



Delinquency is 10 times more common among dropouts.

STUDENTS who quit high school become a liability to themselves and

to the welfare of the country; what can be done about this pressing problem?

by Kevin V. Brown

How Can We Keep Them in School?

In Russia, education is compulsory, curriculum much more advanced than here.



Changing world requires many more technical skills.



FRANK WAS 16, a sophomore in a Passaic, N. J., high school, and the only son of a widowed mother who supported him by working as a cleaning woman.

Frank was an average student, but a good son. Feeling that he was a burden to his mother, he quit school and started looking for work. Luckily, he lived in a community that had the conscience to cope with his problem and the program to solve it.

At the employment office, the counselor, instead of outlining job openings, tried to persuade Frank to return to school. Frank was shown statistics proving that opportunities were far greater for high-school and college graduates than for dropouts. He was impressed but adamant. "We need the money," he said simply.

Frank took a series of tests which showed he had above-average intelligence and potential. He was told that only his attitude toward school—his belief that it was holding him back—kept him from being a better student. Surprised, he agreed to take the counselor's advice.

The high school and Passaic civic groups cooperated. The school arranged Frank's classes more in line with his aptitudes. Civic groups got him a part-time job and found his mother a better-paying one. His material needs satisfied, Frank returned to school and later went on to college. He now has a promising career before him.

Frank's problem is fairly typical nationwide. The solution, unfortunately, is not. As a result, the dropout problem is becoming increasingly serious—to the individual student, his community, and the nation itself.

Take any five students in any high school in the country. If they reflect national averages, one will graduate and go on to college; two will graduate and get jobs as skilled or white-collar workers; the remaining two will drop out before graduation, ill-trained for anything but the most menial jobs and all but useless to the nation in a changing world that's demanding more and more education.

Therein lies the problem. Business, industry, and especially national defense are continually growing more complex. New knowledge, new skills, more adaptability, and greater flexibility will be needed

by larger and larger numbers of workers—an estimated 23 million new workers by 1965. But at the current rate, more than 40 percent—almost half—of the nation's future work force will be ill-equipped to meet the challenge of the next few decades.

The problem is first an individual one. Surveys show that even in an expanding economy less than half of all employers even consider hiring non-high-school graduates. In one area, of 71 occupations listed with vacancies, all required high-school graduates or better.

One executive said pointedly: "Our average worker uses \$12,500 worth of equipment. In a field getting more competitive all the time, we can't gamble with young people who don't have the background to profit quickly from advanced training."

The worst feature, however, is that the dropout cuts off his own chances of finding out just what his aptitudes are, seldom staying in school long enough to take more specialized courses, especially vocational courses, which could help identify them. This, most authorities agree, is probably the major cause of the nation's wasted, undeveloped talent.

Those who stay in school long enough to identify their talents profit most. The U.S. Department of Labor reports that high-school graduates earn an average of \$30,000 more in a lifetime than dropouts, and college graduates \$50,000 more.

THE COMMUNITY also has a stake in promoting education. The government recently surveyed 30 cities, in some of which more than half the population had a high-school education or better; in others more than half had less than a high-school education. The survey showed that sales in the better-educated communities averaged about \$200 more per person per year!

Industry also has an investment in education. Areas which tolerate lower educational levels will always suffer lower-quality workers and lower-quality industry—or no industry at all. A four-year study of a chronic dropout problem in Harrison County, W. Va., showed a direct relationship with another problem: chronic unemployment.

Communities have still stronger motives for keeping their teen-agers in school: their tax dollars.

Dropouts invariably swell the welfare rolls or, worse, the police blotters. Unskilled workers are the best candidates for relief payments because of their inability to find steady employment. Sociologists also admit another startling statistic: juvenile delinquency is 10 times more common among dropouts than among all other teen-age groups combined!

The dropout problem, however, involves more than finding jobs or saving taxes. It involves the nation's security!

Russia's recent scientific achievements shook many Americans' complacency. Used to being No. 1 in everything, we wondered, "How could they do it? How could a nation that was almost illiterate a generation ago get ahead of us, the greatest country on earth?" A simplified sketch of the differences between the two systems may help explain it.

In Russia, the individual's wants are ruthlessly subjugated to the needs of the state; yet it's no secret that the Reds place great emphasis on education. The U.S. Office of Education reports the average Russian child gets twice the education of his American counterpart, studying up to 12 hours a day, six days a week.

Under a controlled curriculum, every Russian pupil gets mathematics starting in 1st grade; biology in 4th; physics, algebra, and geometry in 6th; chemistry in 7th; astronomy and calculus in 10th. The upper 30 percent go on to college—and are paid for it! While American industry cries for more technically trained workers, Russia produces nearly a quarter of a million physicists, engineers, and other professionals annually.

Now, no American is going to say that Russia's system is better, but it has one frightening feature: no one is overlooked who can contribute anything to the state. Yet educators here feel that our system is better. It just hasn't been exploited properly.

Actually, we have compulsory attendance laws, too—those requiring students to stay in school past a certain age or grade—but they aren't always enforced, often with reason.

Charles M. Allen, principal of the University High School of the University of Illinois and an expert on the dropout problem, says, "Compulsory attendance has little relationship to the number of stu-

dents who drop out, but only affects the time they withdraw. If the laws are rigidly enforced, a heavy concentration drops out at the close of the compulsory period. Meanwhile, enforced attendance doesn't make school more meaningful."

That, in brief, is the difference. Russia enforces, we encourage. And educators here insist that the student who completes school voluntarily is better educated than one who is forced.

HOW, THEN, are more volunteers encouraged? By the same methods used in communities that have already tackled the problem: understanding the dropout, making school more attractive for him, relieving his outside problems.

A description of the "typical" dropout was made after a study by the Tucson, Ariz., school system: "This mythical person is 16, comes from a large family which lives in a poor neighborhood. The breadwinner is an unskilled worker, and the home may be broken by death or separation. The student makes below-average marks and may be overage for his grade. There isn't sufficient money, or enthusiasm, to stay in school, so the dropout quits to go to work. The cultural pattern of the home is such as to give little or no encouragement to return."

Thousands, of course, don't fit this pattern, and some communities go to extremes to make sure no one is overlooked. In Quincy, Ill., cumulative records are kept for evidence of irregular attendance, tardiness, gradual lowering of grades, and consistently poor achievement. Other research finds any financial, social, or emotional problems.

Whatever methods are used to spot dropouts, the second step is encouragement. Parents, of course, have prime responsibility here, but others, notably schools and churches, can help. Just one enjoyable class, or one sympathetic teacher or spiritual advisor, often means the difference between a youngster's making an extra effort to stay in school or giving up.

Even classmates can help. A committee in Grand Rapids, Mich., reported, "Among the hundreds of school-leavers we interviewed, only a few had been active, accepted members of any school club, team, or social group." Friendly invitations to shy class-

mates to join something can be vital, because the adolescent urge to "belong" is very strong.

It's in the area of outside problems, however, that the community at large can play its most active role. Samplings from three cities that fought the dropout threat are representative.

In Sacramento, Calif., an intensive part-time employment program for needy students was inaugurated by representatives from labor, management, PTAs, schools, and the employment-service office. The group incorporated permanently, soliciting jobs not ordinarily handled by adults for after-school hours and week ends. Within two years, 3,000 placements were made.

A similar program in Boise, Ida., used existing agencies but depended on widespread publicity to promote part-time jobs for youngsters. The YMCA offered its facilities as headquarters for the project and the Idaho Statesman donated free advertising space during the campaign.

One of the most comprehensive programs was undertaken in Tampa, Fla. Low finances caused most dropouts there, but teen-agers were not even considered for jobs unless first cleared with the schools. Employers, parents, and school officials discussed each student's problem individually, rearranging his courses, if necessary, even to the extent of letting him work days and complete school at night. Lunches and clothing were the chief financial burdens, so some students worked in the lunch-rooms in exchange for meals, and the Junior League arranged for free clothing. Other agencies even provided needed medical care, glasses, and dental work free of charge.

The seriousness of the dropout problem cannot be overemphasized, and it hasn't escaped notice in Washington. U.S. Commissioner of Education Lawrence G. Derthick summed it up: "Pioneers got their education from life itself. As youngsters, they learned most of what they needed by meeting and solving daily problems with their parents. But in the highly dynamic social and economic order of today, the youth is lost who does not have formal schooling, as much and as good as possible.

"Along with the individual, society also suffers when the education of youth is neglected."