

STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AT SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL:  
A SURVEY OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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LONNIE JEWELL WHITLOW



STUDENT ABSENTEEISM AT SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL:  
A SURVEY OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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An Abstract  
Presented to  
the Graduate Council of  
Austin Peay State University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Educational Specialist

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by  
Lonnie Jewell Whitlow  
February 1989

## ABSTRACT

The major purpose of this field study was to determine the "real" reasons students miss school at Springfield High School and what can be done to improve school attendance.

Data for this field study were obtained by compiling information from questionnaires completed by students and faculty at Springfield High School.

The major findings of this study were: (1) students miss school for a variety of reasons, the major reason being sickness, (2) teachers view absenteeism as a problem, however, students do not view absenteeism as a problem, (3) an occasional absence by a student does not affect his or her grades if make up work and tests are completed and turned in, and (4) the majority of students and teachers believe present rules and policies on student absenteeism are fair. Chapter five of this field study contains a list of recommendations which may help to increase student attendance at Springfield High School if implemented.

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To the Graduate and Research Council:

I am submitting herewith a field study written by Lonnie Jewell Whitlow entitled, "Student Absenteeism at Springfield High School: A Survey of Students and Teachers." I have examined the final copy of this paper for form and content, and I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Educational Specialist, with a major in Administration and Supervision.

George M. Rawlins III  
George M. Rawlins, III  
Major Professor

We have read this field study  
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Accepted for the Graduate  
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## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Educators and psychologists have sought for many years to determine why students are absent from school. Attendance problems are probably as old as school itself; no matter how old the problem, it is still a major concern in today's schools.

Today, school attendance is compulsory in most states and school systems. Even though school systems may differ some in compulsory attendance rules, most are basically similar. All compulsory attendance rules are concerned with getting the students to school and keeping them there.

A lot of time and money have been spent on research concerning student absenteeism. Even though educators have a lot of information on student absenteeism, it continues to be a major problem in many secondary schools throughout the country: This brings educators to the basic question, "Why do students miss school and what can be done about it?"

#### Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated in the question form were investigated in this study.

$H_1$ : What are the causes for student absenteeism at Springfield High School?

$H_2$ : How is student absenteeism viewed by students

and teachers at Springfield High School?

H<sub>3</sub>: How does student absenteeism affect student grades?

H<sub>4</sub>: How do the students and teachers view the present rules and policies on students absenteeism?

### Statement of the Problem

This field study investigated the causes of student absenteeism at Springfield High School. This field study attempted to determine the "real" reasons students miss school, and what can be done to improve school attendance.

### Purpose of Study

It is hoped the information gained in this field study will be used to develop an updated attendance policy at Springfield High School. It is further hoped from this field study student attendance at Springfield High School will be improved. This field study revealed trends and needs concerning absenteeism at Springfield High School. The trends may possibly indicate problems or the onset of problems brought about by student absenteeism.

The field study revealed strengths and weaknesses in Springfield High School's attendance policies and rules. At the conclusion of this study the investigator will present the findings on student absenteeism to the principal of Springfield High School. It is hoped from this study that some of the recommendations made may



help lower the student absentee rate at Springfield High School. It is further hoped some of the recommendations made may be used to help develop an updated attendance policy for Springfield High School.

### Definition of Terms

Attendance Rate. The percent of students present at school on a given day.

Compulsory Attendance Laws. Laws made by the local Board of Education or State Legislature covering the rules and policies of school attendance and absenteeism.

Computerized Attendance Mailer. A computer program designed to print letters to be sent to parents of children with irregular attendance.

Distributive Education. A course of study in Robertson County which allows students to gain Carnegie Units for working that can be applied toward graduation.

Drop Out Characteristics. These are characteristics which often show up in students who are considering the option of terminating their high school education before graduation.

Excused Absence. An absence which is acceptable according to the rules and policies of the local Board of Education.

Expelled. Put out of school for the remaining part of the school year, this results in automatic grade failure.

In-School Suspension. This is a program designed

to help keep students in school who have minor discipline problems. The student is not allowed to attend a regular class schedule and is put in the In-School Suspension Class for a period of one to three days.

Suspended. Not allowed to attend school for a period ranging from one to ten days, depending on the offense.

Tardy. Not being on time. A student can be tardy for the start of the school day or for the start of a class.

Truancy. An unexcused absence.

Unexcused Absence. An absence which is not acceptable according to the rules and policies of the local Board of Education.

### Limitations

This field study only included student perceptions from the sophomore class and faculty member perceptions of Springfield High School for the school year of 1988 - 1989. Since the study deals with only one class, it may show the ending of old trends, the start of new trends, or a combination of old and new trends. Therefore, no definite conclusions may be determined.

The day the survey was taken thirty-one students (fourteen percent) of the sophomore class were absent. Therefore, the survey does not contain data from the entire sophomore class. The study is further limited because the students vary greatly in their ability to

read and understand the questionnaire. Since there is such a varied ability to read in the students, all questions basically had to be multiple choice or ranking. Therefore, the possibility of write-in answers was not viewed as being acceptable. Since thirty-three percent of the faculty did not return the questionnaire, all of the teacher's opinions are not represented.



## CHAPTER 2

### A Review of Related Literature

#### Introduction

Student absenteeism is one of the major problems in most schools in America today. A review of the literature reveals an abundance of material published in the past fifteen years. Most of the material can be divided into one of two categories: causes of student absenteeism and prevention of student absenteeism. There are many proposed solutions to the problem of student absenteeism. However, they vary a great deal and none are guaranteed to work in every school.

Before tackling the problem of student absenteeism, the administration must ask if improving student attendance is really worth the effort (DeFour, 1983). DeFour found increased attendance resulted in significant gains in state aide to the school district as well as having a positive effect on the overall school climate. DeFour stated, "The most important benefit to be gained from improved student attendance is improved student achievement."

#### Misplaced Priorities

Many students in America have poor attendance, poor grades, and lack of academic success because of misplaced priorities (Janko, 1987). Janko reported

American students have many cuts and absences because they are working, partying, or have a very low commitment to school. Janko stated evidence shows many students have never seriously given school a chance. In addition, Janko felt schools and teachers cannot be held completely responsible because many students never honestly try to make their educational endeavors successful. Janko suggested students are motivated to work for material goods, but not for educational success.

Votaw (1987) reported on a program started in Picacho Junior High School located in Las Cruces, New Mexico. The basic purposes of the program were to improve student motivation, attendance, and academic progress. The program was to be achieved by enhancing teacher competency (classroom management) and increasing parental contact (participation). The teachers completed a staff development or management training program developed by Dr. Fredric Jones that enabled them to better manage and motivate students. To increase parental involvement, several activities were initiated: phone contact, a letter/mail program, parenting sessions in the school, school programs, special school events, and parent-teacher conferences.

Votaw's (1987) survey showed the majority of teachers felt the program was successful and worth the effort. In a separate survey, a majority of parents and students responded that the program was of value and

helped make school more enjoyable. In summary, Votaw stated discipline problems dropped, academic progress improved, and membership in the honor society increased by forty-seven percent. Unfortunately, attendance rates remained basically unchanged.

### Attendance: A National Problem

In a monograph issued by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, poor attendance was judged to be the most perplexing problem facing today's schools (Wright, 1976). In a survey by Wright, information was secured that focused on three significant findings about student absenteeism. Wright discovered the following in his survey:

- (1) As a school's student population increases, the attendance rate usually decreases.
- (2) More state required courses create a higher attendance rate.
- (3) In schools where there are lower teacher/student ratios, the attendance rate is higher.

Wright found seven variables in his survey, but the three variables listed above most significantly affected attendance.

Hahn (1987) reported students with absentee problems often become dropouts who in turn become burdens on America's society. These students need to be encouraged to improve their absentee rates and therefore, have a better chance to become productive American citizens. High absentee rates add to America's dropout problem. High dropout rates hurt the nation's productivity and



increase a tragic waste of young American lives. Absenteeism is a problem that affects all levels of American society, not just minority students.

When a students fails in school, there are many other side-effects. For example, repeating students are older than their classmates. Hahn (1987) reported the major reasons affecting student absenteeism are pregnancy, poor academic performance, dislike for school, the attractiveness of employment, language difficulties, and detention/suspension. Whatever the reason for absenteeism, it is a major problem in American schools that sooner or later must be dealt with.

Since student absenteeism is such a major problem in today's schools, it is considered a nation wide problem. Estcourt (1986) reported on a survey and program developed by the Centennial School District of Gresham, Oregon. A committee on chronic student absenteeism was appointed to find ways to lower the student absentee rate. A questionnaire was developed and a survey taken of fifty students with chronic absentee problems. The committee's goals were to improve attendance and student academic achievement. Estcourt stated, "While poor attendance leads to low achievement, it may be important to realize that low achievement can lead to poor attendance." The committee on chronic student absenteeism decided to attempt to reach its goal of better attendance by implementing the



following policies:

- (1) Make sure all students are in class by increasing supervision in the parking lot, halls, restrooms, etc.
- (2) Provide incentives to encourage regular attendance utilizing tangible rewards and positive feedback.
- (3) Involve parents in students's attendance and achievement by informing parents of all unexcused absences.
- (4) Identify, monitor, and work with absent students as soon as they enter the school (by using Middle-School records) to stop or prevent chronic absentee problems.

The questionnaire was a tremendous help in determining why students miss days/classes and in preventing absences. Estcourt (1986) further explained the questionnaire dealt with the following areas of absenteeism:

- (1) Why students miss school,
- (2) When chronic absences begin,
- (3) Parents influence attendance,
- (4) Peers influence attendance,
- (5) Extracurricular activities influence attendance,
- (6) What courses, periods of the day are most often missed,
- (7) Student/teacher relationships influence attendance, and
- (8) Success or failure influences attendance.

Student attendance is the responsibility of everyone involved: parents, students, teachers, and the administration. It is a problem that can be controlled if everyone involved will do their best. No one group can sit back and wait for someone else to do the job. Everyone must work toward better attendance. Estcourt (1986) reported the feelings of the committee were that Centennial High school could lower the absentee rate

by following their new attendance policies. Estcourt ended the report by reminding educators chronic absenteeism is not a problem to be ignored but a challenge to be met.

### Excused and Unexcused Absences

Basically, all student absences can be categorized as either legitimate (excused) or illegitimate (unexcused). Rieck (1984) reported much class cutting can be stopped through hard work by the teachers and school administrators. However, there will still be hard core students who will remain absent because of illegitimate reasons. Rieck, a high school principal, helped to design a program to reshape attendance behavior. The program did not require special funds, but it did require students to be regrouped, new supervision techniques, and new staff coordination. Results were improved attendance, better student attitudes, and an improvement in academics.

In a related article, Perlberg (1980) stated, "It is a questionable practice to allow class credit to high school students who miss school frequently, no matter how legitimate their excuse. Either instruction has value or it does not." Perlberg suggested students be required to attend school a certain percent of the time or credit be denied regardless of the reason for the absence. Otherwise, the student receives credit for something he or she has not achieved, and the school

creates a fraud by certifying his or her diploma. Perlberg further suggested the following on how to deal with absenteeism: a minimum attendance required for credit, Board of Education approval of minimum attendance policies, a minimum number of attendance policies, and Board of Education attendance plans of their own.

In a related article, McNitt (1983) found the policies for excused and unexcused absences are often weak or of very little use in combating student absenteeism. McNitt developed new policies to help reduce excused absences by limiting the number to six per semester. Before taking effect the new policies were approved by the school's Board of Education. Under the new policies, if the student missed more than six days, subject credit toward graduation could be denied. However, students were allowed to make up missed school hours/days after school and on Saturday mornings in order to retain subject credits.

McNitt (1983) reported school absenteeism dropped from eleven percent to three and one-half percent in a period of just one year. The program has proven to be successful, but it has required total cooperation from the administration, faculty, parents, and students to make it a success. "You must first believe that class attendance is important", concluded McNitt.



### Absentee-Failure Cycle

National task forces have called for better school programs. They have cited students failure and absenteeism as two major problems in today's schools. They reported that failure leads to a cycle of frustration and absenteeism. Schools today are seeking programs which will help to break the cycle that leads to dropping out of school for many students (Turkel and Abramson, 1986).

Turkel and Abramson (1986) reported, "The constellation of observable negative behaviors of the potential dropout usually consist of poor attendance, low achievement, and negative attitudes toward school." Turkel and Abramson further reported on a peer tutoring/mentoring program being used in some urban schools in New York City. The program used some college students to help tutor potential high school dropouts. The program's main focus was on ninth grade students and was developed to help improve attendance, grades, social skills, and reduce school dropouts. The college students helped with academics, social/personal relationships, and served as role models. The program was considered to be fairly successful. However, many urban schools do not have the proper resources to implement a program of this type.

Chicago has some of the best and worst schools in America today. The system as a whole (with the exception



of a few schools) has a major attendance problem. The attendance problem is viewed as a major cause of failure and dropout with Chicago students. Sween (1987) reported on school system characteristics that affect the dropout rate. Sween presented the following variables which affect the dropout rate: attendance, type of school, percent of low income students, and overall level of student ability for a particular school.

Sween (1987) stated, "Generally schools with high dropout rates have lower attendance rates." Sween reported schools should be held more accountable for student attendance. Schools presently lack the monetary incentive to reduce the absentee rate. Sween suggested tying state, federal, and local funds to a per diem with student attendance. Sween recommended some type of system of reimbursement based on rewarding school systems for good student attendance. A good base for this would be the school's average daily attendance of students.

In a related article, Copple (1987) reported on the correlation of high absenteeism with low academic grades. In a study of a Head Start Program in the Philadelphia School District, Copple noted the relationship between absenteeism and low academic grades are in a somewhat circular pattern or cycle. The more a student is absent from school the lower his or her grades. As the grades become lower, the greater the tendency to be absent from school. When a student has a high rate of absenteeism,

the student, his or her family, or both have a low or negative attitude toward school and its importance. Copple noted in addition, "Absence was found to be related to retention in grade, leaving school, overall class rank, and placement in special education."

#### Computers: Programs to Help With Student Absences

In today's high-tech society, the computer has become a valued part of almost every school in America. Some schools have started using computers to generate a list of students with attendance problems. The computers are programmed to send letters to parents of students with irregular attendance patterns. Moore (1985) reported on such a program designed and administered by the Detroit Public School System tried in twenty-two schools. The purpose of the program was to inform parents of their child's poor attendance patterns and hopefully to improve the rate of attendance. After the research was conducted the following conclusions were drawn:

- (1) Attendance mailers are of little effect in reducing in-school truancy.
- (2) The letters are a good way to communicate with parents.
- (3) Some schools were making great use of the computer reports to help reach some in-school goals.

The research study recommended the computerized attendance mailer program be continued. However, some variations should be made for each school to make the program more successful.

In many of today's schools, attendance personnel are often overwhelmed or totally consumed by vast amounts of paperwork. However, in today's high-tech society, the computer can help to combat and conquer these mountains of paperwork. Today many schools use computers to keep up with grades, attendance, tardies, and student schedules. In the past, school personnel have searched through hand written, outdated, and obsolete student schedules trying to find the whereabouts of absent students. The use of computers have changed the way this is done in many school systems (Waring, 1981).

Waring (1981) reported on a new computer attendance system at Falmouth High School in Falmouth, Massachusetts. Teachers use mark-sense cards to take class roll. The students who are absent from class are all put on a printout by the computer each hour. The computer has been programmed to print attendance records directly on report cards. This system has three important advantages: simplicity, accuracy, and early detection of attendance problems. This system has allowed administrators, counselors, and parents to become more quickly involved when it is deemed necessary. Early detection can help to prevent serious absentee problems. This system has worked well at Falmouth High School in lowering the absentee rate and errors in records concerning student absenteeism.



### Truancy Problem

Teachman (1979) reported many schools have in-school truancy. The student is in school, but just does not go to all scheduled classes. Teachman suggested in-school truancy exists in some schools because of poor attendance policies, boring non-caring teachers, and a poor attitude on the part of the parents and students. Teachman suggested school administrators design and administer good, solid policies on attendance in all classes within the school. The administration is solely responsible for making and enforcing all attendance policies. Teachers should teach to the best of their ability in every class to every student, and parents need to help with their children's school attendance.

### Urban School Absenteeism

Inner-city student attendance and tardiness are major problems which cause other problems such as fighting, drugs, vandalism theft, and dropouts. Davis (1975) commented on a new attendance program at North High School in Omaha, Nebraska. Absenteeism and tardiness at North High School were so bad they were endangering the entire educational program. As a beginning, the policies and procedures on absenteeism had to be redefined and developed to meet their needs. One of the major goals of the program was to see each student would be dealt with justly and all would receive equal treatment. Davis recorded three major parts of North High Schools program.



- (1) Attendance rewards were given (students could earn the right to be exempt from final exams).
- (2) Teachers emphasized why good attendance was desirable.
- (3) Explanations were given to each student as to how good attendance and future success are related.

Davis (1975) reported the program at North High School was considered successful because attendance improved, withdrawal rate declined and academic progress increased.

Improving big city schools is a tough job, but it is possible. Education has become very impersonal, low-luster, and presently has an extremely low rating in the areas of motivation. Maeroff (1988) reported attendance is poor at the start of the school day, and class cutting is even worse in most urban schools. Maeroff suggested the following changes be made in urban schools: a fresh approach to urban education, smaller learning units, a different philosophy of instruction, a lower teacher/student ratio, and the curriculum be narrower in scope.

Many programs designed to keep low income minority students in schools are not properly designed or administered. Many of these programs offer the students only a meaningless diploma and set them up for a life filled with much disappointment (Maeroff, 1988). Urban students have a hard time preparing for a bright future because many have a tough life presently. Maeroff

suggested schools be changed so that students can create a better today. They may then be motivated to study and give education a chance for tomorrow.

### Truancy Programs

On any given day thousands of students skip school (Dougherty, 1983). To help combat this problem, hundreds of programs are in operation nation wide. Dougherty presented three basic parts of a truancy program as follow:

- (1) Apprehension, the police apprehend the student and bring the student to a processing station.
- (2) Identification, the truant student is identified by an attendance teacher.
- (3) Referral, the student is referred to both the school and attendance teacher at the appropriate school building.

Dougherty (1983) found truancy programs were very helpful in the following ways: truanicies decreased, tardiness decreased, and drug traffic was almost completely eliminated near the school. The most important result, however, was students realized the administration, teachers, and community really cared about them.

In a related article Konet (1983) stated, "Students could easily escape involvement with school officials simply by making themselves scarce for a few days." Konet, an assistant principal at Westfield Senior High School located in Westfield, New Jersey, believed something had to be added to a truancy program. Konet and his faculty developed a Student Attendance Review Committee. The committee had two major goals: to improve

the student attendance, and to provide a way for students who wish to improve their attendance. The responsibility for getting to school and class on time was put directly on the students. The program caused the student to think about absences, tardies, and skipping classes. The program worked well because it involved the administration, faculty, parents, and truant students.

#### Advisor-Advisee Program

Keeping students in school until graduation is a goal of all schools. However, this is not an easy goal to reach. Many students have trouble making friends. They have low self-esteem and find themselves lonely at school. Teachers and administrators are busy, and very often these students slowly develop an attendance problem and may eventually dropout of school (McDonald and Wright, 1987).

McDonald and Wright (1987) reported on a program which helps increase student self-esteem and lower student absentee rates. The program was named, "Meaningful Other Person." The program's philosophy is to provide every student with a teacher or administrator to be his or her advisor. The advisor will be concerned about the student and sensitive to the student's needs. The advisor helps to monitor many aspects of the student's education, such as grades, attendance, tardies, and academic progress. The teachers and administrators all attend in-service workshops to gain the desired



skills. Some of the major skills gained or improved on in workshops are communication, listening, and reinforcement feedback. The program has had many success stories. It has helped reduce tardies, absences, and poor student attitudes. It also has helped to improve academic progress for many students.

#### School With-In a School

In an article by Sulack (1975), a school in Anaheim, California, helped decrease absenteeism by starting a new program of study. The new program was basically a modified school with-in the school. Students were allowed to complete school work at their own pace. Sulack reported the administrator's desire was to help make learning enjoyable which would in turn help increase attendance. The program started out with 115 students and anyone in the school could become part of it. The program was so successful after just one year it was limited to juniors and seniors. Sulack reported attendance was up, earned credits was up, student transfers were down, and student attitudes were at an all time high.

In a similar article, Nelsen (1975) reported on a program at Madison High School in Portland, Oregon. Madison High School developed a program which is basically a school with-in a school. The newly developed program is for students with poor attendance, low academics, behavioral and attitude problems. The program



is fully staffed and includes one-hundred students from grades nine through twelve. The program is restructured on a monthly basis according to student and staff input. The school has no required subjects; however, there are five basic areas of study. The school has five objectives: improved attendance, improved self-attitude in students, demonstrated overall efforts to improve, increased academic progress, and improved pre-test/posttest scores.

Nelsen (1975) stated, "The program's greatest thrust has been in such areas as valuing, self image, and inter-personal relations." The program has proven to be successful with attendance, academics, and student attitude having all improved.

#### Alternative School Programs

Green (1985) reported on a program developed and administered by the Detroit Public Schools to help improve student attendance and academic proficiency. The program took students performing below grade level who had attendance problems and enrolled them in a special one semester school center. Students' studies included basic skills in language arts, mathematics, as well as guidance courses which focused on self-awareness, thereby increasing student attendance and lowering the potential for failure and dropouts. The program was only semi-successful. As long as the students were in the center, attendance and academics were good.

Unfortunately, when the students returned to regular schools fifty-five percent returned to their old habits of poor attendance and academic failure. Green recommended the program be restructured so all participating students would take some classes at their regular schools and some classes at the special school centers. Green suggested this combination would improve long range attendance and aide in academic success.

#### Special Attendance-Dropout Programs

Attendance problems affect all levels of public schools from kindergarten through senior high. In 1985, the Portland Oregon Public Schools started a program called "Project Return." "Project Return" was designed to deal with the problem of student absenteeism and to implement a program to help reduce absenteeism. Grice (1986) stated the goals of "Project Return" were to identify, counsel, and guide the students with attendance problems. During the project, it was discovered many students drop out of school before they get to high school.

"Project Return" started with only three employees, a coordinator, a counselor, and a half-time secretary. The staff was to work with student absenteeism in a 152 square mile school district. The project staff set goals, strategies, and priorities. All year long they constantly reevaluated the program. During the first year, the staff identified many students as having

attendance problems. However, they lacked the necessary personnel to properly combat the problem. In spite of this, the program was still considered highly successful. At the end of the first year, the "Project Return" staff made an evaluation report containing recommendations to the Portland Board of Education. The staff discovered the needs of many students with attendance problems are often very different from other students who have good attendance patterns. The staff of "Project Return" recommended much attention be given to middle-school attendance. They felt this could help prevent chronic patterns of absenteeism and future dropouts.

All across America school districts and schools need to make better attendance one of their primary goals. Hebard (1986) reported on an attendance improvement/dropout prevention program conducted in thirty-two school districts in New York City. The program provided many services and incentives to students in order to improve their school attendance rate. Some schools used automatic telephone dialing machines to call parents of students who were absent from school. Other schools provided services such as counseling, family outreach, and attendance monitoring. Many districts used prizes, trips, and parties to encourage students to attend school. About half of the school districts provided special school classes such as remedial, enrichment, alternative, and in-school suspension. Hebard recorded



some staff members felt there was too much effort required to bring up attendance. They felt parts of the program took away time and financial funds from other students who had good attendance. Attendance for all but one of the thirty-two school districts improved. The program was considered to be an overall success although there were some areas of weakness.

### Report on Surveys

Orr (1987) reported a summary of fourteen surveys on absenteeism/dropouts. Orr states absenteeism/dropouts have increasingly become a major problem for educators in America. These students are often unable to obtain employment and often become a burden on today's society. Orr reported four major reasons that students have absenteeism/dropout problems: poor academic performance, inability to get along with teachers, pregnancy, and employment.

Orr (1987) stated the effectiveness of an absentee/dropout prevention program depended on several variables. These variables included size of school or program, course instruction content, structure of the school program, support from students, parents, teachers, administration, supplemental services, and collaboration and funding. What is effective for one school or school district may be a total failure or only partially successful in another. Each school or school district needs to combat student absenteeism. This can best be



done by developing and administering an absenteeism/  
dropout prevention program especially designed for their  
situation.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

#### Subjects of the Field Study

This field study was conducted by compiling information from questionnaires completed by students and faculty at Springfield High School. Springfield High School is a secondary school containing grades nine through twelve, located in Robertson County within the city limits of Springfield, Tennessee. The courses of studies offered are general education, vocational education and training, and college preparation.

Springfield High School has forty-six teachers and approximately nine-hundred students. The student and teacher population change very little from year to year. Most of the students and teachers live within the city limits of Springfield, with only a few from the surrounding rural areas.

Most of the Springfield High School students are from average income families and have one or two siblings. Approximately fifteen percent of Springfield High School's graduates enter college.

The faculty of Springfield High School has an average age of about forty. Most of the teachers are graduates of Austin Peay State University, Middle Tennessee State University, or Tennessee State

University. Sixty percent of Springfield's faculty have a Master's degree or better. The teacher turn-over rate is very low, with an average of two positions being changed each year.

### Procedures of the Field Study

The topic and general description of this field study was first presented to and approved by the investigator's graduate committee. Permission to conduct this field study was then received from Mr. Clayton Sykes, principal at Springfield High School. Permission also was granted by Mr. Sykes to use some data obtained in a previous self study at Springfield High School. In the previous study, student and teacher questionnaires were developed and used to survey the students and teachers regarding causes of student absenteeism at Springfield High School.

The student questionnaire was used to collect information from the sophomore class. The information obtained from the questionnaires was studied and combined. Each section of the questionnaire was studied to determine if there are trends in students absenteeism. Causes of student absenteeism and school policies regarding absenteeism were compared. The questionnaire responses were studied completely, and suggestions pertaining to better school attendance were presented by the investigator to the principal of Springfield High School.

### Description of the Evaluation Instrument

In a previous study at Springfield High School questionnaires were developed to survey the faculty and sophomore class in regard to student absenteeism. The students filled out one for selecting five reasons (from a list of sixteen) as to why they most frequently missed school. The students also participated in a forty-three question survey dealing with possible causes of student absenteeism at Springfield High School.

The faculty participated in a fourteen question survey designed to obtain their perspectives concerning student absenteeism. The surveys also were used to ascertain their opinions concerning the current school rules and policies on student absenteeism at Springfield High School.



## CHAPTER 4

### Presentation, Interpretation, and Discussion of the Data

#### Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present an analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the data. The major purpose of this field study was to determine the reasons students are absent from school.

The data reported in the following sections of this chapter pertain to the four question hypotheses listed in chapter one of this field study.

#### Student Questionnaire

One-hundred and eighty-nine of the two-hundred and twenty sophomores (eighty-six percent) at Springfield High School completed and returned the questionnaires on student absenteeism. The group responding consisted of ninety-seven females and ninety-two males.

#### Teacher Questionnaire

There were forty-six questionnaires distributed to the faculty at Springfield High School of which thirty-one (sixty-eight percent) were returned. Fourteen of those participating in this survey have taught between thirteen and eighteen years as shown in these results:

<u>Years Experience</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>
0 - 3	1
4 - 7	2
8 - 12	6
13 - 18	14
More than 18	8

The curriculum area in which the teacher spends most of his or her time is shown as follows:

<u>Curriculum</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>
Science	4
Mathematics	5
English	6
Social Studies	3
Special Education	5
P. E. / Health	4
Vocational	4
Art / Band	0

All grade levels were represented. Most teachers at Springfield High School teach more than one grade level. However, the majority of the teacher's day is spent with basically one grade level as shown in these results:

<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>Number of Responses</u>
9	7
10	6
11	3
12	5
Equal	10

### Hypothesis One

The purpose of the first hypothesis was to determine the reasons for student absenteeism at Springfield High School.

Table 1 compares sixteen reasons for which students are absent from school. Students were asked to mark the five most frequent reasons for their school absences to the best of their knowledge. The five reasons receiving the most votes were: sickness, death in the family or a close friend, stayed up too late the night before, did

not want to go to school because it is boring, and missed the school bus. The reasons receiving the least amount of votes were: being physically threatened by other students, was to receive discipline for wrongful actions at school from a teacher or an administrator, and unsuccessful in school.

Table 2 compares how sickness affects student absenteeism. Eighty-four percent of the students responded that most of their sickness was minor in nature with their parents recommending that they stay home until they felt better. Forty-five percent of the students answered they usually miss between one and three days of school per year because of illness; only eight percent of the students marked they had missed school because of the use of alcohol or drugs. Fifty-six percent of the students miss three days or less because of sickness, this percentage is acceptable according to the minimum attendance requirement suggested by Perlberg (1980). Eighty-five percent of the students who are absent from school because of sickness are absent because their parents or doctor recommended they stay home. This is an excused absence at Springfield High School. On excused absences the student is allowed to make up all work and tests he or she may have missed. This ranked number one in the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 3 (item 1) shows sixty-six percent of the

TABLE 1

## Reasons for School Absences by Number and Rank

Responses	Ranking	Reason
173	1.	Sickness
117	2.	Death in the family or a close friend
70	3.	Stayed up too late the night before
64	4.	Did not want to go to school because it is boring
46	5.	Missed the school bus
41	6.	Had to work
40	7.	Had car trouble
33	8.	To spend time with friends and or boyfriend or girlfriend
27	9.	Did not prepare for a test that day
23	10.	Did not prepare homework
22	11.	Child (of student) or sibling was sick
20	12.	Did not have clean clothes to wear
18	13.	Pregnant
13	14.	Unsuccessful in school
12	15.	Was to receive discipline for wrongful actions at school from a teacher or an administrator
8	16.	Physically threatened by other students



TABLE 2

## Responses and Percentages to Sickness as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. The days I miss school because of sickness were recommended by:	a. Doctor b. Parents c. Student's choice	40 97 25	25% 60% 15%
2. When absent because of sickness, the sickness would be classified as:	a. Cold, headache, etc. b. Flu, mumps, etc. c. Personal hygiene d. Broken bone, etc. e. Serious illness	93 38 5 6 20	58% 23% 3% 4% 12%
3. In a usual year I miss the following amount of days because of sickness:	a. None b. 1 - 3 c. 4 - 7 d. 8 - 10 e. More than 10	19 75 56 9 9	11% 45% 34% 5% 5%
4. Have you ever missed school because of the use of alcohol or drugs?	a. Yes b. No	14 151	8% 92%

students have missed school because of a death in the family or a close friend. This is a high percentage; however, it was expected. This ranked number two on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 3 (item 2) shows students occasionally miss school because it is boring. Only forty-two percent of the students taking part in the survey have ever missed school because they thought it was boring. These absences are counted as unexcused absences and students are not allowed to make up work and tests which they may have missed. Turked and Abramson (1986) reported negative attitudes toward school had a major influence on school attendance and further increased student absenteeism. This ranked number four on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 4 compares the reasons that students stayed up at night and therefore missed school the next day. Sixty-five percent of the students marked they had not missed school because of staying up too late the night before. Thirty-five percent of the students marked they had missed school because they have stayed up too late the night before. When students did stay up too late, it was usually because of television. Janko (1987) reported many students had absences of this nature because of misplaced priorities. This ranked number three on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

TABLE 3

Responses and Percentages to Death and Boredom of School as Reasons for Absence

Item	Yes Responses	Yes Percentages	No Responses	No Percentages
1. Student has missed school because of a death in the family or of a close friend.	101	66%	53	34%
2. Student has missed school because he or she thinks it is boring.	67	42%	94	58%

TABLE 4

## Responses and Percentages to Late Night Activities as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Have you ever missed school because you stayed up too late the night before?	a. Yes	52	35%
	b. No	95	65%
2. Why did you stay up too late the night before?	a. Watching television	24	17%
	b. Company	12	9%
	c. Homework	18	13%
	d. Ballgame	9	6%
	e. I never miss because of this reason	78	55%
3. How often do you miss school because you stayed up too late the night before?	a. Never	100	68%
	b. 1 - 3 days	36	25%
	c. 4 - 7 days	8	6%
	d. More than 7 days	2	1%



Table 5 compares the reasons students miss the school bus and the frequency they are absent from school because of missing the bus. The major reason for missing the bus was because they had overslept. The survey shows thirty-five percent of the students have missed the bus, however, approximately fifty percent of those missing the bus find alternate transportation to school. Very often those who miss the bus and find alternate transportation to school arrive late. Therefore, they are tardy to some classes or miss some classes altogether. This ranked number five on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 6 compares why students work and if they are required by their parents to work. Twenty-six percent of the students marked they are required by their parents to work. However, seventy-nine percent of the students marked they do not miss school because of their employment. Sixty-four percent of the students responded they work to have spending money or to make car payments. Only twenty-one percent of those working miss school because of their work. Of the twenty-one percent who miss school because of work, thirteen percent miss only one to three days per school year. Only eight percent of those who miss school because of work miss over three days per year. Eight percent of the students have problems with attendance which should be dealt with before they become chronic absentee problems. Hahn

TABLE 5

## Responses and Percentages to Missing the Bus as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. How many times a year do you miss the bus?	a. None	109	65%
	b. 1 - 3 days	48	29%
	c. 4 - 7 days	7	4%
	d. More than 7 days	4	2%
2. Why did you miss the bus?	a. Overslept	48	29%
	b. Eating breakfast	13	9%
	c. Television / stereo	4	2%
	d. Weather	6	4%
	e. I never missed the bus	92	56%

TABLE 6

Responses and Percentages to Missing School Because of  
Employment or Work as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Are you required by parents to work?	a. Yes	43	26%
	b. No	123	74%
2. Why do you work (the reason you earn money)?	a. Spending money	69	51%
	b. Car or insurance	18	13%
	c. Clothes	5	4%
	d. Help parents with bills	1	1%
	e. All of the above	42	31%
3. How many days a year do you miss school because of work?	a. None	126	79%
	b. 1 - 3 days	21	13%
	c. 4 - 7 days	8	5%
	d. 8 - 10 days	1	1%
	e. More than 10 days	3	2%

(1987) reported employment is a major problem in American schools that sooner or later must be dealt with. This ranked number six on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 7 shows the number of students who have missed school because of car trouble and the frequency they had missed school because of car trouble. Sixty eight percent of the students responded that they do not drive to school. Only twenty-seven percent of the students who drive to school marked they had car trouble which caused them to be absent from school. This ranked in seventh place on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 8 shows the number of students that have missed school because they were skipping school with a friend or a boyfriend/girlfriend. Twenty-five percent of the students marked they had missed school to be with a friend. Twenty-seven percent of the students marked they had missed school to be with a boyfriend or a girlfriend. This was expected since Copple (1987) reported absences of this nature are often caused by peer pressure or the student's environment or culture. This ranked number eight on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 9 compares the reasons students have failed to study for a test and the frequency they missed school because they failed to prepare for the test.



TABLE 7

## Responses and Percentages to Car Trouble as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Have you ever had car trouble that caused you to be absent from school?	a. Yes	45	27%
	b. No	123	73%
2. How many days a year do you have car trouble?	a. 1 - 2	32	20%
	b. 3 - 4	12	8%
	c. More than 7 days	6	4%
	d. Question does not apply because I do not drive to school	105	68%

TABLE 8

Responses and Percentages to Friends: Boyfriend or Girlfriend  
as Reasons for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Do you miss school to be with your friends?	a. Yes b. No	36 107	25% 75%
2. Do you miss school to be with your boyfriend or girlfriend?	a. Yes b. No	37 101	27% 73%
3. How many days a year do you miss school because you are with your friends and/or boyfriend or girlfriend?	a. None b. 1 - 3 days c. 4 - 7 days d. More than 7 days	94 36 6 8	65% 25% 4% 6%

TABLE 9

Responses and Percentages to Not Preparing for a Test  
as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Did you ever not prepare for a test the night before?	a. Yes	114	79%
	b. No	31	21%
2. Why did you not prepare for your test the night before?	a. Watched television	22	15%
	b. Had company	23	16%
	c. Ballgame/activities	16	11%
	d. I always prepare	13	9%
	e. Forgot	71	49%
3. How many times per year do you miss school because you failed to study for a test?	a. Never	109	74%
	b. 1 - 3 days	30	20%
	c. 4 - 7 days	4	3%
	d. More than 7 days	4	3%

Only twenty-six percent of the students responded that they missed school because they did not prepare for a test the night before. Eleven percent of the students marked school activities as the reason they did not prepare properly for a test. This ranked number nine on the ranking of reasons why students have been absent from school.

Table 10 compares the reasons students failed to do their homework and the frequency they missed school because they failed to prepare their homework. Only twenty-three percent of the students marked they missed school because they failed to do their homework. Three percent more students miss because of failure to study for test. Therefore, test are perceived slightly more important than homework. Seventy-seven percent of the students marked they never miss school because they failed to do their homework. One significant finding was forty-nine percent of the students marked they did not understand the assignment or that the teachers assigned too much homework. These reasons for not properly preparing homework could be reduced by better explanation on behalf of the teachers and a reasonable amount of homework. This ranked number ten on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 11 shows the number of students that have missed school because they had to stay home with a sick child of their own or a sick sibling. Eight percent of



TABLE 10

Responses and Percentages to Not Preparing Homework  
as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Have you ever missed school because you did not prepare your homework?	a. Yes	38	23%
	b. No	124	77%
2. Why did you not prepare your homework?	a. Watched television	19	13%
	b. Did not understand	28	20%
	c. Teachers assigned too much	21	15%
	d. Ballgame/activities	12	8%
	e. I always do my homework	63	44%
3. How many times a year do you miss school because you failed to do your homework?	a. Never	112	74%
	b. 1 - 2 days	27	18%
	c. 3 - 4 days	8	5%
	d. More than 4 days	4	3%

TABLE 11

Responses and Percentages to Children (of student) or Sibling  
Was Sick as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Do you have any children?	a. Yes	18	13%
	b. No	123	87%
2. If you have children have you ever stayed home from school to be with them?	a. Yes	11	8%
	b. No	31	22%
	c. Does not apply	98	70%
3. Do you ever have to baby sit with a sick brother or sister?	a. Yes	40	28%
	b. No	50	35%
	c. Does not apply	54	37%
4. How many days a year do you have to stay home with someone who is sick?	a. Never	83	56%
	b. 1 - 3	51	34%
	c. 4 - 7	9	6%
	d. More than 7 days	6	4%

the students marked they had missed school to be with a sick child of their own. Twenty-eight percent of the students marked they had missed school to be with a sick sibling. These are not considered as excused absences from school, however, in today's society they are often considered as acceptable absences. These percentages have increased because of the large amount of teenage pregnancies, one parent homes, and homes in which both parents work. This is a problem society must sooner or later deal with. This ranked number eleven on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 12 shows the number of students that have missed school because of embarrassing personal problems such as not having clean clothes to wear. Only eighteen percent of the students marked that they had missed school because of this reason. Of the students who marked this reason only five percent had missed over three days of school. This ranked number twelve on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 13 (item 1) shows eight percent of the students marked pregnancy as being a reason that they have missed school. This percentage has increased in the past few years because of the increase in teenage pregnancies. Naisbitt (1984) reports today's society and its standards are rapidly changing. Nelsen (1975) suggests programs with emphasis in such areas as valuing, self image, and interpersonal relationships. Such

programs may help decrease teenage pregnancies and the absentees they cause. This ranked number thirteen on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 13 (item 2) shows the number of students that have missed school because they believed they were not successful in school. Only fifteen percent marked this as a reason they missed school. Students who view themselves as being unsuccessful in school often develop attendance problems. Sween (1987) reported this as an absenteeism-dropout problem. The more students are absent the more their success rate drops, thus creating a cycle which may lead to dropping out of school. McDonald and Wright (1987) reported this group of students may benefit from school guidance counselors or a school advisor-advisee program. This ranked number fourteen on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 13 (item 3) shows the number of students that have missed school because they were to receive discipline from a teacher or administrator. Only seventeen percent of the students marked this as a reason they missed school. This reason was expected to rank low because the students know that sooner or later they must return to school and then they must face their problem. This ranked number fifteen on the ranking of reasons why students have missed school.

Table 13 (item 4) shows the number of students



TABLE 12

Responses and Percentages to Not Having Clean Clothing to Wear  
as a Reason for Absence

Questions	Answers	Responses	Percentages
1. Did you ever miss school because you did not have clean clothes to wear?	a. Yes	27	18%
	b. No	125	82%
2. Why did you not have clean clothes to wear?	a. Forgot to wash	25	15%
	b. Washer/dryer broke	2	1%
	c. Mother was sick	5	3%
	d. Other	8	5%
	e. Question does not apply	126	76%
3. How many days per year do you miss because you do not have clean clothes to wear?	a. Never	129	83%
	b. 1 - 3 days	19	12%
	c. 4 - 7 days	3	2%
	d. More than 7 days	4	3%

TABLE 13

Miscellaneous Reasons for Student Absenteeism by  
Number of Responses and Percentages

Item	Yes Responses	Yes Percentages	No Responses	No Percentages
1. Have you ever missed school because of pregnancy?	13	8%	0	0%
2. Student missed school because he or she felt unsuccessful at school.	24	15%	131	85%
3. Student has missed school to avoid discipline from a teacher or administrator.	24	17%	114	83%
4. Student has missed school because he or she was physically threatened by another student.	22	14%	136	86%

that have missed school because they were physically threatened by other students. Only fourteen percent marked this as a reason they missed school. This was last on the ranking list, being number sixteen.

### Hypothesis Two

The purpose of the second hypothesis was to determine how student absenteeism is viewed by students and teachers at Springfield High School.

Table 14 (item 1) compares the views of the students on student absenteeism. Only thirty-three percent of the students viewed absenteeism as a problem at Springfield High School.

Table 14 (item 2) compares the views of the teachers on student absenteeism. Sixty-nine percent of the teachers viewed absenteeism as a problem at Springfield High School.

There is a significant difference in the views of the teachers and students when their views on absenteeism are compared. More than twice the percent of teachers (sixty-nine percent) as students (thirty-three percent) view absenteeism as a problem. This could be because students do not pay close attention to absenteeism or because it has a great affect on the teachers' lesson plans and daily progress.

Table 14 (item 3) shows eighty-two percent of the students answering the survey stated that a teacher, administrator, or guidance counselor had not talked to

them about the importance of good school attendance.

Table 14 (item 4) shows one-hundred percent of the teachers answered they talk to their students about the importance of good attendance.

There is a significant difference in the answers students and teachers marked concerning students being occasionally talked to by school personnel on the importance of good attendance. One-hundred percent of the teachers marked they occasionally talk to their students on the importance of good attendance, however, only eighteen percent of the students agree. The difference could be the school personnel do not present this information in the form of a formal lecture. Also, the difference could be the students were not very attentive during the lectures on good attendance.

### Hypothesis Three

The purpose of the third hypothesis was to determine how student absenteeism affects students' grades.

Table 15 (item 1) shows ninety-two percent of the students make up their homework and tests when they are absent. This is a high percentage as was expected because students are allowed to make up homework and tests if their absences are excused. The students usually get their make up work the day they return to school when their teachers sign their absentee note.

Table 15 (item 2) shows sixty-one percent of teachers believe it does not hurt the students' grades



TABLE 14

Student and Teacher Views on Student Absenteeism  
by Number of Responses and Percentages

Question		Yes Responses	Yes Percentages	No Responses	No Percentages
1.	Do students view absenteeism as a problem?	56	33%	115	67%
2.	Do teachers view student absenteeism as a problem?	20	69%	9	31%
3.	Do the teachers speak on the importance of school attendance to the students (students' views)?	30	18%	140	82%
4.	Do the teachers speak on the importance of school attendance to the students (teachers' views)?	31	100%	0	0%

TABLE 15

## Absenteeism Affect on Grades by Responses and Percentages

Questions		Yes Responses	Yes Percentages	No Responses	No Percentages
1.	Do students make up homework and tests (students' views)?	159	92%	13	8%
2.	Does one day of absenteeism per grading period hurt the students' grades (teachers' views)?	12	39%	19	61%
3.	Does one day of absenteeism per grading period hurt the students' grades (students' views)?	58	34%	112	66%
4.	Do teachers allow make up work with an excused absence (teachers' views)?	31	100%	0	0%
5.	Do teachers allow make up work with an unexcused absence (teachers' views)?	2	6%	29	94%

when they are absent as little as one day per six week grading period. This is a high percentage as was expected. Students who had excused absences are allowed to make up work and tests, therefore, no grades are missed. Students who miss as little as one day per grading period usually make up their work.

Table 15 (item 3) shows sixty-six percent of the students believe it does not affect their grades to be absent one day of school per six week grading period. This is a high percentage and was expected. Students are allowed to make up work and tests with an excused absence. Even if the absence is unexcused and grades are missed the students know there is only a possibility of missing one grade out of thirty possible grades.

Table 15 (item 4) shows one-hundred percent of the teachers allow their students to make up homework and tests when they had an excused absence. This high percentage was expected because this is a school policy.

Table 15 (item 5) shows ninety-four percent of the teachers do not allow their students to make up homework or tests when they had an unexcused absence. This high percentage was expected because this is a school policy and it encourages students to have good attendance.

#### Hypothesis Four

The purpose of the fourth hypothesis was to determine if the students and teachers believe present

rules and policies on student absenteeism are fair.

Table 16 (item 1) shows sixty-two percent of the students believe the present rules and policies on student absenteeism are fair.

Table 16 (item 2) shows sixty percent of the students did not believe there was any need to adopt new rules or policies concerning student absenteeism at Springfield High School.

Table 16 (item 3) shows ninety-three percent of the teachers believe the rules on student absenteeism are fair.

Table 16 (item 4) shows thirty-one percent of the teachers think new rules and policies concerning student absenteeism need to be implemented at Springfield High School.

Sixty-two percent of the students and ninety-three percent of the teachers believe that the rules and policies at Springfield High School on absenteeism are fair. However, forty percent of the students and thirty-one percent of the teachers believe new rules and policies concerning student absenteeism are needed. Although present rules are fair they may be outdated or need to be further clarified. McNitt (1983) reported weak and poorly written rules and policies need to be strengthened and clarified to help lower the absentee rate. Since today's society is rapidly changing, rules and policies need to be updated and revised periodically.



TABLE 16

Student and Teacher Views on Present Attendance Rules and Policies  
by Number of Responses and Percentages

Questions		Yes Responses	Yes Percentages	No Responses	No Percentages
1.	Do students believe rules and policies on absenteeism are fair?	105	62%	64	38%
2.	Do students believe there need to be new rules and policy changes?	66	40%	100	60%
3.	Do teachers view the rules on absenteeism as being fair?	27	93%	2	7%
4.	Do teachers believe there need to be new rules and policy changes?	9	31%	20	69%

## CHAPTER 5

### Summary and Recommendations

#### Introduction

The purpose of this field study was to attempt to determine the "real" causes of student absenteeism at Springfield High School. The survey report of students and teachers did not reveal much new information which will bring about better student attendance. The survey basically added to and supported past research on student absenteeism.

Much class time is spent each period checking absentee notes, assigning make up work, repeating vocal information, and taking up past due assignments. Absenteeism affects students who were absent and those who were present. As research shows, absenteeism affects the entire student body, the faculty, administration, and the nation as a whole.

It is very important classroom time be spent in the designated curriculum area working with the specific and general objectives. However, much valuable classroom time is wasted because of absenteeism. Research shows students benefit from good attendance and taking part in the many aspects of school. Research also shows good student attendance improves most aspects of school and carries on through life in the student's chosen vocation.

### Summary

The findings of this study, grouped according to the four hypotheses, were as follow:

H<sub>1</sub>: What are the causes for student absenteeism at Springfield High School?

The researcher list sixteen basic reasons that students are absent from school in Chapter Four. The most common reason for being absent from school was sickness (see Table 1, page 33).

H<sub>2</sub>: How is student absenteeism viewed by students and teachers at Springfield High School?

The researcher found sixty-seven percent of the students do not view absenteeism as a problem. However, sixty-nine percent of the teachers do view absenteeism as a problem.

H<sub>3</sub>: How does student absenteeism affect student grades?

The researcher found sixty-one percent of the students and sixty-six percent of the teachers believed that it does not hurt students' grades to be absent one time per grading period. All teachers allow their students with excused absences to make up missed work and tests. Ninety-two percent of the students answered that they make up their work and tests when they are absent.

H<sub>4</sub>: How do the students and teachers view the present rules and policies on student absenteeism?

The researcher found sixty-two percent of the

students and ninety-three percent of the teachers believed the rules on student absenteeism are fair. However, the researcher found forty percent of the students and thirty-one percent of the teachers believed new rules and policies concerning student absenteeism need to be implemented at Springfield High School.

### Conclusions

This field study revealed some of Springfield High School's strengths and weaknesses concerning its rules and policies on student absenteeism. After studying and comparing the student absenteeism data, the following strengths and weaknesses were determined to exist:

#### Strengths:

1. Sixty-two percent of the students and ninety-three percent of the teachers believed the present rules and policies are enforced equally for everyone.
2. A list of all rules and school policies is presented to every student in the form of a folder on the opening day of school.
3. A Robertson County Rules and Policy Handbook is presented to each student during the third week of school.
4. A Robertson County Rules and Policy Handbook and Springfield High School Handbook are presented to each Springfield High School teacher during the opening week of inservice.



Weaknesses:

1. Some rules and policies are outdated.
2. How the administration determines an excused absence and an unexcused absence is not clearly understood by the students or the faculty.
3. Some of the rules and policies concerning student absenteeism are not worded clearly and precisely, therefore, the faculty has many differing opinions concerning student absenteeism.
4. The present rules and policies on student absenteeism do not do enough, if anything, to encourage better school attendance.
5. There is no real punishment for student absenteeism or any real loss of privileges.
6. The present rules and policies on student absenteeism do not address the need of some students to carry their own children to a doctor in case of sickness or to administering other parental duties.

Recommendations

After having studied the research on student absenteeism and the surveys from Springfield High School, it is evident student absenteeism is a local as well as a national problem. There is not a clear cut answer to the problem. However, many school districts have succeeded in decreasing student absenteeism through a number of various methods. Unfortunately, what works for one school or district may prove to be of little value

or a total failure when used elsewhere.

After studying the data from Springfield High School students and faculty, the following recommendations can be suggested:

1. Review and revise rules and policies concerning student absenteeism. Some of the old rules and policies are good. However, some are presently outdated, difficult, if not impossible to enforce, or totally useless. Make sure all rules are fair to all students and can be properly enforced.

2. Have a homeroom discussion, film, or lecture in every homeroom once a month concerning good attendance. This will reinforce the desired behavior and show the importance faculty and administration place on attendance.

3. Call the students' parents at home or at work regarding all student absences. This will show the school's interest in the student and his or her need to be at school. If the parents cannot be reached by phone, a standardized letter could be mailed. This would help to show the importance the administration places on good attendance.

4. For students who miss school to work, the school should encourage them to take part in the distributive education program. The student's schedule would then be changed and work time allotted. At that point, the student's work would be considered part of the education

through the distributive education program and would not be counted as an absence from school.

5. Students with chronic absenteeism because of cars would have their privilege of driving to school temporarily suspended. When their attendance becomes acceptable their privilege of driving to school could be restored.

6. Once each grading period an article on good school attendance and its importance could be submitted to the Robertson County Times (local newspaper). This would help reinforce the desired behavior and would be available to all parents and students. This would be of no cost to the school system and would serve to help all schools in the county.

7. Once each grading period have a special activity or reward for all students who have perfect attendance. Also, near the end of the year, have a special activity or reward for students with perfect attendance for the entire school year.

Research shows a vast amount of instructional time each period of each school day is spent in one way or another dealing with student absenteeism. Students, teachers, and administrators all get into habits or patterns. This can be especially true with student absenteeism. These habits cause havoc with instructional time and often set bad habits early in life which may exist the student's entire life.

Today there are many innovative ideas in the ever changing world of education (Naisbitt, 1984). Teachers and administrators cannot wait for bad student attendance to change on its own. They must develop and insist on new attitudes concerning good student attendance and its importance.



## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Letter of Intent to Principal

September 10, 1988

Mr. Clayton Sykes, Principal  
Springfield High School  
Route 3, Box 344 A  
Springfield, Tennessee 37172

Dear Mr. Sykes:

I am completing a field study as part of the requirements for an Educational Specialist Degree. The field study is on, "Student Absenteeism at Springfield High School: A Survey of Students and Teachers." This study has been approved by the Austin Peay State University Graduate Council.

The purpose of this investigation is to study the perspectives and causes for student absenteeism. I would like to use some data gathered by Springfield High School in a past study.

I am hereby asking for your permission to carry on this study. If you have any questions or would like to be informed of the results of this study, please contact me at school.

Sincerely,

Lonnie J. Whitlow

Clayton Sykes, Principal  
Phone 384-3516



Hugh Traughber, Assistant Principal  
Greg Bell, Assistant Principal

Springfield High School  
Route 3, Box 344-A Springfield, Tennessee 37172

September 14, 1988

Mr. Lonnie J. Whitlow  
Route # 2  
220 S. Commerce Street  
Adams, Tennessee 37010

Dear Mr. Whitlow:

This letter is in reference to your letter of September 10, 1988, concerning a field study which you are completing as a part of the requirements for an Educational Specialist Degree at Austin Peay State University. You have my permission to conduct this study.

Please send Mr. Jerome Ellis, Superintendent of Schools and me a copy of the results of the study.

Sincerely,

Clayton Sykes,  
Principal

CS/dw

## Appendix C

## Student Ranking Form on Absenteeism

Please mark the following to the best of your knowledge as for why you have missed school days or classes.

Please place a X by the five most frequent reasons for your absences.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Sickness
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Missed the school bus
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Had car trouble
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Had to work
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Did not want to go to school because it is boring
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Did not have clean clothes to wear
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Death in the family or a close friend
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Physically threatened by other students
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Unsuccessful in school
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Did not prepare homework
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Did not prepare for test that day
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Stayed up too late the night before
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Child (of the student) or sibling was sick
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. To spend time with friends and/or boyfriend or girlfriend
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Was to receive discipline for wrongful actions at school from a teacher or an administrator
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. Pregnant



Appendix D  
Student Questionnaire

For each question please mark the appropriate answer on your answer sheet. Thank you.

1. What is your age?
  - a. 14
  - b. 15
  - c. 16
  - d. 17
  - e. 18
2. What is your sex?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
3. Do you see student absenteeism as a problem at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
4. Do you make up homework and tests for the days you are absent?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. In your opinion does it hurt your grades to miss as little as one day per six week period?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
6. Do you think the present rules on absenteeism are fair at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. Do you think new rules and policy changes concerning absenteeism need to be implemented at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Has a teacher, administrator, or guidance counselor ever talked to you about your school attendance?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

9. The days I missed school because of sickness were recommended by:
  - a. Doctor
  - b. Parents
  - c. Your own choice
10. When absent because of sickness, the sickness would be classified as:
  - a. Cold, headache, rash, etc.
  - b. Flu, chickenpox, mumps, measles, etc.
  - c. Personal hygiene
  - d. Broken bone, hospital stay, etc.
  - e. Serious illness
11. In a usual year I miss the following amount of days because of illness:
  - a. None
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. 8 - 10
  - e. More than 10
12. Have you ever missed school because of the use of alcohol or drugs?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
13. How many times a year do you miss the school bus?
  - a. None
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. More than 7
14. Why did you miss the school bus?
  - a. Overslept
  - b. Eating breakfast
  - c. Watching television
  - d. Weather
  - e. I have never missed the bus
15. Have you ever had car trouble that caused you to be absent from school?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
16. How many days a year do you have car trouble?
  - a. 1 - 2
  - b. 3 - 4
  - c. More than 4 days
  - d. This question does not apply to me

17. Are you required by your parents to work?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
18. Why do you work (the reason for earning money)?
  - a. To have spending money
  - b. Car and insurance payment
  - c. To buy clothes
  - d. To help my parents with bills
  - e. All of the above
19. How many days a year do you miss school because of work?
  - a. None
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. 8 - 10
  - e. More than 10
20. How many days a year do you miss school just because you think it is boring?
  - a. Never
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. More than 7
21. Have you ever missed school because you did not have clean clothes to wear?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
22. Why did you not have clean clothes to wear?
  - a. This question does not apply to me
  - b. Forgot to wash
  - c. Washer or dryer was broke
  - d. Mother was sick
  - e. Other
23. How many days per year do you miss school because you do not have clean clothes to wear.
  - a. Never
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. More than 7
24. Have you ever missed school because of a death in your family or of a close friend?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

25. Have you ever missed school because you were physically threatened by other students?
- Yes
  - No
26. Have you ever missed school just because you felt you were not successful at school?
- Yes
  - No
27. Have you ever missed school because you did not prepare your homework?
- Yes
  - No
28. Why do you not prepare your homework?
- Watched television
  - Did not understand
  - Teachers assigned too much
  - Ballgame or other school activities
  - I always do my homework
29. How many times a year do you miss school because you failed to do your homework?
- Never
  - 1 - 2
  - 3 - 4
  - More than 4
30. Did you ever not prepare for a test the night before?
- Yes
  - No
31. Why did you not prepare for your test the night before?
- Watched television
  - Had company
  - Ballgame or other school activities
  - Forgot
  - I always study for my tests
32. How many times per year do you miss school because you failed to study for a test?
- Never
  - 1 - 3
  - 4 - 7
  - More than 7



33. Have you ever missed school because you stayed up too late the night before?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
34. Why did you stay up too late the night before?
- a. I never miss school because of this
  - b. Watching television
  - c. Homework
  - d. Ballgame or other school activities
  - e. Company
35. How often do you miss school because you stayed up too late the night before?
- a. Never
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. More than 7
36. Do you have any children?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
37. If you have children have you ever stayed home from school to be with your sick child?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. This question does not apply to me
38. Do you ever have to babysit with a sick brother or sister?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. This question does not apply to me
39. How many days a year do you have to stay home with someone who is sick?
- a. Never
  - b. 1 - 3 days
  - c. 4 - 7 days
  - d. More than 7 days
40. Have you ever missed school to avoid discipline from a teacher or administrator?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
41. Do you miss school to be with your friends?
- a. Yes
  - b. No

42. Do you miss school to be with your boyfriend or girlfriend?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
43. How many days a year do you miss school because you are with your friends and/or boyfriend or girlfriend?
- a. None
  - b. 1 - 3
  - c. 4 - 7
  - d. More than 7

Appendix E  
Teacher Questionnaire

For each question please circle the most appropriate answer. Thank you.

1. How many years have you taught?
  - a. 0 - 3
  - b. 4 - 7
  - c. 8 - 12
  - d. 13 - 18
  - e. More than 18
2. Curricular area in which you teach the majority of the time.
  - a. Science
  - b. Math
  - c. English
  - d. Social Studies
  - e. Special Education
  - f. Physical Education - Health
  - g. Vocational
  - h. Art - Band
3. Which grade level do you teach the majority of your time?
  - a. 9
  - b. 10
  - c. 11
  - d. 12
4. Do you see student absenteeism as a problem at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
5. Do you think the present rules on absenteeism are fair at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. No opinion
6. Do you think new rules and policy changes concerning absenteeism need to be implemented at Springfield High School?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. No opinion

7. Do you allow students to make up their homework and tests if they have an excused absence?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. Do you allow students to make up their homework and tests if they have an absence which is not excused?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
9. In your opinion does it hurt the students' grades to miss as little as one day per six week period?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. No opinion
10. As a teacher do you ever talk to your students about the importance of good school attendance?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No



## Appendix F

## Attendance Procedures

1. It is important that all rolls be checked regularly and accurately.
  - a. The Homeroom Attendance Card is designed to serve for an entire month. At the end of the homeroom period, write the names of all absentees in the proper space. Write the number of students eating lunch for that day at the bottom of the space. The lunch count is important in preparing the right amount of food for that day. (On the following day correct any discrepancies.)
  - b. At the beginning of each period, an office worker will pick up your absentee slip for that period. If all of your students are present or accounted for, write 100% or all accounted for on your absentee slip. Fill out a slip for each period even if all of your students are present. Use the clip located on the outside of your door.
2. Require an admission slip from students who were absent the day before.
  - a. The student must obtain an admission slip to class from the office before or during homeroom period. Excused reasons for absences are sickness, death in immediate family, required court appearances, driver's license test, work in tobacco, and special permission from the principal. Notes with other reasons will be unexcused.
  - b. Students whose name appears on the check-out list printed on the absentee sheet are not required to have an admission slip.
  - c. Sign the admission slip and record whether the note is excused or unexcused in your roll book. Return the admission slip to the student. Collect the admission slips and turn them in with your absentee slip at the beginning of your 6th period class.
  - d. Students with unexcused absences will not be allowed to make up missed work. Mark a zero "0"

in your grade book for each unexcused absence. When the student has 3 zeros, lower their 6 weeks grade one letter.

3. All students who wish to leave school before the end of the day must check out in the office, with no exceptions.
  - a. The student must bring a note from home stating the reason for leaving, the time of departure, the phone number where a parent may be reached for note verification, and the parent's signature. All notes will be checked and filed in the office.
  - b. The student should present the note to the Assistant Principal before homeroom. The names of students with verified notes will be printed on the daily absentee sheet with check-out time and unexcused reasons noted.
  - c. Sick students must report to the office and get permission before missing class, calling home, or calling a doctor.
  - d. Only parents or legal guardians who come to school may sign a student out. The reason may still be unexcused and may effect the student's grade.
  - e. Excused reasons for checking out or for checking in are the same as those reasons for excused absences from school listed above.
4. All students who arrive at school late must sign in at the Attendance Office.
  - a. A tardy slip will be issued to permit late entry into class.
  - b. When a bus is late, an announcement will be made. Carefully check students entering late. Bus numbers should be recorded in your roll book. Do not allow anyone else to enter homeroom without a tardy slip.
  - c. Each tardy will be recorded. When 6 tardies have accumulated in 6 weeks period, the student will be placed in Detention Hall.

- d. Class tardies will be reported on a daily list and turned in with your 6 period attendance report. Do not send class tardies to the office to get a late slip.
5. Good attendance is an attitude.
- a. Devote some time during homeroom to promote good attendance.
  - b. Explain the county's policies on the attendance law, homebound requirements, and GED diplomas.



## Appendix G

## In-School Suspension Program

THE IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM AT SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AS OF AUGUST 12, 1986.

The in-school suspension program is a method of isolating disruptive students in the school building as opposed to out-of-school suspension. In this program, students will continue their education and receive counseling to improve their behavior.

Many of the rules and regulations are mandated by the Tennessee Department of Education and the Robertson County Board of Education.

It is our hope this consequence to disruptive behavior will enable you to better create an educational environment within your classroom and within the total climate of Springfield High School.

1.) Students are assigned to the program by the building administrators.

2.) They would be referred for committing infractions of the school rules and regulations. These infractions are those that are not serious enough for out-of-school suspension. They include, but are not limited to the following: truancy, cutting classes, tardiness, fighting and disorderly conduct, smoking, and inappropriate dress.

## Goals and Objectives

1.) To provide a place within the school system for the supervision of students who would otherwise be suspended.

2.) To maintain the educational continuity during the time the student has lost the privilege of attending regular classes.

3.) To return the student to his or her regular classes with appropriate behavior and attitude change as quickly as possible.

4.) To refer parents and students to agencies for appropriate behavior and attitude change as quickly as possible.

5.) To gather data on students assigned to the program in an attempt to learn why students become "discipline problems", and to identify and work with potential dropouts and chronic disciplinary cases.

6.) To solicit public support to provide for more community services to augment the school's program and to follow up on problems identified in the school setting.



## Description

### Academics:

The students should have an individual program based upon their normal classwork.

Any tests and important work should be available. The regular classroom teachers can send the assignments to the program as it should be the responsibility of the student to get those assignments first thing every morning. Students should not be penalized academically or be allowed to sit idle.

### Counseling:

Individual or group counseling should provide the students the opportunity to evaluate their misbehavior and look for solutions. Values clarification, group discussions, and self-awareness techniques should be utilized.

### Isolation:

While assigned to the center, students should be isolated from the social activities of the school. Arrangements are made for lunch so that those on suspension will eat at a different time from the regular pupils. The rules for in-school suspension will be the same, basically, as those on out-of-school suspension.

THE RULES OF IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION ARE GIVEN TO THE STUDENTS IN THE STUDENT HANDBOOK OF 1986-87 ARE LISTED BELOW. AFTER STUDYING THE RESULTS OF LAST YEAR'S PROGRAM AND HEARING THE SUGGESTIONS YOU THE TEACHERS HAD, SOME CHANGES HAVE BEEN MADE. WE HOPE THESE WILL BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE STUDENT AND THE TOTAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM HERE AT SPRINGFIELD HIGH SCHOOL.

### Regulations:

1. A student will be placed on in-school suspension for any type of misconduct, violation of school rules, excessive tardies or any other misbehavior deemed punishable by the administration.

2. The suspended student will be assigned to a specific area for the time set by the administration.

3. The student will be given at least 24 hour notice before beginning the suspension.

4. The student will serve the suspension immediately following the violation. If for some reason the student does not attend the assigned suspension, an additional suspension day will be added. The students must choose to behave or will be help responsible for the consequences.

5. The suspended student will be responsible for getting assignments from individual teachers before or after school.

6. The suspension room will be monitored by an administrator or teacher.

7. The student will have an individualized program based upon their normal classwork.

8. Tests and important work will be made available.

9. Students serving in-school detention due to misbehavior in a classroom will forfeit their right to make-up work in that specific class while completing their in-school assignment.

10. Students are isolated from the social activities of the school.

11. Students in in-school suspension will eat lunch at a different time from the regular pupils.

12. Students in in-school suspension may not participate in any extra-curricular activities, athletics, etc. while serving their in-school suspension.

13. If a student serves three days in in-school for the same offense, stiffer discipline action will be taken: out-of-school suspension, etc.

14. The student will do academic work in silence. Time spent off-task will be added to another day of in-school as monitored by the instructor.

15. The student will only be allowed one restroom pass in the morning and one in the afternoon. The student will be escorted to and from the restroom. Additional restroom passes will result in additional time in in-school suspension.

16. During the lunch period, the student must remain in the lunch room. Only one student at a time will be permitted to use the restroom. Choosing to violate this regulation will be treated as leaving the classroom without permission, truancy or blatant disregard of authority.

17. If a student disrupts in the in-school suspension room, he or she earns extra hours there or more severe consequence.

18. Parents will be notified when and why you will serve in-school detention.

#### RULES FOR IN-SCHOOL SUSPENSION:

1. No sleeping.
2. No talking, eating, or drinking.
3. Books, paper, pencil must be brought to be allowed to enter.
4. Students arriving late or without materials with which work will not be admitted for any of the detention time and will be considered a no-show.
5. A student not attending an assigned in-school suspension will be awarded an additional day of in-school. The second no-show will result in an out-school suspension requiring a parental conference for re-admittance.
6. All in-school assignments must be met by all students.



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