5-1-1970

An assessment of the relationship between welfare and school attendance: a study of thirty elementary pupils

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WELFARE
AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: A STUDY OF
THIRTY ELEMENTARY PUPILS

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

BY
PEOLA W. SCOTT

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1970
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The writer wishes to express her thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Genevieve Hill, Dean of the School of Social Work, Mr. Lloyd Yabura, Thesis Advisor, Mr. H. L. Formey, and faculty of J. W. Hubert Elementary School, Mrs. Mary McDew, and Mrs. Neloweze Powell for their assistance, concern and interest in making this study possible.

P. W. S.
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my husband and children, without whose love, encouragement, patience, and understanding this study could not have been undertaken.

P. W. S.
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CHAPTER I

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WELFARE AND SCHOOL ATTENDANCE: A STUDY OF THIRTY ELEMENTARY PUPILS

In recent years many articles and reports have been written on school attendance and the social problem of absenteeism. Literature on this topic offers a variety of causative factors related to absenteeism, and in many instances proposed solutions to this problem. These proposals cite methods from providing school employment for economically deprived students, to drafting drop-outs and sending them to areas of active combat. Regardless of the method used to control absenteeism, the average daily attendance in public schools does not appear to increase. This is true in many metropolitan areas. Recently a study was conducted in the city of Savannah, Georgia on school attendance. The conclusions reached as a result of that study is the major concern of this research project.

The school attendance problem reached a critical point in the Chatham-Savannah area during the 1968-69 school term. Being extremely concerned, the board members of the Chatham-Savannah Public School System conducted a study to determine who actually comprises the chronically absent group. According to statistics gathered, the majority of the children involved are members of public assistance grant groups. As a result the board concluded that there is a direct relationship between welfare and absenteeism. The president of the board of education stated during a television interview that withholding welfare checks seems to
be the solution to this problem where these particular families are concerned. Though the study conducted by this group was extensive, the school board's proposal for correcting the school attendance problem is dehumanizing. The school officials seem to believe holding checks will increase the average daily attendance. This threat cannot be executed completely since AFDC school attendance rules only affect children between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years of age. The only alternative would be to remove the children within the aforementioned age range and continue assistance to the other members in the grant group. Such action would punish the children involved without resolving the problem.

THE PROBLEM

While there may be a relationship between welfare and chronic absenteeism, it is felt that factors other than a family's receipt of welfare accounts for absenteeism of children. The purpose of this research project is to conduct a study of thirty elementary pupils attending a school that has a high absentee count daily. Efforts will be made to reveal the similarities of the circumstances of children chronically absent who are on welfare as compared to those who are not on welfare and are chronically absent.

As this study progresses it may be found that absenteeism is merely a symptom of a problem that is deeply seated. I expect to find associated with absenteeism the problems of: low achievement, low self esteem, lack of motivation (at home and at school), health problems,

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1 Georgia Department of Family and Children Services, Public Assistance Manual Part III, Section V, p. 3.
social and economic problems, in addition to other causes. Attempts will be made to show that absenteeism is not rampant among welfare recipients alone. Efforts will be made to study the family life styles of the children involved in the study in attempts to identify major deterrents to school attendance. Finally it is hoped that a method will be devised to work with and resolve to some degree the problem of absenteeism in the Savannah School System.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

School attendance and the social problem of absenteeism has been a major concern of educators and school boards for many years in the United States. Mere concern contributes little toward resolving the problem if no humane action is taken. When actions such as holding public assistance checks is suggested, it is time for citizens to investigate other means that would increase attendance and provide more rewarding results than empty stomachs of poverty stricken children. Within this spectrum lies the significance of this study.

Exactly what characterizes a social problem? The researcher found Merrill's definition to be an acceptable guide.

A social problem is a situation believed to be a threat to or an infringement upon an established social value and considered capable of amelioration or elimination by appropriate social action. A social problem has the following elements: (a) a situation capable of measurement; (b) a value believed threatened thereby; and (c) a realization that the situation and the value may (theoretically) be reconciled by group action.¹

According to the information available on school attendance and absenteeism, it appears that chronic absenteeism is a social problem. One goal of this study is to devise a plan of action that would ameliorate the situation in the Chatham County Schools.

Literature on the topic of absenteeism indicates that the group usually endowed with the responsibility of resolving this problem are visiting teachers. From past experience, it is felt that visiting teachers are no more than glorified truant officers. In the state of Georgia these personnel must complete a certain number of hours in social work courses, nevertheless they appear to lack having had the kind of exposure to casework techniques that would prepare them to treat the causative factors associated with absenteeism. There are no professionally trained social workers attached to the visiting teachers unit in Chatham County at present. It is my opinion that professionally trained social workers would be in position to effectively move toward the alleviation of the school attendance problem through the processes of assessment, diagnosis, and treatment. Having spent two years as an employee in the Savannah School System, I have a deep concern in the educational welfare of the children involved. My present interest in Family and Children Services generates concern for the clients and disgust with the educational administrators who recommended the curtailment of the already insufficient income of needy families in efforts to coerce them into regular attendance. I feel the results of this study could contribute toward the enhancement of the social functioning of the families concerned, and simultaneously appease educators by increasing the attendance of the chronically absent children involved in this study.
DEFINITIONS OF IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Absenteeism refers to repeated absences from school. Chronic absenteeism means three or more absences each week in Chatham County.

Average Daily Attendance refers to the average number of pupils present daily as compared to the total enrollment of a particular school. Average Daily Attendance is abbreviated A.D.A.

AFDC is financial assistance rendered to families with children between the ages of one day and eighteen years by the department of Family and Children Services (formerly named the Department of Public Welfare). AFDC is the abbreviation for Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

Grant Group refers to the parent(s) and offsprings included in the same payment group approved for financial assistance from Family and Children Services.

Public Assistance is a term that is used synonymously with AFDC and welfare.

Welfare is a term used to indicate the source of a family's income. The term public assistance has replaced usage of the term welfare in this manner since more dignity appears to be attached to the idea of a family being assisted through public funds. Due to the derogatory manner in which the Savannah educators use this term, it will be used occasionally throughout this study to reflect the "oppressive mentality" of the Savannah-Chatham County School Boards.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This study will be conducted in the city of Savannah, Georgia. The area involved is the section surrounding the John W. Hubert Elementary School. This particular school was selected because of the extremely high absentee rate. The community is composed of families in the low economic income bracket. Many of the families receive public assistance and have a multiplicity of problems. These problems include: poor housing, poor health, high illegitimacy rate, apparent lack of

1 WTOC local news telecast, May 22, 1969: Chronic Absenteeism so defined by the Board of Public Education at that time.
motivation possibly resulting from numerous failures, and poor cooperation with school, health, and law officials. Most of the families are headed by females due to a large number of desertions. Juvenile delinquency is prevalent and continues to rise despite efforts of social service agencies to provide cultural, social, and educational activities for area youngsters. Training and job programs are also geared toward meeting the needs of the people since some community leaders realize that financial deprivation may lead to delinquency.

Because of the factors mentioned above, it was felt that this would be an ideal setting to conduct this diagnostic study. Due to the nature of the problem and the limited time in which to conduct the study, only thirty pupils will be assessed. The breakdown will be: 15 welfare recipients chronically absent, and 15 non-recipients also chronically absent.

Attempts will be made to make a psycho-social assessment of each of the thirty cases selected. This study relates to a practical problem that affects a measurable segment of society. Since the Savannah educators have not devised a workable solution to the problem, perhaps a social worker will be in position to offer some suggestions for their consideration at the conclusion of this study.

DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

The names of all chronically absent children in Hubert School will be acquired from the school attendance register. These names will be separated according to their public assistance status, i.e. recipients and non-recipients. Fifteen from each group will be selected via
random sample.

The purpose of this study was explained to the principal, visiting teacher, and the faculty of Hubert School.

Data for the psycho-social assessment will be acquired from school records, personal interviews conducted during home visits with the parents and children, and interviews with the classroom and visiting teachers.

Due to limited time, respondents who do not wish to participate will be eliminated and replaced by others. Actually, the best plan would be to devise a method to gain the support and cooperation of the family rather than elimination.

This researcher believes that teachers in areas such as the Hubert School community should be aware of resources in the city for meeting human needs. To assess their knowledge in this area and their attitudes regarding children presenting attendance problems, each teacher at Hubert was asked to complete a questionnaire.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Every profession emphasizes something it sees necessary for the common good of society. In medicine, it is long life and maximum health. In social work, it is an atmosphere conducive for all persons to function to the maximum of their potential in society. In education it is the wise use of mankind's accumulated wisdom and experience. The profession of education is putting millions of enlightened youth into the mainstream of America's employment world annually. Yet, millions are lost because of their lack of education and skills necessary to compete for meaningful employment. These young adults did not stay in school. The high school dropout began showing symptoms long before age sixteen. More than likely, this person is the one who was absent in elementary school for such minor reasons as oversleeping or to assist mama on washday. The dropout may have stayed home to babysit, or may have lacked shoes and suitable clothing or may have been victimized by parental indifference. After reviewing the literature on school attendance and school dropouts, the investigator is convinced that the average classroom teacher could help abate this problem if she were more resourceful. Authorities do not feel that classroom teachers lack resourcefulness because they are unconcerned for the welfare of their pupils. It is obvious that the average teacher takes on a herculean task as she molds minds, instills values, and broadens the youngsters outlook on life. Yet we cannot overlook the need for regular classroom teachers to be
aware of social services in the community and referral procedures. School systems in all communities are concerned about the school attendance problem. Their concern is usually for the almighty average daily attendance and what this means as far as additional staff is concerned. The investigator's concern is from a social welfare perspective not staff expansion. The investigator views absenteeism as a contributing factor toward educational malfunctioning, which Lichter and associates state to be "a more serious problem than juvenile delinquency."¹ In their article Lichter and associates leaned strongly toward the idea that emotional and personality problems are the main causes of absenteeism. It is possible that children unable to make adequate social adjustments in school might have difficulty and take flight from the distressing school situation by staying at home.

Many studies have been conducted regarding school dropouts. This is fine, nevertheless, educators, sociologists and other interested investigators have a tendency to fail to realize that the dropout began showing symptoms years prior to the dropout stage. Lichter and associates reported on a research project conducted in the Chicago area regarding the use of Child Welfare services in situations to deter absenteeism. It was hoped that Child Welfare services could improve family relations and alleviate personality problems that the research group postulated were basic to poor school functioning, absenteeism, and later the desire to leave school. This group concluded that Child Welfare services alone cannot alleviate the problems that lead to absenteeism

and "drop-outism." This study focused on what coordinated efforts on the part of the school system, social service workers, and the community as a whole should be since the answer exists (as inferred by them) within all these resources.

After reviewing The Drop-outs\footnote{Solomon O. Lichter, et al., The Dropouts (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962).} by Lichter, et al., the investigator is convinced that such factors as emotional and family problems at home, underachievement and behavioral problems at school lead to the eventual dropping out of school. By the same token the problems described above can affect the attendance of the elementary age child. The reactions of the teacher toward the child who uses the school as a battleground to settle problems from other areas of his life is also a contributing factor toward the child's regularity or irregularity in attendance. Again the investigator is saying the teacher needs to use herself as an innovative force to the child's life to get to the emotional problem and once the problem is identified refer the family to the proper resource to meet the child's need.

Educational malfunctioning was cited by Lichter in the above paragraph as more serious than juvenile delinquency. The investigator concurs with this statement because of the vast number of pupils affected by the former. In either case the researcher feels children in both groups--absentees and delinquents are troubled children. Parham in his 1963 report on Georgia's Troubled Children\footnote{Thomas N. (Jim) Parham Jr., Georgia's Troubled Children (Atlanta: Emory Department of Psychiatry, 1963).} states that good teachers
are valuable resources to troubled children. Schools are, in most instances, the first public agency to serve children and keeps them longest. Therefore school personnel are in position to detect early symptoms of maladjustments with the child and sometimes with the parents. If the parents are the causative factors, resources should be available to help them resolve their conflict around this area. A more stringent enforcement of Georgia Law regarding school attendance may be necessary if all other efforts to work with the parents have failed. Georgia Law states all children ages 7-16 are required by law to attend school.¹ Parents willfully failing to comply with this ordinance can be fined $100 or incarcerated thirty days or both.²

From studies conducted in Savannah on the problem of school attendance, it appears the absentee and dropout rate is substantially higher among Blacks. There are many reasons for this and a partial listing is cited below:

1. Most of the families involved are headed by females with either the natural mother or maternal grandmother as breadwinner. Children in these situations are absent to help the mother figure: wash clothes, to baby sit when the mother catches day's work as a maid. Perhaps the child is not sufficiently clothed for the weather and many times the inexpensive shoes or tennis shoes are worn out.

2. The female child becomes pregnant and drops out.

3. The male child becomes disgusted with his impoverished circumstances and stops school and gets a job.

The last example cited above is the sad account of many Black

¹
Georgia Laws 1945, p. 343.

²
Ibid., pp. 347-10.
families. Herman H. Long observes that quitting school (in the context of the social and cultural history of Black people in the United States) is normal.\textsuperscript{1} Studies upon studies have been conducted to describe the socio-economic status of the Black people in this affluent country. The investigator is of the opinion that it is time to stop studying the problem and do something constructive about it. The school attendance problem of chronically absent children cannot be solved by merely making jobs available to these youngsters. Certainly this group is economically exploited, nevertheless political exploitation is so severe until the provision of temporary marginal financial assistance alone contributes little toward resolving the school attendance problem. The investigator is not negating the effectiveness of the poverty program as conducted in the public schools; however it is felt that the present programs of the Office of Economic Opportunity will need revisions to adequately meet the needs of the potential drop-out.

Certainly the life style of a people affects the attitudes of the parents toward school attendance. We must consider the child reared in rural Georgia who is taken out of school for the planting season and again for harvest. This child becomes an adult, migrates to an urban area, and since the pattern cited was his/her way of attending school thinks nothing of rearing his/her child this way. If teachers knew this they might be able to handle this more effectively. This indicates that teachers like social workers should be concerned with family dynamics as well as individual dynamics. Emphasis should then be placed not only

on precipitating but predisposing factors as well. The precipitating factors would incorporate reasons for absenteeism such as: staying home to baby sit, oversleeping, having to assist the parent with the week's washing, no lunch money, no shoes and similar excuses for not being able to attend school. Parental attitudes, values, initiative of both parents and child, as well as community or origin play important roles in school attendance. These factors are predisposing yet play just as important roles as the precipitating factors.

A program similar to the "Early Identification and Prevention Program," of New York State might be worthy investigating for the possibility of implementation in Georgia. This program began in New York in 1959. Services were rendered to families of children from kindergarten through third grade who showed signs of maladjustment. Follow-up services are provided for children who require them beyond this point. This program was designed to deter absenteeism and abate the drop-out rate. These services are rendered by special teams consisting of: Guidance Counselors, Social Workers, and Psychologists.

Schreiber has written extensively on school drop-outs and states:

One of the inherent dangers well meaning people face in dealing with the drop-out problem is a tendency to stereotype drop-out youths—a school failure, a non-academic oriented youth, a discipline case, a delinquent, a future welfare recipient who comes from a welfare family, and if a girl, a breeder of illegitimate children.

The term "drop-out" has an insidious connotation until one realizes that in earlier generations it could have been applied to youngsters who did not complete elementary school, and that it is beginning to be applied to those who enter college but do not stay to earn a degree.1

Schreiber feels the environment of the elementary school is more favorable for treatment of symptoms of the drop-out than is that of the high school. According to Schreiber, the elementary school teacher is better prepared to deal individually with drop-out behavior on this level and seems more concerned with the individual child. He recommends that elementary counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers be recruited to grapple with these problems.

Neimeyer in his article, "Home School Interaction in Relation to Learning in the Elementary School," states that elementary schools can do something toward abating the later desire and act of dropping out of school. He relates that many children have known only failure in school; not only because they have failed to master academic skills but because the school has not been able to give them the social skills, attitudes of self respect and social sensitivity, and quickening of mind for continuing learning which are the other necessary cognitive and affective elements of a healthy, productive personality. In this respect, the drop-outs are perhaps no greater tragedy than the stay-ins who emotionally and intellectually dropped out years before.

Neimeyer also discusses the school's responsibility to the community. He notes that our concern should be the whole child, financial, interpersonal relationships, housing, etc. (See questionnaire). To say the teacher should be concerned about the whole child is one matter. Just how capable this teacher is in dealing with the whole child is quite

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another matter. To know what steps should be taken when a father has deserted and income cannot meet a family's needs, to know what to advise parents to do about emotionally disturbed children, and to know what steps should be taken when health problems exist are areas where the average teacher can be a resourceful person to the family. These areas affect a child's attendance, performance, and adjustment. To measure the average teacher's resourcefulness in the areas above, a questionnaire was constructed and administered. The results of this questionnaire will be reported in Chapter III.

Much has been said about absenteeism and its causes. It should be stressed here that although there is much concern about this social problem, very little has been written on school attendance in the elementary grades. The elementary school is the place where society can heavily invest its resources and reap the reward later in the child's academic career. Expending time, energy and concern early in the child's school life could probably avert some of the later attendance problems and might even serve as a deterrent to the eventual drop-out.

Thus far throughout this exposition the investigator has discussed several alternatives available to the classroom teacher; however the Visiting Teacher also has a responsibility for getting the absentee back into school. It is the Visiting Teacher who must be sympathetic to feelings, needs, and aspirations. Perlman in her article "Casework is Dead,"\(^1\) describes a situation which indicates that a visiting teacher must be able to empathize with a mother who leads a rugged life, trying

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1 Helen H. Perlman, "Casework is Dead," *Social Casework*, XLVII (January, 1967), 22-5.
to be homemaker, breadwinner, disciplinarian, and a mother. There was a need for someone to lend a little understanding to this particular mother whose child had repeatedly been absent from school. The Visiting Teacher must have the capacity to support child and mother and bridge the gap between home and school.

Social services rendered in elementary schools could contribute much toward meeting individual needs. However Pearman and Burrows are not sure casework services can meet these needs, with the number in need of such services so great. Their reservation strongly suggests that individual needs must be met through some other media other than the one to one casework relationship.

Since the inception of School Social Work in 1906 it has been known that more coordination should exist between home and school. As we look at the individual child, we must also realize that this child is impinged upon by many systems which affect his performance and his functioning in general. The school social worker or visiting teacher has a herculean task. It is true that she is a resource person and serves in a consultative role for school faculties; yet such a worker often has caseloads so heavy that the most she can hope to do is to try to get the child who presents an attendance problem back in school. She may refer a family for public assistance or to a child guidance clinic hastily without preparing the person or ascertaining the family's perception of their needs. There is very little time to consider the causative factors for any of the child's behavior. To try to correct any kind of

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behavior without considering causes is like bailing water out of a sinking ship that has a hole; the final result is slowed down, but destruction is inevitable. Ever since the enactment of the compulsory school attendance law in Georgia in 1945 we have been baffled with the question of how this problem can best be resolved. In the final chapter of this thesis the investigator will offer some suggestions that may increase school attendance. All the literature on this subject indicates that changes are needed if schools are to meet the needs of a large segment of the people they purport to serve.
CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF DATA

As the study of the thirty children presenting school attendance problems progressed it became obvious that someone was failing to provide the needs that are prerequisites to being able to take advantage of educational facilities. Deciding exactly where the responsibility for failure should be placed was a rather difficult task. To say that the parents in question are responsible would be a correct assumption. Yet the demands of providing for children alone (since 80.0 per cent of the chronically absent children came from female headed families) sometimes meant that the oldest child stayed home to baby sit while the mother earned money. Many times there were no shoes for all the children so they alternate in going to school as was reported by a mother of fifteen. There were numerous reasons given by the families studied and all of these were causes for absenteeism at one time or other for all the families involved. Of all the families questioned, the primary reason for their children not being in school involved a lack of economic resources. [See Table 1 in Appendix]

As the researcher interviewed the families of children who presented attendance problems, the parents in all thirty cases stated that their children were very alert as preschoolers. The majority of the parents related that the children seemed to lose much of their aggressiveness and seemed to reach a plateau early after entering school beyond which they could not progress satisfactorily. All of the children are
functioning below their grade levels, however none of the children in the study group are in special classes.

As these parents spoke of their children's functioning in school, each parent seemed to feel it necessary to discuss other relatives who have "made it." One mother spoke of her brother who is a M. D. in a northeastern city. Others spoke of cousins who are school teachers in rural towns. It seemed important that the researcher be made aware that the genetic potential is there but circumstances have prevented them from developing to the maximum of their intellectual potential. Their children are now victims of the same system that impeded their progress.

When interviewing the children, it was noted that all of the chronically absent children appeared inhibited when conversing with the investigator. Repeated visits had no affect upon the relationship between researcher and pupils; however positive relationships between researcher and parents were established readily.

It appears that the children in this group have low concepts of themselves. None of the children admitted having analyzed or thought through the reason they are behind other children in their classes. They seem to have apathetically accepted the fact that they cannot function on their grade levels without trying to understand why this is so.

As far as role performance is concerned, these children have good relationships with everyone except persons in authoritative positions. The parents indicated that their children are shy when around superiors (teachers, principals, employers of the mother) and tend to be almost nonresponsive unless coaxed. These children appeared to perceive the
investigator as an authoritative person although it was explained that there was no connection between the researcher and school officials.

In discussing religious affiliations it was noted that the younger mothers made no effort to get their children involved in Sunday School and church activities. Among this group the parents stated that the children attend once annually on Easter Sunday. As a form of tradition they indicated the children wear new attire and recite speeches in neighborhood churches.

A look at household compositions of the families showed that there were three instances among the absentee group where grandparents are members of the household. One of these families is composed of both parents, the grandmother and the children. The other two are composed of the grandmother, mother and children. All twenty-seven other families are female headed.

Chapter I shows that the study group is composed of 15 welfare and 15 nonwelfare. Non-welfare families receive their income from domestic work in private homes and motels in addition to child support from the fathers of the children. The families receiving welfare also supplement their income by domestic work and in some instances receive child support payments. In all instances the parents stated that the income is insufficient to meet all the needs of the children.

Illness among the children studied is not extremely high. Most of the families (welfare and non-welfare) use Memorial Medical Center which is an outpatient clinic. In cases of emergency the adults indicated that they use the city physician. The welfare recipients expressed relief at having medicaid coverage, however a few of the parents indicated
that at times they have found it difficult to find a doctor who will accept new patients on medicaid.

The following excerpt from a case summary represents a family deficient in economic resources:

This family consists of the husband and father of all the children who is a World War II disabled veteran. The mother is a school drop-out. She is expecting a child and relates that this pregnancy resulted from inconsistent use of the birth control pills. She further related that contraceptives have been tried over the years but none were successful preventative measures for her. There are fifteen children ranging from 10 months of age to sixteen years of age. This family occupies a seven room house that is well furnished and in good repair. These seventeen people must exist on $500.00 per month disability compensation. The mother and all the children have dental caries; however the mother's dental problem is extreme. In the home is also the children's paternal grandmother who is old, infirm, and in constant need of personal care. Her income is meager and she does not get maximum old age assistance because of the number of persons in the household. She is ineligible for social security benefits. There is always a financial problem. The family usually has enough to eat although the mother doubts that nutritionists would consider their meals well balanced. This mother cites the following as problems that prevent regular school attendance of her children: no lunch money (for the children who are not on free or 10¢ lunches); insufficient clothing during inclement weather; lack of shoes; toothaches; and vision problems of two children.

Considering this case one wonders who is responsible for this multi-problem situation. It would be easy to say this couple should never have united in Holy Matrimony; but this would be an infringement upon the inherent human rights of these individuals. In searching for the answer it appears that society has a responsibility here. This father was permanently handicapped fighting in the United States armed forces. He is unable to earn a living and his compensation is definitely insufficient to meet the needs of his family.

In each case studied it appears that limited material resources are
very closely associated with school absenteeism. Of course resources
do exist to meet the needs of persons needing dental care; and there is
assistance available through the Lions Club for children with visual
handicaps. Nevertheless the manner in which these services are rendered
often strips an individual of his dignity and leaves the person or per-
sons feeling like "free loaders." We cannot negate the fact that our
government provides financial aid for the handicapped and impoverished;
however the assistance given is extremely insufficient. With the
present day cost of living this family of seventeen is forced to exist
on an income that a single individual would find difficulty stretching
to meet his needs.

There are many other reasons why Black people have difficulty where
school attendance is concerned. To begin with they are cheated. The
Board of Education in Chatham County is run predominantly by white ad-
ministrators and all school children are socialized in the interest of
white America. This researcher stated that Black children are cheated
because the main purpose of education is the perpetuation of the cul-
tural heritage of a people. The cultural heritage of Blacks is ignored
fifty-one weeks each year. Perhaps white America feels Negro History
Week suffices for the constant neglect in this area. It appears that
everything has been modernized except curriculum content. Teachers are
exposed to modern methods and are teaching longer words to younger chil-
dren in shorter periods of time. Educators have made marvelous strides
yet they continue to teach a curriculum which has not quite gotten a-
breast with the times. Granted, more children are passing through school
buildings annually, but the classrooms appear to have lost much
influence over the years. The constant drop annually in the average daily attendance at Hubert School indicates that modern techniques are contributing little toward increasing attendance.

Teachers miss many opportunities to reach children they teach by not relating subjects to everyday experiences of the pupils. Children from the study area probably enjoy looking at pictures of the basic "four" foods on their health charts; but to teach them the nutritional value of dried peas and ham hocks, or collard greens and salt-pork is of greater value because this involves something they are familiar with. The researcher does not wish to leave the reader with the opinion that children should only be exposed to what they are familiar with, but it would seem logical to take the familiar to add or illustrate the unfamiliar. With the advent of the 60 - 40 White/Black ratio of teachers in the elementary schools in Chatham County, it would benefit Black children if teachers could realize that the culture of the African-American is not found in a set of statistics on crime, unemployment, illegitimacy, desertion, welfare payments and unwed mothers; or in the pseudo-scientific material of Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan who seem to infer that Blacks have "no values and culture to guard and protect." The point the researcher is struggling to make here is the fact that the teacher should learn about her pupils. It would be to the teacher's

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1 Telephone contact with personnel department Savannah-Chatham Board of Public Education April 28, 1970.

advantage whether he/she is Black or white to realize that people can be different and not be inferior. The researcher's participant observational experiences in the Chatham County schools suggest that many Black teachers have been brainwashed to stereotype their more exploited brothers and sisters and to depict them as unable to function above average. There are numerous arguments that could be made for the lag in today's educational system but this digresses from the intent of this study. At this point perhaps consideration should be given to the effectiveness of this researcher's involvement in families where the study group presented attendance problems.

At the outset of this project the investigator hypothesized that social services could deter absenteeism. At the completion of the study it was found that data collected did not support this hypothesis. This hypothesis was rejected because it was found that social services rehabilitated children physically but little was accomplished as far as school attendance is concerned. It was found that all of the parents are cognizant of the role education plays in the lives of individuals. However, these parents seem unable to communicate this to their children. Upon investigation it was found that what teachers cited as parental indifference [See Table 2 in Appendix] really turned out to be the parent's inability to provide their children with the necessary tools such as paper, pencils, crayons, lunches, and sufficient clothing for extreme temperatures. Out of desperation the children were kept home. No resources are available to meet these needs since these particular families are already on welfare. In some instances the mothers were referred to the two training programs in Savannah which are Manpower
Development and Training and the WIN program. Both are under the auspices of the Department of Labor and WIN is specifically designated to train and upgrade the employability of AFDC mothers. A financial supplement is provided under both programs. During the study it was apparent that before there could be any emphasis placed on the importance of school attendance the other social problems had to be tackled. Numerous referrals were made to the Dental Health Clinic, Memorial Outpatient Clinic, Family and Children Services, the Department of Labor, and the Food Stamp division of Family and Children Services. Follow up home visits indicated that 50.0 per cent of the families referred followed through and received services. It was felt that those families failing to follow through were not sufficiently motivated for numerous reasons. Many of these families seemed to feel defeat even before they investigated the possibility of getting services. Upon questioning these parents it was revealed that they were ineligible repeatedly for various services in the past, therefore they were certain they would be denied. It seems that past experiences have caused these families to develop functional defeatist attitudes. Among the study group little was revealed that would indicate that these parents have any goals for their children. Surely someone has responsibility here for the youngsters who seem doomed to a third or fourth generation of poverty. The home and school are the institutions in which these persons are constantly involved. When one fails to instill values, serve as a catalyst in the development of initiative and drive, or perpetuate its cultural heritage, the other institution is responsible for filling in the gap. In this case it would be simply meeting this particular need of these youngsters.
The questionnaire completed by the faculty of Hubert Elementary School indicated that the teachers visualize the visiting teacher as a truant officer and not as a social worker. It is understandable that with such heavy caseloads the visiting teacher may be unable to do more than work with a family on school attendance in an isolated manner. That is overlooking other factors that may be creating the attendance problem. Since it appears that it will take years to adequately staff the visiting teachers division, the utilization of Group Work appears to be the only solution to the present dilemma. In a group it is felt that the involvement of the participants one to another on peer levels would have a significant effect. They would find that others have the same or similar problems; thus they would be able to discuss matters on their own level of thinking and feeling, consequently resulting in a helping situation. In addition there would be the time element to consider in which more persons could be reached through the group situation.

According to the questionnaire, the teachers feel the parents are responsible for the presence of their children in school. The responses indicated that 50.0 per cent of the teachers saw their negligence to comply with the school attendance law as parental indifference. In recommending a plan of action to minimize absenteeism some suggested penalizing the parents. No empathy or positive ways of helping the parents were communicated by this segment of the faculty. Economic conditions are seen as causative factors by 12.5 per cent of the teachers and 12.5 per cent feel domestic problems cause absenteeism. 

[See Table 7 in Appendix]
It is interesting to note reasons teachers feel their pupils miss school. The manner in which they visualize their role for minimizing absenteeism is even more interesting. Observation of Table 2 [See Appendix] infers that only two responses, indicates that lack of interest on the child's part contributes toward non-attendance. The researcher wonders if acceptance of these children for themselves (poor attendance, slow achievement, delinquent behavior plus any other deviation) would contribute more toward helping these children develop higher concepts of themselves and they may show more interest in school. A look at the tables [See Appendix] communicates hostile, negative feelings of the teachers toward their pupils and their parents. Since this comes through so clearly in responses on a questionnaire; is it not possible that these feelings are communicated to absentees each time they dare attend school? Rejection is obviously present whether it is communicated verbally or nonverbally. Overt behavior toward anyone speaks louder than anything the individual has to say.

In assessing the attitudes of the teachers toward the parents of absentees it was found that 68.8 per cent of the faculty responded negatively and 6.2 per cent (1 teacher) responded positively. One teacher failed to respond to this item. Three or 18.8 per cent responded in an empathetic manner regarding the plight of the parents [See Table 3 in Appendix].

Regarding the disadvantages of absenteeism from the viewpoint of the teachers, 31.3 per cent felt low performance would be inevitable and saw this as disadvantageous. Only 1 respondent or 6.2 per cent felt absenteeism would eventual lead to the child dropping out of school.
Although 31.3 per cent indicated that absenteeism creates the lack of interest in school. It seems the general tone of the majority on this item relates to overall school performance. This seemed to be the emphasis as responses to various items were analyzed. It appears the teachers tend to dissect children and concern themselves with the isolated intellect. Please refer to Table 5 [See Appendix] for closer scrutiny.

As respondents reacted to the question concerning their actions following a child's absence, some respondents gave one or more accounts of his/her activity. One respondent felt it was no use to give consideration to work completed in a child's absence. Six persons indicated that work is reviewed with the child. Six teachers stated make-up work is assigned. Two persons suggested that help be solicited from peers, and one teacher sends work home upon request. To state any of these practices is inappropriate would be rather judgmental; yet the respondent who gives no consideration at all to work completed in a child's absence is communicating the feeling that the absentee is not important and does not deserve attention.

It is interesting to note that only 6 or 37.5 per cent of the staff actually responded to the sixth item on the questionnaire. The question: "How do you envision the role of the visiting teacher?" was answered by six persons who regard the visiting teacher as a referral source only. Based on the other ten responses table 7 deals with the effectiveness of the visiting teacher. Obviously little hope is held for the types of cases referred to the school social worker. Table 7 gives an account of teacher's feelings around this area of service.
Item 7 on the questionnaire speaks to the resourcefulness of the classroom teacher. Based on the responses given the teachers appear to have some knowledge of resources to meet the needs listed. While no one teacher knew of resources to meet all of the needs listed, it appears that all of the teachers would be able to find a resource for each need with little effort. All of the teachers involved routinely refer children with attendance problems to the visiting teacher. A copy of the questionnaire appears in the Appendix.

Parents in the study group related that 33.3 per cent of absenteeism is caused by children being kept home to baby sit while the mother works. It was odd that with this being as prevalent as it is that only 12.5 per cent or 2 teachers referred such cases to the Child Care Center (Day Care). Of the sixteen teachers 50.0 per cent of the staff refer these families to the visiting teacher. Of this same 50.0 per cent, five (5) have conferences with the parents to deter absenteeism. [See Table 8 in Appendix].

Much can be learned through home visitation. Fifteen teachers indicated a desire to visit the child at home, however ten stated visits are made at least once each school term. Five stated they do not visit and one teacher gave no response. Table 9 shows percentages. [See Appendix].

When asked to recommend a plan of action that would deter absenteeism and truancy 9 of the 16 teachers responded. Penalyzing parents and soliciting the cooperation of parents tied 12.5 per cent each. With the exception of penalizing parents there were only two additional methods
recommended that are punitive. They are placing absentees in detention and placing absentees in foster care. For a closer look at the recommendations please refer to Table 10 in the Appendix. Their recommendations included: education of the parents regarding the harmful results of a poor education, establishing a working relationship with the parents, improving economic conditions through the utilization of community resources, and referrals to the visiting teacher. For an example of the questionnaire see the Appendix.

The teachers appear to have some awareness of existing community resources. While no one teacher knew of resources to meet all of the needs listed, it appears that all of the teachers would be able to find a resource for each need with little effort. All of the teachers routinely refer children with attendance problems to the visiting teacher.

The assistant principal at Hubert stated that the average daily attendance is decreasing as compared to the 1968-69 school term. Since the present methods of coping with the school attendance problem in Hubert Elementary School are not increasing attendance, the investigator ventures to make the following recommendations:

1. Additional visiting teachers should be hired. These persons should in addition to the present qualifications, have a masters degree in social work. They should have completed a course in the study of minority groups.

2. Workshops should be considered for teachers to give in depth consideration to characteristics of ghetto children and methods of working with these families in ways that will strengthen the home-school relationships. Ideally, a course in "Introduction to Social Work" would expose the classroom teachers to basic knowledge that could be

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W.B. Reid, private interview held at Hubert Elementary School, Savannah, Georgia, October, 1969.
an asset in working with children and their families.

3. The school psychologist and school social worker (visiting teacher) should hold group sessions with teachers who have children with similar problems.

4. The teacher and social worker should then lead parents groups as a means of deterring absenteeism using professional time as sparingly as possible.

5. Salaries should be increased since the persons involved would be engaged in activities after normal working hours.

6. The curriculum should be revised to include more about the cultural heritage of Blacks. Daily living experiences of the children in question should be used to stimulate interest as the teachers instruct pupils in their basic subjects.

7. The caseworkers at Family and Childrens Services should be involved (in welfare cases) thus giving additional support to these families as they are helped to realize the importance of regular school attendance. This should be done without threats or coercion.

8. Families should be made aware of the compulsory school attendance law and they should be made aware that these laws are enforced in the child's best interest. This should be communicated positively.

9. In cases of dire neglect the families should be referred to Family and Children Services' Child Welfare Section for possible removal of the children from the home. In this way children would be removed with the idea of preparing parents for filling their roles more effectively. Thus this would be a temporary removal in "ideal situations."

The recommendations made herein are thought to be possible ways of increasing school attendance. Obviously, absenteeism is not merely a school problem but involves the entire community. Therefore involvement of "significant others" in the child's role network seems to be a reasonable strategy of attacking this problem. The investigator is making the recommendations, nevertheless the task of implementation remains with the Board of Education.

This research project revealed no direct relationship between welfare
and absenteeism. However the poverty-stricken, (welfare alike) experience difficulty acquiring the basic necessities of life. Satisfaction of such necessities is a prerequisite to the development of strong bodies and alert minds in poor Black children.
TABLE 1

CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM AS RELATED BY PARENTS OF
THE CHRONICALLY ABSENT PUPILS
N = 30

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Absences</th>
<th>Total Absent for Reason Given</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baby sitting (while mother works)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defective Vision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Problems</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Clothing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Phobias or Truancy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 2
THE CONCEPTION OF TEACHERS REGARDING THE CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM AS INDICATED BY THEIR RESPONSES TO ITEMS ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS
N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children's Lack of Interest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Problems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Difficulties</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Neglect or Indifference</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3
TEACHERS' ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WHO PRESENT ATTENDANCE PROBLEMS
N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic or Sympathetic Feelings</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Attitudes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Responses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Attitudes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers' Role</td>
<td>Total Such Responses</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance of the Child</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform Child of Future Use of Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlate Learning with Everyday Experiences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beautify Classroom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make Lessons more Interesting</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Teacher-Pupil Planning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 5  
**DISADVANTAGES OF ABSENTEEISM AS TEACHERS VIEW IT**  
* N = 16  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creates Discipline Problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Usually Achieves below Grade Level</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causes Retention in Grade</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Lack of Interest in School</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to Eventual School Drop-out</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thwarts Intellectual Growth</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precipitates Poor Communication with Peers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 16 99.9 = 100.0
TABLE 6
ACTION OF TEACHERS REGARDING WORK COMPLETED
IN A CHILD'S ABSENCE
N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher's Actions</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review Work with Child</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage Child to Solicit Help from Peers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign Make-up Work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send Work Home upon Request</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Consideration Given</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 7
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VISITING TEACHER
AS SEEN BY CLASSROOM TEACHERS
N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher's Reactions</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ineffective</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Referral Source Only</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Accommodating with Parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Many Responsibilities to be Effective</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 8

ACTION TAKEN BY TEACHERS WHEN CHILDREN ARE KEPT HOME TO BABY SIT AS INDICATED BY THEIR RESPONSES ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE

N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action Taken</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assign Make-up Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference with Parents</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral of Family to Child Care Development Center</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral to Visiting Teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 9

RESPONSES OF TEACHERS REGARDING THE QUESTION CONCERNING THEIR MAKING HOME VISITS AT LEAST ONCE EACH YEAR

N = 16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Visits</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 10

**PLANS OF ACTION RECOMMENDED BY TEACHERS TO MINIMIZE ABSENTEEISM OR TRUANCY**  
\( N = 16 \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations</th>
<th>Total Such Responses</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Build Child's Self Esteem</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Economic Conditions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalize Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Children in Foster Care</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place Truant Children in Detention</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit Cooperation of Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Parent-Pupil Conferences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Recommendation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>16</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.8 = 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR TEACHERS

1. What do you feel are the main reasons for absenteeism?

2. What do you think of parents of pupils who are chronically absent?

3. What do you feel is your role in motivating children to attend school regularly?

4. What do you see as disadvantages when children are absent often?

5. What do you do about classwork completed in a child's absence?

6. How do you envision the visiting teachers' role?

7. What resources are you familiar with in the Savannah community for families with the following problems?
   A. marital conflicts
   B. desertion of father leaving family without income?
   C. abandonment of children by their mother
   D. child neglect or abuse
   E. children with speech and hearing problems
   F. children with vision impairments
G. unemployment ________________________________
H. families evicted ________________________________
I. children with emotional disorders ___________________________
J. children with specific learning disorders ___________________________
K. health problems ________________________________

8. What do you do when parents keep children out of school to care for siblings while the mother works?

________________________________________________________________________

9. Do you visit each home at least once each school year?
Yes ________  No ________

10. Can you recommend a plan of action that you feel would minimize absenteeism or truancy?

Please write your recommendation below:
GUIDE FOR ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL FUNCTIONING

I. Personality traits
   A. Innate and genetic potential
   B. Basic thrust, drives, and instincts
   C. Mental Maturity
   D. Self image

II. Role Performance
   A. Relationship between parent(s) and children
   B. Sibling relationship
   C. Peer relationship
   D. Relationship with persons in authoritative roles
   E. Others

III. Socio-Cultural factors
   A. Beliefs
   B. Values
   C. Activity patterns
   D. Primary and extended family relationships (living arrangements)
   E. Source and adequacy of income
   F. Religious affiliation
   G. Group participation (scouts, etc.)
   H. Source of medical care (when needed when no regular family doctor)
   I. Usual reason for absence from school
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Miscellaneous