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ABSTRACT

School psychologists as consultants can provide valuable services to the school organization by developing interventions for truancy. Traditionally, truancy has been viewed as a discipline referral rather than a psychological referral, with the consequences predominantly punitive in nature and ineffectual. A variety of approaches to improving academic climate have been found to be successful. One program employs an assessment profile which can be completed by everyone involved in the school's operation, from students to secretaries. Another program focuses on student discipline and academic climate. Risk factors associated with truancy include self-esteem and social skills. These programs are easily directed toward children who evidence high risk characteristics of truancy, but may also be implemented as primary preventions. The majority of in-depth interventions directed toward truants have been behavioral. Contingency reinforcement procedures have been successfully employed with large populations. Interventions directed toward parents have also been found to be successful. The school and justice system working in a collaborative manner can effect changes in attendance as well. Alternative schools have been created to support chronic truants judged to be at risk for dropping out of school and have been found effective in reducing absenteeism. Truancy prevention efforts are the collaborative responsibility of educators, law enforcers, parents, and community members. Therefore, a multilevel approach which augments school-based efforts will yield the greatest effects in preventing and reducing truant behavior. (LLL)

The School Psychologist as a Consultant in Truancy Prevention

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Abstract

School psychologists as consultants can provide valuable services to the school organization by developing interventions for truancy. Traditionally, truancy has been viewed as a "discipline referral" rather than a "psychological referral," with the consequences predominantly punitive in nature and ineffectual. We suggest that the school psychologist is an untapped resource in preventing truancy. Based on a thorough review of the literature, we addressed the numerous considerations relevant to successful implementation of truancy prevention programs. Particular attention was given to the confusion which exists regarding the definition of truancy, short- and long-term consequences of truancy, as well as risk factors associated with such behavior. A comprehensive service delivery model which encompassed primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention interventions was presented. Finally, implementation issues specific to the role of the consultant when planning organizational change were discussed.

The School Psychologist as a Consultant in Truancy Prevention

With the advent of compulsory attendance laws in the 1800's, schools were given the responsibility of ensuring that children remain in school. These attendance laws were instituted for many reasons, such as keeping children out of the work place. Today absenteeism has financial implications for the schools, but there are also implications for the students. School attendance is an important and necessary condition in the education and socialization of children (Sommer, 1985a). Absences from school for any reason, therefore, may have serious consequences. Traditionally, chronic unexcused absenteeism has been referred to as truancy. Since the early part of the century, unexcused absences have been of particular concern to administrators and teachers alike. For example, as early as 1927, Abbott and Breckenridge studied absences in the Chicago elementary schools. The authors conducted 1,158 home visits to categorize the explanations given by parents for their children's absences. At that time, truancy, or unexcused absences, accounted for 5% of all absences at the elementary level.

In contrast to the Abbott and Breckenridge (1927) study, a 1981 census report estimated that truancy accounted for more than half of all absences from school (Bureau of the Census, 1983). The census reported that 7.1% of children 12-15 years of age were truants, which translated into nearly one-half million students skipping school in early adolescence. On the other hand, 5% of children of the same age were absent for legitimate reasons (excused absences) and 1.3% were simply not enrolled.

Although the incidence of truancy reported in the literature varies from study to study, the data are consistent in demonstrating that truancy increases in the junior high school years. A 1976 California survey reported that less than 1% of 13-year-olds were absent from school, but the rate increased significantly for 14-year-olds to 13.6% (Survey of Income and Education, 1976). According to a University of Oregon study, up to 33% of high school students miss, on the average of, one class per day (deJung & Duckworth, 1985). Other estimates of truancy rates vary according to region, e.g., 15% in inner-city Baltimore, 7% in a working class suburb, and 1-2% in middle class suburbs (Safer, Heaton & Parker, 1981).

Truancy Issues

Short-term and Long-term Outcomes of Truancy

Excessive absenteeism impacts the entire school or school system. Many school funding formulas are based on average daily attendance (Schultz, 1985). A high rate of truancy, therefore, may result in a reduction of available resources for all students. Savoy (1983) reported that estimates of lost funding as a result of absenteeism ranged from $1 million in Dallas to $10-$20 million in New York City. The effects of non-attendance on the truant child, however, can have serious short-term and long-term consequences. Truancy has been found to be associated with academic failure, delinquency, school drop out, and poor adult outcomes. A student who is frequently absent from school may quickly fall behind his/her classmates and

fail to acquire basic skills necessary for success in school (Schultz, 1987). This situation may become a trap in which the resulting academic difficulties then lead to more absences from school as the child becomes increasingly frustrated and disenchanted with school. The problem is especially serious if the child is handicapped by learning or behavior problems as appropriate special education services can only be provided if the child attends school.

Several studies have found truancy to be associated with delinquent behaviors such as vandalism, daytime burglaries, and drug use (Farrington, 1980; Kandel, Raveis & Kandel, 1984; Robins & Ratcliff, 1980). In general, truants engage in more delinquent behaviors than non-truants. West and Farrington (1973) found that more than half of their sample of 24 elementary school truants were involved in delinquent activities as adolescents, compared with 18% of their non-truant counterparts. According to Farrington (1980), however, truant behavior and delinquent behavior are both outcomes of the same general set of factors and the difference between delinquent truants and nondelinquent truants is a matter of degree.

Students who drop out before graduating from high school often have been "fading out" since the elementary school years (Keegan, 1985). In a 17 year longitudinal study, Farrington (1980) followed 411 London boys beginning in 1961 when they were between 8-10 years of age. The results showed that truancy during elementary school was a strong predictor of truancy in high school. Of the boys rated as truant by their elementary school teachers, 50% were also rated as truant by their secondary school teachers, compared with 16% of non-truants. Similar results by Robins and Ratcliff (1980) indicated that "frequent" elementary school truants were three times more likely that non-truants to be truant in high school.

Robins and Ratcliff (1980) interviewed 233 Black males between 30-36 years of age in St. Louis, and reviewed their school and public records. The authors found that compared with 1% of non-truants, 10% of elementary school truants were expelled or sent to a residential setting in high school. Furthermore, of the children who were truant both in elementary and high school, 75% did not graduate from high school (vs. 1% for non-truants). Clearly this research identifies truancy as a significant risk-factor for school drop out. In a review of the literature, Bempechat and Ginsburg (1989) found that, as a group, drop outs have significantly higher rates of absenteeism and truancy than non-drop outs. The review indicated that truancy was one factor that discriminated between students who eventually did and did not finish high school.

Problems associated with truant behavior do not end with the possibility of school drop out. Research has consistently demonstrated that long-term consequences of truancy include poor adult outcomes (Farrington, 1980; Kandel, Raveis & Kandel, 1984; Robins & Ratcliff, 1980). Farrington's (1980) longitudinal study reported that, in general, truants held lower status jobs as adults, had more unstable job histories, and had higher levels of anti-social behaviors and more criminal convictions than non-

truants. According to Robins and Ratcliff (1980), as adults former truants tended to earn less money, exhibited more deviant behavior, and experienced more psychological problems.

Risk-factors associated with truancy

Clearly the problems associated with truancy go beyond noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws. A full understanding of the problem must include an examination of some possible predictors of truancy. An analysis of these risk-factors may lead to possible targets for truancy prevention. A variety of child, family, school, and community factors appear to contribute to, or, at a minimum, are related to truancy. A comprehensive list of factors can be found in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Although it is difficult to separate out child factors such as discipline and academic problems from the school or family factors, some personality characteristics are associated with truancy. The characteristics more consistently reported in the literature include insecurity or poor self-esteem (Reynolds, Jones, Leger & Murgatroyd, 1980) and poor interpersonal skills (Levine, 1984; Ollendick, 1979; Reynolds et al., 1980). Though not rated as unpopular by peers (Farrington, 1980), truants do report themselves as being lonely and lacking in friends (Reynolds et al., 1980). These two child factors, self-esteem and social skills, would be likely targets for truancy prevention.

The child's home environment can also impact his/her attendance in school. Sommer (1985b) examined the degree to which certain antecedents and correlates of truancy differentiated a group of truants from non-truants. The subjects were 25 truants in the eighth grade matched for gender, grade, ethnicity, and neighborhood of residence with 25 regular attenders. The results indicated that truants were more likely to come from single parent homes and have more siblings than non-truants. Longitudinal studies conducted in Great Britain (Farrington, 1980; Fogelman, Tibbenham & Lanbert, 1980) suggest that family factors associated with truancy are poor parenting skills, marital discord, poor attitudes toward education, large family size, parental unemployment, and low socio-economic status. Coping skills training aimed at these factors is often used to help the child better deal with his/her life circumstances.

In addition to child and family characteristics, school factors play a major role in non-attendance. An understanding of school factors is particularly important as these variables are likely targets for intervention. Two studies by Zieman and Benson (1980 & 1981) examined the attitudes of truant adolescents as compared to a control group of non-truants. The results were not surprising. The truant children reported that they disliked junior high school teachers, authority and discipline, that the teachers they

disliked were those who nagged or hassled them (boys reported this more than girls), and that they received grades of Cs and Ds in their classes. Low academic achievement and disinterest in school are consistent correlates of truancy (Farrington, 1980; Fogelman, Tibbenham & Lanbert, 1980; Sommer, 1985b). In her study comparing truants and non-truants, Sommer found that as a group truants showed lower achievement scores (although there were truants with high achievement) and had more negative attitudes toward school. While inadequate curriculum and ineffective teaching are often mentioned as school factors contributing to truancy, Fogelman's et al. (1980) study suggested that "specific school variables showed little association with truancy and that the general ethos and atmosphere of a school was the more critical aspect in keeping children there" (p. 157, Sommer, 1985a). Academic climate, therefore, has a significant impact on students' attitudes and attendance in school.

Definitions of truancy

Interestingly, it was noted in Sommer's (1985b) study that a few truants were found in the control group. These truants were boys who admitted to unexcused absences from school but did not appear on the vice-principal's list of unexcused absences. This finding raises the issue of accurately monitoring non-attendance and defining truancy. A major methodological limitation of the research literature is the lack of a consistent operational definition. In a review of the literature, Sommer (1985a) found that few studies provided an adequate definition of truancy. Three out of 10 studies included both excused and unexcused absences in their definition; two used "teacher ratings" of truancy; two used a legal definition of truancy; and only three of the 10 studies based their definitions solely on unexcused absences. Oftentimes, a definition of what constitutes truancy is simply not provided.

Children are absent from school for many reasons, which complicates the task of defining truancy. Absences, for the most part, may be classified into three major categories: excused absences, unexcused absences, and non-enrollment (Sommer, 1985a). Excused absences are those for which the child has a legitimate reason for missing school (such as illness), and/or for which a parent has given consent. There are also two types of unexcused absences, i.e., with parental knowledge (not to be confused with consent) and without parental knowledge. According to Berg (1985), it is difficult to examine the extent to which parental acquiescence with unexcused absences plays a part, but it is a variable which must be considered when designing interventions. Non-enrollment, on the other hand, includes children never enrolled in school as well as expelled students and drop outs.

The specific number of unexcused absences required for a child to be considered truant varies greatly. Of the three studies reviewed by Sommer (1985a) that used unexcused absences from school in defining truancy, the number of unexcused absences required ranged from one to ten within the academic year.

Truancy Prevention

Finally, tardiness and class cuts (unexcused absences from a certain class or classes) are also elements of truancy which have been all but ignored in the literature. Much of the research does not take into account these different types of non-attendance and define truancy rather arbitrarily.

It is important at this point to differentiate between truancy and school phobia as they differ greatly on a variety of dimensions. According to Hersov (1960), while truants are absent without parental consent, school phobics' nonattendance is frequently maintained by their parents' behavior. School phobics are characterized by separation anxiety and truants are not. School phobics typically remain at home when not attending school, whereas truants wander alone or with others instead of attending school, and sometimes engage in delinquent behavior (Hersov, 1960).

The most consistently agreed upon definition in the literature defines truancy as excessive unexcused absences with or without parental knowledge. Excessive unexcused absenteeism is a complex problem which falls on a continuum of severity and which requires careful monitoring. Accurate monitoring of truant behavior is vital in order to identify potential truants as well as chronic truants along this continuum. Sommer (1985a) developed a flow chart, which included excused absences, unexcused absences, tardiness, class cuts, and non-enrollment, to accurately account for truant behavior. This chart is used to estimate the magnitude of loss due to various types of absences within a school. Figure 1 is an adaptation of this chart to be used at the individual student level. A flow chart such as this can be used to identify potential truants and chronic truants as part of a needs assessment, to obtain baseline data on identified students, and to monitor program effectiveness.

Insert Figure 1 about here

A Comprehensive Model

The current school system typically treats truancy as a discipline referral to the assistant principal or principal. Consequences for excessive unexcused absences are primarily punitive in nature and often include detention (time-out), "in-house" suspension, or "out of house" suspension. Research, however, has demonstrated that in order for time-out procedures to be effective, the environment from which the child is removed must be reinforcing (Nelson & Rutherford, 1983). Truants have indicated by their own absences that they do not find school reinforcing. In fact, being absent from school is one of the first signs that a student is disengaging from school (Fenimore, 1988). Furthermore, Zieman and Benson (1980, 1981) reported that avoiding punishment was not important to truant boys and girls. It is evident that this current system

is inadequate and that school psychologists as consultants can provide valuable services to the school organization in developing interventions for truancy.

The following comprehensive service delivery model consists of primary, secondary, and tertiary programs. Primary prevention programs are intended for all students. The main goal of primary prevention interventions is a reduction in the incidence or new cases of a disorder (Caplan, 1964), in this case, truant behavior. Secondary programs are directed toward students with characteristics highly predictive of truant behavior. Tertiary interventions are intended for the chronic truant. Thus, tertiary interventions will be intensive, treatment-oriented approaches aimed to prevent any further decline in attendance. Table 2 lists the three prevention levels along with successful programs found in the research literature.

Insert Table 2 about here

Primary Prevention Interventions

According to Fenimore (1988), by encouraging student participation in school, disengagement from school can be prevented. In a cohesive school environment, each student should feel as though they are an integral part of the organization. The child who is actively engaged in school will sense that they are missed when absent. School climate affects the extent to which pupils feel engaged in their school. Schools with a positive climate are characterized by mutual respect among students and faculty, open communication, student perceptions of teachers as caring and concerned, enthusiasm for learning, and democratic decision making (Wilson, 1988).

A variety of approaches to improving academic climate have been found successful (see Table 2). Two comprehensive programs found to be useful in improving academic climate were described in a review by Wilson (1988). The first program employed an assessment profile which can be completed by everyone involved in the school's operation, from students to secretaries. Four categories are assessed: General Climate Factors, Program Determinants, Process Determinants, and Material Determinants.

The second comprehensive program focused on student discipline and academic climate (Phi Delta Kappa, 1982). Other programs address the transition from elementary to middle school (Elias & Clabby, 1988) and from middle to senior high school (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982). For the consultant who is not interested in a complete program, there are many academic climate assessment tools available. One such instrument is the Brookover Scale of Academic Climate (1977). This questionnaire assesses various aspects of the school environment, including children's sense of academic futility, academic norms, and perceived evaluations and expectations from teachers and parents.

Truancy Prevention

Secondary Prevention Interventions

As mentioned previously, risk factors associated with truancy include self-esteem and social skills. Botvin's Life Skills Training Program (Botvin, 1983) and Rotheram's assertiveness training intervention (Rotheram, Armstrong, & Boorsem, 1982) were among fourteen prevention programs selected by the American Psychological Association's Task Force on Promotion, Prevention and Intervention Alternatives in Psychology as exemplary prevention programs (Bales, 1987). These programs are easily directed toward children who evidence high risk characteristics of truancy, but may also be implemented as primary preventions.

Botvin's Life Skills Training (LST) is a three module program designed to prevent substance abuse. Although the program's effect on truancy prevention has yet been researched, the authors claim the personal and social skills taught have the potential to prevent the development of problems such as truancy (Botvin & Dusenbury, 1987). Topics addressed in the program include strategies to resist peer pressure, self-management, decision-making, and coping with anxiety. Research evidence on the program has shown improvements in social anxiety, personal control, self-confidence, assertiveness, and self-management (Botvin & Dusenbury, 1987). In the school setting, these changes could translate into an increased number of children's friendships, increased involvement in school, and a decrease in inappropriate, maladaptive behavior.

Social skills training is the focus of a program based on a directive teaching model by Stephens (1979). The program is designed for children in kindergarten through eighth grade. Using a diagnostic-prescriptive model, the program consists of four steps: define, assess, teach, and evaluate. Assertiveness training for fourth- and fifth-grade children is also available (Rotheram et al., 1982). Assertiveness training has been found to increase problem-solving abilities and academic achievement in this age-group of children.

Academic failure has been determined a risk factor for truant behavior. Guidelines for developing a study-skills program have been detailed for children experiencing such failure (Wise, Genshaft, & Byrley, 1987). Self-management strategies to reduce anxiety are incorporated into such a program.

As a whole, these programs are designed to address a variety of risk factors. By increasing children's skills in several different areas, children can potentially experience a greater degree of success at school. Thus, students stay engaged in school.

Tertiary Interventions

The majority of in-depth interventions directed toward truants have been behavioral. Contingency reinforcement procedures have been successfully employed with large populations (Barber & Kagey, 1977; Morgan, 1975; Waltzer, 1984). Morgan (1975) compared three procedures: material and peer social

reinforcement, material reinforcement alone, and teacher reinforcement for attendance. In the peer social reinforcement condition, children with excessive absences were paired with two regular attenders. A variable ratio schedule of reinforcement was employed to resist extinction. Compared to a control group, children in all three treatment groups improved their attendance, however, those in the two material reinforcement groups were significantly more resistant to extinction during reversal. In another study, daily attendance charts and access to monthly parties and "fun rooms" were contingent on attendance (Barber and Kagey, 1977). Schoolwide attendance significantly increased as a result of this intervention.

Contingent reinforcement programs with single subject and small n designs have also been shown to increase attendance in regular and special education children. Attendance has been found to decrease when treatment terminates, however, unless a fading program is instituted (Bizzis & Bradley-Johnson, 1981; Books, 1974; Copeland, Brown, & Hall, 1974; Hess, Rosenberg, & Levy, 1990; MacDonald, Gallimore, & MacDonald, 1970; Zweig, Chlebnikow, Epstein, & Cullinan, 1979).

Interventions directed toward parents have also been found successful. Parker and McCoy (1977) investigated the effects of three principal-mediated procedures to reduce truancy in eight elementary school children. Subjects were divided into classroom visit, positive phone call, or negative phone call home. Children in the two home-call groups showed the greatest increase in school attendance. Similarly, Sheats and Dunkleberger (1979) found phone calls to parents from both the principal and secretary were equally effective in significantly reducing the number of days children missed school.

The school and justice system working in a collaborative manner can effect changes in attendance as well. A truancy diversion program was initiated by the Juvenile Court of Lake County, Indiana (Stewart & Ray, 1984). The major goal of this program was to keep children in school and out of court. Schools notified the court when children were truant; the parents of these children were then informed that a hearing would be scheduled. At the hearing, parents were provided with a referral booklet with information regarding a wide variety of community mental health services available to them. Cases were handled either informally (information only approach) or formally, in which case the child was placed on unofficial probation. The probation officer became a sort of case manager, monitoring progress in the home, school, and in any type of referral. The program was found to significantly reduce repeat referrals for truant behavior (Stewart & Ray, 1984). In addition, significantly more truants came from single-parent homes. Through referrals and case management, parents were able to learn about resources and receive support services.

Truancy Prevention

Alternative schools have been created to support chronic truants judged to be at risk for dropping out of school and have been found effective in reducing absenteeism (Butchart, 1986). Most commonly, alternative schools are physically removed from the regular school, however, the school-within-a-school model has been utilized by establishing self-contained classrooms. Alternative education is an effort to engage those students who have become disengaged by attempting to establish a positive social bond between teachers and students. The literature does not currently provide evidence that one specific type of program is superior.

Characteristics of successful programs can be identified, however, as indicated below. For example, Butchart (1986) states that the quality of relationships in alternative schools has been found to be more important than curricular change in determining success of such schools. A dedicated staff, small program size, individualized instruction, and experiential learning are important components of the alternative education model (Wehlage & Rutter, 1987). Wehlage and Rutter (1987) recommend the program be voluntary and that students be required to apply for admission. Students who are not committed to changing their behavior are then screened from the program. Additionally, those who do not comply with program rules are also dropped from the program and returned to the traditional school.

Multilevel Intervention

Truancy prevention efforts are the collaborative responsibility of educators, law enforcers, parents, and community members (National School Safety Center, 1985). Therefore, a multilevel approach which augments school-based efforts will yield the greatest effects in preventing and reducing truant behavior.

Parents. Unexcused absences with parental knowledge constitutes acquiescence. Parents, however, may not fully comprehend the consequences their behavior can have on children's education. Since attendance behavior is learned, parents need to know the role they play in truancy prevention. Parents should have a clear understanding of student codes of conduct, the definition of truancy, state compulsory education laws, the school policy regarding truancy, and the legal consequences of truant behavior (National School Safety Center, 1985). Parents should also be informed as to the long-term impact absenteeism can have on the child. General school meetings and newsletters effectively reinforce this message.

Community based efforts. The National School Safety Center (1985) suggests the establishment of a community truancy prevention committee, the goals and activities of which should be mutually determined by representatives from the school, law enforcement, parents, and the community. Examples of activities may include the clarification of school policy issues, communicating to parents and students about school and judicial consequences of being a truant, and having law enforcement personnel speak to classes regarding the legal response to truancy.

Another viable community approach is the provision of positive role models. Adults who struggled with attendance problems or who dropped out of school can address students on the economic and social effects they have experienced as a result of their behavior.

Methodological Issues

Unfortunately, research on the effects of primary and secondary prevention programs in reducing truancy is rare. Those that have been investigated are under-researched with regard to their generalizability to a variety of populations, academic climates, geographical locations, and ages (Elias & Branden, 1988). Many programs stop collecting data prematurely and may miss significant effects (Bales, 1987). Behavioral approaches appear to dominate the literature on interventions with children chronically truant. Within the behavioral approach, little work has been done comparing the effectiveness of one technique over another and with different populations.

Implementation Issues

Needs Assessment

Action research is the methodological model for organizational development (Burke, 1982). Following this model, a needs assessment includes a diagnosis of the organization's current state of affairs, a prognosis of the system given no changes are implemented, and a determination of the preferred state of the organization. Part of a truancy needs assessment should be documentation of the prevalence of absenteeism as well as school staff time and activities directed toward absenteeism. As described earlier, Figure 1 is a flow chart adapted from Sommer (1985a) which was designed specifically for the purpose of monitoring or documenting the cost to the school and child as a result of truancy. Documentation and description of students dropping out and the reasons for dropping out provide a rationale for truancy prevention. The data are then summarized and fed back to the organization's members so that the intervention planning process can be undertaken.

Schmuck and Runkel (1988) describe conditions of readiness for organizational change which the school psychologist should assess prior to initiating new programs. These conditions include dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs, availability of resources, low staff turnover, collaborative ability, and a commitment to change. According to Forman and Linney (1988) schools are unique organizations with distinct features. Therefore, attending to the following administrative, parent, school staff, and student issues when planning implementation of primary and secondary prevention programs will help reduce opposition and resistance to organizational change.

Truancy Prevention

Administrators

Administrative support, especially from principals, is necessary for successful implementation of a new program. In general, Forman & Linney (1988) suggest that when seeking program approval and commitment from key personnel the school psychologist should be prepared to respond to the following topics:

1. The need for truancy prevention should be effectively communicated. The results of the needs assessment should be presented in a manner which clearly communicates the necessity of a prevention program. Knowledge of the short- and long-term consequences of truancy in terms of costs to the district and to the truant child will assist in establishing the relevance of such programs.

2. The consultant must be prepared to provide a description of program rationale and evidence of program effectiveness in preventing truancy.

3. The costs of the program in terms of money, materials, space, staff training, staff time, and student time must be anticipated.

4. The types of students who will benefit from such a program and how the school itself will benefit should be emphasized.

5. Strategies to deal with anticipated opposition from staff must be discussed with administrators.

School Staff Issues

Staff concerns typically relate to an increased work load and skepticism regarding new programs (Forman & Linney, 1988; Ponti, Zins, & Graden, 1988). Maher and Illback (1985) have proposed a program of activities denoted by the acronym DURABLE (Discussing, Understanding, Reinforcing, Learning, Building, Evaluation) to facilitate program implementation. Initial activities include small group discussions with staff, parents, and administrators during which verbal and written information is disseminated regarding program goals, methods, timelines, and supervision procedures. Participants are encouraged to voice concerns during these discussions. Later activities pertain to staff recognition and reinforcement for program follow-through (see Maher & Illback, 1985).

Parent Issues

The provision of program rationale, goals, and effectiveness to parents is one strategy for dealing with parental opposition (Forman & Linney, 1988). Group discussions such as those advocated in the DURABLE format allow for the communication of concerns and problem resolution. Parents may take an active part in the needs assessment phase by collecting data from other parents and collaborating with school staff in presenting their findings (Schmuck & Runkel, 1988).

Student Issues

Low student motivation and high student alienation can be partially explained by the failure to consider students as organizational participants (Schmuck & Runkel, 1988). Students can be involved in aspects of diagnosis, problems solving, and planning. Through active participation, students are able to voice their concerns and generate ideas. For example, students deemed to be at risk for truancy may resist participation for fear of being labeled. Helping students feel empowered rather than oppressed by the imposition of rules can facilitate the ownership and acceptance of programs. Program scheduling can also impact it's success. High risk students who have been referred to secondary prevention programs but for whom participation is voluntary are more likely to attend if the program is conducted during school hours (Forman & Linney, 1988).

In summary, the problems associated with truancy go far beyond noncompliance with compulsory attendance laws. Short-term and long-term consequences such as academic failure, delinquency, school drop out and poor adult outcomes have been shown to be associated with truant behavior. In addition, a variety of child, family, school, and community factors appear to put children at risk for becoming truants. Although truancy traditionally has been viewed as a "discipline referral", the school psychologist can become an active resource in truancy referrals. A comprehensive service delivery model encompassing primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention interventions is uniquely suited to implementation by school psychologists due to its preventative nature.

Common to the primary, secondary, and tertiary approaches to truancy prevention is the attempt to engage the student into the school organization. A variety of programs have been proposed toward this end and may be incorporated into one model. Some programs are designed to enhance the climate of the organization (primary), others attempt to build skills (secondary), while others focus on parental responsibility and community action. Tertiary interventions are behavioral interventions which target the chronic truant. Dealing with implementation issues, such as obtaining administrative support and staff, parent, and student commitment, will assist the school psychologist in opening doors to change.

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FIGURE 1

Flow Chart for Accurate Monitoring of Truant Behavior
Adapted from Sommer (1985a)

STUDENT:_____
Effective Dates:_____to_____

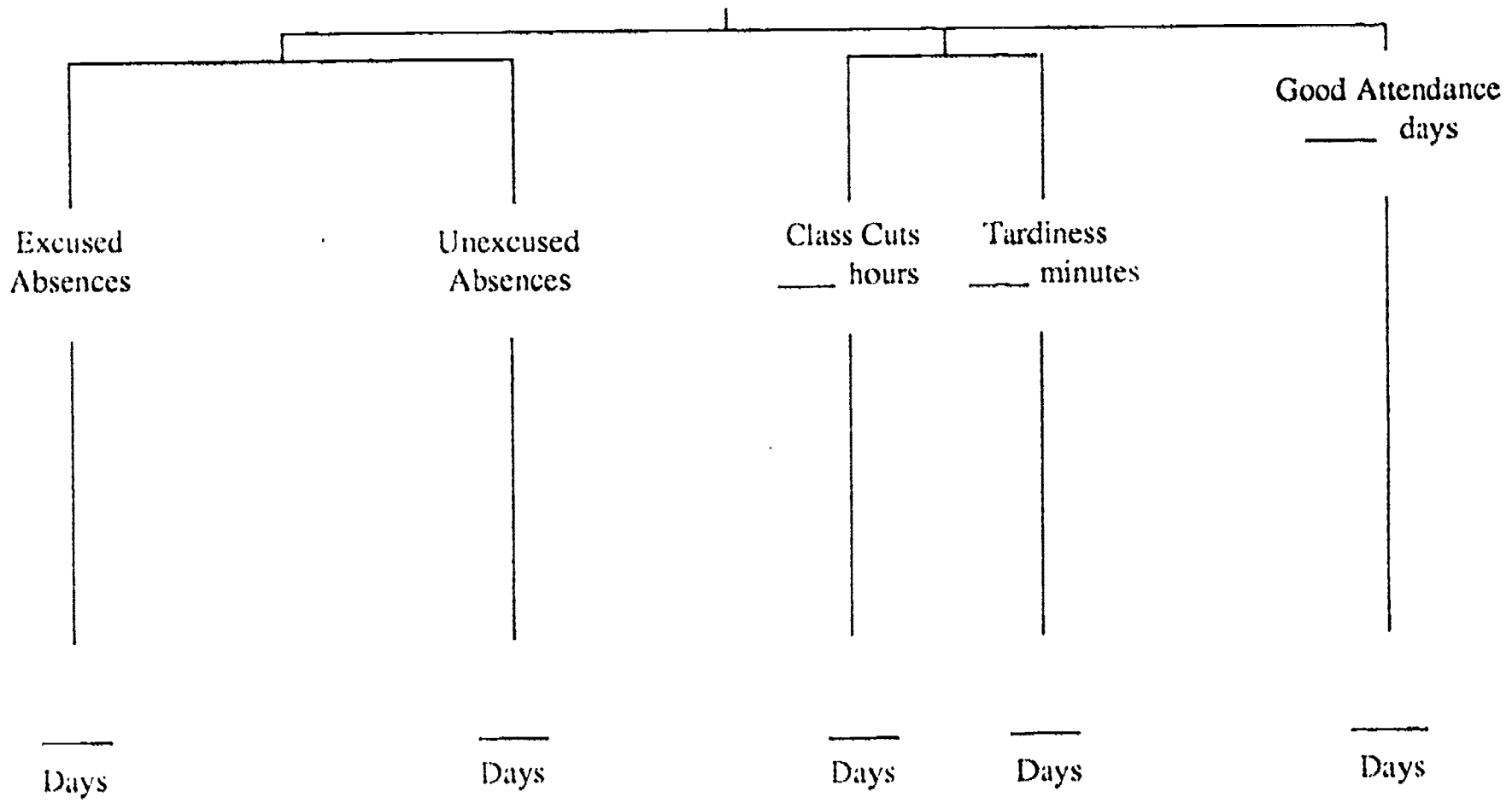

TABLE 1

Risk Factors Associated with Truancy

Child Factors	Home Factors	School Factors	Community
Interpersonal skills	Parental acquiescence	Inadequate monitoring	Peer influences
Poor self-esteem	Family attitudes	Inconsistent enforcement	Gang activity
Academic failure	Socio-economic status	Punitive consequences	
Discipline problems	Family size	Lack of positive consequences	
Attitude toward school	Single parent	Retention & promotion	
	Marital discord	Inadequate teaching	
	Parenting skills	Relevance of curriculum	

TABLE 2

Primary, Secondary, & Tertiary Prevention Interventions for Truancy

Authors	Target	Program Components	Risk-Factor
		PRIMARY	
Elias & Clabby (1988)	School Transition	Organization & study skills School discipline Social problem solving	School: Climate Child: Interpersonal skills
Felner et al. (1982)	School Transition	Organizational complexity	School: Climate
Phi Delta Kappan (1982)	Academic Climate	School discipline	School: Climate
Wilson (1988)	Academic Climate	General climate factors Program determinants Process determinants Material determinants	School: Climate
		SECONDARY	
Botvin (1983)	Life Skills Training	Resisting peer pressure Self-management Decision-making Stress reduction	Child: Interpersonal skills Self-esteem
Rotheram et al. (1982)	Assertiveness Training	Problem-solving Anger control Dealing with criticism	Child: Interpersonal skills
Stephens (1979)	Social Skills Training	Environmental behaviors Interpersonal behaviors Self-related behaviors Task-related behaviors	Child: Interpersonal skills
Wise et al. (1987)	Study Skills Training	Needs assessment Program planning Remediation: skills Evaluation	Child: Academic failure

TABLE 2 (cont.)

Authors	Target	Program Components	Risk-Factor
		TERTIARY	
Barber & Kagey (1977)	School Attendance	Contingent reinforcement: Trip to "Fun room" Daily attendance charts	Child: Behavior Management
Lazerson et al. (1988)	Truancy Reduction	Cross-age tutoring Locus of control	Child: Academic Self-esteem
Morgan (1975)	School Attendance	Contingent reinforcement: Token economy	Child: Behavior Man gement
Parker & Rutter (1977)	Truancy Reduction	Positive phone calls home	Home: Parental knowledge
Stewart & Ray (1984)	Truancy Diversion	School-Court collaboration Mental health resources Case management	Home: Single parent Family attitude
Waltzer (1984)	Truancy Reduction	Behavioral group approach Token economy Group discussion & role play	Child: Behavior Management
Wehlage & Rutter (1987)	Alternative Programs	Program guidelines: Administration Teacher culture Student culture Curriculum	School: Climate