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## A Survey of Counseling Interventions for Treatment of Underachievement in Cook County High Schools

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A SURVEY OF COUNSELING INTERVENTIONS  
FOR THE TREATMENT OF UNDERACHIEVEMENT  
IN COOK COUNTY HIGH SCHOOLS

by

Laura Jill Balson

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University of Chicago in Partial Fulfillment  
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1985

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## V I T A

The author, Laura Jill Balson, is the daughter of Voyne Stevens and Helen Stone Stevens. She was born May 15, 1947, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. On December 28, 1966, she was married to Ronald H. Balson. They have three children.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Historical Background

Underachievement is one of the most chronic and pervasive problems faced by educators today. Although the problem of underachievement has been addressed by educators in the past, a scientific approach to the problem of underachievement dates back only about fifty years.

One of the first scientific studies of this problem suggested that unless these children were provided with remediation, the frustration of failure could push them into an unhappy cycle of underachievement (Keister & Updegraff, 1937). Despite such occasional references, few educational publications before the early 1950's used the term underachievement.

In order to understand the concept of underachievement, a theoretical framework was necessary. During the early 1950's two important works were published which gave researchers a theoretical framework upon which they could build an understanding of underachievement. David McClelland's The Achievement Motive, published in 1953, presented the theory that achievement was a motive. This was consistent with the general theory of motivation which focused on the interrelationship between the person and his/her environment. The theory of achievement motivation suggests that motives, such as the motive to approach success, account for individual differences in the value of certain consequences such as the incentive value of success. Equally important was the work of A.H. Maslow. Twenty

years of effort went into the development of his theory of human motivation. His book Motivation and Personality (1954) explains a hierarchy of human needs, and is a landmark in the understanding of the issues of motivation, personality and achievement. Maslow described human motivation by explaining that one desire is no sooner satisfied than another takes its place. He noted sense and order in the succession of motives.

In order to determine whether or not a student is underachieving, it is necessary to measure the student's potential performance and compare that with a measure of the student's actual performance. Therefore, the expanded use of intelligence and achievement testing which followed World War II was another important element in research on underachievement. After World War II, there was a marked increase in the testing done in American schools. Many of the most popular tests had been developed and published twenty or thirty years earlier. The Stanford-Binet intelligence tests had been used since the early part of the century. The Stanford Achievement Test was published in 1923. The Metropolitan Achievement Tests were developed in 1931. The California Achievement Tests were established in 1933, and the Iowa Tests began in 1940. (Fine, 1967). But it was in 1958 that the Russian Satellite "Sputnik" inspired the Federal Government to finance school testing programs. Soon, an average of three standardized tests per capita were being given each year to American school children. (Fine, 1967). Test information regarding a child's potential and performance allowed for comparison of these scores, leading to further refinement of the concept of underachievement.

When the widespread use of testing made the presence of underachievement scientifically measurable, researchers began to probe the causes of underachievement and the attributes of underachievers. Over the years, researchers have agreed on several traits, such as a poor self concept, passive-aggressive tendencies, and negative attitudes toward school. For many traits, test anxiety, for example, researchers have demonstrated conflicting findings. Clinicians and researchers have found several distinct psychopathologies which cause underachievement. But virtually all have come to agree that the causes of underachievement are psychological in nature.

The earliest and still most common tools used to diagnose underachievement are the intelligence and achievement tests. These tests, however, did not help clinicians understand the problems of the individual underachiever. Some researchers began to develop structured diagnostic interviews to gain insight into the individual psychodynamics of the underachiever. Other researchers began to use other available psychological tests such as the Rorschach, Thematic Apperception Test, and Special Sentence Completion Test.

Many treatment models have been developed, applied, and tested over the past thirty years. Group and individual counseling has been the most frequently used and most often tested treatment model. Models involving curriculum change and instructional counseling have also been widely used to treat underachievement. Recently biofeedback training has been used to treat underachievement. It is clear that much study and research has been done concerning causes and treatments for underachievement. What is not

clear is, to what degree this research and development is being applied in our school systems.

#### Purpose of the Present Study

Research and experimentation in the past thirty years has led to the development of many promising programs for the treatment of underachievement. Programs, however well conceived, are useful only if they are applied on a day to day basis. Therefore, the major purpose of this study is to examine what intervention methods are currently being practiced in Cook County high schools to treat underachievement. It is also the purpose of this study to describe those programs. Furthermore, this study will systematically investigate the reasons for a lack of emphasis on programs for the treatment of underachievement. To this end a survey was mailed to counselors in Cook County public high schools asking them to report whether or not their schools have a planned intervention program currently in operation. If so, they were asked to explain the nature of the intervention; if not, they were asked to give a reason for the absence of a plan. This information will provide a foundation for an understanding of the current status of intervention programs for underachieving students in these schools.

Another important issue probed in this study is the counselors' beliefs and attitudes concerning causes and treatments for underachievement. By examining counselors' attitudes, it may be possible to determine whether the lack of treatment programs somehow relates to counselors' understanding of the problem. This study further proposes to examine counselors' beliefs regarding the seriousness of underachievement.

Perhaps counselors' views on the gravity of the problem are related to whether or not they are making an effort to find a method of combating underachievement among their own student population.

The fact that Cook County is a large and heterogeneous geographic area allows the researcher to compare data from diverse populations. A related purpose of this study is to systematically compare data from different areas. This comparison may make it possible to discover whether counselors in schools which are culturally and socioeconomically divergent report different beliefs and practices concerning underachievement.

In summary, the purpose of the present study is to take information provided by counselors in Cook County public high schools and to correlate and analyze this information. From this analysis the study hopes to draw conclusions about the current status of the treatment of underachievement in Cook County public high schools.

#### Definition of Terms

Underachievement. The term academic underachievement has been applied to groups of individuals working on different levels with diverse levels of ability and with varying levels of achievement. The broadest definition would include all individuals who fail to develop their maximum potential. One frequently used definition limits "underachievers" to those students whose performance on intelligence and aptitude tests places them in the top quarter of their class, but whose grades fall in the lower half of their class (Roth, 1970).

It seems appropriate to broaden this definition even further, especially when dealing with so large and heterogeneous a group as Cook County high school students. Counselors in Cook County may see the range of students described by Norman C. Creange as "the bright child 'just going through the motions,' the average student hovering around the failure level, and the slow learner who is not learning at all."

(Creange, 1971, p. 279) The definition of underachievement given on the survey questionnaire was: "An underachiever is a student whose academic performance is well below his/her tested capabilities."

High school. Also called secondary school, it is a school composed of the grades above those of the elementary school. In this study all schools include students in either grades 9 through 12 or grades 10 through 12.

High school counselor. A high school counselor is a person employed in a secondary school to serve certain functions. These functions vary from school to school, but usually include all or most of the following:

1. appraising student ability, achievement, attitudes and needs;
2. coordinating this data and supervising their maintenance through cumulative records;
3. counseling with students;
4. identifying students with special needs and referring them to other specialists in pupil personnel services and to public and private agencies in the community;
5. working with teachers on student problems;
6. collecting, organizing, and maintaining information of an educational, vocational, and environmental nature;

7. presenting this information to students individually and through group procedures such as assemblies, homeroom programs, career conferences, and college days;
8. encouraging and assisting in the inservice education of all staff members;
9. consulting with parents on student problems of mutual concern to school and home;
10. serving in a public-relations capacity by maintaining close working relationships with various community agencies;
11. working in close cooperation with other pupil personnel specialists in the school;
12. implementing policies delegated by the administration and by appropriate faculty committees; and
13. planning and conducting research designed to improve (a) the total educational program and (b) guidance services available to students. (Miller, Fruehling, & Lewis, 1978, p. 169-170).

Counseling interventions. Counseling interventions are those counselor functions which are designed to produce changes in clients. The purpose of these counselor functions may be remedial or preventative. They may involve direct professional involvement with the client or consultation and training of others (Miller et al., 1978).

#### Significance of the Study

In the vast array of literature on underachievement, none has been found which addresses the practical and theoretical issues raised in this study. On a practical level, the study will yield data on the existence

of intervention programs. On a theoretical level, it will explore the relationship between the presence of an intervention program and counselor beliefs about the cause, treatment, and seriousness of underachievement. With a problem such as underachievement, where there has been significant progress (i.e. development of diagnostic tools and treatment models), it is important to consider whether or not this information has been disseminated and put to use. By analyzing counselors' beliefs about the causes and treatments of underachievement, this study will attempt to find the point of breakdown between the collection of information and its implementation in our high schools. This study researches the state of treatment of underachievement in Cook County. Further, it investigates the causes behind this condition, with the hope of laying a foundation upon which further study, discussion, and debate can occur.

#### Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. Most obvious of these are the problems inherent in survey research studies. One problem with the survey method is that its accuracy depends largely on the level of response.

Kerlinger (1973) stated that the most serious problem faced when using mailed questionnaires is that "at best the researcher must content himself with returns as low as 50 to 60%" (p. 414). Gay (1976) suggests a minimum response rate of 70% to insure validity and to allow for generalizability of results. The present survey achieved a response rate of 62%. This response rate is slightly below the minimum rate suggested for validity. However, since this study uses an entire population, and not a



random sample, results will not be generalized in this case. One way to encourage response rates is to make the questionnaire as brief and simple as possible. The present survey was limited to four multiple choice questions followed by eleven demographic questions. The limitation of a short, multiple choice survey is that it can lead to oversimplification of complex issues. To help overcome this problem and add insight and complexity to the questionnaire, space was provided after each question for additional comments which the respondents might care to make.

Another limitation of survey studies is that one must consider the degree to which the respondents will accurately report beliefs and practices which might put them or their schools in unfavorable light. To minimize this problem, all counselors were guaranteed anonymity for themselves and their schools.

Accurate sampling is also a common problem in survey research. The present study, however, involves the entire population toward which it was directed. Thus, all heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools were sent the survey. Because the sample included the entire population, it is not necessary to be concerned about the representativeness of the sample. On the other hand, it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to any other population because no attempt has been made in this study to prove that high school counselors in Cook County are representative of any other population.

There is a limitation common to studies which represent new types of research on a given issue. Because the literature on underachievement presents no research of this kind, the author had no guidelines or format

with which to formulate the survey. Furthermore, there were no materials or data with which to compare the analysis and conclusions.

### Organization of the Study

Chapter I has presented the historical background, purpose and significance of the study. A definition of terms was included in this chapter. Attention was drawn to some limitations of the study.

The remainder of this thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter II includes a review of the related literature concerning 1) research on attributes of underachievers and causes of underachievement; 2) research on diagnosis; 3) treatment models. The relationship of the present investigation to the existing research and the research questions conclude Chapter II.

The method of investigation including the population, the instruments and materials used, as well as the procedure for collecting and analyzing the data are described in Chapter III. The results of the study are presented and discussed in Chapter IV. Chapter V summarizes the study and offers some conclusions, recommendations and implications for further research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The problem of underachievement is widespread. Studies conducted in the 1950's documented the gravity of the situation. The Conference on the Identification of the Academically Talented Student in Secondary Schools reported that 15 to 25 percent of the gifted students in most school systems fell into the category of underachievers and that in some schools the incidence was even higher (Miller, 1961). In one California high school 42% of the gifted students fell below the top third in scholastic rank (Miller, 1961).

In another dramatic example of the incidence of underachievement, a study of 4900 bright high schools students in New York City (average I.Q. 130) found that 54% of boys and 33% of girls had scholastic averages which were so low that their admission to college was in doubt (Fine, 1967). Fine quotes Jane W. Kessler, Associate Professor in Psychology at the Medical School of Western Reserve University, "some tallies indicate that every second pupil in American classrooms today is not performing up to his abilities. One of every four youngsters, according to current estimates, is in serious trouble -- is a year and a half or more below his grade level, and is losing more ground each time he is promoted (Fine, 1967, p. 10).

#### Attributes and Causes

Extensive research has probed the causes of underachievement and the attributes of underachievers. By the late 1950's and early 1960's

researchers were beginning to develop a picture of the underachiever. Studies progressing through the 1970's and into the 1980's show general agreement on a number of specific characteristics. One of these characteristics is self concept. Clinical observations and research projects have consistently found underachievers to be more negative in their attitudes toward themselves, and to have stronger feelings of inferiority than achievers (Kornrich, 1965; Fine, 1967; Valine, 1965; Fine & Pitts, 1980; Miller, 1961). Roth (1970) posits a commonality of self perception among underachievers.

Passive-aggressive behavior is another common trait of underachievers. Although underachievers are often characterized as hostile, they appear to be unable to give direct effective expression to their negative feelings. Because the child fears his/her feelings of anger toward his/her parents, he/she unconsciously uses underachievement and failure as a weapon to attack them (Fine, 1967; Kornrich, 1965; Fine & Pitts, 1980; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967).

Researchers have documented both negative attitudes toward school and bad study habits as common attributes of underachievers. In a comparative study of achieving and underachieving high school boys of high intellectual ability, Frankel found that underachievers showed their negative attitudes toward school by having poorer attendance records, more disciplinary offenses and less participation in extracurricular activities (Kornrich, 1965). When Wilson and Morrow compared bright high school boys making good grades with an equated group making poor or mediocre grades,

they found that negative attitudes toward school were far more common among underachievers (Kornrich, 1965).

Underachievers usually have poor study skills resulting from the cumulative effect of not applying themselves over the course of several years (Fine & Pitts, 1980; Mitchell, Hall & Piatkowski, 1975; Kornrich, 1965). Yet even when a group of achievers reported equally infrequent use of study skills, the achievers were able to maintain their level of academic performance because of their more introverted (focusing attention into oneself) personalities (Robyak & Downey, 1979).

Researchers have investigated test anxiety as a trait related to underachievement with mixed results. Mitchell, Hall, and Piatkowski (1975) believed that underachievers were victims of test anxiety. However, Wittman (1976) found evidence that low, not high, test anxiety was a problem for underachievers. The low test anxiety reflected a general motivational deficit present in underachievers. The low test anxious students studied less and had less effective test performance. Recent studies using electroencephelograms would support this theory. These studies indicate that many underachievers display little EEG arousal during motivating tasks (Von Bargen, 1981).

Clinicians and researchers are largely in agreement on the major causes of underachievement. Because there are several distinct psychopathologies associated with underachievement, there are several distinct causal factors. One factor common to all underachievement is a disturbed family relationship. As we have seen, underachievement is commonly linked to problems of self esteem. These problems can be traced to parental

influences. Fine observes "...the most powerful factors in influencing the way a child thinks about himself are his parents' thoughts about him and their actions toward him." (Fine, 1967, p.55).

One scenario frequently found by clinical researchers involves what Fine (1967) calls the "overinvolved" parent. Some parents put pressure on their children to compete at too early an age (Kornrich, 1965; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967; Fine, 1967; Walsh, 1975). The doting, perfectionist, aggressively ambitious parents unconsciously use their children to buoy up their own narcissistic and inadequate egos. They are overly sensitive to the child's failures and shortcomings, and so they spend too much time correcting and criticizing, and too little time encouraging and praising. These parents "deny their children the two most precious of all rewards - first the self gratification and then the genuine praise that should accompany a job well done." (Fine, 1967, p.47). This leads to underachievement because as Helpern explains, "for the underachiever, the intrinsic pleasure of accomplishment is lost, because the ulterior unconscious motive of pleasing or frustrating his parents has become primary." (Kornrich, 1965, p.584).

On the other end of the spectrum are parents who show too little interest in their children. Although they live together, parents and children may not occupy the same life space. In order to gain the attention of a parent, a student may cause a crisis or contact his/her parents through failure. The child would rather fail and have attention than succeed and be alone (Fine, 1967; Kornrich, 1965).

Absent or inadequate fathers have been associated with underachievement. Kornrich's (1965) collection of studies and essays on underachievement reveals two works which pertain to inadequate fathers and underachievement. In these studies of learning inhibitions in elementary school boys, underachievement was regarded as resulting from a parental relationship in which the father was inadequate and dominated by the mother. Fathers who were themselves dependent on their wives, viewed their sons as competitors for her support. Mothers unconsciously limited their sons in an effort to maintain their image of men as devalued or dangerous. Sons in this situation came to regard achievement as dangerous. Evidence suggests that often underachievers are unconsciously mirroring their parents' unresolved childhood conflicts. Many parents of underachievers were underachievers themselves (Fine, 1967; Kornrich, 1965; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967).

Viewed from a developmental perspective, underachievement has been divided into several different psychodynamic groups. The first, designated "neurosis" by Roth (1970) and "trust seeking" by Pecaut (1979), involves a person who has failed to mature past the Oedipal stage. Roth describes the neurotic as being in a "state of immobility and anxiety. As a substitute for his own weak ego, the individual constantly seeks transference-like relations... The manner of relating to authority figures is the theme of one's life." (Roth, 1979, p.5). Roth's "non-achievement syndrome" called "dependence-seeking" by Pecaut, is regarded as a fixation at the preadolescent latency stage. Underachievement is designed to postpone the responsibilities which would accrue should the person mature

and become independent. Underachievement is an effort to maintain a dependent relationship with his/her parents. The student in this category projects responsibility for success outside himself. Sherman, Zuckerman & Sostek (1975) identified similar personality traits and behavior patterns in students they called "anti-achievers."

The final category described by Roth (1970) involves students at the level of adolescent crisis. Roth designates this the "adolescent reaction." Pecaut (1976) calls it "independence seeking." Issues of independence dominate this stage of development. The adolescent becomes increasingly aware of himself and the way he functions in the world. He experiences conflict between feeling socially adequate, and compromising his feelings of independence. This conflict creates a state of anxiety that is not considered abnormal at this stage; however, adolescent reactions sometimes become maladaptive.

The point of all this is that regardless of what perspective is taken, regardless of what particular causes and syndromes are identified, researchers in the field of underachievement virtually all agree that underachievement results from psychological development and adjustment problems.

### Diagnosis

Underachievement is, by definition, a state of discrepancy between tested capacity and actual performance. It was the development and widespread use of intelligence and achievement tests which made the problem of underachievement so apparent. Today, as in the past, the main tools used to diagnose the existence of underachievement are these same



tests. Sometimes performance is assessed by grade point average, so that the person may be said to be underachieving when his/her grades fail to approach those one would predict from his/her test scores. (Kornrich, 1965; Fine, 1967; Roth, 1970; Raph, Goldberg & Passow, 1966; Miller, 1961).

It has become apparent that underachievers are too heterogeneous a group to be effectively helped by any one treatment (Roth, 1970; Pecaut, 1976, Allen, 1971). Therefore, it is necessary for those who work with underachievers to have diagnostic tools which will give them insight into each underachiever's particular etiology. Rorschach tests as well as Thematic Apperception Tests have been used to investigate the psychodynamics of underachievers (Kornrich, 1965; Roth, 1970; Bricklin & Bricklin, 1967). Special Sentence Completion Tests have been suggested as a promising tool to develop homogeneous counseling groups (Grossman, 1969). Lowenstein (1977) has developed the Lowenstein Underachievement Multiphasic Diagnostic Inventory (LUMDI). This test measures fourteen criteria which are specifically related to underachievement. The structured diagnostic interview has also shown a high degree of reliability in identifying the different pathologies which underly underachievement (Pecaut, 1976; Roth, 1970).

#### Treatment Models

Much of the literature on causes and attributes centers around developmental and personality-related variables. Many workers in the field of school counseling have come to believe that group or individual counseling offers the best hope for underachieving students. There is

considerable research which indicates that individual and group counseling can be effective in modifying student behavior and improving academic performance (Creange, 1971; Myrick & Haight, 1972; Kornrich, 1965; Jackson, Cleveland & Mereda, 1975; Bednar & Weinberg, 1970). Research investigating the effectiveness of group and individual counseling has shown that such counseling is most effective under specific conditions:

- 1) homogeneous grouping: Because underachievers are a heterogeneous group, different counseling strategies seem to work best if they are designed for and applied to homogeneous groups (Roth, 1970; Riger, 1976; Bednar & Weinberg, 1970; Kornrich, 1967);
- 2) volunteer groups: Researchers have substantiated the fact that treatment is more effective when students volunteer for counseling (Gilbreath, 1971; Mitchell & Piatkowski, 1974);
- 3) lengthy treatment: In one study of short term group counseling, grade point averages actually declined (Kornrich, 1967). Lengthy treatments have consistently shown better results than short term treatments (Bednar & Weinberg, 1970; Mitchell & Piatkowski, 1974; Kornrich, 1967).

The amount of structure in a group process treatment, which would produce the best results, has been investigated by many researchers. Several studies have documented positive changes resulting from relatively unstructured or low structured group process models (Barcai, Umbarger, Pierce & Chamberlain, 1973; Myrick & Haight, 1972; Creange, 1971; Kornrich, 1967). Research at the University of Nebraska indicated that high anxious students benefitted most from unstructured group experiences

while low anxious students profited more from structured experiences (Brown, 1969).

One study was designed to determine whether intensive group counseling would be effective if the counselors were not specially trained but had clear thematic counseling objectives and were allowed wide latitude in carrying out their objectives. The results of this study indicated that low achieving, remedial reading students who received intensive counseling for one year in the first two years of high school, demonstrated significantly improved reading scores at all grade levels. The authors suggested that an effective program requires both personal and academic counseling (Doyle, Gottlieb & Schneider, 1979).

A program developed by The Center for Alternative Education involves identification of underachievers, early prevention, remediation and referral to appropriate sources. Techniques used in this program include group and individual counseling as well as special classes. William Glasser's reality therapy and a warmer school atmosphere have proved useful in bringing about a positive change in underachievers (Sherman et al., 1975).

Several treatment models rely on psychotherapy. Knoietzko (1968) developed a theoretical frame of reference for the use of rational-emotive psychotherapy for the treatment of underachievement. Both Pecaut (1979) and Roth (1970) have developed psychotherapeutic treatment models in which their distinct diagnostic groups are treated with different types of therapy. Roth and his colleagues developed an experiment to determine whether theoretically appropriate treatment was indeed more effective than

inappropriate treatment. Groups of students, all belonging to the same diagnostic group, received three therapies, only one of which was appropriate according to Roth's theory. The results showed that therapeutic changes were greater in appropriate treatment than in either inappropriate therapy or no therapy (Roth, 1970). In discussing the implications of his work for high schools, Roth suggests that counselors develop their skills in therapeutic activities and begin to view themselves as part of a professional community dealing with remediation of underachievement and other problems of emotional immaturity.

The psychoeducator model is still in the early stages of development and testing. In this model, counselors attempt to teach communication and other counseling skills to teachers, parents and students. Although still in the early stages, this model is regarded as promising (Baker, 1983).

The Peer Intervention Network is a program recently developed in New Jersey. It is a group process intervention involving 7th and 8th grade underachievers. Meetings are based on gestalt therapy. Support is provided by peers, teachers, counselors and parents. Results of a three year study found that grade point averages had improved from 1.0 to 2.0, and 80% of the members were promoted (Kehayan, 1983).

In light of the fact that the causes of underachievement so often revolve around family relationships, the team approach, which involves parents as well as counselors and teachers, has been considered valuable (Fine & Pitts, 1980; Lowenstein, 1977; Kornrich, 1967). One model used with black inner-city children was based on a partnership between parents

and mental health clinicians. In this treatment, "filial" therapy was used to reengage children with their parents (Cameron, 1977). Homebased reinforcement (Witt, 1983) provides parents with training in implementing a reinforcement program at home. The 4th graders involved in this program improved on both academic and behavioral performance.

Some researchers have suggested that the classroom teacher can be vital to the process of helping underachievers (Pringle, 1970; Miller, 1961). A study in India trained elementary school teachers in specific classroom behaviors designed to improve student achievement. This study showed positive results (Mukhopadhyay, 1979). Researchers, however, have found evidence which suggests that although teachers attitudes and personalities may enhance or retard potential intervention effects, it isn't sufficient to produce significant improvement without actual training of skills required to implement the intervention procedure. (Barcai, et al.). The importance of the classroom climate was investigated in a study of gifted underachievers. In this study, one group of gifted underachievers was placed in a homogeneous class with high achievers, and another similarly gifted groups of underachievers was placed in a heterogeneous class. The underachievers in the homogeneous class with the high achievers made statistically significant gains in achievement as well as in improved perception of the parent-child relationship as compared with those in the heterogeneous class (Kornrich, 1967).

Both the Federal Government and individual school districts have developed models for the treatment of underachievement. Around 1965 the

Federal Government through the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, began implementing social legislation. Several "compensatory" educational programs were born in this period. One of the most successful was Upward Bound which spanned more than a decade between 1965 and 1978. Upward Bound was designed for a group the government designated as "underachievers" who were also "disadvantaged." Upward Bound students' low socio-economic status was assumed to limit their potential for upward mobility. The majority of schools implementing Upward Bound were in large urban areas and served minority students.

The major objective of Upward Bound was to prepare normally intelligent disadvantaged high school students for admission to and success in college. In order to do this, Upward Bound addressed such issues as self-esteem, future orientation and non-alienation. Although tutoring and teaching were essential parts of the Upward Bound program, there was a strong emphasis on counseling. Appropriate counseling was seen as a crucial tool to help the student develop his potential. Results of a study of Upward Bound (James, 1978) after 13 years showed that success of Upward Bound Programs depended on the effectiveness of both teaching and counseling, as well as student and parent involvement.

Another promising model is the Focus Project (1975) developed and used in Roseville, Minnesota in the early 1970's. Focus emphasizes counseling, curriculum change, and sometimes work experience for students. Objectives of Focus include improving the student's self-concept. The underachiever is expected to improve at least one grade level in each year spent in the program without any decline in GPA, and to decrease truancy,

tardiness and disciplinary referrals. Focus is a school within a school, with instructional rooms, group process rooms, a library, study rooms, and staff office. Team teaching and group counseling are stressed. The detailed evaluation kept to measure pupil progress suggests that the project has been successful.

In 1965, Hartford, Connecticut implemented a program, Higher Horizons. This project was aimed at underachieving 7th, 8th & 9th graders. The objective of Higher Horizons was improvement of basic academic skills. Academic areas of language and math as well as personal areas of self concept and adjustment to school were addressed. As with Focus, intensive counseling was an important component of the program. Another similarity to Focus is found in the small class size and individualized instruction. Additionally, Higher Horizons provides trips, special speakers and other enrichment activities. In 1980 when the program had been in effect for 15 years, an evaluation demonstrated positive results. Test scores showed that students had made gains in reading and math exceeding the year's expectations. Attendance rates were above 90% at all participating schools. Moreover, measures of self-esteem, perceptions of personal growth and positive attitudes toward school all supported the success of Higher Horizons (1980).

The Richmond Plan, instituted in Richmond, California in 1962, attempted to attack the problem of underachievement through curriculum reform and was aimed at the average underachieving student. The Richmond Plan implemented a team teaching approach in which different disciplines, such as math, science, English and industrial arts were brought together.

Subject matter was related through the focus on a practical application project. The illustrative example of a Richmond Plan unit is the penhole camera project, in which the camera is used to interrelate material taught in math, science, English and technical laboratory. After the Richmond Plan had been implemented for four years, evaluations of the results were mixed. In schools where the program was a success, experimental students reported that they got much more out of their high school experience than their comparison counterparts. Some clusters of schools, however, were found not to be operating effectively. The final conclusion of the study was that if properly planned, organized and operated the Richmond Plan could provide substantially improved educational experience (Kincaid & Hamilton, 1968).

Instructional counseling is another model which has produced initially promising results. The counselor is primarily responsible for setting up the framework which integrates the counseling program across home and school settings. There are family planning meetings in which counseling contracts are signed by counselor, student and parents. The student receives academic skills training. Test taking skills, study skills and communications skills, for example, are modeled, demonstrated, specified, practiced and coached. For course specific knowledge, direct subject matter tutoring is provided. Individual counseling sessions are also required for the monitoring of performance, evaluation of student in relation to objectives and provision of rewards for successful accomplishments (Martin, Marx & Martin, 1980).



The use of supplementary materials in addition to regular classroom activities has also been suggested as an aid to reduce underachievement. Again the emphasis is on making school seem more relevant to life. The "Care Kit," Combining Activities with Real Experiences (1977), was developed at Eastern Illinois University. Care details small group activities designed for underachieving junior high and high school students. Job related issues are discussed in each lesson. Linda Nielsen Clark (1968) has even suggested the use of popular board games as an integral component of the curriculum.

Early studies in the use of biofeedback training as a treatment for underachievement have been promising. Where anxiety has been a symptom associated with underachievement, biofeedback has been successful in lowering this anxiety (Thompson, 1980). On the other hand, where underachievement has been related to low EEG arousal during normally motivating tasks, biofeedback has been used to help underachievers increase their ability to concentrate (Von Bargen, 1981).

It is clear that a wide range of treatment models have been developed. Refinement and evaluation of these models is an ongoing process. The extent and variety of approaches available challenges every school to make an effort to intervene with and provide treatment for their underachievers.

### Relationship of the Study to Existing Research

A review of the literature on underachievement makes it clear that a wide discrepancy between capacity and performance plagues a large number of American students. The literature also makes it evident that experts agree that psychological problems are the major cause of underachievement. Moreover, a review of the literature exposes a wide range of interventions which show promise in the treatment of underachievement.

Current research does not, however, address the issue of the dissemination of this information. No studies have attempted to reveal the beliefs of high school counselors concerning the causes and treatment of underachievement. Neither does the current literature evidence studies which document the extent to which high schools implement treatment models to combat underachievement. In view of this, the present study attempts to document the extent to which interventions are presently being used in Cook County high schools. Furthermore, the present study attempts to discover whether or not counselors in Cook County high schools believe underachievement is a serious problem, and whether or not counselors in Cook County high schools are aware of the causes of underachievement and of the treatment models currently in use. In order to ascertain what interventions are currently being used in Cook County high schools, and counselors' beliefs pertaining to underachievement, the following research questions will be explored:

1. Do Cook County high schools have planned interventions for treatment of underachievement similar to those found in the literature?

2. To what cause do counselors attribute underachievement?
3. Are counselors' beliefs about causes of underachievement congruent with their beliefs about appropriate treatment?
4. Do counselors see underachievement as one of their school's most serious problems?
5. Are interventions used in Cook County high schools congruent with counselors' beliefs about appropriate treatment?
6. Do beliefs about causes, appropriate interventions, and seriousness of the problem as well as types of plans used diverge along a number of demographic variables?

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### Subjects

The subjects of the present study were the heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools. A survey questionnaire was sent to the head of the counseling department of each of the 125 public high schools in Cook County. Only the heads of counseling departments were surveyed, and the word "counselor" in this study refers to the head of the counseling department in each school.

The survey was sent out in the spring of 1983. The names of the 65 counselors working in Chicago public schools were taken from the Chicago Board of Education 1982-1983 "Chairpersons of Guidance Department High School Check List." The remaining 60 subjects were drawn from the list of "Directors of Guidance and Pupil Services of Suburban Chicago."

Cook County public high schools were chosen for the survey because of the diversity of student population. Likewise, a wide range of socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups, urban and suburban classifications are represented within this area. It was hypothesized that some of these diversities would be reflected in the various issues involved in the question of underachievement in the student populations. Fifty-two percent of Cook County high schools are Chicago public schools; 20% are north suburban; 17% are south suburban and 12% are western suburban.

In this study, surveys were sent to the entire population of heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools. The results involve only this population. A random sample was not drawn, and no attempt is made to generalize the findings of this study to any other population.

### Instruments

#### Survey

The data for this thesis was collected by the survey method. A questionnaire has the advantage of allowing collection of data from a large base in a relatively short period of time. By using multiple choice and specific demographic questions, one can derive a uniformity of information. In order to obtain additional insights into the research problem, space was provided for additional comments which the respondent might wish to make. The purpose of combining the quantitative multiple choice questions with the qualitative comments was to give both a measure of depth and breadth to the survey.

The questionnaire developed for this research study combines quantitative and qualitative methods, because each method has its advantages and disadvantages. According to Patton (1980):

Quantitative measures are succinct, parsimonious, and easily aggregated for analysis; quantitative data are systematic, standardized, and easily presented in a short space. By contrast, the qualitative measures are longer, more detailed, and variable in content; analysis is difficult because responses permit one to understand the world as seen by the respondents. The purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the points of view of other people without pre-determining those points of view through prior selection of question categories (p.28).

Accordingly, the present study combined quantitative and qualitative methods in order to measure responses systematically, while still allowing counselors to relate their own perspective on the issues.

The survey used in this study (see Appendix C) was developed by the writer. The rationale for the questions on the survey is as follows: The survey begins with a definition of underachievement to prevent the counselors from confusing underachievement with low achievement. Question number one asks which, if any, of the four theoretical models the counselor believes causes underachievement. Question number two asks which, if any, of the four theoretical models the counselor thinks might be an appropriate treatment for underachievement. Comparing answers to questions number one and number two will attempt to show to what degree counselors' ideas of cause and treatment are congruent.

The purpose of question number four is to discover and describe strategies currently being used to treat the problem of underachievement. Furthermore, comparing the answers to questions number one and number two with the answers to question number four will reveal whether the counselor's idea of cause and appropriate treatment corresponds with the school's planned intervention. Question four also asks counselors whose schools have no treatment program for underachievement to give a reason for the absence of a planned intervention.

The purpose of question number three is to discover how serious a problem counselors believe underachievement to be. By comparing questions number three and number four, the perceived seriousness of the problem can be interrelated to the presence or absence of a planned intervention.

Following each of the first four questions counselors were asked for additional comments and given space to provide this qualitative information.

Questions number one through eleven of the demographic data were intended to provide information with which to compare answers to the basic four basic questions according to the variables of school size, location, ethnic composition, socioeconomic status of the community, future plans of the student, as well as staff size and levels of training.

#### Accompanying Materials

A cover letter accompanied each survey (Appendix A). In addition, a letter written by Dr. William Watts was included in each mailing (Appendix B) in hopes of encouraging a higher response level. Also included was a self-addressed stamped envelope for the return of the questionnaire. A copy of the surveys and the accompanying materials can be found in the appendices.

#### Procedure

The procedure followed in the present study is survey research. The survey questionnaire is an efficient and appropriate tool for collecting information from a large population. This type of research methodology is useful in compiling quantitative data which may be analyzed with the appropriate statistical tools in order to infer what meanings may lie within the data. The qualitative data can then be used to broaden the understanding of the meaning of the quantitative data.

In the present investigation, 125 subjects were asked to complete the survey questionnaire described above, under conditions of guaranteed

anonymity. Each subject was mailed a survey with an explanatory cover letter, an additional letter encouraging cooperation and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Subjects were asked to complete the questionnaire and return it in the envelope provided. The results of all the questionnaires were tabulated by the investigator.

The results of the data acquired from the questionnaire have been analyzed in several ways. The most simple of these is the use of percentages to show what proportion of respondents chose each answer. The second level of analysis involves cross tabulating the five major categories of the investigation: the cause of the problem of underachievement, the preferred method of intervention, the perceived degree of seriousness of the problem, the presence or absence of a treatment plan, and the type of treatment plan actually used. Each of these variables was then cross tabulated with each demographic variable.

A joint frequency distribution resulted from the cross tabulation of the variables, and a chi-square analysis was conducted on each distribution. In this study, a random sample was not drawn. Surveys were sent to the entire population of heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools, and the results involve only this population. Therefore, chi-square analysis and the resulting levels of significance are used only to help the investigator in interpreting the data, without attempting further generalizations. Row conditional and column conditional tables were produced for each frequency distribution. Each of these tables was analyzed for trends. The analysis showed some interesting trends which will be discussed in Chapter IV.



Of related interest is the qualitative data provided on the questionnaire. Without the additional comments provided by the respondents, the quantitative results would have been less enlightening. Allowing the counselors to put answers in their own words, rather than simply accepting predetermined choices, provided some important insights. While not every qualitative response is quoted, representative samples of views are given.

#### Summary

The specific aim of the present study was to investigate the use of intervention programs for the treatment of underachievement in Cook County public high schools. Furthermore, the study intends to systematically investigate variables which relate to this issue. Accordingly, a survey questionnaire was mailed to 125 heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools.

The statistical analysis of the data obtained included percentages of responses in predetermined categories, cross tabulation of major categories, joint frequency distributions and chi square analysis. The possible impact of all variables on the results of this investigation and their implications for further research will be discussed in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

As previously discussed, response rates to mailed questionnaires are usually low. A response rate of over 60% is uncommon. The first table shows different areas encompassed in Cook County and the response rates from high schools in each area.

TABLE 1  
RESPONSE RATES

LOCATION	SURVEYS SENT		SURVEYS RETURNED	
	%	(No.)	%	(No.)
Chicago Public Schools	51	(65)	46	(35)
North Suburban Schools	20	(25)	20	(16)
South Suburban Schools	17	(19)	18	(14)
West Suburban Schools	12	(14)	13	(10)
Other	2	(2)	2	(2)
TOTAL	100	(125)	100	(77)

The response rate was 62% overall. Fifty-one percent of the high schools in Cook County are in Chicago, therefore, 51% of the surveys were sent to Chicago schools. The Chicago schools represented 46% of respondents. Twenty percent of Cook County high schools are in the northern suburbs, therefore 20% of the questionnaires were sent to north suburban schools and 20% of responses came from these schools. Southern suburbs accounted for 17% of surveys sent out and 18% of answers received.

Western suburbs received 12% of surveys mailed out and represented 13% of surveys returned. The response rate was high for a mailed questionnaire, and each location was appropriately represented.

#### The Six Research Questions

In order to determine the current status of the treatment programs for underachievement in Cook County high schools, and in order to determine some of the variables related to that status, six research questions were proposed.

Question #1: Do Cook County high schools have planned interventions for the treatment of underachievement similar to those found in the literature?

This question explores two issues. The first issue is the number of high schools having any kind of planned method of intervention. The second issue is whether these interventions are similar to those found in the literature. In order to address the first issue, counselors were asked whether their schools did or did not have a plan or program for the treatment of underachievement. Of the responses, 72.7% reported that their schools had a plan, while 27.3% reported having no plan to treat the problem of underachievement. Schools reporting no planned intervention for underachievement were asked to give a reason for the absence of a plan. In answering this question counselors focused on a variety of factors. Some simply explained what they did in the absence of a plan, i.e. "Counselors handle it on an individual basis," or "each counselor operates own plan - no overall departmental or structured approach. Most

counselors arrange conferences with students and parents, but we never get to see everyone."

Some counselors said their school had no plan because of "a failure to recognize the problem." Another counselor expanded on this idea, "1. Failure to identify the problem. 2. Failure to go beyond the answer that students don't care and build a program to deal with these attitudes. We seem content to allow students to fail and blame them for not trying."

Other counselors were unaware that effective plans for the treatment of underachievement existed. One counselor said, "To my knowledge, no approach has proven successful enough to merit money and time." Another reported, "Essentially, efforts in the past have proven fruitless."

The three biggest obstructions to the development of plans were "Lack of staff," "lack of funds," and "faculty appears to be too busy." In the words of one of the counselors, "I believe people get so 'bogged' down with policy, numbers, paperwork, and cost effectiveness that students are no longer a priority." Another observation stated that underachievement was "Not considered important administratively to free up time-wise to do a good job of working with underachievers." One counselor saw a combination of problems preventing his school from implementing a plan, "Time, money and a lack of understanding of how to handle these students. Also, we find that parents want a quick fix for the problem and are not willing to get involved with their child or the problem."

In questioning counselors about the types of plans being used in their schools, no predetermined categories were given. Instead, the counselors were asked to explain their plans. These plans were then

divided into six categories. The following table gives the categories and number of schools using each type of intervention. Categories one through four were selected to correspond with the treatment models found in the literature. Although the multidisciplinary staff meeting was not a treatment model found in the literature, its use was reported by so many schools that a category was created for this intervention. Many schools reported using a combination of approaches, therefore, the category "combination" was included.

TABLE 2  
TYPE OF PLAN

		<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
0	No Plan	27.3%	22
1	Counseling	23.4%	18
2	Tutoring	10.4%	8
3	Curriculum Change	11.7%	9
4	Experiential/work	0%	0
5	Multidisciplinary Staff Meetings	14.3%	11
6	Combination	<u>11.7%</u>	<u>9</u>
		100.0%	77

Although 23.4% of schools reported the use of counseling interventions, counseling meant different things in different schools.

Many schools try to work with both parents and students. One school offers a "parenting skills program and counselors regularly provide parents with accurate feedback on students' task completion and test performance." A similar program was explained this way. "Teachers indicate which students they feel are underachieving - counselors intervene and monitor progress, checking if isolated subject or across the board. Difficult to measure any success rate. Motivational counseling work with parents - showing kids in black and white where they stand and what's happening is effective." Counselors reported contacting parents and arranging parent/counselor conferences as a frequently used intervention method.

Several of the treatment models reviewed in the literature suggested involving parents. The instructional counseling model (Martin et al., 1980) requires family planning meetings. The psychoeducator model attempts to teach communication and other counseling skills to parents as well as teachers and students (Baker, 1983). Even the Peer Intervention Network involves parents as part of the student's support system (Kehayan, 1983).

In schools where group and individual counseling sessions are used, counselors reported some problems which hamper their effectiveness. One counselor reported that individual and group counseling sessions, as well as contacts with parents and teachers, "are limited due to our lack of time and nearly inflexible schedule." At one suburban school, group meetings and individual counseling for underachievers are "only with those students classified as 'gifted'." Frequently the counseling intervention turns out to be a "conference with student and teachers, home contact,

parent days for the various year groups monthly, and counselors comparing potential with accomplishment," or "a variety of techniques such as personal counseling, career search groups and inventory aptitudes, abilities and self-evaluation exercises."

Several schools reported that their planned intervention was simply to have the students who failed have a conference with their counselors. In some schools reporting the use of regular counseling sessions, the commitment seemed weak. One typical response explained this problem: "The plan is regular counseling sessions in small groups for underachievers. The problem is that the schedule is frequently interrupted." Some schools provided help only "for those requesting, self-referred." Only a few schools report offering the kind of group and individual therapy proposed by Pecaut (1979) and Roth (1970).

One Chicago school reported a curriculum change which has been implemented to help the gross underachiever. In the OMAT (One Major at a Time) program, the student concentrates on one major for four forty-minute periods for ten weeks.

Eight schools reported using an instructional approach. The instructional approaches included study halls, tutoring, resource rooms, summer programs for incoming freshmen and tracked classes. Several counselors said that their programs involved special classes featuring small class size, individual instruction and intensive concentration on basic skills.

Several of the models found in the literature involve combining instructional and curriculum treatments with counseling. Among these

programs are Higher Horizons (1980), Focus (1975), Upward Bound (James, 1978) and Center for Alternative Education (Martin et al., 1980). Cook County high schools offer a number of programs based on this idea. One school used an "Alternative program - special classes, smaller class size, specially trained teachers, and special counseling and social service intervention." Another combination approach used "Group guidance sessions; cluster programming for freshmen and sophomores; team teaching within clusters." Another counselor reported,

We have several programs operating at our school. First we have worked with our curriculum so that underachievers can start where they are and progress upward to higher level courses at readiness time. Second we have some tutorial programs that involve teacher/student and peer group tutoring. We also utilize group sessions and individual sessions with counselors to try to determine why the student is not progressing. We utilize parental help as much as possible.

Even though the plan wasn't formalized one counselor said her school used:

a variety of individual attempts on the part of teachers, counselors, deans and school psychologist, using one-on-one sessions, weekly cards for teacher monitoring, parent conferences, regular progress reports and close contact with students who need help with motivation and seeing the connection between school and the future.

A treatment model entitled Improving Student Motivation Program is a plan developed to deal with underachievement in a large south suburban high school. This program is offered to freshmen and sophomore underachievers and upperclass transfer students. The program involves three steps. In step I there is an initial interview to diagnose the student's "psychosocial developmental level and unique educational needs." At this interview the student and counselor "jointly and mutually analyze



the student's behavior, disciplinary and/or academic record and develop a specific plan for change." Modification of the student's schedule may also be done at this initial interview. Two to four weeks later a follow-up interview is conducted to, "a) evaluate success or failure of the change plan; b) modify the change plan if necessary." After another four weeks the counselor again obtains progress reports from teachers and checks the student's attendance and discipline records. If this has been successful the student's progress is monitored every quarter until the end of the year.

If Step I fails Step II proceeds. Step II involves a "Case Consultation Conference." The conference includes the guidance director, social worker, dean, truant advocate, and perhaps teachers, parents and student. During this conference a comprehensive plan is developed which may involve placing the student on a watch list, or placing the student in a counseling group. The counseling groups in this plan are based on a psycho-therapeutic model parallel to those proposed by Pecaut (1979) and Roth (1970). Referrals to individual or family therapy are sometimes considered appropriate. If the student fails to show improvement within eight weeks, the student is referred to the Pupil Personnel Services Screening Committee. This committee has the authority to "mandate interventions, or refer a student for a comprehensive case study evaluation."

Although the multidisciplinary staff meeting system is not a model currently represented in the literature on underachievement, several schools reported its use. According to one counselor:

"Students are referred to our Pupil Personnel Services Team by teachers or counselors. That organization examines the situation and recommends a course of action. It might suggest counseling by the school counselor, township youth agency or psychologist. It might recommend only a parent conference."

The multi-disciplinary committees usually meet weekly or several times a week. Referrals are made by teachers or counselors. Counselors gather information about the student and the committee discusses the problem and recommends a course of action. The counselor to whom the student is assigned is usually responsible for the follow-up on these recommendations. One school with a well-developed plan used multi-disciplinary staff meetings, individual and group counseling and a class for underachievers, about 10 students per class which meets every day for one semester, and is called "Living/Learning Skills."

Among the models reviewed from the literature on underachievement, several had no parallels in the programs reported by Cook County high school counselors. No schools reported direct treatment of parents as in Cameron's (1977) filial therapy. No schools reported the type of curriculum change used in the Richmond Plan (Hamilton, 1968). Supplementary materials such as the CARE kit (1977) and Clarks (1968) games also were not reported.

Although some schools included teachers as part of a team approach to fight underachievement, none suggested, as did Mukhopadhyak (1979), that the teacher alone could bring about change. Finally, the newly developed biofeedback techniques (Thompson, 1980; Von Bargen, 1981), do not appear to be in use in Cook County high schools.

Question #2: To what cause do counselors attribute underachievement?

Respondents were asked to choose between five causes of underachievement. The causes listed were 1) psychological development or adjustment problems; 2) lack of academic skills; 3) boredom with school; 4) seeing no relationship between school and life; 5) other. Another category emerged from the responses, 6) combination of two or more.

The percentage of counselors choosing each category is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

CAUSES

	Percentage	Number
Psychological development or adjustment problems	33.8 %	26
Lack of academic skills	9.1 %	7
Bored with school	9.1 %	7
See no relationship between school and life	28.6 %	22
Other	15.6 %	12
Combination	<u>3.9 %</u>	<u>3</u>
Total	100.0 %	77

The highest number of counselors believe that underachievement is caused by psychological dynamics. Seeing no relationship between school and life is a close second.

Some of the qualitative responses counselors made about causes of underachievement are worth noting. One counselor who chose psychological development or adjustment problems as the cause explained, "Underachievers are also often immature and irresponsible. Also parents of underachievers often admit to over-indulging their children at a younger age." Another counselor focused on how underachievers are perceived by counselors and observed, "Generally I see underachievers as students who 'wish' to succeed on their own terms, not on those of the school."

Many counselors saw the family and community environment as a source of underachievement. One counselor said, "Inappropriate parenting skills which over the years leads to A above." (A is psychological and adjustment problems.) A counselor from the central Chicago area believed the cause was, "No family unit. The father is not in the home of at least 50% of all students in the Chicago Public Schools." Another Chicago counselor put it this way, "In most cases students have family problems - poor support, separated families, unemployed parents, or parents who need help." Even where the family unit was intact underachievement could be caused by "lack of family involvement and interest in education from birth on."

Counselors seem to believe that schools do not exert enough influence in a student's life to counteract problems outside the school. As one counselor wrote, "The home and social climate in the community are the primary external forces that shape a young person's life." Another remarked, "It seems that we cannot compete with many of the youngsters environmental influences."

Although none of the counselors believed that the schools bore responsibility for causing underachievement, one counselor admitted that he believed the schools may contribute to the problem. "The consequences (positive and negative) for academic performance are either delayed or non-existent within the school and home."

Counselor beliefs about the causes of underachievement were related to whether or not their school had a plan for intervention. Overall 72.7% of schools reported having a plan of intervention while 27.3% reported having no plan. However, among schools where the counselor believed that psychological causes were responsible for underachievement 88.5% had a planned intervention. In schools where the cause was believed to be the student seeing no relationship between school and life, only 50% reported that their school had a plan for intervention.

There were also some interesting relationships between the perceived cause of underachievement and the perceived seriousness of the problem.

TABLE 4  
RELATIONSHIP OF CAUSE TO PERCEIVED SERIOUSNESS

CAUSE	S E R I O U S N E S S					TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	--	45.5(5)	45.2(14)	18.2(4)	23.1(3)	33.8(26)
2	--	18.2(2)	12.9(4)	--	7.7(1)	9.1(7)
3	--	--	6.5(2)	18.2(4)	7.7(1)	9.1(7)
4	--	9.1(1)	22.6(7)	36.4(8)	46.2(6)	28.6(22)
5	--	18.2(2)	12.9(4)	18.2(4)	15.4(2)	15.6(12)
6	--	9.1(1)	--	9.1(2)	--	9.9(3)
TOTAL	--	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	--	11	31	22	13	77

Chi-square = 18.46, 15 d.f.

Level of significance = .2393

Table 4 shows for each level of seriousness of an underachievement reported, the percentage and number of counselors reporting that level of seriousness according to the causes given by the same counselors. These distributions are column conditional, each column giving percentage of the column total, followed by actual numbers in parentheses.

The severity of the underachievement problem was rated on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the least serious and 5 being the most serious. When the cause of underachievement was cross tabulated with the seriousness of the underachievement problem, results showed that counselors who believed in psychological causes perceived the severity of underachievement in their schools to be less than counselors who believed in the "no relationship" cause.

Counselors who believed that psychological causes were responsible for underachievement accounted for 45% of the second and third levels of seriousness, and only 18% of rating 4 and 23% of rating 5. Conversely, counselors who believed in the "no relationship" cause reported the majority of the rating 4 & 5 seriousness with 36.4% in rating 4 and 46.2% of rating 5. In the "no relationship" category only 9.1% were in schools reporting a rating 2 regarding the severity of underachievement.

Not only the existence of a planned intervention but also the type of intervention used was related to beliefs about the cause of underachievement. One crucial question concerning beliefs in causality is whether they affect the type of intervention that is actually practiced in the school. Types of intervention plans fall into 6 categories. 0) no plan; 1) counseling; 2) tutoring; 3) curriculum change; 4) work experiential; 5) multi-disciplinary staff meeting; 6) combinations. When "no plan" is removed, the two major types of plans are counseling at 23.4% and multi-disciplinary staff meetings at 14.3%. Among counselors who say psychological problems cause underachievement, 26.9% are in schools having counseling plans while 23.1% are in schools with multi-disciplinary staff meetings.

In those schools which believe the "no relationship" cause only 4.5% have plans involving curriculum change while 13.6% have counseling interventions and 13.6% have multi-disciplinary staff meetings.

It is clear that the majority of counselors do not, as the literature suggests they should, believe that underachievement is caused by psychological problems. Nonetheless, those schools whose counselors

believe that underachievement is caused by psychological problems are more likely to have a planned intervention. Furthermore, that intervention is more likely to be a counseling intervention.

Question #3: Are counselors' beliefs about causes of underachievement congruent with their beliefs about appropriate treatment?

In order to determine whether counselors' beliefs about causes and appropriate treatments were congruent, it was necessary to ascertain which interventions the counselors preferred. Five interventions based on models appropriate for the treatment of each cause were proposed. The proposed interventions were: 1) group and/or individual counseling; 2) tutoring; 3) curriculum changes and instructional methods modification; 4) experiential or work related programs; 5) other; again a 6th category, "combinations" emerged.



TABLE 5  
PREFERRED INTERVENTIONS

	Percent	Number
Group and/or Individual Counseling	35.1%	27
Tutoring	2.6%	2
Curriculum Changes and Instructional Method Modification	35.1%	27
Experiential or work-related programs	5.2%	4
Other	13.0%	10
Combinations	<u>9.1%</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTAL	100.0%	77

Table 5 shows that equal numbers of counselors preferred counseling and curriculum change as a treatment of underachievement.

When giving additional comments about preferred interventions some counselors focused on the need to involve parents. One counselor suggested group and/or individual counseling, "especially involving parents," while another wanted tutoring and curriculum change "with involvement of parents or guardians to provide meaningful, natural and logical consequences in a systematic way."

A counselor having chosen "other" as the best intervention said, "Building a program where students see success. This changes self-concept and achievement."

It is interesting to note that even when counselors selected curriculum change as the best intervention, they tended to confirm the importance of providing counseling support. For example, "of course individual counseling must go along with any method used," and, "a little counseling never hurts either." One counselor believed, "on the high school level, the serious underachievers have set patterns that group and individual counseling is definitely needed before learning-achievement is functioning properly." Another chose curriculum change because "we would need intensive individual and family therapy to make significant progress."

It has been hypothesized that remedies would reflect beliefs about causality. This can be determined by finding the frequency with which counselors chose an intervention which is congruent with the cause they chose. Counseling treatments were considered to be congruent with psychological causes as follows: tutoring with academic deficiencies, curriculum change with boredom with school, experiential or work related programs with seeing no relationship between school and life.

TABLE 6  
RELATIONSHIP OF PREFERRED INTERVENTIONS TO CAUSE

CAUSE	I N T E R V E N T I O N						TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	50.0(13)	3.8(1)	26.9(7)	3.8(1)	15.4(4)	--	100.0	26
2	14.3(1)	14.3(1)	57.1(4)	--	--	14.3(1)	100.0	7
3	--	--	57.1(4)	--	28.6(2)	14.3(1)	100.0	7
4	50.0(11)	--	36.4(8)	13.6(3)	--	--	100.0	22
5	16.7(2)	--	33.3(4)	--	33.3(4)	16.7(2)	100.0	12
6	--	--	--	--	--	100.0(3)	100.0	3
TOTAL	35.1(27)	2.6(2)	35.1(27)	5.2(4)	13.0(10)	9.1(7)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 63.99, 25 d.f.

Level of Significance - .0001.

The above table, which is row conditional, shows what percentage and number of counselors choosing each cause, chose the intervention which is theoretically congruent with that cause. This distribution shows that among counselors who believed that psychological problems caused underachievement 50% suggested counseling as an intervention, while 26.9% suggested curriculum change. Counseling was also the preferred method of intervention among counselors who believed that seeing no relationship between school and life was the cause of underachievement. Fifty percent of these counselors also chose counseling, however among this group more counselors chose curriculum change at 36.4%. Counseling is as often a preferred intervention among counselors believing in the "no relationship between school and life" cause, as it is among counselors believing in a

psychological problems cause, the difference being those who give "no relationship" as the cause prefer curriculum intervention.

It is evident that the hypothesized relationship between congruence of cause and treatment model is a weak one. This may reflect a lack of information on the part of counselors concerning causes as well as appropriate interventions for underachievement. There was also be a relationship between preferred intervention and presence or absence of an intervention plan. This relationship suggests that counselors who believe in curriculum change tend to be in schools where there is a planned intervention. Of those counselors who believe in the curriculum change intervention, 85.2% were in schools with intervention plans.

Question #4: Do counselors see underachievement as one of their school's most serious problems?

Counselors were asked to rate the seriousness of underachievement at their school on a scale from 1 to 5. One is the least, and five is the most serious.

TABLE 7  
SERIOUSNESS

	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
Rating 1	0 %	0
Rating 2	14.3%	11
Rating 3	40.3%	31
Rating 4	28.6%	22
Rating 5	<u>16.9%</u>	<u>13</u>
TOTAL	100 %	77

Table 7 shows that over 85% of counselors rated the seriousness of underachievement at their schools at level 3 or above, clearly suggesting that underachievement is one of their most serious problems. Qualitative responses about the seriousness of underachievement were interesting. Several counselors explained why the problem of underachievement was rated high in their school. In one largely Spanish speaking school, the counselor commented, "Many students at our school are new to this country and have difficulty adjusting to the language." Another said underachievement is serious in his school "Because kids do not see a sense of purpose in their lives and invest their energy in dealing with daily concerns not related to achievement." This explanation focused on another problem, "A number of freshmen come to high school with poor study skills

and do not take school serious - they fail classes and fall behind in credits."

One counselor noted that it is hard to tell how serious the problem is since many students can underachieve and never come to their attention. "Many students suffer from the problem of not using their potential; but those specifically who come to our attention are ones who have multiple failures, who cause behavior problems, and/or are truant."

Another counselor observed, "When combined with other manifestations of inappropriate behavior (alcohol, drugs, delinquency), the problem becomes much more serious."

Finally, one exasperated counselor who believed that underachievement at his school was very serious, complained, "It's getting worse year by year and the administration - Board wants to cut the Guidance Program."

Several other variables seem to relate to the degree of seriousness. The relationship between seriousness and cause, as well as intervention, has already been discussed. There also seems to be a relationship between seriousness and intervention plan presence or absence. While overall 72.7% of schools have an intervention plan and 27.3% do not, of schools reporting level 2 of underachievement, 90.9% have an intervention plan. Conversely, in the rating 4 group, only 59.1% have an intervention plan.

An interesting fact is revealed in the cross-tabulation of seriousness and types of intervention plans used in schools. Of schools using multidisciplinary staff meetings, 89.9% report a rating of 3 or

below. All other schools had ratings of seriousness that approximated the averages.

Question #5: Are interventions used in Cook County high schools congruent with counselors' beliefs about appropriate treatment?

As previously described, counselors were asked to select a "preferred intervention." In other words, they were asked to select the intervention which they believed would be most effective. The question under consideration is whether or not the types of treatment programs which the counselors believe would be effective are actually being used in their schools. The interventions from which counselors were asked to choose were 1) group and individual counseling; 2) tutoring; 3) curriculum changes and instructional method modification; 4) experiential or work related programs; 5) other; or 6) combinations. The types of plans were: 0) no plan; 1) counseling; 2) tutoring; 3) curriculum change; 4) experiential/work related; 5) multidisciplinary staff meetings; 6) combinations. Cross tabulating these categories resulted in tables 8 and 9.

TABLE 8

RELATIONSHIP OF PREFERRED INTERVENTION TO  
TYPES OF PLANS (COLUMN CONDITIONAL)

PREFERRED INTERVENTION	TYPE OF PLAN							TOTAL	N
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	36.4(8)	61.1(11)	25.0(2)	11.1(1)	--	18.2(2)	33.3(3)	35.1	(27)
2	4.5(1)	--	12.5(1)	--	--	--	--	2.6	(2)
3	18.2(4)	22.2(4)	50.0(4)	88.9(8)	--	54.5(6)	11.1(1)	35.1	(27)
4	13.6(3)	--	12.5(1)	--	--	--	--	5.2	(4)
5	9.1(2)	5.6(1)	--	--	--	18.2(2)	55.6(5)	13.0	(10)
6	18.8(4)	11.1(2)	--	--	--	9.1(1)	--	9.1	(7)
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
N	22	18	8	9	8	11	9	77	

Chi-square = 50.65, 25 d.f.

Level of Significance = .0018.



TABLE 9  
RELATIONSHIP OF PREFERRED INTERVENTION TO  
TYPES OF PLANS (ROW CONDITIONAL)

PREFERRED INTERVENTION	TYPE OF PLAN							TOTAL N	
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	29.6(8)	40.7(11)	7.4(2)	3.7(1)	--	7.4(2)	11.1(3)	100.0	27
2	50.0(1)	--	50.0(1)	--	--	--	--	100.0	2
3	14.8(4)	14.8(4)	14.8(4)	23.6(8)	--	22.2(6)	3.7(1)	100.0	27
4	75.0(3)	--	25.0(1)	--	--	--	--	100.0	4
5	20.0(2)	10.0(1)	--	--	--	20.0(2)	50.0(5)	100.0	10
6	57.1(4)	38.6(2)	--	--	--	14.3(1)	--	100.0	7
TOTAL	28.6(22)	23.4 (8)	10.4(8)	11.7(9)	--(0)	4.3 (11)	11.7(9)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 50.65, 25 d.f.  
Level of significance = .0018.

Table eight is row conditional and table nine is column conditional. Percentages of rows and columns are given first followed by actual numbers in parentheses.

These tables show that although those who believe in a group or individual counseling intervention represent only 35.1% of all counselors, they are 61.1% of those who use this plan type in their school. Of those saying they believe in counseling, 40.7% report that they do in fact use this intervention.

Of those who believe in curriculum change, 29.6% use this intervention in their school, with 22.2% having multi-disciplinary staff meetings. Only 14.8% who believe in curriculum change report counseling

interventions in their schools. Of schools using curriculum change interventions 88.9% have counselors who believe in this intervention.

In each category the type of plan most used was that directly related to the counselors' preferred interventions. Many counselors are working in schools with no intervention plan, and some counselors are working in schools whose plans they do not prefer. Nonetheless, in the majority of schools, counselors' beliefs about appropriate interventions are having an impact on the types of interventions being used to treat underachievement. This trend is strongest in schools where the head of the counseling department believes group and individual counseling interventions are appropriate.

Question #6: Do beliefs about causes, appropriate interventions, and seriousness of the underachievement problem, as well as types of intervention used, diverge along a number of demographic variables?

The results of responses to ten demographic variables were cross tabulated with the five major categories. A joint frequency distribution and a chi-square value were calculated from each of these cross tabulations. Although, as previously explained, the chi-square analysis may be used in inferential statistics, it was used in this study to screen those variables which seemed most closely related. Yet even chi-square values that aren't statistically significant showed important trends when examined by row and column distribution.

The first demographic variable addressed was school size - the number of students. The overall breakdown of school size in Cook County high schools responding to this survey is shown in the following table.

TABLE 10  
SCHOOL SIZE/NUMBER OF STUDENTS

	<u>Number of Students</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
1.	1-1000	9.1%	7
2.	1001-1500	16.9%	13
3.	1501-2000	31.2%	24
4.	2001-2500	29.9%	23
5.	2501-4500	<u>13.0%</u>	<u>10</u>
	TOTAL	100.0%	77

Three categories related to school size. They were: 1) beliefs about causes of underachievement; 2) preferred intervention; 3) types of intervention plan used.

TABLE 11  
RELATIONSHIP OF SCHOOL SIZE TO CAUSE

SCHOOL SIZE	CAUSE						TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	57.1(4)	--	14.3(1)	28.6(2)	--	--	100.0	7
2	30.8(4)	7.7(1)	23.1(3)	7.7(1)	15.4(2)	15.4(2)	100.0	13
3	41.7(10)	8.3(2)	--	20.8(5)	25.0(6)	4.2(1)	100.0	24
4	30.4(7)	8.7(2)	8.7(2)	39.1(9)	13.0(3)	--	100.0	23
5	0.0(1)	20.0(2)	10.0(1)	50.0(5)	10.0(1)	--	100.0	10
TOTAL	33.8(26)	9.1(7)	9.1(7)	28.6(22)	15.6(12)	3.9(3)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 24.26, 20 d.f.

Level of significance = .2312.

The above table is row conditional, giving percentages of row totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. When cause of underachievement was cross tabulated with school size, it was found that the largest schools (those with 2500 to 4500 students) had counselors who believed that the greatest reason for underachievement was the inability to see the relationship between school and life, while only 10% of counselors in these large schools believed psychological problems were at the root of underachievement. The reverse was true of smaller schools. In schools with 1000 to 1500 students, psychological problems were given as the lead cause at 30%, while the "no relationship" issue was a mere 7.7%. Medium sized schools also gave psychological problems as the leading cause of underachievement at 41.7%.

Another variable which showed interesting results when cross tabulated with size was preferred intervention method. Seventy percent of counselors from large schools (2500-4500) preferred curriculum change,

while only 20% preferred counseling interventions. All other size categories favored the counseling intervention.

Types of intervention plans also varied according to school size. Among the small schools, 1500 students or less, no school reported using the multidisciplinary staff meeting. These schools tended to use combination approaches. On the other hand, in the very large schools, 2500-4500 student population, curriculum change and multidisciplinary staff meetings together accounted for half of the types of plans. Only 10% of the large schools used counseling alone.

School location was another interesting demographic variable. Schools were divided into five areas. The table below shows the number of schools in each area responding to the survey.

TABLE 12

LOCATION

	<u>Location</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
1.	Chicago	45 %	35
2.	Northern Suburbs	20 %	16
3.	Southern Suburbs	18 %	14
4.	Western Suburbs	13 %	10
5.	Other	2 %	2
	TOTAL	100 %	77

Different locations varied on beliefs about cause, preferred interventions, seriousness of the problem of underachievement, and types of intervention plans used.

TABLE 13  
RELATIONSHIP OF CAUSE TO LOCATION

LOCATION	CAUSE						TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	28.6(10)	14.3(5)	14.3(5)	28.6(10)	8.6(3)	5.7(2)	100.0	35
2	43.8(7)	12.5(2)	--	18.8(3)	25.0(4)	--	100.0	16
3	42.9(6)	--	7.1(1)	28.6(4)	14.3(2)	7.1(1)	100.0	14
4	20.0(2)	--	10.0(1)	40.0(4)	30.0(3)	--	100.0	10
5	50.0(1)	--	--	50.0(1)	--	--	100.0	2
TOTAL	33.8(26)	9.1(7)	9.1(7)	28.6(22)	15.6(12)	3.9(3)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 14.92, 20 d.f.

Level of significance = .7810.

The above table is row conditional, giving percents of row totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. This table shows how beliefs about the cause of underachievement varied among locations. Counselors in Chicago gave psychological problems and "no relationship" equal weight as causes with 28.6% each. Both northern and southern suburbs believed more strongly in psychological causes, with 43.8% and 42.9% respectively. But southern suburbs gave more weight to the "no relationship" theory at 28.6%. While the northern suburbs only credit this explanation 18.8% of the time, western suburbs disagreed, giving the "no relationship" cause 40% of the time, and psychological cause only 20% of the time.

Preferred intervention also varied along geographic lines, as seen in Table 14.

TABLE 14

## RELATIONSHIP OF PREFERRED INTERVENTION TO LOCATION

LOCATION	PREFERRED INTERVENTION						TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	37.1(13)	2.9(1)	31.4(11)	5.7(2)	14.3(5)	8.6(3)	100.0	35
2	12.5(2)	6.3(1)	37.5(6)	6.3(1)	18.8(3)	18.8(3)	100.0	16
3	35.7(5)	--	42.9(6)	--	14.3(2)	7.1(1)	100.0	14
4	60.0(6)	--	40.0(4)	--	--	--	100.0	10
5	50.0(1)	--	--	50.0(1)	--	--	100.0	2
TOTAL	35.1(27)	2.6(2)	35.1(27)	5.2(4)	13.0(10)	9.1(7)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 20.81, 20 d.f.

Level of significance = .4084.

The above table is row conditional, giving percents of row totals followed by actual number in parentheses. Looking into the relationship between location and preferred intervention, the data showed that counselors in the western suburbs had a stronger preference for counseling interventions. While, overall, counseling received 35.1% of the vote, in the western suburbs it received 60%. Curriculum change accounted for the other 40% in western suburbs. Counselors in northern suburbs also varied significantly from the obtained average. In the northern suburbs only 12.5% preferred counseling interventions. Thirty-seven point five percent of these counselors preferred curriculum changes, while 37.5% said "other or combinations."

Different locations reported different levels of severity of the problem of underachievement. This is shown in Tables 15 and 16.

TABLE 15  
 RELATIONSHIP OF SERIOUSNESS TO LOCATION  
 (COLUMN CONDITIONAL)

LOCATION	SERIOUSNESS					TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	--	18.2(2)	45.2(14)	40.9(9)	76.9(10)	45.5(35)
2	--	36.4(4)	29.0(9)	13.6(3)	--	20.8(16)
3	--	45.5(5)	6.5(2)	22.7(5)	15.4(2)	18.2(14)
4	--	--	16.1(5)	22.7(5)	--	13.0(10)
5	--	--	2.2(1)	--	7.7(1)	2.6(2)
TOTAL	--	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N		11	31	22	13	77

Chi-square = 24.59, 12 d.f.

Level of Significance = .0169



TABLE 16  
 RELATIONSHIP OF SERIOUSNESS TO LOCATION  
 (ROW CONDITIONAL)

LOCATION	SERIOUSNESS					TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5		
1	--	5.7(2)	40.0(14)	25.7(9)	28.6(10)	100.0	35
2	--	25.0(4)	56.3(9)	18.8(3)	--	100.0	16
3	--	35.7(5)	14.3(2)	35.7(5)	14.3(2)	100.0	14
4	--	--	50.0(5)	50.0(5)	--	100.0	10
5	--	--	50.0(1)	--	50.0(1)	100.0	2
TOTAL	--	14.3(11)	40.3(31)	28.6(22)	16.9(13)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 24.59, 12 d.f.

Level of significance = .0169.

Table 15 above is column conditional, giving percent of column totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. Table 16 is row conditional, giving percent of row totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. Underachievement is regarded as a far more serious problem in Chicago high schools than in any of the suburban locations. Chicago schools represent 45.5% of schools in the survey, but Chicago schools made up 76.9% of the schools reporting a 5 rating. No north suburban school gave underachievement a 5 rating. In the northern suburbs, 81.3% of schools rated underachievement at a 3 rating or below. The southern suburbs reported 35.7% at a 2 rating, 14.3% at a 3 rating, 35.7% at a 4 rating and 14.3% at a 5 rating. The western suburbs also put half their rating below a 3 rating and half above, but in those suburbs there were no cases in either the rating 2 or rating 5.

The presence or absence of a planned intervention varied widely among locations. Chicago closely approximated the obtained average with 77.1% having plans and 22.9% having no plan. It was the northern suburbs which reported the greatest percentage with schools having planned interventions for underachievement. In the northern suburbs, 81.3% of schools had plans. Southern suburbs had the least planned interventions with only 57.1%. Western suburbs approached the obtained average with 70% reporting plans and 30% no plans.

TABLE 17  
RELATIONSHIP OF LOCATION TO TYPE OF PLAN  
(COLUMN CONDITIONAL)

LOCATION	TYPE OF PLAN							TOTAL
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	36.4(8)	50.0(9)	62.5(6)	55.6(5)	--	--	88.9(8)	45.5(35)
2	13.6(3)	16.7(3)	12.5(1)	11.1(1)	--	63.6(7)	11.1(1)	20.8(16)
3	31.8(7)	16.7(3)	12.5(1)	11.1(1)	--	18.2(2)	--	18.2(14)
4	13.6(3)	16.7(3)	--	22.2(2)	--	18.2(2)	--	13.0(10)
5	4.5(1)	--	12.5(1)	--	--	--	--	2.6(2)
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	--	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	22	18	8	9	8	11	9	77

Chi-square = 33.50, 20 d.f.  
Level of significance = .0297

TABLE 18  
 RELATIONSHIP OF LOCATION TO TYPE OF PLAN  
 (ROW CONDITIONAL)

LOCATION	TYPE OF PLAN						TOTAL	N	
	0	1	2	3	4	5			6
1	22.9(8)	25.7(9)	14.3(5)	14.3(5)	--	--	22.9(8)	100.0	35
2	18.8(3)	18.8(3)	6.3(1)	6.3(1)	--	43.8(7)	6.3(1)	100.0	16
3	50.0(7)	21.4(3)	7.1(1)	7.1(1)	--	14.3(2)	--	100.0	14
4	30.0(3)	30.0(3)	--	20.0(2)	--	20.0(2)	--	100.0	10
5	50.0(1)	--	50.0(1)	--	--	--	--	100.0	2
TOTAL	23.6(22)	23.4(18)	10.4(8)	11.7(9)	--	14.3(11)	11.7(9)	100.0	77

Chi-square for above tables = 33.50 with 20 d.f.  
 Level of significance = .0297.

Table 17 is column conditional, giving percentages of each column followed by actual number in parentheses. Table 18 is row conditional, giving percentages of rows followed by actual numbers in parentheses. Location proved an interesting variable when crossed with type of intervention plan. The above tables show that those schools using counseling were evenly distributed with 50% Chicago and 50% suburbs. Even the suburban locations split evenly among themselves. On curriculum change the same was true. The split was nearly even.

The real distinction in type of plan and location showed up in two areas, tutoring and multidisciplinary staff meetings. Of those schools using tutoring, 62.5% were in Chicago, none were in western suburbs. The

multidisciplinary staff meeting was entirely a suburban phenomenon. No Chicago school reported using this technique. The highest concentration of multidisciplinary staff meetings, was in the northern suburbs. Northern suburbs accounted for 63.6% of the multidisciplinary staff meetings, leaving 18.2% a piece for the southern and western suburban schools. The multidisciplinary staff meeting was the most often reported intervention in the northern suburbs, with 43.8% reporting their use. Only 18.8% of northern suburbs used group or individual counseling interventions.

Fifty percent of southern suburbs had no intervention plan, but of those reporting planned interventions, the majority used counseling. Western suburbs reported 30% were using counseling with 20% each falling in the curriculum change and review board categories.

A third variable was the ethnic makeup of the school. The proportion of black students in a high school seemed to be related to several issues. The figures on proportion of black students in Cook County high schools responding to this survey is shown in the following table.

TABLE 19  
PROPORTION - BLACK STUDENTS

	<u>Percentage Black Students In School</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
1.	0 - .99%	18.2 %	14
2.	1 - 25 %	40.3 %	31
3.	25 - 50 %	10.4 %	8
4.	51 - 75 %	3.9 %	3
5.	76 - 100%	<u>27.3 %</u>	<u>21</u>
TOTAL		100.0 %	77

The demographic information on race given by the counselors answering this survey, suggests that most Black students are attending schools where they are either a small minority of 1-25% of students (this is the case in 40.3% of schools) or the vast majority 75-100%.

The relationship between the percentage of Black students and counselors perceived cause of underachievement is shown in the following frequency distribution.

TABLE 20  
RELATIONSHIP OF % BLACK STUDENTS TO CAUSE

% BLACK STUDENTS	CAUSE						TOTAL	N
	1	2	3	4	5	6		
1	57.1(8)	--	--	21.4(3)	21.4(3)	--	100.0	14
2	38.7(12)	6.5(2)	6.5(2)	29.0(9)	19.4(6)	--	100.0	31
3	25.0(2)	--	25.0(2)	12.5(1)	12.5(1)	25.0(2)	100.0	8
4	66.7(2)	33.3(1)	--	--	--	--	100.0	3
5	9.5(2)	19.0(4)	14.3(3)	42.9(9)	9.5(2)	4.8(1)	100.0	21
TOTAL	33.9(26)	9.1(7)	28.6(7)	15.6(22)	15.6(12)	3.9(3)	100.0	77

Chi-square = 34.38, 20 d.f.

Level of significance = .0208.

The above table is row conditional, giving percent of row totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. In schools where Black students make up 75% to 100% of the population only 9.5% of counselors believe that causes of underachievement relate to psychological problems. By far the leading cause cited by these counselors is the failure to see a relationship between school and life at 42.9%. Nineteen percent believe that underachievement is caused by a lack of academic skills and 14% say students are bored.

On the other hand, in schools where Black students are in the minority (1-25%), counselors report beliefs of causality much closer to the obtained average with 38.7%, giving psychological problems as the lead cause, putting seeing no relationship between school and life second with 29%.

The severity of underachievement also appears to be related to the racial makeup of the schools. In schools where Blacks make up 75 to 100% of the students in a school, 47.6% report seriousness at a 5 rating. Conversely, where Blacks make up 1-25% of a school's population only 6.5% report a rating of 5.

The opposite is reported in the case of majority Caucasian schools. Where 75 to 100% of a school's population is Caucasian, only 5.9% report a 5 rating. Of all the 2 ratings, 72.7% are reported from schools with Caucasian majorities.

Schools with a minority (1-25%) of Black students were slightly more likely to have plans than schools with a majority of Black students. In minority Black schools, 83.9% reported an intervention plan, while in majority Black schools, only 66.7% did. No such dichotomy existed with relationship to Caucasian school populations.

In schools with 75 to 100% Black populations 33.3% had no plan for intervention in the problem of underachievement. The other 66.7% divides almost evenly among the other categories with 14.3% counseling, 19% tutoring, 19% curriculum change and 14.3% combinations.

Counselors were asked to roughly estimate the socioeconomic status of their community. They reported the following figures.

TABLE 21  
 SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF SCHOOL COMMUNITY

	<u>Socioeconomic Status</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>
1.	Upper Middle	23.4 %	18
2.	Lower Middle and Lower	59.4 %	46
3.	Middle	10.4 %	8
4.	Can't Tell	2.6 %	2
5.	Split	<u>2.9 %</u>	<u>3</u>
	TOTAL	100.0%	77

The cause of underachievement, the seriousness of the problem, and the planned intervention types were all related to the reported socioeconomic status of the community.



TABLE 22  
RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF  
COMMUNITY TO CAUSE

CAUSE	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITY					TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	
1	50.0(9)	28.3(13)	50.0(4)	--	--	33.8(26)
2	11.1(2)	10.9(5)	--	--	--	9.1(7)
3	--	15.2(7)	--	--	--	9.1(7)
4	22.2(4)	26.1(12)	25.0(2)	50.0(1)	100.0	28.6(22)
5	16.7(3)	13.0(6)	25.0(2)	50.0(1)	--	15.6(12)
6	--	6.5	--	--	--	3.9(3)
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
N	18	46	8	2	3	77

Chi-square = 21.01, 20 d.f.

Level of significance = .3965.

The above table is column conditional, giving percent of column totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. The socioeconomic status of the community seems to have some relationship to beliefs in causality. Schools that report being in communities with upper-middle class socioeconomic status tended to favor psychological explanations to a greater degree than those in lower and lower middle class communities. In upper middle class communities psychological causes were given 50% of the time, while in lower and lower-middle class communities psychological causes were only cited by 28.3% of counselors.

TABLE 23  
RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF  
COMMUNITY TO SERIOUSNESS

SERIOUSNESS	SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF COMMUNITY						
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	
1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
2	38.9(7)	8.7(4)	--	--	--	14.3	(11)
3	38.9(7)	34.8(16)	62.5(5)	50.0(1)	66.7(2)	40.3	(31)
4	22.2(4)	30.4(14)	25.0(2)	50.0(1)	33.3(1)	28.6	(22)
5	--	26.1(2)	12.5(1)	--	--	16.9	(13)
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
N	18	46	8	2	3	77	

Chi-square = 19.36, 12 d.f.

Level of significance = .0802.

The above table is column conditional, giving percent of column totals followed by actual numbers in parentheses. It shows the relationship between socioeconomic status of the community, and the perceived seriousness of underachievement in the high school. No school in an upper middle class community reported a 5 rating. These schools reported 77.8% at level 3 or below. Schools in lower and lower-middle class communities reported 8.7% in rating 2; 34.8% in rating 3; 30.4% in rating 4 and 26.1% in rating 5. Middle class communities reported most of their schools in ratings 3 and 4. Clearly underachievement is regarded as more serious in schools in lower socioeconomic communities.

Among types of intervention plans, only the multi-disciplinary staff meeting stands out. Seventy-two point seven percent of multidisciplinary staff meetings are in communities described as upper-middle class, and only 18.2% in lower-middle and lower class socioeconomic areas. Furthermore, multidisciplinary staff meetings are over-represented among schools with high percentages of college-bound students.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine what intervention methods are currently being employed in Cook County high schools to treat the problem of underachievement, and to describe these treatment programs. The study further proposed to systematically investigate a number of variables which could be related to the current status of underachievement treatment in Cook County public high schools. By such an investigation, the present study proposed to begin the work of laying a foundation upon which further discussion of and improvement of treatments for underachievement could be built.

The procedure adopted for this investigation was the survey, a methodological technique which required the systematic collection of data from a population through the use of a self-administered questionnaire. (Denzin, 1978). In this study, 125 heads of counseling departments in Cook County public high schools were mailed survey questionnaires. Seventy-eight questionnaires were completed and returned.

It was postulated that an understanding of counselors' beliefs regarding the causes of underachievement would help to elucidate the current status of underachievement treatment programs in Cook County public high schools. Available literature gathered from research and clinical observation suggests that psychological causes are the major

underachievement. Yet, only about a third of the counselors responding to this survey cited psychological causes. Furthermore, equal numbers of counselors preferred curriculum and counseling interventions to treat the problem of underachievement. The fact that underachievement is one of our high schools' most serious problems was confirmed by counselors. Eighty-five percent of the counselors ranked the seriousness at level three or above on a scale of one to five.

A comparison was made between treatment models currently in use in Cook County high schools and treatment models found in the literature regarding the underachievement phenomenon. No schools reported using work/experiential programs such as the type suggested in the Focus (1975) model. No schools described an activity-based model such as the Richmond Plan (Kincaid & Hamilton, 1968). Likewise, other model types from the literature such as direct treatment of parents (Cameron, 1977), home-based reinforcement (Witt, 1983), and special training of classroom teachers (Mukhopadhyay, 1979), were not in use in Cook County high schools. Neither did any counselors mention the use of biofeedback techniques (Thompson, 1980, Von Bargen, 1981). Treatment models described by counselors in Cook County high schools included group and individual counseling, curriculum changes, tutoring, and approaches which combined these treatments. Furthermore, a model not represented in the literature emerged. This was the multidisciplinary staff meeting.

Analysis of demographic variables made it clear that beliefs about the underlying causes of underachievement, the appropriate intervention

methods, and the rating of the seriousness of the problem, as well as types of treatment plans being used, do indeed diverge along a number of demographic variables. Racial composition and socioeconomic conditions in school areas related to the perceived causes, as well as to the degree of seriousness of underachievement. School size was related to the type of intervention preferred by counselors. Counselors in large schools showed a preference for curriculum change over counseling. It is possible that curriculum change is viewed as a more efficient way to deal with large numbers of students.

Geographic location was also correlated to several variables. Different suburban areas reported different types of intervention plans, as well as diverse beliefs about the causes of underachievement, and the methods of appropriate interventions. The results of the survey make it apparent that Cook County is a heterogeneous educational entity, and that its high schools as well as their counseling departments reflects this diversity.

### Discussion

In evaluating the results of the present investigation, it is important to restate certain limitations. As previously mentioned, the accuracy of the results of a survey study is largely dependent on the level of response. The 62% response level in this survey is somewhat

below the 70% minimum suggested (Gay, 1976). Although the response rate is not far below the suggested rate, a higher rate would give greater confidence.

The most serious limitation is that there are no other similar studies on which this study could be modeled, or with which the results of this study could be compared. Whether or not different questions or different wording of the present questions would have resulted in different responses, and a perspective divergent from the one proposed in this analysis, remains open to debate. Nonetheless, analysis of the data collected in this survey leads to some interesting points for further investigation.

One result which merits closer scrutiny is the finding that, contrary to what the literature would suggest, only about a third of the counselors in Cook County high schools cited psychological causes as the chief contributor to underachievement. An examination of the cross tabulation of cause with the demographic variables offers a possible explanation of this discrepancy. The greatest deviation from the expected response came from schools with a majority of Black students. In these cases, fewer than ten percent of counselors attributed underachievement to psychological causes. Over forty percent gave the primary cause as "seeing no relationship between school and life."

A connection could be made here between the high unemployment and low income levels of predominantly Black urban areas, and the fact that students find little to indicate that academic achievement will lead to future success in the marketplace. In Kornrich's (1965) collection of

research on underachievement, Rosen proposed a similar explanation for his finding that Negroes had the lowest level of vocational aspiration of any racial or ethnic group he tested. In contrast, in the upper middle class, predominantly Caucasian areas, more than half of the counselors listed psychological problems as the primary cause of underachievement. In these areas, students tend to believe that career opportunities and future success are directly related to educational achievement.

Data showed that the seriousness rating of underachievement is related to geographic location, as well as racial and socioeconomic factors. In city schools, largely Black schools and schools in lower income communities, underachievement is rated as more severe than in suburban, largely white, affluent areas. One possible explanation for this is a compounding of causes. As previously discussed, in suburban, affluent areas, underachievement is thought by counselors to be caused mainly by psychological problems; that is, it is chiefly an internal problem of the student. In economically depressed areas, these psychological problems may be only one cause of underachievement. Additionally, external forces and conditions may make academic achievement seem less relevant. This compounding of causes may increase the level of underachievement.

It also seems that having a planned intervention may help lower the severity of underachievement as perceived by the head of the counseling department in a school. Schools with planned interventions reported lower levels of underachievement than schools with no plan.



It is interesting that regardless of what they believe to be the cause of underachievement, counselors think that both curriculum change and counseling are important in combating underachievement. Overburdened by paperwork and a high student-counselor ratio, counselors may see curriculum change as a faster, more efficient means of combating underachievement. Yet even where curriculum change is the major thrust of the program for underachievers, counseling is usually considered a necessary part of the process. Indeed, counselors seem to realize that it is necessary to help the student change not only the way he experiences school, but also the way that he experiences himself.

Some psychologists have argued for group and individual therapy as the most effective treatment for underachievement, however, only a few Cook County high schools use this approach exclusively with underachievers. Although results of the survey indicate that "counseling" is the most frequent treatment plan, further discussion of this response is warranted. A quantitative view would support this, but an examination of the qualitative data indicates that what was frequently termed a "counseling" intervention was in reality, nothing more than a single conference with the student or a meeting with or phone call to a parent. Even where counselors reported monitoring students, the depth of the encounter between counselor and student was often superficial.

The distinction between an intervention and a treatment is important. The question on the survey was, "Does your school have a plan/program for intervening with underachieving students? If yes, what?" In fact, one time conferences, phone calls to parents and student

monitoring are all interventions. It is important to understand the difference between a treatment and an intervention. A conference is, in the broadest sense of the word, an intervention, yet given the widely accepted belief in psychological causes of underachievement, it would be naive to suppose that underachievement could be treated by such a method.

This leads to a closer examination of multidisciplinary staff meetings. The multidisciplinary staff meeting has become prominent in suburban, particularly north suburban schools. Multidisciplinary staff meetings are made up of such school personnel as counselors, school psychologists, teachers, deans, and department heads, the composition of which varies from school to school. The frequency of these group meetings varies anywhere from daily to weekly. Intervention, again in its broadest sense, is the primary purpose of the group. How the student comes to the attention of the multidisciplinary group also varies among schools, but often it involves teacher referrals, truancy, falling grades or other unacceptable behavior. These multidisciplinary staff meetings may be seen as an attempt to prevent students from "falling through the cracks" of the bureaucracies that large schools sometimes develop. To the degree that multidisciplinary staff meetings catch the student early in his downward slide, they are quite helpful. Once again, however, multidisciplinary staff meetings are only interventions and as such are only helpful to the degree that they lead to appropriate treatments. While a multidisciplinary staff meeting may suggest parent conferences, special placement, monitoring of the student, outside psychological help or any of a number of other treatments, it is frequently up to the student to go for

psychological help voluntarily, and most underachievers do not volunteer for therapy.

The most promising plans suggested by one Cook County counselor seems to be ones involving multidisciplinary staff meetings followed by well conceived and mandatory treatment plans such as individual or group therapy, or perhaps curriculum change combined with counseling.

The results of this study suggest that the counselors' preferences are influential in determining the type of plan being used to treat underachievement in his/her school. In each category, the type of intervention plan most used was that directly related to the counselors' preferred interventions. Many counselors are working in schools with no intervention plan, and some counselors are working in schools whose plans they do not prefer. Nonetheless, in the majority of schools, counselors' beliefs about appropriate interventions are having an impact on the types of interventions being used to treat underachievement.

A final word is necessary about schools reporting having no intervention plan. Although none of the counselors chose "nothing" as a preferred intervention, 27% of schools, in fact, had no intervention plan at all. The reasons given for the absence of an intervention plan were the lack of staff, the lack of time and money, as well as a lack of knowledge about existing intervention plans and their effectiveness. The issues here are awareness and commitment. As to lack of knowledge, investigation of the available literature could easily suggest a variety of plans which have been successful enough to warrant usage. A serious effort to look for answers would surely be rewarded with practical ideas.

As to the issues of time, money and staff, multidisciplinary staff meetings have proven very time and staff efficient, and cost no extra money. In addition, the availability of time and staff for such highly recommended treatments as group counseling programs would be greatly increased, if counselors were relieved of some of their clerical busy-work.

A final suggestion would be to establish a dialogue between the guidance departments and the computer departments in high schools in the interest of developing a computer program which would help free the counselors from clerical "busy-work."

As Roth reminds us,

It remains then for the development of a truly professional guidance staff in the high school, centered around the specific remediation not only of underachievement but of other attitudes of emotional immaturity that make themselves noticeable during the high school years. Each school would require a trained staff of counselors with ongoing supervision and professional association with the therapeutic community outside the school in order to provide maximum effective assistance for students in need (Roth, 1970, p.71).

#### Implications for Further Research

The type of research represented in the present study can be helpful in focusing the attention of the educational community on the problem of underachievement. Questions such as: "What can be done?"; "What is being done?"; and "What remains to be done?" are important issues raised by such research. The broader the scope of this research the clearer the answers to these questions will become. The following

suggestions are intended as methods of refining and expanding this knowledge.

1. Replication of the present study should be done using a random sample of the heads of counseling departments on a national level. This kind of national sample would help to validate or weaken trends found in the present study.
2. The survey used to collect the data for the present study needs to be refined. Specifically, the confusion between intervention and treatment models needs to be eliminated. This modification in a replication study may help to clarify the results of the present study.
3. Also useful would be research to collect and compare all treatment models currently being used to combat underachievement in American high schools.
4. Although a review of the literature on underachievement treatment models appears in the present study there is a need for a much more in-depth study of this material, such as a metanalysis.
5. More refined statistical analysis of results should be applied, especially looking at the differential involvement of each demographic variable.
6. Hypothesis testing of each of the research questions would be useful.
7. Evaluation of the effectiveness of treatment programs currently in use in high schools, and comparison of the results is also needed.

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APPENDIX A

COVER LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

January 6, 1983

Laura Balson  
1865 Midland  
Highland Park, IL 60035

831-5742

William Watts, P.P.S. Director  
Argo High School  
7329 West 63rd Street  
Summit, IL 60501

Dear Dr. Watts:

I am a student in the Graduate School of Education at Loyola University. I am preparing a thesis titled, "A Survey of Counseling Interventions for the Treatment of Underachievement in Cook County High Schools."

I would greatly appreciate your taking a few minutes to complete this questionnaire. You may return it in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. I would like to have responses by February 15th.

I realize your time is valuable and to express my appreciation for your assistance, I would be pleased to send you a copy of the results of my study.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have about this survey or about the subject of underachievement as a high school counseling problem. I sincerely thank you for your cooperation.

Best regards,

Laura Balson

APPENDIX B

ADDITIONAL LETTER FOR QUESTIONNAIRE

## ARGO COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL - DISTRICT 217

7329 West 63rd Street  
Summit, Illinois 60501  
(312) 458-3500



April 15, 1983

Dear Fellow Director,

I am a part-time faculty member at Loyola and am on Jill's thesis committee. I am writing this letter hopefully to encourage you to fill out Jill's questionnaire and return it as soon as possible. The results should prove interesting to all of us and can be used as a basis for discussion at professional as well as in-house meetings. Jill is a good student, a nice person, and promises to be an excellent counselor. Please help her out by returning the filled out questionnaire right away. Thanks in advance to all of you for your help and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signature of William R. Watts, Ph.D.

William R. Watts, Ph.D.

Director of Guidance Services

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRE



## QUESTIONNAIRE

Underachievement in High Schools

Definition of underachievement: An underachiever is a student whose academic performance is well below his/her tested capabilities.

Directions: Select the one answer which best represents your opinion, and circle that answer.

1. I believe that the primary reason students underachieve is:
- A. They have psychological development or adjustment problems.
  - B. They lack academic skills.
  - C. They are bored with school.
  - D. They see no relationship between school and life.
  - E. Other. (Please specify)

Additional Comments:

2. I believe the best intervention for underachievement is:
- A. Group and/or individual counseling.
  - B. Tutoring.
  - C. Curriculum changes and instructional method modification.
  - D. Experiential or work related programs.
  - E. Other. (Please specify)

Additional Comments:

3. On a scale with five levels, five being most and one being least, how serious a problem is underachievement at your school?

Very serious

Not serious

5

4

3

2

1

Additional comments:

4. Does your school have a plan/program for intervening with underachieving students?

YES

NO

If yes, what?

If no, what is the reason?

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. Name of School \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Total number of students \_\_\_\_\_.
3. School location: Circle One.
  - A. Central city.
  - B. North suburban.
  - C. South suburban.
  - D. West suburban.
  - E. Other. (Please specify)
4. Approximate ethnic breakdown.
 

% Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_ % Black \_\_\_\_\_

% Spanish surname \_\_\_\_\_ % Asian \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Approximate socioeconomic status of community.
 

% upper income \_\_\_\_\_ % upper middle income \_\_\_\_\_.

% lower middle income \_\_\_\_\_ % lower income \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Percent of students going on to 2 year college \_\_\_\_\_.
- Percent of students going on to 4 year college \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Number of full time equivalent counselors \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Number of full time equivalent social workers \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Number of full time equivalent psychologists \_\_\_\_\_.
10. Degree held by head of counseling department \_\_\_\_\_.
11. Year and school of last college attended by head of counseling department \_\_\_\_\_.

Additional comments.

Check here if you would like the results of this research.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by LAURA JILL BALSON has been read and approved by the following committee:

Dr. Marilyn Susman, Director  
Assistant Professor, Counseling Psychology and Higher Education,  
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Dr. Steven J. Miller  
Professor and Chair, Foundations of Education, Loyola

Dr. William Watts  
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Loyola

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that the thesis is now given final approval by the Committee with reference to content and form.

The thesis is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

4-14-85  
DATE

  
DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE