

News Notes

BOB L. TAYLOR AND ROBERT C. MCKEAN

■ **CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM.** Staff members at Wirth Junior High School in Cahokia, Illinois, are alleviating the problem of student absenteeism and truancy. With a grant from the Truants Alternative Program sponsored by the Illinois Office of Education, the staff has investigated the problem and developed a program.

The initial study indicates that truant students have definite feelings of alienation toward the regular school setting. Specifically, they have few friends, are not successful in school, are behind in their schoolwork, and are quick to find excuses for not attending. They are followers, easily persuaded not to come to school. Data reveal negative feelings toward teachers, principals, mathematics, and school in general. An Anti-Social Index instrument finds these students involved in more trouble in school than others and indicates that irregularly attending students tend to choose friends with the same feelings.

The program seeks to retrieve the absent/truant students and prevent others from developing the pattern. On a daily basis the social counselor checks to see if any of the target group are absent a half hour after school opens. Parents are called regarding absence. When a student oversleeps, the parent is urged to bring the student to school. On rare occasions the social counselor might even visit the home and bring the student to school.

In the hallways in the morning, during breaks, and at lunch, the social counselor and the teacher facilitator are present to give support and aid to the target students. Support counseling on a one-to-one basis is available as needed and group support counseling is set up weekly. A special room includes a home living area, counseling area, and more formal tutorial area. Student tutors are available in all subjects. Monthly parties are held in the alternative room setting for boys and girls who achieve contracted attendance goals, and a chart is kept to indicate days of attendance.

For further information contact Peggy Cole, social/counselor; Ron Burgess, teacher/facilitator or Eugene Hamel, principal, by writing them care of the Illinois ASCD newsletter editor, Illinois ASCD, DeGarmo Hall 232, Illinois State University, Normal, IL 61761.

■ **ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM.** Project SOIL (Studying and Observing Interactions of Life), operated by the Nebraska City Public Schools under a Title IV-C grant, is an ecology course for academically talented students in seventh through ninth grades. The students observe the natural relationships in such ecological systems as forests, grasslands, streams, and lakes. The goal is to provide laboratory and field study of the relationships which exist in nature, to develop a citizen who can set standards to restore and maintain the environment needed by humans and other life, and to develop outdoor laboratory areas with student assistance.

Project SOIL is unique because it relies on nature as its classroom. Each student observes and records data for an investigation. These must include meteorological data, sunshine, wind velocity, precipitation, relative humidity, frost, and temperature. The students study the total living population of a given geographic area. To determine the given population they must trap alive terrestrial animals, net fish, and sample aquatic invertebrates. In addition, they study the water quality of ponds, streams, and wells.

For information on Project SOIL, contact Ben Hammerschmidt, Nebraska City Junior High School, 217 South 9th Street, Nebraska City, NE 68410.

■ **"LET'S READ to the animals!"** says Betty Miller, media specialist in Louisville Elementary School, Louisville, Colorado. Betty Miller's decision to combine reading with a child's natural affection for stuffed animals has been very successful.

The program has only one real requirement. The pupil must read the library book or show the pictures to the animal chosen as a special library friend. Many children also enjoy acting out the stories using the stuffed toys. Paddington the Bear, Curious George the Monkey, and many of Beatrix Potter's animals are among the favorite stuffed animals.

For further information, write to Phyllis Perry, Editor, *The Interchange*, Boulder Valley Public Schools, Instructional Services Division, PO Box 9011, Boulder, CO 80301.

■ **A NUTRITIOUS BREAKFAST.** Under the direction of the home economics department and with the support of the building principal, a student-operated breakfast bar is now available for staff members who relax in a quiet atmosphere while partaking of nutritious breakfast foods. Commented on in *Nutrition News*, published by the National Dairy Council, the breakfast bar is a vocational achievement which affords students on-the-premises work experience and reinforces basic competencies in reading and mathematics.

Initially senior students drafted the organizational and management plan. The eight positions include: manager/cashier, assistant manager/checker, short-order cook, baker, counterperson 1, counterperson 2, beverage counterperson/relief cashier, and a person to wait and bus tables. Each student worked two weeks a term from 7:30 to 10:15 a.m.

Operating on a 50 percent food cost, the profits, "while not monumental," enable the home economics department to supplement moneys needed for items not available through regular school allocations.

For information write to Marie C. Perry, Assistant Principal for Supervision, Home Economics and Nursing Departments, Washington Irving High School, New York, NY, or in care of *Nutrition News*, National

Dairy Council, 6300 North River Road, Rosemont, IL 60018.

■ **"STICKY CITY."** It's a favorite for children who visit the Los Angeles Children's Museum. This unique museum, located atop the Los Angeles City Mall, is a maze of activity areas. "Sticky City," one of the areas, is a large, carpeted, velvet-covered room filled with huge, lightweight shapes. The shapes with strips of velcro attached make building cushioned edifices easy and fun. The "Sticky City" room is "bump-proof" and "hurt-proof" for all children.

■ **AREAS OF CONCERN.** Wisconsin ASCD, under the leadership of Mary Ann Allen, has developed 11 areas of concern:

- Instructional leadership at building and district levels.
- Competency based education.
- Effective utilization of television and radio.
- Educational opportunities for students having special needs.
- Joint programs between school districts and higher education.
- Identification, study, and evaluation of educational issues.
- Support of community education.
- Review and dissemination of information.
- Educational programs for gifted and talented students.
- Opportunities for professional growth.
- Quality education through sharing expertise.

For more information about the selection process and recommendations, write to Dan Johnson, Editor of *Feedback*, 5689 N. 34th Street, Milwaukee, WI 53209.

■ **STUDENT PROBLEMS.** Identify potential student problems with a kit designed by Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). For use in classrooms of up to 30 students between the ages of three and eight, the kit is titled the School/Home Observation and Referral System (SHORS). Frequently problems are not identified before a student falls behind in school, develops behavior problems, or shows other signs of stress. If problems could be recognized earlier, the pupil

could be referred for professional help prior to a failure pattern developing.

SHORS is based on a cooperative plan between the teacher and the parents. For the parents the kit includes guides containing a checklist on the child's health and behavioral history, an outline of common childhood problems, an explanation of the SHORS program, and a list of resources for either parents or children who need more help.

Teachers, with general and specific observation and referral checklists, record a continuous history of observations, parent conferences, and follow-up information. The general checklist is used to keep track of such information as medical history, immunization data, common physical symptoms, and behavioral problem signs. When a pattern of difficulties is identified, then one of the specific checklists is used. The checklists cover seven areas: health, motor activities, vision, hearing, speech and language, learning, and behavior. Each list provides a detailed breakdown of characteristics to help adults focus on the exact nature of the child's problem.

Orientation materials which present an overview of the program for teachers and parents are available in two slide/tape presentations. For additional information, contact Lorin Lentendre, CTB/McGraw-Hill, DelMonte Research Park, Monterey, CA 93940.

Information Resources

FRED ROSENAU

■ **SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLING.** From the NIE-funded Ecological Theory of Teaching project at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development comes an idea-packed article in *Elementary School Journal*—"Successful Schooling Practices: Perceptions of a Total School Faculty" by Kenneth Howey of the University of Minnesota.

Twelve staff members of a single elementary school (K-6) located in a

rural/suburban community 45 miles north of San Francisco "spoke to the importance of the social climate and the type of interaction" occurring between teacher and students and among students. The staff advocated instructional experiences that are concrete, functional, and highly participatory. Clarity of academic goals, behavior standards, and communication modes was underscored. Staff also largely agreed on the importance of accurate assessments of children's needs and interests. Teachers noted that "school should be a place where kids could enjoy themselves and be comfortable . . . in a nonthreatening, relaxed environment." Teachers wanted to provide intellectual challenges while attending to social and emotional concerns of the children.

Seven of 12 staff members pointed to the significance of joint planning and mutual exchange among teachers. Ten of 12 staff also cited "effective interpersonal relationships" (among faculty and between faculty and administration) as contributing to successful schooling practice—openness, trust, respect, acceptance of differences.

Howey believes, too, that "the most pervasive characteristic of a successful school"—other than the quality of teacher-student interactions—is "the concept of leadership" (ten of 12 staff underscored that notion)—in instruction and instructional improvement rather than administration. Teachers pointed to "a person who spends time in classrooms, a person who had specific ideas for specific problems," someone who can provide staff and curriculum development and demonstrate effective instruction with kids. Also mentioned were the ability to listen carefully, to treat teachers as individuals, and to follow through on promises.

■ **MATH UPDATE.** Consider this agenda for action from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM):

- Problem solving is the key goal for the 1980s.
- The term "Basic Skills" means a lot more than just computation.
- Calculators and computers should be used at all grade levels.
- Conventional testing alone won't tell all we need to know about student learning.

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