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ABSTRACT

Data were obtained from six high schools in the Northwest during 1984 and 1985 to determine the variation in students' reports of the frequency with which they skip school and cut classes. The study was guided by the advice of school administrators and a theoretical model of the influences or levels of participation in work organizations. Evidence indicates that skipping and cutting are serious problems among portions of the students in the schools studied. Boys skipped more frequently than girls, and skipping was most frequent among 11th and 12th graders. Student questionnaires indicated the biggest reason for skipping whole days was that students needed to be at home or had something better to do. Selective cutting was most often due to dislike of a particular class or not having completed homework assignments; peer pressure also contributed. Those students who reported infrequent skips scored high on an index of educational ambitions. There was no relationship between the index of perception of rule enforcement and frequency of skips; parental supervision was a stronger inhibiting factor. Since a number of factors and events may contribute to skipping, it may take a major change in the culture before specific factors exert much of an influence. (GJ)

# Variation in Student Skipping: A Study of Six High Schools

by
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Table of Contents



Appendices referred to in this report can be obtained for $2.50 from the Center for Educational Policy and Management, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.

# Variation in Student Skipping: A Study of Six High Schools

Kenneth Duckworth and John deJung

## I. Overview

Student resistance to schooling in the form of unauthorized or unexcused absence--skipping days of school and cutting classes--is a problem in many high schools. This paper is one of a set of reports from a research project on The Management of Student Absenteeism in High Schools, which collected information from students, teachers, counselors, and administrators in six urban high schools in the Northwest in 1984 and 1985. This paper uses data from questionnaires administered to all students in those high schools in 1984 to develop an index of students' frequency of unexcused absences, or "skipping," and to explore variation in students' scores on that index within each of the high schools. Companion papers discuss variation in skipping across high schools and its relationship to school management procedures (Duckworth and deJung 1986) and variation in student absences across different teachers and different classes in each high school (deJung and Duckworth 1986a).

Our explorations of demographic differences to explain variations in frequency of skipping among students are guided to some extent by the folklore about skipping articulated by administrators, counselors, and teachers in the schools in the study. We are interested in subjecting some common explanations of skipping to empirical test. Our explorations are also guided, however, by theoretical principles. These have been set forth in a working paper of the project (Duckworth 1984). We here summarize the main principles that inform the analyses in this paper--socialization to the value of school rewards and predictability of reward deprivation consequent to

nonparticipation.

The expectancy theory of participation in organizations suggests that effort is a function of peoples' valuation of the rewards organizations offer and perception that effort will obtain rewards, or the efficacy of effort (Lawler 1976). The school rewards of high schools include both rewards received while attending school (such as grades) and rewards received after graduation (such as higher education or further training). This theory implies that differences among students in socialization to the value of school rewards--students' educational ambition--should predict differences in the regularity of attendance. Hence this study examines the impact of educational ambition on skipping.

According to expectancy theory, attendance should also be a function of the student's feeling of efficacy, or belief that attendance will in fact lead to rewards. Positively, this means confidence that the greater the effort, the greater the rewards. This study did not collect data on students' feelings of efficacy, although a concurrent study conducted by Duckworth that developed and tested a model of teaching practices affecting efficacy (Duckworth, Fielding, and Shaughnessy 1986) found that feeling of efficacy is negatively (if weakly) related to the frequency of class cutting.

The study reported in this paper did focus on the negative side of feelings of efficacy, however, which is the student's perception that lack of effort will result in deprivation of rewards or other negative consequences. We assume that students' expectation of negative consequences imposed by school or parent will inhibit skipping. Hence we look at school enforcement of rules and penalties regarding absenteeism and at parental supervision of students. It has been asserted by several studies of absenteeism, notably Brodow (1980), Gottfredson and Daiger (1979), and DiPrete (1981) that strict enforcement and/or parental supervision are negatively related to student

absenteeism. The implications are clear: increase the penalties for skipping, tighten their enforcement, and enlist parents' cooperation in this strategy, and skipping will decrease. This theory has many adherents in the subjects of the present study, as is attested by Duckworth and deJung (1986). Students themselves agree in large numbers with this assertion. We set out to test this explanation.

A study by Stinchcombe (1964), however, alerts us to the likelihood that adolescent rebellion against the regimentation of high school may diminish the influence of reward valuation and efficacy on attendance. We investigate the influence of student attitudes about school attendance on skipping.

Looking at the student's relationship to the school as an individual contract with rewards for attending and penalties for skipping also oversimplifies the reality. Stinchcombe found that rebellion was a peer group phenomenon. Students' participation in school reflects the norms of their peers, and friendship networks that encourage skipping can influence individual skipping regardless of school-meted rewards and punishments. Hence analyses will include measures of peer pressure to skip.

The combination of a demographic exploration of student skipping within high schools, the folklore of student skipping, and theory-guided model building could make this paper somewhat overmethodical and deliberate in its examination of every conceivable subgroup of students in a school. We relegate unfruitful investigations to appendices whenever possible, but we retain in the main body of the paper sufficient evidence to indicate both the variation and lack of variation in the troublesome phenomenon called student skipping. Like the companion paper looking at differences in student absenteeism across different classes and teachers, we shall emphasize that student skipping seems to be a widespread phenomenon among students and that

we have yet to account for its observed variation.

## Research Procedures

This paper reports analyses on data obtained from six high schools during the 1983-84 school year as part of a project studying the management of absenteeism in high schools. The high schools were located in two school districts in the Northwest, District 1 serving a large city and District 2 serving a small city. The attendance areas served by the schools spanned a wide range of socioeconomic groups, although ethnic minority communities were not represented. For a fuller description of the sample, see the companion paper by Duckworth and deJung (1986). In reports, we give the three District 1 high schools the fictitious names of Adams, Buchanan, and Coolidge; the three District 2 high schools are called Dearborn, Englewood, and Fairweather.

Quantitative data were obtained from all students in the six schools who filled out a brief, 36-item questionnaire administered during April and May 1984. The questionnaire is included as Appendix A. This data was supplemented by data from students' report cards supplied by the participating districts. Although each student was assigned a project ID to allow matching of questionnaire data and report card data, and although the questionnaire answer forms had students' names printed to facilitate administration of questionnaires, students were assurred of confidentiality of all information. Students' names were not entered into data files used for analyses.

The student questionnaire was administered to all students in attendance at each school on a given day. Because we were interested in students who skip, we recruited teacher help in obtaining questionnaire responses from absent students during the week following questionnaire

administration. The resulting sample approximated 85 percent of the students enrolled in each school. Analyses of absence rates for these students compared to absence rates reported for all students on report cards revealed under-representation, as expected, of chronic absentees. Thus analyses in this paper may not reveal the special factors contributing to the most serious form of absenteeism--the process of dropping out of school by degrees.

The student sample used for analyses was further reduced by omitting students who had enrolled at the school subsequent to the beginning of the spring term, 1984, because their responses to several questions might be invalid as descriptions of their present school. For similar reasons, students who were enrolled for less than 4 classes--and thus who were only part-time students--were omitted.

The resulting sample is shown in Table I-1. The total sample comprised 5,799 students. The school samples ranged from 713 students at Adams to 1,247 at Fairweather. Table I-1 also shows the distribution of the samples on gender and grade level. These numbers indicate the size of subsamples for analyses to be reported later. There was little variation in gender distribution; Englewood had slightly more girls than boys. More interesting is the variation in distribution by grade level. We expected the senior class to be smaller in each school, but this varied. At Adams--with the highest dropout rate of any school in the study, the sample was composed of approximately equal percentages at each grade level. In contrast, at Coolidge, the seniors made up only 15 percent of the sample. The other schools were similar, with seniors constituting about 20 percent of the sample. The freshman class was the largest except at Englewood, where the number of freshmen, sophomores, and juniors was approximately equal.

The quantitative data were supplemented by students' written

Table I-1
The Student Sample: Distribution Across Gender, Grade, and School
(Figures in parentheses are percentages of total school sample)

| | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Adams | Buchanan | Coolidge | Dearborn | Englewood | Fairweather |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Boys | 366 (51) | 408 (50) | 460 (50) | 543 (52) | 490 (46) | 641 (51) |
| Girls | 347 (49) | 400 (50) | 465 (50) | 508 (48) | 565 (54) | 606 (49) |
| Grade | | | | | | |
| 9 | 191 (27) | 255 (32) | 273 (30) | 320 (30) | 289 (27) | 403 (32) |
| 10 | 178 (25) | 200 (25) | 271 (29) | 269 (26) | 269 (26) | 324 (26) |
| 11 | 171 (24) | 188 (23) | 243 (26) | 239 (23) | 289 (27) | 288 (23) |
| 12 | 173 (24) | 165 (20) | 138 (15) | 223 (21) | 208 (20) | 232 (19) |
| Total | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

responses to questions on an extra page enclosed with the questionnaire; this page had no identification, so responses on this page could not be matched with other questionnaire data on individual students. We draw on these responses to amplify overall patterns in the data.

In addition to the student questionnaire data, this paper draws on information obtained from interviews with school administrators, counselors, teachers, and students in each of the six schools. Interviews with administrators were conducted prior to questionnaire administration and helped inform questionnaire design. Interviews with counselors, teachers, and students were on a voluntary basis and took place after administration of questionnaires. We interviewed on average ten teachers and ten students in each school. Teachers were selected from a volunteer pool to include different subject specializations. Students were also selected from a volunteer pool to include boys and girls and younger and older students.

## II. Variation in Skipping and Its Inducements

### Variation in Skipping

The dependent variable in the model under development is the student's frequency of unexcused absences--how often a student skips. This variable includes both skipping whole days of school and "cutting" particular classes. We rely on student responses to two questionnaire items: the number of days skipped since spring break and the frequency with which the student cut a class, not counting full-day absences. Distribution of student responses in each school is shown in Table II-1.

It is apparent in item 33 in the table that the majority of students in each school except Adams reported skipping no days since spring vacation. At Adams only 42 percent reported skipping no days while 19 percent checked the highest response--four or more days. At each of the schools except

Table II-1
Students' Reports of Skipping
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 33. Since spring break, how many full days do you remember being absent without an accepted excuse? | 4 or more days | 19 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 5 |
| | 3 days | 10 | 6 | 7 | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| | 2 days | 15 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 6 | 7 |
| | 1 day | 14 | 9 | 12 | 12 | 10 | 12 |
| | no days | 42 | 70 | 65 | 74 | 76 | 72 |
| (Number of days since spring break: | | 25 | 21 | 16 | 18 | 17 | 19) |
| 36. Not counting full-day absences, about how often would you say you cut a class? | 5 or more times/wk | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| | 3-4 times/wk | 9 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 |
| | 1-2 times/wk | 17 | 13 | 17 | 15 | 14 | 17 |
| | less than once/wk | 18 | 16 | 20 | 23 | 23 | 26 |
| | hardly ever | 52 | 65 | 58 | 55 | 59 | 51 |
| SKIP index (33 & 36) | all students | 14.0 | 9.4 | 10.2 | 9.4 | 8.5 | 9.7 |
| | boys | 15.2 | 9.9 | 10.9 | 10.1 | 9.3 | 10.4 |
| | girls | 12.8 | 8.6 | 9.5 | 8.7 | 7.9 | 9.0 |
| | grade: 9 | 13.7 | 10.0 | 9.2 | 9.3 | 8.3 | 9.0 |
| | 10 | 13.5 | 8.9 | 9.6 | 8.7 | 8.4 | 9.1 |
| | 11 | 15.1 | 8.5 | 11.6 | 9.7 | 8.8 | 9.8 |
| | 12 | 14.0 | 9.6 | 10.9 | 10.0 | 8.7 | 11.7 |
| Number of Students* | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* Actual N for each item depends on number of missing responses

Adams, from 24 to 35 percent of the students at each school reported skipping at least one day, and from 4 to 7 percent reported skipping four or more days.

This paper does not focus on explanation of school differences, which is the topic of the companion paper already mentioned (Duckworth and deJung 1986). Instead, the focus here is on explanation of students' intraschool variation in skipping. In reading tabulated data on the rate of skipping whole days, however, one should be aware that student reports of the number of days skipped may have been influenced by variation in the day on which each school gave the questionnaire. All six schools had the same spring vacation, and it was planned to administer the questionnaire in each school on one of three consecutive days during the fourth week after spring vacation. However, delays in printing answer forms resulted in delays in administering the questionnaire at some schools, with the most serious result being that Adams gave it two weeks later than Coolidge. The likelihood of reporting four or more days skipped increases with the number of days since spring vacation, and hence the high score at Adams may partially be attributed to this factor. Because the question set an upper limit on responses, it was not possible to adjust individual scores to compensate for those differences. Hence analyses of correlates of skipping had to be conducted school by school rather than with the sample as a whole.

Item 36 on frequency of cutting classes was not complicated by differences in questionnaire administration dates, however. As with the item on skipping whole days, responses to this item were skewed, with a majority of respondents checking the lowest category. The degree of skewness was less here than with the skipping item, because in each school except Adams, the percentage reporting "hardly ever" cutting is lower than the percentage reporting skipping no days. By adding the percentages in the first three

responses to item 36 in Table II-1, we can see that from 18 percent (Englewood) to 29 percent (Adams) reported cutting one or more times a week, and by adding the first two responses, that from 4 percent to 12 percent reported cutting at least three times each week.

In order to avoid reliance on a single item as the dependent variable, and because the two items were complementary in producing an overall estimate of the frequency of unexcused absences, we averaged the responses of each student to the questionnaire items on skipping and cutting. The correlation coefficient between the two items was .41 in the sample as a whole. Averages were compiled from standardized measures of responses to each questionnaire item in order to ensure that each item contributed equally to the index. Like other indices to be introduced, the resulting standardized average was subjected to a linear transformation--the score was multiplied by 10 and then increased by 10--in order to produce an easily comparable index called SKIP. In the sample as a whole, the mean of SKIP was 10 and the standard deviation was 8.4. The severe skew in variation in the component items here resulted in SKIP's having a range of 3.4 (skipped no days and hardly ever cut) to 39.3 (skipped four or more days and cut five or more times a week). Mean SKIP scores for each school are shown in Table II-1. They ranged from 8.5 (Englewood) to 14.0 (Adams). Again, some of the differences among schools--and especially the higher mean for Adams--are attributable to the different days on which the questionnaire was administered. We report these statistics not to compare schools but as a reference point for the comparisons within each school to be reported below.

To simplify discussion in the analyses to be reported in this paper, the student behaviors comprising the SKIP index will be referred to as "skipping," in which we include cutting classes as well as skipping whole days. In the few instances in which it is more appropriate to discuss the

component measures separately, we will make it clear where we are talking just about skipping whole days and where we are talking just about cutting classes.

Teachers' grade books could have provided an alternative and possibly more valid measure of unexcused absences, but we did not have access to grade books. Teachers reported total absences for each student--excused as well as unexcused--at the end of each grading period. This information was available to us, although it included days missed because of illness. The correlation of a measure of total absences during spring term, 1984, with the SKIP index at each school varied from .38 to .53. These correlations are not very strong. Some of the independence of the two measures can be attributed to the inclusion of excused absences (possibly uncorrelated with unexcused absences) in the overall measure. A subsequent paper in progress will report analyses of student questionnaire responses using grading period reports of students' class absences as the principal absence measure (deJung and Duckworth, 1986b)

Gender and Grade Level Differences in Skipping

Several of the school personnel interviewed suggested that skipping varied by grade level and/or that boys' and girls' rates of skipping differed. The most common claims were that boys skipped more than girls and that skipping was more frequent (for different reasons) at both ends of the grade-level spectrum than in the middle. Given the dichotomous nature of gender and the suggestion of a curvilinear relationship of grade level to skipping, we deemed it more appropriate to present a breakdown of SKIP scores for boys and girls and for students at each grade level in each school than to compute correlations. The results are shown at the bottom of Table II-1. Here the intention is to identify possible commonalities in patterns of

within-school differences.

The data in Table II-1 show that in all of the schools, boys skipped on the average more frequently than girls. The biggest difference was at Adams, where the mean score for boys was 15.2 compared to 12.8 for girls. The grade level differences are mixed. The only simple pattern was at Fairweather, where skipping increases with each grade. We were particularly interested in how twelfth graders compared to students in lower grades. The seniors were a problematic group because of attrition. One might hypothesize that those students remaining in school through the senior year represent a selected group who should be less likely to skip. On the other hand, some counselors reported that seniors became indifferent to school rules once transcripts were sent to colleges. Moreover, seniors would be most likely to have driving licences and cars at their disposal. The hypothesis that seniors would have lower absence scores than juniors because the most severe cases had dropped out of school was borne out only at Adams and Coolidge. In contrast, at Buchanan and Fairweather, the indifference-opportunity hypothesis was supported, because seniors reported more frequent cutting than students in lower grades. At Dearborn and Englewood, means for juniors and seniors were very much alike. (Appendix B, Table 1 reports the full breakdown of SKIP by boys and girls within each grade level.) We conclude that, while gender has a consistent if modest relationship to skipping, grade level is not a consistent correlate of skipping.

## Reasons and Inducements for Skipping

Reasons. Before testing hypotheses about inhibitors of skipping, it is desirable to consider the strength of positive inducements to skip. It may be informative to look at what students themselves say would motivate them to skip. The questionnaire asked students what was the "biggest reason"

they would skip a day of school or cut a class. We developed the response options for this question after talking to administrators in the six schools and to a few students selected to pretest the questionnaire. Three response options were included on both the skipping and cutting questions. These included "homework not done," "having a bad day," and "none of the above." Some administrators had suggested that students skipped or cut because they were in academic difficulty and/or had poor study habits that resulted in failure to complete homework on time. Such students would find school--or a particular class--a place of punishment and stay out to avoid that punishment. Students whom we talked to, on the other hand, asserted that students skipped or cut when they were emotionally upset or physically below par--without actually being sick and thus eligible for an excused absence.

In addition to these three responses common to both items, each question included two additional options. The two options for the skip question were "needed at home" and "something better to do." Particularly in the schools serving low-income families, administrators mentioned that some students, especially girls, were kept home to help with housework or look after other children. All administrators mentioned that some students took days off from school to party. The two options for the question on class cutting were "class is boring" and "something more important to do." The "boring" response was emphasized by the students we consulted; they regarded some classes as aversive situations even if they had their homework done. The "more important" option also stemmed from student suggestions but also from administrator comments at Fairweather, where there was common acknowledgement that students cut some classes in order to study for others.

The distribution of responses are shown in Table II-2. As is apparent, the modal response to each question in nearly every school was "none of the above." Responses were fairly evenly divided among the other

Table II-2
Reasons and Inducements to Skip
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 34. The biggest reason I would skip a day of school | homework not done | 11 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 14 | 12 |
| | needed at home | 21 | 25 | 19 | 18 | 22 | 15 |
| | something better to do | 20 | 16 | 19 | 19 | 16 | 18 |
| | having a bad day | 15 | 18 | 16 | 17 | 15 | 17 |
| | none of above | 32 | 31 | 36 | 36 | 34 | 38 |
| 37. The biggest reason I would cut a class | homework not done | 14 | 13 | 15 | 18 | 26 | 24 |
| | class boring | 22 | 20 | 23 | 22 | 16 | 15 |
| | something more imp to do | 16 | 15 | 20 | 20 | 21 | 22 |
| | having a bad day | 13 | 14 | 9 | 13 | 11 | 11 |
| | none of above | 34 | 38 | 33 | 27 | 25 | 28 |
| 26. If you have a part-time job, how many hours do you work a week | more than 20 hrs | 16 | 14 | 9 | 9 | 7 | 5 |
| | about 20 hrs | 19 | 14 | 17 | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| | about 10 hrs | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 7 |
| | fewer than 10 hrs | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 10 | 11 |
| | don't have a job | 54 | 58 | 60 | 62 | 60 | 65 |
| 35. Most of my friends cut classes in this school | 5 or more times/wk | 14 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| | 3-4 times/wk | 18 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 11 | 13 |
| | once or twice/wk | 31 | 27 | 29 | 30 | 30 | 35 |
| | less than once/wk | 20 | 22 | 21 | 24 | 24 | 23 |
| | hardly ever | 17 | 32 | 28 | 25 | 29 | 24 |
| 11. If I cut class or skip school, it's usually with friends | strongly agree | 24 | 19 | 22 | 27 | 18 | 20 |
| | agree | 36 | 26 | 35 | 38 | 39 | 37 |
| | disagree | 18 | 22 | 19 | 18 | 23 | 24 |
| | strongly disagree | 22 | 32 | 25 | 18 | 20 | 20 |
| PEERSKIP index (35 & 11) | mean | 11.9 | 8.4 | 9.9 | 10.9 | 9.4 | 10.1 |
| | boys | 12.7 | 8.0 | 10.4 | 10.7 | 9.1 | 10.3 |
| | girls | 11.1 | 8.8 | 9.4 | 11.1 | 9.6 | 9.8 |
| | grade: 9 | 11.2 | 8.0 | 9.9 | 10.5 | 9.2 | 9.3 |
| | 10 | 12.2 | 8.8 | 9.5 | 9.8 | 9.4 | 10.2 |
| | 11 | 12.4 | 7.3 | 10.3 | 11.5 | 9.9 | 10.0 |
| | 12 | 11.8 | 9.6 | 10.0 | 12.1 | 8.9 | 11.3 |

reasons for skipping a whole day, although "needed at home" was checked more than or as often as other reasons in all schools except Fairweather. In general, "something better to do" was the third-most-often chosen response, followed by "having a bad day." "Homework not done" was the least often chosen response in all schools. Thus, if they acknowledged any reason for skipping, students emphasized things to do rather than the aversive options of "having a bad day" and "homework not done."

With respect to reasons to cut a class, "class is boring" was the second-most-chosen response in all schools except Englewood and Fairweather. (These responses were confirmed by student comments on an extra sheet where they listed classes they would cut most often and the reason why. The dominant reason given was that the class, subject, and/or teacher were boring.) At Englewood and Fairweather, "homework not done" and "something more important to do" each were checked by more respondents than "class is boring." Several interviewees at Fairweather remarked that it was widely perceived as legitimate to cut a class in order to study for another, presumably more difficult class, and such a reason would be equivalent with "something more important to do." The higher percentages checking "homework not done" at Englewood and Fairweather suggest that more students are concerned about teacher disapproval, while fewer students find their teachers boring, at those schools.

Did students who skipped frequently report different reasons than those who seldom if ever skipped? We examined the distribution of responses on reasons for skipping and cutting for each category of response on the corresponding frequency item. These data are reported in Appendix C, Tables 1 and 2. We found that in all schools, infrequent skippers were more likely to indicate "none of the above" as the biggest reason, with "needed at home" as the second-most-chosen response. Frequent skippers' biggest reasons

varied with district. In District 1 schools, frequent skippers were more likely to indicate "something better to do" as the biggest reason. In District 2 schools, "having a bad day" emerged as equally potent as "something better to do."

A comparison of reasons for cutting given by infrequent and frequent cutters (in Appendix C, Table 2) also revealed that infrequent cutters, like infrequent skippers, were most likely to report "none of the above" as a possible reason for cutting; otherwise, they gave equal weight to the various reasons listed. Frequent cutters chose the same reasons that were chosen by other students at each school. Frequent cutters' biggest reason was "class is boring" in four of six schools. At Englewood, "homework not done" was the biggest reason. At Fairweather, "something more important to do" was the biggest reason.

We explored the distribution of responses on these two items for boys and girls and for students at each grade level in each school. We found no consistent patterns. The results are reported in Appendix B, Tables 2 and 3.

Inducements: Student Employment. The questionnaire allowed us to investigate the impact of a plausible reason for skipping that was not specifically included in the question about reasons. This reason is part-time employment. Simply on the grounds of competing demands, one would expect that SKIP would be positively related to student job-holding. Greenberger and Steinberg's (1979) findings on the negative influence of student employment on schoolwork are pertinent here.

The questionnaire asked students how many hours they worked a week. The distribution of responses is shown in item 26 in Table II-2. From 35 percent (Fairweather) to 42 percent (Buchanan) of the students in a school reported having a job. From 17 percent (Fairweather) to 35 percent (Adams) reported that they worked 20 or more hours a week--half-time or more.

Was the number of hours worked correlated with the frequency of skipping? The correlations in each school between hours worked and SKIP was as follows:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adams | .14 | Dearborn | .09 |
| Buchanan | .18 | Englewood | .13 |
| Coolidge | .20 | Fairweather | .13 |

All correlations were statistically significant, which is not surprising given the large school sample sizes. All, however, were weak.

Was part-time employment a stronger inducement to skip for boys than for girls, and for older students than for younger students? As reported in Appendix B, Table 4, boys were more likely than girls to hold a job and to work 20 hours or more a week. Furthermore, as reported in Appendix C, Table 3, in five of the six schools, the correlation of hours worked to SKIP was slightly stronger among boys than among girls. This suggests that boys were more likely to be induced by part-time employment to skip, which may account for some of the observed higher rate of skipping among boys at each school. There was considerable variation across grade levels in the correlation of hours worked to skipping, but there was no pattern consistent across the schools.

Inducements: Peer Pressure. Another source of potent inducements to skipping, according to many of the school personnel we interviewed, was the student's peer group, especially the friendship network. Students were said often to skip with their friends, who on their part might exert social pressure to take part in an outing during school time. The people we interviewed at Dearborn especially described strong peer pressure to skip. DiPrete's study (1981) also found that peer skipping exerted an influence on individual students' rates of skipping. Hence we investigated the influence of peers on students' frequency of skipping.

The questionnaire asked two questions about peer pressure to skip.

The first item asked the student how often most of the student's friends cut a class; the wording was nearly identical to the item on self-report of cutting class. The distribution of responses on this item, item 35, shown in Table II-2, make it plain that students see their friends cutting more often then they themselves cut. The percentage of students reporting that friends hardly ever cut ranged from 17 to 32, compared to the 51-65 percent of students reporting that they personally hardly ever cut. Similarly, 17 to 32 percent of the students reported that their friends cut three or more times a week, compared to only 4 to 12 percent reporting that they personally cut three or more times a week.

Evidence of peer pressure to skip also came from a questionnaire item asking whether skipping was usually done with friends. The majority of students in each school except Buchanan agreed that "if I cut class or skip school, it's usually with friends." Consistent with the emphasis, mentioned above, that Dearborn informants placed on peer pressure, the largest percentage of students characterizing skipping as peer social activity was at that school--65 percent.

These two items were not strongly correlated. The whole sample correlation coefficient was only .23. However, because the wording of the question about one's friends' frequency of cutting was so similar to the wording of the question about one's own frequency of cutting, use of this item alone might build some response bias into correlations of peer pressure with SKIP. The item about skipping and cutting with friends seemed more independent and hence a useful corrective against such bias. Hence we deemed it advisable to combine the two items rather than use either separately as an index of peer pressure. The resulting two-item standardized index is called PEERSKIP. Like SKIP, it had a mean and standard deviation of approximately 10. School means on PEERSKIP are shown in Table II-2.

As expected, the correlations between PEERSKIP and SKIP were statistically significant and fairly strong:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adams | .44 | Dearborn | .45 |
| Buchanan | .38 | Englewood | .40 |
| Coolidge | .42 | Fairweather | .42 |

Evidently, the more peer pressure to skip students experienced, the more frequently they skipped.

We were curious to know whether younger students were more susceptible than older students to peer pressure to skip. We were also curious whether we would find an interactive relationship of peer-pressure with gender in influencing student skipping. Table II-2 shows the mean scores on PEERSKIP for boys and girls and for students at each grade level. Whereas SKIP was higher for boys at all six schools, PEERSKIP was higher for boys at only three schools (Adams, Coolidge, and Fairweather) and higher for girls at the other three schools. Furthermore, these differences were smaller than the differences between boys and girls on SKIP. Hence we find no relationship of gender to PEERSKIP. Nor was there any pattern among the grade level means. Seniors exhibited the highest scores at three schools and juniors at two other schools, so one cannot report that peer pressure was greater among younger (presumably more impressionable) students. As with SKIP, the main finding in this breakdown of scores by gender and grade is that peer pressure to skip is distributed fairly widely and evenly among students in each of the schools.

We compared the correlation of PEERSKIP with SKIP for boys and girls and for students at each grade level in each school. Correlations are shown in Appendix C, Table 3. The correlations did not differ substantially for boys and girls or for students at different grade levels. Hence no interactive effect with gender or grade level was observed.

We have hardly investigated all the possible reasons and inducements

for skipping. Such an investigation would require a comprehensive analysis of the competing attractions in an adolescent's environment. The focus of this study, however, was not on the distribution and strength of such inducements to skip but rather on the school's power to inhibit the influence of such inducements. We turn, then, to evidence of such power--students' academic orientation and concern about success in school, and students' perceptions of school penalties for skipping.

## III. Students' Academic Orientation and Skipping

We look at student motivation to attend school regularly as a function of the strength of the positive incentives school offers to students. Hence we hypothesize that skipping will be negatively related to the strength of those incentives. The analyses in this section investigate this hypothesized inhibition of skipping.

The student questionnaire included an item specifically about the inhibition of skipping. It asked students to select one of four reasons as the biggest reason not to cut a class. (There was no parallel question about the biggest reason not to skip a day of school.) The four reasons were "miss too much work," "parents would find out," "teacher would find out," and "detention or other penalty." Students could also respond "none of the above." Item 38 in Table III-1 shows the percentages of students at each school selecting each response.

As the data show, the dominant response in all six schools was "miss too much work," which was selected by as nearly half the respondents in four of the schools and nearly a third in the remaining two schools. "Parents would find out" and "none of the above" tied as the second most chosen response overall. Further analyses (see Appendix B, Table 5) revealed that "parents would find out" was actually the most frequently-checked "biggest

Table III-1
Students' Reasons for Not Cutting Class and Educational Ambitions
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 38. The biggest reason I would not cut a class:* | miss too much work | 42 | 30 | 32 | 47 | 46 | 46 |
| | parent would find out | 24 | 26 | 25 | 21 | 29 | 19 |
| | teacher would find out | 4 | 7 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| | detention/penalty | 6 | 9 | 8 | 6 | 3 | 4 |
| | none of above | 24 | 27 | 28 | 24 | 19 | 25 |
| 30. The lowest grade I would be satisfied with in most of my classes is | A | 4 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 7 |
| | B | 19 | 18 | 28 | 28 | 36 | 41 |
| | C | 55 | 59 | 55 | 55 | 50 | 45 |
| | D | 22 | 20 | 14 | 12 | 9 | 7 |
| 24. After high school I expect to | go to a 4-yr college | 33 | 38 | 57 | 45 | 61 | 70 |
| | go to a 2-yr college | 24 | 21 | 16 | 20 | 14 | 10 |
| | get a job/join military | 23 | 21 | 13 | 18 | 9 | 6 |
| | other plans | 16 | 16 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 10 |
| | no special plans | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| EDAMBIT index (30 & 24) | all students | 7.0 | 8.3 | 9.8 | 9.5 | 11.5 | 13.1 |
| | boys | 6.4 | 7.3 | 9.3 | 8.8 | 10.8 | 12.7 |
| | girls | 7.7 | 7.3 | 11.0 | 10.2 | 12.1 | 13.4 |
| | grade: 9 | 6.7 | 7.6 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 10.8 | 12.8 |
| | 10 | 6.0 | 7.2 | 10.2 | 10.3 | 10.9 | 12.5 |
| | 11 | 7.6 | 7.2 | 10.7 | 9.2 | 11.7 | 13.7 |
| | 12 | 8.0 | 6.9 | 9.9 | 8.1 | 13.0 | 13.5 |
| Number of students in sample | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* "Don't know" responses not included in computation of percentages

reason" among ninth-graders at several schools, but "miss too much work" generally was the biggest reason by tenth grade. Furthermore, the percentages checking "miss too much work" increased each grade after that. Relatively few students in any grade responded that "teacher would find out" or "detention or other penalty" was the biggest reason. This finding suggests that many students are basically commited to succeeding in their schoolwork. The teachers and counselors we interviewed suggested that student concern about success in school is a potent inhibitor of skipping.

Further analyses with this item, however, found no evidence that a student's choice of the biggest reason not to cut was related to the self-reported frequency of cutting. As Appendix C, Table 4, shows, the distribution of responses was very similar for students reporting hardly ever cutting and students reporting frequent cutting. These findings do not indicate that academic orientation inhibits skipping.

To shed further light on this issue, we focus on students' educational ambition as an indicator of valuation of school rewards. Educational ambition is further operationalized as grade aspirations and plans for postsecondary education. We ask several questions. How much does educational ambition influence skipping? Is the potent source of such influence the individual student or the student's parents? Is such influence affected by school academic program stratification?

## Educational Ambition

Students differ in how well they want to do in school and how far they want to go in their education. Some students want a straight-A record; others are satisfied by passing their courses and thus staying in school to graduate. Some students have specific plans for what they want to do after high school; others have no clear image of what they will do after high

school. These two dimensions of educational ambition--grade aspirations and postsecondary plans--are likely to inhibit skipping, because skipping is likely to lower grades and build a school record of unreliability. We now examine data relevant to the hypothesis that educational ambition inhibits skipping.

The student questionnaire asked the lowest grade with which a student would be satisfied in most of his or her classes. Item 30 in Table III-1 shows the percentages of students in each school responding "A," "B," "C," and "D." (Some students responded "Don't know;" their responses are treated as missing data.) The modal response was "C;" a majority of students in each school except Fairweather reported being satisfied with a C in most of their classes. The response with the second highest percentage was "B" except at Adams and Buchanan, where it was "D." Relatively few students indicated aspirations for A's in most of their classes.

The student questionnaire also asked about the student's postsecondary plans. To differentiate students who might see high school as a stepping stone to further education from students who might not see high school as a stepping stone to anything in particular, the questionnaire asked whether, after high school, the student expected

to go to a four-year college;
to go to a two-year college or vocational program;
to get a job or join the military;
"other plans;"
or "no special plans."

Percentages of students at each school selecting each response are shown in item 24 in Table III-1.

It is evident that the percentage of students expecting to go to a four-year college differed substantially from school to school. At Adams, only 33 percent checked this response, while 24 percent indicated plans to go to a two-year college, and 23 percent indicated plans to get a job. In

sharpest contrast, at Fairweather, 70 percent indicated plans to enter a four-year college, while only 10 percent planned to enter a two-year institution and 6 percent planned to get a job. Hence the shape of the distribution varied quite a bit from school to school. Relatively similar percentages at each school checked "other plans" (10-16 percent)and "no special plans" (4-5 percent).

In order to convert this item into an ordinal scale of the educational ambition implicit in postsecondary plans, we reduced the number of response categories from five to four. The highest response was "enter a four-year college;" second highest was "enter a two-year college." Then, because "get a job or join the military" cannot be distinguished from "other plans" as an indicator of educational ambition, we combined these categories. We treated "no special plans" as the lowest response, on the grounds that any plans might be a stronger basis than no plans for students to see the instrumental value of school rewards.

The correlation at each school of the measure of grade aspirations and the measure of postsecondary plans varied from .22 (Buchanan) to .38 (Englewood). Because these items related similarly to variables already in the model, and in order to simplify analyses of educational ambition, we combined them into a standardized index called EDAMBIT. Scores on this index at each school are shown in Table III-1.

The correlations of EDAMBIT with SKIP at each school were negative and statistically significant:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adams | -.28 | Dearborn | -.30 |
| Buchanan | -.17 | Englewood | -.31 |
| Coolidge | -.31 | Fairweather | -.24 |

Except at Buchanan, educational ambition accounted for more than five percent of the variation in skipping at each school. We infer that students' educational ambition does inhibit their frequency of skipping.

Does this inhibition increase with grade level? Some counselors reported that they could make effective appeals against skipping to older students by getting them to think about their futures, whereas younger students were said to respond better to direct control, like sign-in sheets. This suggested that EDAMBIT might increase with grade level and also might inhibit skipping more in the upper grades than in the lower grades. To test this notion, we compared the means on EDAMBIT at each grade level. As the data in Table III-1 show, EDAMBIT did generally increase with grade level at three schools--Adams, Englewood, and Fairweather. However, it generally declined with increasing grade level at Buchanan and Dearborn. This decline suggests an erosion of educational ambition with increasing years of schooling at those schools. In any event, when we compared the correlation of EDAMBIT with SKIP across grade levels, we found no pattern of differences.

We also compared boys and girls on EDAMBIT. At each school except Buchanan, where there was no difference related to gender, girls had higher scores than boys on this index. However, even though they indicated higher educational ambitions as a group, girls did not exhibit higher inhibition of skipping by EDAMBIT than boys. There was no difference in correlations among boys and among girls. (Correlations are shown in Appendix C, Table 3.) Hence the inhibition of skipping by the combination of postsecondary plans and grade aspirations seemed independent of the student's grade level and gender.

Finally, we investigated the possibility that job and peer inducements worked differently for students with high ambitions than for students with low ambitions. We dichotomized the sample in each school with the score of 10 on EDAMBIT as a cutting point. Because there were strong differences among schools on EDAMBIT, this dichotomy resulted in different percentages of students falling above and below the cutting point in each

school. The biggest difference was between Adams, where approximately two thirds of the students fell into the "low" group, and Fairweather, where only one third of the students fell into the "low" group.

The correlations of SKIP with student employment and PEERSKIP were recomputed for the two subsamples at each school. The results showed that hours worked had a stronger correlation with SKIP among students with "high" educational ambition than among students with "low" ambition at Buchanan and Fairweather. Elsewhere, however, differences were minor. See Appendix C, Table 3 for correlations. There was little evidence that ambition interacted with inducements in influencing the frequency of skipping.

Parental Education and Expectations

We turn now to the question of whether differences in student educational ambitions stem from differences in parental attitudes towards schooling. Many of the school personnel interviewed emphasized the relationship between parents' attitudes towards schooling and students' educational ambitions. It was alleged that parents with little formal education themselves often expected little for their children, and these attitudes depressed students' own ambitions as well as condoned students' skipping. We introduce evidence on the relative effect of parents' education and expectations for their children's education on skipping. It is important to verify whether widespread attribution of skipping to parental attitudes was justified, or whether students exhibited independence of parental attitudes. The results have implications for the appropriate target of school efforts to reduce skipping.

The questionnaire asked students how far their parents had gone in school. The distribution of student responses on this item is shown in item 31 in Table III-2. A large majority of students in each school reported that

Table III-2
Students' Perceptions of Their Parents and Their Main Courses
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Item | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 31. How far did your parents or guardians go in school?* | one/both grad coll | 15 | 19 | 39 | 30 | 52 | 71 |
| | one/both att coll | 16 | 23 | 22 | 25 | 22 | 16 |
| | one/both grad h.s. | 52 | 45 | 34 | 42 | 23 | 10 |
| | neither grad h.s. | 17 | 13 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 25. After high school, my parents or guardians would like me to | go to a 4-yr college | 41 | 46 | 63 | 52 | 66 | 74 |
| | go to a 2-yr college | 18 | 15 | 12 | 16 | 12 | 6 |
| | get a job/join military | 20 | 17 | 10 | 12 | 6 | 3 |
| | other plans | 10 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| | no special plans | 11 | 13 | 11 | 14 | 10 | 11 |
| 23. My main classes are in | college-prep. subjects | 24 | 28 | 33 | 30 | 40 | 49 |
| | business | 14 | 10 | 16 | 10 | 12 | 7 |
| | industrial arts/home ec. | 10 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| | other subjects | 32 | 28 | 27 | 28 | 21 | 18 |
| | no special subjects | 20 | 25 | 18 | 25 | 20 | 20 |
| Percent college-prep: | boys | 23 | 28 | 29 | 28 | 37 | 48 |
| | girls | 26 | 28 | 36 | 32 | 43 | 50 |
| Grade: | 9 | 16 | 24 | 25 | 29 | 36 | 43 |
| | 10 | 23 | 28 | 35 | 34 | 40 | 49 |
| | 11 | 31 | 31 | 40 | 33 | 41 | 54 |
| | 12 | 27 | 29 | 30 | 24 | 38 | 52 |
| Number of students in sample | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* "Don't know" responses not included in computation of percentages

at least one parent had graduated from high school, and majorities in all schools except Adams and Buchanan reported that at least one parent had attended (although not necessarily graduated from) college. On the other hand substantial differences existed in the percentage of students reporting that one or both parents had graduated from college--only 15 percent of Adams students so reported, compared to 71 percent of Fairweather students.

The questionnaire also asked students what their parents expected them to do after high school (the response options being the same as with own plans after high school). The distribution of students' reports of parental expectations exhibits a similar pattern--from 41 percent of Adams students to 74 percent of Fairweather students report that their parents expect them to go to a 4-year college. Evidently many children of parents without a college degree perceive that their parents want them to go to college. The differences are especially notable in the first four schools. This item was converted into a four-category ordinal scale like the report of students' own postsecondary plans.

As shown in Table III-3, the correlation between parental education and parental expectations ranged from .19 to .26. Thus, there is considerable independence between students' reports of their parents' level of education and students' reports of their parents' expectations for their own further schooling. Because parental education is of interest as a measure of socioeconomic status, we analyze the relationship of these two measures to the EDAMBIT index separately.

Table III-3 shows that parental education exhibited correlations of from .17 to .31 with EDAMBIT. As expected, the correlation of parental expectations to EDAMBIT was much stronger (.44 to .54). Although subanalyses showed that the correlations of parental expectations to grade aspirations were also statistically significant, the strength of the correlation with

Table III-3
Correlations of Academic Orientation Variables and Skipping
(All correlations are statistically significant at p=.05 level)

| | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Items Correlated | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| Parents' Education and Parents Expectations | .19 | .24 | .19 | .19 | .26 | .24 |
| Parents' Education and: | | | | | | |
| EDAMBIT | .17 | .26 | .23 | .25 | .30 | .31 |
| Students' Postsecondary Plans | .17 | .27 | .18 | .20 | .27 | .27 |
| Students' Grade Aspirations | .10 | .19 | .18 | .21 | .22 | .23 |
| SKIP | -.02 | -.10 | -.15 | -.12 | -.12 | -.14 |
| Parents' Expectations and: | | | | | | |
| EDAMBIT | .45 | .51 | .45 | .49 | .54 | .44 |
| Students' Postsecondary Plans | .53 | .63 | .51 | .56 | .60 | .49 |
| Students' Grade Aspirations | .18 | .17 | .21 | .26 | .28 | .24 |
| SKIP | -.07 | -.11 | -.17 | -.10 | -.10 | -.10 |
| Number of students in sample | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

EDAMBIT was largely due to the even stronger correlations (.49 to .63) between parental expectations and students' postsecondary plans.

When we compare the correlations between parents' education and expectations and SKIP in Table III-3 with the correlations between EDAMBIT and SKIP (reported previously in the Educational Ambition section), we find that the latter are the strongest at every school. For example, at Adams, the correlation of EDAMBIT with SKIP was -.28, while the correlations of parents' education and expectations with SKIP are -.02 and -.07, respectively. The strongest correlation of either parental variable with SKIP was -.17 at Coolidge. These results indicate that while parents' education and expectations, as perceived by their children, do influence students' own postsecondary plans and grade aspirations, they have little direct effect on students' skipping. School personnel may err in stereotyping students' propensity to skip in terms of socioeconomic background and related parental attitudes.

## Students' Orientation to Academic Programs

In addition to the impact of personal educational ambition, the project had intended to investigate the impact of academic tracking on student motivation to attend regularly. The differentiation of students enrolled in academic versus nonacademic programs has been highlighted in other recent studies, such as the analyses of the High School and Beyond data (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore 1983; DiPrete 1981). In none of the schools in our study, however, was it possible to identify a subset of students designated officially as even "college-prep," not to mention finer gradations of placement within a college-prep program. Inspection of school course catalogues and discussion of placement problems with administrators, however, confirmed our suspicion that tracking was implicit in schools' practices. As

a proxy measure of tracking, we relied on whether students identified their main courses as college-preparatory subjects.

Table III-2 (displayed previously) shows the distribution of student responses in each school to a question that asked them to identify their main courses as college-prep subjects, business, home economics or industrial arts, "other subjects," or "no special subjects." The distribution varied with school in a manner similar to the distribution on students' postsecondary plans. Adams displayed the flattest distribution, with 24 percent oriented to college-prep subjects, 14 percent oriented to business, 10 percent oriented to industrial arts or home economics, 32 percent oriented to "other subjects," and 20 percent oriented to "no special subjects." In general, the distributions were bimodal with high percentages reporting college-prep subjects and "other subjects". The exception was Fairweather, where the strong modal response of college-prep (49 percent) was accompanied by a low percentage reporting "other subjects" (18 percent, actually lower than the 20 percent reporting "no special subjects").

Inspection of crosstabulations of academic program orientation with students' postsecondary plans (shown in Appendix D, Table 1) indicated that "main courses are college prep subjects" predicted plans to go to a 4-year college better than vice versa. Nearly all students responding that college-prep subjects were their main courses also responded that they intended to go to a 4-year college. In contrast, a substantial portion of students responding that they intended to go a 4-year college reported that "other" subjects were their main courses. Correspondingly, a substantial portion of the students describing their main courses as "other subjects" indicated that they planned to go to a four-year college.

It would have been desirable to convert academic program orientation into a scale like the measure of postsecondary plans or even into a combined

scale with plans. The ordering of the responses other than "college prep subjects" posed problems, however. As Appendix D, Table 1, shows, the postsecondary plans of students checking each of those other responses indicated that similar percentages of students in three of those response categories planned to go to a four-year college. "Industrial arts/home economics" was the exception, with lower percentages planning to go to college and greater percentages planning to get a job. The number of students checking this response was too low, however, to constitute it as a category in contrast to "college prep" and the three other categories. Furthermore, few of these students indicated "no special plans" for the future, which was chosen by more than ten percent of the students oriented to "no special subjects." The simplest and safest strategy for analysis was to group together all the respon other than college prep and contrast this "other" group with the college prep group.

Table III-4 shows the mean SKIP scores for college-prep and other students at each school. It is evident that scores of college prep students were lower at each school. The biggest differences were at Coolidge (7.4 vs. 11.5) and Buchanan (6.9 vs. 10.4). The smallest difference was at Fairweather (8.8 vs. 10.6). Further analyses revealed that this difference was reproduced for boys and girls at each grade level, with one trivial exception. See Appendix C, Table 5, for the full breakdown of scores.

In addition to examining direct effects on SKIP, we investigated how students' orientation to college-prep vs. other courses affected the influence of part-time employment and PEERSKIP on SKIP. Table III-4 shows that the correlation between hours worked and SKIP was greater among college prep students at all three District 1 schools. This suggests that persuading students enrolled in college prep programs at these schools to limit the number of hours they worked on part-time jobs might be a promising strategy

Table III-4
College Prep and Other Students: SKIP, PEERSKIP, Hours Worked, and EDAMBIT
(Means and correlations for each school)

| Indices | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| Means on SKIP: | College Prep | 12.2 | 6.9 | 7.4 | 7.4 | 7.0 | 8.8 |
| | Other | 14.6 | 10.4 | 11.5 | 9.7 | 9.4 | 10.6 |
| Correlations with SKIP of: | | | | | | | |
| PEERSKIP: | College Prep | .39 | .45 | .41 | .45 | .43 | .44 |
| | Other | .46 | .34 | .39 | .44 | .36 | .40 |
| Hours worked: | College Prep | .21 | .29 | .28 | .07 | .13 | .14 |
| | Other | .12 | .16 | .16 | .10 | .12 | .11 |
| EDAMBIT: | All students | -.28 | -.17 | -.31 | -.30 | -.31 | -.24 |
| | College Prep | -.31 | -.10~ | -.25 | -.22 | -.22 | -.22 |
| | Other | -.25 | -.09 | -.25 | -.26 | -.30 | -.20 |
| Number of Students in Subgroups: | College Prep | 165 | 215 | 290 | 308 | 417 | 566 |
| | Other | 523 | 560 | 594 | 576 | 618 | 586 |

~ Not statistically significant at p=.05 level; all other correlations significant

for reducing skipping among such students. In contrast, there was little difference between the correlations for college prep and other students in District 2 schools.

We also compared the strength of peer inducements to skip among college prep and other students. When we compared the correlations of PEERSKIP and SKIP of college-prep and other students, we found no consistent difference. Evidently, then, the influence of peer pressure on the frequency of skipping may be at least as strong among students in college prep programs as among other students.

Finally, we were curious about the influence of EDAMBIT on SKIP for students who did not report that their main courses were college prep subjects. Virtually all college prep students also reported that they planned to go to a four-year college, so the correlation of EDAMBIT with SKIP for that group was attributable to the effect of grade aspirations. There were many students who planned to go to two- or four-year colleges among the students who said their main courses were other than college prep, however, so both component items contribute to the correlation of EDAMBIT with SKIP for that group. Table III-4 shows that the correlations of EDAMBIT and SKIP were nearly as strong for students who did not say that their main courses were college prep subjects as for all students. Only at Buchanan, which had the lowest overall correlation between EDAMBIT and SKIP, did the correlation for those students fall below the level of statistical significance. Thus a student with high grade aspirations and plans for the future may skip less even if the student does not identify his or her main courses as college prep.

Summary

We have discussed the impact of student grade aspirations, postsecondary educational plans, and academic program orientation on skipping. There seems to be a widespread, moderate inhibition of skipping by such measures of the students' valuation of school rewards. Thus the analyses in this section tend to confirm the expectation that valuation of rewards motivates effort in the form of regular attendance.

It must be remembered that our evidence regarding the forces attracting students to classes is very slender. There was considerable testimony in interviews that the quality of teaching and of teacher-student relationships as well as the relevance or interest value of the curriculum influence student motivation to attend classes and thus inhibit skipping. Furthermore, it is recalled that a main reason given by students for cutting classes was that the class or teacher was boring. Choice of that reason for cutting was not related to the frequency of skipping, however. With respect to students' interest in their courses, analyses of data from a teacher questionnaire (reported in deJung and Duckworth 1986a) revealed that teachers with better class attendance reported that higher percentages of their students were interested in the subjects they taught than did teachers with worse class attendance. We had no data from the student questionnaire on students' interests, however. The student questionnaire did include one item on the perceived utility of what the student learned in school for opportunities in later life, but response was overwhelmingly positive on this item. Hence few students seem to dismiss the value of school learning.

Valuation of rewards is only part of the set of factors influencing effort, according to expectancy theory. We need also to consider the efficacy of effort in sustaining rewards and preventing punishment. The

remainder of this paper focuses on the influence of people who control rewards and punishments--school authorities and parents.

## IV. School Rule Enforcement and Skipping

Section III explored whether student skipping was inhibited by the student's academic orientation and concern about success. While significant correlates of skipping were found, it was evident that strong academic orientation does not by itself suppress skipping. The analyses in this section are centered on the hypothesis that strict enforcement of school rules and penalties adds to the inhibition of skipping. The rules in question are described in another report of this project (Duckworth and deJung 1986). They include procedures for monitoring unexcused absences and imposition of penalties like detention, academic grade reduction, and suspension. The student responses to the question about the biggest reason not to cut a class indicated little concern about teachers finding out or fear of receiving detention or other penalties. On the other hand, students who are concerned about their grades may well fear loss of academic credit if they miss too much work, so teacher enforcement of such academic penalties could deter these students from skipping.

In the report of school-level comparisons of project data (Duckworth and deJung 1986), we found little evidence that school indices of strictness of rule enforcement were related to school indices of rates of skipping. We found evidence that teachers in each school varied in their enforcement of rules, however. We here investigate the hypothesis that such variation, as experienced by individual students in each school, influences skipping. We then introduce two student attitudinal variables--indifference about skipping and rejection of rules--and examine both their direct relationship to skipping and rule enforcement and their interaction with rule enforcement's

effect on skipping.

Skipping and Rule Enforcement

The first question to be answered is whether school rules about absenteeism, if strictly enforced, inhibit student skipping. We focus here on differential perception of strictness of rule enforcement by students within a school, such as may result from some students having contact with school personnel who enforce attendance rules strictly and other students encountering personnel who are less strict. Students who perceive rule enforcement as strict should skip less than students who do not perceive rule enforcement as strict.

The questionnaire included two items to measure students' perceptions that school rules about skipping were strictly enforced. Four response options were provided for each item: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. Percentages of students at each school selecting these responses are shown in Table IV-1. From 40 percent (Adams) to 52 percent (Buchanan) of the students at each school agreed or strongly agreed that rules about skipping whole days were strictly enforced. From 41 (Englewood) to 56 (Buchanan) of the students agreed or strongly agreed that rules about cutting class were strictly enforced. Proportions of students selecting the extreme responses were roughly equivalent. It is evident that students in each school differed considerably about the strictness of rule enforcement.

The correlation between these two items was .62 for the sample as a whole. The two items were combined into a standardized index called RULENF. School means on RULENF are shown in Table IV-1.

Did strict rule enforcement inhibit skipping? We answer this question in terms of correlations with both SKIP and peer pressure to skip (PEERSKIP). The correlation coefficents at each school between RULENF, on

Table IV-1
Students' Perceptions of Rule Enforcement
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 16. School rules about skipping whole days are strictly enforced | strongly agree | 10 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 9 |
| | agree | 30 | 37 | 34 | 39 | 40 | 42 |
| | disagree | 41 | 34 | 39 | 42 | 38 | 38 |
| | strongly disagree | 19 | 15 | 19 | 10 | 12 | 11 |
| 17. School rules about cutting a class are strictly enforced | strongly agree | 11 | 15 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 11 |
| | agree | 37 | 41 | 36 | 39 | 34 | 43 |
| | disagree | 36 | 33 | 36 | 40 | 45 | 36 |
| | strongly disagree | 16 | 11 | 17 | 11 | 13 | 10 |
| RULENF index (16 & 17) | all students | 9.0 | 11.2 | 9.0 | 10.0 | 9.6 | 10.8 |
| | boys | 8.6 | 12.0 | 9.7 | 9.7 | 9.6 | 10.7 |
| | girls | 9.4 | 10.6 | 7.3 | 10.4 | 9.6 | 10.8 |
| | grade: 9 | 9.9 | 12.2 | 11.0 | 10.1 | 10.5 | 12.0 |
| | 10 | 10.6 | 12.2 | 9.4 | 10.4 | 10.6 | 11.2 |
| | 11 | 7.5 | 10.6 | 7.7 | 9.9 | 8.9 | 9.8 |
| | 12 | 8.2 | 9.5 | 6.5 | 9.7 | 8.0 | 9.1 |
| | College-prep | 8.3 | 11.0 | 7.5 | 9.1 | 9.4 | 10.4 |
| | Other | 9.2 | 11.4 | 9.7 | 10.4 | 9.8 | 11.2 |

the one hand, and SKIP and PEERSKIP, on the other, were as follows:

| | RULENF x SKIP | RULENF x PEERSKIP |
|---|---|---|
| Adams | -.10* | -.10* |
| Buchanan | -.04 | -.05 |
| Coolidge | .01 | -.03 |
| Dearborn | -.04 | -.04 |
| Englewood | -.05 | -.06 |
| Fairweather | -.08* | -.11* |

The coefficients marked with an asterisk were statistically si nificant.

The correlations in each school were miniscule and reached statistical significance only at Adams and Fairweather. Evidently students who perceive rules as strictly enforced are hardly less likely to skip than students who do not perceive rules as strictly enforced. In the companion paper (Duckworth and deJung, 1986), we reported that majorities of both teachers and students at each school agreed with the argument that "stronger penalties will reduce skipping." The fundings here suggest that ensuring consistently strict rule enforcement among all administrators and teachers in a school may not be the potent inhibitor of skipping that many informants believe.

Before we accepted this discouraging finding, however, we explored whether the correlation of RULENF with SKIP might be stronger for special subgroups of students within each school.

Some of our interviewees suggested that girls feel more able to evade rule enforcement than boys, which implies that girls might not see rules as so strictly enforced. Some also described ninth-graders as entering high school with an expectation that they will have more freedom to come and go than they enjoyed in middle school. Other interviewees suggested that by the senior year, students have developed a savvy about which teachers and administrators do not enforce rules. These assertions suggest that girls and both ninth and twelfth graders might exhibit lower scores on RULENF than boys

and tenth and eleventh graders. As with our analysis of the relationship of gender and grade to SKIP, it seemed appropriate to obtain a breakdown on RULENF by gender and by grade. This breakdown is shown Table IV-1. There was no consistent relationship of perceived rule enforcement to gender as such. Perception of strict rule enforcement seemed to decline in each school after the tenth grade, however. The more complete breakdown of RULENF by gender and grade is included in Appendix B, Table 1. For girls, this decline was part of a continuous decline from ninth to twelfth grade; for boys, the 9th grade score was often lower than the tenth grade score.

We next compared correlations of RULENF and SKIP among boys and among girls. There were no consistent differences. Nor were there consistent differences in the correlations at each grade level in each school. The correlations are shown in Appendix C, Table 6. Hence although a greater proportion of ninth and tenth graders see rules as strictly enforced, such perception is not more strongly related to SKIP than among the upper-graders.

We also investigated the potential interactions between rule enforcement and correlates of skipping already introduced--peer pressure, educational ambition, and academic program orientation. We observed above that RULENF seemed to have no greater effect on perceived peer pressure to skip than skipping. Nor was there an appreciable relationship between RULENF and EDAMBIT; correlations were negative but nonsignificant (from -.01 to -.05). Similarly, the figures in Table IV-1 show that students oriented to college prep subjects were less likely to agree that rules were strictly enforced than students not so oriented, but the differences were generally slight.

We speculated that rule enforcement might be more effective where peer pressure to skip was low and among students with high educational ambition and/or orientation to college prep subjects. Students concerned

about academic success should respond to strict enforcement of penalties (including academic penalties) by not skipping. These speculations proved fruitless, however. Appendix C, Table 6, includes the correlations. Comparing students who reported high peer pressure with students who reported low peer pressure, we found no variation in the correlation between RULENF and SKIP. The same was true for comparison of students high and low on educational ambition. The negative relationship of RULENF to SKIP was very slightly stronger for college-prep students than for other students at Buchanan, Englewood, and Fairweather, but it was noticeably weaker at Adams. Thus at best, there are weak interactions between school and college-prep orientation in RULENF's effect on SKIP; at worst, no pattern at all.

Student Attitudes: Indifference about Skipping and Rejection of Rules

We will now investigate the potential interactions between rule enforcement and student attitudes that might neutralize its effect on skipping--indifference about skipping and rejection of penalties. Perhaps the lack of relationship between enforcement and skipping can be explained in terms of student insensitivity or resistance. Some students may simply not find any penalties bothersome. Some students may adopt a conscious attitude of rebellion against school penalties and thus skip in defiance. We here consider evidence of these attitudes.

Indifference. The student questionnaire included two items that asked whether students were bothered if they skipped. Student responses to these items are shown in Table IV-2. The percentage of students in each school agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "I am not bothered if I skip school some days," ranged from 23 percent (Englewood) to 41 percent (Adams). The percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement, "I am not bothered if I cut a class sometimes," ranged from 37 percent

Table IV-2
Students' Attitudes About Skipping
(Percentage of students at each school selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 12. I am not bothered of I skip school some days | strongly agree | 11 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 6 | 10 |
| | agree | 30 | 24 | 23 | 21 | 17 | 19 |
| | disagree | 31 | 29 | 34 | 34 | 34 | 39 |
| | strongly disagree | 27 | 37 | 34 | 37 | 43 | 32 |
| 13. I am not bothered if I cut a class sometimes | strongly agree | 12 | 10 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 16 |
| | agree | 37 | 27 | 33 | 40 | 39 | 39 |
| | disagree | 27 | 31 | 30 | 27 | 28 | 28 |
| | strongly disagree | 23 | 33 | 26 | 22 | 22 | 18 |
| 19. Attendance at school school should not count for grades | strongly agree | 22 | 22 | 21 | 18 | 17 | 24 |
| | agree | 24 | 24 | 24 | 23 | 22 | 28 |
| | disagree | 32 | 31 | 30 | 32 | 34 | 33 |
| | strongly disagree | 22 | 23 | 25 | 27 | 27 | 15 |
| 21. Skipping school should be up to the student, with no penalties | strongly agree | 15 | 11 | 12 | 14 | 11 | 18 |
| | agree | 22 | 17 | 20 | 20 | 22 | 22 |
| | disagree | 37 | 36 | 35 | 36 | 39 | 39 |
| | strongly disagree | 26 | 36 | 32 | 30 | 31 | 21 |
| INDIF index (12 & 13) | mean: all students | 11.2 | 8.9 | 9.8 | 9.8 | 9.2 | 10.9 |
| | boys | 11.7 | 9.2 | 10.5 | 10.4 | 10.3 | 11.4 |
| | girls | 10.5 | 8.5 | 9.4 | 9.3 | 8.7 | 10.4 |
| | grade: 9 | 9.5 | 7.2 | 8.6 | 8.0 | 8.2 | 9.3 |
| | 10 | 11.1 | 9.2 | 9.5 | 8.9 | 8.5 | 10.5 |
| | 11 | 11.8 | 8.5 | 10.9 | 11.0 | 9.9 | 11.5 |
| | 12 | 12.6 | 11.6 | 10.9 | 12.3 | 10.3 | 13.6 |
| | college-prep | 10.9 | 6.1 | 7.9 | 8.3 | 7.0 | 10.1 |
| | other | 11.2 | 9.9 | 10.9 | 10.5 | 10.6 | 11.7 |
| REJECT index (19 & 21) | mean: all students | 10.4 | 9.4 | 9.6 | 9.5 | 8.9 | 11.8 |
| | boys | 10.3 | 9.6 | 10.0 | 9.8 | 9.2 | 12.8 |
| | girls | 10.4 | 9.2 | 9.1 | 9.1 | 8.7 | 10.9 |
| | grade: 9 | 9.9 | 7.2 | 9.7 | 8.8 | 9.1 | 11.1 |
| | 10 | 10.8 | 9.2 | 9.3 | 9.6 | 10.2 | 12.6 |
| | 11 | 12.5 | 8.5 | 9.4 | 10.5 | 8.6 | 11.7 |
| | 12 | 8.7 | 11.6 | 9.9 | 9.2 | 7.3 | 12.3 |
| | college prep | 9.4 | 8.0 | 8.1 | 8.4 | 7.4 | 11.4 |
| | other | 10.7 | 9.9 | 10.3 | 9.9 | 9.9 | 12.3 |
| Number of Students* | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* Actual N for each item depends on number of missing responses

(Buchanan) to 55 percent (Fairweather). More students seemed indifferent about cutting classes than about skipping whole days; for example, 23 percent of Englewood students indicated they weren't bothered if they skipped, but 50 percent indicated they weren't bothered if they cut.

The correlation coefficient between responses to these two items was .63 in the sample as a whole. The items were combined into an index called INDIF using the same procedure that generated SKIP. School means on INDIF are shown in Table IV-2.

We would expect that INDIF would be positively related to SKIP and PEERSKIP but negatively related to RULENF and EDAMBIT. Correlation coefficients are shown in Table IV-3.

The correlation coefficients between INDIF and SKIP--all positive as expected--were statistically significant and fairly strong. They show that one can explain between 10 percent (Buchanan) and 18 percent (Englewood and Fairweather) of the variation in skipping in each school in terms of variation in students' indifference about skipping. Thus at least some of the more indifferent students skip more often. On the other hand, the larger proportion of variation in skipping is independent of indifference. Comparing the data in Table IV-2 with the data in Table II-1, we observe that in each school slightly larger percentages of students indicated indifference about skipping than actually reported skipping. From this difference, one might infer that some of the more indifferent students in fact attend regularly.

Table IV-3 also shows that INDIF is positively related to PEERSKIP. Thus peer pressure not only contributes to skipping but also to an attitude of not being bothered by skipping. Turning to the inhibitions of skipping, we find that the correlations between RULENF and INDIF are negative as expected and statistically significant in all schools, but they are

Table IV-3
Correlations of Student Attitudes and Skipping

| Items Correlated | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| INDIF and SKIP | | .39* | .32* | .40* | .40* | .42* | .42* |
| INDIF and PEERSKIP | | .40* | .39* | .43* | .43* | .37* | .41* |
| INDIF and RULENF | | -.14* | -.11* | -.07* | -.08* | -.14* | -.11* |
| INDIF and EDAMBIT | | -.15* | -.18* | -.23* | -.26* | -.31* | -.19* |
| INDIF and REJECT | | .31* | .38* | .37* | .46* | .44* | .41* |
| REJECT and SKIP | | .19* | .26* | .30* | .39* | .33* | .32* |
| REJECT and PEERSKIP | | .20* | .21* | .24* | .33* | .33* | .26* |
| REJECT and RULENF | | .10* | -.01 | .08* | .01 | .01 | -.03 |
| REJECT and EDAMBIT | | -.16* | -.15* | -.18* | -.24* | -.25* | -.17* |
| RULENF and SKIP: | All students | -.10* | -.04 | .01 | -.04 | -.05 | -.08* |
| | High INDIF | -.10 | -.02 | -.05 | -.02 | -.01 | -.09 |
| | Low INDIF | -.04 | -.05 | .08* | -.03 | -.02 | -.05 |
| | High REJECT | -.01 | -.06* | .05 | .02 | .02 | -.08 |
| | Low REJECT | -.16* | -.03 | -.02 | -.09* | -.08* | -.07* |
| Number of Students** | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* $p<.05$; number of cases in High and Low INDIF and REJECT subgroups shown in Appendic C, Table 6.

** Actual N for each item depends on number of missing responses

weak--from -.07 (Coolidge) to -.14 (Adams and Englewood). In other words, the percentage of variation in indifference explained by variation in perceived strictness in each school was only half a percent to 2 percent.

EDAMBIT is also negatively related to INDIF--somewhat more strongly than RULENF. Students with higher grade aspirations and postsecondary plans are more likely than other students to be bothered if they skip or cut.

We explored the effect of gender and grade level on INDIF and its relationship to other variables. Table IV-2 shows that boys had higher scores on INDIF than girls, just as boys had higher scores on SKIP. Moreover, INDIF scores exhibit a general increase with grade level (with minor exceptions), which is consonant with the views of counselors, mentioned earlier in connection with SKIP, about the increasing independence of adolescents. Explorations of correlations of INDIF with SKIP for boys and girls and for students at different grade levels revealed no appreciable differences, however. (See Appendix C, Table 7).

Rejection. Stinchcombe's theory of status incongruity suggests that as adolescents come to regard themselves more as adults, they will reject the school's authority to treat them as children. This should apply to rules requiring regular school attendance.

We included two items on the questionnaire to measure students' rejection of attendance rules. One asked the student's opinion about whether attendance should count for grades. This allowed a reasonable objection. The relationship of attendance to grades was in fact controversial; while district policies recognized "natural conseqences" for grades of poor attendance, they also discouraged (and in Distict 1 prohibited) "mechanical" lowering of grades for unexcused absences (Duckworth and deJung, 1986). The second item was more radical; it asked the student opinion about whether there should be any penalties for skipping. Distribution of students'

responses to these items is shown in Table IV-2.

More students agreed with the more "reasonable" objection to school rules than with the more radical objection. Between 39 percent (Englewood) and 52 percent (Fairweather) of the students at each agreed or strongly agreed that "attendance at school should not count for grades." Between 28 percent (Buchanan) and 40 percent (Fairweather) of students agreed or strongly agreed that "skipping school should be up to the student, with no penalties."

These two items exhibited a correlation of .43 and were averaged into a standardized index of rejection of school control, called REJECT. Mean scores on REJECT are shown in Table IV-2.

We expected rejection of rules to be positively related to indifference about skipping. Moreover, like INDIF, we expected REJECT to be positively related to SKIP and PEERSKIP. However, we were unprepared to hypothesize about the relationship of REJECT to RULENF and EDAMBIT. On the one hand, it is plausible that strict rule enforcement will compel acceptance of rules; on the other hand, it is plausible that strict rule enforcement may under some circumstances engender resentment and resistance and thus higher REJECT scores. Likewise, strong academic orientation, as measured by EDAMBIT, might go hand in hand with acceptance of school authority; for some academically-successful students, however, educational ambition might lead them to feel entitled to use their discretion and make them resent regimentation and thus lead to higher REJECT scores.

Table IV-3 displays the correlations between REJECT and variables previously introduced into the model. Are students who reject school penalties for absenteeism more likely to skip and to be indifferent about skipping? REJECT was positively related to SKIP, with correlations varying from .19 (Adams) to .39 (Dearborn). Students who rejected penalties for

absenteeism were likely to skip more frequently than students who accepted penalties. The correlation of REJECT and INDIF ranged between .31 (Adams) and .46 (Dearborn). As expected, students who rejected control were more likely to be indifferent about noncompliance.

Table IV-2 shows that REJECT had no statistically-significant relationship to RULENF except at Adams and Coolidge where the correlations were positive--.10 and .08, respectively. Table IV-1 showed that those two schools had the lowest mean RULENF scores, so the fact that the correlations were significant there cannot be attributed to exceptionally strict enforcement. There does not seem to be any general relationship of RULENF to REJECT.

The relationship between REJECT and EDAMBIT was negative at each school, which indicates that more academically oriented students are slightly more likely to accept the school's right to penalize students for skipping. It seems that educationally ambitious students' internalization of school values outweighs any tendency to demand discretion as a reward for such internalization, even at Fairweather, where school climate seemed to support such a demand.

As with INDIF, we explored the relationship of REJECT to gender and grade. Table IV-2 shows that boys obtain higher REJECT scores than girls except at Adams, although the differences are small. Furthermore, we observe no general increase in rule rejection from grade to grade. Rejection seems to peak in the eleventh grade at Adams and Dearborn and in the twelfth grade at Buchanan. It seems very stable at Coolidge. At Englewood, it peaks in the tenth grade and then falls off sharply. At Fairweather, where rejection is highest at every grade level, it also peaks in the tenth grade but, after falling in the eleventh grade, rebounds in the twelfth. It may be recalled that Englewood and Fairweather alone exhibited a rising pattern in EDAMBIT

through the twelfth grade. It may be that this increasing investment in educational values is accompanied at Englewood by increasing submission to rules but at Fairweather by increasing independence.

Does REJECT relate differently to other variables among subgroups of students? The correlations of REJECT with SKIP and with RULENF are presented in Appendix C, Table 7. We found that at Adams and Coolidge the overall positive relationship between RULENF and REJECT was weakest in the ninth grade and strongest in the twelfth grade. In contrast, at Englewood and Fairweather, where the overall relationship was nonsignificant, the relationship of RULENF and REJECT was negative and significant in the twelfth grade. Thus there are strong suggestions of an interaction between school and grade level in this relationship.

Interaction of Attitudes with Enforcement. We were interested in INDIF and REJECT as indicators of attitudes that might weaken the influence of rule enforcement on the rate of skipping. In order to analyze the interaction of these attitudes with rule enforcement, we recomputed correlations among RULENF and SKIP for subsamples with high and low scores on each index. High scores were defined as agreement with both questionnaire items constituting each index. Our hypothesis was that the predicted inhibition of skipping by rule enforcement--i.e., the negative relationship between RULENF and SKIP--would be stronger among students with low scores on INDIF and REJECT. The correlations are shown in Table IV-3.

There is no support here for the hypothesis that INDIF interacts with the influence of RULENF on SKIP. There are hints of support for the interaction of REJECT with RULENF. The predicted negative relationship of RULENF to SKIP is stronger among students with low scores on REJECT at Adams, Dearborn, and Englewood. No such difference is noted at Buchanan, Coolidge, or Fairweather, however. In any event, the negative influence of RULENF on

SKIP never becomes even moderately strong.

Summary of Findings

The efforts reported above to further examine the relationship of rule enforcement to skipping by introducing interactive variables have only revealed that those variables--peer support for skipping, indifference about skipping, and rejection of school rules--are each more important influences on skipping than is perceived strict rule enforcement. There were weak hints that college prep students and students who accept rather than reject rules were more likely to respond to perceived rule enforcement by skipping less often. However, we were unable to identify any subgroup of students, categorized in terms of gender, grade, weak peer support for skipping, college-prep orientation, low indifference, or low rejection, for which the impact of perceived rule enforcement on skipping seemed substantial.

## V. Parental Supervision and Skipping

As reported above in Table II-1, the second most frequently chosen reason not to cut a class was "parents would find out," and this reason was actually the most frequently chosen by ninth graders and sometimes by tenth graders. It was also selected somewhat more often by girls than by boys. The frequency with which this reason was cited suggests that parental pressure or punishment is influential in inhibiting skipping. School administrators also felt that parents were influential in curtailing skipping and would do more if they were better informed. Hence we explored the influence of parental supervision on students' skipping in analyses similar to and interactive with our analyses of rule enforcement.

First, it should be understood that we are not casting parents of high school students in the role of school police officers. According to our questionnaire results, from 84 percent (Buchanan) to 90 percent (Fairweather) of the students at each school agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I get along well with my parents."

Our measure of parental supervision came from two questionnaire items that asked students whether their parents kept track of how they were doing in school and how much of the time their parents knew where they were. Distribution of student responses on these items is shown in Table V-1.

The large majority of students at each school reported that their parents or guardians knew where they were most of the time or nearly always. The percentage of students reporting that their parents knew where they were only some of the time or hardly ever ranged from 12 percent (Englewood) to 21 percent (Buchanan). Similarly, the large majority agreed or strongly agreed that their parents kept track of what and how they were doing in high school. Only 11 percent (Englewood) to 17 percent (Adams and Buchanan) disagreed with this item. This presents a picture of strong parental supervision in perhaps 80 to 90 percent of the sample.

These two measures of parental supervision were only moderately correlated--r=.29 in the sample as a whole. They seemed to relate similarly to other variables, however (with the stronger correlate usually being the item on parents keeping track of how the student was doing in school). To simplify analyses, we combined them into an index called PARSUP. School means on PARSUP are shown in Table V-1.

Before looking at PARSUP's relationship to SKIP, let us examine its relationship to the measures of parents' level of education and expectations for their children's education discussed in Section II (see Table II-1). Were students with less educated parents more likely to report weak parental

Table V-1
Students' Reports of Parental Supervision
(Percentage of students at six schools selecting questionnaire responses)

| Item | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| 29. My parents or guardians know where I am and what I am doing | nearly always | 34 | 34 | 35 | 38 | 41 | 30 |
| | most of the time | 46 | 46 | 46 | 47 | 46 | 52 |
| | only some of the time | 16 | 15 | 15 | 12 | 10 | 14 |
| | hardly ever | 4 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| 7. My parents or guardians keep track of what and how I am doing in school | strongly agree | 39 | 36 | 46 | 37 | 42 | 42 |
| | agree | 45 | 46 | 41 | 48 | 47 | 46 |
| | disagree | 13 | 13 | 9 | 12 | 9 | 9 |
| | strongly disagree | 4 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| PARSUP index (7 & 29) mean: | all students | 9.6 | 9.0 | 10.2 | 10.0 | 11.1 | 9.8 |
| | boys | 8.6 | 7.9 | 9.0 | 8.8 | 10.0 | 9.0 |
| | girls | 10.6 | 10.1 | 11.4 | 11.4 | 12.0 | 10.6 |
| | grade: 9 | 9.4 | 10.5 | 11.6 | 10.8 | 11.4 | 11.1 |
| | 10 | 10.6 | 10.6 | 10.0 | 10.9 | 11.8 | 10.1 |
| | 11 | 9.9 | 8.1 | 9.5 | 9.7 | 10.5 | 10.1 |
| | 12 | 8.4 | 5.7 | 9.2 | 8.4 | 10.5 | 6.7 |
| | college prep | 10.7 | 10.7 | 11.3 | 12.1 | 12.0 | 10.7 |
| | other | 9.3 | 8.3 | 9.7 | 9.2 | 10.5 | 8.9 |
| Number of Students* | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* Actual N for each item depends on number of missing responses

supervision? The correlations in Table V-2 show that PARSUP was positively but weakly related to parents' level of education at five out of six schools (at Buchanan there was no relationship). Evidently students with college-educated parents were almost as likely to report weak parental supervision as students with parents who had not gone beyond high school. This stood in contrast to many teachers' expressed stereotypes of parents who are less educated and therefore less interested.

One might assume that parental expectations for their children's education would influence supervision, but in fact this item correlated hardly any better with PARSUP than parents' level of education. The highest correlation, at Fairweather, was only .22. As a corollary of this independence between parental expectations and parental supervision, EDAMBIT (students' own educational ambition) was only weakly correlated to PARSUP. Only at Dearborn and Englewood was the correlation .20 or more. The mean scores on PARSUP for students taking college prep subjects were higher than other students' scores in each school, however, as is shown in Table V-1.

The relationship of PARSUP to SKIP, as shown in Table V-2, varied from -.24 at Adams and Buchanan (the schools with the lowest correlations between PARSUP and EDAMBIT) to -.31 at Englewood and -.37 at Dearborn (the schools with the highest correlations between PARSUP and EDAMBIT). Thus at each school PARSUP accounted for at least five percent of the variance in SKIP, and at the latter two schools, for approximately ten percent. Hence there may be some leverage on skipping available in increased parental supervision. This is important given findings reported in Duckworth and deJung (1986) that in 1984 only half or fewer of the teachers in most of these schools reported that parents helped them to reduce absences in their classes. Possibly parents are an underutilized resource for schools trying to reduce absenteeism. This would somewhat justify the investment several

Table V-2
Correlations of Parental Supervision with Skipping and Other Variables
(All correlations are statistically significant at p=.05 unless marked "~")

| Items Correlated with PARSUP | | District 1 Schools | | | District 2 Schools | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Adam | Buch | Cool | Dear | Engl | Fair |
| Parents' Education | | .07 | .00~ | .17 | .13 | .12 | .13 |
| Parents' Expectations | | .09 | .16 | .17 | .11 | .15 | .22 |
| EDAMBIT | | .11 | .11 | .18 | .27 | .22 | .16 |
| RULENF | | .06~ | .08 | .06~ | .11 | .05~ | .09 |
| INDIF | | -.15 | -.21 | -.28 | -.33 | -.29 | -.27 |
| REJECT | | -.03~ | -.14 | -.19 | -.26 | -.25 | -.17 |
| PEERSKIP | | -.11 | -.14 | -.22 | -.25 | -.13 | -.12 |
| SKIP: | All students | -.24 | -.24 | -.27 | -.37 | -.31 | -.23 |
| | High PEERSKIP | -.29 | -.35 | -.24 | -.37 | -.35 | -.27 |
| | Low PEERSKIP | -.05~ | -.09 | -.23 | -.19 | -.20 | -.16 |
| Number of Students* | | 713 | 808 | 925 | 1051 | 1055 | 1247 |

* Actual N for each item depends on number of missing responses
Number of students in High PEERSKIP and Low PEERSKIP groups
shown in Appendix C, Table 6.

schools were making in personnel and telephone equipment to notify parents promptly about unexcused absences.

PARSUP was also consistently negatively related to INDIF and REJECT, although those relationships were generally weaker than the relationship of PARSUP to SKIP. The correlation with INDIF varied from -.15 at Adams to -.33 at Dearborn, with REJECT from -.03 at Adams to -.26 at Dearborn. The weakest correlations were thus at Adams, the school where the teachers we interviewed expressed despair about the low support given to school by parents. In general, however, the stronger the parental supervision, the more students are bothered by skipping and the less they reject school rule enforcement. Despite the school efforts to involve parents in reducing student absenteeism described in Duckworth and deJung (1986), however, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between RULENF and PARSUP at only three of the six schools, and these correlations were very weak, only at Dearborn rising above .1. Whatever students regarded as strict enforcement did not seem to include school actions to strengthen parental supervision.

As with RULENF, we probed for interactive effects with other student characteristics. First, we investigated whether parental supervision's influence on skipping depended on gender and grade level. Results of these analyses are presented in Appendix C, Table 8. There were no consistent differences.

We also probed for interactions between PARSUP and peer support for skipping, student indifference, and student rejection. Perhaps parental supervision would be effective only for students already oriented to academic concerns, for students who skipped by themselves, and for students low on INDIF and REJECT. To answer this question, we compared correlations of PARSUP and SKIP across each of these contrasting groups. The results, shown in Appendix C, Table 8, were inconclusive, except for one that was the

opposite of what we expected. The correlations of PARSUP to SKIP were more strongly negative among students who reported high peer pressure compared to students who reported low peer pressure. This suggests that parental supervision is more important and more potentially effective for students who are induced to skip by their friends than for students whose skipping is a private business.

In addition to looking at variables that influenced the effects of parental supervision on skipping, we also looked at how the level of parental supervision affected the influence of RULENF on SKIP. Perhaps school rule enforcement would be effective only for students who reported strong parental supervision. Hence we looked at students who either (a) disagreed that parents kept track of what and how they were doing in school or (b) reported that parents knew where they were only some of the time. Appendix C, Table 6, reports the correlations of RULENF with SKIP for this subsample. There was no clear pattern. In some schools, notably Adams, the correlation was stronger for the low PARSUP group; in other schools, the correlations were weaker. Given the relatively small size of the low PARSUP sample--ranging from 184 to 278 students in a school--none of these correlations was statistically significant.

To summarize our findings on parental supervision, this variable did seem to have a more appreciable inhibiting effect on student skipping than did rule enforcement. Moreover, the interactive effects noticed suggest that for students experiencing high peer pressure to skip, enlisting parental cooperation in supervising student attendance may be especially important.

## VI. Conclusions

This report has explored variation in students' reports of the frequency with which they skip school and cut classes in six urban high

schools in the Northwest. Our explorations have been guided by the advice of school administrators charged with managing student absenteeism and by a theoretical model of intluences on levels of participation in work organizations. It is time now to sum up what we have learned.

First, we found that between 24 and 58 percent of the students in any school reported that they had skipped one or more days in a 3 to 5 week period in spring 1984. Relatively few students reported skipping more than three days (about a day a week) during that period, however. We also found that from 35 to 49 percent of the students at each school reported cutting classes sometimes, and roughly three times as many students admitted cutting weekly than to skipping weekly. Moreover, students indicated that their friends cut substantially more frequently than they themselves did. Thus skipping and cutting are serious problems among portions of the student enrollments of these schools.

Using an index called SKIP, which was a combination of self-reported skipping and cutting, we explored the frequency of skipping among boys and girls and among students at different grade levels at each school. We found that boys skipped more frequently than girls in all schools. We also found that eleventh and twelfth graders generally skipped more frequently than ninth and tenth graders, although there was seldom a monotonic increase in SKIP with grade.

Student questionnaire responses indicated that their biggest reasons for skipping whole days were positive alternatives to attendance--work at home or just "something better to do." The biggest reason for selective cutting of classes, however, was the aversiveness of a particular class--in particular, how boring it was. There seemed to be a slight tendency for students who had a job to skip more often than students who didn't, but we cannot say whether this was in order to work during the school day or to

catch up on sleep after working at night. We also found a stronger tendency for students to skip if they scored high on an index of peer pressure to skip (which included the reported frequency of friends' class cutting mentioned above.) We infer that "something better to do" than going to school often involved friends and that, while at school, students often found their friends' company preferable to going to particular classes.

Turning from inducements to inhibitors of skipping, we explored various measures of students' valuation of school rewards. Although many students reported that "missing too much work" was their biggest reason not to cut class, there was no relationship between choosing this reason and reported frequency of skipping. An index of educational ambition comprising postsecondary plans and grade aspirations, however, was negatively related to the index of skipping. Moreover, while educational ambition was related to and possibly influenced by (student-reported) parental educational level and expectations for their children's education, these parental factors had a weaker relationship to skipping than the student's own educational ambition. The inhibition of skipping by students' valuation of school rewards was also indicated by investigations using a measure of students' academic program orientation. Students who said their main courses were college prep subjects skipped less often than other students.

We were especially interested in the inhibition of skipping by school-imposed penalties for skipping. This inhibition would be consistent with the theoretical prediction that participation varies with efficacy, or the predictability of rewards in response to effort. However, although student agreement that school rules were strictly enforced varied widely in each school, there was virtually no relationship between an index of perceptions of rule enforcement and skipping among boys or girls, or at any grade level, in any of the six schools. Perceptions of rule enforcement had

a weak negative effect on students' indifference about skipping, but no appreciable effect on student rejection of penalties for skipping. Students who were indifferent or who rejected school penalties were more likely to skip more often, but the relationship of perceived rule enforcement to skipping was generally similar for such students and for other students.

The percentages of students (especially ninth-graders and girls) reporting that parents finding out was the biggest reason not to cut motivated us to explore the relationship of parental supervision to skipping. Parental supervision proved to have a stronger negative relationship to skipping than school rule enforcement. While our measures of parental supervision focused on monitoring rather than discipline, it is plausible that this finding means that parent-imposed penalties are more salient to students than school-imposed penalties. Also provocative was the finding that parental supervision had a stronger relationship to skipping among students who scored high on peer pressure to skip than among students who scored low. Perhaps parents can counterbalance peer pressure in ways that schools can't.

Finally, it must be admitted that none of the relationships reported above were strong. We have not succeeded in accounting for much of the variation in student skipping at any school. To some extent, this may be attributed to weaknesses in measures and a large error term in analyses. The large percentage of students at each school who weren't bothered by skipping, however, and the similarity in findings from school to school, suggest that one reason for the weak findings is that skipping has become so acceptable to many students that differences in college orientation, expectation of penalties, and parental watchfulness play minor parts in students' day-to-day decisions about attendance. All sorts of individual factors and idiosyncratic events may contribute to the choice to skip. If this is so, it

will take a major change in the culture of schools before specific factors exert much of an inhibition on skipping.

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Appendices referred to in this report can be obtained for $2.50 from the Center for Educational Policy and Management, College of Education, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403.