Absence, Its Causes, As Found in a Study of the City Schools of Biloxi, Mississippi

William Pearson

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ABSENCE, ITS CAUSES, AS FOUND IN A STUDY
OF THE CITY SCHOOLS OF
BILOXI, MISSISSIPPI

BY

WILLIAM BENNETT PEARSON

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

WESTERN KENTUCKY STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE
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Approved:

Major Professor and
Department of Education

Minor Professor, Economics

Graduate Committee, Chairman
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PREFACE

The writer wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. Lee Francis Jones, Major Professor, Department of Education, Western Kentucky State Teachers College, who encouraged him to make this study, and to G. W. Ditto, Superintendent of the City Schools, Biloxi, Mississippi, who made possible the gathering of the necessary data.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Non-attendance on the part of pupils did not, perhaps, present a very serious problem to the teacher of a school in pioneer days. An education was much to be desired and the opportunity to gain it was too dearly bought to permit many absences from the seat of learning. With the increase in educational advantages and the growth of educational facilities, however, has come a corresponding increase in non-attendance of pupils until the problem of the absentee has become one of the major problems of the classroom.

This study of non-attendance of the pupils in the city schools of Biloxi, Mississippi, was undertaken to ascertain the reasons for their absence and to determine, if possible, the remedies to be applied.

Biloxi has shipyards and lumber manufactories. It has also, extensive fisheries which furnish the basis for a large canning industry—oysters, shrimps, and crabs. It is a town of mixed nationalities. The parents of a great many of the children attending the city schools are of foreign birth, with varying attitudes toward education and with different cultural traits. It is well to keep these facts in mind while pursuing the study, for they have considerable bearing on the question of local non-attendance. Although Biloxi cannot be called a typical community, there are many other towns similarly situated; while these may not have its particular industries they have others that offset them.
At the outset it must be stated that this study is not complete. It takes into account only 2,568 pupils, whereas the school census shows 5,619 children of school age within the confines of the city. This difference in numbers is due to the fact that the town has five parochial schools maintained by the Roman Catholics and two schools for Negroes. None of these is included in the study. Again, while the study is as accurate as circumstances will permit, it must be remembered that when a pupil is absent the teacher cannot, in making her report concerning the cause, question or go beyond the excuse offered by the parent when the child returns to classes. Though she may know that a given pupil was visiting during the time he was away from school, if the parent says he was ill, then illness must be recorded.

Our public school systems are being maintained by public funds for a definite purpose. It is obviously a waste of the taxpayers' money, much of which is contributed by persons upon whom the schools have no direct claim, when teachers are confronted day after day with from a few to a great many empty desks. It is also obvious that when a pupil is absent he loses from school activities time that can never quite be made up, when he returns to class he retards his companions until he has once more assumed his proper place among them, and he compels the teacher to consume in explanation and elucidation of work done in his absence much time that she would otherwise devote to other
student. Weber says:

"When a pupil is absent from school one day he usually misses two days of work; the day's work he missed because he was absent and the first day's work after returning. But he seldom realizes this loss because, all other things being equal, his marks are but slightly different from those of the pupil who has not been absent at all. This situation tends to cause high school students to look upon a day's absence as a trivial thing. When pupils become lax about their attendance in school they are apt to become lax about their entire school work, and thereby develop a habit which is not only dangerous at the time, but one which will give serious trouble after the pupil has finished high school and either gone to college or obtained a job."

If teachers could ascertain the real reason for absence on the part of their pupils, could in some way remedy the conditions that cause these absences, and could inspire in their students a love for the school and all its ways, the waste of time and money involved in non-attendance could be stopped and the schools themselves could more completely and more efficiently serve the purpose for which they were established.

---

CHAPTER II

METHOD OF OBTAINING DATA

The school year in Biloxi is divided into six terms, each term being six weeks in length. At the beginning of the school year 1935-36 each teacher, from the first grade through the twelfth, was given a register on which to record the age and sex of each pupil in her class, the grade in which he was enrolled, and the number and causes of absences for that particular term. A similar register was supplied her for each succeeding term during the entire school year.

At the top of the register were listed eight common causes of absence, viz., illness of pupil, illness in the home, work, bad weather and bad roads, indifference of parents, indifference of pupil, truancy, and poverty. These causes were designated by code, i. e., A1, illness of pupil, A2, illness in the home, A3, work, and so on. The teacher was asked to write, in the space provided opposite the pupil's name, the code letter corresponding to the cause assigned for absence. If the pupil's absence was due to some cause not listed, it was to be entered in a space especially provided for that purpose. The total number of days absent because of these other causes, among which were guests, visiting, quarantine, suspension, and summoned to court, were so negligible as to be of little in arriving at the final result.

It will be noticed that a distinction was made between absence due to illness of the pupil and illness in his
home. A distinction was made, too, between indifference on the part of parents and that on the part of the child. Sometimes it was hard, unless his home environment was known, to determine whether absence was due to the pupil's indifference or that of his parents. A study of later pages will show that these two causes were responsible for an almost equal number of absences.

Each home-room teacher in Biloxi sends to the office a list of absentees as soon as the roll is called in the morning. During the first period these lists are consolidated. Subject teachers thus know who is absent from school and they are required to report to the office any who later fail to appear in their classes and who have not already been listed as absent. Five times during the day the roll is verified. This furnishes a constant check on pupils who might be inclined to "cut classes."

Of the eight common causes of absence listed on the register, four--illness of the pupil, illness in the home, poverty, and bad weather and bad roads--are excusable. When a child stays out of school because his parents actually need the financial assistance he can give them by working, he is excused. But indifference on the part of parents or pupil and truancy are not excusable. Of course when a child has been under quarantine, suspended, or summoned to court, his absence is excused.

In the Biloxi schools if the pupil is present less than half a day, he is marked present for one-half day; if he is
actually in school over one-half day, he is marked present for the whole day. Every effort is made to give the pupil the benefit of the doubt and the advantage in all matters having to do with his attendance upon school sessions.
CHAPTER III
PRESENTATION OF DATA BY TABLES AND GRAPHS

The tables presented in this chapter show the number of absences from each cause listed on the register of the city schools of Biloxi. They show the number of boys absent, the number of girls absent, the total number of absences, the percentage of boys and of girls absent for each cause, and the total percentage. Absences are shown for each term during the school year, by age groups and by grade groups. The graphs tell the same story, but in a different way.

The first table compares the number of boys absent for each cause with the number of girls absent for the same cause, gives the total number absent in each case, and then gives the per cent of total boys absent and the per cent of total girls absent for each of the nine listed causes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>Number of Boys</th>
<th>Number of Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Per Cent of Boys</th>
<th>Per Cent of Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1,015</td>
<td>32.82</td>
<td>67.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>19.89</td>
<td>80.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>63.45</td>
<td>36.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>21.55</td>
<td>78.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>55.91</td>
<td>44.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>70.49</td>
<td>29.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>31.37</td>
<td>68.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>64.90</td>
<td>35.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>669</td>
<td>1,458</td>
<td>2,327</td>
<td>37.35</td>
<td>62.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CODE:**

A1 -- Illness of Pupil  
A2 -- Illness in the Home  
A3 -- Work  
A4 -- Bad Weather & Bad Roads  
A5 -- Indifference of Parents  
A6 -- Indifference of Pupil  
A7 -- Truancy  
A8 -- Poverty  
A9 -- Other Causes
Table I shows that in four of the eight common causes listed the boys exceeded the girls in absence, while in the other four the opposite was true. Illness of the pupil accounted for the largest number of absences of both boys and girls. Illness in the home was responsible for more girls being absent than boys, presumably that the domestic machinery might be kept running smoothly. Indifference on the part of parents and poverty kept more girls out of school than boys, but more boys were truant, more kept out by work, more were themselves indifferent, and more were influenced by bad weather and bad roads. There were 589 more girls absent than boys, and 63.65 per cent of the total number of absences were girls, while 37.35 per cent were boys.
Table II shows the number of absences, together with their causes, for each term of the school year. In the last column it gives the total absences for each cause and the grand total of absences.
TABLE II
NUMBER OF ABSENCES AND CAUSES FOR EACH SCHOOL TERM DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes:</th>
<th>First:</th>
<th>Second:</th>
<th>Third:</th>
<th>Fourth:</th>
<th>Fifth:</th>
<th>Sixth:</th>
<th>Total:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Term:</td>
<td>Absences:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1:</td>
<td>694:</td>
<td>965:</td>
<td>12,354:</td>
<td>2,718:</td>
<td>1,873:</td>
<td>1,322:</td>
<td>10,926:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8:</td>
<td>35:</td>
<td>39:</td>
<td>60:</td>
<td>54:</td>
<td>16:</td>
<td>11:</td>
<td>215:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 1,655: 2,673: 6,498: 7,136: 2,988: 1,775: 22,725

CODE:
A1 -- Illness of Pupil
A2 -- Illness in the Home
A3 -- Work
A4 -- Bad Weather & Bad Roads
A5 -- Indifference of Parents
A6 -- Indifference of Pupil
A7 -- Truancy
A8 -- Poverty
A9 -- Other Causes
Table II shows that by far the greater number of absences from any cause occurred about the middle of the school year, or during the third and fourth terms. Taking these causes one by one we find (1) illness of the pupil is lowest in the first term and reaches its peak in the third and fourth terms. In the year under consideration this may be accounted for by the fact that Biloxi had an epidemic of influenza during December, 1935, and January-February, 1936. But even in the sixth term this cause did not return to the level of the first, which may have been due to lowered resistance as a result of the school duties of the five previous terms. (2) Illness in the home, which also reaches its peak in the third and fourth terms is, in the sixth term, less than half that of the first. (3) Work claims most of the absentees in the third term, due, possibly, to the fact that the approaching holidays create a need for an extra supply of money. During the fourth and fifth terms many children are out of school at work, because this is the time when the fisheries industry and the canning of oysters, shrimps, and crabs are at their height. (4) Bad weather and bad roads keep more pupils out of school during the winter season. (5) and (6) The indifference manifested by parents and that of the pupil reach their height in mid-season and seem to be largely overcome toward the close of the school year. Curiously enough, these two causes are practically equal. (7) Truancy claims most absentees during mid-year, as does (8) poverty, though this last sinks
almost to nothingness in the spring. (9) Other causes, which include visiting, guests, and quarantine, reach their peak in the third term, which ends with the Christmas vacation.
FIGURE 1. - CAUSES OF NON-ATTENDANCE WITH VARIATIONS FROM TERM TO TERM
Figure 1 is a line graph, beginning at the end of the first term of six weeks (when the first reports were made), and continuing from term to term to the end of the school year. This graph and Table II should be compared, for they tell the same story. The line graph illustrates more clearly, perhaps, the prominent part that illness of the pupil and illness in the home play in absence from the classroom. These two causes are almost two-thirds of the total causes. This graph is somewhat startling in its showing of indifference of parents and pupil. So nearly do the lines coincide as to be almost one.
Table III shows the total number of pupils absent for each cause and what per cent each is of the total. It also shows the total number of days absent for each listed cause and what per cent these are of the total.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Absence</th>
<th>Individual Pupils Absent</th>
<th>Absence by Causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Number Absent</td>
<td>Per Cent of Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>1,015</td>
<td>43.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>513</td>
<td>22.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>8.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>4.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,327</strong></td>
<td>100.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CODE:

A1 -- Illness of Pupil
A2 -- Illness in the Home
A3 -- Work
A4 -- Bad Weather & Bad Roads
A5 -- Indifference of Parents
A6 -- Indifference of Pupil
A7 -- Truancy
A8 -- Poverty
A9 -- Other Causes
In Table III we find that illness of the pupil accounted for 10,926 days' absence from school, or 48.06 per cent of the total days, while illness in the home was responsible for 5,854 days' absence, or 25.76 per cent of the total days. Work stands next with 2,915 days' absence, which is 12.83 per cent of the total number of days.

Looking at the table from another standpoint, we see that 1,015 pupils, or 43.62 per cent, were absent because of their own illness; 513 pupils, or 22.04 per cent, were absent because of illness in the home; and 197, or 8.47 per cent, were absent because of work. Truancy ranks lowest in number of days absent (178), or .79 per cent of the total; but poverty ranks lowest in number of pupils absent (51), or 2.19 per cent of the total.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAUSE</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 -- Illness of Pupil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 -- Illness in the Home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 -- Work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 -- Bed Weather &amp; Bad Roads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 -- Indifference of Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 -- Indifference of Pupil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 -- Truancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A8 -- Poverty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A9 -- Other Causes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A10 Total Boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2. - Per Cent of Absence Due to Various Causes**

**Code:**

- A1 -- Illness of Pupil
- A2 -- Illness in the Home
- A3 -- Work
- A4 -- Bed Weather & Bad Roads
- A5 -- Indifference of Parents
- A6 -- Indifference of Pupil
- A7 -- Truancy
- A8 -- Poverty
- A9 -- Other Causes
- A10 Total Boys

All -- Total Girls
Figure 2 is a bar graph showing the per cent of absences due to various causes. This figure should be studied in connection with Table III, which shows the same condition in a different form. The reader is referred to Table I for the total number of boys and total number of girls absent, as portrayed on the graph.
FIGURE 3. - NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL PUPILS ABSENT AND CAUSES OF ABSENCE.

CODE:

A1 -- Illness of Pupil
A2 -- Illness in the Home
A3 -- Work
A4 -- Bad Weather & Bad Roads
A5 -- Indifference of Parents
A6 -- Indifference of Pupil
A7 -- Truancy
A8 -- Poverty
A9 -- Other Causes
A10 -- Total Boys
All -- Total Girls
Figure 3 is similar to Figure 2 except that in this case the values are shown in the percentage of the whole number absent rather than in number of absences. This graph should be studied in connection with Table III.
TABLE IV

COMPARISON OF ABSENCES BY AGE GROUPS WITH GRADE GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Pupils' Absence</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Pupils Absent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>VIII</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>IX</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>XI</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>XII</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table IV shows that the greatest number of absences occurred in the first grade, while the greatest number of age absences appeared in ages seven and ten. The reason for this is retardation of pupils, there being a large number in the first and second grades who are seven, eight, nine, and ten years of age.
FIGURE 4. - NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL PUPILS ABSENT BY AGE GROUPS
Figure 4 shows, by age groups, the number of individual pupils absent. Up to and including age ten the absences are rather uniform, with a slight rise at age twelve. Comparing this figure with Table IV, which illustrates the same condition, we find that by far the greater number of absentees are those who are retarded and at eight, nine, or ten years of age are enrolled in the first and second grades. The decrease in non-attendance noted from the twelfth year on is probably due to the smaller number of pupils in these grades.
FIGURE 5. - NUMBER OF INDIVIDUAL PUPILS
ABSENT BY GRADE GROUPS
Figure 5 shows, by grade groups, the number of individual pupils absent, and should be studied in connection with Table IV. It is significant that the largest number of pupils is absent from the first grade. It is possible that this condition can be explained by the fact that younger children are more frequently attacked by the so-called children's diseases than are those older. The gradual decrease in pupils absent as the higher grades are reached is likely due to two causes: (1) that fewer pupils are enrolled in the advanced grades, and (2) greater resistance (hence better health), on the part of the pupil.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF CAUSES OF ABSENCE

Because the absentee pupil not only pays a penalty for his own absence but exacts a penalty from each student in every class of which he is a member, it is well to analyze the major causes of absence and discover the reasons for them.

In the city schools of Biloxi, during the year 1935-36, illness of the pupil and illness in the home were the excuses most frequently offered in cases of absence, and were responsible for 65.66 per cent of all the absences. While it is true that in many cases the child was kept out of school for other reason, the teacher could not, as was explained in the beginning of this study, question the excuse offered when he returned to classes. Longest, in his study of the development of the school system of Biloxi, tells of families of eight or ten living in a single room in a barracks-like building, under conditions unimaginable and indescribable. In these homes illness was the rule rather than the exception. An investigation made while gathering material for this thesis revealed that the majority of pupils who were habitually absent because of illness came from unsanitary homes, where the children were ill-nourished and improperly cared for.

Heck, writing of illness as a cause of non-attendance, says:

"Proper medical inspection, specific advice given in all cases needing attention, and a program of preventive health education ought to make a huge reduction of sickness among school children and therefore of non-attendance."

Work, as used on the register of the Biloxi schools, is an inclusive term, and may mean that the pupil remained out of school to work inside the home or outside of it. The parents of many Biloxi school children are foreign born, and of these the greater number are exceedingly poor. The majority of pupils who offered work as an excuse for absence came from these homes and had, of necessity, answered the summons of the whistles on the canneries or at the shipyards rather than the call of the school bell. Conversations with others of these foreign born parents revealed that, though they did not actually need what their children earned, they had rather add the money to their growing bank account than to have them in school.

The fact that a pupil is kept out of school because the small amount he can earn is needed in the home suggests poverty as the next reason for non-attendance. Poverty kept 2.19 per cent of the total number of pupils out of school during the year under consideration. The child of

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poverty-stricken parents prefers to stay out of school rather than suffer mental anguish because of the differences apparent between his more fortunate schoolmates and himself in matters of appearance, clothing, and other things.

Writing along this line, Martha S. Mason says: 4

"Student aid in the form of food, clothing, books, and other physical help is extended by local Parent-Teacher Associations to children who would be unable to attend school, or would be handicapped in their progress, if assistance were not given."

It would seem that bad weather and bad roads ought not play a very important part in absences in a city school, especially one so far south that deep snows and freezing weather are unknown. In Biloxi, however, the annual rainfall is exceedingly heavy, and rain often comes in such torrents that the streets are so flooded that children living at a distance and with no means of transportation cannot reach the school buildings.

According to the records, indifference of the pupil was responsible for the absence of 3.99 per cent of the total in Biloxi schools last year. When, as is the case in Biloxi, the home environment of these pupils is not good, the parents are shiftless, have low ideas and low ideals, and look askance at the benefits to be derived from an education, the child cannot be expected to display a great amount of enthusiasm toward the school. But this indifference of the pupil is not always due to conditions in the home; often the

4 Martha S. Mason, Parents and Teachers (Boston, Ginn & Co., 1928), p. 231.
teacher or the curriculum is at fault. When, as the writer
knows from conferences with students, the teachers with whom
the pupil comes in contact are unable to inspire him with a
desire for an education and when the curriculum is unsuited
to his present needs and his future good, he prefers to
stay out of school. Turning once more to Heck we read:

"The teacher's attitude toward the pupils
is a great factor in determining the
regularity of attendance. If she conceives
her task to be that of a drill master who
has to keep order and who is responsible for
having the pupils master certain facts,
school may be anything but a delightful
experience. It is likely to be hated and to
become a thing to be evaded upon any pretext
whatever. The teacher must be able to so
interest the child in school work that he
will wish to be regular in attendance."

Indifference of the pupil toward the school may well
lead to truancy. Of this matter Kirkpatrick and Lodge
have written:

"Truancy stands in a class by itself. The
truant has neither overtly injured anyone
nor damaged any property. His sin is one
of omission rather than one of commission."

While investigation has proved that there are many
factors, such as home conditions, or a desire to earn money,
or a sense of inferiority due to physical handicaps, that
tend to make a pupil truant, Sullenger puts the problem
squarely up to the school when he makes this statement:

6 W. D. Kirkpatrick and F. Lodge, "Some Factors in Truancy,"
7 Op. cit., p. 239.
"It is now being realized that the personality and general attitude of the teacher, as well as the poorly adjusted curriculum of the school are vital factors in this problem."

And Fleming is equally positive when he says: 8

"Truancy is not now a problem in well organized city schools, which offer their pupils a variety of interest and have a policy of adapting school experiences to individual differences."

The indifference of parents was responsible for the absence of 4.99 per cent of Biloxi school children for a total of 425 days. Personal investigation proved that this condition is a result of lack of parental knowledge of what the school is trying to accomplish rather than a willful desire to keep the children at home. Parents, many of whom, as has already been explained, are foreign born, simply do not realize the importance of regularity of attendance upon school duties. The problem of the indifferent parent resolves itself into a question of acquainting him with the school program. Butterworth says: 9

"In the long run, educational progress in a community depends upon the intelligent interest of citizens in the schools. Since members of the Parent-Teacher Associations are often among the more alert in the community, they have the opportunity to understand what the school is trying to do and interpret it to the community."


and Heck reports\textsuperscript{10} that the interest of parents in the school in a certain community was secured through the visitation of teachers and the organization of an active Parent-Teacher Association.

Because, as Crider points out,\textsuperscript{11} there is every indication that as the number of absences increases the average number of grade points decreases until the student's scholarship is seriously affected, every effort should be made by those in authority to curb school absences and reduce them to a minimum.


CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Conclusion

The data presented in this study prove that there is a great deal of time and money wasted because pupils are irregular in their attendance at school. There was, in the school year 1935-36, in the twelve grades of the city schools of Biloxi, an enrollment of 2,568 students. Of this number 2,327 students were absent at some time during the year. These 2,327 pupils had a total absence of 22,725 days, or an average of 9.7 days per pupil. Table IV and Figure 2 show that there were more absences from the first grade and that, with the exception of grade nine, the number gradually decreased until in the twelfth grade the absences reported were only one-fourth as many as in the first grade. It will be noted further that of the 353 absences in the first grade, only 216 of the pupils were six years old. This means there were 137 pupils in the first grade who were seven, eight, nine, or more years of age.

The major cause of absence was illness, either on the part of pupils themselves or illness in the home. In fact pupil illness was responsible for almost half of all absences during the entire school year, or, to be exact, 48.08 per cent of the total. Illness in the home accounted for 25.76 per cent of total absences, the two causes together reaching 73.84 per cent of the total. Work claimed
12.83 per cent of the total absences. The three outstanding causes of absence were illness of the pupil, illness in the home, and work. These three represented 86.67 per cent of total absences. The other five common causes—bad weather and bad roads, indifference of parents, indifference of pupil, truancy, and poverty—plus all others, represented only 13.33 per cent of the total pupil absences.

From the foregoing figures and from statements made in preceding chapters, the conclusion is reached that the problem of non-attendance, while serious, is not one that baffles solution. Some of the conditions mentioned in the study require changes within the school system, others can be remedied from without.

Recommendations

Numerous recommendations for future study of the problem of non-attendance could be made—such as a complete comparison of age groups, grade groups, and so on—but to the writer it seems more profitable that the conditions this study has revealed be taken one by one and recommendations made concerning them. Acting, then, upon this basis we consider:

1. Illness of the pupil. If school authorities would maintain full time health service for the benefit of the pupils or if they would give whole-hearted co-operation to city and county health departments, much pupil illness could be avoided and a great many of the absences caused by this one thing could be eliminated. If children of pre-school
age were cared for properly, much of the absences in primary grades could be abolished.

2. Illness in the home. Here again is a need for health education. Unsanitary conditions that breed and foster disease should be eliminated, and parents should be taught to depend upon public health service for care in illness rather than keep the child out of school for this purpose.

3. Work. To check absences from school because the child is working outside the home may require changes in the economic system. While the majority of absentees who are working do so because of financial necessity, it is true that some are allowed to work because parents are uninterested in their school life. This point cannot, in the very nature of things, be definitely proved from the data presented.

4. Bad weather and bad roads. Weather conditions cannot be changed by human agency, but roads and streets could be kept in a thoroughly good condition. Also, a means of transportation for children who live at a distance and must contrive to get to school through a downpour of rain might be worked out.

5. Indifference of parents. Through the Parent-Teacher Association and kindred organizations it might be possible to arouse the parents to a realization of the benefits to be derived from an education and to impress them with the importance of regular attendance at school. This done,
many absences hitherto attributed to work or to illness in the home might be eliminated.

6. Indifference of pupil. When teachers are really enthusiastic about their work and thoroughly alive to their opportunities in the classroom, and when such courses are offered as will enable the student to make a living and make a life, the problem of indifference on the part of the pupil probably will cease to be. He will then stay out of school only when dire necessity compels him.

7. Truancy. As a rule, truancy may be traced to indifference. Remedy the latter condition and the former will take care of itself. In cases that are directly traceable to home environment and that do not yield to other remedial agencies, a well-enforced compulsory school law might be helpful.

8. Poverty. In this case, too, the aid of the Parent-Teacher Association could be enlisted, not only to relieve the immediate necessity of the destitute child, but to render his poverty less obvious by inaugurating a campaign for more simple attire in the classroom and less expense connected with school activities, particularly graduation exercises. The question of books and school supplies for the indigent child is one that should be considered by state legislatures and provision made for free textbooks. Further, a law requiring minimum aid from public funds might be of some value.

There should be concerted action on the part of school
authorities, teachers, and parents, action that is continuous rather than spasmodic, to eliminate the causes of non-attendance. Such action cannot do otherwise than produce favorable results.
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