

IN education one of the most difficult problems confronted daily is that of the student quitting high school. For this, the catchall word "dropout" is totally inadequate. Available explanations, causes, and "solutions" leave much to be desired.

As far back as 1964, the Newark, New Jersey, Board of Education originated and implemented one of the first alternative high schools in the nation. Well aware of the increasing number of students leaving high school, a work-study program was developed to provide the intermediate linkage between two worlds: education and work.

The Department of Secondary Education of the Newark Board of Education was successful in obtaining the prompt cooperation of six business firms in the City of Newark. The basic principle of maintaining a high level of education and work-performance was the major objective. Innovative as this program was, a new philosophy, new techniques, a new set of values and relationships had to be developed. Social workers and work coordinators were essential to the program. The demands of business and industry had to be met with an ongoing education provided in the alternative high school.

A program of this nature requires constant revision and updating. Under the jurisdiction of Theresa S. David, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools in Newark, new dimensions have been added. Extension of the job opportunities, a better liaison between business and school administration, improved orientation of students working on the job, a more specific accountability of the work as well as the education performance, and a greater diversification of job experience are but a few of the administrative objectives which have been implemented.

Students leave high school before graduation for many reasons. It may be boredom, sickness, hostility, emotional breakdown, lack of interest, poor teaching, poor guidance, scheduling difficulties, drug dependence or addiction, retardation in reading, mental or neurological problems, pregnancy, delinquency, truancy, cutting of classes, parental neglect or pressure, family breakdown, exploitation by outside groups, accelerated



maturations, marriage, job opportunities, change of home location, obsolete courses of study or teaching methods, lack of student-teacher rapport; all these reasons are listed under that indefinite term "dropout." This segment of our high school youth is too often "dropped out" of our educational system—or precisely "kicked out."

Education: An All-Consuming Drive

We, at the Education Center, have an alternative program, different from the traditional high school. It is essentially a work-study program, wherein a student studies one week and goes to work the following week. To increase our efficiency of organization, we have two groups of students alternating with each other in a work-study combination. Hence, while group "A" goes to school, group "B" is at work in business or industry. The following week group "B" goes to school while group "A" is at work. One job is held by two students on alternate weeks. Hence, at any given time, one half of the school enrollment is working while the other half is studying. Continuity of work is thus preserved and one student reinforces the other at work.

Performance: The Education Center for Youth

ROCCO A. MISURELL*

This alternative high school, organized in 1964 by the Newark, New Jersey, Board of Education, exemplifies cooperation between the schools, on one hand, and business and industry, on the other. Many signs indicate the success of this year-round program.

The concern of business and industry is indeed to be commended. They regard this program as "our school" or "our students." Business and industry have in reality become adjunct institutions in our school system. The feeling of security and assistance is wonderful to behold. We, at the Education Center for Youth, enjoy the cooperation of the Prudential Insurance Company of America, the New Jersey Bell Telephone Company, the Public Service Electric and Gas Company, Bamberger's Department Store, and the Western Electric Company. Monthly meetings are held to develop policy and implementation of the work-study program. Career Education is a basic objective.

Graduation at our school is held twice a year and an average of fifty students receives a bona fide high school diploma in that time. The feelings and emotions run high on gradu-

ation day because this is the day our students await with greatest anticipation. And why not? After leaving their regular high school for whatever reasons they have, after struggling for six months to a year or two from job to job, after frustrations in the real world of work, after realizing the results of lack of skills and knowledge, after being offered low pay and difficult jobs, after conflicts with the employer, after being hungry, tired, and even sick, the demand for education becomes an all consuming drive for many. It is no wonder then, that Graduation Day is a gala day of achievement. The parents, representatives from business and industry, friends, relatives, and even children of the high school graduates are most enthusiastic about the great event. Members from our participating business glow like foster parents on these occasions. And rightfully so!

Recruitment of the students described here is relatively easy. The Guidance Department of 13 secondary schools may use our facilities, the Youth Opportunity Center, the Unemployment Offices, business, industry, and many other agencies, private or public.

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Our enrollment is usually above 110 students. Their average age may be 17 or 18. The range may be 16 to 20, about 65 percent girls and 35 percent boys.

Our Typical Student

A composite picture of our youth population is somewhat like this: has left high school in ninth or tenth year, reading level is about three years below grade, is living at a poverty level, needs a job and money, home conditions are difficult possibly from a broken family, from a blighted area, exposed to the crime and drug scene, and deprived often of cultural experiences. Education beyond high school is not usually considered until trips and excursions to colleges and better places of employment are made. Too often students in this class are willing to settle for less. Hence their vocational and occupational sights should be uplifted. A sense of pride and experience or accomplishment is needed.

Our courses of study at the Education Center are traditional in name, but in content they are relevant and updated. For example, a course in English II is first outlined and tailored to the ability and needs of the student in terms of his or her interests, potential, and goals. Reading and mathematics are frequently at low levels. Students may enter two to four years behind their grade level. However, within a year at our Education Center students have increased their reading level two to three years. This is reasonable when one considers the concern of teachers, the degree of motivation, the intense desire for a high school diploma, and the rejection and frustration resulting from the real world of work.

Students here are subject to exams in the same manner as in a traditional school. The difference is that they take the exams when the teacher and student agree that it is feasible and when the work has been completed. The relative speed of accumulating sufficient credits for a diploma is dependent

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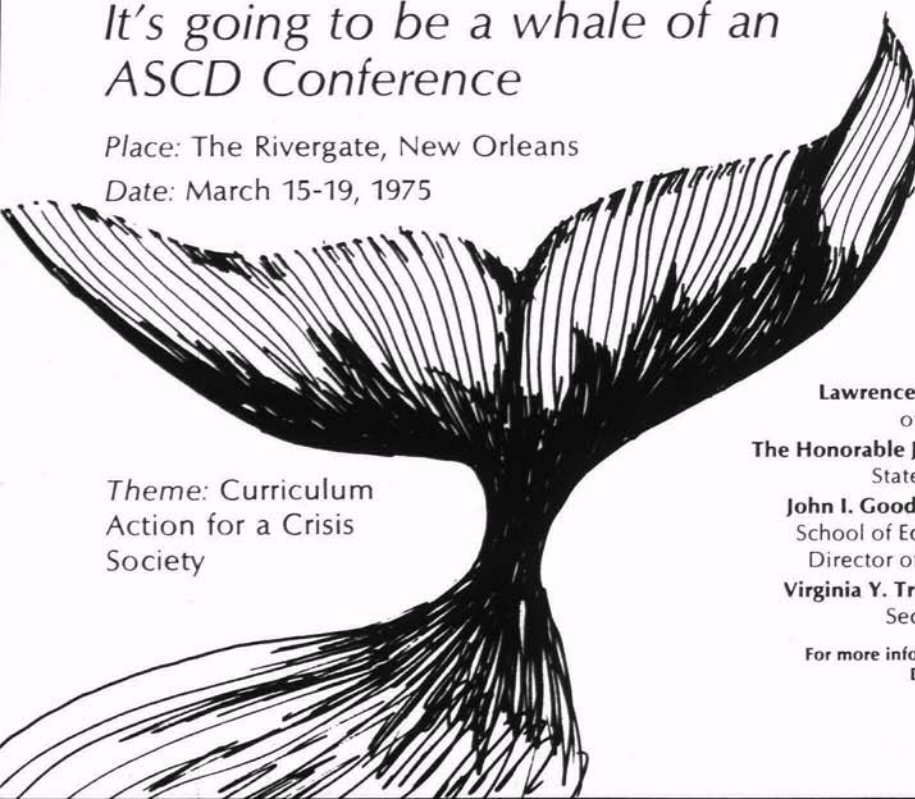
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upon the student. Since this is an all-year-round school, students can reduce their time in half. In other words, two years of normal high school work can be completed in one year.

At the Education Center the enrollment is stabilized at about 110 students. It appears that this is a critical number wherein maximum efficiency is achieved. It is within this number that the teacher-pupil ratio is most suitable, that teacher-student rapport is secure, that the delicate balance between kindness and firmness is maintained. The class size may range from five to ten. In one class there may be two or three different grades of a subject being taught, all on an individual basis.

Our Education Center is essentially business oriented. Hence our jobs for youth are in the category of work dealing with typing, filing, stenography, inventory control, clerical assistance, warehouse storage, selling, mailing, and related positions. Our location is in the business center of the City of Newark. Hence we have ready access to jobs concerned with office work. We are intending to expand our job opportunities into other areas and careers related to industry, health jobs, medical positions, or technical work. There is a crying need for students with knowledge and skills in mathematics, science, mechanical and technical fields. In reality we are talking about gas station operators, auto mechanics, television repairmen, plumbers, carpenters, building maintenance men, laboratory assistants, hospital workers, roofers, masons, electricians, and other blue collar jobs.

Our experience at the Education Center reveals a significant principle. In general the large majority of our students have hidden skills and abilities which need development. Frequently they are like a diamond in the rough which must be ground and polished to show its sparkle and gleam.

The esprit de corps at the Education Center is good. Students and teachers are working in a friendly atmosphere. A spirit of adulthood is prevalent. This does not mean, however, that typical school problems do not exist. We believe, however, that truancy, cutting of classes, apathy, and ne-

glect of homework occur with far less frequency than in the traditional high school. Control of such problems is relatively easy.

What Are Our Accomplishments?

1. Despite prior dropout records, attendance at the Center compares favorably with attendance at the regular day schools in Newark.

2. The school holding power of two-thirds is similar to national norms despite the fact that the student body consists entirely of youths originally alienated from schools.

3. While employers are under no obligation to employ our students after graduation, they do offer 65 percent to 70 percent of our graduates regular employment. About 15 percent go on to college each year.

4. Desirable changes are self-evident. Grooming, dress, posture, and speech habits have improved measurably. Pupils' self-esteem rises with each week in the program. From employers and personnel directors have come warm approvals of student performance on the job.

5. The Education Center for Youth is working intensively to reorient each pupil's attitude toward himself or herself and society. The combination of a bona fide high school diploma program and a meaningful job seems to have inspired these youths to seek wholesome new goals.

6. Going into its tenth year one must say the Center is successful. Over 500 students have been graduated. Many of them have been retained by the cooperating industries, some have gone into trades or business and about 15 percent have gone to college. Whenever alumni return for a visit, it is always with a feeling of warmth and gratitude. "This is *my* school, these are *my* teachers."

It is no wonder that the Education Center for Youth has a built-in feeling of pride. There is a great swell of accomplishment when one thinks of having sent 500 young people into the world of work and reality with knowledge and skills for success. What would the alternative have been?

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