AN EXAMINATION OF HIGH SCHOOL FAILURES AS REVEALED IN THE LITERATURE OF THE SUBJECT IN ORDER TO DETERMINE THE NATURE, EXTENT, CAUSES, AND REMEDIES

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"At least one third of the boys and girls who enter the ninth grade of the typical American public school system do not remain to be graduated."[1] Whether this alarming situation is due entirely to withdrawal because of failure to meet requirements in curriculum and subject matter is not known, but

> The appalling increase in pupil failures with resultant mortality in enrollments through drop outs or for other reasons is one which demands study and concerted steps for alleviation if our societal mass is to escape certain unalterable and uncapturable losses. There is ample evidence to support premises that failures imposed on or incurred by pupils in our public schools are the responsible situations which have led to countless cases of crime, societal maladjustments, and decadent personalities. We cannot hope to circumvent the obstacle which failure places in the pathway of a large number of our youth toward a healthy mental and physical participation in a complex but rewarding culture.[2]

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to investigate the subject of student academic failures in high school. The problem

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[1]Harold Spears, The High School for Today, p. 16.

[2]G. D. McGrath, "Pupil Failure--Our Greatest Challenge and Opportunity," Peabody Journal of Education, XXVI (March, 1947), 290-294.

may be divided into three definite phases, as follows: (1) to determine the extent of failure in various sections of the nation and according to subject-matter fields, (2) to investigate the opinions of educators and pupils regarding factors contributing to failure, and (3) to analyze methods employed to reduce failure.

Sources of Data

Since there are no books devoted entirely to the subject of high school failures, the sources of data for this study are almost completely periodical materials. The majority of these are articles by educators in professional journals or reports of addresses at educational conferences. Most of this material dates from the early 1920's. Some valuable data have been obtained from reports of commissions studying other subjects or aspects of secondary education, such as committees on curriculum planning and guidance programs.

Method of Procedure

The method of study has been to examine critically the literature available on the subject in order to determine the extent of failure in high school, factors that contribute to failure, and remedies that have been employed to reduce failure on the high-school level. There has been an attempt to synthesize findings from this literature in order

to obtain an objective picture of failure in secondary schools.

Limitations of the Study

In the beginning, it should be made clear that it is necessary to limit the definition of failure in the context of this study. The term is used exclusively to denote failure on the part of the pupil to meet definite requirements and standards in courses in high school. It is not implied that accepted tests of subject failure are the only criteria by which a pupil may be adjudged a failure in school. There is, of course, the aspect of failure in personal adaptation and in integration of the pupil's life in his social environment, but these phases are beyond the scope of this investigation.

Evolution of Concepts of Subject Failure

It is natural that some rigid standard for judging failure in the performance of school work should have grown up in the early days of curriculum planning for secondary schools. The Committee of Ten, an officially appointed body of the National Education Association for the study of curriculum planning, took the step of laying down a uniform plan for treating subject matter in high schools.[3]

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[3]National Education Association, Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1894, p. 51.

The Committee affirmed that a subject should not be treated differently for pupils who will go to college, for pupils who will go to vocational schools, or for those who will go to neither.[4]

Thus, the implication from the beginning of the modern high-school curriculum was that students were to be judged by their performance in the subjects of this rigid curriculum without regard to individual inclination, abilities, or capacities. From this standardized curriculum grew the tradition of "pass or fail" on the basis of grades, either in numerals or letters. The majority of high schools in the early period used as failure any grade below 75 to 60. Many instances are known of a student's being refused promotion on a one-point-below-passing grade. A quarter of a century ago this method prevailed in most secondary schools of the country.

Beginning with the late 1920's, a new attitude began to permeate educational literature and to make itself felt in professional conferences. Progressive elementary schools took the lead in passing pupils who met the curriculum requirements partially and whose attitude was satisfactory. This finally led to the present-day practice of passing the

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[4] Ibid.

majority of pupils into high school, a practice deplored by many high-school teachers and administrators.

In the early 1930's the "no-failure" theory was being discussed and agitated by secondary school leaders. In his article, "All Children Should Pass," Tenenbaum, a New York City teacher, refers to a statement by Stephen F. Bayne, Assistant Superintendent of the New York City Schools, to the effect that every child should be promoted at the end of every year. He quotes:

> There is no sound reason for submitting a child to the humiliation of failure, or the public schools to the financial and administrative burden of teaching hundreds of thousands of children what they have already been taught, even though they failed to learn it.[5]

Tenenbaum thinks that to eliminate failures in school would relieve the child from stigma and reduce crime, especially juvenile delinquency. He objects thoroughly and most strenuously to the regimentation in the schools. He says that efforts to maintain standards are nonsense; that grades have nothing to do with the level of knowledge of any given child. " . . . yet knowing the tremendous ranges of intellectual capacity, our school system lumps the Einsteins and dull normals together."[6]

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[5]Samuel Tenenbaum, "All Children Should Pass," Survey Graphic, XXV (October, 1936), 564-567.

[6]Ibid.

Tenenbaum believes that the present standardized system turns truants into delinquents. He suggests a plan whereby the schools co-operate with all community agencies, libraries, museums, parks, and others in educating the child. Under this plan, guidance and home-visiting teachers, medical, psychiatric and psychological, and recreational assistants would share the responsibility with teachers. The idea of this plan would be to discover a child's abilities and limitations, then to make available to him a program so planned as to give him a real chance of success.[7]

In his article, "The Child Who Fails," Myers makes the statement, "The word 'failure' has an ugly connotation; we would substitute 'no credit.'"[8] He continues with the thought that bad mental attitudes grow out of failures, such as humiliation, loss of pride, and self-respect. The student compensates by blaming the teacher and the school.

John W. Bell, District Superintendent of the Chicago school system, is another proponent of the doctrine that the number of failures should be reduced to a minimum. He writes:

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Vest C. Myers, "The Child Who Fails," Education, LVII (January, 1937), 306-309.

> Boys and girls have a right to be in high school. Not only have they a right to be there, but teachers and administrators have an obligation to retain them . . . until they actually secure employment or are graduated. High schools must adjust curriculums, methods and attitudes . . . so that each individual pupil will actually get the kind of educational program with which he will succeed.[9]

Editorial comment on Bell's opinion says:

> It is clear that . . . reduction in the number of failures should be the result of appropriate adjustments in curriculum methods, combined with a functional program of guidance. . . . There is little justification for campaigns to reduce failures as such, but great need for continuing efforts to produce the sort of school in which practically every child succeeds with worth-while educational experiences.[10]

In Weersing's article, "No Failure Program," appear the following statements:

> Persons in touch with trends in schools have noted a rapid movement toward non-failure of pupils. Sometimes it is the avowed policy in a school, more often it is creeping into the schools without awareness on the part of the teacher or the administration.[11]

Weersing continues by saying:

> It is generally agreed today that non-promotion or failure followed by repetition of a semester or a year's work . . . is not usually the best way of dealing with a pupil who is unable or unwilling to do the work of his grade in a satisfactory manner. . . . It has been frequently observed that failure

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[9]John W. Bell, "What Does High School Graduation Mean?" School Review, XLIX (February, 1941), 86-89, condensed from Clearing House, November, 1940.

[10]Ibid.

[11]Frederick J. Weersing, "No-failure Program," School Review, XLVI (May, 1938), 331-333.

> has a very unhealthy effect on the pupil's mental hygiene, his personal sense of security, and his fundamental social attitudes.
>
> Finally, it has been pointed out that the presence in our society of a considerable percentage of adults who have failed in school has a very adverse effect on the confidence of the public in the school as an agency either for personal development or for social amelioration.[12]

The School Review further comments on the above statement by pointing out that certain large school systems, such as Los Angeles and St. Louis, permit large numbers of pupils to go through high school without attempting to make them conform to the usual requirements for promotion or graduation.[13]

It indicates that the high-school diploma, then, represents "merely a certificate of exposure to certain organized cultural and social influences."[14] It does not deplore this situation, however, but continues: "The high school has been made a continuous part of the educational process begun in elementary school and is being re-designed to meet the educational needs of all pupils in the high-school age levels."[15]

These and other trends in secondary education lead to the conclusion that the no-failure program is a first step in setting up a school system in which organized experiences

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

are adapted to the pupil in order to supplant the former scheme in which, all too often, the welfare of the pupil was sacrificed to inflexible standards.

There are dissenters, certainly, in regard to the value of a universal no-failure plan. Coates is emphatic in her indictment of passing all students regardless of their personal inadequacies and largely because of unfavorable environments. She maintains that to inject sympathy into grading is dishonest and does not contribute to a democratic system of education.[16] She contends that a student who is promoted with a grade indicating approval of work which he himself knows is inadequate is being led into disrespect for democratic institutions.

Miller puts it even more succinctly when he writes:

> We are living through a period in education in which failing pupils is not good educational procedure . . . tough minds and tough bodies do not come from easy living. No one of intelligence believes that a student will continue to climb the educational ladder if he is beaten back a round every other year. . . . Successes must be in the majority. An occasional failure when he really has failed to meet an acceptable standard for one of his age and kind, will be a jolt, but the human personality has a mechanism for meeting jolts. . . . It is a part of self-discipline. Teachers who know their work have a keen sense of what successes and failures are doing to the students, and make adaptations to be sure that learners are more encouraged than discouraged.[17]

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[16]Mary Weld Coates, "Democracy and Student Failure," School and Society, LII (October 26, 1940), 398.

[17]Carl G. Miller, "Too Much Good News, Bad Education," Education, LXIV (April, 1944), 513.

To sum up, it may be concluded: (1) that grades which students receive are admittedly inadequate measures of success or failure in education as a whole; (2) that such failures assuredly are detrimental to the morale and sense of personal security of an individual; and (3) that they give him a poor opinion of the school system and of educators in general and contribute to his disrespect for democracy.

Up to this point, concentration has been on the personal harm wrought through an indiscriminate failure system. Let another aspect of this problem now be considered. Failure in high school means more than mere pedagogic or personal failure. It indicates social waste in two ways. First, there is the direct waste of scarce teachers and materials. This is serious in view of the fact that there is still a great scarcity of personnel and materials as compared with the demand. In the second place, it represents waste of young people, potential leaders in the community of tomorrow. It also represents waste of social and economic resources of the community. It is regrettable that figures are not available as to the cost in dollars and cents of failures in high school. There is no doubt that the financial cost of retaining students in the same grade is a burden to the legislative budget and to the taxpayer. Spears, in commenting on the 3,997 failures in the San Francisco high schools for the year 1947, estimates the

cost of these failures as $75,000.[18] In proportion, what a tremendous financial waste to the whole country would be the total aggregate of all high-school failures for one year alone!

According to Spears, it would be infinitely better to spend such sums on reading clinics, new types of courses, and the like. He adds, "An investment in growth and development is much more exciting pedagogically than an investment in frustration and failure."[19]

On these counts, therefore, any attempt to discover the causes for high-school failure and to suggest ways in which these failures may be lessened is particularly worthwhile and is the justification for the present study.

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[18]Harold Spears, "High School Has Yet to Reach Its Full Stature," American School Board Journal, CXVI (March, 1948), 17-19.

[19]Ibid.

CHAPTER II

THE EXTENT OF SUBJECT FAILURE

Prevalence of High-school Failure

Although no comprehensive nation-wide survey of failure in high schools of the United States has been made, limited studies have been completed of failures in specific localities; namely, in New York, in the Middle West, in California, and in Texas. The results of these investigations are valuable since the areas studied are widely separated geographically and are also disparate in economic and social environment.

In commenting on the general extent of failure in high school, Spears says that the loss of students from school between grades nine and twelve is between a third and a half of the total enrollment.[1] He also comments, "In the average American school system one of every three students who enter the ninth grade will leave before he reaches the twelfth year."[2] It is not within the province of this study to discuss the holding power of the high schools except as it may be a preventive of failure, but according to Spears, "The

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[1]Harold Spears, The High School for Today, p. 16.

[2]Ibid.

relationship of failure in school performance to school dropout needs no elaboration. There is a direct, positive correlation."[3] It is evident that there is need for determining the degree of success which high-school students attain in their courses by studying failures in various departments. It is Spears' contention that such a study will help to explain, for example, why the graduating classes of San Francisco high schools in 1947 represented only sixty-two per cent of their size as ninth-grade classes.[4]

Analysis of Pupil Failures

It is profitable to examine the statistics of failure in some of the modern high schools in order to make a comparison of such data and to determine whether any definite pattern is discernible in this material.

Pupil failures in California schools. -- Spears has made a definite study of failure in the nine high schools of San Francisco in an effort to ascertain why the high-school enrollment was nineteen per cent less in 1947 than in 1940. As shown in Table 1, the rate of failure reveals that such failure was fifty per cent higher in the ninth

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[3]Harold Spears, "The High School Has Yet to Reach Its Full Stature," American School Board Journal, CXVI (March, 1948), 17-19.

[4]Ibid.

grade of the four-year secondary schools of San Francisco than in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF FAILURES IN NINTH GRADE WITH FAILURES IN UPPER THREE GRADES, SHOWING PERCENTAGE OF FAILURE BY DEPARTMENTS*

Department	Grades	
	Ninth	Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth
Music	4.6	1.9
Home economics . . .	3.8	2.4
Art	1.5	2.5
Industrial arts . . .	6.8	3.7
Commerce	6.0	4.3
Social studies . . .	8.2	6.3
Science	7.1	6.8
Foreign languages . .	16.7	7.3
English	9.4	7.4
Mathematics	12.1	11.7
Average for all schools .	9.4	6.3

*From Spears, "The High School Has Yet to Reach Its Full Stature," American School Board Journal, CXVI (March, 1948), 17-19.

From this table Spears computes the total number of failures in San Francisco high schools for the last semester of 1947 as 3,997. He goes on to point out that the state of California has a comparable number of failures. He concludes:

> This bears out national studies that prove the American high school is a selective institution in regard to scholastic aptitude. Many of those who fail in the ninth grade will not be in attendance in the tenth because of discouragement. In spite of any idealistic view elders may take, youth, just like adults, get little satisfaction in doing things at which they show poor performance.[5]

Not only is this situation true in San Francisco, but figures seem to indicate that it also obtains throughout the state and the nation as a whole. Spears says that there is no consolation in reports that the state has seen a general decline of nineteen per cent in high-school enrollment, or that one third of the ninth graders enrolled will not be graduated.

Pupil failures in Mid-western schools. -- Is this condition as prevalent in other sections of the nation? Statistics indicate that it is. A study of failure in Middle Western high schools bears out the San Francisco findings. More failures occurred among freshmen and sophomores than among juniors and seniors.[6] Table 2 presents a report from

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[5] Ibid., p. 19.

[6] "Subject Failures by Schools," Secondary School Studies, Bulletin of the Department of Secondary School Principals, No. 29 (January, 1930), 13-20.

a survey made in the schools of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, during the first semester of 1922 to determine the percentage of failures. This report shows that freshman and sophomore students experienced the greatest number of failures. The average percentage of failures in these schools for the first semester was 11.4 per cent, and records revealed that failures in the second semester numbered 9.1 per cent of the total student enrollment.[7]

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGE OF FAILURES, LaCROSSE, WISCONSIN, HIGH SCHOOLS*

Class	Per Cent
Freshman	12.4
Sophomore	14.3
Junior	12.0
Senior	5.5

*School Review, XXX (June, 1922), 431-442.

Pupil failures in New York schools. -- A survey of the nation's largest high school system should yield some valuable material on the subject of pupil failure. That the general percentage of failure in New York high schools is high is indicated by Espy, who writes:

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[7]Ibid.

> These facts arouse many perplexities. Unless it can be assumed that there is some intrinsic benefit in scholastic failure, the educational program is apparently poorly adapted to large numbers of pupils. The percentage of failures in New York secondary schools is gradually decreasing, which is particularly significant in relation to the recent influx of pupils who presumably are somewhat less competent than their predecessors. However, the amount of academic failure still seems excessive. Not only is this true of general conditions, as they are represented in the percentage failing in all subjects throughout the state; but is also strikingly apparent in certain subjects and in particular schools. It is difficult to imagine any plausible excuse for permitting or requiring large numbers of pupils to undertake certain subjects if even a fifth of them will probably be designated as failures. Furthermore, these figures tell only a part of the story. In certain secondary schools one half of the pupils sometimes fail to pass these examinations.[8]

Espy, in Table 3, shows the extent of failures by pupils in New York high schools. From the data in this table

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGES OF FAILURES AND WITHDRAWALS BY GRADE LEVELS, NEW YORK STATE*

Grade Level	Enrollment	Per Cent of Subject Failures	Per Cent of Failures and Withdrawals
Seniors . . .	7,543	2.8	6.7
Juniors . . .	11,563	6.6	11.9
Sophomores .	15,696	8.8	16.8
Freshmen . .	20,724	8.6	15.0

*Herbert E. Espy, The Public Secondary School, p. 98.

[8]Herbert E. Espy, The Public Secondary School, p. 99.

it may be concluded that failures in New York State secondary schools are most prevalent during freshman and sophomore years.

There is no reason to believe that the figures for New York State are not representative of the figures for the country as a whole.

Pupil failures in the state of Texas. -- Investigations made in the state of Texas on the subject of failure in high school are particularly enlightening. In these investigations the definition of a "subject failure" was taken to be "any type of non-acceptable work on the part of a pupil for a term or a semester which makes it necessary for him to repeat the work during an additional term or semester."[9]

At the time this investigation was undertaken, it was felt that in Texas the problem of failure in high schools was a very serious one, partly because of the effect on the morale of the pupils themselves, and partly because of the high waste of educational resources in the form of overcrowding and increased costs, brought about by numerous high-school repeaters. The extent of failure is revealed in Table 4. These figures indicate that in Texas high schools studied one pupil out of four failed in the beginning

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[9]Fred C. Ayer, "The Progress of Pupils in the State of Texas, 1932-1934," Research Bulletin of the Section of Superintendence, Texas State Teachers' Association, November, 1933, p. 20.

semester; and, among the boys, the proportion was one out of every three enrolled. The consequences of this situation

TABLE 4

PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS FAILING IN AT LEAST ONE SUBJECT IN EIGHT TEXAS HIGH SCHOOLS IN 1933-1934 SHOWN BY GRADES AND SEXES (BASED ON 11,950 FAILURES)*

Grade	Per Cent of Total Enrollment Failing		
	Boys	Girls	Total
9 A	32	22	27
9 B	29	20	24
10 A	28	19	23
10 B	25	18	22
11 A	26	15	20
11 B	11	7	9
Total .	26	17	22

*Fred C. Ayer, "The Progress of Pupils in the State of Texas, 1932-1934," Research Bulletin of the Section of Superintendence, Texas State Teachers' Association, November, 1933, p. 21.

were that in this period

> large numbers of the failing pupils will drop out of school; it means that a large proportion of beginning classes will be repeaters; it means, for one reason or another, that the courses of teaching are

> not well adapted to the pupils, particularly to the boys; and it means a lot of discouragement and heartache for both pupils and teachers.[10]

Ayer seems to consider that the figures presented in Table 4 indicate that more pupils leave Texas high schools before completing their courses than would be necessary.

> It is difficult to say how much of this failure can be successfully avoided. I should say, at least, half of it, and under favorable public support and adequate teaching and supervision, at least three fourths of it.[11]

Summary. -- From the data given above on the percentages of failures as to students in representative high schools of the United States, certain conclusions are inevitable, namely: (1) that statistics show that the extent of failures amounts to one out of three students entering the ninth grade or beginning year of junior high school; (2) that the greatest prevalence is in the freshman and sophomore years, with a decline in the junior and senior years; and (3) that since the first year of junior high school has always been regarded as exploratory, the significance of failure in this grade cannot be overemphasized.

High School Failures by Subjects

Having found a striking similarity in the extent of pupil failure in various sections of the country, the writer now proposes to make an analysis of the data on failures by

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[10] Ibid., p. 21.

[11] Ibid., p. 22.

subjects in order to determine whether such a pattern of similarity exists there also. Fortunately, adequate material is available along this line, from research conducted in two of the larger high-school systems, New York and Texas. If these schools show a definite pattern of failure in subjects, certain conclusions may be drawn from the data. Ayer's study of Texas high schools and Espy's investigation of failures in New York high schools are the sources of data for the following discussion.

Texas. -- Table 5 sets forth the percentage of students who failed in various subjects in eight Texas high schools in 1933-1934.

TABLE 5

PERCENTAGE OF FAILING PUPILS BY SUBJECTS IN EIGHT TEXAS HIGH SCHOOLS IN 1933-1934*

Subject	Per Cent of Pupils Failing
Mathematics	18.58
English	13.81
Commerce	12.69
Spanish	12.34
Industrial arts	11.03
History	10.74
Science	10.68
Latin	9.74
French	9.71
Home economics	6.38

*Ayer, op. cit., p.21.

New York. -- Reasonably detailed information is available also for New York State with regard to high-school failures classified by subjects. This is set forth in the following tables.

TABLE 6

PERCENTAGES OF FAILURES IN VARIOUS HIGH SCHOOL SUBJECTS: STATE OF NEW YORK*

Subject	Number of Schools	Total Subject Enrollments	Per Cent of Subject Failures
Mathematics . . .	19	12,655	10.6
Latin	17	6,007	8.9
Modern languages.	19	6,261	8.0
English	22	23,245	7.3
Commerce	19	11,123	5.5
Social studies .	19	15,984	5.4
Sciences	19	11,265	4.8
Manual arts . . .	15	5,628	3.7
Home economics .	15	1,942	2.8
Total . . .	....	90,056	6.5

*Espy, op. cit., p. 98.

If one takes the percentage of failure as measured by failures plus withdrawals, he gets a slightly different

pattern as set forth in Table 7. The figures for the number of schools and subject enrollments are the same as for Table 6 and therefore are not repeated.

TABLE 7

PERCENTAGES OF FAILURES AND WITHDRAWALS IN VARIOUS HIGH-SCHOOL SUBJECTS, STATE OF NEW YORK*

Subject	Per Cent of Failures and Withdrawals
Mathematics	17.0
Commerce	14.5
Modern languages	13.7
English	12.9
Latin	12.6
Social studies	11.4
Sciences	10.1
Manual arts	10.1
Art	6.9
Home economics	6.7
Total	12.5

*Espy, op. cit., p. 98.

The percentages in the preceding tables may be usefully compared with the percentages in Table 8, which indicate the trend of subject failures on the Regents' Examinations in

TABLE 8

SUBJECT FAILURES ON THE REGENTS' EXAMINATIONS OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK*

Subject	Percentage			
	1924	1929	1933	1938
English	19.1	14.1	11.0	7.5
Social studies . . .	19.1	16.7	12.6	8.5
Mathematics	30.1	29.9	25.7	14.7
German	22.0	11.8	17.0	12.4
French	23.4	15.8	11.7	12.2
Spanish	38.1	20.2	19.3	14.3
Italian	24.1	24.9	12.9	8.3
Latin	31.8	27.2	15.7	7.1
Greek	28.4	10.4	19.0	4.8
Science	22.9	15.5	13.8	8.9
Commercial subjects .	20.2	29.8	22.8	19.9
Art	12.2	26.5	28.8	19.5
Music	17.0	40.2	19.3	15.3
Comprehensive vocational test . . .	....	15.6	8.8	9.5
Total per cent of all subjects	23.0	21.5	17.3	11.5

*Espy, op. cit., p. 99.

the state of New York. These examinations are prepared in the State Department of Education and are administered in approved high schools throughout the state. However,

> These figures are not representative of the attainments of all pupils in the secondary schools of New York, for in many schools pupils who are assumed to be failing in their work are not even permitted to attempt these examinations. Presumably, the percentages of failure would be much greater if all pupils took the examinations.[12]

Comparison of High-school Failures by Subjects in the States of Texas and New York

It is interesting to compare the failures by subjects in the high schools of Texas and New York. In the composite tabulation presented in Table 9, Column A gives the rank order of failure by subjects for the New York State pupils, Column B does likewise for failures and withdrawals combined for the New York State pupils, whereas Column C gives the rank order of subject failures for the Texas pupils. The New York State inquiry included a much larger number of pupils than did the Texas inquiry.[13] Column D in the composite table gives the rank order of subject failures in the New York State Regents' Examinations.

Since the sample populations differ in size and composition and since there is no evidence that the standards of failure applied to pupil performance were exactly the

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[12]Espy, op. cit., p. 99.

[13]Ibid.

TABLE 9

RANK ORDER OF SUBJECT FAILURES AMONG HIGH-SCHOOL PUPILS IN TEXAS AND NEW YORK STATE, (APPROXIMATELY) 1933*

Column A New York Subject Failures	Column B Failures and Withdrawals, New York	Column C Texas Subject Failures	Column D Subject Failures on New York Regents' Exam.
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
English	Latin	Commerce	Social studies
Commerce	Modern languages	Modern languages	Modern languages
Spanish	English	English	Latin
Industrial arts	Commerce	Latin	Greek
History	Social sciences	Social sciences	Science
Science	Science	Science	Commerce
Latin	Manual arts	Manual arts	Art
French	Home economics	Home economics	Music
Home economics	Art		

*Espy, op. cit., p. 99.

same in each set of examinations, the tabulation in Table 9 should be used with caution. It seems to indicate, however, that certain subjects are more difficult than others for

high-school pupils. In Columns A, B, and C it will be observed that mathematics heads the list, whereas for the selected population from which weak pupils had been removed, mathematics drops to third place (see Table 8, p. 24). The tables give a high ranking in difficulty to English. Commercial subjects, however, rank high on the list of the non-selected sample populations, but low on that selected for ability. The three New York inquiries place modern languages high on the list for both non-selective and selective samples, whereas the Texas inquiry places Spanish high and French low. One interesting point is that the selected students from New York State place social studies low on the list of failures (Column B, Table 9), whereas these subjects rank very high in so far as the special group of selective students taking the Regents' Examinations is concerned (Table 8). It seems that there is some evidence, though it would be prudent not to overemphasize its validity, that high-school pupils are more prone to fail in certain subjects than in others. The very great geographical and social differences between the states of Texas and New York point to some educational rather than environmental factor as being the determining one.

Wisconsin. -- In 1922, a survey was made of failure in the high schools of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The findings bear out those reported from New York and Texas. In Table 10 it

may be seen that the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages lead in the percentage of failure.

TABLE 10

SUBJECT FAILURES IN LaCROSSE, WISCONSIN, HIGH SCHOOLS FOR THE YEAR 1922*

Subject	Per Cent of Failure
Science	12.1
Latin	11.5
Mathematics	10.5
History	9.5
English	9.5
French	8.5
Commerce	7.0

*B. E. McCormick, "Study of Failure," School Review, XXX (June, 1922), 431-442.

Other surveys. -- The following tables give additional data on subject failure in seven other large high-school systems.

Although these tables are incomplete from the standpoint that all schools did not make a complete report, the pattern is approximately the same; namely, that the highest percentage of failures is found in mathematics, foreign languages, and science, with mathematics leading all other subject failures.

TABLE 11

SUBJECT FAILURES IN THE LARGER HIGH SCHOOLS OF SIX STATES*

Subject	Per Cent of Failure
Cleveland, Ohio	
Mathematics	18.1
Latin	16.7
French	13.9
Science	12.9
Spanish	11.5
Commerce	8.9
History	6.7
Applied arts	3.6
Connecticut (3 schools)	
Algebra	17.0
Geometry	13.7
New Jersey (14 schools)	
Mathematics	20.0
Latin	18.0
English, history, and commerce	11.0
New York (8 schools)	
Latin	18.0
Mathematics	16.0
French	11.6
History	10.4
Science	9.8
English	8.0
St. Paul, Minnesota	
Mathematics	21.8
French	17.0

TABLE 11 -- Continued

Subject	Per Cent of Failure
Denver, Colorado	
Mathematics	24.0
Latin	21.0

*From School Review, XXX (September, 1922), 487-488, quoting United States Bureau of Education Bulletin, 1922.

It is now proposed to examine the results of certain investigations with respect to teaching and testing difficulties, subject by subject, in order to ascertain whether

TABLE 12

SUBJECT FAILURES IN WHITE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN WASHINGTON, D. C.*

Subject	Enrollment	Per Cent of Failure
Commercial arithmetic .	42	33.3
Modern history	17	29.4
Geometry	741	18.4
French	98	18.4
Typewriting	378	15.9
English	1230	14.7
Spanish	472	14.2
Latin	141	14.2
Algebra	283	13.1
Biology	871	12.9
United States history .	1177	12.3
Geography	387	10.1

*"Percentage of Pupils Failing in White Senior High Schools," National Association of Secondary Schools Bulletin, XXX (March, 1946), 147-148.

there is any evidence presented by specialists in subject fields which may account for the pattern of failures.

Failures in mathematics. -- The largest percentage of failures occurs in the field of mathematics, the total percentage of failure in this field being nearly twenty per cent of all students enrolled in the subject, as the following statistics from eight surveys typical of failure in mathematics show:

> 10 Cleveland senior high schools show that 18.1 per cent of the pupils enrolled in mathematics classes failed. . . .
> 30 Connecticut high schools, algebra failures, 17.0 per cent, . . . geometry, 13.7 per cent. . . .
> 14 New Jersey high schools, mathematics caused the downfall of 20 per cent. . . .
> 8 New York high schools, in mathematics 16 per cent of the class failed. . . .
> In St. Paul the mathematics failures were 21.8 per cent of those studying the subject; records for 4,120 pupils in Denver show 24 per cent in mathematics.[14]

An article in School Review comments on the prevalence of mathematics failure by indicating that two conclusions can be drawn: (1) that good mathematics teachers too often are not obtained by the schools; and (2) that there are elements intrinsic in the subject that are not assimilable by some minds. The normal percentage of failure in any subject should be between five and twelve per cent.[15]

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[14] "Failures in High School," School Review, XXX (September, 1922), 487-488.

[15] Ibid.

A clue to failures prevailing in certain subjects may be found in a survey on pupils' choice of electives. Latin and mathematics were most frequently mentioned by students questioned as subjects to be excluded from the curriculum. Pupils' dislike for these subjects seemed to be based on the difficulty of the subject matter and on the fact that these subjects appeared to have no value.[16]

Landry reports on a study in mathematics failures in New York high schools in 1944. Eighteen and six-tenths per cent of all failures were in mathematics. Commenting on this situation, Landry says: "It is needless to remind the reader that mathematics was by implication accorded the distinction of having a higher rate of pupil failure than any other high-school subject."[17]

In eleven New York high schools pupils who were taking mathematics were placed in four groups: (1) excellent, (2) barely passing, (3) just failing, and (4) failing badly. The Association of Mathematics Chairmen sent out a questionnaire to students and teachers in an attempt to determine: (1) What characteristics or attributes are associated with pupils who are experiencing failure in mathematics? and

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[16]Espy, op. cit., p. 82.

[17]Herbert L. Landry, "Study of Failure in Mathematics," High Points, XXVII (April, 1945), 18.

(2) What are the inherent difficulties in the subject which may have an influence upon the prevalence of failure?

As a result of these questionnaires, the following characteristics and behavior patterns of pupils appear to be significantly associated with failure in mathematics:

(a) Acts of delinquency as attested by school records
(b) Failure in other subjects besides mathematics
(c) Truancy or cutting classes
(d) Quality of written homework
(e) Regularity of written homework
(f) Lack of responsiveness in class
(g) Failure to bring necessary materials to class
(h) Failure to perform assigned tasks during the class period
(i) Failure to make up work after absence
(j) Insufficient time devoted to home study in all subjects
(k) Insufficient time devoted to study of mathematics outside the classroom
(l) Somewhat too much time spent on recreational activities
(m) Too much time spent by some pupils on instruction in non-school subjects
(n) After-school employment
(o) Inadequate parental supervision of home study
(p) Failure to request or secure sufficient outside help from teacher or other sources[18]

There are certain inherent difficulties in mathematics, according to this questionnaire, which explain the greater incidence of mathematics failures. These difficulties spring from the demands imposed by a subject which is essentially analytic and synthetic, generalized, logical,

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[18] Ibid., p. 32.

sequential, social, and personal in its applications to the affairs of life.[19]

Failures in English. -- It is suggested that the high place of English among subject failures may be the result not of failure to comprehend or write literate English but of the difficulty of constructing tests which will be objective and yet valid.

> Progressive English teachers, who must usually give numerous tests, are finding the new type examination an inestimable boon. It is easy to score and makes feasible pupil correction either in class or outside class. Being absolutely objective, it has unique importance for English teachers because their judgment of both oral and written compositions is inherently and inevitably subjective and conduces to prepossessions. . . . Prepossessions are seldom shaken by the essay type of examination, but if they are erroneous, they are demolished by the disclosures of the objective test.[20]

It is easy to understand why a conscientious teacher may be attracted to the objective type test, but such a test is of doubtful value in English because of the nature of the content in this field. Measurement of the appreciative and esthetic values is of less significance than testing of the informational side of the subject. The latter is readily susceptible to objective testing, whereas the former is more doubtful. This fact helps to account, perhaps, for the high

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Virginia J. Craig, The Teaching of High School English, p. 291.

percentage of failures reported for high-school pupils in the field of English.

Failures in the sciences. -- With regard to the sciences, some of the difficulty seems to arise from the failure of teachers to impress on their students the principles of the sciences. It is reported with regard to chemistry, for example:

> In formula writing, pupils do not remember accurately the valences of the ordinary simple and compound radicals; they have not become habituated in the processes involved in formula writing; and they have failed, it seems, to learn a simple and rapid check on the correctness of a formula. We, as teachers, overwhelmed by the avalanches of subject-matter which a chemistry student is expected to master, have failed to impress the principles involved and to give the drill which might remedy the difficulty in formula writing. . . . it seems reasonable to conclude that good instruction and drill in formula writing will go far to help the pupil in writing equations.[21]

Further light is thrown upon this problem of significant differences in subject failure patterns, however, among individual students by an investigation carried out at the University of Chicago in 1930. Beauchamp made the following discoveries:

> As the pupils progressed through the units, individual differences were found to develop with respect to attitudes toward work and methods of study; the time required to attain the specific learning products; the number of trials required

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[21] J. C. Bennett, "A Study of Pupils' Errors in Chemistry," Journal of Educational Research, XIV (November, 1926), 275-283.

> to solve the exercises; the interpretation of the exercises presented for solution; the types of errors made and the causes of these errors; and the ability to perform the different activities required in the study of science.[22]

Beauchamp was then led to investigate the factors which influence the progress of pupils in the attainment of specific learning products. His findings are extremely interesting when compared with the views expressed by Bennett with regard to failures in chemistry. Beauchamp found that:

> 1. The teacher has little if any effect upon the total time and number of attempts, or upon the extent of the individual differences and individual variations in completing the exercises.
> 2. The technique of instruction exerts a greater influence upon the total time required to complete the exercises than do the individual differences in the pupils themselves.
> 3. The technique of instruction influences to a small degree the variability in the amount of time required to complete the unit.
> 4. The technique of instruction has little if any effect upon the individual variations in the time required for completing the exercises of the different units.
> 5. The technique of instruction exerts a slight influence upon the total number of attempts required.
> 6. The technique of instruction has little if any effect upon the individual differences and variations in the number of attempts required to solve the exercises.[23]

The final stage in Beauchamp's investigations was to determine the effect of instruction upon learning. He was led

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[22]W. L. Beauchamp, "An Analytical Study of Attainment of Specific Learning Products in Elementary Science" (Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Department of Philosophy, University of Chicago, 1930), p. 44.

[23]Ibid., p. 45.

to the following conclusions:

> 1. . . . while progress in the study of science is definitely related to such factors as intelligence, ability to read, experiential background, and sustained application, there are so many exceptions to this general relationship that the results are of little value in interpreting individual progress unless accompanied by observations of the pupil's methods of work.
>
> 2. . . . the learning situation is extremely complex. . . . There is a constant shifting of attitudes and methods of work and . . . each exercise is qualitatively different for each pupil in the class. The interaction of these variable factors with other variables results in a change in total situation which again reacts to influence the behavior of the pupil in a given situation. The result is a learning situation that is in a state of constant flux. It is thus practically impossible to isolate one factor and definitely determine its causal effect.
>
> 3. . . . there are many kinds of activities employed in the study of science and . . . the ability to carry on these activities is specific rather than general.
>
> 4. . . . most of the individual variations which cause slow progress are corrective in nature. This is particularly true of application, attitudes toward study, and methods of study.
>
> 5. . . . individual differences and variations in the pupil are more closely related to progress than is the method of instruction employed.
>
> 6. . . . direct instruction in a method of study results in an increase in the ability to do that type of study.
>
> 7. Pupils need to be made conscious of the types of study employed in science. . . . Pupils need to be taught how to solve the various kinds of problems, how to observe demonstrations, how to make analytical drawings, etc.
>
> 8. . . . Pupils need to be made conscious of their abilities and limitations.
>
> 9. . . . the study of science must inculcate the methods of thinking employed by the scientist in the solution of problems. Subject matter alone will not

> produce the desired learning products. The crucial point in the teaching of science is the method employed by the teacher.[24]

Failures in the fine arts. -- The difficulty of testing accomplishment in the fine arts is shown in the following criticisms made of standard tests for measuring musical achievement:

> The Baach Standardized Music Tests were among the real pioneers in the measurement of musical achievement. Many of the elements measured by these tests are recognized among the tests of more recent development. . . . The administration of the test is much more difficult than is indicated by the qualities it attempts to measure. . . . Kwalwasser, in his discussion of Tests and Measurements in Music, criticizes this test also for its difficulty in grading and for the fact that no norms are available.
>
> Another test which has had considerable use is the Torgerson-Fahnestock Music Test. Modern music supervisors criticize it mainly because of the unduly large amount of emphasis given to the writing of music, a practice which many supervisors consider an inexcusable waste of time.[25]

It appears that no adequate tests of pupil achievement have been devised in the fine arts because the norms are so variable and standardization of tests so difficult.

Comparison of Failures in Required Courses and in Elective Courses

The two types of curriculum organization common at present in secondary schools are the "constant with variables" type and the "multiple curriculum with variables"

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[24] Ibid., p. 46.

[25] Harry A. Greene and Albert N. Jorgensen, The Use and Interpretation of High School Tests, pp. 479-480.

type. In both of these considerable election is permitted pupils in arranging their programs. This freedom of choice is in itself fraught with the potentiality of failure, since it introduces competition among subjects, increases the difficulty of obtaining unbiased consideration of curriculum problems by members of the teaching staff, and adds to the danger that pupils will select "popular" courses, regardless of their need or their ability.

So far as can be ascertained, no studies are available for a statistical analysis of failures as they exist between required courses and electives. That a student ordinarily does well something that he likes and that he has chosen to do is axiomatic. It is suggested that this would be a fruitful area for further research in the field of high-school failures.

Summary of the Evidence Regarding High-school Failures

It is convenient at this stage to summarize the evidence regarding high-school failures set forth thus far in this study:

1. There is widespread evidence of an alarmingly high percentage of failure among high-school pupils.

2. There seems to be a significant pattern when subject failures are ranked in percentage order.

3. This significant pattern seems to be relatively constant for areas with very disparate geographical and social conditions; therefore, its cause should be sought in educational and not in environmental factors.

4. Doubt has been expressed by competent authorities as to the accuracy and validity of standard objective tests in certain subjects. This doubt increases in strength from informational to esthetic subjects. It probably would not be safe to consider of equal weight the failure to achieve a satisfactory grade on objective testing in the more esthetic and appreciative subjects and the problem of subject failure as commonly understood.

5. Mathematics, English, and the social studies, in the order named, are the high-school subjects in which the largest number of failures occurs.

CHAPTER III

SOME FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FAILURE

Examination of Primary and Secondary Causes

After taking account of the alarming extent of failure in high schools and of its significance to educators and administrators, it becomes important to search for some factors that contribute to failure. Many educators have been concerned over the problem of failure and have attempted to determine the causes. Results of a number of surveys and questionnaires from which to draw data are considered in this chapter.

Viewpoint of teachers and administrators. -- Perhaps the most significant and most recent material is that contained in Burton's The Guidance of Learning Activities. Burton, Director of Apprenticeship in the Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, has called this work a summary of the principles of teaching as based upon the principles of learning. It is concerned throughout with the success of a pupil in the educational process and is indirectly concerned with failure in this process. In Chapter XVIII of Burton's work, a diagnosis of causes of failure is effectively presented. The author is modern in

his outlook and is an ardent proponent of saving all pupils from the stigma of failure. He says that the old-time traditional teacher diagnosed causes of failure very easily. A pupil who did not learn lacked mental ability. It was also frequently stated that "he could learn, but he just won't work."[1] In commenting on this idea, Burton says:

> Simple, superficial answers are more dangerous than no answers at all. . . . causes of pupil failure are actually very complex and numerous. A combination of causes is usually found. Secondary causes are often treated as if they were primary. Symptoms are often confused with causes. A given factor may be both a symptom and a cause, depending on the level of analysis.[2]

Burton continues by stating that the majority of failures in the traditional school are not pupil failures, but are rather failures of the school, the home, or of some other environmental factor. They become the failure of the school when it does not succeed in discovering the nature of the child. "The modern school would regard as failing only the pupil who was not learning so well as his own native ability and rate of growth permit."[3] This is, of course, an ideal in which all high-school teachers and administrative leaders should be vitally interested.

Burton's conclusions as to genuine causes of failure may be examined at this point. He says that a coherent,

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[1]William G. Burton, The Guidance of Learning Activities, p. 449.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 451.

logical summary of causes is most difficult because any given specified cause of failure may be the result of (1) any one of several different primary causes, or of (2) any combination of primary causes. Any one primary cause may produce a dozen different secondary causes. As an example, a teacher lists malnutrition as a primary cause of failure. Secondary causes may be an unbalanced diet in the home, due to economic deprivations or due to unsupervised eating; these are followed by ill health and fatigue, which are also causes. This example could be carried out almost ad infinitum. Burton lists the primary causes of failure, as he sees them, as;

I. Resident in the Pupil
   A. Physical
      1. Central nervous system inadequately developed or injured
      2. Peripheral nervous system inadequate or injured
      3. Glandular imbalance
      4. Physical deformity making for mental instability
      5. Incurable illness
   B. Mental
      1. Congenital or acquired deficiency not curable by individual effort or education
      2. Distinction to be made between genuine mental inadequacy and seeming lack of mental ability
II. Resident in the Social Order
   A. Inequitable distribution of resources
      1. Inadequate educational situation
         a. Poor buildings and facilities
         b. Poorly trained teachers
         c. Poor curriculum
      2. Undesirable housing, recreation, and neighborhood

3. Low economic status of homes
   a. Parental antagonism to education
   b. Necessity to supplement family income
   c. Economic strain
   d. Lack of cultural influences
   e. Malnutrition
   f. Frequent moves
   g. Lack of good health care
   h. Lack of adequate study place

B. Control of school by conservative element (both public and teaching and administrative staff)
   1. Aims of education out of date
   2. Lack of scientific approach
   3. Undemocratic administration
   4. Curriculum not adapted to needs of community
   5. Arbitrary standards of promotion
   6. Erroneous conception of learner and learning
   7. Adult standards for pupils
   8. Lack of professional improvement
   9. Failure to inform public
   10. Inadequate financing
   11. Racial, national and political prejudices

C. Low regard for education
   1. Poor financing
   2. Poor standards for teachers
      a. Low training equipment
      b. Poor physical condition
      c. Low personality
      d. Low social integration
      e. Low intelligence

D. Inadequate understanding by parents
   1. Harsh discipline
   2. Coddling
   3. Failure to guide child's leisure
   4. Lack of protection from adult tensions
   5. Broken homes
   6. Prejudices

E. Immigrant problem
   1. Bi-lingualism in the home
   2. Attendance in native-language schools[4]

In summing up, Burton says:

> The various primary causes in the learner, in the school, in the home and in the community . . . place pupils often in physical settings for learning which

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[4] Ibid., pp. 458-460.

> are uninviting and uninspiring, which in turn produce attitudes of indifference to, lack of respect for, and even antagonism to, education and its aims. . . . The curriculum and texts are often dull . . . irrelevant, unsuited to the needs of the community. Individual differences are not often recognized . . . materials are not adapted to levels of maturity . . . unattainable standards, with lack of recognition for effort, all combine to discourage and antagonize the learner. An undemocratic administration . . . inevitably produces conditions inimical to learning and is productive of failure. Traditional teaching methods based on erroneous conceptions produce thousands of errors in techniques, which are actual causes of failure. . . . Numbers of errors in motivation, questioning, assigning, initiating units, developing study habits, giving marks and rewards. . . . These things are the actual causes of failure since they produce the pupil attitudes and behaviors which are usually listed as causes.[5]

"To attack a case of failure as if it had no background will not only not cure failure, it will very likely aggravate it, by enhancing the cumulative effect of the neglected primary cause."[6] To this end, Burton has compiled a list of teacher-given causes. (He is aware that some of these are symptoms rather than causes.)

I. Resident in the Pupil
   - A. Mental inadequacy
     1. Genuine
     2. Seeming
     3. Immaturity
   - B. Physical
     1. Limited sense organs
     2. Ill health
   - C. Emotional inadequacy
     1. Insecurity
     2. Maladjustments
     3. Complexes
     4. Immaturity

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[5] Ibid., p. 461.

[6] Ibid.

D. Detrimental general attitudes
   1. Indifference
   2. Antagonism
   3. Discouragement
   4. Non-cooperation
   5. Laziness
   6. Truancy
   7. Nervousness
E. Non-possession of elementary skills
   1. Inability to read
   2. Ignorance of study skills

II. Resident in Educational Situation and Community
A. Uniform curriculum and texts
B. Inappropriate administrative standards and practices
C. Heavy teaching load
D. Too frequent transfers
E. Poor teaching in previous grades
F. Poor homes
G. Outside work; too many activities
H. Malnutrition[7]

It is evident from the data given above that Burton believes that causes of failure fall under three main heads: (1) physical, (2) mental, and (3) social. It may be of value to determine whether other authorities concur in these findings. George E. Carrothers, Principal of Iron River High School, Michigan, asked his teaching staff to list in the order of their importance ten reasons why high-school pupils fail. Results were as follows:

1. Lack of application
2. Lazy
3. Wastes time
4. Lacks interest in subject
5. Lacks background
6. Lacks ability
7. Frequent absences

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[7] Ibid., pp. 462-463.

8. Written assignments prepared half the time
9. Never recites[8]

Carrothers then submitted a like questionnaire to parents and other outsiders. The replies were as follows:

1. Heavy load of teachers
2. Lack of interest on part of pupil
3. Lack of understanding
4. Indifference and unconcern on part of teacher
5. Inability of pupil
6. Parental unconcern
7. Community lack of understanding of education
8. Inability of educators to measure educational growth
9. Spoon feeding in home, school, and community
10. Rigidity of curriculum[9]

To the above Carrothers adds some reasons of his own. In summation of causes for failure as revealed by his study, he lists the following:

1. Heavy teacher load
2. Teacher indifference
3. Parental unconcern
4. Community misunderstanding of education
5. Inadequate measures of education
6. Inflexible curriculum and regulations[10]

In the above responses from diverse groups it is evident that there are some correlative answers. Lack of interest on the part of both teacher and pupil appears in all three lists of reasons for failure; lack of flexibility in curriculum and method appears in two lists; community misconception of education appears in two; and heavy teacher

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[8]George E. Carrothers, "Why Do High School Pupils Fail?" National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, XXX (March, 1946), 29-36.

[9]Ibid.

[10]Ibid.

load, in two. These all may be interpreted as social causes of failure.

In an article, "What Causes Failures?" W. Max Chambers, Superintendent of Schools, Okmulgee, Oklahoma, states that his teaching staff compiled the list of causes for pupil failure presented in Table 13.

TABLE 13

REASONS FOR 150 FAILING GRADES AMONG DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS, OKMULGEE, OKLAHOMA*

Reason	Number	Rank
Absence	52	1
Irregular or incomplete daily study	30	2
Lack of concentration . . .	21	3
Indifference	20	4
Lack of ability	7	6
Psychologically maladjusted	6	6
Outside activities	3	7.5
Poor standards of achievement	3	7.5
Educational background . .	2	10.5
Social background	2	10.5
Physically handicapped . .	2	10.5
Dishonest	2	10.5
School program too heavy .	0	13

*W. Max Chambers, "What Causes Failures?" School Executive, LXV (January, 1946), 56-57.

Chambers makes the statement that lack of interest causes most failures, but he hinges this lack of interest on continuous and frequent absence from school. He interprets his listing (Table 13) to show that of the 150 failing grades recorded, absence is a contributing factor in thirty-five per cent of the cases, whereas lack of interest and consequent lack of application reflect themselves in only fourteen per cent of the cases. Poor preparation seems to be the cause for twenty per cent of the cases. But who can say that lack of interest is not responsible for both absence and poor preparation?

> An interesting implication of these findings is the high correlation between attendance and scholastic success, and the low correlation between personality adjustment and scholastic success. This contradicts usual findings that scholastic success is not necessarily contingent upon attendance and that pupils whose scholastic standing is low show marked degrees of maladjustment.[11]

The fact that failure because of physical handicaps is in eleventh place and failure because of mental handicaps is in tenth place is evidence that most of the reasons for failure, according to Chambers' study, fall under the broad head of social reasons.

Viewpoint of pupils. -- C. A. Gardner, Principal of North Side High School, Fort Worth, Texas, made a survey of

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[11]W. Max Chambers, "What Causes Failures?" School Executive, LXV (January, 1946), 56-57.

failures in his school in 1937. Realizing that he was prone to hear teachers' reasons and to ignore pupils' reasons, Gardner started his survey with group interviews of students. Table 14 is a compilation of reasons for failure given by pupils in these interviews.

TABLE 14

CAUSES OF FAILURE AS STATED BY PUPILS*

Cause of Failure	Frequency
Lack of home study	78
Dislike of the subject	76
Little studying	70
Discouraged	66
Insufficient effort	58
Dislike the teacher	58
Timid about answering	53
Slow answering	50
No interest	45
Idleness	44
Poor concentration	44
Poor foundation	40
Irregular attendance	39
Teacher fails to explain	30
No knowledge of how to study	29
Lack of time	26

TABLE 14 -- Continued

Cause of Failure	Frequency
Outside work	24
Not made to prepare lessons	16
Worry over studies	12
Late entrance	12
No chance to recite	12
Too many subjects	12
Laziness	11
Home conditions	9
Social activities	6
Poor health	6
Lack of sleep	3
No opinion	4

*C. A. Gardner, "A Study of Causes of High School Failure," School Review, XXXV (February, 1937), 108-112.

By way of verifying the figures given in Table 14, Gardner submitted a questionnaire to his teachers, who supplied the data concerning failures which are presented in Table 15.

As a result of his study, Gardner's conclusions were (1) that there are two sides to the viewpoint on failure, namely, that of the pupil and that of the teacher; (2) that heretofore the pupil's viewpoint has been neglected; and

TABLE 15

CAUSES OF FAILURE AS STATED BY TEACHERS*

Cause of Failure	Frequency
Irregular attendance	84
Failure on tests	78
Lack of study generally	63
Lack of effort	58
Mentally slow	56
Lack of home study	37
Poor foundation	31
Laziness	29
Poor study habits	26
Failure to hand in written work	25
Idleness	15
Lack of interest	14
Poor health	11
Late entrance	10
Carelessness	7
Inattention	6
Physical defects	5
Home conditions	5
Too many subjects	5
Lost books	4
Immaturity	4
Reading ability poor	4

TABLE 15 -- Continued

Cause of Failure	Frequency
Outside work	3
Work elective	3
Lack of confidence	3
Social activities	2
Depends on others	2
Incorrect habits in typewriting	2
Lack of sleep	2
New work and surroundings	1
Overconfidence	1
Poor concentration	1
Change of classes	1
Came to class without book	1
Too much athletics	1

*Gardner, op. cit., p. 111.

(3) that if one third of the pupils, for instance, report the same cause, this is a grave situation. He concludes, "Smooth-running machinery is not the primary aim in our schools; it is the welfare of the child."[12]

In referring to the survey of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, schools, discussed in Chapter II, the following list of

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[12]Gardner, op. cit., p. 111.

causes of failure, according to the teachers in that system, may be noted:

1.	Lack of application	49.0
2.	Absence	20.0
3.	Poor foundation	16.6
4.	Mental inability	4.7
5.	Poor health	4.4
6.	Laziness	2.5
7.	Defective vision	2.4
8.	Defective hearing	0.4

This survey bears out data previously mentioned in that lack of application to school work accounts for the highest number of failures, with absence running a close second.[13]

In this survey some generalizations as to causes were made: percentage of failures (1) did not depend on size of classes, (2) nor to any extent on subject, and (3) was not especially pronounced in any one year of school. But, the author thinks, failures were influenced by (1) attitude of students toward work; (2) out-of-school study habits; (3) lack of co-operation between student, teacher, and parent; and (4) personality of teacher.

Irregular attendance is the major reason for failure in high school, according to E. E. Smeltz, Cleveland high school principal. He quotes a survey in which several hundred failing pupils were asked to give their ideas as to why they were failing. Their reasons were in the following

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[13]"Subject Failure by Schools," Secondary School Studies, Bulletin of the Department of Secondary School Principals, No. 29 (January, 1930), 13-20.

order of frequency:

1. Dislike of teacher
2. Dislike of subject
3. Laziness
4. Irregular attendance
5. Poor health
6. Poor effort
7. Lack of home study
8. Too many social activities
9. Slowness in answering
10. Too much expected of pupils

When the teachers of these same pupils were asked to give their reasons why the pupils failed, they gave the following list:

1. Irregular attendance
2. Poor health
3. Poor home conditions
4. Low mentality
5. Lack of interest
6. Poor foundation
7. Teacher inabilities
8. Poor effort
9. Changing schools so often

[In discussing pupils whom he would fail, Smeltz says:] I should fail the pupil who by word or action says, "I am not going to study and what are you going to do about it?" I should fail the pupil whose preparation is insufficient to do the work of the next grade, at the level on which he will probably be called on to do it. Finally, I should fail a pupil in college preparatory subjects in which satisfactory work of the usual college entrance level had not been done. I emphasize, however, that the pupil has a right to expect intelligent guidance in his choice of subjects.[14]

In listing causes of failure, Vest C. Myers says that the following are the major factors, according to most investigators:

1. Dullness
2. Lack of application
3. Absence

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[14]E. E. Smeltz, "Facing the Failure Problem," School Management, XV (February, 1946), 337.

4. Poor attitude
5. Lack of purpose
6. Poor physical condition
7. Excessive outside activities
8. Indolence[15]

Lack of application and absence from school, which have occurred in almost all surveys, are again conspicuous.

In his survey, Charles E. Greene of the Denver schools found that in grades ten to twelve, types of failing pupils were as follows: (1) intelligence below average, (2) physically handicapped, (3) socially and emotionally maladjusted, (4) outside distractions, (5) subject failures, (6) home problems, and (7) absentees.[16]

In another survey, that conducted in the New York City high schools, Lucey had one thousand students list reasons for their failures. The twelve outstanding reasons, in the order of their rank, were as follows:

1. Ignorance of study methods.
2. Dislike school.
3. Poor equipment.
4. Too much home work.
5. Improper home conditions.
6. Too much diversion.
7. Failure complex.
8. "Cramming."
9. Copying.
10. Dislike teachers

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[15]Myers, op. cit., pp. 306-309.

[16]Charles E. Green, "Study of Chronic Failures," School Review, XXXI (March, 1931), 161.

11. Poor teacher attitudes.
12. "Cutting."[17]

Summary

Attention should be called to some apparent patterns in the above surveys. Whereas pupils themselves place lack of home study at the head of the list, teachers place this reason third. The second cause of failure, dislike of subject, on the pupils' lists, however, does not appear at all on the teachers' lists. Discouragement, third on the pupils' lists, means nothing, apparently, to the teachers. Only six pupils attributed their failure to physical inability, and three attributed it to lack of sleep, which may be called poor health habits. Teachers attributed failure to poor health in eleven instances and to physical disability in five instances. This bears out the contention that physical causes are few.

As to mental causes, fifty-three students listed timidity as a reason for failure, and sixty-six listed discouragement. Teachers listed mentally slow fifty-six times and immaturity four times.

Of sixty-two reasons given, at least twenty-six could be interpreted as falling in the social category. There

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[17]Michael H. Lucey, "Causes of Failures in High School," School Review, XXXVI (December, 1938), 734-735.

are border-line causes in each category which are not included in the statistics.

In summarizing the preceding data on causes of failure, some very evident conclusions present themselves. The most obvious one is that very few failures appear to be due to physical or mental handicaps. Both pupil and teacher questionnaires show these to be negligible as compared with social and environmental causes.

The outstanding types of pupil failures are those of lack of application to work and lack of interest in school. That these are primary causes is maintained by the majority of both students and teachers, but one must insist that they are conditioned by a multitude of secondary causes such as absence from school, poor equipment, improper home conditions, poor teacher attitudes, psychological insecurity, and the like. For this reason, as suggested by Burton, educators can no longer evade responsibility for failure by saying that a pupil is mentally or physically unable to learn. For each pupil, failure has a long case history and is a challenge to the school in which he is enrolled and to the teachers who seek to guide his development and progress.

CHAPTER IV

METHODS EMPLOYED TO REDUCE FAILURE

Holding Power of the High Schools

In analyzing methods of prevention of failure and of procedures which may serve to alleviate the widespread lack of success in high school, it is obvious that the general holding power of the high schools is involved. An improvement of holding power is an approximate measure of diminution in student failures. That there has been marked improvement in the holding power of the high schools is shown by Table 16.

TABLE 16

HOLDING POWER OF THE HIGH SCHOOLS*

Grade in High School	Number Surviving Per 1,000 Pupils in the Fifth Grade for Each Grade in High School up through High-school Graduation			
	1929-1930	1930-1931	1931-1932	1932-1933
I	760	770	780	786
II	647	652	651	664
III	512	529	546	557
IV	454	463	478	488
Graduates	403	417	430	439

*Spears, High Schools for Today, p. 376.

This increase in holding power seems to indicate that the longer a pupil remains in school, the less probability there is of failure in his case. Spears advocates that schools hold frequent meetings to analyze their holding power and that they discuss in faculty meetings the situation of loss of students, tracing the students who enter to ascertain how many graduate. He also suggests that the guidance department make annual records of all who leave school and the cause for leaving.[1]

Failure of the School

That many educators feel that it is not the pupil who has failed, but the school, is evident from their statements in the press and in teachers' conferences. Lindell says:

> When the school is unable to do its job, the time-honored practice is to send a note home by the pupil, saying that the child has failed. In the first few years of my professional career as a teacher I believed the child had failed. But for the past fifteen years I have shifted the responsibility. I believe that when the pupil does not learn, to the maximum of his capacity, the school has failed. . . .
>
> And so it goes. Teacher and principal, father and mother, specialists of all kinds work closely together if the school is not to fail because when the school fails the nation's greatest resource, manpower, does not develop. Some children respond to one kind of treatment and some to another. Unless the school exhausts every resource, it has failed.[2]

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[1]Spears, "High School Has Yet to Reach Its Full Stature," American School Board Journal, CXVI (March, 1948), 17-19.

[2]Albert L. Lindell, "When the School Fails," Journal of Education, CXXXII (April, 1949), 108.

In like manner, Burton makes this comment:

> . . . can a pupil be said to have failed if he works to the best of his ability, works conscientiously and continuously, and still does not reach a standard set without regard to his native ability? Failed in what? The pupil has here clearly failed to "pass" a standard which he could never pass under any known circumstances. The objection may be raised at this point that the standard may not be wholly arbitrary, but determined by the average performance of large numbers of pupils. . . . If a pupil works to the best of his ability, expends his best efforts, and still does not come up to the average . . . has he failed? Obviously not. . . . No one would think of making a child repeat his ninth year of life, but schools constantly require pupils to repeat a grade in which the pupil has already done as well as his ability and strength permit him to. The pupil needs not repetition of the same experiences but more experiences of a similar nature and more time in which to grow.[3]

Guidance as a Preventive

The guidance program as a preventive of failure is fairly recent in high-school administration. However, many large school systems and some smaller ones use the plan of counseling with students who are near the danger line of failure. Some schools, in order to prevent failure, use the guidance method throughout the student's high-school career. Frequent conferences with students on their progress in various studies reveal problems and point out needs.

Outstanding accomplishment in failure prevention and the raising of scholarship as a whole is reported by Bisbee,

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[3]William H. Burton, Guidance of Learning Activities, p. 450.

Arizona, High School.[4] In that school for several years, there has been a faculty-controlled guidance program in operation. In 1933, a committee of four teachers was given full charge of guiding failing pupils. After consideration of conditions in the school, the committee made recommendations to the administration and faculty. These included: (1) publication of an honor roll; (2) rejuvenation of activities of the National Honor Society; (3) pre-college guidance; (4) recognition of high scholastic ranking in home rooms; (5) failure reports from the faculty to the committee at three-week intervals; (6) scholastic eligibility necessary for all extracurricular activities; (7) exclusion for one semester of all pupils failing in three fourths of their work.

Rouse reports that a three-year study of the activities of this committee reveals both objective and subjective proof of the value of its program. Of the five hundred pupils in the school, forty per cent were interviewed by the committee. These forty per cent needed only one interview.

Thirteen techniques for aiding pupils were used by the committee, but interviews and extra study time accounted for 71.5 per cent of all techniques recommended. As all of these pupils had shown average intelligence quotients,

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[4]Laurance T. Rouse, "Guidance as a Preventive," School Review, XLVI (January, 1938), 2-5.

there was no lack of mental ability. It is, therefore, of interest to observe that marks of failing pupils over a three-year period rose from D to C. Over this period the percentage of failing marks was reduced from 4.7 per cent to 1.5 per cent. Rouse also reports a large financial saving by reducing the number of repeaters.[5]

In the Washington Junior High School of Rochester, New York, a similar procedure was used. A committee of eight teachers was appointed to study scholarship in general, in the hope of reducing the number of failures. By re-defining more clearly the failure rating, which was E (0-64 per cent), and analyzing causes of failure, a beginning was made. Then a formulation of a standard of desirable study habits was undertaken, and suggestions for a remedial program were drawn up. The program as a whole was found to be practical and effective.[6]

Among the most progressive plans for reducing failure through guidance is the experiment of Arthur Farnham, vice-principal of Thomas Jefferson High School, Los Angeles. Farnham organized special classes of failures and near-failures, in which the effort was entirely on personal development of the student's social responsibility. Acting

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

on the theory that failure produces a sense of shame, this educator made the classes entirely voluntary. The student must choose to enter the class. Farnham lists the following as aims of these classes: (1) to help students to gain confidence in teacher and school; (2) to develop group morale; (3) to cause students to understand that they are expected to learn only when they recognize the knowledge to be of value; (4) to encourage students to accomplish some definite learning each day; (5) to enable the pupil to work at a problem appropriate to his developmental level; (6) to help students become "socially acceptable"; and (7) to place teaching on a highly individualized basis.[7]

The only rule in these special classes was that a student must not disturb his classmates in their work. The first class of this type had thirty students, whose work was purely voluntary. Reports of the results of this first endeavor, according to the principal, were encouraging. He reports (1) a lessening of tension from the beginning; (2) standards of performance on the part of the pupils were raised; (3) attendance at school improved; (4) each student attempted more work than before; and (5) teachers reported that these individuals were more socially acceptable than before. No diploma was given for work in these classes, but

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[7]Arthur Farnham, "Class for Chronic Failures," School Review, LVI (March, 1948), 132-134.

each student was made to feel that he was doing a valuable piece of work in his school.[8]

This type of guidance program for preventing failure is the one advocated by many modern educators, although most of them admit that it is impractical under the present system of school administration.

A modified guidance program has been in effect at the San Angelo, Texas, high school for some years. This is a simple check method on pupils failing in any subject. A weekly list of failing students is compiled by the teachers each Friday. Names of pupils and subjects failed are posted on a bulletin board on Monday, to remain until their work is improved. Pupils at first opposed this practice, but when the principal ordered it discontinued, they asked for its restoration. Kenley, the principal, reports that failures have been reduced by 2.5 per cent. This scheme would, of course, be valueless unless some remedial program is provided.[9]

Adaptable Curriculum Plan

By far the largest number of educators seeking a solution to the failure problem advocate some change in the present curriculum as the answer. The adaptable curriculum

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[8] Ibid.

[9] C. H. Kenley, "A Weekly List of Failing Pupils," School Review, XLIV (September, 1936), 489.

or "mastery" plan has gained considerable support in recent years in various sections of the country. Myers in his article, "The Child Who Fails," presents a "mastery" plan. His suggestion is that courses in high school be organized into units. Pupils would be allowed to choose units for study in which the subject matter was naturally interesting to them. When they had mastered the fundamentals of a chosen unit, they would be given credit on the unit. Thus, the child who had a natural ability in science would find himself making valuable progress in the field he loved and would never have the stigma of failure in foreign languages or other subjects.[10]

Myers admits that in this "mastery" plan there may be students who choose a unit of study in which they cannot acquire enough skill to be considered "passing." In such a case he suggests that these students be marked "no credit" and then tactfully directed to undertake other units in which they may become able to attain success.

Myers also recognizes that certain subjects, such as English, are necessary to a person taking his place in the social and business world. His suggestion here is that a student be placed in remedial classes in such subjects, not for the purpose of securing grades but rather of gaining a certain facility according to the ability of the student.

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[10]Myers, op. cit., pp. 306-309.

In Myers' "mastery" plan, citizenship, in its broadest connotation, is the chief subject of study. He admits that the weak student may get only a limited portion of knowledge but contends that the child will be preserved from the feeling of "failure" as a human being.[11]

Burton is a staunch advocate of the adaptable curriculum as a means of reducing failure. He proposes a "continuous progress" system. This continuous progress, of course, is to be judged in terms of the capacity of the individual student. This would involve re-arranging all curricula, methods of teaching, and standards, in the light of known facts bearing upon the ability, interests, and needs of the learner. It would also mean complete re-organization of the philosophy of education and administration. Arbitrary grade standards would disappear. Directional progress and remedial work would be prominent.[12]

The Hibbing, Minnesota, High School conducted an experiment in curriculum rearrangement for failing students. Beginning with a survey of the number of pupils who dropped out of school and the subjects in which they failed, the administration instituted a drastic change in required courses for graduation. Such courses as English, mathematics, and social studies were placed on three levels of

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Burton, op. cit., p. 450.

difficulty. These were (1) an enriched course for able students, (2) deleted or substituted material for slow students, and (3) courses designed for very poor students in which they may enjoy a modicum of success. Justification for this arrangement was found in the fact that the survey showed that poor students were very unlikely to attend the regular college. Therefore, for them the traditional college preparatory courses would be valueless. Junior college was sometimes recommended for the poor type of students who wished to continue their education. Prior to this rearrangement of curriculum it was the custom for pupils who failed in English, mathematics, or the social studies to drop out of school. The principal reports that under the new plan many students have been enabled to finish high school. Hibbing schools have also a planning program for students before they enter high school.[13]

Both the Los Angeles and the St. Louis high-school systems have, since 1938, permitted some students to finish high school without completing the usual requirements for graduation. However, the usual type of diploma is not awarded to these students.[14]

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[13]Kopple C. Friedman and P. B. Jacobson, "Statistical Basis for Educational Guidance," School Review, XLV (May, 1937), 358-361.

[14]Frederick J. Weersing, "No Failure Program," School Review, XLVI (May, 1938), 331-333.

Effectiveness of the Mastery Curriculum Plan

Can this adaptable curriculum or "mastery" plan be adapted to the traditional high school? Most educators who advocate it believe that it can, but that progress toward this ideal is necessarily slow. Remedial work is evidently the initial step. In their first efforts to save pupils from failure, many schools went to the extreme and promoted all students indiscriminately. This method relieved everybody from responsibility, but the result was chaos. "An un-reconstructed school cannot have a true no-failure program, because chaos results in trying to establish it under standards existing."[15]

Psychological Tests as a Preventive

There are those who believe that all failures in high school should be eliminated if an adequate system of psychological testing could be set in order before the student enters secondary classes. The purpose of these tests would be to screen individuals so as to determine mental ability and inclinations. Then the student would be placed in a course of study in which he could be successful.

In an anonymous article, "Failure in School Can Be Predicted," the statement is made that school success or failure

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[15]Burton, op. cit., p. 452.

can be predicted by means of the Rorschach or "ink blot" test. An experiment of this type was conducted with 166 high-school students at Queen's College, Flushing, New York. Reports are that these tests revealed significant differences between successful and unsuccessful students. Experts reading these tests saw specialized distinctions which indicated success or failure in high school. This method would be a valuable starting point in any guidance program, but would not be an adequate basis for arranging a curriculum for the failing student.[16]

A more valuable experiment is reported by O'Connor in which the original aim was to isolate characteristics requisite to achievement in each occupation. Then the technique gradually turned to a study of retarded pupils and an attempt to determine what caused their failure. That certain characteristics, present or lacking, were responsible for success in school was determined. That these characteristics were the corollary of certain aptitudes was valuable in helping a student select a course of study in which he could succeed. The Human Engineering Laboratories have established eight aptitudes which can combine in several hundred ways.[17] This is most helpful in school counseling,

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[16]"Failure in High School Can Be Predicted," Science News Letter, XLIII (January 16, 1943), 45.

[17]Johnson O'Connor, "Failure in School," Atlantic Monthly, CLVII (March, 1935), 318.

but, unfortunately, is not available to all guidance teachers. Many large secondary school systems do use these aptitude tests in the beginning year of high school to guide the student in selecting his courses.

Pyle of the Detroit Teachers College, after experimenting with thirty-three high-school student failures in a variety of psychological tests, concludes:

> The literary type curriculum is not for all students. . . . The poorest student in this school excelled the best in some aspect of learning . . . to talk of an I. Q. is absurd . . . a psychological adviser in all schools is a necessity.[18]

Spears reports a study made in the Evansville, Indiana, high schools. Three groupings were made in English classes: slow, college, and all groups. The naturally slow group had the highest percentage of failures when no differentiation of goals of learning was made. Spears states that he is convinced that homogeneous grouping is necessary for studying failures. He also says that by research it is possible to know the students who are most likely to fail and the subjects in which they are most likely to encounter failure. These pupils should be detected before enrollment and curriculum adjustments made for them.[19]

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[18]W. H. Pyle, "Psychological Study of Some High School Failures," School and Society, XXXI (June, 1930), 819-820.

[19]Harold Spears, Secondary Education in American Life, pp. 216-217.

The Teacher's Responsibility

There are a few educators who place the responsibility for prevention of failure on the part of the student squarely upon the teacher. Myers says: "To the real teacher each failure is a problem which challenges attention. He should make a painstaking examination of studies in this field, rechecking his own ideas on the subject."[20] Yet Myers recognizes that this is an immense task, for he adds:

> What should a teacher do who stands for educational ideals and yet is unwilling to add to a condition of maladjustment by stamping the student with the mark of failure? Can the teacher preserve his standards and yet avoid building up an inferiority complex in the mind of the child?[21]

Roscoe Pulliam, superintendent of the Harrisburg, Illinois, schools, says:

> There was a time when teachers prided themselves on the high standards they maintained, and felt that their responsibility was discharged when they failed to promote pupils who did not come up to certain set standards, or conform to ironclad rules of the school. At most, all that the teacher was expected to do was to inflict a few penalties on the unsuccessful pupil as he went along, in an effort, presumably, to make failure so uncomfortable that the pupil would succeed in spite of any handicaps that might hamper him.[22]

Pulliam continues:

> The modern teacher realizes that pupils do not all possess the same degree of natural ability to

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[20]Myers, op. cit., pp. 306-309. [21]Ibid.

[22]Roscoe Pulliam, "Treating the Child Who Is Failing," Education, XLIX (April, 1929), 465-472.

> succeed. He should seek causes in the pupil or his environment . . . investigate and correct is the modern method.[23]

Boyd says the blame for failure of pupils can be placed directly on study assignments given by teachers. He says, "Teachers go on giving home work and punishing pupils who do not do it." He suggests that it is the teacher's duty to know whether the home environment is detrimental to study habits and that teachers should use ability grouping in classes and have maximum and minimum assignments. He also advocates a longer school day with preparation of lessons at school under teacher supervision.[24]

In her article, "What Price Failure?" Levy holds that teachers can definitely reduce the number of failures. She maintains that such causes as lack of pupil interest, "an infinitely incomprehensible mass of knowledge" to be learned, pupils buffeted by too many opposing forces, and dissatisfaction with the teacher are the teacher's responsibility and that the teacher is criminally negligent if she does not correct these errors.[25]

Burton says that it is evident that the teacher cannot change the system, that she is handicapped by standards and

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[23] Ibid.

[24] James A. Boyd, "Reducing Failures in High School," Education, LI (March, 1931), 425-429.

[25] Muriel Levy, "What Price Failure?" School and Society, XLVII (June 11, 1938), 766-768.

environment, but that to fail the pupil is no solution. The long, hard way of securing confidence is the only way.[26]

Harper condemns the teacher for not being willing to put out extra effort in individual instruction for children in order to prevent failure. She asks:

> Will he be a better citizen if he has finished high school with high rating and interest in one subject and just a smattering idea of the other subjects, or will he be a better citizen if, at 17, he has finally absorbed enough English to pass the eighth grade?[27]

The teacher can largely influence the outcomes of education.

Effectiveness of Procedures Summarized

That the responsibility for reducing failures in high school is not that of any one agent is shown in the foregoing discussion. That considerable success has been effected by guidance both in high school and by pre-high-school counseling is evident from statements of educators who have used such procedures. The growth of sentiment in favor of adaptable curricula for failing students is advocated by many prominent educators, and statistics show that this trend is promising. That teachers have not been relieved of responsibility in student failure is emphasized repeatedly by those in high places.

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[26]Burton, op. cit., p. 454.

[27]Mary Harper, "When Should a Child Be Failed?" Texas Outlook, XXX (February, 1946), 31.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

As a result of this research in the field of academic failures in high schools, the following conclusions appear to be warranted:

1. It is impossible to assert that any one factor or cause is the preponderant influence in determining the failure of pupils.

2. Views concerning reasons for failure vary widely.

3. The attitude of the public toward failure in high school is different from that of educators and administrators. For instance, laymen are likely to blame the shortcomings of the public-school system for the failure of pupils, whereas teachers and other school people recognize that many factors must be taken into account if the cause for failure is to be determined.

4. The problem of failure is an individual one; the factors influencing lack of success in academic courses for one student will not suffice to explain similar failure by another pupil in the same course. This fact indicates that a wide array of personal and environmental factors in the

experience of the individual student exert some influence in determining that student's success or failure in school.

5. The large number of failures in subject matter is, perhaps, an indication that the schools, despite all of their efforts, have not been able adequately to satisfy the needs and interests of young people.

6. The present tendency toward a slight decrease in the number of failures in high schools is due not only to improvements in the educational program offered by the schools but also to the influence of many modern educators who insist that it is preferable to promote a pupil rather than to force him to undergo the humiliation and frustration of repeating a course.

7. Pupil failure is more prevalent in the first year of high school than in the latter years. This situation is partially due to the fact that many students who fail in their first year or two in high school become discouraged and withdraw from school, leaving the more capable, interested young people to complete their high-school training.

8. Considerable improvement has been made in recent years in the percentage of young people who enter high school and remain in school until graduation.

9. New preventive and remedial measures in dealing with failure have been instrumental in giving young people

more wholesome conceptions of the value of education and in enabling them to overcome tendencies toward failure.

10. Mathematics, English, and the social studies, in the order named, are responsible for the largest numbers of failures in high school.

11. The fact that few failures occur in vocational subjects is an indication that interest in subject matter is a determining factor in success in high-school courses.

12. Effective programs of guidance and counseling are of importance in reducing failures in high school.

13. The curriculum remains too rigid and inflexible to permit its adaptation in the proper manner to the needs, interests, and abilities of individual students in order to decrease the frequency of failure and at the same time to prepare the student to become an efficient member of society.

14. The school's attitude toward failure should be a constructive, helpful one. It is more important that the school send out into the community young people who have attained satisfaction in their school experiences, together with a reasonable degree of success, than those who have experienced discouragement and frustration. It is not difficult to predict which of the two will become the better citizen and which will make the greater contribution to his community.

15. Students who fail in school and become "repeaters" are responsible for the expenditure of money for their

repetition of courses that might be used otherwise for providing needed facilities and curricular offerings in the school. These students often develop into maladjusted adults in the community just as they were maladjusted students while in school. For this reason, their social and economic contribution to society is likely to be negative and destructive rather than positive and constructive. The amount of social and economic loss caused by such an individual is beyond measurement, but it is certainly a serious problem.

16. The problem of failures in high school cannot be totally eliminated because of lack of control on the part of the school over complex personal and environmental factors involved in the individual pupil's difficulty.

17. The problem of failures is primarily an educational one, and remedies must be sought and developed within the school system itself.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented as outgrowths of this study:

1. It is recommended that schools study the problem of failure as it pertains to them and make an effort to determine the factors that are most influential in causing failure. With this knowledge, remedial measures can be undertaken with more assurance of some degree of success.

2. It is recommended that achievement and aptitude tests be given at regular intervals, perhaps annually, to all high-school pupils. In the light of the results of these tests and as a result of actual achievements in class situations, the curriculum should be made flexible enough to permit the students to enroll in courses in which they are interested, for which they experience a felt need, and for which they have aptitude.

3. Requirements for graduation will have to be liberalized in order to conform to the proposed flexible and adaptable curriculum of the school.

4. If at all possible, each high school should make guidance and counseling services available to the student in an effort to assist him in attaining his best work and to lead him into fields of study for which he appears to be best fitted.

5. Schools should, as generously as possible, provide in their budgets for enriched curricular offerings in an effort to combat student failures as the result of a rigid, cut-and-dried program.

6. Conscientious effort should be put forth by every high school to develop a curriculum that will be vital, challenging, and worth-while to every student. Offerings should be so broad that each individual can readily find a field

of study in which he can achieve a satisfactory degree of success.

7. Special adaptations should be made in the curriculum to provide for those students who, by scientific testing, are shown to be mentally incapable of attaining success in prescribed subject-matter fields.

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