

YOUNG PEOPLE WITH HIGH SCHOOL **PROBLEMS:**  
DROPOUTS AND LOW ACHIEVERS  
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## INTRODUCTION

Although the majority of young people receive an adequate education through the twelfth grade, a large number of students do not. Three serious problems exist in secondary school education:

- o Although increasing proportions of young people are graduating from high school, a significant proportion of students drop out and do not complete their degree.
- o Many of the high school graduates, as well as high school dropouts, have low academic achievement and skill levels. Achievement test scores have declined over the past decade for high school students, and a large percentage of students are behind in school.
- o Many youths leave high school with no marketable skills and no previous work experience.

## DROPOUTS

Although most young people graduate from high school, a large number of students drop out before completing the twelfth grade. Dropouts tend to have poorer reading and writing ability and fewer employment opportunities than graduates. There is some **evidence** that the employment opportunities for high school graduates have deteriorated over time, and that young people who are not enrolled and not employed have the bleakest futures in terms of income and **employment.**<sup>1</sup>

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1. Sweet, "Changes in the Allocation of Time of Young Men Among Schooling, Marriage, Work and Child Rearing: 1960-1976, Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, and **Arvil V. Adams** and Garth L. **Mangum**, The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment.

What Young People do **not** Complete High School?

Although the majority of young people graduate from high school with their peers, many students do not. About 16 percent of every age group of students does not graduate from high school, (see Table **A**). About 3.2 million young people aged 18-22 are high school **dropouts**, about 6.3 million young people aged 18-22 are enrolled in postsecondary schools, and about 9.5 million 18-22 year olds have completed high school and are not currently enrolled in **school.**<sup>2</sup>

Few of the students who have not completed high school by age 18 later complete their degree. The percentage of each age group who are not high school graduates is fairly constant for those aged 18-34 (see Table **A**). Individuals may find it difficult to return to school and complete their degree if they are employed full-time, raising a family, or reluctant to return to the classroom where they were previously **unsuccessful.**

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2. This analysis is based on the October 1978 Current Population Survey managed by the Bureau of the Census. This survey may underestimate the dropout rate because it is taken at the beginning of the school year, and students drop out over the course of the year. For example, tabulations from the October 1977 CPS indicate that about 11 percent of all young people aged 14-22 are high school dropouts, while tabulations from the March 1978 indicate that about 15 percent of all young people aged 14-22 are high school dropouts. Some of the difference results from differences between the two survey forms, but some is undoubtedly due to students leaving school over the course of the school year.

TABLE A. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF ALL YOUNG PEOPLE BY AGE AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS

Age	Total Population in thousands	Percentage Enrolled, Grades <b>K-12</b>	Percentage High School Graduates	Percentage High School Dropouts
17	4,090	78	10	12
18	4,160	16	68	16
19	3,990	4	79	17
20	4,040	1	83	16
21	4,060	1	83	16
22	3,880	-	83	16
23	3,790	-	84	15
24	3,740	-	85	15
25-29	17,590	-	86	14
30-34	15,690	-	83	16

SOURCE: October 1978, Current Population Survey, Bureau of the **Census**.

NOTE: Totals may not add due to rounding.

Increasing proportions of young people are graduating from high school, and these increases are largest for minority males. In 1960 about 40 percent of all black males aged 20-24 had completed twelve years of school, and by 1976 this proportion had increased to 74 **percent--a** percentage increase of about 80 percent as compared to a percentage increase of only 26 percent for white males. The percentage increase for Puerto Rican males and females is even more **dramatic--183** percent for males, and 150 percent for **females**.

TABLE A-1. HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION **RATES**<sup>a</sup>

	1960	1970	1976	Percentage Increase 1960-1976
<b>Males</b>				
White	69	83	87	26
Black	41	59	74	80
Mexican-American	34	55	64	88
Puerto Rican	24	44	68	183
<b>Females</b>				
White	70	82	86	23
Black	42	62	74	76
<b>Mexican-American</b>	35	<b>51</b>	58	66
Puerto Rican	24	42	60	150

SOURCE: Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, August 1978.

- a. Percentage of persons from 20 to 24 years of age who have completed 12 or more years of school, by year and race.

Despite these **improvements**, minority and low-income youth still have the highest dropout rates and the greatest likelihood of not completing high school. While ten percent of white youth aged 14-22 are not enrolled in school and have not completed high school, in this age category about fourteen percent of black youth and 25 percent of Hispanic youth have dropped out of school (see Table **B**).<sup>3</sup> One quarter of young people from families with annual incomes below \$5,000 drop out of school, as compared to 4 percent of those with family incomes above \$25,000. **Young** people who are both minority and low-income have the highest dropout rates. For example, about 40 percent of Hispanic youths with family incomes below \$5,000 have dropped out of school (see Table **C**).

Although minorities and low-income students have the highest proportional dropout rates, most high school dropouts are white and come from families with annual incomes of \$15,000 or **less**.<sup>3</sup> About 80 percent of all dropouts are white and 54 percent come from families with annual incomes below \$10,000. Dropouts are equally divided between males and females (see Table **B**).

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3. Because a higher proportion of youth aged 14-17 are enrolled in school than youth aged 18-22, the proportion of youth aged 14-22 who are high school dropouts is lower than the proportion of high school dropouts aged 18-22.
  4. This is because these groups have larger populations. Although a lower percentage of white students drop out of high school than do black students, in absolute numbers more high school dropouts are white than are black.

TABLE B. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AGED 14-22 AND DROPOUT RATES FOR YOUTH AGED 14-22 BY RACE, SEX, HISPANIC BACKGROUND, AND FAMILY INCOME

Characteristic of Youths	Estimated Dropout Rates of Youth	Percentage Distribution of Dropouts
Male	11	50
White	10	41
Black	15	9
<b>Other<sup>a</sup></b>	6	1
Female	11	50
White	10	40
Black	14	9
<b>Other<sup>a</sup></b>	8	1
<b>Hispanic<sup>b</sup></b>		
Male	25	6
Female	24	6
Family Income		
0- 4,999	25	25
5- 9,999	17	29
10-14,999	11	18
15-19,999	7	9
20-24,999	4	5
25,000 +	4	5
Unknown	---	9

SOURCE: CBO estimates based on the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, October 1978.

NOTE: A dropout is defined as an individual not enrolled in school and who has not completed high school.

a. Other includes young people who are neither white nor black, such as Asian-Americans and Native Americans.

b. Hispanics may be of any race.

TABLE C. DROPOUT RATES OF YOUTH AGED 14-22 BY FAMILY **INCOME**,  
RACE, AND HISPANIC STATUS: IN PERCENTS

Family Income	Total	White	Black	Other	Hispanic
0- 4,999	25	26	22	22	40
5- 9,999	17	18	15	7	28
10-14,999	11	12	9	4	24
15-19,999	7	6	12	3	10
20-24,999	4	5	4	-	9
25-49,000	3	3	4	-	8
50,000 +	1	1	-	-	-

SOURCE: **CBO** estimates based on the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, October 1978.

Where Do High School Dropouts Live?

On **average**, youths who live in central cities have a higher dropout rate than rural or suburban youths. Youths who live in central cities have a dropout rate of 14 percent, while 12 percent of those who live in rural areas, and 8 percent of those who live in suburbs drop out of school. Certain regions and localities, however, have higher than average drop out rates. For example, 19 percent of the young people aged 14-22 living in the rural South drop out of school (**see** Table D) and New York City has recently estimated that 45 percent of the entering ninth grade class leaves high school before **completing**.<sup>5</sup>

The largest portion of high school dropouts reside in the South. About 40 percent of all high school dropouts live in the South, 25 percent in the North Central states, 17 percent in the Northeast, and 18 percent in the West. The largest single **group--nearly** one-fifth of all **dropouts--resides** in the rural south (see Table D).

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5. This data may not be strictly comparable to census data.

TABLE D. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AGED 14-22, AND DROPOUT RATES FOR YOUTH AGED 14-22 BY REGION AND URBAN STATUS

Region <sup>a</sup>	Estimates Dropout Rates of Youth	Percentage Distribution of High School <b>Dropouts</b>	Percentage Distribution of High School Students/and Graduates
Total	11	100	100
Northeast	8	17	23
Central City	8	9	7
Suburban	5	5	10
Rural	3	3	5
Unknown	1	1	1
North Central	10	26	28
Central City	9	9	6
Suburban	8	8	11
Rural	8	8	9
Unknown	1	1	2
South	14	40	31
Central City	11	11	7
Suburban	8	8	8
Rural	19	19	14
Unknown	2	2	2
West	10	17	18
Central City	5	5	4
Suburban	6	6	7
Rural	2	2	2
Unknown	4	4	4

SOURCE: CBO tabulations from the Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey, October 1978.

- a. The four geographic regions are defined as follows: North-east; Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont; North Central; Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin; South: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia; West: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

What **is** the Employment Status of High School Dropouts?

High school dropouts generally have substantially higher unemployment rates than their peers who have graduated from high school. In October of 1978, 24.7 percent of those who had left high school in 1978 without graduating were unemployed, as compared with 14.1 percent of those who had graduated during 1978 (see Table E). Among white youth, differences were even more dramatic: over 25 percent of the high school dropouts from 1978 were unemployed, compared with 10.1 percent of those who graduated during 1978. For black youth, the differences were less pronounced (see Table E). Recent research based on the National Longitudinal Survey has found that high school dropouts who are not employed have the poorest income prospects of all **youth.**<sup>6</sup>

Because of the large number of high school dropouts who have withdrawn from the labor force, the comparative unemployment rates for high school dropouts and graduates understates the bleakness of the employment opportunities facing high school dropouts. Only a little more than half of all high school dropouts are **employed--usually** in **low-paying**, unskilled jobs; a small percentage (14 percent) are unemployed and looking for work; and one-third of all high school dropouts have withdrawn from the labor **force.**

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6. **Arvil V. Adams and Garth L. Mangum, The Lingering Crisis of Youth Unemployment** (The W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1978).

TABLE E. THE UNEMPLOYMENT RATES OF HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES NOT ENROLLED IN COLLEGE AND OF SCHOOL DROPOUTS, OCTOBER 1978.

Characteristics	High School Graduates, 1978	High School Dropouts, 1978
Total	14.1	24.7
Men	11.1	21.1
Women	17.1	32.0
Whites	10.5	25.2
Blacks	39.7	<b>a</b>

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Evaluation, and Research, Factbook on Youth (1979).

NOTE: The unemployment rate is the number of unemployed individuals divided by the number of individuals in the labor market.

a. Percent not shown where labor force base is less than 75,000.

There is some evidence that employment opportunities for high school dropouts have become worse over time. A higher proportion of single black and white high school dropouts aged 18-29 were not employed (unemployed or not in the labor force) in 1976 than in 1960. One-quarter of all single white male high school dropouts were not employed in 1960, while one-third were not employed in 1976. Among single black male high school dropouts, one-third were not employed in 1960, and nearly one-half were not employed in 1976 (see Table F).

TABLE F. PERCENTAGE OF SINGLE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS AGED 18-29 WHO ARE NOT EMPLOYED

Year	White Males	Black Males
1960	26	33
1970	30	44
1976	33	47

SOURCE: James A. Sweet, "Changes in the Allocation of Time of Young Men Among Schooling, Marriage, Work and Child rearing: 1960-1976," Center for Demography and Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, [**Paper** 79-28, Table 16, p. 48.]

Most employed or unemployed high school dropouts are white males with family incomes slightly higher than those dropouts who are no longer in the labor force. They are fairly evenly distributed between central city, suburban and **non-metropolitan** areas (see Table **G**). Of the high school dropouts who have withdrawn from the labor force 62 percent are white females, two-thirds have annual family incomes of less than \$10,000, and more live in the central cities, or **nonmetropolitan** areas than in the suburbs.

TABLE G. CHARACTERISTICS OF EMPLOYED, UNEMPLOYED, AND NOT IN THE LABOR FORCE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS, AGED 14-22, BY RACE, HISPANIC BACKGROUND, SEX, FAMILY INCOME AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION: IN PERCENTS

Total Population	Employed	Unemployed	Not in the Labor Force
Total	100	100	100
Male			
White	56	45	14
Black	10	14	6
<b>Other<sup>a</sup></b>	1	--	--
Female			
White	29	28	62
Black	4	12	17
<b>Other<sup>a</sup></b>	--	1	2
Hispanic <sup>b</sup>			
Male	9	8	3
Female	5	3	11
Family Income			
0- 4,999	22	25	31
5- 9,999	28	29	31
10-14,999	20	17	17
15,19,999	10	8	6
20-24,999	6	4	3
25,000 +	5	8	2
Unknown	7	9	10
Geographic Location			
Central City	32	34	37
Suburban	27	32	25
<b>Non-Metropolitan</b>	33	28	31
Unknown	8	6	7

SOURCE: CBO estimates based on the Bureau of the Census, Current-Population Survey, October 1978.

NOTE: A dropout is defined as a person who has not completed high school and who is not enrolled in school.

a. Other includes young people who are neither white nor black, such as Asian-Americans and Native Americans.

b. Hispanics may be of any race.

### Why Do Students Drop Out of High School?

Anecdotal evidence has cited pregnancy and a dislike of, or boredom in, school as the main reasons why students drop out of school. Results from a recent survey of young people tend to confirm these reasons. About one-third of all students who drop out of high school do so for personal reasons, and nearly one-half drop out for reasons related to school. Personal reasons for dropping out of school, such as pregnancy or marriage, are more frequently cited by female dropouts (about 40 percent of all black female dropouts do so because they are pregnant), while male dropouts leave because of school related **reasons--almost** 40 percent of white male dropouts say they leave school because they **don't** like it (see Table **H**). Few dropouts leave school for a good job, but male Hispanic dropouts are somewhat more likely to leave school for work than any other group of students.

TABLE H. PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF CIVILIAN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS, AGED 18-22, BY REASON FOR LEAVING SCHOOL, SEX, RACE

Reasons for Leaving School <sup>a</sup>	Total	Female			Male		
		Black	White	Hispanic <sup>b</sup>	Black	White	Hispanic <sup>b</sup>
Personal							
To Get Married	8	4	17	16	1	2	2
Pregnancy	10	40	15	17			
Other	13	12	13	22	14	9	25
Subtotal	31	57	44	56	15	12	27
Employment							
Offered good job chose to work	11	4	6	7	14	15	19
Entered military	1	0	0	0	2	2	3
Subtotal	12	4	6	7	15	17	21
School Related							
Didn't like school	28	15	23	14	29	37	24
Poor grades	6	5	6	1	8	9	3
Other, school	11	9	9	3	18	13	13
Subtotal	45	28	37	18	55	59	39
Other	13	12	12	20	15	12	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

SOURCE: Unpublished report, "Pathways to the Future: A Longitudinal Study of Young Americans; Preliminary Report: Youth and the Labor Market--1979", Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University, January 1980.

NOTE: Totals may not add due to rounding.

a. See Appendix Table A for a more detailed listing of reasons for dropping out of school.

b. Hispanics are both white and black; these categories are not exclusive.

## LOW ACHIEVEMENT

Many high school graduates, as well as high school **dropouts**, have poor reading, writing and mathematical skills, as well as low academic achievement in other areas. Poor skills and achievement may contribute to youth **unemployment**, as employers often cite poor basic skills among young people as an impediment to successful employment. Besides a higher rate of illiteracy, these factors result in other social costs: a reduced ability to cope with the increasing technological demands of industry, and a reduced appreciation of our cultural heritage and literature.

There are several measures of achievement and basic skills. Standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the National Assessment of Educational Progress, indicate what groups of students are faring the most poorly in **school**.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, minimum competency tests, although they vary greatly, provide some measure of which students have the worst basic skills problems. Finally, census data indicate that a large percentage of students are behind in school, though fewer than in previous years.

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7. Standardized tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test have been criticized for containing a cultural bias that impairs the ability of some students, such as Hispanics or blacks, to score highly on the test. While the Educational Testing Service has been trying to eliminate cultural bias from the test, it is possible it has not been entirely eliminated. Consequently, the scores reported herein for nonwhite and disadvantaged students may underestimate the true scholastic aptitude of these students.

Has There **been** a General Decline in Achievement?

**Standardized** test scores indicate that academic achievement has declined significantly over the last decade, but may have leveled off in recent years. The decline is sharpest among older students, as elementary students have generally improved or maintained their achievement in the last decade.

Scholastic Aptitude Test. Overall the average SAT verbal score has declined by 8 percent in the last ten years, while the average mathematical score has declined by 5 percent. In recent years, however, the decline has leveled **off.**<sup>8</sup> Scholastic Aptitude tests are taken by high school students as part of their application to postsecondary institutions. As such, Scholastic Aptitude Test scores do not provide information on the academic achievement of all high school students, but on the scholastic aptitude, or ability to succeed in school, of those high school students and other individuals who plan on attending colleges and universities. The decade decline in average SAT scores indicates that even those students who are the most successful in high school are generally less well prepared for postsecondary education than similar students one decade ago.

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8. See On Further Examination, report of the Advisory Panel on the Scholastic Aptitude Test Score Decline (College Entrance Examination Board, New York, 1977), for a discussion of the decline in Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. The report concluded that the decline in scores from 1965 to about 1970 is primarily due to changes in the group of students taking the test, while in more recent years the decline reflects changes in schools, curricula, teachers, and American society.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress conducts a standardized test of a national sample of young people aged 9, 13, and 17 in a variety of achievement areas. Because similar tests are repeated every few years, it is possible to examine changes in **students'** achievement over time. Data from NAEP tests indicate that reading and math achievement over the past few years has improved more for younger students than for older students. Between the 1972-73 school year and 1977-78, the average mathematics achievement score of 17 year-old students declined by four percentage points, while that of 9 year-old students declined by one percentage point. Between the 1970-71 and 1974-75 school years, the average reading achievement score of students aged nine improved by one percentage point, while that of older students did not improve at all (see Table J). It is possible that increased emphasis on basic skills over this time and compensatory education programs, such as Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, have contributed to achievement gains by younger students.

Changes in achievement over this period for particular geographic, income, or racial groups of students are larger than the aggregate figures reflect. The reading achievement of young people aged 13 and 17 who live in big cities declined markedly, as it did **for** young people who are not black or white, such as Native

Americans. Significant gains in reading achievement were made by blacks aged 13 and 17 who live in the southeast region of the country. In mathematics, the achievement scores of disadvantaged urban students aged 13 and 13 year-old blacks did not decline, while scores for all 13 year-old white students and for the nation as a whole did decline. It is not possible to state with certainty how achievement scores have changed for all other groups of students because the differences between their test scores are not statistically significant, which indicates that there is a good possibility that the results were produced by random chance (see Appendix Table B and Appendix Figures 1 and 2).

TABLE J. RECENT CHANGES IN READING AND MATHEMATICS ACHIEVEMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 9, 13, AND 17

	<u>Mathematics Achievement</u>			<u>Reading Achievement</u>		
	Mean Percent- age Correct 1972-73	Mean Percent- age Correct 1977-78	Mean Change	Mean Percent- age Correct 1970-71	Mean Percent- age Correct 1974-75	Mean Change
Youth						
Aged 9	38	37	-1**	64	65	1**
Aged 13	53	51	-2**	61	61	0
Aged 17	52	48	-4**	71	71	0

SOURCE: National Assessment for Educational Progress, "Changes in Mathematical Achievement, 1973-78," August 1979, and "Reading Change, 1970-75: Summary Volume", April 1978.

NOTE: \*\* Indicates statistical **significance** at the .05 level, or that these results would be produced by random chance only five times out of one hundred.

At the same time that there has been a decline in scores on achievement tests, **fewer** students have been held back in school (see Appendix Table C). It appears that teachers and schools have relaxed their standards in the past decade-both for achievement within a classroom and for promotion between grades.

What Children Have the Lowest **Achievement** Test Scores?

Students from minority or **low-income** families have the lowest average Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, the lowest scores **on** the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, and score poorly on minimum competency tests.

Scholastic Aptitude Test. During the 1976-77 school year the average SAT verbal and mathematical scores of blacks was about three-quarters that of **whites**, while the average verbal and mathematics scores of **Chicanos** was about four-fifths that of whites (see Table **K**). The decline in SAT verbal and mathematical scores was slightly larger for blacks from 1972-73 to 1976-1977 than it was for whites or Chicanos. Students with low family incomes also tend to do less well on the SAT. Students whose average SAT score was below 350 during 1978-79 had a median family income of \$14,900, while those students whose average score equaled or exceeded 650 had a median family income of \$28,300 (see Table L).

TABLE K. MEAN SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST SCORES BY YEAR AND RACE

School Year	SAT-Verbal			SAT-Mathematical		
	White	Black	Chicano	White	Black	Chicano
1972-73	462	342	381	500	365	411
1974-75	451	335	369	489	358	410
1976-77	449	329	374	490	355	412

SOURCE: College Board Program Data Presented in testimony before the House Civil Service Subcommittee, May 1979.

TABLE L. MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME FOR STUDENTS TAKING THE SCHOLASTIC APTITUDE TEST BY SAT AVERAGE SCORE AND BY SCHOOL YEAR IN UNADJUSTED DOLLARS

Average SAT Scores	1976-77	1978-79
Below 350	12,500	14,900
350-399	16,100	17,200
400-449	<b>17,400</b>	20,700
450-499	18,600	21,800
500-549	19,700	23,200
550-599	20,700	24,500
600-649	21,800	25,800
650 or more	23,600	28,300

SOURCE: Annual National reports of college-bound high school senior 1973-1979, the Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey.

NOTE: a. The SAT average score is computed by adding the verbal and the mathematical score and dividing by two.

The reading achievement levels of certain groups of young people are greatly below the national average. The average reading level of young blacks aged 13 and 17 was only 76 percent of the national average in 1974-75. The average achievement of students aged 13 and 17 who live in low-income urban areas was 20 percent below the the national average (see Table M).

TABLE M. AVERAGE READING ACHIEVEMENT SCORES AS PERCENTAGE OF NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13 AND 17 BY SEX, RACE, AND **COMMUNITY** SIZE IN THE 1974-75 SCHOOL YEAR

Characteristics	Percentage of National Average for Young People Aged 13	Percentage of National Average for Young People Aged 17
Sex		
Male	96	97
Female	104	103
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Race		
White	105	104
Black	76	76
Other	86	86
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Type of Community		
<b>Low-income</b> urban	80	87
High-income urban	113	109
Main big city	99	100
Suburban	104	103
Medium city	98	100
Small place	101	101
Rural	93	98

SOURCE: National Assessment of Educational Progress, "Reading Changes, 1970-75: Summary Volume," April 1978.

Minimum Competency **Tests**. Thirty-six states and many localities have established minimum competency tests that a student is required to pass before graduating from high school. Because there is no general agreement among educators or the public on a definition of competence, tests vary in design and substance. The Gary, Indiana school district, for example, is one of the few that requires students to pass a writing and oral proficiency examination, in addition to the standard reading and mathematics competency **tests**.

Despite variation in the content of minimum competency tests, minority and disadvantaged students generally have the highest failure rates. In Florida, in the 1977-1978 school year, about 77 percent of the black students who took the test failed, while 24 percent of the whites who took it also failed. An increased emphasis on remedial education in Florida (in 1980 the state budget includes \$28.3 million for such programs), however, may be reducing the difference in failure **rates** between blacks and whites. In the 1978-1979 school year 61 percent of the black students failed, as did 17 percent of the whites.

#### What Children are Behind in School?

Over time the proportion of children who are held back in school while their classmates advance has declined. Students from

minority, less educated, and poor families are **more** likely to be held back in school than students from other families. While about ten percent of all enrolled young people aged 14-17 are behind their peers in school, about 17 percent of all enrolled blacks aged 14-17, 23 percent of all enrolled Hispanics, 17 percent of all enrolled young people whose parents did not graduate from high school, and 21 percent of all enrolled students whose families have incomes below the poverty level are behind in school (see Table **N**). A higher percentage of male students are held behind in school than females.

Nearly 45 percent of all high school students who are behind in school live in the South, and nearly one-fifth of those behind in school live in the **non-metropolitan** South. Young people who live in central cities are also disproportionately behind in school. While 25 percent of all enrolled students aged 14-17 live in central cities, 29 percent of those enrolled behind their peers live in the central city (see Table **O**). Of course, the percentage of students who are behind in school is not a pure measure of which students have achievement problems, as it also reflects differences in school practice towards grade promotion. Teachers in some regions or schools may be more inclined to hold a student back than are teachers in other regions or schools. Nevertheless, the same groups of young people with high drop out rates, are also

TABLE N. PERCENT OF PERSONS AGED 14-17 ENROLLED BELOW MODAL GRADE BY RACE, **SEX**, PARENTAL EDUCATION AND POVERTY STATUS IN 1976<sup>a</sup>

All Persons	All Races	White	Black	Hispanics <sup>b</sup>
All Persons	10.1	8.9	16.6	22.5
Male	12.0	10.7	19.9	24.0
Female	8.0	7.0	13.4	21.1
Parental Education				
Less than 12 Years	16.5	15.0	20.4	25.7
12 years	7.6	7.2	10.9	16.1
College, 1 year or more	4.9	4.6	7.7	13.8
Poverty status				
Below poverty level	21.1	19.7	22.6	27.2
Above poverty level	8.6	8.0	13.4	20.8

SOURCE: CBO **estimates** based on **information** from U.S. Department of **Commerce**, Bureau of the Census, Relative Progress of Children in School: 1976, April 1979. Based on data from the Survey of Income and Education, Spring 1976.

NOTE: a. Modal grade is the grade or grades in which most children of an age are enrolled.

b. Hispanics may be of any race.

TABLE 0. PERCENT OF PERSONS AGED 14-17 ENROLLED BELOW MODAL GRADE BY TYPE AND REGION OF RESIDENCE<sup>a</sup>

Residence	Percent Below Modal Grade	Distribution of Those En- rolled Below Modal Grade	Percent Distribution of Those Enrolled
<u>United States</u>	10	100	100
Metropolitan	9	61	67
Central City	11	29	25
Outside Central City	8	32	42
Nonmetropolitan	12	40	33
<u>Northeast</u>	9	19	22
Metropolitan	8	15	17
Central City	11	7	6
Outside Central City	7	8	11
<b>Nonmetropolitan</b>	10	5	5
<u>North Central</u>	9	24	28
Metropolitan	8	15	18
Central City	11	7	7
Outside Central City	7	8	11
<b>Nonmetropolitan</b>	9	9	10
<u>South</u>	13	43	32
Metropolitan	12	22	18
Central City	14	12	8
Outside Central City	10	11	10
Nonmetropolitan	15	20	14
<u>West</u>	8	14	17
Metropolitan	7	9	13
Central City	7	3	4
Outside Central City	6	6	9
Nonmetropolitan	13	6	4

SOURCE: CBO estimates based on information from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Relative Progress of Children in School: 1976, April 1979. Based on data from the Survey of Income and Education, Spring 1976.

NOTE: Totals may not add due to rounding.

a. Modal grade is the grade or grades in which most children of an age are enrolled.

behind in school, indicating that students **from** minority, less educated, and disadvantaged families who live in the central cities and the rural South tend to have the most serious problems with high school education.

Why Do Some Students Have More Serious Achievement Problems than Others?

Many factors, both school-related and nonschool related, have been cited as affecting **students'** achievement levels. Some, who have argued that the schools are to blame for the poor achievement levels of some students and for the general decline in achievement, are essentially arguing that all the factors influencing achievement are within a **school's** control. Others have argued that because achievement is primarily influenced by inherited and environmental factors, schools can make little difference in influencing students' **achievement.**<sup>9</sup> It is probable, however, that both factors within and without a school's sphere of influence affect a **child's** learning.

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9. See Christopher Jencks, Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America, 1972, Harper Colophon Books. Jencks argues that equalizing the amount of schooling people get would reduce achievement inequality among adults by 5 to 15 percent, equalizing the quality of elementary schools would reduce cognitive inequality by 3 percent or less, and equalizing the quality of high schools would reduce achievement inequality by 1 percent, while equalizing **everyone's** inherited capability would reduce inequality by 33 to 50 percent, and equalizing everyone's total environment would reduce inequality by 25 to 40 **percent.**

Nonschool Related Factors. Some factors outside of a **school's** control, such as social, intellectual, or racial inequality, influence a **child's** achievement. Until these sorts of inequalities are eliminated or reduced, it is unlikely that differences in achievement levels for different social groups will be entirely eliminated. For example, students from middle-class or high-income areas tend to do better in school than students who are from **low-income** areas. There are several nonschool reasons why this might be so. Parents from middle class areas may be better able to foster a child's capabilities and intellectual development through supplemental activities such as dance and music lessons, than can **low-income** parents. Secondly, children from middle-class families may be more inclined to speak standard English in the home than children from **low-income** families, which puts low-income children at a comparative disadvantage at school where primarily standard English is spoken. Finally, the emphasis on academic achievement and personal reading may be stronger in middle class and high-income families than in low-income families.

School Related Factors. It has been established, however, that there are a number of organizational and pedagogical factors within a **school's** control that do positively affect **achievement.**<sup>10</sup>

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10. See Ron **Edmonds'** testimony before the Human Resources Task Force of the Committee on the Budget, United States House of Representatives, September 27, 1978 and **Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, Ouston, and Smith, Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and Their Effects on Children**, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1979.

Differences in **achievement** may partially occur because of differences in social, intellectual, racial, or economic status, but these differences can be reduced if schools are properly organized and principals and teachers are properly motivated. All else held constant, children appear to learn more in schools which emphasize academic courses, have well planned curricula, have teachers that spend most of their time teaching the whole class, assign homework, provide incentives and rewards for good student performance, and allow children more responsibility for their own behavior.

#### LACK OF MARKETABLE SKILLS AND WORK EXPERIENCE

A third problem that is often cited with high school education is that some students leave or graduate from high school with little or no work experience, and with no marketable skills. Lack of work experience or marketable skills could result in low wages for young workers, or could increase the length of time that one is out of work and looking for a job. Employers often cite a lack of basic education skills, such as reading and writing, and other marketable skills, such as the ability to read a graph or chart, as barriers to successful employment.

#### What Students Do Not Have Marketable Skills?

Young people whose parents did not graduate **from** high school, who live in low-income urban areas or the Southeast region of the country, or who are black, score below the national average test score on work skills such as reading a map or following oral instructions. Students aged 17 whose parents had not attended high school averaged only about 85 percent of the national average score on tests of graphic and reference skills and of manual and perceptual skills, while Black students aged 17 averaged about 75 percent of the national average score on the same tests (see Table P).

#### What Students Do Not Have Work Experience?

Teenagers, high school dropouts and female students are less likely to have had any work experience prior to entering the job market than are older students, high school graduates and male students. About 23 percent of all unemployed male high school dropouts aged 16-21 have not had any previous work experience as compared to about 30 percent of female high school dropouts, and 15 percent of unemployed male high school graduates (see Table Q).

TABLE P. MEAN PERCENTAGE CORRECT ON ACHIEVEMENT TESTS OF BASIC WORK SKILLS **FOR** YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13 AND 17, BY **RACE**, SEX, AND GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION IN SCHOOL YEAR 1973-74

Characteristics	Young People Aged 13 <sup>a</sup>		Young People Aged 17 <sup>a</sup>	
	Graphic and Reference <sup>b</sup> Skills Percentage Correct	Manual and Percentual <sup>c</sup> Skills Percentage Correct	Graphic and Reference <sup>b</sup> Skills Percentage Correct	Manual and Perceptual <sup>b</sup> Skills Percentage Correct
All Youth	70	68	80	66
Sex				
Male	69	70*	80	68*
<b>Female</b>	70*	67*	80	64*
Race				
White	74*	71*	83*	68*
Black	47*	53*	59*	50*
Parental Education				
No high school	56*	61*	68*	57*
Some high school	62*	63*	73*	59*
Graduated high school	70	68	79	66
Post-high school	77*	73*	85*	70*

(Continued)

TABLE P. (Continued)

Type of Community				
<b>Low-income</b> urban	56*	60*	69*	59*
High-income urban	79*	74*	85*	69*
Main big city	68	68	82	66
Suburban	72	70	81	68
Medium city	69	<b>68</b>	80	67
Small places	70	68	81	66
Rural	67	66	80	65
Region				
Southeast	64*	63*	75*	59*
West	69	69	79	67
Central	73*	70*	83*	69*
Northeast	71	70*	81*	66

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SOURCE: National Assessment of Educational Progress, "An Assessment of Career Development: Basic Work Skills", January 1977.

NOTE: \* Indicates that the difference from the national average is statistically significant at the .05 level, or that these results would be produced by random chance 5 times out of 100.

- a. Because difference tests are given to different age groups, scores between age groups are not directly comparable.
- b. The Graphic and Reference Skills test tested a **student's** ability to look up a telephone number in the directory, read a map, or, for older students, use a table from the federal income tax form.
- c. The Manual and Perceptual Skills test tested a **student's** ability to follow oral directions to complete a nonverbal task, to use measurement instruments, and to draw three-dimensional objects.

TABLE Q. PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYED NONENROLLED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES AND DROPOUTS AND ENROLLED STUDENTS WHO HAVE NO WORK **EXPERIENCE**, BY SEX, OCTOBER 1978

Youth	<b>Nonenrolled</b>	Nonenrolled	Enrolled Students	
	High School Graduates Age 16-21	High School Dropouts Age 16-21	<u>Ages</u> 16-17	<u>Ages</u> 18-24
Men	14.5	22.5	48.3	15.0
Women	25.0	29.1	61.4	20.1

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Students, Graduated and Dropouts in the Labor Market, October 1978, October 1979.

NOTE: Never worked at a civilian **job** lasting 2 weeks or more.

Why Do Some Young People Have Fewer Marketable Skills and Less Work Experience Than Others?

There are two sets of reasons why some students have fewer marketable skills and less work experience than other students: school-related reasons and labor market reasons.

School Related Reasons. Skills that are useful in obtaining employment, such as the ability to use a telephone directory, are closely related to basic achievement skills such as reading and writing. Basic reading and writing capability is fundamental to success on almost all jobs. Consequently, students who have low achievement levels, such as those who live in low-income,

inner-city areas, are least likely to have marketable skills. A second cause of few marketable skills for some youth is that vocational education classes and facilities that train students in specific job skills are more often located in suburban areas than central city or rural areas, and tend to serve white, middle-class young people, rather than minorities or the economically disadvantaged.

Labor Market Reasons. The reason why some youth tend to have less work experience than others is that their special characteristics place them at a disadvantage relative to other youth in securing employment. Low-income youth, a group that includes many black and Hispanic youth, have poorer job contacts, since their parents, relatives, and friends are themselves less likely to be employed. A second reason **low-income** youth and dropouts have less work experience is the limited number of jobs in central city **neighborhoods**. Industry and the retail trade have moved to the suburbs, which has left inner-city youth with fewer job opportunities within a **commuting** range. A third reason why some youth may have less work experience is employer discrimination. When there are many applicants to choose from, an employer may be more likely to hire a high school graduate than a dropout, a young adult rather than a teenager, a white rather than a minority, or a male rather than a female. A fourth reason why

some youth have less work experience is that they have not sought out jobs, or when they have found jobs, have been unable to keep them. Many young people are discouraged by high unemployment rates or are enrolled in school and so do not seek employment. The same qualities which might motivate a young people to drop out of **school--for** example, restlessness or boredom with **routine--might** also make that person a poor employee.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX TABLE A. **PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION** OF CIVILIAN HIGH SCHOOL **DROPOUTS** AGED 18-22 BY REASON FOR LEAVING SCHOOL, SEX AND RACE

Reason for Leaving School	Total	Female			Male		
		Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White
Personal							
To get married	8	4	16	17	1	2	2
Pregnancy	10	40	17	15			
Home <b>responsibilities</b>	5	10	6	6	4	11	3
Financial difficulties	5	2	<b>10</b>	3	8	<b>11</b>	4
Moved away <b>from</b> school	3	0	6	4	2	3	2
<b>Subtotal, Personal</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>12</b>
Employment							
Offered good job chose to work	11	4	7	6	14	19	15
Entered military	1	0	0	0	2	3	2
<b>Subtotal, Employment</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17</b>
School Related							
Received degree	4	3	1	6	4	7	2
Didn't <b>like</b> school	28	15	<b>14</b>	23	29	24	37
Poor grades	6	5	1	6	8	3	9
Expelled or suspended	6	5	1	1	14	6	10
School too dangerous	<b>1</b>	1	<b>1</b>	2	0	—	<b>1</b>
Subtotal, School Related	45	28	<b>18</b>	37	55	39	59
Other	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	20	<b>12</b>	15	<b>12</b>	12
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

SOURCE: Unpublished report, "Pathways to **the** Future: A Longitudinal Study of Young Americans; Preliminary Report: Youth and the Labor **Market--1979**", Center for Human Resource **Research**, The Ohio State University, January 1980.

NOTE: Total may not add **due to rounding**.

**APPENDIX TABLE B. COMPARISON OF READING ACHIEVEMENT SCORES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AGED 13 AND 17 IN SCHOOL YEAR 1970-71 AND 1974-75**

Characteristics	Young People Aged 13			Young People Aged 17		
	Mean Percent Correct 1970-71	Mean Percent Correct 1974-75	Mean Change	Mean Percent Correct 1970-71	Mean Percent Correct 1974-75	Mean Change
National	60.60	60.74	<b>0.14</b>	70.81	70.80	-0.01
Sex						
Male	58.00	58.11	0.11	69.14	<b>68.83</b>	-0.31
<b>Female</b>	63.21	63.36	0.42	72.40	72.69	0.29
Race						
White	63.27	63.53	0.26	73.23	73.70	0.47
Black	45.55	46.39	0.84	53.67	54.14	0.47*
Other	56.15	51.95	-4.20*	67.80	<b>60.71</b>	<b>-7.09**</b>
<b>Types of Community</b>						
Urban	59.81	55.82	<b>-3.99**</b>	69.06	65.76	<b>-3.30**</b>
Low-income urban	<b>51.01</b>	48.89	-2.12	62.14	61.32	<b>-0.82</b>
<b>High-income</b> urban	68.31	68.66	0.35	78.51	78.07	-0.44
Remainder urban	62.16	60.07	-2.09	70.29	71.15	0.86
Suburban	<b>62.59</b>	63.07	0.48	72.89	<b>73.18</b>	0.29
Medium city	60.02	59.57	-0.45	<b>71.67</b>	70.57	-1.10
Small places	<b>60.01</b>	61.45	1.44	70.19	71.40	1.21
Rural	56.74	56.79	0.05	67.31	69.40	2.09
Race by Region						
White by Southeast	60.23	61.26	1.03	69.83	71.26	<b>1.43*</b>
White by Northeast, Central or West	64.10	64.13	0.03	74.01	74.38	0.37
Black by Southeast	40.96	45.58	<b>4.62**</b>	49.24	53.22	3.98*
Black by <b>Northeast,</b> <b>Central</b> or West	48.67	47.17	<b>-1.50*</b>	56.62	55.13	<b>-1.49</b>

(Continued)

APPENDIX TABLE B. (Continued)

SOURCE: National **Assessment** of Educational Progress, "Reading **Change, 1970-75: Summary Volume,**" April 1978

NOTE: \* Indicates statistical significance at the **.32** level, or that these results would be produced by random chance 32 times out of 100.

\*\* Indicates statistical significance at the .05 level, or that these results would be produced by random chance 5 **times** out of 100.

All other **results** are not statistically **significant** at **these** levels.

APPENDIX TABLE C. PERCENT OF STUDENTS ENROLLED BELOW MODAL GRADE  
BY AGE AND YEAR

Persons	1950	1960	1970	1976
Age 14	25.0	13.9	10.2	8.5
Age 15	26.4	15.2	10.7	9.6
Age 16	24.6	15.0	10.8	11.0
<b>Age 17</b>	22.0	14.9	11.0	11.2

**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Relative Progress of Children in School: 1976, 1979. Data from the 1950, 1960, and 1970 decennial census, and the 1976 Survey of Income and Education.

**NOTE:** Modal grade is the grade or grades in which most children are enrolled.

KEY TO APPENDIX FIGURES 1 AND 2

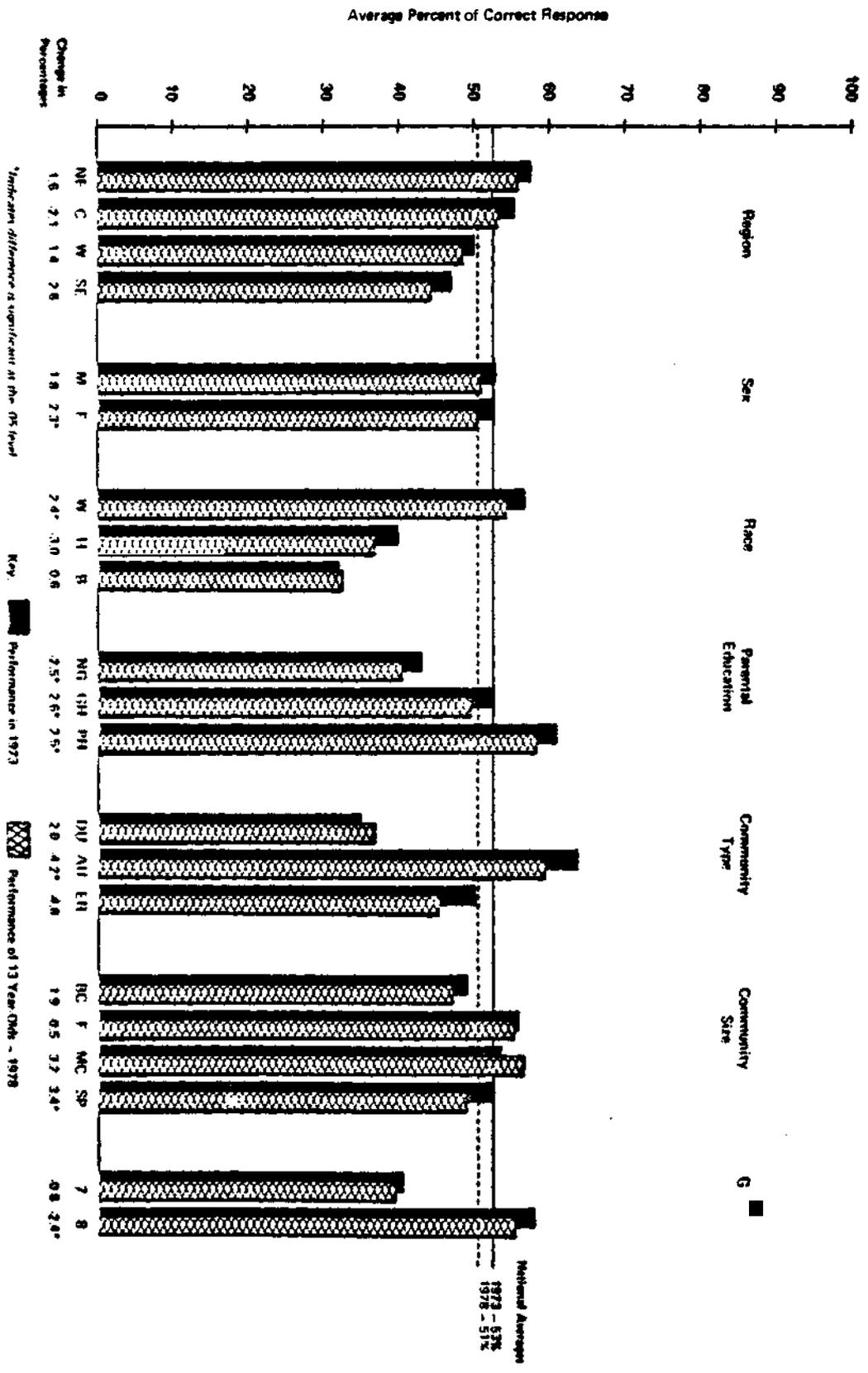
**NE** - Northeast  
C - Central  
V - Vest  
SE - Southeast

NG = not graduated from high school  
GH \* high school graduate  
PH = post high **school**

DU « disadvantaged urban  
AU \* advantaged urban  
ER » extreme rural

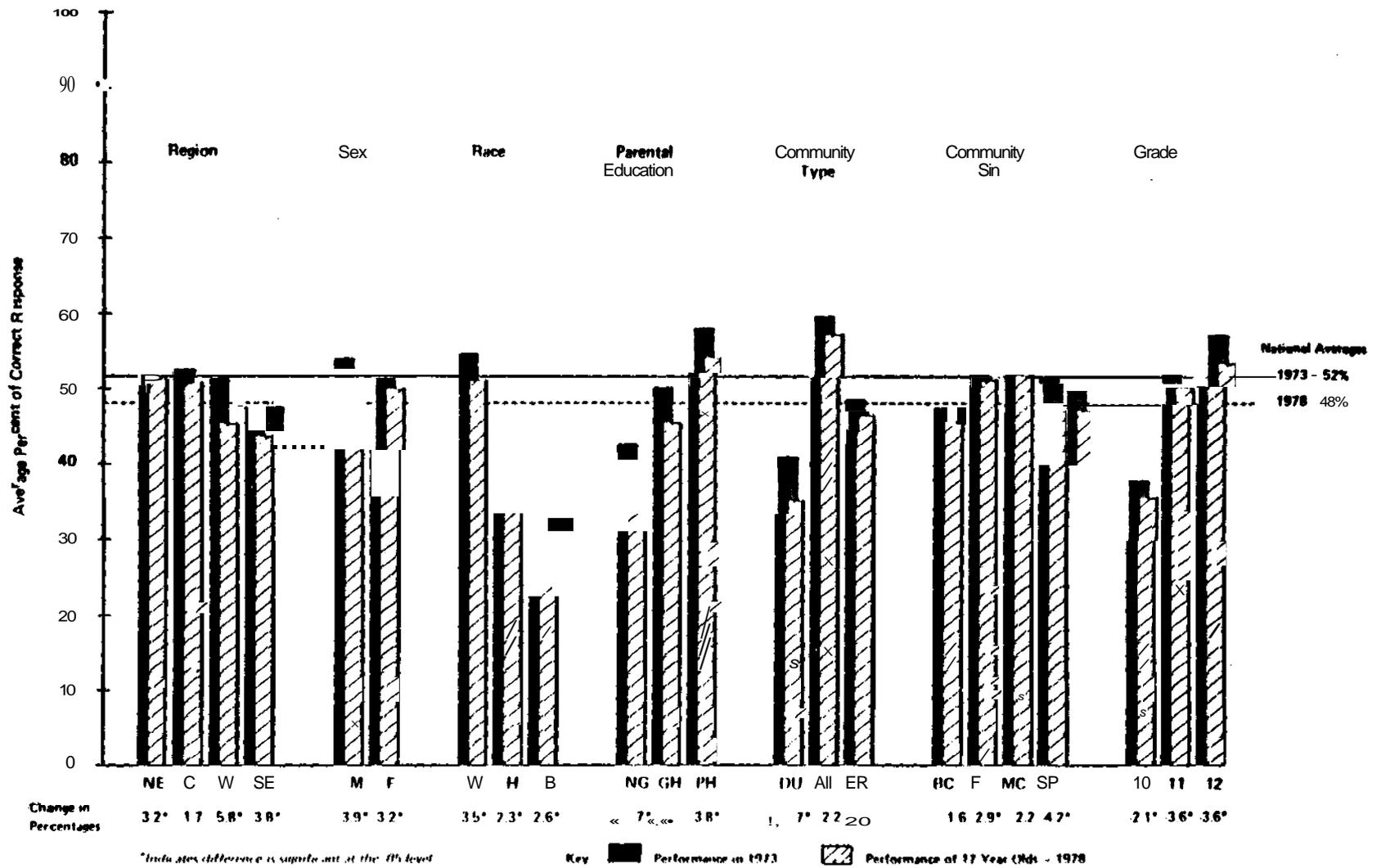
BC - big cities  
F \* fringes around big cities  
**MC** - medium cities  
SP = smaller places

FIGURE 1. Average Percentages of Correct Response for Selected Reporting Groups on Mathematics Items - 1973 and 1978, Age 13



SOURCE: Changes in Mathematical Achievement, 1973-78, Report No. 09-MA-01, The National Assessment of Education Progress, Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colorado (August 1979), p. 19.

**FIGURE 2. Average Percentages of Correct Response for Selected Reporting Groups on Mathematics Items - 1973 and 1978, Age 17**



SOURCE: *Changes in Mathematical Achievement, 1973-78, p. 20.*