Carrots or sticks for high school dropouts?

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GOVERNOR JIM FLORIO of New Jersey and his wife, Lucinda, both dropped out of high school at age seventeen. Although the two students—who did not know each other at the time—were both capable of doing well in school, getting diplomas was simply not a priority for them. Later, both concluded that they had made the wrong decision. Jim Florio had to go out into the world and see for himself that his lack of education prevented him from realizing his occupational ambitions. Lucinda Florio, who left school to marry and start a family, wrote recently that after dropping out she “would never avoid the feeling of having left something undone....”

But at the time their parents’ and teachers’ admonitions to stay in school made no impression. The message was sent, but it did not get through. Jim and Lucinda Florio’s experiences help explain the poor results achieved by most anti-dropout programs. If they had been invited to participate in dropout-prevention programs in their respective high schools, they probably would not have been interested. Both are examples of a type of dropout unique to affluent
industrial societies with near-universal school attendance up to age seventeen or eighteen. Such students drop out because, by definition, mass education cannot appeal to every youngster. Some teenagers develop an expectation that their personal goals will be fulfilled by continuing in school, and others do not. For those who do not, the rational course is to consider dropping out even if they are competent and ambitious; they look for experiences other than formal schooling to equip them for adulthood.

Very different kinds of dropouts also exist, particularly in Third World countries. Some youngsters in developing countries, where welfare programs are virtually unknown, drop out of school in order to go to work and help support their impoverished families. Fifty years ago the United States had a Third World dropout problem too. But with the growth of welfare programs (which subsidize the children of the poor who remain in school) and of child-labor laws (which make it extremely difficult for dropouts to get full-time jobs until they reach age eighteen), dropping out for economic reasons became extremely rare in the developed world. Nevertheless, studies of dropouts still talk about the disproportionate number of minorities and the poor who leave school, as though they were being driven out by poverty. This rhetoric is misleading. Today, dropouts in the United States usually have chosen to leave.

Why should they choose to leave when most adults they know are telling them how important education is? Some sociologists might explain that their peers are disparaging homework and praising money, fun, and cars. Perhaps. But adolescents live in two worlds: the present and the future. They tend to listen to their peers about popular music and how to have a good time, but they look to adults for a better understanding of how to get a good job and whether going to college makes this more likely. That is why a majority of adolescents do not drop out even though some may say that their classes are boring and that they hate school. Certain students go to school the way most people go to work: because they regard it as a necessary evil.

Dropouts give a mixture of reasons for leaving school. In a West Virginia study of dropouts during the 1987-1988 academic year, 21 percent said they left because of “dislike of school experiences” and another 24 percent cited “lack of interest or motivation.” Eight percent said that “academic difficulty” led them to drop out. 2 per-
cent left because of "behavioral difficulty," and 1 percent dropped out for "economic reasons."

Our rough estimate is that 50 to 60 percent of dropouts leave school, like the Florios, because they do not find schoolwork meaningful to them at that point in their lives. Another 10 to 15 percent leave because of pregnancy or marriage plans. Small percentages leave because of physical or mental illness or in order to pursue careers that do not require formal education. Finally, some 10 to 15 percent of American dropouts leave because they are not capable of functioning in school, perhaps because of a chaotic family situation but often because of problems of their own. Some are drug users, alcoholics, mentally disturbed, learning-disabled, or physically or neurologically impaired. Such problems interfere with their functioning in an ordinary public school, even one with "special education" services. They know they are not doing well; they are not learning as much or as quickly as their classmates. Maybe they are not learning anything at all. Staying in school does not make much sense to them.

We sometimes talk about the responsibility of schools to teach students with such problems. But public education is financially feasible because it is mass education. Even with the help of expensive modern technology like computers, public schools find it difficult to serve the needs of every child. In some cases, and especially for youngsters who have not yet lost their motivation to learn, a disability can be overcome with help from teachers, tutors, or counselors. In other cases, a student may have little chance of being put back on track, either because the disability is too great to be overcome or because the youngster's mind is simply closed to further education at the time.

**New York’s Dropout Prevention Initiative**

New York City's experience with a massive attempt to prevent "at-risk" students from dropping out is instructive. In 1985 the Dropout Prevention Initiative was established as a cooperative effort of the New York City Board of Education, the City's Office of Management and Budget, and the Mayor's Office of Youth Services. Over $40 million of special City funding was found to target 4,330 middle school and 6,898 high school students (in twenty-nine different middle schools and thirteen high schools) whose poor attendance records and low proportion of courses
passed suggested that they might soon drop out. Seven different kinds of services were provided, including attendance monitoring, counseling, health services, alternative school programs, and, for middle school students, special efforts to ease the transition to high school.

The Institute for Urban and Minority Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, conducted a careful evaluation of the Dropout Prevention Initiative for the three academic years that it was in operation. In 1990 the Institute published its findings in eight volumes of reports totaling over 1,500 pages. There were hopeful signs in some schools and with some programs, such as the Jobs Program at ten high schools, where students showed a gain in rates of attendance. But the results overall were disappointing (although there was no control group that would permit comparisons with similar students who received no services).

According to the Final Longitudinal Report:

The Year One middle school targeted students' attendance had been 77 percent in the prior year and declined to 73 percent in the program year.... The longitudinal analyses found further that both the Year One and the Year Two students had an additional attendance loss of about -8 percent the year after they were in the program. The loss was somewhat greater for students entering high school than for students continuing in middle school.... Middle school targeted students passed about one tenth of a course more in Year One compared to the same students' number of courses passed in the prior year.... However, the rate of passing courses that resulted was still substantially below what would be required to alter the prospect of many students dropping out at some later time in high school.

The Year One targeted high school students' attendance had been 72 percent in the prior year and declined to 63 percent in the program year.... [T]he Year One targeted students' pass rate had been 44 percent in the prior year and declined to 35 percent in the program year.

Overall, the study found that targeted students' attendance deteriorated over time and that it is likely that at least half of the targeted students in each cohort will have been discharged as a dropout three years after their entry into high school.

The evaluators analyzed mountains of data in order to discover why the program failed to meet its objectives. Although they expected to find a strong positive correlation between the average number of phone calls made to targeted students and improved attendance (a connection that a previous study had established) they did not find a significant relationship. In the first year of the
program, an average of $807 was spent on services to each middle school student and $1,090 on services to each high school student. Greater average amounts were spent in later years. Yet the evaluators concluded that many youngsters were not adequately served. Although they admitted that their recommendations were "largely conjectural," they suggested a variety of other methods that might reduce dropout rates.

It is perhaps not surprising that the public schools have great difficulty providing satisfaction, not to mention success, to students whose aptitudes or attitudes do not permit them to function within the range of acceptable academic performance. But we should not forget that concern with potential dropouts, although appropriate up to a point, may make school less attractive to high-ability students. A small number of students—perhaps five percent—have well-developed intellectual or artistic talents. But they find little chance for developing these abilities in public schools preoccupied with preventing "at-risk" students from dropping out. Some dropouts, although not many, are high-ability students who are bored to death. Selective schools or selective programs within schools may help prevent some of these students from dropping out. Still, certain able youngsters decide—sometimes with good reason—that staying in high school is a waste of their time.

Of course, many dropouts do not make rational choices. They change the course of their lives by leaving school essentially on impulse: over some trivial quarrel with a teacher, with a girlfriend, with a parent. They realize very soon that they made a mistake, but pride does not permit them to admit it. Yet their inability to control the impulse to leave suggests that they did not feel a deep stake in education. That is to say, they may not have had an important reason to leave, but neither did they have an important reason to stay.

**Strategies of dropout prevention**

The main flaw of dropout-prevention programs, as they now exist, is that they do not distinguish between different types of potential dropouts. They tend to address dropout prevention indiscriminately, as though any kind of effort will work with any kind of discontented youngster. At the minimum a distinction should be made between youngsters willing to consider further education and youngsters who are determined to leave school. After all, education
is not cost-free to the student. Learning requires intellectual effort, which is painful for anybody—and very painful for those unaccustomed to making such effort or unfamiliar with the satisfaction obtained from learning successfully.

For the most part, American secondary schools have attempted to increase students' motivation to stay in school by curricular changes that increase the proportion of entertainment to work. The theory, presumably, has been that sugar-coating the education pill will make it easier to swallow. Concurrent with these curricular changes—although not necessarily because of them—the dropout rate has fallen steadily for the past half century. About three-quarters of American youth remain in high school until graduation. Of the 25 percent who drop out, about three out of five eventually graduate from high school—and two-thirds of those do so by taking the General Educational Development (GED) test rather than returning to school.

At the same time, however, studies have demonstrated that high school graduates nowadays know much less than high school graduates used to. Perhaps that was to be expected as we moved closer to giving everyone a high school education. Conceivably, easier courses may have had the unintended consequence of reducing the academic effort of students who would not have left school in the first place. And this may have occurred without increasing appreciably the attractiveness of school for the potential dropouts.

Unlike curricular changes, most dropout-prevention programs are not universal in their impact. They target students deemed at risk for dropping out. This risk is usually inferred from poor academic performance, a bad disciplinary record, or both. Indeed, there is ample documentation that dropouts are typically unsuccessful academically and have little interest in school. James S. Coleman and his colleagues at the University of Chicago analyzed the data from more than a thousand high schools in their monumental study, "High School and Beyond." They found that dropout rates increased dramatically as grade averages declined, from 1 percent for A students to 83 percent for D students. It is not clear whether disinterest in school preceded poor academic performance or poor performance led to disinterest.

Notwithstanding the unresolved problem of the direction of causation, a popular approach among educators is either to try to enhance student motivation by reorganizing the school curriculum
or to solve individual academic problems believed to interfere with success. Work-study programs are examples of curriculum reorganization, while tutoring, counseling, and remedial classes are examples of focusing on individual learning problems.

At least on the surface, dropout-prevention programs targeted specifically at potential dropouts, such as the New York City program earlier discussed, would seem to be an efficient strategy. But it makes a great deal of difference whether students at risk of dropping out are at risk because of some personal problem or inadequacy or because they have so little interest in remaining in school that their failures or deficiencies of behavior result from their rejection of continued education.

A somewhat different approach is to disregard disabilities and simply to give youngsters incentives to remain in school. For example, one program involved important corporate sponsors that promised graduates of inner-city high schools jobs when they graduated. Another type of program—Eugene Lang's "I Have a Dream" Foundation and dozens of imitators—offers youngsters who graduate financial support to enable them to attend college. But these incentive programs will only appeal to the small fraction of dropouts who have college-level abilities. Other incentive programs offer rewards that have little or no intrinsic connection to education; they are more like bribery. Thus, the Red Bank Regional High School in Little Silver, New Jersey, used a federal grant of $108,000 from the U.S. Labor Department to pay potential dropouts $25 a week for staying in school, attending regularly, and bringing books and pencils to class.

The West Virginia program

A radically different strategy is to bring negative sanctions to bear on the potential dropout. Wisconsin has a program that reduces benefits to families on welfare if their children fail to attend school regularly. The threat is designed to give the family an incentive to monitor the child's attendance pattern. In West Virginia, a similar attempt at "statecraft as soulcraft" began in 1988 with a program that aims to cut the dropout rate by revoking the driver's license of any student under eighteen who drops out of high school before receiving a diploma. A member of the state legislature—himself a high school teacher—advanced the idea because he was worried about dropout and attendance problems and
believed that the prospect of losing a driver's license would be a credible threat to teenagers in a rural state. (West Virginia permits sixteen-year-olds to obtain motor vehicle licenses.)

The West Virginia "no school, no drive" law attracted considerable media attention throughout the country. Although challenged in a state court, its legality was upheld. By the end of 1989 seven other states had passed similar laws, and the policy is under active consideration in additional states.

The West Virginia initiative departs from traditional reliance on remediation or incentives to keep the dropout in school; it resorts instead to a threatened deprivation. The few critics who raised objections charged that West Virginia was punishing the victim, the dropout, rather than the ultimate cause, poor school programs that fail to teach basic skills effectively or that kill student interest with dull courses.

The West Virginia driver's license law, one of the most comprehensive of those enacted to date, applies not only to dropouts but also to students with poor attendance records. The law denies the driving privilege to dropouts under age eighteen and to those with either ten consecutive or fifteen total unexcused absences during a single semester. In practice, of course, a student with a poor attendance record is likely to become a dropout.

Other state dropout laws resemble the West Virginia model, but there are variations. Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee also have comprehensive laws that require good attendance records for new licenses and revoke the existing licenses of dropouts or those with poor attendance records. Texas and Virginia require attendance for new licenses but do not revoke existing licenses, and Virginia only requires proof of counseling if a student is not enrolled in school. Wisconsin mandates school attendance until age eighteen, and the driving privilege can be revoked as one of the penalties for truancy.

West Virginia had two full years of experience with the law when we evaluated the impact of a negative-sanction policy directed at all potential dropouts. The unstated assumptions of West Virginia's license-revocation law are: (1) that a significant proportion of potential sixteen- and seventeen-year-old dropouts must have or must be seeking driver's licenses; (2) that the law must be efficiently enforced, which means good reporting procedures, effective implementation of license suspension or denial rules, and
fairly strict standards for exceptions; and (3) that for at-risk students who possess or are seeking driver's licenses, the personal cost of not having a license must outweigh the personal cost of remaining in school. For students with poor academic records or long histories of behavioral problems and disciplinary actions, the relative personal costs may outweigh the advantages of the license.

West Virginia uses a standard definition of a school dropout: any student who leaves school before graduation for any reason except death or transfer to another school. The dropout rate we used consists of the number of dropouts in a given year divided by the enrollment in grades nine through twelve in that year. In the fifty-five counties of West Virginia, we compared dropout rates before and after the laws were introduced; appropriate statistical controls were used to rule out trend effects or other confounding factors that might also explain reduced rates (like differing proportions of students poor enough to be eligible for the free lunch program).

The number of West Virginia school dropouts and the dropout rate for the 1984-1990 period are shown in Table I. Although the total number of dropouts declined by nearly 200 students during the first year of the law (1988-1989), the number of dropouts had declined by over 600 between 1984-1985 and 1986-1987. Thus the 1988-1989 drop could have been due to a preexisting trend rather than to the enactment of the dropout law. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the number of dropouts increased by 173 during the second year of the law, thereby interrupting a five-year trend of declining numbers of dropouts.

Table I. West Virginia Dropout Rates, 1985-1990

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Number of Dropouts</th>
<th>Percent Annual Rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984-1985</td>
<td>5,367</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1986</td>
<td>5,036</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986-1987</td>
<td>4,709</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987-1988</td>
<td>4,725</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988-1989 (law)</td>
<td>4,535</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989-1990 (law)</td>
<td>4,708</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Dropouts as percent of total enrollment in grades nine to twelve.*

Turning to dropout rates, the annual rate shows patterns similar to the raw numbers: a steady decline until 1986-1987, no change when the law took effect in 1989-1990, and an increase in 1989-1990. The law does not appear to have reduced dropout rates for the state as a whole. The lack of an overall effect on dropout rates dur-
ing the first two years of the law can be explained in part by the suspension and enforcement information presented in Table II (enforcement information was available for the second year only).

Table II. Driver's License Suspensions for Dropouts

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<tr>
<td>Total dropouts</td>
<td>4,535</td>
<td>4,708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total reports to DMV</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>3,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No suspension</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Percent of reports)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(78.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>License suspended</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Percent of dropouts)</td>
<td>(15.1)</td>
<td>(17.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinstated for return to school</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Percent of dropouts)</td>
<td>(5.0)</td>
<td>(4.0)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table II suggests that the West Virginia law is properly administered and enforced by most school districts. Of the 4,708 dropouts during 1989-1990, 3,557 were reported to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Since school districts were not obligated to report dropouts over eighteen, who account for about one-fourth of all dropouts, the number of dropouts reported should not be as high as the total number of dropouts.

Furthermore, of the dropouts reported to the DMV, 2,758 or 78 percent were found either to have no license that could be revoked (66 percent) or to be over eighteen (12 percent). In other words, the West Virginia law did not affect the vast majority of dropouts because they either had no driver’s license or were beyond the age limit of the law. We have no information that tells us whether sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds in West Virginia usually do not have driver’s licenses or whether students especially prone to drop out are less likely to have licenses than the general youth population, but we suspect the latter.

True, the law did lead to the suspension of driver’s licenses for 687 dropouts in 1988-1989 and 799 dropouts in 1989-1990, but they constituted only 15 and 17 percent respectively of total dropouts in those years. The suspension rate could not get much higher than this given the high proportion of dropouts who did not have driver’s licenses or who were beyond the age limit.

Finally, of those 1,486 students with suspended licenses during the two-year period, only 424 obtained license reinstatements by returning to school. There are two ways of looking at this number.
On the one hand, those returnees do represent about 28 percent of the suspension population, thereby suggesting that the law has an impact on some students targeted by the law—those under eighteen and having driver’s licenses—although some of these youngsters might well have returned to school even if the law had not been in place.

On the other hand, even if all returnees are credited to the impact of the law, they cannot have much effect on the dropout rate; they constitute less than five percent of the total dropout population. Thus, if all West Virginia dropouts with suspended licenses had returned to school, the annual dropout rate would have fallen to 4.4 percent in both years. That only slightly over one-fourth of the dropouts with suspended licenses returned to school means that for most of this group the loss of the license was not sufficient motivation to return to school. As one official from a moderate-sized district stated, “These kids have a lot of problems; the last thing they are worried about is whether or not they have a driver’s license.”

The new law has not lowered dropout rates statewide, at least during this initial two-year period. In fact, dropout rates actually increased during the second year of the law in spite of a modest increase in license-suspension rates. We infer from interviews with school officials that a number of school districts have changed their administrative or other reporting procedures because of the new law. The increase may be an artifact of the new procedures. If so, we would expect the dropout rate to decline during subsequent years.

Even if the dropout rate proves to have declined in 1990-1991, the decline is not likely to lower dropout rates dramatically below pre-law levels. The reasons are, simply, that too many dropouts either (1) do not have driver's licenses, (2) are eighteen or over, or (3) place too little value on licenses compared to the perceived burden of remaining in school. Furthermore, a recent West Virginia Supreme Court decision has imposed a new requirement for administrative hearings at the local school district level before a license can be suspended. While these additional procedural steps may not reduce the number of license suspensions appreciably, they do add to the administrative cost and burden of enforcing the laws.
When the West Virginia law was announced, it seemed like a creative approach to a difficult social problem. Many prominent officials, including Chester Finn, former Assistant Secretary of Education, and Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, joined a chorus proclaiming that this approach was plausible and well worth trying. But supporters of these policies should bear in mind that, even if small effects can be demonstrated, they require administrative and law-enforcement efforts from agencies that may already be overburdened. Thousands of hours of effort are required to track dropouts, fill out forms, complete reports for the state, and now to conduct administrative hearings. If a small reduction in dropout rates is achieved, it should be weighed against the cost of prevention efforts; a decision must be made as to whether this strategy is worthwhile when compared to the alternatives.

The GED

The GED route to a high school equivalency diploma—the route eventually taken by Jim and Lucinda Florio—is not usually thought of as a response to the dropout problem. After all, GED tests, which are administered by the American Council on Education, are usually taken long after the individual has dropped out of school. Yet GED programs provide reentry points into education for persons of any age. Although 10 percent of those who take the GED tests are over age forty, half are between eighteen and twenty-four. Furthermore, GED programs are infiltrating urban school systems as alternative educational options for students under eighteen. For example, the evaluators of the New York City Dropout Prevention Initiative (DPI) gave warm praise to the GED as an alternative for at-risk students:

Although a low proportion of the targeted students were discharged into GED programs, almost as many targeted high school students received a GED (5 percent) as received a high school diploma (7 percent) in the first three years of the DPI. It appeared that the GED route had so far been more efficient than the regular school route for highly at-risk students to complete their education at the secondary level.

Actually, the history of the GED program shows that its inventor, Cornelius P. Turner, was concerned from the very beginning with remediating educational deficits resulting from leaving school too soon. Turner had been a school superintendent in Leicester,
Massachusetts, before joining the Navy during World War II. Assigned to the U.S. Armed Forces Institute in Madison, Wisconsin, Navy Lieutenant Turner's task was evaluating the educational preparation of soldiers, sailors, Marines, and Coast Guard personnel for courses offered by the military services.

Some servicemen and servicewomen had enlisted before completing high school. College-level correspondence courses offered under the auspices of the Institute required a high school education, as did many of the vocational training courses that the services conducted themselves. Which non-graduates were intellectually ready for these courses? Which required supplementary high-school-level courses?

Turner developed GED tests for service personnel without a high school diploma to enable them to show that they had somehow gotten the equivalent of a high school education. Once military personnel obtained high school equivalency certificates, a path opened for college-level courses sponsored by the Armed Forces Institute as well as for college attendance in civilian life.

Turner gave his high school equivalency tests a strange name: General Educational Development tests. By "general" he meant to distinguish the educational competence that he hoped to measure by the tests from more specific bits and pieces of information. Here is how he described the GED tests in an article for *The Encyclopedia of Education*:

GED tests are designed to measure attainment of some of the major goals of secondary school programs.... They are not intended to measure factual recall so much as intellectual power: competence in using major generalizations, concepts, and ideas; and the ability to comprehend exactly, evaluate critically, and think clearly. Adult learning methods are less formal than those learned in schools. They are more likely to depend on first-hand experience, self-directed reading, and informal contacts with other people than upon close examination of texts.

After World War II ended and Turner was demobilized, he joined the American Council on Education to head its Commission on Accreditation of Service Experiences. His new job was supervising the evaluation of the thousands of training courses that veterans had taken during their military service. How much, if any, credit for these courses should they receive in the civilian colleges that the American Council on Education served? Meanwhile Turner continued to believe that people are educated by informal as
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well as formal experiences; he was pleased that the U.S. Armed Forces Institute was still awarding high school equivalency certificates to military personnel.

Then Turner got a bright idea. Why not extend the high school equivalency program to include civilians? In 1947-1948 he adapted the General Educational Development tests for New York State. The plan was to enable school dropouts with night school courses or educationally relevant work or travel experiences to take the test and get certified by the New York State Department of Education as having the equivalent of a high school diploma. In 1956 Turner began a campaign to extend the acceptability of this alternative route to a high school diploma. He personally lobbied local education officials in all fifty states. Eventually the GED tests were accepted by the education departments of every state and by ten out of twelve Canadian provinces. In 1959—for the first time—the number of non-veteran adults taking the GED tests exceeded the number of veterans.

Civilian test-takers now predominate. About 700,000 people take the tests each year, 30,000 in Spanish, and more than twelve million people have taken it since it started in the civilian sector. What this means is that the mistake of dropping out of high school is not irrevocable. The GED tests open up not only job opportunities but opportunities for further education; a third of those who pursue the high school diploma through the GED route plan to go to college. Women constitute 60 percent of GED candidates and minority adults nearly 30 percent. In short, those who need education to compensate for missed opportunities in the past are taking advantage of GED programs to a disproportionate extent.

Carrots, not sticks

GED programs capitalize on the secret of night school: Voluntary students are motivated students. Motivated students learn more than unmotivated students and present far fewer disciplinary problems to their teachers. On the other hand, dropout-prevention programs, though often ingenious, are almost uniformly unsuccessful. They offer money payments for attending regularly to students who are at risk of dropping out; they take away the driver’s licenses of students who leave school before graduating; they reduce the welfare allowances of the families of truants; and they provide remedial academic services. Why do dropout-prevention
programs so often fail to attain their educational objectives? Partly because they seek to change the minds of students who are personally convinced that attending high school is useless and partly because they are dealing with youngsters with such incapacitating problems that they are incapable of functioning in an ordinary orderly school.

Attempting to coerce unwilling adolescents to remain in school for their own good does not seem to work. And perhaps we have to be modest enough to admit that we do not possess a magic motivational pill that will change their minds. There are some youngsters who, at their present level of development, will reject formal schooling no matter how well society packages it.

Cornelius Turner suggested an alternative strategy: Wait until life teaches dropouts that at least the equivalent of a high school education is necessary for occupational advancement or for desired further education. GED programs have the built-in advantage of targeting people who, though they have dropped out of high school before graduating, have come to realize that they need more education. They choose to return. Since learning requires a cooperative relationship between teachers and students, this gives GED programs an edge over traditional dropout-prevention programs. As Turner recognized, not all dropouts are so disorganized that their personalities have to be rebuilt from the ground up. Many of those who drop out simply need another chance.