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**ABSTRACT**

The preparation of high school students for the transition from secondary to postsecondary education is discussed by an official of the Chicago public schools. It is suggested that access to postsecondary education should not be linked solely to test scores without regard to achievement within the child's environment. Recent statistics show that in Chicago's public schools, fewer students who have completed graduation requirements are planning postsecondary education and training. Of the students planning to enter college in 1982, most are academically strong and can assume high college costs. Preparation of students for college requires cooperation between colleges and high schools, along with the assistance of secondary and postsecondary school guidance counselors. Additionally, technology allows students to interact with the computer to explore career fields and college choices and to obtain an explanation of financial aid. The effect of the recession on students' college plans has been significant, and many middle-class applicants are applying to schools closer to home, state universities, and two-year community colleges, or to the military. In this time of uncertainty and diminished opportunities, the poor cannot afford to attend college. (SW)

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TESTIMONY OF  
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Submitted to:

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

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June 23, 1982

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TESTIMONY FOR THE  
NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION  
JUNE 23, 1982

by

Ora B. McConner  
Assistant Superintendent  
Department of Pupil Personnel Services and Special Education  
Chicago Public Schools

Members of the commission, Chicago public and private secondary school participants, university and college representatives and other interested friends of secondary and higher education, it is a privilege to be with you this afternoon. I have been asked to address this commission as a representative of the Chicago public schools on the preparation of high school students for the transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

Before I make my remarks, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ora B. McConner, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Pupil Personnel Services and Special Education. I am responsible, under the administrative leadership of the Deputy Superintendent of Education Services, for program planning and staff supervision of pupil personnel services and special education staff. Included among the pupil personnel staff are elementary and secondary school counselors, social workers, psychologists, truant officers and teacher nurses. These individuals directly service the Chicago public schools' 442,827 students: 317,608 elementary and 125,219 high school students. This staff, numbering over 3,000 individuals, is directly supervised in the schools and administrative offices by twenty district superintendents, over 600 principals and three educational diagnostic centers.

The Chicago public schools have become increasingly responsive to the needs of its students, parents and communities. Historically, the American public schools, both elementary and secondary, and the American colleges and universities have provided students the opportunity to achieve personal and business success through education. Although there is widespread criticism of American public education, both constructive and destructive, the assumption that each child has the right to a good education is generally recognized and accepted. Also, it is generally recognized and accepted that the goal of quality education must be pursued through intense efforts in the areas of basic skills, adequate counseling, increased staff inservice, and the elimination of tracking and ability grouping which is not congruent to the concept of a multicultural, pluralistic society.

The primary goal of public schooling is to provide a good education for all children. The fundamental right to a sound education is a part of our heritage with strong roots deep into our culture. Although variant conditions may serve as impediments to academic progress, no child should be prohibited from a good education.

Colleges and universities have a key role in achieving this goal. Although public schools have a responsibility to ensure student attainment of basic skills, colleges and universities, as a part of the academic community, share this responsibility.

Access to postsecondary schooling should not be linked solely to test scores without regard to achievement within the milieu where children live, study and grow. Again, I repeat, secondary schools must provide students opportunities to master basic skills and attain a comprehensive, balanced education, while colleges must build upon the strengths and fill in the weaknesses of students accepted for admission.

An analysis of the plans of Chicago public schools seniors reveals some interesting observations. In reviewing the statistics from 1976 until 1981, we see that the percentage of students planning to attend college full time has decreased from 40.1 percent in 1976 to 33.6 percent in 1982; a difference of 6.5 percent. Even more enlightening is the corresponding higher percentage of students who do not intend to continue their academic pursuits either in a junior college or other training programs. In 1976, 21.2 percent indicated other academic full time attendance; in 1982 only 10.7 percent indicated this option; a difference of 10.5 percent. The twelfth grade enrollment has declined from a high of 23,587 students in 1976 to 20,136 in 1981. The attendance rates of the general high schools of Chicago, after a five year decline, are anticipated to raise in 1982 to 85.5 percent; in 1976 the rate was 85.08 percent.

These statistics have a serious implication for both secondary schools and collegiate institutions. Not only are fewer students entering our school system because of a declining birth rate, but fewer students who have completed graduation requirements are planning additional postsecondary education and training.

Of the students planning to enter college in September, the greater majority is academically strong and able to pay the high cost of a postsecondary education. This observation is documented by current letters from colleges across the nation. A typical example comes from the Boston University Alumni Schools Committee which stated:

Admissions Update. AS EXPECTED, THE NUMBER OF FRESHMAN APPLICATIONS FOR 1982 HAS NOT KEPT PACE WITH THAT OF 1981. AT THIS TIME, APPLICATIONS ARE 5.8 PERCENT BEHIND WHAT THEY WERE IN 1981. THIS YEAR'S APPLICATIONS ARE STILL WELL AHEAD OF THE 1980 LEVEL DUE TO LAST YEAR'S 15.6 PERCENT INCREASE. OF SIGNIFICANCE IS THE FACT THAT THE ACADEMIC STRENGTH OF THIS YEAR'S APPLICANTS IS GREATER THAN THOSE OF LAST YEAR AS MEASURED BY AVERAGE SAT SCORES AND RANK IN CLASS. EARLY RETURNS ON PAID DEPOSITS ARE ALMOST EQUAL TO LAST YEAR AND THE ACADEMIC QUALITY IS SLIGHTLY HIGHER. THE HARD WORK OF MAINTAINING OUR POSITION IN THE 1980's HAS BEGUN. WE HOPE THAT WITH YOUR HELP WE WILL EXCEED OUR EXPECTATIONS.

The critical ingredients of college admission are contained in this statement. They are the increasing academic strength of freshmen college applicants as measured by test scores and class rank and financial ability to assume college costs. What about those students who do not fall into these categories? Is there a college education in their future?

The Chicago public school system is now reexamining its secondary school curriculum in order to strengthen its academic quality. The superintendent has taken the following steps toward initiating a secondary school renaissance:

- . Reestablished the 9th and 11th grade testing program in order to develop base-line data, to evaluate student progress and to plan intervention strategies.
- . Expanded a citywide criterion-referenced testing program to insure that all students are mastering basic instructional objectives in academic skill areas such as English and mathematics.
- . Designed for selected schools, under the Options for Knowledge Plan, programs addressing specialized student academic interest fields such as science, technology and business and commerce.
- . Created a task force to review the secondary school program and to recommend a design for change.

In preparing young people for college, cooperation between secondary and higher education levels is essential. An opportunity for dialogue addressing this cooperative role between representatives of postsecondary education and public and private secondary schools was provided at a recent meeting of Project Equality hosted by the College Board in Chicago on May 10, 1982. At that time the General Superintendent of the Chicago public schools reaffirmed her commitment for quality education for all public school students and for a broad continued access to postsecondary education.

Those of us familiar with the professional jargon of the 80's are using the phrase "void of transition" when referring to the cross-over from high school to college. The secondary and post secondary school counselors are the persons who help to bridge the gap. With the decline in resources and the real challenges facing public education, this crucial position is threatened. The high school counselor is responsible for organizing and implementing a guidance program which focuses upon the critical concerns of students, provides pertinent information necessary for educational and career planning, assists students in assessing their competencies, interests, aptitudes and preferences and helps students grow into maturity. The postsecondary school counselor extends these services by facilitating the meeting of transitional needs throughout adulthood. Guidance and counseling support services are needed by our children. Many who are now succeeding in college would have been lost without the services of a trained counselor to ease the transition.

The information explosion is expected to increase at an even more rapid rate over the next ten years. Futurists tell us that technical information doubles every ten years and that 90 percent of all known scientists are alive today. There are over 90,000 different occupations and the number increases every day. Students in high school today may have to change their occupation four or five times in their lifetimes. The future is upon us and education will be evaluated by how well we are able to meet the challenge of the 80's.

One of the primary roles of education has been to prepare students for the future. Until recently it was easier to predict the future based on employment trends, new technologies and occupational forecasts. But the future is no longer predictable. Who could have predicted the effect on the economy of a sustained inflation and the adaptation of American technology by foreign countries? So successful in fact have these changes been in our technology, that we are now studying modification of their techniques. For example, we have just initiated on a pilot basis, in one of our 20 districts, an automatic dialer to reduce truancy and unverified absences. The system is capable of 100 telephone calls a night. At the end of the school day, the telephone numbers of all students reported absent without a note or a call from their parents are typed into the machine. From 5:30 P.M. until 9:15 P.M., the time most parents are home, the computer dials and delivers a taped message. After five rings, or if the machine receives a busy signal, it progresses on to the next number. It then attempts to reach the no answer or busy numbers again. A printout is available the next day.

Another example of computer technology has been the CVIS program currently in 15 Chicago public high schools. Students can interact with the computer to explore career fields and college choices and to obtain an explanation of financial aid. During this last year, over 28,135 student inquiries were made. Yearly update of the college data base is obtained from the American College Testing (ACT) and employment and occupational data from the U. S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook.

Many high school seniors are changing their future plans because of the soaring costs of a college education and the conditions of the economy. Recession has forced many families to reconsider college plans. That many graduating seniors of middle class families are applying to schools closer to home, state universities, two year community colleges or the military was reported in the Wall Street Journal in a recent article, "Recession is Forcing Seniors in High Schools to Alter Future Plans." The children of the poor cannot afford to dream of a college education. Their future is in the hands of philanthropic organizations or individuals. For many high school seniors in Chicago, this is a time of uncertainty, diminished opportunities and "clouded dreams."

Preparing students for tomorrow is costly, but can we afford not to pay the price? The price of a sound secondary educational program for all students; the price of well trained teachers; the price of concerned, informed counselors; the price of college - the price tags are high. But think of the alternatives...

Too few of the children of the urban poor are going on to college. Although causes are complex and multitudinous, I have chosen to concentrate on two areas which present the greatest barriers to college entrance. They are inadequate high school academic preparation and inability to afford postsecondary educational costs.

We do not exist in isolation from our community nor can we be successful without the support of our communities which include businesses, industries, colleges, universities, other agencies, people and especially students. The commission is to be commended for conducting these sessions and for their concern that all students continue to have access to postsecondary education and to successfully make the transition from high school to college. Again, may I express my pleasure in addressing you today.