

CIVIL RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS OF MINORITY STUDENT DROPOUTS

**MICHIGAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TO THE UNITED STATES
COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS**

This summary report of the Michigan Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights was prepared for the information and consideration of the Commission. Statements and viewpoints in the report should not be attributed to the Commission or to the Advisory Committee, but only to individual participants in the community forum where the information was gathered.

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March 1990

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Michigan Advisory Committee to the
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
March 1990

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Attached for Commission review and action is a summary report of a community forum held in Detroit on May 5, 1989, to obtain information on the civil rights implications of minority student dropouts. The Committee voted 10 to 0 to approve submission of this report to you.

The report summarizes information received during background preparations and the community forum convened by the Advisory Committee. Every effort was made to include a diversity of viewpoints on the issues by inviting participation from local school officials, educators, State officials, and community organizations with opposing views on possible discrimination that may contribute to the disproportionately high dropout rates for minority students.

The Committee considers the views expressed as important and believes they should be shared with appropriate State and local officials and the general public.

The information provided does not result from exhaustive review of high school dropout issues in Michigan, but it does identify certain issues and concerns which the Advisory Committee may decide merit further investigation and analysis.

Respectfully,

/s/

Dennis L. Gibson, Jr., Chairperson
Michigan Advisory Committee

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Introduction

This report summarizes the Michigan Advisory Committee's community forum on the civil rights implications of minority student dropouts in Michigan, held in Detroit on May 5, 1989. The purpose of the forum was to receive information on possible discriminatory practices on the basis of race, color, or national origin that may be linked to minority student dropouts. Hopefully, this information will assist in better defining minority student dropout problems, in evaluating educational programs designed to address this issue, assessing progress made as a result of these efforts, and in correcting the underlying causes related to discrimination.

In October 1986 the State board of education declared the prevention of student dropouts as a priority issue. Of major concern was the disproportionate number of minority students represented in the dropout rates.¹ According to the most current data available, during the 1985-86 school year, the statewide average dropout rate for minority students was 12 percent for blacks, 10.9 percent for Hispanics, 5.9 percent for Native Americans, and 2.3 percent for Asian and Pacific Islanders. In comparison, the dropout rate for whites was 4.5 percent.² In response to this problem, public and private agencies established elaborate programs to address the issue of minority student dropouts. The Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks Initiative is a program established by the Michigan Department of Education to stem the decline in the number of minority students entering and graduating from college. This program also included the component, Achieve a College Education (ACE), that was developed to reduce the minority dropout rate in grades K-12.³

The Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation (MDYF), a not-for-profit youth serving agency also developed programs directed toward reducing minority student dropouts. The MDYF established two dropout prevention programs called Twelve Together and Project High Tech. Both programs have garnered the support of public and private organizations.⁴

The Detroit and Lansing school districts provided the focus of this forum from the perspective of local school districts. Both have significant numbers of minority students and are concerned about the high overall dropout rate among their students and the disproportionate degree to which minority students are represented in this problem. The two districts differ in that the Detroit district has a student body that is predominantly black and Hispanic and the Lansing district is more integrated, including large numbers of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students as well as whites.

Since the 1985-86 school year the districtwide dropout rate for the Lansing School District in grades 9-12 dropped from 10.8 percent to 7.9 percent. As of September 1988, the dropout rate for blacks was 7.0 percent, Hispanics 12.7 percent, Native Americans 13.3 percent, Asians 3.6 percent, and whites 7.6 percent. The most current data available from the Detroit Public Schools revealed that the overall dropout rate for grades 9-12 was 41.3 percent. Thirty-nine percent of the blacks who begin school drop out, 51.2 percent of the Hispanic, 46.1 percent of the Native Americans, 3.1 percent of the Asians, and 6.3 percent of the whites.

In an attempt to address this concern and to identify and ameliorate underlying problems that may stem from discrimination, both districts have initiated major dropout prevention programs.

Forum

The committee brought together 13 participants with different perspectives to share their views and opinions on the civil rights implications of minority student dropouts. The following segments of the community made formal presentations at the forum: (1) local educators, (2) academia, (3) State officials, (4) community-based organizations, (5) parents, and (6) students. Also, remarks made during the open session and noted in this report, provided significant insights on how discrimination contributes to the disproportionate dropping out of minority students.

Overview of the Problem

The following presenters began the forum with an overview of the problem as it pertained to black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students: Salome Grbre-Egziabher, University of Michigan, School of Education, Programs for Educational Opportunity; Antonio Flores, Hispanic Education, Michigan Department of Education; Beverly Clark, commissioner, Michigan Civil Rights Commission; and Dr. Lydia Beltrone, Professional Development and Human Rights, Michigan Education Association.

Salome Grbre-Egziabher stated that Michigan's overall dropout rate for black students is 36 percent and Hispanics 32 percent, while the white student dropout rate is 17 percent. She pointed out that in school districts such as the Detroit Public Schools (DPS), which are usually segregated on a de facto basis, the discrimination is not intentional but is "well-intended biased behavior" that has the same effect as discrimination. For example:

Studies in classroom interactions have documented that teachers usually will not ask questions of lower achieving children because the teacher does not want the child to be embarrassed or ridiculed in front of the other children. We mean to protect the child, but at the same time we are not encouraging the child to learn. Children cannot learn unless they can relate to others. This becomes very important in

terms of expectations. It's very unconscious, it's very well meant, but it is discriminatory. Teachers and school people need to be aware of those kinds of interactions.

She believed that current methods used to categorize and classify students are discriminatory. According to Ms. Grbre-Egziabher, systematic discrimination exists primarily in the area of tracking students and expectations. She asserted that expectations are related to self-esteem. The practice of tracking, classifying, and categorizing students impacts negatively on their self-esteem. Educators have been trained to have low expectations for certain minority groups. She described the problem of expectations as follows:

We label students when they come in and ask where do they come from--middle class, lower class, black, Hispanic. Our expectations then matches the label. They say that students who come from a lower socioeconomic status or a particular ethnic group are at risk, therefore, they may not achieve. We teach that expectation and children learn that much is not expected from them. It's good to classify, it's good to know weaknesses, but we should not use it as a means of teaching. It should not be a destiny. It should not be a permanent situation.

Ms. Grbre-Egziabher indicated that curriculum and course selection also contribute to discrimination. Most school enrollments show that blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans are not frequently referred to advanced courses. Although most Asians are placed in higher level courses in math and science, they complain of not being encouraged to pursue courses in literature and art because they are not expected to excel. She also reported that there are problems of fairness in the discipline practices applied to black and Hispanic students. Finally, she contended that there are major inequities in the revenues received by urban versus suburban school districts. Students who attend schools located in areas with low property values, mainly minority, do not receive the same level of financial support for their education as students who live in high property

rate areas, mainly nonminority. She maintained that the resulting differences ranging from \$6,000 to \$3,000 per student render it impossible to provide an opportunity for comparable services and support for minority students.

Ms. Grbre-Egziabher recommended the following for reducing discriminatory practices in schools that may lead to minority student dropouts: (1) training programs to modify school personnel's perceptions and attitudes regarding minority students' abilities to learn, (2) training programs to address fairness and cultural awareness of minority groups, (3) modification in curricula to address contributions by minorities, and (4) restructuring of State financing to ensure that minority students in urban schools receive comparable education and support to that received by students in suburban schools.

Antonio Flores, of the Michigan Department of Education, reported that the U.S. Department of Education recently released its Sixth Annual Report on Schools, which indicated that Michigan's graduation rates had decreased. According to Mr. Flores, Michigan dropped from 38 to 48 among the 50 States with respect to school graduation rates. Last year, almost 37 percent of those who entered 9th grade did not graduate.

Mr. Flores described a multiplicity of factors that have given rise to problems in urban schools. He said that the decline of white enrollments in large central city schools caused by white flight has produced racial segregation in schools. This phenomenon has eroded the value of real estate properties and the financial foundation of schools in urban areas. He believed that this situation has negatively affected the educational programs and services provided to minority students who predominate in these schools. He pointed out that there is a multiple correlation between

declining enrollments, resources for education, achievement rates, and increases in minority student dropouts.

Mr. Flores believed that areas of discrimination that may be factors in this problem are the negation of the linguistic and cultural background of children, particularly children from homes where a language other than English is the main mode of communication; community agencies that do not have the resources to address the minority community's needs; denial of educational opportunities for minority youth whose suspension and expulsion rates approach tragic levels due to obsolete or inappropriate school policies; overrepresentation of minority students in general education and obsolete vocational education programs; and the organization of schools with large minority enrollments on the basis of financial exigencies.

Other problems identified by Mr. Flores are the State's inadequate data collection and the reporting system used to identify dropouts. He said the State enacted a standard definition and procedure to identify student discontinuance, but the system is inadequate. A system should be developed that indicates why students drop out. All data should be collected annually and efforts should be made to provide school personnel in service on data collection and identification procedures for student dropouts. To ensure accurate data collection, periodic audits of the information should be made.

Mr. Flores believed that the best measures for attacking minority student dropouts are through solutions found in the home and school and through partnerships with civic and community groups. Partnership work with parents has been started in the Lansing School District (LSD) in the area of parental training. He also suggested that teachers should support

self-accountability for themselves, and civic and community leaders must take the lead in assisting schools to streamline their operations so that the bulk of school funds are channeled into the classrooms.

Beverly Clark, a commissioner with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission, provided information on the Native American student dropout problems. According to the Michigan 1980 census, of Native American adults who were 23 years of age and over, 43.8 percent have not graduated from high school, in comparison to 30.3 percent of similarly situated white adults in this age group. She reported that 3,614 Indians graduated from high school in 1979 but in 1982 the number dropped to 1,081.

Ms. Clark said that a report prepared by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission in 1984 indicated that Indian students suffer self-image problems in the school environment and that discrimination is a significant contributing factor to the dropout rate among Indian children. She stated that schools do not provide an environment in which Indian children are encouraged to learn and stay in school. One of the problems she cited is the lack of sensitivity to Indian culture and values in the school setting. She pointed out that negative teacher attitudes and expectations, curricula that rarely deal with the positive contributions of Indians, and channeling of Indian students into special education are barriers that deny them an equal education opportunity.

She reported that as Indians in Michigan have been successful in their court battles regarding Indian treaty rights, there has been an increase in the number of altercations between Indian and non-Indian students. She indicated that in 1984 complaints were reported to the Michigan Civil Rights Commission that Indian children in certain schools were being called "gill netters" by other children and no action was taken by school

authorities. She maintained that the problem of self-image is compounded by the use of Indian nicknames and logos depicting Indians as ferocious fighters with limited language skills. Recently the commission completed a study of school logos and found that the use of Indian images on school logos is stereotypic, racist, and discriminatory. She said the commission recommended that the use of Indian names and logos be discontinued by schools and it received favorable responses from school districts in eliminating such images from school materials and activities.

Ms. Clark indicated that unfair discipline practices of schools also contribute to Native American student dropouts. She expressed concern that there appears to be a systematic removal of Indian children from the regular school system by placing them in alternative schools, GED programs, and tribal schools.

Ms. Clark offered the following suggestions that would involve the joint efforts of the State of Michigan and the Federal Government in addressing the Indian dropout problem: (1) hold meetings with school officials and Indian representatives to discuss those factors which contribute to the dropout problem; (2) develop and implement inservice programs designed to inform and sensitize teachers, administrators, and non-Indian children about Indian culture and values; (3) take steps to ensure that school curricula, textbooks, and class discussions address Indian culture, values, and contributions; (4) monitor the disciplinary actions of schools to ensure that Indian students are not treated unfairly in the discipline administered; and (5) discontinue the use of Indian nicknames and logos in school materials and activities.

Lydia Beltrone, of the Michigan Education Association, said that the myth regarding the Asian American as the successful minority group has become a convenient rationale to bolster a policy of exclusion by government and nongovernment institutions. She indicated that there are many Asian American students who do not conform to this myth. Because of this myth she believed that the State's efforts to address minority group problems and remediation exclude Asian American concerns. Dr. Beltrone pointed out that the modern Asian American minority students such as the South Vietnamese, Hmong, Laotians, and Cambodians, are experiencing many difficulties in school that were not experienced by the first wave of Asians who arrived in this country. She attributes this difference to the higher educational level of the first wave of Asian immigrants.

Dr. Beltrone indicated that recently there have been reports of violence and racial harassment against Asian American students in schools. She cited an incident in which two Asian students of Chinese descent were taunted and attacked by other students. She contended that many school settings do not provide an atmosphere of inclusion for Asian students. She believed that the lack of knowledge and sensitivity to the uniqueness of Asian cultures and values are exacerbated by stereotypes, prejudice, and racism.

Dr. Beltrone stated that the National Education Association conducted a series of public hearings on the education of cultural minorities that addressed Asian American educational concerns. The following summarizes pertinent findings and conclusions from those hearings: (1) there is a need to clarify the literacy differences between the first and second waves of Asian American immigrants and refugees; (2) Asian American students are often mistakenly diagnosed and placed in special education; (3) there is a

need for adequate bilingual support and services for Asian American students in local schools; (4) we must eliminate cultural bias in textbooks; (5) we must provide inservice training regarding intergroup relations and Asian cultures; (6) we must eliminate the unfair application of discipline policies; and (7) more adequate responses to reported racial incidents in the schools are needed. In sum, Dr. Beltrone suggested:

The educational system should recognize the current population diversity in our schools and revamp curricular offerings to acknowledge the existence of a multicultural and multilingual student body. Back to basics should mean not a refocus on the monocultural design based on the dominant European culture but on a redesign of the system to meet the changing societal needs.

Statewide Perspectives

A statewide review of the minority dropout problem was provided by: Dr. Eugene Cain, assistant superintendent, Office of School and Community Affairs, Michigan Department of Education; Dr. Eugene Henderson, Jr., ombudsman, Office of Minority Equity, Michigan Department of Education; and Dr. John W. Dobbs, executive director, Urban Education Alliance.

Dr. Cain stated that since the 1962-63 school year, the Michigan Department of Education has surveyed high school dropout rates. To date, approximately 800,000 students have been reported as school dropouts. The Department of Education's last survey in FY 1985-86 indicated that 27,804 students in grades 9-12 dropped out of school. The dropout rate was highest among blacks followed by Hispanics, Native Americans, whites, and Asians, respectively. The average annual overall dropout rate was 5.8 percent, meaning that about 23 percent of students entering the ninth grade will not complete their high school education. Dr. Cain pointed out that the dropout rates are higher in urban school districts with large minority enrollments.

He said that there are a variety of reasons for student dropouts. The common reasons given by students, parents, and school officials are employment, illness, physical or mental handicap, limited English abilities, low achievement, low self-esteem, attendance, chronic truancy, pregnancy, and poverty. He believed that the dropout issue is not solely a school problem but is a situation tied to virtually all institutions in our society. Dr. Cain contended that Michigan's minority student dropout rate will decrease when the achievement of minority students increases. He believed that many minorities who experience academic problems visualize dropping out as early as the third and fourth grade. He suggested that the following efforts must be made in the schools to increase the achievement levels of minority students and reduce their dropout rates: (1) emphasis on basic skills at the elementary and middle school levels; (2) early identification of skill deficits; (3) more available early childhood education programs; (4) provision of adequate student support services; (5) emphasis on developing identity and self-esteem in students; (6) dedicated and skilled staff; (7) strong and imaginative leadership at the building school level; (8) a commitment to changing programs, classes and techniques that do not result in improved achievement; (9) adequate financial resources; and (10) active and meaningful community participation in the total school program.

Dr. Cain reported that ongoing efforts to address student dropouts are underway. The State has invested more than \$43 million in various dropout prevention programs. In February 1987 a report was prepared by the Department of Education for the State legislature called "School Dropouts in Michigan: A Report to the State Legislature and a Proposal for the Review and Study of School Dropouts." The Governor's Human Service Cabinet

also conducted a study, "Michigan Youth Dropout Prevention and Dropout Services Report," that identifies exemplary dropout prevention programs in the State. In 1986 the Office of School and Community Affairs conducted a study on Hispanic student dropouts called "Hispanic School Dropouts and Hispanic Student Performance on the MEAP Tests." This report provided an indepth study of the dropout syndrome among Hispanic students and recommendations for action. In 1988 the Michigan Interagency Committee prepared a report on the black student called "The Black Child in Crisis Report." This report is an evaluation and analysis of the alarming decline of the quality of life for the black child. One of the issues reported on was the incidence of dropouts among black students. Some of the pertinent recommendations were: (1) the legislature should amend the State school code to include a uniform definition of a school dropout, making it easier to determine how many students actually drop out; (2) the State Board of Education should analyze the effect of the compulsory school attendance law on the dropout problem; (3) local school districts should eliminate school practices that "push students out"; and (4) the Department of Education, with the assistance of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights, should monitor the suspension and expulsion of minority students. In this same report, it was noted that specific curriculum problems exist that affect the quality of education received by black students. These include the following: black students are given fewer opportunities to participate in advanced and enriched courses; black students are overrepresented in vocational education programs, therefore, they are less likely to have adequate English, mathematics, and science backgrounds; black students are less likely to have the most trained and competent instructors due to distinct teacher salary differences between urban and suburban school

districts; and classes in urban schools in comparison to suburban schools are often watered down, ill focused, partially covered, and void of challenging activities.⁹ Dr. Cain reported that in April 1989 the Michigan Department of Education sponsored their second statewide conference on dropout prevention.

Dr. Eugene Henderson believed that socioeconomic factors are the primary cause for minority student dropouts. He stated that black youth, particularly the black male, are dropping out because of drugs and poverty. He indicated that black males are dropping out of the education system as early as the third and fourth grade, thereby creating a permanent underclass of youth in this State and country. Dr. Henderson believed that minority students have been tuned out because society has turned its back on public education. He suggested that some, if not all, solutions to this problem can be found in increased school funds to attack the problems of poor equipment, facilities, and underpaid teachers. He pointed out that communities are asking more and more of schools without the resources to perform. He also believed that there is a need for more black male role models in public schools, particularly at the teacher level. Dr. Henderson contended that increased funding, more black male role models, and development of self-esteem among black students are key factors in attacking the problem of student dropouts.

Dr. John Dobbs defined student dropouts as at-risk students. He described students at-risk as young people who have normal intelligence and the ability to succeed in school but who "fell through the cracks."

Dr. Dobbs indicated that research conducted by the Urban Education Alliance established that the primary reasons students discontinue school are lack of academic success and teenage pregnancy. He contended that

black students do not succeed in school because they are not prepared for school. He reported that the High Scope Educational Foundation in Ypsilanti, Michigan, recently completed 20 years of research on why young people drop out of school. They found that early child intervention can prevent many cases of school discontinuance by providing them with the cognitive skills needed when students first enter school. Dr. Dobbs believed that there is not enough reliable data to link minority student dropouts to racial discrimination except in the area of discipline practices.

Dr. Dobbs suggested that in order to solve the problem of minority student dropouts, communities must reassess their priorities and reinvest financially and otherwise in the education of minority children. He described the type of efforts schools and the general community should make:

We can whenever and wherever we choose successfully educate all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know enough about how to get it done. Whether or not we do it will depend on the fact of how we feel about the fact we haven't done it so far.¹⁰

Norma Barquet, who is employed by the University of Michigan, Programs for Educational Opportunity, spoke before the Committee during the open session. She stated that there must be greater effort at the national level to address the educational problems of the disadvantaged students. She believed that whether or not schools are going to be effective for disadvantaged children will depend on the changes made in education, such as modifications in school curriculums to ensure that the historical and cultural contributions of minority groups are represented. She cited Minnesota's educational system as a successful model of a multicultural and gender fair curriculum. The State has mandated multicultural education in every school district. She stated that such a system should be considered

for Michigan. Other changes needed are State funding practices and teacher training. She pointed out that postsecondary schools are still producing teachers who are not prepared to teach disadvantaged children because they are not trained in motivational and discipline techniques. Techniques are being used that are outdated and inappropriate in addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. She suggested that schools should emphasize cross-learning experiences, meaning that learning should be taught in heterogeneous environments as opposed to tracking or homogeneous environments. The underachieving students are isolated from overachieving students and are left with mediocre materials, resources, and teachers. Cross-learning experiences also provide an opportunity for children with diverse backgrounds and skills to impact upon each other's learning.

Local School District Perspectives

Information on the minority student dropout problem from a local school district perspective was provided by Dr. Thomas Steele, assistant superintendent and coordinator of the Detroit Dropout Prevention Collaborative, and Dr. Richard Halik, superintendent, and Dr. Eve Evans, deputy superintendent, of the Lansing School District (LSD).

Dr. Thomas Steele identified the following policies and practices as contributing to student dropouts which may lead to discrimination: State funding practices; transportation; discipline practices; shortage of qualified teachers in math, science and special education, and textbook and curriculum bias.

Dr. Steele stated that the current State funding practices for urban versus suburban schools are not equitable. He believed that the limited resources and continual changes that must be made to adjust to limited resources disproportionately affect minority students. He reported that

many of the budget cuts that are projected for the upcoming school year have a direct impact on at-risk students. He suggested that if these cuts are implemented, the number of high school counselors at the secondary level will decrease, and class size will increase from 24 to 34.

Dr. Steele indicated that there is a disproportionate number of black males in special education. He believed that the special education services offered to minority students do not provide adequate access to opportunities in vocational education and other special curricula that may be able to assist black males. Dr. Steele believed that there is still bias in textbooks and testing materials, however, there is now a movement to include minorities in textbooks as well as the development of unbiased curricula and testing materials. Another area of concern, he stated, is the availability of transportation for students. DPS does not provide transportation for high school students, therefore, there are many at-risk students who do not attend school because of their inability to pay for school transportation.

According to Dr. Steele, DPS and other similar school districts have a history of being unable to attract the most qualified and experienced teachers. At the present time there is a shortage of math, science, special education, and certified pre-school teachers.

He indicated that in the area of discipline, the application of the Uniform Code of Student Conduct is often inflexible. He believed that if the policy is not applied with sensitivity it may lead to discrimination.

Another major problem cited by Dr. Steele is the State's failure to adequately define a student dropout. He contended that coordination

between the State and the local school districts on reporting dropout statistics is poor. The recent report compiled by the U.S. Department of Education that cited Michigan as having one of the biggest increases in the number of student dropouts in the Nation is being contested because the State believes the dropout rate is much lower.

One of the major efforts underway by the DPS to reduce the dropout rate is through the Comprehensive Dropout Prevention Collaborative. This program was established to address the dropout problem with support from the Ford Foundation, parents, student organizations, business, government, community groups, clergy, law enforcement, and the media.

Currently the LSD serves approximately 24,000 students. Forty-three percent of the district's enrollment is minority. Twenty-eight percent is black, 11 percent is Hispanic, 3 percent is Asian, and 1 percent is Native American. Since the 1985-86 school year the overall dropout rate for grades 9-12 has dropped from 10.8 percent to 7.9 percent. As of the 1987-88 school year, the dropout rate by ethnic group is 13.3 percent for Native American, 3.6 percent for Asians, 7.0 percent for blacks, 12.7 percent for Hispanics, and 7.2 percent for whites. According to this data the black dropout rate is lower than the white dropout rate. Dr. Halik reported that with the exception of Asian students all minority group dropout rates have dropped. He said the number of Asians who drop out is very low, however, the dropout rates for Native American and Hispanic students is still of major concern.

Dr. Halik, superintendent of ISD, believed that the significant decrease in black student dropouts is directly related to the efforts of various community groups such as the Urban League, the Pastor's Conference, the Black Child and Family Institute, and Parent Action for Minority

Academic Concerns. Similar to the black community, efforts are underway in working with Hispanic and Native American communities to further reduce their dropout rates. Dr. Halik believed that LSD has succeeded because of the commitment of staff and the broad-based community support received.

Dr. Evans stated that one of the primary goals of the LSD has been to keep children in school. School people who encourage and enhance achievement for minority students are recognized and supported by the district and the general community for their efforts. The district has called upon organized community groups to help solve problems in the schools, such as fraternities and sororities and the Urban League. She believed that these groups' response to their needs have made a difference in the success of education in Lansing.

Perspectives of Constituent Advocacy Agencies and Civic Organizations

The perspectives of community-based organizations was presented by Charles Mitchner, president of the Greater Lansing Urban League; Wilma Henry, parent and student advisor for the Saginaw-Chippewa Tribe, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan; Joseph Radelet, associate director, Metropolitan Youth Foundation, Detroit, Michigan; Mzee Nabawi, of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization and Research on Afro-American History; and Alicia Sanchez, cochair of the Hispanic Coalition for Equal Education Opportunity.

Mr. Mitchner stated that discrimination exists in education because it is allowed to exist. However, he pointed out that the school system, in conjunction with the religious, fraternal, business, and community groups in the black community, decided to collectively address the problems of student dropouts. As a result of these efforts, the black dropout rate is now lower than the majority dropout. It was noted during the forum that an

overwhelming number of blacks in Lansing are professional, which may be one factor affecting the district's success in reducing the dropout rate for blacks.

Wilma Henry said that she was speaking to the Advisory Committee as a parent and an advocate for Native American students. She gained knowledge of educational issues through her volunteer and work experience with Indian educational programs in Michigan. Ms. Henry stated that she was a high school dropout and had two children who dropped out of school. She dropped out of school when she transferred from an Indian school to a non-Indian school setting. She indicated that she dropped out because she was unprepared to deal with the transition and the differences between the Indian and non-Indian education systems.

Ms. Henry believed that at least two of her children were discriminated against while attending public school in Michigan. According to Ms. Henry, two of her sons were denied an opportunity to participate in varsity and junior varsity sports. A civil rights complaint was filed against the school, but the school was determined to be in compliance.

Ms. Henry believed that one of the problems that many Indian children face in the public school is backlash and harassment due to treaty rights issues. This backlash occurs because there is a lack of understanding of Indian culture and values. She also indicated that the curriculum used in schools portrays negative images of Indians, and many times there is blatant racism on the part of teachers and administrators. She also stated that there are not enough Indian role models in the schools. According to Ms. Henry, at one school where she worked, she was the only Indian working in the district. In the school district presently attended by one of her children, there are a total of 177 Native American students enrolled, yet

there are only 3 Native Americans employed full-time of a staff of 375. She reported that 11 of the 42 Native American high school students have dropped out of school, moved, or transferred to alternative programs. Ms. Henry described the factors that contribute to the high dropout rate for Native American students:

It is an historical fact that Indian students are at the bottom rung of the educational ladder. Much of this is due to the fact that educational institutions do not recognize Indian values, not only of American Indians, but all people of color. Again, I stress the lack of positive curriculum material on all people of color. Everything that we are learning and read about in our books is what is portrayed by the dominant white culture. All of these things lead to high absenteeism, lower achievement, and lower self-esteem in the Indian children. There is nothing there for them. Indian students are labeled as troublemakers because school personnel do not understand their value system. If given the opportunity Indian students can achieve.

According to Joseph Radelet, one reason why the dropout rate is subject to intense scrutiny today is because the problem is concentrated in urban areas where it is tied to severe problems of crime, drugs, welfare dependency, and early pregnancy. He stated, "When the dropout walks out of school for the last time he very probably walks into the imprisonment of the ghetto for the rest of his life. The result: a permanent underclass."¹² Mr. Radelet provided an analysis of his position on minority dropout and discrimination by stating that education in the State of Michigan and across this country is separate and unequal. Black youngsters believe that they do not have good opportunities and the opportunities made available to them are not the same as for youngsters in the suburbs. Radelet suggested that the inequality comes from segregated settings that cut them off from future job opportunities, clean new schools, and the network of power in the metropolitan community.

Mr. Radelet pointed out that Brown v. Board of Education declared that separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. The current situation is de facto segregation and has a similar effect. He contended that segregation causes unequal opportunity and these unequal opportunities lead to a higher dropout rate among minorities.

Mr. Radelet blamed the Federal Government for failing to lead the country toward equal educational opportunity. He stated that during the 1980s not one single school desegregation case was initiated by the U.S. Department of Justice. Nor did the Justice Department assist in cases where voluntary intradistrict desegregation programs were at issue. He also alleged that the Justice Department ignored efforts to hold States liable for segregated school districts that they created and funded.

Mr. Radelet maintained that the State is responsible for school boundaries, therefore, the State should be forced to overcome segregation even if it cannot be proven that they had a substantial educational role in creating the segregation. Similarly, he stated that municipalities should be held responsible for actions taken to maintain segregated communities. Finally, he suggested that the legislature should allocate a much higher dollar per pupil for the prevention of minority student dropouts as they do for the education of handicapped students.

Mzee Nabawi, who provided information to the Committee during the open session, said that the Association for the Study of the Classical Civilization and Research on Afro-American History works with youth who have discontinued school. They have also worked with the DPS in the areas of teacher training and curriculum reform. Mr. Nabawi stressed the importance of providing minority students with history grounded in classical civilization concepts with an emphasis on their cultural

history. In his contact with black students who have dropped out of school he sees intelligent youth who believe the system is not there to benefit them. The curriculum is not interesting and they do not see themselves in it. However, when he and others begin to teach these youth about African civilization, they become motivated. He contended that this occurs because they see themselves as being an integral part of the development of civilization and the current world in which they live. Toward this effort, he believed that emphasis should be placed on liberal arts courses rather than vocational education.

Alicia Sanchez, who spoke on behalf of the Hispanic Coalition for Equal Educational Opportunity, contended that the school board in Detroit is not responsive and sensitive to the needs of Hispanic students and parents. One major area of concern cited by Sanchez is the DPS's practice of counting Hispanics as white for desegregation purposes. She reported that Hispanic students continue to be bused and counted as white. She believed that this practice of counting Hispanics as white for school selection is inappropriate and discriminatory.

She indicated that limited-English-speaking children are trapped into learning disability programs because they lack English skills; yet, none of the \$3 million allocated by the State for pre-school education has been provided to the pre-school that serves the Hispanics and other language minorities residing in the southwest area of Detroit. Ms. Sanchez stated that in Area A, which is at least 40 percent Hispanic, DPS received \$200,000 to provide parenting classes and inhouse suspension rooms, but provisions were not made available for limited-English-speaking parents to attend these classes.

In the area of discipline, she alleged that Hispanic students are indiscriminately suspended for minor offenses, and when parents attempted to use the due process procedures for review and appeal, their concerns were ignored. Finally, she contended that Hispanics are underrepresented in all areas of employment within the district. According to Ms. Sanchez, the district does not have Hispanic teachers in the areas of math, science, or social studies. There are also no Hispanic counselors, psychologists, or social workers. The district currently has two Hispanic principals and one assistant principal. Ms. Sanchez indicated that the Hispanic organization, Latin American for Social and Economic Development Agency, is also concerned about the lack of inclusion of Hispanics at all levels of the local and State education systems.

Parents' Perspectives

During the open session several parents of Hispanic students enrolled in DPS provided the Advisory Committee with information on the causes for Hispanic student dropouts based upon their personal experiences. The parents present were Belda Garza, Gloria Pcsas, and Irma Arias.

The parents complained that the district's lack of sensitivity to and concern for their children were factors in their children dropping out of school and one student transferring to a school out of State. Specific complaints were made about DPS's discipline practices. One parent alleged that the school counselor and administrator at her son's school were insensitive and uncooperative toward her efforts to keep her son in school. As a result, they moved him to another State to attend school. They reported that their children's schools do not provide counseling services as required under the Student Code of Conduct to assist students and parents. The parents believed that there is a sustained and identifiable

pattern of pushing disadvantaged students out of school. The parents also expressed concerns about the lack of Hispanic role models in education and inadequate services for students with limited-English-speaking skills.

Students' Perspectives

Two students who are enrolled in the Metropolitan Youth Foundation's GED program told the Advisory Committee why they dropped out of school.

One student dropped out of school in the eighth grade because of home abuse. She stated that when she discontinued school, she was enrolled in DPS. The student said she was unsuccessful in obtaining assistance from a school counselor. Soon after discontinuing school she became pregnant and currently has three children. It took her 9 years to return to school.

The second student discontinued school for multiple reasons due to frequent family moves, poor grades, and association with the wrong crowd. When she dropped out, she was attending school in California. It took her 6 months to return to school to obtain her GED.

Summary

In keeping with its responsibilities to monitor civil rights issues throughout the State, the Michigan Advisory Committee conducted a community forum in Detroit on May 5, 1989, to receive information on discrimination that may be associated with minority student dropouts in Michigan. The information focused on issues related to black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian students' discontinuance of school. This report is a summary of views and opinions provided by State and local school officials, educators, students, parents, and representatives of community organizations. In addition, an open session provided an opportunity for members of the general public to present their views to the Advisory Committee.

The information received primarily focused on the causes of minority student dropouts with possible links to discrimination; the reporting policies and procedures used to establish the degree to which minority students drop out of school; the reasons for such dropouts; and an assessment of efforts being made to address minority student dropout problems and the current underlying causes related to discrimination.

Although everyone agreed that the magnitude of the problem is serious, the actual figures are clouded by the vague and unclear definition of dropouts. Moreover, calculations for student dropouts are based solely on grades 9-12 and do not account for students who drop out before the ninth grade. The legislature has been asked to amend the State school code to include a uniform definition of a school dropout, thereby making it easier to identify and determine how many students drop out of school.

Many reasons for the high rate of minority student dropouts were advanced by forum participants and in various research reports submitted to the Advisory Committee. Reasons cited were segregation, unfair discipline practices, curriculum bias, teenage pregnancy, low achievement and self-esteem, shortage of qualified teachers, and poverty.

Specific areas of discrimination cited by participants included bias in curricula that does not incorporate the history and culture of minority groups, disciplinary practices that push students out, negation of the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of minority students, methods used to track and categorize students, teacher/counselor attitudes, and a level of expectations that denies minority students an equal opportunity to benefit from educational programs. Specialists in the area of student dropouts, parents, and representatives from community groups agreed that discrimination, both institutionalized and disparate treatment of

individual students, contributes to the number of minority student dropouts. Parents repeatedly cited the lack of sensitivity and cooperation exhibited by school officials that push minority students out of school or lead them into dead-end programs. The parents believed that there is a sustained and identifiable pattern of pushing disadvantaged students out of schools. The reasons for school discontinuance among the different minority groups were similar. However, there were areas of concern cited that are unique to Hispanic, Asians, and Native American students, such as insensitivity to language differences, and backlash and harassment that Native American students experience because of resentment of treaty rights.

Two students who participated in the forum indicated that they dropped out of school because of problems related to poor grades and family problems. However, in each case there was no intervention by school or outside organizations.

The State funding practices for education were also cited as discriminatory. The disparity between the amount of money spent to educate urban areas (mainly minority students) and the amount spent on suburban areas (mainly white) is significant. For example, just under \$3,000 was spent to educate a student in Detroit public schools, compared to nearly double that figure in suburban Detroit districts. Michigan's overreliance on property taxes to finance education locks poor school districts into a situation in which they will not be able to match the per pupil spending of many suburbs. It was agreed by all forum participants that education for students who are educated in urban schools requires at least the same dollar investment as education for suburban students. Currently, a State school finance reform movement has been formed to close the gap in funding between urban and suburban school districts.

State and local school district officials attributed the high minority dropout rate to many of the factors referenced above, however, they contended that the situation is also the manifestation of students failing to achieve in school. There was also a consensus among participants that student discontinuance is not solely a school problem but a community problem that will only be reduced through the coordinated efforts between schools, the home, and civic and community groups.

As with causes, many solutions to reduce minority student dropouts were identified. Some recommendations were:

1. Restructure State financing to ensure comparable revenue allocation among school districts.
2. Develop an accurate standard definition of student dropout and a uniform method of data collection.
3. Modify the school curricula to incorporate the history and cultural contributions of minority groups.
4. Consider implementation of a statewide mandated multicultural education in public schools.
5. Eliminate methods to track and categorize students according to ability; instead, emphasize cross-learning taught in heterogeneous settings.
6. Provide more opportunities for minority students to enroll in liberal arts rather than vocational education courses.
7. Initiate an ongoing review and monitoring of school discipline policies and practices.

Based on the presentations made to the Committee and ensuing discussion, it is obvious that causes for the high minority dropout rate are complex and frequently involve a combination of factors that include discrimination as well as socioeconomic factors. It is also evident that in poor urban areas the problem is more pervasive and is believed to have far-reaching implications for the future of minority students.

The Committee hopes the information received will encourage an ongoing and constructive dialogue on the issues and stimulate continued study and solutions to the many existing problems.

Notes

1. Michigan Department of Education, School Dropouts in Michigan: A Report to the State Legislature and a Proposal for the Review and Study of School Dropouts, 1987, p. 3, on file at CRD.
2. Michigan Department of Education, Office of Research and Information, "Public High School Dropouts in Michigan by Racial-Ethnic Group," 1987, p. 18, on file at CRD.
3. Michigan Department of Education, Office of Minority Equity, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Rosa Parks Initiative, 1988, pp. 1-8, on file at CRD.
4. Metropolitan Detroit Youth Foundation, "Twelve Together," (1987), p. 2, on file at CRD.
5. Dr. Richard J. Halik, letter to Charles Mitchner, Feb. 9, 1989, on file at CRD; Dr. Thomas Steele, assistant superintendent and coordinator of Dropout Prevention Collaborative, telephone interview, Aug. 16, 1989.
6. Transcript of community forum, on file at CRD, p. 42.
7. Ibid., pp. 40-41.
8. Ibid., p. 93.
9. Michigan Interagency Committee on the Black Child, "The Black Child in Crisis Report," 1986, pp. 13-45, on file at CRD.
10. Transcript of community forum, p. 149, on file at CRD.
11. Ibid., pp. 200-201.
12. Ibid., pp. 158-159.