A Study of Risk Factors Among High School Students in the Pacific Region

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Editor's Note: We are grateful to the Pacific Region Educational Laboratory for the following item. It is the Executive Summary of a report on a study of factors which led some students becoming “at-risk” of failing to fully benefit from schooling. We hope that readers of 'The Pacific Curriculum Network' will find this of interest. A copy of the full report may be obtained from: The Publisher, Pacific Region Educational Laboratory, 828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813-4321.

Purposes

Purposes of the study are to:

- Provide a profile of variables related to the status of students at-risk of failure in public high schools in the American-affiliated Pacific region, with four entity-level studies of American Samoa, CNMI, and Chuuk and Kosrae States of the Federated States of Micronesia.
- Provide opportunities for collaborative research among the entities' departments of education.

Method and Scope

Representatives from each of the 10 American-affiliated Pacific entities planned and conducted the study. Data were collected from public high schools in the 10 entities served by PREL: American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei, and Yap), Guam, Hawaii, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Republic of Palau. Data were collected during the Spring semester of the 1993-94 school year.

For the purposes of this study, the R&D Cadre agreed to the following definition of at-risk students:

"An at-risk student is one who is in danger of failing to complete his or her education with adequate academic skills, knowledge, and attitudes to function as responsible citizen of his or her community."

Students who failed one or more courses in the fall semester of the 1993-94 school year and were in grades 9-12 of a public high school in the Pacific region were identified as at-risk and selected for the study.

Results

Significant results were obtained for the relationship between students at risk and the following student variables: "foreignness," absenteeism, attitude and behaviour problems in school, substance abuse, previous academic performance, and the amount of time spent on homework. School variables related to at-riskness were class size, teachers' years of experience, and requests for additional training. Home and family variables showing significant statistical relationships with at-risk status were family size and the quality of relationship between the student and the head of the household. In general, academic and personal aspects of schooling were found to be related to the at-riskness of Pacific high school students.

Conclusions/Recommendations

To address critical issues of Pacific high school students at risk, schools, parents, and communities must work together to demonstrate the benefits of school learning, provide counselling services to students and their families, improve school record keeping systems, improve quality of instruction through staff development and availability of instructional materials, and increase parental involvement in the educational process. Policymakers must
assist these efforts by enacting policies that support long-term, systemic change to improve the quality of learning in Pacific schools for all students.

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