

WHAT KIND OF POLICY FOR THE PROMOTION AND NON-PROMOTION OF STUDENTS?

CHAIRMAN: *W. E. Pate*, Principal, Bolton High School, Alexandria, Louisiana

INTERROGATORS:

Richard J. Bradley, Principal, High School, Berlin, New Hampshire

John T. Sasser, Principal, Senior High School, Fayetteville, North Carolina

Charles Veit, Principal, Junior High School, Queens Village, New York

Summary of the presentation made by STANLEY E. DIMOND

RESEARCH on promotions and failures in secondary schools is quite meager. Most studies have dealt with failures in elementary schools. But the impact of these studies on promotion policies has had important effects on the secondary schools. In one high school, for example, over a thirty-year period, the median IQ of the high-school graduating class decreased from 129 to 117. At the same time, the median IQ in the elementary schools was increased from 94 to 111. The major cause of these shifts was the change in promotion policies in the school system.

In the decade from 1944 to 1954, the U.S. Office of Education reports that the percentage loss in the first grade decreased from 21 per cent to 12 per cent. Similarly, the enrollment loss at the tenth grade dropped from 19 per cent to 11 per cent. It appears that, while there is less retardation and failure than in earlier periods, failure is still an important feature of American schools.

Three general policies on failure seem to be operating in our schools:

1. *A Fixed Standard.* Under this system, students must achieve a pre-determined level of competence before they can be passed. The effects of the fixed standard policy are clear: Failure is the fate of the many. A few students are taught that they are superior; most are taught that they are inferior. The drop-out rate from high school is increased. The financial cost of supplying teachers for the repeaters is high.

2. *Continuous Promotion.* By this system, students are promoted on the basis of chronological age. They move regularly through the grades and are graduated from high school with their peers at ages 17 to 18. Although, in practice, continuous promotion seems rarely to be as automatic as implied, the policy is based on a recognition of the facts of individual differences plus numerous studies showing that, by and large, students learn more if they advance with their age mates.

Stanley E. Dimond is Professor of Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

3. *Guidance Promotion.* By this policy, students are promoted on the basis of careful study and analysis of what seems best for each individual. The system is a refinement growing from continuous promotion plans. It assumes that teachers and administrators are professionally competent to make wise judgments about each individual. Guidance promotion is an outgrowth of studies which have shown that most students are better off when they are passed, but a few students seem to learn more if they are failed. For example, in one city, one hundred failures repeated subjects in high school. Forty did worse the second time; forty did about the same. But twenty learned more the second time. Guidance promotion endeavors to locate this minority which might profit by failure.

American high schools are committed to individualized education for all youth. These students are deserving of an education that is not humiliating or a breeder of inferiority. To accomplish this goal, promotion policies should be individualized and not based on arbitrary standards either of the fixed standard type or the continuous promotion type. Most students should pass through our schools with a steady progression, but there should be exceptions based on wise professional diagnosis.

Summary of the presentation made by JACKSON M. DRAKE

OVER 95 per cent of the secondary schools in southern Illinois compel students who have failed a subject required for graduation to repeat the subject in which they have failed. In determining whether or not credit is given after the completion of two semesters of work in a subject, the first- and second-semester grades are averaged. Ordinarily if a subject is failed the first semester and passed the second semester, the first semester's work is repeated the following year, regardless of the grade made the second semester, and *vice-versa*. In mathematics, science, and foreign languages courses, if a student fails the first semester but passes the second semester with a high enough grade so that the average of the two is passing, he is passed for the year. If he passes the first semester and fails the second, however, he repeats the second semester's work the following year.

It is rather obvious that secondary schools are in need of continued study and research in this area. The problem of eliminating failure in the secondary schools may be attacked in several ways. The great majority of secondary schools in southern Illinois are using diagnostic tests, and remedial instruction is being employed in cases of difficulty. An adequate guidance system is one which functions so that pupils who have difficulties receive counseling and guidance from sympathetic teachers who are willing to make changes in the program when changes are advisable.

Jackson M. Drake is Superintendent of Carbondale Community High Schools, Carbondale, Illinois. Enrollment, 850.

Southern Illinois secondary schools are attempting to "beef up" their guidance programs. Many area schools are attempting to set up an individualized program of instruction for its students.

Faculty study of the problem of non-promotion is a much more rational method of solving the problem than is administrative order. Unless the teachers who have been using failure as a part of their teaching technique are brought to a realization of the problem and, as a result of discussion and study, are prepared for a transition, there will be little improvement in educational result. For this reason, a large number of the area schools have faculty committees studying and working on this problem.

A number of area schools are experimenting with differentiated curriculums and methods suited to students of various ability levels. For example, there are courses in practical physics and in general physics, in everyday chemistry and in general chemistry, and in corresponding types of courses in history, literature, and mathematics.

Very few schools in the southern Illinois area have programs that classify students according to clearly defined and labeled programs or tracks such as, "college preparatory," "vocational," or "commercial." An attempt is being made to design an individualized program for each student so that the students themselves do not feel that they are labeled according to the program they may have chosen in the ninth or tenth grade. Flexibility is combined with opportunity for teachers, students, parents, and guidance counselors to work out a plan of subjects that will fit the abilities, interests, and the needs of each student.

No one has the magic formula or panacea for the solution of this problem of promotion or non-promotion. Most of the area schools do not hesitate to fail students who do not meet the minimum level of performance they judge necessary for mastery of *elective* subjects. In the area of required courses, the general standard applied seems to be that a student may be given a passing grade if he has worked to full capacity whether or not a certain level of achievement has been reached.

Summary of the presentation made by WALTER G. ZAHN

IN preparing for this presentation a survey was made of the promotional practices prevalent in the geographical area assigned—the junior high schools in East Central Wisconsin. Examination of responses and literature and research in the field of promotion and non-promotion brought an early conclusion that promotional practices are quite similar regardless of geographic areas. There was a time when the responsibility of schools was considered to be solely that of academic achievement. Equalization

Walter G. Zahn is Principal of Franklin Junior High School, Green Bay, Wisconsin. Enrollment, 1,293.

of educational opportunity and an increased emphasis on the child and his needs instead of total emphasis on subject matter has caused a shift and gradual evolvement of promotional policies which reflect this change in emphasis. Such policies are referred to by a variety of names each descriptive of some particular, unique feature: rigid grade standard promotion, ungraded units, continuous promotion, and guidance promotion.

An examination of survey results leads one to the conclusion that in our geographic area practices can be best identified as belonging to the category of guidance promotion. The program of guidance promotion considers whether retention *or* promotion would favor the child's growth and development. The problems and characteristics of the individual are the determining factors as the decision is finally made.

The following items summarize current practice in East Central Wisconsin: (1) Most of the schools surveyed reported that any form of retention in grades seven and eight was relatively rare. (2) Of those schools reporting some retention of students in grades 7-8, students who were expected to repeat the whole grade were those who failed in several major, required subjects. The decision was arrived at after conference and a consideration of all pertinent, related factors. (3) Several schools reported that promotion on a classified basis, for those students who would otherwise have been retained, resulted in the placement of these individuals in classes especially planned to remove the deficiency or strengthen the weakness without loss of grade classification. Some of these were designated as conditional placement and satisfactory performance was required of them in the grade to which they were advanced. (4) Some report that, in cases of non-promotion, summer school programs are provided to remove the deficiency and provide "make-up" opportunity.

Wisconsin schools in most communities of any sizeable population are organized on the 6-3-3 plan. Generally speaking, for purposes of transcript, the ninth-grade record is included as part of the senior high-school record and some units of high-school credit required for graduation are earned at the ninth-grade level; this procedure has a direct bearing on promotion policy in the ninth grade as such policies must be coordinated with that of the senior high school. Some practices peculiar to the ninth grade are therefore reported. (1) In general guidance promotion procedures are used. (2) Students who fail in several subjects spend one half day at junior high school and one half day in senior high school. Whether it is feasible to arrange for such a program or not is frequently determined by the proximity of the senior high school. (3) Single subject "failures" are sometimes repeated in the junior high school with the rest of the program of studies being taken in the senior high school. (4) One school reports that deficiencies in English and social studies (which cannot be repeated at senior high school) are carried along to the senior year and a qualification test is given then to provide the unit of credit. Very few students report to take such a tests as their subsequent later failures have caused them to drop out of school. (5) None of the com-

munities surveyed has technical high schools, but frequently drop-outs at the ninth-grade level or beyond do choose to enroll in vocational schools for the program of vocational preparation offered there. (6) Placing students in advanced courses and grade level is not uncommon and such placement is noted on the cumulative record.

Many of the principals reporting indicated that a variety of attempts at some form of grouping or placement is tried in an effort to place individuals in instructional programs planned to meet his indicated, apparent needs, but most admit that even when this is accomplished individual differences persist and need to be considered by the classroom teacher in planning instruction, so that flexibility will result and "failure" a comparatively rare occurrence. If such consideration has been given to placing a student, then it most logically follows that instruction must also be planned to take into account these needs and attempt to supply them. Some of the following suggested practices were recommended: (1) provide for a wide variety of learning experiences and materials; (2) provide for sub-grouping and work with small group instructional techniques—teaching machines and specialized audio-visual aids should be considered; (3) provide for flexibility of standards, assignments, and responsibilities; (4) provide remedial instruction as required; (5) provide opportunities for the gifted through participation in system-wide activity concerned with the organization of such programs, or, if numbers are small, provide these opportunities within the class group; (6) join with others in efforts directed toward team teaching for large- and small-group instruction as indicated.