

DROPOUTS

Second Edition

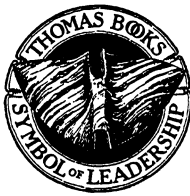
DROPOUTS

*Who Drops Out and Why-
And the Recommended Action*

By

Robert F. Kronick and Charles H. Hargis

*The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee*



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*We would like to dedicate this book to our children, Julia and Will and
April and Jill. They have made us appreciate all children.
Our wives, Sandra and Linda, have personalized many
of the concepts presented in this book.*

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The resources for managing the dropout problem are at hand. The solution should be of no consequential economic burden. In fact, in implementing the suggested reforms, an immediate salutary effect on both the school and the community should occur.

While these reforms are conservative in the economic sense, they are also conservative in the sense of conservation. We feel that these recommended reforms will protect and conserve this large segment of our youth for more constructive and contributive lives.

Our appreciation goes to: Linda Hargis, Dawn Harbin, Larry Coleman, nm Pettibone, Linda Harrell, Holly Henson, Debbie O'Connell, and Susan Palko. We are also indebted to the students, staff, and principal Jerry Morton of the Alternative Center for Learning.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition adds new material on migrant children, an alternative school in a small rural county, family resource centers in rural areas of a southern state, and material that assesses what has transpired regarding dropouts since 1990, and the publication of the first edition of *Dropouts*.

R.F.K. and C.H.H.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS TO THE SECOND EDITION

We want to express our thanks to Hank McGhee, Edward Headlee, and Gary Dutton, respectively, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, and former supervisor of secondary education of Loudon county schools. They were largely responsible, along with Bud Burger, an able communitarian, for establishing Chestnut Ridge Learning Center. Chestnut Ridge Learning Center is an alternative high school for at-risk youth. Its success has been a gratifying affirmation of the principles expressed in this book. We would like to thank Betsy Johnson for typing the new material in this book.

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DROPOUTS

Part 1

An Educational Perspective

Chapter 1

PERSPECTIVE

Each of the authors brings to the dropout problem a different perspective. One has the view of a human service worker. The other, that of a teacher. In examining the problem over the years, we formed images of the problem that synthesize our different points of view. These perspectives influenced the image of what these students look like and how they become dropouts. It also influenced the shape of the model for action that we advocate.

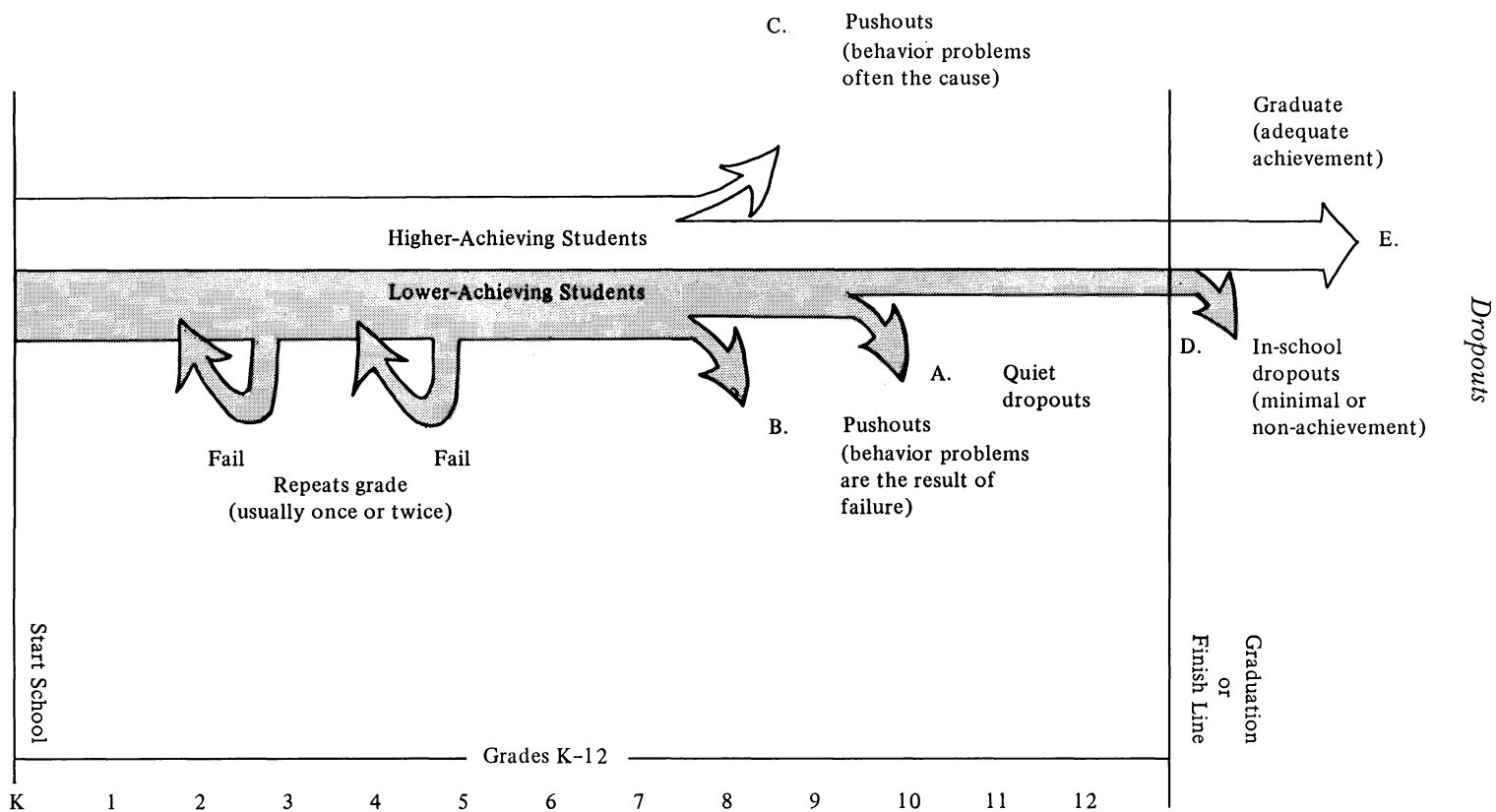
We feel that one must know who these students are and how they come to drop out in order to intervene with reasonable expectation of success. Figure 1 helps to show who the students are and the routes they take either to complete or to drop out of school.

Soon after students start school, they find themselves moving along in separate portions of the curricular path. Higher-achieving students follow one side of the path and lower-achieving students the other.

The portion of the path occupied by higher-achieving students is smooth and relatively free of obstacles. However, the part of the path traveled by the low-achieving students is full of barriers that disrupt progress all along the way. Actually, the curricular path is the same for both groups of students, and herein resides the problem. What some students find reasonably difficult others find frustrating. The curriculum is laid out in normative steps. Most students will find it manageably difficult. Some will find it extremely easy. Others will find it causes only failure. Much more will be said of the link between the lock-step curriculum and dropping out of school in this book. We feel that this is a primary contributing factor for the majority of students who drop out.

We believe that most dropouts should be viewed as curriculum casualties rather than as casualties of personal, family, or financial problems. We do not deny that these latter problems exist in many of these students and may well be contributing factors, but they are primary factors with only a minority of the dropouts. We believe that we have, for too long a time, looked for problems within the dropout and have avoided looking

THE MAP OF GETTING THROUGH SCHOOL: GRADUATE OR DROPOUT



for the cause within the system from which they drop. We have a tendency to blame the victim. We avoid thinking of our schools as victimizers.

An enormous unappreciated range of readiness and learning aptitude characterizes the students who begin school each year. Too often, we treat the extremes of individual variation in students as maladies to be cured. We attempt to cure them by forcing students to fit the rigid forms of our lock-step curriculum. In this process, we cause failure which is the primary obstacle the low-achieving student encounters during her or his school experience. Chronic failure experience eventually produces in many of these at-risk students the many behavior problems that ultimately come to be associated as causes of dropping out rather than as symptoms.

The failure begins almost immediately with many low-achieving students. With sufficient failure a student will be retained and repeat a grade in elementary school. It is a common characteristic of students who will drop out to have failed and repeated one or more grades. In our illustration we show how failure recycles students in the curricular sequence. This recycling process is one factor that makes it difficult to identify accurate figures for dropout rates. Because many students who start in any given year will fail one or more grades, they may be in school extra years and cannot be counted with their original classmates.

We believe that dropouts should be subclassified into at least four groups. The first, and largest group, is composed of the quiet dropouts. These are represented by the arrow labeled "A" on the diagram. Later on in the book they are called "invisible" dropouts because they go unnoticed until they have dropped out. These students are low achievers who experience continued failure through most of their time in school. With virtually no opportunity to experience success in schoolwork and no prospects for successful completion, they drop out after they reach an age at which time it is legal to do so. Their reaction to chronic failure is not overt and attention getting. Their primary distinguishing characteristic is their stoicism.

Group B students are also low achievers whose academic learning abilities are sufficiently out of synchronization so that they are failing almost continually. They, like group A students, often fail and repeat grades and courses, but these students are distinct from group A because of their overt reaction to chronic failure. They react to failure in disruptive, annoying ways. They call attention to themselves continually and are very noticeable. They avoid failure situations by avoiding school. Atten-