

# **Building Bridges to Educational Success:**

The McLean County School  
Completion Research Project Report

June 2004  
Illinois State University

*Stevenson Center*  
for Community and Economic Development  
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# Acknowledgements

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The project team also wholeheartedly thanks the McLean County organizations and residents who participated in key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Their thoughtful and generous insights will help to inform community efforts to prevent students from leaving high school before graduation. Particularly important contributions were made by Bloomington High School, YouthBuild of McLean County, Project Oz, and the Regional Office of Education, which either hosted focus groups or provided research-based information to support project efforts. In addition, the team wishes to thank representatives of model “dropout prevention” and “second-chance” programs located outside of McLean County for sharing their experiences and advice: our planning will benefit from their expertise.

The McLean County School Completion Research Project was conceived by Dr. Lucinda Beier (Illinois State University) as a way to provide students in the interdisciplinary Applied Community and Economic Development sequence with the experience of conducting professional applied research commissioned by a community organization and, at the same time, offer the community research-based information to support planning of new collaborative initiatives. Special thanks are due to Ms. Cindy Caldwell, Staff Secretary, College of Arts and Sciences Research Office, Illinois State University, for supporting contract management and class activities.

The project was conducted in two stages and involved the work of two over-lapping groups of graduate students, supervised by Dr. Beier. Students in POL 474: Community Research I, assisted by Graduate Assistant Beverly Beyer, reviewed the scholarly literature and collected quantitative and qualitative data for the project. This group included:

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The students' hard work, talent, and sincere value for the well-being of McLean County residents—young and old—has produced a research product that well represents Illinois State University's service mission.

**A PDF version of this research report is available at the website of the Stevenson Center for Community and Economic Development, Illinois State University, <http://www.stevensoncenter.org/>**

**Acknowledgements**

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# 1 Executive Summary

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## Report perspective

Educational attainment is strongly linked to individual and community well being. High school diplomas and college degrees translate into good jobs and lifestyles. It is equally true, however, that students who drop out of high school face obstacles that affect both themselves and their communities. McLean County residents are comparatively well educated, with 91 percent of people over age 25 having high school diplomas and 36 percent having a bachelor's or advanced college degree, compared to 81 percent and 26 percent respectively for the State of Illinois.<sup>1</sup> McLean County is also comparatively prosperous, with families enjoying incomes higher than the state average.<sup>2</sup> However, more than 300 students leave McLean County high schools each year before graduation and dropout rates for most schools are stable or rising—exceeding those in demographically comparable Champaign County and in the United States as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Rich in both educational and service resources, the County has an opportunity to change this situation.

In 2003 the United Way of McLean County commissioned faculty and students of the Applied Community and Economic Development masters degree sequence at Illinois State University to conduct research about why some students in McLean County leave high school prior to graduation and what can be done to increase the number of students who finish school. Project research was conducted by Illinois State University graduate students in autumn 2003. A somewhat differently composed group of students wrote the final report in May and June 2004.

The primary purpose of this research project was to identify resources and solutions that can be used to increase the number of McLean County students who graduate from high school. The McLean County School Completion Research Project (MCSCR) team recognized that many factors contribute to this issue and a broad range of perspectives exists about what to do about it. Thus, MCSCR aimed both to increase awareness of the issues and to provide a voice to young people, parents, educators, and service providers in the County. Further, this report suggests models and recommendations to inform future action.

## Research activities and methods

The McLean County School Completion Research Project employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the issue of high school completion in McLean County. Research activities included:

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<sup>1</sup> Fact Sheet of Highlights from the Census 2000 Demographic Profiles for McLean County, IL and the State of Illinois, <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

## 1. Executive Summary

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- Review of the scholarly literature on reasons and remedies for student failure to complete high school;
- Review of best practice and models literature on dropout prevention and second-chance programming;
- Review of local reports, directories and planning documents;
- Review of government data and reports;
- Conduct of eight focus groups representing a wide range of perspectives, including those of high school students (12), youth who left school before graduation (5), educators (5), and service providers (19); and
- Conduct of 32 key informant interviews with young people (4), parents (4), service providers (14), and educators (11).

## Data

Project census data indicate that McLean County's population is growing. During the period of 1990 – 2000 the number of residents that live in poverty slightly decreased. At the same time, the median household income increased substantially. (See Figure 1.)

**Figure 1: McLean County Population and Poverty in 1990 and 2000**

	1990	2000
<b>Total Population</b>	129,180	150,433
<b>Individuals under 18 (% of total population)</b>	29,822 (23.1%)	35,292 (23.5%)
<b>Individuals below poverty (% of total population)</b>	13,973 (10.8%)	13,488 (9.7%)
<b>Individuals under 18 below poverty (% of individuals under 18)</b>	2,953 (9.9%)	2,601 (7.4%)
<b>Median household income</b>	\$31,366	\$47,021

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *1990 Census of Population and Housing*, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Table QT-P1A and Summary Tape File 3: Tables P080A and P117, Washington, DC; *2000 Census of Population and Housing*, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Table QT-P1 and Summary File 3: Table DP-3, Washington, DC.

Growth of McLean County population includes an increase in diversity. While the County's white population has increased by 10.8 percent between the years of 1990 and 2000, the various minority populations have increased by 20 to 108 percent. (See Figure 2.)

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**Figure 2: McLean County Population by Race and Ethnicity in 1990 and 2000<sup>4</sup>**

	White	Black or African American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other race	Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino (of any race)
<b>1990</b>	121,057	5,563	203	1,624	733	n/a	1,671
<b>2000</b>	134,170	9,305	245	3,136	1,524	2,053	3,833
<b>Percent of increase</b>	10.8%	67.3%	20.7%	93.1%	107.9%	n/a	129.4%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Tables P006 and P008, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Tables P4 and P7, Washington, DC.

**Figure 3: Dropout Rates in McLean County in 1998 and 2002**

Type of school	School Name	Low-income students (%)	Dropout rate, 1998 (%)	Dropout rate, 2002 (%)
Urban	Bloomington High School	30.8	5.6	5.0
	Normal Community West High School	16.8	4.7	5.0
	Normal Community High School	9.0	3.1	5.8
Rural	Chenoa High School	27.9	3.2	9.0
	Lexington High School	15.7	2.6	6.3
	Olympia High School	11.5	4.3	4.7
	Ridgeview High School	9.5	2.6	1.7
	Heyworth High School	8.4	3.3	5.0
	Gridley High School	9.9	0.8	1.8
	Leroy High School	6.1	4.1	5.3
	Tri-Valley High School	2.8	0.4	1.8
	<b>Average dropout rate in 11 McLean County high schools</b>		<b>3.2</b>	<b>4.7</b>

Source: Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

<sup>4</sup> In 2000, respondents to the U.S. census could choose more than one race, while in 1990 respondents could choose only one race. Thus, comparisons for race between 1990 and 2000 are not completely accurate. In 2000 in McLean County, for instance, about 1.4 percent of the respondents chose more than one race. Also, Hispanics are not a race, but a separate classification; about 36 percent of Hispanics in McLean County in 2000, however, identified themselves as “Other Race.”

## 1. Executive Summary

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According to the recent Assessment 2000 study of health and human services in McLean County “there are about 23,137 McLean County residents between the ages of 10 and 19, which is 16 percent of the total population.”<sup>5</sup> To educate youth of McLean County fourteen high schools are available: Bloomington High School, Chenoa High School, Normal Community West High School, Lexington High School, Olympia High School, Ridgeview High School, Normal Community High School, Heyworth High School, Gridley High School, Leroy High School, Tri-Valley High School, Calvary Baptist High School, University Lab High School, and Central Catholic High School.

Data on dropout rates in McLean County were collected for the five-year period from 1998 to 2002. The average rate of students that dropped out of high school in McLean County rose from 3.2 percent in 1998 to 4.7 percent in 2002. This compares unfavorably to the decrease in State of Illinois dropout rates (from 6.2 percent in 1998 to 5.1 percent in 2002). (See Figure 3.)

Dropout rates in rural schools vary more than in the urban ones. In the high schools where most of the students are from wealthier families, the dropout rate is much lower than in schools where more poor students are enrolled. (See Figure 3.)

## McLean County resources

Our research indicates that McLean County offers both dropout prevention and second-chance programs to address issues related to high school completion. The Path Directory of Human Services lists 112 human service agencies in McLean County. The Youth Services Directory, published in April of 2003, indicates that there are 47 community agencies that are listed under the heading Education and Training. These Education and Training agencies include programs that range from assistance with English as a second language to tutoring.

Further, researchers learned that McLean County schools and community-based organizations take a variety of approaches in providing services to youth. These approaches include:

- Mentoring programs;
- Collaborative programs;
- Alternative School program;
- Community based organization programs;
- Targeted programs; and
- Informal approaches and services.

However, in project interviews and focus groups, informants noted that there are challenges associated with reducing the number of students who drop out in the County. Based on research conducted for

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<sup>5</sup>Applied Social Research Unit, Assessment 2000. Health & Human Services in McLean County. Summary Report. (Normal, IL: Illinois State University, 2000), 75.

## 1. Executive Summary

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MCSCRCP, the project team concludes that these challenges may be considered within the broad categories of:

- Funding;
- Programming; and
- Relationships.

*Funding:* Experts and local informants tend to agree that financial limitations present ongoing significant challenges to our educational system. Illinois' state and local funding formula, plus the No Child Left Behind Act, increase pressure on local education. The current school funding formula, which depends heavily on property taxes, allows for some school districts to be adequately funded while others are unable to meet the needs of their students; Illinois is at the bottom of the list of states regarding the gap between prosperous and poor districts.

This situation, bleak as it is, creates an opportunity for McLean County residents and organizations to work more closely together to develop innovative cost-efficient ways to meet local needs. One interesting observation from MCSCRCP research is that local educators and service providers say they are already providing the programs and services project informants say are needed in the community. This suggests need for greater communication and collaboration between service providers, educators, and community residents.

*Programming:* MCSCRCP research indicates local need for flexibility in standard secondary curricula, as well as special programs for at-risk students. Although schools are constrained by laws and regulations, it is apparent that “one size does not fit all” students' needs. Project informants call for better counseling and guidance regarding personal and career development, the need for work experience for students that are not college-bound, and the need for flexible options outside of the traditional school curriculum for students to make up credit hours needed for graduation. Project informants also indicate a need to reassess and change ways schools deal with their social environments. With increasing diversity of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic class in local schools, it is increasingly important that educators understand cultural, financial, and domestic issues that affect students' educational engagement and performance.

Research reveals a range of models for alternative approaches and programs that could be adapted to help students who are not successful with conventional academic courses and schedules to pick up the credits and skills needed for independence and success. Additionally, training may be used to address harassment, bullying, and diversity issues.

*Relationships:* Project informants and experts agree that the route to academic success begins with one strong relationship between a young child and a teacher. The relationship between parents and schools is also key to student success. Teachers and parents must communicate productively—a task that takes effort, training, and open-mindedness on both sides. Role modeling, mentoring, tutoring, and adult attention to self-destructive behavior (e.g., truancy, substance abuse, family violence, pregnancy) are proven ways to reduce dropout rates.

## 1. Executive Summary

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# Recommendations

The McLean County School Completion Research Project recommends the following measures to maximize the number and percentage of County students who complete high school.

### *Funding:*

- Advocate for change in Illinois' school funding formula;
- Make imaginative use of local resources, including community-based organizations, volunteers, and businesses, to provide a range of educational alternatives;
- Continue communicating school and program funding needs to the wider community; and
- Expand awareness that performance-based funding discourages at-risk students and may increase dropout rates.

### *Programming and Support:*

- Recognize that “one size does not fit all”;
- Deal with bullying and harassment at the source, rather than pressuring victims to avoid or accommodate bullies;
- Expand training for teachers, students, and families regarding diversity issues, including ethnic, racial, disability, and sexual preference differences;
- Improve communication and collaboration among educators, parents, social service providers, community-based organizations, and businesses;
- Use in-school rather than out-of-school suspensions for students who break school rules; and
- Use imagination and local resources to increase flexibility and relevance in the high school curriculum by:
  - Expanding access to vocational programs;
  - Offering computer-based self-study for high school credit; and
  - Considering implementing a case management model as an enhancement of the Alternative School program.

### *Relationships:*

- Recognize cultural and social class diversity issues as they affect family relationships with teachers, administrators, and school activities;
- Continue to foster family support of students at all grade levels;
- Provide training and incentives for one-to-one relationships between teachers and students;
- Expand after-school tutoring and mentoring programs; and
- Convene a forum or town meeting structured to enable students, parents, educators, social service providers, businesses, and other McLean County residents to share concerns and perspectives regarding why some students drop out before graduation and what can be done to increase high school completion. Use this meeting to spearhead planning for new collaborative initiatives.

# 2 Introduction

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## Report perspective

Educational attainment is strongly linked to individual and community well being. High school diplomas and college degrees translate into good jobs and lifestyles. It is equally true, however, that students who drop out of high school face obstacles that affect both themselves and their communities. McLean County residents are comparatively well educated, with 91 percent of people over age 25 having high school diplomas and 36 percent having a bachelor's or advanced college degree, compared to 81 percent and 26 percent respectively for the State of Illinois.<sup>6</sup> McLean County is also comparatively prosperous, with families enjoying incomes higher than the state average.<sup>7</sup> However, more than 300 students leave McLean County high schools each year before graduation and dropout rates for most schools are stable or rising—exceeding those in demographically comparable Champaign County and in the United States as a whole.<sup>8</sup> Rich in both educational and service resources, the County has an opportunity to change this situation.

In 2003 the United Way of McLean County commissioned faculty and students of the Applied Community and Economic Development masters degree sequence at Illinois State University to conduct research about why some students in McLean County leave high school prior to graduation and what can be done to increase the number of students who finish school. For this research, the McLean County School Completion Research Project (MCSCR) drew on Assessment 2000 (a recent study of community health and human services) as well as scholarly literature, publicly available data, and original qualitative data.<sup>9</sup> Project research was conducted by Illinois State University graduate students in autumn 2003. A somewhat differently composed group of graduate students wrote the final report in May and June 2004.

The primary purpose of this research project was to identify resources and solutions that can be used to increase the number of McLean County students who graduate from high school. The MCSCR team recognized that many factors contribute to this issue and a broad range of perspectives exists about what to do about it. Thus, MCSCR aimed both to increase awareness of the issues and to provide a voice to young people, parents, educators, and service providers in the County. Further, this report suggests models and recommendations to inform future action.

## Research activities and methods

The McLean County School Completion Research Project employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to explore the issue of high school completion in McLean County. The report depends on

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<sup>6</sup> Fact Sheet of Highlights from the Census 2000 Demographic Profiles for McLean County, IL and the State of Illinois, <http://factfinder.census.gov>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

<sup>9</sup> Applied Social Research Unit, Assessment 2000.

## 2. Introduction

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secondary data gathered from federal, state and local sources, as well as original data collected locally. Research activities included:

- Review of the scholarly literature on reasons and remedies for student failure to complete high school;
- Review of best practice and models literature on dropout prevention and second-chance programming;
- Review of local reports, directories, and planning documents;
- Review of government data and reports;
- Conduct of eight focus groups representing a wide range of perspectives, including those of high school students (12), youth who left school before graduation (5), educators (5), and service providers (19); and
- Conduct of 32 key informant interviews with young people (4), parents (4), service providers (14), and educators (11).

In all, more than 70 McLean County residents participated directly in the MCSCRCP project.

## Report structure

First, this report acknowledges the contributions of those who offered their time, energy, and other resources to the MCSCRCP. A Table of Contents and a Table of Figures are provided for the reader's use. The Executive Summary offers a brief overview of the project. Section 2, the Introduction (this section) discusses the approach and research activities utilized by the project. Section 3, which focuses on school completion in McLean County, begins with a discussion of definitions, then provides demographic and occupational data for McLean County, information about high school completion rates and trends, and diverse local perspectives about why local students drop out of school. Section 4, which considers approaches to dropout prevention and second-chance programming, begins with discussion of the professional literature and then offers information about current McLean County approaches and services. This section provides recommendations from area young people, educators, service providers, and parents about what should be done to prevent students from leaving school before graduation and describes selected model dropout prevention and second-chance programs that could be adapted for use in McLean County. Section 5 summarizes the major conclusions of MCSCRCP research, and offers recommendations for future actions. Appendix 1 contains project documents, including a "Fact Sheet" used to communicate with research informants; the focus group facilitator's guide; and instruments used for key informant interviews. Appendix 2 provides a bibliography of works cited in the report and additional recommended sources. Appendix 3 describes selected model programs that have been successful elsewhere in the United States.

# 3 School Completion in McLean County

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## What is a “dropout?”

Perhaps one of the most daunting tasks facing those concerned about high school dropouts is simply defining the term. The use of the word “dropout” can carry with it some loaded connotations. However, it is also a commonly and officially accepted term.

According to Wenifort C. Washington, Executive Assistant of the School Improvement/Specialist Services in Akron, Ohio, defining the population in question is not an easy task. Washington asserts, “A major problem associated with the issue of dropouts is identifying a uniform definition and consistent reporting format . . . No two school systems, social service agencies, or government agencies use the same definition.”<sup>10</sup> Washington further points out that since most information that is collected on school dropouts is gathered at the local level, there are large discrepancies in data collection and reporting from school to school and state to state.

In spite of the inconsistencies in terminology, there have been efforts made to find common ground. The federal Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) Urban Superintendent Network met in 1987 to devise a common definition of dropout. This group agreed on the following definition of a dropout: “A pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school.”<sup>11</sup>

### Defining high school dropouts

According to the Illinois State Board of Education, there is no common official definition of dropouts. Lack of a common definition poses problems for McLean County school administrators, since high school graduation rates are an important measure of school effectiveness and quality. One educator interviewed for this project said the definition used locally “includes students who die and fifth-year seniors.”

The National Center for Education Statistics offers the following definitions of event, status, and cohort dropout rates “. . . to provide a more comprehensive picture of the dropout problem in the United States.”

- Event rates describe the proportion of students in a given age range who leave school each year without completing a high school program . . .
- Status rates provide cumulative data on dropouts among all young adults within a specified age range . . .

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<sup>10</sup> Wenifort C. Washington, “Linking School and Employment: Achieving Success for All Students,” in Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field, ed. Robert C. Morris (Lancaster: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 215.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

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- Cohort rates measure what happens to a group of students over a period of time. These rates are based on repeated measures of a cohort of students with shared experiences and reveal how many students starting in a specific grade drop out over time.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Additional terms and definitions**

##### School leaver

An alternative for the term “dropout,” commonly used in Canada and Great Britain, is “school leaver.”<sup>13</sup> “School leaver” may have the same meaning as a “dropout.” However, the term “school leaver” has less negative connotations than the term “dropout” because “dropout” implies failure and self-destructive intent on the part of the student whereas “school leaver” implies that the student has made a comparatively neutral decision to leave school prior to graduation.

##### Fadeout

In a report conducted by David E. Engel, Heinz Professor of Education at the University of Pittsburgh, the term “fadeout” was frequently used to profile potential dropouts. According to Engel, “Students who experienced increasing absenteeism were candidates for dropping out – what we have identified as ‘fadeouts.’”<sup>14</sup> Other experts refer to these students as in-school dropouts.

##### Pushout

One authority identifies “pushouts” as students who “Call attention to themselves continually and are very noticeable. They avoid failure situations by avoiding school. . . Suspension and expulsion are the means by which these students are purged or pushed out of the system.”<sup>15</sup> Schools have incentives to push disruptive or alienated students out of school because such students negatively affect achievement scores and make life more difficult for teachers and administrators.

##### At-risk

The term “at-risk” is closely linked with the term “dropout.” An at-risk student is one that has a high potential for becoming a dropout, fadeout, pushout, or school leaver. Dennis N. Jackson, manager of the Educational Opportunity Program for At-Risk Students in Indianapolis, Indiana, writes:

Any student who runs the risk of not acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to become a productive adult . . . is at-risk. Therefore, the term “student at risk” refers to any child who has been adversely affected by one, or more, of the factors associated with poor health, economic status, family conditions, linguistic mismatch, social maladjustment, and community change/upheaval. It is the inability to cope with these adversities that negatively affects school performance and attendance. Indicators may include: underdeveloped language skills, drug and

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<sup>12</sup> Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000. National Center for Education Statistics.  
[http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub\\_2001/1.asp?nav=1](http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/droppub_2001/1.asp?nav=1) (2000).

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Deirdre Kelly and Jane Gaskell, eds., Debating Dropouts: Critical Policy and Research Perspectives on School Leaving (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> David E. Engel, “School Leavers in American Society: Interviews with School Drop Outs/Stop-Outs,” in Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field, ed. Robert C. Morris (Lancaster: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Robert F. Kronick and Charles H. Hargis, Dropouts: Who Drops Out and Why—And the Recommended Action, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1998), 7-8.

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

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alcohol abuse, disruptive and/or delinquent behavior, inattentiveness, chronically withdrawn behavior, excessive school absence, dropping out of school, and low academic achievement.<sup>16</sup>

However, the term “at-risk” is also identified by some experts as a way to “create youths as . . . subjects of blame and pathology and thus. . . constructed as deserving of particular paternalistic state interventions.”<sup>17</sup> Use of the term can both silence and disempower the very people educators and service providers hope to help.

The terms discussed in this section are used by academic experts and model program staff members, as well as McLean County educators, service providers, and residents to discuss issues associated with some students’ failure to graduate from high school. Thus, these terms will appear throughout this report without any intention to cast blame.

## McLean County population

McLean County is growing. The County’s population increased from 129,180 in 1990 to 150,433 in 2000 (14%).<sup>18</sup> See Figure 4 for population data for various age groups.

### Poverty and Income

The decade between 1990 and 2000 also shows a slight decline in the percentage of residents who are living in poverty; Census figures indicate that in 1990, 10.8% of the population was below poverty while in 2000, 9.7% was below poverty. The decade also shows a substantial increase in median household income from \$31,366 in 1990 to \$47,021 in 2000. (See Figure 5.)

### Median income

There are vast differences in earnings of men and women. The 2000 median income for working males over 15 years of age in McLean County was \$27,932 whereas the median income for working females was only \$16,327. As could be expected, the median incomes for individuals 15 and older that have full-time, year-round work are much higher. (See Figure 6.)

### Occupational distribution

The differences in median income between men and women can be further explained when looking at the occupational distribution by sex as can be seen in Figure 7. Women are more likely than men to work in service, sales, and office jobs where wages are typically lower. These occupations also require less education so it will be important to investigate how educational attainment relates to these occupations. It

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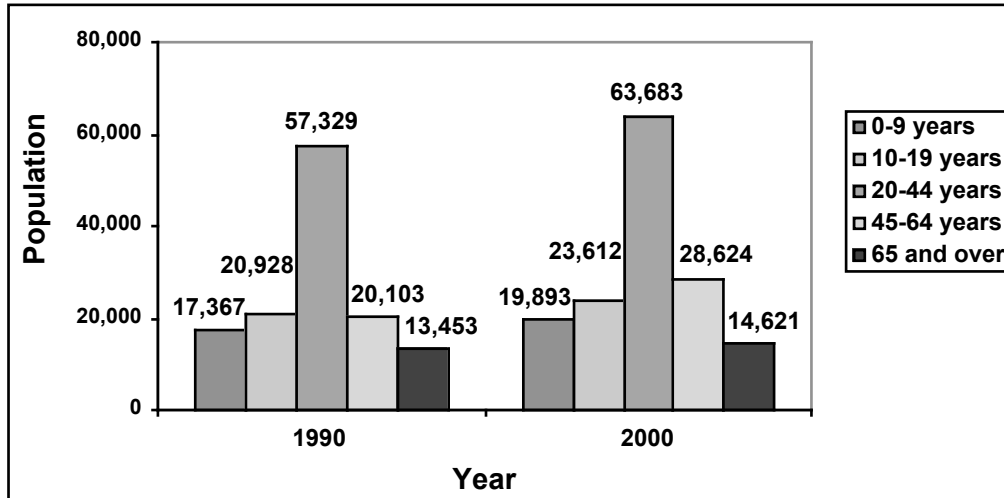
<sup>16</sup>Dennis N. Jackson, “Moving from Reactive to Proactive Planning for Students At-Risk: Indiana’s Story,” in Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field, ed. Robert C. Morris (Lancaster: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 240.

<sup>17</sup>Leslie G. Roman, “Debating ‘Dropouts’: The Moral Panic and Spectacle Over ‘Youth at Risk,’” in Debating Dropouts, ed. Deirdre Kelly and Jane Gaskells (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1996),153.

<sup>18</sup>U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Table QT-P1A, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Table QT-P1, Washington, DC.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

**Figure 4: McLean County Population by Age Groups in 1990 and 2000**



U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Table QT-P1A, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Table QT-P1, Washington, DC.

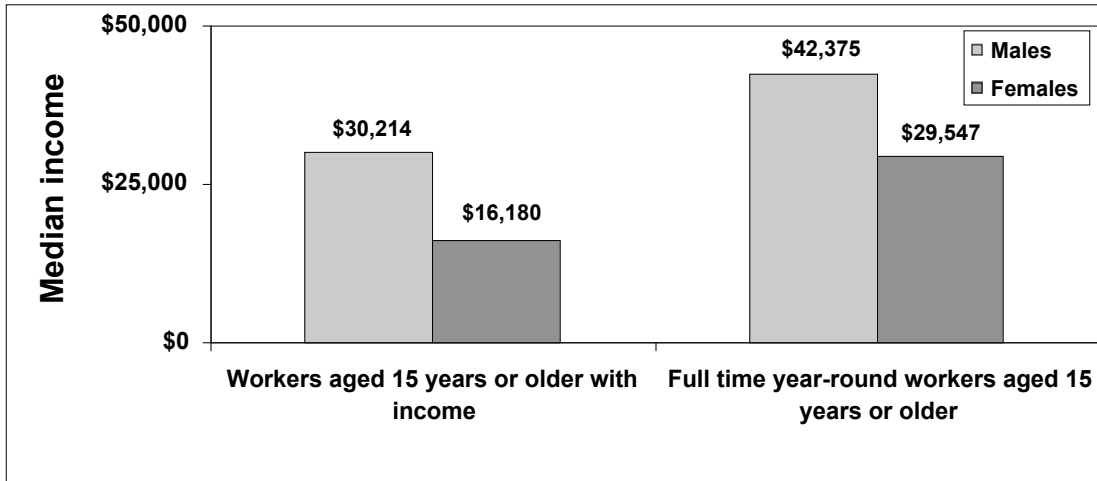
**Figure 5: McLean County Population and Poverty in 1990 and 2000**

	1990	2000
<b>Total Population</b>	129,180	150,433
<b>Individuals under 18 (% of total population)</b>	29,822 (23.1%)	35,292 (23.5%)
<b>Individuals below poverty (% of total population)</b>	13,973 (10.8%)	13,488 (9.7%)
<b>Individuals under 18 below poverty (% of individuals under 18)</b>	2,953 (9.9%)	2,601 (7.4%)
<b>Median household income</b>	\$31,366	\$47,021

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Mclean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Table QT-P1A and Summary Tape File 3: Tables P080A and P117, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Table QT-P1 and Summary File 3: Table DP-3, Washington, DC.

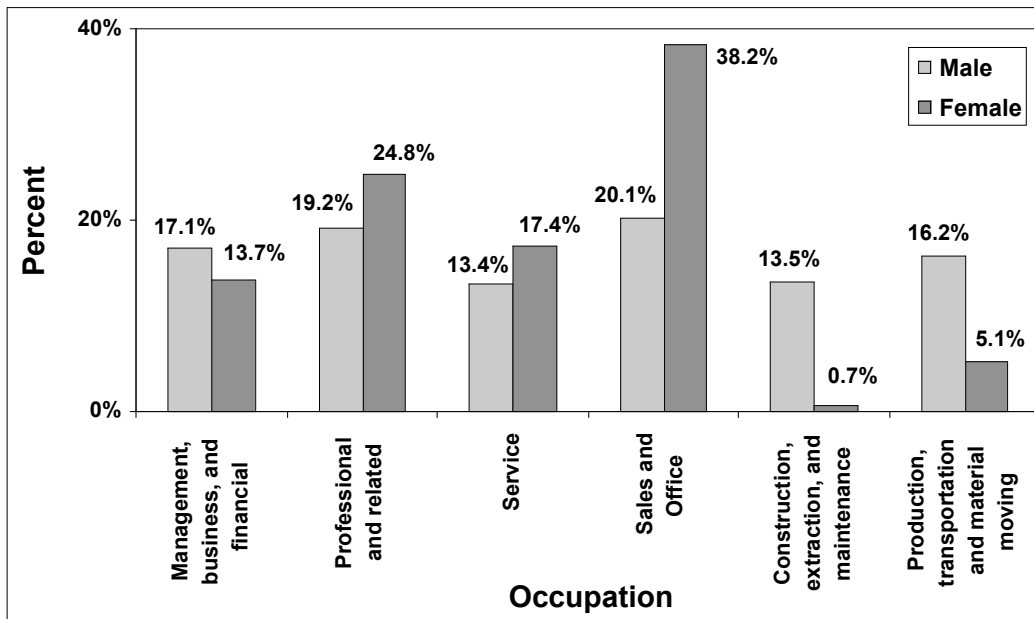
### 3. School Completion in McLean County

**Figure 6: McLean County Median Income for Working Individuals over 15 Years of Age in 2000**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, Mclean County, IL, Summary File 3: Table QT-P33, Washington, DC..

**Figure 7: McLean County Occupation by Sex in 2000**



U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 3: Table QT-P27, Washington, DC

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

is possible that special programs are needed to increase the skills of women in the County. When looking at individuals who have left high school early, it is important to discuss the types of jobs for which they will be eligible, and perhaps project income based on these jobs. Overall, McLean County is prospering; however, this causes concern when considering individuals who are not. An increase in educational attainment for the County’s population is likely to lead to more skilled occupations and thus higher income.

#### Race and ethnicity

Population growth has increased the County’s diversity. The County’s population is predominantly white but between the years of 1990 and 2000 its minority population grew significantly. All of the minority groups in the County at least doubled during that decade, while white population growth was less pronounced. (See Figure 8.)

**Figure 8: McLean County Population by Race and Ethnicity in 1990 and 2000<sup>19</sup>**

	White	Black or African American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Other race	Two or more races	Hispanic or Latino (of any race)
1990	121,057	5,563	203	1,624	733	n/a	1,671
2000	134,170	9,305	245	3,136	1,524	2,053	3,833
Percent of increase	10.8%	67.3%	20.7%	93.1%	107.9%	n/a	129.4%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 1: Tables P006 and P008, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 1: Tables P4 and P7, Washington, DC.

#### Language spoken at home

McLean County’s diversity is not limited to its racial make-up. The 2000 Census also reports diversity of the languages McLean County residents speak at home. Six percent of McLean County residents speak a language other than English at home and 2.1 percent of those residents speak English less than “very well.” Of the six percent of residents speaking languages other than English at home, 2.5 percent of them speak Spanish. (See Figure 9.)

#### Housing in McLean County

The percent of the population living below the poverty level remained roughly the same between 1990 and 2000, decreasing by approximately one percent. However, the large increase in the median household

<sup>19</sup> In 2000, respondents to the U.S. census could choose more than one race, while in 1990 respondents could choose only one race. Thus, comparisons for race between 1990 and 2000 are not completely accurate. In 2000 in McLean County, for instance, about 1.4 percent of the respondents chose more than one race. Also, Hispanics are not a race, but a separate classification; about 36 percent of Hispanics in McLean County in 2000, however, identified themselves as “Other Race.”

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

income in the county suggests a widening income gap between those with higher incomes and those with lower incomes. The cost of living also increased. Median mortgage and rental payments indicate that the median mortgage payment increased from \$684 in 1990 to \$1,058 in 2000. It is also important to point out that the percent of households making mortgage payments which equal 35 percent or more of their household income nearly doubled. Rent payments also increased, but the increase did not appear as drastic as the mortgage payment increase. The percentage of households spending 35 percent or more of

**Figure 9: Languages Spoken at Home in McLean County in 2000**

	Number	Percent of total population
Total population 5 years and over	140,745	
English only	132,245	94.0%
Language other than English	8,500	6.0%
Speak English less than "very well"	2,912	2.1%
Spanish	3,542	2.5%
Speak English less than "very well"	1,370	1.0%
Other Indo-European languages	2,575	1.8%
Speak English less than "very well"	550	0.4%
Asian and Pacific Island languages	2,035	1.4%
Speak English less than "very well"	917	0.7%

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 3: Table QT-P17, Washington, DC

**Figure 10: McLean County Housing in 1990 and 2000**

	1990	2000
Owner-occupied housing units	24,087	31,993
Median mortgage payment and selected monthly owner costs	\$684	\$1,058
Mortgage 35% or more of household income (% of owner-occupied housing)	1,496 (6.2%)	3,293 (10.3%)
Renter-occupied housing units	16,342	18,762
Median gross rent payment	\$387	\$533
Rent 35% or more of household income (% of renter-occupied housing)	4,833 (29.6%)	5,167 (27.5%)

U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary Tape File 3: Tables H043A, H050, H052A, and H058, Washington, DC; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, McLean County, IL, Summary File 3: Table DP-4, Washington, DC.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

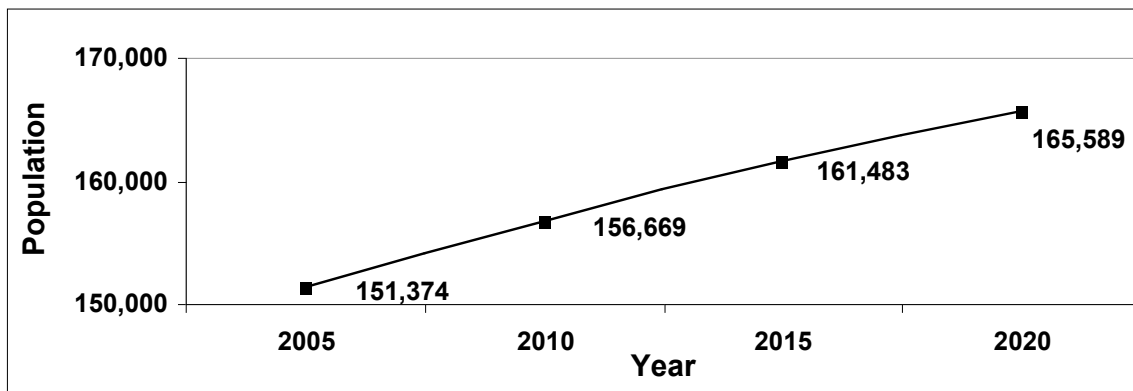
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their income on rent has decreased slightly; however 27.5 percent of renting households are spending over 35 percent of their household income on rent. (See Figure 10.)

#### Population and age projections

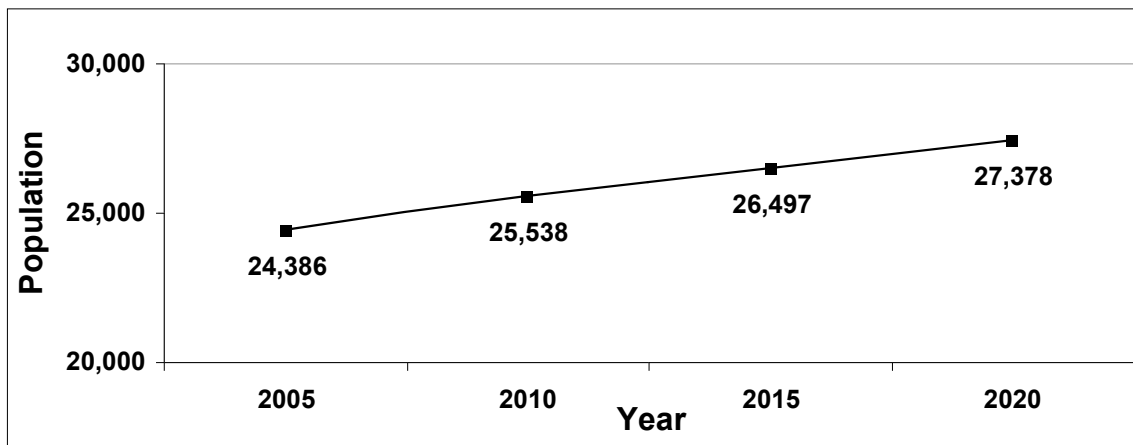
McLean County is expected to continue to grow. The projected population of McLean County in 2020 is 165,589. (See Figure 11.) As the County population increases, the service needs of its residents are also likely to grow.

**Figure 11: McLean County Population Projections for All Races, 2005 to 2020**



Source: Treadway, R. and D.J. Ervin, *Illinois Population Trends 1990 to 2020*, (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, 1997).

**Figure 12: McLean County Population Projections for Ages 10 to 19 for All Races, 2005 to 2020**



Source: Treadway, R. and D.J. Ervin, *Illinois Population Trends 1990 to 2020*, (Springfield, IL: State of Illinois, 1997).

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

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Children under age 14 and young adults aged 20-29 will continue to comprise the numerically largest age groups in the County's population during the next 20 years.<sup>20</sup> (See Figure 12.) Thus, it will remain important for the County to involve as many young people as possible in high quality educational preparation for work and adult life.

#### *Implications*

- Low-income residents in an increasingly prosperous County face increasing pressure to pay bills. Young people from low-income households are at greater risk of leaving school before graduation than students from prosperous families, often to earn money. Creating programs to support successful high school completion will give low-income students tools to get better jobs and move out of poverty.
- With women's earnings continuing to trail those of men, it remains important to educate girls for well-paid occupations.
- Cultural and social diversity is increasing in McLean County population and schools, creating need for training and support for service providers and educators so that they can work effectively with diverse students and their families.

## High school completion rates and trends

### Historical trends of high school completion rates

“About 14 percent of high school sophomores of 1980 left school during or after their sophomore year before completing requirements for graduation. By the spring of 1982, many of these dropouts (over 27 percent) were unemployed or dissatisfied with their work and were looking for work. The majority of those who worked full- or part-time were engaged in low-skilled jobs. Most of the dropouts regretted their decision to leave school prematurely.”<sup>21</sup>

Reducing the high school student dropout rate remains an important challenge for the educational sector in the United States. Thus, an important goal for educators is to keep the students at school and overcome as many obstacles preventing students from staying at school as possible. Although reaching a 100 percent high school completion rate is impossible and most educators do not see this as a reasonable goal, their ongoing efforts are to support students that have more trouble completing their high school education than others. In particular, these are the students facing obstacles including poverty, discrimination, lack of family support, lack of motivation, disabilities, and teen pregnancy. Therefore, the increase of high school completion rates is closely linked to the issue of equal access to secondary education for all Americans.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Applied Social Research Unit, *Assessment 2000*, for a more detailed discussion of County population projections.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *High School Dropouts: Descriptive Information from High School and Beyond, 1983* (Washington, DC: Office of the Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, 1983), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Franklin P. Schargel and Jay Smink, *Strategies To Help Solve Our School Dropout Problem* (New York: Eye on Education, 2001), 10.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

#### High school completion trends in McClean County

Current and past data on dropout rates, school demographics, and other information, are based on the Report Cards of eleven McClean County high schools (Bloomington High School, Chenoa High School, Normal Community West High School, Lexington High School, Olympia High School, Ridgeview High School, Normal Community High School, Heyworth High School, Gridley High School, Leroy High School, Tri-Valley High School). The other high schools of McClean County (Calvary Baptist High School, University Lab High School, and Central Catholic High School) do not supply this information.

Data on dropout rates in McClean County were collected for the five-year period from 1998 to 2002. The number of students that dropped out of high school in McClean County rose from 3.2 percent in 1998 to 4.7 percent in 2002. This compares unfavorably to the decrease in State of Illinois dropout rates (from 6.2 percent in 1998 to 5.1 percent in 2002). (See Figure 13.)

**Figure 13: Dropout Rates in McClean County from 1998 to 2002**

Type of school	School Name (City)	2002 rates (%)	2001 rates (%)	2000 rates (%)	1999 rates (%)	1998 rates (%)	Total Enrollment in 2002
Urban	Bloomington High School (Bloomington)	5.0	3.9	4.1	4.2	5.6	1,518
	Normal Community High School (Normal)	5.8	4.4	4.5	2.9	3.1	1,440
	Normal Community West High School (Normal)	5.0	5.7	6.2	5.5	4.7	1,372
Rural	Olympia High School (Stanford)	4.7	4.9	3.6	4.4	4.3	719
	Heyworth High School (Heyworth)	5.0	2.9	2.9	-	3.3	358
	Tri-Valley High School (Downs)	1.8	1.4	0.7	0.4	0.4	281
	Leroy High School (Le Roy)	5.3	2.5	4.0	2.4	4.1	246
	Ridgeview High School (Colfax)	1.7	1.7	2.1	3.4	2.6	232
	Lexington High School (Lexington)	6.3	4.3	3.0	3.6	2.6	159
	Chenoa High School (Chenoa)	9.0	6.5	7.1	6.9	3.2	122
	Gridley High School (Gridley)	1.8	0.0	0.9	4.0	0.8	111
	<b>Average dropout rate in 11 McClean County high schools</b>	4.7	3.5	3.5	3.4	3.2	<b>6558</b>

Source: Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

#### Comparative Data for Champaign County

School completion data for Champaign County is used for comparative purposes. The sizes and populations of Champaign and McLean counties are similar. Champaign County has nine high schools providing Report Card data. The average dropout rate for Champaign County in 2002 was 3.2 percent. The average dropout rate for McLean County in 2002 was 4.7 percent, 1.5 percent higher than that in Champaign County. (See Figure 14.)

**Figure 14: Dropout Rates in Champaign County from 1998 to 2002**

School Name (City)	2002 rates (%)	2001 rates (%)	2000 rates (%)	1999 rates (%)	1998 rates (%)	Total Enrollment in 2002
Centennial High School (Champaign)	2.2	3.5	4.0	1.1	3.7	1423
Urbana High School (Urbana)	6.1	4.6	2.2	5.5	2.0	1345
Central High School (Champaign)	2.9	2.5	4.1	4.8	5.4	1317
Mahomet-Seymour High School (Mahomet)	1.4	1.6	2.5	3.0	2.1	841
Rantoul TWP High School (Rantoul)	9.3	6.7	7.9	6.3	8.3	800
Unity High School (Tolono)	1.5	4.7	3.0	1.6	2.1	480
St. Joseph-Ogden High School (St. Joseph)	1.1	2.1	1.9	1.7	2.5	450
Fisher High School (Fisher)	2.3	3.1	0.0	0.6	2	273
Heritage High School (Broadlands)	1.7	6.3	4.4	4.2	5.3	196
<b>Average dropout rate in 9 Champaign County high schools and total enrollment</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>7125</b>

Source: Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

#### **Data Analysis**

Dropout data for McLean County were analyzed according to diversity in high schools, location of high schools (rural versus urban areas), and socio-economic of families of high school students.

In the County's three urban high schools (Normal Community High School, Normal Community West High School, and Bloomington High School) the proportion of white students varies from 74.0 to 87.1 percent, the number of Black students varies from 9.3 to 20.0 percent, and the number of Hispanic students varies from 2.4 to 4.7 percent. Rural high school students are predominantly white (between 98.4 to 99.4 percent). (See Figure 15.)

The high school Report Cards do not supply information on the relationship between dropout rates and racial/ethnic background of the students, although Assessment 2000 indicated significantly higher rates

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

among African American and other minority students than among white students during the 1990s.<sup>23</sup> However, Report Card data indicate that the dropout rate in the County's urban high schools, where the percentage of minority students is higher than in the rural high schools, is quite close to the average

**Figure 15: Diversity in McLean County High Schools in 2002**

Type of school	School Name (City)	White Students (%)	Black Students (%)	Hispanic Students (%)	Asian Students (%)	Native American Students (%)
Urban	Bloomington High School (Bloomington)	74.0	20.0	4.7	1.3	0.1
	Normal Community High School (Normal)	85.1	9.2	2.3	3.3	0.1
	Normal Community West High School (Normal)	87.1	9.3	2.4	1.1	0.1
Rural	Olympia High School (Stanford)	98.3	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.4
	Heyworth High School (Heyworth)	98.9	0.3	0.6	0.3	0
	Tri-Valley High School (Downs)	99.3	0.7	0	0	0
	Leroy High School (Le Roy)	99.2	0.4	0.4	0	0
	Ridgeview High School (Colfax)	98.7	0.9	0.4	0	0
	Lexington High School (Lexington)	99.4	0	0	0.6	0
	Chenoa High School (Chenoa)	98.4	0	1.6	0	0
	Gridley High School (Gridley)	99.1	0	0	0	0.9

Source: Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

dropout rate for the State of Illinois (5.0-5.8% and 5.1%, respectively). In the rural high schools, dropout rates vary from 1.7 to 9.0 percent. (See Figure 16.)

It is noteworthy that McLean County's urban schools are significantly larger than its rural ones. The number of students enrolled in the three McLean County urban high schools in 2002 was 4,330, whereas

<sup>23</sup> Applied Social Research Unit, *Assessment 2000*. 25-26, 76. It is noteworthy, however, that although dropout rates are higher among minority students, by far the largest number of dropouts in the County are white.

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

the total number of students enrolled in the eight rural high schools during the same year was 2,228.<sup>24</sup> As for the differences in the dropout rates between urban and rural high schools, it seems that in rural schools dropout rates vary more than in the urban ones. For instance, in 2002, 9.0 percent of students dropped out of Chenoa High School, whereas the dropout rate for the Ridgeview High School was only 1.7 percent. (See Figure 16.) Nevertheless, the average dropout rate for the urban high schools in 2002 was higher than for the rural schools (5.3 and 4.5, respectively).<sup>25</sup>

**Figure 16: School Enrollment and Dropout Rates in McLean County High Schools in 2002**

Type of school	School Name (City)	Total school enrollment	Number of student dropouts	Drop out rates (%)	Average class size
Urban	Bloomington High School (Bloomington)	1,518	76	5.0	19.7
	Normal Community High School (Normal)	1,440	84	5.8	25.0
	Normal Community West High School (Normal)	1,372	69	5.0	18.3
Rural	Olympia High School (Stanford)	719	34	4.7	16.1
	Heyworth High School (Heyworth)	358	18	5.0	12.9
	Tri-Valley High School (Downs)	281	5	1.8	11.7
	Leroy High School (Le Roy)	246	13	5.3	13.2
	Ridgeview High School (Colfax)	232	4	1.7	14.4
	Lexington High School (Lexington)	159	10	6.3	13.9
	Chenoa High School (Chenoa)	122	11	9.0	10.6
	Gridley High School (Gridley)	111	2	1.8	14.4
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6558</b>	<b>325</b>		

Source: Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

<sup>24</sup> Illinois School Report Cards (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. It should be noted that Chenoa High School is scheduled to close after the 2003/4 academic year. Thus, it is possible that dropout rates have climbed for that school as parents have made alternative educational arrangements for their children.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

Experts tend to perceive an association between socio-economic status of high school students and dropout rates. In 2002, from 9 to 30 percent of students from low-income families were enrolled in the urban schools; in the rural schools the percentage of students from low-income families ranged from 2.8 to 27.9 percent. (See Figure 17.) While McLean County data indicate that household income may be related to school completion, it is equally apparent that student poverty levels do not necessarily determine dropout and graduation rates. Thus, Bloomington High School (BHS), with the largest and poorest student body in the County, had the same 2002 graduation rate as Normal Community West High School, which has just over half BHS's percentage of low income students.

**Figure 17: Income Level and Dropout Rates in McLean County Urban and Rural Schools in 2002**

Type of school	School Name (City)	Dropout Rate (%)	Low-Income Students (%)
Urban	Bloomington High School (Bloomington)	5.0	30.8
	Normal Community High School (Normal)	5.8	9.0
	Normal Community West High School (Normal)	5.0	16.8
Rural	Olympia High School (Stanford)	4.7	11.5
	Heyworth High School (Heyworth)	5.0	8.4
	Tri-Valley High School (Downs)	1.8	2.8
	Leroy High School (Le Roy)	5.3	6.1
	Ridgeview High School (Colfax)	1.7	9.5
	Lexington High School (Lexington)	6.3	15.7
	Chenoa High School (Chenoa)	9.0	27.9
	Gridley High School (Gridley)	1.8	9.9

Source: [Illinois School Report Cards](#) (Illinois School Facts, 1998-2002).

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

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#### *Implications*

- According to the data presented above, McLean County dropout rates are lower than in the State of Illinois overall, although County rates are rising while State rates are falling. However, McLean County dropout rates are high compared to Champaign County rates. Dropout rates in the County are also higher than rates for the United States as a whole. This reality implies the need for innovative and flexible dropout prevention programs in the County.
- Rural schools in the County have dropout rates higher (Chenoa High School, Lexington High School) than or similar (Heyworth High School and Leroy High School) to those of urban schools (Bloomington High School, Normal Community High School, Normal Community West High School). It seems possible that larger urban high school enrollment (4,330 students in 2002) attracts greater funding and facilitates the implementation of additional programs and services. Therefore, special attention from community and service providers should be given to rural high schools with high poverty and dropout rates.

## Why students leave

The issue of high school completion matters in all communities. Educational attainment is a widely accepted measurement of both community and individual success. Experts address the impact that education has on communities at the national level, citing a diversified work force and economic development as direct results of educational attainment. The following section will explore the reasons McLean County students leave high school before graduation, beginning with what we will call “in-school” perspectives provided by students and educators, then turning to “out-of-school” viewpoints offered by parents and social service providers.

### **In-school perspectives**

#### Students

Information from young people was collected during three focus groups and three key informant interviews. Research informants included students who had already left school early, those who had considered leaving school early but were still in school and those who were still in school, and had not considered leaving school before graduation. The most frequent response from students when asked why students leave school before graduation was a lack of support on three separate levels external to the students’ control: administration, parents and counselors. Students mentioned:

- Unwelcoming school atmosphere (school officials suggesting students leave school early);
- No second chance for “problem students”;
- 1 or a few credits short of graduation requirements;
- Alternative School not appropriate for some students (i.e. pregnant girls, students who have been bullied, etc.);
- Lack of school support and understanding of personal issues (i.e. gay/lesbian issues, high pressure school work, peer pressure);
- Lack of parental involvement;
- Lack of community support/involvement; and
- Bullying.

### 3. School Completion in McClean County

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Many informants who left school early felt constant animosity between students and administrators (but not teachers, for the most part). In a year when 50 students were expelled from a McLean County high school, one of the expelled students commented, “The administration knew there was a problem and they were just waiting for the moment to kick you out. It was a one-man show with the dean in charge. The students were not given an option or a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance, whether you were involved in a fight, drugs, truancy, or anything.”

A student who has graduated from college and is now bound for medical school said he was “forced” to drop out of high school. He cited the main reason for leaving school early was that the Dean told him that he would not finish high school at that particular school. He was welcome to register, said the Dean, but it was made clear that the administration would most likely find some way of kicking him out. This student also viewed a lack of family support as a reason for leaving school early. Another student echoed this perspective, commenting that his parents did not understand the importance of education because they, too, had left school early.

Students described elements in their own lives that affected the decision to leave school early, including:

- Need for money;
- Lack of interest/involvement in school/student activities;
- Discrimination based on social class or race;
- “Drugs and fights”;
- Pregnancy; and
- No desire to go to college.

A focus group participant commented on diversity issues: “If you go to an all black school and then move to a mostly white school, it can be hard. A teacher may give you a hard time, or other kids. It can get too touchy and you drop out.” Social status also plays an important role, according to another informant: “If you’re poor you might not be able to do some things, if you don’t know what’s going on, like with computers.” There is little communication between students and school staff that address these issues. It is not simply a single characteristic that fuels a student’s decision to leave school before graduation. A combination of any or all of these factors guides his/her separation from school.

Other students commented on the lack of educators’ understanding of student issues as being fundamental to the decision to leave school early. In a key informant interview, a female student, who self-identified as lesbian during high school, discussed the general acceptability of derogatory phrases in the classroom, such as “that’s so gay.” She stated, “This term is used all the time, even in classrooms and teachers do not correct it. This is hate language.” A focus group participant remembered “I dropped out because I was pregnant. It was too late for me to go to an alternative school. It was my senior year and I didn’t want to start all over again and then I’d have to go to another school, with a baby... it’s difficult.” A general consensus among interviewees was that student issues, including these and many others, are not being addressed by school administrators, or even being recognized in many cases.

### 3. School Completion in McLean County

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#### Educators (Teachers, Principals and Counselors)

Educators said that students leave school before graduation for reasons that vary from student to student. Several educators acknowledged that one must unfairly generalize to answer this question. Nevertheless, most responses emphasized the lack of parental and community involvement as well as the students' insufficient understanding of the importance of education. Educators explained failure to graduate with:

- Low parental involvement;
- Community problems manifesting themselves in student work ethic;
- Truancy;
- The student's lack of self-confidence/ "feeling of hopelessness";
- Students not understanding the connection between education and career;
- Lack of student connection to student activities, school environment, and relationships with other students and faculty members;
- Jobs/money;
- Substance abuse; and
- Peer pressure.

In most cases, as we have seen, students viewed school administrators as the source of the problems that lead to students leaving McLean County schools before graduation, with some fault being placed on a lack of parental support and counselor understanding. Educators, on the other hand, held students and families responsible for student failure to graduate. For example, in a key informant interview, one guidance counselor recalled numerous occasions when the parent was too lenient with his or her child concerning absenteeism.

There are, of course, exceptions. One school administrator said that every dropout is a personal failure on his part. He blames the school, because in essence the school says "here's the system, take it or leave it." It is the job of the educators "to motivate and encourage students to get an education." This was reinforced by a teacher's statement that "schools should have a support team in place to identify potential dropouts, and then work with the student to create a *flexible* plan." Another administrator noted, "Many students just haven't developed relationships at school. They haven't gotten involved in activities or made connections with people at school." Several students agreed with this point, commenting on their own lack of involvement in student activities and disinterest in continuing their educations.

Students and educators agreed that lack of parental involvement and need for money caused students to drop out of high school. Students were more likely than educators to blame themselves for their failure to graduate.

#### **Out-of-school perspectives**

Service providers and parents offer unique perspectives on both the reasons students drop out and things that could be done to prevent this from happening. Service providers are involved with both the students thought to be most at risk of dropping out and adults suffering, among other things, from the consequences of leaving high school before graduation. Parents can provide an alternative view of the factors that affect the ability of students to benefit fully from high school education.

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It is important to note the limitations of the research upon which the following analysis is based. While the study team had access to a diverse range of service providers, it did not benefit from a great diversity of parental perspectives. While the opinions of parents interviewed for this study are helpful, the fact that the interviewees were middle-class, white, and well educated limits the extent to which they can represent the views of McLean County parents.

#### Social Service Providers

Service providers identify problems within the current educational system and issues that can motivate students to leave school early, including:

- Lack of close relationships between students and teachers;
- High school curriculum that is not responsive to changing times;
- Excessive focus on performing well on standardized tests;
- Lack of job skills training;
- Insufficient consideration of domestic problems;
- Ineffective student counseling;
- Unwillingness of schools to work with students' employers;
- Student self-esteem problems; and
- Poor relationships with parents.

Service providers' perspectives are based on the conviction that education must be integrated with the goals, challenges, and circumstances of a student's life. Although the foundation for educational success is established earlier, the service providers are virtually unanimous that this integration must occur by the critical age of 14 or 15. Service providers are very concerned about the persistent inability of schools to link diverse student needs with available classes. While schools are fairly well equipped to prepare students for college, schools fail to provide diverse options for education responsive to the job market and the aspirations of students who are not college-bound.

The increasing emphasis on test scores and decreasing budgets in many school districts force educational institutions to focus more on teaching to a test than preparing students for the future. During key informant interviews, many service providers pointed out that some "students do not have the necessary skills to be successful" when they are going through a high school education. The pressure in the educational system is to weed out students that under-perform, regardless of the reasons. Two different focus groups involving service providers indicated that schools "push disinterested students out" and that "educational programs are designed for high achieving students." Service providers strongly stated that schools do not handle poorly performing students well.

Schools do not recognize the socio-economic needs of many students, and fail to support the goal of finding a job with a high-school diploma. Service providers emphasize the importance of providing students with the option of practical job training programs as soon as they reach working age. Like educators, these providers advocate the formation of close attachments between school personnel and students. These methods are meant to mitigate the external obstacles students often face such as a weak support system at home, a lack of value attached to education, economic need to work as soon as possible, and a general lack of self-esteem. Students that drop out are often capable of doing the academic work; however, they are unmotivated or lack confidence in their ability to succeed. This is usually exacerbated

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by a lack of parental involvement. One informant commented, “I rarely see a student drop out whose parents are actively involved in a positive way in their lives.”

#### Parents

Parents had alternative perspectives on the reasons students fail to graduate, placing the blame primarily on school administrators and the social atmosphere in schools. The leading reasons stated by parents for teens dropping out were:

- Lack of individual teacher attention;
- Attitudes that encourage the departure of poorly performing students;
- Negative social atmosphere at schools;
- Bullying and harassment without effective recourse for victimized students;
- Indifference or hostility to struggling students;
- Lack of concern for student problems; and
- Insufficient communication to parents from school officials.

Several parents said that there was an alarming indifference among administrators to students dropping out of school. These informants felt that schools would often blame the child or family for the failure to graduate, and even invite students who “needed more one-on-one attention” or were considered “slow” to drop out. The parents indicated that there was a feeling if students demanded too much attention they were a liability to a class and a drain on school resources. These parents were also strongly critical of the negative social atmosphere that prevailed at school. Many parents were concerned with the high level of bullying and/or harassment and the lack of effective institutional response. Some parents stated that school approaches to these problems focused on teaching victims techniques to minimize or avoid these situations.

Parents were generally unsatisfied with the efforts put forth to actively combat the prevalence of harassment whether physical, emotional or both. The social environment was particularly harsh for students who were homosexual or perceived as such. The presence of homophobia in our schools presents a particularly difficult challenge to a respectful educational atmosphere. While adolescent struggles with sexuality are not a new phenomenon, more schools are dealing with the reality of openly gay students. It is important that schools be proactive in addressing discrimination, prejudice, bullying, and abuse in general to ensure a positive educational environment—particularly since straight parents of gay, lesbian, or transsexual teens may be less understanding and supportive than, for example, a mother might be regarding a daughter’s experience of gender harassment.

Parent informants were eager to criticize, but did not offer as many helpful suggestions as the service providers. They did call for school administrators, counselors, and teachers to make a greater effort to make students feel comfortable and wanted. They said teachers should take an active role seeking ways to reach students that are falling behind, instead of allowing them to fail. One parent commented, “I am not satisfied with the school because the school was useless and they were the ones who failed. There was no concern for my son leaving school.” These parents wanted a school that was more responsive to the needs of individual students and more prepared to confront and deal with the negative social atmosphere of high school.

While some parents interviewed for this study saw their children move on to successful careers despite educational challenges, these families had the resources and motivation to help their children find better

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educational environments. Outcomes for dropouts who come from less caring and/or more economically challenged families could vary significantly from these young people's experiences.

While both parents and service providers offered viewpoints from environments external to schools, parents focused primarily on the shortcomings of schools, while service providers emphasized the socioeconomic problems that distract many students from high school education. Although these perspectives differ about the importance of social environments and the type of curriculum reform needed, they share desire for a stronger support structure for students within the schools. The formation of formal and informal relationships between students and school personnel is essential to maintaining the motivation and effort of potential dropouts.

#### **Recommendations**

The perspectives of students, educators, parents, and service providers on reasons some students fail to graduate from high school paint a rather dark picture of the current educational system. The points where thinking converges on ways to provide more students with positive educational experiences and outcomes are:

- More attention to vocational programs and job training;
- Greater emphasis on understanding student issues and domestic problems;
- Better counseling programs and better counselor training;
- Stronger institutional measures to combat bullying and harassment;
- Greater attention to social atmosphere and finding ways to minimize disrespect in school;
- Fostering close relationships between students and educators; and
- A need for diverse voices of students, parents, educators, service providers, and employers to be heard and used in planning approaches to increase high school completion in McLean County.

# 4 Dropout Prevention

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Keeping students in school is an important issue for academic experts, as well as educators, parents, and communities. Students who drop out of school prior to graduation often face significant obstacles in their adult lives: low-earning and unfulfilling work, higher likelihood of committing a crime, greater probability for getting divorced, increased risks of drug or alcohol abuse, and feelings of inadequacy and failure for not finishing their education.<sup>26</sup> The range of problems and concerns regarding school dropouts has generated numerous studies focused on the reasons students drop out of school. A report conducted by the Colorado Department of Public Health in 2001 provides a simple summary of the challenge: “Students report a variety of reasons for dropping out of school; therefore the solutions are multidimensional.”<sup>27</sup>

This statement is supported by the work of Robert C. Morris, Professor of Education at the Department of Secondary Education at West Georgia College, and editor of *Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field*. For Morris, there is no single solution to preventing students from leaving school before graduation. According to Morris, “Numerous studies show that school programs alone are not well equipped to address those non-school causes which place children at risk of school and life failure. It is therefore, imperative that school boards network with multiple resources (school, community, family, business, and industry) that can serve the needs of at-risk children both in school and outside of school.”<sup>28</sup>

## Characteristics of dropouts

Like the rest of society, dropouts are individuals with their own unique identities, not a category of people that can be easily profiled. There is a tendency to lump dropouts together and label them as a unified group. However, as the literature indicates, there are widespread differences from school to school and place to place regarding who drops out and why.

A 1992 U.S. Department of Education report finds that failure to complete high school is associated with a range of individual, family, and socioeconomic factors. In general, dropout rates were found to be higher for “students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, single-parent families, and non-English family backgrounds.”<sup>29</sup> Also, the research concluded that “students whose parents or siblings were dropouts are themselves more likely to drop out. The same is true for those who marry and have children before graduating from high school.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait,” [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals\\_2/Dropouts.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals_2/Dropouts.html) (May 2004).

<sup>27</sup> *Best Practices: School Dropout Prevention Increasing School Attendance*. Colorado Department of Public Health. 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Morris, Robert C. ed. *Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field*. (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994).

<sup>29</sup> “Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait,” [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals\\_2/Dropouts.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals_2/Dropouts.html) (May 2004).

<sup>30</sup> “Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait,” [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals\\_2/Dropouts.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals_2/Dropouts.html) (May 2004).

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A study published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education in 1990, identified trends and common characteristics of dropouts associated with race and ethnicity, earnings and opportunities for dropouts, and the lives of dropouts.<sup>31</sup>

### Race and ethnicity

- More than one in four Hispanic youth drop out, and nearly half leave by the eighth grade.
- Hispanics are twice as likely as African Americans to drop out. White and Asian American students are least likely to drop out.
- For African-American men, 85 percent of GED holders were in the labor force, compared with 60 percent of dropouts.
- For Hispanics, 93 percent of GED holders were in the labor force, compared with 77 percent of dropouts.

### Earnings and opportunities for dropouts

- In the 20 years between 1970 and 1990, the earning level of dropouts doubled, while it nearly tripled for college graduates.
- Recent dropouts will earn \$200,000 less than high school graduates, and less than \$800,000 less than college graduates, in their lives.
- Men who got a GED earned 21 percent more than male dropouts; women GED holders earned 18 percent more than female dropouts.
- While only slightly more than half the dropouts were either working or looking for work, over 80% of those who had gotten a GED were in the labor force.

### The lives of dropouts

- Students in large cities are twice as likely to leave school before graduating than non-urban youth.
- More than half the students who drop out leave by the tenth grade, 20 percent quit by the eighth grade, and three percent drop out by the fourth grade.
- Dropouts make up nearly half the heads of households on welfare.
- Dropouts make up nearly half the prison population.
- 20 percent of dropouts were married, living as married, or divorced, with females more likely than males to be married. Nearly 40 percent had a child or were expecting one.
- Nearly 25 percent of dropouts had changed school two or more times, with some changing for disciplinary reasons.
- 12 percent ran away from home.
- Almost 20 percent were held back a grade, and almost half failed a course.
- Almost one-half missed at least 10 days of school, one-third cut class at least 10 times, and one-quarter were late at least 10 times.
- One-third were put on in-school suspension, suspended, or put on probation, and more than 15% were either expelled or told they could not return.
- 11 percent were arrested.
- Eight percent spent time in a juvenile home or shelter.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Wendy Schwartz, "New Information on Youth Who Drop Out: Why They Leave and What Happens to Them." New York, ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1995.

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### Identifying at-risk students early on

According to the Department of Education, “dropping out is a process, not an event.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, dropping out is not something that spontaneously occurs, it is a decision that students usually make long before the actual event of leaving school takes place.

Some specialists argue that most students have already made the decision to drop out as early as elementary school. Robert C. Morris claims that “Important research has found that by the time students are in the third-grade, one can fairly reliably predict which students will ultimately drop out and those who will complete their schooling.”<sup>34</sup> Jack Rawlinson, Director of the Southeastern Illinois Vocational System, and John W. Wilson, Regional Superintendent of the Southeastern Illinois Vocational System, agree, maintaining that the key to preventing at-risk students from becoming dropouts is early detection. “Reports from many researchers . . . indicate that most youth who drop out of school make the conscious decision long before the final act occurs. Some researchers suggest that once the decision is made to drop out it can be delayed but is seldom reversed. It is now widely accepted that dropping out for most students is only a visible sign of something that went wrong years before.”<sup>35</sup>

Rawlinson and Wilson discovered there are some common characteristics teachers, administrators, and parents can use to identify elementary school age students who are at-risk.<sup>36</sup>

- Children with poor attendance in elementary school are more likely to drop out of high school;
- Low achievement or academic performance is a predictor of future school failure;
- At-risk students typically start school behind their peers and continue to fall further back each school year;
- At-risk students often display behavioral problems. Inappropriate behavior patterns that begin in elementary school escalate as the student grows older;
- Improper behavior is a sign of a student’s other emotional or social problems; and
- Grade retention is one of the most frequently observed precursors to dropping out. A student two grade levels behind his or her appropriate class has a 95 percent chance of dropping out.

### Why minority students drop out

Research has shown that African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to drop out of school than Whites or Asians.<sup>37</sup> Some of the most prevalent reasons why minority students become dropouts are:

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<sup>32</sup> Schwartz, “New Information.”

<sup>33</sup> “Defining Dropouts: A Statistical Portrait,” [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals\\_2/Dropouts.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachingGoals/Goals_2/Dropouts.html) (accessed May 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Robert C. Morris, ed., *Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc.), 1994.

<sup>35</sup> Jack Rawlinson and John W. Wilson, “Attend and Win: A K-3 Dropout Prevention Program,” in *Using What We Know About At-Risk Youth: Lessons from the Field*, ed. Robert C. Morris (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Technomic Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 141-142.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-143.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Sticht, “[NLA] Race, Ethnicity, and Education,” <http://lists.literacytest.org/piprmail/nla/2003/002561.html>.

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low self-esteem; negative cultural stereotypes; low academic expectations from teachers and counselors; and lack of school curriculum based on ethnic heritage.<sup>38</sup>

### Self-esteem

A recent study found that self-esteem is directly connected to school retention. Researchers report students with higher self-esteem are more likely to stay in school, while those with lower self-esteem are more likely to drop out.<sup>39</sup>

### Negative cultural stereotypes

One of the main reasons why African-American and Hispanic high school students experience low self-esteem is negative ethnic/racial stereotypes emanating from peers and teachers. A study conducted by Elena Aragon de McKissack (1999) compared the high school experiences of two predominantly Latino schools in Colorado, one rural the other urban. McKissack asserts that in both schools Chicano students “internalized the negative views of others toward them” and “faced discrimination and racism at school, college, and work.”<sup>40</sup>

George J. Sefa Dei also found that African-American students were more likely to drop out of school due to negative stereotypes. Dei’s study, conducted in Ontario, Canada, consisted of interviewing 150 black students, 22 of whom were dropouts or at-risk students.<sup>41</sup> One interviewee said what he felt about a white-dominated educational system, “To me the school typifies everything that goes on in our White-controlled society. The people running the system have an idea as to how people should behave if they want to be part of their buddy-buddy [system]. Those who go astray are pushed aside and made to feel it is their fault or some personal weakness in character.”<sup>42</sup>

### Low academic expectations

A crucial factor that causes African-American and Hispanic students to drop out of school relates to expectations of their teachers and counselors. Students who have been treated as inferior or underachievers often lose interest in the educational system and in turn have no incentives to stay in school. Dei confirmed this viewpoint in two separate interviews with African-American dropouts. The first interviewee stated that “Discussing your personal problems won’t convince anyone that it has a bearing on your academic progress. Some teachers still see us [Blacks] as innately dumb.” The second interviewee commented, “The advice from the counselor nearly broke my back. I could not believe it. She said I should be making choices guided by what my capabilities are and that she didn’t think I can

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<sup>38</sup> Elena Aragon de McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement: Comparing Escuela Tlatelolco, a Chicanocentric School, and a Public High School. (Latino Communities: Emerging Voices – Political, Social, Cultural and Legal Issues)*, (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1999).

<sup>39</sup> Zakia Redd, *Background for Community Level Work on Educational Adjustment in Adolescence: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors*, (John S. and James L. Knight Publications, December 2001), 70.  
[http://www.childtrends.org/what\\_works/youth\\_development/education](http://www.childtrends.org/what_works/youth_development/education)

<sup>40</sup> McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement*.

<sup>41</sup> George J. Sefa Dei, “Black Youth and Fading Out of School,” in *Debating Dropouts: Critical Policy and Research Perspectives on School Leaving*, ed. Deirdre Kelly and Jane Gaskell (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1996), 173-189.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

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compete in the advanced stream. I will be left behind.”<sup>43</sup> A 1984 study by Carol Asher echoed these findings, arguing that “Teachers’ cultural stereotypes act negatively on their expectations for Hispanic students, and that language, ethnicity, and social-class factors contribute to a lower classroom experience for the Hispanic student.”<sup>44</sup>

### School curriculum and ethnic heritage

Some minority students comment that part of the reason they leave school early is that the educational system has a strong bias towards white culture. Dei interviewed one dropout who said, “I only know about Canadian history, which is White history. I did not learn anything about Black people. . . Is it tough? I mean, I would like to know more about my history, yes. I think I need to know a lot more than I know.”<sup>45</sup> McKissack’s research comparing the self-identity of 20 Chicano graduates in one rural and one urban school concluded “all but one participant expressed the importance of their ethnic identity.”<sup>46</sup>

## Sexual orientation and victimization

Another category of students who are subjected to discrimination are those who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered (GLBT). Much like minority students, non-heterosexual students find that fitting in at school, and wanting to stay in school, is not easy to do.

Roberta W. Ginsberg, author of *Silenced Voices Inside Our Schools*, explains that problems linked to sexual orientation are not as easily identifiable as problems connected to race and ethnicity. According to Ginsberg:

One important difference between gays/lesbians and other minorities is the invisibility of their “difference,” for while being a recognizable minority encourages prejudicial behavior in some, it inhibits such behavior in many. “Invisible” gays enjoy no such respite from prejudice. On the contrary, the widespread presumption that heterosexuality is “normal” and homosexuality is not frees those prejudiced against gays from most of the social sanctions against prejudice itself. This “freedom,” in effect, condones public behavior that makes private prisoners of many gays/lesbians. For gays in adolescence, this suppression of self is especially painful and difficult.<sup>47</sup>

For high school students who are gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered, the decision to stay in school can be directly tied to how they are treated by their peers. In the case of many GLBT students verbal harassment, physical abuse, teacher/administration apathy, and even hospitalization can be the result of openly expressing their sexuality.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Sefa Dei, “Black Youth and Fading Out of School,” 181.

<sup>44</sup> Ascher, Carol, “Helping Hispanic Students to Complete High School and Enter College,” ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, New York, NY (1984).

<sup>45</sup> Sefa Dei, “Black Youth and Fading Out of School,” 179.

<sup>46</sup> McKissack, *Chicano Educational Achievement*.

<sup>47</sup> Roberta W. Ginsberg, “Silenced Voices Inside Our Schools,” *Initiatives* 58, no. 3 (1998) 1-15.

<sup>48</sup> Perry A. Zirkel, “Gay days,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 84, no. 5 (2003): 412.

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In a study conducted by Anthony R. D’Augelli of Pennsylvania State University and Scott L. Hershberger of California State University (2002), D’Augelli and Hershberger reported the effects of victimization based on sexual orientation of 350 lesbian, gay, or bi-sexual youth.<sup>49</sup> The study concluded, “Over half reported verbal abuse in high school because of sexual orientation, and 11 percent said they had been physically assaulted.”<sup>50</sup>

### How schools can help

In a 1994 article, John D. Anderson argues that GLBT students are “not being given an equal education.” Anderson asserts that part of the problem is a “conspiracy of silence” surrounding the issue of sexual orientation. The “conspiracy of silence” indicates a situation where educators either are not willing to discuss sexual orientation, or, remain unaware of problems that face gay and lesbian students.<sup>51</sup> Anderson contends that there are five approaches schools can take to address the issues of discrimination based on sexual orientation. The five approaches are as follows:<sup>52</sup>

- *Professional development.* “We teachers, guidance counselors, nurses, psychologists, and administrators need to educate ourselves about this newly emerging minority. Professional development workshops go a long way toward accomplishing this goal.”
- *Support staff and services.* “The training of staff members to deal with gay and lesbian students and with issues of homophobia must be a primary consideration . . . Schools should be aware of the rich resources of the gay and lesbian community in many locales. They need to be familiar with gay and lesbian youth groups, gay community centers, telephone hotlines, and especially organizations (e.g., PFLAG) for parents whose children have come out.”
- *Sexuality in the health curriculum.* “It is time for the gay and lesbian adolescents to be included. The social, psychological, and emotional development of gay and lesbian adolescents can be addressed right along with that of their homosexual classmates. Traditionally, the entire discussion of sexuality has been heterosexual, and this leaves a lot out.”
- *Utilizing the Library.* “Central to every high school is its library or media center. Unfortunately, here too the invisibility of homosexuality is often perpetuated . . . The American Library Association maintains very active Gay and Lesbian Caucus. This group can be a source of information, booklists, and support for building a library collection on inclusion.”
- *Curriculum.* “Affording a place to gay and lesbian people in the curriculum does not require lengthy committee meetings, new curriculum guides, or the expenditure of funds. It demands only the education, honesty, and courage of the teaching staff.”

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<sup>49</sup> Anthony R. D’Augelli, Neil W. Pilkington, and Scott L. Hershberger, “Incidence and Mental Health Impact of Sexual Orientation Victimization of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Youth in High School,” *School Psychology Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (2002): 148.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>51</sup> John D. Anderson, “School Climate for Gay and Lesbian Students and Staff Members,” *Phi Delta Kappan* 76, no. 2 (1994): 151-154.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 151-154.

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### Bullying

Bullying is a problem that crosses all lines of race, class, and sexual orientation. Educators and parents may have a tendency to write off the problem as something natural, unavoidable, or part of the routine experience of childhood. However, studies have shown that bullying can be prevented.

The side effects of bullying are often more emotional than physical. A study conducted by Richard J. Hazler, John H. Hoover, and Ronald Olive indicated that “90 percent of those bullied said they suffered side effects – a drop in grades, an increase in anxiety, a loss of friends or social life . . . Physical bullying is easy to see, but to students, it is the least of their worries. Far more common is emotional harassment.”<sup>53</sup>

It is unlikely the problem of bullying will ever completely go away. However, there are some steps schools can take to address the problem. Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver give the following tips:

- Make everyone aware of the problem;
- Prepare the school staff to take a clear, consistent stand on bullying and victimization inside and outside of school;
- Assess the situation. Use student surveys to find out how many are being bullied;
- Develop a student code of conduct – and be clear and consistent about enforcing it;
- Establish effective intervention programs;
- Get parents on your side. If you encourage parents to participate in school activities, you’ll also strengthen the connection between home and school values and procedures;
- Teach students the difference between being assertive and being aggressive or antagonistic; and
- Encourage the attitude that seeking to understand another person is always the first step in learning how to deal with that person.<sup>54</sup>

### Current McLean County approaches & services

McLean County has a wealth of resources focused on issues related to high school completion. McLean County schools and community-based organizations address this issue by focusing on youth identified as at-risk and providing services designed to address academic deficiencies and create attachment to the school. Very often this approach involves collaborative efforts, which maximize resources and address multiple issues.

The current approach for addressing the issue of high school dropouts begins by identifying students that are considered at-risk. “At-risk” may refer to students that need academic help, students with behavior problems, or students with a pattern of absences. After these students are identified, the focus is then on providing these youth with services.

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<sup>53</sup> Richard J. Hazler, John H. Hoover, and Ronald Oliver, “What do kids say about bullying?” *Education Digest* 58, no. 7 (1993): 16-20.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-20.

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Services for youth include mentoring programs (an approach frequently used) and a referral system, linking youth with service programs in the community. Additionally, school administrators, school counselors, and teachers work directly with teens and families to provide services designed to improve academic skills, create attachment to the school, and address barriers to graduation. These services may be offered by the school, a community-based organization, or through collaboration between the school and a community-based organization.

Drawing on data gathered from interviews and focus groups with school staff and service providers in McLean County, this section will discuss ways McLean county schools and community-based organizations address the issue of youth at risk of not graduating from high school.<sup>55</sup> The programs discussed here are not intended to be a comprehensive list of programs in the community. Due to the limitations of this research project and changes in local programs and services it would not be possible to offer a complete program guide. Instead, we are highlighting selected programs in order to illustrate what current approaches and services look like in McLean County.<sup>56</sup>

### Mentoring programs

McLean County schools have implemented a variety of mentoring programs to meet the needs of students. In general, the mentoring approach provides youth identified as at-risk with academic assistance, support, and guidance. This approach provides services that aim to improve academic ability, forge relationships between student and mentor, and create student attachment to the school.

McLean County's mentoring programs range from specialized classrooms with teachers who emphasize improving needed academic skills to linking youth with business members in the community who serve as role models. Examples of a few current mentoring programs include:

- Bloomington High School (BHS) Delta Program, which places students identified as at-risk with a mentor teacher who helps with necessary study skills, such as critical thinking, listening, and note-taking, as well as personal skills, such as mediation and conflict resolution;
- Bloomington Junior High School (BJHS) Coaches program, which provides an Illinois Wesleyan student as a mentor for two class periods per week to students who are having difficulty in school; and
- Bloomington Business Academy, which matches students with mentors in the business community who provide support and guidance and serve as role models.

### Collaborative programs

In addition to the mentoring programs, McLean County schools and community-based organizations have joined in collaborative efforts to serve youth at risk of leaving school. Current collaborative programs include:

- Diversion Program, in which an outreach worker from Project Oz, a community-based organization, is located in the school and meets directly with teens on a regular basis;

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<sup>55</sup> District 87 provided the MCSCRIP with a list of programs. We were unable to attain a similar list from Unit 5.

<sup>56</sup> The names of programs may not be accurate, as programs have been referred to by different names by different individuals.

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- Helping Youth Progress and Excel (HYPE) Program is a collaborative effort between McLean County schools and two community-based organizations, Project Oz and Chestnut Health Systems, in providing peer mentoring and tutoring to students;
- Student Assistance Program (SAP), which allows a Chestnut Health Systems service provider to screen, educate and provide limited intervention on substance abuse and mental health counseling in area schools; and
- Work Experience and Career Exploration Program (WECEP) is a collaborative effort between McLean County schools and private businesses. Here, 14- and 15-year-olds attend a condensed school day and spend two hours a day in a paid job.

A service provider who was involved with a program that offered counseling to students in school commented, “Because we are in the school, but not part of it, students trust us that their information will be completely confidential.”<sup>57</sup> A student noted, “Another positive the schools are doing is creating programs like HYPE”. Another student said that the WECEP program was helpful because it allowed students to work and go to school at the same time.

### Alternative school program

The Alternative High School provides an option to students who are not successful in a regular school setting. Students who have behavior, attendance, or academic issues can transfer to the Alternative School, which offers the SAVE (Save Academics Vocational Education) program. The SAVE program, held at Normal Community West High School, offers smaller classes, more structure, and a shorter school day. Approximately 300 area high school students attend the Alternative High School program at any given time.

A school administrator stated, “Students who several years ago would have been kicked out of school now have an alternative and are successful and go on to graduate.” Further, this administrator noted, “This approach offers a true alternative to traditional education.”

However, a second school administrator referred to the Alternative School as a “dumping ground” and considered this school the last resort, as “it may not be a safe environment for all students.” A parent also noted that the Alternative School might not be the best match for all students who cannot attend regular high school. This parent stated, “Well, we tried other options before we decided he needed to drop out. First we looked at the Alternative School, but he didn’t fit there. He wasn’t a bad student.”

### Community-based organization programs

In addition to being involved in collaborative programs with McLean County schools, community-based organizations also provide direct services to youth. Community-based organizations serve students in school as well as young people who have left school. Current programs for youth include:

- YouthBuild McLean County, which assists youth in obtaining their general equivalency diploma (GED) while also offering them the opportunity to learn construction skills through involvement in building projects; and

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<sup>57</sup> Quotations used are taken from the facilitator’s interview notes. The notes do not indicate if the statements are direct quotes or paraphrased statements.

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- Youth Impact, which provides education and services aimed at reducing gang involvement. The program targets young people who are current gang members, as well as youth who are at risk of becoming involved in gangs.

In an interview a school administrator noted, “Outside of the schools, there are community organizations which make a difference.” However, many community organizations deal primarily with youth who have already dropped out of school.

Service providers from community-based organizations note that their approach is to try to determine the obstacle each young person is facing in completing his or her high school education and then to address that obstacle. Often, community-based organizations involve other programs and try to link the youth to additional services. This may include trying to connect the student to services within the school, such as special education classes, tutoring, or academic counseling. In addition, the service providers also refer young clients to other community-based programs, such as mental health services or substance abuse services.

### Targeted programs

A number of community-based organizations provide programs that are targeted toward youth who are coping with specific issues, such as homelessness or substance abuse problems that may impact their education. Examples of such programs include:

- Youth Initiative Program through Project Oz, which offers assistance to youth who are homeless or runaways. Services include crisis counseling, family counseling using the nationally recognized model “Functional Family Therapy”, and Safe Houses. Safe Houses are operated in collaboration with the Bloomington Fire Department and offer youth a safe location and a way to link with other services in the community; and
- InTouch Substance Abuse Education/Prevention Program through Chestnut Health Systems, which provides alcohol and drug counseling for youth as well as education classes for the family to address the way in which substance abuse affects the entire family.

There is awareness in the community that these issues and others, such as gang involvement, pregnancy, sexual orientation, and bullying, can be important barriers to completing high school.

### Informal approaches and services

Data gathered from interviews indicates that outside of the formal, structured programs, school staff work with individual youth and families to address the needs of students who are at risk of leaving school.

In interviews and focus groups, school administrators noted that the school counselors take actions, such as calling parents if there is a pattern of absences, to prevent youth from leaving school. One school administrator noted that the school counselors “do an incredible job” trying to intervene with students at risk of dropping out. When asked if students who dropout return to school, a second school administrator stated, “Yeah, the assistant principal spends an entire month in August constantly working with students that want to come back to school”.

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Further, teachers also work to create bonds with students. Teachers engage the students and try to encourage them to participate in activities. One student noted, “I joined HYPE because a teacher recommended it.” When asked about dropout prevention, one teacher explained that he worked informally to prevent students from leaving school by developing rapport and trust with the student, treating the student with dignity, and giving the student hope.

Additionally, data from interviews suggested that some churches and religious institutions are also taking responsibility for outreach to teens in their neighborhoods. One teacher noted that a local minister was addressing gang issues. A second teacher explained, that churches are pushing education, that the integration of churches in rural areas has raised awareness of the issue of dropouts and directed a push for better education.

Despite these efforts, however, many project participants noted that students are not always well served. One parent whose child left high school before graduation noted, “Students are also affected by the indifference of teachers. To teachers, only some students matter.”

### **Summary of Current Approaches and Services and Recommendations**

There appears to be an awareness of the programs currently available in McLean County. In the interviews and focus groups conducted with school staff and service providers in McLean County, many noted that there are a number of programs in the schools and the community that are focused on serving youth. Both school staff and service providers referred to programs that have been effective and noted that there are good working relationships between the service program providers and good referral services in place to serve struggling youth.

However, programs are unevenly distributed, with more formal services being available in Bloomington – Normal than in rural areas, and programs vary by district. Additionally, there may be issues with program coordination, overlap of services, imperfect marketing of services, or errors in the referral process. A teacher touched on this by saying, “The community is blessed with a lot of human resources, but it is a case where the right hand and the left hand don’t know what the other is doing.”

Participants in our interviews indicated that there are areas in which services to youth could be improved. The following section addresses the way in which programs are not effective and recommendations for improving current programs, as well as adding additional services, are offered

## **Recommendations from McLean County residents**

This section presents recommendations for reducing the high school dropout rate that were made during focus groups and interviews conducted in fall 2003 by the McLean County School Completion Research Project. Research informants include young people, educators, service providers, and parents. Young people include current students, students currently in “second chance” programs, and people who left high school before graduation. Educators include teachers, school counselors, and school administrators. Service providers include representatives of social service organizations that assist students with needs not being addressed by the schools.

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The MCSCR project team reviewed and categorized the wide variety of recommendations from project informants to identify the services needed to increase high school graduation in McLean County. Project data suggest a good deal of conflict within the school system and community. Teachers blamed administrators for educational shortcomings; thus, educators did not present a united front. Parents frequently stated they were caught between work, school, and their children. One thing that all focus groups and interviews pointed to was the importance of education and making certain that more of the County's students can complete high school.

Figure 18 summarizes recommendations provided in project interviews and focus groups, indicating commonalities and differences in the perspectives of the four categories of research informants. In some instances the original language from research notes was used in order to convey the emotion of the speaker; other statements were paraphrased. All efforts were made to avoid repetition while maintaining the diversity and meaning of the recommendations provided.

### **Cooperation and collaboration**

All the focus groups and interviews indicated a need for cooperation, collaboration, and communication. Project informants agreed that communication between parents, schools, students, administrators, and service providers should be strengthened. Each group noted that if the others would only listen to *their* concerns, a lot could be accomplished. It is impossible to determine what actions are needed or appropriate without open lines of communication, between and among stakeholders interested in improving school participation and completion. Cooperation is essential in order to make any real achievements possible, whatever they may be, and attributing fault is counterproductive. All the groups as well as government and the business community need to support each other and work together to develop solutions that will provide opportunities for the students to complete their education a solution that will, in turn, give back to the community in many different ways.

### **School funding**

Funding was another recurring theme. The funding issue could be looked at from several viewpoints. It is noteworthy that one group often expressed concern about funding for another group's activities. Thus, students and service providers both felt the teachers were being asked to do too much with too few resources. If more money were available, more programs could be offered, classes would be smaller, and individual attention would increase. There is also general concern about public education's over-reliance on property taxes.

### **Suggested changes to school policies**

#### In-School Suspension

All groups felt the need to adopt an in-school suspension program. When students are given out-of-school suspension, they fall further behind in their schoolwork and find it difficult to get caught up when they return. Also, some respondents felt that some students are just looking for a way to be out of school; they are just about ready to quit and a suspension gives them the push they need to drop out. By serving an in-school suspension, students could continue to work and receive the extra help they need. If a student fails to meet the graduation requirements due to a suspension, or is short a few hours of course credit, an

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alternative method to make up the deficiency should be provided. Having to attend a whole semester to make this up discourages students from completing school.

### Flexible curriculum

Project focus groups and interviews with McLean County residents also indicate that a wider range of opportunities needs to be provided for the students. The lack of vocational programs was an issue raised

by several groups; many informants viewed the opportunity to learn job skills while still in high school as very important. Students want hands-on training to help them get a job; especially if they planned a career path other than going to college. Yet, the courses offered by the Bloomington Area Vocational Center are mainly available to high school juniors and seniors with appropriate grade point averages—not the profile of students most at risk of dropping out. Students also want additional life skills training such as citizenship, paying taxes, budgeting, and voting—skills they believe would allow them become a more integrated part of the adult community. In addition too more vocational and life skill training, informants call for a better system of tutoring and mentoring for students.

### What students felt was missing from their school experience

The main issues raised by the students were:

- Parents need to keep better tabs on their children and develop mutual trust and respect;
- Parents and administrators need to be more attentive to the students' needs; and
- Teens feel they were not being listened to or taken seriously.

Many students said that parents should set strict expectations, encourage the student to meet them, and provide rewards or consequences accordingly. If a student has a supportive family, this will most likely show up in their work at school.

Schools should be more sensitive to the students' needs at school and at home. The earlier at-risk students are detected the better. Some informants felt that pre-school or kindergarten is the appropriate time to begin monitoring for risk indicators. Early childhood development and early intervention are critical to helping children to be successful in school. More attention should be given to those with special needs. Schools should spend more time with struggling students reflecting the time spent with gifted students or athletes. A focus group participant commented, "If the community, parents, and students would show more interest in the problem of student dropouts, more would be done. High schoolers need attention and motivation." Study informants agreed that all members of the community need to work together to support students through high school.

### Diversity

Diversity concerns were expressed by all groups interviewed for the project. Schools and agencies need to be more supportive of those with special needs. Programs should be developed to reach a wide variety of different populations, circumstances, and cultural differences. Increasingly, there are issues with English as Second Language (ESL) students—particularly among the growing Hispanic community. Parents with limited English-speaking ability often have trouble communicating with school personnel. The students and their families need to be able to communicate with the teachers and become a part of the school and

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**Figure 18: Recommendations from McLean County Residents on How to Keep Students in School**

Recommendation	Students	Parents	Service Providers	Educators
More and different tutoring and mentoring programs	✓	✓	✓	✓
In-school rather than out-of-school suspension (allows student to keep up with assigned work)	✓	✓	✓	✓
High schools should prepare students for work, starting college, citizenship, and adult life (flexible curriculum, school hours, etc.)	✓		✓	✓
Be sensitive to individuality of students	✓		✓	✓
Need more/better communication and involvement between parents and schools	✓		✓	✓
Schools must address diversity issues (language and cultural differences, shyness/trouble relating to school officials, involve ESL parents in schools)	✓		✓	✓
More early intervention programs		✓	✓	✓
More communication between business, schools, parents, churches, etc.		✓	✓	✓
Recognize that children learn in different ways (use videos, computers, etc)	✓		✓	
Raise the dropout age to 17 or 18	✓	✓		
Teachers need to make more time for students, hire teachers who want to teach	✓			✓
Reward students who are doing well	✓	✓		
Find people after they drop out; make them aware of GED programs/ intervention opportunities			✓	✓
More community support of schools- set goals and work to accomplish them			✓	✓
Schools need to be sensitive to student's personal issues (pregnancy, poverty, low self esteem, etc.)	✓		✓	
Change negative image of alternative schools	✓			
Parents should keep tabs on their kids, set strict expectations, offer rewards/consequences	✓			
Need awareness programs that emphasize the importance of staying in school	✓			
Establish a foundational level of funding for schools				✓
Better truancy program			✓	

community. Schools must realize that not one shoe fits everybody; there are different needs, different ways of teaching and learning, and issues outside of school that affect students.

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### **Involve the community**

Some study informants commented that employers needed to be supportive of schools, students, and their families. Allowing paid time off to volunteer or attend school functions would allow working parents to become more actively involved with schools. Students want their own employers to be sensitive to their school schedules by not making them work late on nights before a test. It was suggested that company sponsors support awareness programs to inform the community about keeping students in school. Companies could offer rewards such as college scholarships or help pay fees for successful students.

If McLean County is able to address all the needs identified in focus groups and interviews, it may in fact see an increase in the number of students that successfully complete high school. The County will probably never see a 100 percent graduation rate, but the current rate is simply too high for such a prosperous County. The community needs to determine what acceptable goals are and work toward achieving them in a cooperative manner, which will help to stretch the limited funding as far as possible.

## **Models**

There are many model programs in the United States that offer disengaged students a chance to be reinvigorated about education. These programs offer students alternative options such as returning at night to earn a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or learn skills through a job-training program. This section describes at selected model programs that could be adapted for use in McLean County. Additional descriptions of models are provided in Appendix 3 of this report.

One program described in this section, the Burlington (VT) Attendance Project, addresses the issue of truancy by creating stronger coordination of existing systems and services to require greater accountability from students. Another model, the Albuquerque (NM) School District's Dropout Re-engagement program, also involves collaboration among different facets of the community to provide as many educational alternatives as possible for disengaged students. A third program, Project 2000, Inc., uses a volunteer-based mentoring approach to address the academic problems of minority students in Washington, D.C., and Newark, New Brunswick and Patterson, New Jersey. Finally, the Manufacturing Technology Partnership (MTP) is a Michigan-based initiative that combines school with paid-work experiences.

### **The Burlington (VT) Attendance Project**

The Burlington (VT) Attendance Project is part of the Vermont Department of Education's statewide truancy and dropout prevention initiative. The Burlington program serves students in grades K-12 and was created to address soaring dropout rates in Burlington. During the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years, the dropout rate was more than 9.4 percent—almost double the state average of 5 percent.<sup>58</sup>

Project planning began in 1996 when the Vermont Secretary of Human Services met with the United Way of Chittenden County's Executive Director, the Mayor of Burlington and Burlington's Superintendent of

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<sup>58</sup> [Burlington Vt. Truancy Prevention Project Report](#), (Vermont Department of Education, 2003).

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Schools to discuss the growing dropout rate in the district, which was about 10 percent at the time.<sup>59</sup> Recognizing that attendance is strongly linked to school completion, these organizations partnered with other Burlington organizations including the Baird Center for Children and Families and the Burlington School-Based Health Centers to form a Truancy Task Force, which began year-round work on an attendance program that offered greater accountability for students. The program involved a number of social services including counseling and mediation. The attendance project was implemented by the district in 1998.

The program's outreach targeted the families of students when a truancy pattern began to develop. Social workers were assigned to families if absences totaled more than five days. In addition to social services, the Truancy Task Force consulted with the local family court to strategize about how to deal with family/students when absences persisted to the point that the student wound up in court.<sup>60</sup>

The following are some high points and challenges of the program according to a program representative:

### Program Results

- The dropout rate in Burlington fell from 9.5 percent for the 1999-2000 school year to 4.02 percent for the 2002-03 school year.
- Also, the number of students who missed more than five days of school has dropped by 36 percent since the 2000-01 school year.<sup>61</sup>

### Program Challenges

- There needs to be an improvement in the provision of alternative educational programs with stable funding for students. The few programs available struggle financially.
- A number of "high-needs" families refuse services offered through the program. These families often need more, in terms of services, than what the program can offer.<sup>62</sup>

## **The Albuquerque (NM) School District's dropout re-engagement program**

The Albuquerque (NM) School District's Dropout Re-engagement Program uses a case management approach to provide disenfranchised students with incentives to come back to the classroom. It forms community partnerships and makes referrals to provide wide range of alternatives.

An Albuquerque educator was approached about developing the program to reach disengaged students in January 2002. He worked with a number of community agencies to develop a vision and goals for the program and the local media to get the word out about the program. In August of that year, the Dropout Re-engagement Program was made available to students<sup>63</sup>. The program provides an opportunity for dropouts to finish their educations through referrals and case management. Students are recruited through referrals from parents, students, schools and community centers. Students are offered any necessary counseling and placed into one of several alternative school/work options.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Martha Maksym, a representative for the Burlington Truancy Prevention Project, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Burlington Vt. Truancy Prevention Project Report.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Martha Maksym, a representative for the Burlington Truancy Project, 2003.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Russ Hague, director of the Albuquerque (NM) Public Schools Dropout Re-engagement Program, 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Russ Hague, "Dropout Re-Engagement: A New Approach," Principal Leadership (High School Ed.) 3, no. 6 (2003): 44-47.

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The following are some high points and challenges of the program according to a program representative:

### Program Results

- The program worked with about 100 students during its first year.
- About 65 percent of students were still engaged in the program as of February 2003.
- After the first year, the dropout rate went from 8.24 percent to 4.5 percent.<sup>65</sup>

### Program Challenges

- Not enough placement options.
- Program needs additional funding to expand (about \$100,000).
- More help is needed advertising the program.<sup>66</sup>

## **PROJECT 2000, Inc.**

Project 2000, Inc. was a program originally designed to prevent school failure at the early stages of a student's education, which eventually grew to address the needs of minority students in grades K-12. Additionally, the program was designed to prevent the development of negative attitudes toward academic achievement among minority students, primarily African American males.

In 1988, the Washington, D.C. Chapter of the Concerned Black Men, Inc. began implementing Project 2000 at Stanton Elementary School in Washington, D.C. This was the year that the Class of 2000 entered the first grade. Adult male volunteers, mainly African-American men, were recruited and trained to serve as Teacher Assistants (TAs) in the classrooms of this group of children during the school day.<sup>67</sup>

The program was originally designed to be a primary grades intervention that provided positive male role models in the early school experience of young black boys. But, the overwhelmingly positive responses of the children, teachers, staff, volunteers and parents encouraged the program to continue with the class of 2000 during the 4th, 5th and 6th grades. More than 300 volunteers participated in the program during the 6 years of the elementary school phase. When the Class of the Year 2000 entered 7th grade in 1994, a fully-staffed organization was created to develop and implement the Secondary School Phase of the program. The primary mission of the program during this phase was to continue to provide sustained educational mentoring and academic support for these children from the 7th through 12th grades, and beyond to post-secondary training with an emphasis on preparing them to enter college.<sup>68</sup>

Today the program has partnerships with elementary and secondary schools in Washington D.C. and New Jersey. The major program highlights, according to its Web site are the numbers of high school and college graduates who participated in the program beginning as early as the first grade. Also noteworthy are the variety of programs (one-on-one mentoring, summer enrichment, academic guidance, cultural enrichment, etc.) available to students participating in Project 2000.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Russ Hague.

<sup>67</sup> "Project 2000: Ordinary Just Won't Do – Brief History," <http://www.project2000inc.org/history.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

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### Manufacturing Technology Partnership (MTP)

In 1992, the Genesee Area Skill Center (GASC), a vocational school in Genesee County, Michigan, implemented the MTP program for beginning high school students to take classes at the GASC and work at the local General Motors (GM) Truck and Bus Plant. The program was aimed at high school students with at least a C average, including a B in 9<sup>th</sup> grade algebra; a 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading level; a good attendance record and an interest in manufacturing as a career. The program was created after a quality study revealed the plant faced a skilled worker shortage.<sup>69</sup>

The program involves collaboration between GM's Truck and Bus Plant in Flint, Michigan and local organizations including Baker College, Mott Community College and JOBS Central. The program provides students with training that prepares them to enter GM's rigorous apprenticeship program. Students in the program split their time between traditional studies and on-site training at the GASC. The MTP program offers paid work opportunities for its students after school and during the summer.

The following are examples of program effectiveness according to the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in Kalamazoo, Michigan:

- High school graduates who participated in the MTP program were more likely to be employed at higher average wages compared to non-participant graduates;
- MTP students had higher average GPAs and similar or higher class ranks compared with non-MTP students; and
- MTP students had higher average postsecondary education attendance rates.<sup>70</sup>

As of 1997, more than 160 students were enrolled in the program. By 1997, the Genesee County partnership included 22 manufacturing employers who were engaged in programs to prepare students for careers in the skilled trades, manufacturing management, manufacturing design, drafting, engineering and/or first-line supervision.<sup>71</sup>

## Implementing these programs in McLean County

The implementation of the Albuquerque program could mean increased options and benefits for the schools, parents and students in McLean County. One of the strengths of the Albuquerque plan is that there are many local organizations and services (universities, community college, social agencies, local government, etc.) that could participate in this program. If such a program were implemented in McLean County, it could provide local dropouts with a range of educational alternatives and case management services.

The Burlington model demonstrates a quick decrease in the number of dropouts since its implementation. A McLean County program could be based on current local truancy prevention activities and enhance existing services.

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<sup>69</sup> American Youth Policy Forum, Some Things Do Make A Difference For Youth, (Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum, Institute For Educational Leadership, 1997), 30.

<sup>70</sup> American Youth Policy Forum, Some Things Do Make A Difference, 30.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

## 4. Dropout Prevention

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The Project 2000 model could be modified for use in McLean County to target the growing diverse student population in the county. This could be an opportunity for educational institutions to work with community-based organizations to recruit minority volunteers to engage in mentoring and/or after school enrichment. The model would help reach students at an early age—a key element of dropout prevention.

The Manufacturing Technology Project (MTP) model is one that could be adapted in McLean County to provide an educational alternative to students who want to develop job skills and link with local employers while still in high school. It could also build on McLean County's wealth of educational institutions and range of employers.

## 4. Dropout Prevention

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# 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

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## Conclusions

In the highly charged debate over the best ways to prepare young people for employment and independence there are many voices to consider. Problems in the American educational system have long been acknowledged, yet effective solutions remain evasive. Indeed, experience and expectation of high dropout rates has resulted in the formation of many public programs to serve out-of-school youth. In 1997, the American government spent 1.48 billion dollars for such programs, yet critics argue this is not nearly enough to meet a growing need.<sup>72</sup> In a democracy, “Once the existence of a problem is recognized by government, its management takes the form of a society-wide approach to confront the problem, including lobbying and publicity through mass media.”<sup>73</sup> Based on research conducted for MCSCROP, the project team concludes that the biggest challenges facing McLean County planners may be considered within the broad categories of funding, programming, and relationships.

## Funding

*Funding* concerns ways money is provided and how it is spent. Experts and local informants tend to agree that financial limitations present ongoing significant challenges to our educational system. We understand that Illinois’ state and local funding formula plus the No Child Left Behind Act increase pressure on local education. The current school funding formula, which depends heavily on property taxes, allows for some school districts to be adequately funded while others are unable to meet the needs of their students; Illinois is at the bottom of the list of states regarding the gap between prosperous and poor districts. Due to the recent economic downturn, voters are unwilling to approve tax increases—despite financial exigencies that are forcing some McLean County Schools to close. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind Act strains already tight budgets by requiring schools to spend limited resources to meet mandated performance levels; it also may pressure schools to encourage under-performing or difficult students to drop out in order to improve school performance scores.

This situation, bleak as it is, creates an opportunity for McLean County residents and organizations to work more closely together to develop innovative cost-efficient ways to meet local needs. Parents, community organizations, businesses, and churches can use their skills and resources to provide the after-school programs, tutoring, mentoring, job/life skills training necessary to prevent students from leaving school before graduation. Schools and teachers are asked to do more than their share; community support and partnership, always key to student success, is more necessary than ever. One interesting observation from MCSCROP research is that local educators and service providers say they are already providing the programs and services project informants say are needed in the community. This suggests need for greater communication and collaboration between service providers, educators, and community residents.

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<sup>72</sup> Sar Levitan Center, *A Generation of Challenge. Pathways to Success for Urban Youth*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 143.

<sup>73</sup> Kelly and Gaskell, *Debating Dropouts*, 84.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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### Programming

In addition to resources, MCSCR research indicates local need for flexibility in standard secondary curricula, as well as special *programming* for at-risk students. Although schools are constrained by laws and regulations, it is apparent that “one size does not fit all” students’ needs. Research reveals a range of models for alternative approaches and programs that could be adapted to help students who are not successful with conventional academic courses and schedules pick up the credits and skills needed for independence and success. Project informants call for better counseling and guidance regarding both personal and career development throughout the educational experience. They repeat what experts tell us—that many high school students are not college-bound, and need work experience and life skills to succeed in adult life. They also indicate need for flexible options outside of the traditional school curriculum for students to make up credit hours needed for graduation.

Project informants also indicate a need to reassess and change ways schools deal with their social environments. Students, parents, and social service providers call for proactive approaches to bullying and harassment in school. Furthermore, with increasing diversity of ethnicity, race, and socioeconomic class in local schools, it is increasingly important that educators understand cultural, financial, and domestic issues that affect students’ educational engagement and performance. Teachers and administrators need training programs on student-centered ways of dealing with harassment, bullying, and diversity issues. To engage and retain more students, schools must acknowledge the issues that they face and create a more responsive educational system.

### Relationships

Finally, project informants focused on the importance of *relationships* among all of the stakeholders in the educational process—students, parents, educators, service providers, and businesses. Experts and educators agree that the route to academic success begins with one strong relationship between a young child and a teacher; indeed, there is concern that if that relationship has not occurred by the time the child leaves grade school, that student may be at-risk of dropping out before high school graduation. The relationship between parents and schools is also key to student success. Teachers and parents must communicate productively—a task that takes effort, training, and open-mindedness on both sides. The social, cultural, and economic challenges affecting many students and their families require ongoing communication and collaboration among service providers, educators, young people, and parents. Role modeling, mentoring, tutoring, and adult attention to self-destructive behavior (e.g., truancy, substance abuse, family violence, pregnancy) are proven ways to reduce dropout rates. Finally, McLean County is home to a diverse range of large and small businesses that care about and invest in the community. With existing track records in working with schools and supporting volunteer activities of employees, these businesses offer a wealth of still un-tapped human and financial resources that could be used to support career development and alternative programming opportunities. Project research indicated a certain amount of finger pointing and blame-shifting among these stakeholder groups—yet the most constructive way forward is for each to bring its perspectives and strengths to bear on shared problems and opportunities for success.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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### Recommendations

The McLean County School Completion Research Project recommends the following measures to maximize the number and percentage of County students who complete high school:

#### Funding:

- Advocate for change in Illinois' school funding formula;
- Make imaginative use of local resources, including community-based organizations, volunteers, and businesses, to provide a range of educational alternatives;
- Continue communicating school and program funding needs to the wider community; and
- Expand awareness that performance-based funding discourages at-risk students and may increase dropout rates.

#### Programming and Support:

- Recognize that “one size does not fit all.”;
- Deal with bullying and harassment at the source, rather than pressuring victims to avoid or accommodate bullies;
- Expand training for teachers, students, and families regarding diversity issues, including ethnic, racial, disability, and sexual preference differences;
- Improve communication and collaboration among educators, parents, social service providers, community-based organizations, and businesses;
- Use in-school rather than out-of-school suspensions for students who break school rules; and
- Use imagination and local resources to increase flexibility and relevance in the high school curriculum by:
  - Expanding access to vocational programs,
  - Offering computer-based self-study for high school credit, and
  - Considering implementing a case management model as an enhancement of the Alternative School program.

#### Relationships:

- Recognize cultural and social class diversity issues as they affect family relationships with teachers, administrators, and school activities.
- Continue to foster family support of students at all grade levels.
- Provide training and incentives for one-to-one relationships between teachers and students.
- Expand after-school tutoring and mentoring programs.
- Convene a forum or town meeting structured to enable students, parents, educators, social service providers, businesses, and other McLean County residents to share concerns and perspectives regarding why some students drop out before graduation and what can be done to increase high school completion. Use this meeting to spearhead planning for new collaborative initiatives.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

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# Appendix 1: Project Documents

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Research for the McLean County School Completion Research Project (MCSCR) was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Lucinda McCray Beier between September and December, 2003, by 15 students in the interdisciplinary Applied Community and Economic Development masters' degree sequence at Illinois State University. To support research activities, students developed and used documents contained in this Appendix including:

- A "Fact Sheet" designed for project sponsors and research participants;
- A focus group facilitator's guide, used to support conduct of project focus groups; and
- Interview guides used for interviews with youth, parents, service providers, teachers, and experts.

## Appendix 1: Project Documents

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### *FACT SHEET*

#### **McLean County School Completion Research Project (MCSCR)**

**What is the School Completion Research Project?** The MCSCR is a partnership between the United Way of McLean County and the Applied Community Development Program administered by the Stevenson Center, Illinois State University. The purpose of this research project is to learn why some people do not finish high school in McLean County and identify resources and opportunities to increase the number that graduate.

**Why is the MCSCR needed?** The issue of high school completion matters to all communities. Educational attainment is a widely accepted measurement of both community and individual success. This research project will identify reasons McLean County students leave high school before graduation and options County organizations can consider to help kids finish school.

**Who is conducting the SCR?** Faculty and students from the Applied Community Development Program (Stevenson Center, Illinois State University) are conducting this research project with support from the United Way of McLean County.

**How will the MCSCR collect information?** Researchers will:

- Review existing information, such as census and school board data;
- Conduct focus groups involving educators, social service providers, high school students, people who left school before graduation, and parents;
- Interview key informants, including experts, community leaders, and people who have special perspectives on project issues; and
- Review “best practice” literature and models about ways communities can improve high school completion.

**What types of input is the MCSCR looking for?** Researchers will gather information on:

- Community trends regarding school completion;
- Experiences and perceptions of a full range of community residents and professionals; and
- Ideas about new ways residents and organizations can work together to improve the educational experience and participation of *all* students in the community.

**How will the information be used?** Project research will result in a comprehensive final report and presentation materials to be used by the community. The MCSCR report will increase awareness of why students leave school before graduation, recommend things that can be done to keep kids in school, and support plans for programs and services that will make a positive impact on the community.

**What is the timeline for the MCSCR?** Project planning began in April 2003. Research will be conducted between August 2003 and June 2004. The final report and presentation will be completed in June 2004.

For more information about the MCSCR, please contact Lucinda M. Beier at Illinois State University at 438-7771, [lmbeier@ilstu.edu](mailto:lmbeier@ilstu.edu).

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### Focus Group Facilitator's Guide

1. (*Facilitator 1.*) Welcome participants. Introduce yourselves. Discuss roles of the facilitator and note taker. Inform participants about how the focus group will be conducted—including switching roles and participation of note taker in discussion (follow-up questions, in particular). Introduce Beverly Beyer (Graduate Assistant) or Lucinda Beier (Professor). (3 minutes)
2. Discuss housekeeping issues – restrooms, smoking, food & drink, parking, length of focus group, *incentives (if appropriate)*. (2 minutes)
3. Ask participants to briefly introduce themselves (name, job or organizational affiliation (if appropriate)), then give information about “Something other people in the room might not know about you.” Facilitator should start. (7-10 minutes)
4. Describe the study and where this focus group fits into the research project.  
“The McLean County School Completion Research Project is looking at why some students in McLean County do not complete high school and considering ways local organizations can work together to help students stay in school, graduate, and equip themselves for employment or further education. We are meeting with groups including educators, social service providers, young people, and parents, to discuss these issues. We are looking forward to talking with you about your experience and perspectives.” (3 minutes)
5. Present focus group discussion guidelines
  - Confidentiality—in our reporting, there will be no association of the names of individual participants with any information or quotation.
  - In our discussion, we ask that you try to refrain from using the names of individuals—particularly students, teachers, or school staff members.
  - Outside this room, it’s okay to talk about the project generally: indeed, we hope you will. However, please don’t talk outside this group about anything a specific individual has said.
  - It is important to us that everyone contribute to the discussion and that nobody dominates it. We also ask that, to help the note-taker, during general discussions, one person talks at a time and that there be no side conversations.
  - We will finish our conversation by the promised time. We know your time is valuable.
  - If you have information you don’t have a chance to share—or don’t want to discuss with the whole group—please write it on the notecard provided and leave it with one of us when you leave.
  - The primary focus is on the future: We want advice from you about how community organizations can work together in new ways to help McLean County young people finish high school. (5 minutes)
  - Do you have any questions about or suggestions for additions to the guidelines?
6. Talk about what we are going to do:  
Answer three main questions:

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- Why do some McLean County students leave school before graduating?
  - What do you think the schools, community organizations, and families are doing right and what do you think they are doing wrong to support high school completion in McLean County?
  - What can schools, community groups, and families do to move toward 100% high school completion in McLean County? *Or* If you were writing the recommendations section of our report, what advice would you offer? (3 minutes)
7. Ask participants to work in pairs to identify three reasons McLean County students drop out of high school. (5-8 minutes)
  8. Ask each pair to report on its three reasons. List reasons on flipchart. Label flipchart pages with question and sheet numbers; as pages fill (where appropriate) tape them to the wall. (10 minutes)
  9. When each pair has reported, review charted responses, and ask participants if they have anything to add. (5 minutes)
  10. (*Facilitator 2.*) Ask participants to work in pairs to identify things schools, community organizations, and families are doing right and wrong to help McLean County students to complete high school. (5 minutes)
  11. Ask each pair to report on discussions, and flipchart responses. (10 minutes)
  12. Go around the room and ask each participant to provide one recommendation for the final report. (10 minutes)
  13. Inform participants that the study will be available in June 2004 and thank them for their time.

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### Interview Guide: Youth

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Description of informant, some background information (e.g., Age. School s/he dropped out of. Age at which s/he dropped out. How long s/he has lived in McLean County.)

1. When (year) and why did you drop out of high school?
2. What, if anything, could have been done to keep you from dropping out of school?
3. How do you feel now about having dropped out of high school?
4. Were there programs, classes, teachers, staff members, family, or social activities that made you want to stay in school? (No names, please!)
5. Was it important to your parents and other family members for you to finish high school? What, if anything did they do or say to encourage you to stay in school? How did they react to your decision to leave school?
6. What did your friends say about your decision to drop out of school? Did their opinions influence you in any way?
7. Did you attend any alternative programs? (Probe, work release, Alternative School, other?)
8. What are the positive aspects of dropping out of school?
9. What are the negative aspects of dropping out of school?
10. Did you return to school or get a GED? Why or why not?
11. What are you doing now?
12. What are your plans for the future?
13. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

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### Interview Guide: Parents

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Position/description of informant, some background information (e.g., How long have you lived in McLean County? What kind of work do you do? What can you tell me about your family?)

1. How old was your son or daughter when s/he dropped out of high school?
2. Why did your son or daughter drop out of high school?
3. What role (if any) did the high school play in your son's or daughter's decision to leave school? Did anyone at the school try to stop your son or daughter from dropping out?
4. Do you feel satisfied with the way the school dealt with your son or daughter?
5. How did you feel about the decision your son or daughter made to leave school?
6. Did you or other family members try to prevent your son or daughter from leaving school?
7. What influence (if any) did your son or daughter's friends have on his or her decision to leave school?
8. Did s/he go back to school or get a GED?
9. What is s/he doing now?
10. Do you have any advice for other parents who are struggling with this issue?
11. How could schools do a better job at helping students complete high school?
12. Are there things other community organizations could do to help students complete high school?
13. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

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### Interview Guide: High School Principals

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Position/description of informant, some background information (e.g., How long have you been working with high school students? How long have you been in McLean County? \_

1. In your experience, why do students drop out of high school?
2. In your experience, why do some at-risk students stay in high school?
3. What is being done at your school to prevent students from dropping out?
4. If you had unlimited resources, what measures might be taken to prevent high school students from dropping out?
5. What is the process for identifying a student as a dropout?
6. Does your school intervene with students considered at-risk for dropping out? (Problems: If so, who is responsible for this? What kinds of students tend to be the focus of interventions?)
7. Do you see students “dropping back” into school?
8. In your experience, what is the level of involvement of the families/parents of students who drop out?
9. What are the characteristics of the students who drop out of your school? Is there a “typical” dropout?
10. Who or what has failed the student if he or she drops out? (No names, please!)
11. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

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### McLean County School Completion Research Project

#### Interview Guide: Social Service Providers

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Position/description of informant, some background information (e.g., Can you tell me about the services you provide to high school dropouts or students at risk of dropping out? How long have you been associated with this organization?)

1. In what capacity does your organization encounter high school dropouts?
2. Does your organization base its services on any prevention or intervention models?
3. In your experience, why do students drop out of high school?
4. In your experience, what encourages students to stay in school or go back to school?
5. Can you give some examples of what dropouts end up doing in the short- and long-term in regard to work, school, family, etc.?
6. Do you believe that failure to complete high school is an important problem in McLean County? Is this something that is increasing? Decreasing? Why?
7. What are schools and other community organizations doing right in terms of helping McLean County students finish high school and prepare for employment and further education?
8. What are schools and other organizations doing wrong in terms of helping McLean County students finish high school and prepare for employment and further education?
9. What are the characteristics of “typical” high school dropout?
10. In your experience, at what age to students drop out of high school?
11. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

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### McLean County School Completion Research Project

#### Interview Guide: Teachers

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Position/description of informant, some background information (e.g., Job/position? How long have you been in McLean County?)

1. Why do you think McLean County students drop out of school?
2. Do you think that certain types of students are more likely to drop out than other types of students?
3. What do you think local schools are doing right in terms of keeping students in school and preparing them for employment or further education?
4. What do you think local schools are doing wrong in terms of keeping students in school and preparing them for employment or further education?
5. Do you know of any successful intervention (drop-out prevention or “second chance” high school completion) programs (here or elsewhere)? (If yes) Why are these programs successful?
6. What can schools, community organizations, and families do to increase the number of students who stay in school and improve their educational experience?
7. Do you think high school completion rates are an important issue in McLean County? Why/why not?
8. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

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### McLean County School Completion Research Project

#### Interview Guide: Academic Experts

Date of interview:

Name of interviewer:

Name of informant:

Position/description of informant, some background information (e.g., What is your academic background? How does your work relate to dropout prevention? (If appropriate) How long have you been in McLean County?)

9. What can you tell me about current research about high school completing and drop out prevention?
10. Why do you think students drop out of school?
11. Are there any clear trends about high school dropouts with respect to socioeconomic status, race, gender, and family structure?
12. What do you think schools are doing right in terms of keeping students in school and preparing them for employment or further education?
13. What do you think schools are doing wrong in terms of keeping students in school and preparing them for employment or further education?
14. Do you know of any successful intervention (drop-out prevention or “second chance” high school completion) programs? (If yes) Why are these programs successful?
15. What can schools, community organizations, and families do to increase the number of students who stay in school and improve their educational experience?
16. Do you think high school completion rates are an important issue in McLean County? Why/why not?
17. Is there a question I should have asked you that I did not ask?

# Appendix 2: Model Programs

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## Alternative Education

### Coalition for PRIDE

Brown, Karen, Chavkin, Nancy Feyl . “Building a Multi-Ethnic Family-School-Community Partnership: Coalition for PRIDE.” School Community Journal. 1. no. 2 (Fall-Win 1991): 33-36. (Milner 1<sup>st</sup> Floor LC215. S387)

To improve its alarming dropout rate, a southwestern Texas school district instituted the PRIDE Center, an alternative high school featuring self-paced curricula and flexible timetables for beginning and completing coursework. School social workers formed an ancillary coalition of community, business, and family forces to support prevention, intervention, and recovery of dropouts. Recommendations for other communities are provided.

### Community Learning Center, Southwest Plains, Kansas

Johnson, Tara. “Proposed Learning Center Could Offer a Second Chance,” Southwest Daily Times. Found at <http://www.swdtimes.com/swdtimes/html/Daily2/SUNDAY/aug26/03.html>

The Community Learning Center is system of schools, or centers, for “recovering dropouts.” There are 7 centers currently and will expand to 14. The average center costs \$60,000 per year. Students are placed in the appropriate literacy level, or in ESL classes. The curriculum is software-based. Centers are open 12 hours a day so students can drop in when they are available. “The students who enroll at the Community Learning Center would be counted as full-time equivalent student; therefore, the State Department of Education would help fund the program based on the full-time equivalent number of students. It’s a source of revenue for districts with successful centers, but more importantly it’s a source (to meet a) human need to recapture students who have dropped away.”

### Daylight/Twilight High School

American School Board Journal. “The Magna Awards 2003: Second Chance High School, Trenton Public Schools, Trenton, N.J.” [http://www.asbj.com/magna/winners2003/Magna03\\_Trenton.pdf](http://www.asbj.com/magna/winners2003/Magna03_Trenton.pdf)

The Daylight/Twilight High School is a school for students 17 or older who have dropped out of school. The school runs in three shifts: 7:30 to 11:30 a.m., 11:30 to 3:30 p.m., and 4 to 8 p.m. It is a “no frills” program that awards diplomas, GEDs, and has opportunities for work-study and service learning credits. “The program is run using state reimbursement funds. ‘It’s essentially very low-cost, because you don’t have cafeterias, libraries, or gyms, and you can either expand or contract the program based on enrollment,’ says Lytle [superintendent of Trenton Public Schools].”

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### **TEAMwork Project**

Fagan, Juanita. "There's No Place Like School." Principal 5. no.36 (2001): 36-37.

The TEAMwork Project in rural Southwest Oregon provides services to homeless children. "In a rural area such as ours, poverty is unlike that experienced in urban communities because the families are isolated from services that could provide support. Even transportation to distant locations where such services are available is a barrier for high-poverty families. In our community, the school has become the social agency for these families, facilitating a variety of services."

### **Coalition of Essential School**

Henderson, Haven, Mary Anne Raywid. "Small" Revolution in New York City." The Journal of Negro Education. 63. no. 1 (Winter 1994): 28-45

The article described the process by which the Coalition of Essential Schools was formed in New York City and includes an interview of Henderson (principal designate for a new CES school) about the Legacy School for Integrated Studies which opened in fall 1993. Coalition schools are smaller than other public schools in NYC. Discussion also addresses CES performance and graduation rates. "Thus the Coalition Campus Schools Project is intended as a research effort, a school transformation effort, a demonstration of new use of existing school plant facilities, a means of spreading the lessons learned by alternative schools, a model for teacher education and staff development, and a model for creating and sustaining new radically restructured schools." ( 33)

### **Seattle Middle College High School at Seattle Central Community College**

Houston, Alice V., Susan M. Byers, Doug Danner. "A Successful Alternative to Traditional Education: Seattle Middle College High School at Seattle Central Community College." The Journal of Negro Education . 61. no. 4 (Autumn, 1992): 463-470.

Established in 1990, Seattle Middle College High School (MCHS) serves a population who are generally between 15 and 20 who are not enrolled in school, typically have a poor attendance record, on average have failed at least two grades. The turnout is amazing. There was a profile of four students who enrolled at MCHS and have graduated with a significant improvement in grade point average and thrived in this nontraditional school environment. Here is one example: "Student A: Male, age 20, last attended school one-and-a-half years before applying to MCHS. He failed to graduate with his high school class and came to MCHS with the equivalent of 16.5 credits and a 14 grade point average. His attendance at MCHS was nearly perfect, and he assumed his academic responsibilities with a great deal of maturity. At MCHS he earned a 4.0 grade point average and 3.5 high school credits ... [and] is presently continuing his education at Seattle Central Community College, where he received a \$1,000 academic scholarship." (465)

## Appendix 2: Model Programs

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### **Service Learning in Alternative Education Settings**

Meyers, Susan. "Service Learning in Alternative Education Settings." The Clearing House. 73. no. 2 (Nov/Dec 1999): 114-17.

This article discusses some results of students in alternative education settings to engage in service learning projects, with benefits to the students, the school, and community. One positive result is the community no longer sees the students as 'problems' that must be fixed. Another is the sense of personal ownership the students have, which draws and keeps their attention. "...The process for planning and implementing service learning project may appear overwhelming. However, teachers have found that when the process is taken one step at a time, with the understanding that the planning itself is an important part of the learning experience for teacher and students, it is well worth the time and energy." (115)

### **Caring Communities**

Paglin, Catherine. "Communities That Care: Personable Approach to Problem-Solving Brings a Warm, Small-Town Feeling to Urban Neighborhoods." US Northwest Education. 4. no. 2 (Win 1998): 42-45, 52

Leaders from business, education, churches, government, and the nonprofit sector in Multnomah County (Oregon) started eight Caring Communities, collaborative programs dedicated to 100% high school completion. Although each has its own emphasis, all support and coordinate other groups' efforts to help poor and minority students succeed. (TD)

### **PLATO Web Learning Network**

"Success in Aldine, Texas." PLATO Roadmap to Success. Volume1, Number 5. August 15, 2002. Found at <http://www.plato.com/roadmap/0208/bestpractices.html>

Students of program work in a computer lab or are assigned laptop computers through which they connect to Success Through Academic Recovery (STAR) labs. The STAR labs cover courses and test preparation where students can work at their own pace. An additional advantage for the school district is that when students successfully complete the PLATO Web Learning Network the average daily attendance funds are awarded to the schools. "Marion Crosby is one of several teacher/lab directors employed by the district. Working at Aldine High School, Crosby has an average student load of 120 students per quarter. She's seeing the difference PLATO and the STAR lab can make in the lives of struggling students. During the 2001-02 school year, she saw an 85 percent success rate among her students."

### **Twilight (in Pennsbury, Pennsylvania)**

McGinity, F.J. "Second Chance High School." Joe's Place found at <http://www.bucks.edu/~currents/currents4/joe/second.htm>

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Curriculum of self-tutorial instruction in math, science, English, social studies all available on CDs accessible to students in computer lab. Teachers and aides help students along with CDs and textbooks. If students receive scores of 80% or better on tests at the end of each chapter, they move on to the next chapter. The student to teacher ratio is 5:1. School runs 1-5 p.m. Jobs or community service are required. The school has a psychotherapist.

### Project LEAD

Walton, Flavia R., Valerie D. Ackiss, Sandra N. Smith. "Education Versus Schooling--Project LEAD: High Expectations!" The Journal of Negro Education. 60. no. 3 (Summer, 1991): 441-453.

Project LEAD is a prevention approach, which addresses reasons why students are initially classified as at-risk. The Project uses a five-pronged curriculum to tackle sex, drugs, decision-making skills, values, self-esteem and image, and academic excellence with vocational or career planning. "If we do nothing but observe their parade of disaster, which all too often ends in self destruction, we are guilty of failing to use the tools, knowledge, and know-how at our disposal to assist our youth to become all that they can be." (442-443)

## Diversity Issues

### Project 10

Shaw, Marvin. "Gay Pride in High School. Project 10 Counseling Program in Los Angeles, California". The Progressive. 59. no. 13 (July 1995).

Project 10 was launched a decade ago by Virginia Uribe, a science teacher at Fairfax High School in Los Angeles, to foster self-understanding and acceptance among gay and lesbian teenagers, reduce verbal and physical abuse from heterosexuals, prevent suicide, and distribute accurate information on AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. The successful project spread to thirty of the other fifty high schools in the Los Angeles Unified Schools District, and it is now being replicated in other districts. An address for further information is provided.

### Worcester Public Schools

McFarlane, Clive, "Worcester dropout rate falls; Alternative programs showing success," Worcester Telegram & Gazette, (Nov 21, 2001) p. B1.

The article reports that Worcester public schools had one of the lowest dropout rates for Hispanic and African American students in the state of Massachusetts during 1999-2000. Educators in the article cite intervention from counselors as a catalyst for keeping potential dropouts in school.

### **Crime and Gangs**

#### **Communities in Schools, Inc., SafeFutures, and Children at Risk**

Morley, Elaine and Shelli Rossman. Helping At-Risk Youth: Lessons from Community-based Initiatives. December 1997. The Urban Institute. <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/helpyouth.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2003).

This book addresses different methods for helping students that are involved in gangs and violence through outreach in the community. “Common sense and years of research suggest that at-risk youth and their families have multiple needs and interrelated problem behaviors that are not likely to be successfully addressed by single-response, stand-alone initiatives.” Communities in Schools, Inc., SafeFutures, and Children at Risk are the three models investigated in this summary. “The five topics addressed here—services integration and case management, parental involvement, using volunteers for tutoring and mentoring, fund-raising and marketing, and monitoring program outcomes—are critical components of community-based initiatives for at-risk youth, yet local programs often experience difficulty implementing them.”

#### **Memphis Shelby Crime Commission**

“Memphis Shelby Crime Commission Best Practices.”

<http://www.memphiscrime.org/research/index.html>. (accessed September 15, 2003).

This website gives an extensive look at the best practices used by the Memphis Shelby Crime Commission. Practices number 6, 7, and 8 are directly related to crime and high school students. “Best Practice Number Six: Crime Prevention Through Coordinated and Community-Based After school Programs, Best Practice Number Seven: Strict Enforcement of Probation for High-Risk Youthful Offenders through the Operation Nightlight Initiative, Best Practice Number Eight: Reducing Crime and Supporting Education through a Comprehensive Truancy Reduction Strategy.”

## Appendix 2: Model Programs

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# Appendix 3: Bibliography

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