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Canadian Alliance of Black Educators

&

Patricia M. Daenzer

## Preface

This report shows that there are striking similarities between the experiences of Black youth in the United States and Black students in Canada with regard to their educational experiences. The facts strengthened by this study are grim. Black students who drop out of high school face significant social obstacles and carry weighty social labels. Trouble with the law (crime), teen pregnancy, alienation from curricular content and apprehensions about racism are significant features in their profiles. The absence of communication with parents is widespread. For many youth, there are tensions between educational needs and economic needs. Overall, the research findings suggest that based upon the experiences of the 334 dropouts studied across Ontario, social and educational systems are continuing to reproduce a sizeable population of Black youth who are disenfranchised, disaffected and at risk to society and themselves.

The issue of "conflict with the law" in the lives of Black students requires further and urgent investigation. It is not known from this study how "conflict with the law" is socially constructed with regards to Black students. The troubling phenomenon of anti-Black systemic and interpersonal racism in schools must be addressed more persuasively. There is also a clear statement from respondents across the four regions about the need for more Black teachers; this has been an expressed concern for many years, across generations. In general, the research findings are a valuable resource at this time of social reforms and educational debates. The Black Communities, the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training must share the responsibilities for addressing these issues.

Dr. P.M. Daenzer  
Principal Investigator

**Canadian Alliance of Black Educators  
High School Drop Out Research  
1993-1995**

**Background to the Research**

In 1990 the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE) announced a research agenda to assume priority. The focus was to be on three areas: the status of Black students in Ontario educational institutions; the status of Blacks educators in Ontario educational institutions; and, the occupational experiences of Black supply teachers in Ontario. This research into Black high school dropouts is a continuation of investigation into the experiences and status of Black Ontarians in high school including those who prematurely left school.

During 1990 members of CABE's executive (Dr. Patricia Daenzer, President; Mr. Emmanuel Dick, Member at Large; and Mr. John Vieira, Immediate Past President) met with Deputy Minister, Robert L. Mitton, of the Ministry of Education and Training, then the Ontario Ministry of Education, and senior bureaucrats, to discuss concerns regarding educational matters. Those meetings resulted in an invitation for a research proposal to address selected issues listed on CABE's research agenda. Since the issues presented by CABE to the Ministry spread across both the education and citizenship mandates, bureaucratic discussions between the Ministries of Education and Citizenship led to an agreement that the research proposal would be jointly funded by the respective Ministries.

The research proposal invited by Deputy Minister Robert L. Mitton, in 1990, received modest funding in 1992 from Education. The agreement for matching funds from Citizenship materialized in 1993, as 64% of the amount provided by Education in 1992. The research, therefore, got under way in 1993. **This 1995 report represents a completion of that phase of CABE's research.**

CABE is grateful to both the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Anti-Racism Secretariat, for the funding received to enable this work. The findings of this research provides the first ever comprehensive data on Black Youth/Learners across selected Ontario urban centres. The evidence within this report will be useful for educational policy planning and community public education for many years to come.

## Acknowledgements

**The Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Anti-Racism Secretariat**, provided the funding for this study. CABE is pleased to acknowledge their contribution to this work. Their support was evidence that both Ministries take seriously the concerns expressed by our members about quality of life issues within our community.

The CABE executive members who were involved in the early-stage proposal preparation, and in negotiations with the Ministries for funding are owed our gratitude. They were, **Emmanuel Dick** for his contribution in the negotiations phase, **John Vieira** who attended meetings with the Ministry of Education and Training, **Ivan MacFarlane** for assistance in drafting the research proposal, and **Dr. Clarence Perry** for assistance in drafting the research proposal.

**McMaster University, School of Social Work**, has contributed in kind to this work through the Principal Investigator's time, the use of the university's computer facilities, and the expertise of the Computer Information Services Technician during the period of the study 1993-1995. We gratefully acknowledge the university's commitment to bridging community with academe.

**Simone Lyons** supervised the research outreach by managing the office in Toronto, and travelling to the three other research sites. She interviewed, recruited and trained the research outreach workers in Windsor, Toronto, Hamilton and Ottawa, and made dozens of contacts with community organizations to facilitate the data gathering. Simone's contribution to this research is inestimable and will be valued hereafter.

**Lois Sullivan** sat in isolation at the computer entering the data for more hours that I am certain she cares to remember. For her precision, commitment and skill with technology, we are truly grateful.

**Helen Ofosu** was on site in Windsor to carry on the work following closure of the research office in Toronto. We are grateful to Helen for her community outreach skills and her persuasion which captivated those youth who were not eager to talk about reasons for dropping out. Helen was also involved in the early stages of drafting the research instrument. We owe Helen much gratitude.

### **List of Research Assistants**

Stephanie Bayliss	Windsor
Esther Burey	Windsor
Marquette Clark	Windsor
Marcel Daly	Hamilton
Correece Downey	Hamilton
Sabine Fortin	Ottawa
Sylvan Francis	Toronto
Tara Freeman	Windsor
Andy Harper	Ottawa
Dwayne John	Toronto
Rita Libab	Ottawa
Helen Ofosu	Windsor
Kathleen Salvador	Ottawa
Denise Small	Windsor
Carlene Thompson	Hamilton
Tamika Wilson	Windsor

### **Data Technicians**

Lois Sullivan	Toronto
Demi Patsios	Hamilton

## **THE HIGH SCHOOL DROP OUT PROBLEM: Issues in Ontario**

In 1995 Canada's Black peoples are still struggling for equitable education. This problem is acute in Ontario. The earliest recorded community action for adequate education is in the 1850s. Black parents in Upper Canada West petitioned the provincial government for access into integrated schools because they believed that Black children would obtain a better education if they attended schools where white children also attended. Parents of that historical period reasoned that the problem was racially-inspired resource distribution. The better educational resources, they believed, were distributed to schools in which white children were educated. The solution, then, was to have Black children in the schools where adequate resources were to be found; in racially integrated schools. Integrated schools, they believed, would effectively prepare Blacks for stabilization in the labour market.

In 1995 Black learners are still disenfranchised, under-educated and account for a disproportionate number of high school drop-outs. We believe that the problems are more complicated than evidence suggests, and that ethno-racially integrated classrooms have not significantly improved the life chances of many young Black learners. During community investigations conducted by the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators in 1990-1992 we learned from listening to parents, students and educators that notwithstanding the ethno-racial mix of students in schools, there is no guarantee to equitable education for all Black students. CABE is also informed by the last decade of enquiries into the obstacles, advantages and challenges which confront Blacks in

education.

Four issues, **inclusive curricular content, anti-racist education, school-parent relationships and equitable hiring of black educators** are central to many of our discussions. Yet, because research by racial-specificity has not been widely developed in Ontario, much remains to be analyzed. A much broader study should be guided by two categories of questions. Firstly, what is the "objective" status of Blacks within Ontario's educational facilities? i.e. what are the numbers of Black educators, Black students and Black educational support workers? in which educational levels are Black students learning? what is the Black drop-out rate by gender? what/how many Afro-centric courses are taught? What measures are in place for anti-racist education?

The second question relates to the "subjective" status of Blacks in Ontario's educational facilities. The second question is perceptionally-driven and relates to the felt experiences of Blacks in their educational institutions and their understanding of their status in schools relative to other groups. This subjective understanding may well be grounded in objective data, but is not necessarily always so. For example, while discrimination by curricular exclusion of Afro-centric pedagogical material is easy to measure, students' intuition and experiences of attitudinal intolerance is not always objectively measurable. Similarly, teachers' low estimation of Black students is difficult to prove and easily deniable by school administration. However, the subjective reality of Black students and educators has as much social cogency as the objective condition. Both inform the reality of different constituencies, and therefore require attention in the

process of actions or initiatives which will seek to address the issues which cause social tensions.

A number of community reports exist which speak to lived realities and issues related to Blacks in educational institutions. These fall into both the subjective and objective reality categories, but focus disproportionately on Metropolitan Toronto schools. Many of these reports were post-crisis documents prepared by, or requested by the Black community. Some of these reports were initiatives undertaken by Boards of Education in the wake of tensions as they struggled to come to grips with a new form of an old problem. **Part 1** of the literature review synthesizes these reports. **Part 2** of the literature review examines the Canadian and American scholarship on the issue of Black learners in educational systems.

### **THE LITERATURE REVIEW, Part 1: School and Community Reports**

Black youth have been facilitated into organized focus groups to discuss issues related to their education and social lives. Separate conferences have been sponsored by various Boards of Education, by Black community groups across Metropolitan Toronto, and Blacks have gathered from across Canada to discuss their condition in education. The City of North York Board of Education hosted approximately 200 students from the grades 7-12 group in 1991. The community within the jurisdiction of Peel Board of Education and The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services hosted just over 100 students in 1992. The Scarborough Board of Education conducted extensive consultations with students, parents and educators in 1990-91. The Canadian Alliance of

Black Educators (CABE) hosted a total of just over 300 high-school students from the Metropolitan Toronto area on three occasions; May 1991, October 1991, and May 1992. In addition, for a number of years, the Toronto Board of Education annually hosted large numbers of Black students in early summer to discuss issues. CABE sponsored a national conference on "Blacks in Education" in November 1991, and again in 1993. CABE's work in bringing educators and parents together from across North America continues.

In 1986-87 there were also enquiries conducted by the Toronto Board of Education with parents, educators, principals and students serving as key informants. These represented students from 10 schools within the Toronto Board of Education, staff from 12 schools, principals and vice-principals from the 10 schools where student key informants originated, and 5 senior administrators from the Toronto Board office.

When all of these reports are examined, one finds repetition of the concerns and issues across constituencies over time; e.g. the same issues uttered in 1986 by students in the Toronto Board, for example, are repeated by North York and Scarborough students in 1991. Some of these issues were recorded for the first time in the 1850s in Upper Canada West. They are briefly discussed below five broad thematic groups:

1. Problems affecting identity and esteem in the classroom
2. Difficulties with achieving academic excellence
3. Insensitivity leading to alienation
4. Inadequate parental involvement
5. Inadequate community involvement.

**A. Problems affecting identity and esteem in the Classroom**

An outpouring has come from older students who share the perception that they are a less valued and accepted group in schools where the majority of the school population is white. Students believe that white teachers ascribe inferior status to them, that the behaviours of teachers, principals and white students suggest that Blacks are unwelcome in schools, and that their Black identity is neither respected nor valued.

**. . . when you have been taught  
for so long that you are inferior  
you start to believe it. . .**

**North York Student  
November 1991**

**. . .the constant racism at school  
attacks our self esteem . . .**

**Female at CABE conference  
May 1991**

**. . . teachers . . .have internalized  
the negative societal stereotyping of  
Black males as lazy, irresponsible,  
dishonest and/or shifty, inclined  
towards criminal behaviour . . .**

**Male at CABE conference  
October 1991**

At the core of the Black identity issue is the frequently-articulated and well-documented problem of the gaps in curricular content. Black contribution is not included with enough sophistication and generality to reassure Black students that their ancestry and the achievements of their ancestors are respected. African heritage is neither an implicit nor explicit subject of wholesome intellectual exploration. This is not an altogether debated issue by education administrators. Over the last ten years a number of reference books and resource guides have been commissioned and produced, many by the Ministry of Education and Learning. Until the recent Policy Memorandum #119 requesting Boards

of Education to submit plans for introducing Race and Ethno-cultural Equity in schools, no serious direction emanated from the Provincial Ministry of Education with regards to inclusive curricular content.

The intellectual deprivation caused by this curricular gap diminishes the education of children of all races. While the most painful outcome is the sense of exclusion and devaluation experienced by Black learners, more insidious and indirect consequences may accrue to other children. The conceptual void about peoples of African heritage encourages misinformation and solidifies damaging stereotypes.

The exclusion of lessons on African heritage establishes a hierarchy of the ethno-racial groups by this focus on Whiteness and exclusion of Blackness, with degrees of references to those in between. The danger of this is that many children may then rely on capricious and random media exaggeration for information about African heritage and the Black peoples in our society. The latter then becomes the basis for the social relations among students in the classroom.

Many schools have pointed to experiences which focus on cultural awareness or cultural celebration; the multicultural forays which explore national foods, dress and music. While celebrating can be quite joyous and fun, it is not clear how children can celebrate together in the face of inter-racial derision. The real need of Black students is inter-group respect, and inclusion through curricular recognition of Blacks as a contributing people to humanity. In addition, lessons on inter-racial tolerance would introduce the notion of rights

in classrooms. The right to a non-hateful environment might be included in these discussions.

## **B. Difficulties with achieving academic excellence**

A common theme throughout the conference reports and anecdotes from students is that of the lower expectations teachers entertained for Black learners.

- **Blacks are believed to be inferior  
hence teachers have lower expectations  
of us**
- **Schools with a large population  
of Black students tend to have  
lower standards**

### **Female Students at Sharing the Challenge Conference, CAFE, 1991**

Black students reported that the process of seeking guidance counselling is often embarrassing since they are made to confront the worst outcome scenario of their career potential. They are encouraged to drop courses, leave school and work part-time, abandon aspirations about post-secondary education, or focus on unenriched basic-level courses. When some students were surveyed about resources used to obtain direction about course or career choices, many reported that they used each other instead of the guidance service. Other students reported that they received guidance from family members, external mentors or "O.K." teachers. . . . **because of my dialect and**

**my**

**fear of speaking out, I went to  
basic school . . .**

**Black students with ability and ambition**

**are discouraged and turned-off by  
guidance. . .**

**we get short interviews from the counsellors**

**Students from Toronto Board of Education  
1986-87**

Many students share the perception that the preponderance of Blacks in physical education type activities is the schools way of suggesting that Blacks cannot achieve academic excellence. Many see this as an insult but could think of no strategies to challenge the practice.

**. . .some teachers think Blacks  
should only be involved in sports. . .**

**. . .teachers are only nice to  
Black students in gym class**

**Comments by Toronto Board of Ed.  
Students: 1986**

Because of the level of concern expressed by Black youth about lower expectations it is safe to postulate that they have high values about education and visions about the pursuit of excellence. This also indicates that they have a well-developed understanding about their status in their schools. There is no evidence that in spite of the students' knowledge/ perception of their location, status and relative condition in their schools, that they are able to take action to correct their condition.

**. . . You think I care if you  
pass or fail? I still get paid  
anyway . . .**

**Reported by North York Student  
November, 1991**

A well-established pedagogical axiom is that all children can learn. The challenge

is often identifying and responding to children's learning styles. A frequent complaint by both Black students and parents has been that too many Black students are streamed into basic level education. It is not known how individual schools or Boards of Education are equipped to evaluate children's learning styles and needs. It appears though, that there is some relationship between the challenge to effectively assess the Black child's achievement potential and learning needs and the frequent resort to the assumption that Black children are under-achievers. In fact, there is mystification about exactly what occurs in classrooms. The students interpretation is often the only data available about classroom occurrences.

In a 1985 program review of one Board in Metropolitan Toronto, the consultants Hitner Starr Associates found that there was a phenomenon they labelled post-secondary type "collegial culture". Collegial culture was characterized by a high degree of autonomy in respective schools, with little Board control or monitoring process of what actually occurs in the classroom.

**. . .Board of Education has operated under a collegial system which has allowed teaching and senior staff to work in an environment free from formalized management control. . .**

**Hitner Starr Associates, 1985**

A review of the reports shows that parents and students share the view that teachers take arbitrary actions which result in a limitation of the academic success of Black students. Since a degree of mystification surrounds what actually occurs in the

classroom, and since the perception of this "aura of classroom mystery" is made more real by the autonomy of individual schools, there is little trust between some parents and some schools. The problematic evidence continues to be that more Black students are found in basic level courses, and more recent evidence suggests that more Black students drop out of high school. Black students have voiced little confidence in current educational systems to meet their needs:

**. . . we need to have our own Board of Education  
so as to create opportunities and provide programs  
to meet the needs of Black students . . .**

**Female, Sharing the Challenge Conference, May '91**

**. . . that an outside the school  
ombudsperson for (students of) African  
(heritage) be assigned to each school . . .**

**North York Student 1991**

### **C. Insensitivity Leading to Alienation**

Reports about educating children have stressed that providing a safe and comfortable learning environment for students enhance learning comfort. The reports reviewed here contain comments repeated by students over the years, that, often they find the school environment hostile. Hostile in these cases appears to mean uncomfortable interpersonal relationships with teachers, administrators and white students. Students reported that teachers single them out for stricter codes of behaviour, ignore racist incidents, and fail to treat them with the same courtesies and respect which are extended to many white students.

**Principal talks to white not  
Black students**

**Principals show different/negative  
attitude to Black parents who come  
in to complain about unfair treatment  
of their children**

**Teachers do not respond to Black  
students with respect**

**Females at Sharing the Challenge  
May 1991**

**The white principal is unapproachable  
and unfair**

**Teachers are short with, and unapologetic  
to Black students**

**Students, Toronto Board  
1986**

The issue of strained relationships between Black students and white administrators/teachers may be really not unlike social behaviour in the wider Canadian context. The gestation period for developed inter-racial relationships vary depending upon a range of circumstances. Two factors are different in the school environment. The students may need to feel readily accepted and liked; the teacher is expected to have the skills for facilitating social interaction. If the student fails to get that immediate message of welcome and acceptance then feelings of alienation may develop.

Another form of alienation exists for Black students. Students reported that when they attempt to form social clubs these attempts are greeted with suspicion. In their perception this suspicion is based upon stereotypical notions about Blacks:

**The teachers always think that  
Black kids up to something**

**Student, Toronto Board  
1986**

They cite instances of ridicule when they wear clothing which reflects African heritage, and are discouraged from speaking in patois, or Caribbean dialect. The determination of Black students to resist what they see as the de-emphasis of non-white cultures is strengthened by such opposition.

The absence of the "familiar" in the curriculum heightens this sense of unwelcome and alienation. Both Black educators and students believe that schools resist the inclusion of curricular content which is racially and culturally representative. In response to this a number of Saturday morning schools run by Black educators exist in Metropolitan Toronto. These schools provide both cultural education and offer remedial/supportive academic education. These supportive educational infrastructures have existed in Toronto and other large cities across Canada for decades. Their growth in numbers is more recent.

**D. Inadequate Parental Involvement in the education of Black students**

The parent networks such as the Organization of Parents of Black Children (OPBC) should be commended for their long struggle to resolve issues of inequity in the education of Black students in the city of Toronto. The Black teachers and Black parents who

volunteer at the Saturday morning schools across Metropolitan Toronto also deserve recognition. Many Black parents individually advocate on their children's behalf and give guidance, support and encouragement. But Black students have said in most reports reviewed that their parents do not take sufficient interest in their education. And while in 1995 there are indeed organized parent groups in a number of large cities, their presence alone is insignificant for responding to or assessing the merits of the comments made by Black students. We cannot presuppose that the existence of such groups means that sufficient numbers of Black parents are able to access active membership, and take appropriate action in educational matters. The issue of parental involvement in the research to be discussed below is significant.

Black immigrant parents may well have other social patterns which preclude involvements with educational institutions. Daenzer (1989) has shown that the post-migration integration process of racial minority immigrants is fraught with obstacles. Labour-market adjustment becomes the most serious challenge to post-migration life. Other activities such as involvement with schools, advocating for their children's rights, and active membership in parents' groups may be secondary by necessity.

Finally, however, there may well be parents who either trust the educational institutions to educate their children; who see education as the business of educators, and who are not socialized to become involved in the process of the educational guidance of their children. Finally, it must be remembered that some students reported that their parents have not been welcomed with respect at their schools when they have ventured

to visit.

### **E. Inadequate Community Involvement**

Students have said that Black professionals "who have made it" and "Back community organizations should take a more active role in their education. They have identified these roles as school visits, school talks, advocacy on their behalf and a presence for the purpose of "showing off role models".

**Where are the Black professionals  
when we need them ?**

**Blacks who make it should be  
encouraged to return to our schools  
to encourage us**

**Females and Males  
Sharing the Challenge  
1991**

It is quite consistent that students who identify isolation and alienation as risk factors would want the presence of mentors in their schools. They assume correctly that the task of integrated and supportive education is a task for the broader community. However, the definition of community should be broadened.

In keeping with Radwanski's (1987) findings there may well be a relationship between parental poverty and low academic achievement and students who need support. Students who are members of these disadvantaged families enter the educational system with additional challenges. Unless measures are put into place to minimize these challenges these students will not have the same opportunity to benefit from the

educational process.

Many Black families are subject to labour-market instabilities; they suffer more underemployment and unemployment. Therefore, the community supports which might increase the possibilities for stability and success for Black students must necessarily take many forms. Both the Canadian and American literature speaks to some of these measures.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW, Part 2: THE CANADIAN & AMERICAN SCHOLARSHIP**

### **Introduction:**

The issue of high school dropouts in Canada has sparked sporadic public concern in Canadian educational and labour-market quarters. The 1980s to the 1990s has been a period of more sustained debate and enquiry, culminating with at least one provincial Royal Commission on education which reported in 1994, in Ontario. In contrast, the American literature indicates that high school dropout has received serious attention in the United States for many decades. More American academics have been involved in analysis of the dropout syndrome.

Qualitatively, the American and Canadian literature differs. Most Canadian drop out studies have been commissioned by the ministries of education or federal employment bureaucracies for general Canadian labour statistics, and tend to be numerically descriptive. These studies focus on the relationship between labour market

preparedness and the effect inadequate schooling. While Canadian researchers pay some attention to the attitudes of dropouts to education, they pay scant attention to psych-social reasons related to premature school departure. Of relevance to this study, race, immigrant status and ethnicity are not seriously accounted for as significant variables in influencing high-school experiences leading to dropout.

A number of community reports prepared by educators, parent groups and other special interest bodies exist in Ontario. Among the more substantive of these are the reports prepared by the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE) in the 1990s. The latter explored the perceptions of Black high school students who were still in school. Overall, the reports produced by CABE in the early 1990s gave strong evidence of students who were disenfranchised and experiencing degrees of social alienation. Those findings were never politicized and remained shelved among the many reports produced about the condition of Blacks in Ontario schools over the last two decades.

### **What Researchers Found:**

Sullivan (1988) found that, "both dropouts and non-dropouts believe a good education is important in terms of job opportunities or advancement. . . ." Similarly King, et al. (1988) concluded that, "it would appear, then, that there is some advantage in having a graduation diploma in providing greater access to jobs. . . ." Predictably, researchers found not only a connection between getting a job and possessing a diploma, but also with the employment income received. Sullivan (1988) found that "non-dropouts' average income is \$5000 more than that of dropouts. . . ."

Studies show relationships between investment in education and occupational rewards without taking race, racism and labour force discrimination into account. Sullivan found that dropouts were less likely to be employed in professional, technical or cultural capacities. Instead they were most concentrated in "dead end" jobs such as cashiers and other such service oriented positions (Sullivan, 1988; 11). However, Canada has a long history of labour-force marginalization by race and gender. Underemployment, disproportionate unemployment and constrained labour force mobility have been shown to be related to race, ethnicity and gender (for example, Statistics Canada quoted in the Toronto Star June/July 1995). While it is true that human capital investment (through education) cannot be ignored in labour market adjustment and attachment, the relationship between race, education and labour market status is underdeveloped in the drop out scholarship. Researchers uncritically postulate as fact that graduates earn more and have greater possibilities for career choices, thus school completion is a viable alternative for Black students. It would be more appropriate to suggest that education in itself is empowering and a valuable social good in its own right. The latter proposition, however, would then beg the question, what form should empowering education take?

Some emphasis is directed at learning comfort factors and the influence of the presence of these in encouraging school completion. According to Quirotte, et al. (1990: 15), "the relationship of students with teachers can play a very important role in encouraging students who are at risk of dropping out of school. . . ." This argument was also supported by the King study. They found that

there is overwhelming evidence of a need for teachers to develop an improved level of sensitivity towards students emotional needs as well as academic needs. Teacher sensitivity to students needs appear to be a critical factor in the retention of students" (King, et al. 1988; 9)

The argument that sensitive, caring teachers can make a difference is borne out by our study discussed below. Quirotte's study also suggested that teacher training should stress skills in establishing social comfort environments to help them in functioning as effective preventative agents. (Quirotte, et al. 1990; 75)

Alienation is mentioned in the Canadian research but not dealt with as in depth as the American research. Rather, the process of alienation is an outcome, linked in the Canadian context to a history of failure. However, like the American studies, there is recognition that dropping out produces a complex array of outcomes neither fully explored nor understood (Quirotte, et al. 1990; 67; King, et al. 1988). Socially produced tensions existed during the dropout decision process. For some students, dropping out was seen as a complicated "choice" and some dropouts were forced to find acceptable justification for having chosen to leave school early.(King, et al. 1988; 15)

The characteristics of the "typical" dropout is similar across Canadian and American borders. However, characteristics of some Canadian provincial school structures seemed to influence dropout decisions. For example, the Canadian studies noted that, students who take courses at the Basic level tend to drop out at or near the sixteenth birthday, usually corresponding to Grade 10 (King, et al. 1988; 16). Thus one of King's primary conclusions was that a highly significant factor which determines early school leaving is the level at which students take their courses. (King, et al. 1988; 3) In the Canadian

context then, the phenomenon of streaming is a primary factor in determining who drops out.

The placement of certain students at lower or basic levels affect their social and academic experiences at school. Streaming produces early social and intellectual alienation. This idea was expressed by Quirotte, et al. They argue that, "in the case of potential dropouts, it is important to note that as they start their high school programme, they have already 'turned off'. (They are also) . . . seriously discouraged by school failures, and generally find their school experience uninteresting" (Quirotte, et al. 1990; 50).

Like American studies, Canadian research shows that more males than females dropped out, that the common ages were between 16 and 19, and that many dropouts had a history of academic failures and grade repetition. Family background was also found to affect the students likelihood of dropping out. (Quirotte, et al. 1990, Sullivan, 1988, King, et al. 1988)

King provides a summary of the reasons for high school dropout but ignores issues related to race and racism. Among factors summarized in King's study are pregnancy, religious discouragement from pursuing higher education, behavioral problems and lack of interest in required courses. By far the greatest reasons cited by King is lack of academic success (King, et al. 1988; 130). While American studies link religion, ethnicity and dropping out, others discount the saliency of ethnicity in early school leaving (Sullivan, 1988; 8).

Studies show that lower socio-economic status positively influenced students decisions regarding premature school departure. (Quirotte, et al. 1990; 45) Another reason often cited by students was the lack of care/concern by their teachers. (Sullivan, 1988; 31: Quirotte, et al. 1990; 45) Overall students drop out mainly because of negative school experiences. These experiences include poor academic histories and the perceived lack of sensitivity on the part of teachers and administrators.

Julian Tanner (1990) studied the case of dropouts in the Edmonton area. Like the Fine and Rosenberg (1983) study, Tanner looked at the role of society and the school in contributing to the problem of students dropping out. She noted that, "dropouts are, on the face of it, students who have rejected school as much as they have been rejected by it" (Tanner, 1990; 77). Tanner's analytical slant on the dropout phenomenon differs from other Canadian studies because she paid serious attention to students' anecdotes. She noted, for example, that "some respondents also made it clear that their decision to leave school was not entirely a voluntary one -- that rather than dropping out of school they felt they had, in fact, been kicked out" (Tanner, 1990; 80) Although social class is a significant variable in Tanner's study, like other Canadian studies, race and racism are omitted from the analysis.

substantial dropout rates, therefore, highlight the persisting connections between social origins, educational achievement and class destinations, and reinforce the suspicion that those same social origins are in some way responsible for the subsequent rejection of schooling" (Tanner, 1990; 75).

Tanner concludes that "the choice involved (in dropping out) is sometimes more illusionary than real, and (that) schools play a more vigorous role in this outcome than

is . . . recognized" (Tanner, 1990; 81). Fine and Rosenberg and Wehlage (1983) agree with Rutter's conclusion. All looked not only at the "general" characteristics of dropouts, but at how these characteristics were developed. Their conclusions are unanimous that although family background and "other" factors are important, the role of schools is also important.

### ***Prevention***

The issue of prevention in the high school dropout research is also important. It is assumed that once the characteristics of the drop-out phenomenon can be verified and the reasons stated, then something can be done to eliminate the further occurrence of this problem. Hence, research has focused on the characteristics of the behaviour in an attempt to predict when and how the process of dropping out occurs. Some Canadian research focus analysis on the complexity of school experiences which occur in deprived social environments. King et al. stress the importance of effective policies and programs directly aimed at preventing drop-out:

the most direct way to reduce the dropout rates is to increase the success rate. This can be done by increasing the motivation of students by means of more relevant programming, improving student/teacher rapport, improving the quality of guidance services and by reducing or changing expectations with respect to student evaluations" (King, et al. 1988; 131).

Early identification of student crisis, the recognition that drop-out is a long and complex process, improved counselling facilities, smaller classroom sizes, and a program to help students make the transition from elementary to high school are suggestions for circumvention in some cases. (King, et al. 1988; 19,25) Others see mentoring and group counselling as beneficial. Mentoring is seen as a mechanism for increasing emotional

support for some students. (Quirotte, et al. 1990; 68).

**The pressing needs of our youth must supersede politics or individual ideologies (Mildred Henry, 1986).**

The high school drop-out debate in the United States heightened in the late 1960s and American researchers have produced a rich body of research with findings which vary. Some researchers tend to take the position that students make conscious choices to drop-out, but make these decisions based on known causes. Others, however, tend to look for structural forces in their society or the school environment which produce the drop-out outcome. The latter perspective is the minority view.

Since the American research populations are identified by race, culture and gender characteristics, it is possible for this particular review to focus on those studies related to racial minority youths. Many of these studies suggest strong relationships between economic status and drop-out behaviour and make predictions about premature school departure and labour market stabilization potential. In spite of the differing time spans between the various studies, there is consistency between the conclusions reached in the early studies and those replicated in later studies. Occasionally, researchers differed; notably two studies undertaken by Wehlage and Rutter (1986) and Fine and Rosenberg (1983) identified structural and environmental stimuli for youth disaffection with school. However, much of the emphasis is routinely focussed on the misfit between education and market skills. For example, Rumberger notes that:

dropouts' lower level of educational achievement does not just have an immediate consequence, it becomes an even bigger disadvantage overtime

because dropouts have fewer opportunities to obtain additional education and training needed to remain even relatively competitive in the job market" (Rumberger, 1987; 113).

This rhetorical observation, popular in the sparse Canadian literature, is echoed by Wehlage and Rutter (1986) who state that:

in order to be employable in other than the most menial work, those entering the labour market will certainly have to master the case competencies that should be acquired in high school" (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; 375).

Others stress social consequences such as poverty, out of wedlock births, crime increased rates, and drug abuse" (Bearden et al., 1989; 116). However, Bearden does not show how education eradicates or diminishes poverty, crime and out of wedlock births. He also postulates the latter as a social problem.

### ***Characteristics and Reasons:***

There are many characteristics which are said either predicts or explains why students leave school prematurely. These factors have been grouped into "school related" or "non-school related" issues even though there is no clear way of determining or differentiating when an issue is entirely school-related and when not. However, the "school related" issues tend to be similar in most studies. Among those most often cited were, (1) a lack of educational motivation, (2) little or no participation in school activities, (3) academic failure, (4) poor school attendance and (5) lowered expectations. (Pittman, 1986; 1) Among these, the issues that most pertain to minority students were lowered expectations and academic failure posited in a cause and effect relationship. Low expectations on the part of a teacher may lead to low academic and poor behavioral

performances on the part of the student, who finally decides to dropout of school because of the negative outcome (Martinez, 1986; 14). Butler (1987) agrees, in saying: "children respond to the expectations teachers have of them, positive or negative. Once this pattern is established, it is difficult to alter" (Butler, 1987; 17). Butler posits the teacher as a dominant influence in the student's life and de-emphasizes other possibilities. If indeed teachers are significant in the socio-emotional lives of students, there may well be some relationship between the child ethno-specific designation and the bonding pattern with teachers. The Ohio State Department of Education found that "throughout levels K-12, minority group membership (remained) one of the most consistent predictive variables of alienation and withdrawal from school" (OSDE, 1983; 19).

Among the "non-school" related factors which influence drop out socio-economic status and family background are seen as strong influences on educational attainment. (Rumberger, 1983; 201). Ekstrom et al. (1986) found that:

dropouts tended to come from homes with weaker educational support system. (Also), compared with stayers, dropouts ... had fewer study aids present in their homes, had less opportunity for non-school related learning, were less likely to have both natural parents living at home... and had parents who were less likely to be interested in or to monitor both in-school and out of school activities (Ekstrom, et al., 1986; 358)

Brooks-Williams (1987; 317) and others agreed. For example, Beck and Muia (1980) concluded that "the lower the socio-economic level of his family, the greater is a student's chance of becoming a dropout. (This may be because his) family is less solid, less influenced by a father figure, less likely to interact in leisure activities, and are less able to communicate" (Beck and Muia, 1980; 66). This relationship between poverty and marital status and poverty and literacy has been postulated by others.

Special characteristics are evident when gender is combined with ethno-racial specificity. These include low self-esteem, little desire for self growth, and limited

commitment to accepted social values" (Beck and Muia, 1980; 66). These characteristics tend to show up in more males than females and also in more minority students (Bearden, Spencer and Moracco, 1989; 113).

In addition to these apparent personality deficits, some racial minority students also must deal with discrimination and the effect it has on their psyche. All the researchers who studied racial minority dropouts, found a correlation between racial discrimination and dropping out. Tidwell (1988) found; "dropouts are more likely to experience racial discrimination and may tend to **devalue themselves because of their decision to leave school early** (Tidwell, 1988; 942), and others concur; "minority dropouts (were) keenly aware of the racial discriminatory practices that (went) on at school. . . .In fact these students were so affected by these discriminatory practices that their perception of the job market was also distorted. . .they tend to perceive the occupational system as closed for racial minorities irrespective of their educational attainment. . . ." (Martinez, 1986; 16).

Most relevant to the current research, the studies done by Fine and Rosenberg (1983) and Wehlage and Rutter (1986) best explores the reasons minority students dropout of high school. Both these studies take a critical look at society and the school environment as contributing to students dropping out. Fine and Rosenberg argue that dropouts

are critics of . . . education, (but) their voices are rarely heard. Describing dropouts as 'helpless', troublemaking, incipient welfare recipient, or delinquent, shifts attention away from the educational institution from which these youths flee (Fine and Rosenberg, 1983; 257).

Researchers see the act of dropping out as the students' way of escaping from an environment that devalues them. They see students alienated from the "fundamental" institution of education and getting little respect and interest from school administrators

and teachers (Bearden et al., 1989; 113).

According to Fine and Rosenberg (1983), the act of dropping out must be seen from both the students viewpoint and that of the school/society. They argue that:

dropping out represents a complicated outcome-- of individual decision and/or institutional coercion-- emerging for different reasons and generating different consequences for individuals across social class, race, and gender lines (Fine and Rosenberg, 1983; 259).

Some observe that the student not only has rejected a fundamental institution, but they (the students) believe that they have been rejected by the institution. (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; 385). Others argue the act of dropping out should be conceptualized as a societal problem involving families and society. Students accept the low status ascribed them by society, and believe that in dropping out they can escape their status deprivation. Their attempt is to escape social rejection and make their economic deprivation less visible to peers (Larsen and Shertzer, 1987; 166; Mokler and Hernandez, Fine and Rosenberg, 1983; 262)

Fine and Rosenberg found that students who dropped out came disproportionately from the social classes, races, and ethnic groups most alienated from schools. For minority students, they believe:

standard curricula tend not to reflect their lived experiences, nor provide much encouragement for their pursuit of education. (Also) teachers hold disproportionately low expectations and students often recognize the formal promise of mobility as an illusion (p.269-270).

Larsen and Shertzer found that there is despair among minority students as to their place in society. They point out that these students know that with or without a high school diploma, their chances at success in the "real world" is still less than their white

counterparts.(Larsen and Shertzer, 1987; 166)

Fine and Rosenberg also stressed that the effect of the school experience and contradictions in the society interact to provide minority students with little hope for a bright future. They feel that by characterizing these students as "loosens", society excuses itself from its responsibility. It allows the schools to fail in carrying out their duty and for policy makers to disregard minority dropouts as unimportant. Since these students have rejected one of the most important institutions in the society, policy-makers and social scientists can dismiss them and their concerns. However, Fine and Rosenberg argue that disregarding these critics of the education system exasperates the problem. They believe that students see through the lie that education leads to equalization or raised economic status. Students, they suggest . . . "are most aware that class and race are better predictors of one's employment and income prospects in (North American) culture (Fine and Rosenberg, 1983; 270).

### ***Exploring Solutions:***

Those researchers who saw high school as a structurally-driven issue note that "the intent (to address the problem) is noble, but the results have been negligible because the focus on social, family and personal characteristics does not carry any obvious implications for shaping school policy and practice . . ." (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; 376). Mokler and Hernandez, (1987) pointed to the difficulties associated with formulating policy solutions which could impact the mix of influences associated with dropping out. They suggest that "as long as we look at the dropout problem in isolation, we won't be able to

understand it or solve it" (Mokler and Hernandez, 1987; 14). Ekstrom et al. attempts to identify major issues for attention:

no single program or policy can meet the needs of the diverse dropout population. Three major types of programs are needed: (1) programs to help pregnant teens remain in school; (2) programs to help youth with economic needs combine work and education; and (3) programs directed toward students who perform poorly because **they are dissatisfied with the school environment** . . . (Ekstromm, et al. 1986; 371)

Gray (1987) suggests early identification combined with guidance and high expectations as possible ways to prevent alienation and thus dropping out. She suggests:

. . . to reverse the trends (of dropping out), children need academic encouragement in elementary and middle school and need to . . . envision going to college after high school as an expectation for themselves (Gray, 1987; 2).

Henry (1986) supports the early identification through lower grade level attention to motivation. She notes that "experiments have shown that early childhood education of high quality can give children the skills and attitudes needed for success in school and life" (Henry, 1986; 13). The Ohio State Department of Education (1983) study, concurs.

They suggest that:

districts and practitioners should not develop dropout profiles for secondary students only. The most effective dropout prevention efforts begin at the elementary levels. Potential dropouts can be identified as early as the first grade. (OSDE, 1983; 6)

*Fox's Potential Early Leaver Profile* was suggested as an effective instrument for identifying students who are at risk of alienation and dropout. This instrument is user-friendly since it is easily administered, interpreted, and scored (OSDE, 1983; 7).

Emotional support and teacher bonding are cited as important for nurturing children at risk of alienation. (North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction [NCS DPI] 1985, 22; Pittman 1986, 11). Some researchers suggested that educators (must) demonstrate feelings of love and approval toward potential dropouts, (thereby) letting them know that they are **valuable, important individuals** (Beck and Muia, 1980; 72) Bearden, Spencer and Morracco (1989) stressed "raised expectation" and supported by Gray (1987, 2). Many researchers agreed that effective dropout prevention programs, and nurturing should begin as soon as the child enters school. This should be accompanied by raised expectations and acknowledgement of the dignity and worth of all students (Bearden, Spencer, and Morracco, 1989; 117-120; Rumberger, 1987; 117).

Rumberger also listed elements needed to develop a successful strategy of dropout prevention and recovery. These include:

(a) different programs designed for different types of dropouts; (b) an appropriate mix of educational and non-educational services in each program; (c) accurate and timely identification of students with a high risk of dropping out; and (d) programs designed for early prevention, late prevention and recovery" (Rumberger, 1987; 116).

If incorporated, these "programs" should be monitored for effectiveness. Evaluations must be able to determine whether outcome was actually caused by the program or caused by something else. Policy makers would know if a program is effective if the following "outcomes" are achieved, (1) a reduced incidence of dropping out among the target population; (and) (2) improvements in the known correlates (eg.) -- student involvement or academic performance (Rumberger, 1987; 117).

Pittman also, favours early identification and treatment. He proposes that, there must be an effort to improve the academic success of identified students through alternative programs and through increasing the instructional skills of teachers. These "alternative programs" should be combined with extra counselling to help potential dropouts remain connected to the system. Gray (1987), concurs with the early identification preventative program, especially when combined with early guidance (Gray, 1987; 2). Individual caring is seen to be important. Some suggest that dropout programs at all levels should emphasize personal, affective approaches, because there can be no substitute for adults. Acknowledgement of the students should be shown by knowing their names, asking about their lives, assigning homework, grading homework, and returning homework (Mann 1986, 318; NCSDPI, 1985; Pittman 1986, 10-11).

### ***Programs to Prevent Dropping Out:***

Two drop-out preventative programs were evaluated by researchers mentioned in the previous section. The first evaluation was undertaken by Richard Mauer in 1982, and involved a program implemented in New York State. Mauer concludes that this program was very effective and implementable in other schools.

New York school district and state authorities for education were perplexed by the rising dropout rate. Authorities voted to demand a 90% retention rate from all 1200 public and non-public high schools in the state (Mauer, 1982; 470). In an attempt to meet these new policy requirements, one school district came up with *Project Intercept*.

The school picked to launch the program was described by Mauer as having a history of persistent violence and a high dropout rate of six percent, and rising at one half of a percentage point each year (Mauer, 1982; 470). The school also recorded a high suspension rate; 27 out of every 100 students were being suspended. Violence included verbal and physical attacks on teachers and other students. Teachers and the community at large were happy to entertain changes. (Mauer, Ibid.)

The school board targeted four areas for change; in-service training for the teaching staff, alternative academic programs were developed for "high risk" potential dropouts, students were trained in social and interpersonal skills, and, families were provided with intervention training to assist the students in keeping up with the changes made at school. (Mauer, 1982; 470).

Fifteen teachers **volunteered** to participate in an intensive thirty-hour training program and were ultimately "significantly better able to incorporate into their classrooms those techniques of discipline, classroom management, and instruction that research has identified as effective in changing student performance" when placed with high-risk students (Mauer, 1982; 470). A control group was left without the benefit of these trained teachers. This step was replicated the second and third years. The retraining of parents was started in the second year.

According to Mauer, the results showed significant success. The first result showing

the effectiveness of *Project Intercept* is the "fact that the school dropout rate decreased from 6.4% to 3.3% ( $p < .001$ ) (p.471). Most pertinent to the questions asked by an evaluation, Mauer reported that the dropout rate for the students in the "treatment group" was 3% while that for the "control group" was an astounding 32%. Similarly, the other school related "predictors" also showed significant changes. For example, the absence rate for students in the program decreased by 16%, the failure rate decreased by 52%, and the suspension rate for the entire school dropped by 71% (Mauer, 1982;471).

the training provided the teachers with the necessary competencies to establish a therapeutic remedial academic program for a large number of disruptive potential dropouts. These alternative programs allowed the regular teaching staff to be freed from those few disruptive students who had disrupted so many classrooms. By training families, the project staff reinforced the changes taking place in school, helped parents to deal more effectively with all of their children, and garnered solid community support. (Mauer, 1982; 471).

Beck and Muia (1980) investigated the *School to Aid Youth Program*. It was implemented to help children in the first, second, and third grades. The purpose of the program was to identify the potential dropout early and to provide (them) with many success experiences in order to improve (their) feelings about school and themselves (Beck and Muia, 1980; 71). While this program aimed at early identification and treatment some researchers dispute the possibility that dropouts can be identified at this early stage. All students, some argue, begin school life with hope of graduating (Wehlage and Rutter, 1986; 385)

Ontario, Canada, has been experimenting with strategically located programs to decrease the instances of drop out among racial minority youth. The *Change Your Future Project*, a joint initiative by the provincial departments of Citizenship and Education targets low risk minority youth who are assessed to be potential drop-outs. Parental and community involvement was an early goal of this project. Students receive counselling about work and study habits, and are on occasion placed in community work sites which purportedly give them work skills and money. The work skills are tangential. The strength of this initiative is the specialized attention targeted youth obtain from counsellors who resource the day-to-day aspects of the project. Its primary weakness is the focus on personal dysfunction of students and the negation of the real institutional dysfunctions which prevail in schools and within educational policies. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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## **The 1993/95 Black High School Drop Out Study**

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **The Research Sample and Interview Process:**

Structured survey questionnaires were administered to three hundred and thirty nine (339) respondents from four geographic urban centres in Ontario. Of the completed questionnaires, three hundred and thirty three (334) were useable. Six were sufficiently incomplete to be considered void. Respondents were interviewed in Windsor, Metropolitan Toronto, Ottawa Carleton and Hamilton-Wentworth.

This convenience sample was obtained by canvassing community recreational areas, shopping malls, the streets, teen social events, high density neighbourhoods, youth job-training programs and youth hostels. The initial plan to obtain names of recent dropouts from Boards of Education had to be abandoned because Boards did not/could not adequately support the study. Some had difficulty identifying Black students, others claimed that they had no way of tracking dropouts. Only one Board of Education supplied a mailing list of recent dropouts. Fifty letters were mailed to names randomly selected from the mailing list, but this method yielded only one respondent.

The mix in the neighbourhoods, community locations and hang-out areas where respondents were found provided a varied sample which included youth exhibiting more

structured life scripts (engaging in job training), and also those leading more unstructured life styles (hanging out in malls/unemployed). All respondents were out of school for no more than one year. They were either very recent dropouts (2-3 months), or slightly longer out-of-schoolers (6-7 months). Research outreach workers conducted a short pre-interview to ascertain that the respondent had not previously completed the questionnaire, and, that they had genuinely dropped out of school.

All research outreach workers were trained in administering the questionnaire. Because of the uncertainty regarding literacy levels of the respondents, each structured instrument was administered. The respondents signed consent forms which were read to them, and which they also read, and engaged in a one-time 50-60 minute interview with the research outreach worker. Some were interviewed at first contact. Because of the length of the questionnaire others agreed to return to a pre-arranged interview site. No tape recording was done. No financial compensation was given to respondents for the interview; all interviews were voluntary. In some cases, transit tickets were given to those who agreed to return to a pre-arranged interview site. All interviews occurred between June 1993 and December 1994.

The survey instrumentation yielded **215 variables**, derived from **99 questions** which fall into **four subject areas**. The structured instruments contain questions regarding the respondents **experiences in school** for the four years preceding drop out, their **experiences in the family**, their **experiences in the wider community** and their knowledge of their **parents experiences and involvement with their schools**.

## **Data Analysis:**

Data Analysis appears in **Section 1 and Section II**. Responses from the questionnaires were loaded into an SPSS/PC+ system software package. A frequencies report provided first run analysis. More in-depth analyses can include bi-variate and multi-variate cross tabulations. Cumulative descriptive analysis for each of the four sections of the survey provides cohort profiles in **Section 1**. These are presented as self perceptions based on recent and immediate environmental experiences and reflections about how they fitted into school, community and home life during the period which span the years leading up to drop out. Information is also included on immediate life circumstances.

Cross tabulations of responses from the four sections of the survey provide information about the cumulative affects of home, community and school life experiences in **Section II**. Since many respondents left home and school at about the same time, their relationships with families changed at the same time when their official status as students changed. At the time of the survey, many were able to retrospectively examine the life changes they initiated through dropping out of school and family. From these retrospective self-analyses we are able to obtain information on post drop out group status. The data analyses provide useful information about the youth dropout culture and the perceptions of the youths who lose their attachment to structured education and family life.

## **Section 1:**

### **Cumulative Descriptive Analysis of School Life**

Slightly more than fifty percent of all respondents were male (55.6%), and 42.3% were females. The most common age group of respondents was the sixteen to twenty age group. The median age was between ages seventeen and eighteen; age 23 represents the mode age.

Eighty seven percent (87%) of respondents spent most of their school life in Canada. The next higher percentile group were newer immigrants with 4.8% spending most school years in Jamaica, 3.9% in other Caribbean nations and 2.7% with most school years in the United States. The majority of respondents both immigrant and native born saw themselves as average social persons since 50% made new friends at a pace they were comfortable with (average pace). However, considering the importance of peer-group affiliation for pre-teens and teenagers, 15% made friends slower than most and it might be expected that this group existed in a more marginal social sphere.

The rate at which respondents made friends at school does not relate to the rate at which they adjusted institutionally. While most saw themselves as average social persons, the majority of immigrants adjusted quite slowly to the Canadian school system. 10.6% of immigrant students experienced extreme difficulty in adjusting to Canadian schools, and 42.5% experienced difficulty. Fifty three (53%) of immigrant students, then, experienced an adjustment process that was difficult to extremely difficult. Overall, most

immigrant students chose other Black students as their first friends; 71.7% chose Blacks and 27.4% chose whites as their first friends. Of the latter, it is not known what percentage of the schools' populations were Black.

Most immigrant students entered the Canadian school system between grades 1-8 with (60%) and grades 9-11 (40%). The majority entered Canadian schools with high esteem. 79.1% thought of themselves as bright students, with only 20% having doubt about their academic ability. Their perceptions about themselves changed over time; 16.5% felt they were smarter after entering the Canadian school system, 13% felt worse -- that they were "dumber" than they first thought, and 68.7% felt their ability was unchanged.

Some of the explanation for the changed feelings about their academic ability can be attributed to their grade assignments in the Canadian school system. 35.5% were placed in grades lower than they expected they should, with most, 63.6%, approving of their initial grade assignment. Of those placed in grades other than their expectations, 31% had no reaction, or said that they did not care, with 23% expressing regret, or said they felt badly about their grade placement.

The first indication of the level of communication which existed between respondents and their parents appears in the question about grade assignments. 29.5% of respondents said their parents did not care about the inappropriate grade assignment, 16.4% said their parents felt bad about the placement, and 45.9% said their parents were pleased about their initial grade assignment.

When immigrants and non-immigrants perceptions are combined, approximately 50% of all respondents (330) said that in their views their teachers showed poor understanding about their academic abilities. Thirty percent (30%) saw their teachers as encouraging; more than 60% held the view that their teachers did not encourage them to do their best. Only 23% thought that teachers gave their parents an accurate account about their progress; 38% was of the opinion that teachers did not accurately inform their parents about their progress. Only 17% thought felt that their teachers had a nice caring relationship with them, and 20% were of the view that teachers made suggestions to their parents for their improvement. Nearly 80% were either ambivalent or disagreed that teachers gave directions to their parents regarding their academic improvement. However, the issue of parental involvement in their school lives will be discussed more fully below.

The matter of poor teacher/student relationships was a recurring theme in all of the literature reviewed above, and especially in the reports of the CAFE focus groups held with approximately 300 Black students still attending high school in 1992. In this survey only 4.8% of students clearly agreed that their teachers treated all students fairly. Nearly 38% only barely agreed with the view that teachers were fair in their dealings with students, and nearly 24% had no opinion. Slightly more than thirteen percent (13.3%) were strongly of the view that teachers did not treat everyone fairly, and slightly more than 12% had some doubts about teachers' fairness. Their opinions were no better about principals. Only 5.4% thought that their most recent Principal cared equally about all students, with most either ambivalent about or doubting the caring behaviour of their principals.

The frequent complaint by Black students that they were often encouraged into sports rather than academics was borne out by 14% of respondents. But only 21% were clear that this was not the case. Others reflected degrees of agreement and disagreement. The fact that 21% had no opinion may be explainable by gender differences to be discussed below.

Parental involvement in schools has been central to much of the discussion of Blacks in the school system. From the perspective of the respondents principals did not encourage parental involvement in their schools. Only 6.4% shared the view that principals encouraged parental participation. But principals fared better in the relational perceptions of the students. Nearly 50% thought that principals were somewhat caring with 5.5% expressing a strong view that they had caring principals. A significant 45% had somewhat positive feelings about the fairness of their Principals, with 5.8% strongly agreeing that principals were fair. However, another twenty percent (20%) held clear views that their Principals were unfair.

The perceptions of respondents with regard to Vice-principals were similar to those of Principals. On the whole respondents thought that Vice-principals were more than less caring with 8% in strong agreement that VPs were caring. Nearly 18%, however, felt differently; believing that their Vps were uncaring. Fifty-seven percent (57%) compared to twenty-five percent (25%) thought that VPs were more interested in their academic progress than in their involvement in sports. Only 25% thought their VPs were more

interested in their athletic rather than academic experiences. On the other hand, 37% were of the view that VPs did not encourage their parents to become involved in their school lives. Just over 50% thought of VPs as caring, with the opposite view held by 27%.

Most respondents (70.4%) gave first thought to quitting school in grades 8-11. However, 6% first thought of quitting in grades six and seven. Most quitting decisions or first thoughts occurred when respondents were between 14-16 years of age. However, 8% gave first thought to quitting when they were ages 10-13. Most respondents (62%) quit school in grades 10 and 11; another 8.6% quit in grade 9, and 12.5% quit in grade 12.

Rewards for academic accomplishments in school were rare for most. 75% never received an award for academic accomplishment, but a surprising 24.3% received awards at some time in their school years. On the other hand, 39.2% received awards for athletic or extra-curricular accomplishment. Most students had a pattern of skipping classes. However, the frequencies are low with the majority skipping no more than eight classes.

Discipline emerged as significant with 54.8% facing suspension at least once but 44.3% never having been suspended. More serious problems were faced by 17.3% who were expelled; 23% of those expelled cited fighting as the infraction, with only 2 respondents expelled for not attending school, and 3 for skipping classes. In spite of disciplinary problems and the general state of marginalization for many, some functioned with degrees of integration for at least some of the time. Of the total respondents, 78.2% had never been in any leadership role in their school, however, 21% reported having been

in some leadership capacity of a school team or club.

Not unlike youth of their age group, most respondents relied heavily on peer-group support. When difficulties arose in their lives the majority turned to friends for guidance and support. Only 8.2% turned to parents or guardians for help. Of the 45.3% which turned to friends for guidance, 50% reported getting useful assistance or help. This means that half of all respondents who required help with difficult problems were not able to find that assistance. Five percent of all respondents showed independence by attempting to sort out problems on their own; this group turned to no one for help.

The common assumption about high school drop-outs is that most encounter academic difficulties. In this study only 29% ever repeated grades in school; seventy (70%) reported never having had to repeat a grade. Grades 9 and 10 were grades most repeated. Most respondents who repeated grades did not feel bad about having to do so. In only 50% of cases of grade repeaters did respondents believe that their parents were concerned; 37% reported that in their view their parents did not care about the repeated grade. In addition, most respondents were placed in general (64%) rather than basic (11%) course levels. A striking 25% were in advanced levels.

In spite of the relatively high percentage of dropouts in this study who were placed in advanced levels, only 6.7% of all respondents categorized "classes" as the most enjoyable experience in their school lives. Aspects most enjoyed included friends, by 54% and sports, by 19%. Least enjoyed were teachers, by only 1.2% of all respondents

(N=328). When new variables are added and the aspects re-labeled "disliked most" teachers still emerged as the most disliked by 32.6%, classes by 24% and a feeling of failure by 22%. Another 13% most disliked feelings of isolation -- of not belonging.

Most respondents, 58% regretted leaving school prematurely; another 45% had no regrets. In another section of the survey, when the question is asked more directly, only 3.8% of dropouts expressed extreme satisfaction with their decision to quit school. No one reason for their regret was statistically significant. Most (89.3%), however, would like to see more Black teachers at their schools. More than half of all respondents (59.4%) had never had Black teachers at their school. And considering the importance stressed in the literature regarding bonding with teachers, more than half of all respondents never had a favourite teacher of any ethno-specific group.

Of those who had favourite teachers (48%), the latter tended to teach Math and English. However, favourite teachers did not always increase learning enjoyment. Only 31% of those with favourite teachers found learning the related subjects simpler. Other attributes of favourite teachers included, getting help when needed, being nice to, and patient with students, showing interest in their work and working with them.

Problems which were significant for these respondents in their final year at school were, complete boredom in classes (57%), economic problems (43%), feelings of victimization -- teachers seemed to have something against them (38%), problems with school work (34%), trouble with the law (33%), friends were all in higher grades (21%),

unplanned pregnancies (26%) and racially motivated incidents (22%).

Academic achievement output changed for many respondents in the transition from elementary to secondary school. The majority 48%, performed at the Grade "C" level in elementary school, with 40% still performing at the "C" level in high school. However, there was a lowering of performance level for many. Of the 42% which performed at the "A-B" level in elementary school, only 23% were still performing at the "A-B" level in high school. A significant change occurred in high school where many more (31%) functioned at the grade "D" level than in elementary school (10%).

The majority of respondents (34%) did not find the first year of high school difficult. The social climate in high school was, however, important for most. More than half of this sample (57%) felt that the most important factor in their "perceived ideal" school would be teachers who were **free of racial biases**. When first and second factor preferences are combined, this aspect (racism-free teachers) become the ideal preference for 70% of the respondents. Other "**most important factors**" in the ideal school include high expectations from teachers (23%) and caring and nice teachers (26%).

Curriculum issues were also important for many. The majority (51%) viewed the "ideal curriculum" as one which was interesting; when first and second preference factors are combined for interesting curriculum, this becomes important for 65% of respondents. Others (26%), see the inclusion of Black history and good preparation for the work force as equally important in the ideal curriculum. However, when first and second ideal factors

are combined for Black history, this increases as the choice of 57%, and of 48% for workforce preparation.

Ideal student population, most said, should be free of racism (34%). When a racism-free student body as first and second choices are combined, it becomes an important preference for 55% of respondents. Other important elements in the ideal student body are non-violence (36%) and Black students (33%). If the first and second choices for Black student body are combined this becomes important for 50% of respondents. Combining of the first and second preferences for non-violence makes this important for 59% of the sample.

Only 4% of respondents told their parents about their decision to drop out of high school; most (67%), told friends. Another 20% made the decision without telling anyone. An insignificant number confided in siblings. The fact that students made such important decisions without parental advice is instructive. The survey attempted to explore family relations, with a focus on parental involvement in the educational lives of respondents. The next section of the survey examines the respondents relationships within their families.

### **Cumulative Descriptive Analysis of Self and Home Circumstances:**

The majority of respondents are Canadian by birth (62.5%), with the next higher group being immigrants from the Caribbean (25.7%). Just over eight percent of

respondents were born in Africa, approximately 5% were born in the United States and two percent were born in Europe. Most respondents are members of families of average family size with one or two siblings. Some families are reconstituted with sixteen percent declaring step-brothers, and seventeen percent declared the presence of step-sisters. Only 23.4% of respondents lived with both parents at the time of the survey. Of those who still lived "at home" 30.3% lived with mothers, 3.8% lived with fathers and 14.6% lived with grandmothers. The largest percentage (49%) reported living in other arrangements. More than half of all respondents reported having other relatives close by. However, more than 50% reported minimal (hardly ever) contact with these relatives.

More than sixty percent of respondents are first generation Canadians with their birth mothers and birth fathers originating in the Caribbean. Approximately 22% are children of Canadian mothers, and 15.8% reported fathers who are Canadian by birth. Another larger group, more than 60%, are second generation Canadians with grandparents having the Caribbean as their birth country.

More than half of respondents (56.3%) reported having mothers who were employed, and 68% reported employed fathers. Service and health care work was the popular occupation for mothers with technical and management jobs as the popular occupational areas for fathers.

Economic lure was not the primary reason for dropping out of school; only 26% of respondents had jobs before quitting. Of those that had jobs, 83% were part-time

occupations. Most worked between 15-20 hours each week. The majority of employed drop-outs reported being satisfied with the amount of responsibility they were given on their jobs. However, 51% of respondents said they would consider returning to school if they had more money. Other possible factors which would variously influence their return include having a choice in their schools and being able to attend school by night.

Most respondents reported average to poor relationships with their parents. At the two extremes of relationships, 24% reported excellent to pretty good relations, and 35% reported pretty bad to horrible relations. However, 40.1% said they enjoyed average relationships with parents.

Most dropouts (50%) said communication with their parents was average to easy. Another 47% said talking with their parents was either difficult or extremely difficult. Still, however, only 14% said that encouragement from parents would make them return to school. Friends had marginally greater persuasion; only 17% would return to school on the encouragement from friends.

The average state of affairs which existed in most respondents lives (average relations with parents, on the job satisfaction) stands in contrast with their social standing in the community. Nearly half of all respondents (48.3%) reported being in trouble with the law. Approximately 23% of offenders were placed in group homes following their experiences with the law. In 91% of cases parents sought professional assistance for them following their incidents. Most parents also set guidelines, attended court with them

and found them legal assistance when they were in trouble. However, 85.6% said their parents (also, ultimately) kicked them out following their stint with breaking the law. Seven percent of respondents said their parents did nothing on their behalf after they got into trouble with the law.

### **Cumulative Descriptive Analysis of Parents' Involvement with Schools:**

Parents are overwhelmingly distant from schools and other community organizations, according to respondents. The majority have parents who "rarely" visited schools. Approximately 22% of parents visited their children's schools once each year; another 68% never visited, and only 6% of parents visited schools about once each month. In the majority of cases parents did not attend social functions at schools, and did not telephone schools. Overwhelmingly, dropouts reported that their parents were neither members of community organizations nor parent groups. This distancing from institutional life was reflected by the majority of respondents; 71.4% reported they rarely visited the library, 7.6% went to the library at least once each year and another 10.3% went once each month. However, 10.3% used the library once each week.

Written communication with schools was more frequent. Approximately 46% of parents received letters from schools; behaviour and attendance were the most frequent subjects of written communication. However, according to respondents, parents rarely sent return letters to schools. In addition, in the view of respondents, their parents either disliked visiting schools or were indifferent to this task (disliked 28.7%; indifferent 22.8%; really disliked 16.5%; absolutely hated visiting 17.2%; liked visiting schools 11.6%; really

liked visiting 2%). Correspondingly; parents were rarely among those to whom youth turned for advice; friends were often used as sounding boards. Only 4.4% of respondents told parents of their decision to quit school. On the whole, most respondents were of the view that their parents knew relatively little about the school system.

### **Cumulative Descriptive Analysis of Respondents Community Involvement:**

Out-of-school summer-time for most respondents was divided between low-skilled work and recreation. Very few participated in the more economically privileged activities such as organized summer camps. Others (21%) reported attending summer school on occasion. The majority do not attend church. Their supportive attachment in their communities is limited. In spite of difficulties with their academic lives only 10% ever had the assistance of a tutor, and 21% never thought they needed one. However, many were visited by the police (42.2%) and by social workers (30.2%). And, although many females left school because of pregnancies only 17 respondents in total were ever visited by a public health nurse.

Assumptions regarding premature school departure because of peer-group influence are not validated in this survey. The majority of respondents (74.1%) reported that most of their friends are still in school. In section 1 (School Life) of the analysis above, respondents also reported that one reason for dropping out was because their friends had move ahead into higher grades.

This survey also calls into question the notion of **dropout**. Most respondents

(71.4%) have reported a plan/desire to return to school. A significant 34% would like to be preparing for college in one year's time. Another 5% plan to take night classes. The latter is consistent with replies in other sections of the report where they identified access to night school, and choice of school as incentives to returning to education. It would seem then that while all respondents were out of school as dropouts at the time of the survey, their cognitive connection to education was active.

In assessing their social and educational environments as a whole, approximately 46% of respondents experienced slight to extreme racial intolerance. However, 49% of respondents found their neighbourhoods and schools to be average in tolerance; they did not see racism as a significant issue. In the analysis of ***school life*** above, most reported that the ideal school environment should be one free of racial bias. The majority (38%) also reported (in that section of the survey) feelings of victimization. Most also reported having Black friends.

The respondents see themselves as average social beings. In evaluating their social relationships they are of the view that they "get along" with both Blacks and Whites. However, while an insignificant .3% (one respondent) has poor relations with Black people, an instructive 15.3% reported bad to terrible relations with white people. Since most educators and educational administrators are white, social relations would have been problematic for the 15.3% of dropouts who reported bad to terrible relations in general, with whites. In addition, at least for this population, social relations in schools with majority white populations would have been negative. Of related significance is the large number

of respondents (38.3%) who reported feelings of victimization by teachers (teachers seem to have something against me). Many also reported cultural alienation through non-representative/non-inclusive curriculum.

### **GENERAL DISCUSSION:**

Taken together we now have impressions from over 600 Black youth regarding their educational experiences. The cumulative impressions of the sample in this survey (N=334) and the 1991/2 *Sharing the Challenge* focus groups respondents (N=345) of Black high school students converge into significant findings. Both phases of the ongoing research permit us to obtain first hand impressions of the felt experiences of Black youth.

Racial identity issues emerge as important factors in the learning comfort of both groups. Both groups reported major dissatisfactions with unrepresentative curriculum, uneasiness with the racial climate and poor social relations with predominantly white teachers. Relatedly, more than 60% of survey respondents reported boredom with their classes and 34% were failing. Both groups reported that an increase in the number of Black teachers, a racism free climate, and the presence of "caring" teachers would maximize their educational experiences.

However, socio-economic factors are also important. A significant number reported economic problems as a reason for leaving school. The majority of respondents lived with mothers and grandmothers. The occupational classification of mothers suggest that they

are in lower income groups than fathers. Therefore, when respondents' parents' economic participation patterns by occupation and employment stability are examined we note that most may be categorized as working class to poor. While the lure towards money, or the perception of money is indeed a school incompleteness stimulus in many other research findings, other factors are instructive.

One American researcher postulated that students dropout to avoid (escape from) daily reminders of their economic deprivation. However, in this survey 26% of respondents had part-time jobs before quitting school; they quit school in spite of their jobs. In addition, many poor students stay in school, and many who drop out are not poor. Poverty or the perception of poverty has differential effects upon young adults. If poverty exists alongside other deficits such as family fragmentation and tensions, and social isolation in school, it is reasonable to suggest that the cumulative effect upon young adults will be overwhelming. In such cases part-time work may not be sufficient to offset the combination of poverty and stressful social relations. Dropout may well be seen as a reasonable response (not solution) to all immediate life stressors.

Therefore, it remains difficult to put money into accurate context with their drop-out decision since at the time of the interviews most dropouts were unemployed. This means that they were enduring at least four life-stress situations at the time of the interview: lack of sufficient money; lack of success in school; family dis-communication (and possibly membership); abrupt change of social status (student to non-student). It may be reasoned then that the dislocation from the structure of school and family and the inability to make

meaningful attachment to the workforce created significant psycho-social needs which, for them, were easier to conceptualize as a financial need.

The reality is perhaps much more complex than the linearity suggested by financial need. In **Sections 1, 2 & 4** of the survey respondents expressed needs for affective domain comforts. They expressed a need for caring relationships with teachers, a continuing need for comfort-inducing stability and antagonistic-free social environments. Taken together, these are expressions of unmet needs in the continuing process of post-adolescence to early adulthood development. Given the added factor of tentative inter-racial dynamics it is not reasonable to expect schools to transform sufficiently in the near future in ways which could give Black students such socio-emotional supports. The Black community should have a significant role to play in this regard.

An alarming percentage of dropouts also confronted legal issues. There appears to be coincidence between the periods of dropping out and leaving home for many respondents. Unstable home relations and feelings of failure are not surprisingly related to problems with the law. On the other hand, conflicts with the law may well have been the stimulus for dislocation from both home and school. The American literature reviewed above also reflect similar relationships. It is not known how in-school cohorts compared on this factor since the "legal problems" question was not directly asked at the focus groups in 1991/92.

Since the indication in sections of the survey is that communication between young

Black adults and their parents is minimal, it is then not surprising that a relationship exists between getting into trouble and not residing at home. Because of their unpreparedness to stabilize in the labour market, fractures in their family and social processes places them at undue risks. Given the potential risks evident in the daily lives of young Blacks both in education and in society as a whole, intensive community dialogue is necessary to discuss alternative social supports for young Blacks; even those above the age of majority.

On the other hand, all drop outs were interviewed within one year of dropping out, and in general most respondents reported variations of positive aspirations. This sample, then, cannot be described as a lost generation at this time. They spoke about wanting to return to established life patterns in a number of ways (return to school, going to college, finding work, a desire for nurturing environments -- e.g. caring teachers). They also viewed themselves as average citizens; there were no indications of extremes in social relations. While many reported problems in relations with whites, most saw themselves as average in terms of social relations. This would suggest that in spite of the momentary negative experience of failure by dropping out, that appropriate community programming could still capture most dropouts before negative social experiences further alienate them.

When the focus groups cohort and the survey sample are combined, Black students have reported major dissatisfactions with schools and given indications of distancing in family relations. Many were failing and most reported boredom with school work. However, overwhelmingly, parents are not reported to be central in their educational lives; an insignificant number discussed issues or problems with parents. It is not known

if this situation changed as students matured. Parents, were not presented through their responses as significant others in their lives. The in-school cohort (1991/92) specifically stated that parents were not sufficiently involved in their lives. Family relations are problematic for most respondents of the combined study.

**BLACK HIGH SCHOOL DROP OUT RESEARCH**

**SECTION II**

**CHARTS AND CROSS TABULATIONS**