

Success for the Unsuccessful

The DeLaSalle Education Center in Kansas City, Missouri, gives local at-risk youth the "last chance" they need to turn their lives around.

The DeLaSalle Education Center accepts only students who cannot be expected to graduate from any high school—ever. To enter the school, a student must be a confirmed educational failure. We recruit from juvenile court, mental health programs, school districts that have permanently expelled students, and the inner-city streets. Our students come from neighborhoods with the highest crime rates and the lowest family incomes. Some are from families who have been unemployed for generations and on welfare most of that time. Most have been abused. Many have had a pattern of drug abuse.

DeLaSalle serves about 400 students a year in a free-standing building. Classes are small, generally fewer than 10 students in each. Fully accredited for both regular and special education, the school features intensive remediation in academics and a no-nonsense counseling program. To promote feelings of success, schoolwork and study materials are so designed that each student averages 90 percent on daily class assignments.

Even though DeLaSalle is a private school, no student or parent is charged tuition or fees. Families have offered to pay for their children to attend, but we prefer to serve those least able to afford it. Our funding comes primarily from private sources and also from government grants, the Job Training Partnership Act, local school districts, and the United Way. The student's responsibilities are to provide his or her transpor-

tation, bring pencil and paper to each class, and follow three rules: regular attendance, no drugs, and no fighting.

A violation of any rule can be met with instant termination, but we do our best to encourage students not to break the rules. For example, regular attendance is fostered by a short and intensive school day, vocational and athletic offerings, and daily contact with parents, group home managers, and probation officers. To help students stay off drugs, our counselors work with those who need assistance during class, at lunch, or during recreational periods. They provide individual and group therapies as well. Intensive counseling in a variety of settings is also provided to discourage students from fighting.

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DeLaSalle is based on the premise that educational programs are more successful when the teacher and the student agree on the learning materials, how they are to be used, and the expected results. Once in the classroom, the student and the teacher develop a series of contracts that lead to graduation. The contracts stipulate goals, objectives, learning materials, time-frames, and so on. If problems arise later, the contracts can be modified. Within very broad guidelines, the teacher and the student are free to select almost any learning materials they agree upon, for example, the State Driver's Manual, words and music of pop songs, various magazines and newspapers. Another option open to the student is the method of the material's presentation, for example, audiotapes, computers, texts, and so on. Post-secondary plans are also covered in the contracts.

Comprehensive studies by the U.S. Department of Education and the University of Missouri-Kansas City show that students are able to increase their academic skills by four or five grade levels in one year. Measured gains of self-esteem are equally impressive, and students dramatically increase their ability to get jobs. Ninety percent of our graduates go on to post-secondary education, full-time employment, or child rearing. As a direct result of the program, we have seen a decrease of 40 percent in government aid among the graduates.

Until this time, about the only choice these students had was whether or not

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Yes, I would like to attend. Please send me a registration packet for the 1990 NSDC Annual Conference. If I am not currently a member, my conference fee will include a one-year membership in NSDC.

I am not able to attend this year's conference, but I'd like to know more about NSDC. Send me information on membership.

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to come to school at all. They were probably destined to spend the greater part of their lives receiving some type of social service either in or out of prison. Once in the program, though, an impressive number of these drop-out, push-out, and "throw-away" children complete the program and improve their prospects for successful lives. □

¹For more information about these studies, see B. Nobel's "A Comparison of Student Success Between Matched Groups Who Received and Did Not Receive Educational Services at the DeLaSalle Alternative School," a monograph published in March 1989 by the University of Missouri-Kansas City; and *Educational Programs That Work*, Edition 16, 1990, Program Effectiveness Panel #58-20, National Diffusion Network, Sopris West, Incorporated, 1140 Boston Ave., Longmont, CO 80501.

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New and Noteworthy

A program designed to give children individualized learning experiences that promote motivation, thinking skills, and self-confidence is now available from the newly formed Intelligy Corp. The WINGS program is based on periodic personal evaluations of each child's learning style and growth pattern and provides an ongoing, personalized learning system of educational toys, games, and interactive activities for kids from birth to age 12. Aimed at parents who wish to take an active part in ensuring that their children begin school ready to learn, the program is designed by child development experts to capitalize on the power of close parent/child relationships in enhancing early learning development in the major skill areas: cognitive, language, physical, and social-emotional.

WINGS will be promoted through a trained teacher sales force at a price of \$89.95 for the Introductory Kit and \$29.75 per month for Ongoing Program Kits. Scholarships will be offered to provide WINGS to low-income children. For more information, call Intelligy Corp. at (800) KIDS-2222.

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