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# Absenteeism Trends in the North Franklin School District From 1974 to 1985

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ABSENTEEISM TRENDS IN THE NORTH FRANKLIN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT FROM 1974 TO 1985

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate Faculty  
Central Washington University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements of the Degree  
Master of Education

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by  
Gail A. Thompson  
July, 1985

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ABSENTEEISM TRENDS IN THE NORTH FRANKLIN  
SCHOOL DISTRICT FROM 1974 TO 1985

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July, 1985

The purpose of this study was to compare trends in absenteeism in the North Franklin School District with those identified in the literature.

Data on annual certificated leaves were collected from 1974 to 1985 by the payroll clerk from the district Monthly Attendance Summary. The average annual days of absence, average absence rate, and percentage of absence by sick leave, bereavement, personal, and released time leaves were computed.

The study had several comparisons with the literature. This rural district's days absent were lower than the average and showed a marked increase in the use of released time.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES. . . . .	vi
Chapter	
1. Background of the Study. . . . .	1
Introduction . . . . .	1
Statement of the Problem . . . . .	2
Limitations. . . . .	2
Definition of Terms Used . . . . .	2
Summary. . . . .	3
2. Review of the Literature . . . . .	4
Research Studies . . . . .	4
Absenteeism Improvement Program. . . . .	7
Substitute Solution. . . . .	10
Summary. . . . .	10
3. Procedures of the Study. . . . .	12
4. Results of the Study . . . . .	14
5. Summary. . . . .	21
Conclusions. . . . .	21
Recommendations. . . . .	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY. . . . .	24

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. North Franklin School District Recap of Certificated Leaves. . . . .	15
2. Average Days Absent/Average Absence Rate Per Certificated Staff Person . . . . .	16



## CHAPTER ONE

### Background of the Study

#### Introduction

The question of the relationship of the amount and quality of learning time and student achievement has been a key issue with the effective schools movement. The national report, "A Nation at Risk" (National, 1983) by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, made five recommendations to be acted upon for school improvement. The topic of "Recommendation C" is time.

We recommend that significantly more time be devoted to learning the New Basics. This will require more effective use of the existing school day, a longer school day, or a lengthened school year. (National, 1983, p. 29)

The key for school improvement is student achievement and the antecedent skills and conditions necessary for learning to take place.

There is much research on the amount of time that teachers allocate to instruction and student achievement.

John Goodlad expresses the importance of time:

Some seem almost unaware that time is virtually the most precious learning resource they have at their disposal. School-to-school differences in using time create inequities in opportunity to learn. (Goodlad, 1984, p. 30)

The concern about time raises the parallel question of the effect on learning when the teacher is absent. Many studies show an increase in teacher absenteeism in recent years.

Substitute teachers can break regular instruction and often fail to create the stable and supporting environment in which learning flourishes.

The increase in absenteeism is a concern which carries both financial and instructional costs. There have been many programs which have successfully improved teacher attendance. The Beginning Teachers Evaluation Study (McREL, 1981, p. 2) recommends that certificated personnel make the best use of the time assigned to instruction. (McREL, 1981, p. 3) A teacher's absence is an interruption of regular instruction.

#### Statement of the Problem

This study is concerned with the question: Is there a trend toward an annual increase in certificated absenteeism in the North Franklin School District, Connell, Washington, and does any such change parallel trends as identified in the literature?

#### Limitations

This study is limited to the annual certificated leaves in the target district from 1974 to 1985, as indicated in Table 1.

#### Definition of Terms Used

Sick Leave. Leave which is granted without deduction of pay for personal illness, family illness, injury, and emergency. Total accumulated of sick leave is 12 days per year.

Family Illness. Family illness shall be limited to 3 days for members of the immediate household.

Emergency Leave. Emergency leave shall be deducted from sick leave up to 2 days for a sudden, unexpected crisis situation beyond the employee's control.

Bereavement Leave. Bereavement leave shall be granted up to 5 days in the event of a death of a family member, a fiancée, or fiancé.

Personal Leave. Personal leave shall be one day a year at the employee's discretion.

Released Time. Released time shall be a leave of absence with pay for workshops, attendance of meetings and conferences, association leaves up to 25 days, jury duty, and coaching duties.

### Summary

It is the purpose of this study to show the trends in certificated absences in the North Franklin School District and to analyze any such trends in light of the literature on the topic. There will follow a review of related literature, Chapter Two, summarizing reviewed literature regarding trends in teacher absenteeism. The procedure to gather local data will be described in Chapter Three. Chapter Four will contain the analysis of the data using tables and graphs to show comparisons. The summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study will follow in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Review of the Literature

Literature related to "Teacher Absenteeism" is not as completely documented as that of "Student Absenteeism." The literature on teacher absenteeism seems to fall into three sub-topics; research studies, absenteeism improvement programs, and substitutes as a replacement. The review will be grouped into three sections.

#### Research Studies

Peggy G. Elliott and Donald C. Manlove published two articles on absenteeism to help to alert the public to the problem of teacher absenteeism. Their first, in 1977, used New York and Indiana studies to point out the increase in teacher absenteeism and loss in learning that occurs when substitutes are in the classroom. (Elliott, 1977, p. 269) Their subsequent article came in 1979, "Absent Teachers. . . Another Handicap for Students?". Seven extensive studies reviewed, helped point out the dramatic increase in teacher absenteeism. (Manlove, 1979, pp. 1-2) After stressing the ineffectiveness of substitutes, six possible solutions to increased absenteeism were listed.

Peggy Elliott published "Where are the Students and Teachers? Student and Teacher Absenteeism in Secondary

Schools." Past studies found teacher absenteeism increased after collective bargaining. (Elliott, 1979, p. 23) In 1982, Peggy Elliott reviewed findings in "Update on Teacher Absenteeism." A 1981 Educational Research Service study found days absent were fewer in rural areas 6.6 to 8.9 in urban areas. (Elliott, 1982, p. 2) Authorities on the topic of employee absenteeism suggested that absences should not exceed 3 percent of the average work time; the 1981 study showed teacher absences exceeded 3 percent. (Elliott, 1982, p. 3)

Teacher Absenteeism, Professional Staff Absence Study by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Inc. (1978), was a comprehensive study intended to aid administration in developing policies on absenteeism. It explored basic characteristics and patterns of absenteeism and noted that in 1977-78 the average days absent for a Pennsylvania teacher was 8.2 days. (Pennsylvania, 1978, p. 15)

The National Association of Independent Schools, Boston, Massachusetts, published the results of their 1971 survey of practices and policies in member schools. Questionnaires were sent to 721 schools with a response rate of 84 percent. (Dahlberg, 1972, p.1) "Vacation and Absence" was one of the ten headings analyzed in the computer breakdown.

A 1978 survey of 7,000 teachers from different degree zones and community types was one in a series by the New York State Education Department Board of Regents. There was little similarity because of degree zone or community type.

Attendance was a little higher with rural teachers over the city and suburban teachers. (Report #7, 1978, p. 6)

Student and teacher absenteeism were both on the rise according to the investigation by Chrissie Bamber in 1979. The Department of Labor groups all employees in the education industry together. Educational employees were absent 3.6 percent of the time (as of May 1976). (Bamber, 1979, p. 16) Stress as a cause of increased absences was surveyed by the RMC Research Corporation (November 1977) in Chicago. (Bamber, 1979, p. 25)

James Lewis Jr.'s article in 1981 looked at absenteeism as a disease which approached epidemic proportions, 10-15 percent in some schools. (Lewis, 1981, p. 29) Concerned that teacher absenteeism had increased in the last 15 years, he gave symptoms to determine the extent of the disease in a school and follows with an eight-point plan for an attendance improvement program. A later article by James Lewis Jr. suggested a computer-produced employee absenteeism profile to monitor attendance. (Lewis, 1982, p. 32)

Absence rates on the incline in Youngstown, Ohio was not a new problem. T. Susan Hill's 1982 article shared the concept of James Lewis Jr. on the "absence culture." Several studies revealed that the absence rate, as high as 8.3 percent in some urban districts, exceeded that of private industry. (Hill, 1982, p. 32) Strategies were listed to reward good attendance.

## Absenteeism Improvement Program

Increased absences in the late sixties and early seventies in Newark School District, New Jersey, initiated the Newark School Study by the Chamber of Commerce with the cooperation of the Newark School Board. (Newark Chamber, 1974, p. 1) The report was completed in June of 1971 and highlights a need for an attendance improvement plan. The resulting Newark Attendance Improvement Program was used in the Newark and Ewing Schools. Both had a 20 percent reduction in absences in 1972-73. (Newark Chamber, 1974, p. 4) The goal was to keep the medium rate of absences in the two to four percent range. (Newark, 1974, p. 96) This report detailed a five year study of absences. Two outcomes of the study were the historical study of illness and a mechanized confidential computer listing of attendance. (Newark, 1974, p. 101) The program stressed establishing a climate where people could work toward individual goals and a school manager that take the lead in maintaining that climate. (Newark, 1974, p. 77)

A major study in New Jersey led to Richard Harclerode's Attendance Improvement Program. The study pointed out that districts with over 10 days sick leave experiences highest rates of absence and that 70 percent to 80 percent of absences are short term. (Harclerode, 1979, p. 2) This action plan used data, staff workshops, monthly reports, and teacher absence reports. Intrinsic motivation was used to reward excellent staff attendance. (Harclerode, 1979, p. 17)

The plan was to be used for continuation of the educational process and in the case of absences over the two to four percent range of the United States private sector.

(Harclerode, 1979, p. 20)

Evan Pitkoff pointed out a need to reduce teacher absenteeism from his 1976 study's teacher absence rate of 3.75 percent. (Pitkoff, 1981, p. 1) Absences are categorized into contractual, procedural, environmental, and social. His proposal for reduction in absenteeism included care in hiring, use of team teaching, and routing attendance report to the supervisor. (Pitkoff, 1981)

The Merrick, Long Island School District cut absences by 55 percent in the 1973-74 school year. (Gendler, 1977, p. 32) This total approach included cooperation of central office personnel, building administration, and the faculty association. Administration was fully accountable for implementing this plan.

The key to decreased absenteeism was support by administration, according to James H. Capitan and others in their 1978 study of 90 school systems in Ohio. (Capitan, 1980, p. 3) Administrators can work to reduce the absenteeism problem.

Edwin M. Bridges used a questionnaire to gather information on 40 elementary schools. (Bridges, 1980, p. 41) He wanted to gather information to find a relationship between job satisfaction and teacher absenteeism. He used the Job Descriptive Index developed by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin.



(Bridges, 1980, p. 46) The results were tenuous, and job satisfaction was not a major factor. (Bridges, 1980, p. 53)

The "Second Mile Plan" was an incentive pay plan for Houston teachers. (Say, 1982, p. 270) The program focused on four issues of concern: improvement of instruction, staff stability, teacher shortages, and teaching as a rewarding career. (Say, 1982, p. 270) Teachers had to meet seven criteria to be eligible. Teacher attendance was impacted by this plan decreasing by an average of 1.3 days in 1979-80 and 1.4 in 1980-81 from the 1978-79 school year. (Miller, 1982, p. 5)

The King William County schools in Virginia adopted the Teacher Incentive Program to encourage, recognize, and reward excellent instruction. (Winborne, 1984, p. 29) To receive the \$2,000 supplement, a teacher must apply and meet six requirements, one of which included three or fewer days of absence. (Winborne, 1984, p. 29)

John White surveyed 59 teachers in two urban elementary schools and one suburban elementary school to gather information on what the majority of the staff would like as a bonus plan. (White, 1982, p. 3) Seventy-three percent of the sample approved a bonus program. (White, 1982, p. 16)

A report by Donald E. Skidmore, pointed out the concern when absenteeism in Illinois rose to ten days per teacher in 1978-79. (Skidmore, 1984, p. 40) A series of simple steps over a four year period reduced absenteeism to 4.3 days per teacher in 1982-83. (Skidmore, 1984, p. 40)

### Substitute Solution

Rebecca Feldman stated the national problems of substitutes who teach approximately five to six percent of the total teachers' days. (Feldman, 1981, p. 1) She supported the upgrading of substitutes, but also mentioned the plans of Gendler, Manlove and Elliott, and Capitan. (Feldman, 1981, p. 46)

A "guest teacher" program for educational enrichment was suggested by Sandra Deutchman as an alternative to substitutes when the teacher is absent. (Deutchman, 1983, p. 397) The students would be able to request the type of "guest teacher" they wanted from the pool of talented substitutes available. The "guest teacher" would be well prepared for the day with her lesson on index cards and ready for a productive day. (Deutchman, 1983, p. 397)

The first major study on substitutes since the Educational Research Service in 1977 was by Charles Koelling in the North Central Region for the 1981-82 school year. (Koelling, 1983, p. 155) He sent out 2123 questionnaires on policies on substitutes to 19 states and got back 81.39 percent. (Koelling, 1983, p. 156) He suggested how to handle the problem of substitutes to secure the best alternative to a regular teacher. (Koelling, 1983, p. 171)

### Summary

On the basis of the literature, teacher absenteeism was a growing and major concern to many. Many programs were suggested to stop the rise in teacher absenteeism. Substitutes

as a replacement for the absent teacher required upgrading or they added to the problem of teacher absenteeism. Decreasing teacher absenteeism was stressed from the readings as one of the best solutions to this problem.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Procedures of the Study

To gain information on teacher absenteeism the following procedures were employed. An ERIC computer search was done with the descriptor, "Teacher Absenteeism." The Educational Service District #123 in Pasco was utilized in the research by the use of their microfiche library. The Central Washington University Library was utilized for microfiche and published articles.

The data on certificated leaves, "Recap of Certificated Leaves," in the North Franklin School District were gathered by the payroll clerk from the district's Monthly Attendance Summary. The annual certificated leave count from the 1974 school year to 1984 school year was used. The number of certificated employees was shown by "n" for each year. The leaves were broken into type of leave from four to six depending on the negotiated agreement.

The data from "Recap of Certificated Leaves" were totalled and mean days absent and average absence rate were calculated and shown for each year. Charts were used to show the trends in the average absence rate and the percentage of leaves used for each school year.

The data from the study were compared to the trends in

the literature, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were made.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results of the Study

The North Franklin School District in Connell, Washington was selected for this study. The district is a rural district with a certified staff average of 86. This study is concerned with the question: Is there a trend toward an annual increase in certificated absenteeism in the North Franklin School District, Connell, Washington, and does any change parallel trends as identified in the literature?

Table 1

North Franklin School District  
Recap of Certificated Leaves

<u>1974-75 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=75	<u>1980-81 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=89
SICK LEAVE	315.5 days	SICK LEAVE	391.25 days
EMERGENCY LEAVE	18.0 days	FAMILY ILLNESS	25.5 days
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	44.5 days	EMERGENCY LEAVE	24.5 days
*RELEASE TIME	50.5 days	BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	8.0 days
		*RELEASE TIME	140.75 days
<u>1975-76 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=80	<u>1981-82 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=92
SICK LEAVE	374.5 days	SICK LEAVE	311.25 days
EMERGENCY LEAVE	15.5 days	FAMILY ILLNESS	28.75 days
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	36.0 days	EMERGENCY LEAVE	9.0 days
*RELEASE TIME	68.0 days	BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	12.25 days
		PERSONAL DAY LEAVE	50.75 days
 		*RELEASE TIME	108.5 days
<u>1976-77 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=83	 	
SICK LEAVE	280.0 days	<u>1982-83 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=87
EMERGENCY LEAVE	14.5 days	SICK LEAVE	374.5 days
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	17.0 days	FAMILY ILLNESS	42.25 days
*RELEASE TIME	72.5 days	EMERGENCY LEAVE	10.5 days
		BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	13.5 days
 		PERSONAL DAY LEAVE	58.0 days
<u>1977-78 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=86	*RELEASE TIME	235.0 days
SICK LEAVE	355.0 days	 	
EMERGENCY LEAVE	12.5 days	<u>1983-84 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=91
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	46.0 days	SICK LEAVE	445.75 days
*RELEASE TIME	95.5 days	FAMILY ILLNESS	31.0 days
		EMERGENCY LEAVE	5.0 days
 		BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	15.5 days
<u>1978-79 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=87	PERSONAL DAY LEAVE	42.25 days
SICK LEAVE	345.0 days	*RELEASE TIME	196.5 days
FAMILY ILLNESS	22.0 days		
EMERGENCY LEAVE	28.5 days	 	
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	6.5 days	<u>1984-85 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=90
*RELEASE TIME	98.0 days	SICK LEAVE	364.0 days
		FAMILY ILLNESS	29.0 days
 		EMERGENCY LEAVE	14.5 days
<u>1979-80 SCHOOL YEAR</u>	n=82	BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	18.5 days
SICK LEAVE	374.75 days	PERSONAL DAY LEAVE	37.0 days
FAMILY ILLNESS	14.75 days	*RELEASE TIME	212.75 days
EMERGENCY LEAVE	10.5 days		
BEREAVEMENT LEAVE	17.0 days		
*RELEASE TIME	96.0 days		

\*RELEASE TIME includes leave for workshops, NFEA, jury duty, conventions, meetings, conferences, trackmeets and tournaments.

Data pertaining to annual certificated leaves were taken from the Monthly Attendance Summary. The leaves were divided into up to six categories and totalled as seen in Table 1. The number of certificated staff is shown as "n".

Table 2  
Average Days Absent/Average Absence Rate  
Per Certificated Staff Person

School Year	1974- 75	1975- 76	1976- 77	1977- 78	1978- 79	1979- 80	1980- 81	1981- 82	1982- 83	1983- 84	1984- 85
<u>Leave</u>											
Sick Leave	315.5	374.5	280	355	345	345.75	391.25	311.25	374.5	445.75	364
Family					22	14.25	25.5	28.75	42.25	31	29
Emergency	18	15.5	14.5	12.5	28.5	10.5	-24.5	9	10.5	5	14.5
Bereavement	44.5	36	17	46	6.5	17	8	12.25	13.5	15.5	18.5
Personal Day								50.75	58	42.25	37
Released Time	50.5	68	72.5	95.5	98	96	140.75	108.5	235	196.5	212.75
Total(t)	428.5	494	384	509	500	513	590	520.5	733.75	736	675.75
Certificated(n)	75	80	83	86	87	82	89	92	87	91	90
Average Days t/n	5.7	6.2	4.6	5.9	5.8	6.3	6.6	5.7	8.4	8.1	7.5
Average Absence Rate	3.1%	3.4%	2.5%	3.2%	3%	3.6%	3.6%	3.1%	4.6%	4.5%	4.1%

Table 2 included the data from the previous table and the average days absent and the average absence rate per certificated staff person. The average absence rate was computed by the formula:

$$\text{The average absence rate} = \text{average days absent} / 182 \times 100$$



The days absent (6.6 for the 1980-81 school year) were the same as that found for a rural area in the 1981 Educational Research Service study. (Elliott, 1979, p. 23) The New York survey also found rural teacher attendance higher. (Report #7, 1978, p. 6) Average days leaves each year were over the 4.3 days goal of Illinois in 1982-83 (Skidmore, 1984, p. 40) and under the 8.2 days average absence for a Pennsylvania teacher. (Pennsylvania, 1978, p. 15)

Figure 1

Certificated Average Days Absent  
Due to Leaves

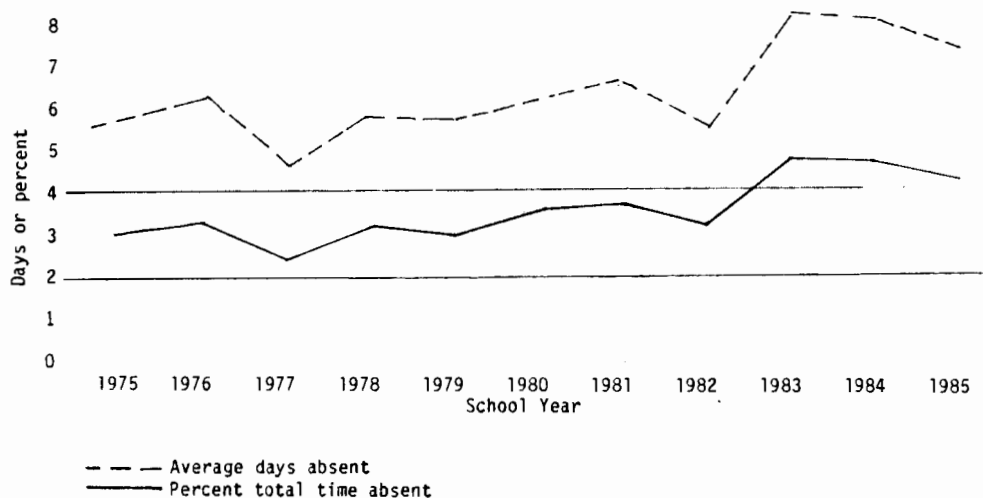
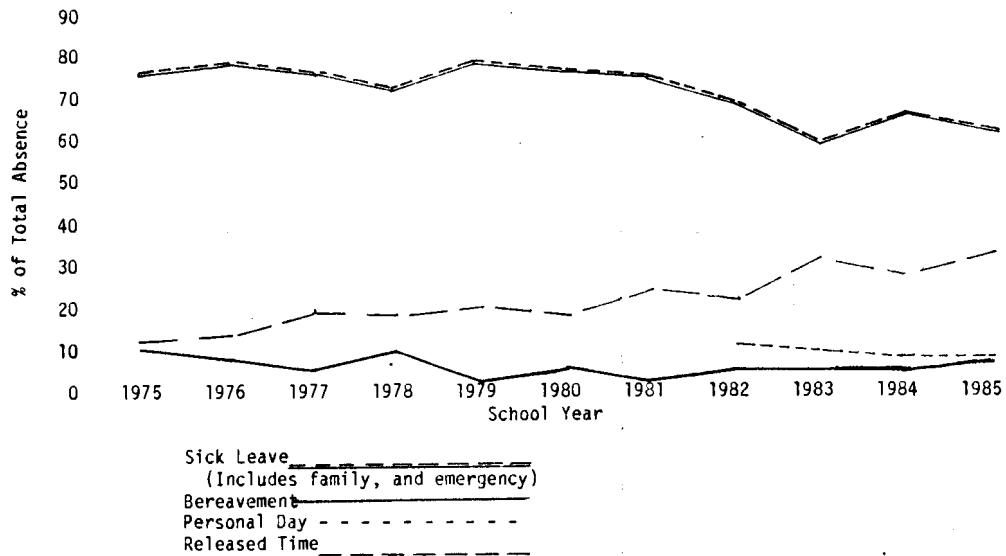


Figure 1 includes the average days absent and absence rate for the 1974-75 school year to the 1984-85 school year. Lines are drawn to show any rate above recommended two to four percent range. (Harclerode, 1979, p. 20, Greater, 1974, p. 96) The past three school years have been above that range. The Department of Labor showed educational employees were absent 3.6 percent in May 1976 (Bamber, 1979, p. 25) and in this sample time absent was 3.4 percent for the 1975-76 school year. The labor statistics included all educational employees where the target sample is of certificated staff only. The 1975-76 absence rate was under the 1976 absence rate of 3.75 percent. (Pitkoff, 1981, p. 1) The range in absence rate was from 2.5 percent to a high of 4.6 percent.

There have been three periods of increase in absenteeism in the target district over an eleven year period. Since the highest rate of absence in the 1982-83 school year, absence has been on a decline.

Figure 2

## Percentage of Total Absence by Leave



Percentage of total absence for each leave used is shown in Figure 2 for the four types of leaves. Family illness and emergency leave come out of sick leave, therefore, are included under sick leave.

In 1976-77, 96 percent of the districts in a New York study indicated use of substitutes for professional growth activities. (Manlove, 1977, p. 269) Absence under released time includes in-service or professional growth activities. In recent years district caused leaves for professional growth are commonly used. (Koelling, 1983, p. 160, Manlove, 1977, p. 269) In this district, there has been a constant rise in the percent of absence due to released time and a decline in the percent of absence due to sick leave.

When family illness was added to sick leave in the

1978-79 school year, there was a rise from 72 percent in 1977-78 to 79 percent in the absence rate due to illness. The study in Pennsylvania found personal sick leave was 69 percent of all staff absences in 1977-78. (Pennsylvania, 1978, p. 30) The addition of a personal day leave in 1982-83 accounted for 10 percent of all leaves. This has since dropped to 5 percent. Collective bargaining on such items had contributed to the increase in absenteeism. (Elliott, 1982, p. 2) However, in the North Franklin School District, the increase in the percent of leave for sick leave in 1977-78 and personal leave in 1982-83 was followed by a decline in leave time used.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Summary

Attendance data was collected from the North Franklin School District for an eleven year period from the 1974-75 to the 1984-85 school year. The Recap of Certificated Leaves was supplied from the Monthly Attendance Summary. Average days missed per certificated staff and the average percentage rate of absence per year were calculated. Figures were included as graphic representations of the data to help compare different years.

### Conclusions

The North Franklin School District showed increases in absenteeism which have been lower than the trends indicated in the literature. (Greater, 1974, p. 96) The literature showed lower absenteeism in rural area schools. The increase above the four percent absence rate (Figure 1) has occurred since the 1982-83 school year. The steady increase in the percentage of the total absence due to released time is very obvious having grown from 12 percent in the 1982-83 school year to 31 percent in the 1984-85 school year (Figure 2). In 1976-77, 96 percent of the districts in a New York study indicated use of substitutes for professional growth activities. (Manlove, 1977, p. 269)

The addition of other negotiated leaves from four types to six types has increased the time a teacher may be absent from the classroom. A teacher in the North Franklin School District may legally be absent from the classroom assignment a maximum of 18 days per year, not including released leave time. Released time has no official upper limit. In their study, Elliott and Manlove found the mean number of days of legal absence to be 13.06 days per year, with the range from nine to 24 days. (Manlove, 1977, p. 269)

The average days absence in the past 11 years has been 6.4 days per certificated staff per year. This target district has not been at or over the mean of 10 days which are critical according to Manlove and Elliott. (Manlove, 1977, p. 269, Lewis, 1981, p. 29) Since the 1982-83 school year, absence has been up to a high of 8.4 days and over the four percent rate (Figure 1). There was an increase the past three years in the use of released time (Figure 2) in the target district.

The decrease in the percentage of time teachers' absence is due to illness, and the increase of the time their absence is due to released time both show a trend (Figure 2) toward intersecting in the future. If this occurs, district controlled release time for professional growth would exceed sick leave. If absence rates stayed constant and only the percentage of released time over sick leave increased, the district would have control of the quality of time certificated staff was absent.

## Recommendations

This study found increases in teacher absenteeism in the North Franklin School District and compared these increases and absence rates with the trends in the literature. During the study other questions arose which could not be answered with study data. The following are recommendations offered as additional areas of study:

1. Identify methods and resources needed to continue inservice activities without taking the teacher out of the classroom.
2. Determine if the decline in absence due to sick leave and increase in absence due to released time are typical in a large number of districts.
3. Determine ways to raise student achievement and professional growth of staff without one taking from the other.
4. Improve the quality of the substitutes who replace the teacher.

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