

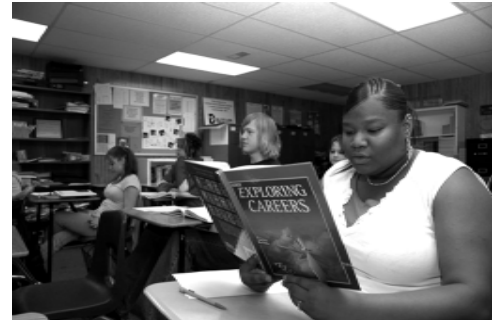


NEWSLETTER

High-Performance Workforce

Preparing for the Demands of the New World Economy

I'VE BEEN READING QUITE A BIT LATELY—BOOKS, REPORTS, BRIEFS, AND DOCUMENTS WITH TITLES LIKE *MELTDOWN 2010*, *LEADERS AND LAGGARDS*, *AMERICA'S PERFECT STORM*, *THE SILENT EPIDEMIC*, AND *TOUGH CHOICES: TOUGH TIMES*, TO NAME A FEW—AND THE PREVAILING MOOD SEEMS TO BE THAT AMERICA IS ON A COLLISION COURSE TO THE FUTURE. AS A NATION, WE ARE UNPREPARED FOR THE DEMANDS OF THE NEW WORLD ECONOMY, AND, IN PARTICULAR, AT-RISK YOUTH ARE IN THE MOST DIFFICULT POSITION OF ALL. THEY CAN BARELY DO THE MINIMUM THE EMPLOYER REQUIRES TODAY LET ALONE WHAT THIS FUTURE WILL REQUIRE. OF THE MANY TITLES I CITED, I THINK *THE SILENT EPIDEMIC* MAY BE THE MOST PROPHETIC AS THOSE TWO WORDS REALLY DESCRIBE THE SITUATION. THE PRIMARY PURPOSE OF THIS ISSUE OF THE NEWSLETTER IS TO FOCUS ON BOTH THE “SILENT” AND THE “EPIDEMIC” ASPECTS OF PREPARING AT-RISK YOUTH FOR THE HIGH-PERFORMANCE WORKFORCE (HPW).



The *silent* aspect of the problem indicates we need to create awareness. The *epidemic* aspect indicates the problem is serious, complicated, and requires an important, strategic response. As employer requirements continue to increase, the at-risk student will fall further behind. The most serious and expensive aspects of this silent epidemic occur with disenfranchised populations in the lower socioeconomic strata including the poor, minorities, immigrants, and displaced workers. Some even claim the at-risk/dropout problem is a civil rights issue.

Still, there is hope. Many people, foundations, agencies, groups, and organizations are very concerned about and dedicated to addressing this problem. We know a lot about this “silent epidemic,” and we also know how to address it. What we really need is a rethinking of our resource priorities and efforts to rally around addressing the many interrelated issues, just as we would any other national epidemic.

The information assembled for this newsletter addresses both the *silent* and *epidemic* aspects of the problem as well as the solutions. The first article describes the relationship of at-risk youth to the high-performance workforce. This article also includes input from a group of professionals who attended a pre-conference seminar on the subject at the recent At-Risk Youth National Forum sponsored by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. We profile two exemplary programs that represent best practices, reflecting the multifaceted aspect of effective solutions. The Butler Tech example shows the importance of a data-based, strategic activity that brings together multiple stakeholders to address the challenges. Note the important connection between workforce and academic preparation in Elaine Craft's article. Both of these examples indicate that we can be successful in preparing at-risk youth for the HPW. An excerpt from a new book by Schargel, Thacker, and Bell defines the need for a differ-

ent kind of school leader to meet this challenge.

We include a review of *The World Is Flat*, a book that describes the serious nature of globalization and the impact it is having on our workforce. Our recommended readings also will inform the reader of the various dimensions of the problem.

The needs of the high-performance workforce require us to ask tough questions, and perhaps more importantly, to implement tough answers. We need to realign our thinking, priorities, and approaches to addressing the challenges of the new century. We must continue to study it, learn more about what works, and replicate those effective best practices. We also we need to go beyond this, exploring new ways of thinking about and addressing the problem.

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Guest Editor

Connecting At-Risk Youth to the High-Performance Workforce

A great deal has changed in the American workplace in recent years, and it is very likely that trend will continue. The days of low-skill jobs with high pay are long gone. In many cases, even the high-skill jobs with high pay will be in jeopardy in the future. Presently, our approach to addressing this issue has mostly been to increase the number of students going to college; however, there are several flaws in this single-solution approach. About 23 out of every 100 students who enter the 9th grade will eventually graduate from college. We need to be addressing the needs of the other 67 students. How can that group of students secure a future in a new, knowledge-based global economy?

High-performance workforce (HPW) is a term used to define the modern workplace—a high-tech, constant change environment with a pri-

The essential challenge is the at-risk student is barely able to meet the minimal personal and academic expectations to get on the continuum let alone move up it.

ority on lifelong learning. In the HPW, workers are referred to as knowledge workers and companies are called learning organizations. It is a workplace quite different from the “check your brain at the door” workplace of the past. It is a workplace that requires teaming and self-direction. It’s a workplace with fewer supervisors. The result is that the HPW requires an employee who is more a part of the organization’s competitive equation than previously.

The essential employability characteristic in the HPW is the ability to be self-directed. This competence results from moving through a learning continuum that employer and employee must establish. Everyone connected to the education of at-risk youth must be about teaching the competency of self-direction. However, at-risk youth must first be able to meet the basic educational foundation level.

The essential challenge is the at-risk student is barely able to meet the minimal personal and academic expectations to get on the continuum let alone move up it. We need to devise an action plan that gets them to the starting point. In many cases, we will need to engage the at-risk student in developmental/remedial work before we can even start on the basics. This is just as true for many in the workplace and those who have already been displaced.

Many at-risk youth, and many youth and adults in general, need to improve their reading ability. Reading is the essential skill needed to participate in education, training, and learning. For most at-risk students, we

need to start with reading as it is both the problem and the solution. Much of the reading problem actually begins before students ever get to school.

A group of 50 professionals attended a Pre-FORUM workshop at the 2007 NDPN At-Risk Youth National FORUM in Myrtle Beach. The group was asked to identify solutions related to various stakeholder groups (students, parents, school, etc.) related to at-risk youth and the HPW. The group identified many ideas and suggestions for enabling at-risk youth to meet the basic educational foundation level of the learning continuum. Some suggestions related to improved awareness of the magnitude and impact of being at-risk. In addition, some specific strategies the group identified were to increase connections between schools and parents of at-risk youth, increase the amount of mentoring and after-school tutoring/literacy programs, improve the reading experiences of preschoolers, and increase programs that connect at-risk youth to real-world work experiences.

There is considerable research, literature, and evidence of effective strategies for working with at-risk youth and preventing them from dropping out of school. We can build on this foundation. It will, however, require all stakeholder groups to work together to improve the academic, social, and self-direction abilities of at-risk youth.

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National
Dropout Prevention
Center/Network

NEWSLETTER

The *National Dropout Prevention Newsletter* is published quarterly by the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network. Your comments are always welcome. Please address mail to:

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Network Notes

Governor and Mrs. Richard W. Riley Award

■ Congratulations to Val Richardson who became the fifth recipient of the Governor and Mrs. Richard W. Riley Award of Excellence in Dropout Prevention on February 20, 2007, at the At-Risk Youth National FORUM in Myrtle Beach. The purpose of this award is to identify and bring recognition to an outstanding individual who has made significant contributions to the advancement of dropout prevention initiatives in the state of South Carolina. As Workforce Development Manager for Palmetto Health, Val develops and facilitates workforce and career development processes and products. Currently, she has been serving as chair of the Education and Economic Development Council – At-Risk Committee.



Pictured here with Val Richardson are her husband Charles, and Associate Director of NDPC, Dr. Sam Drew.

Guide All Students to the Winner's Circle!

■ Be sure you plan to come to the 19th Annual National Dropout Prevention Network Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, this fall, October 27-31, 2007, where we will be gathering at The Galt House Hotel to "Guide All Students to the Winner's Circle" through "Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships." Registration is now available on our Web site, www.dropoutprevention.org. There will be more than 100 sessions on such topics as secondary school redesign, programs for students with disabilities, juvenile justice/safe schools, truancy, adolescent literacy, ESL, and service-learning. Questions? Contact Conference Coordinator, Linda Shirley at paige@clemson.edu.

High-Performance Workforce

Meet Our Guest Editor

■ Network member Dr. Patrick J. O'Connor is on the faculty in the College and Graduate School of Education, Health and Human Services at Kent State University. He teaches graduate classes in workforce development and career-technology education. Dr. O'Connor also coordinates the career-technical education program at Kent State, and is the author of *Think You Know America, Now You Know America*, and the NDPC/N publication, *The High-Performance Workforce and the At-Risk Student*.



New Officers for NDPN Board

■ At the February meeting of the National Dropout Prevention Network Board, new officers were selected. The new officers for the Board are John Murray, Chair; Stuart Udell, Vice Chair; and Mary Jo McLaughlin, Secretary.



John Murray

Dr. Art Stellar, conducted his final meeting as chair and his efforts to bring more focus and structure to the Network were acknowledged by the Board. We all join the Board in expressing our appreciation to Art for his years of service to the National Dropout Prevention Network and its mission.



Art Stellar

Notes From the FORUM

■ This year's At-Risk Youth National FORUM was a resounding success. As always, the program was stimulating, educational, and inspiring. This year, however, there was a 30% increase in attendance, thus enriching the experience for all.

For example, one of the attendees came from across the globe, Zahid Majeed, a lecturer in Special Education from Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, Pakistan. Zahid noted after his first experience at the FORUM: "I am thankful to NDPC for providing me an opportunity to share and present my research at the 19th Annual At-Risk Youth National FORUM. I got very good suggestions and feedback from the participants. Many thanks and best wishes to NDPC staff."



Zahid Majeed, pictured here with NDPC Staff.

NDPC-SD Visit

■ Mr. John H. Hager, assistant secretary for special education programs and rehabilitative services, U.S. Department of Education, and colleague, Mr. James Button, made a site visit to the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities in February, meeting the staff of both NDPC and NDPC-SD. Mr. Hager also attended America's At-Risk Youth National FORUM and shared the podium with Dr. Loujeania Bost, Director of the NDPC-SD.



Pictured here with John Hager is Dr. Loujeania W. Bost, Director of NDPC-SD.

Program Profile

Butler Tech Responds to the Needs of At-Risk Youth

by Harold Niehaus

Butler Tech's Educational Options division currently serves over 2,500 students through at-risk and online program offerings. Working with nine associate schools, county service agencies, the juvenile court system, and parents, Butler Tech builds educational options that lead to successful graduation and citizenry. We are dedicated to preparing our youth to be members of a high-performance workforce. The students currently served range in age from 13 to 21 and have the common need of bolstering their educational experience or running the risk of dropping out. These students have either academic deficiencies, economic requirements, or a basic level of social/emotional needs. The students with academic deficiencies can be further defined as having a need to pass previously failed state assessments, failing a majority of their core academics, or those who are two or more grade levels behind in reading.

All programs have been funded through traditional local and state revenue streams.

Butler Tech's desire to design *Education Beyond Expectations* has led to programming for the at-risk population by keeping them in school, improving their reading ability, and preparing them for the high-performance workforce and/or postsecondary education. We work to create a continuum of program offerings available to our students based on their need level. We have taken steps to involve parents, social workers, and employers and to build capacity for sustainable

programming. A continuous improvement model that includes planning and reflection from both the Butler County Alternative Education Advisory and Special Education Task Force committees helps assure increased and improved services for our at-risk youth.

Starting in 2002, the Butler Tech Board of Education reviewed a continuum of alternative educational offerings and approved programming that would begin to fulfill the identified needs. As initial programs were started and second stage programs planned, inside experts and outside consultants were included to assure solid implementation and direction. Some of the inside experts included many of our 25 Career-Based Intervention instructors as well as counselors, social workers, and experienced administrators who had numerous years of serving the at-risk student population. From the outside, consultants from the National Dropout Prevention Center/Network were hired to conduct a PAR review. This expertise, input from the task force and advisory committees, and other varied assessments have allowed for targeted program development. Data-based results indicate implementation that has proven successful in many ways.

An important part of the overall strategic plan to serve the at-risk population included the need for programs to be sustainable. With this in mind, all programs have been funded through traditional local and state revenue streams that include average daily membership and career technical weighted funds. Not having reliance on grants or other



soft money has assured the continuance of programs that have proven successful through data collection and analysis.

Assisting at-risk youth to achieve workforce readiness is more than measuring success through touching anecdotal stories of individual students. Data must be collected, published, and analyzed as it has been at Butler Tech in the areas of suspensions and expulsions, student attendance, and passage rates of the state standardized tests. Above and beyond these performance measures, Butler Tech strives to provide students with additional training and experiences that positively affect their social and emotional involvement with peers and adults. In addition, a variety of career and other assessments and personalized educational plans are used to address the development of career cluster related skill sets in preparing them for the high-performance workforce.

Information on Butler Tech and our programs designed to serve at-risk students can be obtained by visiting our Web site at www.butlertech.org/teen and clicking on **+ learning alternatives** or contacting Harold Niehaus, Vice President of Educational Options at niehaush@Butlertech.org or 513-645-8245.

Program Profile

The Technology Gateway

by Elaine Craft

To prepare the High Performance Workforce (HPW), we must begin by realizing that the current and future workplace is quite different from the workplace of the past. According to former Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, “The top ten jobs that will be in demand in 2010 didn’t exist in 2004. We are currently preparing students for jobs that don’t yet exist using technologies that haven’t been invented in order to solve problems that we don’t even know are problems.” The HPW must be able to learn and adapt, and adapt quickly.

Certainly in the marketplace and even in education, we have seen that organizations must be flexible, constantly evolving in response to changing expectations and demands—not just to maintain the status quo but also to survive and flourish. Employers are demanding highly skilled technicians and other employees with strong teamwork, communications, and problem-solving skills. Employees needed for the new, high-performance workforce must have “a high level of education, engagement, and responsibility.” How can this be accomplished in today’s classrooms, with today’s students?

The South Carolina Advanced Technological Education (SCATE) Center of Excellence, funded by the National Science Foundation since 1994, addressed this challenge by developing curricula, program improvement strategies, and faculty professional development designed to increase the quantity, quality, and diversity of students who are ready for the HPW. Demographic shifts in schools and colleges across the country show clearly that the quantity and diversity of high-performance, workplace-ready graduates can only increase by addressing the needs of diverse learners who are often at risk of dropping out of the education system at secondary or postsecondary institutions. The focus of SCATE work has been on the

High schools are implementing the Technology Gateway to reengage these bored and at-risk students.

retention, preparation, and success of students who may become highly skilled industrial and engineering technicians or engineers.

SCATE has been guided by the following research-based mandates:

A clearer connection needs to be made between the skills taught in the classroom and the skills needed in the workplace.¹

Appropriate teaching methods—based on the latest learning theory research—must be used to meet the learning needs of all students.²

For first-year engineering technology students in college, SCATE developed the Engineering Technology Core Curriculum. For high school students, or slightly underprepared college students, SCATE developed the Technology Gateway curriculum. Both products are research based, tested, and have proven successful in retaining and preparing students for today’s technological workplace.

According to a recent survey conducted by Indiana University researchers, “a majority of U.S. high school students say they get bored in class every day, and more than one out of five has considered dropping out...usually because the subject matter was irrelevant or their teachers didn’t seem to care about them.”³ High schools are implementing the Technology Gateway to reengage these bored and at-risk students with an integrated, problem-based course of study that models the workplace through the use of industrial-type problems to guide instruction in multiple disciplines and student and faculty teams. Unlike typical textbook

exercises that have only one correct answer, SCATE problem scenarios are constructed to have multiple solutions which require students to assess several possibilities, select one they would propose to an employer, and provide a rationale and documentation to support their solution of choice.

The Technology Gateway improves student skills and knowledge in essential academic content areas in context. The learning format models that which will be expected of them as high-performance employees. For students, being in a Technology Gateway class mimics having a job: They are expected to work well in teams; research, learn, and apply what they need to know to solve science and technology-based problems; and develop the critical thinking and communication skills that help keep them engaged and in school while preparing them for success in higher education or the workplace.

The SCATE Center of Excellence, located at Florence-Darlington Technical College, Florence, SC, helps educators implement the Technology Gateway by providing curriculum kits, staff development, technical support, and career exploration materials. For more information, visit www.scate.org or email scate@fdtc.edu.

¹Collins, T. W., et al., *Gaining the competitive edge: Critical issues in science and engineering technician education*, July 1993.

²Felder, R. M. (1993). Reaching the second tier—Learning and teaching styles in college science education. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, March/April, 23(5), p. 289.

³CNN.com, *Survey: Many U.S. high school students bored in class*, Chicago, Illinois (Reuters), February 28, 2007.

Book Review

The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century, 2004. Thomas L. Friedman, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, NY [ISBN 0-374-29288-4]

Perhaps the most authoritative treatment yet about the complexity of globalization and its current and future impact on the United States is found in *The World Is Flat*. The author takes a wide swipe at the breadth of globalization and all the various aspects of American life that are and will be affected by it.

Although in some ways it may be a bit dated, the book is still the boilerplate document for understanding globalization. Even after an extensive run as a number one bestseller and considerable attention, it is surprising the number of people (especially in the educational community) who are unfamiliar with it and the entire notion of globalization and its impact. The concepts, statistics, and evidence Friedman presents would lead a reasonable person to conclude there is a tsunami of sorts on the way. And, it appears that much of America is “asleep at the switch.”

The duties and tasks associated with many jobs are often reduced to their minimal requirements. In these cases, the work, and thus the jobs, are easily replaced with technology or less expensive overseas labor (or a combination of both). This has been happening for many years and in many jobs. In the past, the work and jobs most affected by this trend have been low-skill manufacturing positions. In addition to these jobs, more and more high-paying, high skill jobs in manufacturing as well as services are following suit. The end result is less job opportunity for American workers.

The pattern of job erosion that began with low-level manufacturing positions has now progressed to include higher-skill and even some professional jobs. This trend continues because technology is more and more available. Countries that have an educated workforce are able to significantly compete with the U.S. worker. Friedman projects that job opportunities for American workers will be in products and services that cannot be easily mass produced via technology or by low-cost overseas labor. These positions will require a very different skill and knowledge set than the American worker of the past.

Though Friedman describes a very serious situation for the American workforce and society in general, he concludes with the hope that America can rise to the challenge. The education and training system in the U.S. has the capacity to reeducate existing workers and prepare future workers with the essential skills needed to compete globally. This book is highly recommended as an excellent read for anyone concerned with the quality of our workforce.

—Patrick J. O'Connor, Ed.D.
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Also Recommended:

The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts, (2006) by John M. Bridgeland, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Karen Burke Morison. This report was produced by Civic Enterprises in association with Peter D. Hart Research Associates for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. This report shares results of focus groups of young people, ages 16-25, who are dropouts, from 25 different locations in the U.S.

Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness, (2007) United States Chamber of Commerce. This report is unique in that its emphasis is on coupling a focus on academic outcomes with attention to key business metrics: innovation, flexibility, management, and fiscal prudence.

Dropouts in America: Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis, (2004) Edited by Gary Orfield. Harvard Education Press. Learn more about the dropout crisis,

and especially its impact on minority populations.

America's Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation's Future, (2007) Educational Testing Service. The three forces are 1) divergent skill distributions among U.S. population groups; 2) a changing economy; and 3) demographic trends of a growing, more diverse population.

The High-Performance Workforce and the At-Risk Student, (2006) by Patrick J. O'Connor. National Dropout Prevention Center. This comprehensive booklet provides you with information on the issue as well as solutions.

Resources

National Youth Employment Coalition

NYEC is a non-partisan network improving the effectiveness of organizations that seek to help youth become productive citizens.
www.nyec.org

Association for Career and Technology Education

The Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is the largest national education association dedicated to the advancement of education that prepares youth and adults for careers.
www.acteonline.org

Alliance for Excellent Education

The mission of the Alliance for Excellent Education is to promote high school transformation to make it possible for every child to graduate prepared for postsecondary education and success in life.
www.all4ed.org

Events

June 18-21, 2007 **Clemson, SC**
Summer Institute on Service-Learning,
Strategies for Building Resiliency in Youth
www.dropoutprevention.org

Dec. 13-15, 2007 **Las Vegas, NV**
2007 ACTE Convention and Career
Tech Expo, *Connecting Education and
Careers*
www.acteonline.org

What Are the New Responsibilities of Our School Leaders?

by Franklin P. Schargel, Tony Thacker, and John Bell

Today's teachers, principals and superintendents must respond to a host of new challenges: diversity of cultural backgrounds, waves of immigration, income disparities, physical and mental disabilities, and variation in learning capability. Increasingly, schools must adapt to address the needs of at-risk, nontraditional learners. Wherever teacher education programs have not kept pace with these challenges, many of their graduates must learn on the job, under the tutelage of their school leaders. And the tasks of scheduling, programming, ensuring security, and providing counseling have all become more complex.

Schools can no longer afford to offer one-size-fits-all education. Today's society demands an individualized approach that caters to the needs of each child. Today's educational leaders cannot rely solely on traditional methods of teaching and learning; they need a new repertoire of skills and approaches.

New Responsibilities Require New Qualifications

In the olden days, we could sum up the principal's role in a few words: to manage the building and head the school; to be a pal to students, parents and teachers; to be a leader of teachers. But that role has dramatically expanded. Consider a list of the major leadership responsibilities outlined for today's principals (see chart).

Most of an educational leader's time is spent managing the school. This requires that the principal have the skills and competencies appropriate for businesses as well as the schoolhouse. But, contrary to popular opinion, the principal is not the CEO of the school. At best, the principal is the middle manager in a system of rules, regulations, and mandates from above—at the bottom of the pyramid of true policymakers.

But command and control theory no longer works in education—not in the classroom or in the administration of schools. The days when principals

and/or superintendents could order people to do things are over. Traditional top-down models of school leadership do not work in an educational environment where workers possess as much education and experiential knowledge as the nominal leader. Only collaboration will get the job done.

And the job remains daunting. We judge our principals and superintendents by a new bottom line: their students' academic success. In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, we cared about equality of access and opportunity. Today, with the emphasis on higher standards, we focus on proficiency of achievement. We no longer expect school leaders to simply usher students through the grades at a level of learning that matches the population or its special needs. Each year, the numbers must show improvement. Politicians, business leaders, the media, the public and the parents expect excellence in every school district, school, and classroom, and principals must provide the leadership to make that happen.

Leadership Responsibilities

Principal as a Leader	Principal as a Lead Teacher and Learner	Principal as the Face of the School	Principal as a Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate and implement a comprehensively developed and shared vision and mission. Create a culture of high expectations for all students. Model ethical conduct and universally expect the same from faculty and staff. Empower others to make significant decisions. Nurture teacher involvement and engender teacher leadership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sustain a school culture conducive to student and staff learning. Participate in focused and sustained professional development that implements, nurtures, and sustains research-based learning and teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attend community events. Ensure that steps are taken that guarantee improved educational experience for each student. Work to develop cooperative relationships between the school and the surrounding community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and manage the school budget. Select and evaluate instructional staff. Deal with discipline and attendance concerns. Provide a safe and orderly learning environment. Maintain accountability for an effective and aligned instructional program.

This article is an excerpt from the new publication *From At-Risk To Academic Excellence: What Successful Leaders Do* © by Franklin P. Schargel, Tony Thacker, and John Bell; published by Eye on Education Inc.

Viewpoint

We have invested a tremendous amount of energy and resources in the last 25 years since *A Nation at Risk* and *The Forgotten Half* reports pointed out the shortcomings in the preparation of our young people. Since that report, dozens of additional reports have chronicled various problems related to the same theme—our young people are poorly prepared for the future. Yet, it is surprising that so much effort has produced so little results, and there seems to be little outrage about the poor return on our investment. The results of numerous studies indicate the plight of the high school dropout is actually worse. Job opportunity, finding secure employment, and incarceration have all worsened for the dropout.

The problem is heavily concentrated in lower socioeconomic strata which often include a number of minorities. I wonder if this might be part of a larger problem between the haves and have-nots. Gary Orfield laments in *Dropouts in America* that the dropout problem is a civil rights issue. He may very well be correct. In our system, work is seen as the avenue to choice. Virtually all groups in our history—immigrants from whatever country, minorities, the disabled, and

Everyone needs to be about two things: improving reading ability and preparing self-directed learners.

women—have found economic freedom and independence as a result of successful employment. I suspect the same will be true for at-risk students.

Where do we start? Everyone needs to be about two things: improving reading ability and preparing self-directed learners. And everyone has a stake in the solution. Our society seems to think this is a problem and solution for the schools to handle, but schools are just one part of the solution. Students and their parents, policymakers, community leaders, employers, and social service agencies all have a role in addressing this problem.

We can start by lending our support to young people at four critical points in their development. The first point is preschool. Children need to come to school prepared to learn to read. Next is in grades K-3, emphasizing the ability to read and then, in the middle-school years (ages 12-14), to ensure that students strengthen their reading ability. We also need to im-

prove the number, type, and accessibility of at-risk intervention programs during high school. We can also start by acknowledging that simply increasing the number of students who enter college is not the only solution to preparing young people for the future. We have to “widen the lens” and provide realistic options that enable at-risk youth to find some level of success in our society.

At-risk youth, especially the younger ones, are not in a position to change their situation. Their situation must be addressed and improved by the adults in their world who are responsible for dealing with the dropout crisis, both finding and implementing the solutions. We have the capacity to address this challenging problem and make a meaningful impact that will benefit all of us. The question is: Do we have the will to make the tough decisions to address it? The longer we wait to address this epidemic, the worse it will get.

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The purpose of Viewpoint is to allow professionals to express their opinions about issues related to dropout prevention. The opinions expressed by these authors do not necessarily reflect those of the National Dropout Prevention Network.

★ National Dropout Prevention Center/Network



NEWSLETTER

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