

68-3780

DAHLIN, Donald Dale, 1921-  
DEVELOPING HOLDING POWER IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL  
FOR POTENTIAL DROPOUTS. [Appendix D: "The  
Mooney Problem Check List", pages 195-197, not  
microfilmed at request of author. Available  
through the Psychological Corporation, New York].

The University of Nebraska Teachers College,  
Ed.D., 1967  
Education, general

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

DEVELOPING HOLDING POWER IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL  
FOR POTENTIAL DROPOUTS

by  
Donald D. Dahlin

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The University of Nebraska in the Teachers College  
in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education  
Department of Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Professor Wesley C. Meierhenry  
and Associate Professor Alan T. Seagren

Lincoln, Nebraska

1967

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA  
TEACHERS COLLEGE  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For their counsel, guidance and encouragement in the development of this study, I am grateful to my co-advisors, Dr. Wesley C. Meierhenry and Dr. Alan T. Seagren.

I wish to express gratitude to the high school staff and office personnel of Grand Island Senior High School for their assistance and cooperation, without which this study could not have been made.

I am greatly indebted to my parents, and my wife's parents, for their interest, consideration and aid.

Finally, to my wife, LaVerna, and my three children, Sheri, Dale and Anne Marie for their patience, understanding and encouragement, I express my deepest appreciation.

D.D.D.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The failure of many youth to complete high school even though they have the ability to do so has been of great concern to educators and parents in the United States for several decades. The dropout problem is of concern because the nation as well as the individual usually suffers when a boy or girl does not prepare himself as fully as possible to make a living. The dropout problem varies in extent and with respect to associated factors from state to state and from community to community. Educators in every school system need to study the problem as it affects their youngsters if effective means are to be developed to reduce the rate of dropouts to a minimum. This concern is evident in the following statement:

A major problem confronting personnel in local schools and the nation is that of finding effective ways of encouraging young people to remain in secondary school long enough to graduate. A significant percentage of young people who enter ninth grade withdraw prior to completion of the twelfth grade.<sup>1</sup>

The secondary school cannot make its maximum contribution to pupils who leave to enter adulthood equipped with less than twelve years' schooling.

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<sup>1</sup>Walter H. Gaumnitz, High School Retention by States, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Circular 398 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 9. (Mimeographed.)



People in America believe in education for all. We are deeply concerned with the large number of youngsters whose potential capabilities go partially to waste; children for whom there has not been an adequate appreciation of the real difficulties with which they are involved--the emotional, social and economical problems that interfere with both personality and school performance.

The one million dropouts in addition to the large number of potential dropouts each year are evidence that we are falling short of the American dream of giving everyone a chance to achieve to his full capacity. To the potential dropout, defeat and failure have been regular and expected experiences. Almost inevitable results are frustration, negative attitudes, and poor behavior. At a crucial point in life, this bewildered student is denied a chance to experience success and grow in self-confidence. We are slowly realizing that offering the same opportunity for all does not give everyone an equal opportunity to become educated.

"Holding Power" is an apt phrase for so tenuous a project; because students held in school have an opportunity to develop and learn. Students can become productive and self-sufficient adults if society is for them and not against them. Schools must dare to break with traditional classroom teaching and provide education on the students' level to meet their needs.

Extensive study, therefore, should be given to factors related to the holding power of schools and to practices aimed at the improvement of secondary school "holding power."

### Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was: (1) to investigate the drop-out problem in order to discover evidence which would indicate vulnerability to early school leaving, and (2) to determine measures that might increase school holding power.

Specifically, the objectives of this study were:

1. Review various studies which have been conducted concerning the extent of and causes associated with the problem of early school leaving.
2. Identify from the literature significant characteristics and symptoms which influence certain youth to discontinue their education before secondary school graduation.
3. Ascertain from the literature recommendations and practices for the purpose of increasing school holding power.
4. Investigate the school records and conduct personal interviews with all available 1964-65 dropouts of the Grand Island Senior High School to ascertain:
  - a. Reason(s) for early withdrawal from the secondary school.
  - b. Suggested practices which the school could employ to encourage students to remain in school.
5. Identify a group of tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade potential dropouts from the Grand Island Senior High School according to characteristics determined from the review of literature. This selected group was used as an experimental study group throughout the 1965-66 school year.

6. Administer holding power practices determined from the review of literature to members of the study group for the purposes of:

- a. Encouraging members of the study group to remain in school.
- b. Ascertaining from members of the study group the most desirable and satisfactory practices for increasing holding power in the secondary school.

7. Develop recommendations for the purpose of increasing school holding power.

Detailed information was obtained on each member of the study group in order to more fully understand the students and to provide a better understanding and background for teachers and counselors so that they could attempt to work more effectively with the group.

#### Definition of Terms Used

Dropout. A student who leaves school before completing some recognized program of education at the secondary school level. A student who transferred to another school district or who was sent to a correctional institution was not considered a dropout.

Secondary school. As used in this study, the term secondary school shall be interpreted as including grades ten through twelve. In this study the terms "secondary school" and "high school" were used synonymously.

Holding power. Holding power shall be interpreted as the ability of the secondary school to retain secondary pupils in consistent

and regular membership and attendance until the completion of a prescribed course of study.

Study group. Seventy-nine students identified as potential dropouts were selected in order to assist the investigator to ascertain desirable practices for holding students in school.

Action program. Desirable practices identified from the review of literature set in progress during the 1965-66 school year in an effort to hold the identified study group in school.

### Theory

People are not born school dropouts or stayins; we must acknowledge when a youngster fails to complete high school that the school as a major instrument of society has failed the child just as much as the child has failed in school.

Today the chances of employment without a high school education are diminishing. Unemployment is likely to become more acute with technological changes. Positive action must be taken to prevent school dropouts and to provide continued education and training for those who have already dropped out of school.

If potential dropouts can be identified early in their school career, conscious attempts should be made by school personnel to help hold the students in school.

The dropout problem can be solved. Students will stay in school if they really believe that the school is interested in helping them develop, and if the school is offering a program which meets the

needs of the students. Interest is related to retention, and potential dropouts can be motivated to want to learn, and can be transformed into actively motivated youngsters wanting to achieve.

### Origin of the Study

Many factors, in addition to the school itself, are responsible for students dropping out of school. Whether the school, the home, or the community is most responsible, is entirely a moot question. Schools can only cooperate with the family and the community to reduce dropout rates in school, but they are completely responsible for the practices used in the school that increase or decrease the dropout problem.

Because of this charge of responsibility for the schools to provide practices for increasing school holding power, and from concern for the number of dropouts in Grand Island secondary schools where the investigator served as assistant principal in charge of students for three years, the initiation of this study originated. Conferences regarding this problem were held with Dr. Glen L. Lundstrom, Superintendent of the Grand Island Public Schools.

It was determined that the outcome of the study would be helpful in developing greater holding power in the Grand Island Public Schools.

### Basic Assumptions

1. Potential dropouts can be identified.
2. A youngster is better off staying in school.

3. Treatments or valid practices of developing student holding power can be identified.

4. The public schools can provide an appropriate education for all youth.

5. Factors associated with students dropping out of school are a combination of influences upon the individual by the school, by the home, and by the community.

#### Scope and Delimitations

1. The detailed results will be only descriptive of the situation in Grand Island, Nebraska, for the study group during the 1965-66 school year, and limited information about former students who dropped out from grades ten through twelve, in the Grand Island High School, during the 1964-65 school year and who resided in Grand Island during 1965-66.

2. The identified study group in this investigation was not necessarily representative of the total student population.

3. The study was primarily of the descriptive survey type. No statistical treatment of the data has been attempted. Only tabled summaries and discussion of the information gathered were used.

#### Significance or Need

Personnel of the Grand Island Public Schools as well as other educators are concerned about dropouts. They realize that dropouts become detriments to themselves and losses to society along with

having been handicapped by the very school that should have helped the individual develop. This problem is of local and national concern.

Jacobs of California wrote:

There is a need for continued research in the area of the dropout. Each school district should become aware of the factors affecting school attendance in its own areas, and make itself acquainted with the causes for early withdrawal from school, and set up machinery to take into account and counteract the influences that are causing early school leaving.<sup>2</sup>

The findings of this study should provide information which will:

1. Present the existing status of practices used in working with the potential dropout.
2. Determine those services and activities which were considered most helpful to a successful career in high school.
3. Assist administrators, counselors, and teachers in evaluating the complete school program for the potential dropout.
4. Assist administrators in identifying program areas and school practices needing improvement for the potential dropout.

#### Procedures of Research

A condensed plan of procedure will be presented in Chapter I since Chapter III will represent a detailed procedure of research.

Review of related literature. In order to establish a background for this study, a thorough examination was made of literature

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<sup>2</sup>J. Smith Jacobs, "Problems of Current School--Leaving Age Requirements," California Journal of Secondary Education, 33:93, February, 1958.

in the area of the dropout and school holding power.

Population and sample. A group of seventy-nine potential dropouts were selected for the holding power study conducted at Grand Island Senior High School. The sample was selected according to criteria determined from the review of literature.

Development of Questionnaires and Interview Schedules. Significant findings revealed in the literature were used in the development of the instruments which were administered to the study group, parents of the study group, counselors, and teachers.

These instruments were devised to obtain personal feelings about the dropout, his problems, and school holding practices, or lack thereof, that were aiding or hindering young people from staying in school.

Staff understanding. One of the main tasks of this study was the development of staff understanding and support. This was accomplished through a series of discussions, individual and group, involving the school faculty and guidance staff. Dittoed material was distributed frequently relating to the problem.

Dropouts interviewed. All available students of the fifty-one 1964-65 dropouts were interviewed as to why they had dropped school, and to ascertain what the school could have done to hold them in school. The cumulative guidance folders for this group of students of the Grand Island High School were perused for specific data.

Action program established. Following a review of the literature relating to the high school dropout problem, practices were