

**BURRILLVILLE SCHOOL SYSTEM**

**STEMMING THE TIDE:**

**A STUDY OF STUDENT DROPOUTS**

**Submitted to:**

**Steven Welford  
Superintendent of Schools**

**and**

**The Burrillville School Committee**

**By**

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## **FORWARD**

The author of this study was engaged in 2006 by the superintendent of schools to assist the Burrillville School Department with two clearly defined tasks: (1) To facilitate the compiling of the *New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Five Year Report* for Burrillville High School and (2) To study the high school dropout rate which was deemed to be at an unacceptable level and to render remedial recommendations for the school department and the community.

The *Five Year Report* was submitted on March 1, 2007. The content of the report and the interaction with the administration and staff of the high school enabled the writer to form a very clear picture of the technical and social underpinnings of Burrillville High School. Without such experience, this report could not have appreciated the culture, assets, and challenges of the high school. I am grateful for the excellent cooperation of the administration, teachers, and support staff.

The act of dropping out of school, however, does not begin in the high school. In compiling this report, the writer spent time reviewing records of dropouts throughout their school careers. To better understand those records, the writer met in focus groups with professional personnel at the Pre-K/Kindergarten/ First grade-level, the elementary level (2-5), and the high school (9-12). In addition, multiple sessions were spent with the district "A" Team (Superintendent, principals, and central staff).

Next, an exhaustive review of the available research on dropouts was conducted, both locally and nationally. During the incipient stages of the project, a school department employee told the writer that this research was unnecessary because so much information already existed. He was right about the volume of information-but very wrong about much of its relationship to the town of Burrillville.

The remaining pieces of the puzzle were secured through contact with the dropouts themselves and their parents/guardians.

The results of the study confirm that great concerns exist for both the present students and those who will follow in the years to come.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Ron Struminski** is currently in his sixth year as a Principal Support Specialist in the Office of Leadership and Development in the Providence Public Schools.

Working under the auspices of a Wallace Foundation Grant for Leadership, Ron is also an adjunct instructor with the University of Rhode Island in the Providence *Aspiring Principals Program* and the *Leadership Fellows Program*. Additional duties entail the planning and delivery of professional development programs for teachers, administrators and staff. He also mentors new principals. His focus this year is on improving leadership in middle schools.

Ron is a graduate of Boston University and Rhode Island College. He has taught English language and literature in middle school, high school, and at the college level. He has served as a department head, housemaster, assistant principal and principal at the high school level over his 45 year education career. Additionally, Ron consulted on the development of curriculum at the Rhode Island Training School and is a certified instructor of leadership for the *Southern Regional Education Board (SREB)* in Atlanta. Most recently he has been engaged in assisting the Board of Higher Education of Louisiana in examining their leadership preparation programs and in assisting the Columbus, Ohio, School Department in a study of their high school culture.

Ron has also served on visiting evaluation committees for the *New England Association of Schools and Colleges* and is a former educational programming consultant to WCVB-TV in Boston. From 1979-1994, he hosted issues-oriented radio and television talk shows for WARA and ICTV Channel 8 in Attleboro, MA.

In 2007, in the area of organizational planning, Ron was engaged to build a strategic plan for Attleboro Enterprises, Inc., a non-profit area rehabilitation center located in North Attleboro. Involving participants from the board of directors, management, staff, parents and clients, the plan led to the highest level of certification by CARF (Commission on Accredited Rehabilitation Facilities).

Although he currently resides in Massachusetts, Ron spent 13 years as a resident of Pawtucket and West Warwick. While in West Warwick, he served in various community leadership roles including chairman of the board of directors of the Kent County Community Mental Health Center.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

“For some decision-makers low graduation rates will be an uncomfortable truth that must be faced. And for some it will be necessary to progress through the stages of disbelief, denial, and acceptance before moving on and resolving to meet this challenge, armed with determination and better data about the hurdles ahead.”<sup>1</sup>

Research on this project commenced in the spring of 2007. The writer had recently assisted in completing the *Five Year Report* to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges for Burrillville High School. Superintendent Steven Welford was very concerned about the number of students leaving the system without a diploma. He was desirous of attacking the problem, but he required reliable data that could only be compiled by an in depth look at the community and school department.

The writer embarked on a journey of interviews with all principals, representative teachers in focus groups at the elementary and middle school levels, and individual and group discussions with high school teachers and staff. Specialists in reading, social services, substance abuse counseling, and special education were queried. Periodically, other teachers contacted the writer with additional input in person, via email and in writing. Current students were surveyed, 2006-2007 dropouts (26) were contacted and interviewed, parents/guardians of dropouts were asked for their experiences and input. This report shares their thoughts and insights.

The target population was to be the dropouts in the school year 2006-2007. Forty-two students were lost for a variety of reasons. To get to the core of this concern, the writer researched the numbers from 1998-2007. In that time frame, a total of 361 students or over 40 young people per year left Burrillville High School. Sixty percent (60%) were boys and forty percent (40%) were girls.

It became very clear that being retained at any time in a student’s career, especially at the high school level, resulted in a strong possibility of dropping out. In fact, of the 42 students that exited last year, 31 or 73.8% were retained at least once. Almost half (47.6%) were or had been diagnosed with special needs.

Another alarming fact came to light. Sixteen or 38% of the dropouts were either proven or strongly suspected of substance abuse. In the system SALT reports, the class of 2007, when in the seventh grade, self-reported that more than one out of every four students (26%) had imbibed 1-5 alcoholic drinks within the last 30 days. In their senior year, the number increased by only 1%, although those drinking 10-19 times in the prior 30 days doubled from 4% to 8%. Use of marijuana in Grade 7 –more than 10 times in the last 30 days was 7%. In Grade 12 the number in the same category rose to 14%. Student attitudes regarding illegal substances while in Grade 7 are also a cause for concern.

While one might suspect that dropouts are disciplinary problems, 10 or 23.8% had no occasions of in or out-of-school suspensions. Almost 50% had no out-of-school suspensions.

The large majority of the dropouts failed to acquire the necessary credits in English, math and science and most (29) exited by the end of January 2007.

The SALT reports also paint a picture of how students feel about themselves and how they believe their teachers perceive them. In 1998-1999, when the class of 2007 was in the fourth grade, only 76% thought that they would graduate. (Note that this number was nearly accurate since the graduation rate is now 75%). Only 48% believed that their teachers thought they would complete high school. When asked in the eighth grade if their teachers thought they would graduate, the prophetic number was 75%!

Teachers across the grade levels shared their frustration and belief that the community of Burrillville does **not** value education. There was also a sense of exhaustion regarding their attempts to get parents to respond to school-based meetings.

Elementary teachers believe that class numbers must be lowered in order to assure proper individual attention. Some felt overwhelmed by the individual needs of young children entering school. Others felt that greater communication among teachers was needed.

Middle school teachers felt the need for better communication with the high school. They also voiced the need for a newcomer program, and bemoaned the cuts in extra-curricular, non-athletic activities.

High school teachers said that parents spoke badly of their school, that the biggest problem was the ninth grade, that student advisories were a failure and needed to be rethought, and that there is a lack of follow through by students in regard to student responsibilities. Some thought that not enough was asked of students and that more elective opportunities were needed.

Current students in grades 9-12 voiced the concern that more information about college and how to get there was the biggest need and that class work and homework needed to be more relevant.

Dropouts reported that course failure was the biggest reason for their leaving school and that they did not “like” school. A majority further said that they could not keep up with the school work, did not see the relevance of the work, that they had missed too many days, and that they could not get along with their teachers. Half said they did not feel like they “belonged.”

The writer has framed four sections of commentary and recommendations for consideration by all stakeholders in the town. Attention was paid to the fact that budgets are stretched and cuts are the order of the day. Most of the recommendations do **not** require large price tags with the exception of some limited suggestions in the area of personnel. Of greatest concern is the contemplated elimination of the substance abuse counseling services.

The major task at hand is a change of culture in regard to education in Burrillville. Nothing will be transformed without a plan that allows for the participation of a larger number of the greater community. In addition, this plan should be viable regardless of the constant changes in both central office and school administrators. The writer believes that implementation of the recommendations in this document is good place to start.

## THE LASTING EFFECTS OF DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

In 2006 in *An Open Letter to the American People*, the authors of the research report entitled, *The Silent Epidemic-Perspectives of High School Dropouts*,<sup>2</sup> stated:

“There is a high school dropout epidemic in America. Each year, almost one third of all high school students-and nearly one half of all African-American, Hispanics and Native Americans-fail to graduate from public high school with their class. Many of these students abandon school with less than two years to complete their high school education. This tragic cycle has not substantially improved during the past few decades when education reform has been high on the public agenda. During this time, the public has been almost entirely unaware of the severity of the dropout problem, due to inaccurate data. The consequences remain tragic.

The decision to drop out is a dangerous one for the student. Dropouts are much more likely than their peers who graduate to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high school themselves.”

The litany continues with added specificity:

Dropouts earn \$9200 **less** per year than high school graduates and more than \$1 million **less** over a lifetime than college graduates.<sup>3</sup>

Dropouts are more than twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty **in a single year** and **three times** more likely than college graduates to be unemployed.<sup>4</sup>

Dropouts are more than **eight times** more likely to be in jail or prison than high school graduates.

Dropouts are **four times** less likely to volunteer than college graduates, are half as likely to vote or participate in community projects, and represent only **3 percent of actively engaged citizens** in the United States today.<sup>5</sup>

The government would **reap \$45 billion in extra tax revenues and reduced costs** in public health, crime, and welfare payments if the 700,000 20-year-old high school dropouts in the United States today were **cut in half**.<sup>6</sup>

The dropout problem **is likely to increase substantially through 2020** unless significant improvements are made.<sup>7</sup>

## THE NATIONAL PICTURE

*Job satisfaction in the U. S. plummeted in 2006 to a record low. That's according to a survey of 5,000 households done for the Conference Board. Only 47% of workers were satisfied with their jobs in 2006, down from 59% in 1995. "The demands in the workplace have increased tremendously...especially as technology has made it even harder to get away from the job."<sup>8</sup>*

In July of 2005, realizing the dysfunctional nature of dropout reporting in the public schools, The National Governor's Association (NGA) reached a common definition for high school graduation rates. Thirty-nine governors and 11 national organizations signed onto *Graduation Counts: A Compact on State High School Graduation Data*.

The states that were signatories to the document, including Rhode Island, agreed to implement the following recommendations:

- Begin implementing a standard four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate. The states agreed to **calculate the graduation rate by dividing the number of on-time graduates in a given year by the number of first –time entering ninth graders four years earlier.** Graduates are those receiving a high school diploma. The denominator can be adjusted for transfers in and out of the system and data systems will ideally track individual students with a longitudinal student unit record data system. Special education students and recent immigrants with limited English proficiency can be assigned to different cohorts to allow them more time to graduate. Lead efforts to improve state data collection, reporting and analysis, and link data systems across the entire education pipeline from preschool through post secondary education;
- Take steps to implement additional indicators that provide richer information and understanding about outcomes for students and how well the system is serving them; and
- Report annual progress on the improvement of their state high school graduation, completion and dropout data.<sup>9</sup>

The Bush administration announced new high school graduation policies:

- Providing better tracking of student progress to identify those who need the most support and asking schools to report graduation rate data by racial and ethnic subgroups at the district level in **2007-2008** and at the school level by **2012**

- Encouraging incentives under federal law to improve performance and graduation rates.<sup>10</sup>
- Creating the U. S. Department of Education’s Dropout Prevention Database for the “What Works Clearinghouse” to examine secondary school and community-based interventions designed to help students stay in school.<sup>11</sup>

### **THE RHODE ISLAND GRADUATION RATE**

“Dropout data are exceptionally difficult to track accurately because they rely on local school officials and outdated collection systems to track the whereabouts of individual students who have left a given school for any number of reasons.”<sup>12</sup> Fortunately we have now come to the realization that greater accountability for the accurate tracking of our students is essential if we are to fully realize the fruits of our labors and be able to evaluate our true effectiveness both in the classroom and in our administrative offices. The writer has yet to meet a single educator who is willing to say that his/her statistics are totally reliable. In fact, we have for many years applied the term “satisfice” to our school statistics, meaning it just *satisfies* the current need-and besides, who reads them anyway?

A look at the Rhode Island dropout rates represents just such “satisficing” information. The figures are derived from as many different sources as there are school departments. If time and energy allowed, there is little doubt that many differences would be found in the reporting procedures. Schools in Rhode Island utilize the following table for determining the status of departing students:

#### **WITHDRAWAL CODE**

#### **DESCRIPTION**

01	Public-Local
02	Public-RI
03	Public-Out of State
04	Private-Local
05	Private-RI
06	Private-Out of State
07	Religious-Local
08	Religious-RI
09	Religious-Out of State
10	School- Out of Country
11	Institution
12	Charter School

13	Home Schooling
14	Matriculation to Local
15	Graduated
16	Completed-Other Credential
17	Death
18	Illness
19	Expulsion
20	Reached Maximum Age
21	Discontinued Schooling
22	Grade 12-Did not Pass
23	GED Program
24	Post Secondary Institution
25	Moved
30	Matriculated Next Grade
31	Retention-Current Grade
32	Completed GED
33	Changed District of Residence
97	Reason Unknown
99	Other
WO5	Did Not Enter

As you can see, the reporter has great flexibility with the “Reason Unknown” category and the “Other” category. This acts as a catch-all for lack of follow-up or insufficient information. This being the case, more often than not, these students are not reported as dropouts. Until *No Child Left Behind* became a reality, too little heed was paid to the accuracy of categorization.

“Genuine uncertainty often surrounds the status of a former student who is no longer enrolled at a particular school, even after good faith attempts have been made to locate that student. Has she dropped out? Did he transfer to a different school or district, or even move out of state? It can be truly difficult for schools to tell the difference-although the distinction makes a tremendous amount of difference when it comes to calculating dropout or graduation rates.”<sup>13</sup>

According to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the high school graduation rate for the year 2006 was 85% in the state. Burrillville recorded a rate of 75%. Interestingly, according to the *2007 Kids Count Factbook*, the adult population of Burrillville has a high school graduation rate of 80%.<sup>14</sup> This raises troubling questions about the current and future prospects of Burrillville’s youth and the culture and climate in which these statistics incubate.

**NINE YEARS OF BURRILLVILLE DROPOUTS**

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>OCTOBER ENROLLMENT</u></b>	<b><u>DROPOUTS</u></b>
98-99	948	23
99-00	941	38
00-01	952	58
01-02	901	32
02-03	899	48
03-04	869	51
04-05	847	27
05-06	882	42
06-07	887	42
<b>TOTAL FOR LAST NINE YEARS.....</b>		<b>361</b>
<b>YEARLY AVERAGE FOR LAST NINE YEARS.....</b>		<b>40.1</b>

<b><u>YEAR</u></b>	<b><u>GENDER STATISTICS</u></b>	
	<b><u>BOYS</u></b>	<b><u>GIRLS</u></b>
98-99	18	5
99-00	24	14
00-01	31	27
01-02	16	16
02-03	24	24
03-04	29	22
04-05	17	10
05-06	29	13
06-07	29	13
<b><u>TOTALS</u></b>	<b><u>217</u></b>	<b><u>144</u></b>

## **PROFILING THE DROPOUTS OF 2006-2007**

For the purposes of this study, a dropout is defined as any student who dropped out to pursue a GED (General Education Diploma), withdrew as a straight dropout, was withdrawn administratively, withdrew by not returning, or was reported as reason unknown during the time span of September 2006 through June 2007. Based on these criteria, Burrillville High School lost a total of **forty-two (42)** students in the school year 2006-2007. Note that this statistic does **not** take into account the students who did **not** return at the end of the 2005-2006 school year. (These students are “summer dropouts” and are traditionally counted as dropouts in the school year for which they fail to report.)

One of the common arguments regarding dropouts in any system is the number of dropouts who were transient in nature, i.e. they entered a system after missing the basics of instruction offered locally. A closer look at the 42 students in this study reveals that **24** or **57 %** entered the Burrillville system after Grade 3.

In my preliminary report, the writer cited national studies that claimed that a potential dropout could be identified in the fourth grade by looking at their achievement in reading. At that time, the number of dropouts was forty (40). Of those 40, only one (1) had an unsatisfactory grade in reading on his report card. The writer posed this curiosity to the focus group of elementary teachers. Their response supports the importance of looking deeper at statistics. The teachers were **not** surprised by the reported grades. They shared that when the class of 2006 was in the fourth grade (1997-98), students were graded based on their achievement level. If a student were reading at the second grade level, he was measured accordingly. They assured me that this was no longer the case on report cards. In short, my scouring the grade reports was unhelpful. One wonders whether the national commentary also suffers from this malady.

Another issue that needed to be addressed was the question of dropout statistics being over blown due to some students being counted twice: dropping out, returning, and dropping out again. This scenario existed for **three (3)** of the students.

The question of retention prior to high school is also a predictor of future dropouts. The figures for the class of 2007:

Retained One (1) Year	Retained Two (2) Years	Retained Three (3) Years
<b>11 (26.1%)</b>	<b>16 (38%)</b>	<b>4 (9.5%)</b>

**73.8% (31)** of the dropouts were retained at least once.

Yet another marker examined in dropout studies is achievement in Grade 8 and the transition to high school. A large percentage of the dropouts passed all of their courses in their final year of middle school **16 (38%)** Of those who failed classes, the predominant course was mathematics.

An examination of the special needs population among the dropouts revealed that exactly **twenty (20)** or **47.6 %** were or had been on individualized educational plans. **One (1)** was on a 504 plan and **one (1)** had previously been on a 504 plan. As of this writing, two (2) dropouts are known to be incarcerated.

One symptom that reared its ugly head throughout interviewing and the examination of data was the frequency of drug and alcohol use. While it is difficult to acquire exact information in this area, there is little doubt that this is a problem to be addressed. **Sixteen (16) or 38%** of the dropouts were either confirmed or suspected of involvement. Although all of the dropouts were not a part of the same projected year of graduation class, further evidence of this problem can be seen in the student responses to the SALT reports. In the 2000-2001 administration of SALT, when the class of 2007 was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, the 246 students responded to questions of illegal drug/alcohol usage as follows:

*During the past 30 days, how many times (if any) did you use illegal drugs (such as marijuana, uppers, downers ,etc.)*

#### **GRADE 7**

- 5% (12+) said they had used 1-2 times
- 6% (14+) said they had used 3-5 times
- 2% (5) said they had used 6-10 times
- 9% (22+) said they had used more than 10 times

When this same class was in their senior year, there were 181 students remaining who answered the same question:

#### **GRADE 12**

- 7% (12+) said they had used 1-2 times
- 3% (5+) said they had used 3-5 times
- 7% (12+) said they had used 6-10 times
- 14% (25+) said they had used more than 10 times

*During the past 30 days, how many different times (if any) have you had at least one drink of alcohol (such as wine, wine coolers, beer, mixed drinks ,or hard liquor)? Please report the number of times or days, not the number of drinks*

#### **GRADE 7**

- 26% (64) said they had alcohol 1-5 times during the last 30 days
- 7% (17+) said they had alcohol 6-9 times during the last 30 days
- 4% (9+) said they had alcohol 10-19 times during the last 30 days

- 8% (19+) said they had alcohol 20 or more times during the last 30 days

When this same class was in their senior year, there were 181 students remaining who answered the same question:

### GRADE 12

- 27% (49) said they had alcohol 1-2 times in the last 30 days
- 9% (16+) said they had alcohol 3-5 times during the last 30 days
- 7% (12+) said they had alcohol 6-10 times during the last 30 days
- 8% (14+) said they had alcohol more than 10 times during the last 30 days

The students were asked in 2000-2001 (Grade 7) to respond to the following question:

*How would your close friends feel...*

If you smoked marijuana regularly?

- Approve: 10% (24+)
- Wouldn't care 30% (73+)

*If you tried cocaine or crack once or twice?*

- Approve: 7% (17+)
- Wouldn't care: 17% (41+)

*If you had five or more alcoholic drinks once or twice each weekend?*

- Approve: 13 % (32)
- Wouldn't care: 37% (91)

In the writer's opinion, it is **not** possible to educate a student who is actively engaged in drug use. This is a problem that will **not** get better over time and will be addressed in the recommendations in this report.

Attendance has always been a factor in studying dropouts. It is obvious that a student cannot pass courses when they are somewhere other than in class. Among the forty-two (42) dropouts under study, only **nine (9) or 21.4%** were referred to the truancy court. It should be noted that the family court judge holds truancy court in the high school. When queried about the effect of truancy court, two (2) of the dropouts chuckled and said that they had signed their own teacher reports for the judge without detection. One parent confirmed that this had taken place with her child.

**Unauthorized absences** were recorded for the dropouts as follows:

- 0-5 5 (11.9%)
  - 6-10 8 (19%)
  - 11-15 8 (19%)
  - 16-25 8 (19%)
  - 25-40 9 (22%)
  - Over 40 4 (9.5%)
- The range was 0-70

**Out-of-school suspension days** were served as follows:

- 0 20 (47.6%)
  - 1-3 14 (33.3%)
  - 4-6 4 (9.5%)
  - 6-9 3 (7%)
  - Over 10 1 (2%)
- The range was 0-20

Note that almost half, **20 (47.6%)**, did not experience even one day of out-of-school suspension.

**In-school suspension** days were as follows:

- 0 12 (28.5%)
  - 1-4 11 (26%)
  - 5-10 10
  - 10-15 7 (16.6%)
  - 16-22 2 (4.7%)
- The range was 0-22

Note that **ten (10)** of the dropouts (**23.8%**) had **no** occasions of out-of-school or in-school suspension. This would surely indicate that about one out of four dropouts were not disciplinary problems.

Another indicator to be concerned about is the accrual of credits. Students at Burrillville High School must attain 22 credits to qualify for a diploma. Credits must be earned in the following areas:

- 4 (1/2 credits in physical education)
- 4 credits in English
- 4 credits in mathematics
- 3 credits in science
- 3 credits in social studies
- ¼ credit in Digital Portfolio (Grade 9)
- ¼ credit in career education (Grade 10)
- 5 1/2 credits in electives
- Students must also demonstrate computer literacy

The range of credits acquired by the dropouts was a low of 0.0 to a high of 19.25. A more precise breakdown of earned credit follows:

Credit Range	Number of Students	Percentage in Range
0	4	9.5%
1-5	8	19%
6-10	8	19%
11-15	15	35.7%
15-20	7	16.7%
Over 20	0	0%

Without question, the issue of credits is a major reason for the consideration to drop out of school. In particular, course credits in the core subjects of English, math, and science were most often the focus of concern.<sup>15</sup>

An analysis of the 42 Burrillville students who dropped out in 2006-2007 supports the research of Allenson and Eaton cited above.

### **WHEN DID THE STUDENTS DROP OUT?**

The following chart clearly illustrates the timing of the **forty-two (42)** dropouts during the 2006-2007 school year:

<b>AUG</b>	<b>SEPT</b>	<b>OCT</b>	<b>NOV</b>	<b>DEC</b>	<b>JAN</b>	<b>FEB</b>	<b>MAR</b>	<b>APR</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>JUNE</b>
2	7	1	3	6	10	2	1	2	4	4
4.7%	16.6%	2.3%	7.1%	14.2%	23.8%	4.7%	2.3%	4.7%	9.5%	9.5%

It should be noted that **nine (9)** of the dropouts (**21.3%**) exited in August and September, **sixteen (16)** of them (**38%**) exited in December and January, and **eight (8)** or (**19%**) exited in May and June.

It is reasonable to assume that the **nine (9)** August and September dropouts did **not** enter school with a strong desire to continue their education. The negative results of the previous year of schooling made the decision much more viable for the students and went a long way to convincing the parents/guardians to allow their children to leave. The **twelve (12)** students who exited in December and January saw little hope of achieving success after realizing poor results as of mid-year. This was also true of the **eight (8)** that left in May and June with few credits accrued.

## SALT AND THE SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECY

SALT (*School Accountability For Learning and Teaching*) is a research-based tool designed to assess school improvement planning for all school districts in Rhode Island. Data is collected from teachers, students, parents and administrators. Tracking the Class of 2007 via the SALT reports reveals interesting attitudes of students, teachers, and parents/guardians. On the following pages, note the attitudes of each group in regard to Self Academic Expectations, Parents' Academic Expectations and Teachers' Academic Expectations as reported by students.

### **CALLAHAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

(See Page 19 for a complete sample report)

Note that in 1998-1999, the Class of 2007 was in the fourth grade. **Seventy-five percent (75%)** of this class did not graduate in 2007. Most significant is the fact that the students did not feel that their teachers thought they would graduate (**45%**). Parents held the belief that only **seventy- two (72%)** of their sons and daughters would graduate. Additionally, students lacked confidence that their teachers thought they would “*do better in school next year*” (**45%**) or that they would go to college (**44%**).

### **STEERE FARM ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

The picture is similar at Steere Farm:

Self Academic Expectations	1998-99- 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade-Class of 2007
Do you think you will graduate from high school?	<b>76%</b>

Parents' Academic Expectations	1998-99-4 <sup>th</sup> Grade-Class of 2007
Do your parents/guardians think that you will graduate from high school?	<b>73%</b>

Teachers' Academic Expectations	1998-99-4th Grade-Class of 2007
Do your teachers think that you will graduate from high school?	<b>48%</b>
Do your teachers think that you will do better next year?	<b>42%</b>
Do your teachers think that you will go to college?	<b>43%</b>

**1998-99 STUDENT REPORTS OF ACADEMIC EXPECTATIONS  
BY GRADE LEVEL**

Percent of students responding “definitely or probably will” on the following:

	4th	5th
<b>Self Academic Expectations</b>		
Do you think that you will do better in school next year?	59%	45%
Do you think that you will graduate from high school?	79%	78%
Do you think that you will go to college?	79%	71%
<b>Parents’ Academic Expectations</b>		
Do your parents/guardians think that you will do better in school next year?	66%	47%
Do your parents/guardians think that you will graduate from high school?	72%	65%
Do your parents/guardians think that you will go to college?	77%	68%
<b>Teachers’ Academic Expectations</b>		
Do your teachers think that you will do better in school next year?	45%	17%
Do your teachers think that you will graduate from high school?	45%	56%
Do your teachers think that you will go to college?	44%	40%

When the Class of 2007 was in grade eight in the middle school in 2003-2004, they were again questioned:

**Percentage of students responding “definitely or probably will” on the following questions:**

Self Academic Expectations	2002-2003-Grade 8
Do you think you will graduate from high school?	88%

Parents’ Academic Expectations	2002-2003-Grade 8
Do your parents/guardians think you will graduate from high school?	89%

Teachers’ Academic Expectations	2002-2003-Grade 8
Do your teachers think that you will graduate from high school?	75%
Do your teachers think that you will do better in school next year?	49%
Do your teachers think that you will make the honor roll next year?	45%

Note that although students and parents increased their belief in success leading to high school graduation, students reported that they felt that their teachers did **not** share the same optimism. In fact, the **75%** graduation figure proved to be a perfect prediction. By extension, fewer than half believed that their teachers thought they could improve or make the honor roll the following year.

For comparison sake, the writer has included the responses of students in the eighth grade of middle school in 2006-2007. These are the current Class of 2011 who are **now** freshmen in the high school:

Self Academic Expectations	Class of 2011-Grade 8
Do you think that you will graduate from high school?	88%

Parents' Academic Expectations	Class of 2011-Grade 8
Do your parents/guardians think that you will graduate from high school?	89%

Teachers' Academic Expectations	Class of 2011-Grade 8
Do your teachers think that you will graduate from high school?	75%
Do your teachers think that you will do better in school next year?	49%
Do your teachers think that you will make the honor roll next year?	45%

While student and parental optimism remain high, the ominous nature of how students view the feelings of their teachers portend similar dropout results in the future unless a serious intervention plan is put in place.

### **WHAT DO TEACHERS SAY?**

The writer held focus groups with teacher volunteers at each grade level to allow for their thoughts and experiences to be a part of this research. Since time was limited, what follows are snapshots in time which require more consideration in the future.

#### **LEVY ELEMENTARY**

Five members of the Levy faculty representing over 45 years of experience in kindergarten and grade one participated. The session took place in the spring of 2007. There seemed to be consensus on the following issues:

- Question: What is the major cause of so many students leaving high school without a diploma?  
Teachers felt that there was too much emphasis on the college bound student and too few electives for those who would terminate their education with high school.
- All believed and voiced the concern that education in Burrillville was **not** valued.
- Support at home was lacking, particularly in the parenting skills area.

- They feel that there is a culture problem in regard to education in the town.
- Parents are overwhelmed by the behavioral issues of their kids.
- One teacher said: “These kids rule the roost.”
- Early intervention among 3-4 year olds is **not** working.
- In the Dibel screening in reading, fourteen (14) students in kindergarten are **not** at a level to meet success.
- Of the fourteen (14) students cited above, only four (4) of the most serious cases are seen by a reading resource specialist.
- There are insufficient aides available in the classrooms.
- The same issue is problematic in Grade 1.
- The teachers strongly feel that they need more involvement in who is seen by the reading specialist. They do not feel their voice is heard and that the reading specialist determines who gets services. As one they exclaimed: “We know who needs help.”
- There is a feeling that reading specialists are “ex officio administrators.” They decide who goes where.
- In order to better utilize reading specialists, they need to take more kids.
- Classroom teachers feel “overwhelmed.”
- Parent education programs, when offered, have received little response.
- One third of the kindergarten parents are **no shows** to open houses. (Since there are 192 students enrolled as of November 7, this figure would represent 64 parents/guardians)
- Teachers feel that some thought should be given to a policy wherein parents/guardians be required to attend open houses via some type of contract.
- It is felt that classroom concerns, in regard to parents/guardians, are the classroom teachers’ problems.
- Grade level discussions are lacking.

- Some school committee members have visited the school, but they would like to see the superintendent more often.
- Would like to see more homogeneous grouping considered.

### **CALLAHAN AND STEERE FARM**

Ten (10) volunteer teachers attended a focus group, six (6) from Callahan and four (4) from Steere Farm. All were veteran staff and represented Grades 2, 3, 4, and 5 and reading. Their comments and concerns follow. The session took place in the spring of 2007.

In response to the question of why so many students are leaving the high school without a diploma:

The teachers felt that too many of the students were being encouraged to leave school rather than exploring alternative assistance. In addition, they would like to know from the high school the families with dropouts so that teachers can be aware that siblings have left school.

- Not enough value is placed on education in Burrillville
- Many parents/guardians consider schools a “baby sitting service.”
- Parent education programs are needed.
- Homogeneous grouping is needed.
- Too much boredom in elementary classes. Enrichment is needed.
- Not enough help is available to students in need of it
- Pull- out approaches are hurting the classes. Help is needed before or after classes.
- By third grade the needs truly are serious.
- Summer school should be considered. They felt the summer was too long to be away from lessons and reinforcement.
- The same families come to school for open houses and conferences. “Give aways” are necessary to get parents/guardians to school.
- Some short-term help is needed in terms of personnel.

## **BURRILLVILLE MIDDLE SCHOOL**

A focus group was held at the middle school attended by six (6) volunteer teachers and the administrative intern. The session took place in the spring of 2007.

When asked why they felt so many students were leaving school without a diploma, the teachers felt that growing emotional concerns led to a feeling of “giving up.” They also voiced the concern that Burrillville does **not** value education. They further cited the many transitions that students experience (from school to school) as contributing to the problem. Students do **not** have time to feel a part of the school.

- There is a need for a newcomer program in the middle school
- Poor parenting skills are regularly exhibited.
- Cuts in elective courses have been damaging.
- Teachers favor homogeneous grouping. The teachers feel that students are **not** working as hard as they could due to mixed ability grouping.
- Advisory-type sessions would be helpful.
- Lack of intramural sports (only interscholastic sports currently).
- Cuts in extra-curricular (non-athletic) activities have been hurtful.
- The SPED Advisory Committee is **not** well attended.
- A concern about the students who will **not** be attending college was voiced.
- Lack of vocational assessments.
- Transition programs need to be reviewed and improved. Grade 9 students returning to visit the middle school have voiced this concern.
- Going from a teamed student organization in the middle school to the high school setting creates concerns re: adjustment.
- Need greater communication from middle to high school.
- More attention is paid to elementary to middle school transition than middle to high school. Some elementary teachers come to the middle school.

## **BURRILLVILLE HIGH SCHOOL**

The writer spent an entire day at the high school and welcomed teachers to share their thoughts over donuts and coffee. At times only one teacher was present. At other times there were two or more in attendance. As a result, the following comments do **not** represent the consensus of the high school faculty but gives us some incite into what these faculty members are thinking. Eleven (11) teachers participated during the day. Teacher reactions and opinions are presented individually. The session took place in the spring of 2007.

### **Teacher #1:**

- Parents talk badly about the high school. This has a detrimental effect on the students.
- Teachers constantly have to defend themselves.
- There is a huge adjustment problem for students coming into the high school from middle school.
- The biggest problem is the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.
- There is a lack of student responsibility.

### **Teacher #2:**

- There has been a trend over the last 10 years toward greater numbers of dropouts.
- There is a lack of discipline. Kids rule the roost.
- Parents do not want to argue with their kids.
- Students often drop out as a result of being offered two alternatives: Either drop out or you are going to truancy court. This is the prevalent administrative attitude.
- The town is **not** involved in the high school.
- We need a dynamic individual to do community outreach and to advertise what we do to the greater environs.

### **Teacher #3:**

- Classroom numbers are the problem.

- There is a lack of follow through on the part of students.
- More calls need to be made to homes to seek parental help.
- Teachers never receive any feedback in cases where students are referred to truancy court.
- There is a need for better enforcement of rules.
- We need a return to best practices workshops where our own staff presents to our own teachers.
- A printout would be preferred to absence list on computer.
- Advisories have gone nowhere.

**Teacher #4:**

This teacher was queried about the physical education program and its effect on non-graduates.

- There is 99% participation in Physical education classes
- Students do need to be reasonably dressed for activity.
- Felt that the department was quite liberal in allowing make-up of classes.

**Teacher #5:**

- Had concerns re: success of inclusion for the SPED population and the lack of preparation of academic teachers involved.

**Teacher #6:**

- The elimination of the culinary program will further delimit the options of students who need this kind of program.
- The Newcomers program needs to be reviewed and strengthened.
- There is a need to study the advisability of organizing a gay/straight alliance club in the building. Several students have inquired.
- The student assistance counselor is stretched too thin. Availability at the middle school is two days and at the high school only three days.

**Teacher #7:**

- There is great frustration on the part of kids who feel that nobody cares once they are “pigeon-holed.”
- Social promotion has stopped.
- Extra help is available but few take advantage of it.
- Many do not even ask when they feel it is necessary.
- The Academy program helps in Grades 11 and 12.

**Teacher #8:**

- We do not ask enough of our students.
- The breadth of programs is just not there.
- There is a need for career exploratory.
- More vocational opportunities
- The ninth grade should be teamed to assist in the transition to high school.
- Perhaps a house-type organization could be explored.

**Teacher #9:**

- Some Grade 9 students are unable to read.
- There is too much laziness-do not want to do the work
- Too many behavioral concerns
- No continuity in the district.
- No vertical communication
- Department teachers are not observed or evaluated. (Department omitted by the writer)
- The heaviest loads are at the ninth grade where students need the most help.
- Need for more hands-on opportunities

- Advisories need to be strengthened for greater student support.

### **Teacher #10**

- Math is a major concern
- Some students have not passed math since 6<sup>th</sup> grade.  
(Writer's note: **This is not true of any of the dropouts**)
- Student teams at middle school have created dependence that is problematic when students get to the high school
- Students are given too many second chances.
- Lack of student responsibility
- Overall immaturity
- Parents not responsible-school must do it all.
- Parents make too many excuses for their kids
- Academic laziness is all too frequent
- No respect for authority
- Will not go out of Burrillville
- They only stay for driver's education

### **Teacher #11:**

- Students have learned "helplessness."
- There is a lack of courses that meet their needs
- At least 20% of parents are asking for class placements above the ability of the students.
- The community of Burrillville does **not** hold the high school in high regard.
- There is a need for more options in the core areas.

## **WHAT DO CURRENT STUDENTS SAY?**

In November of 2007, a sampling of students in Grades 9 through 12 were asked to respond to a written survey during their advisory block. Most of the items on the survey were related to the major reasons students drop out of high school. Sixty-one students completed the survey. In a few instances, some students did not answer every item. This accounts for numerical discrepancies. There were a total of fifteen questions on the survey. The first ten (10) were multiple choice involving four (4) possible options. In all cases the options were

- (1) *Agree (this change is needed)*
- (2) *Disagree (It is OK now)*
- (3) *Not important to me*
- (4) *No opinion*

The final three (3) questions involved graduation, attending college and enlistment in the military.

Answering options were:

- (1) *Yes*
- (2) *No*
- (3) *Not Sure*

### **Results of the survey:**

**Note: The responses are reported in the order in which students felt the greatest need for change.**

The question that drew the largest number of responses that indicated that change is needed was as follows:

*Provide more information and advice about college and how to get there and ensure students have the information before their senior year.*

Overall, **38 (62.3%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 46%	Sophomores: 85.7%
Juniors: 70%	Freshmen: 42.8%

8 (13%) Felt that it was OK  
7 (11%) Not important  
8 (13%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

Two questions were close behind the previous one.

*Encourage interactive teaching methods: make class work and homework relevant work, not busy work; create environments that allow and encourage all teachers to be motivators and advocates for their students.*

Overall, **37 (60.6%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 61.5%      Sophomores: 85.7%  
Juniors: 65%      Freshmen: 28.5%

11 (18%) Felt it was OK  
6 (9.8%) Not important  
7 (11.4%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

*Change classes and curricula so that they relate more to the real world and can cater to a variety of student interests to keep students engaged.*

Overall, **37 (60.6%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 61.5%      Sophomores: 71.4%  
Juniors: 65%      Freshmen: 42.8%

6 (9.8%) Felt it was OK  
10 (16.3%) Not important  
8 (13.1%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

The fourth most significant question to the students:

*Provide help and resources (like computers and dedicated class time) for students working on graduation requirements like the portfolio.*

Overall, **36 (59%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 76.9%      Sophomores: 71.4 %  
Juniors: 50%      Freshmen: 42.8 %

9 (14.7%) Felt it was OK  
7 (11.4%) Not important  
9 (14.7%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

The fifth most felt need was this question:

*Invest in after-school programs (both in schools and in the community) and extra curricular college preparation programs.*

Overall, **33 (54%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 61.5%      Sophomores: 64%  
Juniors: 75%      Freshmen: 7%

6 (9.8%) Felt it was OK  
15 (24.5%) Not important  
5 (8.1%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

The sixth most felt need was the following:

*Enable high schools to be flexible learning environments that can provide alternatives for students with different needs.*

Overall, **32 (53.3%)** of the 60 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 53.8%      Sophomores: 64.2%  
Juniors: 65%      Freshmen: 21.4%

8 (15%) Felt it was OK  
12 (20%) Not important  
7 (11.7%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

The following questions fell below the fifty percent level of need:

*Provide more academic supports for students who are struggling and improve access to resources like tutoring*

Overall, **30 (49.1%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 53.8%      Sophomores: 78.5%  
Juniors: 60%      Freshmen: 0 (0%)

10 (16.3%) Felt it was OK  
15 (24.5%) Not important  
6 (9.8%) No opinion

**Note: The Grade 9 response to this question, although the sampling is limited, raises serious concerns in light of the academic results reflected on Term I grade reports.**

\*\*\*\*\*

*Involve student leaders in school and district planning processes.*

Overall, **23 (37.7%)** of the 62 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 12.9%      Sophomores: 4.8%  
Juniors: 12.9%      Freshmen: 6.5%

14 (22.6%) Felt it was OK  
15 (24.2%) Not important  
10 (16%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

*Reduce class sizes.*

Overall, **23 (37.7%)** of the 62 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 11.3%      Sophomores: 9.7%  
Juniors: 8%      Freshmen: 8%

15 (24.2%) Felt it was OK  
14 (22.6%) Not important  
9 (14.5%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

*Increase the number of guidance counselors in schools or provide alternatives for mentoring and advising*

Overall, **21 (34.4%)** of the 61 respondents said that this need existed.

Seniors: 6 (9.8%)      Sophomores: 4 (6.6%)  
Juniors: 8 (13.1%)      Freshmen: 3 (5%)

16 (26.2%) Felt it was OK  
13 (21.3%) Not important  
11 (18%) No opinion

\*\*\*\*\*

When asked if they thought they would graduate, 59 indicated **YES**, and only two (2) said **NO**.

When asked if they were planning on going to college, 59 said **YES**, two (2) said **NO**, and one (1) was **NOT SURE**

When asked if they were planning on going into the military after completing school, only two (2) said **YES**, fifty-six (56) said **NO**, and three (3) were **NOT SURE**.

\*\*\*\*\*

## WHAT DO DROPOUTS SAY?

The writer experienced great difficulty reaching the dropouts of 2006-2007. Letters to the parents/guardians realized little response and only direct telephone calls reaped rewards.

Twenty-six (26) of the forty-two (42) dropouts or their parents/guardians (62%) were reached. Six (6) of the dropouts' telephones (23%) were no longer in service. Parents/guardians were pleased that they were contacted and offered candid opinions of their experiences with the system. Students, for the most part, were cooperative but concerned about confidentiality. The writer assured the students and parents/guardians that all information regarding individuals would remain confidential.

The following are the student dropouts' reasons for leaving school in the order of most frequent to least frequent:

- Was failing in school-20 (77%)
- Did **not** like school-16 (69%)
- Could **not** keep up with school work-18 (70%)
- Did **not** see relevance of school work-16 (61.5%)
- Missed too many days-16 (61.5%)
- Could **not** get along with teachers-13 (50%)
- Felt they did **not** belong-13 (50%)
- Changed school and did **not** like new one-12 (46%)
- Was "pushed out"-6 (23%)

When these responses are compared to a national study by Civic Enterprises, we note many significant differences:

- Did **not** like school (51.2%)
- Was failing in school (35%)
- Could **not** keep up with school work (31.3%)
- Did **not** see relevance of school work (47%)
- Missed too many days (43%)
- Could **not** get along with teachers (20.1%)
- Felt they did **not** belong (23.3%)
- Changed schools and did **not** like the new one (13.2%)
- Was pushed out (13.4%)

**THE ROAD BACK - PART I**  
***A Framework for Change***  
**COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The evidence of the need to address the problem of dropouts is surely prominent in this research report. Creating observable change will rely on a combination of factors that will call upon the commitment of many groups and individuals. What follows is an eight (8) stage, research-based **approach**<sup>16</sup> to realizing success in a focused attack on the problem.

**Recommendations:**

**1.0 Establish a Sense of Urgency**

There currently does **not** appear to be an outcry regarding the dropout problem in Burrillville. There are several individual programs throughout the system addressing isolated concerns, but no coordination of effort. The superintendent, as evidenced by his direction in clarifying the data, has identified dropouts as his number one concern. This concern should now be shared by the school committee, teachers, and the community.

**1.1 School Committee Declaration of Support**

The school committee will need to promulgate a written declaration of their concern and support for the development of a strategic plan which will address the dropout problem.

**1.2 Review of School Committee Goals**

All school committee goals should be reviewed and prioritized. Short term dropout prevention goals(1-3 years) and longer term (3-5 years) should be established.

**1.3 Creation of a Vision Statement**

The superintendent and school committee will write a vision statement that will guide all future actions and decision-making.

**1.4 Individual Schools Develop Goals and Objectives**

Each school should present grade level, appropriate goals and objectives to be reviewed by the superintendent and personally presented to the school committee by the principals and teachers who assisted in their development.

## **2.0 Build a Coalition**

It will **not** be sufficient to just set goals and objectives. Without a coalition of teachers, parents, community organizations, community leaders, the teachers' association, businesses, police, clergy, etc., there will be little hope for success.

### **2.1 Organize a Steering Committee**

The superintendent and school committee should organize a steering team to monitor the development and implementation of the strategic plan. The steering committee should be comprised of the following:

- a. School committee representative
- b. Superintendent of schools
- c. Teacher union representative
- d. High school principal
- e. High school guidance counselor
- f. Middle school principal or assistant
- g. Elementary principal
- h. Two high school teachers from core subject areas  
(One should represent grade 9)
- i. Two middle school teachers from different grade levels.  
(One should represent grade 8)
- j. Two elementary teachers from different schools and grade levels.  
(One should represent grade 4)
- k. One adjustment counselor or social worker
- l. Two parent representatives from different levels  
(One should be from the high school)
- m. Two students from the high school
- n. One media representative
- o. Others as deemed appropriate to meet the goals as designed

### **2.2 Steering Committee Communication**

- a. All meetings are posted and open to the public
- b. Notes are maintained for all meetings
- c. Notes of meetings are shared with the public via the system web site
- d. Notes are emailed to all school personnel
- d. Bulletin boards are created at all schools with the purpose of posting minutes of meetings and other pertinent information.

### **2.3 School Committee Member**

- a. The school committee liaison reports at every school committee meeting regarding the progress of the strategic plan.
- b. This is a fixed agenda item for all regular school committee meetings.

The importance of this initiative is demonstrated by regular attention to the topic. As Gary Lister, chairman of the Bleckley County School Board in Cochran, Georgia, recently wrote:

“If it’s not on the agenda, it’s not important to you. The published, advertised agenda shows the whole world what you actually care about as a board.”<sup>17</sup>

## **2.4 Decision-making**

- 2.41 Since meetings will be open to the public, a portion of each agenda should allow for community input regarding dropouts.
- 2.42 The committee should utilize consensus rather than voting to make decisions.

## **3.0 Include a Dropout Reduction Goal in the School Department’s Strategic Plan**

(Note: Since the current Burrillville School Department Strategic Action Plan spans the years 2004-2007, there is a need to revisit the document.)

- 3.1 This new goal will be the impetus for addressing the dropout problem.
- 3.2 An experienced strategic planner should be engaged to assist the steering committee with the document.
- 3.3 The plan will build on the vision statement developed by the school committee.

## **4.0 Communicate the Change Vision**

- 4.1 The superintendent should organize a school and town-wide convocation to establish the urgency and communicate the change vision.
- 4.2 The event should be planned and reviewed by the steering committee.
- 4.3 Posters should be provided to all schools, town offices, the library, and other venues as deemed important.
- 4.4 The steering committee should develop an invitation list.
- 4.5 The town manager should be enlisted to speak at this event.
- 4.6 RIDE representative(s) should be invited and possibly speak.  
(Consider invitations to Education Commissioner Peter McWalters, Roy Seitsinger, Director of High School and Middle School Reform and George McDonough, a program coordinator who deals with various data initiatives)
- 4.7 Invite Elizabeth Burke Bryant from *Rhode Island Kids Count*, One Union Station, Providence, RI 02903. Telephone: (401) 351-9400

**4.8** Consider an opening reception for invited guests prior to the convocation.

**5.0 Empower Broad-based Action**

**5.1** The plan should allow for as many people as possible to become involved in the process.

**5.11** SIT teams at each school should take a prominent role by sending representatives to steering committee meetings.

**5.12** Student councils should be encouraged to discuss their concerns and forward them to the steering committee.

**6.0 Generate Short-Term Wins**

Taking on the most difficult items in the recommendations before dealing with some short-term, easily resolved issues, is a mistake. The steering committee should be concerned with “early victories” to create momentum.

**7.0 Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change**

The Steering Committee should be certain to publish the progress of the above short-term wins and the next step(s) in the plan. If a media rep is **not** found to serve on the steering committee, one member, proficient in writing, should take the responsibility of writing press releases.

**8.0 Anchor New Approaches in the Culture**

The ultimate goal of the entire plan is to make the concern and action steps a permanent part of the town and schools’ culture, regardless of changes in the make-up of the school committee, superintendency or school administrators. This will **not** happen overnight and can only be realized by a sustained effort over a period of years. Patience will be a virtue.

**THE ROAD BACK-PART II**  
***Across the System***  
**COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are presented in no particular order of priority. They have been developed with the realization that funds are limited or non-existent at this juncture.

**Recommendations:**

**9.0 Elementary principals and teachers should revisit their SALT reports and discuss the results of student attitudes and the reasons for these feelings.**

Although this report focuses on results of fourth grade student responses, all teachers should participate in this exercise. Six (6) of the seven (7) current fourth grade teachers were on staff in 1998-1999 and should be particularly concerned with the data.

**10.0 Provision should be made by the principals for whole school review of all future SALT reports**

Teacher interviews revealed that many were unaware of the previous results and that little or in most cases, **no** time, had been allocated to the subject.

**11.0 All schools should immediately embark on a “Stay in School” campaign.**

**11.1** All schools should display posters and other inspirational materials which convey the message of the importance of completing high school.

**11.12** School communications to parents/guardians should include the message.

**11.13** Morning announcements should include the “Stay in School” theme.

**11.4** Civic and community organizations should be enlisted to contribute funds for the preparation of “Stay in School” buttons and awards to be distributed to elementary and middle school students.

**11.41** As an incentive to wear the buttons, prizes should periodically be awarded to those identified wearing the buttons. These awards could consist of food and store gift certificates.

**11.42** All students awarded prizes for wearing the pins will have their name entered into a year-end drawing for a major prize donated by a local sponsor.

## **12.0 Community collaborations must be fostered.**

An essential element of success in this entire endeavor will be the enlistment of the entire Burrillville community. Everyone must share the vision of the importance of keeping students in school. As previously reported (See “What Do Teachers Say,” Pages 20-27), teachers feel strongly that the town does **not** value education and that parents do **not** support educators’ efforts. The writer felt the teacher dismay at every turn and believes that this cavernous divide must be addressed. Since teachers feel that this attitude is rooted in the culture of the town, a long range plan needs to be initiated to change this toxic situation. Building a successful collaboration will **not** occur overnight and will be the most difficult obstacle to conquer. Paper plans are easy to write. Sustaining the effort will be a major challenge that will require skillful leadership. So where should you start?

### **12.1 Establish a “Dollars for Scholars” Chapter**

What can bring the entire community together in support of education? What proven vehicle has shown positive results over and over again for a half century? There is an answer!

“In 1958, an Optometrist in Fall River, Mass., had a simple but profound idea-if everyone in his community gave just a dollar to an educational fund, it would be enough to help nearly every student in the community who wanted to attend college. Dr. Irving Fradkin called his plan “*Dollars for Scholars*,” and it has expanded into what, today, **is the nation’s largest non-profit, private sector scholarship and educational support organization.**”<sup>18</sup>

“*Dollars for Scholars*” is a nationwide network of more than 1200 grassroots community based scholarship foundations...”<sup>19</sup>

The writer has personally experienced the value of “*Dollars for Scholars*”, having been a recipient in 1959 and having served on the board of directors in Wakefield, MA.

Burrillville advertised 113 scholarships to graduating seniors in 2007 and is duly proud of this number. A closer look at the list reveals (as reported by guidance) that twenty-two (22) are locally generated. Sixty-seven (67) of the 113 place restrictions on the recipient that are non-academic in nature. Six (6) are limited to a particular nationality.

So what are the advantages of the “*Dollars for Scholars*” program? First, it is a cooperative effort that involves both the schools and the community. Its board of directors includes a predominance of community members, some educators, and high school students. **Everyone** is involved in the effort to raise scholarship monies. The current scholarships can be maintained although there may be some question regarding those scholarships that are limited by nationality.

A newer initiative of “*Dollars for Scholars*,” *The American Dream Challenge*, involves both elementary and middle school students in competing for scholarships through the writing of an essay format. The goal is to involve young students in thinking about higher education.

There are currently eleven (11) chapters in Rhode Island including Barrington, Charlestown, East Providence, Little Compton, North Providence, Portsmouth, Providence, Greater Providence, Scituate and Warwick (2).<sup>20</sup>

The writer has contacted Dr. Irving Fradkin, the founder, who is willing to come to Burrillville to further explain the program to the superintendent and/or other interested parties. His contact information is as follows:

Dr. Irving Fradkin  
624 Florence Street  
Fall River, MA 02720  
(508) 672-0092

The Rhode Island coordinator is Bill Hurry. He can be reached at (401) 736-1100.

The New England office of “*Dollars for Scholars*” is located in Stoneham, MA. The toll free number is (800) 335-4360.

## **12.2 Reinvigorate the Current Burrillville Mentoring Program**

*“When we invest today in expanding our community’s capacity to mentor our youth, we will see an incredible return in the lives of our children and the health of our communities for generations to come”<sup>21</sup>*

One of the success stories that the writer came across was the Burrillville Mentoring Program. Fashioned with the guidance of the *Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership*, Burrillville’s current program began some five years ago through the untiring efforts of Tammy Beaudreault, a volunteer community member. Previous to Tammy’s involvement, a mentoring program was in place thanks to the efforts of Ocean State Power (Callahan Elementary) and Wright’s Farm (Steere Farm). In 1996-97, Callahan had the services of 16-17 mentors for one

hour each per week. That number has now dropped to 6-7. Steere Farm has about the same at this time. The middle school has 3-4. The high school has none.

Tammy Beaudreault is **no** longer able to act as coordinator of the program, and it is very clear, without the type of leadership she has provided, that the program will dissolve. Staff members Tammy Mak and Stacey Boulet are attempting to keep the ship afloat, but their other pressing duties and responsibilities must come first.

The *Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership's website*<sup>22</sup> offers testimony to the importance of kids who have mentoring:

- 46% less likely to begin using drugs
- 27% less likely to begin using alcohol
- 53% less likely to skip school
- 33% less likely to engage in violence

Mentoring is a proven commodity in all fields of human endeavor. An effort should be made as soon as possible to seek out a replacement for Ms. Beaudreault. The current mentors could be lost to inaction.

Ms. Beaudreault has submitted a job description, at my request, to help guide the search. (See Appendix A) Please note that the *Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership* offers training to prospective coordinators for \$150.00,<sup>23</sup> a small investment for invaluable returns. Information regarding this program can be acquired by calling: (401) 732-7700.

In the event that a volunteer is unable to be found, the system should consider offering a stipend to an interested party to sustain the program.

An additional consideration for seeking extra assistance in the schools is to bring back to life a program that thrived in the 1990's in Burrillville entitled: "VITAL." Created by the Resources Committee of the PTO, records indicate that upwards of 60-75 parents were active in Burrillville elementary schools as late as 1998. (It should be noted that Levy has a very active parent group with a parent coordinator of volunteers.)

### **12.3 Involve the Big Brother and Big Sister Programs**

The dropout population is replete with young people who are in need of additional support outside of school. This additional mentoring program has also proven effective over the years. Securing a Big Brother or Big Sister involves a significant wait time. Early identification of those in need is imperative. It is advisable to recruit and promote the need in Burrillville for such mentors to cut down on delays to finding appropriate matches. The agencies, of course, handle screening and matching of candidates. Contact information for these programs:

***Big Brothers of Rhode Island***  
**Val Sinesi, Executive Director**  
**3300 Pawtucket Avenue**  
**East Providence, RI 02915**  
**(401) 432-9955**

***Big Sisters of Rhode Island***  
**Karen Gager, Program Director**  
**120 Lambert Lind Highway, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor**  
**Warwick, RI 02886**  
**(401) 921-2434**

#### **12.4 Initiate a Peer-to-Peer Tutorial Plan**

Many schools have instituted programs where students help students during and/or after school. Many high schools utilize National Honor Society students, but it is **not** necessary to limit the tutor population in this manner. Often students of good character who are **not** in the honor society can be selected to participate. This approach should be considered, including sending high school students to the middle and elementary schools when able. The time schedules of the high and middle school are close enough to enable this recommendation to work well. This plan is also an excellent source of community service hours. The writer discussed this possibility at the end of the last academic year with the then high school principal.

*“Unlike adult-child instruction, (in) peer tutoring the expert party is not very far removed from the novice party in authority or knowledge; nor has the expert party any special claims to instructional competence. Such differences affect the nature of discourse between tutor and tutee, because they place the tutee in a less passive role than does the adult/child instructional relation. Being closer in knowledge and status, the tutee in a peer relation feels freer to express opinions, ask questions, and and risk untested solutions. The interaction between instructor and pupil is more balanced and more lively. This is why conversations between peer tutors and their tutees are high in mutuality even though the relationship is not exactly equal in status.”<sup>24</sup>*

Professor Diane Hedin in her book, *Students as Teachers*, bemoans the fact that peer tutoring is not more widely used and considers this fact a “mystery”,<sup>25</sup> and alcohol and drug abuse specialist Bonnie Bernard strongly advocates a “peer resource model of education”...in which research indicates that peer relationships contribute to children’s social and cognitive development. She further states that

“It seems imperative we encourage and provide youth the opportunities to relate to each other and work together in a cooperative and/or collaborative way from early childhood on.” (p.5)<sup>26</sup>

### **13.0 Study, Improve and Enhance the Current Transitions of Students from School to School**

**WHOSE FAULT IS IT?  
CERTAINLY NOT MINE...**

**The college professor said,  
“Such wrong in the student is a shame,  
Lack of preparation in high school is to blame.”**

**Said the high school teacher,  
“Good heavens, that boy is a fool.  
The fault, of course, is with the middle school.”**

**The middle school teacher said,  
“From such stupidity may I be spared,  
They send him to me so unprepared.”**

**The elementary teacher said,  
“The kindergartners are block-heads all,  
They call it preparation; it’s worse than nothing at all.”**

**The kindergarten teacher said,  
“Such a lack of training never did I see,  
What kind of mother must that woman be.”**

**The mother said,  
“Poor hopeless child, he’s not to blame  
For you see, his father’s folks are all the same.”**

**Said the father,  
At the end of the line,  
“I doubt the rascal’s even mine.”**

Research has shown that student achievement drops in proportion to the number of school transitions experienced by students.<sup>27</sup> Since this paper cannot fully discuss this finding, the district would be well-served in the future to study its grade configurations in light of this information.

All transitions in the system should be reviewed regularly. Principals said the most significant need rests in the transition from middle to high school. Dropouts aid that more could have been done in this area to create a greater comfort level. All dropouts expressed some excitement about going to the high school initially

but soon realized that they lacked the support given them by the teaming system in the middle school. Teachers, too, expressed this feeling as previously noted. A review of recent school committee minutes reveals that this topic has been discussed in prior years (See School Committee minutes 2/14/2006, page 6)

There is little doubt that changes in leadership at the high school have taken its toll in this area. This should not be a surprise. However, it is imperative that this topic be discussed and a plan executed for the class of 2012 and thereafter.

The transitioning of students at all levels requires excellent communication among administrators, teachers, and parents. As expressed by Hertzog and Morgan in a 1998 article in the *NASSP Bulletin*, transition is not an event, but rather an extended period of time that influences student attitudes and behaviors across two distinct organizations, and high school dropout rates are significantly lower in school districts that have explicit middle school to high school transition programs.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, since the needs of boys, girls, and special needs students vary, attention should be paid to their differences during planning. Girls tend to experience greater difficulties adjusting to high school with respect to social aspects, whereas boys are more likely than girls to struggle academically.<sup>29</sup> Burrillville's dropout statistics clearly illustrate this fact. The writer's experience also dictates that special needs students need to be involved in at least one extra-curricular activity.

Communication between middle school and high school is often a missing link in school systems and Burrillville is no exception. Teacher focus groups reaffirmed this concern. Attitudes and expectations need to be shared. Here is a typical example of a statement made by a middle school teacher:

“High school teachers have a superior attitude about what they do. Most of them wouldn't last a week in middle school, especially if they tried to ignore the non-academic needs of these kids. I agree we need to get together and have a conversation about what they expect our kids to know. But I'm not sure they can treat us as peers and colleagues, and if they can't, it won't work.”<sup>30</sup>

**13.1 The SIT at the high school and middle school should take responsibility for reviewing the transitioning needs of students in grade eight.**

**13.11 These groups should hold a joint meeting to establish their priorities.**

**13.12 Guidance counselors, grade eight and nine teachers and parents of current freshmen should be represented.**

**13.2 The high school SIT should establish a sub-committee to plan a sequence of activities to meet the objectives of the joint SIT meeting. These objectives must include parents as a target population, realizing that**

**parents' greatest concern is in the realm of social issues such as students being bullied and the effect of peer pressure.<sup>31</sup> (It should be noted here that one of the parents of a dropout reported that bullying was partially responsible for her son's dropping out.)**

**13.3 The best way to know whether the orientation program is a success is to ask the students and parents. Evaluation surveys should be prepared and distributed. Results should inform plans for the following year. "No one knows better than students themselves what they need from teachers as they move into the high school"<sup>32</sup>**

**13.4 Although difficult to schedule, an effort should be made to allow grade eight and nine teachers to meet annually to discuss curriculum and transitional concerns. If this is made a priority, it will happen.**

In the writer's 39 years of high school experience, many successful orientation programs were planned. The following is a list of suggested activities to consider:

- Begin the orientation procedure at the end of Term II by sending ninth grade students to the middle school to talk with eighth graders.
- Plan a parent forum and invite parents of current grade nine students to serve as a panel to discuss the concerns of transitioning from middle to high school
- Prior to the opening of school in September, hold a cookout followed by a dance for incoming students only. Enlist the help of parents of incoming students and the student council to plan and work at the event. This creates a welcoming social opportunity for administration, teachers, and parents.
- Plan tours of the facility using responsible students to act as tour guides. Be sure to train the guides.
- Hold a "BRONCO PRIDE NIGHT" in the gymnasium. This event, held from 6:00-8:00 pm in May, is for parents and students and is focused on extra-curricular activities. Invite incoming grade 8 parents and students and students who have registered new to the district. Also, encourage seventh graders to attend with their parents. This is your opportunity to showcase your students' achievements in both activities and sports. Each activity has a decorated table manned by student participants and advisors or coaches who can answer questions. Printed literature is available and videos, pictures, and awards can be displayed. Sign up sheets are available to enlist new members. (This step makes it easier for the students to attend the initial meeting of the group because they

are expected). Music groups are scheduled to perform, cheerleaders, dance teams, drama, and other student endeavors are brought to life for the community. The principal is introduced and welcomes everyone to the school. Other speakers, as deemed appropriate, can welcome students. Caution: **KEEP THE SPEAKING BRIEF.**

Additional activities such as foul shooting contests can be held with prizes. This can involve seventh graders and other non-incoming students in a separate category contest. Announce door prizes periodically.

The school's parent organization can recruit members at their table. The SIT can seek new members as needed.

The school store sets up tables to sell school-related merchandise, especially items that instill school spirit such as pennants, school tees and sweatshirts, etc. Food should also be available and can act as a fundraiser for a different school organization each year. A 50-50 drawing can be sponsored by clubs on a rotating basis.

The possibilities are endless as you can see. Get creative and make this night a new tradition at the school.

After two years of ironing out your arrangements, invite the entire community. The public relations value of this event is invaluable. Many people in town have no idea of the extent of your activities. I have seen this night build school support and encourage students and parents who were contemplating enrolling elsewhere, change their minds.

- Plan days or partial days for eighth graders to “shadow” high school students.
- Hold a tour of the high school in the evening for eighth grade parents and parents of newly registered students of any grade. (Recall that students new to town did not feel welcome). Utilize students to lead the tours.

This list does **not** include the usual academic-related sessions that are traditionally held. They are equally important and appear to be in place in Burrillville.

In brief, researchers Hertzog, Morgan and Smith contend:

**“High school dropout rates are significantly lower in school districts that have explicit middle school to high school transition programs.”<sup>33</sup>**

### **13.5 Support the strengthening of the *Newcomers' Club* at the high school**

It was refreshing to find that the high school does have a *Newcomers' Club*. Unfortunately, according to the sponsors, it has “lost some steam” in recent years. The club currently does meet all new students, discusses concerns, but tends to do

little following the early weeks of school. As the reader has seen, fully half of the dropouts did not feel welcome at BHS. The bulk of that number were from other communities. They all acknowledged and appreciated the attempt by the *Newcomers' Club* to assist them, but they invariably felt that it was **not** enough to make a real difference. Unless additional supports are put in place, this valuable asset will be lost.

**13.51 Administration and SIT should hold a meeting with the club advisor(s) and determine what assistance is necessary to sustain the activities of the organization throughout the year.**

**13.52 Seek out volunteer staff who would be willing to assist in the planning and activities of the club.**

**13.53 Involve the student council and class officers in the future.**

**13.54 Actively assist new students to get involved in school activities.**

**13.55 Consider a buddy-type system of pairing new students with high school students of similar interests. This can also be effective at the middle school level.**

In the research of Kristen Isakson and Patricia Jarvis, they concluded:

**“Studies reveal that students who feel they are a part of the school community are more motivated and show higher academic achievement”<sup>34</sup>**

**14.0 A study should be undertaken to analyze how high school guidance counselor time is utilized.**

As the writer has noted in this report, students feel the need for more involvement with their counselors. Some parents of dropouts expressed dismay with both guidance and administration. One parent claimed that her son’s counselor appeared totally unprepared at team meeting and had little knowledge of his background and problems. Another parent felt “traumatized” by the administrator dealing with her son. As expressed by the student survey, more information regarding colleges has been requested.

**14.1 Remove all guidance counselors from duty periods.**

The contractual utilization of guidance counselors in totally unrelated duties contributes negatively to their role and responsibilities. The hours spent in supervisory duties is akin to a hospital asking doctors to monitor the boilers.

**14.2 Provide more direct supervision to guidance counselors by appointing a supervisor of guidance.**

**THE ROAD BACK-Part III**  
**The Ninth Grade**  
**COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is little doubt that the attention of the school department must be on the organization of Grade 9. The writer has discussed the needs of transition and how important the dropouts viewed this time in their life. Unless a different approach is utilized than now exists, there should be **no** reason to believe any changes will occur.

An analysis of the Term I grades for freshman versus other classes in 2006-2007 clearly illustrate the concern:

General Overview:

- **583 total courses failed**
- **Approximately 273 students failed at least one (1) class**
  - 77 were IEP students
  - 15 were 504 students
  - 97 were one year repeaters
  - 17 were 2 or more year repeaters

Number of students who failed 1, 2, 3 or 4 or more courses:

Grade	1 failure	2 failures	3 failures	4 or more	Total
9	43	29	17	23	112
10	35	19	12	11	77
11	24	14	13	10	61
12	7	7	2	7	23
Total	109	69	44	51	273

**Summary of failed classes:**

- **125 failed English**
- **70 failed Math**
- **95 failed history**
- **121 failed science**
- **18 failed World Language**
- **48 failed physical education**
- **70 failed elective classes**

**Grade 9 Enrollment 2006-2007-October 1<sup>st</sup>**

- **Girls: 130**
- **Boys: 136**
- **Total: 266**

**Grade 9 Failures as a Percentage of Enrollment:**

<b>1 Failure</b>	<b>2 Failures</b>	<b>3 Failures</b>	<b>4 or more</b>
<b>16%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>8.6%</b>

A view of the Term I results for **2007-2008** continue to illustrate the course failure problem in Grade 9:

<b>Course #</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Total Students</b>	<b># of Failures</b>	<b>% of Failures</b>
011	Eng 9 ST	127	10	7.87%
013	Eng 9 TRA	41	21	51.22%
013A	Eng 9 TRA	41	16	39.02%
	<b>English</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>22.49%</b>

Note that the failure rate in Grade 9 English (Standard and Traditional) approximates the dropout rate of the high school.

The high school is to be commended for attacking the English and math failure concern by initiating a “ramp up” program. This program identified students in need of additional assistance in these subjects and scheduled an additional block of instruction. The Algebra Review course is also a welcome addition. The Term I results are as follows:

<b>Course #</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Total Students</b>	<b># of Failures</b>	<b>% of Failures</b>
018R	Eng 10-Ramp	20	7	35%
122R	Alg A-Ramp	55	7	12.73%
123R	Alg B-Ramp	24	3	12.5%
	<b>Eng and Alg</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17.18%</b>

Although there are some drawbacks to a ramp up program, specifically the inability of a student to be able to choose an elective, it is vital that failing students be rendered the help they require as soon as possible.

**Recommendations:**

**15.0 Evaluate *and* continue the ramp up program at the conclusion of the 2007-2008 school year and make necessary adjustments to the entry criteria, course**

**content, and instructional methodologies. This evaluation should include guidance counselors who need more involvement in the departmental discussions and can possibly offer additional insights. The Algebra Review course should also be evaluated since ten (10) of the thirty-one (31) students failed Term I.**

**15.1 Course selections take place well in advance of the end of the school year. However, some flexibility should be allowed for the accommodation all students in need of this extra help.**

**15.2 Reorganize Grade 9 into a teaming approach *as soon as possible* to sustain the attention realized in the middle grades.**

While this recommendation will require that some teachers assume new courses, it is imperative that a new approach be initiated. Attention should be paid to the selection of instructors from the standpoint of their desire to participate and their previous preparation. These teachers should have common planning time and the assigned Grade 9 guidance counselor should be available to meet with them on a regular basis, supplying necessary data to the team while being aware of problems throughout the year. The much-needed Advisory program would be an important facet of this approach. Other resource personnel should be available such as social workers and tutorial coordinators. A paid summer workshop should be afforded the team participants and an experienced middle school team teacher or middle school administrator should also attend. If possible, a middle school counselor and the receiving Grade 9 high school counselor could be present.

**15.3 Plan to consider the reorganization of Grade 10 following the teaming of Grade 9. The design of Grade 10 will be similar to Grade 9. See this approach as utilized by Westerville High School, Westerville, Ohio: <http://www.wcshighschoolredesign.com/>**

**15.4 Consider the addition of a course for Grade 9 that will enroll students who fail the Grade 8 NECAP math testing.**

This course will complement the *Algebra A* curriculum. The course should focus on problem solving, reading math problems and analyzing and interpreting results. It should include real life mathematics and utilize hands-on activities and would act in a similar fashion to the ramp up approach and be an additional course to the regularly scheduled math class.

**16.0 Seriously consider adopting a *credit recovery program* beyond the ramp up courses currently in place.**

Three programs worthy of investigation are *Plato*, *EDOptions*, and *Stars suite*.

**THE ROAD BACK-PART IV**  
**Drugs and Alcohol**  
**COMMENTARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the reader noted earlier in the SALT surveys, drugs and alcohol permeate the landscape. While others may argue that the extent of these abuses is no greater in Burrillville than elsewhere, that is little comfort when we realize that many of our dropouts were trapped in the clutches of addiction or near addiction. Others were too often drawn in by peer pressure and the excuse that “There’s nothing to do in this town!” The current *Burrillville School Department Strategic Plan*, School Committee Goal #7 states: “Ensure a safe and supportive environment for students.” The stated Objective #1 reads: “The Superintendent develops and implements data-driven and research-based programs for addressing the physical, social, and emotional needs of students that are affecting their academic performance.” Some of the strategies for accomplishing this objective follow with indicators, and status:

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Status</b>
The Superintendent develops and implements programs and procedures for preventing school violence, fostering a drug-free learning environment, and ensuring civil preparedness.	A strong relationship exists with law enforcement and other community agencies to ensure a safe environment.	Ongoing efforts
Data show a reduction in unsafe/risk behaviors and/or an increase in healthy behavior	Health assessment results have shown improvement.  The Wellness Committee will be addressing the issues.	Ongoing efforts

Although there appears to be a high level of satisfaction with the school/law enforcement relationship, the writer noted in the records a strained relationship in regard to the development of a *Memorandum of Understanding*, an essential element that guides behaviors of school and police. The issue of *Zero Tolerance* has been often debated. School Committee policies, however, clearly delineate the prohibitions and state: “The School Department shall provide full cooperation with legal authorities.”(P6432) An excellent relationship also exists with the current resource officer at the high school.

Another concern revolves around the availability of the substance abuse counselor. With the tightening of budgets, this year the position has experienced a severe

cutback from two (2) full time people (one in the middle school and one in the high school), to just one person who is shared by the two levels. This situation, coupled with the deterioration of available time at the high school of a social worker (available only one day/week), is a sure formula for possible increased occasions of continued substance abuse. Fewer students are being seen for help although it is requested. An administrator shared the feeling that the substance abuse counselor was on the road to burnout.

A close look at the substance abuse counselor's report for the school year **2006-2007** truly tells the story of this necessary service:

<b>Number of Students Assisted</b>	<b>All percentages are based on a Grade 6-12 population of 1,530</b>
<b>254</b>	
<b>16.6%</b>	

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>36.22</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>14.96</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12.99</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11.02</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9.84</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>9.45</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5.51</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	

The high number of Grade 8 and Grade 9 referrals is further testimony to the importance of these years and the transition concern expressed in this report.

Another interesting and revealing statistic is the source of the referrals:

<b>Self</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>36.61</b>
<b>Friend/Peer</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>27.95</b>
<b>Guidance Counselor</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13.39</b>
<b>Vice Principal</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4.33</b>
<b>Social Worker/Psychologist</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4.33</b>
<b>Faculty</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>3.94</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3.15</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3.15</b>
<b>School Nurse</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2.36</b>
<b>Principal</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.79</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	

The full 2006-2007 *Student Assistance Utilization Report* can be found in Appendix B.

The cut of the available time of the social workers and substance abuse counselors has resulted in the elimination of the SADD program at the middle school and fewer occasions for classroom time in Grade 8. Where additional outside agencies once assisted in the attack on substance abuse, according to staff, none are currently involved. Teachers and staff also report poor attendance by parents/guardians at targeted substance abuse adult programs.

Adding to the problem is the slippage that has occurred in the K-12 substance abuse curriculum. Principals and staff agree that the many mandates facing the schools have eroded the once effective delivery of information to students.

The Burrillville Prevention Action Coalition (BPAC) is to be commended for their contribution to the schools and community. Activities such as *Red Ribbon Week* and the sponsoring of other programs such as the appearance by Johnny the K promote good choices on the part of students. Unfortunately, the proposal currently on the table to regionalize task forces supported by the Rhode Island Division of Behavioral Health Services, if approved, will curtail available monies as the governor attempts to resolve a multi-million dollar state deficit.

### **Recommendations:**

- 17.0 The role and effectiveness of the Wellness Committee should be reviewed as it relates to the drug and alcohol concerns in the report.**
- 17.0 A *Memorandum of Understanding* should be drafted and approved by the school committee and chief of police.**
- 18.0 Strategies should be written to address the dropout problem in an updated strategic plan.**
- 18.0 Restoration of the position of the substance abuse counselor to full time will be testimony to the importance of the role and its significance in reducing the the number of dropouts.**
- 19.0 Consideration should be given to increasing the available time of social workers.**
- 20.0 Since the continuation of the SALT surveys by the state is very much in question as of this writing, the district should consider the designing of its own surveys to continue to monitor attitudes of the various stakeholders.**

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

The research and writing of this report could not have taken place at a less advantageous time. The ongoing contract negotiations and lack of progress hindered the ability of the writer to gather the necessary facts and information in a manner befitting the professional setting in which we work. Many school personnel voiced their concern about cooperating in the research for fear of reprisals and some actually looked over their shoulders when in my presence. Others answered my requests with curt emails and notes, especially when the teachers determined that they needed to work to rule. The writer is thankful for the large majority of contacts who viewed my mission as important to the students and families of the town.

It is perfectly clear that dropping out of school has a major deterrent effect on those who follow this path. Loss of earning potential, unemployment, a higher risk of disease and illness ultimately resulting in a shorter life span, a greater likelihood of incarceration, increased participation in welfare programs, higher divorce rates, and limited community involvement are some of the prospects faced by the dropout. It should be difficult to understand why so many students make this decision. It is until the data is studied.

Human beings shun those things that are distasteful to them, and for a large number of Burrillville dropouts, school represents an unwelcoming setting. The system must address this finding or see the dropout rate in the future add students who would otherwise remain in school.

The issue of drug and alcohol use, which has lost prominence in the last several years in the system's curriculum, must be elevated in importance at all levels. It should be obvious from the SALT studies that more needs to occur in the early years of the students' experiences. In addition, as seen in the statistics of the substance abuse counselor contacts, loss of this position will impact a large number of students and families and certainly do little to decrease potential dropouts.

As soon as economically feasible, additional electives need to be available at the high school and more activities need to be added at the middle school.

The mentoring program must be tended to as soon as possible before it is completely lost due to a lack of leadership. This cannot be left to fate; someone needs to take this on as a priority.

Until the community culture is addressed, however, Burrillville will labor in vain to see a change in the respect shown for education. Educators: teachers, administration, and the school committee together, must lead the way in the example they set in the years ahead.

**APPENDIX A**

**Burrillville Mentor Coordinator**  
**List of Duties**

## **BURRILLVILLE MENTOR COORDINATOR**

### List of Duties

(unedited)

(As supplied by Tammy Beaudreault)

- Make all copies of training manuals for new mentors at beginning and mid-year
- Gather all new calendars, contact sheets, lunch schedules for each school at start of each school year
  
- Recruit all new Mentors (on-going basis until March)  
Attend PTF meeting for WLC and SFE  
Attend school functions such as Harvest Fair at WLC  
Work with Business Partner—Wright’s Farm Restaurant  
Word of mouth/who knows someone that would be interested talking to teachers  
Newspaper article about program in “The Neighbors”-goal not yet met
  
- Submit all BCI’s to Burrillville Police Department
  
- Email with administration (Bev Hill) when all BCI’s come back from police  
Send a copy of license to Administration for each new member
  
- Schedule and conduct all training sessions for new mentors
  
- Contact all principals at beginning of school year to review permission slips before sent out  
Work with each school’s administrative staff to send out permission slips to parents  
Staff communicates with me when slip returns so visits or program kick off can begin
  
- Schedule a “Kick Off” for each school at beginning of year for Mentors, Mentees & Staff  
Create memos and email school staff and mentors of dates and times
  
- Communicate with Mentors throughout the year to see if they need anything via email and phone calls from home
  
- Constant communication with all schools regarding:  
New students needing mentors  
Issues with current mentors/mentees  
Idea sharing on program improvements
  
- Meetings with each new Mentor/Mentee pair for introduction when newly starting

- Keep a log of hours of on-going activity of program per school year
- Research and write grants for program
  - Need help with this task from someone with experience
  - Not able to do a lot of research due to time constraints
- Attend Coordinator meetings and training sessions as needed
  - Training provided by RI Mentoring Partnership
- Schedule an end of year function for each school
  - Create and communicate dates, time and place to all mentors and staff
  - Create certificates for Mentors, Mentees and staff
  - Buy supplies to bring to each function (certificates, cards, gifts and ice cream Supplies)
- Create and distribute all end of year evaluation forms
  - Forms are distributed to: Mentor, Mentee, Teacher, Parent and Principal per school
- Compile end of year report for RI Mentoring Partnership, Principals and Advisory Committee
- Update all forms on an on-going basis

**NOTE:** all work is done from home  
 All phone calls are done on a home phone or personal cell phone  
 All meetings are used with my own transportation and gas  
 All emails are done from home  
 All original printing is done from home PC

**APPENDIX B**

**Student Assistance Utilization Report**

**September 1, 2006-July 31, 2007**

## End Notes

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