MARYLAND'S CHALLENGE

A Report of the Commission for Students at Risk

January 1990

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January 1990

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MARYLAND STATE ARCHIVES

Dr. Joseph L. Shilling
State Superintendent of Schools
Maryland State Department of Education
200 West Baltimore Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Dear Dr. Shilling:

It is my pleasure as chair of the Commission For Students At-Risk to convey to you our report. The challenge given to the Commission in its charge was sizable. Our hope is that this report will benefit both you and the State Board in planning for the needs of at-risk youth.

The Commission labored long and hard on the many issues that surround at-risk youth. As the report indicates, there is no one solution to the educational problems of our youth. Rather, state encouraged actions by local schools, working in concert with their communities and focused on rich, measurable outcomes, offer us our best hope of success.

The Commission met over the past year as a whole and as subcommittees, considering our charge:

1. What goals should the state adopt regarding students at risk?

2. How do we define and identify students at risk of school failure during different stages of schooling?

3. What current state and national initiatives appear promising or have proven effective?

4. What alternative assumptions, objectives, interventions, or strategies should be included in Maryland's at-risk effort?

5. What legislative or regulatory actions are necessary to assure students the educational or support services reasonably calculated to lead to high school graduation?

We discussed a wide range of issues and programs as we explored the charge, with each member internalizing and synthesizing ideas.

Our deliberation included not only the insights of our divergent members, but also the work of four technical teams. The technical teams were organized around four levels of schooling and chaired by: 1) Mary Nicholsonne, Early Learning Years; 2) Joan Palmer, Middle Learning Years; 3) Margaret Trader, High School Years; and 4) Dorothy Harvey, the School-to Work Transition. Without the insights of the technical teams, our discussions would not have been as informed or valuable. In fact, the work of these teams has been so thorough that we have asked that their reports be made available to those who wish to further pursue specific topics.

Members of the Commission are to be commended for their perseverance and thoroughness in completing their tasks. As chair, I want to offer special thanks to my colleagues on the Commission who include:

Don Hutchinson (Co-Chairman)
C. Berry Carter II
Sharon Clark
Carolyn W. Colvin
Dianne G. Daniels
Dr. Chinnaduri Devadason
David Falk
Judge Ellen M. Heller
Meldon S. Hollis, Jr.
Dr. William P. Hytche
James Lemmert
Susan Leviton
Delegate Anne Perkins
Marion W. Pines
Dr. Harry Pitt
Linda D'Amario Rossi
Dr. Robert Slavin
Guffrie M. Smith, Jr.
Carl W. Struever

Special mention should be made of the Co-chair, Donald Hutchinson, who substituted for me on those occasions when other duties required me to be absent from the meetings. His insights into the needs of youth and his unflappable ability to work with others made our work more productive.

As chair and representing the entire Commission, I would like to extend our thanks first to Martha J. Fields, Assistant Deputy State Superintendent for her unfailing support and provision of resources. Secondly, I would like to thank Dr. Phyllis Sunshine for her coordination of all theTechnical Team Reports and her tireless efforts to provide us with information. Special mention also needs to be extended to staff from Research for Better Schools, namely Dr. Richard McCann, Dr. Gail Meister, and Dr. Susan Austin for their technical support, resources, and insights. Without all their efforts the Commission would not have been able to operate.

The Report has traveled a long road of discussion and effort. The Commission considered many approaches and corresponding drafts related to the issues of at-risk students before this final version was selected. The Commission in selecting this approach owes its gratitude to David Falk, who headed a subcommittee charged with formulating the final report, and to Marion Pines, the primary drafter.

Each Commission member thanks you for the opportunity to be a part of improving Maryland education and opportunities for each Maryland student.

Sincerely,

Clarence W. Blount

Senator Clarence W. Blount,
Chairman

CWB/ls

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A Report of the Commission for Students at Risk

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INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In 1987, the Council of Chief State School Officers articulated its deep concern about the wasted potential of at-risk youth by approving a policy statement "Assuring School Success for Students at Risk." The Council, chaired by David Hornbeck, also developed a model state statute that provided for educational entitlements for these students, as one example of an approach to implementing the policy statement.

The Department of Labor shared the Council's concern, recognizing the economic implications of millions of untrained, unskilled dropouts seeking to enter an ever more demanding workplace. To help sharpen the nation's focus on improving the education of at-risk youth, the Department of Labor awarded the Council $500,000 to administer planning grants for 10 states that expressed interest in pursuing this challenge. Twenty-nine states responded; Maryland became one of the successful grantees.

Accordingly, the State Superintendent of Education appointed a 21-member Commission, chaired by Senator Clarence Blount, and charged it with developing a strategy for the successful education of at-risk youth in Maryland. The Commission has been meeting for more than a year, with the able assistance of staff from the Maryland State Department of Education and four technical teams of practitioners. This report reflects the beliefs of the Commission, based on the findings of the technical teams, additional research, and the combined experience of the diverse members of the Commission.

The Commission for Students at Risk recognizes the growing crisis in Maryland created by the undereducation of a significant body of students, predominantly the children of poverty. We identify them as at risk because, without intervention, they are likely to emerge from school unprepared for further education or for the demands of the workplace.

Because of their deprived environments and lack of access to supplemental enrichment, these children have the most to gain from a nurturing and developmental quality public education. Yet, currently in Maryland, jurisdictions with the highest concentrations of poor youngsters have public schools with the fewest resources.

This paradox becomes critical because it could cripple the aggressive economic development strategy of the State. That strategy brings with it the need to develop and maintain a quality workforce. With thousands of our citizens functionally illiterate and dependent on public assistance, and with more than 15,000 children dropping out of school every year, the rationale for an action plan--such as the Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants proposed by the Commission--becomes clear and persuasive (Chapter I).

The Commission for Students at Risk recognizes that our public schools cannot solve or even address all of society's problems on their own, nor can these challenges continue to be met by the traditional approach--a series of unrelated, albeit well-intentioned, school based "fixes." Rather, the Commission recommends for those students most at risk of not completing school, a broad set of school preparedness activities, followed by a sustained strategy from pre-K through high school and beyond.

The Commission acknowledges the success of Maryland's Extended Elementary Education Program (pre-K) and calls for its expansion; and it hails the impact of Maryland's Tomorrow (9-12) and recommends its expansion. But the Commission notes the significant gap between these two initiatives and, therefore, recommends a comparably intensive strategy aimed at the primary and middle years to provide a continuum of support from pre-K to graduation and beyond. Moreover, the Commission defines the basic principles that should guide implementation of the strategy. The first principle is: "Educational policy and practice throughout Maryland must be premised on the belief that all children are capable of succeeding in school" (Chapter II).

To support this principle, the Commission calls for turning good rhetoric into reality by defining rich, measurable outcome expectations for the three key developmental stages of a student's school life: primary, middle and high school. These expectations are reinforced by a set of recommended strategies for success and a proposed system of incentives and sanctions called Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants (Chapter III).

Although the Commission identifies key roles and responsibilities for the State--policy setting, technical assistance, financial incentives, simplifying regulations--we believe that it is at the level of the local school where teachers, administrators, parents and community must join together and commit to success.

Most efforts in the past have concentrated on trying to "fix" the children. The Commission for Students at Risk believes the time is right to effect systemic change in style, climate, organization and curriculum in the children's schools:

RECOMMENDATION #1: To fulfill the expectation that all children enter school fully prepared to learn, the Commission recommends:

- Development of neighborhood-based, one-stop family investment centers;
- Expansion of the EEEP program to all Chapter I schools;
- Expansion of affordable quality child care; and
- Mandatory kindergarten attendance for all children.

RECOMMENDATION #2: To fulfill the expectation that all students complete the elementary grades with mastery of critical learning skills, the Commission recommends:

- Treating the years between kindergarten and the end of the third year as a learning bloc;
- Implementing a new initiative--Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants--in targeted elementary schools; and
- Phasing this initiative into all Chapter I schools over a period of years.

RECOMMENDATION #3: To fulfill the expectation that successful completion of middle schools reflects measurable skills building in higher-order competencies and developmental life skills, the Commission recommends:

- Extending the new initiative to selected middle schools serving disadvantaged youngsters; and
- Phasing it into all junior highs and middle schools that feed students into the 76 Maryland's Tomorrow high schools.

RECOMMENDATION #4: To fulfill the expectation that all students entering high school are able to complete their educations and graduate, the Commission recommends:

- Continuing financial support for Maryland's Tomorrow so that targeted schools can enroll a full four-year cohort of students; and
- Expanding it over time to all high schools in the State that serve disadvantaged students.

RECOMMENDATION #5: To fulfill the expectation that strategies for serving at-risk students will be successful, the Commission recommends:

- Providing adequate funding for poorer jurisdictions;
- Extending new financial incentives to targeted elementary and middle schools;
- Requiring effective assessment and accountability systems; and
- Sanctioning for schools and options for students if schools are not successful.

In declaring these expectations and recommending steps to be taken to fulfill them, the Commission recognizes the necessity for action on two fronts: leadership, support and resources from the State to energize school districts, and a school level community planning process that translates goals into an action plan.

In this manner, the Commission for Students at Risk addresses the challenge of the Governor's Commission on School Performance: "The State must blow the whistle and mobilize the help needed now to assure Maryland's future well-being." We are blowing the whistle and suggesting how to mobilize the help.

MARYLAND'S CHALLENGE: THE PROBLEM

A crisis is brewing among the neat rows of desks in Maryland's classrooms--a threat to our economic future so grave that the longer we delay in meeting it, the more costly it will be. Maryland's crisis is the nation's crisis. David Kearns, chairman of the Xerox Corporation, calls it "the making of a national disaster;" Owen (Brad) Butler, former chairman of Proctor and Gamble, fears "the creation of a 'third world' within our own country;" James Burke, CEO of Johnson & Johnson, speaks of the "American dream turned nightmare."

The crisis is the undereducation of a significant body of students, growing each year as a proportion of our young people. Predominant in this group are the children of poverty, whose families and neighborhoods are unable to help them grow into responsible, productive adults. Why are they called youth "at risk?" *It is because they are likely to emerge from school unprepared for further education and unprepared for the demands of a changing workplace.*[1]

The results of this "unpreparedness" are painfully evident to employers, public officials, community leaders and society as a whole. Nationally, over 25 million people are "functionally" illiterate; Maryland's share is estimated at 400,000. Over three million Americans of working age are on public assistance; 60,000 of them are in Maryland. Every year, almost one million children drop out of the nation's public schools; in Maryland, it's more than 15,000, almost equal to the size of the state prison population.

Crime and educational achievement appear to be closely correlated: the Correctional Educators Association estimates that only one in four prisoners has a high school diploma. A recent study of literacy levels among Maryland prisoners found 93 percent scoring below accepted standards of functional literacy. Repeated studies find disturbing but strong correlations among states with high dropout rates and those with large prison populations.

It must give all Marylanders cause for concern to know that 25 percent of the students who entered the 9th grade in Maryland's public schools in the fall of 1989 will not graduate in 1993--or, perhaps, ever. Students drop out of school before graduation for many reasons, some associated with the need to support a family or to help at home with younger children. Dropping out is not exclusively a phenomena associated with poverty.

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[1] America's Shame, America's Hope, MDC, Inc., 1988.

However, the percentage of dropouts is almost double in those subdivisions of the state with severe concentrations of poverty. Therefore, this report argues for early and sustained institutional and financial commitments to the educational success of economically disadvantaged, educationally at-risk youngsters. As an educational pundit explained "The state pen costs a lot more than Penn State." [2]

Children of the poor have always been less likely to complete their educations. But in an earlier age, the dropout phenomena was not as serious a problem for the individual or for society. In an earlier era of industrialization, not only could employers absorb large numbers of unskilled laborers, but there seemed to be almost an endless supply of potential workers from which to choose. A strong back, good hands and a willingness to work usually secured a decent job in industry or agriculture.

That situation has changed irreversibly. Production processes depend more on computers; production teams must develop decision-making skills; manufacturing jobs require greater intellectual ability; and farms are few and mechanized. This increasingly sophisticated workplace means that the jobs created over the next 10 years will require more literate workers with creative thinking and problem solving skills, workers who have *learned how to learn*. Projections by the Hudson Institute estimate that in 10 years, new jobs will require workers whose median level of education includes at least a year and a half of college--not to be the boss, just to hold a job.

While the workplace is undergoing drastic change, so is the workforce. Current projections point to a serious labor shortage that many Maryland employers are experiencing already. The total number of young people potentially available for work is declining rapidly, while minorities, non-English speakers and youth from impoverished backgrounds will make up a far higher proportion of these new young workers.

Why is this significant? In 1985, two thirds of Black children, over 70 percent of Hispanic children, and nearly half of all white children who lived in female headed households lived in poverty.[3] Poverty in childhood raises the risk of school failure for many reasons:

POOR CHILDREN GET A WEAK START IN LIFE

A high proportion have low birth weight, which brings health problems that should be dealt with aggressively. But, increasingly, their mothers are teenagers themselves with undeveloped skills, who are unable to create a healthy, secure, developmentally nurturing environment for their kids. By the

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[2] The Same Client, Harold Hodgkinson, Institute for Educational Leadership.

[3] Children in Need, A Statement by the Research and Policy Committee of the Committee for Economic Development, 1987, pg. 81.

time these youngsters come to the school house door, they are significantly behind their more advantaged peers. Families with incomes exceeding $35,000 enroll their four-year-olds in a pre-school program 65 percent more often than families with incomes below $10,000.[4]

THOSE WHO START BEHIND USUALLY STAY BEHIND[5]

Poor teens fall behind their peers in school. Among 16-year-olds who have lived most of their lives in poverty, 40 percent have repeated at least one grade, twice the failure rate of their peers who never lived in poverty. Poor teenagers are four times more likely than non-poor teenagers to have below average basic skills,[6] and make up a disproportionate share of teen parents. The interaction of family breakdown, limited education, crime, drug abuse and poverty has been documented in studies of census data.[7] According to data analyzed by the Children's Defense Fund, the school performance of minority youth, who bear a disproportionate burden of poverty, reveals our failures. The average reading level of minority 17-year-olds is only slightly ahead of the average reading level of white 13-year-olds. So it is not surprising that, with higher failure rates and poorer test scores, poor teenagers are almost three times more likely than non-poor youth to drop out of school.[8]

SCHOOLS ARE NOT STRUCTURED TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES

The Technical Teams assembled by the Maryland State Department of Education to advise the Commission declared that fundamental aspects of the organization and operation of public schools in the state--and the nation as a whole--contribute strongly to the failure of students. These Technical Teams consisted almost entirely of teachers and administrators active in local school systems throughout Maryland, so their insights are particularly instructive.[9]

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[4] A Vision for America's Future, An Agenda for the 1990's: A Children's Defense Budget, Children's Defense Fund.

[5] Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future, Berlin and Sum, Ford Foundation, Occasional Paper 3, 1988.

[6] Lagging Behind, U.S. Department of Education, 1986.

[7] A Proper Inheritance: Investing in the Self-Sufficiency of Poor Families, Levitan, Mangum and Pines, George Washington University, 1989.

[8] High School and Beyond, The U.S. Department of Education.

[9] Technical Team Reports submitted to the Commission for Students at Risk. Appendix B contains summaries of these reports.

- There is a lack of respect for background and cultural differences.
- Negative messages are conveyed by school and system policies and practices.
- Large group instruction is common with little recognition of diverse learning styles and needs of students.
- Instruction is passive, over-using the classroom lecture.
- Teachers set all learning goals for children, reinforcing passive roles for students.
- School tracking and sorting functions begin early and are formalized in the middle grades, often locking students into predetermined failure.
- Some school systems use retention policies for poor achievement without dealing with the additional distress and alienation it creates.
- Teachers in the middle learning years are usually trained as elementary or high school teachers, and have little knowledge of the instructional or developmental needs of young adolescents.
- Physical factors, rather than human factors, shape the climate of high schools; tradition is a major obstacle to change.
- A "band-aid" approach is taken to "fixing" at-risk behaviors in a crisis environment as they occur, rather than anticipating the challenges by changing the school climate.

The implications of a weak start, unlikely catch-up and a hostile environment are inescapable. With little or no exposure to such developmental enrichments as trips, camps, museums, libraries and stimulating home environments, *poor youth, coming from impoverished backgrounds, have the most to gain from their school experience; yet they are most likely to attend schools with poor resources.* Political jurisdictions with the highest concentrations of poor children have, therefore, both the greatest need for a high quality public school system and the fewest resources to meet these greater challenges.

If we fail to ensure the educational success of poor children, we are in danger of creating a permanent underclass of the unemployed in our state at the same time that we are creating whole new categories of jobs that may go begging. If we fail, we will also be ensuring huge future costs to the state for public assistance or incarceration.

Public schools do not choose the children who walk in their doors. Nor should they. The children who attend school come from all income levels, from all types of family and social environments, and in many cases speaking languages other than English. The challenge is to deal creatively with this diversity of children in a single institution. Except in isolated cases, this is not happening with respect to at-risk youngsters in Maryland.

As the Sondheim Commission stated in its *Report of the Governor's Commission on School Performance*:[10]

> "...rich academic content, skilled teaching and sensitive classroom assessment bring improved achievement for all children. As important as education is for its own sake, it is the way to success in adult life and *one of the surest paths out of poverty*. ...poor children cannot continue to be the victims of poor schools. The State must blow the whistle and mobilize the help needed now to assure Maryland's future well being."

The Commission for Students at Risk accepted this formidable challenge; in this report, we recommend the guiding principles, the outcome expectations and the action steps we believe must be taken now to make Maryland's schools responsive to *all* our children.

[10] The Report of the Governor's Commission on School Performance, Sondheim Commission, 1989.

MARYLAND'S CHALLENGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

After almost a year of meetings at which the Commission heard from academic experts and practitioners, and studied many other reports from around the country on the education of "at-risk" students, we reached consensus on five overarching principles that form the basis for this report and the recommendations for action.

1. EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE THROUGHOUT MARYLAND MUST BE PREMISED ON THE BELIEF THAT ALL CHILDREN ARE CAPABLE OF SUCCEEDING IN SCHOOL

From its beginnings, this nation has been committed to education as fundamental to the exercise of freedom. If we do not accept, as an article of faith, that all children can learn and be successful in school, we exclude a significant proportion from sharing in the bounties of American life. We refuse to give up on these children.

We also refuse to continue accepting excuses for not assuring that each child achieves the knowledge and skills necessary to become a productive and self-supporting citizen.

- We cannot continue to accept as an excuse that the child was born in poverty.
- We cannot continue to accept as an excuse that the child is without a stable family.
- We cannot continue to accept as an excuse that the child lacks a healthy, safe and stimulating home environment.

These are statements of the challenges to be confronted, not excuses for failing to address them.

2. MARYLAND MUST HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR AT-RISK CHILDREN THAT PROVIDES A CONTINUUM OF SUPPORT FROM PRE-K TO GRADUATION AND BEYOND

At present, Maryland has early childhood (pre-K) programs in only 120 schools and a special program, Maryland's Tomorrow, which intervenes aggressively for at risk high school students in 76 schools. Although there are countless model projects scattered among various primary and middle schools, there is no statewide policy or strategy that fills the gap between Extended Elementary Education Program (pre-K) and Maryland's Tomorrow (9-12).

It is clear that no single period of a child's development should be dealt with to the exclusion of others. But it is also clear that prevention is better than remediation. This belief undergirds the Commission's emphasis on the early years of a child's schooling in the hope and expectation of increasing the odds for success as children proceed through their school years. While stressing this, however, we want to emphasize the need also to reinforce support during the years of early adolescence when many youngsters are on the brink of failure and dropping out. Maryland cannot afford throw-away children.

A comprehensive strategy is not the same as a prescriptive strategy. Neither a commission, nor an executive, nor a legislative body can order "success for all." But we can describe the challenge, set goals, clarify outcome expectations, identify key program strategies, provide incentives for change and sanctions if warranted, and then revitalize the tradition of local responsibility. There are many promising approaches to meeting these educational challenges. We want to encourage more experimentation from which to learn, and greater commitment on which to build.

3. SCHOOLS MUST CHANGE THE WAY THEY EDUCATE CHILDREN

Tinkering and quick fixes won't work. The lessons learned from the schools influenced by the research of Dr. James Comer of Yale University, Dr. Robert Slavin of The Johns Hopkins University (a Commission member) and others demonstrate that energized school management teams, active parental involvement and an interactive learning environment tailored to students' needs can make successful outcomes the norm. Comer's techniques have been transplanted to some schools in Prince George's County; Slavin's approach, "The Success for All" school, is being replicated in a few Baltimore City elementary schools.

From these models and review of other research, **it is clear that learning takes place when**

- *it is viewed as meaningful to a student's own life;*
- *learners feel that their teachers are committed to their success; and*
- *the school environment allows for differences in learning paces, methods and styles in order to be in harmony with the diverse needs and interests of its students.*

THE COMMISSION SUGGESTS A BAKER'S DOZEN OF SPECIFIC ELEMENTS THAT SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO BRING THIS ABOUT. They include:

1. **An emphasis on prevention of learning problems and early intensive intervention when learning problems arise, rather than on long-term remedial or special education services;**

2. **Use instructional methods that have proven successful with disadvantaged students including creating smaller communities of learners--schools-within-schools--to overcome anonymity and alienation;**

3. **Improve the linkage between teacher training programs and the realities of public education today; follow up with top-quality staff development including demonstrations, coaching and in-class follow through;**

4. **Actively involve parents as partners in their children's school success;**

5. **Encourage and assist school staff and other members of the community to become mentors;**

6. **Allow flexible scheduling to accommodate current events, special activities, integrated curricula, counseling time, teacher planning time and student diversity;**

7. **Form teacher teams to work together and plan together to enhance students' development;**

8. **Develop experimental hands-on learning experiences to make learning more exciting, relevant and focused on student futures in college or employment;**

9. **Eliminate rigid tracking and grouping; use cooperative learning/peer tutoring techniques;**

10. **Use community service as a way of learning responsibility and self-esteem and exploring careers;**

11. **Extend school-based health services, as part of the overall effort to establish schools as healthy environments;**

12. **Create partnerships with community agencies to encourage family support, health and nutrition services to children and before- and after-school and summer programs; and**

13. **Provide a facilitator selected by the school to work with teachers, parents and community to ensure top quality implementation.**

Schools need to marshal all resources to compensate partially for the debilitating environments from which many of their students come each morning. Most efforts in the past have concentrated on trying to "fix" the children. *The Commission believes that attention must now shift to effecting systemic change in style, climate, attitude, organization and curriculum in the children's schools.*

4. SCHOOLS MUST DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS WITH ALL LOCAL COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Children come to school representing the entire spectrum of income, family structure, and home and community environments. They bring problems that, in many cases, staff have not been trained to face.

The Commission recognized early in its deliberations that schools need help. There is professional health, social services, recreation and employment and training expertise in the community that can provide valuable support for local schools. In addition to public agency support, there are also the rich resources of the voluntary sector--Scouting, Big Brothers, Big Sisters--the business community, the churches and particularly the families that should become a vital part of a community educational team. The Commission believes strongly that local schools must take the lead in reaching out to develop collaborative partnerships and a sense of "shared mission," which will encourage and nurture lasting commitments.

These community resources need to be marshaled, not only after children begin school, but during infancy and early childhood. The Early Learning Years Technical Team emphasized to the Commission the value of early inter-agency intervention with young families. The Infant and Toddlers Initiative, the "Casey Project" in Prince George's County, and the Family Development Center in the Lafayette Court Housing Development in Baltimore City were cited as models of case-managed, integrated service delivery systems that meet the nutritional and developmental needs of youngsters and their families so that they are "readier" for school.

5. LOCAL SCHOOLS MUST DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT CHANGE WITH CLEAR POLICY GUIDANCE AND FINANCIAL INCENTIVES FROM THE STATE

The Commission believes that addressing the needs of at-risk students is so important to the continued prosperity of our State and Nation, that this set of initiatives *cannot be allowed to fail.* State and local roles and responsibilities must be clear.

The state has a key role to play in establishing policy, setting goals, waiving regulations if appropriate, providing incentives and technical assistance, monitoring and reporting performance, and requiring corrective action if warranted.

In tandem with state policy, the Commission supports a vigorous local planning process at both the school district and the local school levels. For it is finally at the level of the local school where teachers, counselors, administrators, parents and community must join together and commit to success. The local plan for success must be locally owned and operated.

In summary, our five guiding principles are:

- Success for all,
- A comprehensive statewide strategy,
- Major school restructuring,
- School/community collaboration, and
- Local planning and implementation.

Within this framework, specific outcome expectations and an action plan will be articulated in the next chapter.

MARYLAND'S CHALLENGE: HIGHER EXPECTATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

What do students, parents, employers and the community at large have a right to expect of public education? Has the mission changed as we approach a new century? Has public education been responsive to the changes in the economy, society and the family that have increased demands on the schools? In grappling with these issues, the Commission acknowledged the difficulties schools face, and determined not to engage in a finger pointing exercise. We also agree with David Ellwood:[11]

> "There will be no quick fixes, no magic silver bullets. What we need is intensive, long-term experimentation and commitment to education, opportunity and empowerment. If we cannot offer a real vision, a real hope to those in our most hostile neighborhoods, America may lose an important segment of its society."

Our vision is of schooling that embodies a belief in success for all students. To achieve that vision, the Commission for Students at Risk proposes the following set of fundamental expectations to undergird the curriculum, the pedagogy and the school environment:

- Positive self-esteem must be engendered and nurtured throughout schooling in order for individuals to reach their full potential;
- Concern for others, starting with classmates and extending to community, must be developed in order for democracy to flourish;
- Academic achievement, including problem-solving skills and communication skills, must be instilled and measured in order for students to lead productive lives; and
- A positive attitude toward life-long learning needs to be kindled in order to enable students to cope with a rapidly changing economy.

As stated earlier, we do not believe schools can, or should be expected to do all this alone. *We support a school district and a school level community planning process that translates goals into an action plan.*

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[11] Divide and Conquer, David T. Ellwood, Ford Foundation, 1987.

The Commission itself began that process with a series of outcome expectations or performance standards for schools at the three critical junctures students must navigate successfully:

1. The acquisition of basic skills in the early years;

2. The transition to middle schools, where adolescent and academic pressures converge; and

3. Entrance to high school, where interests and energies in schooling and futures must be guided.

For each of these junctures, we articulate outcome expectations more specifically, as well as recommend action steps to achieve them.

EXPECTATION #1: **ALL CHILDREN SHOULD ENTER SCHOOL FULLY PREPARED TO LEARN.**

Special attention must be paid to children of poverty because:

- Poor parents who are less likely to get quality prenatal care increase their babies' risk of being born at low birth weight, a condition that can lead to learning disabilities.

- Increasing numbers of babies are being born to chronically addicted mothers, with resulting health and learning problems.

- As they grow up, poor children are less likely to receive the key building blocks of early development: good nutrition, medical care and a safe and stable environment.

- Children who are undernourished and ill are less alert and curious, and more passive in their interactions with others, making them generally less prepared to start school than are more advantaged youngsters.

- A growing number of poor children live with parents who themselves lack basic skills and cannot provide a home environment that helps prepare a child for school.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

1.1 DEVELOP NEIGHBORHOOD-BASED, ONE-STOP FAMILY INVESTMENT CENTERS.

The Commission supports the initiatives of the Governor's Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Governor's Employment and Training Council to develop neighborhood-based, one-stop family investment centers, where interagency funded case managers assess need and provide resources, early intervention and developmental services to young families. Research has demonstrated that investments in educating young mothers have immediate impact on the attainments of their children, thereby slowing the intergenerational perpetuation of problems.[12] Models for emulation abound: The Project for Children and Family Services Reform (The Casey Project), the Family Support Centers, the Lafayette Courts Family Development Center. Resources are available through the Infants and Toddlers Program, Child Find, the WIC program, Literacy Works, Project Independence, the Job Training Partnership Act, etc. A strong *interagency neighborhood-based, family-focused team strategy* needs to move from pilot projects to institutionalization of such programs in targeted areas across the state.

1.2 EXPAND THE EEEP PROGRAM TO ALL CHAPTER I SCHOOLS.

This is another cost-effective strategy. According to the House of Representatives' Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, every dollar spent on high quality preschool programs for disadvantaged children saves society as much as $4.75 because of savings on special education, public assistance and the criminal justice system. The State of Maryland has funded the Extended Elementary Pre-Kindergarten Program (EEEP) in 120 of the 473 Chapter I eligible schools. Evaluations have demonstrated that disadvantaged students who participate, achieve more throughout elementary school and are significantly less likely than other students to fail in elementary school or be assigned to special education. Therefore, we recommend immediate expansion of EEEP to all Chapter I eligible schools in the State and, over the next five years, expansion to all elementary schools. The Commission supports eventual expansion of such opportunities to three year olds.

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[12] Berlin and Sum, op. cit.

1.3 EXPAND AFFORDABLE QUALITY CHILD CARE.

Critical to the successful early development of children and to the peace of mind of parents is the availability of developmentally appropriate and affordable child care services. Such services can be particularly constructive in mitigating the effects of impoverished environments by providing toys, games, books and supervised play. Obtaining such full-time child care will be especially critical for parents who are to enter education and employment and training programs under Project Independence, the State's new welfare reform program. State funding at a level sufficient to draw down the full Federal match from the Family Support Act of 1988 for child care for these dependent mothers is of primary importance.

1.4 MAKE KINDERGARTEN ATTENDANCE MANDATORY.

Maryland is among 43 states in which kindergarten attendance is still not mandatory by state law. Approximately 95 percent of five-year-olds do attend kindergarten, but the 5 percent that do not are disproportionately poor and minority students. In practice, a student who arrives "off the street" in first grade is usually considered to have no chance of passing, and thus starts off his or her school career with a year of frustration and failure. Making kindergarten mandatory would help ensure that all students have had some school experience before they enter the critical first-grade year. However, the availability of before-and after-school supervision for kindergartners is critical so that working mothers will be able to enroll their children.

EXPECTATION #2: ALL STUDENTS SHOULD COMPLETE THE ELEMENTARY GRADES WITH MASTERY OF CRITICAL SKILLS IN LEARNING TO READ, WRITE AND COMPUTE.

Success during the early elementary years is critical for students who are at risk of school failure. Research has shown that, as early as third grade, we can predict with a high degree of accuracy which children will ultimately graduate and which will drop out.[13] Yet we know that reading failure can be prevented for virtually all students, regardless of their home backgrounds and other characteristics. Ensuring that every student gets off to a good start in reading and other basic skills is not only good educational and social policy, it is also a good investment.

[13] Howard, M.A.D., Anderson, RT., 1978, Early Identification of Potential School Dropouts: A Literature Review, Child Welfare, Vol. 52, p. 221-231

Expanding preschool and mandatory kindergarten attendance are important beginning points in a statewide commitment to ensuring the success of at-risk students, but there is more the State must do to follow through in the early elementary grades to help guarantee reading and other basic skills for all students. Investing in ensuring the success of children in the early grades could pay off in a few years, if it could significantly reduce the need for remedial and special education and retentions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

2.1 TREAT THE YEARS BETWEEN KINDERGARTEN AND THE END OF THE THIRD GRADE (K-3) AS A LEARNING BLOC.

Particularly in the early years, young children vary enormously in their developmental pace. Little girls are usually cognitively ahead of little boys; yet, we continue to educate them monolithically, expecting all six-year-olds to achieve uniformly. This unrealistic expectation is tragically reinforced when some Maryland school districts fail as many as 20 percent of its first graders! On the other hand, giving schools four years to achieve the expected basic skills competency outcomes allows for flexible groupings, elimination of formal grade testing and, most importantly, a developmental approach to learning that reinforces success.

2.2 IMPLEMENT A NEW INITIATIVE--MARYLAND'S INCENTIVE CHALLENGE GRANTS--IN TARGETED ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

Consistent with our guiding principle that calls for a comprehensive strategy and a continuum of support for at-risk children, the Commission For Students at Risk proposes a challenge to schools and districts: Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants. With these grants, the State would provide the financial resources, technical assistance and flexibility in State regulations necessary to accelerate the achievement of disadvantaged students and to improve other indicators, such as year-to-year promotion rates and reduction of special education referrals. Some of the specific elements that help foster such improvements are described in Chapter II and in Appendix A. To receive the opportunity and a proposed incentive of approximately $100,000 per school, schools must commit themselves to developing a plan to be approved by the State, characterized by high expectations, specific targets for performance, rigorous accountability, and meaningful collaboration with other community agencies and actors.

We propose that at the end of three years, schools that have achieved the planned measurable improvements in performance would receive renewed funding. Those that did not show this level of gain would lose the Challenge Incentive and status. In order to be considered for renewed funding, such schools would be subject to sanctions, which could include bringing in a new principal with power to transfer staff into or out of the building. Students in these unsuccessful schools should have the opportunity to select another school in their home district, or pursue a successful education through inter-district transfer.[14]

The Commission is persuaded that this new initiative is needed to reinforce and sustain the jumpstart provided by the EEEP program, and to get an earlier start with students suggested by the success of Maryland's Tomorrow. We ask: "Why have a program that continually requires remediation, that requires fixing things, when you can have one to *prevent* breakdowns?"

Appendix A gives details on this new Incentive Challenge Grant initiative.

2.3 PHASE THE MARYLAND'S INCENTIVE CHALLENGE GRANT ELEMENTARY MODEL INTO ALL CHAPTER I SCHOOLS OVER A PERIOD OF YEARS.

The Commission recommends starting this rigorous initiative in about 50 elementary schools and gradually expanding it throughout the State. Over time, the process is sure to develop evidence concerning effective schoolwide change to ensure the success of all children. The required collaborative planning process will also begin to institutionalize a supportive community educational team.

[14] Commissioner Harry Pitt has requested that we note that he cannot fully support the recommendations on mandated state sanctions and student transfers requiring costly transportation.

EXPECTATION #3: THE SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL SHOULD REFLECT MEASURABLE SKILL BUILDING IN HIGHER ORDER COMPETENCIES, DEVELOPMENTAL LIFE SKILLS AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING.

Success in the elementary grades provides a basis for success in later schooling but does not by any means guarantee it. Even students who have adequate basic skills can run into trouble in the middle grades. Recently, there has been a great deal of criticism of the way middle schools are typically organized, and many proposals have been made for substantial restructuring of middle school programs. The most influential of these is the Carnegie Foundation's *Turning Point* report and the Maryland Task Force on the Middle Learning Years' *What Matters in the Middle Grades* report.

The middle school years are a time when the typical turmoil of adolescent development produces feelings of alienation, heightened sexual awareness, and increased dependence on peers for guidance. Among many at-risk youth, this is also a time characterized by drug, alcohol and sexual experimentation, teen pregnancy and lack of interest in academics. Captive to their chemical and hormonal imbalances, adolescents can be brash and full of bravado one moment and overcome by anxiety and self-doubts the next.

As our Technical Team on the middle learning years pointed out, "the transition from a small, safe, secure and often neighborhood elementary school to the larger more complex environment of the middle grades can exacerbate the conflicts in loyalties and values many students experience." Many students develop an increasing sense of anonymity: "No one cares whether I'm here or not."

Diversity also marks this stage of development. School rules and regulations, curriculum and staff need to reflect a more pluralistic view of students in order to make schooling a more personalized experience and one that prepares teens for active citizenship. Without that understanding and support, youngsters can make poor decisions in the middle learning years, with devastating consequences.

This is also the period in schooling when students need to understand the relevance to their lives of the subject matter they are learning. Competency in specific subject matter is not enough. Students must be helped to develop the ability to reason critically and understand the interrelationships of many disciplines. Both the Carnegie and the Maryland reports on the middle learning years are replete with excellent and thoughtful recommendations for improving the outcomes of the middle school experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

3.1 EXTEND THE MARYLAND'S INCENTIVE CHALLENGE GRANTS TO SELECTED MIDDLE SCHOOLS SERVING DISADVANTAGED YOUNGSTERS.

Consistent with our guiding principles, our recommendations for elementary schools and the current State policy for selected high schools (Maryland's Tomorrow), we propose that special assistance be extended to the middle years. We believe much can be accomplished if leadership is provided and community resources are marshaled to encourage school restructuring to achieve higher expectations.

Accordingly, we propose an Incentive Challenge Grant of approximately $100,000 for targeted middle schools that engage in a broad community planning process culminating in a plan, to be approved by the State, that has measurable performance standards and agrees to rigorous evaluations of outcomes.

To help achieve the outcomes, the schools must provide an inviting climate, a flexible organization, a diverse and comprehensive curriculum, and opportunities for caring relationships and good citizenship to flourish. Some of the specific elements that help to foster these innovations are identified in Chapter II and in Appendix A.

As in the case of elementary schools, we recommend that the Incentive Challenge Grant be available for three years, during which time participating schools would be restructured and rigorously assessed in accordance with approved performance benchmarks. Sanctions for non-performance and options for student transfer mirror those proposed for the Challenge elementary schools.

3.2 PHASE THE CHALLENGE GRANT CONCEPT INTO ALL JUNIOR HIGHS AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS THAT FEED STUDENTS INTO MARYLAND'S TOMORROW HIGH SCHOOLS.

In the Commission's view, the State needs a continuity of effort for at-risk youth sustained from infancy through high school graduation. Our recommended Challenge Incentives fill the gaping holes between pre-K (EEEP) and the high school intervention known as Maryland's Tomorrow. We envision the elementary "challenge" schools to be ones with EEEP programs and the middle "challenge" schools to be closely linked with

Maryland's Tomorrow, to reinforce the state's continuity of purpose. We recommend starting this initiative in about 50 middle schools and gradually expanding it throughout the state.

The Commission sees the Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants as a way of stimulating both school restructuring and community involvement, to achieve higher expectations for youth most at risk of failure in school and in life.

EXPECTATION #4: **ALL STUDENTS ENTERING HIGH SCHOOL SHOULD BE ABLE TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATIONS AND GRADUATE SUCCESSFULLY.**

High school completion has become a minimum requirement for all but the most menial occupations. Yet too many of Maryland's students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, fail to graduate from high school; too many of those who do graduate fail to attain adequate skills; and too many students who could and should go on to receive higher education fail to do so.

High schools shape the knowledge, skill and attitudes that position students for lives of productive, participatory citizenship. If schools, for example, ignore excessive absenteeism, lateness or misbehavior, they are reinforcing standards of failure in the adult world: students would have no reason to believe that punctuality or reliability is taken seriously by adults, or that failure to behave responsibly will have adverse consequences. Failure to promote the mastery of core academic skills needed in a modern technological society also has consequences that can be reinforced by a feedback mechanism through which employers can keep schools informed about the performance of their graduates in the workplace.

However, if all the recommendations for action to achieve the expectations established in this report were magically put in place tomorrow, Maryland's high schools would still have the difficult job of compensating for the educational and attitudinal deficits in its *current* flow of students, and for the flow of students expected over the next several years who would not have had the benefit of early and sustained intervention. For this reason, it is critically important to maintain the State's strategy for high schools.

The State's investment in Maryland's Tomorrow is already having a significant payoff. In operation only since July 1988 with a first cohort of entering ninth-graders, Maryland's Tomorrow is targeted to those at-risk students in 76 Maryland high schools who show symptoms of failure in their schooling and their environments. Targeted students who are at least a year below grade level in reading or math or who have been retained in grade at least once are provided with strong advocacy, mentoring, intensive remedial training, motivational and self-esteem building activities, parental and business support,

incentive awards and jobs. The program model starts with students in the summer between the eighth and ninth grades and continues year round until graduation and successful transition to further schooling or productive work.

After the first year in operation, evaluators[15] examining the differences in pass/fail rates and ninth-grade dropout rates between Maryland's Tomorrow students and matched comparison groups in the same schools found very promising trends. The *nonparticipant* dropout rate was 45 percent higher than the Maryland's Tomorrow rate and the failure rate was 26 percent higher. The *nonparticipant* promotion rate was 20 percent lower than the Maryland's Tomorrow rate. Among students who did not drop out, 24 percent more Maryland's Tomorrow students than nonparticipants passed at least three of the four Maryland Functional Tests. *Thoughtful, caring intervention does make a difference in measurable, demonstrable ways.* These findings are supported by extensive field monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

4.1 CONTINUE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR MARYLAND'S TOMORROW SO THAT CURRENTLY PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS CAN ENROLL A FULL FOUR-YEAR COHORT OF STUDENTS.

The State's investment in the initial year was $3 million, rising to $5 million in the second year to allow a new ninth-grade cohort to enroll. It is recommended that support continue to increase, to accommodate a full four-year enrollment in the targeted schools.

4.2 EXPAND MARYLAND'S TOMORROW OVER TIME TO ALL HIGH SCHOOLS IN THE STATE THAT SERVE DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS.

Maryland's Tomorrow embodies the key principles described in the Commission's Incentive Challenge Grant program:

- State goals, guidelines and technical assistance;
- State incentive funding;
- State monitoring;
- Local planning processes involving the broader community;
- Local program implementation;
- Staff development;
- Careful assessment and evaluation; and
- Successful leveraging of other resources, public and private.

[15] Making a Difference - Maryland's Tomorrow Year 1 Evaluation, Pelavin Associates, Washington, D.C., 1989.

Having demonstrated success, we cannot afford to fail other students.

EXPECTATION #5: **THE STATE OF MARYLAND SHOULD HAVE A SUCCESSFUL COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS WHICH PROVIDES ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR POORER JURISDICTIONS, INCENTIVES TO STIMULATE CHANGE, AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEMS OF ACCOUNTABILITY.**

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

5.1 PROVIDE ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR POORER JURISDICTIONS.

The State must assure that the jurisdictions with the largest concentrations of students at risk of failure have adequate financial resources to meet their educational responsibilities. Other commissions are exploring this very complex area and therefore the Commission for Students at Risk did not closely examine the elements of state/local funding relationships. However, no report that deals with the issues of educating at-risk students can fail to point out that the largest number of students at risk of failure attend school in school systems with the least financial resources. The State must provide those school systems with the financial resources necessary to meet their educational responsibilities. Those jurisdictions, for their part, must be held strictly accountable for progress with the at-risk students in their charge.

5.2 EXTEND FINANCIAL INCENTIVES TO TARGETED ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS.

New resources will be needed to provide incentives for change, incentives to achieve higher measurable outcomes, incentives to change the climate of schools to one that expects success for all students.

The Commission proposes that funds be allocated on the basis of need factors, such as percentages of poor children, Chapter I schools, school failure and dropouts. An average of $100,000 should be made available as an incentive grant to targeted elementary and middle schools.

5.3 REQUIRE EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEMS.

Maryland's Challenge will provide financial incentives but, in turn, requires strict accountability for improvements in students' performance. In fact, in order to receive a Challenge Grant, schools must make a commitment to major school restructuring and be held accountable for substantially reducing the number of students who perform below an adequate level, are truants, are retained in grade and are discipline problems. The schools who fail to meet these standards would lose the Challenge incentive, and would have to change personnel and develop a new plan in order to be reconsidered for funding.

Because the main thrust of Maryland's Challenge is to improve the performance of students at risk and to change the climate of the schools, there must be a remedy for students who attend schools that fail to live up to the challenge. This remedy recognizes that students must not be permanently victimized by the failure of their schools. Those students will have the opportunity to transfer to a successful school in their jurisdiction or to another school district. However, in this connection the Commission on School Performance emphasized the importance of developing criteria for "credentialling" schools and for issuing school report cards. Parents need to have this information in order to make responsible decisions about their children's education. In order to make school transfer an effective remedy, funding for transportation must be provided and mechanisms must be developed to inform parents, children and advocates of their choices.

CONCLUSION

Each year in Maryland, more than 15,000 children drop out of our public schools. Undereducated and underprepared, these young people will have difficulty finding jobs and their chances of leading economically productive lives are slim.

All children are capable of succeeding in school. They must first enter school fully prepared to learn. Neighborhood-based family investment centers, affordable quality child care, an expanded EEEP program and mandatory kindergarten attendance will help young children already at risk even before they enter the classroom.

A continuum of support must be present from pre-K through graduation. To create and sustain this, the schools themselves must change. Strategies will differ in elementary, middle and high schools. With state policy guidance and technical assistance, the planning and implementation of these outcome-focused strategies will be accomplished by local school districts working closely with their communities. By implementing a new initiative--Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants--in targeted elementary and middle schools, the state will offer important financial resources to help translate community plans into action. Continuation and expansion of Maryland's Tomorrow as well as additional targeted funding for Maryland's poorer sub-divisions is also necessary.

The Commission believes that each school district in Maryland, working in partnership with the state, can, and indeed must, address the educational needs of every child. This is a challenge that must be met and it is the Commission's hope that this report and its recommendations offer a blueprint for success not only for Maryland's at risk youth - but indeed for all Maryland's children.

MARYLAND'S INCENTIVE CHALLENGE GRANTS

The State of Maryland has two major statewide initiatives to assist students at risk. The initiatives focus on the beginning and end of the progression through the school years: the EEEP program, which provides high-quality preschool programs to schools with disadvantaged children; and Maryland's Tomorrow, which targets at-risk students with intensive year round developmental activities as they make the transition from middle school to high school, and continues throughout high school to help students move toward careers in higher education or employment.

There is no corresponding state program focusing on the elementary and middle years. About three-quarters of Maryland elementary schools do receive federal Chapter I dollars, but national studies of Chapter I find that the effects of these programs are small and short-lived. State Compensatory Education (SCE) monies, used to supplement Chapter I, are spread too thinly to have much effect on at-risk students.

This proposal--Maryland's Incentive Challenge Grants--speaks to new and intensive efforts in elementary and middle schools with large at-risk student populations. The effort will be characterized by a high degree of state and local planning, strict accountability for performance-based results, activities for every sub-division in the state, and targeted funding for school districts in greatest need. The initial pilot efforts we propose are capable of expansion and incorporation into the programs of all schools that serve disadvantaged youth.

MARYLAND'S CHALLENGE:

The State Provides...

Additional funds, training and materials targeted toward implementation of effective programs.

Waivers of certain state regulations (e.g., State Compensatory Education) and technical assistance in preparing and carrying out a schoolwide plan.

Local Government Provides...

Local leadership, coordination of local public and private resources, oversight of the planning process and program development.

Individual Schools Agree...

To participate in a process of change and a more rigorous level of assessment and accountability for higher levels of achievement for its most at-risk students.

STATE ROLE

1. State Board of Education establishes general policy and has oversight responsibilities for the program.

2. Investigates feasibility of waiving restrictions on use of State Compensatory Education funds to enable these monies to be used in concert with new monies provided to the schools.

3. The State Board of Education in cooperation with the Governor's Employment and Training Council creates an interagency management team to oversee the planning and implementation of Maryland's Challenge, to be chaired by a project director.

4. Responsibilities of State Management Team:

   - develop and issue planning and operational program guidelines;
   - develop goals and measurable performance benchmarks;
   - provide technical assistance, training and staff development;
   - establish evaluation criteria; and
   - review and approve local plans.

LOCAL ROLE

1. The chief local elected official (or designee) will have the responsibility of convening the local planning team, which shall include:

   - Superintendent of Public Education and other key educational staff;
   - Department of Social Services representative;
   - Department of Health representative;
   - Department of Recreation representative;
   - Service Delivery Area representative; and
   - Private Industry Council and other business representatives.

2. Responsibilities of Local Planning Team:

   - identify local participating schools;
   - oversee the design of local program;
   - develop and submit local plans to the State for approval and funding; and
   - agree to provide a matched control school to allow for evaluation of program impact over time.

3. Responsibilities of Local Schools:

   - involve school faculty, parents and community organizations and agencies in support of the plan for that school; and
   - assume responsibility to implement the local plan as approved and funded by the State.

SELECTION OF SCHOOLS

Criteria for selection of participating schools are as follows:

1. Schools must be from among the top quarter of the district in percent of students receiving free or reduced-priced lunch or represent another index of below-level performance.

2. The local plan must describe continuum of intervention from pre-kindergarten to Maryland's Tomorrow.

3. There is concurrence from and with participating schools.

4. The school must agree to allow students to be tested with instruments other than those ordinarily used for accountability, and to provide data on program effectiveness to the state evaluation team.

KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS: ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Plans developed for the elementary grades should have at least the following key elements:

- An emphasis on prevention of learning problems and on early, intensive intervention when learning problems arise, rather than on long-term remedial or special education services;
- Use of instructional methods that have been successful with disadvantaged students in rigorous evaluations;
- Provision of a facilitator selected by the school to work with teachers, parents and the community to ensure top-quality implementation;
- Flexible use of Chapter I funds under schoolwide plans in schools with at least 75 percent of students receiving free lunch;
- Top-quality staff development, including demonstrations, coaching and in-class follow up;
- Involvement of parents and family support services as an integral part of the plan;
- Partnership with community agencies to leverage additional or redirected resources for family support, health, nutrition and other services to children, as well as to provide before- and after-school programs and summer programs coordinated with school programs; and
- Measurable performance benchmarks by which program can be assessed, including increase in student performance, reduction in retentions, teacher/student absenteeism and disciplinary removals.

KEY PROGRAM ELEMENTS: MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Plans developed for the middle grades should have the following key elements:

- Smaller communities of learners--schools within schools--to overcome anonymity and alienation;
- Flexible scheduling to accommodate special activities, integrated curriculum, teacher planning time and student needs;
- Teacher teams to work and plan together to enhance students' development;
- Programs to increase bonding of adolescents with responsible adults, such as mentoring programs and/or provision of longer blocks of learning time with one teacher;
- Increasing use of heterogenous groupings; elimination of rigid tracking and grouping;
- Use of alternatives to traditional disciplinary practices, such as in-school detention;
- Community Service as a way of learning responsibility, increasing self-esteem and exploring careers;
- Curriculum and counseling focus on postsecondary education or employment;
- Top-quality staff development including demonstrations, coaching and in-class follow up;
- Involvement of parents and family support services as an integral part of the plan;
- School-based health services as one part of overall effort to establish schools as healthy environments;
- Partnership with community agencies to leverage additional or redirected resources for family support, health, nutrition and other services to children as well as to provide before- and after-school programs or summer programs coordinated with school programs; and
- Measurable performance benchmarks by which program can be assessed, including increase in student performance, reduction in retentions, teacher/student absenteeism and disciplinary removals.

PROPOSED PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

STATE:

Step 1

- Creation of state inter-agency management team

Step 2

- Statewide awareness conferences

Step 3

- Planning and operational guidelines

Step 4

- Review and approval of local plans

LOCAL:

Step 1

- Convene local planning team

Step 2

- Identify participating schools

Step 3

- Complete local plans and submit to State for approval

Step 4

- Implementation and start-up

PROPOSED FUNDING - $10.2 million

$4,800,000	48 elementary schools averaging $100,000 per school
4,800,000	48 middle schools averaging $100,000 per school
600,000	Evaluation, management, technical assistance and training.
$10,200,000	

Funds should be allocated on the basis of need factors, such as percentages of poor children, Chapter I schools, school failures and dropouts.

EARLY LEARNING YEARS TECHNICAL TEAM REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report from the Early Learning Years Technical Team to the Commission confronts the conditions of children at risk and builds a case for changing the odds in their favor. The introduction summarizes nearly a decade of education reform efforts in terms of disadvantaged youngsters. It underscores a need to intervene early and change things from the start. Five remaining sections contrast typical conditions with the conditions children at risk encounter, define risk in early childhood, clarify the nature of Maryland's problem, identify children at risk, and make recommendations on behalf of young children at risk.

Based on developmental knowledge, this report highlights the tasks of normal developmental stages and investigates what children need to guarantee such growth. A philosophy for young children focuses the Team's beliefs and creates a preamble for recommendations.

Case studies specify children's needs and illustrate the long-term effects of neglect. The circumstances of risk categorize the range of complex environmental conditions contributing to risk. Poverty is cited as the single most pervasive and pernicious factor.

In identifying young children at risk, this report specifies variables at each stage of development. It notes how difficult it is to conclusively predict performance based on grouping by indicators. It cautions against labeling children.

Section VI returns to the Team's philosophy to coordinate interventions with needs. Tables itemize the services, activities, and outreach to families with children at risk. Recommendations are offered in light of what is currently being done, what needs to be done, and what works.

Sources and references appear internally in tables and at the conclusion of the report.

MIDDLE LEARNING YEARS TECHNICAL TEAM REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The years from 10 to 14 constitute a critical transition period in human development. Young adolescents face issues that determine, in significant ways, their ability to function in future schooling and in life. For many, the middle learning years represent a time of decision in terms of continuing schooling. Schools can act as supports for developing youth. This report goes beyond the school to communities and families and asks what contributions each environment can make toward preventing and intervening in at-risk early adolescent behaviors.

Part One explores the characteristics of early adolescents and examines environmental contexts that will capitalize on their diversity and minimize their risk of failing in school and in life. A review of early adolescent physical, psychological, cognitive, social, and character/citizenship developmental traits, identifies the diversity within and between individuals that marks this period. This section of the report highlights factors in the home, school, and community to create a balance sheet for study:

- *School* concerns include climate, curriculum, instruction, staff, and organizational variables. Central to this examination is the question, "How can middle schools act to promote healthy young adolescent development and preclude early school-leaving decisions?" School-based self-analysis and evaluation is one of the procedures recommended for improving school practice and increasing school success with a wider range of students.

- *Home and Home/School Partnership* concerns include a rationale for the availability, use, and impact of home supports on student development and achievement. This section contrasts the needs of early adolescence with the early learning years and notes the prerequisites for expanding relationships with parents from this point into high school learning years. Also emphasized is the powerful role home/school partnerships play in keeping schooling on the home and student agendas. Behaviors that schools can use to develop these partnerships are emphasized.

- *Community* concerns examine the reciprocal relationship between early adolescents and their community. Access to health care, safety, social outlets, and cultural opportunities are balanced with service responsibilities, rights of others, and contributions to the common good. The complex area of community/school partnerships is likewise a reciprocal one. Both institutions should benefit from initiatives to aid and support early adolescents.

While Part One addresses those initiatives and conditions that seek to prevent youth from becoming at risk, Part Two suggests an identification process and range of intervention responses for use with at-risk early adolescents. An identification of at-risk youth would include:

- Identifying students who are at risk of school failure based on formal and informal data analysis including student attendance, behavior (suspensions, office referrals), achievement (grades, test scores), and teacher perceptions/observations.

- Identifying possible explanations for at risk behaviors (e.g., analyzing possible "causes" of student performance: the student factors, home influence, community impact, and school environment).

Appropriate interventions should correlate with the needs of young adolescents deemed already at risk. This report offers five categories of intervention design:

- Academic Assistance/Remediation
- Pupil Services/Social Services
- Vocational/Career Awareness
- Alternative School Approaches
- School Improvement/Reorganization Approaches.

In terms of service, the Technical Team found omissions in intervention traditionally used in Maryland and around the nation. Many programs addressing the various needs of students do exist. Rarely, though, are programs structured to meet the needs of communities and homes as they intervene with at-risk early adolescents. This report raises the issue of *how* and *what* can be done to strengthen homes and communities in entering into partnerships to support youth.

Two goal statements for the middle learning years conclude this report:

Goal One: To foster environments that promote the development and achievement of middle learning years youngsters, thereby preventing them from becoming at risk.

Goal Two: To design and implement a range of interventions required to help groups and individual students at risk of school failure to become successful.

Finally, the Technical Team reviewed several barriers to achieving these goals in the middle learning years:

- Uniqueness Ignored
- Not Teaching to Whole Child
- Tracking Policies
- Staff Preparation Often Inappropriate
- Organization and Structure Alienating
- Inadequate Pupil Services Resources
- Parent Involvement Minimal
- Troubled Families
- Philosophy Poorly Defined
- Negative Messages
- Non-Promotion Policies
- Data/Information Not Used
- Weak Links to Community Resources
- Curriculum Often Irrelevant
- Bias

The Technical Team asks that the Commission recognize and consider the barriers to these goals when determining the action and recommendations it will make. The Team notes that much of what needs to be done is already known.

"Whether or not we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far."

Ron Edmonds

HIGH SCHOOL YEARS TECHNICAL TEAM REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Although high school age adolescents vary in the degree and type of difficulties they encounter as they grow into adults, far too many young people fail to receive resources and support when they need it. Can we--homes, schools, communities--help these young people during adolescence? Have the accumulated effects of heredity, upbringing, childhood adversities, and encounters with unresponsive institutions caused irreversible damage by the time adolescents enter high school? The Technical Team agrees with many social scientists in affirming that high school age adolescents are capable of changing. It also agrees that earlier, negative effects on development can be overcome.

Yet, the weight of research evidence suggests that interventions to change youth during this period are difficult, complex, and costly. In addition, we must make sure that our current and future practices do not create new problems for previously healthy adolescents. Both prevention and intervention must be our focus. To be effective in our efforts, we must become adept at identifying the causes of adolescent at-risk behavior and correlate our intervention accordingly.

This report begins with a description of the developmental tasks that adolescents need to accomplish before they can assume productive adult roles in society. It notes two conflicting views of the period while supporting the capacity of young people to change. Educational opportunities should exist to nurture the wide range of adolescent developmental profiles without creating labeled segments of learners.

Circumstances that adolescents encounter can ease or retard their transition to adulthood. This report examines the characteristics of home, school, community environments that support the healthy physical, emotional/social, cognitive, and character development of adolescents.

- *School* environments that promote student learning attend to factors of inviting climate, balanced curriculum, and flexible school organization. The degree to which a school accomplishes these objectives is the measure of its degree of "wellness". A well school is one that has assessed the learning environment and has taken action to reduce or eliminate impediments to learning. It is a school where adolescents of all types achieve academically and grow socially.

- *Home* environments affect student success/achievement in powerful ways. In fact, researchers find that parental concern and encouragement are twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status. Families need to have sufficient strength to care and nurture adolescent growth and adolescent values formation. Homes and schools should connect with each other and reinforce each other in this task. Structures should be in place to ease parental involvement in schools. Structures should also exist to communicate effective parenting practices.

- *Community* environments offer youth an opportunity to operate outside the institutions of home and school in building a sense of social connectedness. Communities offer youth activity and service opportunities as well. Communities also represent coordinated services to adolescents. In the context of the community, adolescents "try on" the capacities needed for adulthood. Some communities require assistance in providing services to their adolescents. They lack the resources to meet current and ongoing needs. We know that community participation yields positive adolescent growth. Communities need to connect with schools and homes to meet adolescent needs.

The previous two sections of the report analyze those practices and conditions that seek to prevent at-risk behaviors. The next section of the report outlines an identification process and highlights some intervention designs for youth already displaying at-risk behaviors. An identification of high school age, at-risk youth, would include two factors:

- Progression toward high school graduation.
- Progression toward acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed in young adulthood.

Five categories of intervention design correlate with the needs of adolescents already at risk:

- Academic Support
- Pupil Services/Social Services Supports
- Career Preparation/Experiential Learning
- Schools of Choice
- School Effectiveness/Reorganization.

The recommendations of the Maryland High School Study Committee raise the issue of *how* and *what* can be done in strengthening school to meet adolescent needs. From that study, the Technical Team defines two challenges that precede any change.

Challenge One: To review and rethink high school practices, policies, structures, and resources to assure that they operate in the best interest of all students.

Challenge Two: To review and rethink a range of interventions with resources to assure that high schools operate in the best interest of those students exhibiting at-risk behaviors.

Finally, the Technical Team recognizes that barriers exist to meeting the challenges to change. The Technical Team requests that the Commission respond to these barriers in accepting the challenges to change. We ask the Commission to "Make the message so obvious that even organizations and institutions with no prior history of involvement with education cannot, in good conscience, ignore it" (Robert B. Schwartz, Office of the Governor, State of Massachusetts).

TRANSITION TIMES TECHNICAL TEAM REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An increasing number of young people fail to fulfill expected adult roles. This report examines public policy supports that might assist adolescents in transitioning to the workplace or to future schooling.

In the first section of the report, the team presents a "We believe" statement about the school's role in the transitioning process:

- All students could become at-risk if certain prevention strategies and support systems are not provided by home, school, and community environments.
- Students who make successful transitions from one learning level to the next have an improved chance of successfully transitioning from school to work and/or further education.
- Students are capable of self-satisfying and productive employment.
- Students can learn to adapt to a series of transitions.
- Many students need supplemental experiences. Some may need more intensive support to apply school-based learning to post-graduation plans.
- Transitional activities must be an integral part of the instruction and support programs.

Section Two reviews "The Crisis" we face in transitioning supports. It itemizes the student view, the business view, and the higher education view. It notes that a growing number of students leave school poorly equipped to make a smooth transition to the world of work or to perform successfully in post secondary educational experiences. Students express concerns about the extent to which high schools help in transitioning students. They also observed that few, if any, work site experiences complimented their transition. Businesses cite well-documented reports of ill-prepared and ill-educated employees. Higher education also notes the growing number of youth requiring remediation before entering higher learning courses.

Section Three addresses what students need in the areas of prevention and intervention to effect smooth transitions from schooling to future endeavors. The Team notes the critical need for expanded school-based pupil services programs, particularly career and employability development activities. It also documents that more emphasis on how school learning relates to the world of earning. It advocates this integration of learning at each level of schooling.

The team devotes special attention and a recommendation in regard to students who leave school before graduation. If funding for K-12 were re-examined, we might find ways to place financial support for those students who would return to school after leaving. Current evening/GED efforts are funded to address the needs of only a few students.

Finally, the last section of the report presents what else needs to be done. To meet the needs of Maryland's students will require serious rethinking in the way schools operate. School policies, procedures, organizational structures, curriculum, community outreach, staff development, and youth entitlements are some of the areas that must be analyzed. The team recommends:

- Increased parental involvement should be given in all aspects of transition support efforts.
- Curriculum frameworks should infuse career development at each level of learning.
- Each school should develop a comprehensive strategy for career and employability development based on local needs and input.

- Individual career development plans should be meaningfully designed, implemented and updated for students at each level of the learning continuum.

- Consideration should be given to expanding certification requirements. At least one career education course should be completed by all teachers, counselors and administrators, or extensive staff development should be provided.

- More support should be provided through reduced ratio of students to pupil services staff (e.g., counselors, pupil personnel workers, school psychologists, and health professionals).

- Resources should be made available to increase team building among all school staff. This would contribute to improving overall pupil services efforts.

- State and local education agencies should re-examine policies and procedures that may cause barriers to student access of services. This will help students overcome special transition challenges.

- Programs and projects should be developed and implemented to support effective transitioning. A mechanism should be provided for replication of those programs and projects.

- Students should be ensured ongoing opportunities for developing and refining their skills in the use of emerging technologies.

- A re-examination of the K-12 public school funding formula should be done to guarantee educational opportunities for individuals returning to school to earn their high school diploma regardless of their age.

- Joint programs should be developed for students with businesses and communities, such as mentoring, community service, and work experience activities.

The Appendix sections catalog currently promising programs and practices for reference by the Commission. This report highlights the urgency of the current problem. Jobs are changing, workforce demographics are changing. There is a growing mismatch of workplace needs and workforce capacities. We need to change to accommodate the needs of our changing world and the adolescents in our care.

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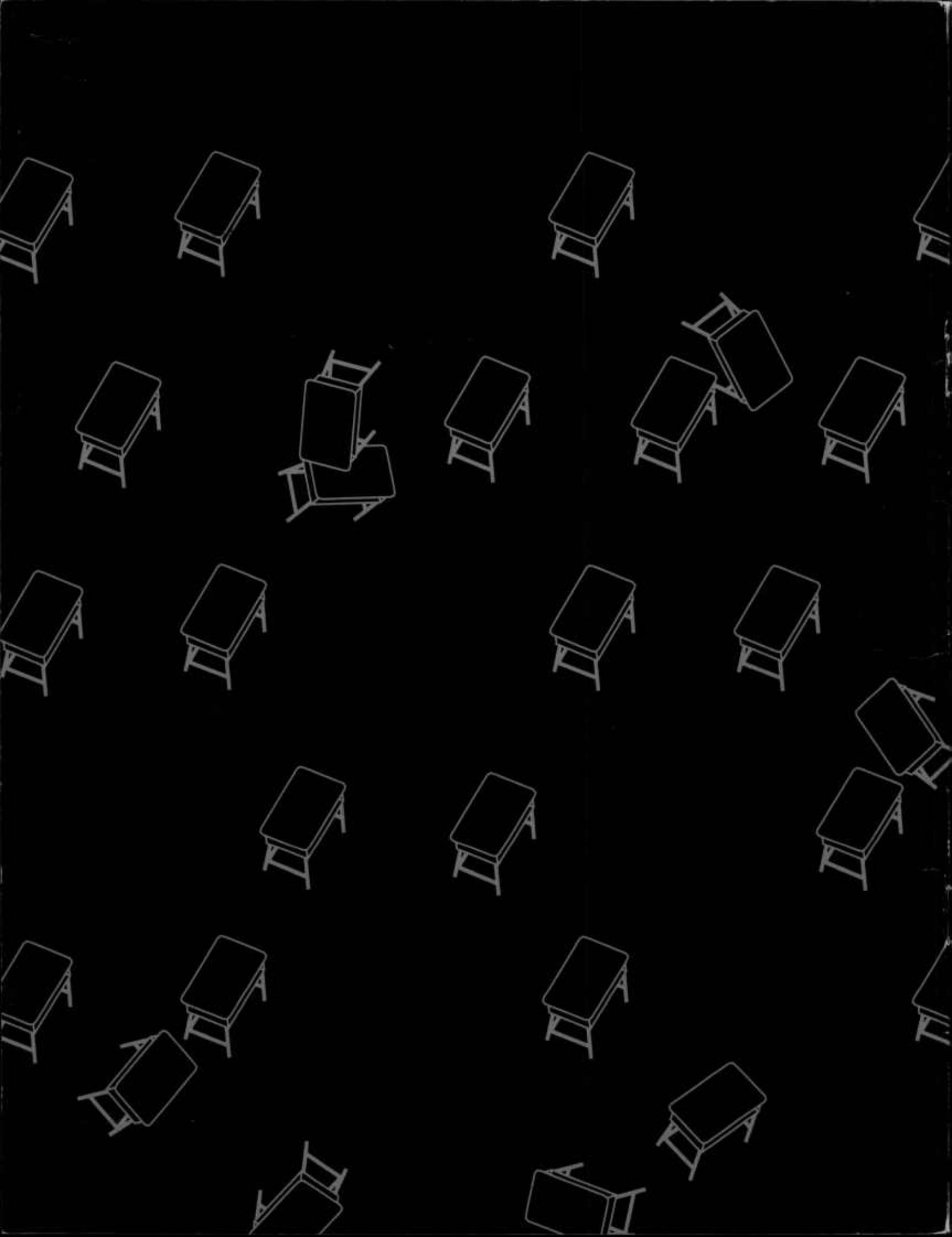
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