

**A SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S EXPERIENCE**

**WITH AN INNOVATIVE STAY-IN SCHOOL**

**PROGRAM**

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A Four-Credit Project  
Submitted to the Faculty of Education  
of The University of Lethbridge  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
MASTER OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

April, 1994

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## INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1991, a team of administrators employed by Lethbridge School District #51 proposed a very ambitious project designed to assist junior high school students whose school experiences have been, for the most part, unsuccessful, and whose continuation through the traditional educational system was in jeopardy. The name given to this initiative was "Project Connections" (see Appendix A). The proposal was submitted to Canada Employment and Immigration in hopes that it would be approved for operation under the Project START Program. The proposal was well-received. Following formal approval, funding was provided for a one-year period and, in September of 1991, "Project Connections" became an integral part of the programming in four secondary schools in Lethbridge School District #51.

It is the purpose of this study to discuss the complex nature of the adolescent dropout and to investigate the effectiveness of Project Connections. It begins with a thorough review of the literature associated with early school leavers, with particular emphasis on the junior high school student. A detailed description of the operational model of Project Connections follows. Next, a summation of the assessment data collected over a two year period from participating groups is presented. The study

concludes with an evaluation report based on the findings.

## **WHO IS THE ADOLESCENT DROPOUT?**

It is imperative that the terms of reference be identified at the onset of this review. How can one describe an adolescent who may be at-risk of becoming a dropout upon turning sixteen, if not earlier? Interestingly, little research has been completed in this area so one must draw from that which focuses on high school students. There are as many definitions as programs to address the problem and, therefore, it may be much more meaningful to identify the potential dropout in terms of characteristics rather than a definition which identifies the dropout in terms of high school criteria and its setting. George Morrow (1986) categorized the potential dropout as fitting into one or more of the following: a "pushout", a "disaffected student", a "capable dropout", or an "educational mortality".

### **The "Pushout"**

The "pushout" is a student who has been identified as an undesirable within the system for a variety of reasons. Perhaps he/she exhibits anti-social behaviors, or has been habitually engaged in more seriously inappropriate behavioral. Rumberger (1990) found a similar profile while studying early school leavers in California. They describe the "pushout" as having more behavioral and

attendance problems, particularly of a more serious nature, such as theft, assault, vandalism and other criminal activities. This is also echoed in other national studies in the United States which have found that schools with higher dropout rates are typically schools with significant numbers of disciplinary problems (Ekstrom 1986).

At this point it is appropriate to discuss the issue of attendance or lack of it. A student at the junior high school level typically falls into one of the following profiles with respect to attendance:

- A. Illness - student is too ill to attend and has been excused by a parent
- B. School Phobia - student who legitimately has a psychological aversion to the school environment
- C. Excused by Parent (Validity Questionable) - student has been kept at home by his/her parent to help out OR the parent allows the student to be excused rather than cause domestic problems
- D. Truancy - student has not been excused by parent and is absent without good cause

Although the reasons for poor attendance by students will be investigated later in that portion of the review which addresses causal factors, it is worth noting that the majority of the literature correlating early school leaving and absenteeism claims that absenteeism is one of

the best predictors of future dropouts (Cervantes 1965, Nash 1978, Schreiber 1967, Minkler 1980, Zamanzadeh and Prince 1978).

### **The "Disaffected Student"**

The second category in Morrow's description is the "disaffected student". This is probably the profile which serves as a common thread linking a wide variety of students in a train of academic failure. For some this may mean a problem of relevance. They are much more interested in the attractions found in the world outside the classroom and, therefore, are not motivated to achieve. Or, as Ellen Karp (1988) found, they are "hands-on learners" who are not adept at setting long-range goals and, as a result, are intolerant of a school setting which does not measure up to their ideals. They are anxious to work at a job, and to receive the concrete rewards of their labour.

In addition to the desire to enter the work force, the "disaffected student" feels alienated from other students. It may be that he/she feels that the educational system focuses on the high achiever, or the brighter students. Consequently, the potential dropout is not likely to participate in the co-curricular programs offered by the school (Karp 1988, Titone 1982). In 1967, Bell completed

a comparison of early school leavers and those who remained in school with respect to participation in extra-curricular activities. In comparing the activities of 212 Kansas high school students he found that significant differences were evident. Of those studied, 68% of the early school leavers did not participate in extracurricular activities as opposed to only 4% of those who remained in school. The findings of this study were further supported in other research conducted by Cervantes (1965), Howard and Anderson (1978) and Young and Reich (1974).

One possible explanation for the above findings has been brought forth by Hunt and Clawson (1975). They suggest that the relatively high costs of these extracurricular programs is a deterrent to participation by those students from lower socio-economic classes.

This lack of participation in the social life of the school further alienates potential dropouts. Their sense of belongingness becomes much more intense in their peer relations, which could eventually pose a variety of problems for these students if the influences are negative.

**"Capable" Students**

Those who Morrow refers to as "capable students" are often the students who teachers feel the most frustration about. They are quite capable of being successful, and most likely have I.Q.'s within the average range (Schreiber et al. 1965). They have a desire for relevance and approaches to education which focus on student-centred philosophy and practice (Karp 1988). Unfortunately, for a number of reasons which will be explored further in this review, they have made educational choices which do not foster success. This is exemplified in the low marks, the neglected assignments and a general attitude of apathy.

**"Educational Mortalities"**

Another category which has been referred to by Morrow is the "educational mortalities" for whom schooling has been one failure after another. Typically students at risk of dropping out have failed at least one grade (Titone 1982, Schreiber 1964). Schreiber (1964) also submits that if a student fails grade one or two there is an 80% chance that the student will not complete grade twelve, and that two of the most reliable predictors of early school leaving are retention and poor academic standing. Research has also shown that students who ultimately make the decision to drop out of school are five times more likely to have been retained than graduates (Curley 1971). Bachman,

Green and Wirtamen (1972) found in their study of 2 000 students from various communities in the United States that 40% of those who dropped out had failed a grade in comparison with a 10% rate of those who remained in school.

Needless to say, the lack of educational success has adverse effects on the self-worth of the student. In a study conducted of Ontario schools, dropouts were much more likely to rate themselves as having relatively positive self-concepts. However, the authors are quick to point out that other factors contradicted these self-rated appraisals. (Karp, 1988) Other studies conducted by Sewell, Palmo, and Manni (1981); Bachman, Green and Wirtamen (1972); and Zmanzadeh and Prince (1978) support Karp's observation.

#### **Common Personality Traits**

Directly related to self-esteem has been the research on the personality characteristics of early school leavers. They have been described as being less stable emotionally, less mature, more introverted, more inclined towards impulsiveness, less reliable and as having less concern for the welfare of others (HLA Consultants, 1984).

#### **Intelligence Effects**

It has been shown that a relationship exists between I.Q.

and the incidence of dropping out. One study completed by the United States Department of Labour (Schreiber 1962) illustrated that 70% of those students who had dropped out of school had I.Q. scores above 90. One quotation from Bachman (1972) reveals the inconclusiveness of much of the data:

"Dropouts tended to score below average on the tests of intelligence and academic ability. What may be surprising is that the differences were not very large, about five I.Q. points between dropouts and stay-ins who did not go to college."

To complicate matters further, there has been much criticism in recent years about the reliability of I.Q. tests. Therefore, to rely on I.Q. as a primary predictor might be ill-advised.

Prior to reviewing the literature specifically related to the causal nature of the dropout problem, it may be instructive to consider the connotations of the terms "early school leaver" and "dropout". Ponciano (1988) suggests that these terms may imply the following:

- the student is at fault
- the student leaves entirely by choice
- parents are partly to blame
- student's culture doesn't value education
- student is a loser
- school is blameless
- the choice is irremediable

Although junior high school students under the age of sixteen who are consistently truant cannot be categorized

as "dropouts", many of them have mentally and socially divorced themselves from the school environment.

#### **FACTORS CORRELATED WITH EARLY SCHOOL LEAVING**

Considering the aforementioned profiles of at-risk adolescents it is not surprising that the circumstances under which students consider dropping out of school are varied and complicated. The factors which have been identified as significant predictors of students who may drop out of school are:

- academic frustrations
- socio-economic status
- relevancy
- pull of work
- family background
- value assigned to education
- family problems
- pregnancy
- personal trauma
- rebellious nature
- self-esteem
- boredom
- double standard
- moving
- class size
- perceived concern of school/teachers
- ethnic background
- alienation
- disciplinary problems
- attendance problems

These "predictors" can be categorized in terms of school-related, demographic, family-related and individual (Rumberger et al. 1987). Much of the literature emphasizes the need to consider combinations of these factors, recognizing that they are intricately nested and

not easily untangled.

## **SCHOOL-RELATED ISSUES**

### **Academic Performance**

In the previous discussion of dropout characteristics, poor academic performance was identified as describing the vast majority of at-risk adolescents. Considering this, it is not surprising that school can be a source of major frustration for a youth. Mann (1986) has summarized the source of the dilemma which relates to this frustration in school.

"Is it that children fail to learn or that schools fail to teach?" p. 309

In a study of secondary schools in Ontario (1988), forty-two percent of the students who had dropped out of school claimed that the school system catered to the high achievers. Since the dropouts had problems academically, this perception added to the sense of alienation they felt. Also, the dropouts maintained that it was difficult to receive extra help within the system. Seventy-six percent said that they did not feel that the teachers took time to vary instructional strategies or to take extra time with the slow learners.

Academic difficulties in math and reading have been linked

to the causal effects of early school leaving by a number of researchers. The average dropout is at least two years behind his/her peers in reading proficiency and one quarter of them also have trouble in spelling (Howard and Anderson 1978). Cervantes (1965) illustrated in his table on dropout characteristics that typically dropouts are functioning two years behind their peers in reading and math at the grade seven level. An even more alarming finding noted in ERIC/CUE (1980) reported that nearly 100 per cent of the Grade 9 students who were well below grade level on standardized math and reading tests eventually left school.

#### **Special Education Programs**

Karp (1988) in her investigation of Ontario secondary schools termed special education programs as a "catch 22" in that they offer support for those in academic difficulty by small group instruction, personalized assistance, and sometimes reduced academic pressure, but they may also be the source of other problems associated with dropouts. Some students may feel that the special education classroom, or the label sometimes associated with it, is a stigma which follows them throughout their school life. It may, in fact, exacerbate the at-risk student's feelings of alienation.

Two common themes found in many of the causal factors have been the lack of self-esteem and the feelings of alienation experienced by the at-risk student. Gordon (1957) offers an interesting equation which encapsulizes many of the feelings attributable to the potential early school leaver:

Students' school status = academic achievement + participation in school activities + position in the informal sociometric network.

He also suggests that the most important of these "addends" is the participation in school activities while the least important is academic achievement. All of this is based upon his premise that status in relation to peers is one of the most sought after goals for an adolescent.

### **Personality of the School**

Wehlage and Rutter (1986) conclude that there are four characteristics which identify schools where a higher dropout rate would be evident. They say that the perception by the students that the adults in authority are "weak" is a contributing factor. In addition, large school size, low expectations, and dull curriculum add to a high incidence of dropouts. Among early school leavers in the United States, Thornburg (1975) noted that negative attitudes toward school were associated with boredom, irrelevant curricula, teacher prejudice, teacher emphasis

on grades and school restrictions. Cervantes (1966) in another study of student perceptions, found that the early school leaver was typically critical of teachers, school activities and the curriculum. They liked very little if anything about school with the exception of some extracurricular activities.

Young and Reich (1974) reported similar results to those above. Reportedly, the features which tended to be identified as having a positive influence were other students, general course work, personal relationships with teachers and some extracurricular activities. Those features identified as negative pertained to rules and regulations, coursework, personal relationships with teachers and teaching methodologies. The most significant features identified by early school leavers were rules and regulations, the personal relationships, especially those with teachers, and teaching methods. The teacher holds the key to many of the frustrations associated with at-risk adolescents, but this does not imply that the teacher bears the total responsibility for the student's education.

Unless the staff are interested and engaged, and emphasize academic work in an orderly environment, the school will continue to lose students. (Bryk and Thum 1989) According

to Elliott, Voss and Wendling (1966), the attitudes and actions of teachers have the ability to influence a student's choice to remain in school or to leave more so than that of the student's parents. Zeller (1966) identified these characteristics as necessary for teachers who work with high risk students: commitment, a positive and caring attitude toward the student and a genuine understanding of the issues surrounding the life of the at-risk adolescent.

In the absence of successes in the school setting, the potential dropouts begin to view themselves as inadequate, and definitely not as deserving of quality, individualized instruction (Karp 1988). Here again, at-risk adolescents are reminded of their inadequacies, another barrier to the development of a positive self-concept.

Further to this, is the direct effect of school administrators on the educational factors influencing dropout rates. Following an extensive review of the perceptions of high school administrators, Clark (1987) concluded that generally they perceive dropouts had more domestic problems, low expectations, poor academic performance and were not interested in what the schools

had to offer. Additionally, Clark found that few administrators held the school system as bearing even partial responsibility for the problems faced by at-risk adolescents. Instead, they tended to attribute the problems to the students and their backgrounds. If this is a widespread belief then this has significant implications for dropout prevention programs and their ability to address the real issues.

### **Relevancy**

The literature suggests that "typical" dropout are drawn out of the school setting by the world of work. With so little of the curricula in the junior high school being job-related, it is not surprising that dropouts find the school environment irrelevant to their future. The exceptions may lie in the complementary or option classes such as Industrial Arts, Home Economics, Computer, Sports and Recreation or Outdoor Education which have direct applications to the "real world" outside of school. Karp (1988) contends that dropouts do not value a classical education most probably because their parents feel much the same way.

Modelling behavior has long been one of the major influences on student behavior and Rumberger et al. (1990), while studying the influence of the family on

at-risk students, found that parents of dropouts made less of an effort and were less engaged in their children's education than those parents whose children remained in school. The lack of parental involvement sends a message to the child: If my parents don't think school is important then why should I?

### **FAMILY-RELATED FACTORS**

One of the most widely researched factors affecting a student's potential for dropping out is family background. While some maintain that it is secondary to school-based issues, others feel that it constitutes the very core of the dropout problem.

#### **Socio-economic Status**

When socio-economic status is defined in terms of the income and educational level of the parents, it has been shown to be highly influential on academic success and the ability of schools to reduce the percentage of students who choose dropping out as an alternative. In fact, students who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to drop out than others (Bachman, Green, and Wirtanen 1971; Ekstrom et al. 1986; and Rumberger 1983).

Similar results have been presented when socio-economic

status is measured in terms of overall family income or father's occupation and its level of difficulty, prestige and responsibility. (Bachman, Green and Wirtamen 1972; Tseng 1972; Zamanzadeh and Prince 1978; Kaplan and Luck 1977; Jones 1977; Poole 1978; and Watson 1976;). Furthermore, an article by Kaplan and Luck (1977) claims that poverty, both the physical and psychological effects of it, contributes to academic difficulty. This is manifested in the lack of study aids, literary materials, and educational toys, along with the low self-esteem and alienation associated with poverty (Ekstrom et al. 1986; and Rumberger 1983; Natriello et al. 1986).

### **Family Structure**

After interviewing more than 800 dropouts from Ontario secondary schools, Karp (1988) found that 29 per cent of dropouts came from single parent (mother only) families, as compared with 23 per cent for graduates. Sixty-two per cent of dropouts and 74 per cent of graduates live with both parents. Although these are not significant findings, Karp maintains that they do suggest that the dropout is more likely to come from a family structure which does not provide as much support as that of the graduate.

Other researchers have stated the effects of single-parent families more conclusively. Cervantes (1965), Howard and Anderson (1978), Jones (1977) and Zamanzadeh and Prince (1978) claim that higher incidences of early school leaving are evident in families characterized by broken homes, or when one or both parents are deceased.

#### **Parental Attitudes Towards Education**

A number of researchers have identified parent characteristics as being one of the many predictors of early school leaving. They have concluded that the following are most influential: parental expectations and educational achievement, parental support, number of learning tools in the home and parental involvement in the school (Kim 1985, Ekstrom et al. 1986, Gadwa and Griggs 1985, Howell and Frese 1982, and Wagner 1984).

Following a comprehensive study of family influences on the dropout rates in one California school, Rumberger et al. (1990) identified three major differences between families of graduates and those of early school leavers. The first of these was related to differences in parenting styles. They found that parents of dropouts were more likely to adopt a permissive parenting style which resulted in the dropouts making many decisions regarding schooling and behavior on their own. This has been found

by some researchers to lead to excessive autonomy for the child (Steinberg, Elman and Mounts 1989). In effect, this makes the adolescent much more susceptible to peer influences (Steinberg and Silverberg 1986). The combination of diminished parental control and the effects of peer influences may result in adolescents making decisions regarding their behavior and attitudes which may cause them to engage in inappropriate behavior such as truancy, poor academic performance and increased disciplinary problems (Dornbusch et al. 1985; Dornbusch et al. 1987; and Steinberg et al. 1988).

The second influence Rumberger et al. put forth pertains to the reactions of parents to their child's academic performance. The study claims that parents of dropouts are more likely to use negative sanctions and emotional reactions when responding to lack of academic success whereas parents of those who do not dropout offer encouragement, with a positive demeanour while they promote intrinsic motivation. Bachman, Green and Wirtamen (1971) suggest that the use of extrinsic motivators by parents, whose children are at risk of dropping out of school is often coupled with high levels of parental punitiveness.

The third parental characteristic is the amount of interest parents take in their child's education and their own involvement with the school. The parental involvement referred to includes attendance at parent-teacher conferences, assisting their child with homework, and promoting education in the home. Karp (1988) found that in Ontario secondary schools dropouts come from homes where education is not as valued as in others. Schreiber (1967) found that this may be in part associated with the educational experiences of the dropouts' parents. His study estimated that 70% of the mothers and 80% of the fathers had never finished school. These results were further confirmed in research by Poole (1978), Tseng (1972), and Curley (1971). It has been surmised that since parents of dropouts have low educational aspirations for their children, this in turn causes the children to adopt a similar attitude (Bachman, Green and Wirtamen 1972; Tseng 1972 and Poole 1978). Rumberger suggests that parents may be too involved in family problems or personal crises to provide the support required. In fact, they are often viewed as negligent by the school. The lack of support from home and the preponderance of numerous other factors further add to the causal influences associated with early school leaving.

#### **DISCIPLINARY FACTORS**

**Attendance**

The issue of attendance, or lack of it, could be the result of any number of the factors already presented. Research shows truancy to be a manifestation of factors such as relevancy in the curriculum, permissive parenting strategies, family problems, the nature of adolescence, student-teacher relationships, and the location of the school with respect to proximity to malls, arcades and the like (HLA Consultants 1984). In light of the abovementioned research on the influences of parents on dropping out, the findings of Sharples et al. (1979) are noteworthy. They indicate that parental attitude is one of the major factors in the incidence of a child being excused from school unjustifiably. Poor attendance can only increase the frustration level for students who struggle academically and heighten their feelings of alienation pertaining to the school. The cycle continues unless some type of intervention interrupts it.

**Antisocial Behaviors**

Since at-risk students have immense difficulty establishing a positive identity within the context of school, they are much more apt to engage in other behaviors which are peer-related in their pursuit of an identity. Coupling this with the permissiveness of the

parenting style and the possibility of negative peer influence the incidence of inappropriate behaviors increases (Karp 1988). Where adolescents lack feelings of belongingness, school is seen to be the antagonist and therefore, rules and property need not be respected. As was mentioned earlier in this review, potential dropouts see themselves as less important than other students. This transfers into the classroom with respect to discipline where they feel that the "goodie-goodie" is less likely to be reprimanded for inappropriate behaviors. This heightens the feeling that school does not value their presence and that they are unwanted (Karp 1988). Feelings of alienation are further reinforced.

Elliott and Voss (1974) found a high correlation between failure in the formal school setting and delinquent behavior. Quite often these at-risk adolescents have engaged in criminal or delinquent activities outside of school. This can sometimes lead to further alienation from other students because they are not willing to engage in such activities and avoid friendships with the at-risk student.

#### **ETHNIC BACKGROUND**

The ethnic background of a student acts as a factor in two ways. First, if students have recently entered Canada

from another country they will most likely have different academic and cultural experiences. These two differences, in addition to the challenge of learning a second language, will probably cause great frustration. The feelings of alienation and fear of failure which plague the typical dropout will be at least as problematic for these types of students.

Second, the study of Ontario secondary schools states that for those cultural groups whose educational values do not blend well with Canadian standards, it may take two to three years for them to become accustomed to the differences (Karp 1990).

The Rumberger et al. study (1990) found that certain ethnic groups in California high schools were over-represented in the dropout statistics. They are much more likely to be of Hispanic, Black and Anglo and less likely to be from Asian or other cultural groups.

In the Canadian context, Zamanzadeh and Prince (1978) found similar results to those of Rumberger et al. (1990) who had analyzed the American situation. There is a much higher percentage of non-Canadian, non-English speaking young people among the early school leavers. The predominant group in this category is the Native student.

In 1971, McCarthy studied the dropout rates of Native children in Alberta from the time they were in Grades 5, 6, and 7 until they had reached Grade 12. By the end of Grade 9, 53% of the students had dropped out. This percentage escalated to 77.8% in Grade 10 and to 96.7% by the end of Grade 12. In support of these findings is the research completed by Saigonaokai (1975) who wrote that of those Native students who had started Grade 1 in 1964 - 65, 80 per cent had left school within the next ten years.

#### **GENDER**

Although it may be a relatively minor predictor of dropping out, gender has been referred to in a number of studies. There is evidence to support the finding that males are slightly more likely to drop out than females and that they tend to leave at earlier ages (Kaplan and Luck 1977; Zamanzadeh and Prince 1978; Watson 1976; Annis and Watson 1975; and Young and Reich 1974). Mann (1986) discovered in his study that 51% of males and 33% of females dropped out of school because they disliked it. There are also gender-related differences in the reasons for leaving school. Mann (1986) found that males were more likely to drop out to seek employment and that females were more likely to drop out due to family-related

issues including pregnancy, marriage and babysitting  
siblings.

### **MITIGATIVE MEASURES**

In light of the immensely complex nature of the dropout problem, elimination of it totally is unrealistic. However, there are a number of interventions that have been identified which could serve to mitigate the incidence of early school leaving. There is no doubt that the ideal program would succeed in finding panaceas for each causal factor outlined in the previous discussions on predictors. On the other hand, however, advocates of dropout prevention programs maintain that concentrating on a limited number of factors is the best starting point for schools.

Writers in the area of prevention identify several characteristics of successful programs. Weis, Farrar and Petrie (1989) submit that if a school promotes academic engagement and school membership it will be more successful with at-risk students. They claim that the traditional school structure hinders the promotion of these two foci due to three problematic characteristics. First, they not provide extrinsic rewards for academic excellence. Second, the rewards which exist center on a narrow range of intellectual competence such as those which can be developed and displayed. The third problem is the strong emphasis on "content driven" instruction

which our school structures, especially at the secondary level have fallen victim to.

Dale Mann (1986) maintains, as do others, that the place to begin preventative strategies is in the elementary grades. If students find success early in their education, they are more likely to continue to succeed. Identification of those elementary students who may be at risk of dropping out is important so that appropriate strategies and programs can be implemented to provide academic assistance at an early age (Titone 1982).

In an attempt to organize the issues surrounding dropout prevention programs, Mann (1986) uses the four "C's" approach - "cash", "care", "computers", and "coalitions". For "cash" he advocates a connection between schooling and paid employment which is not simply attained by placing the at-risk adolescent in a work-experience program but rather through something resembling a joint training partnership between the schools and the workplace.

The second, "care", refers to the importance of caring teachers. Personal contact and genuine concern for students pave the way for greater successes for at-risk students. A system of pairing at-risk students with teachers to encourage personal relationships is one method

advocated by researchers. Amenta (1982) encourages the use of an "advisor system" whereby each student is assigned to a teacher whose responsibility it is to provide both emotional and academic support. The extent of the support is based upon the model which best suits the individual school and its population.

"Computer tracking" of students and "computer-managed instruction" constitute the third "C" in Mann's writing. The computer can be used to ensure that at-risk students are not "lost" in the school system as they progress through the grades and from one school to the next. In addition, the computer can provide for easier management of instructional materials and can assist weaker students via computer assisted instruction or remediation.

The final category is that of "coalition". Mann notes that in order for a dropout prevention program to succeed, the community must work in cooperation with the schools since the problem is not simply the school's; it affects the entire community. A collaborative approach enriches understanding and benefits the youth involved.

Hamilton (1986) further echoes much of what has already been said. He supports programs which: separate at-risk

adolescents from the rest of the school population in terms of programming; emphasize a strong vocational component; have low student/teacher ratios; promote individualized instruction, have strong counselling components; and are smaller in size.

Considering the aforementioned opinions on the required elements of an effective dropout prevention program, it would appear that much of the research can be organized under the following headings:

Curriculum/Instructional strategies  
 Teacher Characteristics  
 School/Administrative Characteristics  
 School Belongingness/Membership  
 Special Programs  
 Home and Community Involvement

### **Curriculum/Instructional Strategies**

A summary of the research in this area by Zeller (1966) suggests a number of ways of addressing curricula and instructional needs:

- ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all students
- emphasize reading and writing skills
- use small group instruction to facilitate learning
- use creative teaching techniques and materials
- focus instruction and evaluation on individual progress
- offer vocational programs prior to high school
- provide programs which include topics such as: employment, marriage, budgeting, parenting (as in Health and CALM curricula)
- provide instruction regarding the importance of education

These components have also been supported by other researchers in the area whose findings appear elsewhere in the review.

### **Teacher Characteristics**

The majority of the work in the area of teacher characteristics can be summarized as follows:

- the teachers should be among the most enthusiastic and eager
- student motivation is a strength area
- the teacher genuinely cares for the at-risk student as well as others
- the teacher understands the at-risk student's problems
- the approach should be child-centred, not subject centred
- evaluation and instruction is based on continuous progress

As has been mentioned earlier in this review, the teacher is the key to the success of any instructional program.

### **School/Administration Characteristics**

In addition to the information offered previously, the items below further outline what constitutes the best possible environment for the potential dropout:

- a counselling program which starts at least at the Grade 7 level
- a program which assists high-risk students with the acquisition of socially acceptable behaviors
- a tutoring program
- a plan encouraging parental involvement

Eli Casey (1990) emphasizes the importance of the school

environment in the following:

"People tend to frequent those places where they find success and avoid places where they experience failure." p. 7

### **School Belongingness/Membership**

At-risk students need to be convinced that the school cares and needs them (Casey 1990). In addition, these students need to feel that they play a valuable role in the school activities including extra or co-curricular programs (Weis et al. 1989). Casey further suggests that the school must take an active role in developing strategies for assisting students with the problems of adjustment, particularly between levels or schools, and isolation which can be the result of moving, loss of friendship groups, or the alienation and insecurity often associated with adolescence.

Part of the problem of alienation stems from non-attendance at school. Reducing absenteeism can be accomplished through many of the recommendations mentioned to this point. However, Kaplan and Luck (1977) claim that there are six basic methods for improving the attendance of at-risk students:

- enforce compulsory attendance; increase number of people assigned to this task and increase home contacts
- institute remedial, vocational and work study programs

- emphasize rapport-building among students, staff and parents
- provide guidance and counselling services
- work in cooperation with community agencies such as public welfare, private counsellors, employment agencies

### **Parental Involvement**

Since parental involvement in the schools is a factor in how a student views education, there is a need to encourage programs which bring more parents into the school community. Often the parents of at-risk students are hesitant to come to parent-teacher interviews because their past experiences have led them to believe that they will only hear how poorly their child is progressing. Again, the schools must provide an encouraging place in which all parents, not just those whose children are successful, feel that they are an important part of the educational experience for their child (Rumberger et al. 1990). Home contacts which tend to stress the successes of the child would be one step towards this end.

It is imperative that the schools realize that they cannot be effective working in isolation from the home. Dougherty (1990) states the following: "What the school does in a six- or seven-hour day must be reinforced by the family for the remaining 17 or 18 hours." The promotion of a partnership between the school and home would most likely increase parental involvement.

### **Community Involvement**

The dropout problem is not an educational or parental concern; it is a concern for everyone. In addition to purely philanthropic motives for addressing the issue of early school leavers, the general public eventually bears significant economic and social consequences associated with it. In the United States alone, the dropout problem has cost the country in excess of \$77 billion dollars annually (Levin 1987). This figure takes into account \$71 billion dollars in lost tax revenue, \$3 billion dollars in crime prevention, and \$3 billion dollars associated with welfare and unemployment. Therefore the public would be well advised to assist the schools with stay-in-school initiatives which over the course of time are much less costly.

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF INEFFECTUAL PROGRAMS**

While it is true that programs which do not incorporate many of the components recommended previously have been shown to be less than successful, however, there are some factors which would tend to make any program less able to achieve longterm results. According to Kaplan and Luck (1977), the "crash" programs which take a "bandaid approach" are less likely to be effective over time.

These programs fail because they tend not to address the causes. Kaplan and Luck also claim that programs with poor media campaigns do not provide longlasting results and that those which take the form of special schools or classes, with reputations for being punitive, fall prey to similar results.

#### **WHAT WORKS?**

It is difficult to find documentation of dropout prevention programs in the literature which offer conclusive results or have been thoroughly evaluated. This is particularly true when researching those programs which are designed to target the junior high school student and, although many of the basic elements of dropout prevention programs are consistent from grades seven to twelve, the junior high school setting has some unique characteristics.

Many of the preventative programs aimed at the high school student incorporate a work experience element which helps to address the issue of relevancy of learning experiences. For the most part, the traditional junior high school cannot adopt this component because of the age of the students. Also, in Alberta, a child is not legally able to leave school until age sixteen, and since the majority of students enrolled in grades seven through nine are

under sixteen, the nature of the problem is somewhat different from that found in the high school setting. Suffice it to say, a dropout prevention program in a junior high school environment, in order to have a long-term effect, must recognize all the major factors related to early school leaving and institute strategies which diminish their effects.

### PROJECT CONNECTIONS

Project Connections was conceived as a result of a growing concern for the welfare of those students in our schools who find little success in the school setting. It was based on the premise that at-risk adolescents had many needs which the "regular" school setting was ill-equipped to meet. The authors of the project felt that a focussed, intensive effort would yield more positive educational experiences for potential dropouts than the crisis intervention which is currently the practice. The name "Project Connections" was chosen to reflect the primary objectives of the program which were to promote the establishment of connections; a network comprised of parents, students, schools and the community. The schools which chose to adopt the project were: Allan Watson School, Gilbert Paterson Community School, Hamilton Junior High School and Wilson Junior High School (see Appendix A).

Although the program which exists in the schools today is quite similar to that which was described in the proposal, the operation has been modified and adapted as the year has progressed. A full understanding of the programs offered within the District must be presented before engaging in a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of

## Project Connections.

The objectives which form the philosophical basis for Project Connections remain the same as in the initial proposal:

1. To improve attendance patterns of students who are perceived to be at risk of dropping out of school through provision of individual guidance and support counselling to student participants in the program.
2. To increase the likelihood that student participants will complete school by providing them with increased opportunities for academic success through individual and small group tutoring and other remedial programs.
3. To increase the likelihood that student participants will complete school by providing them with experiences intended to increase their self-esteem and their feeling of self-worth. These experiences will focus on work-related projects including Work Orientation, Work Simulation and Work Experience.
4. To increase the level of support available to these students in their home by offering assistance to their parents in the form of parenting skills workshops, parent support groups, and so on.

(Appendix A, p. 170)

Although each of the objectives listed above has been addressed to varying degrees by the participating schools, more of the efforts have been directed towards the first and the second.

**District Structure**

Prior to the actual implementation of the project in the fall of 1991, Lethbridge School District #51 hired the equivalent of four full-time child and youth care workers. Gilbert Paterson, Hamilton and Wilson each received one worker whereas the remaining position was shared between two workers at Allan Watson because of the uniqueness of the school. Allan Watson provides both a junior and senior high school program. Each school was given the autonomy to develop its own program within the context of the Project Connections proposal.

The primary responsibility for the administration of the project at the district level was that of the Student Services Department which consisted of the Associate Superintendent of Student Services, the Coordinator of Student Support Services and the School Liaison Officer. They provided assistance in the area of budgeting, evaluation and general implementation of the project at the participating schools. In addition, they acted as the liaison between the community, Alberta Education, Canada Employment and Immigration and the District.

**PROJECT CONNECTIONS, SCHOOL-BY-SCHOOL****Allan Watson School - An Integrated Occupational Setting**

The project at Allan Watson School is not at all

dissimilar from that which was planned in the original proposal (see Appendix A, page 182 - 188). As outlined in the proposal, the project has two coordinators (child and youth care workers). Since Allan Watson Staff has developed a continuous progress philosophy in their junior high school program, the students who are grouped in this manner are called "pre-high school" students. Therefore, one of the child and youth care workers (CYCW) is assigned to the pre-high school students. The other worker is assigned to the Teen Mom program and the senior high school students.

#### **Participants at the Pre-High School Level**

Allan Watson School has chosen to include all of the pre-high school students in the project since many of them fall into the categories of at-risk adolescents as outlined in the proposal. (Appendix A) Allan Watson has a higher number of at-risk students because many of the students who were referred to the school had had difficulty succeeding in the traditional junior high setting and were in need of more positive educational experiences. Prior to attending Allan Watson these students were typically achieving below grade level in one or more of their academic or core classes and were in need of modified programming with an emphasis on vocational

education. Allan Watson chose to include all of their student population in their project and created a model which was unique to their situation.

One of the primary functions of the CYCW at Allan Watson is to monitor student attendance, particularly for those students who have had a history of truancy or school-avoidance. The CYCW encourages the students by telephoning those who are absent to enquire about the reason for their non-attendance and by promoting the value of education in their lives through one-to one counselling sessions. It is not unusual for the CYCW to visit a student's home to discuss the reason for the absences or to provide transportation for those reluctant to attend. It is not the role of the CYCW to discipline the student for truancy. This is a task undertaken by the administration.

Within the project, financial provisions were made for the development of an incentive program to encourage students to attend on a regular basis. It is the responsibility of the CYCW to coordinate this reward system with assistance from such community agencies as the Chamber of Commerce. Various city businesses are expressing an interest in providing merchandise or food items as contributions to the "stay-in-school effort".

The students who are at risk often require individual personal and emotional counselling to deal with the problems they encounter in the challenging travel through adolescence. Allan Watson has several provisions for such counselling. One of the support mechanisms in place is the advisor system. Each student in the school is assigned to a staff member who provides support to the student academically, socially or emotionally through regularly scheduled periods throughout the week or during out-of-class times. Additionally, support is provided through a student Peer Support Team, two school counsellors, a support group which meets weekly, two administrators, a school nurse, college and university practicum students. The district's School Liaison Officer is another resource which is available to all schools. His mandate is to offer support to students who are chronic non-attenders or seriously at risk when requested to do so by a school. The CYCW offers counselling services as well, although she focuses on the students who are most at-risk and who require frequent one-to-one counselling. Since the CYCW's availability is not restricted by other assignments such as teaching, she has the flexibility to see students when required.

Another aspect of the CYCW's role is the maintenance of

the tutoring program. Allan Watson is providing academic support for the pre-high school students with the assistance of tutors. The tutors function as either aides within the classroom or by offering group or individual instruction outside of the regular classroom. They have employed three tutors who have been an integral part of the school community since the program began in September of 1991.

#### **High School and Teen Mom Program**

The second CYCW is responsible for those students who are registered in high school courses and the Teen Mom program. Although there are many similarities between the high school and pre-high school students at Allan Watson, one fundamental difference is the fact that once adolescents reach sixteen they are no longer required by law to attend school. This provides an even bigger challenge for the CYCW when attempting to prevent students from dropping out. The role of the second CYCW is very similar in nature to that of the pre-high school CYCW in terms of attendance monitoring and counselling, although there is more of an emphasis on career counselling at this level.

The Teen Mom program was initiated in response to a District need for support for teenage mothers who often

feel overwhelmed by the challenges of raising a child and completing their education. Allan Watson is home to a day care facility operated by the YWCA for children of teenage mothers from throughout the District. The facility has eleven children registered who are cared for by two caregivers. The CYCW acts as a liaison between the teen mothers and the daycare workers. She also coordinates programs offered to the mothers from support agencies such as Parents' Place and the City of Lethbridge Health Unit. Transportation is provided at no cost to those mothers who are unable to arrange it for themselves.

The CYCW in charge of the high school level has developed a partnership with McDonald's Restaurants to provide an incentive program for encouraging regular school attendance. It is called the McDonald's Hurricane Breakfast Club and it offers a light breakfast to students before school begins.

#### **Parental Involvement**

The CYCW's maintain frequent contact with parents of those students who they feel are at risk, recognizing that the school-home educational partnership must exist in order to help students to make "connections" in their lives. The parents often contact the school to request assistance

from the program and more specifically, from the CYCW's.

#### **Gilbert Paterson Community School Program**

Although Gilbert Paterson provides programming from kindergarten through grade nine, the primary implementation level is at the junior high. The students who were selected for inclusion in the project at Gilbert Paterson were those who had been unsuccessful in school during the previous year due to poor attendance, inability to complete the required academic work and/or a history of personal or emotional problems. It was anticipated by the administration that these characteristics would apply to approximately 9% of the school population which, at the junior high school level, translated into between ten and fifteen students.

Gilbert Paterson has in place a support network for at-risk students which includes a student Peer Support Team, two counsellors, four administrators, special education teachers, and a teacher-student advisory system which allows teachers to assist in the monitoring of student progress. The teacher advisor's responsibilities include acting as a school contact for the parents, advising students on personal and academic matters, and developing positive relationships with his/her advisees.

The role of the CYCW at Gilbert Paterson is to monitor student attendance, to coordinate a tutoring program, to provide counselling to at-risk students and to act as a liaison between interested community agencies and the school. The CYCW at Gilbert Paterson encourages attendance by telephoning home, making home visits and by providing incentives such as prizes offered by participating city businesses. Periodically, students are rewarded for their efforts with a visit to a local restaurant for coffee breaks or lunches.

The tutoring program at the school is offered during the school day. Students engage in the tutoring sessions during the time when a complementary course would ordinarily be scheduled for the student. There are five tutors available at Gilbert Paterson, four of whom are university students sponsored by the University of Lethbridge Education Undergraduate Society and one who is not, but who has the skills to provide quality assistance. Typically, the ratio of students to tutors is two or three to one. The tutoring is offered in a specially designated room not far from the CYCW's office and is primarily offered only to those who have been identified as Project Connections candidates. A contract between the student's parents and the school is sometimes used in cases where a

student's attendance at the tutoring sessions has been irregular. The parents agree to pay for the cost of the tutoring time in this instance.

The CYCW is responsible for scheduling the tutors, maintaining their time sheets and for ensuring that they have work from the students' teachers. During school staff meetings the CYCW informs teachers of those students who are receiving the tutoring assistance and encourages the use of the "blue sheets" which are forms designed to communicate expectations to the tutors. These "blue sheets" are available in the main office and once completed are placed in a master tutoring binder as a resource for the tutors.

The CYCW at Gilbert Paterson offers one-to-one counselling to the project's students and, at times, acts in an intake capacity for future referrals to the school's counsellors. The CYCW is available throughout the school day and is easily accessible to students. Students are encouraged to make appointments which require prior consent from the teacher whose class the student will miss. Her office is located along one of the main hallways in the school which further adds to her visibility.

Parental involvement was identified as one of the goals of

the project. The CYCW at the school made arrangements for Parents' Place to provide a parenting program which offered parents a variety of techniques for coping with their teenaged children. A similar program was offered at the other junior high schools last year. The CYCW also makes herself available to parents at parent nights and throughout the day for those who need her support.

In an effort to encourage participation in school activities by the Project Connections students, the CYCW has coordinated lunch presentations by the system's Resource Officer (police liaison), a modelling agency owner, a fitness expert and others. Although designed to target at-risk students, the activities are open to all students in the school at no charge.

At the end of the first year of the project, 71 students had been referred to the program for a variety of reasons. Found below is a profile of the students who were included in the project.

#### **Reason for Referral**

Lack of Academic Progress	93%
Chronic Absence from School	18%
Chronic Tardiness	24%
Social/Emotional Problems	63%
Other	3%

**Referred by...**

Teacher	41%
Administrator	34%
Other	1%
Parent	17%
Self	21%

**Services provided...**

Short Term Tutoring (less than 1 mo.)	17%
Long Term Tutoring	69%
Counselling	63%
Attendance Monitoring	47%
Other	0%

The program was able to accommodate a much higher percentage of the student population than they originally anticipated indicating that they, like other schools in the District, chose a pro-active approach to ensuring success for those students who were potentially in danger of early school leaving.

**Hamilton Junior High School Program**

The students who were identified at Hamilton at the inception of the project comprised a group of approximately fifteen to twenty students although, according to the proposal (see Appendix A, p. 191), the potential number was much higher when homework completion and achievement rates were considered. Hamilton's current resources for working with at-risk students consist of a student Peer Support Team, two counsellors, three administrators, special education programs and a

teacher-student advisory system very similar to that offered by Gilbert Paterson. In addition, Hamilton offers a grade 7 transition or integrated classroom setting. Unlike the traditional junior high school, each of the four integrated classes is taught primarily by one teacher. The teacher teaches the class language arts, math, science, social studies and occasionally is also assigned to teach another subject such as physical education or health. The purpose of these classes is to foster a smooth transition for students entering junior high for the first time. Each of the integrated teachers serves as advisor for his/her group as well.

Another service offered to students is based on the consultative team approach in which teachers, an administrator, a counsellor, a school psychologist, parents, the CYCW and other interested parties meet to formulate action plans to assist students who are at risk. Referrals to this Students' Assistance Service are received from teachers, administrators and parents alike. Typically, meetings are held bimonthly during the school day. Substitute teachers are available to teachers who wish to attend these meetings. Those who do not participate are provided with copies of the plans of action developed during the meetings.

Within the context of the above setting, the CYCW at Hamilton has the task of monitoring attendance, coordinating the tutoring program, offering counselling and acting as a liaison between the school and outside agencies. Hamilton's CYCW encourages attendance by telephoning home, making home visits and by providing incentives such as those of Gilbert Paterson. Often rewards are offered in the form of visits to local coffee shops, parties, or coupons from participating city businesses. One of the initiatives is the "Lunch with the Principal" program. Students are eligible for a lunch with one of the administrators if they show a significant improvement in their attendance over a specified time period.

The tutoring program is designed to operate both during the regular school day and after school. Students who have been targeted under the umbrella of Project Connections are included in the tutoring classes, which are offered during regularly scheduled complementary course times or periodically when a student is not participating in physical education. Teachers are provided with a weekly schedule of tutoring sessions at the beginning of each week. Hamilton employs four tutors who are students from the University of Lethbridge's

Education Undergraduate Society. The remaining two are university students who have demonstrated an ability to work effectively in the tutoring setting. The ratio of students to tutors varies throughout the day but is usually three or four to one. Unlike the tutoring setting at Gilbert Paterson, Hamilton's tutoring sessions operate out of a room which also serves as an office for the CYCW. A partition separates the room into two areas, but the CYCW prefers the setting so as to monitor student progress and to engage in informal counselling with the students. The room is decorated with pictures of students who are in the program and reminders of incentive programs being offered. An atmosphere of student ownership is apparent. To facilitate student learning, two computers are available for student use. If a student has made a commitment to after-school tutoring sessions, and does not attend, then a contract is completed under which the parents agree to pay for the tutor if their child does not take the responsibility to attend.

In addition to scheduling the tutoring sessions and monitoring their effectiveness, the CYCW at Hamilton acts as a liaison between the tutors and the classroom teachers. Teachers are requested to inform the tutors of assignments or other tasks which must be completed. Similarly to Gilbert Paterson, a request form has been

developed which is placed in the tutoring binder by the CYCW. The tutors also keep a log of each student's progress during the tutoring sessions.

A significant service provided by the CYCW is that of individual counselling. Most of the students in the program require frequent contact to deal with the myriad of social and emotional problems they encounter. The CYCW is easily accessible to the students, however, permission must be granted for students being excused from classes prior to the counselling sessions.

Parents' Place provides parenting workshops as a service to the schools which have been well-received in the past. In order to prepare the CYCW's to be facilitators in such workshops, Parents' Place offered an inservice which was attended by all District CYCW's. Consequently, the CYCW at Hamilton initiated a parent support group which meets on a regular basis. These evening meetings are designed to encourage parents to talk about their frustrations and to learn new strategies for coping with their teenagers' behaviors. In addition, the CYCW is available to parents at parent nights and parent-teacher interviews.

At the encouragement of the CYCW, the students in the

project have developed their own support group. Although open to all students in the school, it is hoped that the leaders in this group will be from the target population. The agenda for this group is to talk informally about issues facing teenagers including both experiences in and out of the school setting. The CYCW acts as a facilitator.

The actual number of students who had been included in the project by the end of the year was 95. Student profiles yielded the following results.

#### **Reason for Referral**

Lack of Academic Progress	79%
Chronic Absence from School	32%
Chronic Tardiness	13%
Social/Emotional Problems	24%
Other: (behavioral, etc.)	37%

#### **Referred by...**

Teacher	51%
Administrator	42%
Parent	6%
Self	8%
Other: (consultative team; AMH, etc.)	7%

#### **Services Provided...**

Short Term Tutoring (less than 1 mo.)	38%
Long Term Tutoring	48%
Counselling	34%
Attendance Monitoring	24%
Other:	5%

Similar to the profiles reported from Gilbert Paterson,

the students in the project at Hamilton were referred primarily for academic difficulties stemming from a variety of inter-related factors.

#### **Wilson Junior High School Program**

Although the programs offered at each of the participating schools are very similar, they each have distinct differences in population and programming needs. A significant feature of Wilson Junior High School is that it has been designated as an intercultural school due to the high percentage of the student population that has a language other than English as a first language. These English as a Second Language (ESL) students comprise approximately one hundred of the school's population of 650. To accommodate their needs, the school has a full time teacher and an aide in the program. When the target population for Project Connections at Wilson is being identified, these students are taken into consideration in addition to those who qualify under the criteria of serious academic difficulty and poor attendance. Under the criteria outlined in the proposal and including the ESL students, Wilson had a starting base of students numbering about eighty to one hundred with approximately forty who had frequent absences from school which could not be attributed to illness.

Much like the other schools previously discussed, Wilson has a student support network in place. One component of this network is a student-teacher advisor system which is much more comprehensive than that found at either Hamilton or Gilbert Paterson in that it has a more extensive academic monitoring component. One feature of the Wilson advisor system which is unique is that during the first reporting period parent interviews, the parents meet with the advisor and the student, not the course teacher. At this meeting the student takes an active role in the meeting by providing personal goals to be attained and participating in any problem solving regarding academic or social difficulties.

Wilson also offers a student Peer Support Team, two counsellors, three administrators, special education programs and four integrated or transitional grade 7 classes similar to those previously described at Hamilton Junior High. Also, Wilson has a consultative team called a "C-Team" which meets weekly to discuss student concerns raised by teachers, counsellors, administrators or parents. The team consists of the principal, a counsellor, a school psychologist, a special education teacher, the Project Connections CYCW and usually the student's advisor and/or one or two teachers.

Occasionally parents are invited to attend. A plan of action is developed and records of the proceedings are kept in the main office so that other teachers are kept informed.

The role of the CYCW at Wilson Junior High is to provide regular contact with chronic non-attenders and to counsel these students, making referrals to outside agencies where deemed necessary. The CYCW benefits from the assistance of one of the school counsellors in coordinating the tutoring program. Additionally, he is to act as a liaison between the school and outside agencies and community groups. Not unlike those in the other schools in the project, the Wilson CYCW makes home contacts through telephone calls and home visits. Incentives are offered to promote attendance and improvements in achievement. The CYCW also attends parent-teacher interviews in the event that parents wish to consult with him about the project or their child.

The CYCW at Wilson spends the majority of his time interacting with students in a counselling setting. He has an office which is located in the main hallway making him easily accessible to students who require his attention. The CYCW encourages students to drop-in when

they feel that they need to talk about an issue. He does not limit his clientele to Project Connections students, although they are his focus.

The tutoring program at Wilson is offered during the noon hour and after school. It is open to all students in the school who feel they require the extra support, but teacher referral is recommended. Each student participating in the tutoring program is asked to complete a contract for services to ensure their attendance. The contract is signed by the parents who agree to pay for the tutoring time if their child misses a scheduled session. The other junior highs make use of this type of contract when required as well.

Due to the larger numbers of students during the lunch and after school tutoring times, fourteen tutors have been employed at Wilson. Of this number, approximately four of the tutors are education students whereas the others are either university students, high school students or other members of the community. The tutoring takes place predominantly in the school library and the ratio of students to tutors is two to one. The other venue used is a classroom in which a teacher in the school has established a tutoring environment. Once staff members are informed of who is in the tutoring program,

information for the tutors is gathered through the use of a filing cabinet placed in the staffroom. Teachers are invited to place homework in the students' files found in this cabinet.

Other than the involvement of the CYCW in both the "C-Team" and the parent-teacher interviews, the school is anxious to initiate programs which encourage more parental participation in the school. In the fall these programs designed to focus on parents of at-risk students will be in operation.

Wilson Jr. High had anticipated a student base of between eighty and one hundred students. The actual number reported at the end of the school year was 94. Student profiles further illustrate the unique characteristics of Wilson's program.

#### **Reasons for Referral**

Lack of Academic Progress	54%
Chronic Absence from School	37%
Chronic Tardiness	20%
Social/Emotional Problems	94%
Other: (behavioral, etc.)	14%

#### **Referred by...**

Teacher	49%
Administrator	56%
Parent	27%
Self	38%

Other: (consultative team, AMH) 28%

**Services Provided...**

Short Term Tutoring (less than 1 mo.)	15%
Long Term Tutoring	18%
Counselling	98%
Attendance Monitoring	37%
Other: (referral to outside agencies)	26%

The higher reported percentages in the area of counselling reflects the fact that Wilson operates its tutoring program during out-of-school time which allows the CYCW to spend the majority of time in a counselling role.

Now that the stage has been set for an analysis of the interventions undertaken by the Lethbridge School District #51 in the realm of at-risk adolescents, it is worthwhile to note that "Project Connections" does not exist in isolation. There are a number of interventions already in existence in the district which assist students who are having difficulty in the traditional junior high school. Two of the most commonly utilized programs for at-risk students who cannot cope in the conventional school setting are found at The Alternate School and The Lethbridge Regional Hospital Program.

**George McKillop Alternate School**

The Alternate Junior High School located at George McKillop School is designed to assist those students who range in age from 12 - 15 years and who are unable to

succeed in the traditional school setting for a variety of reasons. Perhaps some of the students have significant family-related problems which are so overwhelming that they find traditional schooling unimportant in their lives. Conversely, they may be so frustrated academically that smaller class sizes or one-to-one instruction is necessitated. A third reason for inclusion in an alternate program of this type is behavioral disorders. It may be the case that a student requires a behavioral modification plan which is not so easily monitored in a junior high school where one student may have as many as ten teachers; the higher the number of teachers monitoring the plan, the less likelihood of consistency. The students who are referred come from diverse backgrounds and abilities, but share an inability to function within the contexts of a large junior high school setting.

One of the primary goals of the program is to encourage students to become responsible for their education and their behaviors. This is a difficult task since many of the students who qualify for the program have habitually directed the responsibility or blame towards their parents, teachers, or peers. The Alternate Junior High School allows them to work towards their goals in an environment where two adults, a teacher and a youth care

worker, promote a trusting, caring community. The maximum number of students in the program is fifteen. It is a temporary "time out" of sorts which works towards preparing the student both academically and socially for return to his/her designated junior high school. Student placements are reviewed every two months by a placement committee.

#### **Lethbridge Regional Hospital Program**

Another outreach program which caters to the needs of seriously at-risk students is housed in the Lethbridge Regional Hospital Psychiatric Unit. Although intense therapy is the primary service offered to adolescents in the hospital, a small school has been established to ensure that they do not fall behind academically. Once students have reached the point where they are able to return to the regular school setting, they are exited from the program and receive counselling services on an out-patient basis.

#### **ASSESSMENT STRATEGY**

To further gain pertinent information regarding the implementation of Project Connections in Lethbridge School District #51 a series of interviews was conducted with students, child and youth care workers, counsellors, teachers, school-based administrators and central office

administrators. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format in that the prepared questions served as a starting point for further inquiry into each of the topical areas. A summary of the findings in each of the categories is prescribed in the following sections of this report.

#### **STUDENT INTERVIEWS**

Since the project was initiated to assist students it was felt that this group would offer much valuable information regarding the effectiveness of the program across the system. Twenty students participated in the interviewing. Five students from each of the four schools comprised this sample group. The students interviewed were involved in Project Connections in varying degrees. Some were in the tutoring program, others were not, but received extensive counselling from the CYCW. The majority of the students were involved in every aspect. The data collected from these interviews have been organized according to the specific questions asked, although many comments made by the students are appropriate as responses to more than one question. The interviews took approximately thirty minutes and consisted of fourteen questions (see Appendix B).

**Results****Question #1: What grade are you in?**

Two of the students were in Grade 7, six in Grade 8, seven in Grade 9, one in Grade 10 and 4 were in the pre-high school program at Allan Watson School. The variance exists in the numbers since equity of numbers do not exist within grades in the project.

**Question #2: Were you ever asked to repeat a grade? Which one?**

Eleven of the twenty surveyed had repeated a grade. One had repeated grade 1, one grade 5, one grade 6, two grade 7, four grade 8 and two grade 9. It is important to note, however, that of the nine who did not repeat a grade, eight of them had averages between 10% and 50% in the core areas of language arts, math, science and social studies in their previous school year. They had also been told that there was a strong possibility that they would not be promoted to the next grade if their marks hadn't improved.

**Question #3: Are you involved in any school activities?**

Three of the twenty students stated that they had been or were currently involved in school activities. Some said that their marks were too low to make the athletic teams

or that they were excluded from participating in activities because of their history of disciplinary problems which included detentions and suspensions. Still others maintained that they weren't interested or preferred to "hang out" with their friends. When questioned about whether the cost of the activities was a hindrance, none of them reported that to be the case.

**Question #4: Have you ever considered quitting school?  
Why?**

Nine of the students claimed that they had never considered it although one had wanted to take correspondence because of problems in school. The other eleven students, for the most part, had thought about it in the past but had dismissed it as an option. Three students, all girls, had "quit" school for a time last year. One of the three who had been in several foster homes was "on the run" intermittently for about three months last year and, as a result, had not attended school during that time. The second girl had not been in school at all last year due to a number of problems including pregnancy. The third girl had also left due to pregnancy, but had returned after two months. Pregnancy had not been the only factor in their non-attendance. They cited several reasons, most of them related to problems

encountered outside of school. Two other students claimed that serious social problems with their peers had been a major factor in their wanting to avoid school. Several claimed that having been in more than one foster home in differing locations and problems with family members had caused them to be too distracted to be able to concentrate on their school work. A general dislike of school and disregard for education as a whole had been a motivating factor for some. Most of the feelings of dislike about school were rooted in the lack of success they had had.

**Question #5: How long have you been involved with Project Connections?**

The majority of the students interviewed had been identified as candidates in June of 1991 and therefore were included as early as September. Four of the students had become involved between October and as recently as two months prior to the interviews.

**Question #6: What were your feelings about school before you became involved with the project?**

Without exception the students had had negative experiences with school for a variety of reasons. Historically, as was noted earlier, the majority had had tremendous difficulties succeeding academically. For many

they had acted out their frustrations by seeking negative attention and were consequenced with suspensions and detentions for their actions. Although some had adverse feelings about attending school, they were attracted by the positive peer interactions they encountered while at school.

**Question #7: What would you say were/are your biggest problems associated with school?**

The most common responses focussed on disciplinary problems and academic frustrations. Two of the students had no difficulty with the work, but found it boring or irrelevant in their lives. Three said that peer relationships were much more of a motivating factor for their attendance at school than the programs offered. For two of them their priorities lay with becoming popular with their peers, not with academic success. For the third, being victimized by peers had been a long-standing problem and, therefore, school avoidance was a form of escape.

**Question #8: Has school attendance been a problem for you? Has this program helped you to attend more regularly? Why?**

Fourteen of the students said that they had either had a history of truancy or, as two reported, had feigned illness in order to stay at home. Interestingly, only one student mentioned consequences from home as being a deterrent to non-attendance. She said that, "I wouldn't dare stay home from school...my parents would kill me". Also, several reported that although they had not had serious problems with truancies, they had a habit of tardiness prior to becoming involved with Project Connections.

Eighteen of the twenty students stated confidently that the project had made an improvement in their attendance. Some of the students attributed the improvement to the fact that someone was always checking up on them. Another said that last year she had felt stupid, but that this year her success, as a result of the tutoring program, has given her much more confidence in every respect. She feels that the teachers are more accepting of her and therefore school is a more secure environment. One student said that it felt good having someone seek her out to enquire about why she had been away the previous day. Others credited the project, particularly the support of the CYCW for assisting them with personal problems which had become too overwhelming for them to cope with. This support from the CYCW in turn prompted them to view the school as a

warm, caring place and therefore being truant had become less of an attraction. In one boy's words, "I feel like I belong!" The comment made by one girl was very powerful. She said that she had done whatever she could to avoid school last year, but because of the project and the feelings of self-worth she had achieved she said, "I had thought about quitting school last year, but not in a million years now!" It must be noted at this juncture that an enthusiastic and positive tone accompanied the responses of those who attributed their improved attendance to the project.

Of the two who claimed that the project had no impact on their attendance patterns, one had not had difficulty with attendance before inclusion in the project so the question did not apply to his situation. The other student said that she hated school because it was boring, she had few friends her age and that it was hard to motivate herself because she felt that the teachers treated her unfairly. She said that this treatment was most likely due to the number of inappropriate behaviors that she had exhibited in the past and her older sister's reputation in the school.

**Question #9: How do you feel about school now?**

Eighteen students said that they felt better about school. Some felt better because their grades had improved, others said that it was more fun, they looked forward to it and had more friends because they felt better about themselves. One student who had had a tendency to feign illness and had suffered from teasing by her peers since elementary school said that she even loved her options. Many said that their self-concept had become more positive and that they would describe themselves as being happier than before their involvement in the project.

**Question #10: Has Project Connections made a difference in how you feel about school?**

Eighteen of the students said that it had made a positive difference in their lives. They named the CYCW as having the greatest impact on why they felt more positive and more accepted. Some of the comments were:

"...the tutoring really helps..."

" (the CYCW) taught me about why it was better for me to stay in school..."

"because my marks have improved I feel better about myself"

"I like feeling like I belong...I feel safe in the tutoring room because no one teases me..."

"I have built some great friendships with the other students in the program..."

"I like how (the CYCW) comes looking for

me...she cares..."

"...getting caught up in my work makes me feel better..."

A significant comment was made by a student who claimed that she hated school and that her attendance hasn't improved as a result of being in the project. When responding to this question she said that being involved in the tutoring component has made it easier for her to get her work done. Also, she said that talking with the CYCW has helped her to deal with a number of issues. She may not have recognized that the program had impacted positively on her but her comments and tone were much more telling.

**Question #11: Are you involved in tutoring? How often?**

Sixteen students were involved in the tutoring program at their school. The frequency of sessions varied from twice to five times per week with the exception of one Grade 7 boy who takes his core classes with a tutor. Of the four who are not in tutoring one is planning to begin in the near future, two feel that they have the ability to succeed without it and the third does not want to give up out-of-school time with her friends to take advantage of the service.

**Question #12: What do you like best about the tutoring**

**program? What is the one thing that you would change about it?**

Many students commented on the advantages of more individual attention given in the tutoring setting. One girl stated that in the small group environment she was not as reluctant to ask questions as in her regular classroom. She didn't feel "stupid". Many appreciated the comfortable, friendly atmosphere fostered by the tutors. Two students found that they accomplished more working in the tutoring room away from the distractions of a larger classroom setting.

The students had difficulty responding to the second part of the question because they were generally quite satisfied with the operation of the tutoring program. Several of the students thought that hiring more tutors so that the student-tutor ratio was closer to one-to-one would be advisable. Two of the students said that because the environment in the tutoring area was so attractive to other students, they felt that more should be done to discourage students from dropping in when they weren't scheduled to be there. The majority of the students felt that the tutoring should be offered during the school day because it would ensure that those who needed the assistance would receive it. Three students suggested

that access to more computers would be beneficial. Two said that they would appreciate having a different colour of paint on the walls of the tutoring room, perhaps purple or black.

**Question #13: If I were a new student to the school what would you tell me about Project Connections?**

The comments made in response to this question emphasized the strong support the project offered to students. Below are found some of what they said:

"The CYCW helps if you have problems of any kind..."

"The CYCW is someone to talk to and feel comfortable with...someone who you can trust."

"It's a project for kids to get their marks up...the CYCW monitors attendance and even picks kids up!"

"...the tutors are good and you can be yourself. It's easy to make friends because of (the CYCW)."

"...the CYCW is here to make sure kids learn to be successful in life."

"They are not like gladiators; they don't chop your head off or throw you to the lions if you don't come to school or do well - they aren't the 'suit and tie types'."

"...there is no teasing from other kids when you go to see the tutors."

"If you had problems you have a place to go."

"...counsellors have judged me, but not (the CYCW)."

"...the tutors and the CYCW are nice; they are our friends."

"It's a program that helps you boost your self-esteem...makes you happier."

Probably the comment which reflects the feelings of many of the students was made by a girl who had had very little success in school in the past and whose life had been a series of traumatic events:

"It's a place where you go when you have problems with homework or personal problems. It helps you to understand school work more and helps me to stay in school."

**Question #14: What do you like best about Project Connections? What is the one thing that you would change about it?**

Consistent with the comments made previously, the skills and approachability of the CYCW's were applauded. Students described the CYCW's as caring, kind, trustworthy, attentive, open and accepting. Many made mention of the accessibility of the CYCW as a definite advantage. Many of the students said that they find learning fun now and their comments reflected a genuine optimism for their future.

Since most of the students were very satisfied with the program as it exists, they offered few changes. Seven

students felt that no changes were needed. Several students said that because of the success of the CYCW's in the school more should be hired. One student commented that there is a need for more CYCW's because the counsellors who are already in the school are also teachers and their dual role poses problems for some students. In an effort to provide a response, one student commented on the type of music played in the tutoring room and one on his dislike of the wall color.

#### **CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKER INTERVIEW SUMMARIES**

Each of the child and youth care workers was interviewed twice: once in the fall and a second time this spring. Although each Worker has had some support from a school-based administrator, central office personnel as well as counsellors and teachers, they have been ultimately responsible for the programs at their schools. Thirteen questions were asked of each Worker. What follows is a summary of the responses given (see Appendix D).

#### **Results**

**Question #1: How many students do you have in the program at present?**

The average number of students in the project at each school is approximately sixty-five with the exception of

Allan Watson which includes their entire population in the project. Across the system, approximately three hundred students are in the target group.

**Question #2: How many students in total have you included in the program this year?**

Each school reported having had more than one hundred students actively involved throughout the school year for a total of about four hundred and sixty students.

**Question #3: Where do you spend the majority of your time? (in what capacity?)**

The CYCW's stated that they spend the majority of their day engaging in personal/social counselling and attendance monitoring. Secondary to these two tasks is scheduling the tutoring sessions and acting in a liaison capacity between staff members and students.

**Question #4: Do you feel that you have adequate parental support for your program?**

All of the CYCW's answered affirmatively. They stated that parents welcome their assistance and do not hesitate to call on them. Parents feel that they are in a partnership with the CYCW's with the primary goal being to

make their child's school experiences more successful. The support of the parents is easily illustrated later in this document with the inclusion of testimonial letters authored by parents whose children have been in the program (see Appendix H).

**Question #5: Do you feel that you have adequate administrative support?**

All of the CYCW's maintained that they had ample support. They were appreciative of the availability of an administrator to provide assistance with difficult situations and to encourage the implementation of the innovative strategies they had developed. Although most had worked in the school setting prior to this appointment, they were in need of direction regarding district policies and procedures.

**Question #6: Do you feel that you have had adequate support from the teachers? (for the project as a whole? for the tutoring program?)**

Without exception the responses reflected teacher support of the program. Some said that teachers sometimes assumed that the CYCW could "save everyone". This expectation has caused them concern. Each of the CYCW's stated that the

majority of the staff offer only positive comments, but there are two or three at each school who, even though they are supportive for the most part, have doubts about whether these at-risk students are deserving of the extra attention. These are also the teachers who are reluctant to allow students to leave their classes to receive either counselling or tutoring support.

Regarding the tutoring program, the CYCW's said that the teachers were supportive, but that at times it was difficult for the tutors to obtain work from them. Some teachers needed frequent reminders to submit enough work to keep the students occupied during the tutoring sessions. The tutors overcame this problem by working on study and organizational skills with the students if no subject-specific work had been provided.

**Question #7: Is your role different from the counsellors in the school?**

For the most part the CYCW's felt that their role was very similar to that of the school's counsellors. The counsellors at all of the schools have teaching assignments in addition to their counselling duties. The role of the CYCW with respect to counselling is dependent upon the personalities of the counsellors, the

expectations of the administration and the needs of the school. At some of the schools the roles are indistinguishable. At others the CYCW's clientele consists primarily of Project Connections students whereas the counsellors concentrate on the balance of the population thereby taking on a preventative approach. A few of the CYCW's commented that because of their accessibility during the school day, they are often approached by students not in the project. This can pose problems for them because they are usually expected to refer these students to the counsellors; they are concerned that students may feel rejected by them especially if the students have disclosed some very personal information.

**Question #8: Have there been times when you have felt that you lack the training or experience (in the schools perhaps) to be able to deal with situations effectively?**

Most of the CYCW's responded affirmatively. They explained that quite often District policies and procedures were unfamiliar to them so they contacted either the counsellors or administrators for assistance. Some said that periodically they had encountered unfamiliar terminology in student files but they had no difficulty soliciting help from staff members to interpret

it.

**Question #9: What do you feel are the strengths of the program?**

They believed that their relationships with the students and the success of the tutoring program constituted the strengths. The comments reflected their enthusiasm about the program particularly when they spoke of the positive changes they had observed in the students.

**Question #10: What aspects do you feel require change and what specifically would you do?**

Most of the CYCW's felt that they had made the changes that they thought should be made throughout the year. Some felt that they could have done more with incentive programs and have plans to implement more in the next school year. One CYCW wants to make changes in counselling by making use of more group counselling rather than one-to-one. Suggestions were also made regarding the need for the CYCW's to meet as a group on a regular basis so that they would not feel isolated and so that they could share ideas with the others. Presently, the CYCW's attend monthly meetings of the staff from the various outreach programs in the system, but this does not appear to meet their needs. Another suggested that the role of

the CYCW should be defined at each school. That had been difficult to do this year because of the newness of the position within the schools. Many of the CYCW's roles evolved as the year progressed.

Frustration with the paper work associated with the evaluation of the project was named as something that they would like to see changed. The collection of data and the completion of forms retroactively caused them significant stress. This resulted from requests from Alberta Education in December of 1991 for project data of students dating back to September. They understood the need for such data, but were frustrated with the time it took away from their work with students.

With respect to the Teen Mom program, the CYCW suggested that there was a need for a definite a.m. or p.m. program with the mothers offering courses from all diploma routes. Perhaps in the other half of the day they could improve job skills. Also, the CYCW suggested that a school starting time of 7:55 a.m. was troublesome for these young parents with the challenges of readying the children and travelling time.

**Question #11: Do you feel that you have had an impact on kids?**

All felt confident that they had had a significant impact on the students they had worked with. They talked of the successes they had had in preventing students from committing suicide, from quitting school, from running away from home and from making poor choices which could have had devastating consequences. They spoke with some reluctance, choosing their words carefully, so as to not appear to be boastful. Their comments reflected their belief that the welfare and success of the students in their program was the most important consideration.

**Question #12: Tell me about one of your success stories.**

CYCW "A" told of his/her success in keeping students in school by emphasizing the need for an education in the job market and of a program that he/she had developed to encourage students to become more active physically. CYCW "A" was delighted with the increase in self-esteem he/she observed as a result of this program.

CYCW "B" spoke of the success he/she had had in counselling students. Students were constantly seeking him/her out; not only those from the project but numerous others as well. He/she felt that his/her presence had had a significant impact on an overwhelming number of students.

CYCW "C" spoke of a student who had left school in the previous year to have a baby. The girl had had difficulty with school in the past and required a considerable amount of one-to-one attention to help her cope with problems both in and out of school. As a result of the attention given the girl, she has taken a leadership role in the school, has made significant gains in her academic achievement, has developed self-esteem, and is viewed by many at her school as a person who is able to relate well to her peers. At the encouragement of the CYCW she has joined the school's Peer Support Team.

CYCW "D" related his/her successes with a boy who had been a chronic non-attender and was moved from foster home to foster home because of inappropriate behaviors. The CYCW knew that this student was at high risk of leaving school altogether, but made the effort to seek him out at local arcades to check up on how he was doing. Instead of bombarding him with lectures about attending school, the CYCW offered him positive comments at each meeting. He/she has begun to notice an improvement in his attendance and is encouraged by what he/she sees.

CYCW "E" had been pleased with the progress a girl with

serious attendance problems had made. The girl was doing virtually no homework and was not taking responsibility for her education in any way when the CYCW first started working with her. After engaging the girl in tutoring, picking her up at home if she did not go to school on her own, and working with her mother in an effort to make the student more accountable for her actions, significant improvements were observed. The student's attendance has improved dramatically. She increased her mark in one subject alone by almost 70% and she has begun to be more positive with both teachers and her peers.

**Question #13: Are there any students that your program has not been able to reach and what do you think the reason for this is?**

When responding to this question each of the workers was able to think of a couple of students with whom they had not achieved the success they would have liked. A common characteristic of the students they described was that they had been "out of control" at home for a lengthy period of time prior to being included in the project. Some of the students they referred to were very capable academically, but felt that they had the right to fail. Many of the students had had long histories of acting out both in and out of the school setting. Also, many of them

had had previous intervention by Alberta Social Services or Alberta Mental Health which had been marginally effective because the history of negative experiences each had faced. Their parents, for the most part, had given up on them and were desperately looking to the school to work miracles. Often the CYCW would be placed in the position of counselling the parents because of the personal problems they were facing in their own lives.

The CYCW's were disappointed that they were not able to help each and every student, but were pragmatic enough to realize that the road to recovery for these students would entail much more than the one year the program could afford them. The CYCW's have by no means given up on these students, but are buoyed by the successes of others.

#### **COUNSELLOR/TEACHER INTERVIEW SUMMARIES**

Five counsellors and three teachers were interviewed in the survey. The counsellors were able to respond from a teacher's point of view because all of them have at least half-time teaching assignments as well (see Appendix E).

**Question #1: (Counsellors only) How often do you meet with the CYCW's?**

They all meet formally once a week and communicate

informally daily. All of the counsellors felt comfortable with the frequency of meetings with the CYCW's.

**Question #2: (Counsellors only) How have your roles changed as a result of the project?**

The counsellors felt that their roles had changed in that they had more time available to work with students other than to spend inordinate amounts of time with the non-attenders at the expense of those students at school with serious emotional problems. In the past the counsellors had spent numerous hours chasing after the non-attenders and felt that they were only able to offer "band-aid" solutions to their problems. With one person primarily responsible for this core of students, the quality of the counselling in the school increases. These students often require daily contact and the CYCW is able to provide that. Also, the counsellors felt that with the addition of the CYCW, they were able to identify at-risk students earlier than in the past. In a way this increased the counselling workload initially but served to prevent crises from developing.

**Question #3: What do you think are the strengths of the project?**

All those interviewed said that the positive relationship

that the CYCW was able to nurture with the at-risk students was a definite strength. They also stated that because of the communication between the teachers and the CYCW, the teachers appeared to be more tolerant and patient with Project students. Since the CYCW's role included acting as a liaison between the community and the school, it was felt that the public's perception and understanding of the school had improved. More businesses were approaching the school to offer support as a result of this increased understanding.

**Question #4: What do you think could/should be changed and why?**

Those interviewed were pleased with the project and did not identify serious concerns regarding its operation. The counsellors felt that the CYCW was not receiving a salary commensurate with the duties he/she performed. It was recommended that teachers be notified if a student was to be excused from class to see the CYCW. This arose out of the situation developing where a teacher marks a student truant from class and later finds out that the student was not truant at all, but was with the CYCW. A suggested maximum appointment time of twenty to thirty minutes for meetings with the CYCW would ensure that students did not take advantage of the time out of class. Also, the

teachers would like the tutoring time to continue to be scheduled during complementary course times, not during core classes.

**Question #5: Is the tutoring program effective?**

The comments were generally very positive. They advised that assigning the CYCW to coordinate the tutoring program may be expecting too much and that perhaps the schools should consider further assistance from administrators or counsellors. They did not suggest that there were problems with its implementation. Several comments were made about the success of the tutoring programs. Some claimed that they had seen tremendous improvements in student achievement.

**Question #6: What improvements have you noticed in your school since the project began?**

The interviewees had observed improvements in the climate of the school because many of the students who had exhibited poor attitudes towards the school were beginning to feel more positive about themselves. This positive attitude displayed by those students in the project has been almost infectious within the regular classroom. The program has also impacted favorably on those students who

had not yet developed a serious attendance problem, but who were at risk of it in the future. They also commented that there is no stigma attached to the tutoring programs which has been the case with some other "special" programs.

**Question #7: How has the teaching staff accepted the program?**

Initially teachers viewed the program with some skepticism, but they are much more accepting now that the program has met with success. On most staffs the CYCW is considered to be an integral part of the school. This has probably been much more the case since funding has been approved for a second year and the CYCW's are not viewed as temporary staff.

**Question #8: (Counsellors only) What reactions, if any, have you had from parents?**

They had received only positive comments from parents. In fact, they said that they frequently received telephone calls from parents wanting to refer their child to the program.

**Question #9: Do you believe that the project should be continued?**

The response to this question was an unequivocal "yes".

#### **SCHOOL-BASED ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW SUMMARIES**

The principal of each of the participating schools was interviewed. Many of the questions asked have been addressed in other interviews.

However, each time a question is asked the answer comes from a somewhat different perspective and, therefore, becomes a valuable addition to the study (see Appendix F).

**Question #1: How often do you meet with the CYCW and/or counsellors?**

Each administration meets with the CYCW and counsellors weekly and converses with the CYCW daily.

**Question #2: How have the roles of your counsellors changed as a result of this project?**

The role of the counsellors has changed, not with respect to workload, but with respect to clientele and quality of service provided. The CYCW has been a welcome addition to the counselling team - another person who can act in a supportive role for students. The CYCW focusses his/her efforts on a smaller group of students whereas the

counsellors are responsible for more than six hundred in addition to their other duties. There are, of course, differences in how the counselling roles have been affected at each of the schools. For some, the addition of the CYCW has meant a restructuring, or a redefining of roles. For example, the counsellors in the school may be spending more time on career and educational counselling than before and the CYCW has taken on more of the personal/social counselling. It is wholly dependent upon the personality of the individual school.

**Question #3: What do you think are the strengths of the program?**

The primary strength according to the principals has been the ability of the CYCW to connect with those students who "fell between the cracks" in the past due to a lack of a program which focussed on their needs. Some of the other advantages noted were that the CYCW is available immediately, has training related to at-risk students, has facilitated inter-agency cooperation and is a non-teacher in the school which may be less intimidating for parents to approach. And, of course, the tutoring program was seen as an excellent addition to the school's services.

**Question #4: Are there still some students who even this program has failed to help?**

The administrators felt that there are some who can't be reached until their life circumstances change significantly. These are the students who are so entrenched in problems that changing them would take an intense cooperative effort on the part of all agencies involved with them, not just the school. One administrator suggested that although the schools may not have been successful in changing attitudes or work habits for these students, it was felt that the groundwork had been laid with them for the future. They know now that the school doors will be open to them when they make the decision to accept the help available.

**Question #5: What do you think should be changed and why?**

There wasn't one prevailing concern regarding the program, but rather, suggestions for consideration. It was suggested that increasing the number of CYCW's would be advisable. Also, they felt that the salaries of the CYCW's should be reviewed considering their training, qualifications and experience. Currently the salary averages \$22 000.00. Since the program has met with so much success, the principals would like to see it become a permanent part of the services provided in the

participating schools. They would like to see even more parental involvement in the project. Additionally, they also believe that a clarification of the roles of both the CYCW's and counsellors is advisable.

Although the principals felt that the budget afforded the program was adequate, they would like to see more direction from the District regarding the distribution of funds so that more consistency exists within the system. In relation to the budget, funds are required by the tutors for materials in order to operate the program effectively (see Appendix B).

**Question #6: Is the tutoring program effective?**

All principals offered nothing but praise for the tutoring programs saying that there is no question it has been an asset to the school. One administrator said that he has noticed a decrease in the number of students who are at risk academically and suspects that there is a strong link between the tutoring program and this decrease.

**Question #7: What improvements have you noticed in your school since the project began?**

They cited more positive climates, improved academic

progress by the project's students, closer attendance monitoring, more home visits and parental contacts, and improved relationships between the students and the school personnel.

**Question #8: How has the teaching staff accepted the program?**

They all commented that the majority of the staff members viewed the program as a positive addition to the school. There are a few who were resistant to the program at first, because they felt that perhaps these students were not deserving of the added support. These teachers, they added, are often those who are reluctant to deviate in any way from the status quo and this program is no exception. The principals did feel, however, that all teachers were much more accepting now that they have seen the program in action.

**Question #9: What reactions, if any, have you had from parents?**

The parents have responded very positively. They are appreciative of the CYCW and some have noticed dramatic improvements in their children as a result of their participation in the project. Their testimonial letters are evidence of their views (see Appendix H).

**Question #10: How has the project affected your workload in relation to truancies? at-risk students?**

The CYCW's work with the chronic non-attenders has lessened the burden, but since attendance is being monitored more closely, there are more students identified who require attention from not only the CYCW but the administration as well. It has allowed the principals to be more proactive in dealing with at-risk students because more is known about them through the CYCW and, therefore, interventions are more effective.

**Question #11: Do you believe that the project should be continued? Why or why not?**

The principals agreed unanimously that the project should continue. Some said that it had been some of the best money spent in years to aid troubled students. The reasons for their recommendation that it continue have been recorded previously; to include them here would be redundant (see Questions 3,6,7,9).

#### **INTERVIEW SUMMARIES OF DISTRICT OFFICE PERSONNEL**

Interviews were conducted with both the Coordinator of Student Support Services and the School Liaison Officer.

It was the responsibility of these two people to oversee the project and to act as a liaison between Alberta Education, Canada Employment and the District. Ten questions served as the basis for the interviews (see Appendix G). Their comments are summarized below.

**Question #1: What do you see are the strengths of Project Connections?**

Both interviewees concurred that the CYCW's were responsible for the success the project has experienced. Specifically, they believed that the ability of the CYCW's to develop rapport with the at-risk students was an asset. A second strength noted was the tutoring program. A third strength was the evolution of the support network which consisted of CYCW's, counsellors, system and school-based administrators, community agencies and parents.

**Question #2: What do you believe could and should be changed for the second year of the project**

There was a strong recommendation to encourage more parents to get involved so that they could assume a more proactive role in dealing with their children. Also, it was recommended that the CYCW's continue in their efforts to build connections with businesses in the city. They

also suggested that there is a need for the CYCW's to meet together on a regular basis to exchange ideas and support one another. In order to strengthen the teams at the schools, they would encourage those counsellors with limited counselling education to continue to develop their skills. According to the interviewees, it might be advantageous for each of the schools to more clearly define the roles of the counsellors and the CYCW's to avoid confusion. One of the people also recommended that the salary paid to the CYCW's is in need of review with the intent to increase it. Closely related to this is the need for increased job security for the CYCW's. They were under a great deal of stress this year because of the uncertainty about whether the program would be funded a second year. This caused anxiety for not only the CYCW's, but also for the students involved in the project.

**Question #3: What do you believe has been the key to the successes this year?**

Both said the CYCW's skills and dedication had been the key. Each of the CYCW's appeared to be well matched to his/her school.

**Question #4: What have been your major frustrations with the project?**

Both said that coordinating the evaluation data for Alberta Education had been difficult in that the requests for the data did not arrive until just prior to the Christmas break. They were both placed in a position of responding to questions from the schools about forms with which they were unfamiliar. This request for data had also posed some addition confusion because the school district had appointed an evaluator to complete the system evaluation in August of 1991 and this data was not consistent with that person's assessment plans. There were also some concerns about the role that central office administration should take in the implementation of the program at each of the schools. Where does the central office personnel's role end and the school-based administrators' begin? A suggestion was made that a review of roles should be completed for the fall.

**Question #5: What elements of the project do you believe have been the most challenging for the CYCW's?**

They stated that the social/emotional counselling engaged in by the CYCW's was sometimes overwhelming for them particularly due to the scope, breadth and depth of the issues. Schools should ensure that the CYCW's are given ample support when dealing with serious issues such as abuse and suicide. Also, they would like to see classroom

teachers take more responsibility for the welfare of the at-risk students so as to support the work being done by the CYCW's. They advised that every effort should be made to ensure that the tutors are able to commit for long periods of time, preferably the entire school year, so that the students are able to develop relationships with them. This would also be of benefit to the tutors in that they would feel a strong connection with the school.

**Question #6: What elements of the project do you believe have been the most challenging for the school-based administrators?**

One challenge, they believe, has been clarifying roles for the CYCW's. Some have been given too much autonomy, others have been given very little.

**Question #7: Do you believe that the funding amount was adequate?**

Although both felt that the funding had been adequate to accommodate the needs of the program during the first year, changes to the project will require more (see Appendix B). Serious consideration should be given to increasing the salaries paid to the CYCW's.

**Question #8: Do you believe the project has duplicated**

**any services already in existence in the system? If so, is this duplication necessary? What changes should be made?**

There has been some duplication of counselling services, but it has been of benefit to students. As one of the interviewees stated, "Counselling services have not so much been duplicated, but complemented."

**Question #9: What comments, if any, have you received from the community in response to the project?**

Both stated that all responses had been very positive; no negative comments were received. Those community groups particularly encouraging were Alberta Mental Health, Alberta Social Services, Parents' Place and other support services which work closely with schools. The business community has shown its acceptance of the project by offering services or products for the incentive programs.

**Question #10: How has the project been publicized? Would you have made any changes in that area? If so, what changes and why?**

Two of the local television stations conducted interviews with participants in the program, there were radio spots and an article appeared in The Lethbridge Herald. Both

people were satisfied with the media coverage to date. They felt that there is a need to publicize the projects more within the school communities in addition to the community as a whole.

**PROGRAM EVALUATION - YEAR ONE****A summary of findings, commendations, recommendations,  
and suggestions**

Within the literature reviewed on the causal nature of early school leaving, three primary themes evolve. The first of these is the at-risk student's history of academic difficulty in school. This difficulty may be the result of a lack of ability and/or a lack of desire to achieve. Second, the potential dropout does not feel comfortable within the school community. This isolation serves to alienate the student even more from the school environment. Third, the attitudes and skills of the parents play an integral role in the child's view of the world, particularly in terms of the value of education. These three themes, and the factors associated with them, must be taken into consideration if any dropout prevention program is to be effective.

Lethbridge School District's Project Connections appears to have integrated components which encompass each of the aforementioned themes. The tutoring program offers support for those students who require individual attention and encouragement in the academic areas. The child and youth care workers spend much of their time building relationships with students in an effort to

increase their feelings of belonging. Closely related to this is the time that the CYCW's spend in nurturing self-esteem in the students. Although a somewhat more difficult challenge, the need to get parents involved in their child's education can be achieved by encouraging partnerships between parents and the school. Project Connections has made provisions for the implementation of parent support groups and more positive parental contacts initiated by the schools.

Although the Project Connections proposal has plans of action designed to counteract many of the negative influences on at-risk students, assessing their implementation is a challenging task. The assessment interviews provided valuable information from which to draw some conclusions, but it must be emphasized at this point that the comments and recommendations to be found in this report are preliminary in nature. They are based solely on qualitative data analysis and have not included such pertinent data as attendance patterns, achievement gains and other quantitative data which can only serve to complement what information has already been obtained.

The subsequent section of this report is structured in such a way as to identify strengths, offer suggestions, and make recommendations based on the information gleaned

from the interview data. The comments are arranged in the following categories: attendance monitoring, counselling, tutoring, and parent and student involvement administration and evaluation. These are consistent with the major objectives of the project as it has evolved to this point.

NOTE: The purpose of this evaluation report is not to provide a "report card" of the quality of the match between the proposal and the program as it exists today, but to analyze the current operational models and assess their success.

#### **ATTENDANCE MONITORING**

It appears that the CYCW's spend a great deal of time ensuring that they are well-informed as to the attendance patterns of each of their students. Many comments were made during the course of the interviews which claimed that attendance monitoring of the at-risk students had been much improved since the arrival of the CYCW's.

#### **The CYCW's should continue to:**

- monitor attendance daily
- make regular home contacts to enquire about absences
- provide incentive programs
- report truancies to the administration
- promote the importance of regular attendance

#### **It is recommended that:**

- the CYCW's be encouraged to request that a counsellor or administrator accompany them on home visits
- the CYCW's refrain from **repeatedly** visiting a student's home to cajole him/her into coming to school (students must accept responsibility at some point)

### **COUNSELLING ROLES**

#### **Continue to:**

- allow the CYCW's to engage in personal and academic counselling
- hold weekly meetings with the CYCW's, counsellors and administrators
- attend consultative meetings where they exist
- work closely with the counsellors at the school
- promote acceptance of Project Connections
- refrain from placing youth workers in the position of disciplinarians in the school; maintain advocate role

#### **It is recommended that:**

- definite role descriptions be developed which identify roles for both the counsellors and the CYCW's
- that the CYCW's be encouraged to seek advice from either the counsellors, or school-based or central office administrators in dealing with sensitive issues
- the CYCW's ensure that teachers have been notified of counselling appointments which cause students to miss class
- students not be allowed to miss classes for more than one class period unless there are extenuating circumstances

#### **It is suggested that:**

- the CYCW's focus their attentions on the seriously at-risk students; otherwise their load becomes too overwhelming

### **TUTORING**

#### **Continue to:**

- offer the tutoring service
- insist that students attend if they have agreed to it
- work at finding ways to encourage teachers to submit

work for the tutors

- strive towards hiring tutors who will commit to months at a time; preferably for the entire year
- provide teachers with tutoring lists and schedules
- utilize tutoring contracts with parents and students
- discourage students not scheduled for tutoring from "dropping in"
- offer tutoring during complementary course time slots rather than during core course time
- promote student belongingness by encouraging the students to display their work in the tutoring room (where applicable)
- have tutors maintain a log of student progress

**It is recommended that:**

- the tutors be selected from the University of Lethbridge Education Undergraduate Society pool first; from others with backgrounds in education second; then, if necessitated, from members of the community who have demonstrated a talent for relating well to adolescents
- the administration and CYCW jointly screen all tutors
- the CYCW's receive more assistance from the counsellors and administration in the school with respect to the coordination of the tutoring program
- an "open house" activity be held during the times when the students and the tutors are working to publicize the program within the school
- feedback be solicited from teachers, perhaps in survey form, regarding the program's effectiveness

**PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

**Continue to:**

- maintain close contact with parents
- attend parent meetings/interviews
- encourage parental involvement
- recognize the importance of parental support
- make parents feel comfortable about visiting or phoning the school
- request feedback from parents

**It is recommended that:**

- the program be publicized in school newsletters and at

- parent information nights
- parent support groups be developed at all schools
  - the schools encourage parents to take leadership roles in the formation of these support groups
  - parent workshops be planned for the fall regarding strategies for parenting adolescents

**It is suggested that:**

- individual invitations be sent to parents of students in the project to encourage their attendance at school functions; perhaps the students could be responsible for their design

**SCHOOL-BASED ADMINISTRATION**

**Continue to:**

- offer support and encouragement to the CYCW's
- foster the acceptance of the CYCW within the school
- meet regularly with the CYCW and the counsellors
- allow the CYCW the freedom to develop innovative incentives
- meet regularly with administrators from the other participating schools to share ideas and successes
- encourage the inclusion of the CYCW in the counselling team in the school

**It is recommended that the administration:**

- ensure that the tutors are receiving ample work from the teachers
- make a concerted effort to provide positive feedback to the tutors
- introduce the tutors at staff meetings
- promote the integration of the tutors into the school "family"
- provide information on the project to elementary feeder schools
- formally evaluate the effectiveness of the Teen Mom project (Allan Watson) if this has not already been proposed

## **DISTRICT LEVEL ADMINISTRATION**

### **Continue to:**

- provide positive feedback to the CYCW's and the school-based administration
- administer the project's budget
- act as the District liaison with Alberta Education and Canada Employment and Immigration
- meet informally and formally with both the CYCW's and the school-based administrators
- monitor the programs at each of the schools

### **It is recommended that:**

- role descriptions be developed for each administrator responsible for Project Connections
- communication regarding tasks to be completed by the CYCW's be in memo form to avoid confusion

## **EVALUATION**

### **Continue to:**

- gather data for submission to Alberta Education thereby keeping their department well informed regarding the project's successes
- maintain daily logs of student and parents contacts
- utilize the school computers for tracking students and for facilitating data collection
- solicit feedback from parents, students, staff members District personnel and the community
- maintain communication between Alberta Education and the District

### **It is recommended that:**

- one person be assigned to coordinate the evaluation of the project at both the district and provincial level
- the District develop computerized forms coinciding with those required by Alberta Education so that data can be collected more efficiently
- more clerical time be made available to the CYCW's for

- the collecting and recording of data
- information regarding dates and procedures for renewal of funding by the government be requested early in the 1992 - 1993 school year so that evaluation timelines can be set well in advance
  - all participating schools develop procedures for collecting homework completion rates

#### **SUMMATIVE STATEMENTS**

It appears at this point in its implementation that Project Connections is meeting with success in all areas. The interviews conducted yielded numerous commendations and an optimism for the future of the students involved in the project. During the course of the project's implementation, operational models were adapted to accommodate the needs of the participating schools and, most importantly, the needs of the students for whom the program was designed. Once the data on attendance patterns and achievement rates are collected at the end of this school year, further information will be available which will complement the findings of this study. There is little doubt that Project Connections has been an excellent addition to the support services offered to students, parents, and teachers in Lethbridge School District #51 and continuation of the program is highly recommended.

## **PROJECT EVALUATION - YEAR TWO**

### **A further analysis of the findings and recommendations**

During the first year of operation Project Connections was well-received by the participating schools and the school district generally. Responses from those closest to the project yielded some valuable information which resulted in recommendations and suggestions for making modifications to the operation of the project. Although the programs in each of the schools continue to operate in much the same manner as during the previous year, there are some issues which merit discussion.

## **ASSESSMENT STRATEGY**

In addition to the quantitative data collected for submission to Alberta Education, follow-up qualitative data will provide the foundation for this summary. Valuable information was garnered from the comments made by students, staff members, and other school district personnel.

## **STUDENT INTERVIEWS**

During the evaluation conducted last year, student interviews were deemed to be significant when considering the success of the project. They provide invaluable

insights into the actual workings of the projects and how modifications could be made to ensure further success. Nineteen students were interviewed in a similar fashion to last year. Each student was asked fourteen questions (see Appendix B) and ample time was given for discussion of their responses. The sample group consisted of students from all participating schools and the results will be reported from a district perspective, not from that of the individual schools. Each school will have the option of requesting data which addresses their unique situation.

## **Results**

### **Question #1: What grade are you in?**

The results were as follows:

	<b>Grade</b>					
	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>No. of Students</b>	3	6	7	1	1	1

The three students who were in senior high school were from Allan Watson.

### **Question #2: Were you ever asked to repeat a grade?**

#### **Which one?**

Of the nineteen students surveyed, seven had repeated.

**Grades Repeated:** Kindergarten and Grade 1 (1 student)  
Grade One (3 students)  
Grade 7 (2 students)  
Grade 8 (1 student)

**Question #3: Are you involved in any school activities?**

Surprisingly, nine of the students were involved in some type of school activity. Three students were members of Students' Council, three attended and/or organized school dances, and the other three were members of clubs. This number is significantly different from last year's survey which reported only three students of twenty involved in school activities.

The ten students who were not involved cited reasons such as wanting to be with friends, not being interested and, for the teen mom, family obligations.

**Question #4: Have you ever considered quitting school?  
Why?**

Eight students said they had considered quitting school at least once. Two students indicated that they had been bored with school and found the world of work much more appealing. Three were disheartened because of their failing grades and the frustration associated with their lack of success. One student said that in his previous school he had been the only student in his class from a

divorced family and he had felt discriminated against because of it. He attributed his behavior and academic problems to the lack of acceptance he felt. Another said that he had had negative experiences with school because of his inappropriate behavior and he was tired of being suspended and given detentions. The two others who had considered dropping out cited peer problems as the reason. They had experienced incessant teasing and felt victimized and defeated.

Of those who responded in the negative, ten genuinely wanted to finish school and "get good grades". One student said that she would never consider leaving school because she said, "My parents would kill me."

<b>Response</b>	<b>% Female</b>	<b>% Male</b>
<b>Yes</b>	42%	43%
<b>No</b>	58%	56%

**Question #5: How long have you been involved with Project Connections?**

	<b>No. of Students</b>
Since Report Card #2 Began (Nov.)	8
For the Entire School Year	4
For the Full Two School Years	7

**Question #6: What were your feelings about school before you became involved with the project?**

Fourteen students said that they had either hated school or disliked it. They used comments such as:

"I hated it; it was a waste of time."

"My teacher didn't like me and I felt lousy about everything."

"It sucked; I hated the whole school."

"I didn't care about school...nobody cared if I skipped out."

"I didn't like it because the work was too hard."

Three students said that they thought school was okay and two said they had always liked it.

**Question #7: What would you say were/are your biggest problems associated with school?**

**No. of Students**

Attendance	1
Peers	3
Marks/Academics	10 (9 indicated Math)
Behavior and Marks	2
Peers and Marks	1
Being a Teen Mother	1
Attendance and Behavior	1

When the students spoke of their academic problems they communicated their frustration both verbally and nonverbally. The nine students who identified Math as an area of weakness said that they had experienced

difficulty with it for a number of years. The teen mother said that she liked school and was interested in attending, but that her family responsibilities sometimes made it difficult for her to attend as regularly as she would have wanted.

**Question #8: Has school attendance been a problem for you? Has this program helped you to attend more regularly? Why?**

	No. of Students	
	Yes	No
<b>Attendance a Problem?</b>	10	9
<b>Program had Helped?</b>	18	1

Although only ten students indicated that they had problems with attendance, those who didn't said that the program had encouraged them to remain in school and to attend regularly. Here are some of their comments:

"it's fun to come to school now..."

"now I can get my work done..."

"It helped me get back on track; ----(the CYCW) knows me and watches me closely."

"----(the CYCW) opened my eyes...now I want good marks."

"I get rides to school now!"

"I look forward to tutoring."

"I used to fake being sick, but now I know ----(the CYCW) checks up on me."

"...no truancies, no lates...it has helped me."

"They motivated me by encouraging me and helping me."

"It's fun going there...they take time for you and give you time to do your work."

**Question #9: How do you feel about school now?**

	No. of Students
Good/Great	13
Okay	6
Badly	0

**Question #10: Has Project Connections made a difference in how you feel about school?**

	No. of Students
Yes	16
No	1
Unsure-	2

Those students who answered in the affirmative had no hesitation in responding. They had definite, positive feelings about the program. When asked to comment on why they felt the way they did, they responded as follows:

"...I have someone to talk to about my problems"

"I'm finally getting better grades."

"School is funner."

"...it's keeping me here."

"I realize how important school is now."

"I like the incentives, the tutoring and the special attention I get."

"It makes school easier...it's not as stressful so I can get my work done."

**Question #11: Are you involved in tutoring? How often?**

<b>Tutoring?</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
Yes	18
No	1

<b>Frequency</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
1 time per week	1
2 - 3 times per week	14
4 times per week	1
5 times per week	1

These figures included both in-school and out-of-school time for tutoring.

**Question #12(a): What do you like best about the tutoring program?**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
A. Tutors	3
B. The Extra Help	2

C. Getting Homework Done	4
D. The Fun Environment	1
B. and D.	1
A. and B.	5
A., B. and D.	2
A., B. and C.	1

**Question #12(b): What is the one thing that you would change about it?**

Five students indicated that they felt no changes were required. The other suggestions were as follows:

- have more tutoring time
- have more tutors
- make sure that there is less socializing
- hire tutors who are better at Math
- exit students from the program who are not working
- give a grade for tutoring
- have more books available
- have a larger space assigned only for tutoring
- for homebound tutors - one hour visits daily are better than three hour visits twice a week
- provide assistance with content - more than just with homework

**Question #13: If I were a new student to the school what would you tell me about Project Connections?**

The responses were overwhelmingly favorable. The students who were interviewed did not appear to feel any kind of stigma in being a participant in this type of program which is sometimes the case with programs for special needs students. Their responses are reflected in the following:

"If you are having problems, go there. The

incentives are great too...donuts and everything."

"...people you can talk to - the counsellors of the school.

"...a tutor who helps if you have problems."

"----(the CYCW) is nice and funny. Tutoring is fun and you get things done."

"It helps you with your work and it's fun."

"----(the CYCW) referred me to others who could help me."

"----(the CYCW) got me out of the psych. ward."

"It's a good time to do your homework; take advantage of it."

"I like the daycare in the school...I can go there on breaks to see my baby. The staff is flexible and it relieves some of the pressure."

"----(the CYCW) helps you with everything."

**Question #14(a): What do you like best about Project Connections?**

The majority of the students said that they enjoyed working with the tutors and the youth care worker. They described them as friends who were there to help them. There was no doubt that they appreciated the special attention and the opportunities to succeed.

**Question #14(b): What is the one thing that you would change about it?**

Six students said that they would change nothing. Four

students would like to see an increase in the amount of tutoring time and the number of tutors who are assigned so that the tutor-student ratio is lowered. Others suggested a larger space for tutoring, reducing the number of students who drop in to see the CYCW when they should be in class and teaching skills in addition to assisting with homework completion.

#### **TEACHER SURVEYS**

At the end of each school year all teachers from each of the participating schools were asked to complete a questionnaire about Project Connections. Although the questionnaire was primarily designed to solicit information about the tutoring component of the project, the results provided even further insight into how the entire program was functioning and, most importantly, how the teachers were feeling about its success or lack of it.

**Question #1: Do you feel that you understand what Project Connections is all about?**

	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993
<b>Yes</b>	75%	70%
<b>No</b>	7%	11%

**Unsure**

18%

19%

The results indicate that there is still a significant percentage of teachers who do not understand the project. The higher percentages who responded "yes" in 1991 - 1992 may reflect the fact that new programs are typically well-publicized in the first year of operation in order to foster acceptance. It would be advisable for each school to communicate the specifics of the program at regular intervals throughout the school year.

**Comments from 1991 - 1992 Surveys**

The comments during the first year of operation suggested that teachers were aware of the general philosophy of the project, not the specifics. One comment which aptly summarizes the other comments is:

"The project seems to be multi-faceted, but I do not understand the specifics of each program component, i.e. tutoring, counselling, home liaison, etc."

**Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Surveys**

Similar comments were found in the second year:

"I'm sure there is more than I am aware of, but I know it assists those students who are in need."

"This year has been less delineated than last year."

"...know of tutoring component, unsure of what else is offered."

"an extremely valuable program"

"have skeletal knowledge"

**Question #2: More specifically, do you feel that you understand the tutoring program?**

	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993
<b>Yes</b>	89%	81%
<b>No</b>	0%	10%
<b>Unsure</b>	11%	9%

Again, regularly communicating the focus, activities and purpose of the program would address the 10% increase in those who feel that they do not understand the tutoring component.

**Comments from 1991 - 1992 Survey**

Only two respondents commented on this question. One emphasized the need for the tutoring component while the other had reservations about the type of students in the program:

"some are students who need the help while some seem to be there for other reasons like behavior"

**Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

The comments from the second year were predominantly positive with the exception of three who thought the tutoring program was valuable but were unhappy with the present format at their school.

"if students need it it should be available"

"excellent addition for our 'at risk' kids"

"works very well"

"students give some feedback but role details would be appreciated"

"it has been of tremendous help"

"(Yes) however, I do not like the way it is being handled - students are allowed to fool around too much, the monitoring of the tutors does not seem to be done on a consistent basis. Who is supposed to monitor?"

**Question #3(a): Has the tutoring program had a positive impact on the students from your class who are involved?**

	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993
<b>Yes</b>	64%	62%
<b>No</b>	6%	7%
<b>Unsure</b>	30%	31%

Many of those who responded "unsure" were teachers who taught options and, therefore, had limited knowledge of the tutoring program.

#### **Comments from the 1991 - 1992 Survey**

The statements made in support of the tutoring component were similar to the following:

"some it has helped - others not"

"I don't detect any specific changes, but hopefully in a general way the tutoring has helped."

"assisted in specific work habits"

"but only when the student involved is willing to participate."

"students enjoy the one-to-one work and feel more confident when facing tests"

"for one student it has helped self-esteem"

"great assistance - especially the SLD students"

"students who are struggling get more assistance during class and need not wait as long for assistance than they would if no tutor available."

"it did increase the self-esteem of the pupils in my class"

#### **Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

In these surveys there were significantly more comments. Again, the majority expressed their appreciation for the tutoring program.

"the majority of the students are benefitting from the program"

"I see that a number of students' attitudes in my class improve when they can understand or get help with material they have previously had trouble with"

"especially those students who are truly interested in being successful"

"some very successfully, others no noticeable gain"

"I have noticed that some of my weaker students have improved - also seem to have concentrated on study skills"

"success with some, less with others"

"on some it has; there are those who don't seem to apply themselves anywhere"

"I feel that it is principally due to the care and personal involvement of the youth care worker"

"the more one-to-one the better"

"it hasn't helped my students at all"

"I know students are getting the help they need and deserve"

**Question #3(b): If yes, how has it helped your students?**

**Comments from 1991 - 1992 Survey**

"I had some students really improving and trying a lot harder"

"Students have one-to-one assistance; they see a difference in their marks."

"organization"

"achieving success"

"it has helped to obtain marks on assignments that would have otherwise not been done"

"to get caught up when I don't have time for individuals"

"some students have changed their attitudes towards completing assignments"

"increased knowledge and attendance"

"higher grades"

"it helps those who want to be helped"

"just the additional support has had a positive effect on my students..."

"improved confidence"

"it has given them success in school - the CYCW and the tutors have created an excellent student-staff attitude"

"individual attention and time have boosted skills both in subjects and interpersonal...students can identify with someone who cares about them"

"one-to-one contact is fantastic for disabled learners"

#### **Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

"students have been able to get extra help for tests and assignments"

"students have increased their grades by completing work and building on their ability to keep an organized notebook"

"improved attitudes in class; often these kids just need someone one-on-one work and positive reinforcement to get motivated to learn"

"gives them confidence"

"has brought up grades, given confidence to those who lack it, provided a warm, secure, small setting for some lost souls"

"they have stated feelings of success"

"facilitated receiving of more assignments"

"they have individual attention and for most students at risk that is what they need... sometimes they need privately to talk to someone before they get to work"

"made them more responsible for their actions"

"more individual attention yields greater progress"

"readers, scribes, coaches, positive reinforcement increased success rate"

"the students and parents have really appreciated the extra help and the time to complete tasks"

"some students seemed to grasp new concepts easier as a result of the extra help"

"I have received positive feedback from the kids in the program."

**Question #3(c): If no, please explain.**

**Comments from 1991 - 1992 Survey**

Four respondents commented.

"a few students used it as a method to get their homework done and really didn't improve in their skills"

"those students who were receiving tutoring have not shown any improvement at all"

"many of the students stopped working thinking that tutoring was going to get them off the hook"

"too haphazard; some go, some don't - some do homework only - some study skills"

**Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

"some students misbehave occasionally"

"tutoring should not be an excuse to do work that was neglected homework. The present forms to obtain missing assignments seem to indicate that negligent students can catch up during that time to avoid consequences from teachers."

"sometimes the students do not take working seriously; maybe we should only keep students in the program who work seriously."

"in some cases tutors do not have control over students"

"no, I haven't seen any improvement from those who were involved"

"teachers do not provide materials or specific work"

**Question #4: Has the method for communicating what work is to be done in the tutoring setting been effective?**

1991 - 1992

1992 - 1993

<b>Yes</b>	43%	46%
<b>No</b>	13%	23%
<b>Unsure</b>	44%	31%

It must be understood that since each of the tutoring models is unique, this question may not be appropriate in all cases. For example, at Allan Watson School the tutors are in the classrooms for much of the time and therefore, formal communication is unnecessary. Also, in other situations the tutors have developed a study skills program which may not require subject teacher input to maintain. Even in light of these cautionary comments, there appears to be a need to improve the methods for communicating what work is being accomplished in the tutoring sessions. This may require encouraging teachers to visit the tutoring areas so that they can gather information as they need it or, as some have noted in their comments, developing a method for communicating on a weekly basis. Below is a sampling of comments which represent the general direction of those submitted.

#### **Comments from the 1991 - 1992 Survey**

"As a teacher I rarely heard from the tutors except when the program was being set up. Perhaps a monthly update from tutors to teachers would be beneficial."

"teachers sometimes too busy to get work for students"

"I'm quite often asked for work to be done."

"The tutor usually comes to me to find out what is to be done."

"We need to further develop and enhance the roles specific to individual student needs. Roles are sometimes vague."

#### **Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

"...often don't know what students are doing"

"We know the students that are being placed in the program, what times, and what's going on or how we can help."

"We have homework sheets and students are told and if it does not work there is direct contact with tutors."

"...as long as the teachers take the initiative to see the work is passed on..."

"It would be desirable to have tutors more directly involved in planning modification and objectives for students."

"Forms requesting what we want done are circulated."

**Question #5: How often have you been contacted by the tutors?**

	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993
<b>Frequently</b>	23%	26%
<b>Sometimes</b>	45%	36%
<b>Never</b>	32%	38%

In most schools the CYCW is the person who makes the contact with the staff instead of the tutors. This may

explain the relatively large percentage of those who responded "sometimes" or "never".

**Question #6: Do you have any suggestions for change/what are some ways in which the tutoring program can better assist the students or teachers?**

**Comments from 1991 - 1992 Survey**

"Perhaps a form checklist could be devised in which teachers indicate some general objectives for the students and the tutor could indicate how the objectives are being met. I think a more formalized method of communication between teachers and tutors is needed."

"...larger work area, then able to separate students"

"teachers should take more responsibility providing information to tutors"

"perhaps regularly scheduled meetings for tutors and the teachers involved"

"we wish we could have more tutors"

**Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

"some indication whether the student is working on the material; perhaps even collecting the finished assignments and placing in teachers' mailboxes, or comments on lack of time or student difficulties"

"greater involvement in planning"

"it works just fine"

"have more tutors"

"variety of venues in a school - too many in one area"

"...having tutors assigned to specific pods or teachers"

**Question #7: Do you believe that the tutoring should be continued next year? Why or why not?**

	1991 - 1992	1992 - 1993
<b>Yes</b>	98%	92%
<b>No</b>	2%	5%
<b>Unsure</b>	0%	3%

**Comments from the 1991 - 1992 Survey**

"the best method of teaching; employment for University of Lethbridge students; role modelling for children; help at a time when pressure is increasing for teachers and students"

"for struggling students this program offers some positive encounters with academics"

"provides additional support for those students who need it; positive impact on public relations of the school"

"at-risk students may experience success consistently for the first time in long time"

"for those who are trying it has made a difference"

"those students deserve the extra help they need to achieve success"

"...improved the attitude in the school"

"it has saved some students from inevitable failure"

"levels of student frustration are reduced; student success rate has increased; disruption by struggling students has been reduced; self-esteem has improved as students find success"

**Comments from the 1992 - 1993 Survey**

"success for students who do not receive the attention they need; it provides a generally safe and non-threatening environment"

"for those students who honestly put in an effort and still need one-to-one it is fantastic"

"it has proven valuable to the success of the students"

"it has been very beneficial for the kids that can't keep up in class"

"many students involved have been getting better marks and they are feeling better about themselves"

"it is a must!!"

"for the great benefit of students!!!!"

"yes, with more supervision and structure"

"helps students if done properly, pleases parents"

"it has been a lifeline for many struggling students"

"they have more success because more people are trying to help them"

**CHILD AND YOUTH CARE INTERVIEW SUMMARIES**

The Child and Youth Care workers were interviewed at the end of the second year in a similar manner to the first year. The same questionnaire was utilized (see Appendix D).

**Question #1: How many students do you have in the program at present? and Question #2: How many students**

**in total have you included in the program this year?**

During the course of the school year more than three hundred students were served through Project Connections. This is a similar number to last year's total of 365.

**Question #3: Where do you spend the majority of your time?**

All interviewed said that they spend the majority of their time counselling students in the program. There are one-to-one sessions and this year they have initiated more group sessions. In Gilbert Paterson and Hamilton the CYCW's are also responsible for coordinating the tutoring program during school hours. At Allan Watson there is a teacher assigned to coordinate the tutoring program which leaves the CYCW's more time for counselling. Similarly at Wilson, the CYCW has more time available during the school day for counselling because they operate their tutoring program at lunch and after school only. However, with the development of the Student Academic Intervention Centre (SAIC), the CYCW has taken on other responsibilities associated with providing for at-risk students. The SAIC program allows students to catch up on work missed during extended absences, truancies or suspensions. It is monitored by the administration with support from teachers and the CYCW in

supervision during the day.

**Question #4: Do you feel that you have adequate parental support for your program?**

All commented that they felt they had very supportive parents. Parents are appreciative of the time and effort the CYCW's and tutors are giving to their children.

**Question #5: Do you feel that you have adequate administrative support?**

In every case they felt that they had excellent support. They felt that they were accepted and respected for their role in the school.

**Question #6: Do you feel that you have adequate support from the teachers - for the project as a whole - for the tutoring program?**

Generally they felt that they had excellent support. However, they also said that there are a few who still believe that at-risk students should not receive any special attention. Judging from the overwhelming statistics from the teacher surveys, the teachers are very pleased with the tutoring program.

**Question #7: Is your role different from the counsellors in the school? How?**

None believe the role is different. All of the CYCW's have been integrated into the counselling departments at each of the schools. They do believe, however, that the fact that they are non-teaching staff members may make students more comfortable with them. During the 1993 - 1994 school year two of the schools, Wilson and Hamilton have designated the CYCW as one of the two primary counsellors in the school.

**Question #8: Have there been times when you have felt that you lack the training or experience (in the schools) to be able to deal with situations effectively?**

Most said that the longer they are in the schools, the easier it becomes. However, one CYCW felt that in the role of supervisor of the tutoring program more experience or training in educational strategies would be an asset.

**Question #9: What do you feel are the strengths of the program?**

One CYCW offered this comment:

"the kids have learned to develop trusting

relationships with adults".

The other CYCW's reported that administrative support at the district and school level was an asset. They also said that the program has a focus which appears to be meeting the needs of the students it was designed to help.

**Question #10: What aspects do you feel require change and what specifically would you do?**

They mentioned the following:

- more group counselling
- meet with pods of teachers regularly
- make tutoring an option with a grade
- assign a permanent room for the program  
(one CYCW had to move several times)
- continue with more pro-active work rather than bandaiding
- reduce the stress on the CYCW's by making the funding permanent
- develop a computer program for tracking students and to record data for government forms

**Question #11: Do you feel that you have had an impact on kids? In what way?**

All genuinely felt that they had definitely had an impact. Their comments were as follows:

"they're more trusting of the school"

"they are more settled"

"they look for that contact every day"

"someone cares about them"

"I feel I am their mother, teacher, and big sister."

"We are there when they need someone to talk to."

"I got some really nice letters from the kids thanking me for things I had done for them."

**Question #12: Tell me about one of your success stories.**

It was difficult for them to identify one student. It was apparent that they felt connected to all of the students they were working with. They told of students who had finally disclosed childhood traumas to them when no one else had been able to. They told of students whose families they had helped by making the appropriate referrals to outside agencies and then by ensuring that action was taken. Other students had blossomed under their care. One boy had had a history of little success in school, but became a "real star" in the school. Another who had serious peer problems, struggled with academics and attendance began to like school and when she was interviewed she told me that she loved going to school because of the CYCW and the tutors. They had numerous stories of success to share.

**Question #13: Are there any students that your program has not been able to reach and what do you think the reason for this is?**

The students they identified bore some of these characteristics:

- extremely transient
- habit of dropping in and out
- long history of pent-up anger and hostility
- very low self-esteem
- defiant and distrustful
- from dysfunctional homes
- unable to take responsibility for actions

Although these descriptors are common when profiling at-risk students, the CYCW's felt that a very small number have been more adversely affected by their past than others. They did believe that they had made some headway, but were not convinced that the program made a real difference to these five to ten students.

#### **DISTRICT COORDINATOR**

The district coordinator has been overseeing the project since its inception. He has been responsible for ensuring that evaluative data was collected and has been acting as a liaison between the schools and the other agencies involved. He met on a regular basis with the CYCW's to hear their concerns and to provide support from the district level. After meeting to discuss the project with coordinator, the following information was attained. (see Appendix G)

**Question #1: What do you see are the strengths of**

**Project Connections?**

He felt that the success of the project was directly attributable to the CYCW's. He also commended the school-based administrators for their part.

**Question #2: What do you believe could and should be changed for the third year of the project?**

He reported that the collection of evaluation data for Alberta Education had been the biggest obstacle for the program. Since the Lethbridge project is the largest in the province, collecting data on over three hundred students was a monumental task. It had taken up a significant amount of time and the CYCW's had done much of the work on their own time rather than take time away from their students.

**Question #3: What do you believe has been the key to the successes this year?**

He said that in every school, it had been the hard work and dedication of the CYCW's.

**Question #4: What have been your major frustrations with the project?**

Coordinating the evaluation data and trying to meet the

needs of the District, Canada Employment, Alberta Education, and the external evaluators.

**Question #5: What elements of the project do you feel have been the most challenging for the CYCW's?**

The evaluation was identified.

**Question #6: What elements of the project do you believe have been the most challenging for the school-based administrators?**

He reported that the administrators are challenged to provide a program which meets the needs of the students, teachers and the parents.

**Question #7: Do you believe that the funding amount was adequate?**

He did not feel the funding was adequate with respect to the amount allotted for CYCW salaries. He felt that they were doing far more than their salaries reflected and that consideration should be given to allowing them to have days off in recognition of the contributions they make to the system.

**Question #8: Do you believe the project has duplicated**

**any services already in existence in the system? If so, is this duplication unnecessary? What changes should be made?**

It was his belief that it encouraged the system to be more creative in the use of counselling personnel in each of the schools. This led to less duplication of services and a more focussed approach to intervention.

**Question #9: What comments, if any, have you received from the community in response to the project?**

There has been very positive feedback from the Outreach Schools, social workers, outside agencies and the community generally. His concern was that the district should be cautious not to take over the roles of the helping agencies in the community without their full cooperation and the associated financial support.

**Question #10: How has the project been publicized? Would you have made any changes in that area? If so, what changes and why?**

He said that this was an area that needed attention, because although every opportunity is taken to inform district personnel and the community, a more pro-active approach would be more effective.

## EVALUATION REPORT - YEAR TWO

This section of the document has as its purpose to supplement the evaluation completed following Year One of the project and not to replace it. Although many recommendations for change have been outlined in the various sections summarizing the interviews and surveys completed, conclusions will be drawn based on both years of operation. Unlike the evaluation completed at the end of Year One, this section will not include "continue to" suggestions to avoid redundancy. However, recommendations from the Year One Report remain as they are yet to be thoroughly addressed.

### ATTENDANCE MONITORING

In all programs, attendance monitoring was an important role for the CYCW's. It provided them with information they needed to be able track their students accurately.

#### **It is recommended that the CYCW's:**

- refrain from making home visits without being accompanied by a counsellor or administrator
- alert the administration about any trancies that occur
- inform staff members of their role in this area

## COUNSELLING ROLES

This was an area identified by the CYCW's as the component which took the most time, however, the student responses did not see this as a significant role for the CYCW's. It may be that the informal counselling done in the tutoring setting was not perceived by students as counselling. This model was implemented in at least two of the participating schools, and therefore, should not be seen as a problematic area.

### **It is recommended that:**

- definite role descriptions be written at each school for the CYCW (confusion still exists among the teaching staff)
- the CYCW's ensure that teachers are notified when a student has a counselling appointment (although a concern voiced by staff in only one school)
- students not be allowed to miss more than one class period unless there are extreme circumstances (in some schools students and teachers reported that students would miss two or three periods, often without direct supervision)
- the administration ensure that the CYCW's load does not become overwhelming
- that the counsellors and the CYCW meet regularly to ensure no duplication of services

These recommendations are based on the data collected and should be viewed as goals for improving an already excellent program in each of the schools. The comments made by the students clearly illustrate that the CYCW's are approachable, empathetic, skilled, caring and dedicated.

## TUTORING

Given that the project has only been in existence for two years, the CYCW's and the tutors have made remarkable progress with the tutoring component. This is in evidence in the teacher surveys which gave overwhelming support for tutoring in their schools.

### It is recommended that:

- the tutors be selected from the University of Lethbridge Education Undergraduate Society pool first; from others with backgrounds in education second
- the administration and CYCW jointly screen tutors
- tutors be introduced to the staff upon being hired and be given the opportunity to report on the tutoring program and its progress at regular intervals throughout the year
- a committee of teachers, tutors, the CYCW, and an administrator be struck to review the structure of the tutoring program at least twice a year (from teachers' comments there is a need to include teachers in the decision-making process so that it meets everyone's needs)
- students who abuse their privilege be exited and parents contacted
- when tutoring is scheduled outside regular school hours the CYCW or an administrator is responsible for supervision (this will address the concerns expressed by some teachers and students that there is too much fooling around during these sessions)
- staff members and parents are fully aware of the referral process
- the space available is adequate
- teachers be given the opportunity to meet with the tutors and the CYCW to develop a method for communication which is mutually beneficial

As mentioned in the recommendations, many of the concerns

expressed during the evaluation could easily be addressed if teachers, tutors, CYCW's and administrators could meet so that it is a program developed by all. This would also reduce the problems associated with lack of adequate understanding about the project's goals and practices.

#### **PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT**

The number of students in the program may be a reflection of the support offered by parents. On the rare occasion that a parent has made a request for their child to be removed from the program, it was the result of a mutual decision between the school and the home. The demand from parents for their children to be included in the program is almost overwhelming, especially the tutoring component.

#### **It is recommended that:**

- the program be publicized more frequently in school newsletters and parent information nights
- parent support groups be developed at all schools
- invitations be sent to parents of students in the project to encourage their attendance at school functions (often these parents are reluctant to attend such events because much of their association with schools in the past has been of a negative nature)

#### **SCHOOL-BASED ADMINISTRATION**

Although the CYCW's in each of the schools have excellent

leadership skills, they must receive the support of the school-based administration in ensuring their program is successful. According to the CYCW's, the support they are currently receiving is excellent.

**It is recommended that the administration:**

- ensure that the tutors are receiving ample work from the subject teachers
- provide continued positive feedback and encouragement to the CYCW's and tutors
- promote the integration of the tutors into the school family
- inform other administrators in the district about the program

**SUMMATIVE COMMENTS**

There is little doubt that Project Connections continues to meet with a high degree of success. As an evaluator and participant observer, I found the program to be operating very successfully throughout the District. Many of the concerns highlighted, particularly those in the second year of operation, could be easily remedied with minor procedural changes and by increasing staff participation in the decision-making process.

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE EXPERIENCE

When I first learned about Lethbridge School District #51's need for an evaluator for Project Connections, I did not hesitate to offer my services. I had always been involved with at-risk students and was so hopeful that this program would truly address their needs, thereby reducing the number of students who felt that early school leaving was their only alternative. I was particularly intrigued because I had long thought that drop-out programs too often focused on the high school student when, in reality, potential dropouts can be identified as early as grades five and six.

### **YEAR ONE: 1991 - 1992**

After having given careful consideration to the various forms of evaluative techniques which could be used in this type of evaluation, I decided to focus more on qualitative assessment. It was my contention that a combination of qualitative data and complementary quantitative data such as attendance patterns and achievement test scores would yield a much richer study. Following consultation with Dr. David Townsend from The University of Lethbridge I began preparing for the collection of pertinent data. In the fall of 1991 I met

with the Child and Youth Care Workers and the District Coordinator responsible for the Project to apprise them of my plans.

The qualitative data collection consisted primarily of interviews with students, teachers, Youth Care Workers and administrators from the participating schools. I had also prepared quantitative instruments for the collection of information related to attendance, student characteristics and achievement. The Youth Care Workers were responsible for the completion of the student profile sheets, for ensuring that computerized lists were kept of the students involved in the program, and for assisting in the scheduling of interviews with students. The participating administrators assisted in ensuring that the teacher surveys were completed and that the achievement data was made available to me.

In November of 1991 the evaluator for all "START" projects in the province met with me to discuss my plans for the evaluation. At that time I told him that, in my opinion, a qualitative evaluation would lead to a more accurate assessment of the success of the program. Since his company, Nyberg Consultants, had been hired to evaluate all of the programs in the province, he felt that his only choice was a quantitative assessment. He

was, however, most interested in combining our results and our ideas to develop a richer assessment. No specific directives were given from Alberta Education at this time. We were to evaluate the program as we deemed appropriate.

In early December of 1991 a meeting was held in Edmonton for all Project Coordinators and Youth Care Workers associated with Project START programs across Alberta. Upon their return from this meeting the participants from our jurisdiction were immensely concerned about the directives they had been given regarding statistical data collection expectations. Given that none of our people had been trained in statistics, their reaction was panic-driven and created a climate of extreme frustration. I assisted when I could, but I was still rather concerned about the time that the Youth Care Workers, in particular, would be expected to spend on data collection. They already had very demanding responsibilities for keeping the students in the program on track. In their dedication to their students and their reluctance to take school time away from them, the Youth Care Workers spent numerous hours in the evening and on weekends doing the statistical work required by Alberta Education. Although, in general, the type of

data being requested would lead to valuable insights, the task was much more difficult for Lethbridge School District #51's project than any in the province simply because we had included more students. In fact, at the end of the first year (1991 - 1992), the average number of pupils in the other projects across Alberta was 41 whereas Lethbridge's totalled 225. Therefore, what may have seemed like a reasonable request to the majority of the participating school districts proved to be an almost overwhelming task for us. Another source of frustration was the confusion which developed over the actual role I was to take. Initially I was under the impression that I was to evaluate Project Connections and that the Project Coordinator would be responsible for meeting the needs of the various agencies involved in the Project. What occurred following the December 1991 meeting was that his role was expanded to include the collection of evaluative data expected by the consultants commissioned by Alberta Education. I, on the other hand, was advised to continue with my evaluation as I had originally planned. There were two reasons for this. First, I was not being employed by the District to be in charge of the Project and, second, I did not fully agree with the mode of assessment being carried out by Nyberg Consultants. The existence of two avenues for evaluation proved to be somewhat confusing for the Youth Care Workers and I had

to reassure them throughout the two year period that the information I was gathering would be a reflection of the success of the Project. I had to convince them that I was not "using" the Project as a means to achieve my Masters' Degree in Education. I had a genuine interest in the Project and was willing to spend two years studying it. It was my opinion that if I could use the study to complement my university program then that would be a bonus.

The specific forms which were generated by Alberta Education and Nyberg Consultants included a Dropout Report, a Background Information Report and an Attendance Report. Each of these was to be completed at mid-year during the 1991 - 1992 school year with baseline data to be submitted in the fall of 1991. It was the responsibility of the District's Coordinator of Project Connections to collect this data and provide a two to three page summary at mid-year. Faced with the large task of implementing a new program of this type, most people involved considered the evaluation an irritation. The data collection instruments were often misinterpreted and the District Coordinator, in his attempt to assist the Youth Care Workers, periodically gave differing interpretations which resulted in inconsistencies in the

reporting. In my conversations with the various participants I learned of these problems and attempted to assist them. However, I had to be cautious about undermining the directives given by the Coordinator. Given these circumstances, resentment developed and I suspect, from my conversations with participants, that some took the data collection process much more seriously than others. Therefore, the quantitative data was not as reliable as it should have been.

Another request made by Alberta Education was for data related to the intervention strategies which the District had developed. These included tutoring, counselling, agency referrals, parent contact, and student advocacy. Reporting this type of information in quantitative form proved to be very difficult. The District Coordinator developed the data collection form. It recorded the frequency of interventions and whether improvement was made or not, based on the opinion of the Youth Care Workers. It was my contention that numerical data was not an effective way to assess the success of intervention strategies. For example, does the frequency of visits to the school counsellor or Child and Youth Care Worker provide reliable data to assess the effectiveness of these interventions? However, this was the only form the provincial evaluators would accept. I,

on the other hand, maintained that personal interviews with students and staff of the participating schools would yield a much more accurate assessment of attitudinal change and therefore somewhat more valid measures of the success of intervention strategies. The summary and conclusions regarding the interventions offered by the external evaluators appeared to be based more on their brief meetings with the Youth Care Workers at the various schools. The quantitative information regarding the interventions is interesting, but does not appear to be the basis for comments which indicate that "teachers in the respective schools have changed their behavior and attitudes towards the students". How could these conclusions have been reached without the authors ever having met or surveyed the teaching populations? With the focus on the quantitative data, how could the evaluators justify conclusions based upon limited contact with the program?

Of particular interest to me were the conclusions related to school attendance. According to the statistical analysis of attendance in the Lethbridge Project, attendance percentages were less than those in the preceding year when the project was not in place. There was no mention of the fact that previous attendance

problems took no account of the inclusion of these students in the program. There was also no recognition given to the fact that attendance patterns were affected by many different factors which clearly could have altered the results. These statistics were great cause for concern simply because school districts and governmental funding agencies rely heavily upon them to make decisions regarding funding.

In April of 1991 I submitted a preliminary report to Alberta Education, Nyberg Consultants and to our District School Board. My report included my findings from interviews conducted with staff and students from each of the schools involved. In addition, it included testimonial letters from parents whose students were in the program. As a participant observer I felt confident that the recommendations I made in my report would be valuable to the continued success of the project. This information is contained in the summative document I prepared on the success of the project during the two year period of 1991 - 1993. I had also collected computerized final report cards for the students in the Project so that I would be able to draw comparisons between the marks at the end of the 1992 and 1993 school years.

**YEAR TWO: 1992 - 1993**

In October of 1992, Nyberg Consultants prepared a report on the first year of the Project's implementation based on the data derived from the various forms (Appendix A). It provided some rather interesting information regarding the background of the Project's students and their parents which was consistent with what I had found in my literature review. However, they also included tabulations on the frequency of intervention strategies which, as I mentioned earlier, did not necessarily relate to questions of quality.

Following release of the summative report on Year One of the Project, Clarence Nyberg met with administrators and Youth Care Workers from each of the schools. Much to our dismay, he brought with him additional data collection instruments which were to be completed for the second year. Although it was wise on his part to request information for the purpose of making comparisons between continuing students in Year One and Year Two of the Project, the statistical analysis and compilation of this data meant that we would most likely have to hire someone with statistical experience to complete this task. In addition, he had developed a form very similar

to the one I had prepared in Year One to identify the reasons why students were referred to the Project. I had called it a Student Profile Sheet and had taken the time to ensure that the data gleaned from this sheet was put into computerized form for easy retrieval. This similar form sent from Nyberg caused some anxiety on my part because the Youth Care Workers were required to complete the governmental forms first. My forms became obsolete. In addition, he had made plans to collect students achievement information in the same format as that which I had already developed at the end of the 1992 school year.

This report on Year Two of the Project was completed by Nyberg Consultants in September of 1993. I was most anxious to see what conclusions had been drawn from data that I had viewed as being somewhat incomplete. I found Table 4.2 (Appendix I) to be quite valuable in that it provides an overall profile of the students enrolled in the Project. Information made available to them from my evaluation was contained in this section of the report on the characteristics of Project Connections' students which, of course, I was pleased to see because it was the only time in the two years of evaluative reports when the views of the students were reported.

In the next section of the report a table of the ratings given to the various interventions was presented. These ratings were given by the Youth Care Workers. The fact that the Youth Care Workers were assessing their own program concerned me. Therefore, I was pleased to see that the information I had gathered on the classroom teachers' views regarding the tutoring component had been included as well. Also, I believe that the inclusion of the comments I had collected from the students added to the overall quality of the report.

Another component of the report was the percentage of school days attended by students. A similar format to that found in the Year One report by Nyberg Consultants was used in the Year Two report. The only addition was the data comparing the new students with the continuing students. It would have been most valuable to add a discussion of the reasons for the decrease in attendance percentages particularly since attendance was not the primary reason for students to be included in the program. This was supported by Nyberg's Table 4.2 where chronic absence was given a ranking of "7", considerably below problems related to school achievement. Unfortunately, reporting attendance figures without the benefit of explanatory notes could lead other readers to

erroneous conclusions about the merit of Project Connections, particularly those who find hard statistics easier to interpret.

The next section in Nyberg's Year Two Evaluation referred to Academic Achievement. When I had first met with Mr. Nyberg in the fall of 1991, we had both been concerned about the most effective way to assess academic gains. I had suggested at that time that an analysis of final exam marks and final report card marks would most likely be our best source of comparison. He concurred. However, the final exam marks are not shown in the final analysis. Also, the significant rate of change in both Allan Watson School and Wilson Junior High School should have been accompanied by an explanation of possible reasons for these rather unusual figures since both had a profound effect on the overall outcome of the report. Perhaps these differences could be attributable to some change in the focus, philosophy or structure of each of the respective schools. It would have been worth investigating since these two schools in particular are so very different in culture, philosophy and student population.

Considering all of the statistical data collection and analysis completed by Alberta Education over the two year

period, it was quite surprising to me that their overall conclusions about the effectiveness of Project Connections consisted of an excerpt from the summative statements contained in the report I issued in July of 1993. Although some of the information they gathered was potentially valuable, I cannot help but question whether the conclusions derived were worth the countless hours and endless frustration experienced by the Youth Care Workers whose primary goal was to help the at-risk students in their care. Unfortunately, the Youth Care Workers had no choice but to comply with the requests made whether they deemed them to be reasonable or not. They were all on a temporary placement in the program and, therefore, were not in any position to publicly question the merits of the type of data requested. I do believe that the study I conducted offered a truer picture of the Project although I would have liked to have been able to carry out my original plan of blending both pertinent quantitative and qualitative data. Since some of my ideas were borrowed and revised for the external evaluator's use, my only choice was to proceed by revising my original plan in hopes that both evaluations would lead to a thorough assessment of the Project.

**SUMMARY OF CONCERNS**

I have documented several aspects of this Project and the contracted evaluation performed by Nyberg Consultants that have caused me great concern. The following is a summary of these points:

1. From the very beginning the evaluation method was not congruent with the purposes and practices of Project Connections. In particular, purely quantitative data was not an adequate way of determining how well the Project was achieving its goals.
2. The expansion of the Youth Care Workers' role to that of data collector and statistician was a concern.
3. There were problems with the change in method and focus between the evaluative data collected in Year One as compared with Year Two.
4. The interpretation of the success based on quantitative data did not reflect the overall picture of what was really happening in each of the schools. There was a failure to discriminate between the schools and their respective student populations.

5. The tremendous amount of quantitative data did not provide enough information to truly assess the quality of the Project.

6. The external evaluator did not make adjustments to the data collection instruments to accommodate the large numbers of students enrolled in the Lethbridge School District #51's Project.

7. There was no attempt on the part of Nyberg Consultants to survey the staff, students or parents associated with Project Connections to find out how they perceived the Project to be working.

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**APPENDIX A: PROJECT CONNECTIONS PROPOSAL**

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

### 1.0 Introductory Statement

Project "Connections" is the name given to the proposal for a project to operate under the authority of Canada Employment and Immigration's START program. Project "Connections" is intended to serve participating students from each of the four schools with junior high school aged students in Lethbridge School District No. 51. We have chosen the name Project "Connections" because the name encapsulates the intentions and objectives of our proposal, namely to build connections for students at risk of dropping out of school; connections between these students and their parents, their schools and their communities. Project "Connections" is intended to meet four general objectives on a community-wide basis:

1. To improve attendance patterns of students who are perceived to be at risk of dropping out of school through the provision of individual guidance and support counselling to student participants in the program
2. To increase the likelihood that student participants will complete school by providing them with increased opportunities for academic success through individual and small group tutoring and other remedial programs .
3. To increase the likelihood that student participants will complete school by providing them with experiences intended to increase their self-esteem and their feeling of self-worth. These experiences will focus on work-related projects including Work Orientation, Work Simulation, and Work Experience
4. To increase the level of support available to these students in their home by offering assistance to their parents in the form of parenting skills workshops, parent support groups, and so on.

### 1.1 General Description Of Project Connections

#### 1.1.1 "Umbrella Organization"

Project "Connections" will operate on a community-wide basis through an Umbrella organization coordinated through the office of the Superintendent of Lethbridge School District No. 51 under the auspices of a Project "Connections" Steering Committee. The steering committee will have representation from parents and students as well as all interested stakeholders. While the shortness of time has prevented the final details of the structure and organization of the steering committee from being fully developed, initial contacts with the Manager of the Canada Employment Centre, various community agencies in Lethbridge

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

(Parents' Place, Lethbridge Family Services, the Lethbridge Community College and the University of Lethbridge among them), and the Lethbridge Chamber of Commerce, all seem to indicate that there is wide interest in and strong support for our project within our community. Overall coordination would be under the authority of the "Project Connections Coordinator", who would act as chair of the steering committee. Each school would be responsible for articulation of the aspects of Project "Connections" which operate within its facility.

## 1.1.2 Articulation With Other District Programs

The schools in Lethbridge School District No. 51 have been actively working to prevent drop-outs for a number of years and many initiatives are in place in our city which address the needs of students who, we believe, are potential drop outs. These initiatives include the following:

1. Organization of parent information meetings and parent support groups. Last year the attention of the whole nation was focussed on Lethbridge through the unfortunate death, by suicide, of three of our junior high aged students. Our schools coordinated the provision of information and support for the parents of our community and were responsible for many of the initiatives taken to address the problems.
2. Integrated Occupational Program at Allan Watson School. Allan Watson school offers an integrated occupational program which is intended to meet the needs of students who face continued lack of success within the regular school programs and who are judged likely to benefit from the Integrated Occupational approach to education.
3. Alternate Junior High School. An alternate junior high school program operates in our city. It currently serves a varying population of 12 - 15 junior high school aged students who have effectively dropped out of school. Specific details of its operational guidelines are available from Mr. Bruce Stewart, Associate Superintendent of Student Services for Lethbridge School District No. 51.
4. Pitawani School. Pitawani School is operated by Lethbridge School District No. 51 in cooperation with Family and Social Services. It serves students who are in residential treatment at the Sifton Children's Centre as well as a number of students who are judged likely to benefit from the highly structured environment found in the Centre.
5. The "Hospital Program". A school is operated in the Psychiatric Care wing of the Lethbridge Regional Hospital in cooperation with Alberta Mental Health offices. This school serves junior high school aged students who are patients at the hospital as well as a number of day students whose

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

attendance is under the direction of Dr. Davies of Alberta Mental Health Services, and who are judged likely to benefit from the psychiatric counselling services available at the hospital.

6. Harbour House School. A school is operated at the Harbour House Shelter for women. Students are provided with educational services in the protected environment of the shelter in an effort to maintain, without interruption, their educational programs during times of extreme crisis and stress associated with family violence.
7. Distance Education Project. A limited number of students are being provided with educational programs through the facilities of Distance Education under the coordination of the Lethbridge Community College. Many students in this program have been identified as "school phobic" and these arrangements have been made to help them continue their education without the requirement of attendance at a school building.
8. Cooperative Ventures with Agencies. Currently the Solicitor General's Department, Family and Social Services, Alberta Mental Health Services, YWCA and other community agencies are providing direct cooperative services to secondary students in both jurisdictions within the schools. As well, the two school districts, the city of Lethbridge, and Family and Social Services jointly fund an agency to provide counselling assistance to elementary students and their families.

Each of the above initiatives has been undertaken in order to provide educational services to groups of students who would otherwise not likely be able to continue their education and each of these initiatives is currently being used to its capacity. In addition to the initiatives organized and operated at a community or district level several school-based programs are common to all the schools. These include:

1. Advisory Programs: Each of the schools in Lethbridge operates a school based advisory program. These programs operate under slightly different operational models but all have a common focus of student advocacy and the development of a close personal relationship between the student and his or her teacher/advisor. The three-year relationship between student and advisor is often used to provide support to students who experience attendance or academic problems.
2. Agendas and Homework books: Each of the schools also uses a "school agenda" which is intended to help students achieve academic success through improving their organizational skills and study habits. It is our hope that by increasing the opportunities for success we may be able to have a

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

positive impact on the students' self-esteem; this, in turn, should have a positive relationship on their continued attendance in school.

3. Peer Support Programs: Each school operates a Peer Support Program. These programs are intended to allow students to support one another and to provide additional opportunities for students to face and cope with the difficulties they face. By providing one on one contacts between students who are facing trouble and those who have successfully handled similar situations it is hoped that our "at risk" students may see the light at the end of the tunnel and be encouraged to perservere in their educational programs.
4. Incentive Programs: Each school operates a variety of incentive programs for students. The range of incentives is deliberately made as broad as possible in order to provide rewards and positive experiences for all students. Particular attention is paid to ensuring that "at risk" students are recipients of encouragement, incentives and rewards at every opportunity.

Project "Connections" is intended to expand and enhance the efforts and initiatives currently in place in our city and our schools. It is intended to be preventative rather than remedial. We believe that by offering a wide variety of early intervention measures we can meet the unique needs of individual students and that we can assist students to establish positive patterns of behavior rather than allow them to become entrapped in negative, self-destructive habits.

### 1.1.3 The "Partners" - Coordination With Other Agencies

Project "Connections" is intended to provide the target students with connections with their schools, their homes and their communities. Because of the limited time available for the preparation of this proposal, final details of participation by community agencies and businesses have not been worked out, but a number of contacts have been made and a positive reception has been the unvarying result. Specific components of Project "Connections" which require coordination and cooperation with other agencies in the community include the work exposure and the parent support strategies. Our initial contacts leave us very optimistic that we will be able to include a community wide recycling project as one strategy of the work exposure component and we have also received a very positive response to the implementation of a child-care project which would be operated as part of the work exposure activity. This strategy would be operated by and for student participants in Project "Connections". Our contacts with groups such as Parents' Place and Lethbridge Family Services have been very positive. These and other family oriented agencies in Lethbridge are eager to coordinate the support they can offer to parents with other initiatives at the school level.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

The prospect of being able to arrange a large group of community agencies and businesses who will cooperate with, and become partners in, Project "Connections" is excellent. Details will be finalized after approval of the proposal has been received.

## 1.2 Lethbridge Demographics

Lethbridge, a city of approximately 60 000 residents, has five schools which serve students in the 12 - 14 age range. Three are public junior high schools and one is a junior high operated by the Roman Catholic Separate School District. The fifth is Allan Watson, an Integrated Occupational School (alternate school) which serves both Junior High and Senior High students. The total junior high population of these five schools is slightly less than 2500. Children of recent immigrants to Canada total approximately 150 students and they are largely concentrated in two schools, Wilson Junior High and St. Francis. Our junior highs also serve slightly less than 100 native students with most of these attending either St. Francis or Hamilton. Gilbert Paterson is a community school and includes students from K - Grade 9. The four schools in Lethbridge School District No. 51 are submitting the following joint proposal while Lethbridge Roman Catholic Separate School District No. 9 will be submitting a separate proposal to operate at St. Francis school.

Specific data regarding rates of school leaving between grade seven and grade twelve are not available for Lethbridge, but our review of relevant literature indicates that, on a national basis, as many as 30 - 38% of students who register in Grade 7 do not complete Grade 12 within 8 years. There is no evidence to suggest that Lethbridge is much different from the rest of Canada or from many centres in the United States where specific research in this regard has been done. If this is so, then as many as 800 of our current junior high population might well drop out of school rather than complete grade 12. This would be a tragic waste of human resources. Project "Connections" is intended to become another opportunity to meet the needs of many of these students.

At present no data are available on a system-wide or city-wide basis regarding attendance patterns, percentage attendance rates, etc. The data are available in the computerized attendance records which are kept at each school and arrangements are being made to have appropriate software written which will report the data needed to provide the baseline information required to support this proposal. Rather than attempt to compile city-wide data manually (which would be a time consuming task) we have decided to provide relevant data for one school, Hamilton Junior High, which we believe to be typical of all schools. The computer software will be ready and all necessary baseline data will be generated before the implementation of any project which is approved.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

## 1.2.1 Identification of target students from Hamilton Jr. High

Hamilton Junior High School has a total student population of 640; of these, ninety-eight students, or slightly more than 15% of our total population, were on a list of students in serious academic difficulty after the first report card. Students are included on this list for special attention from the administration and counsellors if either of the following two conditions are met: 1. The student's overall average in all subjects is less than 50%; (or) 2. The student has two marks below 50% in the academic core (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies) subjects. Recent news stories have frequently mentioned a "30% dropout rate" so it is not unreasonable to assume that most, if not all of these 98 students are at some risk of dropping out of school either during their time at junior high school, or later, in senior high.

## 1.2.1.1 Rate of Homework Completion

Few of the ninety-eight students referred to above have satisfactory records of homework completion. The table below indicates the homework completion ratios in each of the core subjects for the target group on the first report card for the 1990 - 91 school year.

TABLE 1:

Homework Completion Ratios of Students in Academic Difficulty

		Lang. Arts	Mathematics	Science	Social St.
Grade 7	(31)	126/210=60%	343/644=53%	117/210=56%	147/267=55%
Grade 8	(25)	141/219=64%	282/530=53%	80/140=57%	67/118=57%
Grade 9	(42)	144/261=55%	321/601=51%	83/202=41%	267/421=63%

These very poor rates were achieved in spite of a number of initiatives taken by the school to encourage student responsibility regarding homework. These initiatives included providing each student with a student agenda in which all assignments are to be recorded, requiring all students to maintain a "marks record sheet" of all assignments, quizzes and tests, contact with the home initiated by the subject teacher approximately one month prior to the issuance of the report card for all students who were projected to be in academic difficulty (at that time more than 140 students' parents were contacted), and operation of a noon hour study hall where students may work on homework and receive assistance if needed.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

## 1.2.1.2. Attendance Patterns

In combination with the poor rate of completion of homework assignments we find that the vast majority of students who are in academic difficulty also have attendance records which are less than satisfactory. The following table contains data regarding the attendance records which the ninety-eight students identified above accumulated during the first fifty-nine days of school in the current school year.

TABLE 2:

Attendance Records of Students in Academic Difficulty

	# of days late to school	# of truanancies or unexplained absences	total number absences (inc excused)
Grade 7 n=31	2.96 (5.02%)	3.23 (5.47%)	12.96 (21.97%)
Grade 8 n=25	7.25 (12.29%)	2.46 (4.17%)	13.67 (23.17%)
Grade 9 n=42	8.23 (13.95%)	4.53 (7.68%)	18.61 (31.54%)

Again, the school has taken significant action to deal with students with very poor attendance patterns. One of the school secretaries is assigned the duty of monitoring attendance on a daily basis. Attempts are made to contact the parents of each absent student by telephone either at home or at work. Where our efforts to make telephone contact are unsuccessful we expect the parents to provide a note of explanation when the student returns to school. If no note has been received within five school days of the student's return to school the parents are contacted by letter and an explanation is requested. If the absence has not been explained within one additional week, then it is considered to be truancy and the student is dealt with by the administration. Parental contact is an essential element in all administrative dealings with students regarding truancy.

As can be seen from the above data the severity of attendance problems increases as students pass through junior high school. The rate of absence from school reported for the Grade Nine students would result in those students being "dropped" from high school courses if the same patterns of attendance were continued during their senior high school years. These data support our contention that most, if not all, of the ninety-eight students who are currently experiencing academic difficulty are "at risk" of dropping out before completing high school.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

## 1.2.1.3 Other Characteristics which indicate "Risk"

In addition to their lack of involvement in the academic aspect of school life most of the ninety-eight students under discussion have little involvement in other components of school life. Hamilton school's cross country team won the city championship; a check of the seventy-two names on the team roster revealed only two matches with the list of ninety-eight while a simple proportional representation across the school would indicate that we should expect eleven names to be common to the two lists. Checks of the rosters of our school volleyball and basketball teams confirm similar underrepresentation from the students in academic difficulty.

These ninety-eight students are well known to the administrators and counsellors at Hamilton. They have contacted most of the grade eights and nines several times over the past two years and began their contacts with the grade seven students as soon as their difficulties began to be apparent. A minimum of two formal meetings with each of these students has been held to this date with additional meetings scheduled to follow up on action plans developed during the first two meetings. These meetings will continue throughout the year or until the individual student begins to function at an acceptable academic standard. We do not have hard data regarding the following statements, but all members of the counselling and administrative staff concur in their belief that they are generally very accurate descriptions of the students:

1. These students are not involved in any co-curricular programs at the school. Interviews with these students include some "ice breaking" questions about involvement in the school and several address involvement in noon-hour activities, clubs, study hall, etc. The perception is that very few of these students have any connection with any of the informal, community building aspects of school life.
2. These students are largely uninvolved in their community. If they do not participate in school activities they are also rarely involved in other community activities such as organized sports, church groups, scouting, or other similar activities.
3. Many of these students lack positive role models with whom they can relate. This is not to say that positive role models do not exist in these students' lives, rather they often ignore or dismiss as unimportant the positive influences around them and turn more for guidance to peers or to the more seamy side of our modern street culture. Also, contacts with their parents lead the conclusion that many lack basic parenting skills and that the school's sense of powerlessness in dealing with these young people is

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Introductory Remarks

shared at least equally by their parents. In many cases it appears that the parents may actually fear their students; there is some hard evidence that the students are able to manipulate their parents (for example, the number of excused absences is almost double the school average. This appears to be an indication that the students may be able to convince their parents that they need to be excused from school when, in fact, nothing is wrong.).

4. The peer group is probably even more important to these students than to the average young person. Outside Hamilton school there is a "red fence" which separates school property from the public sidewalk. It is used as a retreat for students who smoke. Many of the ninety-eight do not smoke, yet they frequently congregate with the smokers early in the morning (as much as one hour and twenty minutes before school begins), at noon and after school (often for as much as two hours after school is out).
5. School is not a place which these students actively avoid. Rather they often seem to perceive school as a safe, not unpleasant place to be. There have been many instances when teachers and administrators have returned to school on the weekend and have found congregations of these students at the red fence. Also, the relatively small number of truancies among these students which involve leaving the school without permission as opposed to simply not showing up to school seems to indicate that they do not actually "hate" school, rather they are just not involved enough to make it worth the effort to come.
6. Few of these students could be described as having a positive image of themselves. Interviews with them indicate that they tend to view themselves as failures both within the school context and in society at large. Few of them can elaborate specific goals for their lives and they rarely have an image of the future which extends more than a few weeks. They have learned to live without success and have successively lowered their expectations for themselves to the point where they, essentially, have no expectations beyond immediate gratification of needs for companionship and fun.

To summarize, we are dealing with a significant number of students who, we believe, are potential drop-outs. Although there is variation within the group, the characteristics of the group are low self esteem, acute need for approval from peers, lack of involvement in school and society, a history of non-success (as opposed to active failure) academically, poor study skills and attendance patterns. In addition they, as a group, lack relationships with, and recognition of, positive role models.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Allan Watson School

2.0 Individual School Proposals (Box 14 Of Application Form)

Box 14 of the START Program Application form invites schools to attach extra information providing the details of their individual needs, target student population, programs in their school, specific objectives of the START program strategies in their school, a list of needed resources, budget estimates and details of the program partners within their school as well as their unique plans for evaluating the success of the strategies. The following section contains the details of Project "Connections" strategies for each of the five Lethbridge schools who will be participating.

2.1 Allan Watson School

Allan Watson School is an Alternate School in the Lethbridge Public School System. It was established as an Integrated Occupational Program with Alberta Education. The Integrated Occupational Program (IOP) is a five year program that begins in the eighth grade of schooling and continues through the twelfth year. The program is for students who have experienced difficulty in learning. The focus of the academic courses is on development of skills necessary for everyday living at home, in the community and on the job. While basic skill development in the academic courses is directed toward improving students' skills in communication, computation, and social relationships, the practical arts/occupational courses provide opportunities for students to apply these skills.

The IOP courses, and in particular the practical arts/occupational courses, all have a community partnership component. To provide enrichment to the curriculum, parents, private citizens, and business, industry and community volunteers may come into the school. Alternatively, students may go out into the community and/or business world to apply learned skills in "real life situations". As students see the relevance of their learning, they may become more interested in learning and in acquiring needed skills. Community partnership opportunities also provide a means of enhancing students' social skills and self-esteem while providing occupational preparation for entry into the world of work.

PHILOSOPHY OF ALLAN WATSON SCHOOL

We believe the alternate program at Watson School should provide students with the opportunity to reach their potential regardless of differences in ability and performance. The IOP strives to develop positive attitudes, life skills and practical knowledge in individual students to facilitate and encourage responsibility and self-confidence; to develop the ability to make informed choices and act in ways that will improve the quality of their own lives, apart from, and as useful contributors to, the community.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Allan Watson School

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Our program offers a unique opportunity for students to take an alternate route through junior/senior high school. Recognizing that traditional classes do not suit everyone, our alternate educational program focuses on a student's strengths and strives to provide successful experiences for each student.

2.1.1 Number And Age Range Of Target Students

The number of students who experience learning difficulty with the regular program school varies from place to place, however, the following criteria have been established by Alberta Education which, when taken together, determine student eligibility for the IOP:

**AGE:** Students must be 12 years, 6 months of age or older as of September first.

**ACHIEVEMENT:** Candidates for the IOP often demonstrate a significant lag in one or more of their academic courses and thus lack the prerequisite skills for successful entry into senior high school.

**RELATED FACTORS:** IOP students typically fall in the intelligence band of 75 - 95, although most of the Watson students fall into the average-to-low average category. Intelligence should be considered in light of such related factors as behavior, motivation, emotional make-up, psychomotor coordination, work habits, attendance and persistence.

2.1.2 Basis Of Need

Allan Watson School has a total student population of 120 students; of these, more than half are at risk of never completing high school due to life circumstances.

As can be seen from the above statistics, the needs of these students are great and varied. Watson School was established in the 1987-88 school year, as an alternative school for those students who were not experiencing success in the traditional

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Allan Watson School

school system. Over the past three years there have been many successes, where students who would have otherwise dropped out of school are choosing to stay in classes and complete some courses. Last year, of 13 students who completed high school at Watson, ten received a Province of Alberta High School Diploma.

However, each month Watson School, in spite of current intervention strategies, experiences a turn-over rate (i.e. students who drop out of the school and others who register in the school) of 3% to 5%. Over the course of the year this figure is estimated to be nearly 30% (difficult to measure accurately, due to the transient nature of many students, to the varied life-circumstances of each student, and to the difficulty in defining a "dropout").

#### 2.1.3 Program(s) In Which Students Are Enrolled

The programs of Allan Watson School have been described in the preamble to this section. Further information, if required, is available from Mrs. Carol Steen, Principal.

#### 2.1.4 Program Objectives

The general objectives of Project "Connections" are outlined in the introductory remarks above. Specific objectives of the Allan Watson component of Project "Connections" include the general objectives as well as the following:

1. monitor student attendance and assist students in finding solutions to their attendance problems
2. establish a "buddy system" within the school for students who have attendance and related problems
3. operate a Day Care Program for teen moms (those who attend Allan Watson School as well as moms attending other schools in our vicinity) to help to "break the cycle"
4. provide support and encouragement to parents of students who are at risk

#### 2.1.5 Program Strategies (Operational Model)

Students in Watson School require a tremendous amount of support and guidance for their enormous needs. They need someone to trust, to hear them in times of crisis, and to advocate on their behalf in times of great turmoil. They often need a resource person to provide liaison between themselves and the community agencies (Social Services, Child Welfare, The Court System, the City Police, etc.), to provide them with information, support, and resources. Project "Connections" will be the vehicle which students will perceive as the means of delivering this support, guidance and assistance.

##### 2.1.5.1 Resources Needed

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Allan Watson School

1. These students in crisis need a Youth Worker, someone who will:
  - monitor students with chronic attendance problems, and assist in finding solutions to the problems
  - assist in establishing a "buddy system" within the school for those students who have attendance and related problems
  - organize and participate in some noon hour activities and sessions for individuals and small groups, especially for students in need of special attention
  - develop, administer and evaluate results of a needs assessment program to determine other specific needs as identified by students
  - develop programs and activities based on the needs assessment program
  - establish and maintain home contact/communication with the homes of those students in need of support
  - provide counselling and guidance services, in conjunction with the Counselling Department, to students in need
  - coordinate parent support programs for the parents/guardians of students at risk, to promote improved home relations, communication skills and to lessen the dysfunctions which exist in many home situations.
  
2. A small percentage of our school population (about 20% of the female population at this time) consists of "teen mothers", adolescents who have given birth and chosen to raise their babies on their own. These teen moms are interested in continuing their schooling, yet are frustrated by the lack of appropriate child care, and are experiencing a lack of parenting skills.

The school could facilitate a Day Care Program, for the teen moms, to allow them to attend school and provide them with the assistance of community agencies and on-site parenting classes. This would be a positive approach to "breaking the cycle" of social assistance provided for "children raising children". Watson School currently has three teen moms attempting to attend school, with four more female students pregnant at this time with plans to keep and parent their babies. This indicates an area of need, where a program such as this could reduce the number of adolescent females who are dropping out of school to raise their children.

A part-time coordinator could implement and coordinate a day care/parenting program such as this, for a minimal cost, providing a Day Care Operator could be found from within the community. Currently in the city, there has been excellent support for such a program from existing day care operators.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Allan Watson School

2.1.5.2 Budget

PROGRAM	NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
YOUTHWORKER	1 Full time position	\$22,000.00
	inservice for parent support groups	\$600.00
DAYCARE/PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAM	facility	minimal, provided by Board and School
	staff	provided by community day care and social services
	equipment and start up costs	\$2000.00
	parenting skills sessions with community agencies	\$2500.00
	part time coordinator	\$14,000.00
	fees for child care for teen moms	covered by subsidies and Social Services
		\$41,100.00

2.1.6 Program Partners

The partners in the Allan Watson Program are described throughout the proposal. They include the manager of Canada Employment Centre, Lethbridge, representatives of Alberta Social Services, local day care operators and the Youth Worker Program at the Lethbridge Community College

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Allan Watson School

2.1.7 Program Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of the Allan Watson strategies will conform to the general evaluation plan of the system project with several modifications to address the unique aspects of these strategies. Evaluation will focus primarily on the success of the project in meeting the needs of the teen moms with a secondary emphasis being placed on the support programs for parents. These emphases will be addressed in the following ways:

1. The level of success achieved by teen moms in the parenting classes will be assessed and will form part of the evaluation data.
2. Completion of other courses by teen moms will be monitored and rates of completion during the project will be compared with rates established prior to Project Connections being implemented.
3. Parents who participate in the parent support programs will be asked to conduct evaluations of each session which they attend. Surveys will be distributed after each session.
4. Attendance of all students will be monitored and compared with baseline data which are being compiled prior to Project "Connections" being implemented.
5. Student "turnover" (entries and exits) rates during Project "Connections" will be compared with baseline data.
6. Attempts will be made to track the number of students who are employed one year after leaving school to measure the success of the work exposure programs.
7. A general evaluation will be conducted in which students in the program will be asked to comment on it and its benefit to them.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Gilbert Paterson Community School

## 2.2 Gilbert Paterson Community School

Gilbert Paterson Community School, located in South Lethbridge, is a school that houses students in E.C.S. through Grade 9. Although there is only one class of E.C.S. and in each of the elementary grades (to Grade six), the school accepts students from grades 7 - 9 from three other elementary schools and has a junior high population of approximately 550 students. The school is considered to be a dual track school, having French Immersion classes in grades 7 - 9.

There are resources available to help students who are experiencing difficulties in Language Arts. Our counselling program attempts to meet the needs of all students who seek help or are recommended for personal assistance.

Being a designated Community School, efforts are made to include the public in the functioning of the school. Volunteers and advisory mechanisms are in place to help the citizens of our attendance area. However, we have been concerned with the amount of time and number of personnel available to assist in the area of "high risk" students.

The Philosophy of the school is to enhance the academic programs through resources brought into the school and through the school using the community as a learning laboratory. The thrust of the school is the involvement of people in the learning process and the operation of the facility. It is in the climate of caring and sharing that the school makes a conscious effort to be part of the community it serves. Our school intends to provide its students with a wholesome, well-rounded education of the highest calibre. It is our purpose to develop in each student a sense of self-worth, an attitude of caring and concern for others, and an enthusiasm toward learning.

### 2.2.1 Number And Age Range Of Target Students

Our school population of 650 ranges in age from 5 years to 16. An estimated 9% of our 12 - 16 year olds are demonstrating some form of inability to cope with daily requirements of attendance, completion of school work, participation in school recreational/club activities, and/or are demonstrating poor attitudes and low self-esteem. This type of student becomes very difficult to motivate and often sees no value for being in school -- a "Potential Drop-Out".

### 2.2.2 Basis Of Need

Although there are a number of alternative schooling programs in Lethbridge, many students prefer to attend their own school and be with their peers. In order to reach these students and their parents in a more meaningful way, to increase the likelihood that they will remain in school to completion, we propose a number of

strategies within the Project "Connections" umbrella.

#### 2.2.3 Program(s) In Which Students Are Enrolled

Our school resource programs, offered both at elementary and junior high, are targeted for students displaying learning difficulties. These programs focus on:

- assessing and diagnosing the needs of students who are demonstrating low achievement
- providing pull out programs for Language Arts
- providing option programs in Mathematics and Reading
- modifying programs in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies as required.

#### 2.2.4 Program Objectives

The Gilbert Paterson Community School portion of Project "Connections" will include the general objectives of the system wide project and will be expanded to include school specific objectives which reflect the Community School philosophy and operation at Gilbert Paterson. These objectives include the following:

1. training and utilization of peer counselling for students who are at risk.
2. involvement of school based Parent Advisory Council and the Community School Advisory board in designing and delivering programs to students who are at risk.
3. utilization of community school resources to implement a school based work exposure component.

#### 2.2.5 Program Strategies (Operational Model)

At Gilbert Paterson Community School we envision the model for Project "Connections" as a pyramid with three levels. The base of the pyramid is composed of the programs which are offered to students by the school, the community, and by special interest agencies. The "partners" in Project "Connections" comprise the second level. Here we find the school administration, the teachers, school counsellors, the project coordinators, and the parents. The apex of the pyramid is the focus of the project, that is our high risk students. Project "Connections" is intended to bring together programs and services, people with a stake in children, and the high risk students themselves. Its purpose is to build connections between the high risk students and the community safety nets where these connections and bridges have not existed before.

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Gilbert Paterson Community School

Schematic for Project "Connections" Operational Model

2.2.5.1 Resources Needed

The specific resources which are needed at Gilbert Paterson Community School to support Project "Connections" include the following:

- tutors who would assist the teacher in working with students to ensure that the students receive immediate help with their educational difficulties and to provide them with immediate, informal counselling, guidance and attention.
- a youth worker who would be responsible for monitoring attendance and completion of homework, who could provide liaison between the school and the many community and social agencies that are involved with these students, and who could plan and provide programs for parents in cooperation with other community agencies.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Gilbert Paterson Community School

2.2.5.2 Budget

PROGRAM	NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Youth Worker (Program Coordinator)	Coordination of Community based segment of program	\$22,000.00
Tutors	Individual instruction and remedial education	\$25,000.00
Parent Support	Education and coordination with parents	\$500.00
Transportation	Travel to work exposure sites.	\$1,000.00
Other Costs	Office Supplies & copying	\$1,000.00 \$1,000.00
Total		----- \$50,500.00

2.2.6 Program Partners

The partners in the Gilbert Paterson Community School Project are identified throughout the proposal. Each of the following agencies would have significant roles to play in the ongoing successful implementation of Project "Connections":

- School administration and staff
- Parent Advisory Council
- Community School Advisory
- Manager, Canada Employment Centre
- Parents' Place
- Lethbridge Family Services
- Education Undergraduates Society, U of L
- Lethbridge Community College

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Gilbert Paterson Community School

2.2.7 Program Evaluation Plan

Data are available in the computerized student records which can be accessed to provide the baseline data from which the level of success of the individual strategies of Project "Connections" could be measured. Indications of success will include significant improvement in individual performance in the following categories: report card grades (core subject marks and overall grade point averages), attendance (reduced number of lates, unexcused absences, and total absences), assignment completion ratios, and participation in school activities (clubs, intramurals and interschool sports). Reports would be generated monthly on each student associated with Project "Connections" and would form the basis for ongoing counselling and interventions with the student.

In addition, summative reports on the operation of each program strategy would be prepared twice per year and would be submitted to the system Program Coordinator for compilation with data from other schools. This could result in a "report card" for the system being prepared.

Finally, Gilbert Paterson Community School is prepared to cooperate with the Manager of Canada Employment Centre and with Alberta Education in preparing other statistical reports as may be required to assess and document the success of the program.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Hamilton Junior High

### 2.3 Hamilton Junior High School

Hamilton Junior High School has a population of approximately 640 students. It is located in a mature part of Lethbridge and serves its neighborhood as well as the West side of Lethbridge. Almost 500 students are bussed to school each day. Since students arrive only minutes before going to classes and are bussed home immediately after the end of the instructional day there are few opportunities for students to develop a close identification with the school and its programs. Also, since few parents live close to the school, there is little sense of community with the school in many of the homes of our students; most identify more closely with the recently constructed elementary schools which are located in their neighborhoods. In an effort to combat this the school has worked hard to encourage parents to come in to the school and become part of its community. At present we have more than twenty parent volunteers who work in our office, library and classrooms.

"Each for All" is our school motto and it captures the main essence of our school philosophy. At Hamilton we try to treat each student as an individual at the same time as we reinforce the idea that the individual must become part of a team, that individual actions reflect on the group and that we bear a collective responsibility for one another. Our school programs reflect our efforts to recognize and accept all individuals; we have full time programs in Learning Assistance, Severely Learning Disabled, and Learning Resources and have part time programs in Blackfoot Language and Culture as well as a Challenge program for the academically talented. We have also made a determined effort to ease the transition to junior high schools for our new grade sevens by offering an Integrated program to approximately half of these students. The Integrated program operates on a model similar to the Middle School programs and reduces the number of teachers which a student must contact. This program also helps our new students to establish relationships with their core subject teachers very quickly and to have one person to whom they are responsible for homework rather than many.

At Hamilton we take pride in the efforts we make to look upon each student as an individual and in the lengths we go to in making people feel part of the school community.

#### 2.3.1 Number And Age Range Of Target Students

The students who are the targets of Project "Connections" have been identified in the introductory remarks. At this time data which were collected at Hamilton Junior High School were used as illustrations of the type of students we are concerned about. There seems little point to repeating these descriptions here. Please see pages 5 - 9 of this document.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Hamilton Junior High

2.3.2 Basis Of Need

In similar fashion, the basis of need was established during the introductory statements. At this time it is sufficient to reiterate that the administration, counsellors and staff of Hamilton Junior High are concerned about these potential dropouts and that we have taken as many steps as possible to deal with them effectively. While our current resources, human and financial, are stretched to their limits we see Project "Connections" as an ideal opportunity to meet the needs of more of our students.

2.3.3 Program(s) In Which Students Are Enrolled

Many of the instructional programs at Hamilton were described in the school profile which began this section. At this time we are pleased to present brief outlines of specific initiatives taken within our school to address the social, emotional and psychological needs of our students. These programs and their descriptions are found below:

1. Advisor program: Hamilton teachers also function as advisors. Our advisor program focusus upon providing opportunities for students to relate to at least one adult in the school in a positive, non-threatening environment. The main emphasis of the advisor program is to provide each student with someone who will act as an advocate, who will listen and be there, who won't necessarily hassle the student and who will be a friend. To facilitate this we minimize the advisor's role in discipline and in monitoring academic achievement.
2. Peer Support Program: Hamilton Junior High School was one of the pioneers in developing and implementing a peer support program at the junior high school level in Southern Alberta. Our program is very successful in dealing with many of the problems faced by adolescent students. It has two major shortcomings. The first problem is the lack of adequate funds to train students as peer support counsellors. We are constantly operating on a shoestring and trying to patch together a program which meets the needs of our students without spending any money. The second major shortcoming of the program has two aspects, first that the students most in need of peer support counselling are not attracted to the program because they tend to perceive students who volunteer to become peer counsellors as not being their "peers". The other aspect to the same problem is our inability to attract students from the at risk group into the training programs we offer and we therefore do not have counsellors in our peer support program whom the at risk students feel comfortable about contacting.
3. Parental contacts: All parents of students in academic

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Hamilton Junior High

- difficulty are contacted a minimum of seven times during the first eight months of the school year either by telephone or in writing. These contacts keep parents informed about the progress their students are making and also offer assistance in monitoring daily work.
4. "Homework books": At parent or student request we offer a service to students in which students are provided with a duo-tang in which they record their daily assignments, have the teacher initial the record at the end of each class, then bring the book home to their parents at night. Parents can then monitor the completion of homework and initial the sheet when all work has been completed. The sheets are checked either daily or weekly by a member of the administrative or counselling staff. It was initially intended that this system have an incentive or "reward" system built into it, but we have not been successful in finding a sponsor for the program in the community and do not have sufficient financial resources within the school to do it ourselves.
  5. "Winit" Program, student of the week, other incentives: Our school operates a Winit program as designed by Coyle and Greer. Students receive Winites in more than 100 categories as positive reinforcement of positive action. In addition we run a student of the week program which recognizes a student from each grade for non-academic positive activities around the school. Finally we offer numerous other incentives to become involved in our school through competitions in our advisor system, students' council activities, fund raising, and so on.
  6. Personal contacts with administrators and counsellors: For the past two years we have run a program of regular administrative and counsellor contact with students in academic difficulty. A minimum of seven meetings are scheduled each year (at the mid-point and just after each report card). These interviews provide students with personal attention and offer assistance and advice regarding study skills, homework, involvement in school activities, etc. We believe they have a significant positive impact on our students. During last school year, the number of students in academic difficulty slowly dropped from more than 140 to fewer than 50, mostly, we believe, as a result of students realizing that their efforts were being monitored and that someone was taking a personal interest in them.

PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"-Individual School Projects  
Hamilton Junior High

2.3.4 Program Objectives

The objectives of Hamilton's strategies within Project "Connections" include the general strategies listed on Page one of this document as well as the following which are specific to our school:

1. To improve academic achievement levels of individual student participants in Project "Connections" by providing them with individualized tutoring, supervision of homework, and instruction in study skills.
2. To improve "connection" with the school through the provision of individual and small group contacts with caring adults. These contacts will extend the contacts which are normally made as part of the advisor program and classroom instruction and are intended to be positive and supportive.
3. To improve the support which these students receive at home by assisting their parents to develop appropriate parenting skills and by facilitating the establishment of appropriate parent support networks in our community.
4. To improve the self-esteem of these students through various strategies and incentives including many of the things mentioned above as well as the work exposure and work experience programs which are described in the summary remarks at the end of this document.

2.3.5 Program Strategies (Operational Model)

The program strategies at Hamilton will be consistent with the objectives of the program. The strategies have been identified under four broad headings and are described below:

1. Instructional Programs: Students will continue to receive regular instruction in their classrooms with their teachers, but will be offered additional support outside the classroom through the services of tutor/supervisors from the Education Undergraduate Society at the University of Lethbridge. The tutor/supervisors will also assist students to develop improved study skills and will supervise their homework.
2. Connections: The program coordinator will be responsible for this set of strategies. Students will notice that they are frequently called before school opens for the day to ensure that they are coming, that they are welcomed to the school each day they attend by some member of the staff and that they are "missed" if they are not present at school. We have made preliminary contact with our local Burger King and MacDonald's franchises and are optimistic that this aspect of the program will include some form of a "Miss

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Hamilton Junior High

School Miss Out!" program.

3. Parent Support: Students will notice that their parents have much more frequent contact with the school and that the contacts are not always negative. Rather they will see that the school is offering support and assistance to their parents and that the parents are increasing their support for and commitment to the school. The program coordinator will be responsible for arranging many of the parent support activities with existing community agencies.
4. Self-Esteem Building: We are currently planning for implementation of a series of community service options, including some complementary courses in which selected students will have opportunities to make important contributions around the school (in the office, library, canteen, etc.). Instruction of these courses will be offered by certificated teachers; supervision of much of the practical work will be accomplished by the tutor/supervisors and facilitation of the work schedules will be the responsibility of the program coordinator.

#### 2.3.5.1 Resources Needed

The resources required to operate Hamilton's strategies of Project "Connections" are outlined below:

1. Program Coordinator: This person will be responsible for the day to day operations of the program and will be the primary liaison between the program and the school administration. This person will have the added responsibility of coordinating program services with those of the many community agencies which support and facilitate the program.
2. Tutor/Supervisors: We anticipate needing approximately 2500 hours of tutor/supervisor services. This will allow us to have four full time equivalent persons at the school during normal hours of operation. Since we anticipate using tutor/supervisors from the Education Undergraduates Society at the University of Lethbridge, as many as twenty different people may be involved in these activities at any given time.

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Hamilton Junior High

2.3.5.2 Budget

PROGRAM	NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Project Coordinator	1 Full time position	\$22,000.00
	inservice for parents	\$1,000.00
Tutor/Supervisors	2500 h @ \$10.00	\$25,000.00
Office Operations	supplies, materials	\$1,000.00
	copying, equipment	\$1,000.00
Transportation		\$1,000.00
Total		\$51,000.00

2.3.6 Program Partners

The partners in the Hamilton Junior High School strategies are described throughout this proposal. They include the Education Undergraduates Society at the University of Lethbridge, the Lethbridge Community College Child Care and Youth Worker Program, community support agencies such as Parents' Place and Lethbridge Family Services, provincial agencies such as Alberta Mental Health and Alberta Family and Social Services, local business such as Burger King and MacDonald's, and (if the community recycling project is approved) the manager of the Canada Employment Centre.

2.3.7 Program Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of Hamilton's strategies will follow procedures and criteria which are consistent with the general evaluation plan for the whole project which is described in the summary remarks. In addition to data which will be compiled on a district wide basis we intend to evaluate the success of our strategies by measuring changes in the behaviors of individual participants in the program. We will compare baseline data regarding attendance, lates, homework completion and academic success as well as look for increased participation in the many other programs at Hamilton.

Parents will be asked to evaluate the services we offer to them through questionnaires and, when appropriate, interviews. Student participants will be given an opportunity to comment on the success of the program through the system-wide evaluation. Businesses and other partners will also be contacted for their appraisal of the success of the project.

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## 2.4 Wilson Junior High School

Wilson Junior High School serves a population of approximately 650 students in grades 7 - 9. It is the only junior high school on the North side of Lethbridge, and most of the recent immigrants to the city have settled within the Wilson attendance area. Because of this, approximately 15% of Wilson's student population have English as their second language and, in response to their needs, Wilson has been declared an Intercultural School. Several major initiatives are in place to welcome immigrant students and to meet their special needs. Wilson Junior High School has a full time English as a Second Language Program.

Wilson has also implemented a "Consultative Team" to address the needs of new students, academically unsuccessful students and non-attenders. The team addresses social, emotional, physical and behavioural concerns of these students. The team consists of the principal, two school counsellors, the learning disabilities teacher, a psychologist from the School District, the individual student's advisor, and the teacher who referred the student to the team. Parents and "other significant people" join the team as appropriate.

### 2.4.1 Number And Age Range Of Target Students

Many of the 100 students who have English as a second language are at risk of failing to complete high school. The stress placed on them by their new country with its different customs and culture in combination with difficulties in learning a new language and adjusting to a new educational system, make successful school completion beyond the abilities of many of these students.

Other characteristics which we believe are linked with early school leaving include lack of academic success and poor attendance patterns. After the first reporting period in the 1990 - 91 school year, 113 students were identified as academically unsuccessful (Note: the same criteria are used at Wilson as were listed in the introductory statements on Page 6 of this document). Also, 40 students were identified as having significant attendance problems. These forty students have frequent absences from school which are not associated with sickness or treatment of medical problems.

### 2.4.2 Basis Of Need

The resources of Wilson school and our School District have been stretched to their limits in implementing the many programs we already have in place. Our English as a Second Language program is overcrowded. Teachers are putting their best efforts forward to provide extra help and to design modified programs for students with special needs. The single attendance officer in

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Lethbridge School District No. 51 has his hands full in dealing with more than 8000 students. There seems to be little more that can be done in our School District and in our school with the present resources and facilities.

2.4.3 Program(s) In Which Students Are Enrolled

The programs of Wilson Junior High School have been described in the preamble to this section. Further information, if required, is available from Mrs. Pat Hales, Principal.

2.4.4 Program Objectives

The objectives of Wilson's strategies within Project "Connections" will include those identified in the introductory remarks of this document. These will be complemented by the following specific objectives which are intended to reflect the unique nature and mode of operation of Wilson Junior High School. Project "Connections" will:

1. Assist new students, especially students with English as a second language to adjust to a different school culture by providing them with an opportunity to understand what the school and the other agencies of the City of Lethbridge have to offer.
2. Provide regular contact with chronic non-attenders to encourage improved attendance. This will include home visits and counselling where this is deemed advisable. The intention is to show these students and their families that the school cares about them.
3. Connect non-attending students with appropriate community agencies in order to assist students in dealing with other circumstances which may contribute to non-attendance and lack of success at school. Referrals for concerns such as substance abuse, legal advice, physical and mental abuse, pregnancy, depression, suicide, etc., would be coordinated within Project "Connections".

2.4.5 Program Strategies (Operational Model)

We intend to operate the Wilson Project "Connections" through a project coordinator who will be responsible for developing an individualized program to meet the specific needs of the students. The referral process will be simple and direct. Self referral will be encouraged as well as referral by parents or by staff members. All new students registering in Wilson during the school year will be automatically referred to the project coordinator for orientation to the school and for informal assessment of other needs which may not be immediately apparent. Students with aberrant attendance patterns will be referred to the program coordinator by the school administrators.

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Wilson Junior High

The Project "Connections" coordinator will work closely with the school's Consultative Team and will have significant input into the development of special educational programs for students requiring Project "Connections". In addition, the Project "Connections" coordinator will work with individual school staff members to ensure that they are informed of initiatives being taken on behalf of needy students. Articulation of school-based services with community-based programs will reinforce the work of each of these major stakeholders and will also promote efficiency by reducing the duplication of many important services.

#### 2.4.5.1 Resources Needed

The major resource required to support the strategies of Project "Connections" which will be offered at Wilson Junior High School will be a project coordinator. This person will work with students, parents and staff and will coordinate the services provided to students at Wilson by other community agencies.

#### 2.4.5.2 Budget

PROGRAM	NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Project Coordinator	Salary and Benefits	\$22,000.00
Parent Support	Workshops, incidental costs, etc	\$2,500.00.
Transportation	Work Exposure Program	\$1,000.00
Other	Supplies, Materials, copying, etc	\$2,000.00
		-----
Total		\$27,500.00

#### 2.4.6 Program Partners

Again, the partners in Project "Connections" have been identified throughout the description of the Wilson Strategies. It is significant to note that Wilson Junior High School's Consultative Team will have a major role in the program and that the activities of the many community based partners will be coordinated through the school based Project "Connections" coordinator and the Consultative Team.

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Wilson Junior High

2.4.7 Program Evaluation Plan

Wilson's strategies within Project "Connections" will be evaluated in June of each year so modifications can be made which will enhance their effectiveness. Input will be solicited from all stakeholders in the project including students, parents, staff members, the coordinator, and community agencies participating in the strategies. Written testimonies will be solicited from participants in the evaluation and these will be supported by questionnaires. The project coordinator will keep a logbook record of all contacts with students, parents and community agencies as well as details of plans of action and follow up to each contact. Data will also be retained relative to workshops provided to parents and/or students. Also comparisons of student attendance and achievement data will be made as part of the evaluation of the system wide Project "Connections" program.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Summary Statements

## 3.0 Summary Statements

In Lethbridge we believe strongly that for a school program to be successful it must "fit" into the overall character of that school. It must be consistent with the school's philosophy and way of operation. It must not depart radically from what the school usually does nor must its mode of operation be foreign. For these reasons, we have decided to allow each school to design its own specific operational model under a system wide "umbrella" group. Each school has done this. There are many similarities in the approaches taken. This should not be surprising; our community is not large and the administrators of our schools meet frequently to discuss issues. There is also considerable movement of staff members among the secondary schools in Lethbridge.

A component of Project "Connections" which has been alluded to, but not described in detail in any of the individual school proposals is the aspect of work exposure. There are many reasons for this but primary among them is the relatively small size of Lethbridge and the few opportunities for job placements for students in the 12 - 15 age range within our city. The two senior high schools and Allan Watson School all operate work experience programs in our community and these programs have already stretched the ability of our business community to the limit in attempting to find appropriate, meaningful placements for our students in these programs. We have no wish to compete with the senior high schools for job placements, nor do we have any confidence that we would be successful if we chose to compete directly for work experience placements.

Rather, we have decided to attempt to create our own opportunities for work exposure and work experience within Project "Connections". One example of this is the proposal for a school-based day care centre at Allan Watson school. This centre will provide a valuable service to students with critical needs, will allow us to offer enhancements to our educational programs and will also provide job placement opportunities at the centre.

A second work exposure project which we propose will meet these same criteria if approved for inclusion in Project "Connections". It is a proposal for creation and operation of a community recycling project. A number of attempts by local businesses to operate such projects have not been successful primarily, we believe, because of Lethbridge's small size. Our City Council has recognized this and has attempted to encourage such projects by offering grants of \$5.00 per tonne to assist with collection and storage of paper for recycling. In spite of this no projects are currently in place in Lethbridge.

We have contacted a local businessman who has made several attempts to operate recycling projects. He currently operates a container return depot and believes that it could be expanded to

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Summary Statements

a general recycling project if several conditions were changed. He requires a larger supply of paper of all types to make collection viable and also feels a responsibility to accept other types of glass and plastic containers as well. The kinds of work required in such a recycling depot are not beyond the abilities of junior high aged students either in requirements of strength or in terms of operation of equipment, etc. We believe that, if we are able to work out the details of such a community based project and if we are successful in obtaining appropriate financial support for its initial stages, then we will have accomplished the objectives of providing a much needed service to our community, allowing us to enhance certain aspects of our educational programs (mainly aspects concerned with preservation of the environment and with wise use of resources), and creating a significant number of opportunities for work exposure and work experience to junior high aged students.

We request, however, that this aspect of Project "Connections" be considered separately from the remainder of this proposal because while we believe in its importance as a vehicle to provide our students with an opportunity for meaningful exposure to the world of work and while we are strongly committed to the concept of work as a way of building self-esteem, we do not wish to have approval of other aspects of the project to hinge on an idea which departs considerably from what has traditionally been done for junior high school aged students. We are also cognizant of potential difficulties in certain types of employment for students as young as those who would be enrolled in the project.

### 3.1 Summary Of Resources Requested

Project Connections requires the following resources for successful implementation:

1. Youth Workers at each school. These youth workers would serve as project coordinators for the strategies which are implemented at each school and would also be the front line troops in dealing with student participants in the program on a day-to-day basis. The Youth Workers would also be responsible for monitoring attendance patterns of students in the program and for initiating appropriate interventions when attendance problems arise.
2. Tutor/Supervisors. These persons would be responsible for providing tutorial services and remedial programs to students, for assisting them in developing improved study skills and for supervising them in doing homework. It is hoped that by increasing their levels of success at school, students in Project "Connections" will be more likely to remain in school.
3. Parent Support. We hope to increase the amount of support available to students by helping their parents. We wish to

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Summary Statements

offer parenting skills workshops, assistance in organizing parent support groups and additional information to parents so they can become more effective in dealing with their students. It is, in our opinion, vital that we begin to break the vicious cycles of "disconnection" which are so apparent in many of our dealings with at risk students and their parents.

4. Cooperation and Coordination of Services. The school is one place where all students are accessible to community agencies. Through Project "Connections" we hope to be able to coordinate services, improve efficiency, reduce duplication and overlap and increase effectiveness of such services.

## 3.2 Community Project Budget

1. System-Wide Coordination	\$25,000.00
2. School Based Coordination (Youth workers at each school who would be responsible for coordination of school strategies, for dealing with attendance, for counselling and support and for youth advocacy. 4 @ \$22,000.00)	\$88,000.00
3. Tutoring/Supervision Services (2 @ \$25,000.00)	\$50,000.00
4. Parent Support Services & Inservice Programs	\$7,100.00
5. Transportation	\$3,000.00
6. Equipment, Supplies & Miscellaneous Costs	\$8,000.00
7. Child Care Centre	\$14,000.00
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TOTAL PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"	\$195,100.00
8. Community Recycling Project Subsidy	\$25,000.00
	-----
	\$220,100.00

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Summary Statements

## 3.3 Evaluation Plan

Evaluation of Project "Connections" will, essentially, consist of a compilation of the evaluations of the strategies implemented at each of the participating schools as well as the evaluation of the community recycling project if it is approved. This compilation will be the responsibility of the Project "Connections" coordinator. The following data will be collected for use in the evaluation:

1. Attendance records for students in the program, including number of lates, truancies, and excused absences.
2. Assignment and homework completion data similar to that included in the introductory remarks will be collected for all schools. Baseline data will be compared with data collected during and after the project.
3. Records of participation in school activities, clubs, etc., will be compiled. Increasing levels of participation in these activities during the project will indicate success since we do not have "hard" baseline data.
4. Surveys of participants and project "partners" will be conducted. These surveys will be prepared by the project coordinator and will include at least some items which address changes of attitudes as a result of participation in the project.
5. Interviews will be conducted with a limited number of participants and partners to allow open ended comments which are not possible in most surveys.
6. A "log" of each school's strategies will be prepared and will be included as data in the evaluation. The format of these logs will be determined by the coordinator of Project "Connections" and will be consistent among the schools.
7. Any other data which may be required either by Alberta Education or by Canada Employment and Immigration will be collected and made available as part of the evaluation.

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" - Summary Statements

## 4.0 Project Timelines

It is our intention that, following approval of our proposal, details of individual strategies will be firmed up and all baseline data collected. This will take place during the period from April 1, 1991 to June 30, 1991. Strategies will be implemented commencing on September 1, 1991 and will operate for a complete school year (until June 30, 1992). At that time the project's initial evaluation will determine whether it continues for additional years. As well, the evaluation of individual strategies will determine whether they are continued, modified or dropped.

**APPENDIX B: PROJECT CONNECTIONS BUDGET**

LETHBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 51  
PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"

206

A Program Operating under Employment and Immigration Canada's  
START Program

PROJECTED BUDGET  
1991 - 92 School Year

REVENUE:

Total Grant Approved \$150,000.00

EXPENSES:

Administration and Coordination \$0.00  
(to be absorbed by LSD No. 51)

Wage Costs (Participants)

Position	No of Persons	Total Hours	Hourly Rate	Total Cost
Youth Care Workers	3	4387.5	11.11	48745.00
Youth Care Workers	1	1462.5	11.85	17325.00
Tutors	?*	5100.0	10.00	51000.00

Total Wages \$117,070.00

Mandatory Employment Related Costs 11,230.00

Reserve for Negotiated Salary Increases 3,600.00

Overhead Costs

- Telephone Line Rental	1440.00	
- Duplicating and Supplies	2610.00	
- Parent Support Groups/Inservice (incl. teen parenting, P.D for participants and teachers, etc.)	2100.00	
- Transportation (Buspasses/car allow)	2000.00	
- Group Interaction Activities (Peer Support, Therapy & Development, Field Trips, Special Activities)	2000.00	
- Community Service Activities (includes Community Events, Rec. passes, special events passes, etc.)	2000.00	
- Recognition and Awards	1000.00	
- Assessment and Evaluation	1000.00	
Total Overhead Costs		14,150.00

Special Costs

- Equipment Leasing/Purchase (Telephone Handsets and Computer terminals)	3950.00	
- Audit (to be borne by LSD No. 51)	0.00	
Total Special Costs		3,950.00

TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENSES 150,000.00

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"

## EXPLANATORY NOTES RELATED TO PROJECTED BUDGET

1. We cannot, at this time, provide a specific number of persons who will be involved with the program as tutors. Each school will be allocated a total of 1275 hours to provide tutoring to students who are participants in Project "Connections". The tutors will be hired from within our community including tutors available through the University of Lethbridge (Education Undergraduate Society), the Lethbridge Community College, etc.
2. The Community Youth Care Workers who will be employed through Project "Connections" are covered by a Collective Agreement between Lethbridge School District No. 51 and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (Local 2843). No Collective Agreement has been negotiated for the 1991-92 School Year. We project an increase of approximately 5.5% and have allocated a reserve to accommodate this anticipated increase.
3. We have attempted to itemize the Overhead Costs quite specifically. This being the first time we have participated in a program such as this we recognize that the estimates may not be completely accurate. It is our hope that estimates within this category could be reallocated based on our perceptions of need as the program develops.
4. Project "Connections" will necessitate the acquisition of one computer terminal and one additional telephone handset in each school. We have not been able to obtain a price for lease of handsets compatible with the AGT Trillium system, therefore have included the purchase price of these sets in our projections. Similarly, we have included the purchase price of \$650.00 for computer terminals (4) in our estimates because, if we act now we can obtain very special pricing on these as part of a much larger purchase of computer equipment. Normal 1 year lease charges (including service contract) on these terminals is approximately \$480.00 per year.
5. We wish to enquire regarding the amount of flexibility we have in moving expenditures from one category to another within the general budget.

Coordination of Project "Connections" will be the responsibility of the Associate Superintendent of Student Services for Lethbridge School District No. 51, with direct supervision being the responsibility of the Coordinator in the program. All facilities will be provided by Lethbridge School District No. 51, as will custodial and caretaking services. Most day-to-day supplies, copying, etc. will be provided by the schools as part of their normal operating budgets; the only charges to Project "Connections" will be supplies and copying related to extension of the program beyond the scope of normal school operations (eg. Parent Support, Teen Parenting, Workshops and Inservice, etc.). Accounting and Audit relative to Project "Connections" will be

the responsibility of the Business Affairs Department and the School District's auditor.

LETHBRIDGE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 51  
 PROJECT "CONNECTIONS" 209  
 A Program Operating under Employment and Immigration Canada's  
 START Program

PROJECTED BUDGET  
 1992 - 93 School Year

REVENUE:

Total Grant Requested \$169,667.00

EXPENSES:

Administration and Coordination \$0.00  
 (to be absorbed by LSD No. 51)

Wage Costs (Participants)

Position	No of Persons	Total Hours	Hourly Rate	Total Cost
Youth Care Workers	3	4389.0	12.84	56355.00
Youth Care Workers	1	1463.0	14.33	20968.00
Tutors	?*	5100.0	11.00	56100.00

Total Wages \$133,423.00

Mandatory Employment Related Costs 16,144.00

Overhead Costs

- Telephone Line Rental	1440.00
- Duplicating and Supplies	4610.00
- Parent Support Groups/Inservice (incl. teen parenting, P.D for participants and teachers, etc.)	2100.00
- Transportation (Buspasses/car allow)	2000.00
- Group Interaction Activities (Peer Support, Therapy & Development, Field Trips, Special Activities)	2000.00
- Community Service Activities (includes Community Events, Rec. passes, special events passes, etc.)	2000.00
- Recognition and Awards	1000.00
- Assessment and Evaluation	1000.00
Total Overhead Costs	16,150.00

Special Costs

- Equipment Leasing/Purchase (Computer terminals & software)	3950.00
- Audit (to be borne by LSD No. 51)	0.00
Total Special Costs	3,950.00

TOTAL BUDGETED EXPENSES 169,667.00

## PROJECT "CONNECTIONS"

## EXPLANATORY NOTES RELATED TO PROJECTED BUDGET

Coordination of Project "Connections" will be the responsibility of the Associate Superintendent of Student Services for Lethbridge School District No. 51, with direct supervision being the responsibility of the Coordinator in the program. All facilities will be provided by Lethbridge School District No. 51, as will custodial and caretaking services. Most day-to-day supplies, copying, etc. will be provided by the schools as part of their normal operating budgets; the only charges to Project "Connections" will be supplies and copying related to extension of the program beyond the scope of normal school operations (eg. Parent Support, Teen Parenting, Workshops and Inservice, etc.). Accounting and Audit relative to Project "Connections" will be the responsibility of the Business Affairs Department and the School District's auditor.

The projected expenditures in all wage categories have been increased to reflect Collective Agreement settlements for the 1992 - 93 School Year. This is due to negotiated increases to salary grids for employees of Lethbridge School District No. 51 who are members of CUPE Local 2843. In addition, most of the CYCW's employed under Project Start have earned an experience increment. Tutoring costs have also been increased by a 10% factor although the tutors are employed on a fee for services basis. We believe that the principle of equity should be used to provide them with an increase comparable to that of Project Start staff who are members of the union.

Employment related cost estimates have also been increased by 10% to reflect increased benefit premiums which will be incurred by the Board.

Projected costs for overhead and special costs have been maintained at levels approved for the 1991 - 92 school year with the exception of supplies and materials. Our tutoring programs have suffered somewhat by severe restrictions in the supply and material areas. An additional \$2000.00 is being requested to allow the tutoring programs to acquire needed supplies and materials.

Special costs have also been maintained at 1991 - 92 levels to provide for continued lease of computer terminals for administrative needs in each school as well to allow some administrative software to be modified to meet specific requirements of Project Start re: tracking of students and evaluation of the project.

- Revisions to Project Start for 1992 - 93 School Year

It is the intention of Lethbridge School District No. 51 to continue to operate Project Connections under the same general guidelines that were approved for the 1991 - 92 school year. The program will operate at Allan Watson School, Gilbert Paterson Community School, Hamilton Junior High School and Wilson Junior High School. Each school will be responsible for day to day operation of the program in their school and, as was the case last year, slight differences among the programs will exist to meet specific needs at each school. General coordination will continue to be provided by the School District and a second general evaluation will be conducted by the District.

Responsibilities of Project Start personnel will remain essentially unchanged from last year. The emphasis will continue to be on personal counselling to improve self-esteem and attitude toward school attendance and tutoring to improve school achievement in keeping with the overall goals of the stay in school initiatives under which this program operates.

Several minor changes in emphasis have been accepted by the School District for 1992 - 93, and it is hoped that these will be supported by the Project. These are:

1. To enhance the school based Parent Support Groups. These groups provide much needed support to the students in Project Start and to their families. Through Parent Support Groups we hope to be able to provide one more avenue for ensuring that students are able to attend school regularly.
2. To implement a Teen Support Group. This group is intended to provide a unifying force among the four school programs which operate under Project Start. Teens would meet in a city-wide group to engage in self-esteem building activities, community recreation events and to provide community service work, especially with the Senior Citizens' Centre. Preliminary plans for the Teen Support Group include bi-weekly meetings for these activities. The activity would be coordinated by Project Link (funded through Alberta Family and Social Services).
3. To provide continued support for students who participated in Project Start during the 1991 - 92 school year and who will be in Senior High School during 1992 - 93. We feel that it is important for us to be able to continue to track students who have participated in Project Start even after they leave our schools and to support them in their continued attendance at school. This extension of the program would enable us to do so. These efforts will be coordinated with stay in school initiatives which are already in place at the High School level.

**APPENDIX C - G: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### PROJECT CONNECTIONS STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Hi, my name is Wendy Fox and I am here to find out as much as I can about "Project Connections". Since the focus of the program is to assist students I feel that your opinion is very important. By answering my questions you will be helping us to decide if this program is working. Also, I will be very interested in how you think the program might be improved.

This is strictly a voluntary interview. If you do not wish to participate you don't have to. Also, if any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable please let me know. If you don't understand a question I will gladly repeat it for you.

The information you give me, along with that which I receive from other students, will be used in a report I am writing summarizing Project Connections. Your name will not appear in my notes or in my final report. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. What grade are you in?
2. Were you ever asked to repeat a grade? Which one?
3. Are you involved in any school activities?
4. Have you ever considered quitting school? Why?
5. How long have you been involved with Project Connections?
6. What were your feelings about school before you became involved with the project?
7. What would you say were/are your biggest problems associated with school?
8. Has school attendance been a problem for you? Has this program help you to attend more regularly? Why?
9. How do you feel about school now?
10. Has Project Connections made a difference in how you feel about school?
11. Are you involved in tutoring? How often?

12. a) What do you like best about the tutoring program?  
b) What is the one thing that you would change about it?
13. If I were a new student to the school what would you tell me about Project Connections?
14. a) What do you like best about Project Connections?  
b) What is the one thing that you would change about it?

Thank you very much for your help! It has been great talking with you.

(file: Inde3)

## PROJECT CONNECTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKERS

1. How many students do you have in the program at present?
2. How many students in total have you included in the program this year?
3. Where do you spend the majority of your time?
4. Do you feel that you have adequate parental support for your program?
5. Do you feel that you have adequate administrative support?
6. Do you feel that you have adequate support from the teachers - for the project as a whole? - for the tutoring program?
7. Is your role different from the counsellors in the school? How?
8. Have there been times when you have felt that you lack the training or experience (in the schools) to be able to deal with situations effectively?
9. What do you feel are the strengths of the program?
10. What aspects do you feel require change and what specifically would you do?
11. Do you feel that you have had an impact on kids? In what way?
12. Tell me about one of your success stories.
13. Are there any students that your program has not been able to reach and what do you think the reason for this is?

(file: Inde5)

## APPENDIX E

PROJECT CONNECTIONS  
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR COUNSELLORS/TEACHERS

1. (Counsellors only) How often do you meet with the CYCW's?
2. (Counsellors only) How have your roles changed as a result of the project?
3. What do you think are the strengths of the project?
4. What do you think could/should be changed and why?
5. Is the tutoring program effective?
6. What improvements have you noticed in your school since the project began?
7. How has the teaching staff accepted the program?
8. (Counsellors only) What reactions, if any, have you had from parents?
9. Do you believe that the project should be continued?

(file: Inde8)

## APPENDIX F

## PROJECT CONNECTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL-BASED ADMINISTRATORS

1. How often do you meet with the CYW and or counsellors?
2. How have the roles of your counsellors changed as a result of this project?
3. What do you think are the strengths of the project?
4. Are there still some students who even this program has failed to help?
5. What do you think could/should be changed and why?
6. Is the tutoring program effective?
7. What improvements have you noticed in your school since the project began?
8. How has the teaching staff accepted the program?
9. What reactions, if any, have you had from parents?
10. How has the project affected your workload in relation to truancies? at-risk students?
11. Do you believe that the project should be continued? Why or why not?

(file: Inde6)

## APPENDIX G

## PROJECT CONNECTIONS

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR DISTRICT COORDINATORS (C.O.)

1. What do see are the strengths of Project Connections?
2. What do you believe could and should be changed for the second year of the project?
3. What do you believe has been the key to the successes this year?
4. What have been your major frustrations with the project?
5. What elements of the project do you believe have been the most challenging for the CYW's? why?
6. What elements of the project do you believe have been the most challenging for the school-based administrators?
7. Do you believe that the funding amount was adequate?
8. Do you believe the project has duplicated any services already in existence in the system? If so, is this duplication unnecessary? What changes should be made?
9. What comments, if any, have you received from the community in response to the project?
10. How has the project been publicized? Would you have made any changes in that area? If so, what changes and why?

(file: Inde7)

**APPENDIX H: TESTIMONIAL LETTERS**

**The following testimonial letters were written by parents from the participating schools and were offered as support for continued funding for Project Connections.**

To whom it may concern;

Project Start is an excellent program to have in the Schools. There are children in this program that have benefited so much. I'm sure that some of these children probably wouldn't be attending school if it wasn't for this program.

I have two children in this program and already I have seen an improvement in their attitudes about school; in their grades, and getting along and understanding more at home about why we ask them to study.

I strongly believe that some of these children would be at a loss if not for this program. I hope that this program will grow so that children in other schools will have this opportunity. I support Project Start to the fullest in hopes that it will continue at School.

Let me add that \_\_\_\_\_ has been a great support for these children and a good friend. She has done a wonderful job at keeping this program working and benefiting the children. I believe that's what this program is all about.

March 10, 1992

221

Honorable James Dinning,  
Minister of Education,  
Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Mr. Dinning;

I'm writing to enlist your help in efforts to have funding continued for a program at \_\_\_\_\_ School in Lethbridge.

The program is Project Connections, designed to provide an opportunity for those who have been struggling with the regular class work and have become turned off with school, heading for being drop outs.

We moved to Lethbridge from Edmonton six weeks ago and my Grade 7 son \_\_\_\_\_ is in Project Connections. There was no such program in Edmonton and I was told there by officials of two schools that nothing like it could be found for Grade 7 students in Alberta, perhaps in Ontario. \_\_\_\_\_ has been battling with regular school for several years and is certainly not at the Grade 7 level in the core subjects.

You can imagine how excited I was when arriving in Lethbridge and finding the program at \_\_\_\_\_ High. \_\_\_\_\_ was also excited and remains so. He says if it weren't for the program he'd be skipping school. He still has to take the regular subjects but they are given in a setting within the school, with tutors as students from the University of Lethbridge. Had he been put in a special education group, like they wanted to in Edmonton, he would not have had his options such as industrial arts and home economics, which he likes very much and does quite well in. In the Lethbridge program he keeps his options and also has all the extra-curricular activities as a Grade 7 student.

I understand Project Connections was started last fall and has a combination of funding from the federal and provincial governments. The problem being faced by school officials and parents and students in the program is that funding was only provided to the end of June this year. Everyone concerned is anxious to have the funding extended into the years ahead, so students who have problems will not drop out at age 16, and will have their rightful chance to make good, getting an education that can lead them into fields where they have talents apart from academic fields.

more

Project Connections takes a student from where he or she is, in other words from the place where they know what they like to do and can do well, to deal with things they would like to learn to do - all the while not neglecting the core subjects.

In . . . 's education until coming to Lethbridge the teachers always said . . . was able to do the regular work but 'didn't apply himself.' That's really not an answer to a problem.

I was impressed that soon after . . . was enrolled in . . . in the regular classwork program, the teachers and others soon recognized he needed an alternative route or he would soon be totally turned off with the school and all those with it.

In a matter of days I was contacted by the school's principal, . . . and a meeting was arranged with . . . 's teacher, a counsellor, . . . , myself, and the leader of the Project Connections program. We explored possibilities for . . . , including a rewards plan. When it came down to it we all agreed that the Project Connections program was best suited to . . . 's needs. I felt, and others agreed, for instance, that a rewards program would only put . . . under more pressure and risk a negative result if he tried and likely failed to earn the reward.

I personally can relate to . . . program here in . . . school because I dropped out of school in Ontario years ago mainly because there was no alternative to the regular classwork I struggled with. A few years ago I went to NAIT in Edmonton and found that in high school upgrading I could do the work but that was because I was a mature student. When you're young ( . . . is 13) the world is seen as quite a different place and the importance of education can't be realized if you are struggling over your head.

I have met the leaders of Project Connections and work with them. They are sincerely dedicated to the challenge of helping students to succeed - and above all to stay connected with the school and education system. I'm sure the program would year after year play an ever more important role in giving young students their rightful and fair chance at an education.

Above all, I feel it would be devastating to . . . and others if the program that they fit into so well were suddenly dropped when they just got to feel good about it and school in general. Surely it can be seen that funding for the program is a vital part of our education system, especially since we as a community and country are trying to become more competitive in the economic field. We badly need those who can acquire good levels of skills in vocational fields and technical expertise.

I understand the funding for Project Connections is shared by federal and provincial departments. I ask you, as minister, to use all authority and influence at your call to influence the continuation of the program launched last year at . . .

Thank you for your help. As one parent with a child in the program here I sincerely hope it can continue.

Yours ~~truly~~,

CC: to Lethbridge MLAs, Lethbridge MP  
and public school board.

Lethbridge, Alberta,  
TIK 5N1

March 10, 1992

Dear

When three of our grandchildren and their mother . moved recently to Lethbridge from Edmonton the grandchildren were enrolled in

As grandparents we were aware of the grandchildren's levels of school studies, especially aware that ., a Grade 7 student, was having considerable difficulty coping with the core subjects. The grandchildren, by the way, are ., his . sister also in Grade 7, and ., in Grade 9.

We were more than pleased to discover that . had a special program, Project Connections, that seemed tailored to . 's needs. Shortly after being in ., he was placed in Project Connections, and so far it seems more-than-adequately suited to his needs.

Our delight in finding such a program, however, was dampened when we learned the funding for Project Connections is only to the end of this school year.

It is our strong feeling this type of program is a long-needed part of our educational system. Years ago, we had one of our children drop out of school at Grade 9, the reason almost entirely, we feel was that there was nothing else available when he had difficulties with the standard program of core subjects.

We have met the leader, . of Project Connections, along with some who work with her. We are confident the program is well lead and staffed.

For the sake of our grandson and others for whom Project Connections is essential to giving them a fair break in school we strongly hope funding will be extended to the program for the years ahead.

Accordingly, we have written our concerns to Jim Dinning, Alberta minister of Education, with copies to Lethbridge MLAs John Gogo and Dick Johnston, as well as Lethbridge MP Blaine Thacker.

Yours truly,

Sunday, March 1/92

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express my appreciation and support for "Project Start" at \_\_\_\_\_.

My son \_\_\_\_\_; has been receiving tutoring in math since mid-January, 1992. \_\_\_\_\_ had been increasingly frustrated with his ability to do his math assignments, and he wanted some help. I had been helping him at home, but I was finding it very difficult.

We are both extremely grateful for the tutoring services in the school in Grade 9 math. \_\_\_\_\_ is much happier, as he feels his schoolwork is back under his control, and he can still be in the regular math class with his peers.

I feel the excellent reinforcement of his day-to-day math assignment that he gets at tutoring is the strength of this program, which can be gained in no other way than with the tutor working closely with the classroom teacher.

The assistance and receptiveness of the school, especially from \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_'s tutor, Corey, have been wonderful, and this reinforced the feeling in \_\_\_\_\_ that he can do something about his math.

Thank you from both of us,

March 2, 1992

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To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter in support of the Project Start program. Right now my daughter is taking advantage of it, and I am grateful for this. She had a lot of problems with her English and was getting very depressed and discouraged, but now that she had that help, it made a world of difference to her. She improved greatly her mark. She herself, appreciate the kindness and caring of all the people that are involved in this program. When a child receive the help that he needs, he does a lot better in return.

All my thanks!

28 February 1992

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Project Start

Our son is a grade 7 student at  
Unfortunately . . . has what is called Attention  
Deficit Disorder. These type of children function best in  
small groups and one-on-one learning sessions.

During grades 1 through 6 the schools have tried their best  
to assist Scott with his problem however the only programs  
that were offered were character building programs after  
school conducted by other agencies. The school was unable to  
offer a special education program for this child.

To reiterate, now we are in grade 7, with six precious years  
of learning already gone by. What my son needs is special  
education, what the school is able to offer is Project Start.  
With Project Start he at least has a chance as he is able to  
obtain limited in-school tutoring on those subjects which he  
has difficulty with and could end up failing.

Project Start has also been a significant player in the  
home/school communication area.

Project Start must be kept alive and strengthened!

Yours truly,

Lethbridge, Alberta  
T1K 1C1

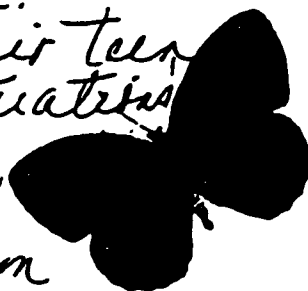


To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter in regards to the recently instilled program in ..... School called "Project Start."

I have personally found this program to be a great advantage for my son ..... in both areas of "counselling" and tutoring. I feel that some children need an opportunity to express their feelings and thoughts about school and related topics without a feeling of threat or fear. By having someone available for them to speak with other than a teacher of theirs or administration helps to eliminate these pressures of opening up. An unbiased Youth Care Worker, I feel, is an excellent choice.

Children entering their teen years face so many situations that can become over-whelming for them and therefore may lead them




out of control. I'm thankful for the support that the school board, school and the Youth Care worker have offered my son this past year - a difficult one for him - in preventing this from happening to my son.

Being informed and being in touch with the youth care worker has been strongly beneficial. I feel secure in knowing that there is someone I can call if I sense a problem with . . . . . And I feel that . . . . . feels comfortable being able to discuss his problems with the youth care worker.

I also found the tutoring program to be a benefit to my son. If children have difficulties in particular areas of their studies, a tutor can be a wonderful opportunity for them. Having someone brought into the school specifically to tutor these children can also help to remove some pressure off the teachers on staff and therefore allow them more instructional time with their classes.

Because I have another



son preparing to attend  
School  
in the future, my hope  
is to see the program continued.

I thank you for taking the  
time to read my letter and  
hear my concerns & appreciations.

Sincerely,  
yours.



Lethbridge AB

March 3, 1992.

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To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Project Start and

I would like to express my support for Project Start, under the direction of [redacted] my child, although capable in many ways, is having a difficult year and is not coping well in the school system. [redacted] has been an invaluable source of support for her, and [redacted] has been most helpful in keeping me in touch with the "going on" of my child at school. I think she is sincere in trying to figure out who my daughter is as an individual and how she might be assisted in improving her school performance. [redacted] is one of the very few positive influences at school as far as my daughter is concerned. - And for this and her communication with me, I am very grateful.

Project Start is a vital and necessary program in junior high school. There appears to be little available for bright kids who do not fit well into the mainstream and mediocrity of much of the educational system. I am sure [redacted] is required to deal with many varied

situations, and from what I have seen as well <sup>231</sup> equipped to deal with difficult students who many teachers do not have the time or inclination to deal with.

In conclusion I reiterate: Project Start is an excellent idea and a practical approach for the troubled student who needs additional individual attention and help. More specifically, is a person who seems to be well suited to dealing with the difficulties these students present.

Thank you for attention.

Yours truly

APPENDIX I: NYBERG CONSULTANTS' EVALUATION  
REPORT

**EVALUATION OF START PROGRAMS**

**REPORT FOR YEAR 2**

**Submitted by**

**V.R. Nyberg and H.C. Rhodes**

**On behalf of**

**Nyberg Consultants Ltd.**

**September 21, 1993**

### **SPECIAL NOTE**

**The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of Employment and Immigration Canada or those of Alberta Education.**

**Lethbridge School District No. 31**

**Supervisor in Charge - D. Shannon Geer, Principal/Consultant  
Division of Instructional Services**

**Schools - Hamilton Junior High School (Grades 7 to 9)  
Gail Vandebek, Child & Youth Care Worker  
Gilbert Paterson Community School (Grades ECS to 9)  
Debi Lysak, Child & Youth Care Worker  
Wilson Junior High School (Grades 7 to 9)  
Greg Paskuski, Child & Youth Care Worker  
Allan Watson School Integrated/Occupational (IOP) School  
(Grades 8 to 12)  
Monica Bosscha & Carole-Anne McFalls, Child & Youth  
Care Workers**

**Name of Project: Project Connections**

**Rationale**

**The Lethbridge School District #51 provides a very comprehensive and wide-ranging set of programs and services for special needs students. Project Connections has been designed to supplement and complement these.**

- 1. For a school program to be successful it must "fit" into the overall character of that school. Accordingly, each school needs to have reasonable autonomy in planning and implementing a program.**
- 2. The city cannot provide more Work Experience employment than is currently available to the two high schools and to the Allan Watson I.O.P. school.**
- 3. Establishing bonds with peers, the school, and significant adults is an important factor in preventing dropping out of school and in developing adequate self images. Augmenting the "people power" part of the project will facilitate bonding. The proposal indicates the human resources and infrastructures needed:
 
  - i) youth workers**
  - ii) tutors/supervisors**
  - iii) parent support**
  - iv) cooperation and coordination within the school and with persons in external agencies.****
- 4. The cooperation and coordination as noted above and implied in the title of the project (connections) reinforces the notion that partnerships among people and agencies have been assigned high priority in the District.**

### External Consultant's Comments about Outcomes

Since all of the average evaluation ratings used by the teen mothers exceed 4.0 on the 5-point scales one must conclude that, for this major client group the Learning Centre has been judged as quite satisfactory. The overall satisfaction ratings were all at 4.0 or 5.0 on the scale relative to "care for your child" and ninety percent were at these levels for "respect you have received as a mother."

The self-evaluation ratings by the Child Care Workers are all 4.5 or better on the 5 point scales, indicating a high degree of satisfaction and pride for the quality of their work. In the one instance where the same statement was rated by both teen mothers and CCW's (re communication skills and behaviours of the mothers) there was a marked discrepancy: self ratings by the students were higher than those assigned by Learning Centre workers. This inflation/deflation phenomenon was expected.

Attendance likely improved significantly as a consequence of the project services. The improvement of two days per month over the baseline year standard is of practical significance. Dropouts, at 9.1 percent, are likely very low for this group of high-risk students. A comparison group of pupils with similar backgrounds and characteristics, but without the interventions provided by the Learning Centre, would likely have had a much higher proportion leaving school.

As noted above, a follow-up report on last year's START Project members was not submitted. As a consequence, the medium-term effects of the project at Louise Dean School are not known.

### Background Factors

As noted above, the School District and other agencies provide a very comprehensive and broadly based set of programs and facilities for at-risk pupils. Other programs already in place within the district are listed in the appendix.

By using available survey information, the proposal prepared by the Lethbridge School District illustrates the needs for the 12 to 15 year age group. These are outlined in the appendix.

Table 4.1 - Enrolment of START Pupils in Lethbridge School District

School	Group	Number*	%ge
Hamilton	Continuing	37	7.7
	New	101	21.1
Gilbert Paterson	Continuing	30	6.3
	New	78	16.3
Wilson	Continuing	19	4.0
	New	100	20.9
Allan Watson	Continuing	53	11.1
	New	54	11.3
Allan Watson (Teen Moms)	Continuing	2	0.4
	New	4	0.8
All	Continuing	141	29.5
	New	337	70.5
Total		478	100

More detailed data (not available in Table 4.1) indicate that about ten percent of the START students are in senior high school. Background information forms were not required to be submitted at year-end 1992-93 by the external evaluators. As a consequence the information in tables 4.2 and 4.3 include only mid-year numbers and percentages.

Table 4.2 shows that the most common reason for identifying pupils as "At Risk" was "Lack of academic success" (70.3%). Next in order were: "Low motivation in academic subjects" (53.0%), "Social-emotional problems" (44.2%), "Low self concept" (35.4%), "Negative attitude toward school" (25.6%), "Unstable living situation" (20.4%), and "Chronic absence" (18.7%). Of the 29 reasons in the table, 16 were listed for more than five percent of the students. This indicates that there was a wide variety of problems among the START students, ranging from low achievement, to negative attitudes about themselves and about school, and to social problems.

Table 4.2 - Reasons for Identifying Students as "At Risk" (as of Mid-year, 1992-93)

Indicators	Number of Students		Overall School Totals		
	New	Continuing	Number	%ge	Rank
1. Lack of academic progress	-	-	248	70.3	1
2. Chronic absence	-	-	66	18.7	7
3. Social-emotional problems	-	-	156	44.2	3
4. Unstable living situation	-	-	72	20.4	6
5. Chronic tardiness	-	-	29	8.2	11
6. Negative attitude toward school	-	-	91	25.6	5
7. Low self concept	-	-	125	35.4	4
8. History of early failure in school	-	-	53	15.0	8
9. Other reasons	-	-	18	5.1	16
10. Anecdotal information	-	-	6	1.7	21
11. Low motivation in academic subjects	-	-	187	53.0	2
12. History of medical problems	-	-	9	2.5	19
13. Behaviour disorder	-	-	31	8.8	10
14. Drug or alcohol abuse	-	-	6	1.7	21
15. Previously dropped out of school	-	-	-	-	-
16. No participation in extra curricular acts	-	-	6	1.7	21
17. Negative attitude toward school	-	-	21	5.9	15
18. Self referral, or by family	-	-	29	7.4	13
19. Low self esteem	2	1	25	7.1	14
20. Teen parenthood	-	-	4	1.1	25
21. Short range problem solver	-	-	26	7.9	12
22. Alienation from other students	-	1	13	3.7	17.5
23. History of trouble with authorities	-	-	36	10.2	9
24. Lacking in social skills	2	-	3	0.8	26
25. ESL student	8	5	13	3.7	17.5
26. Recent immigrant	5	-	5	1.4	23.5
27. Lack of a support system	4	3	5	1.4	23.5
28. Pregnancy	-	-	1	0.3	27
29. Lack of previous schooling	4	1	-	-	-

Survey of START Pupils

For both years that Project START has been in place at Lethbridge one of the school administrators has conducted surveys of teachers in participating schools and of a sample of START pupils (Fox, 1993). Some of the responses to the survey of pupils (N= 19) during Year 2 of the Project contribute descriptions of their backgrounds. Survey questions posed and pupil responses (expressed as percentages) are shown below.

Have you ever considered quitting school?

<u>Response</u>	<u>% Females</u>	<u>% Males</u>
yes	42	43
no	58	56

What were/are your biggest problems associated with school?

<u>Problem</u>	<u>% of students</u>
Attendance	5.3
Peers	15.8
Marks/academics	52.6 (90% said Math.)
Behaviour and marks	10.5
Peers and marks	5.3
Being a teen mother	5.3
Attendance and behaviour	5.3

Has school attendance been a problem for you?

Has this program helped you attend more regularly?

<u>Question</u>	<u>% Yes</u>	<u>% No</u>
Attendance a problem?	52.6	47.4
Program has helped?	94.7	5.3

How did you feel about school before being involved in the project?  
About three-quarters indicated that they either hated or disliked school.

How do you feel about school now?

<u>Responses</u>	<u>% of students</u>
Good/great	68.4
Okay	31.6
Bad	0

External Consultants' Comments on Background of Students

The Lethbridge District's Project Connections is by far the largest START project of the ten reported in this evaluation. At 478, its membership is over five times the size of the runners up. The per-pupil cost at Lethbridge is substantially lower than the unit cost for other projects. The pre-project planning at Lethbridge is yielding dividends in terms of efficiency when measured in dollars.

Nearly one in four of the junior high school population at Lethbridge is enrolled in the project. This represents all students

with significant needs. As a consequence, a comparison group with some characteristics in common with the START members cannot be assembled. This is unfortunate, since the referent levels provided by a comparison group (for example, changes in attendance, attitudes, achievement, and so on) would enhance substantially the precision of the evaluation. Because of the large number of pupils being served, Project START resources are relatively thinly dispersed at Lethbridge. Relative to some other projects, interventions are less intensive in Project Connections.

The results of the pupils' survey indicate that the tutoring component has the potential to address the most frequently mentioned problems pupils associated with school - marks/academics, behaviours/marks and peers/marks. Two-thirds of the pupil sample included marks in school subjects as their biggest problem.

#### Interventions

The major interventions in the Lethbridge START Project are the services performed by the Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCW) and by the tutors at each school. The full-time service providers are the CYCW personnel, who, in addition to counselling Project START students and serving them as advocates, coordinate the Projects' school and community services, liaise with school staff and administration, and schedule and supervise the work of the tutors. They also serve as role models and confidants. The CYCW relate well to school staffs, to parents, and to outside agencies.

Table 4.3 provides an overview of the success ratings assigned by Project staff at the four schools to the various Project components (interventions). The "All Schools" row displays the weighted average of aggregated ratings for the four Project schools. The CYCW group was most directly involved in the counselling component and the various interventions subsumed in the "Other" column. Overall, their ratings averaged 3.3 on the 5-point scale for counselling, and 3.7 for "Other".

Some of the activities included in the "Other" column were: Attendance Monitoring, Incentive Program, and Study Skills Program (not rated) at Hamilton School. Some of these activities were school-specific; for example, Watson school conducted "Attendance Monitoring", and Gilbert Paterson used the Incentive Program.

Table 4.3 shows that Tutoring and School Liaison Officer ratings averaged 3.6 on the scale, higher than access to, and communication with, Alberta Social Services and Alberta Mental Health.

**Table 4.3 - Number of Students Served and Average Success Rating for START Project Components**

Number of School Pupils	Tutoring			Counselling			Social Services			Alberta Mental Health			Liaison Officer			Study Skills			Others*			Total		
	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating	No.	%	Rating
Hamilton	148	90	61	4.0	148	100	3.0	17	12	3.0	10	7	3.0	4	3	3.5	47	32	N/A	86	58	4.0	291	3.4
Paterson	98	75	76	3.8	82	84	3.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	31	4.0	-	-	-	175	100	3.7	370	3.7
Wilson	119	97	82	3.0	80	67	4.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	13	3.4	-	-	-	54	45	3.3	246	3.4
Watson	109	41	37	4.0	48	44	3.0	14	12	3.0	15	14	3.0	10	9	3.0	-	-	-	109	100	3.4	237	3.2
Teen Moms	4	-	-	-	4	100	3.8	4	100	4.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	100	4.0	12	3.9
All	476	303	64	3.6	382	79	3.3	35	43	3.1	25	11	3.0	85	20	3.6	N/A	N/A	N/A	428	89	3.7	1256	3.5

\* Hamilton has 3 programs grouped in this category and Paterson has 2. This had to be taken into account when numbers and percentages of students were calculated.

Sample of Comments About Interventions by Child Care Workers

**Tutoring** - Tutors help with academic progress, but also vicariously act as a support to counselling services.  
Students choose to give up an option class to accept tutoring in their core subjects.

**Counselling** - Students tend to feel more comfortable accessing school counselling than outside services.  
Counselling occurs in small groups or individually.  
Administrators, teachers, Child & Youth Care Workers and parents are all integral parts of the counselling program.

**School Liaison Officer** - Very helpful in connecting with outside resources.  
Very valuable to Project Connections students who are chronic non-attenders.

**Alberta Social Services** - Confidentiality issues have a tendency to interfere with communication.  
Little contact between Social Services and Project Connections personnel.

**Alberta Mental Health Services** - Would like to work in closer unison with A.M.H.S.

**Parent Support Group** - Parent self-help group focusing on anger-management, communication skills, improving self-esteem, and women's self defense. Some difficulty in enticing parents to partake of these services.

**Incentive Program** - Tokens given to students displaying good attendance, study skills, and behaviour.

**Study Skills** - Teachers, counsellors, administrators, and, most importantly, parents are involved.

**Community School Involvement** - Partnerships between Project Connections students and local business.  
Students donate time to community agencies. agencies.

**Student Academic Intervention Centre (S.A.I.C.)** - Teacher-supervised pull-out program to help small groups of students improve academic and social skills. Some real progress with chronic non-attenders and behaviour problem students.

**Self-Esteem Group for Guys (Grade 7)** - Role modelling and role playing very helpful with this component.

**Attendance Monitoring** - With parental involvement this component is fairly successful.

### Survey of Classroom Teachers in Participating Schools

During the spring of 1991-92 and 1992-93 surveys of teachers in the junior high schools involved with Project Connections were undertaken by one of the administrators in the District (Fox, 1993). After an initial question the focus shifted to the tutoring component. Table 4.4 enumerates the questions posed and the percentages of regular classroom teachers responding "Yes," "No," and "Unsure."

Table 4.4 - Classroom Teachers' Perceptions about the Tutoring Component

Question	Year	Percentage Yes	Percentage No	Percentage Unsure
Do you understand what Project Connections is all about?	1992-93	70	11	19
	1991-92	75	7	18
Do you understand the tutoring component?	1992-93	81	10	9
	1991-92	89	0	11
Has tutoring had a positive impact on your students who are involved?	1992-93	62	7	31
	1991-92	64	6	30
Has communicating what work is to be done in tutoring been effective?	1992-93	46	23	31
	1991-92	43	13	44
Do you believe that tutoring should be continued next year?	1992-93	92	5	3
	1991-92	98	2	0

Most of the "No" and "Unsure" responses were from teachers of optional subjects who did not have students enrolled in Project START tutoring. Including these, about two-thirds of the regular teacher group felt that pupils were benefiting. About 30 percent were unsure at both survey times. Communication methods for the tutoring component were felt to be effective by slightly less than half of the regular teaching staff. Nearly all regular teachers (92% or more) felt that tutoring should continue next year.

The external consultant queried child care workers, tutors, and administrators about the organization and implementation of tutoring during the second year of the survey reported above. Efforts to improve communication appeared to be in place during the second year of the project. Forms were used and close attention was paid to homework assignments and due dates. Parallel to close monitoring, incentives and credits were used. Records of work completion were kept. For some of the higher needs pupils remedial instruction was undertaken; for example, diagnostic mathematics worksheets, essay formats and outlines, paragraph and sentence construction, etc. During May practice in test taking was provided.

### Survey of Pupils about Tutoring

The responses from the sample (N=19) of pupils during the spring, 1993 survey, conducted by the local school administrator, were as follows:

Are you involved in tutoring?		If so, how often? (N=19)	
Response	% of students	Response	% of students
Yes	94.7	1/week	5.9
No	5.3	2-3/week	82.3
		4/week	5.9
		5/week	5.9

What do you like about the tutoring program?	
Response	% of students
A. Tutors	15.8
B. The extra help	10.5
C. Getting homework done	21.0
D. The fun environment	5.3
E. Both B and D	5.3
F. Both A and B	26.3
G. A, B and D	10.5
H. A, B and C	5.3

Over one-half (57.3%) included "The extra help" in their replies. an equal number included "Tutors". About one quarter reported "Getting homework done" with what they liked best.

What is one thing you would change about the tutoring program? Over one-quarter replied "No change needed". Other suggestions were:

- Have more tutoring time
- Have more tutors
- Make sure there is less socializing
- Hire tutors who are better at mathematics
- Exit students from the program who are not working
- Give a grade for tutoring
- Have more books available
- Have a larger space assigned only for tutoring
- For homebound tutors, one-hour visits daily are better than three-hour visits twice a week
- Provide assistance with subject content, not just homework

Time spent tutoring ranged up to 6.25 hours per week. Most got more than two hours per week of this type of assistance.

#### Survey of Administration about Project Implementation

The major problem area reported by the Project Administrator was associated with the demands required for evaluation. Because of the large numbers of pupils served and the breadth of service offered with a limited budget, the resources and energy available for evaluation were severely limited.

#### External Consultants' Comments About Interventions

The Lethbridge Project Connections has been a successful venture in most respects. A major reason is the effectiveness and commitment

of the Child and Youth Care Workers (CYCW's). They not only performed well as front-line care-givers, counsellors, and advocates but had management and coordinations skills as well. The work of the CYCW's was complementary and supplementary to the responsibilities of school and central office administrators, special education and counselling personnel, and the School Liaison Officer. The last-named provided crucial services in follow-up and linking with outside agencies.

The tutoring service was scheduled and coordinated by the CYCW's. Major beneficiaries, other than the target pupils, should have been the regular class subject teachers. Unfortunately, the survey of regular classroom teachers about the efficacy of the program did not single out the perceptions of those directly served by the tutoring component; that is, those with pupils being tutored. (Anonymity of the teachers was necessary, and could only be ensured by having all of them respond.) During the past year changes had been undertaken in two-way communication with regular class teachers about assignments. Careful monitoring and record keeping were the norm. Tutors were reported to be serving a bit as confidants, role models, and mentors as well as assisting in school work. Both assignment completion and remedial instruction were undertaken by tutors. Skilful use of incentives, credits, and one-on-one counselling was evident.

Lack of communication with outside agencies such as Alberta Social Services and Alberta Mental Health was reported by all schools. The reason, of course, was the obsession with confidentiality that is unfavorable in the context of today's social climate. For this reason and because workers in all settings were extremely busy there was infrequent opportunity to "Connect" with respect to problem students. Accordingly, with respect to external agencies, the "Connections" aspect of "Project Connections" was acknowledged to be difficult to accomplish.

The overall success ratings assigned by project staff to the various components, ranging from 3.3 to 4.0, appeared to be somewhat conservative.

The survey about project administration conducted by the local school administrator revealed that the greatest hurdles experienced were meeting the requirements for evaluation. The External Consultant concurs, from the perspectives of both cause and effect. In retrospect, one solution would be to provide for these demands in the project budget. This was done in several other projects, thus reducing the trauma and frustration of data collection, record keeping, and reporting.

## Outcomes

Outcome indicators for the Lethbridge School District project were comprised of percentage of attendance results compared to baseline years' attendance, dropout rates, the 1992-93 status of last year's members, and changes in academic achievement as represented by report card marks.

### Percentage of School Days Attended

Table 4.5 provides information about the the changes in percentage of attendance between the baseline years and 1992-93. An overall decline of 0.7 percent occurred. This is a very slight improvement over the result for last year (-0.9%).

Table 4.5 - Attendance During Baseline Years and 1992-93

Group	Year in START	Baseline Years		1992-93		Change (%)
		N	%	N	%	
Hamilton School	New	91	90.7	91	89.2	-1.5
	Continuing	27	91.5	27	88.7	-4.8
Paterson School	New	55	94.9	56	91.4	-3.5
	Continuing	22	93.4	22	88.3	-5.1
Wilson School	New	110	89.7	110	91.9	+2.2
	Continuing	16	78.7	16	75.3	-3.4
Watson School	New	43	81.6	43	87.0	+0.4
	Continuing	15	91.0	15	88.0	-2.0
Teen Moms	New	2	34.5	2	66.5	+32.0
	Continuing	2	75.0	2	70.5	-4.5
All Schools by Year	New	301	90.1	301	90.3	+0.2
	Continuing	82	89.0	82	84.9	-4.1
All Schools Total		383	89.9	383	89.2	-0.7

Notes: Net changes were computed by subtracting the baseline attendance from the 1992-93 attendance for the same pupils. Since both baseline year data and 1992-93 data were not available for some students the number of cases (N) was reduced accordingly.

### Dropouts and Transfers

Table 4.6 displays information about the movements out of the original school of the 1992-93 START Project membership during the year. Dropouts were reported by the District as nine in number (1.9% of the START population of 478). Table 4.6 indicates that another six (1.2%) with status unknown. All of the nine dropouts were from the Continuing groups, indicating that they were in the project last year.

Table 4.6 - Transfers and Dropouts of START Students During 1992-93

Group and Number of START Pupils	Attending Elsewhere		Employed		Quit School		Status unknown		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Hamilton: New (101)	11	10.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	10.9
Continuing (37)	11	29.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	29.7
Peterson: New (78)	12	15.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	15.4
Continuing (30)	6	20.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	20.0
Wilson: New (100)	8	8.0	-	-	-	-	1	1.0	9	9.0
Continuing (19)	2	10.5	-	-	1	5.3	-	-	3	1.6
Watson: New (58)	10	17.2	-	-	-	-	4	7.1	14	24.1
Continuing (55)	3	5.5	7	12.7	1	1.8	1	1.8	12	21.8
Totals: New (337)	41	12.2	-	-	-	-	5	1.5	46	14.5
Continuing (141)	22	15.6	7	5.0	2	1.4	1	0.7	32	22.6
All Schools (478)	63	13.2	7	1.5	2	0.4	6	1.2	78	16.3

#### Follow-up Report on 1991-92 START Project Students

Table 4.7 indicates that, of the 331 students registered in START in June of 1992, more than one-third (33.8%) were enrolled, in 1992-93, in a regular program (at Lethbridge, most of them were in senior high schools without a START Program). Eleven of last year's START group dropped out of school (3.3%); of these, four (1.2%) secured employment.

Table 4.7 - Follow-up of 1991-92 Project START Pupils\*

Continuing in START		Attending regular school		Quit School				Transfers, or no follow up data		Total	
N	%	N	%	Employed N	Employed %	Unemployed N	Unemployed %	N	%	N	%
98	29.6	112	33.8	4	1.2	7	2.1	107	32.3	331	100

\* Some of the students followed up were not officially enrolled in the START Program in 1991-92. Because of this the number of students listed as continuing in START does not agree with the number shown in the 1991-92 year-end report.

#### Gains in Academic Achievement

Final report card marks in Mathematics and Language Arts were used as indicators of academic achievement gains which might be attributed to the Project. Marks from a baseline year (the year preceding enrolment in Project START) were compared to the final grades awarded for 1992-93. Table 4.8 displays the results for Grade 8 and Grade 9. Change scores for Grade 7 could not be computed since numerical scores were not used in the Grade 6 baseline year. Overall, there was an average gain in the Mathematics final marks of 0.5 percent. In Language Arts the gain was considerably higher at 2.4 percent.

Table 4.8 - Gains in Achievement in Mathematics and Language Arts

School	Year in START	Report Card Marks in Mathematics				Report Card Marks in Language Arts			
		N	Baseline %	1992-93 %	Change %	N	Baseline %	1992-93 %	Change %
Hamilton	New	49	54.4	55.1	+0.7	49	57.0	59.5	+2.5
	Continuing	25	50.8	51.8	+1.2	24	51.0	54.8	+3.8
Peterson	New	25	50.7	52.6	+1.9	25	60.2	63.7	+3.5
	Continuing	22	51.0	49.0	-2.0	22	61.7	60.8	-0.9
Wilson	New	42	54.2	49.7	-4.5	41	58.9	59.7	+0.2
	Continuing	14	58.8	49.1	-7.7	14	54.8	49.3	-5.5
Watson	New	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Continuing	10	33.8	66.3	+32.7	10	45.2	67.4	+22.2
All Schools	New	116	53.5	52.6	-0.9	115	58.4	60.3	+1.9
	Continuing	71	49.6	52.4	+2.8	70	54.3	57.4	+3.1
Total		187	52.0	52.5	+0.5	185	56.8	59.2	+2.4

#### External Consultant's Comments on Outcomes

The percentage of attendance remained about the same as last year where a loss was experienced for the START students. Less than two percent of the current year's START membership was reported as dropouts. Even if the 1.2 percent recorded as "status unknown" were added this 3.1 percent total was relatively low - an indication that the dropout rate has likely been reduced substantially by the project. Since only two of the dropouts (1.4% of the total) were unemployed the project can be judged relatively successful using this indicator.

An intermediate term outcome indicator is the dropout rate from school of those who transferred at the end of the last year. Here the figure is relatively low as well - 3.3 percent. This supports a conclusion that school retention has likely improved for graduates from the program.

Finally, academic achievement, as represented by year-end report card marks, had improved markedly in Language Arts. In Mathematics pupils held their own on average. As indicated in the administrator's survey of students, the main school-based problem reported was performance in Mathematics. The results from the report card data support the conclusions that the project likely succeeded in preventing further deterioration in marks in Mathematics and improved achievement in Language Arts.

The External Consultant concurs with the Summative Comments recorded by the local administrator on completion of her two-year study of the project:

There is little doubt that Project Connections continues

to meet with a high degree of success. As an evaluator and participant observer, I found the program to be operating very successfully throughout the District. Many of the concerns highlighted, particularly those in the second year of operation, could be easily remedied with minor procedural changes and by increasing staff participation in the decision-making process (p.146).