

A Talent Development Program

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DADE County, Florida, is operating one of 19 federally sponsored Title VIII projects in the United States designed to curb the climbing nationwide dropout rate. The program serves four feeder schools in the Model City area. Innovative courses have been added to the existing curricula. Additional teachers, psychologists, teacher assistants, and aides supplement the regular school staff allotments.

Through positive reinforcement, Talent Development Program components offer potential dropouts an opportunity to succeed and receive personal recognition. When the U.S. Office of Education advised that federal funds were available to decrease the number of dropouts, a group of teachers, administrators, and community citizens developed a plan to incorporate several new programs in the schools which statistics showed to have the highest rate of dropouts.

The Talent Development Program is now in its fourth year of operation. Approximately 65 staff members are involved in the program. Each year's operation in the proposed five-year project has been slightly different in terms of the schools served and the

exact nature of the programs offered, but the major goal of reducing the number of dropouts has not changed. In the 1969-70 school year, there were 438 dropouts in the schools served by the Talent Development Program. In 1970-71, the number decreased to 268—a difference of 170 students—a 39 percent decrease. Even though the Talent Development Program specifically serves only students enrolled in the four schools, the program's major objectives are stated in terms of total school populations.

To lower the dropout rates of the four schools, the Talent Development Program attempts to serve the students whose records indicate at least three of the following factors:

1. A pattern of irregular attendance and frequent tardiness
2. Low achievement test scores
3. Social activities with actual or potential dropouts
4. A history of frequent disciplinary referrals
5. That they are members of a low-income family



Talent Development Program "currency" is used to reward students for achievement and attendance.

6. That they are members of a family which includes a parent with less than a junior high education.

The Dade County Model City area consists of approximately nine square miles and nearly 80,000 residents, 95 percent of whom are black. The area is predominately residential, with 34 percent of the 22,686 households listed in the poverty classification and seven percent considered destitute. Some of the major problems in the area are overcrowding, lack of recreational facilities, low income levels, high crime rates, and extensive unemployment.

Component Descriptions

Component 1: Vocational and Technical Education. Identified potential dropouts at Drew Junior High and Miami Northwestern Senior High participate in high interest vocational training programs. In the Small Gas Engine Shop, eighth and ninth grade boys learn to dismantle, repair, and reassemble both two- and four-stroke engines. While constructing projects, junior high youngsters gain experience in the use of sheet metal tools and equipment. The print shop at the senior high offers training in both the letterpress and offset printing processes.

Junior and senior high students enrolled in the work experience program and other Talent Development Program participants take part in the employability skills laboratory. Interviews and on-the-job simulations

are videotaped, critiqued, and retaped throughout the school year. Each student also learns to complete properly several types of employment application forms which are provided by local businessmen.

Modern electric office machines are used in the office career classes at both the junior and senior high. Students participating in the course acquire sophisticated training in the skills required by the most up-to-date business offices.

The vocational and technical programs offered through the Talent Development Program emphasize skill training. Talent Development endeavors to provide each identified student with an opportunity to attain gainful employment after graduation.

Component 2: Individualized Instruction. Identified students at Drew Junior High and Miami Northwestern Senior High receive their academic training in individualized instruction centers. The program is designed to enhance the dignity of each participant, in that no one suffers embarrassment in the center and students work in a nonthreatening, nonfrustrating environment. Each academic subject is planned with built-in success, reinforcement, encouragement, and stimulating experiences.

Achievement levels are diagnosed, individual learning prescriptions are developed, and students are directed through learning experiences in social studies, language arts, science, mathematics, and reading by certified subject area teachers. A special guidance counselor is assigned to each center to provide each student with group and individual counseling on a regular basis.

Component 3: Incentive Motivation. The Incentive Motivation Component is designed to affect directly and decisively the academic and social behavior of each identified student through the use of positive reinforcement, meaningful rewards, and behavior modification techniques. Performance contracts serve to define appropriate goals for each student and to specify behaviors upon which rewards are contingent.

Talent Development currency is awarded on a regular basis to students who have ful-

filled the promises of their contracts. Such promises are concerned with behavioral changes regarding absenteeism, tardiness, conduct, and the completion of daily assignments. Talent Development currency may be used to purchase items such as ballpoint pens, notebook paper, candy, free time in a student recreation room, costume jewelry, movie tickets, records, and sporting equipment.

The psychologist directing the component confers with teachers on a regular basis. He also supervises the reinforcement procedures and the distribution of items which are purchased by the students with the currency they have earned.

Component 4: Community Education. Community Education acts as a liaison between the school and the home. Staff members visit the homes of potential dropouts to investigate absences, determine needs, encourage involvement in school activities,

improve parent-student relationships, and discuss the school problems of Talent Development students. An education advisory committee is formed at each project school which sends a representative to the Community Advisory Council. This board advises project administrators of community needs and suggests directions for the program.

An information center at Drew Junior High includes a telephone answering and recording service. Appropriate action is taken by component staff members to resolve questions proposed to the center with regard to educational, social, and economic areas such as medical agencies, job placement, family counseling, and legal services.

Component 5: Continuing Education (COPE Center—Continuing Opportunities for Purposeful Education). Pregnancy is one of the reasons frequently mentioned by girls dropping out of school. Through the opportunities offered at the COPE Center, a school-



Eighth grade youngsters acquire vocational skills in the sheet metal shop.

age girl may continue her education through the period of pregnancy and reenter the public school program shortly after the birth of her child.

Each expectant mother receives regular pre- and post-natal care by medical personnel provided by the Dade County Health Department. The girls develop understandings and skills involved in proper nutrition while participating in the daily preparation of school luncheons. Many of the young women acquire new talents such as crocheting and knitting from expert teachers who double as counselors.

At a time when parental responsibility suddenly becomes a reality in a young mother, the motivation to acquire a salable skill is often at its maximum. At the COPE Center, the Talent Development Program has also included an office career and a cashier training program.

In the office career lab, the young women learn to type on electric typewriters, use a dictating machine, prepare stencils, operate duplicating machines, and develop skills in the use of adding machines. After a thorough training session, girls who indicate a desire to become cashiers have the opportunity to practice individually on cash registers to increase their speed and accuracy.

Component 6: Staff Development. The Talent Development Program provides project schools with many additional staff members to work specifically with potential dropouts. New programs have been implemented. Special equipment and new techniques are utilized. Through staff development activities, project teachers are introduced to new procedures and sensitized to the needs of potential dropouts through seminars, workshops, and small group meetings.

Program planning is based on the development of precise behavioral objectives which determine the strategies to be implemented and the evaluation which will take place. Each project teacher is governed by the objectives through a management plan which emphasizes accountability. Staff de-



Pupils learn to type on modern electric typewriters.

velopment also serves to inform total school faculties of the Talent Development Program goals, objectives, and techniques.

Component 7: Early Identification. Five- and six-year-old children at Drew Elementary School who are found to possess cognitive deficiencies are treated within the Early Identification Component. Specific stimulation is prescribed on the basis of deficits revealed during the testing procedures. Many of the programs are composed of prerecorded tapes and slides which present stimuli in special cubicles designed to dispense tokens for proper responses. The tokens are used by the children to purchase tangible or consumable reward items. It is TDP's assumption that small children with specific learning problems receiving regular stimulation and positive reinforcement will overcome their problems faster than those who do not receive the treatment.

Component 8: Practical Arts. Success, involvement, and activity are the guiding words of the upper elementary TDP Practical

Arts class. Identified potential dropouts at Charles R. Drew Elementary School gain practical experience in industrial arts, food preparation, sewing, family economics, crafts, and typing. Many of the units covered include field trips to local banks, industries, and businesses.

For most of the 120 students in the program, constant failure, frequent absenteeism, and low achievement have become a way of life in school. TDP is trying to change the pattern. Students from fourth through twelfth grades were surveyed by TDP to acquire the students' reactions to their schools. In answer to the questions "What do you like most about school?", "What do you like least about school?", and "Why do students drop out of school?", the answer overwhelmingly was—teachers—in all three instances. TDP believes that the modern equipment and high interest materials can play a positive role in reaching the hard-to-reach students only when the teachers involved are highly motivated and committed to developing positive student-teacher relationships. The teacher-student ratio averages about 1 to 15. "Show them you care" is the motto followed in TDP.

It is the concern of many educators in Dade County that, when Title VIII funding has ceased, the TDP procedures may not be able to continue because of the extra expenses involved. Many federally funded projects which have proven successful have been abruptly extinguished when funding was finished because school districts have not been able to support them. However, Dade County is willing to implement proven techniques when possible. For example, TDP initiated the Practical Arts Program in the upper ele-



In the Employability Skills Laboratory, students use a videotape machine.

mentary, and this concept has been adopted by other schools in the county.

One of the greatest problems involved in the implementation of TDP instructional components is the lack of sufficient planning time. It takes many hours to prepare individual learning activities for students operating on so many levels. Although instructional aides are freeing the teachers of a great deal of noninstructional tasks, there are still not enough hours in a day to accomplish the job. Administrators and teachers involved in TDP are actively seeking a solution to the problem.

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