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ABSTRACT

A program was developed and implemented to help increase the attendance of potential grade 10 dropouts from a predominantly black urban area. The objectives for the program were to increase the daily attendance rate for the 10 targeted students by at least 40%, to develop positive career and life goals, and, for 4 of the young men, to develop positive educational goals. The target group was required to complete a biotherapeutic learning packet that required a great deal of self-examination, to participate in regular counseling sessions, and to complete a vocational technology portfolio as part of the implementation. Incentives awarded in a lottery for perfect attendance ranged from free meals to gift certificates. All of the program objectives were met. Of particular note was the attitude change among the four young men who had believed initially that education was not necessary for future success. Eight appendixes include an academic history for each student and the the pre- and postsurveys. (Contains 1 appendix figure, 4 appendix tables, and 16 references.) (Author/SLD)

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INCREASING ATTENDANCE OF INNERCITY YOUTHS

by

Valerie S. Wanza

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A Final Report submitted to the Faculty of the Fischler
Center for the Advancement of Education of Nova
Southeastern University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Science

The abstract of this report may be placed in the
University database system for reference.

June 17, 1996

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Abstract

Development and Implementation of an Attendance Program for Innercity High School Students.

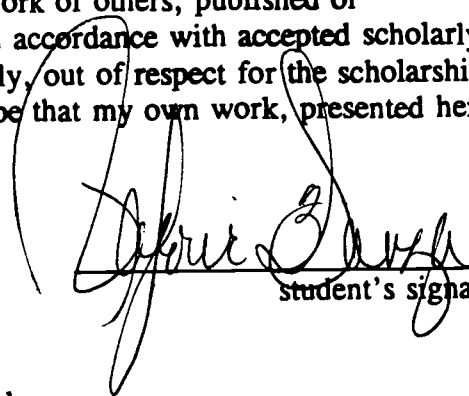
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Descriptors: Attendance/Dropout Prevention/Potential Dropouts/Peer Counseling/Peer Tutoring/Community Mentors/ Sophomores/Academic Failures.

This program was developed and implemented to help increase the attendance of potential Grade 10 dropouts. The objectives for the program were to increase the daily attendance rate by at least 40%; to develop positive career and life goals; and, for four of the young men, to develop positive educational goals. The target group was required to complete a biotherapeutic learning packet, participate in regular counseling sessions, and complete a vocational technology portfolio as part of the implementation. All of the program objectives were met. Appendixes include an academic history for each student and pre- and postsurveys.

Authorship Statement

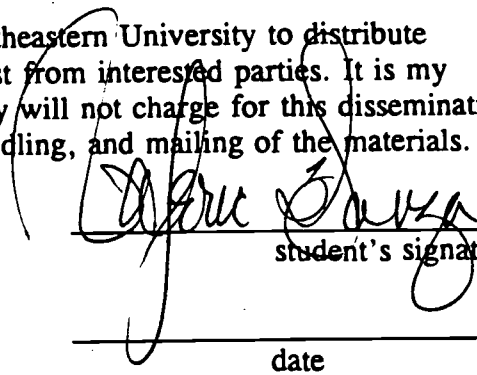
I hereby testify that this paper and the work it reports are entirely my own. When it has been necessary to draw from the work of others, published or unpublished, I have acknowledged such work in accordance with accepted scholarly and editorial practice. I give this testimony freely, out of respect for the scholarship of other professionals in the field and in the hope that my own work, presented here, will earn similar respect.



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Practicum Title Increasing Attendance of Inncercity Youths

Student's Name Valerie Wanza Completion date 6/13/96

Project Site Dillard High School

Mentor's Name Walter Clark W. Clark
print *signature*

Mentor's position at the site Assistant Principal Phone # (954) 797-4800

Comment on impact of the project (handwritten):

The above mentioned practicum was successfully implemented under my supervision. I enjoyed working to help Ms. WANZA in her Educational endeavors. The objectives and out comes were clearly stated and achieved. The school has incorporated some of the activities of the practicum into its school discipline plan.

CHAPTER I

Purpose

Background

The site where this project was conducted is one of the oldest predominately black high schools in Southeast Florida. The school was undergoing an extensive renovation process for its curriculum offerings as well as its buildings and technology support services. This learning institution served approximately 2800 high school students in Grades 9-12; they attended the school from all over the county. The boundaried population was joined by the students who attended the two magnet programs housed at the site. The ethnic background was as follows: 9% white, 86.9% black, 3.5% Hispanic, .5% Asian, and .1% Indian. The curriculum of the school had been tailored to meet the needs of the multicultural school population.

The school provided its students with general education, vocational, business, exceptional, Air Force Junior Reserve Officers Training Corp (AFJROTC), college preparatory, compensatory, athletics, as well as magnet programs for the visual and performing arts and for computer technology. In addition, the site housed an adult and

community school, a teen parent program, a System for Applied Individualized Learning (S.A.I.L.) Program, a community child care program, and a family counseling center that further served the needs of the community. This learning institution also had two major businesses, partners-in-education, who provided varied services to the student body. Their many activities included tutoring at-risk students, conducting a quarterly breakfast for students on the honor roll, supplying speakers for classrooms and special occasions, and supporting various other school projects and activities. The school was located in a predominately black, urban area of the county. Approximately 90% of the total student population was minority, and over 50% of the student population lived in households where incomes were at or below the poverty level.

The school's personnel was as diverse and complex as its physical and student compositions. The administration was comprised of a principal and seven assistant principals. The guidance staff was headed by a director who supervised the work of seven guidance counselors, an Exceptional Student Education Specialist, a Drop-Out Prevention Coordinator, an advisor for the county's continuing education program (BRACE), a school psychologist, a visiting teacher,

an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) social worker, a school nurse, a job coach, a career counselor, a speech and language pathologist, the Model School Adjustment Program (MSAP) Coordinator, and a teen parent social worker. The instructional staff was comprised of over 120 teachers with varying levels of academic and professional competency. The site also included a media center that was run by two exceptional media specialists. The school's noninstructional staff included 22 clerical workers, 7 teacher aides, a school resource officer, 3 security specialists, 6 campus monitors, 3 technicians, 16 custodians, and 12 cafeteria workers.

The researcher was an English teacher at the school, who had been at the site for four years. At that time, the writer taught two classes of compensatory English and four classes of peer counseling. The writer was involved in a number of activities that promoted the school. This professional was a member of the Faculty Council, School Improvement Team, [Attendance and Discipline Committee Chairperson], [Grant Writing Team], as well as Freshmen Class Advisor, Silver Knight Coordinator, and Students Against Driving Drunk, (SADD) Advisor.

Problem Statement

The focus of this project was high school students under the age of 16, who had demonstrated a problem with school attendance. These young people each accumulated 21 or more unexcused absences during the 1994-95 school year. Although the Principal's Annual Report indicated a total number of 389 with this problem, the target group consisted of 10 students within this number who were classified as Grade 10 students for the 1995-96 school year.

After a self-survey was completed by each student, it was determined that each of the 10 students in the group showed a lack of career or life goals. Eight members lived in single parent homes where regular school attendance was not enforced. The two young ladies in the group were teen parents with unreliable child care services. Four of the young men in the group did not believe that formal education was necessary for future success (Appendix A, p 44.).

According to the permanent record cards in the guidance office, eight members of the group scored at or below the 20th percentile in math and/or total language on the 1995 Stanford Achievement Test (Appendix B, p 46.). All 10 members of the group had less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average on a 4.0 scale, which was required for

high school graduation. Three members of the group failed six of seven classes during the 1994-95 school year. Five members failed five of seven classes, while the other two failed three of seven classes during the same year (Appendix C, p 48.). Because of these failures, all of the students in the group were deficient in credits for promotion and ultimately graduation.

Six members of the target group were referred to administration at least seven times during the stated school year for behavioral reasons. Eight members had been issued at least 10 attendance referrals. For these eight, at least seven post cards were sent to parents. Three students in the group were absent unexcused 40 days during the school year. Four members were absent unexcused 36 days, 2 were absent unexcused 30 days, and 1 was absent unexcused 28 days during the same school year (Appendix D, p 50.).

If this poor attendance continued, these students were at risk for high school graduation. The district's average for students under the age of 16 with 21 or more unexcused absences was 24.3% and the school's was 28.0%. This meant there was a discrepancy of 3.7%.

Outcome Objectives

A large number of students at the site where the project was

conducted demonstrated a problem with school attendance. Their reasons were as complex as their backgrounds. This problem put them at risk for high school graduation. The researcher chose the following objectives for the practicum:

Objective 1. By the end of a 12-week period, the 10 Grade 10 students in the target group will increase their daily attendance by at least 40% as measured by the daily attendance reports.

Objective 2. By the end of a 12-week period, the 10 Grade 10 students in the target group will develop positive career and life goals as measured by the Vocational Technology Career Portfolio for High School Students, which each student will individually develop.

Objective 3. By the end of a 12-week period, the four young men in the target group who believe that an education is not necessary for success will develop positive educational goals concerning education as measured by teacher-made surveys.

CHAPTER II

Research and Planned Solution Strategy

Truancy was not a modern dilemma. Since 1872, society had been faced with the problem of children leaving early from school. In 1884, only one-third of the students required to attend public school actually did. In 1933, more than two-thirds of all absences from school were non-illness related. For the past 12 years, pupil lack of interest in school attendance or truancy had been ranked as one of the top 10 problems facing America (Rohrman, 1993).

Communities suffered serious repercussions due to truancy. It had been linked to daytime burglary rates, auto theft, and vandalism. High absentee rates have also reduced state funding for public schools. In California, for example, some schools lost as much as \$9 a day in federal funds for each student absent (Rohrman, 1993).

Significant consequences had also affected the truant student. When compared to regularly attending students, chronically truant students received lower grades and showed less than expected learning gains. It had also been found that adults who were truant as children often coped with illiteracy, social alienation, poverty, and political

powerlessness. Truancy had also been linked to adolescent delinquency. In a study done of prison inmates, 89% had a history of school truancy (Englander, 1986).

An overwhelming number of studies had been devoted to assisting the educational system with truancy. These interesting studies took an indepth look at some of the possible causes of truancy and some effective measures to deal with the problem. The studies were conducted with a wide variety of groups. Although each study was unique, the researchers all seemed to believe that an effective program had to have policies that incorporated the school, the family, and the community. These programs and policies, however, had to be consistent and fair.

Rohrman (1993), a member of the Social Work Department at Taylor University, linked truancy to four causes: (a) an unsupportive school environment, (b) lack of community support, (c) chaotic family life, and (d) personal deficits. His study took a close look at the family, the school, the community, and the student. It seemed that attending school was one of the lowest priorities for the truant student. Some truants felt that they did not fit in or were not accepted by their peer groups. Thus, it was not suprising that these individuals considered

social factors to be the primary reason they did not attend school. These truant students did have some friends who were regular school attendees. The problem was that they had few or no "mainstream" friends. It was found that by forming friendships with regular attendees and teachers, these students found the sense of belonging and security they had been looking for. Those truants that had formed these relationships generally became involved in some sort of after-school activity, which gave them a reason to attend school.

Rohrman (1993) also saw that these students were interested in academics. Students who were otherwise integrated into the school could still become truant for academic reasons. Because truants tended to have lower grades than regular attendees, students who skipped would have improved attendance if there was a chance for their grades to get better. In order for this to occur, the learning environment had to change. It had to include a staff that welcomed and encouraged all students.

In looking at the family, Rohrman (1993) noted that the home life of truants was often characterized by overcrowded living conditions, frequent relocations, and weak parent-child relationships. In some cases, older children were asked to stay home to care for

younger siblings or work to supplement the family income. In other situations, some truants were overwhelmed by the responsibilities associated with being a teen parent. He insisted that the truant student benefited more when there was meaningful contact between the family of the truant and the school.

In Rohrman's (1993) opinion, the community also had a role to play in solving the truancy problem. It seemed that communities sent a conflicting message about where they stood in regard to truancy. He noted that court decisions that involved school attendance had been far from consistent. It was also reported that almost all states allowed some exceptions to compulsory school laws.

Rohrman's (1993) study noted the focus on the truant's personal "deficits." Truants had been labeled as mentally ill, retarded, unable to persevere at tasks, learning disabled, lacking social skills, and even neurotic. Some truant students' self-esteem made them feel less powerful, attractive, and competent than regular attendees. Efforts that said what was wrong with the student did not help unless it led to the development of a useful strategy for reducing truancy.

In his successful responses to truancy, Rohrman (1993) believed that programs that included the school, the family, and the community

presented the best defense against truancy. School programs had to have policies that gave academic incentives for good attendance. Although such policies had only limited success in his study, they were reasons for the students to come to school. Also included in his school-based program were policies that gave administrative consequences for absenteeism. This approach helped the "class cutter," but gave the chronic truant no motivation to attend school. The third component of his school-based program gave academic consequences for nonattendance, such as lowering grades or removing students from the regular school program. The truant was able to keep up with schoolwork but lost the social rewards of regular classes. In addition, they provided consequences for truants without removing the students from school. The final phase of his school-based program included programs that provided supportive services. These services included, but were not limited to, counseling sessions, rap sessions, chemical dependency groups, peer tutors, mentors, and computer calls to parents whose children were not in school on a particular day.

When Rohrman (1993) looked at the family, he found that counseling was the most helpful in reducing truancy. Several forms of therapy were effective. The greatest problems appeared in the

decision of when the truant should return to school. He did insist that counseling should continue until the dysfunctional family behavior and truant behavior were eliminated.

Ironically, Rohrman (1993) saw community agencies often assuming the main responsibility for dealing with truancy. These resources included social workers, juvenile probation officers, law enforcement officers, community mentors, and the courts. These agencies pulled together to form an intervention process to combat truancy. Although this approach was not always effective, it forced the families to cooperate with the school.

At the conclusion of his study, Rohrman (1993) thoroughly believed that truancy was a complicated problem. He strongly recommended that schools actively engage families in the work of reducing truancy. In helping the marginal students, efforts that fully integrated them into the school life proved to be the most beneficial. Finally, the use of supportive services was more effective than rewards in reducing truancy.

Malbon, an assistant principal in Rhode Island, and Nuttall, a professor at Boston College (1992), developed a promising approach to reducing absenteeism in secondary schools. Their study linked

absenteeism to three major reasons: illness, personal choice, and weather and transportation. Illness produced a rate of absenteeism that averaged 4 to 5 % annually. The percentage of personal choice varied in their study. Weather and transportation problems were responsible for only an additional 2% of students out of school. In a single school year, a total of 42,097 student absences and 4,654 student requests for early dismissal indicated that youngsters did not take regular school attendance seriously. It seemed that the three and four day week became too common among students who felt no sense of involvement or commitment to their education. The attendance policy at the school required students who missed one or more classes to make up time in an after-school detention. Three unexcused absences were grounds for a two-day suspension. A conference was held with the student and parents before the child was admitted back to school. Excused absences carried no penalty.

Because the absentee rate continued to soar, these researchers looked for a plan to correct the problem. The new plan shifted the responsibility of school attendance to the students and their parents. The major change in the attendance policy was the incorporation of a mandatory failing grade of E after the seventh unexcused absence each

quarter. Excused absences for school-sponsored activities, religious holidays, emergencies, and prolonged illness under doctor's care did not count toward the six permitted absences.

Their new plan was rather lenient. Aside from monitoring truancy, the administration made no attempt to determine how students spent the days they missed. Moreover, if students decided to use all permitted days for all quarters, they could still pass their classes with an 87% attendance rate. Letters were mailed to parents on the third, sixth, and seventh days of absence of the students.

The plan was lenient and it did have a drawback. The new policy increased the clerical burden. Teachers had to maintain accurate records for each class on an authorized form. The assistant principals and guidance counselors had to provide additional services under the new plan as well. All of the burden seemed to be a small price to pay for the success of the program.

School attendance increased by 3.7% for the entire population of 2100 students within one school year. This improvement represented an average of six additional school days per student. The new plan had the greatest impact on the low-achieving students who tended to have the highest absentee rates. The plan seemed to be just what the school

was looking for at the time (Malbon & Nuttall, 1992).

Dowdle (1990), a principal in West Des Moines, Iowa, found a way to keep kids in school. His plan called for sufficient administrative and clerical personnel as a given for program success. The students were permitted to miss up to 20 days for the year, generally 10 days a semester. At the seventh and seventeenth absences, conferences were held with the students, the parents, and the guidance counselor. These staffings allowed the family and the school to see the problem for what it was and look for solutions.

The school had to be ready to issue consequences for students who reached the limit. These penalties included denial of class continuation, mandatory make-up time in summer school before credits were issued, possible denial of graduation rituals to seniors, and dismissal of students who were not remediable. There were also rewards for those who made strong efforts. Every Monday, a student from each grade level won a prize in a lottery-style drawing. A public announcement was made to the entire school stating the students' names and prizes won.

The results were gratifying. The school's population was 1200 students. The previous year's total absences were 3,110. This number

dropped to 2,181, almost 1 day less for each student (Dowdle, 1990).

In his research, Konet (1994), an assistant principal in a New Jersey high school, found an attendance system that worked. Teachers at his school were discouraged at the length of the daily absentee list. The students were loosely accountable for their attendance. Even though letters were sent to parents by administration, they were frequently unanswered. One of the teachers on his staff, with the support of the rest of the staff, developed a student attendance and review committee (SARC). The committee had two goals: to improve student attendance and to separate the students who wished to improve their attendance from those who did not care to function properly in school. Each teacher was equipped with triplicate forms to report students' absences as necessary. A copy of the form was given to the student, one to the committee, and another was for the teacher's files.

Once the students were written up, they had to appear before the committee within three days. If the students did not come, they were personally escorted. A conference was held with the committee and some sort of reprimand was given based on the number of times the student had been before the committee. The consequences ranged from

counseling to Saturday detention. Because the students had to justify unexcused absences before a jury-like forum, the students did not miss class as much as they had previously. Konet (1994) noted that the school's attendance rate had moved from the upper 80's to well above the 90% mark on an average day.

Kube, an Iowa mathematics teacher, and Ratigan, an Iowa principal (1991), knew that students did not learn if they were absent from the classroom. The paperwork that was required to track absences was so time consuming that the attendance office fell behind, and the students took advantage. A seven-step program was designed by these researchers to combat the problem. The plan included parent supervision, a limit in the number of absences before loss of credit, and an in-house suspension.

Although some of the measures seemed to be controversial, they made a sound policy. Students were only allowed a maximum of 10 absences in each class during a semester if they wanted to receive credit. If the students' parents did not verify the absence, it was considered truancy. Truancy carried the punishment of in-house detention on Saturday morning. Students had to complete all assignments from the days they were absent. Students with perfect attendance in a class had

an option to be exempt from the semester examination. Parents and students were notified prior to the tenth absence. Students with 10 absences in a class could appeal to the teacher for credit.

The plan was very successful for the school. The new policy clearly set forth the expectations. The support of teachers, parents, and even students made the program work. The students' attitudes changed because they were rewarded for their attendance. They found that with low absenteeism, learning increased (Kube & Ratigan, 1991).

Stine (1991), a principal in Colorado, decided to do his truants a favor by getting tough on them. He created a three-step plan to replace the school's ancient policies. The pilot program aimed at the casual class cutter, the chronic truant, and the abuser. The plan was designed to put the parents in charge of the students' absences.

Rewards were given for positive attendance. Negative attendance resulted in stiff consequences. Students who violated could be suspended for as little as cutting one class. Because the parents had a part of the responsibility and the students felt the direct effect of their absences, the program resulted in much success for the school. The school's attendance rate was increased by 1.25%. The overwhelming success came when the 600 names on the daily absentee printout had

gone down to barely a page on a bad day (Stine, 1990).

Miller (1993), an Illinois junior high school teacher, became more and more upset with the high absentee rate in his school. It seemed that everything that was tried failed after a short period of time. He thought this was true because the students were never really given the chance to understand their reasons for being truant. He decided to do something a little more concrete about the problem.

A 10-week study was done with randomly selected students in a 76-member experimental group and an 83-member control group. The members of the experimental group were given a portfolio with a biotherapeutic learning packet. It consisted of essays and short stories relating to students' backgrounds. The members of the control group did not receive a packet. Progress was measured on a Likert-type instrument. Results proved that the members of the experimental group improved their attendance, attitude, and insight. It appeared that the biotherapeutic learning packet helped the students to understand their actions and their reasons for them. The members of the control group showed no change in any of the areas (Miller, 1993).

Lee, Bryant, Noonan, and Plionis (1987) put together a plan that helped to keep youths in foster care in the District of Columbia in

school. The project combined the resources of the public and private sectors on behalf of severely disadvantaged youths in the urban community where the school's dropout rate was extremely high. The plan had four interventive strategies: peer mentorships, employment and preparation for employment, involvement of primary caretakers, and social support. The goal was to help the participants embark on a journey of self-realization and independent living.

The program was a success because of the cooperation on every level of all parties involved. The peer mentors brought about remarkable changes in their youths' attendance and academic achievement. The community's commitment to the program also contributed greatly to its success. It was hoped that the long-term results would be as successful as the short-term ones (Lee, Bryant, Noonan, & Plionis, 1987).

Helm, of Walters State College, and Burkett, of East Tennessee State University (1989), investigated the effects of a computer-aided telecommunications device that called the homes of selected groups of students on the days they were absent. The students in the control group were comparable to the students in the experimental group in terms of race, sex, and socioeconomic class. It was hoped that the

telephone call would stimulate parental involvement in the students' attendance. The study was conducted for one year. At the end of the year, the students whose homes were called showed higher attendance rates. The students who did not receive telephone calls on the days they were absent did not show an increase in attendance. The plan proved effective because parents became aware of their children's attendance.

Cooley (1993), an assistant superintendent in Westfield, Indiana, created tips for aiding at-risk students in a program entitled Student Assistance For At-Risk Individuals (SAFARI). His program included such components as adopt-a-teacher, support groups, parent education, student activity groups, and peer facilitation. Students were referred to SAFARI for numerous reasons. These reasons ranged from poor attendance to attempted suicide. Because of the strong commitment the program had to the school, students, and community, it was successful. He found that more and more students were being referred to SAFARI. The program was able to reach the most difficult students. He further believed that the greatest success was changing the attitude throughout the Westfield community.

Mayer, Mitchell, Clementi, Clement-Robertson, and Myatt, of

California State University, Los Angeles, in conjunction with Bullara, of Ohio State University (1993), developed a dropout prevention program for at-risk high school students. The program emphasized consultation that promoted positive classroom climates. They knew that attendance problems were characteristic of students who dropped out of school. They found that punitive classroom environments had been identified as a major contributor to attendance problems. They attempted to reduce dropout rates by making classroom environments less punitive, primarily through consultation and tutorial services. The dropout rates that resulted for at-risk students were lower than the district's rate. Consultation increased the percentages of students working on task, as well as increased the percentages of teachers' rates of approving statements. The study showed that by making the classroom environment more positive, more students were doing assignments, and dropout rates continued to decrease.

Phillips, an employee of the Charles F. Ketterin Foundation in Dayton, Ohio, and Rosenberger, an Indianapolis principal (1988), saw a way to break the failure cycle in innercity high schools. Their project, entitled Quest for the Best, took an eight-step approach in reaching innercity youths. The heart of the program was the level of concern

among teachers, parents, and students. Teachers taught students about themselves as well as their course content. The expectation levels of the students were increased. The model put the school on the path to breaking the cycle.

The pilot did help to improve the school for several reasons. The teachers designed and directed their own staff development. Teachers and students became empowered by being able to assume new roles in the decision making about programs for their school. They solicited the help of parents, students, and the community, thus giving everyone a role to play (Phillips & Rosenberger, 1988).

Clariana (1993), a researcher with Jostens Learning Corporation in Phoenix, Arizona, investigated the motivational effect of advisement on attendance and achievement in computer-based instruction. His study researched the motivational and instructional effects of advisement on learners of varying ability and locus of control orientation. During a summer remediation program, learners were required to attend five computer-based instruction sessions. Experimental treatments consisted of advisement and no-advisement in the form of progress reports. Sessions attendance served as the motivation dependent variable and the mathematics subtest of the

Wide Range Achievement Test served as the achievement dependent variable.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of attendance data revealed a significant difference between the advisement and no-advisement groups. ANOVA of mathematics achievement data revealed a significant interaction between advisement and tests. The locus of instructional control and ability did not interact with advisement in the study. Providing the student with advisement in the form of progress reports had a strong positive effect on high school students' attendance, but to a lesser extent on achievement (Clariana, 1993).

Weaver, a school counselor in Winston, South Carolina, and Matthews, a professor in the Department of Counselor Education at South Carolina State University (1993), attempted to build the self-esteem of at-risk students. Their study found that attendance, self-esteem, and achievement were directly related. The researchers randomly selected 70 ninth grade students from a pool of 200 students who were identified by their homeroom teachers as at-risk. The students in the group met twice weekly for 14 weeks of self-esteem training.

At the conclusion of the instruction in self-esteem, the students

took the Piers-Harris Children Self-Concept Scale to measure self-esteem. The students showed increased levels of self-esteem and self-management skills. Achievement and test scores also increased. The students' discipline problems showed a decline in numbers (Weaver & Matthews, 1993).

C. Weinberg, a professor of education at the University of California, Los Angeles, and L. Weinberg, a special education advocate at Mental Health Advocacy Services in Los Angeles (1992), presented multiple perspective on the labeling, treatment, and discipline of at-risk students. Their study examined the idiosyncratic, the sociocultural, and the institutional perspectives. Common student problems of learning, inappropriate behavior, depression, and truancy were evaluated through the lens of multiple perspective analysis. Their research produced useful findings. At-risk programs had to be well-grounded, and they also had to cover an expanded range of the student problems. At-risk students had to see the need to stay in school. Moreover, society had to take a hand in helping at-risk students.

Society's problem with truancy has been given a great deal of attention. Reseachers have developed a number of strategies to help schools, families, and communities with this problem. More and more,

school had interesting stories about how they overcame bouts with truancy. One thing was certain in their battles, they had to be consistent and fair and enlist the help of outside resources.

Planned Solution Strategy

The writer reviewed numerous sources on the topic of improving attendance of innercity youths. Several researchers had developed strategies to combat this problem. The writer was impressed with the strategies studied. After a careful review of the literature, the writer decided to use a comprehensive plan, over a period of 12 weeks, to improve attendance.

Because students needed to understand their thoughts and actions and the reasons for their actions, a biotherapeutic learning packet was developed. The packet consisted of six essays, with guided exercises for the students to complete. Exercises in autobiographical poetry were also included in the packet. All assignments were kept in a district-made portfolio (Miller, 1993).

A number of support services were made available to the students within the group. Student counseling sessions were held regularly. Parents were encouraged to attend these sessions with their

children. The students were assigned a community and peer mentor. Informal rap sessions were held between the writer and the group (Rohrman, 1993). The students were also paired with a teacher for additional support (Cooley, 1993). A perfect attendance lottery was held each week to reward desired efforts. Prizes were donated by local businesses (Dowdle, 1990).

The administrative component of the plan required the help of some members of the school's staff. A student attendance and review committee was comprised of the writer, two teachers, and a guidance counselor (Konet, 1993). A clerical worker called the students' homes if they had unexcused absences (Helms & Burkett, 1989). The writer conferred with the students' teachers to see if assignments missed due to unexcused absences were completed.

The writer carefully monitored the students and their progress for the 12-week period. The stated strategies were used to improve the attendance for the members of the target group. All of the students' work and portfolios were collected and duplicated for further use by the writer. Copies were provided for the students.

CHAPTER III

Method

Identification of People, Materials, And Tasks

The writer chose a number of strategies that were utilized during the 12-week implementation period. The school used a district policy that enlisted the local law enforcement to escort truant students to their parents jobs or back to school. Teachers handled unexcused absences according to their own discretion. The only written policy was one that permitted teachers to take up to 2.2% off a student's grades for each unexcused absence.

A meeting was held with the teachers, guidance counselor, and clerical worker chosen for participation in the project. This meeting was arranged by the writer's mentor. The writer thoroughly explained the entire process to these individuals. Each teacher was paired with a student in the project for the purpose of mentoring. A letter explaining the project was also given to all of the students' teachers. The guidance counselor was asked to set up blocks of time for entrance conferences and one-on-one counseling sessions with the group members. The clerical worker was given instructions on how to call the students'

homes on the days they were absent unexcused. The members who served on the Student Attendance and Review Committee were also present at this meeting. They created guidelines for the committee at that time.

Students in the target group attended an initial conference. Their parents were encouraged to attend. Three of the parents did come to the meeting. A certified letter was sent to the parents who were unable to attend. Students met with the writer, her mentor, and the guidance counselor involved in the project. They were told why they were selected to participate in the program. For some, it was the last step before being withdrawn for nonattendance. Four of the young men did have reservations about participating. After they were assured that the program was only there to help them, they agreed to stay.

The entire 12-week process was explained to the students. They were given their biotherapeutic learning packets. The writer explained all of the entries and assignments. They were also given an intense individual portfolio for completion. The students were given a chance to ask any questions they had about the materials. The students were also given a counseling schedule by the guidance counselor. They had to meet with the guidance counselor at least once a week. They also

met with their adopted teachers weekly and their community mentors bi-weekly.

The writer and her mentor invited a number of local business people and community activists to the school. Many of these people were members of the school's task force for quality education. The writer chose these people because they had already expressed a great interest in meeting the needs of all of the students at the school. The purpose and intent of the program were thoroughly explained to these individuals. The community activists agreed to serve as mentors for the members of the target group. They also agreed to meet with the students bi-weekly at the school, during the school day. The local business people committed to donating prizes for the weekly perfect attendance lotteries. The prizes ranged from a free meal at a local restaurant to gift certificates at a local sportswear shop. The need for sincere commitment to the program was greatly stressed.

Weekly Time Line

The first three weeks of the program were a little rough. The students began working in their biotherapeutic learning packets and portfolios. They were not aware of how much they had to look inside of themselves to complete the required assignments. Initially, three

young men in the group had a problem with discussing their inner thoughts and feelings. They came to the writer with questions about the importance of revealing what was inside of them. She explained to them that it was important for them to not only understand their actions, but also what caused them to act as they did.

Counseling proved to be a plus during this time. The students did not miss their weekly counseling sessions with the guidance counselor. They also built strong foundations with their adopted teachers. They were also surprised to see how the people in the community had a vested interest in them. They could not believe that so many people actually cared that much about them. Their greatest amazement came, however, when they saw how much the students that were selected to be their peer tutor/counselor wanted to see them succeed.

At the end of each week a perfect attendance lottery was held. Two students won the first week, three won the second week, and five won the third week. They were absolutely thrilled with the prizes. One of the young men did not believe that he had won an \$85 pair of athletic shoes until he went to pick them up.

At the end of the third week, the writer met with the staff

members and the community mentors. The guidance counselor was encouraged by the program. He said that he was finally getting to do what he wanted to do, counsel. Teachers who were selected as adopted teachers liked their roles in the project. They were beginning to make definite impressions upon the students. The clerical worker found that after the first perfect attendance lottery was held, she only had to call two homes for unexcused absences.

The student attendance and review committee was pleased with its role. The members found that the number of students that were sent to them dropped tremendously from the first week to the third. One of the young men in the group, however did appear before them at least one time a week. They found that their purpose was truly being served.

The community took pride in the entire project. When they met with the writer, they continued to express their commitment. One of mentors felt as though he received a second chance at parenthood. The students seemed to be very receptive of them. The students were still amazed at the number of people who shared a common interest in them.

The next three weeks brought calmness to the project. The

students were in the middle of their portfolios. As they completed their work, the writer reviewed it and placed it back in their portfolios. At the end of Week 5, the writer held a rap session with the members of the target group. The students were able to discuss any aspect of the program they desired.

Two of the young men in the group stated that they could not stay in school the entire day. They claimed that they got bored after lunch and had to leave. The other members of the group believed they were actually changing for the better. They said that their mentors and adopted teachers showed them a different view of life and their futures. The change ultimately began to take place when one of the mentors took them to his place of employment at the end of Week 4.

This individual was a probation officer. She took them to one of the county's jails. The students had an opportunity to tour the courthouse and the jail. The inmates gave them personal accounts about what prison or jail life was actually like. Three of the young men in the group walked out of the building in tears. They said that if they did not get their lives turned around, those same men that they saw would some day be them.

At the end of the sixth week, a Parents' Night was held in the

school's media center. All school employees and community members involved in the project were present to meet the students and their parents. The writer displayed the students' portfolios. The parents were impressed with their children's work. Some of the parents learned things about their children from the portfolios that they never knew. Each of the students who had perfect attendance during these three weeks received prizes from the perfect attendance lottery.

Weeks 7, 8, and 9, were for the most part like the previous three. The students were nearing the end of their biotherapeutic learning packets. Another student rap session was held with the students. Their thoughts mirrored those of the first session. The writer also made contact with the adult members of the project. Things were running smoothly for them. Two students received prizes during the perfect attendance lotteries at the end of each week.

The project was in its final stages during Weeks 10, 11, and 12. All of the students' work was placed in their portfolios. The writer met with the staff members involved in the project to plan the final Parents' Night. Two students received prizes in the perfect attendance lotteries for Weeks 10 and 11. The students were required to attend an exit conference from the program.

A final Parents' Night was held at the end of Week 12. Members of the school's administration were present. Everyone involved in the project was given an opportunity to express his/her accomplishments and difficulties throughout the program. One of the parents gave a personal thank you to all of the adults in the program. She stated that her son's life was finally on the right track. All of the target group members were given a gift by their mentors, certificates from their adopted teachers, and a plaque from the writer. All of the adults involved in the project were given certificates of appreciation from the writer.

Program Monitoring and Evaluation

The writer reviewed the daily attendance reports, computer calls, and attendance and review committee forms (Appendix E, p 52.) daily. She also conferred with the students' teachers bi-weekly concerning the students' academic progress. The writer also checked to see if the students completed assignments when they had unexcused absences. At the end of Weeks 3, 6, and 9, the students completed a teacher-made program assessment survey (Appendix F, p 54.). A final program evaluation was completed by the students, with their parents, at the final Parents Night (Appendix G, p 56.). On both forms, the students

were able to elaborate on strengths and difficulties encountered during the project.

This implementation plan was used to increase the attendance of the target group. The students were carefully monitored throughout the 12-week period. These strategies were very instrumental in accomplishing the goals of the project.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The members of the target group demonstrated a problem with regular school attendance. Several strategies were used to increase their attendance. These strategies were closely monitored over a 12-week period. The researcher used the following plan to evaluate the program:

Objective 1. At the end of the 12-week implementation period, the attendance records of the target group were compared with their previous attendance records. During the previous school year three of the students in the target group were absent unexcused 40 days, four were absent unexcused 36 days, two were absent unexcused 30 days, and one was absent unexcused 28 days. The comparison of pre and post attendance records showed that the total group increased its overall attendance by 52.2%. The students did make remarkable individual gains during the implementation period (Appendix H, p.58). With this outcome Objective 1 was met.

Objective 2. At the end of the 12-week implementation period, the members of the target group had their Vocational Technology

Portfolios for High School Students examined. This instrument contained a section for goal formation. It called for a minimum of three positive career or life goals. The students had to work weekly on developing these goals.

A number of difficulties were experienced with this task as several of the participants never thought much about the future. There was an absence of a positive role model in some of their homes as well. The adults involved in the project worked untirelessly to help the students formulate these goals. An examination of the portfolios revealed that each participant had developed three to five positive career or life goals. This analysis also showed that Objective 2 was met.

Objective 3. Throughout the 12-week implementation period, the students were given a teacher-made survey regarding the importance of an education. Prior to implementation, four young men in the group did not believe that an education was necessary for future success. They saw this to be true because several of their friends and/or family members had become successful through illegal practices. They were interested in pursuing the same paths.

One of these students' mentor was an employee of one of the local law enforcement agencies. This person arranged a special trip to

the county's courthouse and jail. They students were exposed to the Scared Straight Program. Prisoners began to give personal accounts about how they got to where they were. Many of them talked about the same paths these four young men were destined to go down. The inmates closed by saying that if a program like this were in place when they were in school, they would not be in the place that they were. When the final teacher-made survey was issued, it demonstrated that all four of the young men saw education to be necessary for future success; thus Objective 3 was met.

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Appendixes

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Appendix A
Pre-Attendance Survey

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APPENDIX A
PRE-ATTENDANCE SURVEY

1. Do you feel regular school attendance should be mandatory?
1 female-yes 1 female-no 3 males-yes
3 males-no

2. Who is the head of your household?
1 female-grandparents 1 female-mother
1 male-mother and father 7 males-mother

3. Does your home setting promote education? Explain.
1 female-yes 1 female-no 1 male-yes
7 males-no

4. Are you a teen parent? If so, do you have reliable childcare?
2 females- are teen parents with unreliable childcare
8 males- are not teen parents

5. Is a formal education mandatory for future success? Explain.
2 females-yes 4 males-no 4 males-yes

6. Describe your career/life goals.
None of the individuals surveyed were able to complete this request.

NOTE: The survey group consisted of 10 students in the 10th grade; 2 females and 8 males.

Appendix B

1994-95 Stanford Achievement Test Scores

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Appendix B
1994-95 Stanford Achievement Test Scores

Students	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Math	19	17	26	1	22	1	16	20	18	11
Reading	35	21	29	1	6	50	26	23	20	11
Language	15	13	23	4	10	37	14	21	16	85

SCORES ARE ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL PERCENTILE.

EXAMPLE: Student A scored in the 19th percentile in math, 35th percentile in reading, and 15th percentile in language.

Appendix C
1994-95 Academic History

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Appendix C
Academic History
1994-95

Students	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Cum. g.p.a.	.622	.842	.667	1.00	.605	1.09	1.13	.286	.143	.895
# classes failed of 7	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	6
*credits earned	4.0	4.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0

Cum. g.p.a.=Cumulative grade point average.

* Students may earn a total of seven credits per school year, excluding summer school.

Appendix D

1994-95 Administrative Records

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Appendix D
Administrative Records
1994-95

Students	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
A Refer	13	12	8	16	10	17	9	6	16	13
B Refer	2	11	7	8	4	12	10	9	4	2
Post Cards	10	8	6	12	8	14	6	4	12	11
Unex. Abs.	28	36	40	30	36	30	36	40	40	36

A Refer=Attendance Referrals

B Refer=Behavioral Referrals

Post Cards=Post Cards Mailed to Parents

Unex. Abs.=Unexcused Absences

EXAMPLE: Student A received 13 attendance referrals, 2 behavioral referrals, 10 post cards were mailed home, and was absent unexcused 28 days.

Appendix E
Class Absence Report Form

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Appendix E
STUDENT ATTENTANCE and REVIEW COMMITTEE
Class Absence Report

Student's Name _____ FSI _____

Teacher _____ Period _____ Date _____ Tot. Abs. _____

Date(s) of Unexcused Absence(s) _____

To the Student:

This report officially inform you of your absence from class on the dates indicated above in violation of the attendance policies and regulations. You are required to attend all classes unless you have a permitted or excused absence.

You must report to the Student Attendance and Review Committee the day after you receive this report. You must report during fourth period after first reporting to class. The committee will be waiting for your arrival. Specific penalties will be imposed if you failed to report intentionally.

Reason(s) for Absence:

Teacher Comments:

Disposition by SARC (Date: _____)

Time Dismissed: _____

SARC Official: _____

Triplicate Form-White-Student Canary-SARC Pink-Teacher

Appendix F
Program Attendance Survey

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Appendix F
PROGRAM ATTENDANCE SURVEY

1. Do you feel regular school attendance is necessary?
2. Is a formal education necessary for future success?
3. What strategies will you use to aid in keeping your attendance regular?
4. Is this project helping to improve your attendance?

Results: All 10 of the target group members completed a form.

	Week 3	Week 6	Week 9
Ques. 1	6 yes/4 no	7 yes/3 no	9 yes/1no
Ques. 2	6 yes/4 no	8 yes/2 no	9 yes/1no
Ques. 3	none	personal incentive	same
Ques. 4	6yes/4 no	8 yes/ 2 no	10 yes

Appendix G
Final Program Assessment

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Appendix G
FINAL PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

1. Was this project fully explained to you?

10 yes/0 no

2. Did you understand why you were chosen to participate in this study?

10 yes/0 no

3. Did you understand all materials that were given to you?
Did you understand their purpose?

10 yes/0 no

4. Did you have any major problems with the project?

10 yes/ 0 no

5. Was your mentor, adopted-teacher, and peer tutor helpful?

10 yes/ 0 no

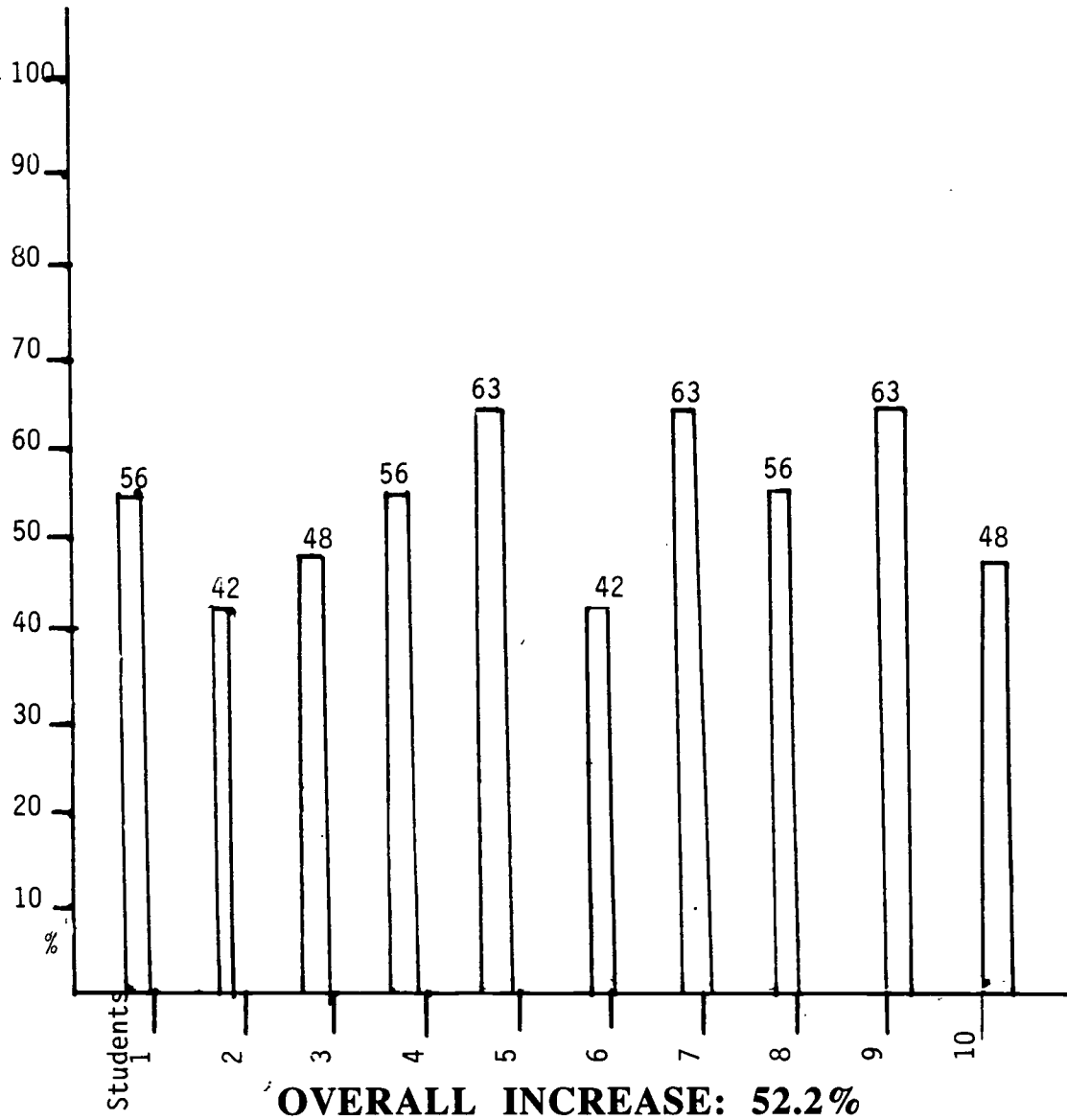
Appendix H
Attendance Graph

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Appendix H

Attendance Graph



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
GEM PROGRAM
PRINCIPAL COMPETENCY RECORD

NAME Valerie Wanza DATE SUBMITTED 6/17/96

COMPETENCY: # 8 TITLE MANAGING INTERACTION

Please emphasize your role in each step of the **STAR** recording system.

Sate the situation: **Background/setting** *Several students at the practicum site had demonstrated a problem with school attendance.*

Tell about the problem: **What was happening/ Who was affected?** *I developed a comprehensive plan to reduce the attendance of 10 young people who were plagued by a number of problems that contributed to them not attending school regularly. Collectively, these students were absent unexcused 134 of 180 total school days during the 1994-95 school year.*

Action taken: **Plan and calendar/population/date accomplished** *The program took place over a 12-week implementation period. The plan called for the efforts of several members of the school's staff. I met throughout the process to guide the efforts of these individuals. Their tasks included, but were not limited to, mentorship, counseling, and clerical duties. They had to report any findings they encountered to me continuously. These findings were used for modification and evaluative purposes. The students were constantly in contact with adults to steer them in the right directions and encourage school attendance.*

Results: **Effectiveness: Who was affected and to what degree?**
As a result, all of the programs objectives were met. The students overall attendance was increased by 52.2%.

Approved Rejected _____
8/93 professor (advisor) signature date

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
GEM PROGRAM
PRINCIPAL COMPETENCY RECORD

NAME Valerie Wanza DATE SUBMITTED 6/17/96

COMPETENCY: # 17 TITLE Self Presentation

Please emphasize your role in each step of the **STAR** recording system.

State the situation: Background/setting *I needed the help of several community vendors and activists to help increase the attendance of the target group.*

Tell about the problem: What was happening/ Who was affected? *I needed these people to serve as community mentors and to donate prizes for the perfect attendance lotteries. The two items were vital to the implementation process.*

Action taken: Plan and calendar/population/date accomplished

I had a meeting in the school cafeteria with 18 community business people and activists one evening in the school's media center. I thoroughly explained the project to them. I showed them how their efforts and services would fit into the plan. I also showed them how important it was that the students see how the people in the community not only cared about athletic efforts, but academics had a greater importance. These people would meet individually with the students for mentorship purposes. I showed them that if we did not help them now, we would be supporting them for the rest of their lives.

Results: Effectiveness: Who was affected and to what degree?

As a result, 10 of the people present agreed to be mentors for the members of the target group. The other eight consented to donating prizes for the weekly perfect attendance lotteries.

Approved Rejected

8/93

professor (advisor) signature

date



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