.9	23.2
Child care	0.0	4.4
Farm work	10.7	1.2
Factory work	10.0	5.7
Skilled trade	4.8	7.5
Other manual labor	15.5	10.9
Sales	1.5	20.7
Office, clerical	0.0	9.5
Hospital, health	0.8	0.6
Gas, car wash	5.8	3.8
Delivery jobs	1.0	0.4
Military	7.3	0.0
Other	4.6	5.8
Missing data or not employed	10.9	5.8
Sample size	149	133

Source: David Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California: Why We Should and How We May. Analysis of California's sample from High School and Beyond.

[21] High School and Beyond is a national longitudinal study of 1980 high school sophomores and seniors compiled for the U.S. National Center for Education Statistics. Data on the students sampled in 1980 were also collected in 1982 and 1984. The study follows the progress of 58,000 young people during high school, postsecondary education, work and family formation. We have relied on the National Commission on Secondary Education for Hispanics for analysis of the study's nationwide data and on David Stern, Professor of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, for analysis of the California sample of the study.

Professor Stern found that the majority of California's dropouts were working in traditionally low-paying jobs. Of the male dropouts, 31 percent were working at lawn or odd jobs, gas or car washes, doing manual labor, or making deliveries. Seventeen percent were working in factories, skilled labor or sales. Restaurants employed a sizeable percentage of dropouts: 19 percent of males and 23 percent of females. Of female dropouts, 31 percent were in clerical or sales jobs, while 11 percent were employed doing manual labor.

A study of 730 youth in Stockton confirms that undereducated youth have very poor employment prospects. John Ogbu, Professor of Education at the University of California, Berkeley, interviewed parents and young people in Stockton in 1969 and 1982. Most of the students interviewed in 1969 aspired to professional-managerial, clerical-sales or service occupations. Forty-two percent of black youth and 38 percent of Mexican-American students desired professional, managerial and supervisory jobs.[22] In 1982, Ogbu's interviews with the same individuals showed that a large proportion had dropped out of high school and had very poor employment prospects.

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[22]John Ogbu, Stockton, California Revisited: Joining the Labor Force, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley. Draft, May 1984, pp. 4-9.

Figure 15

Status of Black and Mexican-American Youth in Stockton Revisited, 1982

	Black		Mexican-American	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Status				
Employed	41%	33%	74%	54%
Military	8%	1%	4%	--
Unemployed	30%	35%	19%	12%
AFDC	--	29%	--	12%
Jail	10%	--	--	--
Deceased	6%	--	--	--
Returned to Mexico	--	--	4%	12%

Source: Ogbu, Stockton Revisited, Table 6, p. 8.

Of the black young adults, half of the males and two thirds of the females were unemployed, on welfare or in jail. (See Figure 15.) One fourth of the Mexican-American males were unemployed while one third of Mexican-American females were unemployed, on welfare or had returned to Mexico. Ogbu concluded that in many cases the youth who did find employment were engaged in unskilled or semiskilled jobs similar to jobs held by their parents.

Unemployment

Over the long term, dropouts have higher unemployment rates than high school graduates. Figure 16 shows that blacks pay the highest economic penalty for dropping out of school; black dropouts have 16 percentage points higher unemployment rates than black high school graduates. The lowest economic penalty is paid by Hispanic dropouts. Hispanic dropouts have eight percentage points higher unemployment rates than do Hispanic graduates.

Figure 16

Unemployment Rate of California Youth Ages 16-19, by Ethnicity (1980)

	Dropouts			Graduates		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
White	26%	26%	25%	11%	12%	10%
Black	40%	41%	39%	24%	25%	24%
Hispanic	22%	21%	22%	14%	15%	12%
Other	29%	29%	28%	9%	9%	10%

Source: Werner Schink and Tre Braun, California Employment Development Department, Statistics from the 1980 Census Public Use Microdata for California for Youth 16-19 years of age. Sacramento, August 1985.

Earnings

Dropouts earn less as adults than high school graduates. Figure 17 shows the difference in annual earnings between dropouts and graduates who are 35 to 44 years of age. The discrepancy in income between males and females is greater than the effects of education or ethnicity. However, within each sex and ethnic group high school graduates earned more than dropouts. Black female dropouts pay the highest economic penalty with an average 27 percent reduction in earnings. Hispanic female dropouts earn 25 percent less than their counterparts who graduate. Black males and white females pay a similar economic penalty for dropping out.

Figure 17

Average Annual Earnings for High School Graduates and Dropouts Age 35-44, By Sex and Ethnic Group, 1980

	Males			Females		
	Dropouts	Graduates	Difference	Dropouts	Graduates	Difference
Black	$12,304	$14,999	$-2,695 (-22%)	$7,649	$9,674	$-2,025 (-27%)
Hispanic	$14,639	$16,907	$-2,268 (-16%)	$6,810	$8,489	$-1,679 (-25%)
White	$18,247	$20,704	$-2,457 (-14%)	$7,539	$9,169	$-1,630 (-22%)

Source: David Stern, Educational Attainment and Employment of Major Racial or Ethnic Groups in California, University of California Conference on Linguistic Minorities, Berkeley, May 1985, Tables 5 and 6.

As employers appear to place increasing importance on the high school diploma, the economic penalty paid by dropouts is becoming more severe. The labor market disadvantage of dropouts has accelerated in the past 30 years due to increases in the proportion of workers with high school diplomas.[23] In 1959, only a minority of the civilian labor force age 16 and older had graduated from high school. By March 1982, 78 percent of the labor force had high school diplomas.[24]

In 1981, annual earnings of men aged 25 and older who had finished only one to three years of high school were 71 percent of average earnings for

[23] California Employment Development Department, Youth Unemployment in California, (Sacramento, April 1985) p. A-11.

[24] Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate, p. 23.

all men. In 1966, annual earnings of men aged 25 and older who had one to three years of high school were 99 percent of the average of all men in that age group.[25]

Many employers use the high school diploma as a screening device in selecting employees.[26] Two factors, an employer's emphasis on basic educational skills acquisition, coupled with a negative view of the failure to graduate from high school, place dropouts at high risk in the labor market.[27]

On the whole, dropouts participate in the labor force less than any other group,[28] are least likely to make a successful transition to work[29] and are most likely to remain unemployed or underemployed throughout their lives.[30]

Long Term-Social Consequences

In addition to the personal price dropouts pay when they leave school, the dropout's lack of basic educational skills result in high costs to society. The consequences for the 100,000 California youth who drop out annually are described in this section.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] California Employment Development, Youth Unemployment in California. April, 1985, p. A-11 and Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate, P. 16.

[28] Young, 1981, cited in Youth Unemployment in California, April, 1985.

[29] Ginsberg, 1980, cited in Youth Unemployment in California, April, 1985.

[30] California Employment Development Department, Youth Unemployment in California, p. A, 11-13.

Public Dependency

On a personal level, pregnant teens and teen mothers face a lifetime of poverty and become part of the process known as the "feminization of poverty." In 1980, 42 percent of women below the poverty level had not completed high school.[31] The public cost of teenage pregnancy is very high. In 1975, $5.7 billion in welfare funds were spent in the United States for women who gave birth as adolescents. If present trends are unchanged, this group will receive $39.6 billion in Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Medicaid and food stamps between 1981 and 1990.[32]

The public cost of adolescent pregnancy includes costs for children born to teenage mothers. Adolescent mothers have a 39 percent higher risk of delivering a low birth weight baby than mothers in their early twenties. Young mothers, 15 or younger, are twice as likely to have low birth weight babies than women aged 20 to 24. Low birth weight babies have 3.5 times the risk of normal birth weight babies of developing mental disabilities. The average 20-year state cost for a developmentally disabled child is $98,120.[33]

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[31] Assembly Office of Research, Low Income Single Mothers and Public Assistance Programs (Sacramento, 1980), p. 7.

[32] The Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1981 and Barbara S. Blum, "Helping Teenage Mothers," cited by Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, Executive Summary, (Sacramento, October 1984), p. v.

[33] Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, p. 9.

The cycle of dependency, in which families subsist on welfare from one generation to the next, is receiving nationwide attention. A national longitudinal study found that while half of AFDC recipients depend on the program an average of only two years, a significant portion of AFDC expenditures are accounted for by women who have been on welfare eight years or more.[34]

Women who were school dropouts and women who became heads of households by having a child stay on AFDC for a longer than average period for welfare recipients.[35] In one California county, one half of the mothers receiving AFDC reported they had not completed high school.[36] In California, the number of persons who are long-term dependents on AFDC is increasing. There are two reasons for this development. First, dependency begets dependency: the longer a family is on AFDC, the less likely they are to get off AFDC. The second is the intergenerational cycle of dependency: teenagers on welfare become welfare cases of their own by having children.[37]

Pregnant teens and teen mothers who drop out of school and their infants are contributing to the "feminization of poverty" and the cycle of dependency which is, in turn, increasing the cost of public dependency.

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[34]Mary Jo Bane and David T. Ellwood, The Dynamics of Dependence: The Routes to Self-Sufficiency, Executive Summary, Urban Systems Research and Engineering (Cambridge, Mass. June 1983) p. iii.

[35]Bane and Ellwood, The Dynamics of Dependence, and Michael Wiseman, "Poverty and the Welfare System," Speech presented at a roundtable on Poverty and Poverty Policy in California convened by the Assembly Committee on Human Services of the California Legislature, March 1985.

[36]Clarice Stasz. Training Needs of AFDC Women: County of Napa (Napa, February 1984), p. 1.

[37]Wiseman, "Poverty and the Welfare System."

Functional Illiteracy

Functional illiterates are people who are unable to perform necessary daily tasks because of the inability to read and write. These daily tasks include reading a menu or bus schedule, balancing a checkbook or filling out a job application. Functionally illiterate adults have trouble reading the label on a bottle of cough medicine or following the instructions on the back of a frozen turkey dinner.[38]

Functionally illiterate adults are crippled in at least three ways. They cannot find employment, they cannot participate in the democratic process as informed voters, and they cannot help their children escape a comparable fate.[39]

Year after year, large numbers of poorly educated dropouts leave school and enter adult life. These dropouts have a cumulative negative effect on the education level of California's adult population. Dropouts who have low basic skills contribute to the functional illiteracy rate. Nationally, it is estimated that 30% of Americans are functionally illiterate.[40]

While functional illiteracy is widespread, it is not distributed equally among all groups. One study conducted by the University of Texas

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[38]James N. Johnson, Business Council for Effective Literacy, Adults in Crisis, an Adult Performace Level Study, University of Texas (Arlington, Texas, 1975)

[39]Jonathan Kozol, "Why 60 Million U.S. Adults Wouldn't Be Able To Read This," Sacramento Bee, March 10, 1985.

[40]Johnson, Adults in Crisis, p. 1.

in 1975 found that more than 40% of blacks and Hispanics surveyed were functionally illiterate compared with 16% of the whites surveyed.[41] It is estimated that of the 2.3 million people who join the pool of functional illiterates annually, one million are high school dropouts.[42]

The California State Library estimates there are two to four million adults in California who are functionally illiterate.[43] Others estimate the number of illiterates to be 5-6 million Californians, ages 16 and older.[44] A significant number of functional illiterates are in between 20 and 30 years old; some have high school diplomas.

Functional illiteracy is an economic drain on California because functional illiteracy is transmitted from generation to generation. Children of functionally illiterate parents become the next generation of students who do poorly in school and who may drop out.[45] The National Commission on Excellence in Education urges parents to read to their children every night, to supervise their homework, to provide the model of devoted consistent readers, a difficult task for a functionally illiterate parent.

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[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Martha A. Lane et al., California Literacy Campaign Program Effectiveness Review, California State Library (Sacramento, October 1984), p. 5.

[44] There is no complete and scientific study of the population and literacy. For this reason, attempts are made to correlate the numbers who self-report years of schooling completed on census data with official studies of illiteracy.

[45] Johnson, Adults in Crisis, p. 2.

Population Trends

Large numbers of California youth dropout of school and are ill prepared for economic self-sufficiency. The urgency of the dropout problem is likely to increase in coming decades because of the so-called "age/race gap," described by Hayes-Bautista and other economic reasons.[46]

The "age/race gap" describes the projected restructuring of the population of California which will occur between now and the year 2020. The white population is shrinking as a percentage of the total population and the average age of whites is increasing. The white birthrate has dropped below replacement levels. The average age of all Californians will increase from 31 years in 1985 and 36 years by the year 2000.[47]

While whites as a percentage of the total population will drop, the percentage of Hispanics and Asians will increase by the year 2010 because of immigration and higher birthrates. The black population is projected to remain constant as a percentage of total population. By the year 2000, half of California's population will be Asian, black and Hispanic.[48] The minority population will be younger working age people.[49] Most of the elderly population will be white.[50] Elderly require higher than average government subsidized health, housing and social services.

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[46]David Hayes-Bautista, The Hispanic Portfolio: A Prospective for Investment. California Public Affairs Council, 1983, pp. 10-13 and The California Post Secondary Education Commission, Population and Enrollment Trends: 1985 - 2000 (Sacramento, March 4, 1985), pp. 8-10, 18-20.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

Hayes-Bautista projects an "age/race gap" in which the younger working age minority population, with low average family income levels, will have to pay a higher percentage of their earnings to suppor public services, including support for the large elderly population.[51]

The California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) has published policy statements which point with alarm to the high dropout rates of black and Hispanic youth in California and their underrepresentation in four year colleges and universities. As minorities become a larger percentage of the population, the high minority dropout rate will threaten the available supply of skilled workers. This will undermine California's economic growth. CPEC projects that "up to one million adults could be on the streets without a high school diploma by the year 1999."[52]

Summary

School dropouts pay a heavy personal price for their decision to leave school. Opportunities are remote for earning a college degree, employment prospects are dim, unemployment a lifelong threat and lifetime earnings are lower than those of high school graduates.

Society pays for the dropout problem in increased public dependency and illiteracy. We believe the dropout problem poses a serious threat to California's long term economic growth.

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[51] Ibid.

[52] The California Post Secondary Education Commission, Population and Enrollment Trends: 1985-2000, p. 9 and The Sacramento Bee, "Experts Fear Schools Will Fail the Class of '99," May 27, 1985.

Chapter III

Why Students Leave School

In this chapter we describe the reasons why students leave school. Students drop out because they are not succeeding in their schoolwork, they want to work, or they are pregnant. Many dropouts are overage for their grade in school or have failed the proficiency tests or courses needed to graduate.

Students Leave Because They Are Not Succeeding in School

In the High School and Beyond study, California youth cite school-related reasons (poor grades or "school was not for me") as the most important factors in their decision to leave school.[53] Dropouts have low grades, they are more likely to be in general or remedial courses rather than college prep courses, and they are alienated from the school. In this section we describe the academic problems of the dropouts: being overage for grade and failure to pass proficiency tests and courses required for graduation.

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[53]Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California, Tables 12 A and B.

Dropouts Are Overage for Grade

Dropouts commonly are overage for their grade in school, or older than their grade level peers. The Los Angeles Unified School District study found that "overage" was the most frequently cited reason for leaving school. Overage was the reason for leaving given by 41 percent of Los Angeles dropouts between 1981 and 1984.[54]

Dropouts become overage for grade by being held back a grade in elementary or intermediate school or by failing courses and not earning enough credits to progress at the expected pace through high school. Students who are held back a grade are four times more likely to drop out than those who are not held back.[55]

The 1980 United States census data for California shows that in all ethnic groups, a higher percentage of males than females are overage for grade. One-fourth of Hispanic male 18 year olds and one-fifth of Hispanic female 18 year olds were overage for grade.

Figure 18

Percentage Of California Eighteen Year Olds Overage For Grade By 1 To 3 Years, U.S. Census 1980

	Male	Female
White	15.5	11.8
Black	21.1	17.8
Hispanic	25.8	20.4

Source: AOR analysis of U.S. Census 1980 for California, 18 year olds in grades 9-11.

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[54] Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of Student Dropout, p. 60.

[55] J. G. Bachman, S. Green and I. D. Wirtanen, Youth in Transition: Dropping Out Problem or Symptom? (Vol. 3), University of Michican, 1971 cited by Lawrence Steinberg, Patricia Lin Blinde and Kenyon S. Chan in Dropping Out Among Language Minority Youth: A review of the Literature (Los Alamitos, California: National Center for Bilingual Research, 1982), p. 16.

As shown in Chapter I, reduced summer school offerings after the passage of Proposition 13, have decreased the opportunities for students to get back on grade level after failing courses. Reduced summer school may be a major contributing factor to the large numbers of students who become overage for grade and eventually drop out.

Dropouts Fail Proficiency Tests or Courses Needed to Graduate

Students who fail to pass district proficiency tests in the 12th grade do not receive a high school diploma. District proficiency tests in basic skills are mandated by state law to be given once between grades 4 through 6, once between 7th through 9th grades, and twice in grades 10 and 11. (Education Code Section 51215 et seq.) Once a student passes the district proficiency standards in basic skills required for graduation, that student need not take the test again. In 1982-83, 25 percent of students failed one or more tests in 6th grade, 65 percent of students failed one or more tests in 9th grade, and 74 percent failed one or more tests in 11th grade. Nine percent failed at least one 12th grade proficiency test.[56] The sharp drop in the numbers of students failing one or more proficiency tests between 11th grade and 12th grade could be attributed to steep attrition in the 11th grade among those failing the tests and/or mastery of the competencies measured by the tests by many twelfth grade students who failed the tests as 11th graders.

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[56]California Department of Education, Statewide Summary of Student Performance on School District Proficiency Assessments (Sacramento, 1985), pp. 7-15.

Figure 19 shows the proficiency failure rate by grade level and ethnicity.

Figure 19

Percent Of Students Failing One or More Proficiency Tests, 1982-83

	Grade 6	Grade 9	Grade 11	Grade 12
Asian	13	52	62	4
Black	32	71	85	11
Hispanic	30	73	80	10
White	14	54	64	6
TOTAL	25	65	74	9

Source: California Department of Education, Statewide Summary of Student Performance on School District Proficiency Assessments.

In the class of 1983, 40,605 twelfth grade students did not graduate due to failure of district proficiency tests and/or the courses required for graduation. They represented 15 percent of the twelfth grade class. A larger percentage of Hispanic and black 12th graders did not graduate due to failure of proficiency tests or courses. Failure of proficiency tests is a far more important reason for 12th graders not to graduate than is failure to pass course requirements. Figure 20 shows the percentage of twelfth graders who did not graduate with their class in 1983 for academic reasons.

Figure 20

Academic Reasons Why Twelfth Graders Did Not Graduate With The Class Of 1983

	Total Not Graduating	Failed Proficiency Tests	Failed District Course Requirements	Failed Tests and Courses
All twelfth graders	15%	7%	2%	6%
Black students	18%	7%	3%	8%
Hispanic students	19%	8%	2%	9%
White students	12%	6%	1%	5%

Source: California Department of Education, Summary of Student Performance on School District Proficiency Assessments.

While Figure 20 shows that nine percent of seniors failed one or more proficiency tests, Figure 21 shows that seven percent failed to graduate due to not passing the tests. The two percent difference occurs because students who fail proficiency tests in twelfth grade may ultimately graduate with their class if they pass the test prior to the end of summer school of their twelfth grade year.

Dropouts Leave Via Continuation Schools

High school students who experience academic or behavior problems or who seek an alternative to regular high school may be referred to continuation schools. Continuation schools served a total cumulative enrollment of 102,025 students in the 1982/83 school year.[57] In the class of 1983, we estimate that

[57] California Department of Education, Continuation School Unit, Sacramento.

18,660 students who dropped out or 19% of dropouts left from a continuation school. Appendix A contains detailed information on the calculation of this estimate. In Chapter V we present more information on continuation schools.

Students Leave to Work

While students cite school factors as their first reason to drop out, the second most common reason male students give for dropping out is to work. Nearly one quarter of white and black male dropouts named the need to work as the reason they left school. Entering the workforce is an even more important reason for Hispanics to drop out: nationally, 40 percent of Hispanic male dropouts and 25 percent of Hispanic female dropouts cite the need to work as the reason for leaving school.[58] In the Los Angeles Unified School District study of dropouts, 30 percent of dropouts said work responsibilities were the reason they left school.[59] In Los Angeles Unified School District study, of the 362 dropouts interviewed, 52.8 percent were working, 30.4 percent full-time and 22.4 percent part-time.[60]

In the San Diego Unified School District dropout study, 17 percent of dropouts reported they were working full-time. Twenty percent of white dropouts and 19 percent of Hispanic dropouts reported working full-time while 9 percent of black dropouts reported working full-time.[61]

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[58]Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, p. 13.

[59]Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of Student Dropout, p. 25.

[60]Ibid, p. 27.

[61]San Diego City Unified School District, The 1982-83 School Leaver Study, p. 17.

A number of programs in California are designed to allow high school students to work and attend school: continuation education, work experience, and regional occupational programs (Chapter V describes these alternatives). Potential dropouts do not know about the alternatives available to them to allow them to work and go to school.[62] Most alternative programs start at 11th grade or age 16, which is too late for at least 43 percent of Hispanic dropouts who leave school before 10th grade.[63]

Dropouts like work better than school, yet they understand it was a mistake for them to drop out of high school.[64] In the Los Angeles Unified School District interviews, 94.2 percent of the dropouts agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I believe it was important to graduate from high school and receive my high school diploma."[65]

The desire to work, held by a sizeable number of dropouts, is tragically inconsistent with their long term employment prospects discussed in Chapter II of this report. One national report, calling for action to reduce the Hispanic youth dropout rate, urged that "the business community and schools work together to design part time and summer job strategies which link the school and the work place."[66]

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[62]Assembly Office of Research, Policy Seminars held in Sacramento on January 14, 1985 and in Claremont on February 8, 1985.

[63]Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, Hispanics and Urban School Reform (Washington, D.C., 1984), Vol. 1, pp. 35-36.

[64]David Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate, pp. 24-25.

[65]Los Angeles Unified School District, A Study of Student Dropout in the Los Angeles Unified School District, p. 26.

[66]Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, p. 37.

Females Leave School Because They Are Pregnant

Pregnancy is the most common reason females drop out of high school. We estimate that 20,000 females dropped out of the class of 1983 because of pregnancy.[67] Pregnancy accounts for 14 percent of the statewide attrition from this class. Four out of five girls who become pregnant in high school will drop out.[68] Teen mothers pay a high price: they face physical and mental health risks, they have reduced earning power and limited employment prospects, and most will live in poverty.[69] In this part we describe the dimension of the teen pregnancy problem in California and the programs designed to help teen mothers earn a high school diploma.

Dimensions of the Problem

One-third of female dropouts cite marriage or pregnancy as the reason for leaving school.[70] San Diego City Unified School District reported that 44 percent of black females, 30 percent of white females, and 20 percent of Hispanic females left school due to pregnancy.[71]

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[67] In 1983, there were 31,106 live births to females aged 15-18. Seventy-nine percent were first time births (24,574). National literature demonstrates that 80 percent of teen mothers dropout, 80 percent of 24,574 is 19,659 (Department of Health Services, Program Information Services, Vital Statistics Section).

[68] Laurie Olsen, Push Out, Step Out: A Report on California's Public School Dropouts, Open Road Issues Research Project (Oakland: Citizens Policy Center, 1982), p. 23.

[69] Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant. A Special Report on Adolescent Pregnancy (Sacramento, October 1984), p. v.

[70] Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate, Table 1A.

[71] San Diego City School District, The 1982-83 School Leaver Study, p. 17.

California has the second highest rate in the United States for adolescent pregnancy: 14 percent of teenage girls get pregnant.[72] Figure 21 identifies California's pregnant teenagers by ethnic group.

Figure 21

Teen Pregnancy In California of 15 to 18 Year Olds by Ethnic Groups, 1983

	Percentage of Teens Who Become Pregnant	Number of Teenage Live Births
White	10.7	10,400
Black	27.1	5,095
Hispanic	15.8	13,594
Other	----	2,017
TOTALS	14.0	31,106

Source: California Department of Health Services, Center for Health Statistics.

One out of 10 white female teenagers becomes pregnant, while one of out of four black female teens will become pregnant. White teens account for roughly one half of all pregnancies and four out of 10 live births to teen mothers. Black female teens account for less than two out of 10 teen pregnancies but four out of ten live births to teen mothers.

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[72] The Alan Guttmacher Institute, U.S. and Cross National Trends in Teenager Sexual and Fertility Behavior cited in Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad, I'm Pregnant, p. 3.

According to the California Department of Health Services, 143,160 adolescents (ages 15-19) were pregnant in 1981. Thirty-one thousand infants were born to teen mothers in 1983. These live births to adolescents were 7 percent of the total live births in California.[73] In 1981 if all of California's pregnant adolescents had completed their pregnancies, roughly one third of the total live births in the state would have been to adolescent mothers.[74]

Nature of the Problem

Young mothers under the age of 20, face a greater health risk, greater chances for poor mental health, and a greater chance for depending on public assistance. Pregnant women under the age of 20 face a greater risk of death and life threatening maternal complications than older mothers.[75] The attempted suicide rate among pregnant students under 18 is ten times higher than that of students who are not pregnant.[76] Teen mothers who drop out of school have the added risk of public dependency, as two-thirds of the single mothers between the ages of 14 and 25 are living in poverty.[77]

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[73]California Department of Health, Center for Vital Statistics. Data Matters, Topical Reports. Advanced Report: California Vital Statistics, 1983. Sacramento, June 1985. Table 4, p. 11.

[74]Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, p. v.

[75]The Alan Guttmacher Institute. Teenage Pregnancy: The Problem That Hasn't Gone Away (New York, 1981), p. 29.

[76]The Family Life Education Program Development Project, Family Life and Sex Education, A Summary of Facts and Findings, Planned Parenthood of Santa Cruz County. (Santa Cruz, California, August 1979) p. 3 and Olsen, p. 3.

[77]Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, p. v.

Programs for Pregnant Teens and Teen Mothers

California has established three programs to provide services to pregnant teens. Pregnant Minor Programs which have been established the longest, allow school districts to establish special educational services, usually off the regular school site, to pregnant students. School Age Parent and Infant Development programs provide service to teen parents focusing on providing child care for the infant, child development classes, social services, and high school classes, allowing teen parents to earn their diploma. In the 1985-86 Governor's Budget, Governor Deukmejian allocated $5 million to carry out the Adolescent Family Life Program and established an additional program in the Department of Health.[78] The goal of the program is to assure pregnant adolescents receive comprehensive, continuous prenatal care in order to deliver healthier babies. The program is designed to establish regional networks to provide medical care, psychological and nutritional counseling, academic and vocational programs and day care; to provide a case manager for each family unit; to provide primary pregnancy prevention services; and to develop a data base to measure outcomes of adolescent pregnancies.

The State Department of Health reports that 31,106 teens between the ages of 15 through 18 gave birth in 1983 and were eligible for service,[79]

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[78]California State Department of Finance, Governors Budget for 1985/86 (Sacramento, 1985), p. HW 43.

[79]California State Department of Health. Data Matters. and Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, Table 9, p. 27.

and roughly 10 percent were served by school programs for pregnant teens and teen mothers.[80] Existing programs fall far short of the need.

In 1983-84, the 49 statewide School Age Parent and Infant Development Programs served 1,342 teen parents and 1,092 infants of those parents.[81] State regulations (California Administrative Code Title 5, Section 18142) require school districts or county superintendents of schools that maintain school age parent and infant-development programs to provide specified services so that the parent may continue their secondary education. Services include supervised infant care during school hours, instruction in parenthood education, and instruction in child growth and development. Boys and girls are eligible if they are enrolled in a high school program that leads to a diploma if they need care for an infant or toddler in order to continue their secondary education.

State regulations (California Administrative Code Title 5, Section 11823) require Pregnant Minor Programs to provide an academic program to students who are pregnant minors and to refer and place students who have not completed graduation requirements at the end of program eligibility. Prior to school funding reform, the program was funded categorically. Currently there are no special funds going to districts for the program. In 1980, 132 out of 382 high school and unified school districts provided Pregnant Minor Programs. By 1984, the number of districts offering

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[80]California State Department of Education, Office of Child Development and the Local Assistance Bureau.

[81]Ibid.

Pregnant Minor programs dropped 50 percent from 132 to 66, serving only 2,034 teens statewide.[82]

Figure 22

California Pregnant Minor Program

Year	State Total Average Daily Attendance
1981/82	2,103
1982/83	2,628
1983/84	2,034
1984/85	1,898

Source: State Department of Education, Local Assistance Bureau.

The shortage of programs for pregnant minors and teen parents is due primarily to limited funds. Some school districts have filed formal letters of intent with the state, expressing their desire to expand programs for pregnant teens.[83] Additional funds allocated by the Legislature could be directed immediately to expand services to underserved or unserved areas of the state. AB 55 (W. Brown) of the 1985/86 legislative session, would appropriate an additional $30 million to augment child care and development services including child care services for teen parents at school sites. SB 1151 (McCorquodale) of the 1985/86 legislative session, would appropriate an additional $2 million for expansion of the Pregnant Minors Program School governing boards or county superintendents of schools could apply to the State to establish new programs. The bill creates data reporting requirements and creates state responsibilities for administration of the program. Funds received by school districts and

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[82]Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, p. 12 and California Department of Education.

[83]Assembly Office of Research, staff interview with Department of Education officials, Sacramento, June 26, 1985.

county offices of education for the average daily attendance of pupils in pregnant minor programs are required to be spent for program purposes exclusively.

In the 1983-84 legislative session, AB 3225 (Molina) and SB 1555 (Hart), The Adolescent Family Life Act, proposed to implement the statewide successful model program Teen Age Pregnancy Project (TAPP). TAPP has reduced the high school dropout rate, increased the school enrollment and high school graduation rates, and reduced the rates for low birth weight babies and repeat pregnancies in San Francisco.[84]

The Adolescent Family Life Act would have appropriated $5.07 million for regional demonstration projects using a comprehensive case management approach. The bills were passed by the Legislature and vetoed by Governor Deukmejian.

The Adolescent Family Life Program created by Governor Deukmejian in the 1985-86 Budget and administered at the state level by the Department of Health Services will be administered locally by county health departments or Social Service agencies.[85] It is estimated that 2,300 teens were served in 1984. An estimated 2,500 additional teen mothers will be served with the 1985-86 augmentation.[86]

In summary, California has an enormous teen pregnancy problem which is a major component of the statewide dropout problem. We estimate

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[84]Senate Office of Research, Mom, Dad I'm Pregnant, pp. 14-16.

[85]California State Department of Finance, Governor's Budget for 1985/86, Sacramento, 1985. p. HW 43.

[86]Assembly Office of Research, staff interview with State Department of Health officials, Sacramento, July, 1985.

conservatively that of the 31,000 teens between the ages of 15 and 18 in the class of 1983 who gave birth, 20,000 dropped out due to giving birth totheir first child. Programs for teen mothers fall far short of the need as only 10 percent of eligible teen mothers are served in programs to help them earn a diploma.

Summary

Students drop out of school for a variety of reasons: they are not succeeding in school, they want to work, or they are pregnant. Students leave school because they are not succeeding in their schoolwork. Dropouts tend to be overage for their grade -- they have run out of time to pass required courses. Some dropouts fail district proficiency tests or courses required to graduate. Of the 100,000 dropouts in the class of 1983, 40,600 left in twelfth grade due to failure of proficiency tests or the courses needed to graduate. Approximately 19,000 left the Class of 1983 from continuation schools.

Dropping out to go to work is a major reason for males to leave school. The connection of schooling to work and adult life has not been achieved for the dropout despite a variety of school programs designed to forge that connection. Pregnancy is a major reason for females to leave school. We estimate that 20,000 females dropped out of the class of 1983 due to becoming teen mothers. California has the second highest teen pregnancy rate in the United States and serves less than 10 percent of eligible females in programs designed to help teen parents finish high school. In the following chapter we discuss school factors which contribute to the academic failure of dropouts.

Chapter IV

SCHOOL FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THE DROPOUT'S ACADEMIC FAILURE

School-related reasons are the most important factors given by dropouts for leaving school. School programs can overcome academic failure of students with adequate counseling, a stimulating and appropriate curriculum tailored to student needs and high quality teaching. In this chapter, we discuss elements of California's secondary schools which contribute to academic failure: inadequate counseling, tracking practices and a narrow curriculum.

Inadequate Counseling

Most dropouts dislike school and have not succeeded in high school work. Inadequate counseling contributes to students' academic failure. Counseling and other adult student contact leads to greater academic success by providing youth and their parents with advice on school and career planning. Counseling also acts as an "early warning system" to alert parents of academic problems so that they can be solved. Students experiencing academic difficulty are at greater risk of dropping out than students who are making adequate progress, so their need for counseling is particularly acute.

Inadequate counseling has been identified as a major contributing factor to Hispanic underachievement in the United States.

> Lack of counseling appears to be a large part of the problem (of Hispanic underachievement). ... Without sensitive guidance, students choose courses with no blueprint and without relation to their long-range goals.
>
> Counseling is also important in monitoring and assessing student performance. When there is no early warning system for students, teachers and parents, problems can escalate beyond the point of solution or remediation.[87]

Students whose parents have attended college have external sources of information about career and school planning. Students whose parents have little formal education are more dependent on school counselors and teachers for advice, information and assistance.[88]

California has a serious crisis in counseling services to students. Students have limited access to counselors and the limited academic counseling services are concentrated on students at the top and the lower end of the academic programs. The average non-college bound student receives little guidance in school. In its study Paths Through High School, the California Department of Education found that college prep and remedial track students receive more attention from counselors than the average "general track" student.

> "Students in the college prep and lower tracks receive more attention from counselors about the completion of college entrance or graduation requirements. Middle track students who have no attendance or other problems and can graduate were reported to receive less attention from counselors about their choices of courses."[3]

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[87]Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, p. 13.

[88]California Department of Education, California High School Curriculum Study: Paths through High School (Sacramento, January 1984), Chapter 4, p. 1.

Access to Counseling

Student access to counselors is limited by the low number of available counselors and the large numbers of students each counselor must serve. Figure 23 shows the counselor pupil ratio for California schools. For students in grades K to 8 access to counseling is almost nonexistent. At the secondary school level, the number of high school students served by a single counselor has grown by almost 50 percent since 1976-77.

Figure 23

Counselor/Student Ratios
1976 to 1983

	Elementary K-8	Secondary 9-12
1976-77	1/3905	1/262
1979-80	1/3704	1/255
1983-84	1/3445	1/356

Source: California Department of Education, California Data Basic Education Data System.

The College Board studied the counseling services in California high schools and found a 20 percent decline in the number of high school counselors from 1978-79 to 1983-84. In districts surveyed by the College Board, the student counselor ratio increased from 372 to 1 to 427 to 1 during that five-year period, representing a 15 percent increase in student workload for counselors. Counselors reported less individual

student contact as a result of their higher workload. The College Board found California's reduction in counseling services to be unique among Western states.[89]

As a consequence of dwindling counseling services at the secondary level, most high school students' contact with a counselor is limited to an annual conference to discuss graduation requirements, proficiency tests and future plans.[90]

Assessment At Entry

Inadequate assessment at entry is an especially serious problem for nonreaders. Assessment of entering students' strengths and weaknesses is an important first step in educational planning for the high school student. In its 1984 study of high schools, Overcoming the Odds: Making High Schools Work, the Assembly Office of Research found different approaches to student assessment in effective and ineffective high schools. To plan an effective program for all students, school staff need to know what skills entering students have mastered.

In effective schools, staff emphasize careful student assessment. Teachers at these schools design their own tests, which are used to pinpoint the strengths and weaknesses of incoming students. At

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[89]Kris Crowe Zavoli, The Status of Counselors and Counseling Services in the Western Region: A Focus on California, A Survey for the College Board (Palo Alto, January 1985), p. 12.

[90]California Department of Education, California High School Curriculm Study: Paths Through High School, Chapter 4, p. 4.

low-performing schools, however, staff generally had a casual approach to assessing students entering high school. At these schools the most common criterion used for placing students in English and math courses was the recommendation of the student's 8th grade teacher. The next most commonly used instruments were standardized tests, which do not detail student strengths and weaknesses.[91]

The Paths Through High School study found school staff initially placed students in courses using a combination of standardized tests, grades, junior high school teacher recommendations and career plans. Parental involvement in decisionmaking varied widely.[92]

Monitoring Progress in School

High school counselors should monitor student progress in four areas: attendance patterns, successful completion of proficiency, graduation and college entrance requirements; completion of an overall school plan for courses in high school based on their long range goals; and post high school follow-up of graduates.[93] The Paths Through High School study identified major shortcomings in sample high schools' counseling services in two of the four areas: monitoring fulfillment of the student overall

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[91]Assembly Office of Research, Overcoming the Odds: Making High Schools Work, Report 009 (Sacramento, 1984), pp. 16-17.

[92]California Department of Education, California High School Curriculum Study: Paths Through High School, Chapter 4, p. 3.

[93]Ibid, p. 6.

plan and follow-up of graduates. The study also found that "only a few schools formally monitor the match between actual courses students take and their initial program plan."[94] "Very few schools formally collect information about the post-graduation progress of their students."[95]

SB 813 Tenth Grade Counseling

The need for better counseling services for students was recognized in SB 813 (Chapter 798, Statutes of 1983), when the state provided $6.2 million in new funding for counseling high school students. The counseling was intended as an academic "checkpoint" to assess student progress in meeting graduation requirements, and parental involvement was encouraged. Participating districts were given $20 per tenth grade student to provide an individual review of the student's progress. First priority was to be given to students not making satisfactory progress in high school.[96]

Virtually all California high schools participated in this counseling program in the first year of SB 813 implementation, 1983-84. The additional state support purchased an average of one 30-minute individual counseling session per identified student. In addition, an independent evaluation found that parent-counselor contact was stimulated by the program.[97] Districts emphasized service to high risk students with second

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] California Department of Education, Program Advisory on 10th Grade Counseling (Sacramento, November 26, 1983), p. 1.

[97] Policy Analysis in California Education, SB 813 and Tenth Grade Counseling: A Report on Implementation (U.C. Berkeley and Stanford University, April 1984), p. viii.

priority given to college bound students. Less emphasis was placed on students with college potential but not in college prep courses.[98] An initial independent evaluation concluded that while SB 813 tenth grade counseling funds stimulated valuable additional student/counselor contact, much more action is needed to improve counseling services.

California high schools have a serious shortage of counseling services, this shortage is particularly detrimental to students who lack other sources of advice about career and college plans. Inadequate counseling also contributes to the isolation and the inability to connect school to adult life which precede the dropout's decision to leave school.

Tracking of Students

Students who leave school prior to graduation are likely to be in the general or remedial track rather than the college prep or honors track.[99] The tracking practices used in California schools contribute to the dropout problem.

Tracking is perceived by many educators as a perjorative term, and some deny that it exists. State regulation forbids schools from tracking educationally disadvantaged secondary school students for more than two periods per day in state and federally-funded compensatory programs (California Administrative Code, Title V, Section 3934). Despite

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[98] Ibid, p. 11.

[99] K. L. Alexamder et al., "Curriculum Tracking and Educational Stratification: Some Further Evidence," American Sociological Review, 43 (1) pp. 47-66, 1978; J.E. Rosenbaum, Making Inequality : The Hidden Curriculum of High School Tracking (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1976); J.E. Rosenbaum, "Structure of Opportunity Schools," Social Forces 57 (1) 236-256, 1978, all cited in Steinberg, p. 21.

educators' discomfort with the concept and regulatory prohibition of tracking for remedial classes, tracking is practiced in California high schools.[100]

Grouping of pupils by ability begins in kindergarten in most schools. Students are assigned to separate groups for instruction based on a judgment of their intellectual ability. At entry to most secondary schools, students are assigned to separate course sequences based on prior academic performance, standardized tests, or teacher recommendation. Course sequences, or tracks, are commonly called honors, college prep, general, vocational or remedial. "Ability grouping" is based on three assumptions: that students vary greatly in ability in a manner which calls for separate educational treatments, that ability is stable and not affected by educational treatments, and that it is possible to accurately classify students by their learning potential.[101]

Students assigned to one ability group or track generally stay in that group throughout their school careers. Movement from track to track is difficult, due to different patterns of prerequisite courses in different tracks. If students move to another track it is almost always to a "lower" track.[102]

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[100]Achievement Council, Excellence for Whom?, Oakland, 1984) p. 17, and California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Ch. 3, pp. 1-5.

[101]Jeanie Oakes, "Tracking and Ability Grouping in American Schools: Some Constitutional Questions," Teachers College Record, Vol. 84, No. 4, (Summer, 1984), p. 802.

[102]R. C. Rist, "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education," Harvard Educational Review, 40, 1970, pp. 411-451, cited in Peter Treadway "Buy and Statistics: Doing Something About Dropping Out of School: A Synthesis of Relevant Research," prepared for Whitney Foundation (Stanford University, March 1985), p.8.

Tracking has profound consequences on students' educational experiences. Students in lower tracks are taught by less experienced teachers, have lower self-esteem than their peers in higher tracks, receive less academic instruction and achieve at a lower level than if they were placed in higher tracks.[103] Additionally, minority and poorer children are disproportionately placed in remedial and general tracks and upper income youth are disproportionately placed in college prep tracks.[104]

Tracking in the United States

Tracking practices have changed historically in America. Tracking was practiced extensively in the 1920s when intelligence tests were developed. In the 1930s, progressive educators argued against tracking. In the 1950s, tracking was favored as a means of accelerating the learning of gifted students.[105]

Since 1964, the percentage of high school students nationwide in the general track has increased from 12 percent to 36 percent.[106] National growth in the general track was viewed with alarm in A Nation at Risk.

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[103] Oakes, "Tracking and Ability Grouping," pp. 803-84.

[104] Ibid, p. 803.

[105] Susan Andonian, "A Closer Examination of Ability Grouping," (Sacramento, December 1984), p. 3.

[106] National Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, p. 32.

> "Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose ... Twenty five percent of the credits earned by general track high school students are in physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics and personal service and development courses such as training for adulthood and marriage."[107]

Hispanics are disproportionately tracked into general track courses. In 1980, 40 percent of Hispanic sophomores in High School and Beyond were in the general track, compared to 36 percent of all sophomores.[108]

Tracking in California

The Paths Through High School study found an average of 45 percent of California high school students were in the general track, higher than the national average of 36 percent.[109] Fifty-five percent of high school students are in non-college prep courses.

Figure 24

Percent of California High School Students, by Track,[110] 1982-83

	Percent
Gifted or honors	10
College prep	35
General	45
Remedial	20

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[107] National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, (Washington, D.C., 1983), pp. 18-19.

[108] National Hispanic Policy Development Project, Make Something Happen, Vol. 2, p. 59.

[109] California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Ch. 3, p. 3, and National Center for Education Statistics, Condition of Education, 1983 Edition (Washington, D.C., 1983), p. 36.

[110] California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Chapter 3, p. 3. These figures do not add to 100 percent because students can be counted in more than one track.

In the Assembly Office of Research study, Overcoming the Odds, staff asked English and math department chairs what percentage of students were in honors, college prep, general and remedial tracks. An average of 80 percent of students were described as being in general and remedial tracks.

The Paths Through High School study examined the content of course sequences or tracks in California high schools. The greatest definition of curriculum content and sequence was found in the University of California college bound track courses and in the remedial track while the courses for the average student were the least well defined. The study also found that students in the college prep track receive an average of one hour per day more academic instruction time than general education and remedial track students.[111]

Teachers also reported to the Paths Through High School study team that it was difficult to plan courses for general and lower track students due to the unavailability of suitable textbooks and greater student absenteeism and transiency.[112]

> "Tracking systems are organizational responses to student diversity. Some students enter high school at low achievement levels, and high schools must plan courses for them. If the planning for each track created sequences of courses which were of comparable length and progressively advanced content, the tracks could be seen as providing different but equally good secondary educations. However, this was not found to be the case."[113]

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[111] California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Chapter 5, p. 11.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid.

By placing a greater than average percentage of students in the general track, California high schools place more students at risk of dropping out than do other states.

Narrow Curriculum

The high school curriculum has changed significantly in California in recent years. Curriculum is both content and structure; it includes what is taught and how it is taught. Curriculum should be structured with clear goals for students to acquire skills or subject matter mastery. Courses should be organized in logical sequence to enable students to build upon prior knowledge as they master new material.

The range of course offerings has been reduced. This narrowing in curriculum may be a major factor contributing to California's high dropout rate because it offers fewer opportunities for success and fewer ways for students to learn. Students with academic deficiencies entering high school who experience success in one course can transfer that positive experience to other areas. This technique has been successfully used by effective high schools with entering students who have poor academic records and are at high risk of dropping out.[114]

The interaction of a number of forces has led to reduced course offerings. The practice of offering a five-period high school day, financial pressures on school districts with declining enrollment,

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[114]Assembly Office of Research, Overcoming the Odds, p. 20.

proficiency testing, increased college entrance requirements and graduation standards have created the narrow academic curriculum in most California high schools.

A high school day is divided into periods for classroom instruction. A high school day of seven periods offers more opportunities to students to take courses than does a day of five periods. By 1983, one-third of high schools in California had only a five-period day. Fewer periods of instruction is a serious obstacle which prohibits students from taking a variety of courses.

Financial pressure on school districts after 1978 has led to reduced course offerings. After Proposition 13 passed in 1978, financial pressure was particularly acute on districts with declining enrollment, because school districts are funded by the state, based on their average daily attendance (ADA) of students. The enrollment loss caused a decline in real revenues during a period of high inflation. Reductions in the teaching force resulted in the termination of courses not required for high school graduation, such as fine arts, vocational education and other elective courses.[115]

Students must pass state mandated local proficiency tests in basic skills to graduate from high school. Students who fail one or more tests must take remedial courses until they pass the test. School districts have responded to the state mandate for proficiency testing by offering a highly developed remedial course curriculum, which has edged out elective, vocational and arts courses for non-college bound students.

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[115]California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Chapter 2, p. 11.

In addition to the need for increased remedial course offerings, the national and statewide school reform efforts have encouraged more advanced academic course work for more students. For the freshman class entering in 1988, California State University has increased its course requirements to match those of the University of California. School reform efforts in California have been concentrated on improving academic rigor for the college bound student.

A major element of the recent school reform legislation (SB 813, Chapter 498, Statutes of 1983) was increased high school graduation requirements. For the class of 1987, students will have to complete the following courses to graduate:[116]

3 years of English

2 years of Math

2 years of Science

1 year of foreign language or visual and performing arts

2 years of physical education

The new state standards exceed the average local district standards in effect in 1983 for math and science courses.[117]

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[116]California Education Code, Section 51225.3.

[117]California Department of Education, Paths Through High School, Chapter 2, p. 4.

There has been a significant decline in high school-based vocational education in California. From 1981-82 to 1983-84 enrollment in high school-based vocational education courses declined 14.5 percent.[118] Vocational education teachers have decreased in number statewide by 14.8 percent between 1981-82 and 1983-84.[119] Home economics, industrial arts, work experience, technical and business education experienced the greatest reductions in teachers.[120]

A high school confronted with competing demands for proficiency testing, higher graduation and college entrance requirements and limited faculty resources can overcome the odds with low achieving students by careful planning, evaluation and implementation of curriculum.

School Effectiveness

In the 1984 study, Overcoming the Odds, the Assembly Office of Research found a stark contrast between effective and low-performing high schools. Both effective and low-performing high schools served large numbers of incoming students who could not read well enough to do high school level work and had a history of poor attendance.

The Assembly Office of Research found that faculty and administrators at effective high schools share a common sense of purpose that guided the development of curriculum, influenced classroom and administrative procedures, and related instructional methods to measurable outcomes. In contrast, principals and faculty at low-performing schools had difficulty

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[118]California Department of Education, "A Special Study on the Effects of SB 813 Graduation Requirements on Vocational Education in California High School 1984-85," (Sacramento, 1985), Table 1 in Appendix 2.

[119]Ibid., Appendix 2, Table 2.

[120]Ibid.

articulating their school's mission, and when they did express a goal, faculty and administrators at the same school frequently disagreed with each other.

Principals and faculty at effective schools commonly cited statistics they relied on to assess their school's success and provided examples of their using these data as a basis for making changes in their instructional programs. Faculty of low-performing schools relied on classroom subject-matter tests to gauge pupil learning, but did not discuss overall measures of school performance. Many principals at these schools considered collecting and reporting schoolwide data a necessary evil.

At effective schools individuals, whether department chairpersons and/or a designated site administrator, have express authority over what is taught and how it is taught in each subject area and in the entire curriculum. This authority is complemented by the teachers' participation in curriculum review and redesign. At many low-performing schools no one claims authority over the instructional program; responsibility for curriculum is ambiguous or is seen as a district responsibility.

At the effective schools, faculties described procedures they used regularly to ascertain whether their instructional programs were meeting the needs of their students. Efforts were made to expand the curriculum to assure that students received experiences in vocational training, art, drama, music, and foreign languages. At low-performing schools, there was little evidence of ongoing curriculum review and adjustments to accommodate students' strengths and weaknesses; course offerings had become narrower, with fewer offerings in vocational education, the arts, or foreign languages.

Principals at effective schools expressed school goals based on the underlying premise that poor and minority students can learn and that schools make a difference. These principals assemble strong, cohesive administrative teams, establish productive relationships with their communities, and engineer a healthy school "climate." Principals at some low-performing schools, however, did not express a positive belief in their students' potential and had not instilled such attitudes in their faculties. Some principals articulated higher expectations for students but expressed frustration in modifying the school program to meet student needs. Efforts to involve parents and the community met with mixed success.

We found that the faculties at effective schools shared their principals' belief in the students' potential and agreed with each other about students' needs and about methods to meet their needs. The faculties at low-performing schools expressed strong disagreement over basic educational principles, their expectations for student learning, and instructional methods. [121]

Summary

School factors contribute to the academic failure of dropouts. Counseling is inadequate for all students in California high schools, but especially for the students in the general track. California high schools assign more students to the general track than do high schools in other states. Many forces including regulated mandates for proficiency testing,

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[121] Assembly Office of Research, Overcoming the Odds, pp. 2-6.

increased graduation and college entrance requirements, and financial pressures have created a narrow curriculum with reduced course offerings in vocational education, fine arts, and other electives. The result is a curriculum which offers students fewer chances to succeed. Despite all the forces which contribute to a high dropout rate in California, there are effective schools which have reduced their dropout rate. Changes in curriculum, counseling, and school organization have resulted in improved academic performance of students who entered high school with low reading skills.

The dropout rate is a symptom of deeper underlying problems in the high school. To understand why students "vote with their feet" and drop out of school, policymakers should examine the high school of the 1980s in California.

Chapter V

EXISTING LAWS DO NOT SOLVE THE DROPOUT PROBLEM

The dropout problem is growing despite laws which require youth to attend school and a variety of alternative means to earn a diploma. In this chapter we discuss laws which require school attendance and on alternative programs.

State Laws on School Attendance

Three major state laws require or encourage youth to attend school up to the age of 18: compulsory school attendance, state funding for public schools based on average daily attendance, and child labor laws.

Compulsory School Attendance

The compulsory school attendance law requires youth under 18 to attend school. Students who cut classes, who are truant, or who leave school before age 18 are in violation of state law and can subject their parents to penalties (Education Code §48200 et seq.). School districts and law enforcement vary widely in the attention they give to enforcing school attendance.[122]

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[122]Assembly Office of Research interviews with school district personnel and law enforcement personnel, September 1984 to February 1985.

> Unfortunately, many of our school staff don't reach out to get the truant back in school. One less kid is one less problem. (Director of Child Welfare and Attendance, Unified School District)

> The kids know there is no bottom line on truancy. (County Office of Education, attendance official)

Under California law, local law enforcement agencies must take action against parents whose children do not attend school, however, enforcement of compulsory school attendance is a low priority for most probation departments, district attorneys and courts.[123]

> No one enforces compulsory school attendance. The police are too busy. (District official, High School District)

> Our problem begins when we go to the Probation Department, it [our enforcement effort] goes nowhere, the school and district put all the documentation out. It is not a priority for the Probation Department. (Principal of high school with 52% attrition rate)

Action against the student is precluded because under California law truancy is not a criminal offense. There is no consensus among law enforcement or school officials as to what should be done to curb truancy. Some favor making truancy a criminal offense, arguing that many truants commit crimes. For example, 65 percent of daytime burglaries are committed by truants.[124] Others feel that truancy is a school-related problem and should be approached through school-run programs.[125]

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[123] Ibid.

[124] California Legislature, Office of the Auditor General Report on Attendance and Absenteeism in California Schools (Sacramento, 1978), p. 3.

[125] Juvenile Court Law Revision Commission, Final Report (Sacramento, 1984) pp. 65-66.

While school officials and law enforcement officials debate what should be done about truancy, it continues to be a major contributing factor to the dropout problem. Poor attendance and academic problems are closely related. In the Assembly Office of Research study of low-performing high schools, low reading skills and poor attendance were the educational problems mentioned most frequently by principals and teachers. Poor attendance contributes to the inability of students to read well enough to learn high school subjects. As one principal told us:

> When you look at a teenager reading at 4th grade level, chances are he's only attended four years worth of school. Seen in that way, 4th grade reading level is achievement at an average level. Poor attendance and poor reading go hand in hand. We cannot do anything with them if they're not here.
>
> Principal, Low-Performing Inner City High School[126]

High school students with poor attendance who fail courses are at great risk of dropping out of school.

Average Daily Attendance

State funds for school districts operations are based on student attendance. Average daily attendance (ADA) is the count of the number of youth in school. School districts receive 83 percent of their operating revenues from state and local sources based upon the count of students in average daily attendance.[127]

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[126]Assembly Office of Research, Overcoming the Odds, p. 12.

[127]Legislative Analyst, Analysis of the Budget Bill for Fiscal Year July 1, 1985 to June 30, 1986 (Sacramento, 1985), p. 1061.

In using average daily attendance to determine financial support, state law is designed to provide a powerful incentive for school districts to maintain high levels of student attendance. This incentive is not working to curb truancy or dropping out because of three weaknesses in the implementation of average daily attendance accounting.

The first weakness is that attendance accounting encourages documentation of absences in order to receive funding rather than remediation of attendance problems.[128] Average daily attendance is based on actual attendance of students and absent students with valid excuses. Valid excuses for absence include illness, medical treatment, jury duty and, under specified circumstances, religious instruction (Education Code Section 46010, 46014). California is the only state which allows excused absences to be counted as ADA.[129] Counting excused absences as valid attendance creates a financial incentive for school officials to accept illegitimate illness notes written by students.[130]

> When students and parents write such notes (illegitimate excused absences) you accept it, you receive funding. (Principal)

> That money enables you to maintain your classes, to buy books for those kids who are coming--provide services. ADA is just base salary. (District official)

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[128]Thomas Jacobson, "Keeping Track with Computers: Student Attendance Accounting," Thrust, November-December 1984), p. 33.

[129]National Center for Education Statistics, Digest of Education Statistics 1983-84, (Washington, D.C., 1984), p. 32.

[130]Assembly Office of Research interviews, September 1984 to February 1985.

A second weakness in the ADA system is that attendance accounting procedures require only the counting of homeroom attendance. Students who attend homeroom but are truant for the remainder of the day may be counted as present for ADA reporting under current law.

Some districts have required period-by-period attendance accounting sometimes called "hot seat attendance." Grossmont High School District in San Diego County instituted period-by-period attendance and found that students, counselors and parents paid more careful attention to regular attendance. Counselors shifted from stressing documentation for absences to identifying and solving attendance problems. Parents appreciated knowing more about their children's school attendance.[131]

Grossmont High School District also participated in a pilot program to count ADA for actual attendance of students plus a fixed percentage for excused absences. The allowance of a fixed percentage for excused absences was designed so that pilot districts, on the average, would not lose state funds under the new system. The pilot program was conducted under AB 3269 (Chapter 1369, Statutes of 1980). Between 1979-80 and 1982-83 absences at the high school level decreased from 12.79% to 7.4%.[132]

A third factor that undermines the value of the ADA system as an inducement for increased attendance is that the financial incentive is not effective for personnel at the school site who implement attendance accounting procedures. Under state law, the general operating revenues, which are based in part on ADA, go to the school district. Increased

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[131]Jacobson, "Keeping Track with Computers: Student Attendance Accounting," p. 33.

[132]Senate Committee on Education, Attendance Improvement Pilot Study, 1984.

revenues due to increased attendance may never be seen by school site personnel who have made extra efforts to reduce truancy; instead, the financial benefits can be allocated to all or a portion of the schools in the district. Because individual schools do not necessarily benefit from increased attendance, troublesome or unmotivated students who are truant or who dropout may be perceived simply as relieving the burdens of teachers and school site administrators.[133]

> When the truant comes back in, he is not school oriented, he has a very poor attitude, he may be disruptive, he may be violent, he may be responsible for vandalism. He has to be almost reprogrammed before we can allow him back on a regular campus. It is really going to be a problem, and I am wondering if we do bring all of these dropouts back into school, can we afford it? (Junior high school principal)

Average daily attendance accounting should be a powerful incentive for school personnel to get students back to school who are truant or who drop out. Instead, weaknesses in ADA procedures are undermining the effectiveness of the state policy to keep youth in school.

Child Labor Laws

California child labor laws require that, in order to work, a youth under 18 must have a work permit. In order to receive a work permit a youth between 16 and 18 must have parental permission, the work may not impair the student's education or health, and the youth may only work a maximum of four hours on a school day. Youth between the ages of 14 and 16

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[133]Assembly Office of Research interviews with school district personnel, September 1985.

may work full-time only when there is family economic hardship arising from the death or desertion of the youth's parent or guardian. In such cases, the youth must attend continuation classes. Employers who employ a youth under age 18 without a work permit commit a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of from $100 to $400 and/or 60 days in jail. (Education Code 49100 et seq)

In 1984-85 one million work permits were issued for 1.25 million high school students statewide. Using state Employment Development Department and U.S. Census data, we estimate that 75 percent of California high school students work during the school year or summer vacation.

Enforcement of child labor laws is the responsibility of the State Labor Commissioner. As with compulsory school attendance, enforcement of child labor laws is lax and uneven. Little attention is given to enforcing work permit laws. In 1983 there were only 384 violations cited for child labor violations.

> The situation is out of control in LA County. Anyone over 14 can get a job without a work permit. (Official in State Department of Industrial Relations, Labor Standards Enforcement Division)

By law, students must show adequate progress in school in order to work with a permit. School officials may exert control over a student's continuing use of a work permit.

> If kids are working, they need a work permit. This gives me a powerful tool with the casual truant. Ninety-eight percent of my truants are casual rather than hard core. If I threaten to pull their permit they come back to school. (Director, child welfare and attendance, unified school district)

The vast majority of working high school students receive minimal organized supervision from school staff regarding their regular school

attendance and academic progress. Only four percent of working high school students received work experience supervision in 1983-84.[134]

In order for a school district to claim average daily attendance for state funding purposes for a student's time in work experience programs, the student must be in an organized work experience program supervised by a work experience coordinator. By state law a full-time work experience coordinator may not serve more than 125 students (Education Code Section 46300).

Supervision provided by work experience coordinators includes monitoring workplace activities of students, offering related class instruction at school and insuring that working students complete their required courses for high school graduation.[135] Work experience coordinators frequently function as part of high school's counseling services.[136]

Working students demonstrate initiative and responsibility. The desire to work rather than attend school is a major reason for boys to drop out of school and dropouts do not understand the connection between schooling and work. One half of dropouts already have a job before they leave high school.[137]

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[134]Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California, p. 53.

[135]Ibid, pp. 50-51.

[136]Assembly Office of Research interviews, September 1984 to February 1985.

[137]Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California, p. 24.

Ninety-six percent of working high school students are not in an organized work experience program. Their unsupervised work experience is a lost opportunity for schools to build on the positive aspects of their students' working life and to show youth the connection between schooling and adult life.

Alternatives to Regular High School

A variety of programs have been developed in California to provide an alternative means to earn a high school diploma, including continuation schools, regional occupational programs and centers and independent study. Many of the alternative programs are designed to forge a stronger connection for youth to the world of work than that provided in the regular high school. Although administrators of these programs and many school officials believe that the programs keep potential dropouts in school, it is impossible to assess the effectiveness of these alternatives as dropout prevention because official dropout data and uniform statewide performance outcomes for program participants are not available.

Continuation Schools

Continuation education is the oldest alternative schooling program in California. Established in 1919, continuation schools were originally designed to allow the working student to complete high school.[138] Under current law, continuation school students who are employed part-time must attend school at least 15 hours per week, while students employed full-time

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[138] Ibid, p. 35.

must attend school four hours per week. (Education Code Sections 48400 et seq.) Eighty-nine percent of students who attend continuation school in 1983-84 were over 16 years of age.[139]

Continuation schools serve a diverse student population: youth with health impairment or juvenile justice records, teen parents, dropouts waiting to reenter regular high school, youth who have been suspended or expelled from high school, and students who prefer the structure of continuation school to a regular high school.[140] Continuation schools are smaller than regular high schools, with an average enrollment in 1980-81 of 250 students.[141] Statewide, a total of 102,025 students were enrolled in 430 continuation schools in 1982-83.[142]

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[139]California Department of Education, Continuation Education Unit, Sacramento.

[140]Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California, p. 35.

[141]Ibid, p. 37.

[142]California Department of Education, Continuation Education Unit, Sacramento.

Figure 25

Students in California Continuation Schools, 1979/80 to 1983/84

	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83	1983/84
Total cumulative enrollment	100,904	103,761	103,377	102,025	99,645
Leavers total	39,695	43,600	44,070	41,822	42,541
Education leavers[a]	19,498	26,378	26,279	n.a.[c]	22,907
Non-education leavers[b]	21,197	17,222	17,791	n.a.[c]	19,634
Completers total	10,511	9,650	10,380	11,235	9,890
Continuation diploma	7,632	7,021	7,876	8,615	7,637
Regular diploma	728	671	720	921	815
GED	539	465	547	826	562
CHSPE	1,612	1,493	1,237	873	876

[a] Defined as students who returned to regular high school, transferred to another high school, entered military service or a job training program, adult school or community college or juvenile justice system.

[b] Defined as students who left school due to marriage, being over age 18, expulsion, or whereabouts unknown.

[c] Data not collected in 1982/83.

Source: Department of Education, Continuation Education Unit.

In the school reform legislation of 1983, SB 813, the Legislature stated three goals for continuation schools: to provide students with opportunities to earn a high school diploma, to enable students to work and attend school under supervision, and to provide opportunities for individualized instruction in basic skills and job training. A recent study, however, raises questions about continuation schools.

In 1985, David Stern, Professor of Education at the University of California reviewed outcome measures for continuation schools.[143] Stern attributes the graduation rate of 10 percent of continuation students to

[143] Stern, Reducing the High School Dropout Rate in California, pp. 41-49.

very high student turnover and low accumulation of graduation credits by entering students. One out of three students who enter a continuation school in any month will not finish the school year as an enrolled student.[144] In addition, 43 percent of students entering continuation school have 50 or fewer high school credits. As a result, the great majority of these students are too far behind upon entering continuation school to acquire the 200 to 220 credits most districts require for graduation.[145] In 1983/84, continuation school students who received a high school diploma or its equivalent were 10 percent of total continuation school enrollment, but represented 37 percent of students entering with more than 100 high school credits.[146]

Another goal of continuation schools,to enable students to work while completing school, also has not been totally achieved. In 1983/84, 19 percent of continuation students worked, 13 percent full-time and six percent part-time; only 6 percent of continuation school enrollees participated in job training in Regional Occupational Centers or Programs.[147]

Continuation schools are a major element in the secondary school system, serving almost 20 percent of 11th and 12th grade high school students. They serve a variety of students; 80 percent attend voluntarily and 20 percent are assigned involuntarily.[148] While SB 813 stated goals for continuation schools,

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[144]Ibid, p. 41.

[145]Ibid, pp. 44-45.

[146]California Department of Education, Continuation Education Unit, Sacramento.

[147]Ibid.

[148]Stern, Reducing, the High School Dropout Rate in California, p. 36.

it did not address statewide standards or accountability for these programs. Continuation schools have not been addressed in school reform. In the class of 1983, 18,660 students left high school from continuation school while 11,235 students received a diploma or equivalent in 1982/83. We need more information to assess the effectiveness of continuation schools in preventing dropouts and inducing reentry into school.

Regional Occupational Programs and Centers

Regional Occupational Programs and Centers (ROP/Cs) offer part-time training in entry level job skills to high school students in grades 11 and 12 and to adults. In 1984-85, ROP/Cs offered training to high school students, or 19 percent of 11th and 12th graders, at high school sites, in businesses or at separate job training centers.[149] Participating students must attend ROP/C classes at least one hour per day in addition to attending classes at their regular high school for 3 hours per day. (Education Code Section 46144 and 52326)

In its 1983 study of job training programs, Training Tomorrow's Workers, AOR concluded that ROP/Cs offered higher quality job training to high school students that did high school-based vocational education programs because of the ROP's emphasis on meeting labor market needs, their linkages with industry, their higher placement rates, and their greater flexibility in hiring staff with recent industry experience.[150] At the same time, AOR found major shortcomings.

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[149] Legislative Analyst, Analysis of the 1985/86 Budget Bill, pp. 1118-1119.

[150] Assembly Office of Research, Training Tomorrow's Workers (Sacramento, 1983) pp. 39-42.

with ROPs in two areas: access and career guidance. Access to ROPs is limited because ROP training classes are often located away from the school site and students must travel to attend classes, leaving friends and school activities. Access to ROP classes also is limited by the short school day and recent increased academic graduation requirements, which are squeezing available time for students. A third factor limiting access to ROPs is institutional rivalry between high school staff and ROP staff.

> Despite the quality of the offerings in shared-time vocational centers [ROPs], many of the programs for secondary students are under-enrolled. Chief among the reasons offered for this underutilization is the institutional rivalry that exists between the shared time schools and the comprehensive high schools. Repeatedly, staff at these centers told us that, for a variety of reasons, school principals, counselors, and vocational teachers in comprehensive high schools resisted sending students to shared-time vocational programs.[151]

Career guidance to students in ROP classes is not appreciably better than the guidance given to most high school students.[152]

ROP programs offer better quality job training to high school juniors and seniors than they would receive in high school-based vocational education. Increased high school academic graduation requirements will exacerbate and continue to limit the time high school students can spend in ROP classes. To the extent that ROP classes offer youth a chance to get job training and a high school diploma, ROP should serve as a dropout.

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[151]National Vocational Education Resources, School of Education, University of California, Berkeley, California, Descriptive Study of the Distribution of Federal, State and Local Funds for Vocational Education: A Final Report, (1981), pp. 319 and 320, cited in Assembly Office of Research Training Tomorrow's Workers, pp. 17-18.

[152]Assembly Office of Research, Training Tomorrow's Workers, pp. 18-22.

prevention program. No information is available at the state level as to the effectiveness of ROP in dropout prevention or reentry into school.

Independent Study

Authorized by state law in 1976, independent study allows a student to learn subjects and earn credits under the "general but not immediate' supervision of a certificated employee of a local district (Education Code Section 51745). Independent study can be used in a variety of situations to replace instruction in regular classes. Student athletes, for example, can use independent study to make up classes missed during competition and training. Students in rural districts can use independent study when their schools are inaccessible in bad weather. Independent study offers a flexible, individually paced instructional program for students who cannot otherwise meet all their graduation requirements on time. Potential dropouts can use independent study to gain credits, prepare for General Educational Development Test (GED) or the California High School Proficiency Examination (CHSPE).

In order to count independent study attendance for average daily attendance for state funding purposes, school districts must adopt a formal policy for such programs. Each student must enter into a written agreement with the school staff stating learning objectives, duration of study, and methods to evaluate student progress. The contract must be signed by the student, his/her parent or guardian and a school official (California Administrative Code, Title V, Section 11702). The State Department of Education estimates that 25,000 students are enrolled in independent study.[153]

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[153]Gary Longholm, California Department of Education, letter dated March 8, 1985.

In 1981 the State Auditor General audited independent study programs in 12 California school districts. Many students in independent study had been chronic truants or had already dropped out of school.[154] The Auditor General found 11 percent of participants graduated from high school and 2 percent passed General Education Development diploma test or the California High School Proficiency Exam.[155] Despite these data, no statewide consistent information is available on the outcome of independent study. As a result, the effectiveness of independent study in preventing dropouts or inducing reentry to school cannot be assessed at this time.

Diploma Equivalents

California youth also can earn a high school diploma equivalent by passing either the General Education Development exam or the California High School Proficiency Exam. A total of 19,127 young adults in the Class of 1983 received diploma equivalents.

General Education Development

A high school equivalency certificate is available to individuals who pass the General Education Development (GED) exam. (Education Code Sections 51420-51427) Offered nationwide since the 1940s, the GED test consists of five parts: writing skills, social studies, science, reading skills and mathematics. The passing rate is set at 30th percentile rank for high school seniors. Certificates of equivalency have comparable legal status with a high school diploma for the purpose of public employment.

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[154]Auditor General, Improved Administration and Attendance Accounting Needed in Independent Study Programs (Sacramento, 1981) p. 30.

[155]Ibid, p. 30.

To be eligible to take the GED test, an individual must be at least 60 days before his or her 18th birthday, graduation from the 12th grade, or dropping out of school. In addition, a candidate who is under 18 years of age must present a written request to take the exam from the military, a college, or an employer.

In 1984, 34,290 people passed the GED exam in California, a passing rate of 84 percent. Thirty seven percent of California GED test takers were under 19 years of age. Another 32 percent were between 20 and 24 years old. In 1984, 12,680 people under 19 years of age obtained a high school diploma equivalent by passing the GED exam. Forty four percent of California GED test takers aspire to further their education in college. The average educational attainment of test takers was the 10th grade of high school.[156]

The ethnicity of California GED test takers is not available, however, nationally 79 percent of GED test takers are white, 18 percent are black, three percent are other ethnic groups. Hispanics are included in the white total and account for 6 percent of GED test takers in the United States.[157]

California High School Proficiency Exam

Whereas the GED can be taken only by individuals at least close to 18 years of age or graduation, the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE) allows students over 16 years of age, or those who have completed one year of enrollment in 10th grade, to gain the equivalent of a high

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[156]American Council on Education, GED Testing Service, The 1984 GED Statistical Report (Washington, D.C., 1984), pp. 4-5.

[157]American Council on Education, Who Takes the GED Tests?, GED Testing Service Research Studies, Number 1 (Washington, D.C., March 1981), pp. 6-9.

school diploma by passing a state administered exam. (Education Code Section 48412) The Exam consists of an essay and multiple choice test. The passing rate is set at the average basic skill level for California twelfth graders, or the 50th percentile rank.

In 1984, 13,974 people took CHSPE and 7,085 (51 percent) passed it. Most test takers were under 18 years of age; only 9 percent were over 18. Seventy-one percent of test takers were white, 5 percent were black, and 9 percent were Hispanic. Most CHSPE test takers were in the 11th grade. Unlike most dropouts, most CHSPE test takers report getting good grades in high school and having parents with above average educational attainment Half of CHSPE test takers plan to enroll in community college and eventually enter four-year colleges.[158]

Summary

Students who leave school before graduation or before attaining the age of 18 are in violation of the state compulsory school attendance law. If dropouts work, they are in violation of child labor laws which require school attendance as a prerequisite for a work permit. Parents of chronic truants can be fined or jailed or both. In practice, neither school attendance or child labor laws are enforced with uniform rigor throughout the state. Financial incentives in state law for school districts to increase attendance are flawed in their administration. Taken as a whole

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[158]Assembly Office of Research Analyses of data on CHSPE 1984 administrations provided by California Department of Education.

the three major laws designed to encourage youth to stay in school are ineffective in stemming the flood of dropouts.

Large numbers of students dropout of high school in spite of the many programs designed to provide them with alternative means to complete a high school education. The fragmented set of alternative programs do not constitute a systematic safety net for dropout prevention or re-entry into school. The effectiveness of each of the major alternatives cannot be assessed due to inadequate performance information at the state level.

Chapter VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

California has an enormous school dropout problem which requires concerted action on three fronts. First, we should enforce the laws we have to keep youth in school. Second, we should improve the schools to correct the factors which contribute to dropouts academic failure. Third, we should strengthen the safety net of dropout prevention and recovery programs.

Enforce the Laws We Have to Keep Youth in School

California has enacted state laws to keep youth in school until age 18. These laws are not working. A critical step to lowering the dropout rate is to enforce existing laws designed to keep youth in school. California sends an ambiguous message to parents and teenagers by having compulsory school attendance and child labor laws that go unenforced.

We recommend the following:

Dropout reporting

The state should require school districts to collect and report comprehensive information on students who drop out of high school. Schools, school districts, and the state need to know who drops out, their sex, race, age, grade in school, and the programs they have participated in

while in school. We also need to know the reasons students left school. Analysis of this information should be an initial step in assessing the dropout program in each school and district so that solutions can be developed, implemented, and evaluated.

We recommend that the Department of Education and the Legislative Analyst analyze dropout data collected by school districts. The results of the analysis should inform policymakers on the dimension and nature of California's dropout problem.

Average Daily Attendance

Because chronic truancy leads to academic failure and dropping out of school, schools and school districts must take steps to improve student attendance. State attendance accounting procedures must be changed from a system which encourages documentation of absences to one which encourages school staff to improve the attendance of students. Two major weaknesses in the average daily attendance accounting system should be eliminated. First, the practice of allowing unlimited excused absences to count as ADA for state funding purposes should be replaced by a system based on actual attendance, and a statewide average percentage of excused absence for elementary, intermediate and high schools. Second, to reduce cutting of classes by students, high school attendance should be taken each period rather than once each day. School district governing boards should adopt policies to reward schools which improve attendance with additional financial resources.

Work Experience Supervision

More supervision of working students is essential if schools wish to forge a stronger connection of school to work. Currently, four percent of working high school students receive supervision from a work experience coordinator. The state should take steps to systematically expand work experience programs in high schools. Outcome indicators should be used in the expansion process to measure the impact of supervised work experience on students job search skills, job readiness skills, and academic success.

Improve Secondary Schools

Students who leave school prior to graduation are "voting with their feet." Many dropouts are alienated from the high school and have experienced years of academic failure. While intensifying efforts to bring truants and potential dropouts back to school, equally aggressive efforts are needed to improve the curriculum, counseling, and instructional programs of the schools.

We recommend:

Counseling

As a short-term stopgap measure, the state should act immediately to expand the successful SB 813 Tenth Grade Counseling Program to grades 4 through 9. Funds should be given to school districts to develop programs for counseling students and their parents about school and career planning.

To address counseling in a longer term manner, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction should review counseling services available statewide in grade 7 through 12 and recommend steps to improve the availability and

quality of counseling for all students. The review and recommendations should pay careful attention to the needs of average students in the general track who are receiving the smallest share of existing counseling resources.

Curriculum

California has a program, the School Improvement Program, which is designed to fund evaluation of a school's curriculum and instruction and systematic steps to improving the school's effectiveness.[159]

In 1983, an independent evaluation of the School Improvement Program conducted by Berman, Weiler Associates found that secondary SIP was generally less effective than elementary SIP. Contributing factors included:

- The structure of the high school into departments has not been specifically taken into account in SIP.
- Secondary SIP has been viewed as a remedial program or a funding source.
- Department heads are key leaders in secondary schools yet they have been excluded from SIP site councils.[160]

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[159] The School Improvement Program began as an elementary school program which stressed schoolwide problem solving and parental involvement, and in 1983-84, 68 percent of students in grades K-3 attended schools participating in this program. Expansion of the program and authorization for secondary School Improvement were included in AB 65 (Chapter 894, Statutes if 1977). Statewide, 21 percent of students in grades 9-12 in 1984-85 were in schools served by SIP.

[160] Paul Berman, Improving School Improvement: Abstract and Summary (Tiburon, California: Berman, Weiler Associates, 1983), p. 13.

We recommend that the state examine the SIP program as a catalyst for improving secondary schools. The SIP program at the secondary level should be revised to focus on curriculum, student assessment and tracking, and counseling services. SIP programs should be refocused to encourage schools to set goals, measure success and modify their programs. The state should expand secondary SIP and reward schools which successfully meet their goals for improvement.

Summer School

The state should expand summer school. Summer school allows students who have failed courses the opportunity to retake and pass courses needed for graduation or college entrance. Statewide, high school attrition increased by 5 percentage points between the class of 1978 and the class of 1979. This increase coincides with sharp reductions in summer school following the passage of Proposition 13. Between the summer of 1978 and the summer of 1979, students in average daily attendance in summer school dropped by 75,000 ADA. Decreases in summer school opportunities may be increasing the numbers of California high school students who are overage for grade. Summer school expansion can also provide a means to enrich the narrow academic high school curriculum by adding fine arts and vocational courses. We recommend that the state systematically expand summer school to pre-Proposition 13 levels.

Junior High Schools and Middle Schools

Dropouts' disaffection from school is apparent in the junior high or middle school years. School reform efforts have not yet focused on intermediate level schooling. The state should encourage school districts to examine the programs in their junior high and middle schools. An

expanded secondary SIP program is one means which could be used to stimulate schoolwide planning and evaluation in intermediate schools.

The Legislature should require the State Superintendent to prepare recommended state actions to improve middle and junior high schools. The Superintendent should consult with teachers, administrators, parents and community organizations in the course of the review.

Review for High Schools with an Acute Dropout Problem

The state should provide intensive review once every three years for high schools which graduate less than 50 percent of entering students. The review should be preceded by a self-review conducted by school staff to examine their dropout problem and the school's use of existing resources. The state review team should be composed of experts in schoolwide planning, curriculum and counseling. The team and school staff should prepare a three-year plan of remedy to increase the graduation rate. The state should provide funds to support activities in the plan.

Accreditation

High schools are accredited by a private association, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. High schools are evaluated for accreditation based on goals set at the school. The state should evaluate accreditation procedures of California high schools. Consideration of the dropout problem and school policies and procedures which affect the dropout problem should be added to the accreditation process.

Strengthen the Safety Net

California has a variety of school-based programs which provide alternative means to earn a high school diploma. These programs are run independently of each other and do not constitute a dropout prevention or recovery system. To strengthen the safety net for dropouts we recommend the following.

Systematic Dropout Prevention and Recovery

California schools need a systematic set of alternative programs for dropout prevention and recovery. Schools, school districts and the State Board of Education should take steps to make effective use of existing resources in the many alternative and categorically funded programs. School district governing boards should initiate school level review of existing programs, setting goals for dropout prevention and redesigning programs if necessary to meet those goals. The Legislature should remove statutory barriers to effective use of existing resources in alternative or categorically funded programs. The consolidated categorical process in AB 777 (Chapter 100, Statutes of 1981) could be a model for this review and redirection. At the same time, responsible administrators at the school site and school district level should be held accountable for drop out prevention and recovery.

Continuation Schools

Continuation schools serve 20 percent of 11th and 12th grade students yet continuation schools have not been addressed in school reform. The effectiveness of continuation schools cannot be assessed with existing information.

Therefore, we recommend that the Legislative Analyst contract for an independent evaluation of continuation schools. The function, structure and performance of the continuation schools should be examined. The evaluation should include recommendations for change.

Independent Study

The State Department of Education estimates that 25,000 students are enrolled in independent study. No statewide consistent information is available on the outcome of independent study. The effectiveness of independent study as dropout prevention or reentry to school cannot be assessed at this time.

Therefore, we recommend the Legislative Analyst contract for an evaluation of independent study. The function, structure and performance of independent study should be examined. The evaluation should include recommendations for change.

Programs for Teen Parents

A total of 31,106 teenage girls aged 15-18 in California gave birth in 1983. Only 3,400 teen mothers were served in pregnant minor and school age parent and infant development programs administered by the state Department of Education that same year. An estimated 2,500 additional teens will be served with the 1985-86 Governors Budget augmentation to the Adolescent Family Life program administered by the state Department of Health. Despite the 1985-86 augmentation, programs for teen mothers fall far short of the need.

Therefore, we recommend systematic expansion of the Pregnant Minor, School Age Parent and Infant Development Programs and the Adolescent Family Life Program. We also recommend the Legislative Analyst review the two state programs currently administered by separate departments (Health and Education) that serve the same population and make recommendations to the Legislature concerning potential program integration and consolidation.

We recommend the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Director of Health develop outcome measures for Pregnant Minor/School Age Parent/Adolescent Family Life Programs in their jurisdiction and report annually to the Legislature on the performance of the programs in reducing dropout rates or teen mothers.

Adult Literacy

The State Department of Education and the State Library Literacy Campaign estimate between 4.5 and 6 million Californians are functionally illiterate. Existing literacy programs serve approximately 630,000 people, leaving 3.9 million to 5.4 million illiterate adults not served.

Figure 26
Literacy Programs
in California,
1983-84

Program	Numbers Served
Adult education	608,265
Corrections department	9,500
State library literacy campaign	6,000
Volunteer literacy programs	10,500
Total	634,265

Source: California Department of Education, California State Library.

To add to the problem, 40 percent of immigrants and refugees entering the U.S. through other States ultimately end up in California and most will need help learning English. One southern California school district turns away 5,000 adults per week who are seeking literacy classes. Another northern California school district has a waiting list of 500 adults.[161]

Despite the efforts of state and voluntary groups, great numbers of adult Californians are illiterate and seek literacy classes. Therefore we recommend a major phased-in expansion of adult education diploma and English as a second language course, and the State Library Literacy Campaign.

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[161]Assembly Office of Research Survey of largest school districts in the state, Spring 1984).

APPENDIX A

Methodology for Calculating Estimates

Estimate of Dropouts from the Class of 1983 who Entered Trade School

1. Estimate of total enrollment in California in private trade schools is 100,000 from Student Aid Commission, A Report on the Expenses and Resources of Undergraduate Students Enrolled in California Postsecondary Institutions during the 1982-83 Academic Year, (Sacramento, February 1985), p. 16.

2. Estimate of students in private trade schools who are under 20 years of age is 26.7 percent. Source: Student Aid Commission, Student Expense and Resource Survey, February 1985, Tables 1-3.

3. Estimate of dropouts enrolled in private trade schools in the United States is 25 percent. Source: Preliminary analysis of survey data. National Association of Trade and Technical Schools. Washington D.C. Chris Davis, Public Relations Officer, Assembly Office Research interview: July 25, 1985.

4. Calculations: 100,000 X .267 = 26,700. 26,700 X .25 = 6,675.

Estimate of dropouts from the Class of 1983 who left school via continuation school.

The continuation school leavers for non-educational reasons for 1979/80 to 1983/84 were multiplied by the percentage of continuation school students in the age cohort of the Class of 1983.

Students Leaving Continuation School for Non-Educational Reasons

	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83*
Non-Educational Leavers	21,197	17,222	17,791	18,961[1]

Continuation Students Percent by Age

	1979/80	1980/81	1981/82	1982/83*
Under 16	18%	18%	16%	14%[2]
16	35%	38%	37%	37%[2]
17	36%	34%	36%	37%[2]
18	9%	8%	9%	10%[2]
Over 18	2%	2%	2%	3%[2]

Calculation:

Year	Percent in Age Cohort		Leavers	Result
1979/80	(under 16) .18	X	21,197	3,815
1980/81	(16) .38	X	17,222	6,544
1981/82	(17) .36	X	17,791	6,405
1982/83	(18) .10	X	18,961	1,896
Sum of years 1979/80 to 1982/83			=	18,660

*Data not collected for 1982/83 so these are estimates.
[1]Average for 1979/80, 1980/81, 1981/82 and 1983/84.
[2]Average for 1981/82 and 1983/84.

Source: Department of Education Continuation Education Unit.

APPENDIX B

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