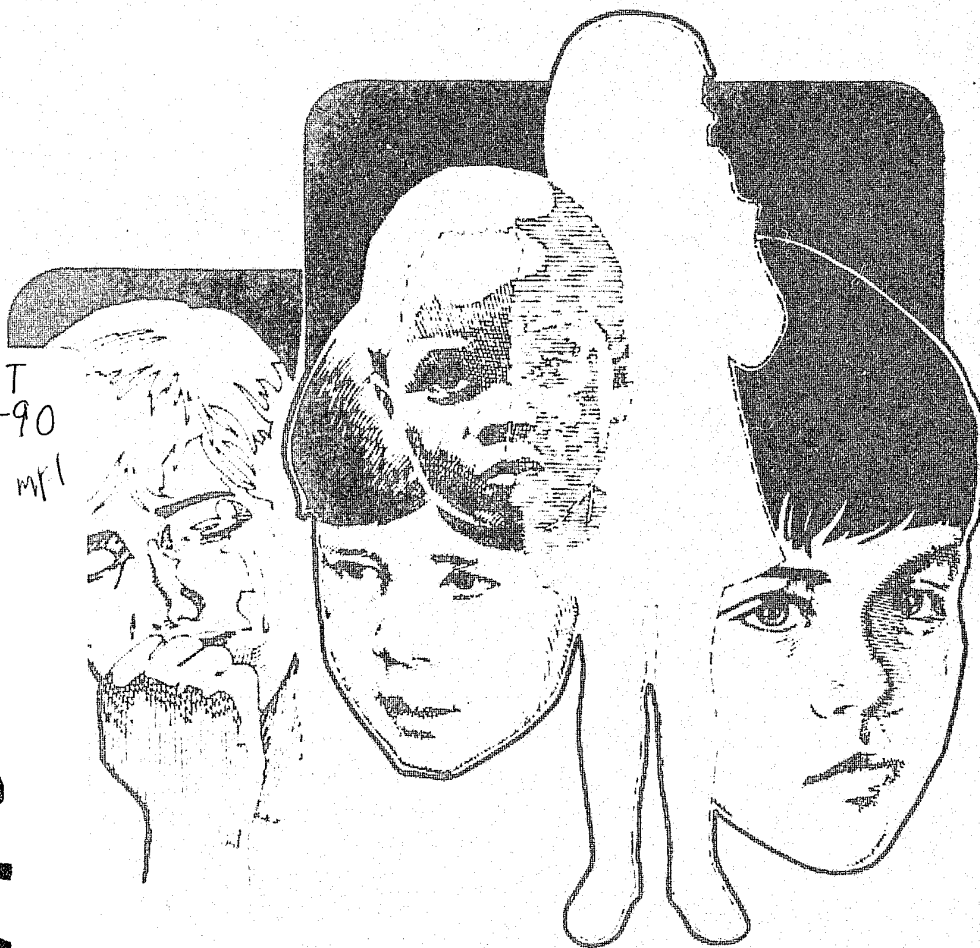


AT RISK CHILDREN AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ARKANSAS

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A Report

by

The Governor's Task Force on Youth At Risk

Nancy Ball, Chair

Written and Edited by

Max Snowden, Project Coordinator

SEPTEMBER 1988

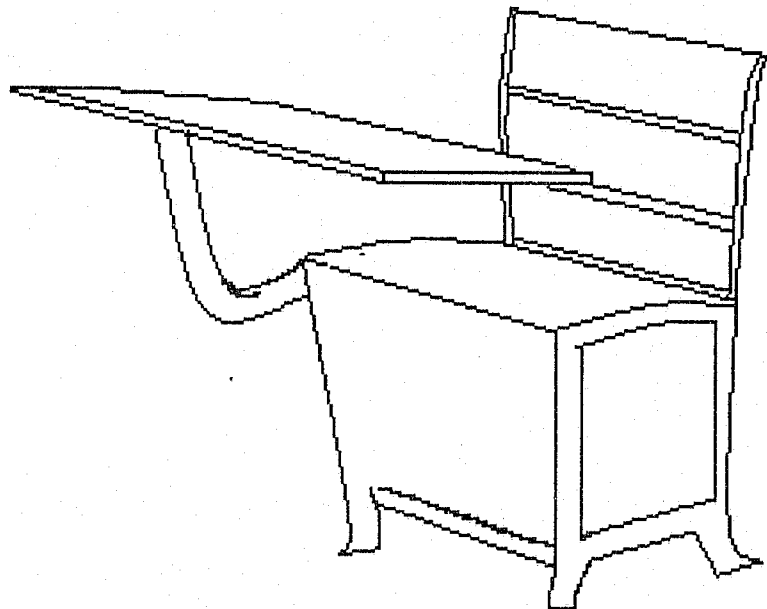
NCJRS

OCT 24 1989

ACQUISITIONS

"We don't have a person to waste...The education standards are working, but they can't help the thousands of young people who leave school every year."

Governor Bill Clinton



"We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that. Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."

Dr. Ron Edmonds

Arkansas Project SPARK

Services Provided for At Risk Kids.

Bill Clinton
Governor
State of Arkansas

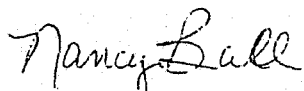
The Honorable Bill Clinton
Governor
State of Arkansas
State Capitol Bldg.
Little Rock, AR 72201

Dear Governor Clinton:

It has been well over a year since the Task Force began its work on recommendations to you concerning at risk youth.

Enclosed please find a concise and final draft of our recommendations. In addition, I commend you for your contributions in improving the education process in our state.

Sincerely,



Nancy Ball, Chair
Governor's Task Force
on Youth at Risk

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THE PROBLEM

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Each year, thousands of school age children in Arkansas drop out or are excluded from school. Presently, there are upwards of 700,000 people in our state without a high school education. Considering that nearly one-fourth of those entering high school do not graduate, it is estimated that more than 10,000 children are added to the number of non-completers each year. The resulting economic and social impact is staggering.

The consequences of dropping out of school in Arkansas and across the nation are serious. Some of these consequences can be measured in dollars--amount of lost income, lost tax revenue, unemployment and welfare costs, and increased public and human services. Other outcomes are not so easy to measure, but are equally as costly in human terms. These include the consequences of lost potential, difficulty in finding a job, the struggle in reaching and maintaining a satisfactory standard of living, and the heightened potential of welfare dependency and the hopelessness and disconnection which result.

Youth who drop out of school in Arkansas are projected to earn at least \$200,000 less in their lifetime than do graduates. The resulting loss in tax revenues amounts to a lifetime average of no less than \$50,000 per dropout for Arkansas and the nation. School dropouts are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than a graduate. The average unemployment benefit in Arkansas is \$114.00 per week, while the average cost of educating a child in the public schools is about \$63.00 per week.

Conservatively, 70% of the inmates in the state's prison system have less than a high school education; a majority of people receiving some type of public assistance benefits are not high school graduates; young women with poor academic skills are three times more likely to become teen-parents; dropouts feel more hopeless and that their lives have little meaning. Clearly, large numbers of children at risk of dropping out of school represent an educational, economic and social loss to our communities which we can no longer tolerate.

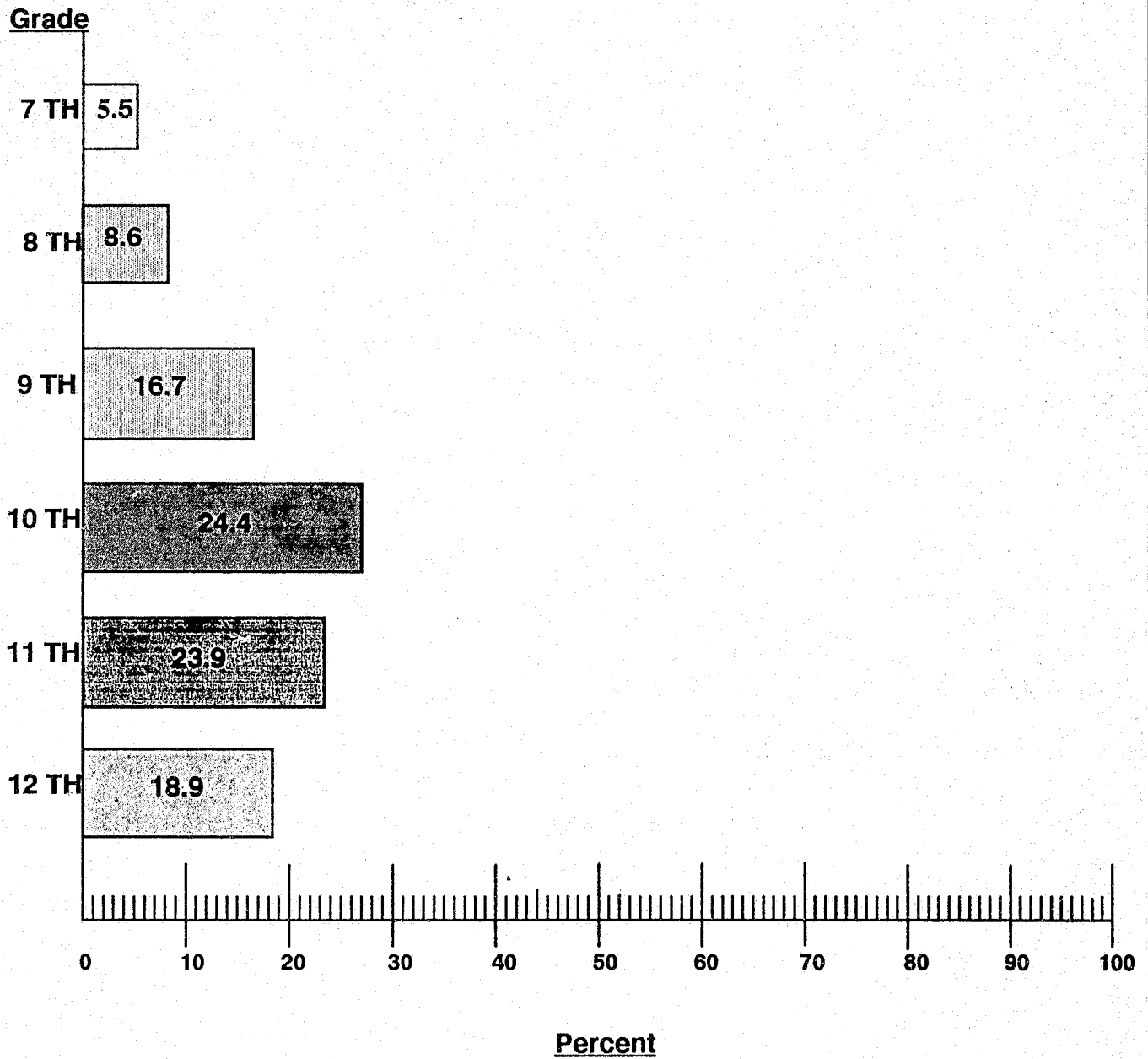
For many years dropping out of school in this country was accepted and in many instances condoned through policy and legislation. But as the world changed and advances in technology began to have a greater impact upon our daily lives, there were more reasons to stay in school. Yet, in most instances, "business as usual" continues. School must become the place that gives each child, regardless of background and ability, an equal opportunity to achieve, at the very least. If children are expected to complete school and enter adult life prepared to become productive, responsible, contributing citizens, they must be empowered to do so by the education they receive.

Physically leaving school, however, is the expected action for many children whose entire school lives have been marked by failure and exclusion. Dropping out is not a sudden problem; it typically has its beginning many years earlier. Who are these children? They are the children at risk of never achieving their full potential, often through no fault of their own. Included among the risk factors that help identify those students are academic failure, truancy, behavioral problems, exceptionality (physical, mental, or emotional handicaps) and/or sexual abuse, delinquency, an unstable home environment, and physical or emotional health problems. These children come from all backgrounds, although far too many are poor and minority. Many are from families in which the parents were also school leavers. Many are from single-parent families. They are children who are given little opportunity to see the relevance of school to their lives.

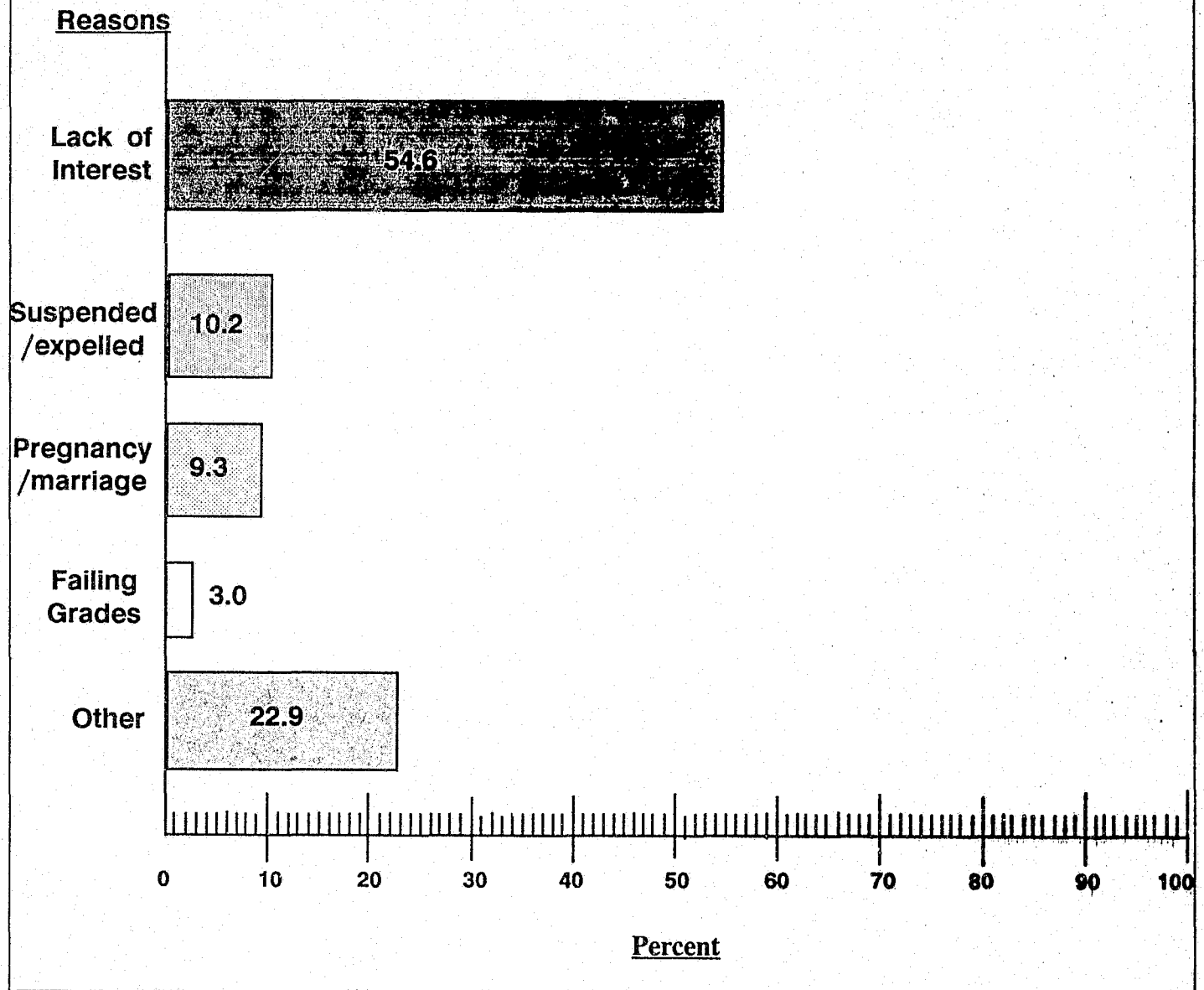
Recognizing that improving education standards cannot help those youth who are not in school nor fully benefit those who remain in the classroom but have to deal with circumstances which diminish their ability to learn, Governor Clinton has initiated a concerted action plan to address the needs of at risk children in Arkansas. The ongoing education reforms being forged in our state will provide the momentum as well as many of the avenues for addressing the problems of "at risk" youth.

Though the task is enormous, the premise is simple--a strategy must be developed to maximize resources for at risk youth in Arkansas, while recognizing cooperation as the emerging paradigm. It is clear that neither our state, nor others, can accomplish this necessary task without a longterm, flexible, sustained effort. A significant commitment shared by all levels of government, parents, educators and youth will be necessary if our children are to be educated adequately and prepared to be thoughtful, productive members of society. We can no longer view large numbers of students as expendable.

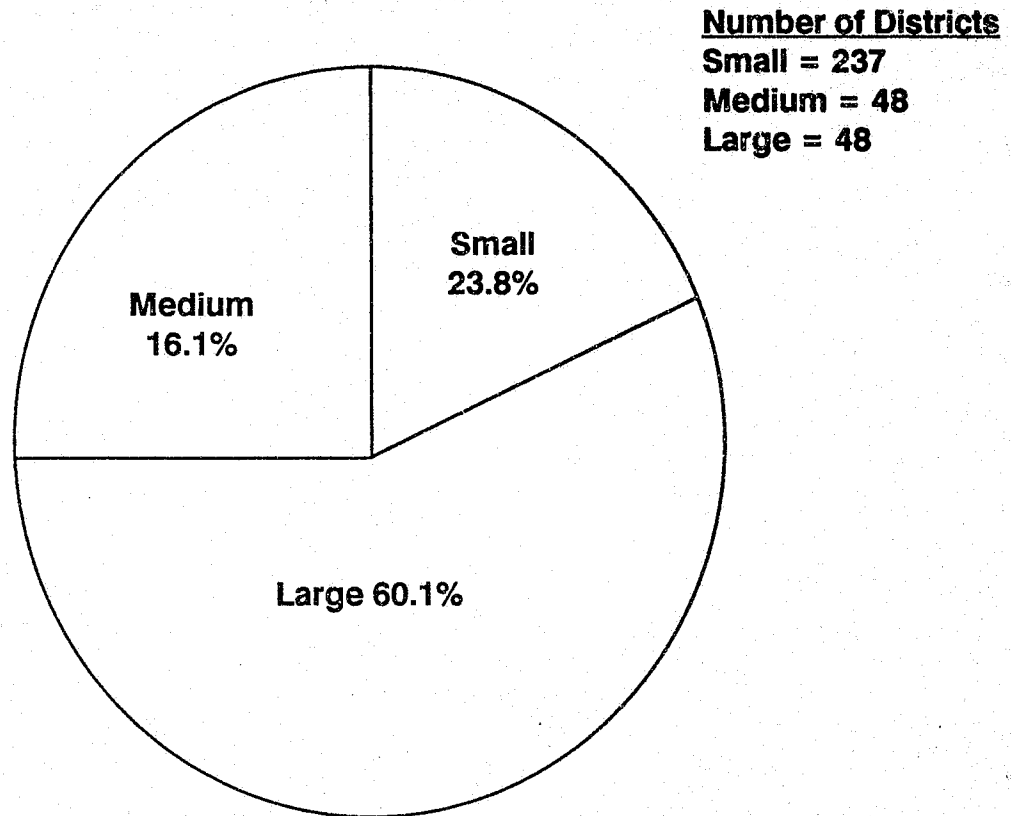
**Distribution of Dropouts
by Grade
Average for School Years 1984-1987**



**Distribution of Dropouts
by Reason
Average for School Years 1984-1987
(Grades 7-12)**



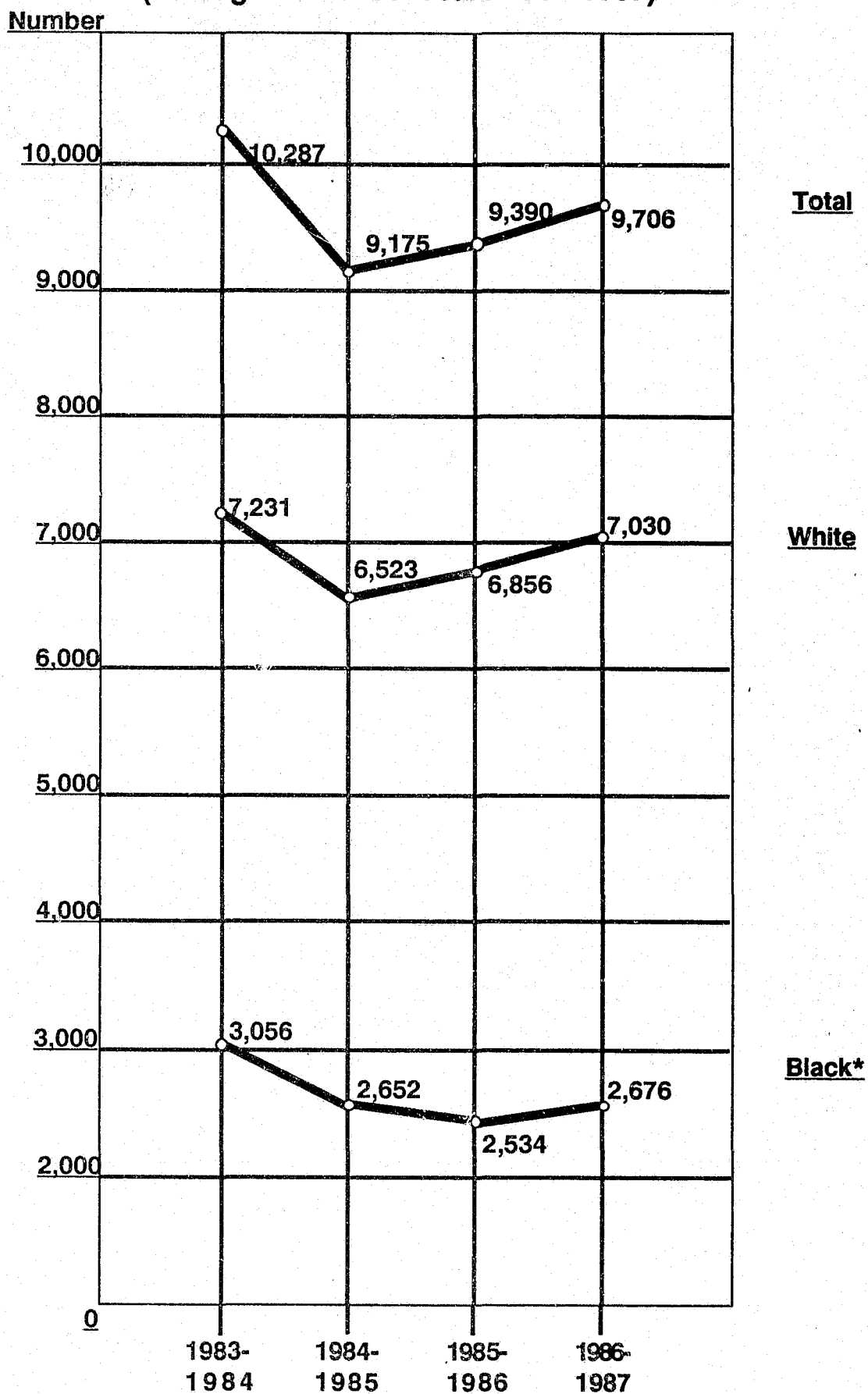
**Distribution of Dropouts
by size of School*
Average for School Years 1984-1987
(Grades 7-12)**



***Size of school based on enrollment in grades 7-12 as of October 1, 1986.**

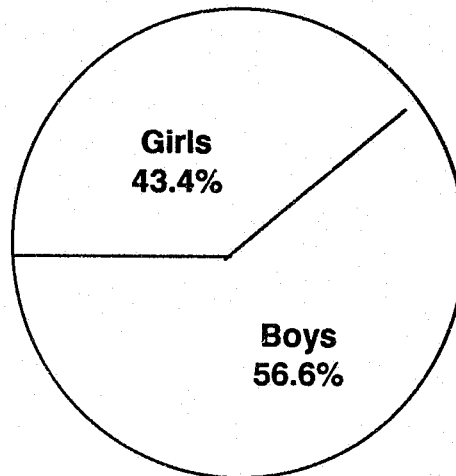
**Small = 500 students or less
Medium = 501-1,000
Large = 1,001 or more.**

Dropouts, Grades 7-12, by Race (Average for School Years 1984-1987)



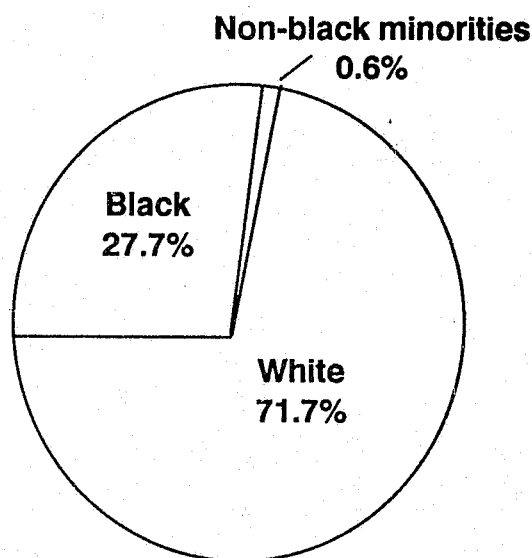
*Includes between 50 and 75 minority non-black dropouts.

**Distribution of Dropouts
by Sex and Race
Average for School Years 1984-1987
(Grades 7-12)**



Sex*

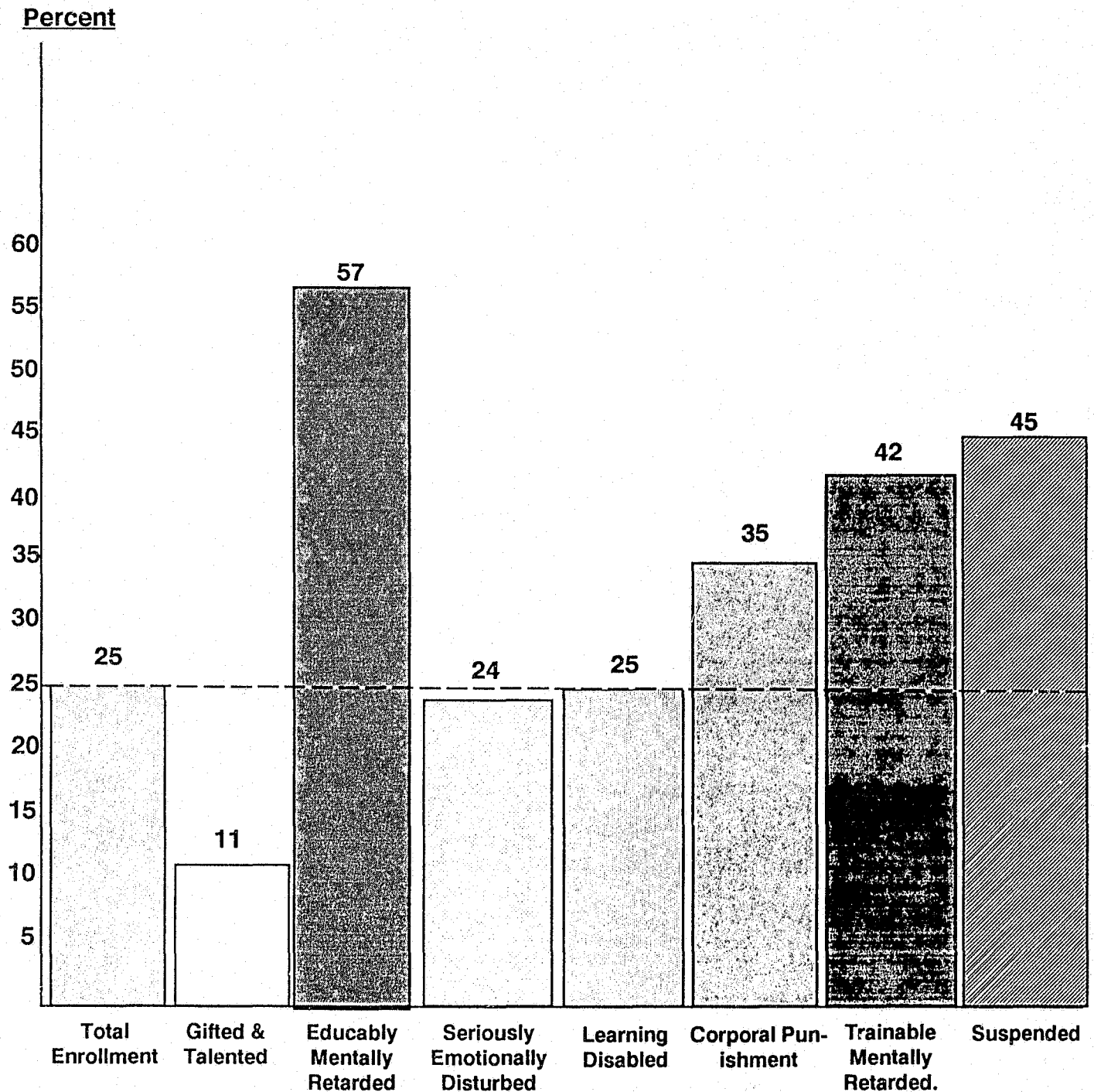
***3 -year average, as 1984 figures not available.**



Race

Arkansas' Black Students as a Percent of Total in Selected Categories, 1984

Taken From:
**A Special Analysis Of 1984 Elementary And Secondary School
Civil Rights Data**
by National Coalition of Advocates for Students



FINANCIAL IMPACT OF PUPIL DROPOUTS

COUNTY	TOTAL DROPOUTS 1983-1987	TOTAL AID LOSS 1983-1987
Arkansas	227	\$ 331,717
Ashley	390	573,656
Baxter	348	525,841
Benton	885	1,320,236
Boone	380	561,317
Bradley	195	300,221
Calhoun	47	68,680
Carroll	188	286,252
Chicot	365	542,506
Clark	199	308,212
Clay	348	515,048
Cleburne	207	317,302
Cleveland	65	94,538
Columbia	311	471,604
Conway	251	366,451
Craighead	898	1,350,493
Crawford	712	1,092,305
Crittenden	1,339	2,005,219
Cross	371	542,644
Dallas	162	237,801
Desha	311	438,095
Drew	267	403,499
Faulkner	505	742,542
Franklin	189	281,311
Fulton	93	139,167
Garland	1,090	1,648,150
Grant	197	294,564
Greene	366	536,220
Hempstead	374	573,150
Hot Spring	633	972,548
Howard	169	255,126
Independence	473	675,635
Izard	72	98,060
Jackson	318	465,016
Jefferson	1,814	2,674,163
Johnson	327	500,129
Lafayette	161	233,075
Lawrence	209	317,562
Lee	312	447,396
Lincoln	156	232,972
Little River	139	216,786
Logan	312	474,933
Lonoke	750	1,086,978
Madison	188	281,246
Marion	210	315,563
Miller	686	1,008,958

COUNTY	TOTAL DROPOUTS <u>1983-1987</u>	TOTAL AID LOSS <u>1983-1987</u>
Mississippi	1,363	2,009,275
Monroe	203	303,317
Montgomery	117	179,070
Nevada	146	213,217
Newton	103	148,725
Ouachita	406	621,186
Perry	129	187,204
Phillips	730	1,041,935
Pike	158	242,726
Poinsett	549	833,770
Polk	200	301,748
Pope	564	855,371
Prairie	137	200,489
Pulaski	7,244	10,830,056
Randolph	205	305,047
St. Francis	641	941,227
Saline	729	1,092,175
Scott	139	216,830
Searcy	121	177,788
Sebastian	1,352	2,015,317
Sevier	220	321,635
Sharp	198	292,769
Stone	175	255,395
Union	751	1,105,224
Van Buren	207	306,004
Washington	2,188	2,775,747
White	943	1,428,158
Woodruff	167	245,338
Yell	<u>409</u>	<u>616,573</u>
TOTAL	38,703	\$57,188,203

PROJECT AND TASK FORCE OVERVIEW

Focusing on the development of a coordinated effort involving state agencies, the business community and schools to address issues of students dropping out of school, the Task Force on Youth at Risk began the process of developing recommendations which would define a context of action to address circumstances which place students in greater jeopardy of leaving school early.

The Task Force's activities were premised on the belief that a positive transition from school to post-secondary activities is greatly enhanced by providing a well-rounded education to every child. Another, and equally important, goal of the project was to develop a foundation from which to build future efforts to address the needs of disadvantaged, at risk students in a concerted fashion.

The twenty-three member Task Force, made up of representatives from the education, business, youth services, legislative and student community focused attention on actions they believed to be necessary to establish a foundation of effort to positively impact at risk students and to establish dropout prevention as a major policy thrust.

During the first year of study, members agreed to limit their focus to concerns which were not being significantly addressed by other groups and which warranted immediate attention.

The Task Force itself was divided into three separate committees:

- (1) The Policy, Procedures, and Programs Committee examined existing laws, mandates, policies, and guidelines of public schools and their impact on at risk students. The philosophy of the committee was that recommendations should address statewide issues and that proposals should be able to be integrated into the education system and allow for necessary flexibility at the local district level. The driving premise of this committee was that policy, which serves as a foundation for all schools, should be child centered, rather than institution centered; should be inclusive in nature, rather than exclusive; that there should be a vision of what could be; and that existing avenues to address such issues should be used wherever possible.
- (2) The Community Resources Committee surveyed possible ways of enhancing and developing capabilities of local school staff to utilize community resources to better meet the needs of at risk students. In many instances, although services are available, students are dropped, suspended or expelled from school when staff feel they can no longer deal with such problem students. Moreover, the sense of the committee was that additional resources needed to be available to be called into play before that decision was made. By knowing existing resources, whom to contact and what to expect, the school, family, and child would have a much broader base of potential helpers to call upon.
- (3) The Business/Private Sector Committee addressed issues which impacted upon the potential employability of at risk students and upon positive school-to-work transition. The Committee's activities reflected a concern that the basic premise of its work be directed toward efforts which would facilitate and reinforce keeping at risk students in an appropriate educational setting.

The following report reflects those actions which the Task Force has determined can have effective and immediate impact upon at risk students in Arkansas. The recommendations are both long-term and short-term in scope and, in most cases, can be accomplished through broad interpretation of provisions in the Quality Education Act of 1983 and companion legislation.

Recommendations presented have been developed through a period of careful study of issues related to children at risk of leaving school in Arkansas. It is the fundamental belief of the Task Force that when these recommended actions are initiated, a foundation for the development of a process to attend to the needs of disadvantaged, at risk youth can become a reality.

Our focus in this report is on public schools and their effectiveness with children who are at risk of leaving school prior to graduation. The emphasis of the Task Force's work has been on how the formal school structure impacts those children. We have primarily addressed concerns about circumstances that are within the purview of our education system - from the state Department of Education to the local school building. This does not reflect a belief that other participants

in the process lack responsibility or that attendant factors do not make the challenge a difficult one. The immediate emphasis, however, is that of the school's role and how it may become more positive and effective in keeping children in school and provide the most appropriate education possible.

Basic tenets and beliefs underlie the work of the Task Force and reflect its concern over the reality that many youth in Arkansas do not attend school at all, attend sporadically, are denied access as a form of punishment or are subtly encouraged to drop out of school.

The Task Force reflects the sentiments of Arkansas in its belief that the welfare, development and education of all children must be the primary goal in the structuring of philosophy related to education and in the evaluation of how well the education system is meeting its mandates. A clear measure of how well children's interests are being served is the ability and commitment of the education system, at all levels, to include and serve all children.

While the Task Force agrees that schools cannot by themselves assure the participation of all children, our education system must commit fully to find solutions and must minimize any circumstance in which the system contributes to children not participating fully. The need is obvious for school to serve all children by the great significance that has been given to graduation as a key to positive transition to adult roles.

During the tenure of the Task Force's effort a great deal was learned about policies and programs that are helpful and those that are harmful; about proven, positive ways to address these critical issues, and about community and school efforts that can make a difference in the lives of children. This report is a vehicle to share some of our findings and views about problems and what we feel must be done to assure that all children are equitably served in the public schools of Arkansas. Our hope is that it will be helpful in raising concerns about these issues and will serve as a contribution to necessary and overdue problem-solving efforts.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON YOUTH AT RISK

PUBLIC AWARENESS

That a coordinated effort, spearheaded by the Governor's Office, be mounted to bring widespread public attention to the issue of at risk youth.

AT RISK LEGISLATION

That appropriate legislation be developed, for presentation in the 1989 legislative session, to address the broad spectrum of at risk youth issues. The Task Force encourages the evaluation of existing legislation of other states which has proven elements of success.

POINT OF COORDINATION

That an office, in the Department of Education or an independent setting, be adequately funded to provide a point of coordination and assistance in efforts directed toward the at risk student population.

STUDENT ADVOCATE

That a staff position within the Director's office of the Department of Education be funded to serve as an advocate to answer questions, register complaints and generally serve as an individual case advocate for both parents, students and school age residents.

CONTINUATION OF TASK FORCE

That the Governor maintain the Task Force on Youth at Risk or a similar group to continue efforts to address needs of the at risk youth population.

ATTENTION TO IMPACT ON MINORITY POPULATION

That specific attention (through policy evaluation, in-service training, etc.) be given to addressing the disparate numbers of minority students who leave school early and the factors which place minority students in a higher risk category.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

That, realizing the critical importance of positive parental involvement, efforts by local school districts, the Department of Education and others be expanded to encourage and facilitate involvement of parents at all grade levels. Two possible avenues include the expansion of the use of volunteers and the commitment of local districts to meet the spirit of standards which dictate specific mechanisms to facilitate parent involvement.

POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND PROGRAMS COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of the Policies, Procedures, and Programs Committee centered on the examination of existing laws, mandates, policies and guidelines and their impact on at risk students. The philosophy of the committee was that recommendations should address statewide issues, could be institutionalized in the education system, and would allow for necessary flexibility at the local district level.

The driving premise of this committee was that policy, which serves as a foundation for all schools, should be child centered rather than institution centered; should be inclusive in nature, rather than exclusive; should reflect a vision of what could be; and that existing avenues to address these issues should be used where possible.

OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSION/EXPULSION

Suspension and expulsion are two disciplinary practices that interrupt or preclude participation and access to instructional benefit. While often presented as a means of providing an orderly environment for all students, the reality that these practices deprive the excluded student access to educational opportunity underlines the need that they be used with great care, avoided whenever feasible and reviewed regularly. An irony of the public school system is that while regular attendance is a major concern and priority, school exclusion is a readily acceptable disciplinary option when students misbehave.

The fact is that some children do misbehave. They act out in ways that, in the judgement of school personnel and often times the community, are inappropriate and interfere with the learning process as well as disrupt the school environment. Some misbehavior is aggravating, but not serious; some is chronic; and some is threatening or illegal. In many cases, the behavior is precipitated by personal problems, unresolved educational needs, frustration, or a poor school environment.

While it is generally agreed that schools must provide an orderly environment, that students must learn to behave in ways that conform to accepted societal expectations, and that children must be accountable for their behavior, it is incumbent upon educators to create a positive learning environment to accomplish these expectations for all students. The concern centers on whether school exclusion is the most appropriate means to accomplish these expectations.

While justifications may exist for such actions by the school, the overriding concern is that suspension and expulsion are too costly in the long term. School participation has been embraced as one of the most viable avenues to accomplish a positive transition to productive adulthood. Because of this belief, the availability of an education should not be denied easily. A concern must be sounded when such drastic punishment is used for behavior that is not threatening, behavior that is inconsequential, incidents that are chronic but not serious or, as is most often the case in Arkansas, for attendance problems.

The Task Force believes that suspension and expulsion are most appropriate - and most likely to be perceived as equitable - under the following conditions: when such punishment is reserved for behavior that is illegal or clearly threatening to the safety and security of others; when behavior which warrants exclusion is outlined and understood by students, parents, and staff; when a structured, sequential process is followed which reduces subjectivity; and when punishment is an element of a larger strategy to create an orderly learning environment and meet individual education needs of students. The Task Force also takes the position that acceptance of and compliance with school rules is most widespread when students and parents have been active participants in the development of such policy guidelines.

Finally, the Task Force believes that any equitable system of punishment is fatally undermined when exclusion, of any amount, is used for minor misbehavior or is motivated by such inappropriate reasons as to set an example, attract the attention of parents or because of frustration or lack of resources to address underlying problems.

Recommendation #1

That long-term (5 or more consecutive days) out-of-school suspension and/or expulsion should be reserved

for student behavior that is illegal, clearly threatening to the safety or security of others or continues to occur after appropriate intervention efforts.

Recommendation #2

That suspension should not be available as a substitute for corporal punishment, should corporal punishment continue to be utilized as a discipline measure.

Recommendation #3

That, upon suspension or expulsion, parent(s) should be notified by phone, certified mail or personal contact that the student has been suspended and the reasons for suspension. If the notification is by phone or personal contact, a certified letter shall be sent to the student and parent(s) no later than the day following suspension stating the reason(s) for suspension and a step-by-step outline of due process. If the student and/or parent(s) wish to appeal the decision to the school board, the student shall be reinstated pending the board's decision, unless there is a determination of clear threat to the safety or security of others.

Recommendation #4

That an expanded due process model be adopted by the Department of Education and be required of all school districts to ensure the availability of due process for any student suspended and/or recommended for expulsion. (See Appendix A)

Recommendation #5

That suspension from (bus) transportation provided by the school district be used only as a last resort disciplinary measure. Except in extreme cases, discipline for misbehavior occurring on buses should be attended to within the context of the school.

Recommendation #6

That, upon long-term suspension (5 or more consecutive days) from school, or the accumulation of 5 days of separate suspensions, an assessment by qualified school personnel and/or appropriate community service providers be accomplished to develop an Individual Intervention Plan and to implement necessary remediation efforts.* Such assessment should begin on the first day of suspension and include both academic and social components. School districts are encouraged to adopt policies which would put the suspension "on hold" if the parent(s) and student agree to follow up on the recommendations of the assessment.

* For those students who are expelled, this assessment would take place upon re-entering school.

Recommendation #7

That academic assignments and tests shall be made available to suspended students for completion for credit.

Recommendation #8

That the Department of Education shall provide assistance and monitoring to local districts in their plan development to maximize attendance.

Recommendation #9

That policies shall encourage parental participation in Intervention Plan development for any student who is suspended, expelled, or chronically absent. Such policy shall not preclude any student from returning to school if parent(s) chooses not to participate in the Intervention Plan process.

Recommendation #10

That upon student's expulsion from school, the student and parent(s), in an exit conference with school counselor, will be apprised in writing of existing education programs such as Adult Basic Education programs, Alternative Schools, or other available education programs, the processes for admittance to each program and the identification of other services which might be appropriate to the individual student. Such information shall be sent to parent(s) and student in written form when an exit conference cannot be held.

Recommendation #11

That school districts shall develop and implement an "intervention-in-lieu-of-suspension/expulsion" policy for first offences, particularly for drug/alcohol and/or any other infractions, for which such policy is deemed appropriate by the district.

Recommendation #12

That due process guarantees be available upon any suspension or expulsion and that a model process be adopted by the Department of Education. It is also recommended that due process guidelines apply to referrals to in-school suspension.

IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION

The central assumption of the recommendations regarding in-school suspension is the belief that it is desirable and readily possible to reduce the use of out-of-school suspensions. The concerns which have been raised about expulsion and suspension necessarily lead to the issue of alternatives.

Generally speaking, alternatives to suspension and expulsion should be positive in nature and address the reason(s) for children's unacceptable behavior. A wide range of alternatives, short of suspension, currently exist for addressing discipline problems. While some of the alternatives focus on punishment and strategies to control students without excluding them, many of the options go beyond punishment and utilize a variety of techniques for identifying problems or unmet needs that may precipitate inappropriate behavior. These include counseling, community resource utilization, methods to improve communication and interaction between school and home, strategies to enhance the student's sense of belonging and modification of school policy.

Perhaps the most readily available alternative to exclusion is in-school suspension. Though there are extremes, the model which seems to be the most promising in meeting the broad range of needs of children at risk of leaving school is the problem solving, time-out model where the student may be isolated from the rest of the students but involved in academic work, problem solving activities, counseling, and remediation. There are many programs that fall within the scope of this model, but the basic tenet is to provide an opportunity to focus resources to address the needs of students so that they can be productively involved in school.

The operational design of an in-school suspension program must be carefully developed. Areas which require special attention include criteria and procedures for referral; physical design; selection of staff; clear communication to staff, students and the community regarding the philosophy, need and purpose of the program; processes which facilitate interaction with parents; quality instruction including remediation and counseling (both group and individual); access and utilization of community resources and follow-up activities.

Recommendation #13

That criteria and guidelines for appropriate in-school suspension programs and the provision of assistance and monitoring shall be developed by the Department of Education.

Recommendation #14

That existence of an in-school suspension program which meets or exceeds Department of Education

guidelines for all grade levels shall be viewed as part of the criteria and guidelines in determining compliance with existing accreditation standards by each school district.

Recommendation #15

That during the time a student is assigned to the in-school suspension program, continuation or make-up of academic work for credit shall be available to the student.

Recommendation #16

That students shall receive individual attention in examining the consequences of their actions and behaviors, as well as emphasis on continuation of academic work. It is recommended that 75% of the students' time be spent on academics and 25% of their time be spent in counseling or related activities.

Recommendation #17

That the utilization of appropriately trained volunteers as staff for in-school suspension programs be encouraged. This process should be developed through the volunteer office in the Department of Education.

Recommendation #18

That students shall be able to continue to use bus transportation while in in-school suspension.

ATTENDANCE/TRUANCY

Recommendation #19

That schools notify parent(s) by certified mail, telephone or personal contact, and record method of notification and date, no later than the 5th day of student's absence in any school quarter, whether the absence is excused or unexcused.

Recommendation #20

That between the 5th and 10th day of absence in any semester, school personnel shall make personal contact with the student and parent(s) to determine causes of absences and academic impact. Where appropriate, parent(s) shall be given notification of their legal responsibility to ensure the student's school attendance. Upon student's return to school, parent(s), counselor, student and administrator shall develop an Individual Intervention Plan, including necessary academic remediation components and other services deemed necessary and appropriate.

Recommendation #21

That local districts shall develop a plan, reflecting both short and long-term goals, to be approved by the Department of Education, to address truancy and chronic absenteeism as part of the districts' six-year plan.

Recommendation #22

That, should parent(s) not participate in development of the Individual Intervention Plan, the process shall take place with the student. Parent(s) shall be notified, in writing, of recommended actions. Non-participation of parent(s) in plan development or conferences shall not preclude the student from returning to school or class.

Recommendation #23

That the legal mandate of school attendance for all children between ages 7 and 17 shall be an equally shared responsibility of parents, students and school district.

Recommendation #24

That schools shall develop and offer attendance incentives to students who individually, during a specified period, maintain the attendance goal established by the school district in its six-year plan. (This would be an opportune point to involve the private sector.)

Recommendation #25

That school districts shall identify at each building level a staff person who will be responsible for monitoring attendance and notifying principals when students reach established number of absences to warrant notification and intervention procedures.

Recommendation #26

That local school districts should explore the use of trained volunteers to serve in the capacity of "attendance monitors", whose duties would include personal notification of parents regarding absences.

Recommendation #27

That the Department of Education shall develop and stipulate a policy which has as a long range goal the elimination of the use of corporal punishment at all grade levels. As an integral part of this process, the department shall provide in-service training and assistance to district staff in developing alternatives to the use of corporal punishment.

Recommendation #28

That a portion of Minimum Foundation funds, calculated on the number of school dropouts statewide, be set aside for the purpose of funding necessary programming at the local district level for dropout prevention.

Recommendation #29

That staff in-service training specific to issues of at risk students be required by the Department of Education in all school districts.

Recommendation #30

That the Department of Education shall develop guidelines, criteria, and provide assistance in the development of alternative classroom programs for each grade division in each school district.

Recommendation #31

That data collected on dropouts shall be expanded to include the number of out-of-school suspensions; in-school suspensions; expulsions; the number of dropouts who had been retained at any grade; number of dropouts who qualify for free or reduced lunch program; the elimination of the "lack of interest" category currently used; the requirement that an exit interview by school staff be conducted within 2 weeks of the determination that a student has dropped out of school.

Recommendation #32

That the Department of Education shall develop evaluation criteria and guidelines for the implementation of the Task Force recommendations and establish reasonable timelines for implementation in each school district.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The primary focus of the Community Resource Committee was to look at possible ways of enhancing or developing capabilities of local school staff to utilize available community resources to better meet needs of at risk students.

Across Arkansas, there exists a viable base of community resources. It is generally accepted, however, that interactions and networking between such services and school personnel is woefully underutilized. In many instances children are dropped, suspended or expelled from school when district staff conclude that, without prior consultation with any of the community resources, they can no longer address the needs of the marginal or problem student.

While each region of the state is served by a state funded youth services provider, it is often the reality that such a provider organization is constrained by funding guidelines and other barriers in identifying at risk youth as a high priority service group. One critical consequence of this situation is reduced referrals of children until serious dysfunction is evident.

The contention of the committee and the Task Force, therefore, is that existing resources should be used and that additional resources need to be called into play before a decision to suspend or expel a student is made. Committee members believe that a first step in addressing the lack of appropriate referral is to familiarize school staff (most particularly counselors and administrators) with services and providers available in their district or geographic region which might more fully address needs of at risk students. At the same time, a clear expectation must be established that providers will respond in a more timely fashion to requests for assistance.

The use of community resources can provide a broader base of intervention which will afford heightened potential for an at risk child to remain in school, while dealing with issues which jeopardize his/her ability or desire to continue an education. Effective ways of enhancing needed service provision and community involvement must take place in each school district and become an institutionalized element of the school's operation.

The committee also believes that school counselors at both the elementary and secondary level can -and should- play a central role in the process of identification and intervention regarding at risk students. While the mechanism for this to be accomplished exists, the process is often less than adequate. Counselors at all levels must be given the support and direction to be able to fulfill the demands of their roles as helper and advocate for all students.

Recommendation #33

That the Office of Program Operations of the Department of Human Services compile a manual of service resources in each county to be distributed to individual school counselors. The manual shall contain separate page descriptions of each agency and services offered; criteria to receive services; after hours phone number(s) and other pertinent information. Ideally, manuals would have a service cross-reference index; a listing of statewide service organizations; and a listing of national resource organizations. For greatest effectiveness, the manual should be updated at least annually, with update information distributed to counselors prior to the beginning of each school year.

Recommendation #34

That, to facilitate optimum use of resources, counselors shall be brought together at the Education Co-op in each region by the Office of Guidance and Counseling of the Department of Education to review resource manuals. Following the regional meetings, Co-ops will assist in organizing meetings in each school district for counselors, administrators and service providers to discuss available services and to promote personal contact and familiarity between school personnel and community resources.

Recommendation #35

That all appropriate departments within state government commit to renewed efforts to encourage, support and facilitate the use of community resources by school systems and begin the process of identifying and eliminating barriers to such resource utilization at both the local and state level.

Recommendation #36

That the Division of Children and Family Services of the Department of Human Services shall identify a select number of youth service providers to implement an expanded effort involving intake, referral and case management of at risk students referred by schools. Such an effort would allow for data collection and evaluation which would include monitoring the movement of such indicators as suspensions, expulsions, dropouts, client self-esteem and others.

Recommendation #37

That the Department of Education and local districts shall explore the development and implementation of program models, e.g., Communities-In-Schools, which maximize the use and availability of local resources to address varied needs of at risk students.

Recommendation #38

That casework, counseling and group work be given the highest priority regarding counselor duties and such priority will be reflected in the counselor handbook and in-services training requirements.

BUSINESS CONNECTION COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The mandate of the Business Connection Committee centered on addressing issues which impact upon the potential employability and school-to-work transition of at risk students. The committee's activities and resulting recommendations reflect a concern that the basic premise of its work emphasize efforts which would facilitate and reinforce keeping such students in an appropriate educational setting.

A primary source of funding for job training and related efforts which benefit at risk students, both directly and indirectly, is the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). Not only do JTPA programs offer specific training and education programs, but also provide for such necessary components as child care and transportation. The Task Force felt that every effort should be made to optimally utilize available funds for such support services for program participants.

Enhanced community awareness of the issues concerning youth at risk is particularly critical in encouraging expanded participation of the private sector. Such education would not only increase the appreciation of the economic and social consequences of school dropouts but could, as well, provide practical avenues of becoming involved in efforts to enhance the capabilities of the future work force.

Available in the school setting are a number of program efforts which bring students into contact with the world of work. While such classroom efforts continue to expand and are supported by the school standards, the committee members felt that areas remain which could be addressed to enhance the potential positive impact on at risk students.

While not a specific recommendation, members believe that greater effort needs to be made to inform both students and parents of vocationally oriented programs which are available through the school. Often, such programs provide the motivation to remain involved in school for those students struggling with the traditional academic structure. Another direction which has gained momentum and one in which the committee encourages expansion are cooperative efforts between public schools and vocational schools which provide opportunities for both job skills and job readiness training. Finally, there was some discussion in the committee that the "Career Orientation" class offered in junior high school might be restructured to emphasize "life" skills with much less emphasis given to specific career information. Living skills development will serve the students well during their daily lives and in future employment. Establishing these skills as a priority would better prepare, in a broader sense, students for school-to-work transition.

Committee members also concluded that a concerted effort must be undertaken which would facilitate continuity and comprehensiveness in program development and reflect maximum priority to fund youth training efforts.

Recommendation #39

That the state JTPA plan allow for a significant increase in the use of 8% training funds for remediation/intervention efforts, including employability and youth competency skills for school dropouts and at risk youth. The ultimate goal should be that of designating a major portion of 8% funds for this purpose.

Recommendation #40

That a mechanism shall be developed to inform and educate members of Private Industry Councils (PICs) and Service Delivery Area (SDA) staff statewide as to philosophy and options regarding youth programming.

Recommendation #41

That there be special emphasis in the state JTPA plan to encourage new directions in programming and services for school dropouts and at risk youth which address the concerns regarding the potential limitations posed by performance standards.

Recommendation #42

That the availability of vocational counseling should be expanded in secondary school. This, most practically, might be done by the Division of Vocational-Technical Education providing in-service training to school counselors to keep them updated on vocational issues and vocational training opportunities available to students.

Recommendation #43

That funding should be increased for secondary vocational programs such as Coordinated Career Education (CCE), General Cooperative Education (GCE), Distributive Education Clubs of Arkansas (DECA), etc. and that the majority of participants involved in these programs be students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school.

Recommendation #44

That better information be provided employers who participate in secondary vocational programs as to the philosophy and intent of such programs and clarification of expectations of those employers.

Recommendation #45

That, where feasible, the scheduling of work placement be flexible, e.g., to schedule work placement in the morning and classes in the afternoon - instead of typically having class in the morning and work placement in the afternoon.

Recommendation #46

That secondary vocational education courses which contain the basic competencies listed in the general education course content guides be accepted for both vocational and academic credit, e.g., Health Occupations and General Science.

Recommendation #47

That a concerted effort by Employment Security Division, the Governor's Office, Department of Human Services, Vocational Education, Department of Education and others be implemented to publicize available programs with a job skills orientation for both youth and adults.

Recommendation #48

That the Employment Security Division publicize, at the local level, tax benefits and other incentives available

to employers who hire members of at risk groups.

Recommendation #49

That the Vocational Technical Education Division continue, expand, and adapt the Education-for-Employment Committees developed by the SPARK Project to serve as a vehicle for expanded private sector and community involvement.

APPENDICES

DUE PROCESS PROPOSAL

BUILDING LEVEL:

- (1) Notification to parent(s) and student of suspension and/or expulsion.
- (2) School officials request meeting with parent(s) and student for discussion of problem and how it might best be addressed and resolved.

DISTRICT LEVEL:

- (1) A hearing will be scheduled within 2 school days before a panel made up of counselor, superintendent or other administrator, building level principal, and a person agreed upon by parent, student, and school for a discussion of the situation, and to present recommended action(s) by consensus of the panel.

If the problem is not resolved or suspension and expulsion is the recommended action then information will be given to student and parent(s) which explains the process or bringing the issue before the school board, together with a written notice of the panel's recommendation.

GOVERNOR'S TASK FORCE ON YOUTH AT RISK COMMITTEES

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TASK FORCE DEFINITION OF YOUTH AT RISK

At risk children are those enrolled in school or eligible for enrollment whose progress toward graduation, school achievement, preparation for employment and the role of productive workers and citizens are jeopardized by a variety of health, social, educational, familial and economic factors. They are the children with special needs who are underserved, categorized, ignored, unchallenged and for whom expectations are low.

While there are numerous characteristics associated with potential dropouts and those at risk, the clustering of such indicators in the profile of the individual are of critical importance. Such indicators/characteristics include:

- * Excessive absenteeism or irregular attendance
- * Poor or failing grades
- * Low math and reading scores and achievement
- * Failure and retention in at least one grade
- * Lack of participation in school and extra-curricular activities
- * Dissatisfaction with teachers and traditional school structure
- * Failure to see relevance of education to personal desires
- * Gifted, learning disabled, or handicapped
- * Below average in basic skills
- * Uncooperative, inattentive, unmotivated
- * Suspension, expulsion, other disciplinary action
- * Feelings of rejection, alienation, isolation, insecurity, inadequacy
- * Association with disaffected peer group
- * Lack of encouragement to stay in school
- * Low self-esteem/self-concept
- * Lack of future orientation
- * Poor decision-making skills
- * Alcohol or drug problems
- * Health problem(s)
- * Pregnancy/marriage
- * Delinquency
- * Desire/need to work
- * Family disturbances, e.g., separation/divorce, violence, death
- * Racial or ethnic minority
- * Non-English speaking home
- * Low socioeconomic background
- * Parent(s) or sibling(s) not finishing school
- * Lack of parental emphasis on importance of education
- * Frequent moves
- * Poor communication between school and home
- * Attending a poorly financed school