

1952

Problems of Attendance in the Elementary School

Keith E. Haskins
Central Washington University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haskins, Keith E., "Problems of Attendance in the Elementary School" (1952). *All Master's Theses*. 83.
<https://digitalcommons.cwu.edu/etd/83>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Master's Theses at ScholarWorks@CWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@CWU. For more information, please contact scholarworks@cwu.edu.

PROBLEMS OF ATTENDANCE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

Keith E. Haskins

An extended paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of
Education, in the Graduate School
of the Central Washington
College of Education

August, 1952

This research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, in the Graduate School of the Central Washington College.

Approved:

Dr. Maurice L. Pettit, Chairman

Miss Lillian Bloomer

Dr. E. E. Samuelson

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my wife, Lois,
who furnished much needed inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Dr. Maurice Pettit who directed this study, and to Dr. E. E. Samuelson and Miss Lillian Bloomer, members of the graduate committee.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM	1
The importance of ratios	5
Purpose of the study	6
Limitation of the study	7
II BACKGROUND AND RELATED INFORMATION	8
The religious beginning	8
First attendance laws	9
Provisions relating to attendance	11
Provisions of law enforcement	11
Modern trends	12
III PROBLEMS IN PUPIL ATTENDANCE AND NON- ATTENDANCE	14
The role of administration	14
Attendance fluctuation	18
Modern concepts	18
Leading causes	20
Factors related to non-attendance	24
Home and environment	25
Responsibility for non-attendance	26

CHAPTER	PAGE
Single cases in which the home is primarily responsible	26
Causes of non-attendance traceable to the school's responsibility	27
Causes of non-attendance for which the pupil assumed responsibility	27
Causes of non-attendance traceable to the community	27
Multiple causes	28
IV RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS	31
With respect to the school	32
With respect to the teachers	33
With respect to the pupil	34
With respect to the parents	35
With respect to the community	36
With respect to the attendance officer	37
The Oakland Plan	37
Conferences develop understanding	40
Persistence in home contacts	41
Attendance improved	42
Cooperation extended to other youth agencies	44
Important considerations for the principal	44
The Cleveland Plan	47

CHAPTER	PAGE
Sources of help within the school system	51
Community resources and the attendance problem	52
Permanent and continuing census	55
Checking of enrollment against census	55
Cooperation with non-public schools	55
Prompt investigation of absences	56
Follow up on transfer of pupils	56
Cooperation with teachers and other school workers	56
Cooperation with community services	57
Case work with habitual truants	57
Court action as a last resort	58
Records and reports	58
The part of each local school	59
The teacher's relation to attendance problems	59
V SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	62
Improving health conditions	63
Economic conditions	63
Responsibility of the home	64
The school	64
The teacher	64

CHAPTER	PAGE
The administration	65
The community	65
BIBLIOGRAPHY	66

APPROVED BY:

THESIS COMMITTEE

_____ Chairman

DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE SCHOOL

PROBLEMS OF ATTENDANCE IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The regularity of each child's attendance is a problem of major concern in educational administration. Absence for any part of the school day, even one school period, disrupts the educational process. Keeping the child in regular attendance is the duty of all associated with his school interests. Regularity of attendance is desirable in developing some of the following goals according to Yeager.¹

1. Proper habits.
2. A feeling of mastery through success.
3. An interest in school.
4. A sense of responsibility.
5. Many other aspects affecting later life.

Reeves has pointed out that the trend of the school population in any given city has been difficult to predict because of migrations of people from cities or regions having

¹ William A. Yeager, Administration and the Pupil (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 67.

no war industries to those having war industries.² One of the principal problems mentioned by Reeves was the housing of children in war industry areas.³ Another factor could be the declining trends of population and increased costs in another area.

If every child attended school regularly, there would be no problem of attendance or need for compulsory attendance laws and their enforcement. The majority of the children in school at the present time are of elementary school age. The number of little children would appear to increase with the current birth rate. In the light of these trends it would seem likely that attendance and non-attendance are of great importance to anyone working in the public elementary schools.

Two different reasons have justified studies of and emphasis upon school attendance:

1. The conviction exists that pupils who work near their capacity to attain acceptable school achievement cannot do satisfactory school work if absent.

2. When funds are distributed to the schools on the basis of attendance, the cost of absence demands a minimum.⁴

² Charles E. Reeves, "Outlook for School Population of the Future," American School Board Journal, 106:40-41, February, 1943.

³ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴ R. W. Edmiston, and others, "Special Emphasis to Improve Attendance," Journal of Educational Research, 41:35-40, September, 1947.

Both preventive and remedial measures merit consideration of school attendance. The factors related to failure to attend must be known before prevention or remedy can be effectively applied. Edmiston has stated that poor health, distance from school, lack of laws or their enforcement, and parental negligence were the chief causes of absences in the public schools.⁵

The same writer suggests possible remedies to include better health service, transportation facilities, compulsory attendance laws, means of enforcement, and parental education.⁶ Further study in this field has convinced this writer that there are many more important ramifications of the attendance problem.

The consideration of the loss of school time suggested several important questions for which the writer attempted to find at least partial answers to be included in the investigation. Some of these queries naturally follow: Even if the child makes up the work and is promoted with his class, what might he have achieved if he had attended regularly? Will gaps in his educational progress appear sooner or later?

In order to fulfill his obligation to society, a school administrator must see that the child of school age is present and in school regularly. This study seeks to inquire into

⁵ Ibid., p. 40.

⁶ Loc. cit.

the causes of non-attendance of school children, methods of improving school attendance, and places emphasis on practical means of securing regularity in the school attendance of every child.

Ideally, all children of elementary school age should go to school, and while in school should be in regular attendance upon the means provided, and should attend school every day it is in session. This ideal has never been attained. According to the 1940 census nearly fifteen per cent of the children five to seventeen years of age were not attending school. Of this number, forty per cent were of elementary school age, (five to thirteen inclusive). These percentages do not take into consideration the average daily attendance of those who are now enrolled in the schools. Considering attendance in relation to enrollments, using 1940 figures and including public school (25,433,544) and private and parochial school (2,611,074) enrollments, 3,729,927 (or 13.3 per cent of the 28,044,589 enrolled children) were absent each day. Adding this number to the number of children not in school at all (4,311,704), we get the grand total of 8,041,631 children not in school on any one day during the school term in that year. While sufficient for general purposes, this figure does not take into consideration children attending special schools or children classified as exceptional who were not enrolled in school.⁷

⁷ Yeager, op. cit., p. 90.

In reviewing these figures one must subtract a small number of school children who are under the age of six years or are eighteen years of age or older. With these omitted, approximately eight million or twenty per cent of the school population six to seventeen years of age are out of school each day of the school year.

Anyone studying the problems of attendance must consider the great variations in school absence among the several states. There are differing limits of the compulsory attendance ages, and varying lengths of the school term. Geographical sections of the country show wide differences in school attendance reflected in parental attitudes, factors of distance, wealth or poverty of the people, occupations, and industrial conditions. The child himself is the factor to be considered in this study as well as the school to which he is sent.

The Importance of Ratios

In consideration of the importance of problems of attendance in the elementary schools of this country, it should be recalled that the percentage of the pupils enrolled in the public elementary and secondary schools in the United States who attend school each day is eighty-five per cent. This means that of twenty pupils, three are absent from school each day. By states, the percentages range from 94.4 (that is, roughly nineteen present out of twenty) to 76.4

(approximately fifteen present out of twenty) with thirty-eight states attaining or bettering the eighty-five per cent record, and five holding a higher than ninety per cent record.⁸

Within the states there are bound to be many variations due to climatic and economic conditions with much variance in parental attitudes. Many states have stimulated better attendance through state appropriations based upon attendance and awards of various kinds.

In the opinion of most educators, lost time can scarcely be made up satisfactorily through any scheme. Coaching at home by parents or a tutor, or at school by the teacher or another pupil, is usually no more than an educational makeshift, being of lessened value to the child and frequently most time-consuming to the teacher.

Purpose of the Study

Irregularity of attendance causes the pupil to achieve less than he normally would. The problem of school attendance is to locate every child of school age and keep him in school regularly within the limits and under the conditions specified by law. Although education is essentially a state function, the very nature of school attendance makes it primarily a local administrative problem. Therefore, the purpose of this study is three-fold:

⁸ Ibid., p. 69.

1. To explore certain problems of pupil attendance on the elementary school level.
2. To identify and study problems which directly affect school attendance adversely.
3. To discover possible administrative policies which might be used in the improvement of school attendance.

Limitation of the Study

The material for this study was gathered from the library of Central Washington College of Education, Ellensburg, Washington. Only books, pamphlets, and periodicals were used as sources. These facts are a limitation of the study in view of the nature of the secondary sources used.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND AND RELATED INFORMATION

The Religious Beginning

Compulsory attendance at school is not a recent concept in educational thought. The Protestant Reformation furnished the beginning of the concept of universal public education and compulsory school attendance. Under the theory of individual judgment and responsibility for one's own spiritual welfare, it became very important that everyone should be able to read the Word of God, to participate in the worship services, and to order his own life with understanding. This called for the education of all. The close association of the church with the secular movement, and the rise of democratic government gave rise to a new conception of public education for all children under the control of the state. This took many years to accomplish.

There were many important people associated with this movement. Martin Luther wrote a long sermon as early as 1530, to be preached in Lutheran Churches throughout Germany, admonishing parents to send their children to school. He

advocated compulsory school attendance, basing the right to compel attendance on the general right of the state to protect itself and advance its welfare.¹

First Attendance Laws

In England the historians have traced attendance laws to the year 1405.² In America the idea of compulsory education was expressed in the early Massachusetts Law of 1642.³

Public opinion brought about the establishment of free schools. Public authorities had difficulty at first in taking care of those who wanted to go to school without bothering much about those who did not want to go. Various laws gradually extended upward the requirements for the universal education of children. Especially after 1800, state regulations took a variety of forms governing provision for destitute children, enumeration, manner of distributing state funds, employment of children, manner of enforcing attendance, and others similar in nature.⁴

¹ Martin Luther, Sermon on the Duty of Sending Children to School, quoted in Elwood P. Cubberly, Readings in the History of Education (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1920), p. 244.

² F. C. Ensign, Compulsory School Attendance and Child Labor (Iowa City: Athens Press, 1921), p. 10.

³ G. H. Martin, The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), p. 8.

⁴ "Development of Compulsory School Attendance," Bulletin Number 6, Monograph Number 5 (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, 1942), p. 5.

As the principle of universal attendance developed, the states enacted laws compelling children of certain ages to attend school, placed legal prohibition upon the employment of children of specified ages, and provided a state school fund to be distributed to local districts to make further provision for the education of children.

Massachusetts was the first to pass a compulsory attendance law, and not until after the Civil War, in 1867, did Vermont follow suit. Then closely followed New Hampshire, Michigan, and Washington in 1871 with a succession of northern and western states through the next three decades. Kentucky was the first southern state to pass a compulsory attendance law, in 1896. Other southern states, with the exception of West Virginia, delayed until the twentieth century, the last being Mississippi, in 1918.⁵

A study of the compulsory education laws in the United States reveals wide variation. The ages most common for compulsory attendance are seven to sixteen years. (Twenty-four states.) In other states the ages are eight to sixteen (nine states), and eight to seventeen (three states). For ages fourteen to sixteen or fourteen to eighteen there are, except in four states, regulations covering both school attendance and employment. There are also many forms of

⁵ "School Census, Compulsory Education, Child Labor, State Laws, and Regulations," Federal Security Agency (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, 1945), p. 9.

exemptions.⁶

Deffenbaugh and Keesecker summarized the essential features of existing compulsory attendance laws as follows, the numbers in parentheses representing the number of states:

Provisions relating to attendance, age, exemptions, and term of attendance.

- | | |
|---|------|
| 1. Minimum compulsory attendance age less than eight years. | (32) |
| 2. Maximum compulsory attendance age sixteen or more. | (42) |
| 3. No exemptions allowed for poverty. | (29) |
| 4. No exemptions allowed for distance. | (26) |
| 5. No exemptions allowed for indefinite reasons. | (31) |
| 6. Eighth grade or more allowed for work permit. | (20) |
| 7. Attendance required for full term. | (39) |
| 8. Nine years or more attendance required. | (33) |
| 9. School term of eight or more months. | (25) |
| 10. Attendance officers certified. | (27) |

Provisions for enforcement.

- | | |
|--|------|
| 1. Annual or continuous school census. | (36) |
| 2. Truancy defined. | (21) |
| 3. Provides when truancy shall cease. | (29) |

⁶ "Development of Compulsory School Attendance," Bulletin Number 6, Monograph Number 5 (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, 1942), p. 6.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| 4. Penalty on principals or teachers for failure to report truancy. | (16) |
| 5. Penalty on attendance officers for neglect of duty. | (19) |
| 6. Requires truancy to be reported immediately. | (11) |
| 7. Requires attendance officers to act immediately. | (16) |
| 8. Provides who shall grant exemptions. | (38) |
| 9. Provides who shall report truancy. | (37) |
| 10. Regular attendance officer required. | (45) ⁷ |

Modern Trends

Several trends are apparent in the development of legislation pertaining to attendance laws. Parents have been held responsible for compliance with these laws. This has been a continuous and universal practice. Where irregularity of attendance has occurred, parental blame has been attached along with laxity in enforcement. There has been a definite trend to increase required school attendance to cover the full term of school in keeping with the importance of reaching established educational goals and making for better economy and business. There has been a growing trend to make more specific the conditions under which children may attend

⁷ Walter S. Deffenbaugh and Ward W. Keesecker, "Compulsory School Attendance Laws and Their Administration," Bulletin Number 7 (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, Government Printing Office, 1935), p. 19-21.

non-public schools or receive educational advantages in place of public school attendance. Rapid progress has been made in shifting emphasis from penalties imposed for violations to preventive methods. There is a definite attempt to tighten up exemptions from compulsory school attendance allowable under previous laws, and to provide for greater continuity of school attendance.

Thus the principles upon which our modern attendance concepts were laid down. Martin indicates these as follows:

1. The universal education of youth is essential to the well being of the state.

2. The obligation to furnish this education rests primarily upon the parents.

3. The state has a right to enforce this obligation.

4. The state may fix a standard which determine the kind of education and minimum amount.

5. Funds may be raised by a general tax to support such education.

6. Education higher than elementary may be supplied by the state.⁸

More recently there has come a new emphasis to compulsory education. This has come from stressing the physical, moral, and intellectual welfare of the child. The adequate development of the whole child appears to be the primary purpose of compulsory education and would seem to be an all-inclusive reason for its existence.

⁸ George H. Martin, The Evolution of the Massachusetts School System (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1923), p. 57.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS IN PUPIL ATTENDANCE AND NON-ATTENDANCE

The Role of Administration

Those most familiar with attendance problems have discovered that the problems of delinquency and non-attendance can be classified roughly as child problems and as school problems.¹ To improve attendance service, the principal must be in some measure psychologist, educator, and sociologist. There was seldom a single cause for truancy in the cases studied in this investigation. Usually there were two or three causes operating together and closely related, and often where the cause appeared to lie in some weakness or abnormality of the child, there was to be found at home some unhappy situation which partially accounted for the trouble.

While it seemed clear that the school program needed adjusting in order that the delinquent pupil could enjoy and profit from his school experience, it was usually important

¹ Willard S. Elsbree and Harold J. McNalley, Elementary School Administration and Supervision (New York: American Book Company, 1951), pp. 228-230.

to give the pupil's parents a clearer understanding of school policies and practices. Otherwise, the revision in the school program was likely to be ineffective, since it was affected by home forces, which in the life of most pupils are more powerful than the influence of the school.

The fact that repeated pupil absences are commonly caused by several factors rather than a single one complicates the problem for the school. There were, nevertheless, predominant causes of absences, which when known can become the basis for an attack upon the problem. Among these the following have been commonly reported by investigators: personal illness, sickness in family, work at home, poverty, inclement weather, parental indifference, and miscellaneous reasons.²

The factors seeming to appear in rural schools differ substantially both in amount and kind from those affecting attendance in city schools.³ Personal illness, while one of the leading causes of pupil absence in both city and rural areas, did not, according to some investigators, account for as large a proportion of the total absences in rural schools as it did in urban schools.⁴ Travel distance,

² Walter S. Deffenbaugh and Ward W. Keesecker, "Compulsory School Attendance Laws and Their Administration," Bulletin Number 7 (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, Government Printing Office, 1935), p. 4.

³ "Rural School Attendance," Research Bulletin, National Education Association, 18:155-156, September, 1940.

⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

on the other hand, seems to rank higher as a cause of absence in the rural districts. Community attitude and type of teacher appear also to be leading factors in some schools.⁵

The chief value of examining the statistics relating to causes of absence was to provide the writer with a basis for assessing his own situation. There would seem to be no substitute for a local analysis of non-attendance.⁶ The principal must know the causes of pupil absence if he is to make an intelligent attack upon the problem.

If the illness factor appears to be abnormally large, then it is possible that the health division of the school system needs to work on the problem. If dislike of school work looms large in persistent cases of non-attendance, then some changes in the learning program ought to be studied.

Not only is it desirable to know the distribution of non-attendance factors in a school system, but it is even more important to know in the case of each individual absentee (where there is a history of absenteeism) the specific difficulty which seems to be the predominant cause of absence.⁷

⁵ "Absent From School Today," Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1949, pp. 4-9.

⁶ G. H. Reavis, Factors Controlling Attendance in Rural Schools (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1920, p. 4.

⁷ Stephen C. Gribble, Teacher Qualifications and School Attendance in New Mexico, 1918-1946 (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), p. 6.

To illustrate: Johnny is absent repeatedly on account of illness in the family. This brings to mind some very important questions. Which member of the family is ill? Is it likely that conditions will get better or worse? What role does Johnny play at home in relationship to the illness? Where lies the full explanation of Johnny's absence?

Fred is absent frequently, and both he and his family have reported that he has to work around the home. What kind of work? Why does Fred have to help his father and mother? Is it financially necessary? Many similar questions need to be asked where other causes have been reported.

When the principal has at his command as complete information as can be secured within the time limits set by his schedule of school duties, he should initiate some action to remedy the situation. Here the basic knowledge mentioned earlier will stand him in good stead. If he knows which departments and individuals within the school system are best qualified to assist him and what agencies in the community have facilities for correcting existing ills, he can effectively attack these problems.

In answer to the question of who is in charge of attendance, schools divide into three groups:

1. Schools in which attendance procedures are centralized in one person, frequently with teachers or with clerical help.
2. Schools in which deans or advisers are mainly responsible for attendance follow-up.

3. Schools in which the teacher is expected to do most of the attendance work.⁸

Attendance Fluctuation

The suggestion has often been made that the person in charge of attendance might keep a graph of attendance. This is a simple way of discovering and pointing out all the days on which the school has the poorest attendance. If this information gathered over a period of a term or two together with the cause of the poor attendance is presented to the principal, measures could be taken to promote good attendance on those days. For example, in some schools, a large number of pupils are absent on the day preceding a holiday. On the day preceding or following a holiday, the school might adopt the policy of scheduling some very important work. Pupils might possibly come if they are notified in advance that worthwhile work will be done and that every absence will be investigated.

Any preventive job is a heavy responsibility and a time consuming assignment. It would follow that parents must be educated as well as pupils in good habits of attendance.

Modern Concepts

One hundred years of compulsory education has brought about many changes in our ideas concerning school

⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

attendance.⁹ While these changes have come slowly, they have been constant and encouraging. A century ago, the aim of the truant officer, as he was called, was to enforce the law regardless of circumstances surrounding absence.¹⁰ A century of experience has brought about among advocates of achieving better attendance the philosophy of making necessary adjustments in school, at home, and in the community, so that children may attend school in the most favorable atmosphere for learning.

Maintaining good school attendance for all of the children of all the people involves more than meets the eye. When children of every walk of life attend school, they bring with them a multitude of conditions which affect their first attendance. One child may never have been denied the necessities of life; the next may have been indoctrinated with any of numerous types of bias; the third may possess only a limited capacity for learning, and so on. Every educational activity today must be prepared to meet these problems, and attendance is no exception.

The concept of maintaining good attendance primarily through fear is outmoded and has no place in the philosophy

⁹ "School Census, Compulsory Education, Child Labor, State Laws, and Regulations," Bulletin Number 1, Federal Security Agency (Washington, D. C.: United States Office of Education, 1949), p. 3.

¹⁰ "The State and Sectarian Education," Research Bulletin, National Education Association, 24:5, February, 1946.

of the modern educational worker. The attendance officer is no longer an officer of the law whose sole purpose is enforcement and punishment of offenders.¹¹ He now is a representative from the school whose primary purpose is to help the child to get to school under conditions which will enable him to make the most of his capacities, interests, and abilities.

Leading Causes

It appears that a child's attendance is chiefly determined by the conditions under which he lives.¹² For example, the records of attendance percentages of the Cleveland Public Schools over a period of sixteen years may be cited. During the seven years prior to the outbreak of World War II, pupils attended school well. Of every 100 pupils enrolled, more than ninety-four attended school regularly. This is an enviable record. With the coming of the war, however, attendance dropped. Peaceful home life no longer existed. Fathers moved their families about looking for better paying jobs and more satisfactory working conditions. War casualties broke the family chain, resulting in emotional disturbances. Housing became difficult, causing parents to separate their

¹¹ J. F. Bender, The Function of Courts in Enforcing School Attendance Laws (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1927), p. 5.

¹² David Wiens, "Attendance Service in the Cleveland Public Schools," American School Board Journal, 119:37-38, September, 1949.

children. The child, upset by death in the family, critical illness, or other conditions which affect the emotions, did not attend school as he normally would have.

We have seen the effect of war on school attendance, but there are many everyday factors which disturb the equilibrium of children and reduce school attendance. The child's physical health, his adjustment to his home and community environment, and his own emotional stability are common factors which affect attendance at school.¹³

Attendance contests such as home room drives for perfect attendance with the usual reward seldom produce lasting results and frequently do irreparable damage to pupils. During such contests excitement runs high, and frequently pupils who are too ill to be in school attend in order to maintain the perfect record for this group. Once a child brought a note to his teacher asking to be excused for half a day to attend his father's funeral. The wise principal discourages practices which result in these undesirable effects.

Early investigations which relied largely on statements made by pupils and parents showed that about fifty per cent of non-attendance was caused by the illness of the child.¹⁴

¹³ Arch O. Heck and Others, "School Attendance," Review of Educational Research, 23:156-57, April, 1936.

¹⁴ Wiens, op. cit., p. 37.

Studies made in more recent years have taken greater account of the possibility of the unreliability of excuses for absences made by pupils and parents.¹⁵ Although the later studies still report illness as a predominant cause of non-attendance, particularly among pupils from the poorer sections, illness does not maintain the high frequency shown in earlier investigations. Such factors as distance from school, parental neglect, laxity of teachers in keeping records and reporting absences, farm work, and complex social problems were found to be of greater significance than illness. Reiners, in an attempt to determine the factors which have the greatest influence upon school attendance in five rural counties in Pennsylvania, concluded that the five most important factors out of a list of fifty possible factors were: distance from school, progress of the pupil, academic standing of the child in school, type of teacher, and kind of community.¹⁶

Deffenbaugh and Keesecker reported in 1933 that causes for unexcused absences in Pennsylvania were: parental neglect, 84.4 per cent; truancy, 14.4 per cent; and illegal employment, eight per cent.¹⁷ The same investigators then reported the

¹⁵ A. E. Calloway, "Relation Between Socio-Economic Status of Health and School Attendance," (unpublished Master's thesis, Emory University, Atlanta, 1939), p. 11.

¹⁶ N. W. Reiners, "Public Secondary School Attendance in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania," (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, The University of Pittsburgh, 1939), p. 54.

¹⁷ Deffenbaugh and Keesecker, op. cit., p. 63.

causes of both excused and unexcused absences in Philadelphia in 1932 to be distributed as follows: parental neglect, 33.5 per cent; illegal employment, 0.3 per cent; truancy, 9.3 per cent; illness of the child, 37.1 per cent; illness in the family, 3.9 per cent; inclement weather, 0.7 per cent; and miscellaneous causes, 15.8 per cent.¹⁸

Calloway's study showed that children having physical defects were absent more than those not having physical defects.¹⁹ Reiners' investigation revealed the contribution to non-attendance being made by inadequate procedures for enforcing the attendance laws and the laxity of teachers in keeping records and recording absences.²⁰

Illness is still given an important place on the list of absences reported by parents and attendance officers, with common colds being the principal illness.²¹ However, Kincaid believes that illness is given as an excuse to cover other causes, which in many instances includes parental negligence or indifference, parental stupidity or ignorance, weather, economic conditions of the home, parental greed, and the

¹⁸ Loc. cit.

¹⁹ E. E. Calloway, "Visiting Teacher and Attendance," Understanding Children, 19:20-2, January, 1950.

²⁰ Reiners, op. cit., p. 54.

²¹ Sullenger, Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1936), p. 32.

failure to adapt the school to the child.²² Gardner went further and concluded that absence is rarely the result of any one cause, but rather of associated factors.²³ Lawing traced poor school attendance to lack of legislation or defining which children must attend, length of time they must attend, and penalty for non-attendance.²⁴ Lack of enforcing agencies were thought to be responsible to a smaller extent.

Factors related to non-attendance. Pupils who are often absent tend to receive the lowest marks, and the reverse is also true. Many studies have been made to attempt to show the relation between intelligence, achievement, and attendance, in which there seems to be a lack of agreement.

Younger children of a given grade were found to have a better record of attendance than older children of the same grade. Girls were usually more regular in attendance than boys, although studies differ in these observations. Pupils whose parents were unemployed tended to be absent more than those whose parents were employed. Distance from school was

²² R. J. Kincaid, "Pupil Personnel, Guidance, and Counseling," Review of Educational Research, 14:162, April, 1939.

²³ John Ralph Gardner, "Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Salt Lake City Junior High Schools (unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 1935), p. 2.

²⁴ John L. Lawing, "Standards for State and Local Compulsory School Attendance Service," (unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Columbia University, New York, 1934), p. 36.

always a factor, as were tardiness and penalties for absence. The modern development of transportation systems for children has probably increased regularity of attendance. Bermijo classified twenty-seven different causes with some disagreement as to their lawfulness or unlawfulness.²⁵

Home and environment. In addition to those indicated in previous studies, there are certain other causes of truancy within the home environment. Some of these causes and conditions as developed by Abbott and Breckenridge are: (1) family emergencies, (2) poverty, (3) lack of clothing, (4) parental carelessness in sending the child to school, (5) lack of parental discipline, (6) working mothers, and (7) broken homes and parental rifts. Causes of truancy within the community were classified by Abbott and Breckenridge as follows: (1) bad companions, (2) poor cultural environment, and (3) lack of recreational or other facilities.²⁶

²⁵ F. V. Bermijo, The School Attendance Service in American Cities (Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1923), p. 56.

²⁶ Edith Abbott and Sophonisba Breckenridge, Truancy and Non-Attendance in Chicago Schools (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1917), p. 18.

Responsibility for Non-Attendance

Some of the facts of non-attendance have been determined, and responsibility must be placed for their allocation. An analysis was made by Heck and others of all the available studies of causes of non-attendance.²⁷ A classification was then made with a view to locating some responsibility in whole or in part. It was found that responsibility may be divided among the home, the school, the pupil, and the community. Heck further observed single causes in which each was responsible.²⁸ The findings of his study follow:

Single cases in which the home is primarily responsible. These are arranged in alphabetical order rather than order of importance.

Both parents employed
 Church services
 Domestic social maladjustments
 Emergencies at home
 Family moved out of district
 Funerals
 Geographical location of home, as distance
 Illness of others at home
 Lack of proper or adequate clothing
 Malnutrition
 Parental apathy
 Poverty and economics
 Mismanagement in the home
 Private lessons
 Pupil accompanying parents on vacation
 Pupil belonging to a migratory family
 Quarantine of home
 Weddings

²⁷ Arch O. Heck and others, "School Attendance," Review of Educational Research, 17:157-63, April, 1936.

²⁸ Ibid., pp. 157-58.

Causes of non-attendance traceable to the school's responsibility were:

Age 14 and had passed highest grade offered
 Age 15 and was employed as domestic or farm hand
 Age 16 (or legal age) and held employment certificate
 Allowable transfer to other school district
 Emergencies of school plant and equipment
 Exempt by completion of secondary school
 Inability to secure a teacher
 Instruction at expense of teaching (certification vs qualification)
 Lack of orientation or guidance
 Lack of school facilities (sanitation, over-crowding)
 Quarantine of school building
 Regular school vacation
 Strikes of pupils or teachers or similar occurrences
 Too few pupils in districts (legal limits)
 Transportation deficiencies
 Unattractive school program
 Unwise location of school

Causes of non-attendance for which the pupil assumed responsibility were:

Forged excuses from school
 Immorality
 Pupil-pupil controversy
 Pupil strikes
 Shame or pride of pupil in which may be involved probation, parole, immorality, alcoholism, crime of parent, self, or relation
 Temporary unconfining illness of pupil
 Transportation by individual pupil
 Truancy of group of pupils
 Truancy of individual pupils

Causes of non-attendance traceable to the community were:

Explosions
 Fires that disrupt community routine
 Impassable highways and detours
 Strikes affecting the community
 Transportation emergencies (traffic accidents or tie ups)
 Wars and insurrections

Acts of God which include inclement weather, earthquake, floods, and violent storms.²⁹

Multiple causes. Heck further listed multiple causes in his survey, or those causes in which the responsibility was placed on more than one location.³⁰ Examples of these were community celebrations, transportation difficulties, mutual dislikes affecting pupil-teacher-parent and community, incorrigibility, mental unfitness, laxity of enforcement, school excursions, enforced vacations because of religious, social, political, economic, parental, or other reasons. To this list Heck added communicable diseases, fear of examinations or other school assignments, pupil suspension or expulsion, moving of family, entertainments in which the pupil through participation or non-participation was kept out late, part-time occupation of pupil, child labor, malingering, seasonable activities involving both employment and non-employment, visitors in the home, court routine (as detention), and parental indifference to pupil connivances.³¹

In rural school districts farm work is responsible for many absences. Country schools are often emptied of their pupils during the busy season. Cotton and fruit picking extends from late summer until after Christmas, so that

²⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 161.

³¹ Ibid., p. 162.

many youngsters do not enter school until the season is over. Children in some sugar beet districts sometimes do not even enroll until after the middle of November when the season is over. Truck farming has much the same effect on children's schooling. Migratory fruit picking also has an adverse effect upon school attendance. Both the planting of crops in spring and their harvest in the fall take their toll of school attendance in all northern states. The migrant child who follows the season's crops seems to have been most seriously affected.³² Farm work of one sort or another is almost universally the chief cause of absence in rural areas.

Schwartz listed the causes of absence most frequently found for non-attendance at school. The list is a partial one and he did not rank the causes in order of importance. the list follows:

1. Illness of children
2. Illness of parents
3. Religious observance
4. Extended vacation
5. Extended weekends
6. Medical and dental appointments
7. Shopping trips
8. Inclement weather
9. Over-solitious parents

³² William P. Schwartz, "We Can Improve Pupil Attendance," High Points, 29:24-25, February, 1948.

10. Insufficient clothing
11. Use of children to care for younger children at home
12. Emotional upset at home
13. Illiteracy of parents
14. Children at work
15. Failure to adjust to the school program
16. Failure of school to report absence to the home
17. Travel difficulties for younger children
18. Neglect of parents
19. Community hazards and attractive nuisances³³

It would appear that in practically every phase of its activities, the school administration helps or hinders school attendance. The appearance of a serious attendance problem would seem to indicate a failure of administration on some of these critical points. All administrative activities should be directed toward making the school environment as attractive and effective as possible.

³³ Ibid., p. 25.

CHAPTER IV

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Recommendations and suggestions may be evaluated in terms of the amount of emphasis which each school desires to give to attendance checking and improvement. Good attendance has a high correlation with constant awareness, systematic check-up, and planned improvement.¹ A consideration of the causes of non-attendance must necessarily include such areas as guidance, curriculum, health, delinquency, school-home-community relations, community agencies, social services, socio-economic conditions, and parent education, among many others. It is necessary to learn why the child was absent from school and what measures, devices, and procedures can be used to discourage unlawful absence. It seems urgent that all persons and agencies interested in the continuous growth and development of children become attendance conscious. Apparently there can be no mass treatment of attendance problems. Attention must be focused upon individual

¹ "Absent from School Today," (New York: Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, 1949), p. 1.

problem treatment of attendance troubles based upon adequate diagnosis and understanding of children's intellectual, emotional, physical, social, and moral needs. The job would then become a joint enterprise, a cooperative venture of all persons and agencies interested in the welfare of children. The writer has had the opportunity to visit several elementary schools and to speak with superintendents, principals, assistants to principals, teachers, school clerks and secretaries, attendance officers, pupils, parents, and many others interested in child welfare. Some of the practices employed by these schools to check and improve attendance are:

With respect to the school.

1. Commendation for perfect attendance.
2. Realization by pupils of necessity to attend school.
3. Check up of remedial physical defects causing absences.
4. Attendance banners awarded weekly in an assembly.
5. Interviews by the supervisor with the absentee.
6. Hall charts showing the per cent of attendance.
7. Daily absence charts for all pupils.
8. Investigation reports or truant slips when necessary.
9. Interviews with pupils and attendance officers.
10. Morning inspection to detect illness.
11. Daily attendance check in the office.

12. Honor certificates distributed in the assembly.
13. Interesting and stimulating activities.
14. One hundred per cent banners displayed on the classroom doors.
15. Pupil graphs showing individual attendance records.
16. Individual awards such as buttons, ribbons, certificates, and badges.
17. Wide implementation of the health education program.
18. Pupil participation through a school club.
19. Classes with highest attendance visit other schools.
20. Attendance for half day better than absence for whole day.
21. Children urged to attend school after visiting clinics, doctors, or dentists.
22. Inter-class, inter-grade, and inter-group competition.
23. Reports showing standing of each school explained.

With respect to the teachers.

1. Daily attendance cards sent to the office, explaining absence.
2. Absences followed by telephone calls, cards, and reports.
3. Notes for absence required, discussed, and filed.
4. Roll books regularly checked.
5. Program of class activities interesting and planned.
6. Program for special cases adjusted and interesting.

7. All absences investigated, none go unchallenged.
8. Letters written to parents, showing interest in absentees.
9. Grade meetings to discuss improvement of attendance.
10. Vitalized teaching based upon an experimental program.
11. Mental hygiene approach through success, recognition, and belonging to a group.
12. Lateness preferred to absence.
13. Morning health inspection a must.
14. Improvement always praised, no matter how small.
15. Weekly averages posted in office and studied.
16. Children with contagious diseases and serious illness promptly excluded.
17. Suspected truance reported promptly to the office.
18. Daily absence sheet listing causes of absence.
19. Attractive techniques and programs.
20. Cooperation between official teacher and guidance office.
21. Commendation for teachers whose efforts have secured high attendance averages; encouragement and assistance for teachers whose attendance records are poor.

With respect to the pupil.

1. A guidance program established.
2. Program adjusted to meet pupil needs.
3. Attendance records of the school graphed; comparisons with previous records and with neighboring schools made; causes of drop or rise in attendance investigated.

4. Daily absentee charts examined regularly.
5. Immediate referral to the attendance officer of all unexplained absences and suspected truancies.
6. Cooperation with the attendance officer sought; understanding of and compliance with its procedures and practices required.
7. Individual and class commendations are awarded.
8. Parent and teacher commendations are awarded.
9. Attendance of the lunch children checked.
10. Greater pupil participation in all phases of school life encouraged.
11. Daily absences cards signed by teachers and parents required for truants.
12. Roll books inspected regularly.
13. Talks and dramatizations stressing good attendance and punctuality given in assemblies.
14. Extra privileges such as parties, movies, and excursions extended to individuals and classes with high attendance records.
15. Daily personal contact with chronic absentees and constant praise for good effort.
16. Statistics of attendance office discussed with the staff.
17. Talks and forms are presented at parents meetings.
18. Messages concerning health and attendance practices sent to parents.
19. The effects of attendance upon state aid are stressed.

With respect to the parents.

1. Values of good health and good routine stressed at parents' meetings and through letters and bulletins.

2. Types and examples of undesirable excuses for children's absences are discussed.
3. Values of an uninterrupted school program discussed.
4. Parents of truants interviewed, difficulties, and problems at home learned, and guidance given.
5. Letters written to each parent at the beginning of the term requesting cooperation in not keeping children at home unlawfully, citing reasons for wishing attendance to be good and stating procedures to be followed in the event of legitimate absence.
6. Parents educated as to their responsibility in complying with the compulsory education law.
7. Parents encouraged to send children to school and to call for them during the day in cases of emergency.
8. Parents encouraged to serve on school committees.
9. Parents advised to use their own judgment in keeping sick children at home, with the understanding that a day or two of absence at the beginning of an illness may save a longer absence later.
10. Replies to absence cards required.
11. Frequent conferences with the parents of chronic absentees held.
12. Parents encouraged to telephone the school and report absence.
13. Health information and advice about proper clothing frequently given to parents.
14. Relationship between absence and retardation stressed.

With respect to the community.

1. Complete and accurate entries on all forms required by the Board of Education and attendance officer.
2. Cooperation with clubs, churches, and agencies sought.

3. Cooperation of the drug store, candy store, and movie owner sought to discourage loitering and truancy.

4. Personnel of the attendance office, Board of Health, Police, and other agencies invited to address the parents.

5. Contact with such outside agencies as charitable institutions and big brother organizations established.

6. Community recreation programs organized.

7. Elimination of cellar clubs encouraged.

8. Participation by civic and business groups urged.

9. Films and other visual aids depicting the evil effects of truanting are used and discussed.

With respect to the attendance officer.

1. Complete and accurate entries on all forms required by the Board of Education and attendance officer insisted upon.

2. Cooperation with the attendance officer sought.

3. Attendance personnel invited to guide school and community.

4. Teachers are informed as to all attendance procedures and practices.

5. Accurate and up to date school files, easily accessible, kept for ready references.

6. School attendance coordinators integrate and coordinate the school attendance program.

The Oakland plan. The public schools of Oakland, California developed an excellent approach to the problem of non-attendance through cooperative planning and community cooperation.

In the Oakland Plan developed by Rex H. Turner there was a close relationship between the police in Oakland and the schools. This was brought about by the acquaintance of the principals with the officers and men of the Oakland Police Force. This cooperation was carried on to the point where frequent discussions were held of various youth and school problems and especially those involving potential or known juvenile delinquency.²

From this relationship a plan developed which furthered cooperation in terms to meet specific difficulties. The Oakland Schools had found in the past that many of their known truants were also juvenile problems to the police. Consequently the police had known that the cases they handled invariably had a record of truancy.³

This high correlation brought about a suggestion that a more effective procedure for both schools and police might result if a police officer and a supervisor of attendance joined forces and worked as a team. This suggestion was presented to the Oakland Chief of Police and the superintendent of the Oakland Public Schools. It was met with their immediate approval.

² Rex H. Turner, "Cooperation Cures Oakland Truancy Problem," American School Board Journal, 24:114-115, December, 1947.

³ Loc. cit.

The plan was inaugurated in the fall of 1946 with two teams, one working with schools in the western area and the other in an eastern area. Before the program actually started the attendance records of the schools were studied and three schools in the west and three in the east with the worst attendance percentage records for the previous year were selected for service. In both areas there was one junior high school and two elementary schools. The principals of these schools, the captains of police in the two stations, the two attendance teams, a consultant in attendance, and the assistant superintendent were called together for discussion.⁴

It was decided that the first effort should be directed toward the younger ages, and to limit the work to pupils before their truancy patterns had developed to a marked degree. During the first semester the teams worked on students from about the fourth through the ninth grade. The conference further set up a plan for screening the cases carefully so that only the most difficult of truancy cases would come to their attention, in order to avoid taking health or psychopathic types of cases who were handled by the Department of Guidance in the Oakland Schools. All cases given to the teams were cleared through the Guidance Department prior to being released to the attendance teams. Some one individual in each school was responsible for the

⁴ Loc. cit.

screening process and that same person had the further responsibility of reporting these cases to the team and providing the team with all essential information. After the team made the investigation, action was reported back to this same person.⁵

Conferences develop understanding. It developed after the plan went into full operation that there was need for holding regular conferences with all the schools concerned with representatives from the Probation Office and later with representatives from the Youth Authority. As the program progressed, additional schools were taken over by the team until at the end of the first year each team was handling eight or ten schools and in addition had followed the pupils who were in high ninth grade into the various senior high schools.

The conferences mentioned proved to be very helpful because many cases were discussed and procedures in dealing with social agencies, both public and private were developed. It was thought that these conferences were the means by which many errors were avoided and procedures decided upon which enabled the teams to carry out their program with the least possible conflict with other individuals or groups. In addition, the sharing of ideas by all acted as an in-service training program and developed a high degree of morale in the

⁵ Loc. cit.

entire group.

Throughout the year it was found that a very high per cent of the serious truancy problems, many of which were of several years standing, were entirely cleared up. The teams avoided what might be called typical police methods but were insistent that parent and child obey the school law and the child attend regularly.⁶

Persistence in home contacts. Contacts were made with the home at almost every possible hour, from six o'clock in the morning until late at night, even on week ends. If it was necessary to make three or four calls a day at the home, this was done. As a result of this careful and consistent checking, pupils and parents found that they could no longer get by and when they realized this, attitudes in almost every case were decidedly improved. This close supervision provided a steady influence for the youngsters, informed many families who were new to Oakland as well as old timers, of California attendance laws, removed almost entirely from the mind of the student any questions which he may have had about attending school, reduced the number of cases taken before the Prosecuting Attorney from six to eight weekly average of previous year to between one and two, stimulated a high morale among teachers and principals in the schools,

⁶ Loc. cit.

and for a large percentage of students who returned to regular attendance, enabled them to do a better job of school work merely because they were there regularly.⁷

It was recognized that returning truants to school and keeping them there was only part of the solution to their problem. Subject offerings were made available which would better meet the needs, interests, and abilities of these children. An even more serious attempt than was made in the past was attempted by each of the schools on the serious problem cases. In addition to these adjustments in programs of individual pupils, in one school a special class was set up for the twenty worst problem boys. Most of these had been reported previously to the attendance teams. Practically every one of these boys was no longer an attendance problem. Other plans were developed in other schools, and as rapidly as similar needs evidenced themselves an attempt was made to meet them.⁸

Attendance improved. During the first three or four months of the plan's operation, attendance was greatly improved. In addition, in the early stages of the program, dozens of cases of petty theft and juvenile delinquency were uncovered by following up these truancy problems.

Shortly after the plan was set in motion the problems

⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁸ Loc. cit.

in the elementary schools were completely solved, so that only occasionally an elementary pupil was referred to a team, thus enabling the three teams to concentrate primarily on the thirteen junior high schools and six senior high schools.⁹

At the end of the school year each school reported the results of the work on all cases handled. The two teams during 1946-47 handled 432 different cases. An analysis of the results showed that sixty-three of these had left school for one reason or the other during the school year, and twenty-one were cases that should not have been given to the team. This left 438 cases actually followed through, of which it appeared that 123 were completely solved; that is, they were in school regularly and in most cases doing better school work; thirty-four showed great improvement; sixty-four some improvement; and twenty-seven on which little or no success was noted.¹⁰

The use of these teams did not remove the need for regular attendance supervisor's work. It had definitely lightened the load, and freed time so that additional cases which had previously been impossible to handle because of case loads.¹¹

⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁰ Loc. cit.

¹¹ Loc. cit.

Cooperation extended to other youth agencies. This looked to be a most successful experiment in that it demonstrated conclusively that there is a great need for very close cooperative effort among the representatives of the Probation Office, Youth Authority, Police, and the Oakland Schools in their dealings with youth.¹²

A close relationship also sprang up during the year with the Health Department when it became apparent that many families and pupils were encouraging illness and various communicable diseases such as scabies, pediculosis, and impetigo, by their general apathy and indifference to treatment, and thereby extending unduly, the absence from school.¹³

This plan seems to prove further desirability of all agencies dealing efficiently with youth and getting together frequently for discussions, sharing of problems, the understanding of others' procedures, and the development of a healthy respect for a close cooperative program to meet the ends which are more or less common to all.

Important considerations for the principal. Most of the responsibilities which fall on the shoulders of the school principal are self-imposed. Within certain limits he has

¹² Willard S. Elsbree and Harold J. McNally, Elementary School Administration and Supervision (New York: American Book Company, 1951), pp. 225-234.

¹³ Ibid., p. 230.

freedom to perform his major duties as he sees fit and at a time which suits his convenience. There are a few responsibilities which are required by law. This seems to be the case with school attendance. Attendance officers have enforcement powers and do much of the detailed work related to school delinquency. Attendance officers usually have enforcement powers and they do much of the detailed work related to school delinquency. A good attendance program is dependent to a large degree for its success upon the efforts of the school principal. The superintendent and the board of education look to the principal for explanation of any violations of the law within the district and for reliability of the information provided by teachers and others in his school. In most states the principal is legally responsible for reporting truancy. Compulsory attendance is closely related to many other phases of school administration and supervision. The manner in which the attendance problem is approached has often conditioned the attitude of many children and parents toward the school. In the past many school administrators have looked upon the absence problem as an isolated and independent one and have failed to see its relationship to either the home or the school environment.¹⁴

Investigations have found that the amount of truancy and absenteeism in school systems is affected by policies

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

related to pupil progress and by the nature of school offerings. The implications of these findings have led the more thoughtful administrators to take stock of their guidance provisions and to appraise their instructional programs critically. Students of the attendance problem have emphasized the need for teachers to give thought to the mental health of their pupils. They also recommend that lock-step methods be abandoned and individual differences recognized. It is becoming apparent that the school should lead the way in bringing community resources to bear on the needs of pupils during their out of school hours. The principal who can see these relationships clearly and help to interpret them to the teaching staff, lay citizens, and pupils would be rendering a real service.

The following aspects of the attendance problem are especially important for the principal to consider:

1. The principal should know in detail the provisions of the state attendance law. He needs to know compulsory age limits, the specific examples relating to work, to travel distance and to health, the scholarship bases for obtaining work certificates, and residence requirements relating to attendance.

2. The principal should know in detail the report forms required by the central office and by the state and should be thoroughly familiar with the attendance record system used in other schools of the district.

3. The principal should make every effort to learn the causes of non-attendance in his own school and to understand their implications for the instructional program.

4. The principal should become acquainted with the services provided by the other social agencies in the

community, particularly related to the problem of school attendance.

5. The principal should be thoroughly familiar with the procedures to be followed when cases are brought to court as a result of persistent violation of the law.

6. The principal should have a copy of the state law on or inside his desk.

In highly industrialized communities where the school population is fairly heterogenous and schools are large the problem of attendance is fairly involved and consumes much more of the principal's as well as the attendance officer's time. Frequently a substantial portion of the families in such a community have no telephones and can be reached only by mail or by a personal visit. In these situations a visiting teacher can render most helpful service.

The Cleveland Plan. The work of the school nurse particularly, has much in common with the attendance worker. The Cleveland Plan advocated the following procedures in securing better attendance:

1. Reduce duplication of work done by the school nurse and attendance officer.

2. Agreement as to when and how home calls should be made on pupils absent because of illness.

3. A system of interdepartment referrals so that the services of nurse and attendance office would be available to the other, quickly and effectively.

4. An agreed upon method of reporting contagion to health authorities.

5. More effective procedure for excusing pupils who become ill during school time.

6. A plan for securing doctor's certificate when children are absent due to extended illness.¹⁵

7. Coordination of pupil personnel services in public schools between attendance and health workers and among visiting teachers, psychologists, vocational counselors, psychiatrists, and welfare agencies.¹⁶

In a few instances state charity organizations and child labor committees may constitute good sources of help and a list of these agencies should be on file in the principal's office. The basic precept that should guide the school administrators is that no family situations that involves the welfare of a child in relation to his schooling should be neglected.

It is clear from the number of agencies and services just mentioned that the task of insuring educational opportunities to all children of school age in a big district is a big responsibility and requires a great deal of planning. Beyond the administrative and coordinating functions, there is the task of learning how to deal with children and adults successfully in the face of current living conditions. A thorough knowledge of mental hygiene is basic to a real appreciation of the meaning of much behavior. One must know that children who feel that they are unloved, unappreciated, or unjustly treated tend to lose some of their self respect,

¹⁵ David J. Wiens, "Attendance in the Cleveland Public Schools," American School Board Journal, 119:28, December, 1947.

¹⁶ Loc. cit.

and as a result, they turn away from the people to whom they were formerly attached.

As has been mentioned often in this study, the behavior of a pupil often reflects his treatment at home or in school. Quarreling parents or step parents may be the cause of the estrangement, or undue preferance of parents for a brother or sister, or the inability of the child to compete successfully with conditions or persons. It is also true that children who are exposed to ridicule by their classmates or are reproached by their teachers, suffer humiliations and are in danger of becoming socially maladjusted and of losing interest in school. Frequently pupils with marked physical deformation have difficulty in adjusting to the school world around them. The creation of an atmosphere at school which would encourage these handicapped children to face their world with confidence is a challenge that should not be overlooked.

The ramifications are nearly endless. Experience has shown that the case method of approach, involving as it does investigation, diagnosis, treatment, and follow up, is the most hopeful means of bringing about fundamental changes in human behavior. Attendance work is a part of the educative process and as such it must be undertaken with a full realization of the psychological factors involved. Otherwise it will deal with the problem only superficially.

Elsbree and McNally have listed some excellent sources of help from within the school system itself.

The positive side of school attendance service should be the concern of any school administrator, not merely seeing to it that the law is enforced or that attendance records are properly kept. Preserving to each child his just and rightful opportunity for schooling and education is the real challenge in providing school attendance service. It would be well for a principal to stress this objective with children and parents.

Many school systems have set up machinery for keeping in touch with each child from birth to the upper age limit set by the school attendance law (sixteen or eighteen years). This is commonly done through a continuing school census consisting of a complete and accurate list of the children of a district, amended from day to day as information regarding changes is gathered. It is important in the case of teachers new to the state that the principal acquaints them with the procedures used, making certain that the teachers fully comprehend the methods to be employed. Beyond this the principal should work out some systematic scheme for getting in touch with parents when children are reported absent, and for communication with attendance officer when cases require his investigation. Much of the attendance work can be handled by the principal or his secretary over the telephone. In many communities the eccentricities of both pupils and parents are likely to be well known to principals and teachers and the problem cases can be easily

identified. These sources follow:

Sources of help within the school system.

1. The work of the school medical inspectors or school physicians usually brings them in close contact with the health conditions of pupils. If the cause of absence is primarily one of ill health, then constructive advice should be sought from the school medical inspector or the school physician.
2. The school nurse is in a good position to follow up the suggestions of the physician or medical inspector and can often treat children suffering from minor infections without excluding them from school. She can also go into the home and advise parents with respect to health matters with little disturbance to home or school. To the degree that the home situation can be remedied and the pupils' illness shortened, the nurse will be improving attendance and indirectly the educational background of the pupil.
3. Many school systems employ visiting teachers or school visitors whose primary job is to devote themselves to the many needs of individual children who are experiencing learning difficulties or whose conduct is baffling, erratic, or troublesome, or who show signs of neglect. The latter group often includes children who are irritable, worried, violent-tempered, repressed, abused or overworked, or a combination of the foregoing conditions. Through her knowledge of child behavior as well as her understanding of adult psychology, she is in a favorable position to sense the child's basic trouble and bring about the changes that are essential for eliminating the difficulties. At least there is a better chance of improving home and school relationships and of insuring steadiness of school attendance when this service is available. Hence the principal should not overlook this source of help.
4. Most attendance officers in the past have been poorly trained for the constructive job of removing the causes of non-attendance. Even today there are some indications that the police conception of handling truancy has not been entirely eradicated. The principal therefore needs to take account of the background, the point of view and the general wisdom of the existing officer in deciding how far to rely on him for assistance. Because of the legal authority residing in the attendance officer, many homes do not welcome his presence. In some instances of course the attendance

officer will be in a position to render outstanding help.

5. Fortunate is the school principal who is able to call upon such trained individuals as a school psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a guidance specialist. These people have the background of knowledge and the technical skill necessary for dealing thoroughly and scientifically with maladjusted children and abnormal parents. Sometimes their combined efforts are not sufficient to straighten out the difficulties, but the principal will have the consolation, at least, of knowing that the school has drawn upon its best resources.

6. The school truant often craves attention and failing to achieve as much status as he needs in the class he uses truancy as a means of satisfying this desire. When this appears to be the cause of the absenteeism, the cooperation of the physical education instructor should be sought in an attempt to provide special opportunities for the pupil to earn recognition. If this step can be taken simultaneously with modifying the classroom program so as to meet the pupil's immediate needs there, the effort stands a good chance of succeeding.¹⁷

Community resources and the attendance problem. School systems have varying resources for dealing with underprivileged and maladjusted children. Even when all of the school personnel puts their shoulders to the wheel and attack an attendance problem, there are still cases which defy all effort. When poverty, health of the child or parents, broken homes, improper guardianship, or desertion is the cause of the difficulty, the help of agencies outside the school need to be summoned before any permanent cure for many absence ills can be devised.¹⁸

The Denver, Colorado, Public Schools have issued a handbook of school and community resources entitled, "Denver

¹⁷ Willard S. Elsbree, and Harold J. McNally, Elementary School Administration and Supervision (New York: American Book Company, 1951), p. 35.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

Serves Its Children." This handbook is not only a most valuable guide to parents, but principals now have at their command an invaluable source to consult in attacking problems beyond the power of the school alone to solve. What help is available in Denver? Where is the service located? Who is eligible for the service? Is there a charge? These and other pertinent questions are all answered in the handbook. School districts generally would do well to prepare a bulletin of this type for the use of principals, teachers, and parents.¹⁹

In every school system, and most county and village systems, services which the school principal would probably find it desirable to utilize are provided either at public expense or supplied by private charity. The town health officials with their special authority in the home can often achieve results which the school physicians and nurses are able to secure particularly where parents resist all normal efforts to improve their surroundings. The welfare commissioners are in a position to render financial assistance as are the appropriate officers in church and charitable organizations. Civic groups, such as the Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis are open to suggestions when some tangible need involving children is clearly expressed. These organizations

¹⁹ Russell A. Lewis, "All Present and Accounted For," School Executive, 25:90, September, 1941.

often have education committees that can be approached directly, and in the past their aid has been generously given in many communities. Wherever possible the principal, after conferring with the superintendent of schools, should present a specific recommendation to a civic organization based on a careful study of the help needed. The parent-teacher association is another socially minded group. Then there are county nurses, county child placement officers, specialists in child guidance clinics, and doctors in hospitals who are in a position to provide special services. Naturally, the principal will have to decide when to ask for assistance. Some community agencies may be carrying as heavy a burden as they can efficiently handle, in which case their services may not be available to the school. Certainly the school should exhaust its own resources first. Overlapping of services should be avoided. The principal needs to get acquainted with the personnel responsible for policy making in the various organizations concerned and be in a favorable position to present the case for the children who most need help.

Davis has prepared an excellent check list of desirable practices regarding attendance service. It can be used by local schools as a local practice.²⁰

²⁰ Hazel Davis, "Personnel Administrative in the Non-Teaching Services of the Public Schools," Contributions to Education, Number 784 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1938), p. 383.

Permanent and continuing census. A permanent and continuing census of the child population should be maintained.

1. The census includes a permanent and continuous record of all children in the district from birth to age twenty-one.
2. The census records include an alphabetical card file with a card for each child.
3. The accuracy of the census is maintained by a continuing enumeration of the child population.
4. The accuracy of the census is maintained by reports from schools on admissions, changes of address, transfers, and withdrawals.
5. The accuracy of the census is maintained by cooperation with community agencies, such as the bureau of vital statistics, express, and moving companies, police, and social agencies.
6. Other census data are supplemented by a yearly enumeration of all children.

Checking of enrollment against census. The enrollment at the opening of the school should be checked with the school census with a view to securing the enrollment of all pupils who should be in school.

1. The attendance department sees to it that the enrollment in each school is compared with the census.
2. Prompt investigation is made to secure the enrollment of children of school age listed in the census who are not in school.
3. Checking of enrollment with census is done at the beginning of the school term.²¹

Cooperation with non-public schools. The attendance department should seek to assist and to enlist the cooperation of non-public schools.

²¹ Loc. cit.

1. The enrollments of non-public schools are checked against the child census.

2. The attendance officer investigates cases of absence reported by non-public schools and assists in securing adjustments.

Prompt investigation of absences. The attendance officer should investigate promptly all cases of absence referred to him and should make prompt report on the reasons discovered for the absence and adjustment made.

1. The attendance officer secures information daily from each school which he serves as to cases of absence which should be investigated.

2. The attendance officer investigates promptly all cases referred to him if possible on the same day they are received.

3. The attendance officer reports back to school on all cases referred to him, giving reasons discovered for the absence and stating the adjustment.

Follow up on transfer of pupils. Transfer of pupils from one school to another should be immediately followed up by the attendance officer to protect children from loss of school attendance.

1. The attendance officer secures a notice of each transfer from the school of a pupil.

2. The attendance department makes sure that each child transferred is enrolled in the receiving school.²²

Cooperation with teachers and other school workers. The attendance officer should know policy and work cooperatively with the teacher.

1. The attendance officer has conferred with the principal of each school in his district with respect to special objectives and activities of the current school term.

2. The attendance officer attends conferences with teachers and others for consideration of attendance and

²² Loc. cit.

child adjustment problems.

3. The attendance officer visits schools on a definite schedule so that teachers know when he is in the building and available for consultation.

4. The officer receives information about the pupil's work and problems of adjustment in school before visiting the pupil's home.

5. The attendance officer discusses with the teachers concerned the cases needing special attention, reporting to teachers on home conditions.

6. The attendance officer reports cases to the school nurse or other workers when such action seems appropriate.

Cooperation with community services. The attendance worker should cooperate with community agencies in seeking to eliminate causes of absence.

1. The attendance officer has available a list of all welfare, social, and religious agencies which are prepared to render assistance.

2. When a confidential exchange of social agencies exists, the attendance officer cooperates in its use.

3. The attendance officer helps to secure institutional care or other outside aid for pupils whose parents cannot pay for such services.

Case work with habitual truants. Cases of persistent non-attendance which may lead to delinquency and court action should be made the basis of case work records and intensive study.

1. Case work records are available showing analysis of cases of difficulty and reporting efforts at adjustment in cases of habitual non-attendance.

2. Repeated visits and follow-up of home and school adjustments are made in cases representing the most serious problems.²³

²³ Ibid., p. 384.

Court action as a last resort. When all other means fail, the attendance department should take court action to secure good school attendance.

1. Opportunity is given for an informed hearing by school authorities in the effort to bring about adjustment without court action.
2. A pupil who is habitually absent is transferred to a different school and given another trial before court action is taken.
3. If other measures fail, court action is initiated.
4. Detailed records of evidence are prepared for cases presented in court.

Records and reports. Comprehensive records and reports on work done should be made by the attendance department.

1. The attendance officer keeps a daily record of activities.
2. The attendance office keeps records of the approximate distribution of his time among various duties performed.
3. The attendance officer files a weekly or monthly report of his services, giving an accounting of cases investigated and a general analysis of their types and dispositions.
4. Annual reports are prepared covering all services rendered by the attendance department.
5. Records are available which show trends from year to year in:
 - Per cent of children of compulsory school age who are in daily attendance.
 - Per cent of all children enrolled who are in daily attendance.
 - Number of days of absence and whether lawful or unlawful.²⁴

²⁴ Loc. cit.

The part of each local school. Each local school occupies a strategic position with reference to attendance problems. It is within the school and its surrounding environment that the problems arise. The initial report to the central attendance office must originate in the local unit. The person who investigates the case should work in close cooperation with the parents, teacher and principal. Finally the pupil who has been absent or who has become an attendance problem must be adjusted to the school, its environment, and its purposes. Any facts obtained by the social workers which supplement the school records should be made available to teachers and utilized in all possible ways in effecting a readjustment of the child. All of these relationships between the local school and attendance service are obviously in addition to the large majority of cases which are handled by the principal and the teacher.²⁵

The teacher's relation to attendance problems. Because the teacher is directly responsible for the work of instruction and is in immediate supervision of the progress and growth of pupils, she is more interested in good attendance than any other person in the school. The teacher perhaps realizes most fully the interruptions in her work and the

²⁵ Henry J. Otto, Elementary School Organization and Administration (New York: D. Appleton Century Company, 1944), p. 336.

gaps in pupil progress which are caused by absences. The magnitude of this problem may be observed in the knowledge that on the average more than ten per cent of the total number of children enrolled in city elementary schools are absent each day.²⁶ When pupils miss school it is desirable that the work should be made up. If a conscientious attempt is made by teachers to compensate through extra work for the time missed, much teacher time is consumed in follow-up instruction.

If the teacher time requisite for make up work is not available and pupils are readmitted to class groups which by this time have progressed to advanced stages in the work for the grade, there are dangers of creating for the pupil a situation which may result in maladjustment, retardation, and failure.²⁷

Among many responsibilities regarding attendance which rest upon the classroom teacher are the daily reporting of absences; understanding home conditions and cooperating with the home in securing regular and willing attendance; and developing a proper attitude toward pupils and wholesome attitudes among pupils.²⁸

²⁶ Loc. cit.

²⁷ Loc. cit.

²⁸ Loc. cit.

It is plain that the teacher is a very important factor in determining regularity of attendance. In the last analysis it is the classroom teacher who exerts a potent influence in determining the environment and activities of children while they are in school, and in her hands rests the responsibility for applying educational procedures which will prevent maladjustment, truancy, and behavior cases.

The aim of a good attendance system should not be solely to get the child back to school irrespective of his attitude and of the attitude of the parent toward the school. The aim should be to win the confidence of both the child and the parent, so that when the child does reenter school it will be with a new appreciation of the school's work and his relation to it. If school personnel can help each child feel that he belongs to the social group, that he is achieving success in his work, and that he is secure in his relations with others, the basis for a good attendance system can be formulated.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Each school has to face the problem of non-attendance to a greater or lesser degree. Recent approaches to the study of causes of non-attendance have been to substitute analytical and case study methods for the summaries of student and parent statements. It seems clear that the oral or written excuses which children bring to school are frequently little more than plausible statements of surface features which hide the real reasons. Non-attendance is being recognized as a system associated with a variety of complex and deeply rooted social, emotional, and economic factors which have to be identified, understood, and remedied before the problem can be solved.

Since the basis of school attendance is compulsory, one suggested approach to its improvement is through legislative enactment or adequate law enforcement. There seems to be a great need for this approach in many states and individual districts of those states. Heck followed this approach when he said:

The remedy for non-attendance is understanding not force. If society demands regularity of attendance of all children, then society must equalize the burdens which such compulsion to attend places upon individuals. All data compiled which show the existence of such inequalities must be utilized in an attempt to eliminate them. Steps thus taken, backed by knowledge of conditions, certainly have more chance of lessening non-attendance than a policy of force alone.¹

Improving health conditions. Illness, either of the child or in the home, suggests the need for an adequate health program involving the child, the home, the community, and the school itself.

Economic conditions. Remedies should be provided for those economic conditions which cause laxity in attendance laws and their enforcement. Everyone is entitled to a childhood free from labor which deprives him of his educational privileges. We need a uniform labor law adequately enforced. All types of home work should be subordinated to the child's right to an education. Lack of economic means depriving the child of attendance at school must be society's responsibility, also provision for suitable clothing and suitable food. Those causes of non-attendance due to seasonal economic conditions of depression, or others more chronic with certain racial or social groups, should be studied and provision made for the educational release of the children concerned.

¹ Arch O. Heck, Administration of Pupil Personnel (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1929), p. 114.

Responsibility of the home. The causes of non-attendance due to the home need to be studied where they exist, that is, in the home. The home must be brought to see its purpose in the educative process. This should be one of the first obligations of the school, perhaps through the visiting teacher or organized forms of parent-teacher cooperation. Greater cooperation with the home is needed in common causes in which parental or pupil pride hides a condition beyond their control. Any means to secure rapport with the home would be highly commendable.

The school. Within the school lies to a considerable extent, the means of control and elimination of non-attendance on the part of many children. A study of causes traceable to the school which have been given in a previous chapter reveals many conditions that cannot but have a melancholy effect upon the child. Pupils seem to use every excuse to evade the monotony of an unattractive school program, a dull routine, or a dull teacher. Schools must be made happy places where children feel the lift of a wholesome environment. A closer study of the administration of attendance itself would be advisable in many instances.

The teacher. An attractive school environment improved by a pleasing personality would do much to attract children to school. Problem cases need study and every effort should be made to coordinate the special services in

the school system to the desired end, which is pupil adjustment.

The administration. Suggestions indicated for the teacher can be made the basis of school policy. This suggests better supervision on the part of administrators. Guidance and counseling services, properly organized and functioning adequately, will require cooperation with all the school's special services or the community's social agencies. A reclaimed youngster should find an environment offering encouragement when he returns to school. Whatever administrative plans are used must be carried out with discrimination to all concerned.

The community. Assistance rather than obstructive influences should characterize the proper enforcement of attendance laws.

In the last analysis, the program of adjustment must be fitted to each child. There is no substitute for a local survey or analysis of attendance and non-attendance problems together with their possible solutions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

- Abbott, Edith and Breckenridge, S. P., Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Chicago Schools. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1917.
- Bermijo, F. W., The School Attendance Service in American Cities. Menasha, Wisconsin: George Banta Publishing Company, 1923.
- Edwards, Newton, The Courts and the Public Schools. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1933.
- Elsbree, Willard S. and McNally, Harold J., Elementary School Administration and Supervision. New York: American Book Company, 1951.
- Ensign, F. C., Compulsory School Attendance and Child Labor. Iowa City: Athens Press, 1921.
- Gribble, Stephen C., Teacher Qualifications and School Attendance in New Mexico, 1918-1946. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1948.
- Heck, Arch O., Administration of Pupil Personnel. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1929.
- Kyte, George C., The Principal at Work. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1941.
- Landis, Paul H., Adolescence and Youth. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1945.
- Martin, G. H., The Evolution of the Massachusetts Public School System. New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898.
- Noble, M. C. S., Pupil Transportation in the United States. Scranton: International Textbook Company, 1940.

Sullenger, T. E., Social Determinants in Juvenile Delinquency.
New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1936.

Yeager, William A., Home, School and Community Relations.
Pittsburgh: University Book Store, 1939.

_____, Administration and the Pupil. New York: Harper
and Brothers, 1949.

PAMPHLETS

"Absent From School Today," Metropolitan Life Insurance Com-
pany, New York, 1949.

Deffenbaugh, W. S. and Keesecker, Ward W., "Compulsory Attend-
ance Laws and Their Enforcement," United States Office of
Education, Educational Bulletin 4, 1935.

Farley, Belmont, "Willingly to School," Washington: National
Educational Association, 1938.

Hegel, N. H., "The Social Services of the Public Schools,"
Report of the Survey of the Schools of Chicago, Illinois,
Division of Field Studies, Institute of Educational
Research, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York:
1932.

Reavis, G. H., "Factors Contributing to Attendance in Rural
Schools," Bureau of Publications, Teachers College,
Columbia University, New York: 1920.

"Statistics of State School Systems, 1937-1938," Federal
Security Agency, United States Office of Education.
Bulletin 2, Washington: 1940.

PERIODICAL LITERATURE

Broom, Eustace, and Trowbridge, Bertha, "The Visiting
Teachers' Job," Elementary School Journal, 27: May,
1926.

Clark, C. E., "Pupil Personnel, Guidance, and Counseling,"
Review of Educational Research, 39: April, 1939.

"Compulsory School Attendance Laws and Their Administration,"
Bulletin Number 4, United States Office of Education,
Government Printing Office, Washington: 1935.

- Fleming, Paul, "Truancy--When and Why It Occurs," Nation's Schools, 33: November, 1933.
- Heck, Arch O., and others, "School Attendance," Review of Educational Research, 27: April, 1936.
- Lewis, Russell A., "All Present and Accounted For," School Executive, 25: September, 1941.
- Larson, Emil, "Migration and Its Effect on School," Elementary School Journal, 26: December, 1940.
- Reeves, Charles E., "Outlook for School Population of the Future," American School Board Journal, 115: February, 1947.
- Schwartz, William P., "We Can Improve Attendance," High Points, 29: February, 1948.
- Schultz, J. L., "School Medical Service and Attendance," American School Board Journal, 115: February, 1947.
- Sullenger, T. E., "Some Social Factors in School Non-Attendance," School and Society, 16: February, 1935.
- "The State and Sectarian Education," Research Bulletin, National Education Association, February, 1946.
- Townsend, Florence D., "Basic Factors Underlying Good Attendance," High Points, 29: May, 1947.
- Turner, Rex H., "Cooperation Cures Oakland Truancy Problem," American School Board Journal, 114-115: December, 1947.
- Wiens, David J., "Attendance Service in the Cleveland Public Schools," American School Board Journal, 119: September, 1949.

UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL

- Calloway, A. E., "The Relation Between Socio-Economic Status, Health, and School Attendance," Berkley: Emory University, 1939.
- Davis, Hazel, "Personnel Administration in the Non-Teaching Services of the Public Schools." New York: Contributions to Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1939.

- Gardner, John R., "Truancy and Non-Attendance in the Salt Lake City Junior High Schools." Salt Lake City: Unpublished Master's thesis, University of Utah, 1935.
- Lawing, John L., "Standards for State and Local Compulsory School Attendance Service," New York: Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, Columbia University, 1934.
- Reiners, N. W., "Public Secondary School Attendance in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania," Pittsburgh: Unpublished Doctor's dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1939.