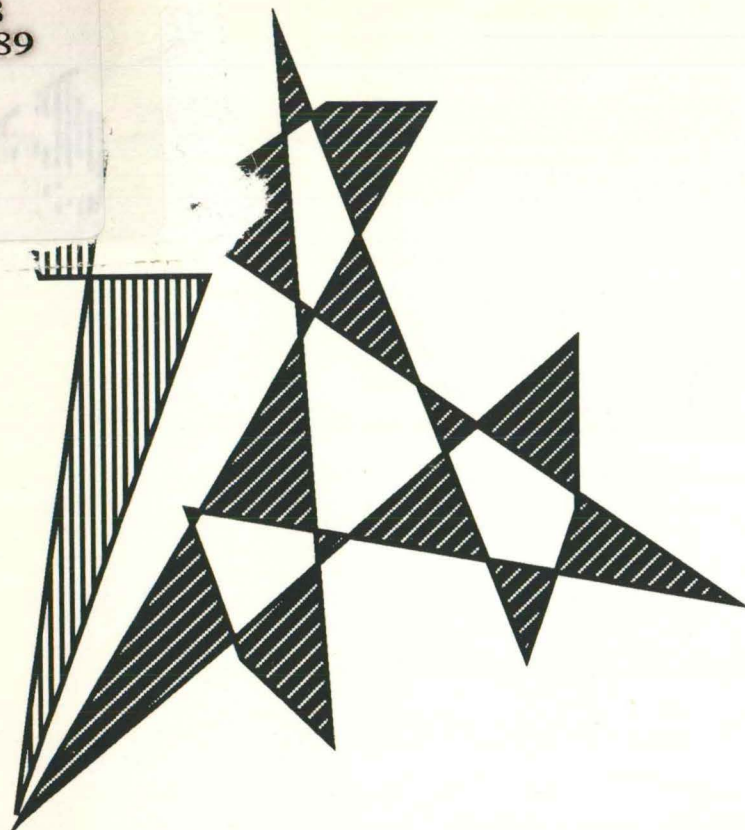


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Inventory of Policies and Practices Related to Student Failure and Dropping Out

**Iowa Department of Education
1989**

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Inventory of Policies and Practices Related To Student Failure and Dropping Out

Iowa Department of Education

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Inventory of School Policies and Practices Related to Student Failure and Dropping Out

This inventory was developed to serve as a working tool to help local education agencies to review existing policies and practices in six different areas that may be negatively affecting student performance, especially in grades 7-12. The six areas are: instruction, discipline, support services, attendance, student activities, and school/community relations. The inventory represents a direct response to school research, publications, and dialogue on the need to develop more positive learning environments for all students.

The content of the inventory was developed under a grant from the Education Commission of the States allowing input from a thirteen member task force and 237 student dropouts enrolled in seven different alternative schools throughout Iowa. Time limitations naturally prevented an exhaustive review of all policies and practices and potential alternatives. Therefore, the content is considered a beginning base to work from and should be revised and modified to accommodate new information to best meet the needs of local practitioners.

The format of the inventory identifies a policy or practice, the potential negative effect on students, and possible alternatives to the policy or practice. It allows the user to identify whether or not the policy or practice is a perceived problem and what action should be taken locally.

Local administrators and school board members are encouraged to use this inventory to gain information to help design local plans for at-risk student services. Students, teachers, parents, business persons, community agencies, and other interested persons could be involved to help develop consensus on local problems and solutions to the problems. The questionnaire in this inventory, which was used to help develop it, serves as an example of how information could be collected from students at the local level. Other suggestions for use of the inventory include:

- Local boards of education could schedule time to review one section of the inventory at a time during regularly scheduled meetings. This process may be more productive than trying to do the entire inventory in one setting.
- Involve all professional staff in the process of responding to the inventory through scheduled staff development. Allow time for the staff to complete the entire inventory or one section at a time. Encourage staff to make recommendations, allow time for discussion of the recommendations, and establish group consensus for final decisions. Prioritize decisions and set goals that can be realistically accomplished given the time available.
- Develop a similar format, identifying local policies for each education level, and have students and other community persons analyze the policies with regard to negative effect on students and suggest potential alternatives to the policies.
- Revise the enclosed student questionnaire and use it with all students. Prioritize policies and practices by using the total number of student responses. Specifically work on the top ten or top five policies depending on local capability.

Instruction

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Minimum course loads for all students.</p>	<p>Causes students who are not ready for full course loads to fail in one or more classes.</p> <p>Encourages truancy/tardiness.</p>	<p>Allow reduced loads for students in special cases after conferences with parents/guardians.</p>		
<p>Teaching styles and learning styles of students not matched.</p>	<p>Establishes stressed relationships between students and teachers.</p> <p>Reduces student performance.</p> <p>Establishes an "I can't learn attitude."</p> <p>Causes discipline problems.</p>	<p>Provide collegial teaming to improve instruction.</p> <p>Allow time for matching teaching styles and learning styles.</p> <p>Schedule students based on teaching/learning styles.</p> <p>Allow students to change teachers, especially when failure exists and teacher/student conflict restricts learning.</p>		
<p>Tracking Ability grouping</p>	<p>Characterizes some students as "losers."</p> <p>Locks students into ability groups, preventing movement into other ability groups.</p> <p>Creates feelings of inadequacy.</p> <p>Limits the perception of students about their potential ability and aspirations for future opportunities.</p>	<p>Group students flexibly, allowing mixed ability groups and dynamic, cooperative learning.</p> <p>Allow voluntary course selection with guidance.</p>		

Instruction				
Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
Promotion based on strict credit attainment to achieve grade level.	<p>Causes students who do not reach strict attainment level to repeat entire grade.</p> <p>Establishes student doubts that they belong in school.</p>	<p>Promote students on the basis of partial credit attainments.</p> <p>Require students to repeat only deficient areas.</p> <p>Establish alternative promotion programs, allowing students to catch up to age peers by Saturday schools, before school/after school tutoring, etc.</p>		
No more than two credits allowed to be earned by correspondence or equivalency programs from other institutions.	<p>Limits options for completing a high school education.</p> <p>Discourages students from trying.</p>	<p>Allow unlimited transfer of credits as long as the credits are judged equivalent to local credits.</p>		
K-12 retention.	<p>Reduces self esteem.</p> <p>Causes permanent negative effect on performance.</p>	<p>Transfer students to a classroom with fewer students, more individual attention, and special resources.</p> <p>Provide competency-based curriculum in multi-grade groupings.</p> <p>Provide an early readiness program to overcome development lags.</p> <p>Practice no retention after first grade; individualize programs starting at grade 9 based on projected plans (academic, personal/social, career/vocational) and parent/guardian input.</p> <p>Allow promotion with remediation in a given skill area, possibly in an alternative setting.</p>		

Instruction

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Absence of transition programs for students experiencing a change of buildings and staff as they move from one level of education to another or as they move laterally.</p>	<p>Reduces student's sense of place or belonging.</p>	<p>Establish transition programs to assist students experiencing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) a change of buildings and staff (elementary to junior high, junior high to senior high, senior high to post-secondary) b) restructuring of grades c) departmentalization d) transfer between school districts e) returning from long term illnesses or institutionalization 		
<p>Increased requirements for graduation.</p> <p>Increased ratio of mandatory classes to electives.</p>	<p>Increases chances of failure for those not academically inclined.</p> <p>Restricts student options in elective areas such as vocational education.</p>	<p>Allow mandatory requirements to be met through a network of electives, including vocational education.</p> <p>Allow articulation with other secondary and post-secondary institutions to satisfy graduation requirements.</p>		
<p>Expanding the number of classes that students must take in a given day.</p> <p>Scheduling all students to graduate from high school by the age of 17 or 18.</p>	<p>Increases student stress in trying to meet schedule demands.</p> <p>Increases chances of failure in one or more classes.</p> <p>Causes difficulties in meeting homework demands.</p>	<p>Expand options to meet the demand for increased requirements, such as expanded school year, Saturday school, extended graduation program to age 21, evening school.</p> <p>Provide students a choice to graduate by the age of 21.</p>		

Instruction

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Defining the school day as 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. only.</p>	<p>Eliminates options for students who must work to satisfy basic needs.</p>	<p>Develop schedules to accommodate students' needs.</p>		
<p>Passive teaching practices such as lectures, monitoring seat work, and preparation for assignments.</p>	<p>Limits student achievement.</p> <p>Establishes and reinforces student passiveness.</p> <p>Negates students attaining and maintaining a sense of relevancy.</p>	<p>Increase the interaction between students and teachers and students and administrators by open discussions in classes, evaluative and opinion questioning, feedback on work performed, and more projects necessitating people/community interaction.</p>		
<p>Classroom instruction, guidance and teacher/student interaction that is not sensitive to gender differences and that favors boys over girls.</p>	<p>Lowers performance levels of female students.</p> <p>Limits curriculum choices of females.</p> <p>Leads to low self-esteem of female students.</p> <p>Causes pregnancy to become an escape mechanism.</p> <p>Channels females into training leading to lower-paid jobs.</p>	<p>Provide gender-free training for staff to change classroom instruction, guidance, and student/teacher interaction.</p> <p>Encourage females to enter nontraditional training areas, such as science, math, computer courses, managerial and technical trades, and professional career areas.</p> <p>Provide counseling to enhance girls' self esteem.</p> <p>Provide instruction that encourages group activities and collaboration that complements female cognitive development.</p>		

Instruction

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>No alternative education plan for those who drop out of school.</p>	<p>Reduces number of students who return to school.</p> <p>Dropouts experience high unemployment and/or low entry level employment.</p> <p>Reduces participation in community activity.</p> <p>Contributes to criminal activity.</p>	<p>Follow up all school dropouts.</p> <p>Develop individual plans for students to complete a high school education by existing resources.</p> <p>Coordinate with business and industry and community agencies to provide an alternative school.</p>		
<p>Requiring all students to fulfill physical education requirements before graduation.</p>	<p>Causes students to fail physical education because they are embarrassed by the clothes they have to wear, are afraid to shower, can't afford proper dress or foot attire, or are embarrassed by showering together.</p>	<p>Provide alternative ways for students to complete physical education objectives, such as personal exercise programs, participation in community sponsored activities, etc.</p> <p>Provide proper physical education attire for students who can't afford it.</p> <p>Provide for private showering if needed, or eliminate requirement to shower.</p> <p>Provide clean, neat clothing for students who need it and will accept it.</p> <p>Allow a variety of attire for physical education to accommodate students.</p>		
<p>Reassigning teachers through reduction-in-force actions to positions in which they have little interest or motivation.</p>	<p>Negative attitudes of teachers conveyed to students.</p> <p>Causes teachers to do an inadequate job and students to lose interest.</p>	<p>Provide staff development to prepare teachers to function adequately.</p>		

Instruction

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Grading system based on grade points and reports by letter grades only.</p>	<p>Discourages students because grades are not sensitive to or do not reflect student progress.</p> <p>Creates inconsistent demands on students.</p> <p>Reduces self-esteem.</p> <p>Reinforces feelings of alienation.</p>	<p>Provide for alternative grading practices, including checklists of competency attainment, and letters to parents identifying specific progress.</p> <p>Establish consistency between teachers in how grades are calculated.</p>		
<p>Prerequisite courses.</p>	<p>Discourages students from taking courses and trying new areas.</p>	<p>Establish prerequisites only where absolutely necessary.</p> <p>Allow exceptions to prerequisites where student backgrounds may suffice for prerequisites.</p> <p>Allow exploratory periods.</p>		
<p>Unlimited homework assignments.</p> <p>Applied practice and study exercises expected to be conducted as homework the majority of the time.</p>	<p>Causes slow-learning students to be overwhelmed by homework.</p> <p>Results in failing grades/ loss of credits.</p> <p>Prevents students from developing adequate study habits.</p>	<p>Establish class time for practice and study exercises.</p> <p>Provide after school, before school, and weekend supervised study areas.</p> <p>Implement a phase-in system, gradually increasing homework expectations from elementary through secondary.</p> <p>Allow reduced class loads, allowing students more time to keep up and do well.</p>		

Discipline

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Discipline and punishment carried out by teachers and principals only.</p>	<p>Reduces students' responsibility for good behavior.</p> <p>Causes students to feel powerless and alienated.</p>	<p>Allow student input into designing rules and punishment for behavior.</p> <p>Allow student involvement in discipline and punishment.</p> <p>Meet with students throughout the school year to discuss rules, responsibility, and plans for change. Implement "quality of school life" programs.</p>		
<p>Teachers in departmentalized programs with their own rules for discipline.</p>	<p>Creates different expectations in each class, confusion, and mixed reactions.</p>	<p>Establish common rules that all staff can agree upon.</p> <p>Limit the number of rules to as few as possible to avoid over emphasis on rules and punishment.</p>		
<p>Counseling services limited to crisis situations.</p> <p>Counseling staff required to do administrative assignments, taking time away from direct interaction with students.</p>	<p>Limits students' access to counselors.</p> <p>Students recognize counselors as not being helpful.</p> <p>Reduces help when students need it.</p>	<p>Provide counselors with para-professional and secretarial help to encourage more time with students.</p> <p>Establish a counseling program involving all students.</p> <p>Establish counseling as a service across all staff.</p> <p>Lower counselor/student ratios.</p> <p>Target students for increased help.</p>		

Discipline

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Corporal punishment applied liberally by administrators and/or teachers.</p>	<p>Establishes fear in students about attending school.</p> <p>Creates feelings of being abused or misused.</p>	<p>Establish clear guidelines on when corporal punishment can be used.</p> <p>Apply corporal punishment conservatively.</p>		
<p>Absence of clear, written communication on rules and discipline.</p>	<p>Creates misunderstanding about the consequences of behavior.</p> <p>Prevents students from filing a grievance and participating in due process.</p>	<p>Clearly communicate expected behavior and consequences of positive/negative behavior to students and parents.</p> <p>Reward proper, expected behavior.</p> <p>Establish grievance procedures.</p> <p>Establish written guidelines for students and parents on due process and rights and responsibilities.</p> <p>Incorporate model rules found in work places. Categorize rules by consequences/rewards. Example: Behavior disruptive to the learning environment yields severe consequences. Behavior not disruptive to the learning environment yields flexible problem solving.</p>		

School and Community Relations

Policies and/or Practices	Negative Effects	Alternative	Local Analysis	
			Problem Yes/No	Objective
<p>Failure to establish role models within the teaching staff that reflect the cultural diversity of the community/student enrollment.</p>	<p>Reduces minority students' ability to form a sense of identity with positions of authority and decision making.</p> <p>Reduces majority students' ability to form a sense of identity with different cultural role models in positions of authority and decision making.</p>	<p>Adopt policies requiring that faculty and staff represent the racial makeup of the student body in every school.</p> <p>Hire para-professionals or incorporate volunteer assistants to supplement the staff to meet cross-cultural demands.</p> <p>Develop teams of teachers made up of different cultural backgrounds to teach, address student problems, counsel, coordinate community services, etc.</p>		
<p>Reporting to parents and guardians without notice to or involvement of the student.</p>	<p>Establishes distrust of adults.</p> <p>Violates privacy.</p> <p>Causes feelings of being watched.</p> <p>Causes feelings of not being responsible enough to be involved.</p> <p>Causes rejection and intimidation.</p>	<p>Inform students when parents are contacted.</p> <p>Involve students in communicating with parents/guardians.</p> <p>Let students assume responsibility to forward messages and design solutions to problems.</p>		

This questionnaire can be used with students to help guide professional decisions regarding changes in policies and practices. Student responses can be ranked and utilized to prioritize policies and practices needing change.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The school district is doing a study to determine what things school districts do to influence students to drop out rather than stay in school. Please place a check by all of the statements below that describe something that influenced your decision to drop out of school. Also place a check by any statement that describes something that caused you to not do well in school.

- 1. The school did not accept credits earned by correspondence.
- 2. I was retained one or more times before dropping out.
- 3. I had to be a full-time student with a full schedule.
- 4. The groups I studied with were considered low ability.
- 5. When I failed a grade I had to repeat everything rather than just the classes I failed.
- 6. Because of my pregnancy I was encouraged to leave.
- 7. Out-of-school suspensions and/or expulsions were a way to get out of work.
- 8. The way I dressed was not acceptable.
- 9. Teachers did not teach me the way I could learn.
- 10. The scheduling system did not allow me to choose my classes or teachers.
- 11. The number of required classes was increased to the point where I could not keep up with the work.
- 12. I had to take too many classes each day.
- 13. The school did not allow me to go part time and work part time.
- 14. Rewards were only given to students with good grades.
- 15. Teachers lectured most of the time.
- 16. Counselors and teachers did not help me feel that I belonged in school.
- 17. Teachers and counselors did not help me get started when I entered a new school.
- 18. My classes were short and switched so often I never had a chance to meet anyone and get to know them well.
- 19. Discipline and punishment rules were unfair to me.
- 20. Different teachers had different rules, which confused me.
- 21. Minority students were made to feel like they did not belong.
- 22. I needed a minority teacher/counselor to really understand my problems.
- 23. My parents did not help me to do well.
- 24. When I got help from a service outside of school it conflicted with my school schedule. I couldn't keep up all my classes and work on my problems at the same time.
- 25. My teachers did things that helped boys more than girls or girls more than boys.
- 26. Only a certain number of students were allowed to participate in clubs, sports, and other extra-curricular activities. I was never good enough.

- _____ 27. I could not afford to pay fees for books, tools, and materials.
- _____ 28. Counselors did not try to help me.
- _____ 29. I needed more individual help to learn.
- _____ 30. My drug and/or alcohol problem was not recognized or treated.
- _____ 31. The punishment used by teachers and principals was scary.
- _____ 32. The rules for punishment were not explained well and understood.
- _____ 33. I missed school because I knew I could miss a certain number of days before anyone would do anything.
- _____ 34. Suspension from school was a relief, so I did things to get suspended.
- _____ 35. I was not accepted into school until my records were sent from another school and I missed too much work.
- _____ 36. Physical education was embarrassing because of showering.
- _____ 37. I could not afford the proper clothes for physical education.
- _____ 38. Physical education activities were mostly things that I could not do well.
- _____ 39. Most of my teachers did not care whether I did well.
- _____ 40. I did not understand why I had to go to special education classes.
- _____ 41. Although I tried to do the work, my grades were always low.
- _____ 42. I did not take some courses because I had to take other courses to get in.
- _____ 43. I could not keep up with homework assignments.
- _____ 44. Reports were sent to my parents/guardians without me knowing about them.
- _____ 45. Caring for my child was more important than going to school.

Feel free to add any additional ideas that you have about what caused you to not do well in school or to drop out.

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