Chapter 1

An Unscientific Inquiry
Into the
Causes of Dropping out of School

This memorandum constitutes a highly subjective, but hopefully constructive, attempt to address the question of why young South Dakotans drop out of high school. It is intended to view the problem from new or at least nontraditional perspectives. It makes no attempt to review professional studies or compiled statistics. Because this approach is radically different from most of the literature and analyses that are the product of professionals in the educational establishment, it may be purposeful to preface this memorandum with a series of assumptions that the author has made and which provide the framework for what follows.

Starting Assumptions

First, and most important, it is the conviction of the author that most high school students who drop out of school do so for a variety of reasons, that these reasons are complex, synergistic, and unquantifiable, and that identifying and analyzing these interlocking rationales defies most traditional statistical techniques.

Second, and also very important, it is the conviction of the author that a veritable witches' brew of social, psychological, economic, cultural, and interpersonal phenomena have far more to do with the drop out problem than various flaws or deficiencies in the educational system. This is not to say that better schools would not alleviate the situation. However, educational institutions, like all human institutions, are not closed systems and are strongly influenced by the cultural environment in which they exist.

Third, it is the conviction of the author that it is of limited utility and negligible statistical veracity to attempt to determine why students drop out by asking students why they drop out. This statement is not intended to disparage the truthfulness, the integrity, or the intelligence of most drop outs. However, all attempts to rationalize human decision-making are highly problematic. This is especially so when the decision maker is an adolescent who has made a far reaching decision of which most adults would disapprove. Even among mature adults, most important personal decisions have at

least as many irrational components are rational. The emotional allure of "I want to" is often more than a match for the more logical "I ought to."

Fourth, it is the conviction of the author that the public school system in South Dakota is, at present, superior (id est., better funded, with better facilities, better teachers, better curricula, et cetera) than the public school system of South Dakota in the 1960's when the author was a high school student in rural South Dakota. Yet, in the 1960's, the dropout rate was negligible while today it is a serious social problem and public policy concern. The only logical conclusion that can be drawn from this fact is that the dropout rate is powerfully influenced by factors other than those which are purely components of the educational superstructure.

Basic Hypothesis

If the present educational system is not the main cause of the dropout rate, what is? It is again the conviction of the author that a complex, interrelated, and synergistic collage of phenomena arising almost ineluctably from contemporary American society has, completely unintentionally and unpremeditatedly, created a social milieu that, not so much encourages dropping out of school, as it does far too little to actively discourage it. In the most overly simplified formulation, today's high school student CAN drop out ----- those of fifty years ago simply did not have a viable option to do so.

Disclaimer

As we proceed to the enumeration and overview of the specific societal phenomena that create, as an unintended consequence, the type of social milieu that enables the contemporary attitude of nonchalance toward school attendance, please constantly bear in mind the following:

(1) It is not my intent to characterize societal changes as good or bad. Many changes, technology as a prime example, are intrinsically positive, but bear unintended negative secondary consequences;

(2) It is not my intent to characterize all students, parents, teachers as helpless in the face of social determinationism. Every individual will resist, adapt, or react to social phenomena in highly individualistic ways;

(3) It is not my intent to generalize excessively. But in a memorandum of this length, it will not be possible to avoid over generalizing from time to time to illustrate points;

(4) It is not my intent to minimize the synergy and catalysis of the whole social environment by naming and attempting to isolate individual societal phenomena. It is my firm conviction that most of the phenomena categorized in this memorandum are, to a considerable degree, interdependent, relativistic, and catalytic.

Catalogue of Contributing Causes

What, then, is different between the social milieu of South Dakota in 1966 and in 2006 that may be significant to understanding the dropout phenomenon? I believe that the following, at a minimum, are relevant:

(1) Adolescent Wage Earning ----- Probably the most important single phenomenon bearing on the subject of this memorandum is the change in the economic earning capacity of adolescents in the last two generations. In 1960, there simply were no wage-earning jobs for teenagers in South Dakota. Most had household chores to do or may have helped with the family farm or business, but very few had, or could hope to find, part time employment. Paper routes, errands, lawn work, and babysitting might provide a little pocket money, but no real income. Today's service economy provides countless employment opportunities to high school students in fast food restaurants, convenience stores, retailing, delivery services, clerking, waitressing, and a hundred other activities. Wages are good, considering that the labor force is unskilled and often unmotivated. Hours are flexible, and there is no discrimination against hiring teens in certain business sectors. As a result, many, if not most, teens have the very real sense of independence that comes with a regular paycheck. This not only gives them more economic freedom and options, but weakens their reliance on parents as providers.

(2) Material Distractions ----- Because South Dakota is more affluent than it was forty years ago, teens own more things. Cars, cell phones, video games, computers, and whatnot are almost universally available. Teens acquire material things that they enjoy and spend large amounts of time and psychic energy enjoying them ----- often neglecting school work. Forty years ago few high school students had cars, most modern technology did not exist, and the only choice of television viewing was ON or OFF. Ownership of material possessions also contributes powerfully to a sense, substantially false, of independence from parents ----- similar to the phenomenon discussion in the previous section.

(3) Sexual Activity ----- Contemporary teens are much more sexually active than their grandparents were. The formation of sexual partnerships, even if temporary, is strongly disruptive to adolescent relationships with parents, families, and school. Teens in love or in lust are likely to view any number of activities as more important than getting an education. Moreover, if the most important person in a teen's life is another teen who shares his or her value system and priorities, the propensity to dismiss schoolwork is amplified and ratified.

(4) Decline in the Traditional Family ----- Children live in families with their parents, who are adults, and with their siblings, who may be older or younger. In families, children learn to gauge mature, as opposed to immature, behavior

based on the daily examples of their father, mother, brothers, and sisters. During the last forty years, the demographics of the traditional South Dakota family have changed. The child is more likely to be in a family with only one parent and with fewer siblings. This reduces the probabilities that the teen will be exposed to the variety of mature behavior patterns that will help him or her to make mature decisions ----- like the decision to stay in school.

(5) Decline in Parental Authority ----- A very marked difference between 1960 and 2006 is the decline in parental authority. This derives from a plethora of causes which could easily fill a book. Some of the more important include the various factors listed in this memorandum which tend to make teens less dependant on parents. But several other factors are also vitally significant.

(A) One parent cannot exercise as much parental authority over a teen as two are able to, either individually or in unison. As more and more families become one-parent households, the inevitable concurrence is a diminution in parental control.

(B) When children live in a one-parent household that parent is usually the mother. Generally speaking the mother is the better caregiver, but the father is the better disciplinarian. The result is often a further diminution of parental authority.

(C) When any member of the traditional family unit is no longer present, the relational dynamics existing between all of the remaining members changes. Sometimes single parents begin to act in some situations more like older siblings or friends toward their teenage children. Again the result is often a further diminution of parental authority.

(6) Decline in Parental Discipline ----- Not only has the structure of parental authority changed over the last four or five decades, but the character of parental authority has also changed markedly. Generally speaking this is a change for the better, but, as with all changes, there are often unexpected consequences. Parents today are more likely than their parents to attempt to rear their child in loving kindness, and to attempt to reason with them, and to allow them to learn by making poor decisions in small matters that the parent knows are not the best. Previous generations of parents were more authoritarian, imposed their values on their children, and presented little opportunity to experiment or dissent. Both methods have some merit. However, some child raising decisions, such as staying in school, are simply too important to allow the child to play a meaningful role in the decision-making process. Parents need to veto any attempt of the child to drop out, and some of those who are used to reasoning with their children find it difficult to impose their will upon a child that is used to seeing the parent give in or grant latitude.

(7) Mobility as an Adjunct of Adolescent Independence ----- Truly the automobile revolutionized, more than anything else, the twentieth century. Not the least significant aspect of the car has been its impact on the nature of American adolescence. Most teens today have, or have access to, cars. Teens of my generation did not. Mobility creates a sense of independence in teens which is at least partially beneficial. Mobility also creates a sense that you can flee from or escape your problems which is at least partially negative. Mobility means that high schoolers will spend more time with their peer groups and less time with their families which, in turn, weakens parental authority and gives the teen a false sense of emancipation.

(8) Decline in School Discipline ----- School discipline in any era is a thorny question. In recent decades, corporal punishment and other forms of harsh punishment have virtually disappeared from the school system. But even more significantly, parents are increasingly reluctant to permit the schools to effectively discipline students, and teachers and administrators are increasingly reluctant to enforce discipline on students even to the extent authorized by school boards. The result is a significant decline in student discipline, a significant increase in students hectoring other students and disrupting instruction. This tends to make the school environment less fostering and less welcoming than forty years ago and contributes to the drop out phenomenon.

(9) Social Affluence ----- South Dakotans are financially far more comfortable than they were fifty years ago. Although many teens are reared in economically disadvantaged families, the kind of poverty that translates to hunger, lack of warm clothing, and bad housing is no longer common. These changes contribute to the drop out phenomenon in several ways:

(A) Since teens have never experienced poverty, they do not fear it. They have always been provided for and see no connection between gaining an education and achieving a comfortable existence.

(B) Affluent parents provide a social safety net for drop outs. Few parents, no matter how disappointed that their child has dropped out of school, lack the resources to cushion the child's transition to the outside world. Such benevolence enables the drop out phenomenon.

(C) In our affluent society, it really does not cost much to live at a subsistence level. Drop outs often are initially quite satisfied with a bohemian life style of an inexpensive one-room apartment, a twenty-year old Honda, and a weekly paycheck for thirty hours of light labor at McDonalds. Some continue to live at home; others share low-rent housing. With such modest economic aspirations, the leap from school attendance to quasi-vagrancy is quite attainable.

(D) Societal affluence has, to a considerable extent, destroyed the Great American Dream. Throughout much of American history, the public school system and gaining a primary or secondary education were universally recognized and respected as every child's ticket to social and economic advancement. Widespread affluence has weakened the perception of a cause and effect relationship between education and success. Many uneducated people find employment that allows them to live comfortable lives. Many others pursue advanced professional or academic education that often does not translate to impressive careers or salaries. Most teens of the present generation neither fear failure nor do they desire success to the same degree as teens forty years ago.

(10) Adolescent Self-Esteem ----- One of the most subtle, but, at the same time, most portentous differences between my generation of teens and today's is their self-image. Basically the contemporary student is far more self-confident and self-assured then his grandparents were. This is partially inculcated in the schools, partially fostered in the family, partially the result of the teen's sense of independence concomitant to employment, possessions, and free time. Generally this is a positive thing. However, many teens are not mature enough to avoid some of the inherent pitfalls. Students, who are correctly taught that everyone, including themselves, have the right to their own opinion and the right to express it, fail to understand that some opinions are better than others ----- in fact, some opinions are just plain wrong, even self-destructive. Although it is important to acquire the self-confidence to be an adult in an adult world, it can be a tricky thing to learn when to yield to an adult, whether parent, teacher, mentor, or role model, who holds a contrary, but superior, opinion that affects your wellbeing.

(11) Peer Pressure ----- Adolescent peer pressure is certainly not a new phenomenon ----- it existed forty years ago. However, it is the conviction of the author that it is more pervasive with the youth of today. Contemporary teens spend more time together, away from parents and other adults, in more intimate settings. Their sense of independence and self-esteem makes them more likely to express and advocate opinions that will be approved and ratified by their peers. When the teen hears a parent or teacher express a value judgment that is contrary to his or her belief system, the teen is more likely to resist the adult's opinion, since the teen knows that others in the peer group also disagree. Contemporary youth spend so much time with their peers, that the peer group takes on aspects of being a second family ----- but a second family in which it is less likely that a mature value system will be espoused and prevail.

(12) Adolescent Tribalism ----- One fascinating aspect of contemporary adolescent peer groups is the tendency, fostered by information transfer by means of technology, to gravitate to likeminded associations of individuals. Several of these "tribes" have become almost universal on the American scene. In most

high schools, there will be free-associating collectives of geeks, jocks, nerds, stoners, Goths, valley girls, bangers, and other types. Because of mass communication, a stoner in South Dakota is more likely to share the value system of a stoner in California or Alabama than that of a jock who sits next to him in the classroom everyday. These "tribes" form an exceedingly powerful peer group which, once joined, exert tremendous influences on the behavior of their members. Moreover, certain of these "tribes," especially Goths and stoners, engender value systems predisposed to dropping out.

(13) Contemporary Changes in the Concept of Childhood ----- For a multitude of reasons, Americans tend to view childhood much differently than previous generations. Two generations ago, childhood was largely viewed as a preparation for adulthood, a testing and trying time culminating in the ideal of matrimony and parenthood, id est., mature adulthood. Today parents want their children to be happy and to enjoy their adolescent years as a kind of "Golden Time." While there is certainly nothing inherently wrong with either approach, the two are to a degree at incontrovertible crosscurrents with each other. The concept of formal education is more congenial to the "preparation" ideal of childhood than the "Golden Time" ideal. Being instructed, whether in the classroom or in the home, is an important, but not necessarily, an "enjoyable" experience. Many teens would admit to enjoying school. But on closer examination, you may find that, by school, they mean associating daily with their peers, athletics, extracurricular activities, dancing, dating, hanging out, and a variety of things that only tangentially relate to school. Few enjoy classroom instruction, which is the essence of school. Hence there is a logical disconnect between attending school and being "happy."

(14) Urbanization ----- The old African proverb that "It takes a village to raise a child" may be an exaggeration, but it is easily demonstrated that villages generally do a better job of raising children than urban environments. In small towns there are often dozens of adults more than willing to act in loco parentis by encouraging, cajoling, and pressuring teens to stay in school. In cities and large towns, fewer adults are likely to assume this role. Thus as rural communities have declined in South Dakota over the last fifty years, more and more teenagers are attending city schools or consolidated schools far away from the watchful and protective eyes of the "village."

(15) Technology as an Impact on the Psychological Environment ----- One of the most profound differences between the present generation and my own is that both were reared in astonishingly different technological environments. Typical childhood activities of fifty years ago required time, application, and concentration. We read books, did chores, even the games that we played, whether chess or Monopoly or card games or cowboy and Indians, required attention, application, and persistence. Modern technology, whether computers, video games, cell phones, television, and many others cater to and inculcate instant gratification and require only a short attention span and

limited application. Contemporary children grow up in a world where things happen quickly and effects are largely transitory. Again, this is progress and in many ways good. But it fosters an adolescent mindset which is somewhat antithetical to schoolwork and public instruction.

Technology also impacts the psychological environment of young minds by multiplying the variety of options available to spend one's time ----- or, put differently, to distract one from more important activities like learning. The more options a child has the more chances that the child will select a poor option or will be distracted from more important alternatives.

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis of the societal causes for the failure of contemporary teens to resist the temptation to drop out of school is obviously incomplete and well as inconclusive. It attempts to view the problem from a multitude of varied perspectives but fails to encompass all of the important perspectives. It struggles to identify, isolate, and catalogue complex social, cultural, economic, and psychological phenomena that defy identification, isolation, and categorization. It does, however, make a case for the core proposition of this memorandum ----- that the most significant cause of the present problem of keeping students in school until they complete their education is powerfully impacted by subtle, but enormously powerful and pervasive, forces that extend far beyond the narrow realm of our educational institutions.

Chapter 2

Dropping out of School -- Recovery and Reconnection

If South Dakota is to thrive as a worthwhile place to live and work, all of our young people must receive the educational preparation needed to become skilled and enterprising contributors to their own success. Yet, too many of our youth fail to finish their education, even at the high school level and fall far short of reaching their full potential as people and as contributing members of our society. It is an even more distressing situation than is readily apparent because many young South Dakotans who quit school too soon are neither stupid nor lazy. What they often are is uninspired and lacking a long term vision for their lives that will make them happy and productive. Why do the challenges and burdens of going to school today loom so large that they surrender to them rather than doing what they know will secure a better future and a more rewarding life? Simply relying on student demographics can be misleading, academic performance and engagement in school are better indicators of who will leave school early. South Dakota's schools must be evaluated not only for improved student achievement but also for their ability to reach all students and retain those who might be at risk for dropping out. Schools must adopt a dual agenda of high standards and high graduation rates. Otherwise, the benefits of increased performance will be realized by too few students, the others, and our state will suffer.

"Just for Kids", a Best Practices Study authored by Mike Hudson and Jean Rutherford, presents a survey of several school districts which have exhibited success in helping their students reach higher levels of achievement and performance than comparable schools. Their survey is prefaced with an overview of the Best Practice Framework which we will recite here. The five organizing themes or the Framework provide a structure for studying the practices of high-performing schools and determining what works to meet the needs of students generally and lower performing students (potential dropouts) particularly.

1. Curriculum and Academic Goals: What is it that we expect students to learn? Better performing schools have clear and measurable goals for each grade and higher expectations for students characterized as 'average' or below. Learning goals for all students are developed from achievement assessments from previous years and then projected forward for the new school year. Assignments are rigorous whether or not the student is academically advanced. High-performing schools create curriculum maps that focus on math and literacy ensuring a connection between grades as students advance and fashion a curriculum guide that reflects state and national standards.

2. Teacher Selection and Capacity Building: High-performing schools are deliberate in selecting and developing staff that have the capacity to help students achieve established goals. Equally important is an aptitude for collaboration with other teachers when selecting materials, planning instructional strategies (all teachers in a grade may need a common planning time), evaluating student progress and when mentoring and being mentored. Mentors are assigned to new teachers and spend time in the new teachers' classrooms. New teachers provide their lesson plans to the mentors for review and guidance. Teachers meet often, by grade level, to discuss curriculum issues, align and reform curricula based upon student assessments (which are continual and ongoing) and craft lesson plans. Teachers are supported when they seek professional development opportunities which they must do every year. Some high-performing schools have had success developing administrative leaders from within by encouraging staff to seek the appropriate credentials. Leadership internships are widely available to allow candidates to gain experience, evaluate their abilities and be evaluated for their leadership potential.

3, Instructional Programs, Practices and Arrangements: Instructional programs must be closely aligned with the goals the school has developed for its students and there must be sufficient materials and resources available to support the programs. Programs must have a measurability component so that a determination can be made if the program is aligned with school goals and is effective in meeting the goals. Teachers at high-performing schools are encouraged to promote pilot programs which are strenuously tested for their worth before general adoption. Throughout program development, there is a theme of differentiation, not remediation for differing levels of students exemplified by a shift from moving slower students out of a classroom to providing in-class specialized (differentiated) instruction. Teachers may collaborate with a librarian and a technologist to provide instruction for gifted students while a different

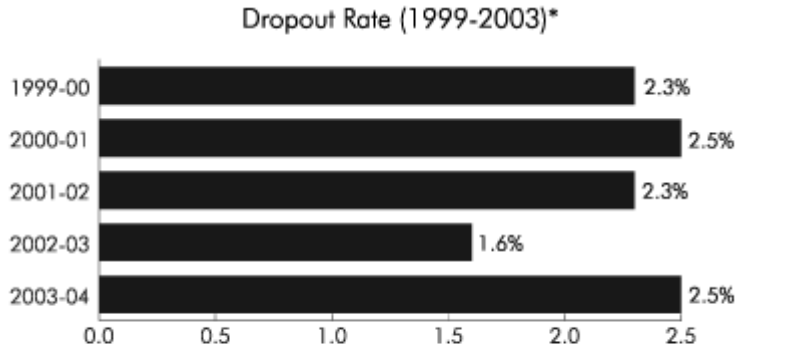
team of people may help with students who are struggling. But the same basic curriculum is provided to all students. It is just provided in different, more appropriate ways.

4. Monitoring, Compilation, Analysis and Use of Data: Knowing what must be taught and providing qualified and prepared people to teach it are important but they will be for naught if there are no means to determine if the goals set for student success are being achieved. Data must be collected and multiple assessments made to determine if students are learning what they need to learn. Particular interest is paid to the math and literacy components. Continual and frequent assessments are essential to improved instruction, generally and to timely intervention with students that need additional attention. Teachers and schools develop goals for their instruction based upon the analysis of the data.

5. Recognition, Intervention and Adjustment: What actions must follow a discovery that students are not learning what teachers and administrators said they would learn? Teachers use benchmark assessments, standardized tests and close observation of all students' work and classroom behavior. When intervention is needed, high-performing schools have already assembled an array of responses ranging from differentiated or remedial instruction to intensive immersion in the area of concern, to tutoring and to counselor and parental involvement. All are available to meet the needs of the students. For teachers who are struggling, interventions are available including lesson plan help, the assistance of a master teacher or the institution of a formal improvement plan. Lower-performing schools may need additional resources. On the other side of the equation, outstanding performances by schools and individual teachers must be recognized.

Inevitably, students leave even high performing schools unless significant steps are taken to keep them in school and on a path that will engage them and guide them in reaching the highest level of performance possible. Following is the latest report revealing the extent of South Dakota's dropout concerns.

Student Achievement and College Readiness



*The dropout rate represents the percentage of students in grades 7-12 that dropped out during that particular school year. 2003-04 is the most recent year for which statistics are available.

Dropout Prevention Techniques

Below are some of the programs being developed to encourage youth to finish high school.

Talent driven schools: The talent driven schools model is designed for large high schools with high dropout populations and encourages the transition of all students into academically challenging courses while developing a climate that increase the chances these students can and will attend college. Basically, large schools are subdivided into smaller academies, starting in the crucial 9th grade, organized around interest areas with extended class time periods and 4-period days. Troubled students may be referred to a twilight program to help them get back on track academically and to develop more mature behavioral skills. Discipline is tight here but counseling and individualized instruction are also available.

No Pass-No Drive: Students must be enrolled in school and maintain a minimum GPA to receive/retain a driver's license.

Parental Consent/Increased Age threshold: Some states have increased the minimum age before a student may quit school and/or require that parents must consent to discontinuation.

Truancy intervention: Increased sanctions against habitual truancy may be instituted including suspension of driving privileges; fines assessed against the student, parent, or guardian; home detention; revocation of a work permit; or a court order to participate in various programs, including teen court, community service, and formal or informal supervision. States or school districts may establish truancy abatement centers, which provide short- and long-term counseling for juveniles who have been apprehended for truancy, as well as for their parents or guardians or they may change the school schedule since research indicates that block scheduling with fewer but longer class periods in a day reduces truancy.

Graduation Plans: As early as eighth or ninth grade, students may be required to develop an individual graduation plan charting the courses they will take each year for high school and post high school. The intent of the plan is keep students focused on their educational goals and permit early identification of students who are falling behind in time to help them get back on track.

Early/Middle Colleges: High school students have long been able to complete their high school requirements while simultaneously taking courses for college credit. Under the Early/Middle system, students may complete or make significant progress toward completing both a high school diploma and Associate Arts degrees/technical certification. Middle colleges are high schools located on college campuses. Early college high schools combine high school and college and allow students to earn both a high school diploma and college credits. Early colleges are targeted toward at-risk students and most involve school district/community college partnerships. However, some states, like South Dakota have statewide initiatives (including distance learning) to reach communities which do not have immediate access to college facilities.

Rigorous Curriculum: South Dakota is a leader in the use of this approach which requires/incentivizes students to complete a challenging curriculum. When students are held to high expectations in high school, they rise to the challenge, rather than giving into boredom. Also, they are more prepared for education beyond high school.

Parental participation: When parents are more involved in the student's schooling, the students are more likely to succeed academically. Few states have directed any funds to parental involvement programs but there are pilot programs being developed that include parental involvement contracts. These are often only applicable in early grades and the traditional understanding is that parental involvement falls off after middle school. Effective parental participation programs have yet to evolve.

What characteristics do effective dropout recovery programs share?

From a report of the American Youth Policy Forum "Whatever it Takes"

Dropout recovery programs are varied because their audience is varied. The good news is that there are any number of programs and options available to reconnect young people to participation in the nation's economy and society.

Open-Entry/Open-Exit: Most programs are open-entry/open-exit with students proceeding through curricular modules at their own pace. Curricula are keyed to state standards and graduation occurs upon successful completion of these requirements. Learning software and the Internet are common forms of computer-assisted learning aids as flexibility is crucial programs serving youth with vastly different skill levels and needs.

Flexible Scheduling—Year-round Learning: Flexible scheduling is key to meeting the needs of out-of-school youth because of the many demands on their time and the burdens they bear and the obstacles they face.

Teachers as Coaches, Facilitators: Self-paced learning in small, personalized learning communities changes the role of teacher to coach or facilitator. The emphasis is on close informal relationships that treat students as adults and signal that 'teachers' are here to help them achieve their goals.

Real-world Curricula: Career-oriented programs aligned with local employer needs are common. Success in employment, not just obtaining credentials, is a significant objective of students in this environment.

Opportunities for work while studying: Many students need income, hence, many programs provide for employment opportunities or offer modest stipends for work performed while in training. Work opportunities should be related their studies and stress career goals.

Clear Codes of Conduct Consistently Enforced: Staff and students honor voluntary codes of conduct and strict standards of attendance and effort. Nothing further appears to be necessary. Students are treated as adults and positive rewards are used to influence behavior rather than punishment. The results have been very promising.

Extensive Support Services: Dropout recovery students require extensive support services especially in regard to health and physical well-being to overcome barriers to learning. Homelessness is a problem and young students need adult figures to counsel, mentor and guide them.

The questions that need to be asked are…

- Do the programs help students to see themselves as successful learners?

- Do the programs support positive development for youth when their previous experience has been school failure?

- Do the programs put youth in a position where they can better compete for good jobs at decent wage levels?

- Do the programs prepare students for a rapidly changing world?

- Do the programs help their graduates avoid self-destructive and antisocial behavior?

- Do graduates become good citizens?

Examples of successful Youth/Adult Recovery and Reconnection Programs

Salt Lake City Utah operates an "Instruction and Training Center" at twenty-nine sites for disconnected students at all ages including adults. Of the 9,000 students served, 4,300 are adults and 1,400 are high school ages. Salt Lake City's program is as much a "last resort" program as a dropout recovery program since it also takes referrals of low-performing, at-risk student even before they quit school as well as dropouts. The program is a part of the Salt Lake City School System but receives additional funding from approximately 50 pubic and private agencies to fund the resources they must have to meet the needs of their constituency including day care, multi-language libraries and technology labs for vocational/technical education. Academic courses meet Utah state and district requirements. Expectations for learning are high and teachers are held accountable for the success of each of their students but each student moves at his/her own pace and can spend part of their day in vocational courses or in concurrent college courses. The teachers who teach in this program must buy into the individualized, flexible approach to education or they do not stay in the program. The year-around adult high school is an open-entry/open-exit model that helps adults complete the GED or obtain a high school diploma or simply raise literacy levels and the program integrates its students into local community colleges for continued educational opportunities.

Portland Oregon's public school system is mandated to recover out-of-school youth and has created a broad array of programs to meet this mandate. Local school systems are provided with 100% of state aid for use in paying for alternative programs and thus may establish alternative educational options with the school system or contract with qualified private providers. Students are advised of available alternatives based upon behavior records, expulsion or withdrawal, or if the student has failed to consistently meet state educational standards. Portland's alternatives include:
■ Evening High School serves students who are still in conventional school but who are far behind their classmates. EHS provides for additional classes and allows students to make up credits and obtain a diploma from their daytime high school.

■ Night High School serves dropout students who must work during the day. At night, courses are available for a student to work towards a GED.
■ Marshall Night School is for dropout students and offers a discontinuous program of study to those who want a conventional high school diploma or a GED and also want to earn college credits.

Other local community colleges also offer programs to students who want to earn both high school and college credits on their way to obtaining both diplomas. An open-entry/open-exit alternative high school program is a state offering that serves students with multiple barriers to success in school and in employment. The coursework is aimed at attaining both employment skills and life skills at various times during a person's life.

South Dakota's Plan for Reconnection

Alternative education now in-place:
Recognizing a high school education is a basic need to advanced training and employment, the South Dakota Department of Labor dedicates funds for alternative schools willing to incorporate career programming. Affiliate schools must not only assist youth in completing a high school program, but prepare youth to successfully transition and complete further training or employment. There are 18 Department of Labor affiliated alternative high schools located throughout South Dakota. These schools are off-site from traditional high schools, have teacher ratios of 12:1 or better and offer a curriculum that meets all district and state standards. Students served include dropouts, those who have less than 9th grade level reading and math skills, are pregnant or parenting, are homeless or a ward of the state or are in need of additional education to complete high school and obtain employment.

Job Corps:
The Corps is a residential employment and training program for disadvantaged people in ages ranging from 16 to 24 and who have dropped out of school. The students live in a dorm setting and further their education while receiving vocational training. Tuition, board and room and living expenses are covered by Federal funding (yearly Federal stipend is $25,000/student which is sufficient to cover costs) while students seek to earn a GED or a High School Diploma together with vocational preparation equal to that received at a state vocational technical school. Four hundred twenty-five students are served by the Job Corps each year with over 40% of those attending being in the early age range of 16-17.

Adult Education and Literacy Program:
Adult Education and Literacy instruction is designed to teach persons 16 years of age or older to read and write English and to secure training that will help them become employable. Those eligible to participate include high school dropouts and persons for whom English is a second language.

New Initiatives:

High Schools That Work. High Schools That Work is the nation's first large-scale effort to engage state, district, and school leaders and teachers in partnerships with students, parents and the community to improve the way all high school students are prepared for work and post-secondary education. Schools are expected to show progress in changing school and classroom practices in ways that improve student achievement by focusing on applications that have proven most effective in advancing student achievement.

Goals include raising the math, science, communication, problem-solving and technical achievement of more students to the national average and above, blending college-preparatory studies with career/technical studies and engaging in continuous school-improvement efforts for both academic and career/technical studies.

High Schools That Work can achieve these goals by…

1. setting high expectations and getting students to meet them,
2. increasing access to intellectually challenging career/technical studies with an emphasis on using high-level math, science, language arts and problem-solving skills to prepare for the modern workplace and continuous education,
3. encouraging students to use academic content to address real-world projects and problems
4. encouraging students to complete a challenging program of study including an upgraded academic core curriculum, getting every student involved in rigorous and challenging learning,
5. giving students and their parents the choice of a system that integrates school-based and work-based learning spanning high school and post-secondary studies,
6. providing a structured system of extra help to enable students who may lack adequate preparation to complete an accelerated program of study that includes high-level academic and technical content, and
7. using student assessment and program evaluation data to improve continuously the school climate, organization, management, curricula and instruction to advance student learning and to recognize students who meet both curriculum and performance goals.

2010 Education Initiative (2010E). The 2010 Education Initiative is a series of specific goals and action plans intended to improve the state's education system by the year 2010 and insure accountability in realizing that improvement.

The plan consists of three components; Starting Strong, which targets kids from age 3 to grade 3, Finishing Strong, which focuses on the high school and postsecondary experience, and Staying Strong, which targets teachers, Native American issues and financial resources. Each component advances its aims through the establishment of six specific goals that provide structure to the effort and measurements to ascertain progress. The goals are…

1. That all third graders will be proficient, or be on a plan to become proficient, in both reading and math;

2. That South Dakota will lead the nation in the percentage of students seeking post high school education;

3. That the state's post secondary education system will effectively meet the changing needs of the state's economy and its citizens;

4. That South Dakota will provide the qualified teachers needed to achieve its goals;

5. That South Dakota will increase educational outcomes for Native American students; and

6. That South Dakota will target education resources to improve classroom instruction and educational opportunities.

Initiatives designed to attain these goals include:

a. an increase in the compulsory attendance age to 18 years;

b. the implementation of individual learning plans (a map for high school achievement) for students;

c. An increase in the use of advanced placement/dual credit courses which will allow students to earn college credit in high school. In support of this effort, the Department of Education is funding teachers to attend AP (Advanced Placement) Institutes. AP Institutes are weeklong institutes where teachers of a specific subject area come to learn, in detail, about teaching an AP course;

d. The implement of rigorous graduation requirements and the enrollment of 75 percent of high school students in the "advanced" or "distinguished" graduation path (students work with counselors and parents to determine the path they intend to pursue), follow up by monitoring student enrollment in South Dakota postsecondary institutions;

e. The creation of a statewide virtual high school program to increase 21st century skills using advanced technology that will allow students constant and equal access regardless of location. It will serve home school students, students needing credit recovery, and students wanting to take additional coursework;

f. The creation of a senior project model where students become "experts" in a chosen topic and showcase the skills and abilities they have gathered through their high school experience;

g. The implementation of a laptop initiative for high school students. This initiative ensures that students have access to the same resources regardless of income,

improves students' research skills, increases their interest in school work and allows for time to spend engaged in collaborative work. Laptops are especially effective for project based instruction where students manage their own learning by completing individual and small-group projects;

h. The creation of end-of-course exams and grade level tests;

i. The implementation of intern programs to connect students with the real world through different work experience; and

j. The creation of a state scholars program that connects schools to business.

Central to the 2010E Initiative is the ongoing evaluation of progress towards the stated objectives, which in turn leads to an evaluation of progress towards achieving the established goals. Less than satisfactory progress in attaining goals will cause a re-examination and modification of the initiatives and action steps designed to achieve the goals of 2010E.

Working to advance Native American students: To help Native American students advance, South Dakota offers the "Gear-Up" program in concert with the state's universities. The primary goal of the "Gear-Up" program is to encourage more Native American students to finish high school and then attend college. The program seeks to insure that students have the academic and social preparation necessary to succeed at the postsecondary level. Native American students in grades 7 through 12 spend a part of every summer in a college environment. They leave for college, live in a dorm and go to class in a cohort of students that is designed to provide inherent support. The cohort concept serves as an answer to the culture shock that Native Americans face when going off to college away from their reservation homes. They learn; they visit several campuses; they become familiar with the college experience where they are encouraged in numerous ways to stay in high school and earn a diploma, then to attend college. For example, at SDSM&T, the curriculum includes plenty of math and physics together with computer skills classes, English and life skills (including study skills and college preparation). Nearly 100% of these students finish high school and 85% attend college.

When they reach campus as freshmen, it is no longer an unfamiliar or disconcerting place and they are more inclined to stay. There is considerable interest from the vocational-technical schools in being included in the summer programs and if they do so, Native American students will have even more options from which to choose.

Keeping Native American students in high school is essential and the "Teach for America" program which, in a Peace Corp style model, invites the best of America's college graduates, whether they seek to be teachers or not, to invest two years of their lives teaching in Reservation schools. These teachers not only perform the standard academic function of any teacher but are expected to become immersed in the lives of

their students and in the community where they teach. This is a very intense and stimulating program and the results to date are very encouraging.

Summary:
There is a quote that effectively expresses how a state should proceed in educating its student citizens. "A civilization is often measured by the way it treats other people's children". Certainly it is important to the foundation of a civilized society that all students have an opportunity to learn in a way that works for them. They must not be abandoned, rather, a solution that recovers and reconnects them must be found. In South Dakota, there are many opportunities for alternative education that perform this service. Some are described in this memorandum. Leaders of alternative education should be included when high school reform is at issue. They have much to tell traditional high schools about reconnecting disengaged youth and about what can be done to get it right the first time and keep at-risk students from dropping out. Legislators may be called upon to speak out on these issues of dropout recovery and reconnection and support sound legislation to achieve success in this area. Treating all students to high-quality educational opportunities, regardless of their current status in life has the potential to benefit everyone.

Chapter 1 of this issue memorandum was written by Reuben D. Bezpaletz, Chief of Research and Legal Services, with the assistance of Kris Schneider, for the Legislative Research Council. Chapter 2 of this issue memorandum was written by James Fry, Director, with the assistance of Lisa Shafer, for the Legislative Research Council. It is designed to supply background information on the subject and is not a policy statement made by the Legislative Research Council.