"To keep children in school and to free them from alienation and apathy..." this large-city system has created an array of special offerings designed to meet the needs of the actual or the potential "disaffected" youngster.

Schools and school systems throughout our country have increasingly in the past 10 or 15 years been mounting programs designed to capture the attention, commitment, and participation of students who are "turned off" by the conventional classroom. These include youngsters whose intelligence ranges from average to superior, who have no physical handicaps that could interfere with learning, and who come from homes and backgrounds that are no different from those of many boys and girls who accept their schools.

Another puzzler is that disaffection among students manifests itself among the advantaged as well as the disadvantaged; it is found not only in the cities, but also in small towns and in rural areas. We are concerned, therefore, with a phenomenon that involves all educators. Thus, the Philadelphia story of some of the ways our public schools are trying to reach and teach disaffected youth will hopefully be of interest to many readers coping with similar problems in their own communities.

The core of the Philadelphia public schools' philosophy concerning disaffected students is that such pupils are not merely marching to a different drummer. This is unlike the case of Thoreau, whose alienation and disenchantment with the conventional revealed new, provocative vistas of thought and moved him to prodigious creativity (based, it should be noted, on a sound, classical college education). Rather, today's disaffected
students show their alienation and disenchantment by “dropping out” of school, by poor and irregular attendance, by unruly and disruptive behavior, by virtual withdrawal from participation (although they may be physically present), by failing school subjects, and by emotional maladjustment.

Left to his or her own devices, the disaffected student continues to drift, atrophies intellectually, is apathetic toward almost everything except the gratification of the senses, and is indifferent toward the value of self-discipline and good work habits. Rarely does the disaffection result in any kind of positive accomplishment. If there is any awareness of the external world, it is often as an oppressive, uncaring, hypocritical, and exploitative society—an adversary to be outwitted and “ripped off”; or, if this takes too much effort, one that should be ignored.

In attempting to help students fettered by such anomie, the Philadelphia Public Schools have initiated many programs featuring guidance, redirection, reinforcement, and encouragement. These are provided in settings involving the students’ peers, school personnel, parents, and many sectors of the community, including business and industry. Work is done in small groups, using practical approaches to the problem. The emphasis is on showing that there is light at the end of the tunnel, that the individual is able through education to shape his or her own destiny and live the good life.

The Philadelphia Public Schools also recognize that, although they accept responsibility for adapting and recreating school programs, practices, and environments for disaffected students, other factors, personal and societal, contribute to the student’s negative attitudes (and perhaps underlie them). Although schools have little or no control over these outside factors, successful and promising programs developed for disaffected youth must try to incorporate provisions for dealing with such factors as well as with those that are perceived as school-related.

In discussing some of the School District of Philadelphia’s approaches to working with disaffected students, no claim is made that they are ideal. What kind of program would be considered ideal? Probably one described by Kenneth Osvald, director of a dropout school in St. Paul, Minnesota, as resembling “an intensive care unit of a modern hospital—with each student getting the attention he needs from a staff of specialists.” Like public school systems everywhere in America, Philadelphia is suffering from financial problems and has had to economize in many areas. What is significant, however, is that at a time when many promising educational programs are under attack throughout the country and are being abolished or cut back, the Philadelphia Board of Education, our Superintendent, and the administrative and teaching staff are still committed to trying new ways of reaching disaffected students.

Special School-Based Programs

Currently, there are over 120 alternative programs operating in The School District of Philadelphia, extending from kindergarten through the 12th grade. Approximately 10,000 students are involved.

Recognizing that different students learn better in different types of schools, the alternatives stress variety rather than uniformity. In order to be considered an alternative, a program must provide diverse approaches to teaching and learning in core subjects and develop an approach that is significantly different from that of conventional programs. These alternative formats represent a restructuring of a student’s learning experience and incorporate components of academic remediation, career education, work-study internships, open classrooms, academically-talented programs, and special interest programs.

Additional financial resources and allocations are provided in order to make possible a high degree of individualized instruction and counseling.

Most alternative programs have originated in the schools themselves, not in a central planning office. The advantage of this is that they are custom-made to suit the needs of specific groups of children within a school. Two such elementary programs are described here:

1. Project Success—This program is designed to serve children in grades 6 and 7 who are identified as underachieving and alienated from the conventional environment. Upon admission to this program, teacher and student devise a learning contract. The program consists of basic skills, career education, art, home economics, music, and industrial arts. Students participate
actively in their education through the various techniques employed by the teacher and the flexibility incorporated into this program.

Counseling plays a vital part in the success of this program. Emphasis is placed on improving attitudes, changing negative behavior, eliminating frustration, and developing reasoning processes in order that students may evaluate themselves honestly and objectively. As part of the program, students work as aides or observers in the community and are introduced to the business and professional world.

2. GRASP (Growth, Response, Achievement, Self-Esteem, Participation)—This program works with second graders who exhibit high academic achievement but who are not meeting their recognized potential. Through a variety of “doing” activities, the children are given an opportunity to enrich their educational experience. Activities include trips, cooking, and attending various special interest centers. Children also contract their weekly work with their teacher. The group represents a cross-section of the school population functioning in a free, open atmosphere. A thematic approach makes use of a variety of learning resources including skill building, field trips, speakers, creative dramatics, interschool activities, and music specialists.

On the secondary level (junior and senior high school), The School District of Philadelphia conducts over 60 alternative programs. The most famous of these is the Parkway Program, which consists actually of four different schools or “communities.” Each of these separately-housed units explores the city’s educational, cultural, and scientific institutions as part of its extended campus, using the many resources found there. A core faculty provides instruction in basic skills, offers courses in their fields of expertise, and supervises tutorials. The tutorials are advisory groups that provide counseling and supportive interaction. Community volunteers with special skills offer on-site programs, classes, and internships in academic, commercial, and vocational subjects. Students throughout the city are selected by lottery for each Parkway unit.

Many of Philadelphia’s secondary schools have also elected to sponsor alternative programs. These are conducted within the school buildings or at off-site locations. Regardless of where they are, the alternative programs are largely autonomous operations that do not follow the routines and practices of the parent schools.

One such program, PEP (Penn Treaty Junior High School-Edison High School Program), is a dropout prevention program offering ninth- and tenth-grade boys a smaller, more personalized atmosphere in which the teacher can work closely with the group. The teachers use a variety of learning materials that appeal to their students’ interests. Special emphasis is placed on reading and mathematics, as well as on skills needed to succeed in high school and on the job. The student population is integrated and representative of the black/white/Spanish-speaking community in which PEP is located.

All PEP students participate in a career education program at the A. Philip Randolph Skills Center. Ninth graders are involved in the trade exploration program. Tenth-grade students are assigned to specific skill clusters. Some PEP students are placed in paid after-school jobs.

The Penn Treaty Junior High School also sponsors BEST (Better Education through Service and Training), which is a motivation and career preparation program for girls who are not doing well in the regular school setting. The students at BEST receive special attention in a family-like learning unit. One teacher works with the same class for the entire day in order to establish a closer working relationship. A traditional teaching approach is used with strong emphasis on developing reading skills.

BEST has a career component that provides girls with work experiences in hospital training and elementary school tutoring. Students in the tutoring program spend two days a week on-site at BEST and three days a week in an elementary school helping pupils improve basic skills. The hospital training program introduces girls to the various careers in a hospital. They spend two days a week at their hospital jobs and three days a week at the BEST center.

Edison High School has developed alternatives designed to reach disaffected students and reduce their dropout rate. One of these is the Academy of Applied Electrical Science, a three-year program. Academic subjects are taught in relation to the electrical training received. A project team from business and industry supervises instruction and furnishes the necessary
Photos clockwise from top: Better Education through Service and Training (BEST), Penn Treaty Junior High School; Electrical Academy, Edison High School; and Southern Learning Alternative Experience (SALE)—all in The School District of Philadelphia.
managerial and technical expertise. Industrial experience supplements classroom instruction.

The same high school conducts the Edison Project Dropout Prevention Center, where the major focus is on career education. Half of each student’s day is spent in a self-contained classroom improving basic skills and using, for the most part, curriculum packets developed by the staff. Instruction takes place in both individual and small group situations, with additional attention available in mathematics or in a reading laboratory.

The Career Education Component covers three areas: a work-stipend program that provides students with up to ten hours of work a week at minimum wages, work exploration in-school, and out-of-school experiences that introduce students to the working world through lessons on available careers, application procedures, and visits to job sites. The program also provides “learning stations” that offer a week’s intensive exploration at business and industrial locations.

An ancillary services component provides for the student’s medical, dental, and eye care. Resource people serve as liaison between the Edison Project and the community, building contacts, developing resources, providing instructional assistance, and coordinating services.

In another alternative model, several junior high schools are feeders for the Bishop Learning Center, which is designed to work with disaffected youth. Most of the students attending the Center have been chronic disciplinary problems in their own schools. At Bishop, students learn to cope with the various problems they had faced in conventional classrooms. The staff attempts to deal with student behavior problems through counseling and other therapeutic approaches. This is primarily a program whose strength is not in academic or other special offerings but rather in the commitment of the staff, which attempts to
deal with students' problems from an intensive human relations standpoint. Every member of the staff has to be skilled in listening, be patient with the hostile child, have a high degree of empathy and self-awareness, be skilled in fostering educational relationships, and be willing to assume responsibility for children who are hostile and impatient with the demands made of them in the traditional high school.

Some of our programs designed to serve the disaffected concentrate on the students of a single grade. An example of this is SALE (Southern Alternate Learning Experience) conducted by South Philadelphia High School. In this program, those tenth-grade students who are potential dropouts, have low reading and mathematics profiles, have failed to be promoted, or are dissatisfied with school, receive special help. The program operates at an off-site location. The traditional curriculum, which includes mathematics, social studies, English (concentrating on reading skills), and science, is followed. Reduced class size, shorter instructional periods, and flexible scheduling are the chief vehicles used to reach students.

Two of our schools (Boone and Catto) have been specially organized to receive and meet the needs of particularly disruptive students. Such students usually have been involved in serious offenses and have not been successful in adjusting, in spite of local school alternative programs and approaches. In these schools, the students receive highly individual attention, extensive counseling, and are under the tutelage and supervision of teachers who are particularly sympathetic and skilled in relation to youth who are "in trouble."

These are only a few of the many programs designed to reach the disaffected. Their variety is great, but space limitations make it impossible to describe them in the present article. The names of some of these programs will give the reader an idea of their thrust: LADS (Learning Alternative for Disruptive Students); Bartram School for Human Services (hospital, school, social work, experience); PLUS (Pupils Learning Usable Skills); UCEC (Urban Career Education Center); CARE (Content Area Reading Experiences); Kensington Pre-paraprofessional Training Program; SAVE (Selecting Alternatives to Violence through Education); ACE (Academy for Career Education); Operation Prestige; Philadelphia Youth Theatre Alternative; and TIME (Taking in More Education).

City-wide Supportive Programs

The activities described in the preceding section are ad hoc in nature, organized and conducted to help specific groups of students with immediate problems. Most are offshoots of preexisting school organizations and are limited largely to students attending one school or serve a group of schools. In addition, The School District of Philadelphia conducts several citywide supportive programs designed to appeal to disaffected students. Two such programs are described here:

1. Affective Education

The Affective Education Project focuses on a variety of techniques. These are intended to connect the emotions and concerns of students to subject matter. Teachers use such techniques as role-playing, gaming, and other group techniques in order to make the classroom meaningful for the student. Learning is personalized, and the student is provided with an opportunity to explore several processes to gain a perspective on life's problems. The project's teachers also organize curriculum around processes, teaching students "ways of operating" in a variety of contexts.

The project features the development and implementation of a communications network including a multifaceted approach to developing the basic communication skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Training of parents and school personnel, and development and implementation of curricula are essential aspects of the communications network.

2. Motivation Program

The Motivation Program's principal thrust is seeking out and motivating toward complete fulfillment students with hidden potential for higher education as well as those who demonstrate ability but show poor achievement. As part of community involvement, colleges and universities lend their support to the program academically and financially. Students attend classes on campus for further enrichment, and professors come to the high schools to lecture on their disciplines.

Community residents, leaders in industry and commerce, professionals, and neighbors in-
vite groups of students to visit their homes. These responsible adults help promote a climate of confidence for young people.

In addition to the curriculum and enrichment, motivation students are introduced to Philadelphia’s cultural assets. Each student is exposed to music, drama, science, and painting through trips to exhibitions and performances. Groups of students and their parents also engage in weekly discussions led by professional group leaders. Students and parents propose the topics for discussions; the sessions seek answers to the concerns of the average adolescent.

In summary, most schools throughout our city strive to meet the needs of all youth (particularly those who are disaffected) by restructuring the learning environment to provide a reinforcing, nonthreatening atmosphere that emphasizes group and individual interaction. The result is a more individualized curriculum, which is particularly important in reaching the disaffected student.

Flexibility is encouraged to focus on student interest, individualization of instruction, and earning of credit based on competence and demonstrated experience. Increasingly, a variety of school and community resources are being utilized for learning experiences, including exposure to other classes and educational institutions, business, industry, and commercial establishments, civic and cultural events and organizations. This tapping of a broad base provides an opportunity for students to interact with people with whom they would not ordinarily come into contact and to have experience in the "real world."

Self-discovery and independence are elements that disaffected students find particularly attractive in programs designed especially for them. Consequently, extensive use is made of a variety of media to help such students discover themselves and interact with others.

In general, all types of special programs have been proved worthy of continuance, even at a time when funds for their operation are limited. They are keeping more children in school and are freeing them from alienation and apathy. This is due primarily to the dedication of their staffs, and to the fact that small student-teacher ratios allow for a great deal of personal attention.

Attention to the problem of meeting the needs of "disaffected" school youth, and the development of programs for them has had the concomitant beneficial result of "opening up" the total program being offered to all students. Commitment to community-based education, school-work opportunities, greater decision-making roles for students, and greater flexibility and variety in school offerings have all been strengthened and extended.

It is hoped that these efforts will result in constructive schools that are more responsive to the needs of all youth and are better able to help them.