A study of the effects of school social work services on attendance in the Charlotte- Mecklenburg Public Schools

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A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES ON ATTENDANCE IN THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY

ALICE ROCHELLE WASHINGTON

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY, 1966
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer acknowledges Dr. Hugh I. Peck, Director of Educational Evaluation Services, for helping her to obtain the necessary data for this study.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

The school is a social institution with which all people have had some experience. It is both authoritative and compulsory in its very nature, requiring not only reasonable and academic achievement, but also regular attendance. School standards and controls are formulated for the welfare of the individual as well as the group. The requirement of regular attendance at school of all youngsters between certain ages is but one of the limits set by society in the interest of the individual and the community.

Historically, from the inception of organized educational systems regular attendance was considered essential, and today regular attendance was considered essential, and today regular attendance has become a subject of national study and concern. All of the states of the United States recognize to some degree the importance of education and have made provisions to afford each child educational opportunity.
The provision of educational opportunity for all children and of social services for children within the school programs raises an immediate consideration of school attendance. Obviously, children must attend school if they are to receive the benefit of the opportunities offered in the school. Although compulsory attendance laws have long been on the statute books of every state, enforcement of laws has varied in different localities and in individual schools. The statutes met with opposition from individuals and groups who failed to consider education as a valuable right; from parents, particularly in rural areas, who felt they needed the children to work at home; and from employers who were eager to exploit child labor. Some school administrators thought of attendance mainly in terms of average daily attendance which brought greater revenue to the school, and seemed to show little understanding of causes of non-attendance. Many states made no provision for implementation of attendance laws beyond holding the school superintendent responsible; others indicated that local communities might employ attendance officers; and some states made mandatory the
employment of such officers.¹ In the past, much of the emphasis of attendance service was on enforcement and punishment, rather than on protecting the rights of the child to receive an education. Qualifications for attendance officers were ill-defined and did not insure personnel who could help parents and children with problems of school attendance.

Experience showed that legal enforcement alone was not sufficient to alleviate the problem of non-attendance. Reasons for non-attendance are many and varied, and often indicate some problem which requires careful study and expert help. Non-attendance and truancy are now recognized as symptoms which indicate that there is some problem in the child, his home, or the school. Educators and parents are recognizing that the child who chooses this way of expressing a problem should have skilled help as does the child who shows any other symptom of disturbance. Concern over the fact that children who showed such symptoms as shyness, aggressive behavior, and so forth, were receiving expert help, while those who stayed from school were being punished by legal

action and given little constructive help with their problems, has led to many changes in attendance service. Educators and attendance workers are recognizing the need for a preventive program which requires personnel with a good understanding of physical, emotional, and social problems, and with knowledge of ways of helping parents and children. Qualifications for attendance workers are being studied and revised. An increasing number of states are finding social caseworkers helpful in attendance work and are requiring varying amounts of social work training for attendance personnel.

An increasing number of states are finding the social casework approach useful and are now requiring varying amounts of social work training in addition to a working knowledge of or experience in education. With changes in qualifications there is concern that salaries be commensurate with appropriate education and experience. Some states are making provisions for in-service training for attendance workers. Leadership for such training is sought from fields of medicine, psychology, psychiatry, and social casework.¹

Although definitions and problems of attendance in the United States have varied with time and place, a general upward trend is evident. For example, from

1870 to 1950 the percentage of all day school enrollees in attendance increased from 59.3 to 88.7 and the average annual attendance increased from 78.4 days to 157.9 days.3

The National League to Promote School Attendance and the National Association of School Social Workers offer leadership in working toward higher standards for attendance service.4

Purpose of the Study

The goals of attendance administration in the United States have shifted from legal enforcement to the broader concept of providing attendance services. More specifically the philosophy of "what is preventing you from attending and how can we enable you to attend."5

The state of North Carolina is but one of those states in the United States which has compulsory school attendance laws and which has shifted from the enforcement concept to a diagnostic "helping approach."

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In Charlotte, North Carolina, school administrators, attendance workers, and legislators, are more and more recognizing non-attendance as a symptom of social and emotional difficulty requiring the skilled help of a social worker. They are convinced that unless there is an adequate professional service -- people who have knowledge and understanding and have learned certain skills in helping people on an individual basis -- there will be little abiding change in non-attendance figures.

Since 1954 the Department of School Social Work Services has been an integral part of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System. Since 1954 it has been the sole service within the school setting to deal with the problem of attendance in the Mecklenburg public schools, for it was in this year that Dr. Elmer Garinger, became aware of the relationship between the child's emotional problems and his attendance and adjustment, and recognized the need for a special service with this focus within the schools.

In 1963, however, the Department of School Social Work Services was reorganized in that:
1. Public Accounting was made a separate part from School Social Work Services.

2. The name of the Agency was changed from the Department of Child Accounting and Attendance to the Department of School Social Work Services.

3. There was a change in the Agency's structure and procedures; School Social Workers began to offer direct casework service to those children who were experiencing difficulty through absenteeism, behavior and underachievement.6

The purpose of this study is to make a survey of the effects of school social work services on the attendance records of students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools before and after reorganization of School Social Work Services in the summer of 1963.

Method of Procedure

In this study the researcher investigated data regarding the record of attendance of students attending

6Interview with Mr. Joseph Frankford, Director of School Social Work Services, Charlotte, North Carolina, February 18, 1966.
the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools before and after reorganization of School Social Work Services in 1963. The data was obtained from the reports presented to the North Carolina State Board of Education from the public schools regarding the attendance and the percent of attendance from 1954-1964. In this study the researcher dealt specifically with four school years -- 1961-1962, 1962-1963, 1963-1964, and 1964-1965 (see Chapter III), for prior to 1963 two autonomous school systems existed, and each school system had its own social workers.

Once the data was collected, the researcher arranged the data in tables showing the average daily attendance, the average daily membership, and the percent in average daily attendance of the students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System since the inception of the Department of School Social Work Services and since the reorganization of the Department of School Social Work Services (see Appendix). From the data collected the researcher then drew impressions regarding the effects of school social work services on the problem of attendance in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools.
For the purpose of this study the researcher defined the following terms. All definitions were taken from The Principal Monthly Report, Charlotte, North Carolina. **Average Daily Attendance (ADA)** The number of children attending school on a given day. The sum of pupils present divided by actual "days of school." **Average Daily Membership (ADM)** "Sum of daily membership" divided by "actual days of school." **Per Cent in Average Daily Attendance** "Average daily attendance" divided by "average daily membership."

**Scope and Limitations**

The material for this study was limited to articles, books, reports and any other related material obtained from the Department of School Social Work Services in Charlotte, North Carolina. The researcher's study was restricted to that area of school social work involving the problem of attendance at school. It was further limited in that the researcher studied the problem of attendance at the one hundred and nine public schools in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area from 1955-1965, Charlotte, North Carolina.
CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE AGENCY

The Department of School Social Work Services, originally the Department of Child Accounting and Attendance, was established in September, 1954 under the auspices of the Board of Education in Charlotte, North Carolina. As the original name indicates the Department was established mainly to alleviate the problem of attendance in the public schools.

An experienced professional worker, Mrs. Anne S. Hausmann, was appointed by the Board of Education to head the agency. She was given the title of Director. Mrs. Hausmann was indeed qualified for the job -- she had received her M. A. degree from Columbia University and a diploma from the New York University School of Social Work. She had had extensive experience in working with Community Welfare Planning Councils, Juvenile Courts, Travelers Aid Association and Family and Children's
Services. As Director of the newly established agency, Mrs. Hausmann selected Miss Grace McCauley, a professional and a graduate of Atlanta University School of Social Work, to be her co-worker.

Mrs. Hausmann began immediately to set in motion the machinery to ensure the cooperation and support of those social agencies necessary for effective coordination of the Department.

During the month of September, 1954, individual conferences with the key person or persons in the various health and welfare agencies in the community were carried on for the purpose of learning the nature of the services provided by that agency, establishing friendly relationships and working out methods of referrals.

As a result of her many conferences, various persons became interested in and willing to cooperate with the newly established department. Among those interested persons were Mrs. Cordelia Henderson, Social Worker, Alexander Home, Mr. G. E. Mattison, and Mr. Robert W. Wright, Directors of the United Community Fund and Social Planning Council, Judge Willard I. Gatling

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9Ibid., p. 6.
of Juvenile Court, Dr. M. L. Fisher, Director, and Miss Elizabeth Allen, Social Worker of the Mental Health Clinic, and Mrs. Elizabeth McCubbin, Director of Family and Children's Services.

In order to determine the kind of services that the Department would offer in relations to the schools, a regular work schedule was set up in September, 1954. Two schools were included in the schedule -- Piedmont and Dilworth. According to the schedule, the Director of the Department of Child's Accounting and Attendance was at each school two mornings a week for the purpose of conferring with the principals and teachers about attendance problems. Home visits were made to provide counselling to the families involved in an attempt to regulate attendance at school. Conferences were held with various social agencies and school personnel served as a means of supplementing and interpreting the Department's intensive efforts to help the child and his family.

Toward the latter part of 1954 Mrs. Hausmann made trips to Richmond, Virginia, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. In Richmond, she examined the Attendance Department of the public schools of that city. A full
report of her findings was submitted to the Board of Education, Charlotte, North Carolina. In Chapel Hill, Mrs. Hausmann conferred with Dr. Arthur Fink, Dean of the School of Social Work, University of North Carolina. Her conference with Dr. Fink was very informative as the latter promised to assist the Department in recruiting staff personnel for the following school year. Dr. Fink also promised to assist the Department in effecting a program appropriate enough to meet the needs of the schools.

Meanwhile, the Department of Child Accounting and Attendance began to broaden its services as it took on new programs. In the fall of 1955, the Department of Child Accounting and Attendance was given the responsibility of investigating all applicants for free lunch. Prior to 1955 certification of free lunch was done by the Board of Education.

In addition to the free lunch program, the Department took on another responsibility -- procuring clothing and giving them to needy families. During the first half of the school year, 1955-56, the Department made use of the clothing closet operated by the ladies of the Unitarian Church under the auspices
of Family and Children's Services. The school social workers were authorized to certify children to receive clothing. The clothing were provided from funds solicited from private sources such as the Parent-Teacher Association in a number of schools, the Needlework Guild, and from funds obtained from individuals and groups. Only those needy children of families who were not receiving assistance from other social agencies in the community were eligible to participate in this program. By February, 1956, under the leadership of the Welfare Planning Council, a committee was formed to speculate on the establishment of a central clothing room to serve all agencies in the fall of 1956.

The Department expanded in other ways. For example, the agency cooperated in the student training program of the Sociology Department of Winthrop College by accepting a senior student for training during the spring semester. The student training program was designed to prepare the student for graduate training in social work. "As the Department's student training program expanded, the Department's student training program

10 Martha Moore, loc. cit., p. 8.
expanded, the Department accepted graduate students for training in social work practice. "11 The two graduate schools included were and still are Atlanta University, Atlanta, Georgia, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

From 1954 to 1963 there was an increase in the size of the agency's staff. The staff expanded to include nine qualified, experienced social workers, two full-time secretaries and a full and a part-time clerical worker for the Continuous File. The Department now had the responsibility of keeping records on all children enrolled in the Charlotte city schools.

During 1963, there was much transition in the Department of Child Accounting and Attendance. The name of the department changed during the 1963-64 school term. In September, it became known as the Department of School Social Work Services. Moreover, the director of the agency became the Coordinator of School Social Work Services.

Still, Mrs. Anne Hausmann, who held the position of Director of Child Accounting and Attendance was succeeded by Mr. Joseph Frankford, ACSW, Coordinator of the Department of School Social Work Services.

Also, during the 1963-64 school term, the Department of School Social Work Services, as the agency was now called, moved to a new location. Formerly housed in the old building designated as the Education Center located on Ninth and Brevard Streets, the Department moved to a new physical plant on 1400 North Graham Street (the old Park Hutchinson School).

Furthermore, beginning with the 1963-64 school year, the Department of School Social Work Services became an integral part of the Division of Special Services. The Division of Special Services, also housed on 1400 North Graham Street, consists of Guidance Services, Psychological Services (individual testing), Educational Services (group testing) in addition to School Social Work Services. "Though the Special Services are closely related and work as a team in helping to educate children, each has its specialized skills -- its area of expertness. It is important for others to know what these skills are and how they may complement, extend or refine their own
services. But it is essential that each service knows its own function — those skills which are uniquely its own, how they can best serve the educative process, and how they can best relate to other school personnel as well as to the outside agencies.12

In 1964-65 the Department of School Social Work Services continued to be more expansive. The agency's staff expanded to include a coordinator, ten social workers, and four secretaries. In addition to the regular staff, eight graduate students were accepted by the agency for six months of training in school social work practice.

Beginning in September, 1964, the department concentrated on working with children in the elementary schools. The junior high and high schools in the school system were served on an "on call" basis. The major philosophy underlying this change was and still is the belief that the child may be more amenable to social work services in the elementary grades.13


13Mosley, loc. cit., p. 17.
In 1964, consideration was given toward reorganization relative to the agency's function in the school system in the area of free lunch certification and provision of clothing to the children of needy families. The Coordinator, Mr. Frankford, attempted to have free lunch certification delegated to someone else. The responsibility for the Clothing Room was delegated to the Parent-Teacher Association.

During the 1964-65 school term the coordinator also attempted to bring to the schools a fuller understanding of the agency's function by establishing In-Service Workshops. The workshops were opened to all principals and assistant principals in the school system. The first workshop was held on February 16, 1965 and its recognized purpose was:

To acquaint school personnel with the services of school social workers offered to pupils having difficulty in using the school program and to explain how these services are coordinated within this school system.

By the beginning of the 1965-66 school year, Mr. Joseph Frankford's title was changed from coordinator

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14 Ibid.

to director. In addition, the Department added a new member to its staff, Miss Lefevers, a graduate of the School of Social Work, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She was also a former student who did her graduate training at the Department of School Social Work Services.

Of paramount importance during the 1965-66 school year was the integration of a Volunteer Attendance Program into the Department of School Social Work Services. The Volunteer Attendance Program began as an experiment during the previous school term and because of its effectiveness on the problem of attendance in many of the schools, it is presently a permanent part of the agency's program. The Volunteer Attendance Program is a program working with the schools through the Department of School Social Work Services. According to Mr. Frankford, "the program is not one of merely combating truancy. It involves changing the attitudes of parents and students toward school."16

The Volunteer attendance worker is assigned to a school. She works out of the school, investigating the

16Quoting from an article written by Hugh Fullerton, The Charlotte News, December 25, 1965, p. 12D.
cases of irregular attendance where there is no reliable information available to the principal and school concerning the cause of absence, or when the absence is believed to be illegal. At the request of the principal of the school, or other school person designated by the principal to be responsible for coordinating all programs and service in the school, the volunteer attendance worker attempts to learn the reason for the non-attendance, advises the parent and child of the School Attendance Law and reports reason for absence back to the principal or the faculty member assigned to attendance work in said school. The volunteer worker also gives any other pertinent information to the school which may help them to understand the child's situation or problems.17

Should there be no response to the efforts of the volunteer attendance worker and school, it becomes necessary for the volunteer attendance worker to transfer the case to the counselor or school social worker.

Since September, 1965 the volunteer workers have

17"Volunteer Attendance Worker Program," School Social Work Services, Charlotte, North Carolina, B-48, (Mimeographed.)
progressed in the "local war on hookey" as reported in an article appearing in The Charlotte News:

The work of a small group of women volunteers is starting to pay off in better attendance at some of the county's schools with the worst attendance records.

The group of about 15 volunteers -- all but one of them women -- has been working in eight schools this year. Several principals report that attendance already has improved. The volunteer attempts to find the reason a child is cutting school and solve the problem. The solution may be as simple as getting the child shoes or it may require the services of a professional school social worker.18

Obviously, the Department of School Social Work Services has shown marked progress over the past ten and a half years. It has and continues to reorganize its various programs in order to render the best possible service to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg one hundred and nine public schools.

CHAPTER III

AN IMPRESSIONAL SURVEY OF SCHOOL SOCIAL WORK SERVICES ON THE PROBLEM OF ATTENDANCE

The inception of the Department of School Social Work Services was in September, 1954, when social work became an integral part of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System (see Chapter II). Since its introduction into the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System, the school social work service structure approach has changed, so much so that school social workers now provide casework to children at school. Casework is an individualized process of helping. Its basis is the conscious use of a relationship which develops between client and worker in an agency setting, in this instance the school. The school social worker recognizes and functions on the belief that a child's approach to the school experience reflects the adequacy or inadequacy of his basic approach to living. The relationship pivots on this belief.

Every attendance problem have an area to which casework methods and principles can be therapeutically applied.

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Before Reorganization

According to Table A (see Appendix), prior to the reorganization of the Department of School Social Work Services in 1963, the per cent in average daily attendance ranged from a 92% during the 1957-58 school year when average daily membership was 51,000 and average daily attendance was 46,938, to a 95% during the 1960-61 school year when average daily membership was 60,084 and average daily attendance was 56,952.

Unfortunately, (see Table A, Appendix) the range of 3% does not take an upward trend, that is there is not a steady increase in the per cent in average daily attendance of the students over the years. Instead, the increase in per cent in average daily attendance fluctuates. During the 1955-56 school year average daily attendance of the students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public school system was 94%, while culmination of the 1957-58 school term showed that average daily attendance decreased two per cent. Consequently, there is an increase in the average daily attendance of the students, and for two consecutive school terms average daily attendance is stabilized at ninety-four per cent. However, the next school term instead of
increasing, the per cent in average daily attendance decreased to a level of 94 per cent until 1963, when the Department of School Social Work Services was reorganized.

Significantly, prior to the 1961-62 school term, two autonomous school systems existed. They were the Charlotte City Schools and the Charlotte County Schools. Each of these two school systems had its own school social workers. Consolidation of the two school systems was in the summer of 1961, thus becoming The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System.

After Reorganization

The Department of School Social Work Service was reorganized in the summer of 1963. Of paramount importance (see Chapter I) was the fact that social workers began to provide casework to those children at school who were experiencing difficulty through absenteeism. Yet, there has not been any real change in the attendance records of the students in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System. For example, during the 1963-64 school term, the per cent in average daily attendance increased only .5 of one per cent over the per cent in
average daily attendance of the previous school term. Even by the end of the 1964-65 school term the per cent in average daily attendance had increased only a slight .1 of one per cent.

Obviously, since reorganization school social work service has not produced any significant changes in the attendance records of the students attending the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools. Of significance is the fact that the per cent in average daily attendance since reorganization has not even exceeded 95% when two autonomous school systems existed.

Perhaps a span of two years is not adequate time to measure the kind of effect that social work will have upon the problem of attendance in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg public schools. Perhaps nine experienced social workers are not able to provide adequately intensive casework service to the child who is not in regular attendance at school. Perhaps, as has been suggested, the certification of children for free lunch should be delegated to some other agency or organization. Much time is spent by the school social worker investigating the financial situation of applicants for free lunch.
Much of this time can be spent with those children who need casework service because there is a pattern of chronic non-attendance or truancy.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to make a survey of the effects of school social work services on the attendance records of students comprising the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System.

A survey of the attendance records of the students indicated that before reorganization of the Department of School Social Work Service in 1963, the highest percent in average daily attendance (95%), occurred during the 1960-61 school year when two autonomous school systems existed. Upon consolidation of the two school systems the average daily attendance of the students for two years prior to reorganization decreased to nine per cent. After reorganization in 1963, however, there is an upward trend in the percent in the average daily attendance records of the students. Over a period of two years the average daily attendance of the students has risen only .6 per cent. This is no more than the normal fluctuation from year to year. It is assumed
by the researcher, based on previous flux of attendance, that the percentage will continue on this trend. Therefore, the researcher contends that the past and present existing presence of school social work services has had no relevant influence on the average daily attendance records of the students of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public School System.
APPENDIX I

TABLE A

ATTENDANCE RECORDS OF STUDENTS
BEFORE REORGANIZATION

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<th>Years</th>
<th>ADM</th>
<th>ADA</th>
<th>Per Cent in ADA</th>
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<tr>
<td>1955-56</td>
<td>45,352</td>
<td>42,541</td>
<td>94</td>
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<td>1956-57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Information not available</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957-58</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>46,938</td>
<td>92</td>
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<td>1958-59</td>
<td>53,898</td>
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<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>1959-60</td>
<td>56,974</td>
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<td>1960-61</td>
<td>60,084</td>
<td>56,952</td>
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<td>1961-62</td>
<td>62,960</td>
<td>59,225</td>
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APPENDIX II

TABLE B

ATTENDANCE RECORDS OF STUDENTS AFTER REORGANIZATION

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<th>Years</th>
<th>ADM</th>
<th>ADA</th>
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<tr>
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<td>69,836</td>
<td>65,991</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>72,318</td>
<td>68,445</td>
<td>94.6</td>
</tr>
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