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Michigan State University, 1988

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**TEACHER ABSENTEEISM IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION:
A MICHIGAN STUDY**

**By
Thomas Lee Moline**

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

1988

ABSTRACT

TEACHER ABSENTEEISM IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: A MICHIGAN STUDY

By

Thomas Lee Moline

Teacher absenteeism in our nation is a phenomenon which has been reported to be a growing and serious problem in K-12 public education over the past ten years (Collingwood, 1984; Educational Research Service, 1980). It has not been uncommon to find mean staff absence rates for teachers exceeding double the national work force standard of 3.5% (Klein, 1986).

In this study, teacher absenteeism in nine Michigan elementary schools was reviewed in fourteen research question areas related to personal, organizational and time/place factors. Measures used in this study of elementary educator absence behavior were based on those devised by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Klein, 1986; Taylor, 1978) for assessment of total time lost.

Given the variations in worker benefits afforded to professional groups such as elementary educators, it is justifiable to assert that groups having access to benefits

Thomas Lee Moline

such as paid personal/family sick leave and paid personal days will have higher rates of absence from work than those who do not have such benefits.

It is evident that when provisions for paid leave are available to workers, their utilization heightens specific group mean rates of total time lost above national norms. Such is the case for worker groups like elementary educators who in this study were found to attain a total sample mean rate for total lost time of 4.76% (N = 176 subjects within nine separate school staffs in nine separate districts during the 1985-86 school year).

The implications for school administrators as presented by the more significant findings of this study can be joined with previous education research in underlining the need for direct immediate supervisor involvement in the absence reporting process. The findings of this study also suggest that school managers need to be more directly involved in the construction of absence reduction or attendance goals in order for educators to be aware of what is expected in their profession.

Wishing you were here

To Ed

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INTRODUCTION

Making inferences about a profession having absenteeism seems synonymous with telling someone they have bad breath. No matter how diplomatically or eloquently one tries to avoid direct accusation, the end result is usually a received insult. Absenteeism equates in the minds of most workers to the notion that someone is not doing his or her job. It rings of lack of commitment to one's work.

Teachers remain cognizant of charges made by the 1983 Commission on Excellence Report entitled "A Nation At Risk." Consequently, the issue of absenteeism in education is, at present, a particularly touchy issue. The teaching establishment of the middle 1980's has little regard for those who would dare unearth more topics about poor teacher performance. So much so, that the author of this descriptive study found data collection of teacher attendance records to be an almost clandestine endeavor.

What has materialized since the Commission report has been a plethora of reasons, issued in large part by representative teacher agencies, as to why schools may be lacking in producing quality education. The results of which seems to be producing more finger-pointing than constructive attempts for communities and their local school systems to

define and progress towards their own connotation of "excellence in education."

Counteracting any current widespread acceptance of a nationwide investigation of problematic educator absence phenomena are the still timely topics of teacher stress, burnout and turnover in the education profession. Their effects on the performance and length of careers of educators cannot be denied in light of a recent national survey of former teacher in the United States.

In a 1985 poll conducted by Lou Harris & Associates and funded by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. a survey of 500 former teachers found that:

The more teachers work under stress, the more likely they are to leave the profession. This finding has implications for all teachers, since teachers experience greater stress than most Americans.

Former teachers report job stress has dropped dramatically since their teaching days have ended. Fifty-seven percent of former teachers recall that, as teachers, they felt great stress on the job several days a week or more.¹

Attempts at increasing teacher attendance and in some fashion making for higher expectations of educators still finds little acceptance from organizations that have established exclusive representation in the work place for the teaching community. Those agencies that teachers turn to most often for professional direction offer little

¹ Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. "Former Teachers In America," American Educator, (Summer, 1986), p. 35.

current hope of establishing true investigation from within the ranks of educators.

The National Education Association (NEA) continues to uphold its constituency while admitting that teacher absenteeism is a matter for investigation. The position the NEA takes in addressing the issue is one which utilizes current beliefs about stress in the work place while giving little attention to a much wider array of factors relative to absence phenomena of individuals and work groups. In a 1979 report on the issue of teacher absenteeism the NEA concluded that:

When local associations can document exceptionally low use of sick leave by teachers, they should tout it in newsletter stories and news releases to the public. Conversely, if teacher-leaders note a rise in the incidence of teachers using sick leave for reasons other than illness, they should point to working conditions as the probable cause.²

It is quite apparent to this researcher that although teacher union management points to working conditions as the probable cause of problematic absenteeism, there are far more factors associated with employee non-attendance. Personal factors such as age, dependent children, marital status; time/place factors such as the day of the week or month of the year; and organizational factors such as group size, reporting procedure, evidence of absence control

² "Absenteeism: An Issue No Matter How You Look At It," NEA Now, (March 26, 1979), p. 4.

policies, etc., all have influence on absenteeism phenomena experienced in both the private and public sector. Adequate investigation of absenteeism in a work setting must account for all these influence areas.

Those agencies whose position it is to fervently uphold educators continue to emphasize topics which must be truly investigated in order to understand problematic absenteeism in educational settings. However, an emphasis on the debilitating effects that may be experienced by educators only at the work site bars thorough research on the phenomena.

If educator absenteeism is to be genuinely researched, then all of the factors relative to its occurrence must be reviewed. The literature on absenteeism in business and industry is immense and reflects the private sector's concern in controlling this problem. Therefore, it would do well to review such factors found to be of importance to Human Resource Management (HRM) researchers in the private sector to ascertain their existence and potential importance in the educational setting.

The Importance of Absenteeism Research In Elementary Education

The primary goal of this proposed study is to ascertain the impact of an already identified set of influences related to the private and public work place and to assess their impact in elementary schools in the State of Michigan. The procedure in which most findings are reported

will be descriptive in nature with data extracted from the attendance records of nine elementary school staffs in Michigan local school districts.

Understanding absenteeism phenomena of elementary educators (or factors related to educator absence at any educational level) does well to provide for potential changes in administrative procedures or practices that might increase educator performance and student learning. It is without question that elementary education touches upon nearly all members of our society. It is the foundation level for development of basic skills within those in our society who will be deemed functionally literate and advance to higher levels of our educational system.

Understanding elementary educator absenteeism and moving in the direction of improving teacher attendance at this very influential level would seem an appropriate starting place if research is to be of most benefit to the majority of our nation's future students. It is unfortunate that a steadily increasing number of children, adolescents and teenagers are seen dropping out of the educational system as grade levels increase.

It is vitally important that our elementary schools function as highly consistent and effective programs dedicated to instilling maximum functional skills in students; some of whom may opt to exit formal schooling shortly after their elementary years.

It is also interesting to note that research conducted in the states of New York, Pennsylvania, Illinois and Florida pinpoint elementary school teachers as having the highest rates of absence from work than of other K-12 educators in those state's schools (Educational Research Service, 1980). From a priority basis, emphasis upon research of educator absenteeism at the elementary level would seem appropriate.

Is Elementary Teacher Absenteeism A Problem In Our Schools?

Is there any solid basis, or in terms of our nation's judicial system "a preponderance of the evidence," to conclude that absenteeism is definitely a problem in our nation's elementary school systems? The answer is a definitive "yes" when one examines a comprehensive 1980 survey of 1,423 school districts from across the United States conducted by the Educational Research Service (Arlington, VA). The findings are of particular concern to those affiliated with the operation of our nation's elementary schools:

(The) mean of teacher absence rates due to all paid absences in all reporting school systems; 4.3% for unified systems, 4.8% for elementary systems, and 4.2% for high schools.³

As will be discussed in the following subtopic area, our nation's educators on the whole do not stand up as particularly good models for attendance behavior when

³ Educational Research Service. Teacher Absenteeism: Experiences and Practices of School Systems. ERS, Arlington, VA, (1981), p. 4.

national average absence rate ranges of 2.9%-3.6% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985) are taken into consideration.

Given the importance of the products our elementary school systems deliver, the problem of elementary teacher absenteeism and its effects has to be viewed as an extremely serious problem affecting the maximal development of our nation's youth.

Recent investigations associated with teacher interest in their jobs and antecedent effects such as absenteeism shed some light upon a growing teacher absenteeism problem in our nation. In a 1986 study of elementary school teacher burnout conducted by the University of Michigan, researchers Jackson, Schwab & Shuler found that:

Of our 228 respondents, only 39% indicated that their most preferred job status was being in their current teaching jobs. A full 30% indicated they would most prefer jobs unrelated to education. These figures, in combination with other evidence that teacher turnover rates are declining, suggests that a large percentage of teachers are in their current jobs involuntarily.⁴

Research findings such as the above and survey results such as those obtained by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. (1986) emphasize the importance of pinpointing where absenteeism exists so that remedies can be directed.

Unlike absenteeism research in business and industry, absenteeism among educational personnel did not engender the

⁴ Jackson, S.E.; Schwab, R.L.; Schuler, R.S. "Towards An Understanding of the Burnout Phenomenon," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol 71 No. 4, (1986), p. 639.

amount of intensive investigation over the past 50 years that was noticed in the private sector until recently (Educational Research Service, 1980). However, a noticeably escalating number of studies have been conducted relative to teacher absenteeism in the 1980's and their findings point out that the problem of absenteeism is greater in educational institutions than is commonly found in business and industry (Educational Research Service, 1980).

The increasing amount of research conducted on absenteeism in education in the past and current decade shows that the problem is most definitely on the rise (Skidmore, 1984; Pennsylvania School Boards, 1978; State of New York, 1974; Illinois Office of Education, 1977). Illinois, in particular, identified the problem of educator absenteeism to be of such importance that it directed the following statement from its State Department of Education to all of its local school districts:

Teacher absenteeism as a phenomenon has the potential to be a serious problem for the State of Illinois. The State Board of Education is well advised, as are local districts, to acknowledge the strong possibility that teacher absenteeism as a problem will be aggravated rather than alleviated in the years ahead.⁵

Additional research conducted at the turn of the current decade concludes that teacher absenteeism in the

⁵ Report on Teacher Absenteeism in the Public Schools of Illinois to State Board of Education, Illinois Office of Education. Indianapolis, Indiana: The Academy for Educational Development, Public Policy Division, July 1977. p. 5.

U.S. as a whole as in specific states and districts, indicates that the problem is serious and growing:

Although little published data are available on staff absenteeism in education, the information that does exist, from studies conducted in New York City, Newark, New Jersey, suburban Philadelphia, and the states of Pennsylvania, Illinois and Florida suggests that employee absenteeism in education is a definite problem, perhaps as big a problem as it is outside education.⁶

It is readily noticed in a review of the literature that most of the studies conducted relative to teacher absenteeism have a heavy reliance on previous findings developed outside of the teaching profession. The vast majority of these studies utilize descriptive models of employee absenteeism, measures of absence, and definitions based on research in industrial settings.

Current investigators of educator absence phenomena could greatly assist in the continued research of an area that is not only appreciably lacking in basic research but also in an understanding of what generally known factors are truly germane to absenteeism in public education.

Defining Absenteeism

As defined in industrial relations literature, absenteeism is defined as "the nonattendance of employees for scheduled work" (Brook, 1984; Johns, 1978; Jones, 1971;

⁶ Educational Research Service, Inc. Employee Absenteeism: A Summary of The Research. Arlington, VA, (1980), p. 1.

Gibson, 1966;). From the economic/monetary standpoint of most businesses and agencies, absenteeism is seen as:

The disruption of scheduled work processes, and the loss or under-utilization of productive work capacity.⁷

Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, 9th Edition (1983) defines absenteeism as "absence from duty, work or station; especially, such absence when deliberate or habitual."

Researchers in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) have at times expressed a desire to invent new terminology that lessens the impact of the term "absenteeism" (Volles, Carone & Krinsky, 1975). Their intent would be to devise a word that separates legitimate absence from work apart from what could be viewed as deviant problematic absence. However, such a term has yet to be produced by HRM researchers especially in light of the problems faced in separating legitimate from abusive absence behavior (Markham & Scott, 1982).

A major obstacle to the study of absenteeism in both the public and private sector has been the establishment of a common definition of what constitutes absence (Muchinsky, 1977).

Records on the absence behavior of industrial, business, and governmental employees in the United States during the 1950's and early 1960's was reviewed by Frederick

⁷ Allen, S. G. "An Empirical Model of Work Attendance, "Review of Economics and Statistics, No. 63 (1981), p. 78.

J.Gaudet in 1963. Gaudet utilized this information to conclude not only a national average absence rate for the period in review but also an expectation of what could be determined to be "an attainable minimum" rate for an employee or work group. According to Gaudet:

A reasonable level of absence would be about three percent (3%) of available work time . . but the attainable minimum level may approach two percent (2%) or less.⁸

In 1975 researchers Johnson and Peterson added to the research conducted more than a decade earlier by Gaudet by exhibiting data from their study that they indicated created cut-off levels of absence in distinguishing acceptable from problematic absence rates. Johnson and Peterson concluded that:

Monthly absence greater than five or six percent should be a matter of serious concern to organizational management.⁹

Validating the research of the aforementioned authors is information collected by the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) on annual average absences for business, industry and government occupation work groups (excluding full-time farm workers). BLS continues to affirm an annual average absence rate of from 2.9% to 3.6% from sample

⁸ Gaudet, Frederick J. Solving the Problems of Employee Absence. A.M.A. Research Study 57. New York, N.Y.: American Management Association (1963), p. 46-47.

⁹ Johnson, R. D. & T. O. Petersen. "Absenteeism or Attendance: Which Is Industry's Problem?" Personnel Journal, 54 (1975), p. 572.

selection sites from 1973 to 1985 (the most recent year of reporting at the time of this study's literature review).

However, BLS continues to note to those utilizing their data that variations do exist in the exact definition of absence and recording procedure from site to site. Therefore, minor differences in average absence rates for specific worker groups would be expected though extreme variations would be suspect either in the case of definition used or actual employee non-attendance reporting procedures.

In reviewing the literature relative to educator absence rates, the parameters for determining levels of absence within an organization or occupation group correlate closely with those developed by the aforementioned authors. Both public education studies and those found in labor and industrial relations research distinguish absenteeism from other forms of nonattendance such as vacations or temporary duty which are normally arranged in advance (ERS, 1980).

The more limited amount of studies in education and the larger amount of research conducted in the private sector both maintain absenteeism in terms of "nonattendance of employees for regularly scheduled work." It should also be noted that within most absenteeism studies in education, variations for assessing exemplary, average and problematic absence rates of educational employees alter little more than one percentage point from those determined by Gaudet and Johnson & Peterson (Elliott, 1982).

Given the parameters upon which to judge an individual's or system's absence rate, a researcher can begin in attempts to answer whether or not an institution such as public elementary school education suffers from teacher absenteeism.

As was previously noted, national absence rates for elementary educators approach the level which researchers Johnson and Peterson (1975) contend is a level approaching "serious concern for management."

Objectives and Research Questions

As previously mentioned, the ultimate goal of this study is to ascertain the impact of an already identified set of influences related to absenteeism in the private and public work place and to assess their impact in elementary schools in the State of Michigan. Understanding all currently identified factors and then utilizing them as standards for investigation in elementary education is the primary direction taken by this investigative endeavor into the area of elementary educator absenteeism in the State of Michigan.

The intended result of this descriptive study of nine elementary school staffs is to provide school managers (administrators, school board members) solid information and insight in order to pinpoint absence problems and develop remedial programs and/or supervisory practices.

A myriad of influences have been identified that relate to absenteeism in the work place. A compilation of

these factors was refined into a process model developed by HRM researchers Steers and Rhodes (1978). This model met with further development by Brooke (1985) in after several attempts to operationalize the Steers and Rhodes model in the work site necessitated more precise delineation of absenteeism attributes.

The contributions of these researchers will be expanded upon in the forthcoming chapter concerning the literature review. The contributions of the three investigators have been joined with education research concerning teacher absenteeism to construct a three set group of possible factors for absenteeism in educational settings.

A random sample site selection was conducted in the winter of 1987 in which nine separate local district elementary schools were reviewed relative to individual teacher attendance data, contractual provisions for attendance and absence, supervisory controls and incentive/reward practices; all evidenced in the 1985-86 school year. Findings from the review of these areas was then conducted to exact the extent of elementary educator absenteeism in an analysis of the following three major influence areas:

Personal Factors

Age
Sex
Marital Status
Dependent Children
Education Level
Years employment/
experience
Individual absence as a
percentage of total
staff rate

Organizational Factors

Staff Size
Absence Control Policies/
Reporting Procedure
Grade Level Taught
School Commitment After
Work Day

Time/Place Factors

Day of Week

Month of Year
District Demography

It should be noted that the independent variable utilized to assess the above listed factors is predominately a mean group percent of total time lost applied to the fourteen research questions addressed in this study.

Personal Factors

Age

Percent of time lost for elementary educators will show a positive relationship with increasing age in an analysis of the age groups;

25 and under	46 - 50
26 - 30	51 - 55
31 - 35	56 - 60
36 - 40	61 - 65
41 - 45	66 and older

(Collingwood, 1984; U.S. Dept. of Health,
Education & Welfare, 1975)

Sex

Female elementary educators will have higher percentage of time lost from work on the average than males (Klein, 1985; Hedges, 1975).

Marital Status

Married men will have lower percentages of time lost than single men. Married women will have higher percentages of time lost than single women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985; Taylor, 1979).

Dependent Children

Elementary educators with children under the age of 18 will have higher percentages of time lost from work than the average obtained from the entire sample (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985; Nicholson & Goodge, 1976).

Educational Level

Employees with advanced degrees will have lower percentages of time lost than those educational employees with bachelors degrees (Taylor, 1979; Douglas, 1976).

Years Employment/Experience

As elementary educators increase in years employment/experience, the amount of time lost from work will correspondingly increase (Blankinship, 1986; Manganiello, 1972).

Individual % of Time Lost as % of Total Staff Absenteeism

A review of each of the nine building's total staff rates of total time lost will illustrate that approximately 10% of each building's employees will be responsible for 45% or more of the total staff absences (Yolles et. al; 1975; Plummer, 1960).

Organizational Factors

Staff Size

As elementary staff size increases, the mean staff rate of total time lost will correspondingly increase (Giullian, 1986; Coffman, 1985).

Absence Control Policies

Elementary educators required to report absence directly to the building administrator will have lesser percent of time lost than for employees utilizing an alternative reporting procedure (Elliott, 1982; Educational Research Service, 1980).

Grade Level Taught

Percent of time lost for elementary school employees will decrease as the grade level taught increases (Bouknight, 1985; Smith, 1984).

School System Commitment After Work Day

Elementary educators who elect to consistently sponsor, coach, chaperon, etc., activities after or before the contracted work day, will have lower percentages of time lost from work than the average percent of time lost for the entire building staff (Sheldon, 1985; Slick, 1974).

Time/Place Factors

Day of The Week

An analysis of attendance registrars for the total sample will illustrate that the highest amounts of employee absence will be experienced on Fridays with Mondays being the second highest day of the week for elementary educator absence (Educational Research Service, 1980; Capitan & Morris, 1978).

Month of The Year

An analysis of all school employees percent of time lost for all nine elementary staff reviewed will show that average percent of time lost for the 9 month school year will progress from highest to lowest in the following order:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. May | 6. December |
| 2. April | 7. November |
| 3. March | 8. October |
| 4. February | 9. September |
| 5. January | |

(Coffman, 1983; Marlin, 1976)

District Demography

An analysis of average total percent of time lost for each elementary school staff reviewed will show that average percent of time lost will be highest for urban schools and lowest for rural schools (Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986; ERS, 1980).

Contributing Factors Relative To Absenteeism In Education

Even before weighing the evidence from individual school districts or states that report absence data, the field of public education allows for paid sick leave accumulation programs that consistently shows in the literature as being a basis for abuse.

Public school districts in the State of Michigan (and most others in the United States) allow for paid leave for illness experienced by school staff. Those who do not report for work and instead report prior to the workday that they will be using sick leave suffer no loss in monetary compensation. HRM researchers make the valid point that in

the absence of a strong worker commitment in these employment situations, there is as much monetary incentive to stay away from work as there is to attend (Smardon, 1974).

A secondary feature contributing to potential sick leave abuse of tenured educators is the debilitating effects of an accumulative sick leave program that eventually caps the number of available days after several years of employment.

An incentive system maintains for teachers while they progress towards the accumulative maximum (90 days, 110, etc.) but the incentive is lost when they reach that goal. When no annual buy-out of excess time is provided, the feeling generated by many at the point of maximum accumulated leave days is that they are losing or giving away leave days. In turn, such affected educators begin to utilize higher than usual amounts of leave time.¹⁰

Taken together, the aforementioned situations of paid sick leave and capped accumulation programs give potential for abuse by employees who are privileged to such benefits. Just how influential these factors are in elementary education has yet to be strongly identified by educational research. However, research in areas outside of education clearly show that when such provisions exist, it is not uncommon for absenteeism to be negatively beyond national averages (DuFour, 1983; Porter and Steers, 1978; Garrison and Muchinsky, 1977; Morgan and Herman, 1976).

¹⁰ Winborne, C. R. & Stainback, G. H. "Our Salary Supplement Program Gives Teachers an Incentive They Can Bank On, "American School Board Journal, Vol. 171, (Feb. 1984), p. 29.

THE EVOLUTION OF ABSENTEEISM THEORY

Concern over employee absenteeism is probably as ancient as the human process of servitude and employment. Ancient Egyptian history refers to the process of dispatching daily census takers to slave enclaves to search for those who failed to report to work (James, 1984). Roman history makes reference to the practice of flogging workers who failed to provide sound excuse for not executing regular duties and the exercise of putting to death of servants who were deemed consistently too ill to be of regular service to the ruling aristocracy (Windrow, 1984).

The actual beginnings of absenteeism concern and concurrent research in American society varies with the interpretation attributed to our country's early politicians and industrialists. United States historians note the concerns of General George Washington over the excessive amount of desertion at various points during the Revolutionary War and his continual efforts to maintain the morale of his army (Meltzer, 1986).

The written recordings of American historians of the early 19th Century note treatment of errant slaves by plantation supervisors to be similar to that metered to

slaves of the Roman Empire (Davis, 1975). Graphic depictions in novels and biographies clearly illustrate the cruel treatment of tardy workers in the sweat shops of the early American Industrial Revolution (Heilbrunner, 1966). A wide variety of other written illustrations about concern and punitive action upon an imperfect work force show clearly that regularity of worker performance has been a major employer priority in our country's short life time.

A good portion of our modern day absenteeism research and fashioning of potential controls has much of its origin in studies conducted upon assembly line operations of the 1930's and 1940's both in the U.S. and Canada. The emphasis upon increasing employee attendance and productivity came to national concern as our country entered the 2nd World War:

During World War II considerable attention was given to the absenteeism of employees in war plants. Several studies appeared comparing the personal characteristics of low versus high absence employees. Although these studies did not present extensive statistical analyses, they did suggest that there were identifiable personal characteristics associated with absenteeism.¹¹

As noted earlier, much of what has been utilized as the basis for absenteeism research in the public work place has been fashioned from far more extensive findings in the far outweigh those produced in government and education.

¹¹ Muchinsky, P. M. "Employee Absenteeism: A Review of The Literature," Journal of Vocational Behavior, No. 10, (1977), p. 320.

It is speculated that private employers, working within the arena of the profit motive, have invested far more than public employers because of the apparent personal financial gains of increased productivity (Markham & Scott, 1982). Those researchers who have delved into the area of teacher absenteeism have reached common agreement that:

Absenteeism among educational personnel, especially among teachers, who comprise more than half of all school staff and whose presence in the classroom is essential for normal school operations, has not engendered nearly the amount of scholarly and popular inquiry as that found in business and industry.¹²

However, it would be safe to reason that greater societal gains of a long-term nature could be realized by the increased productivity of those who educate our nation's students.

Previous and Current Definitions of Absenteeism

It was earlier stated in this paper that one of the most perplexing problems circumventing research of absenteeism in work settings is the varied definitions of absence developed by employers. Several researchers of this phenomenon have simply concluded that a true definition of absenteeism must be as varied and descriptive as human nature itself (Nicholson, et. al, 1982).

¹² Educational Research Service, Inc. Employee Absenteeism: A Summary of Research, ERS, Inc., Arlington Va., (1980), p. 1.

The word absenteeism itself rings of deviant or aberrant behavior. Like the "isms" of our time (alcoholism, sexism, racism, etc.) absenteeism is viewed as a human behavioral problem. Being a human act affecting the quality and quantity of worker performance, employers are most often confronted by absenteeism not so much in general terms but more specifically in terms of the validity of reasons why employees are off from work. Most definitions of absenteeism, therefore, focus more on the prevention of voluntary worker absence.

It is in this sense that demarcations can be made in the types of absence that in many employment situations are not preventable and created by the collusion of the employer and employee. Such employer benefits (contractual concessions) as paid vacation days, paid holidays (beyond legal mandate), personal days, inservice days, and many other paid leave situations found in a variety of employment sites all lend to the absence of workers from "regularly scheduled work" (BNA, 1985).

These kinds of absences from work are non-preventable in as much as, given the characteristics of its work force, there is nothing an employer can do to control or limit the amount of time that is taken off. . . . In a strict sense, such absences could be preventable - the employer need only say "no." But if an employer does choose to grant them, it seems hardly appropriate to

regard them as preventable absences.¹³

The absences that remain (after sifting out those which are employer permitted) are those which truly comprise the realm of employee voluntary absence. Absences occurring primarily from illness, accidents, personal problems, family responsibilities, medical checks, etc., are those that are usually addressed by employers in that they are viewed as preventable to varied degrees. It is these types of absences that are scrutinized by employers and deemed "unauthorized." Such absences are viewed by the U.S. Department of Labor as countable and in accord with the department's definition of "unauthorized time away from the job (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1972)."

Aside from the general view of absenteeism discussed above, some Human Resource Management (HRM) researchers have developed classification schemes along the lines of "unavoidable/ involuntary" and "voluntary" considerations. Such a scheme was introduced by HRM researchers Chadwick-Jones, Brown & Nicholson (1982, 1973). In their representation, the three researchers classified absences as either "A-Type" (unavoidable) or "B-Type" (voluntary/avoidable).

A-Type behaviors under this definition are viewed as legitimate from the standpoint that they are condoned by the employer by set procedure or actual contract provision.

¹³ Kelly, L. Absenteeism: Policies and Programs for the 80's. IRS Research Services, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Brown & Martin, Ltd., (1981), p. 2.

B-Type absences are viewed as those which lack employer provision for non-attendance and remain in the realm of employee individual choice and decision.

The problem with classification schemes such as those proposed by Chadwick-Jones, et al., is seen in the development of a shared agreement among employers that allows for consistent reporting of absence statistics by employer groups. The authors themselves admit that:

Where the dividing line between A and B is drawn and what criteria are involved will depend on individual, group, or situational factors and will produce some differences in attitudes, beliefs, and actions toward individual instances of absence. Ways in which absence is classified will touch on the rights, duties, and behaviors of individuals as they relate to the customs, expectations and practices which prevail in the organization.

B-Type absences are those seen to lack imperative personal or situational justification and which allow for the exercise of individual choice or decision. Extreme examples are usually condemned as irresponsible, but such absences too are evaluated by variable standards. Even when criteria for distinguishing A-Type from B-Type absences are agreed upon, acceptable reasons for B-Type absences will range widely.¹⁴

Cutting through classification schemes such as the above are theoretical considerations for modern day absenteeism proposed by HRM researchers Dilts, Deitsch & Paul

¹⁴ Chadwick-Jones, J.R.; Brown, C.A.; Nicholson, N. "A-Type and B-Type Absence: Empirical Trends for Women Employees," Occupational Psychology, (1973), #47, p. 75-76.

(1985). These researchers offer a basis upon which to judge "absence from scheduled work" in consideration of modern day employee benefits. Their definition has as its underpinnings the understanding that there are a wide variety of aberrant behaviors emitted by workers that truly constitute voluntary absence. In addition, the authors note there are increasing opportunities in our modern day work world for employees to abuse employer provided work benefits that allow for absence from work.

In most instances, employers place provisions on the use of such paid leave provisions as sick leave, personal days, etc.. However, when actual employee certification for use of such days is absent (as is the case in many public employment situations) the tendency for abuse of such work benefits is not uncommon.

In fact, employers now view the increasing tendency of employees to misuse such benefits as a type of employee crime referred to as "time theft."

A recent study conducted by Robert Half International, a New York based recruiting firm and Goodrich & Sherwood, currently our nation's largest HRM consulting firm, utilized Bureau of Labor Statistics employment and earning data to calculate that:

U.S. employees stole \$170 billion worth of their employers' time last year (1986). The average time thief steals six work weeks per year. The major forms of time theft are late arrival or early departure, feigning

illness and claiming unwarranted
"sick" days.¹⁵

The timely point that researchers Dilts, Deitsch & Paul (D,D&P) make is that the myriad of benefits given to employees should be scrutinized for their contributions to actual "time lost." This is especially relevant when considering the impact of paid leave benefits. The basic argument these researchers offer in support of their point is that classifications schemes such as involuntary/voluntary or A-Type/B-Type are useless in light of their inability to truly delineate legitimate absence from abuse situations especially when a variety of employer sanctioned avenues exists for employee time away from the job. Simply stated, all time away from regularly scheduled work is counted as within the definition of absence and reduced to reporting as a "time lost" measure.

The absence definition proposed by D,D&P and its concomitant measure fits well in researching absenteeism in a field such as public elementary education. Employer paid provisions for sick leave, bereavement days, maternity leave, self-improvement days, personal days, etc., abound in elementary school contractual arrangements especially in the State of Michigan. Such provisions are created for teachers by employing school boards in the event a definite need arises. If misuse occurs, the deciphering of acceptable

¹⁵ Bacas, H. "Stealing Time: The Subtlest Theft," Nation's Business, Vol. 75, No. 6, (June, 1987), p. 23.

versus non-acceptable use of such leaves in many cases becomes a fruitless task for employers.

Studies of educator absence conducted in the current decade make particular use of a simplistic "time lost" definition and measure based on employee use of provisions for paid time away from the job. Several educational investigators make the valid point that employees have as much incentive to stay away from work as to report when paid leave provisions exist (Wright, 1986; Pelicer, 1984; Lewis, 1982). These investigators and many others avoid a determination of absences on the basis of acceptable versus unacceptable and instead define all time away from the job as absence. Furthermore, the majority of educational investigators assert that all time away from the job for currently employed educational personnel be counted as absence. Otherwise, highly erroneous reporting can result. Such has been the case with several national surveys of the past:

A company that submitted to the Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) two sets of figures reported that its monthly average job absence rate was 3.15% when only the first four days were counted in long-term absences and 6.31% when the full length of the absences was included.¹⁶

In summary, definitions of absence have varied with the intent to delineate voluntary from involuntary absence

¹⁶ Miner, M. G. "Job Absence and Turnover: A New Source of Data," Monthly Labor Review, No. 100 (Oct. 1977) p. 26.

and the time intervals utilized to designate the extent of absences. Given the variability of employer definitions and the increasing presence of leave benefits, current day investigators are calling for the simplification of an absence definition and analysis of absence primarily on a "total time lost" basis.

Measurement of Absenteeism

In an extensive review of the literature conducted in the mid-1970's, researcher Paul M. Muchinsky began his premier journal article concerning absenteeism by stating that:

The single, most vexing problem associated with absenteeism as a meaningful concept involves the metric or measure of absenteeism.¹⁷

As noted earlier, the evolution of methodology to accurately assess absence of workers across occupations is hampered by the complexity of employer reporting procedures coupled with the wide variations in definition. Absence research has gained considerable momentum in the past twenty years particularly in the private industrialized sector. However, absence research still must be considered in its early development.

In a more current review of the subject, HRM researchers Chadwick-Jones, et al., delivered their updated findings of a review of the literature circa 1982:

¹⁷ Muchinsky, P. M. "Employee Absenteeism: A Review of The Literature," Journal of Vocational Behavior, No. 10 (Oct. 1977), p. 317.

Studies of absence from work have little to offer in the form of an explanatory framework. In a review of over 100 articles, we found a variety of methods and approaches. In these studies "absence" had no uniform operational definition. The term referred to sickness absence, to absences for causes unknown, to "certified" or "uncertified" absences. No standard approach was found; no normative information was available about attendance (or absence), whether considered as an act of choice or as habitual, routine, or rule-following behavior.¹⁸

Given the myriad of definitions and reporting procedures, one could postulate that no national normative data of any value would be produced, especially in light of current researcher assessments. Yet, our federal government has made consistent attempts for nearly thirteen years to conduct national surveys and derive sample estimates of absence in a variety of job occupations.

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) began the process of estimating absences in 1973 by conducting a national sample for a one-week work period in the month of May. Though the department's compilation of data are criticized primarily on the basis of employer reported data variations, BLS's annual absence reports are deemed to be fair indicators of "employee absence from scheduled work" for a variety of job occupation groups. BLS absence data are compiled via measured rates which identify (1) the

¹⁸ Chadwick-Jones, J.K.; Nicholson, N.; Brown, C. Social-Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N.Y., (1982), p. 1.

proportion of workers with an absence; (2) the proportion of hours lost relative to all scheduled hours; and (3) the proportion of hours lost relative to the hours usually worked by those with an absence.

Specifically, the incidence rate is the number of workers absent divided by the total employed times 100 or;

$$\frac{\text{Number of workers absent}}{\text{Total employed}} \times 100.$$

The inactivity rate is the number of hours absent divided by the total number of hours usually worked times 100 or;

$$\frac{\text{Number of hours absent}}{\text{Number of hours usually worked}} \times 100.$$

A third measure, the severity rate, indicates the proportion of hours lost by workers with an absence relative to the hours they usually work, also expressed in percentage terms or;

$$\frac{\text{Number of hours lost by absent workers}}{\text{Number of hours usually worked by absent workers}} \times 100.$$

It should be noted that in all of the above computations, BLS data reflect absences of full-time wage and salary workers employed at least 35 hours per week. It is of concern to find that in many public elementary education school systems in the State of Michigan, certified full-time teachers have contractual work weeks of from 35 to 38 hours. Should the amount of time be reduced in future contracts, Michigan elementary educators could conceivably fall short of the BLS definition for sampling and comparison purposes.

The database utilized by BLS to extract samples is termed the Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS represents a conglomerate of sample reporting sites from around the United States. As of 1985, the BLS listing has grown to include the following worker occupation groups:

1. Goods Producing Industries - including mining, construction and manufacturing
2. Service Producing Industries
3. Transportation & Public Utilities
4. Wholesale and Retail Trade
5. Finance, Insurance and Real Estate
6. Services - Including Health and Education Systems
7. Public Administration - Including Government Operations

As indicated, samples from the CPS have been ongoing since 1973 and give economists a basis upon which to judge the efficacy of local, state and national policy upon the work force as well as to detect current work force reaction relative to current assumed national economic factors (i.e. labor supply and demand, inflationary cycles, overseas competition, etc.).

BLS indicators of our national average absence rate fluctuated between 2.9%-3.5% in the first decade that BLS reported absence data. Interestingly enough, our national rates reflected what Gaudet (1963) earlier termed to be "acceptable" rates of employee "absence from regularly scheduled work."

Most industrialized nations also compute national absence rates for their occupational work groups. Once again, controversy arises as to actual definitions of absence utilized by other countries and the true validity of the data reported. Nonetheless, both BLS and BNA make a bold attempt to compare national rates throughout the industrialized world. For the record, 1985 BLS national tabulations rank the U.S. as having less worker absences per year than England, Canada, Denmark, France and The Netherlands. Belgium, Greece, Germany, Sweden, Italy and Japan were reported to have lesser absence rates than the U.S. in the BLS assessment (Monthly Labor Review, 1986).

Given a degree of good faith in the BLS results of the past fourteen years, it is interesting to note that overall job absence for our nation's workers shows a significant increase in worker absence between 1973 and 1980 and as significant a decline in our nation's average absence rate between 1980 and 1985:

According to data collected in May, 1985, from the Current Population Survey (CPS), about 4.7 percent of the full-time non-farm workers had an absence in a typical week caused by illness, injury, civic duties, or personal reasons. The proportion of hours lost was 2.6% of the potential that would have been worked during the survey's reference week. These figures were substantially lower than those obtained in a 1980 survey. In fact, they showed the

first decline since BLS began
estimating absences in 1973.¹⁹

Cross-validation of these findings were conducted by the Bureau of National Affairs from entirely different data. BNA noted a similar decline in time lost on a national basis between 1980 and 1985 (BNA, 1985).

Short-Term Indices of Absence Measurement

Several research studies of absence from work have given high priority to the review of short-term indices of absence behavior rather than accounting for time lost or absence frequencies over the course of an entire work year. Justification for such short-term measures comes in light of consideration for long-term illness. Early researchers of absence phenomena such as Fox & Scott (1943) and Walker (1947) have argued validly that total hours or days lost over extended periods of data collection are in some cases heavily weighted by long-term sicknesses or personal accidents.

Proponents of short-term indices favor an alteration of data that eliminates long-term continuous absences (normally accepted as verifiable and unpreventable) and instead direct analysis of short-term illness of one or two days maximum (normally not associated with actual illness situations and seldom requiring verification).

¹⁹ Klein, B. W. "Missed Work and Lost Hours, May 1985," Monthly Labor Review, U.S. Dept. of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, (Nov. 1986), p. 26.

Researchers Hammer & Landau contend that such short-term indices give clearer evidence of the probability for absence control in occupation groups where one and two-day absences comprise a significant proportion of total absences over a given period of time. In research terminology, the measure of absence by only one or two days absence has been termed both the Attitudinal Index (AI) or Short-Term Index (STI). Be it either AI or STI, current research is scant in relation to the reliability of such measures and their potential for diagnosing actual habitual voluntary absences. One of the largest criticisms of the AI and STI is that when utilized on small populations over short periods of time, the results in many cases are instable and highly variable in later comparisons. Conducting national sampling such as the type produced by BLS for a single work week each year via short-term indices, would undoubtedly produce highly unreliable data from which to speculate about the entire work year.

Other short-term indices are based on weekly cyclical patterns. The usual format for this type of index is revealed by a count of the difference in total absence rates between Mondays and Fridays for full (five day) work weeks. The primary justification for utilization of such an index is based on the contention that true sickness should be spread equitably across work days. Work groups with high Mondays (sometimes referred to as "Blue Mondays") and/or

high Friday absences are held suspect in terms of voluntary absences and thereby prime for absence controls.

Deviations of cyclical patterns for a given day in a work week have been aptly coined by researchers Argyle, Gardner and Cioffi (1958) as the "worst day index (WDI)." Once again, the main argument against such a measure is the instability and variability found in results after several samples. Consequently, formation of appropriate controls is also hampered.

Rather than place a reliance on one single short-term index, HRM researchers have promoted the use of combined short term indices to more accurately assess an organizations possible voluntary absence problem:

It seems quite unlikely that any one measure (of short term variety) will be adequate for the analysis of absences . . . Each measure has methodological or theoretical deficiencies, but it seems probable that a converging approach using measures such as FI, STI, and WDI is most constructive.²⁰

In summary, the controversy over the reliability of absence measures and consequent validity of absenteeism reports continues to plague research in this area. Nonetheless, U.S. government tabulations and reports on absence phenomena have been ongoing for a decade and one-half. Such national sampling have become increasingly accepted as they continue to correlate primarily with private industry

²⁰ Chadwick-Jones, Brown & Nicholson. Op. Cit., (1982), p. 60.

reaction to such factors as worker supply and demand, quality control and national economic status.

BLS and BNA absence data seems to have less of an effect on the actions of public employers. National measures of absence data collected on public institutions (in particular, education) show that the public sector consistently lags behind private sector rates. In addition, institutions such as public education seem to lack the responsiveness to national concerns as compared to that generated by industry over the past five years:

Public administrations have the highest percentage of workers with absences, which may be the result of liberal leave policies towards Federal, State and local government employees. Within the professional services sector, educational and medical service providers have the highest absence rates. This may reflect the fact that teachers, who make up a large component of this group, usually have an allotment of personal days off which are filled by substitute teachers.²¹

Given some good faith in current established measures, the area of elementary education is ripe for investigation into possible causes of educator absence and the introduction of preventative measures to combat education's current poor status in our national work force.

²¹ Klein. (1986), p. 27.

The Relationship Between Absenteeism and Personal Factors

National interest in employee productivity was understandably intensive during World War II. With the actual future existence of our democracy at stake, our society as a whole was deeply committed to gleaning the utmost from our nation's work force.

An associated topic which fell into this area of concern was worker absenteeism and the intent to develop controls and reinforcement systems that would reduce employee absence to a minimum. The commonly held notion of the times (which is still very prevalent to date) was the view that employee absenteeism was primarily an individual and personal phenomenon. Consequently, extensive investigation into personal factors was undertaken in the 1940's with the intent of discovering common traits or factors of individual employees in the work force that could be potentially manipulated to increase group production. Much of the information obtained from this era remains as reference data for later studies conducted in the 1950's to the present.

Absenteeism and Age

Studies on the relationship of age and absenteeism seem to suffer the same problems as those of studies utilizing short-term indices. That is, that sampling over time seem to have highly variable results.

As of 1986, the purported relationship between age and worker absence represents a national current curvilinear

relationship (Klein, 1986). Information accessed from BNA from their one-week survey in May 1985, indicates that:

Teenagers have the highest rate of any age group. . . Teenagers have a higher absence rate because they attach more importance to non-work activities than do older workers. As workers get into their early twenties, their absence rates decline and approach that of workers age 25 to 54. Past age 55, the absence rate rises again for both men and women.²²

Overall, the preponderance of studies conducted on age and absenteeism since the 1940's verifies a significant relationship of a curvilinear nature. However, variations do exist for particular occupation work groups and even wider variation exists when age and absence are reviewed by sex demarcations of male vs. female.

In absence studies conducted upon BLS data by HRM researchers Janice Hedges (1977) and Daniel Taylor (1979), both concluded that women ages 25-34 had higher incidence and inactivity rates than either older or younger women. The fact that this age period was also the national average for childbearing was offered as rationale for this exception to national norms.

Additional exceptions to the curvilinear norm are found in an analysis of workers with extended absences. When full-week absences were considered, a positive relationship was found between age and absence:

²² Klein. (1986), p. 28.

Part-week absences in 1972 decreased continuously with each age group, i.e., 7.9% of 16-19 year-old workers were absent in an average week, while 3.3% of workers 55-64 years old were absent. The reverse was true for full-week absences, with older workers absent more often than younger workers. Workers 55-64 years old had an absence rate of 3.7%, compared to a rate of 1.4% for 16-19 year-olds.²³

Absenteeism research on public employees shows noticeable variations from the curvilinear pattern exhibited by national sampling. Two studies of teacher absenteeism conducted in the Mid-West and Southwestern United States in 1984 presented a more positive relationship between absenteeism and increasing age of teachers.

Both studies indicated that average teacher absence remained relatively low for both male and female educators who were in their early to middle twenties. Increases for females was higher than for males at near thirty years of age but both groups displayed increases in absence from work as they approached the thirty year mark. Small but progressive increases were reported for all age groups both male and female until approximately age 55 where attendance rates dropped slightly between 55 and age 65 (Pellicer, 1984; Collingwood, 1984).

Studies of educator absence in the 1970's show highly variable results. Collier (1975) found that absenteeism was

²³ Hedges, J. N. "Absence from Work: A Look At Some National Data," Monthly Labor Review, No. 96 (July 1973), pgs. 28-29.

not significantly related to age in a study of school teachers in Livonia, Michigan. This finding was verified by Bundren (1974) in a similar review of educators in Las Vegas, Nevada. On the other hand, Marchant (1976) found a significant positive relationship between absence rate and age in a fairly comprehensive study of 286 teachers in Redmond, Virginia.

On a national average, age has been shown to positively influence the rate of employee absence, although the results have been mixed. While some studies indicate a gradual increase of absence as workers get older, others contend the existence of a curvilinear relationship. A smaller number of studies report a negative relationship or no relationship at all between age and absence.

Studies of age and absence make it fairly clear to researchers that it is of more importance to conduct such studies from the viewpoint of obtaining results valid only to the sample or at most, to the job occupation reviewed. This is particularly evident when studying teacher absenteeism if the ultimate intent is to fashion controls or policies based on research findings.

Absenteeism and Sex

Nearly fifty years of research on absenteeism in both the private and public sector single out sexual status as one of the best predictors of absence. A large number of broad-based studies have shown continuously that women lag behind men in regularity of attendance. Bureau of Labor

Statistics (BLS) May sampling and Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) data compilations have demonstrated over the past two decades that female absences are not only in excess of males but in some sample years, are nearly double the number of absences of men.

The following 1985 selected data illustrate the discrepancy between female and male rates:

% of workers with an absence in reference week, May 1985			
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>
All ages . . .	4.8	3.7	6.3
16-19	7.0	6.7	7.4
20-24	4.8	3.9	5.9
25-54	4.6	3.4	6.3
55 & older . .	5.7	5.0	6.8 (BLS, 1985)

As can be ascertained from the above rates, women in the most recent period of data collection by BLS show minor variation from the attendance of males in the early years and much wider separation in weekly absences in early adulthood and mid-life. Taylor (1978) concluded that such variation was due primarily to the child-rearing expectations placed on women at these ages. Additionally, Klein (1986) offers speculation that men delve more into their careers at these ages thereby producing less absence because of increased job involvement.

Both theories seem plausible given research that validates age ranges for child-rearing by women and high levels of job involvement especially for middle-aged men. However, results pinpointing continued variation of absences for men and women at ages sixteen to nineteen and beyond 55

lends some skepticism to popularly held explanations of variations for absence by sex.

Studies of the relationship of absenteeism and sex in educational settings are mixed in their findings though the preponderance of this research confirms the better attendance of males, especially at the elementary school level (which incidentally is staffed predominately by females). Variations in male and female rates are not as wide as those found in industrial or private employment settings. Such discrepancies between occupation groups have caused federal government data collection agencies to preface their findings:

The U.S. Department of Labor, which has published major studies on employee attendance, warns that other factors may influence the sex/absenteeism relationship such as age, marital status and occupation. Occupation is especially critical to this relationship.²⁴

Alternative explanations for male/female absence rate variations branching from the "child-care" causal explanation are based on the Department of Labor's cautions illustrated above. In an analysis of Bureau of Labor statistics conducted in 1973, Hedges made similar conclusions about the generalizing of male/female absence phenomena across occupational groups:

Sex differences in absence rates narrow when comparisons are made

²⁴ Robinson, G. Employee Absenteeism: A Summary of The Research. Educational Research Service, Inc., Arlington, Va., (1980), p. 30.

within a particular occupation group
even though within the group men
tend to occupy the better paying
jobs.²⁵

The point Hedges makes in the above quotation is relevant today concerning female work positions in the work force. One of the current criticisms voiced by women's organizations is the contention that although women comprise 50% of the U.S. work force, their representation in "upper level" management positions is minimal compared to that of males. Higher level management or "white collar" positions show lower absence rates than "blue collar" or lesser paying jobs in an organization. Upper level positions are noted to bring with them greater responsibility, more individual job involvement and subsequent job satisfaction (Markham & Scott, 1982).

More importantly (as regards absenteeism studies), such positions commonly provide flexibility in the work day to accomplish personal and family tasks while not actually being considered absent from scheduled work (Porter & Steers, 1978). If an organization has a preponderance of females in its work force at lower level positions, the absence data that will be accumulated will in large part reinforce not only variations between management and lower skilled positions but also the absence variations purported to exist simply on the basis of sex.

²⁵ Hedges, J. N. "Absence From Work - A Look At Some National Data," Monthly Labor Review, No. 96 (July 1973), p. 28.

Returning to the field of education, the results of female/male absence comparisons point to greater leave use by females though conflicting data does not illustrate the consistent findings of Labor & Industry. The findings of educational researchers throughout the last twenty years usually show variations of no more than two percent between male and female educator absence rates in a variety of select age ranges. At ages above 50, several studies of educator absenteeism present findings of equality in absence use of males or of females attending better than males.

Educational studies conducted in the state of Florida by Manganiello (1972) encompassing the records review of over 400 elementary educators and in Virginia by Marchant (1976) found no correlation between absenteeism and sexual status.

The same finding (no correlation) was true for educational absenteeism studies conducted by Bridges and Hallinan (1978) and more recently by Pellicer (1984). In addition, these researchers also concluded (via records reviews) that although female teachers lost more time from work due to short-term illness, male educators were more likely to be away from work for longer periods of time during a particular single illness.

These studies lend to the skepticism concerning the higher commission of single day absences of women as signs of absence abuse. It is apparent from the deeper investigations of Bridges & Hallinan (1978) and Pellicer (1984) that

male teachers do in fact utilize sizeable portions of sick leave for long-term illness recognized to be signs of legitimate absence leave use. However, the measurement indices utilized in these educational studies also complement the greater amount of industrial relations research that pinpoints women as being primarily responsible for a variety of familial "care-giving" duties normally involving short-term use of absence leave.

It would assist Human Resource Management (HRM) researchers greatly if particular use of employee absence leave would be designated as either "personal" or "family responsibility" in nature. Such designations would lend a great deal to determining just how much "family care" situations lend to female absenteeism and what proportion of such situations are being covered by male workers.

In summary, a simplistic view of absence phenomena in the work place lends one to believe that males more regularly attend work than do females. However, a deeper look into the reasons for absence underscores a continuing disparate set of family care duties being placed on female workers thus contributing to higher absence incidence rates for women.

Suggestions by governmental research services and independent investigators alike emphasize the need to conduct absence research relative to personal factors within particular work occupation groups. Heeding such suggestions does well in occupations such as education where it has been

found that variable correlations between male and female absence rates are not uncommon.

The Relationship Between Absenteeism, Marital Status and Dependent Children

Even prior to BLS record keeping on national absence data (1973), a variety of studies have pinpointed that a marked relationship exists between marital status and absence from work. Married individuals seem particularly affected by the responsibilities of a formal legalized relationship and especially by the inclusion of children into the marriage equation.

The previous discussion on sexual status parallels much the same findings relative to absenteeism and marital standing. For the most part, married women who have children in the home seemingly find it necessary to act as primary care giver when children require such care during mother's work hours. Consequently, mothers in a wide variety of studies dating as far back as 1944 are generally shown to have poorer absence rates than married men, single males and single females. This is especially true for women with two children or more. BLS data from 1985 and 1978 indicate that the inclusion of only one child into a woman's marriage makes little effect on absence from work in that their absence rates have been better than single females in those two report years.

On the other hand, married men have shown quite consistently during the past 14 years BLS have maintained

correlates positively with better attendance at work thus giving married men the most respectable of absence rates:

Marital responsibilities seem to induce men toward a firmer commitment to their jobs, so that they spend less time away from work. For most women, the proportion of time lost increased with the presence of children, especially young ones. Women maintaining families alone who have three children or more have the highest absence rate.²⁶

1985 BLS compiled absence rates for full-time wage and salary workers by marital status, sex and number of dependent children (under age 18) presents the consistent patterns of the past with a small number of variations. Following are select data that have been taken from the 1985 Bureau of National Affairs (BNA) second quarterly report (previously cited) on job absence and turnover relative to single and married worker inactivity rates (percent of time lost):

<u>Marital Status & Sex</u>	<u>Inactivity Rate</u>
Single/Female/No Children	3.3%
Single/Female/1 Child	2.8
Single/Female/2 Children	3.1
Single/Female/3 or more Children	4.5
Married/Female/No Children	3.1
Married/Female/1 Child	3.8
Married/Female/2 Children	7.0
Married/Female/3 or more Children	4.0
Married/Male/No Children	2.5
Married/Male/1 Child	2.5
Married/Male/2 Children	1.4
Married/Male/3 or more Children	2.0

²⁶ Klein, (Op. Cit.), p. 28.

Missing from the BNA report was specific information on single men with children. Though the actual number of full-time working males who are sole supporting parents may be minimal in BLS data collections and BNA reports, it would be helpful if such categories would become regular assessment areas. Inclusion of such categories would more accurately assess the effects of children on single working fathers.

It is interesting to note from the above 1985 figures that single women with one or two children seem minimally affected by these added responsibilities. In the case of married males, it is apparent from 1985 data that increases in the number of children are in some manner related to better attendance by working fathers. As previously indicated, it has been speculated that working fathers commit more to jobs because of increased responsibilities to act as provider. In a more speculative vein (and somewhat more humorous), it has been theorized that working fathers may also desire to attend work more frequently to escape the increased activity in the home (Johns, 1978).

Specific studies of marital status, dependent children and their relationship to absenteeism have been ongoing for over forty years. Jackson (1944) concluded in his World War II vintage national data reviews of U.S. industrial facilities that married men with several dependents had steadier attendance records than either single men or those who were married but had no children.

A 1958 study by Shepherd & Walker pointed out that single males were absent far more often than married British iron and steel workers. Taylor (1979) reported similar findings concerning U.S. male workers. In addition, Taylor reported that U.S. married women had a higher percentage of time lost than did our country's single women.

Studies of marital status and dependent children relative to absenteeism in education are by no means congruent with findings in labor and industry. For the most part, findings in education are mixed and by no means consistent in establishing a relationship concerning these personal factors.

One of the most comprehensive current decade studies of teacher absenteeism in the U.S. conducted by Elliott (1982) found that both the high absence male and high absence female categories contained a higher percentage of married employees than the low absence groups for males and females.

Educational research conducted by Skidmore (1984) concluded that the institution of on-site day care programs for employees with very young children made for significant reductions for both female and male parents who utilized such programs. Skidmore postulated that the need to use paid leave provisions for sick dependent children was not localized to either male or female teachers.

It is interesting to note that HRM researchers Garrison and Muchinsky (1977) found results similar to that

of Skidmore (1984) in a study based on the review of attendance registrars of accounting workers. Garrison and Muchinsky wrote that:

Marital status was found to be a significant negative predictor of absence without pay, but not with pay.²⁷

It is apparent once again that the investigation of personal factors relative to absenteeism should be relegated to specific occupational groups rather than viewed across occupations. BLS data collections and BNA interpretive reports fail to make any solid distinction between worker groups who are not paid for use of absence leave and those who are.

Returning to specific studies of teacher absenteeism, Marlin (1976) reported that the mean absence rate for married teachers was higher than for single educators. One year earlier, Collier (1975) reported exactly the opposite finding in a study of teachers in Livonia, Michigan, public schools in summarizing that married teachers had lower absence rates than single educators.

As for family size, the provision of paid leave for family illness versus unpaid benefits also flavors variable findings in education. BLS data supports acceptance of industrial relations findings that increases in the number

²⁷ Garrison, K. R. and Muchinsky, P. M. "Attitudinal and Biographical Predictors of Incidental Absenteeism," Journal of Vocational Behavior, No. 10 (April 1977), p. 229.

of children are positively correlated with increases in absence for women and decreases in absence for men.

However, such is not the case in education. Capitan, et al., (1980) concluded that high use of leave for illness in the family for Ohio teachers was not relegated to either sex. Redmond (1978) also reported that no relationship existed between family size and absenteeism over a four-year review of Iowa school teachers. A Florida study conducted by Manganiello (1972) also reported that there was:

. . . no significant difference in the absence frequencies of female teachers who had children and female teachers without children, as indicated by their payroll records.²⁸

In summary, the relationships between absenteeism, marital status and dependent children seems fairly consistent in broad-based national sampling but inconclusive in looking at particular occupation groups such as educators. It is apparent that one could be comparing "apples to oranges" when groups with little or no paid leave benefits are mingled with those who enjoy such provisions. In such a situation, a researcher is left wondering just how influential the provision of paid leave benefits are in assessing the impact of voluntary absenteeism in the work place. Previous discussion illustrated that public employees who

²⁸ Manganiello, L. P. "A Study to Determine the Relationship of Teacher Self-Acceptance and Other Selected Variables to Teacher Absence Behavior." Ed.D. dissertation, University of Miami, (1972), 101 pgs. (Abstract located in Dissertation Abstracts International, (Vol. 34/01-A) p. 95.

have paid leave benefits are shown to have consistently higher rates of absence from work than workers in the private industrialized sector. Educators in particular have been found to have consistently higher rates of absence than national averages.

Also discussed earlier was the notion that employees who have paid leave provisions have as much financial impetus (or more) to stay away from work as to attend. It would seem more appropriate to conduct studies of the impact of marital status and familial responsibilities upon absenteeism from the viewpoint of paid vs. non-paid leave provisions. Such reviews would require attitudinal surveys of workers as well as records reviews. This approach would definitely make investigation more laborious but the results could more appropriately assess the impact of voluntary absenteeism in areas such as elementary schools.

Absenteeism & Educational Level

The majority of absenteeism studies that find a relationship between educational level and absenteeism are from private industry and reflect the wide range of educational achievement indicative of our total society. For the most part, occupations that employ workers ranging in educational level of non-high school graduate to advanced college degree persons find negative correlations between education level and absenteeism. However, occupations such as education have college undergraduates as the baseline

education level and differences between these workers and employees with masters degrees and higher is negligible.

Taylor (1979) utilized BLS data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) to report a negative relationship existed between education level and absenteeism in the U.S. work force. Taylor's results were as follows:

<u>Education Level</u>	<u>Inactivity Rate</u>
Non-H.S. Graduate	4.9%
H.S. Graduate	3.5%
College Graduate	2.1%

Given the above results, one would speculate that a definite correlation exists between education and absenteeism. However, higher levels of education open higher level positions to those with such degrees and employees in these positions operate within a different universe of benefits and job considerations.

In remembering the discussion on sexual status and absenteeism, variations exist between "blue collar" and "white collar" working conditions. Far less leniency is said to exist for workers at lower level positions to accomplish personal tasks during work hours. "White collar" workers on the other hand, find it easier to break away from job duties either at the work site or for short periods of time away from the job while not actually being regarded as absent. The end result is that lower level workers must take time away from the job and be more frequently counted as absent (Porter & Steers, 1978).

In addition, higher level positions in a work setting many times allow for greater worker control and consequent personal involvement (Nicholson, Wall & Lischeron, 1977). Therefore, there is more impetus for upper level, higher educated workers to enjoy their jobs more and desire to escape their positions less (in the case of voluntary absences).

As for educational studies of absenteeism, very few comprehensive reviews of personal factors and absenteeism account for educational level. Educational researchers seem to regard education level as a moot point for investigation in that profession.

Redmond's study (1978) of Iowa teachers found no correlation between degree level and absenteeism. However, Douglas (1976) found that the variable of "academic degree" did show a small negative correlation when added in a step-wise regression. A 1960 study of Chicago, Illinois, teachers conducted by Lee reported that:

Teacher's with a bachelor's degree on the average took 0.78 days of sick leave; teachers with a master's degree, 0.73 days; teachers with a master's degree plus 30 hours, 0.67 days; and teachers with a doctor's degree, 0.12 days.²⁹

The above quotation's findings, in presenting the basis for a negative relationship between educator advancing degree status and absenteeism, are phenomenal in the

²⁹ Lee, B. C. Teacher Absences and Cost of Substitute Services. Research Memo 1960-35. Wash. D.C.: National Education Association, Research Division, (Nov. 1960). p. 8.

reported rates of absence for all degree levels. By today's standards, the attendance rates of Chicago's teachers in 1960 all ranged above exceptional standards of 2% or less (Gaudet). Roughly fifteen years later, assessment of Chicago teachers absence rates were reported to be averaging an inactivity rate of 7.1% (Academy for Educational Development, 1977).

In summary, correlations between educational level and absenteeism are found to exist in a negative relationship when wide diversity of educational levels exist in a work organization or occupation group. The relationship established by broad national sampling such as that conducted by BLS masks the variations in working conditions known to exist between upper level and lower level work positions. Studies of educator absence and their relationship to obtained degrees are few but those that do investigate the relationship report minor correlations or conclude that no relationship exists.

Absenteeism & Experience/Tenure

Studies in the private sector concerning absenteeism and experience or tenure in a position illustrate conflicting results over the past three decades. The majority of studies in private labor and industrial situations show a tendency for absence of workers to stabilize over several years of continuous employment. On the other hand, reviews of absenteeism in education circles show a variable pattern of absence use by educators in the first one to five years

of continuous employment and then a gradual increase in absence use until retirement age.

A closer look at experience/absenteeism correlation studies show a particular association with the availability of paid sick leave benefits. Private industry studies such as those conducted by Garrison & Muchinsky (1977) illustrate the variability of results that can be found concerning absence and experience when the effects of paid vs. non-paid absence are accounted for. In their study of 195 accounting workers the two researchers found a significant positive relationship between tenure and paid absences. However, a significant negative relationship was found between tenure and unpaid absences within the same sample. Garrison and Muchinsky concluded that:

Employees with more tenure usually were eligible for more paid absences and employees with less tenure normally took more unpaid absences. Thus the organizational policy regarding paid absences accounts, in part, for the significant correlations between tenure and the two absenteeism measures.³⁰

Current investigations into teacher absenteeism and tenure illustrate, in the majority of studies, that the availability of paid sick leave is a factor seemingly contributing to the formulation of positive correlations.

A 1986 study conducted by Blankinship (Kansas State University) found a curvilinear relationship between absence

³⁰ Garrison, K. M. and Muchinsky P. M. Op. Cit., (1977), p. 226.

and tenure in a review of 1,092 Kansas City area public school teachers. Teachers with 1-3 and 30 or more years of experience were found to have the lowest rates of absence from work. Between those age groups, absence leave use was found to increase gradually with experience until a point where retirement was possible. Blankinship concluded that the effects of increasing age and concomitant health problems coupled with the ability to take time from the job without loss of monetary compensation contributed to the internal sample's positive correlation between teacher experience and absence.

Eight years earlier, in a 1978 study of Michigan educators in the Livonia, MI school system, Collier found much the same results as those discussed above. Nearly the same curvilinear correlation was found with minor variations in years experience in low rates being at 2-4 and 23-25 years of experience.

In contrast to the findings in education, a small number of private industry reviews of blue-collar employees having little or no leave benefits actually show decreases in absence with increasing experience. Researchers Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) contend that employees in private industry who maintain long-term continuous employment typify the type of "job satisfied" employee who grows in commitment to the position as time advances:

People tend to justify any given act by viewing it as right, good, and useful and hence justified. And the process reiterates itself over time,

which increases the probability that people will commit themselves to a given course of action (i.e. regularity of attendance).³¹

To summarize, absenteeism and years of experience or tenure follows, to a large degree, the same course of occurrence as that found with age and employment. However, variations exist when the ability to be absent brings with it little or no monetary loss.

Individual Absence Rates As A % of Total Staff Absence

One of the more interesting areas of absence research in private and public employment is the review of individual contributions of absence to the total of work force absences. The investigation into actual absenteeism problems concerning this factor brings some surprising findings. In a study conducted by Yolles, Karone & Krinsky (1975) it was found that approximately ten percent of workers caused ninety percent of all absenteeism in the quarter reviewed.

A large automobile manufacturing corporation, for example, tracked the absenteeism of more than 600 employees for 6 years. It found that while some employees had perfect attendance, several were absent more than 600 days.³²

³¹ Mowday, R. T. , Steers, R. M. & Porter, L. W. "The Measurement of Organizational Commitment, Journal of Vocational Behavior, (1979), #14, p. 245.

³² Henneman, H. G. III, et. al., Personnel/Human Resource Management. Richard D. Irwin, Inc., Homewood, Ill. (1983), p. 160.

Such lopsided commissions of individual absence contributing to total absence are rare in the literature. However, such findings point out the need for surveillance and monitoring by employers as regards absenteeism and the potential for reducing total absenteeism by emphasizing sanctions upon those few in work groups that are found to be truly abusive of absence leave.

Earlier studies conducted by Plummer (1960) and Steinmetz and Schroeder (1967) in industrial settings set a general expectation for employers concerning individual absence ratios accounting for the majority of total staff absence. These researchers concluded that approximately 10% of employees in a given work force are generally responsible for 45% of all absences, and that one-third of workers normally account for four-fifths of employee group absences.

Two education studies of the current decade investigate the question of what percentage of teachers contribute to the total amount of absence in the sample reviewed. In a study conducted by Harper (1984) of 872 teachers in an urban Mississippi school system the author reported that approximately 20% of all teachers were responsible for 50% of the total paid absence reported.

A second study conducted by Bouknight (1985) of South Carolina elementary and secondary teachers reported that 25% of the educators involved in the study were responsible for 60% of the total time lost due to use of paid sick or personal leave.

Both of these studies do not come close to the more dramatic findings of Yolles, Karone & Krinsky (1975). However, the findings illustrate to school managers that problematic absenteeism may very well involve dealing with a relatively small number of employees.

School managers do need to be aware of the particular controversy concerning absence data analysis. In general, evaluating employee absence rates on the basis of total time lost (hours or days) may lead to inappropriate assumptions about individual employee absenteeism if compared to national findings released by such agencies as the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). BLS data pertaining to absenteeism are premised on the idea that absence frequency, rather than total time lost, is a more appropriate methodological approach in estimating voluntary absenteeism:

Absence frequency is a more stable measure of absenteeism over time than is the total number of days absent (total time lost). Absence frequency, because it is less sensitive to one long period of absenteeism, is more reflective of voluntary absenteeism than is the total number of days an employee was absent.³³

However, the vast majority of absenteeism studies in education present findings in "time lost" measures and comparisons of results are, therefore, currently more appropriate using similar measures. Time lost measures attempt to

³³ Breaghaugh, J. A. "Predicting Absenteeism From Prior Absenteeism and Work Attitudes," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 66 No. 5, (1981), pgs. 556 & 557.

determine the total amount of time lost due to all absences in a particular time frame in an organization while side-stepping the issue of the existence of a voluntary/involuntary continuum. Such is the direction of this study.

The Relationship Between Absenteeism and Organizational Factors

Staff Size

A variety of industrial relations studies coursing the past forty years give fairly solid and consistent evidence of a positive relationship between absenteeism and an organization's size. Validation of these studies is found in the nearly consistent findings of the Bureau of National Affairs from 1973 to 1985. Even though national absence rates dropped over the period 1980-1985, correlations between absence rates and worker group size remained consistent as a positive correlational finding (Klein, 1986).

Speculation as to the consistency of findings relative to staff size compliment similar findings relative to studies of worker "group cohesiveness," "job involvement," and "job satisfaction." Muchinsky, in his 1978 review of four decades of absenteeism literature summarized a variety of findings of studies that found increases in work group size brought concomitant higher rates of employee absence:

Greater absenteeism is associated with larger work groups. . . . Increases in size could result in lower group cohesiveness, higher task specialization and poorer communications. Such results could

make it more difficult to fulfill one's expectations, resulting in increased dissatisfaction that would lead to increased tendencies to withdraw.³⁴

Muchinsky does note at the time of his review (1978) that the vast majority of studies relative to work group size encompass "blue collar" work groups. He further noted that similar studies of "white collar" and professional groups were inconsistent in their findings. It is interesting, therefore, to note the current findings of studies of absenteeism and work group size of such professionals as public educators.

A 1986 study of Colorado public schools conducted by Giullian reported that of the 151 public schools reviewed, there were a higher number of absentee days in districts of large size (greater than 250 employees). A 1983 study of Pennsylvania public schools found similar results in concluding that larger districts experienced higher rates of absence than smaller ones (Coffman, 1985).

School absenteeism studies of the 1970's showed mixed results as concerns correlations of staff size and teacher absence rates. A 1978 Pennsylvania study found that small staff operations had virtually the same absence rates as large systems (Pennsylvania School Boards Association, 1978). Conversely, data on Illinois public schools found a direct positive correlation between the size of teacher staff and group average absence rates based on total time

³⁴ Muchinsky, P. M. Op. Cit., p. 329.

lost (Illinois Office of Education, 1978). This study illustrated that district teacher work forces serving less than 300 students had the lowest rates of total average time lost (2.9%). Eight staff gradations of average daily attendance (ADA) of students served showed increasing average teacher rates culminating to an average staff absence rate of 6.5% (ADA = 25,000 pupils or more).

One study conducted by Gibson (1968) reported a curvilinear relationship as concerns staff size and teacher absence. Gibson's study was unique in that it was extensively longitudinal, encompassing school years 1948-1959. Results of his records review indicated that staff sizes were lowest for very small teacher groups (13 employees or less). Absence rates increased with larger staff but then decreased with teacher groups of over 100 employees.

A concluding theory on the subject of absence and work unit size is offered by researcher Laurence Kelly of the Canadian based IR Research Service. In his book "Absenteeism: Policies and Programs for The 80's" (1982)

Kelly states:

Size of firm and size of work group are two organizational characteristics which have an effect on absence rates. Time lost is lowest in firms with few employees and highest in the largest companies. . . Suffice to say that the most basic reason why some organizations have higher

rates of absence than others is quite simply, poor management.³⁵

What the above quote underscores is, in part, the point previously raised by Muchinsky. That being, that larger organizations or worker groups allow for not only less identification of employees with management but also for less ability of management to affect individual workers. It would seem appropriate from the research conducted in this area that absence control programs in large organizations need to operate in sub-units of workers. Such is already the movement of organizations in programs stressing "employee participation" and "quality of work life" (Crosby, 1985).

Absence Control Policies

Most studies of absenteeism focus investigation into voluntary absenteeism. The rationale being that an organization can only hope to effectuate those absences that are within the control of the employee. Much controversy has evolved over where the true domains of actual involuntary and voluntary absence exists:

The factors responsible for absenteeism have proven illusive, inscrutable and difficult to analyze. A number of factors account for this; the sheer number and diverse nature of the variables influencing absenteeism, the myriad of ways in which these variables interact with one another to encourage or discourage absenteeism,

³⁵ Kelly, Laurence. Absenteeism - Policies and Programs for The 80's. (IR Research Service, Inc.), Brown & Martin, Ltd., Kingston, Ontario, (1982) p. 21.

and the sensitivity of these variables to a wide variety of different environmental, organizational and personal characteristics.³⁶

However, organizations that step aside of the controversy about what types of absence can be counteracted and establish sound policies based on the accumulated research and experiences of others usually find positive results. A common denominator of many organizations whose aggregate work force has a low absence rate (2% or less) is the presence of an absenteeism policy, consistent enforcement of that policy and termination due to excessive unwarranted absence (Scott & Markham, 1982). To a lesser degree, organizations with low absence rates also have a reinforcement system for those employees who attain absence rate goals (Schmitz & Henneman, 1980).

It is quite evident that employers who make absence an issue and continually follow through with expectations of employees, normally get what they ask for. Why then, do so many organizations (especially public institutions such as schools) operate without control policies?

One of the primary reasons for the lack of absenteeism policies in organizations is the amount of time, effort and emotional energy needed to implement them (Henneman, Schwab, Fossum & Dyer, 1983). Enforcement of absence policy is usually confrontational in nature, pitting immediate

³⁶ Dilts, D. A.; Deitsch, C. R.; & Robert, P. J.; Getting Absent Workers Back on the Job. Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., (1985), p. 143.

supervisors against employees in the process of verification for employee lost time. Additionally, enforcement of absence policy by immediate supervisors often leads to variations of enforcement within work organizations and concomitant loss of policy intent and effectiveness. A 1982 study by researchers Scott & Markham found peculiar problems encountered by direct supervisors:

Contrary to common expectations, the maintenance of daily records by supervisors had a reverse effect (of absence reduction plans). Those organizations whose supervisors were responsible for maintaining daily attendance records had a significantly higher rate (4.6%) than those organizations who did not use this method (3.8%).³⁷

Scott and Markham's study of 34 absence control methods concluded that one of the primary considerations for absence control policies is not simply whether they exist but that they are structured in a centralized manner. Such a structure is intended to intentionally eliminate the burden of enforcement and verification by immediate supervisors. Secondly, the process is centralized to eliminate the costs of maintenance of records at the immediate supervisor level. Scott and Markham found repeated instances of duplication of efforts in organizations that had absence policies. The researchers explain that:

There is no advantage in having duplicate systems of daily absence

³⁷ Scott, D. & Markham, S. "Absenteeism Control Methods: A Survey of Practices and Results," Personnel Administrator, (June 1982), p. 81

records. In fact, it would seem almost desirable to eliminate the supervisory system. While this might seem like a radical suggestion, it corresponds to a number of our experiences in large organizations who suffered from absenteeism problems.

Quite simply, they (supervisors) had come to realize that without a strong control system guided by the personnel department, there would never be consistency and equity in the absence program. More importantly, hourly employees usually did not believe that the supervisors kept accurate records and so frequently challenged the record's veracity. They would believe, however, that the personnel department kept reliable data.³⁸

The presence and effectiveness of absenteeism control policies in education received extensive review by the Educational Research Service, Inc. in 1981. In that year, ERS received information from across the U.S. on teacher absence control programs in 470 K-12 public school systems.

Mean averages were accumulated in a variety of data areas including; 1.) average days absent, 2.) average days absent by use of personal days and 3.) average costs to districts by demographic characteristic. The vast majority of information collected was based on total time lost (ERS, 1981).

The gist of the Educational Research Service report was dedicated to simple presentation of data relative to 39 topical areas of inquiry. Very little narrative or analysis

³⁸ Ibid. p. 81 & 83.

of data were provided. However, two important findings became evident in an analysis of reporting school system data concerning control programs.

The first was that the majority of reporting systems had absence control programs operating two years or less in their districts. These districts reported noticeable reductions of total time lost with a small number of districts reporting absence rates being cut more than 50% since the institution of control programs. Secondly, those few districts with programs operating three years or more had a majority of absence rates reported above the entire sample mean assessed by ERS (4.3% time lost).

It became apparent from the ERS presentation of data that significant gains were being produced in districts where absence control programs were quite new. District's employing control programs for several work years had staff absence rates closer to national norms (3-4%). There was no indication given about the initial effects of long-term programs (3 yrs. or older) nor was historical data provided to illustrate improvements in the districts. However, the mean group absence rate variations between "newly introduced" and "long-term" programs underscores the findings of researchers concerning the novelty of newly introduced plans:

Intervention programs are frequently subject to attenuation effects; that is, over time, the initial effects

of the program lessen and drift back toward baseline measure.³⁹

Researchers Schmitz and Henneman point out that many experiments on absence controls that are of short duration are subject to the "Hawthorn Effect." The fact that some absence control programs have produced results even before they are fully instituted gives backing to their contentions. Schmitz and Henneman indicate that many absence control programs elicit management's concern that there is a problem. The normal response by employees to the creation of new systems is to over-react with high rates of attendance especially in the initial phases of the program.

The onset of radically positive results at the formation and/or institution of absence controls is by no means a poor situation for management. To the contrary, it is in many instances a very welcome but short-lived facet of an absence control program. However, the potential "settling-in" of absence rates to average but acceptable levels is noted in the literature to be a long-term feature of absence controls which should be viewed as verification of success if mean rates were unacceptably high prior to institution of a plan. Unfortunately, many control programs have been abandoned when the dramatic results of a program's introduction lessen (Olson & Bangs, 1984).

³⁹ Schmitz, E. M. & Henneman, H. G. "Do Positive Reinforcement Programs Reduce Employee Absenteeism?," Personnel Administrator, (Sept. 1980), p. 92.

Several successful long-term education absence control programs are highlighted in the literature and warrant discussion of their components. "The Second Mile Plan" developed by the Houston (TX) Independent School District utilizes financial incentives, personal and public recognition for educators achieving district attendance goals. Seven total goal areas are addressed in the total program stressing such areas as student achievement and contributions to curriculum development.

The average teacher absence rate (total lost time) has wavered between 4.5% and 4.8% over the past three years. Though this rate is above national norms, the Houston Independent School District feels itself fortunate to have stabilized lost time from levels as high as 12% experienced at the turn of the present decade (Say & Miller, 1982).

The absence control program of the Des Moines Independent Community School District (Iowa) stresses specific review of the entering behavior of an employee. The plan emphasizes review of:

. . . an employee's predisposition toward work in general, toward its purpose, and toward a specific job. Certain specific actions can be taken to ensure that only people with strong work records are employed.⁴⁰

Unlike some programs that are intended to fix an existing problem, the Des Moines plan stress a goodly

⁴⁰ Ebmeier, H. H. Staff Absence: Where Do We Stand? Dept. of Evaluation, Des Moines Independent Community School District, (April 6, 1979), p. 26

measure of prevention. Managers of the plan attest to the creation of a work force whose personal commitment to the job limits the potential for absence leave abuse.

The Des Moines and Houston plans follow the basic components of solid control programs outlined by Scott & Markham (1982). Absence goals are clearly outlined. The policies of the program are continuously enforced throughout the school year. Employees are appraised at least monthly as to the status of their attendance behavior by written report. Employees bordering upon or found to be at unacceptable levels are quickly alerted. Repeated absentees are ushered into an assertive discipline system.

On the opposite end of enforcement practices, employees who attain an absence level deemed exemplary are appraised continuously of their standing throughout the school year. In the case of these two plans, employees with exemplary levels at the end of the school year are recognized publicly and given monetary rewards.

In summary, the existence of an absence policy with specific goals is prerequisite to combating absenteeism in educational systems experiencing such problems. However, the simple existence of absence policies is not the only criterion to reducing teacher absenteeism. Following the experience of private labor organizations, policies must be continually enforced, in some cases, to the point of dismissal of employees with habitual and excessive uncertified leave use. In such instances, educational

organizations in particular must show clear evidence of evenly applied policy, application of substantial due process and documentation of efforts to help errant employees attain attendance goals (Buford & McAndrew, 1983).

In addition to enforcement of policy, reinforcement for teachers who attain attendance goals is a recurrent feature of successful long-term plans. In many cases, such reinforcement is monetary in nature though simple recognition of performance is a feature of several control programs (ERS, 1981).

Grade Level Taught

Studies of educator absenteeism give ample evidence of variations of absence by system level but not by individual grade. Elementary teachers are regularly reported as having the highest amounts of group absence as compared to middle school, junior high or senior high school levels (ERS, 1980). Several studies conducted during the 1960's, 70's and in the current decade attest to higher group rates of absence in elementary schools than in any other education level in K-12 systems.

One of the more recent studies integrating comparisons of elementary educator absence rates to those of higher education levels was conducted by Bouknight (1985). This researcher found average rates for elementary levels in the state of South Carolina to be approximately 5.4% while secondary schools (7-12) averaged 3.8% time lost in the school year 1982-83. Earlier studies conducted by Sylwester

(1979), Redmond (1978) and Capitan & Morris (1978) also attest to similar findings regarding high absence levels for elementary systems.

The rationale provided for such regularity of occurrence in elementary schools is based on the predominance of female educators at that level (Bouknight, 1985). As has been discussed earlier, female workers in education and the national work force in general show higher rates of absence than for male workers for a number of fairly well researched reasons. Researchers Capitan & Morris (1978) add to the considerations for female workers in elementary education in noting that a large number of female teachers in elementary schools in their study were found to be married with minor children. These researchers speculated that the family demands placed on female teachers negatively influenced their attendance.

Researcher Sylwester (1979) lends an additional rationale for higher rates of absence of elementary educators in offering speculation that teachers at this level are subjected to younger children whose under-developed immune systems increase potential for transmission of illness in elementary schools. However, Sylwester offered no formal data on teacher personal sick leave or incidence rates of illness of children to substantiate his assumption.

As regards specific "grade level taught," there is very little research data that provide group absence rates for elementary teachers by exact grade level. Only one

study was found in the research literature that provided a source of information relative to absence rates for elementary grade levels.

In a study of the relationship between teacher absenteeism and the achievement of elementary pupils in reading and mathematics, Smith (1984) provided data comparing actual average rates of absence for teachers in grades 1-6 in the State of Michigan. Data was collected for two school years (1980-82). Smith reported that absence rates for teachers in the various levels fluctuated between 3.8% and 5.2%. Teachers in grades 1, 5 and 6 had the lowest levels of absence in the total sample. Teachers in grade 2 had levels approximating the median rate of 4.5% with teachers in grades 3 and 4 having the highest levels of absence from work in the total sample.

It should be noted that Smith concluded that the results supported the hypothesis that teacher absence negatively affects pupil achievement in reading and mathematics at grade levels 2, 3 and 4. The author further noted that the ability to generalize findings of his study to the majority of elementary educators in Michigan is limited in that only one district was utilized for the sample.

Reporting Procedures

Fairly conclusive evidence exists about the type of reporting procedure employed by school districts having a direct effect on the attendance of teachers. In particular, a strong correlation is found to exist between low absence

rates of teachers and the procedure of reporting illness to immediate supervisors (Elliott, 1982).

A variety of absence studies in both private industry and public services stress the importance of involving immediate supervisors in the reporting process. This is not to be confused with the process of absence recording and verification. As was presented earlier in this review, there is in some cases a detrimental effect caused by immediate supervisors being required to maintain and verify absences after the act. (Scott & Markham, 1982).

A study of twenty-five New Mexico public school systems by Blanco (1986) presented findings concerning personnel policies in which reporting procedures comprised a portion of the investigation. Blanco reported that school systems that employed the practice of reporting absences directly to school principals had an average staff absence rate of 2.37%. Districts utilizing school secretaries, central office staff or answering machines had higher rates ranging from 3.0% to 6.24% (total lost time per year).

A 1984 study of Georgia public schools sampling the responses of seventy-two (72) principals supervising 1,925 general education teachers and 347 special education teachers revealed similar but not as mutable findings relative to reporting procedure. Summary data indicated that teachers that reported absences directly to immediate supervisors took an average of 6.06 absence days as

contrasted to 7.22 absence days for those teachers who reported absences by other methods (Reale, 1984).

A comprehensive study of Pennsylvania school reporting procedures and mean work absence rates in total time lost was conducted by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association in 1978. The results are as follows:

<u>Contact</u>	<u>Abs. Rate</u>
Building Principal	4.508%
Central Office Admin.	4.648%
Building Secretary	4.778%
Central Office Sec.	4.985%
Answering Service	5.209%
(District Operated)	
Answering Service	5.629%
(Contracted)	
Other Dept. Supervisor	6.486%

[⁴¹]

It should be noted that a small number of education studies incorporating reporting procedures found no relationship to exist between reporting procedure and mean absence rates of school staffs. A 1983 study of 501 Pennsylvania public school districts conducted by Fusco (University of Pittsburgh) and a 1985 teacher absenteeism study conducted by Bouknight (University of South Carolina) reported no significant difference in school absence rates between schools that require teachers to report impending absences directly to the principal and those that do not.

School System Commitment After Work Day

Organizational commitment is a relatively new area of interest for organizational behaviorists. Heightened

⁴¹ Pennsylvania School Boards Assoc. Teacher Absenteeism: Professional Staff Absence Study. Penn. School Boards Assoc., Harrisburg, Penn., (October 1978), p. 29.

interest concerning organizational commitment has been noticed in our country during the past decade. This interest is spurred by a loss of international markets due to overseas competition and a significant loss of internal markets to newly industrialized nations such as Japan.

Organizational commitment now represents itself to be a growing and specialized industrial science with ever-expanding theoretical frameworks. The variety of definitions now found in the research literature have created an overflow of branches from the mainstream theories that numbered four fundamental theories prior to 1978 (Morrow, 1983). This rapid and somewhat unchecked growth has stimulated justifiable concern:

The growth in commitment related concepts has not been accompanied by a careful segmentation of commitment's theoretical domain in terms of intended meaning of each concept or the concept's relationships among each other. The result has been the formation of over 25 commitment related concepts and measures.⁴²

For the purpose of this literature review and the hypothesis related to this topic area, no exhaustive discussion of the many varieties of organizational commitment will be presented. Instead, emphasis will be placed on two concepts which have enjoyed some longevity and have solid research histories to back them.

⁴² Morrow, P. C. "Concept Redundancy In Organizational Research: The Case of Work Commitment," Academy of Management Review, Vol. 8 No. 3, (1983), p. 486.

Central life interest (CLI), coined by Dubin in 1956 focuses upon the occupational vocation as the primary locale in which a worker wishes to carry out the majority of their live's activities. CLI in organizational commitment precludes being committed to one's church, civic organization, or family. However, the 32-item scale devised by Dubin to measure a worker's potential for organizational commitment is found to overlap with high levels of devotion to work values which may be an associated function of a civic, church, or union group (Dubin, Champoux, & Porter, 1975). It is assumed by Dubin, et. al., that an individual whose organizational job commitment registers as a strong central life interest would tend to be on the job more regularly and possibly work beyond the minimal daily or weekly requirements.

Job involvement, as described by Lodahl and Kejner (1965), involves two similar definitions each of which now has its own research base. One definition describes job involvement in terms of a job-involvement/self-esteem relationship and the other as a component of one's self-image or personal identification with work. The former definition is of most interest to this study and the particular hypothesis concerning additional work beyond the minimal requirements.

The job-involvement/self-esteem form of worker commitment particularly involves how an individual equates one's worth in terms of how well one performs one's job

(Lawler & Hall, 1970). It could be hypothesized that educators with high job involvement would not only commit to the system beyond the minimal requirements but attend very regularly to insure high performance.

It should be noted that both of the two concepts described in this topic area have specific measures for determination of gradations of central life interest and job involvement. However, utilization of such measures is not to be a feature of this dissertation. The attendant hypothesis related to this topic area is to be researched primarily by immediate supervisor report of those individuals who regularly provide system service after the work day and relating those designated individuals to their total time lost (absence rate) in the school year studied.

Studies of educator absenteeism commonly intertwine the concepts of "job commitment" with "job satisfaction." Due to this situation, results of such studies have to be regarded as fairly inconclusive of their findings:

The variable "commitment" is similar to and often inclusive of satisfaction but is really much more. It is so because it incorporates a normative concept which implies actions and because it is possible to inculcate a sense of organizational commitment without necessarily providing the usual terms of satisfaction.⁴³

⁴³ Klein, S. M. "Organizational Behavior and Administration," in Carroll, S. J. & Schuler, R. S. Human Resource Management in the 1980's, Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Wash. D.C., (1983), p. 3-17.

One very clear analysis of work commitment in an educational system was conducted by Sheldon (1985). This researcher utilized three scales: (a) the Measure of Professional Commitment, (b) Miller's measure of work alienation, and (c) the Job Involvement Scale in a comparative analysis of scores and individual teacher absence rates as one of the hypotheses areas. This study sampled 440 secondary level teachers in Summit County, Ohio.

Results of the study gave indication of a significant correlation ($p < .05$) between measures of professed high job involvement and professed commitment to actual low absence for teachers in Summit County. Sheldon noted, however, that the sample size of the study was not sufficient to warrant generalization to all secondary level educators.

A 1983 study by Sacks (Yeshiva University) utilized Lodahl and Kejner's Job Involvement Scale in a study of organizational behavior and teacher absenteeism in a single school district. 149 elementary, junior high, and high school teachers served as the sample. Contrary to Sheldon's study, Sacks found no significant relationship between teacher's perceptions of job involvement and the number of days absent (total time lost) in the 1981-82 school year.

Additional studies that mixed the concepts of "commitment," "job involvement," and "job satisfaction" within hypotheses concerning teacher absenteeism were generally supportive of the existence of a negative relationship between the concepts and teacher absenteeism.

A 1986 study conducted by Kuhns in the Tulsa Public Schools (Oklahoma) found that when the aforementioned variables were analyzed separately, it was found that teachers who displayed measures of strong commitment were satisfied with their jobs, rarely felt tension related to their job, infrequently considered leaving their school or profession, and maintained a high attendance rate.

An additional study of 795 elementary, middle and high school teachers in Lee County, Florida (Doran, 1986) utilized the Job Descriptive Index by Smith, Kendall and Hulin to assess its measures with individual teacher absence rates (time lost). Results were reported basically on the concept of "job satisfaction." However, the author indicated that the lowest rates of absence (less than 3.5%) were noticed in the set of teachers who scored high measures of job satisfaction and maintained employment in the district for more than 13 years. Long-term employment and high satisfaction coupled with low absence rates were speculated in this study's summary to be indications of "high work commitment."

Additional research conducted by the Educational Research Service (ERS) in 1980 presents several studies which also mix the concepts of commitment and satisfaction in hypothesis construction, testing and analysis of findings. In general, ERS supports the existence of a negative correlation between teacher work commitment and absence from the job. However, ERS utilizes the concept of "sense of

achievement" as opposed to "central life interest" or "job satisfaction." ERS definitions seem to match these latter concepts though the reader is left without conclusive evidence as to the actual amount of concept overlap and consequent interfacing of the results of studies to others concerning work commitment.

The Relationship Between Absenteeism and Time/Place Factors

Day of The Week

Several education absenteeism studies indicate that Mondays and Fridays are the two days of the week with the highest mean rate of absence for teachers. A slightly higher number of education studies indicate that Friday is the day for the highest occurrence of absence for educators (ERS, 1980).

Recent studies conducted by Bouknight (1985) and Smith (1984) indicate that Friday remains as the day having the highest mean absence rate for teachers. These education studies both assert that the variation in mean rates among the five normal work days was not excessively dispersed.

A fairly normal distribution of absence across work days was an indication that leave for illness purposes was not abusive. Mean elementary educator absence rates for the Bouknight study was 5.4% and 4.5% for that of Smith. As compared to national samples, these rates are noticeably varying from national mean rates of 3.0%-3.5%.

Additional education studies coursing the past twenty-five years vary little from the more recent

investigations. The Pennsylvania School Boards Association (1978) reported data that Fridays were ranked first as having the highest mean incidence rate for its sample. Researchers Capitan & Morris (1978) reported that the highest day for sick leave use by teachers was Friday (25% of all leave use) followed by Monday (22% of all leave use).

A notable review of medical and discretionary leave by day of the week was conducted by the New York Office of Education Performance Review in 1974. Though the results are distant in terms of time from the present, this New York City review of its full-time certified teachers give impetus to particular review of absence from a "specific leave type" to discover actual modes of leave use in a particular sample:

<u>Day of Week</u>	<u>Medical</u>	<u>Discretionary</u>
Monday	1.9%	7.1%
Tuesday	1.9%	6.2%
Wednesday	1.8%	6.0%
Thursday	1.8%	5.8%
Friday	1.9%	6.8%

[44]

The results of this study exemplify the contention of absenteeism researchers that actual illness of workers is evenly spread throughout all days of the week including weekends (Nicholson, et. al., 1982).

⁴⁴ Office of Education Performance Review. Teacher Absenteeism and the Cost-Effectiveness of Substitute Teachers. Albany, New York: State of New York, Office of Education Performance Review, (January 1974), p. 13.

Behrend (1959) argues that there is no reason why actual illness should vary among the days of the week. This investigator reviewed 57 engineering companies in his review of "blue collar" industrial workers. Monday was found to be the day of highest mean rate for absences. However, the rate of absence decreased throughout the five-day work week to the point that Friday was found to be the lowest day of mean rate of absence.

Behrend did not discount the fact that employee personal motivation was a major factor in time away from work. However, the financial disincentive to stay away from work (loss of pay) resulted in a decreasing mean rate of absence as the work week progressed:

The explanation suggested for this cyclical pattern is that motivation to go to work is lowest immediately after the weekend, since leisure has just been enjoyed and the prospect of another five-day work period is unattractive. However, the positive outcomes of absences will tend to diminish and costs (to the employee) to increase; thus, during the week there may be a steady increase in the number of employees returning to work.⁴⁵

However, when the potential for leave time in any other form is available, the general tendency for such days to be added to weekends or vacation periods increases.

High mean group absence rates on Mondays and Fridays are most noticeable in occupation groups that enjoy paid

⁴⁵ Chadwick-Jones, et. al. Social Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N.Y., (1982), p. 59.

leave situations; especially where the financial incentive to stay away from work is as great as it is to report to work.

Employment in public education normally brings with it the benefits of paid sick leave, personal leave and a smaller number of paid options to escape the job without financial loss. Higher than average rates of absence on days following leisure periods for employees who have access to paid leave provisions signals voluntary absenteeism and a level of leave abuse.

A study conducted by Brubacher & Stiverson (1982) of the effects of a four-day work week in Colorado public schools is of particular interest to this topic area. The effects of a four-day week upon school employee absenteeism in 23 Colorado local school districts indicated a one-third reduction in total absences for employees (paraprofessionals and teachers included in sample) when the school day was lengthened to allow for an extended weekend. The results would indicate that increased access to leisure time decreases absence from the established work week.

Month of Year

Attendance reviews of industrial labor organizations indicate that absence from work is highest during the winter months. Given that minor illness is most frequently associated with the winter months, these findings would seem to correlate with the utilization of leave for certifiable illness absence.

The rate of full-week absence is almost twice as high in the early months of the year as it is in summer months, while there are even wider variations in the rate of part-week absence. These variations probably can be explained primarily by seasonal patterns in the incidence of illness such as flu, etc.⁴⁶

However, monthly absence use patterns in public institutions show varied and sometimes questionable differences from those of private enterprise. Though absences are found to be high in colder winter months, high rates of absence in warm seasons are not uncommon in career fields such as public education. Such incidence patterns again raise questions about paid leave abuse and employee access to paid personal days.

A 1983 study of teachers in south central Pennsylvania reports that March was the month for highest paid leave use followed by May and December. These researchers noted that while March was the month with the highest use of sick leave use, May was the month in which the highest use of personal leave was taken (Coffman, 1983). The pattern raised serious concern about the accelerated use of personal leave by teachers at a point concurrent with the end of most school years.

Coffman pointed out that the school districts in his study did not allow for accumulation of personal leave. He speculated that teachers, seeing these days going unused,

⁴⁶ Kelly, L. Absenteeism: Policies and Programs for The 80's. p. 9.

manufactured a variety of reasons for the need to be released from the job for short one or two-day durations. In essence, the viewed potential for loss creates abuse of teacher personal leave in May, according to the researcher. In his summary, Coffman lends speculation to the possible reduction of May abuse patterns by the allowance for accumulation of educator personal leave similar to that of illness leave.

An interesting pattern for monthly mean work absence rates (total time lost) in the State of Pennsylvania was found in a Pennsylvania School Boards Association review in 1978. This study found that mean work absence rates increased progressively in each successive month of the school year. Results were as follows:

<u>Month</u>	<u>Mean Work Abs. Rate</u>
Sept.	2.617
Oct.	3.430
Nov.	3.749
Dec.	4.095
Jan.	4.220
Feb.	4.303
Mar.	4.458
Apr.	4.596
May	4.781 [⁴⁷]

Little rationale for the above escalating mean rates was offered other than speculation that availability of paid personal and sick leave may have lent to the increasing mean absence rate pattern.

⁴⁷ Pennsylvania School Boards Association. Teacher Absenteeism: Professional Staff Absence Study. Penn. School Boards Assoc., Harrisburg, Penn. (Oct. 1978) p. 24.

A 1976 review of teacher absenteeism conducted by Marlin indicated that May had the highest rate of lost time for teachers in southern Mississippi school districts. However, Bundren (1974) concluded that no significant relationship existed between the time of year and teacher absenteeism for teachers in and about the Las Vegas, Nevada area.

In summary, mean group absence rates for teachers for specific times of the year are varied and do not necessarily follow patterns of private industry. Teacher sick leave use corresponds primarily with traditional months of high illness. However, teacher access to paid personal leave seems to produce a positive relationship between teacher absence and the later months of nine-month school years.

District Demography

Reviews of teacher absenteeism in K-12 public education report little on the comparisons of mean group absence rates on the basis of district demography. Most published and unpublished dissertations focus on a particular district or county level and do not cover an adequate sampling of districts as regards urban, suburban or rural districts.

From a review of the literature, the Educational Research Service (1981) national report on teacher absenteeism serves as one of the most comprehensive reviews of teacher absence and its relationship to district demography. In that year, ERS reported that larger urban districts had

some of the highest mean group absence rates of the 470 reporting school systems. Several urban districts reported time lost rates of more than 10%.

In general, large urban districts in the ERS survey were grouped into categories of districts serving 25,000 or more students. Some suburban districts met this enrollment criterion. However, the majority of suburban districts served student enrollments between 10,000 and 25,000 students. The majority of districts reporting their demographic description as rural reported student enrollment of 2,500 or less. Mean group absence rates of teachers for all paid absences were reported in four student enrollment categories.

The demographic descriptions of participating districts paralleled enrollment groups on both ends of the four enrollment levels. Suburban districts generally incorporated the two middle enrollment levels. Summary data are as follows:

<u>Enrollment</u>	<u>% Lost Time</u>
25,000 or more	9.0
10,000-24,999	8.4
2,500-9,999	8.0
300-2,499	6.5 [48]

As can be seen from the above data, mean group absence rates for teachers for the entire sample were significantly higher in all categories than the national

⁴⁸ Educational Research Service. Teacher Absenteeism: Experience and Practices of School Systems. ERS, Inc. Arlington, VA, (1981), p. 7.

norms of 3.0-3.5% experienced prior to the turn of the current decade.

The reports of larger amounts of teacher loss time in urban districts interfaces with findings relative to worker group size. As was discussed earlier, larger group mean absence rates are found in operations employing large work groups. Kelly (1982) explained that worker group cohesiveness, disassociation of the workers from organizational goals and lessened ability for individual workers to influence operations are side effects of large work groups. Kelly theorizes that such outcomes of large groups increases the potential for leave abuse. Such situations may also occur in large school systems where districts serve large student populations.

Additionally, urban school districts also have reportedly higher amounts of lower achieving and behaviorally maladjusted pupils. Researchers Jackson, Schwab and Schuler (1986) provide ample argument that public service operations in inner-city regions produce significant stress factors on employees that in turn lend to higher rates of job absence and employee turnover. Though higher rates of absence from work for urban district teachers may very well be influenced by large work group size, teaching climate may also be a significant influence upon the higher absence rates of urban teachers.

Descriptive Models of Absenteeism

The accumulated knowledge concerning absence research has been synthesized over the current decade into descriptive models relative to absence phenomena. The attempt made in devising such representations is to provide not only a summary of the findings relative to absenteeism of workers but to also project the particular author's theoretical framework for absence behavior. Therefore, the presentation of absenteeism models reflects not only a summary of the state of the art (at the time of model development) but also the arrangement of factors in a manner congruent with the designer's ideology concerning absence behavior.

In this section, two models will be discussed in detail. The development of the "Process Model" as coined by researchers Steers & Rhodes (1978) and "Causal Model" as developed by Brooke (1986) show definite variations based upon the passage of time, and consequently more researched and newly developed understandings about employee absence behavior. More specifically, the Brooke paradigm also shows refinements of the Steers & Rhodes (S&R) representation after attempts to operationalize and test the S&R model.

However, both models do share basic theoretical underpinnings and represent the approximately fifty years of industrial relations, private and public work place research relative to voluntary and involuntary absenteeism.

Steers & Rhodes: A Process Model of Attendance

At the time of this model's development (1978), Steers & Rhodes (S&R) were apparently embroiled in as much a controversy over the then suspected relationship between absenteeism and turnover as they were about the factors relative to absenteeism. At the introduction of their premiere article, the authors noted that absence and turnover differed in three important respects:

- 1.) The negative consequences associated with absenteeism for the employee are usually much less than those associated with turnover;
- 2.) Absenteeism is more likely to be a spontaneous and relatively easy decision, while the act of termination is typically more carefully considered over time; and
- 3.) Absenteeism often represents a substitute form of behavior for turnover, particularly when alternative forms of employment are unavailable.⁴⁹

A secondary argument raised by Steers and Rhodes was in the refuting of job dissatisfaction as a primary cause of absenteeism. S&R pointed out that the research literature at the time of their model's development displayed a very weak correlation between job dissatisfaction and worker absenteeism. The research conducted in the current decade continues to confirm the downplaying of job dissatisfaction

⁴⁹ Steers, R.M. & Rhodes, S.R. "Major Influences on Employee Attendance: A Process Model," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 63 No. 4, (1978), p. 391.

as a major absenteeism influence (Kurtz, Googin & Howard, 1983; Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson & Brown, 1982).

The model, as illustrated on the following page, is based on the understanding that a variety of situational constraints affect employee attendance. S&R reject the singular assumption that employees are generally free to decide whether or not they wish to report to work. Such personal complications as poor health or family problems and ill children are noted to illustrate the additional ties workers have and how these can interfere with a job. Given such understandings, S&R suggest that:

An employee's attendance is largely a function of two important variables; a.) an employee's motivation to attend and b.) an employee's ability to attend.⁵⁰

The basic premise of the process model centers on the employee's motivation to come to work and its influence on actual attendance. S&R theorize that if an employee enjoys the work environment and its inherent duties, it can be expected that he/she will have a strong desire to come to work regularly.

Within the first sector of the model, S&R focus on "job scope" and "job level" as factors contributing to reduced absence if both are favorable to the employee. S&R can be viewed as a team of researchers contributing to the

⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 392.

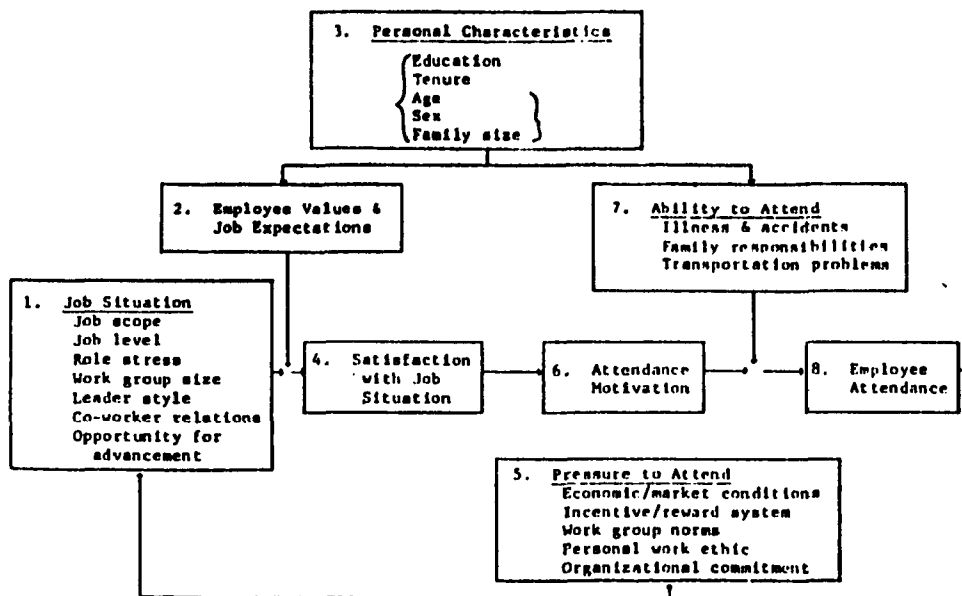


Figure 1.--Steers & Rhodes - A Process Model of Attendance.
 (Source: Richard M. Steers and Susan R. Rhodes.
 "Major Influences on Employee Attendance: A
 Process Model," Journal of Applied Psychology,
 63 (Aug., 1978), p. 393. Copyright 1978 by
 the American Psychological Association.)

promotion of the recent influx of employee participation and quality of work life programs. S&R rely on the work of industrial relations researchers such as Glaser (1976) and Hackman, Lawler & Kaufman (1973) in exhibiting findings that enriched jobs and addition of more challenging job responsibilities enhance job satisfaction thereby reducing employee absenteeism.

The inclusion of job level under the job situation area is intended to illustrate the effects of the challenging nature of jobs upon attendance behavior. S&R relied upon the work of Garrison & Muchinsky (1977) in reporting that the more challenging nature of high level jobs lends to higher job satisfaction and better work attendance. However, S&R fail to include discussion on the more lenient aspects of upper level jobs that allow for managers/supervisors to leave work for short periods of time to attend to personal affairs while not actually being counted as absent from work (Henneman, et. al., 1983).

Role stress is reported to have a positive relationship with absence behavior (Bernardin, 1977). This factor is of particular importance to the field of K-12 education where stress on the job is reportedly a major work environment malady (Jackson, Shuler & Schwab, 1986).

Previous discussion has been given to the organizational factors of work group size. In general, increases in work group size are reported to be concomitant with lower group cohesiveness, higher task specialization and poorer

communication, all of which reportedly lend to higher rates of work absenteeism (Ingham, 1970). S&R also include the organizational factors of leader style, co-worker relations and opportunities for advancement in the "job situation" area. However, the authors give little real conclusive evidence to support these later three factor's influence on absence behavior. S&R summarize their efforts as being moderately related to job satisfaction which in turn has been found to be related to attendance.

In summarizing the effects of factors related to the job situation, S&R indicate that variables that relate primarily to job content have a seemingly stronger influence on absenteeism than those found to relate to job context:

Job content variables were generally found to be consistently related to both satisfaction and absenteeism. In contrast, context variables, while they were consistently related to satisfaction, were seldom related to absenteeism. Hence, they would be expected to influence absenteeism only to the extent that they altered one's satisfaction with the job situation.⁵¹

The "role of employee values and job expectations," as represented in sector two, illustrates S&R's contention that such values and expectations influence job satisfaction and indirectly weights upon attendance motivation (Sector 6). S&R report that workers enter most job situations with a pre-conceived notion of what the work will be like. The extent to which the perception matches the actual work

⁵¹ Steers & Rhodes. Op. Cit., p. 396.

environment later experienced by the employee, influences one's job satisfaction and attendance behavior. The greater expectations are met or exceeded, the better the conditions for good attendance, according to the authors. Research foundations for this area are those provided by Nicholson, Brown & Chadwick-Jones (1977 & 1982).

"Pressures to attend" are encompassed in five areas (as illustrated in Sector 5). S&R report that (a) economic and market conditions, (b) incentive/reward systems, (c) work group norms, (d) one's personal work ethic, and (e) one's organizational commitment represent external and internal personal motivations upon employees and their attendance behavior.

Economic and market conditions are found to be related to attendance motivation. Klein (1986) reported that economic downturns and the potential for employee layoff in industry are associated with lower than average national absence rates. Incentives and reward systems are of primary interest to S&R as considerable attention is given by the researchers to its potential effects on attendance behavior. S&R make a strong point of indicating that paid leave situations invariably give workers incentives not to report to work. Consequently, such incentives not to work need to be counteracted by incentives to report to work more regularly. S&R make it clear that:

There must be an expectancy on the part of the employee that attendance (and not absenteeism) will lead to desirable rewards. Moreover, the

employees must value the rewards available.⁵²

A variety of incentive systems are illustrated by S&R, many of which were short-lived experiments that produced quick effects. The longevity of these programs is questioned by S&R yet their potential for reducing worker absenteeism is given strong support despite conflicting results of the studies cited.

The authors rely upon the work of Glaser (1976) in reporting that reward/incentive systems are more likely to maintain their longevity if development of such systems incorporates employee participation at all levels. Creating a sense of "ownership" in such situations is imperative according to S&R.

Work group norms and on an individual but like basis, personal work ethic, exert influence on employee attendance via a value system that worker groups and individuals ascribe to. Lawler (1971) is utilized to exhibit research that shows that cohesive groups who share a belief in the importance of good attendance for the benefit of all workers, have average mean absence rates below national norms. In the same vein, individuals who view work as an important aspect of life and have a deep internal pressure to attend are generally more responsible in their regularity of work attendance. The research into group and individual worker commitment exemplified by such notions as "Protestant

⁵² Steers & Rhodes. p. 398.

Work Ethic" (Ilgen & Hollenback, 1977) are attempts to categorize and develop measurement tools for work group norms and personal work ethic. To date, such developments look to be inconclusive in truly identifying such factors on either a group or individual basis (Chadwick-Jones, et. al., 1982).

The factor of organizational commitment is somewhat related to the factors of work group norms and personal work ethic though organizational commitment may very well be a manufactured and external influence created by the employer, not the employee. The actual goals and objectives may be developed by the organization but reliance is still placed on the individual to adopt and work towards organizational ends. The research of Morgan and Herman (1976) is utilized to show that where employee's primary commitments lie elsewhere (family, friends, church, etc.), more pressure may be exerted on the employee to be absent. On the other hand, where the importance of one's work and the organization's contribution to society can be exemplified (i.e. hospital work, school teaching, etc.), the competing interests of the individual may not influence absenteeism in a negative manner.

The "ability of an employee to actually attend work," devoid of the discretion given to a voluntary choice, is viewed by S&R to be influenced by three main personal employee factors. Sector seven of the Process Model addresses: (a) illness and accidents, (b) family

responsibilities and, (c) transportation problems as attendance roadblocks. It is these particular areas in which the researchers make their most fervent plea for understanding of attendance phenomena not under the control of the employee.

S&R contend that a major weakness of much absenteeism research is in the failure to account for the influence of involuntary absenteeism in studies primarily dedicated to voluntary absenteeism factors. Illness and accidents represent a primary cause of absenteeism according to researchers Paringer (1983) and Miner & Brewer (1976). However, the extent to which true illness and accidents are out of the control of employees is yet to be actually verified. That is to say, that although illness and accidents are deemed to be a major cause of worker absence, there is considerable question and controversy existing about the amount of certifiable illness and personal injury that is under the control of the employee. Researchers such as those just cited side with the argument posed by Brooke (1986) in questioning just how much absence termed involuntary is actually under the voluntary control of the worker:

Illness is widely recognized as the most important cause of absenteeism, accounting for from one-half to two-thirds of all employee absence. Within the broad category of illness, available research indicates that the primary causes of absenteeism are social-psychological, and involves such factors as personal maladjustment, emotional

disorders, alcoholism and drug abuse.⁵³

According to S&R, family responsibilities and their influence on employee attendance show direct relationship not only to family size but to gender as well. Those relationships have already been extensively reviewed in this literature review. S&R add to the earlier discussion by citing the work Ilgen & Hollenbeck (1977) and that of Nicholson & Goodge (1976). These researchers support later research in the 1980's attesting to higher rates of absence for women with dependent children. Ilgen & Hollenbeck (1977) added to these findings noting that absenteeism rates for women declined later in work careers while rates for men increased with age. These researchers postulated that declining health for older men contributed to these findings.

Transportation problems gain mention by S&R yet get no real backing by previous research for inclusion in their model. A small amount of research by Stockford (1944) and Isambert-Jamati (1962) provided S&R with the information needed to make a small case for problems encountered by workers who traveled long distances to work. However, research conducted by Nicholson & Goodge (1976) found no such relationship.

⁵³ Brooke, P. P. "Beyond The Steers & Rhodes Model of Employee Attendance," Academy of Management Review, Vol. 11 No. 2, (April 1986), p. 354.

In summary, the Process Model devised by Steers & Rhodes does a good job of compartmentalizing the then current findings relative to absence phenomena and attempting to bring order into a research field that until 1978 seemed to escape any disciplinary approach. However, shortly after its inception, additional researchers in the field began to delimit its utility. Of particular concern was the inability to actually test the model in any real-life work situation. Criticism of specific elements of the model by researchers such as Chadwick-Jones, et. al. (1982) and Mowday, et. al. (1982) centers on the diverse nature of the concepts of the Process Model. Such purported concepts as "pressures" and "ability to attend" are viewed by critical researchers as being more in the realm of labels for categories rather than actual constructs. Other purported concepts such as "attendance motivation" were seen to be clearly ambiguous in nature.

More general criticism of the work of Steers & Rhodes come from those researchers offering competing theories relative to group interaction and concomitant effects upon absence behavior of individual workers:

Any model based on the abstract notion of an "individual employee," irrespective of the industrial and occupational context, is entirely defective. To refer to the employee's "motivation to come to work" as "the primary influence on actual attendance" is at best a banality, and at worst is destructive of a social psychological theory of

absence that, as a social phenomenon, it must have.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, the developing criticism of the first attempt at absence phenomenon classification by Steers & Rhodes has produced additions and alterations of their work that increases the respect of their pioneering efforts. Steers & Rhodes themselves encouraged continued analysis and modification of their model to represent future findings in absence and attendance research. Rather than assert their work as uncontestable, they expressed the hope that their work would be considered "a series of propositions suitable for testing" (1978, p. 392.). Such has been the case as will be evidenced by the analysis of the forthcoming Causal Model of Absenteeism developed by Paul P. Brooke.

Brooke: A Causal Model of Absenteeism

Paul P. Brooke, a Lieutenant Colonel in the U.S. Army Medical Service Corps at the time of his model's development, was one of many researchers who experienced great difficulty in attempting to test the Steers & Rhodes model. After his own extensive review of absenteeism literature, Brooke pieced together those empirical relationships relative to absence behavior and placed them in a more orderly path diagram that depicted direct and indirect effects.

⁵⁴ Chadwick-Jones, J.R., Nicholson, N. & Brown, C. Social Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N.Y., (1982), p. 13.

Brooke's Causal Model, as illustrated on the following page, is based on the understanding that his definition of absenteeism avoids a judgement of legitimacy. This stance is a departure from the classification schemes of voluntary and involuntary absenteeism that permeates the literature. As Brooke puts it:

The definitional emphasis is intended to focus on the key organizational consequences of unscheduled non-attendance - the disruption of scheduled work processes, and the loss of or underutilization of productive capacity. These consequences will be the same, regardless of the reasons for the absence, or their organizational classifications.⁵⁵

Brooke focuses upon worker absence rather than attendance as noticed in the Steers & Rhodes model. He points out that measures of employee attendance show far less interpretable information than measures of absence (Ilgen, 1977). Additionally, the point is made by Brooke's review of previous research that the variation between measures of frequency and duration actually refer to different forms of absence behavior (Smulders, 1980).

The measurement situation proposed in the Causal Model is reliance on counting total absences regardless of the length of time (duration) for each occurrence. Ultimately, Brooke's model is focused upon the idea that all absence should be accounted for because true distinctions of

⁵⁵ Brooke, P. P. Op. Cit., p. 349.

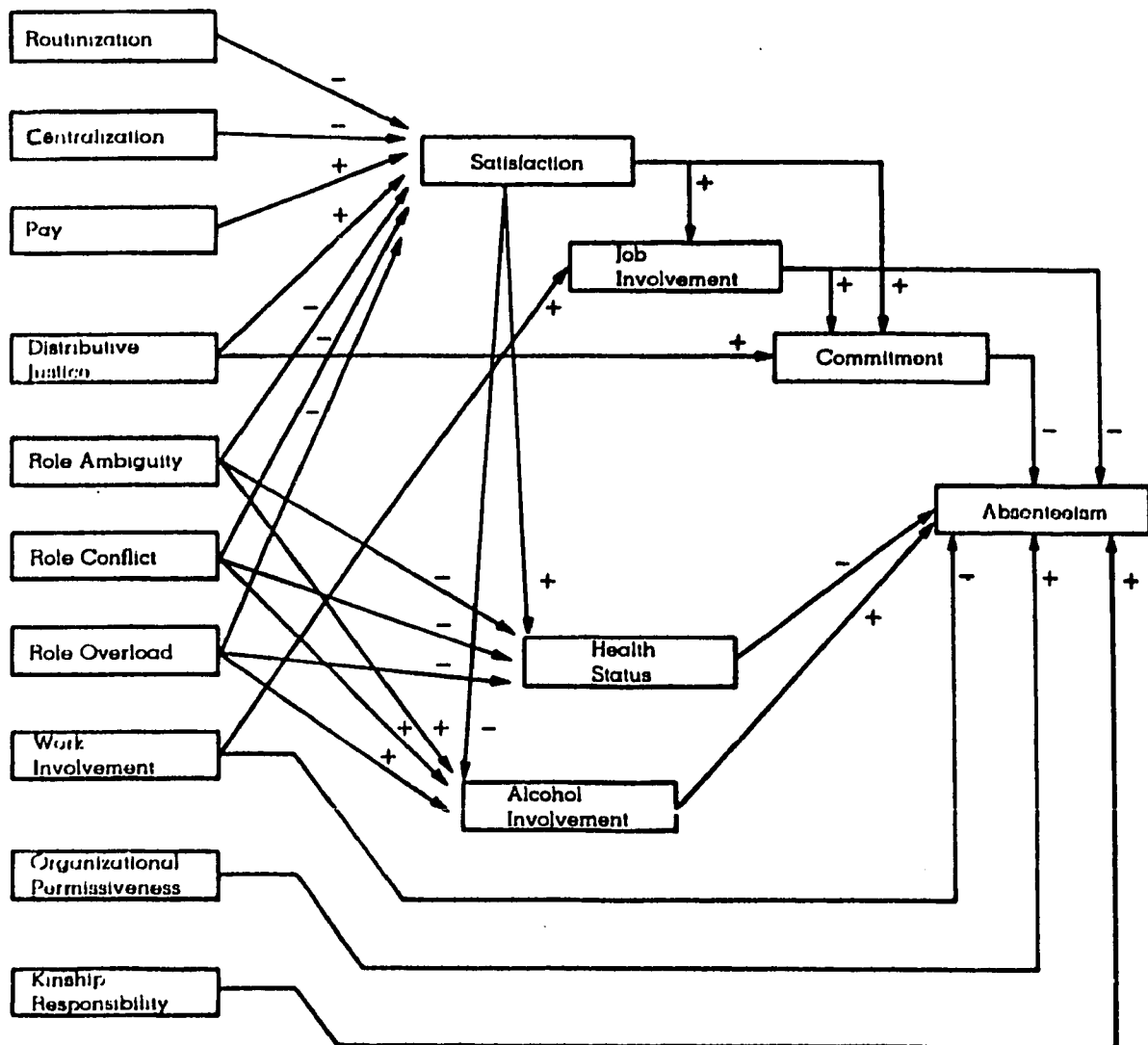


Figure 2.--Brooke - A Causal Model of Absenteeism. (Source: Paul P. Brooke Jr. "Beyond the Steers & Rhodes Model of Employee Attendance," *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 11 No. 2, (April, 1986), p. 350.)

"voluntary" and "involuntary" absence "encounter an inevitable criterion contamination" (Brooke, p. 351).

In the first sector of the Causal Model, "routinization" is illustrated as a work environment feature that increases absenteeism when its evidence is high. The more monotonous and repetitive a job, the more the tendency exists for low job satisfaction and increased worker absence to evolve (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

"Centralization" is viewed as the degree to which employees are involved in exercises of organizational power (Hall, 1982). If only management exercises the majority of decision-making power in an organization or only a very small number of employees exercise this power, then centralization is deemed to be high. However, if employee participation over immediate, work related decisions is widespread in an organization, then centralization is deemed to be low. Low centralization is viewed by Brooke to enhance job satisfaction which in turn would be expected to decrease worker absenteeism.

In its simplest sense, "pay" is shown to be related to job satisfaction when the wage or salary earned is viewed by the worker to be fair or better than that of other workers in the same job situation (Lawler, 1973). Pay indirectly influences absenteeism, according to Brooke, when wages earned are viewed to be low and worker job dissatisfaction produces poor worker commitment and lessened job involvement. Pay is also viewed to encompass fringe

benefits and job perquisites. Effective incentive/reward systems that incorporate additional pay in an effort to reduce absenteeism may affect absenteeism directly (Scott & Markham, 1982).

The elements of "pay" and "distributive justice" are related in that the latter concept encompasses the degree to which rewards and punishments are related to performance. However, "distributive justice" also incorporates such processes as job evaluation and work assessment and their determinants upon pay rates and promotion (Johns & Nicholson, 1982). As with "pay," fair distribution of "distributive justice" within an organization enhances job satisfaction and worker commitment; both of which decrease the potential for worker absenteeism, according to Brooke.

The factors of "role ambiguity," "role conflict," and "role overload" are all viewed to be an influence upon worker health status and potential involvement with alcohol. Though "alcohol involvement" is illustrated as the area for escape behavior typically classified as substance abuse, utilization of a variety of drugs by employees is shown to be a potential reaction to "role ambiguity," "conflict," and "overload." In the same vein, the three factors are also negative work place influences due to the production of emotional stress in some workers producing health problems that have potential to increase worker absence from scheduled work.

It would be expected that the large accumulation of research concerning smoking would have entered into Brooke's model at or near the point of "alcohol involvement."

Smoking in response to work place stress has recently been found to be linked to increased absence behavior especially when employees are denied the ability to smoke during working hours:

In organizations that do not permit smoking at work, higher levels of unauthorized absence occur among those who normally tend to smoke as a means of regulating negative affect (affective distress). It can be predicted that smoking, and more specifically negative-affect smoking, will act as a moderator of the relationship between affective state and absence in work settings in which smoking is restricted.⁵⁶

"Role ambiguity" is described as the degree to which roles are unclear (Locke, 1976). "Role conflict," on the other hand, is a stress situation developed by workers when one's job expectations are unclear. This situation, in particular, was noted by the Metropolitan Life Insurance (1985) study to be a primary reason for teachers leaving education within the first five years of teaching.

"Role overload" is noted by Brooke to be "the extent to which work role demands exceed the amount of time and other resources available for their accomplishments" (Brooke, p. 352). "Role overload" is in many cases

⁵⁶ Parkes, K. R. "Smoking as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Affective State and Absence From Work," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 68 No. 4, (1983), p. 700.

precipitant to the burnout phenomenon in education described by Jackson, Shuler & Schwab (1986) and to worker absenteeism. When under-manning is consistent in large organizations, "role overload" has been shown to create a snowball effect of increased absenteeism across several workers at the same time (Harvey, Schultze & Rogers, 1983).

The area of "work involvement" focuses on the importance or, in Brooke's terminology, the "centrality" of work in one's life. Steers & Rhodes (1978) gave particular attention to this factor in their model's construction. Investigation into such areas as a worker's value system, personal work ethic and an American socio-religious theory termed "Protestant Work Ethic," (Rokeach, 1973) have been found to be difficult areas to measure by any current standard. Researchers note that investigation into such subjective personal areas can become as complex as human nature itself (Steers & Rhodes, 1978). Yet, questions about the wide variations in work attitude and absence rates of workers in single organizations lead researchers to studying individuals in work groups in an effort to assess the impact of personal work values upon attendance and absence behavior.

"Organizational permissiveness" is viewed by Brooke as "the degree to which absenteeism is accepted by an organization" (Brooke, p. 353). Lack of any formal control policies, attendance goals or allowance for frequent absence without consequence, are signs of high organizational

permissiveness towards employee absenteeism (Oberman & Ranier, 1983). Brooke notes that the concept is akin to concepts such as "work group norms" supported by Steers & Rhodes (1978) and "absence culture" postulated by Johns & Nicholson (1982). High "organizational permissiveness" has been found to exist especially in public institutions where organizational ownership has no specific locus point for either management or workers (Rhodes & Steers, 1981). Such findings should be of particular concern for education.

"Kinship responsibility" as presented by Brooke is fairly parallel to the concept of "family responsibility" presented by Steers & Rhodes (1978). Both concepts address the primary influence of demands placed upon workers by immediate family members and their effects on absence behavior. However, Brooke presents the work of Krauz & Friebach (1983) to exemplify the change in the immediate family in our society and the revamping of kinship responsibility.

The higher rates of divorce and alternative living arrangements being produced in our society signals the development of new kinship networks that may seem estranged from the previous understanding of the concept of family. Personal affinity to non-relatives in a supportive living arrangement may still impact a worker's feelings of responsibility and absence behavior much in the way of traditional family relationships. However, this form of kinship responsibility and its effects on absence behavior may now

be a process of association with extended family or wrought from social interaction.

Brooke's Causal Model is unquestionably an advancement over initial attempts by Steers & Rhodes to summarize the current state of the art concerning worker absence. Since Steers & Rhodes' Process Model was actually geared towards attendance behavior, Brooke could claim the first representation committed to absence behavior. In actuality, however, each model shows considerable cross-over in the research base especially when some of the particular concepts are nearly parallel in their effect on either attendance or absence behavior.

Brooke's model exhibits further changes in societal developments in the passage of the eight years between his replication and that of Steers & Rhodes. Changes in areas such as increased worker involvement constituting substance abuse and in kinship responsibilities illustrates the diverse nature of work place influences on absence behavior. The Causal Model's steps beyond the Process Model serves notice to absenteeism researchers that absence phenomena, being a human response, will change as human behavior also changes.

Brooke's ultimate goal was to build a replication of absence factors that could be operationalized and tested by further research. As noted earlier, this was the downfall of the Steers & Rhodes Process Model. This is not to say that Brooke's efforts have been unquestionably verified by

other investigators. Like Steers & Rhodes' offerings, the Causal Model must now withstand its own trial by fire. Undoubtedly, other redevelopments and new findings in our understanding of absence behavior will be added to new replications. Just as the work place and employee reactions in the work environment change; so shall collective theoretical models of absenteeism.

Social Psychology Theory Concerning Absenteeism

Researchers Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson & Brown (1982) bring to light a variety of interesting and fairly well-researched findings concerning group behavior and its effect on individual worker absenteeism in the work place. Their work, exemplified in an analytical study of British and Canadian private and public service organizations, focuses on group interaction in organizations and its effect upon absence behavior. Chadwick-Jones, et. al. quite openly contest individual theories of absence behavior in supporting their social-psychology theory while agreeing in part to the existence of individual work ethics.

School managers would agree that group interaction in teacher strikes is undoubtedly precipitant to the formal act. However, such activity is viewed by Chadwick-Jones, et. al. to be in excess of the type of group interaction that sets the tone for organizational collusion between workers and their managers in the construction of a controlling "absence culture:"

By use of the word "culture" we mean the beliefs and practices influencing the totality of absences - their frequency and duration - as they currently occur within an employee group or organization. The nature of this culture is known by employees, though partially and imperfectly, but to the extent are regulated by the norm. Thus, the norm is what they collectively recognize (usually with management collusion) as suitable and appropriate for people in their job, their unit, their organization, given the particular conditions, both physical and social, of tasks, pay, status and discipline.⁵⁷

Chadwick-Jones, et. al. (C-J, et. al.) rely heavily on the previous research of Hill & Trist (1962) in developing a three-phase absence culture induction process for workers. The initial phase for newly hired employees is based on a lack of knowledge of any existing absence parameters operating within the organization. New employees may utilize the process of elected termination of employment in this phase rather than absence if a need for escape behavior is realized.

The second stage described by C-J, et. al., is termed "differential transit." This is a period in which workers learn (over several months) the absence culture and begin to operate within it with a degree of assuredness that no consequences will evolve.

⁵⁷ Chadwick-Jones, J.K.; Nicholson, N. & Brown, C. Social Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N.Y., (1982), p. 7.

The third phase, termed "settled connection," is a point reached by workers (often after years of employment) where they attain a level of absence commensurate with their own personal preference and in conjunction with the latitude provided by the established work group norms. C-J, et. al. note that this third phase typically shows reduced individual rates of absence as workers attempt promotion or develop a higher degree of organizational commitment.

These researchers further suggest that just as groups sanction a degree of absence, so do they also provide retribution for those workers who go beyond acceptable levels. In these instances, management action may supercede any group action. Management, being characterized as in collusion with workers about acceptable norms, typically emerges in response to group concern (be it open or clandestine). In a smaller amount of cases, norm offenders may be subjected to group ostracization. Such situations, in many cases coupled with management action, often times produces an environment in which offenders terminate their own employment and sever group association permanently.

According to C-J, et. al., employees operate within a determined level of acceptable absence constructed by way of a group process. This process could be limited to operation in a single organizational complex or could be of regional industry propensity. Social exchange is the process by which the absence culture is manifested; the results being termed "agreed" behavior by C-J, et. al.:

This implies that employees understand that their absences should fall within certain limits and, therefore, that their decisions to be absent or to attend conform to a normative frequency level. Employees can be expected to have a definite notion of the appropriate frequency and duration of their absences. The question for them is not only whether to be absent today, but how often they have already been absent this month or this year.⁵⁸

C-J, et. al. do not fully reject all absence research based on an individualistic approach. There is apparent agreement as to the existence of individual work ethics and their influence on absence behavior. However, the researchers purport that such individual motivations (or lack thereof) are amenable to the group processes they argue exist in the work place.

Additionally, C-J, et. al. do not argue heavily against the differentiation of absence behavior into voluntary and involuntary continuums. They agree that much absence is aligned with choice (voluntary) but that such choice is in interaction with the absence culture. C-J, et. al. agree that involuntary absence surely exists but side with many researchers in advancing the idea that creation of a true or pure definition of involuntary absence is a virtual impossibility given the variability of human reactions to the work place.

Social Psychology Theory of Absenteeism, as postulated by C-J, et. al., strikes a harmonic chord with those in

⁵⁸ Chadwick-Jones et. al. (1982), p. 11.

managerial positions. School officials such as building principals, central office managers and school superintendents confess to interacting (or being in direct collusion) with those they supervise in constructing organizationally acceptable levels of absence (Jackson, Shuler & Schwab, 1986). Therefore, acceptance of the work of C-J, et. al. may be taken on face value alone by some managers in such positions even without supportive data.

However, in reviewing the actual sample used by C-J, et. al. and the results of their studies, one has to be apprehensive about fully accepting these researchers findings. Only twenty-two sample sites composed the research base for the work of C-J, et. al. that were selected from the near parallel economies of Canada and Great Britain. Given the small sample base alone, one finds it difficult to generalize social psychology of absenteeism findings. The researchers themselves admit to the deficiencies of their sample, the manner of their research approach and the poor results:

The correlational analysis that we undertook - between three absence measures and scores on a job satisfaction questionnaire - resulted in the disappointing coefficients that are usual in this kind of study.⁵⁹

More acceptable conclusions about group behavior and absenteeism comes near the conclusion of the C-J, et. al. text when construction of absence control programs is

⁵⁹ Chadwick-Jones, et. al., (1982), p. 130.

discussed. Sound advice concerning group participation in construction of absence controls is based on conclusive research concerning the effects of participative decision making (Baum & Youngblood, 1975). C-J, et. al., in discussing negotiation of absence norms state that:

In the case of a renegotiated norm, the legal sanctions for "new" rules would be secured in management-union agreements, which could bring into operation the pressures of group commitment in which the force of an additional form of control - social controls - is added to the legal and instrumental ones.⁶⁰

It is still not soundly shown by Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson and Brown that group interaction is an over-riding element in employee absenteeism. Nonetheless, the power of the work group to adhere to control policies that are mutually constructed between management and employees shows real promise for highly organized professions such as education. At present, this seems to be the most acceptable and plausible finding of social psychologists studying work place absenteeism.

In summary, though the past five decades have shown considerable investigation by industrial relations researchers into causes for worker absence, the public schools have seen an intensive review occurring primarily over the past ten years. The directions taken by educational researchers investigating teacher absenteeism have been in a manner that avoids the establishment of voluntary versus involuntary

⁶⁰ Chadwick-Jones, et.al. (1982), p. 127.

continuums for worker absence. Education researchers note that teacher access to paid leave provisions gives teachers as much monetary incentive to stay away from work as to report consistently. Consequently, there remains questions about the complete acceptance of research procedures in absence data collection for teachers that do not account for all lost time.

Given the most recent descriptive models of employee absence and attendance behavior, this study of Michigan elementary educator absence phenomena developed fourteen hypotheses in three areas for personal, organizational and time/place factors.

The descriptive models of attendance behavior previously presented by Steers & Rhodes (1978) and the redevelopment of that model for the specific analysis of absence factors presented by Brooke (1984) provide the underpinnings for this study of elementary educator absence behavior in Michigan.

The Occupation of Teacher as Related to Absenteeism

Specific consideration should be given to the profession of teaching, especially in its known relationship to stress and avoidance behavior to deter stress. Prior references were made to the fact that many educators who have ceased employment as teachers found teaching to be a tension-ridden experience (Metropolitan Life Ins. Co., 1985). These previous educators later found that many types

of other employment had equitable or better earning potential but produced less anxiety.

One need not research the profession of regular elementary education too deeply to find practical answers as to why elementary education (or all levels of public education) produce inordinate amounts of tension and stress on teachers. The fact that educators are daily responsible for large numbers of individuals over much of the normal working day is in itself a recognized contributor to heightened anxiety in the education profession. Couple this supervisory responsibility of twenty to thirty or more students with the expectation that daily success will be produced with each child, and you have the basic ingredients for a high anxiety producing situation.

This is not to say that the anxiety produced in workers in schools is not always unwelcome. Teachers who are especially in their early careers, many times find the responsibility exhilarating (Kahn, 1984). However, continued challenge over extended periods of time is in many cases precipitant to stress overload. Such continued stress is noted to produce what is commonly termed "teacher burnout (Hunsaker, 1986)."

Unlike the worker who is responsible for a manufacturing task or a white collar worker geared to an office location, the teacher must submit to an arena where personal performance is imperative. The industrial worker or management official may very well be able to gear his or her

work day to accommodate minor illness. However, the public educator must have the continued ability to perform in front of either a singular or shifting number of classes during the day.

Given such demands, educators who are minimally ill at the beginning of a work day must make the choice of fending in a high responsibility work environment (with potential decreased capacity to perform) or stay away from work. That is to say, that teachers who decide to risk minimal illness also risk having to accommodate the high degree of hourly responsibility if illness persists or gets worse.

Unlike many workers, the ability to escape the work environment is especially difficult for teachers. In most cases, teachers normally have the ability to report illness in the early portions of the pre-teaching day. This situation could be likened to an escape window that is only open for a short period of time. The teacher who hesitates beyond the open period in the a.m. normally finds escape from work difficult. Such a situation is especially true in small districts where availability of teacher substitutes is poor. Administrators in this study admitted that on some days they were required to cover for educators due to lack of substitute services. They reported that some of the most vexing situations were the instances when during the day they were required to cover for an ill teacher after the work day had begun.

Given the above considerations, it may be plausible to conclude that the occupation group known as public school educators in many cases are susceptible to perceived psychological dilemmas as well as physical illness when at a point of indecision to report they are sick. Even minor illness, when truly not debilitating enough to warrant absence from work, may cause the decision not to chance the school environment so as not to be "caught" by the system in the event the illness escalates.

Research conducted by Hunsaker (1986) and Jackson, Schwab and Shuler (1986) give indication that the high commission of single-day absences in an occupation may signal the existence of high stress and parallel avoidance behavior. As an occupation, education may very well be weighted negatively by the simple decision of its employees not to take an occasional risk.

A variety of educational studies amassed by the Educational Research Service (1980) during the 1960's and 1970's give solid indication that the profession of teaching is plagued by single day absence use. Such findings, though purported to be signals of absence leave misuse, may very well be indicators of the stress environment faced daily by teachers. This study does not go as far as to develop research questions to ascertain the impact of stress within the sample reviewed. However, the particular work environment faced by educators is indeed an area for future

investigation by those who would research teacher absentee-
ism behavior.

METHODOLOGY

Description of Sample

The majority of Michigan elementary schools selected for this study were chosen primarily on the basis of availability to the investigator within a one-hundred mile traveling distance in the Central Michigan area (Lower Peninsula). One school district in the Southeastern region of the state was contacted via the intervention of the Michigan Association of School Boards while another district in the South-Central area was made available by way of referral from a dissertation committee member.

A total of nine individual elementary school building operations in nine separate Michigan local school districts comprised the research sample. Illustrated on the following page in table format are the primary factors reviewed in this study that were the basis for construction of research questions.

Variations in grade structure for the nine sample sites is as follows:

<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>No. Within Sample</u>
K-3	3
K-4	4
K-6	2

TABLE 1.--Description of Sample

District	Demography	Grade Range	Number of Staff	Age Range	Female/Male	Married/Single
BEL	RURAL	K-3	14	28-58	11/3	14/0
CEL	RURAL	K-4	21	23-63	19/2	19/2
FEL	SUBURBAN	K-6	24	27-65	18/6	21/3
GEL	SUBURBAN	K-3	27	26-59	25/2	23/4
HAB	RURAL	K-4	22	28-56	20/2	20/2
HHS	RURAL	K-3	13	26-68	13/0	11/2
HLS	RURAL	K-4	13	31-58	10/3	12/1
MEL	URBAN	K-4	24	28-63	19/5	19/5
WEL	URBAN	K-6	17	22-56	12/5	14/3

Additional intent in sample selection was to deliberately choose a portion of the sample from the demographic areas of rural, suburban and urban school districts. To a varied degree, this task was accomplished although an equal distribution by demographic area was not intended. Instead, sample selection by demographic area was conducted in relation to the proportional existence of school districts in Michigan by the three demographic areas as listed below:

<u>District Demography</u>	<u>No. Within Sample</u>
Rural	5
Suburban	2
Urban	2

In actuality, rural school districts in Michigan comprise approximately 60% of the states K-12 operations, while suburban and urban districts (though serving considerably larger student populations per square mile) comprise 40% of Michigan's local K-12 school districts (Michigan Dept. of Education, 1986). Precise delineation of suburban and urban districts is questionable in that the Mich. Dept. of Education (MDE) is imprecise in actual designation of these two demographic categories. Verification as to actual classification by district demography was cross-referenced in this study by questioning school principals directly on their knowledge of their local school district's demographic gradation.

Nearly 5,200 public elementary designated schools operated in the State of Michigan in 1985 with an approximate total of 26,000 public school teachers serving grades

K-6 in that year (MDE, 1986). Given this total population, the sample selected for this study accounts for approximately .004% of all K-6 operations and .006% of all K-6 educators in the State of Michigan in the 1985-86 school year.

The actual number of females to males in Michigan elementary schools in 1985 was not known at the time of this study was conducted and reported. Actual percentage of men to women in elementary education was not available from MDE statistics. However, the research sample studied in this investigation was comprised of 84% women and 16% males. Given this significant overweighing by females in the research sample, the findings of this study are primarily female educator oriented. However, if the sample is representative of the actual existence of men in elementary education in Michigan, then the findings are truly representative of males in the total population of Michigan elementary educators.

As noted, the majority of school districts in this study's sample are rural in nature and to be found in Central Michigan's lower peninsula. Many of these rural districts operate in an agricultural and small industry setting. Two rural districts, representing the northernmost area sites in this study, serve students from an area where an abundance of lake resort homes and cottages exist. There is a predominance of retirees in these district areas

living year-round though a lesser number of lake site houses are summer vacation homes.

Suburban and urban districts found in this sample are primarily supported by both small and large industrial operations. The outer fringe service areas of the two suburban districts touch upon or include agricultural communities.

Socio-economic conditions of the nine sites represent a potpourri of social and economic conditions. School administrators in rural districts generally describe their teaching staff and student populations as being predominately White Caucasian while suburban district administrators noted approximately 80% of students and staff to be of White Caucasian (W-C) ethnic origin and the remaining 20% of staff and students classified as Black, Hispanic and Asian-American. One urban district followed the same general description as for suburban districts. However, the remaining urban district (and the most heavily industrialized site) indicated that about one-half of the students in the district were of W-C ethnic origin, 25-30% were deemed to be of Black race and the remaining student population encompassed the origins of Hispanic, Asian-American and Mid-Eastern nationalities. 80% of the teaching staff in this more diverse cultural district were deemed W-C and the remainder Black. No Hispanic, Asian-American or Mid-Eastern ethnic origin elementary educators were reported in the elementary school sample sites in this study.

Economic conditions of students, as described by school principals, ranged widely in all school districts. The mean average classification of students was depicted as lower-middle class children whose parents were typically viewed as median wage earners for total household income (\$20,000 - \$40,000 per year estimates). However, exceptions were also described as common. Districts reported serving a minority of children in households at or below poverty levels as assessed by knowledge of school lunch applications. At the opposite end, a small number of students were reported to come from homes where parents were highly skilled and highly compensated for their occupations.

Administrator descriptions of economic conditions of teachers equated educators as being in lower-middle or upper-middle class economic ranges. Rural districts principals were more inclined to equate teachers at upper-middle class levels. Experienced rural district teachers were further equated to be some of the district's top wage earners; a situation described by school administrators as problematic at times when public approval was needed for financial support.

Research Procedures

The emphasis of this study is descriptive in nature while relying upon the absence data of full-time certified teachers in elementary schools as the main source of information to test the various research questions. Utilization of a questionnaire during on-site interviews

with building principals assisted in conducting routine surveys. (The questionnaire used in interviewing district school principals is contained in the Appendix at the end of this dissertation.) Additional collection of written policies concerning use of teacher sick leave, personal days, etc., was obtained from all nine districts. In all cases, this information was in contractual form. No separate written policies relative to absenteeism or attendance were found in evidence in the districts reviewed outside of formal contractual language. All districts studied had formal organized teacher associations representing educators. All teacher associations were represented by the Michigan Education Association (MEA/NEA).

Interviews with elementary school principals were conducted on-site and averaged two hours in duration. This amount of time was double the period requested of school principals but interviews were generally found to be enjoyable by the administrators and consequently were more extended in time by desire of those interviewed. One interview session lasted approximately three and one-half hours.

Help with the collection of data from teacher registrars varied from location to location as concerns the assistance provided. In the majority of cases, data was provided by school principals within a two week period after interview. This information was either mailed or the

investigator returned to the district to personally collect the data.

In two instances, information was collected on-site on the same day that interviews took place. In both of these situations, the school principal and secretary assisted in either copying attendance registrars or placing information on data collections summaries.

It is interesting to note that most school principals initially were especially concerned about confidentiality of information in attendance registrars and desire to keep this information personally unidentifiable. However, five of the district principals forwarded actual teacher attendance registrars with names identifying teachers after assurance was given that names would be eliminated and information either returned or destroyed. It was apparent to this investigator that once personal contact was established and time was spent in elongated interviews, school principals trusted the intent of this researcher to follow through on confidentiality of records.

The ultimate and final concern of many of the administrators was that their school staffs not learn of the principal's collusion with this study and willingness to provide information centered on personal factors of teachers. Information such as a teacher's age, marital status, number of dependent children, etc., became more of a concern than the documented record of absence for the school year studied. Personal factor information was also provided in a

varied manner. Most principals provided this information with attendance registrars within a two week period. Only in two instances was this additional information collected on the same day as formal interviews. (A sample summary sheet for collection of this information is also included in the Appendix.)

As a descriptive study, this investigation utilized portions of three basic research procedures in what might be deemed an eclectic educational review. Elements of "survey" research were utilized by including a questionnaire when interviewing school principals. The intent here was to explore possible relationships between professed administrator controls or courses of action and teacher percentages of time lost. The use of pre-arranged questions allowed for relative consistency and standardization of questions for discussion.

A facet of "observational" research was employed in using audiotapeing during interview sessions. This was permitted in seven of the nine initial interview sessions. Use of a tape recorder allowed for continual review of sessions long after data collections were completed. In three instances, highly variable data were obtained from teacher attendance registrars and responses written on interview questionnaires was easily cross-referenced by replaying interview sessions on audio-tape. This method of research triangulation assisted in more clearly defining intended responses by school principals.

Finally, "education evaluation" research was employed in investigating the possible presence of teacher absence controls, attendance goals and any related policies in the nine districts researched. One of the primary goals of this study was to obtain results concerning controls (or lack thereof) and information relative to the various research questions. This information, in turn, would allow school administrators to make better judgments and decisions concerning teacher absenteeism in their building operations and possible need for construction of absence controls and/or incentive/reward systems.

Given the above outlined research procedures for this study, the following research questions were investigated in the three previously mentioned absence factor group areas:

Personal Factors

Age

Percent of time lost for elementary educators will show a positive relationship with increasing age in an analysis of the age groups;

25 and under	46 - 50
26 - 30	51 - 55
31 - 35	56 - 60
36 - 40	61 - 65
41 - 45	66 and older

(Collingwood, 1984; U.S. Dept.
of Health, Education &
Welfare, 1975)

Sex

Female elementary educators will have higher percentage of time lost from work on the average than males (Klein, 1985; Hedges, 1975).

Marital Status

Married men will have lower percentages of time lost than single men. Married women will have higher percentages of time lost than single women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985; Taylor, 1979).

Dependent Children

Elementary educators with children under the age of 18 will have higher percentages of time lost from work than the average obtained from the entire sample (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1985; Nicholson & Goodge, 1976).

Educational Level

Employees with advanced degrees will have lower percentages of time lost than those educational employees with bachelors degrees (Taylor, 1979; Douglas, 1976).

Years Employment/Experience

As elementary educators increase in years employment/experience, the amount of time lost from work will correspondingly increase (Blankinship, 1986; Manganiello, 1972).

Individual % of Time Lost as % of Total Staff Absenteeism

A review of each of the nine building's total staff rates of total lost time will illustrate that approximately 10% of each building's employees will be responsible for 45%

or more of the total staff absences (Yolles et. al; 1975; Plummer, 1960).

Organizational Factors

Staff Size

As elementary staff size increases, the mean staff rate of total time lost from work will correspondingly increase (Giullian, 1986).

Absence Control Policies

Elementary educators required to report absence directly to the building administrator will have lesser percent of time lost than for employees utilizing an alternative reporting procedure (Elliott, 1982; Educational Research Service, 1980).

Grade Level Taught

Percent of time lost for elementary school employees will decrease as the grade level taught increases (Bouknight, 1985; Smith, 1984).

School System Commitment After Work Day

Elementary educators who elect to consistently sponsor, coach, chaperon, etc., activities after or before the contracted work day, will have lower percentages of time lost than the average percent of time lost for the entire building staff (Sheldon, 1985; Slick, 1974).

Time/Place Factors

Day of The Week

An analysis of attendance registrars for the total sample will illustrate that the highest amounts of employee absence will be experienced on Fridays with Mondays being the second highest day of the week for elementary educator absence (Educational Research Service, 1980; Capitan & Morris, 1978).

Month of The Year

An analysis of all school employee percent of time lost for all nine elementary staff reviewed will show that average percent of time lost for the 9 month school year will progress from highest to lowest in the following order:

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. May | 6. December |
| 2. April | 7. November |
| 3. March | 8. October |
| 4. February | 9. September |
| 5. January | |

(Coffman, 1983; Marlin, 1976)

District Demography

An analysis of average total percent of time lost for each elementary school staff reviewed will show that average percent of time lost will be highest for urban schools and lowest for rural schools (Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986; ERS, 1980).

Steps In Data Collection

Prior to development of the research proposal for this study, important questions concerning access to individual teacher absence registrars needed to be answered.

In particular, the concern by administrators over confidentiality of teacher records posed serious roadblocks to conducting this investigation.

These concerns were reviewed by the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) legal counsel in April of 1986. MASB is viewed by local and intermediate school districts as a supportive legal network of professionals who provide legal counsel, negotiation representation and various other forms of assistance to boards of education and school administrators.

Response from MASB was couched with concern about the intent of obtaining work histories of educators that were personally identifiable. MASB pointed out one specific law relative to the process of collecting and disseminating records that would clearly show health histories (either favorable or unfavorable). The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) of 1974 otherwise known as the "Buckley Amendment" was cited as a potential stumbling block for this study if proper consideration for confidentiality was not taken.

FERPA was noted as generally being related to students. However, records of teaching personnel were noted to be under employer control and subject to confidentiality safeguards. Access to such materials as attendance records with personally identifiable information would require individual teacher approval, as advised by MASB.

In order to insure such confidentiality and circumvent need for individual permission, it was strongly advised that schools participating in this study submit data that were devoid of names, social security numbers and any other coding systems that would allow other individuals to pinpoint the identification of teachers. Additionally, MASB advised that health records of educators that displayed serious illness of either physical or emotional type be reported in the dissertation in terms that did not allude to sexual, racial or ethnic origin of affected individuals. This advice was forwarded with the understanding that although individual records were being searched, reported findings affixed to specific groups may be challenged if such findings are negative and felt to be erroneous.

Given these procedural considerations, a trial attempt was made in early June of 1986 to access teacher registrars of two rural elementary schools in the Central Michigan area. In both instances, the school principals contacted were most agreeable and provided registrars of their full-time teaching staff for the recently completed school year (1985-86). Delays were found when needed personal information such as age, marital status, dependent children, etc., was requested. In one instance, this investigator was asked to research the needed data from health insurance forms as secretarial help was not available during the remaining summer. Otherwise, all information was collected by the end of June 1986 for the two trial schools.

After approval was given by the dissertation committee to conduct the full-scale study, seven local district elementary schools were personally contacted by the investigator. Of the seven, five local district elementary principals consented to provide needed data. Of the two district administrators who did not consent, one cited concerns about confidentiality while the remaining principal indicated that it was "too much work" on his part.

Of the five new districts consenting, one was lost when the district Superintendent intervened after a request was made by the building principal for return to his office of attendance information on his staff for the 1985-86 school year. This investigator contacted the Superintendent and explained the specific need for information and safeguards to insure confidentiality. Even after discussion with MASB, the district's chief executive officer did not consent to release requested information. The results of this initially unfortunate situation proved to finally be a mild blessing. Shortly after losing this district, MASB's Communications Dept. Officer contacted this investigator and offered an elementary site in the Southeastern portion of the State. This site turned out to be an urban setting, one of the two more difficult locations for this investigator to contact.

Shortly before Christmas 1986, an intermediate school district conference set the stage for inclusion of one additional rural location. Discussion at lunch not only

brought about the interest of a building principal in the northern part of Michigan but his eventual participation.

In February of 1987, one final district of suburban demography was contacted after a lead was provided by one of this investigator's dissertation committee members. At that point, nine individual building operations in nine separate local school districts were included in the demographic proportion desired for this study to be conducted.

Absence Data Collection Parameters

Specific data relative to testing of personal and time/place factors were obtained from 1985-86 school year attendance registrars of full-time certified elementary teachers. Educators who severed employment during the school year (either short-term or permanently) by such acts as personal termination, elected retirement, granted leave or sabbatical request were excluded from this study. Two such situations were found to occur in the total population of 178 educators studied. Therefore, the final total of teachers representing this investigation's population stood at 176.

The period of employment under investigation was the 1985-86 nine-month school year for contracted elementary teachers. This period encompassed the State of Michigan mandate of 180 school days for instructional purposes plus the additional time contracted for teacher inservice days, record days, etc. that increased the work year for teachers to as much as 184 work days in some districts. The work

year range for all nine districts varied from 182 to 189 days.

As noted earlier, all nine school systems included in this study have teachers formally represented by the Michigan Education Association (MEA). This situation proved helpful for this investigation in that contractual benefits for use of teacher leave benefits (sick leave, personal days, etc.) was very similar in all districts.

Specific instances where variations in leave use were found are as follows:

1.) Accumulation of Sick Leave Days - All districts allowed for accumulation of sick leave days although variations in total days accumulated were found. The district with the least amount of leave days to be accumulated stood at 90 days in one district. One district did not fix a cap on accumulated leave and allowed sick leave to accumulate indefinitely. Most districts capped accumulation on the average at 110 days.

2.) Personal Day Restrictions - Seven of the nine districts allowed for three days of leave for personal business. One district allowed only two while one district allowed for four days of teacher personal time. Four districts had no restrictions upon use of personal leave where no reason needed to be given (called "no question days" by administrators). Three districts required teachers to respond to administrative interrogation of use of personal time for one day only. Two districts required

teachers to tell why they wanted to use personal leave at all requests for such leave and to gain immediate supervisor approval before using such leave.

3.) Funeral Leave Restrictions - All districts allowed for bereavement leave of one day for teachers who desired to attend the funeral of a non-relative. However, bereavement leave allowance for death in a teacher's immediate family ranged from a minimum allowance of three days to a maximum of ten work days (noted as "two work weeks" in that district's contract). Designation of immediate family remained similar in nearly all respects except that seven districts included marriage in-laws as immediate family while two districts did not. It should be noted that the maximum continuous funeral leave situation found in this study was five consecutive days. All bereavement days in all nine districts were taken from the teacher's sick leave bank.

4.) Verification of Sickness - Seven of the nine district contracts contained language that allowed for administration to require doctor's verification of illness for consistent teacher illness of three days or more. Two districts had no such language and consequently no such requirement.

5.) Length of Time for Single Illness - Use of sick leave for personal and family illness was permitted in all districts.

Leave for a single instance of personal illness allowed for complete use of the teacher's accumulated sick leave and possible access to an Association sick bank for

additional leave from 10 to 20 days in seven districts and for unlimited time in two districts (as allowed by district administration). Length of time spent on behalf of an ill immediate family member for a single instance of illness stood at three days in seven districts, five work days in one district (noted in contract as "one work week") and regulated by district administration on a needs basis in one school district.

Definition of Teacher Absence

A determination of a day of teacher absence held to the considerations previously discussed in the literature and exemplified in the work of researchers (a) Brooke (1986); (b) Dilts, Deitsch & Paul (1985); and (c) Educational Research Service (1981). These researchers and/or organizations support this study's direction in not attempting to enter into a classification of voluntary vs. involuntary absence.

Instead, this investigation is concerned with all time lost to a school operation developed by personal choice of leave benefits by teachers. Brooke (1986) notes that accounting for all time lost to an organization actually constructs a situation in which all absences are deemed to be voluntary if one were to consider the precepts of a voluntary/involuntary continuum. However, this study's direction intends to avoid current controversy and does not intend to delve into a delineation between absence situations considered to be under the control of the teacher and

those which are speculated not to be under a teacher's prerogative. The construction of "time lost" measures for this study and their implications in this investigation will be discussed later in this chapter.

Teacher days of absence for one-half day or more were deemed as such when the following leave situations were utilized:

1. Sick leave days for personal or family illness;
2. Personal (business) days;
3. Funeral/Bereavement days.

In these instances, teachers elect to use these days for occasions determined by themselves to be valid and justifiable. Though such ill-fated situations such as a death in the family would want to be avoided by educators, the decision to attend a funeral and take time away from the job is that of the teacher's.

A secondary consideration for counting the above situations as absence appears when one views the intrinsic value of such time away from scheduled work for the employing school district. In the above situations, no benefit of a secondary nature is realized by the school district (other than reducing the possible transmission of disease or reducing worker tension or grief).

Instances in which time away from the actual job of teaching is not counted as absence are as follows:

1. Conference/Records/Inservice Days
2. Union/Association Leave Days

3. Jury Days (by selection process)
4. Act of God Days (weather/disaster/power failure, etc.)
5. Military Service or Community Emergency Service (National Guard, Red Cross, Civil Defense, etc.)

In the first situation, teachers may not be actually engaged in teaching but the district realizes secondary benefit by the related service or information garnered. Some school principals questioned the "chronic" attendance of teachers at conferences and conventions and tended toward deeming these situations as escape behavior from the actual job of teaching. However, all conference and convention attendance for teachers was under the complete control of school administrators in all nine districts. Therefore, if conference/convention attendance was a problem, it was most definitely one ultimately created by school administrators.

Union/Association leave days account for a minimum of teacher time away from work and the allowance is contractually determined and not in direct control of district administration outside of contract negotiations. Time away from the job in the latter three situations is also out of the control of teachers and administrators though in the last situation teachers may elect to be a part of such service organizations. Nonetheless, many absenteeism studies equate such things as jury duty and National Guard service as benefit to all work organizations as well as society in general (Klein 1986; Educational Research Service, 1980). During periods of actual emergency, schools

may actually be closed and calendar days lost might be more appropriately viewed as "act of God days."

Measures

Prior to discussion of measures utilized in data analysis, it is important to once again delineate the intent of this study in relation to its absence measures. One of the main goals of this investigation was to assess the impact of an already identified set of influences related to the private and public work place upon teacher absenteeism in elementary schools in Michigan. To this end, the actual amount of absenteeism needs to be ascertained on an individual, group, and total population basis.

Voluntary/involuntary continuums concerning worker absenteeism seek to separate factors relative to absenteeism of the basis of worker control and those out of worker control (Muchinsky, 1978). Such attempts, still being challenged in the present decade, are normally based on advanced analysis of factors after organizations have assessed the actual occurrence of absence in their ranks (Hammer & Landau, 1981).

Once again, this study did not attempt to wander into uncharted ground in education research. Elementary educator absenteeism in Michigan has yet to be given the type of thorough investigation (as evidenced by the research literature) that has been ongoing in industry for nearly 50 years. Therefore, this study will not deal to any extent

with frequency indexes (FI) but will instead deal with durational measures of "time lost."

Time lost measures give a general but total indication of the scope of absenteeism in an organization. Criticism of such measures is based on the knowledge that national sampling (such as the ones taken by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in May of each year) insert cut-off points in long duration absences (excluding time lost after four days of a single illness). National occupational norms, therefore, are geared toward frequency (Chadwick-Jones, et. al., 1982).

Time lost measurement accounts for all absence time and is equated as being an overstatement of an organization's absence rates by those who tout frequency data (Brooke, 1986). However, reverse criticism can be as easily levied at those organizations, both public and private, that understate the total amount of time lost by workers who do not report for regularly scheduled work. The fact is, there are specific drawbacks to both frequency and time lost measures. Hammer & Landau (1981) make that point clearly in stating that:

The obvious problem with a direct translation of frequency of absence into voluntary withdrawal and of time lost into involuntary absenteeism is, of course, that a frequency index (even when corrected for absences of long duration to avoid obvious contamination by instances of illness and injury) will contain a number of involuntary absences, and a time-lost measure will be

contaminated by voluntary withdrawal.⁶¹

This study is directed towards an initial investigation that will pinpoint possible areas for further review and possible experimentation within elementary teacher absenteeism. It is not directed towards research of voluntary and involuntary aspects of teacher absence. The measures constructed and used in this investigation are geared towards "total time lost" estimates. These measures appear most frequently in the research literature where elements of choice are not the primary emphasis (Chadwick-Jones, et. al., 1982).

Given the above considerations, calculations for individual and group percent of time lost were measured in a "total time lost" fashion often times referred to as "inactivity rate" by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) but more generally referred to simply as "absence rate" in educational research (Hedges, 1977; Goodman & Atkin, 1984).

Percent of time lost calculations for individual computation were developed using the BLS formula while inserting teacher contracted work days and days of individual teacher absence in the following manner:

$$\text{Percent of Time Lost} = \frac{\text{No. of Contracted Days Absent}}{\text{Number of Contracted Days}}$$

Given the above formula, a hypothetical situation in which a teacher was absent nine work days during a

⁶¹ Hammer, T.H. & Landau, J. "Methodological Issues in the Use of Absence Data," Journal of Applied Psychology, Vol. 66, No. 5, (1981), p. 575.

contracted work year of 183 days would yield a time lost absence (or inactivity) rate of 4.91%.

Many of the research questions analyzed in this study utilized individual percent of time lost and grouped them according to the specifications dictated by that particular question to develop a mean rate for application. For example, the research question concerning expected positive correlation between advancing age and teacher absenteeism grouped individual percentages of time lost into five-year gradients for the entire sample of 176 teachers. This type of use of individual rates was most common in researching personal and time/place factors.

Given an investigation into an organizational factor such as "absence control policies" a true replication in this study in which a full-time staff of 17 teachers produced 157 total days of absence from regularly scheduled work during a 185 contracted word day school year produced a staff percentage of time lost of 5.0% In some instances, staff absence rates for total time lost were grouped across the entire sample in such time/place research question areas as "day of week" and "month of year."

The reporting of findings (as presented in the following chapter) utilized the raw data to construct tables and graphic illustrations for most of the fourteen research question areas. However, a supplemental investigatory technique related to observational research was also utilized by tape recording interview sessions with

supervising school principals. The "critical-incident technique" (Flanagan, 1954) supplied a variety of information that has proven helpful in many education studies such as this:

This technique, as usually applied, involves studying the performance of one group of individuals (such as teachers) by asking another group of individuals (such as principals) to describe "critical incidents" that relate to the performance of the first group. In vocational studies, the informants are usually supervisors, but the method can be used whenever a group can be identified that has information about the performance of another group.⁶²

As was noted earlier, much investigation about policy concerning teacher absenteeism in the nine districts was undertaken in an investigation of written documentation. It was also noted that little written absence policy was found. Yet, the influence of the immediate supervisor (principal) upon teachers and the impact of this unwritten policy (or lack thereof) was an important area for review by this investigator. In fact, several of the studies previously discussed in the literature review place strong emphasis upon the unwritten policy and personal style of supervisors and their impact on worker absenteeism.

Adding to the need for a critical-incident technique was the need to further investigate findings with the

⁶² Borg, W. R. & Gall, M. D. Educational Research. Longman Inc., New York, N.Y., 1979, p. 358.

principals that were previously interviewed once raw data had been placed in table and graph format:

One of the most common weaknesses found in the writing of graduate students is that their reports present information and interesting findings but fail to provide a thoughtful interpretation of these findings. Often the findings obtained from the analysis originally planned by the student will suggest other analytic procedures to the student that will either provide additional data concerning his hypotheses or will yield interesting information not related to this initial hypotheses. In either case the further analysis should be done.⁶³

As this study neared completion, it was possible to return to four of the district locations and conduct a final interview with building principals. The information garnered from second interviews is couched in the understanding that these additional insights may not be applicable to the entire sample. However, the principal's interpretation of portions of the findings gave this researcher the type of insights needed to make a case for possible support or rejection of the research question under investigation.

In summary, this research study of 1985-86 elementary educator absenteeism in Michigan elementary schools incorporates the extensive findings of the private industrialized sector with the more limited national research conducted in K-12 education settings. The research questions constructed

⁶³ Ibid. p. 675.

for this investigation and the methods utilized in this study are extracted from the nearly five decades of research conducted in both the private and public work place.

The three group areas of personal, organizational and time/place factors are representative of a culmination of the current state of the art concerning absenteeism theory. In addition, the measures constructed for this investigation are patterned closely to those utilized by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) which are also given annual interpretation by the federal Bureau of National Affairs to describe current levels of worker absence for private, public and governmental work institutions.

The major variation for this study (and many other education absenteeism reviews) as compared to national sampling is found in the accounting of all lost time during the time period reviewed. Whereas, BLS did not account for lost time after the fourth consecutive day of a single absence, this investigation did not install such a cut-off point. Consequently, the findings of the following chapter reflect a complete representation of total absence for the sample studied and no understatement of the actual time lost by the Michigan elementary teachers reviewed.

REPORT OF FINDINGS

Reporting Format

Research findings reported in this segment of the dissertation will follow the format of first presenting the particular research question under discussion and then reporting the significant findings relative to it. Several of the findings relative to the fourteen research questions in this study are displayed in table and/or graph format.

Given fourteen research question areas and the extensive segmentation within particular tables and illustrations, the reporting of all findings would be far too cumbersome and monotonous for the reader to digest. Therefore, particular analysis will center on findings that significantly support or do not support research upon which research questions are founded. Additional commentary will be offered where major insights garnered from this study and related to research question are found to be worthy of noting.

Before entering into analysis of the findings of particular research question it would do well to present general findings relative to the entire population. It is important to report that the average percentage of time lost for the entire population was assessed to be 4.76% of all

contracted time for the school year 1985-86. This significant finding continues to underscore the higher than normal amount of time lost in the field of elementary and all of K-12 education in our nation as compared to national mean rates of absence (ERS, 1980). However, it has to also be understood that the measure utilized in this study is not totally comparable to that used by Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in its May sampling of private and public work organizations.

BLS data do not reflect a pure total time lost measure since it does not account for time lost after the fourth day of a reported single illness. BLS data, therefore, underestimate total time lost on a national basis. The vast majority of education studies, however, utilize total time lost measures. Comparison of a particular education sample with national data compiled by BLS tends to exaggerate the differences between means. Yet, national education studies account for this variation in prefacing most reports that an additional one-half percent should be allotted for studies of total time lost when these findings are compared to BLS data.

For instance, the mean rate of absence derived by BLS since 1973 for work organizations hovers at 3.5% of all regularly scheduled work hours (Klein, 1985). Education studies that would report a mean rate of absence at 4.0% of total time lost would actually be regarded as being nearly the same as that of the national average.

As noted, the mean rate of total time lost for elementary teachers in this study stands at 4.76% in the school year 1985-86. Klein (1985) provides findings for BLS data for the period 1980-85 that shows in this five year period the mean rate of absence on a national basis has actually ranged from 2.7%-3.0%.

If that is the case, then subtracting one-half percent from the mean rates of absence assessed for elementary teachers in this study would still leave a sizeable variation between national rates of absence and those found in this investigation. Clearly, absenteeism of several elementary educators in this study is not at par with the national trends thus giving indication that a problematic situation concerning teacher absence exists in the sites reviewed.

Table 2 and Figure 3 on the next page provide a look at the entire sample in this study by way of absence gradients. The first set of gradients from 0% time lost to 3.5% are broken down into one-half percent ranges to show the number of elementary teachers that fall into acceptable and exemplary levels.

In additive fashion, it can be seen that 47% or nearly half of the teachers in this sample have percentages of total lost time that fall into an acceptable range of 3.5% lost time or less (Gaudet, 1963). 24% of elementary teachers in this study actually had percentages of total lost time of 2.0% or less. On the other hand, an equal 24%

Table 2.--Rate of Lost Time by Absence Gradient.

ABSENCE GRADIENT (% Of Time Lost)	0 - 0.5	0.5- 1.0	1.0- 1.5	1.5- 2.0	2.0- 2.5	2.5- 3.0	3.0- 3.5	3.5- 4.5	4.5- 6.0	6.0+
% OF SAMPLE	1	2	8	13	13	5	5	15	14	24
N	2	3	14	23	23	9	9	27	25	41

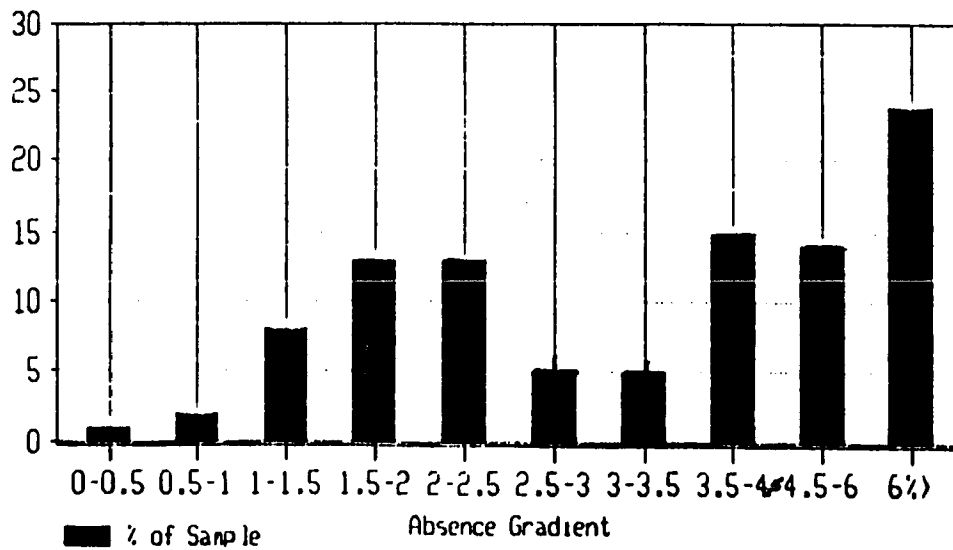


Figure 3.--Rate of Lost Time by Absence Gradient.

of teachers in this sample had rates of 6.0% lost time or more and thereby fell into unacceptable levels of absence as determined by Gaudet (1963). It is this latter group that raises serious concern for school managers.

If the general findings of this study are representative of actual absence behavior of elementary teachers in Michigan, then the field is most certainly ready for development of controls that will effectuate those workers with unacceptable rates of absence. Additionally, the inclusion of reinforcement schemes may very well provide the types of incentives needed to induce a higher amount of educators towards the goal of 2.0% or less absence in a given school year.

One additional understanding needs to be brought to light before venturing into research question findings. As indicated, the mean rate of total lost time for this study for the entire population stands at 4.76%. This percentage was computed by adding the entire individual percentages of lost time after computing to four decimal places and dividing by the sample total (176). However, when certain research question areas call for the arrangement of data according to specified parameters and rounding of percentages of total lost time is made to only two decimal places, then the sample mean is in some cases varied as much as one-half a percentage point.

For example, the research question involving staff size (to be discussed in detail later in this chapter)

involved the computing of mean rates of absence for all nine staffs. The compilation of these mean staff rates is illustrated in Table 2 and displayed to two decimal points for each district. However, when the mean rates in the table are added and then divided by nine to establish a mean rate for the entire sample, the attained mean rate equals 5.08%. This assessed mean for staff size is actually inflated by approximately one-half percent from the reported mean rate of total lost time for this study's sample (4.76%)

The reader is advised to keep in mind that such minor variations in the collective mean rate for a table or figure will occur as he/she courses through the following findings in the various research question areas. The variations are only noticed when rounded data are summarized for a mean rate for the table presented. The particular individual rates within a table are accurate and representative of that particular segment of the sample studied.

Findings Relative To Personal Factors

Age - Percent of time lost for elementary educators will show a positive relationship with increasing teacher age.

Analysis of age and absence data are reported on the following page in five year spans. Table 3 and corresponding Figure 4 illustrate (following page) that percentages of total lost time for the given increasing age groups do not wholly support previous positive relationships (Klein, 1985). In addition, the findings of researchers Hedges & Taylor (1979) regarding high percentages of lost time for

Table 3.--Rate of Lost Time by Age Range

Age Range	20- 25	26- 30	31- 35	36- 40	41- 45	46- 50	51- 55	56- 60	61- 65	66+
Absence Rate	2.59	6.16	3.83	3.63	3.97	6.56	9.03	3.73	4.92	1.09
N	2	15	46	44	22	16	18	9	3	1

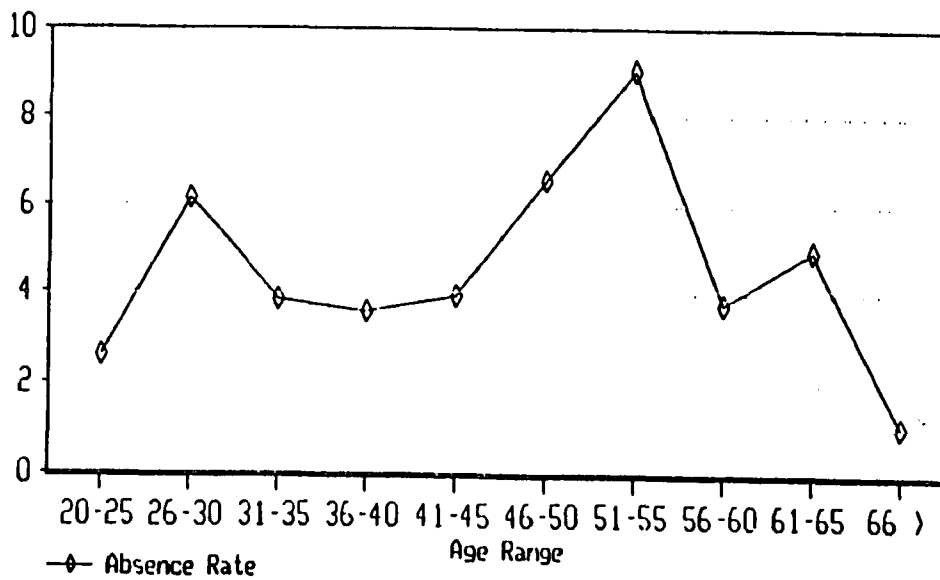


Figure 4.--Rate of Lost Time by Age Range

women in child bearing years is also not supported by this study's findings.

To the contrary, it is somewhat surprising to find that percent of total lost time for the primarily female population between the ages of 31 to 45 are respectably low and bettered only by new incoming elementary educators and those most senior teachers in the population. However, findings relative to these latter two groups must be discounted due to extremely small sample size.

Percentages of total lost time for the age group 26-30 show a marked increase after initial employment years. Data on dependent children (to be later discussed) shows that approximately 75% of elementary teachers in this age range have children under age 5. Therefore, it is theorized that the impact of very young dependent children upon the employment of working women and men potentially affects age levels 26-30. However, teachers in later years whose children are beyond age 5 are seemingly unaffected by child-care responsibilities.

A dramatic increase in absence for elementary teachers age 46 to 55 signals a particularly significant area for concern. At the age 40+ juncture, a noticeable positive relationship exists between absence and advancing age. Numbers of teachers within each sample area at this point are large enough to establish a degree of confidence in this particular finding area. Increases in absence at middle life corresponds to the research of Pellicer (1984)

and Collingwood (1984). Based on their findings, increased rates of absence for teachers in this sample are theorized to be a product of increasing illness and increased desire for leisure time as workers reach retirement age.

Disassociation with work by teachers in middle years is a finding echoed by administrators interviewed in this study. School principals were fairly unanimous in this assessment of age groups 46-55. Decreased volunteering for extracurricular activities, paid coaching and miscellaneous chaperoning was particularly noted by supervisors in describing this age group. Actual absence data for educators in this age range also showed a higher than average incidence for a single day absence; being an attitudinal indicator of disassociation from work (Collingwood, 1984).

Though sample size is small for age groups 56 to 66 and older, there is some interpretation given by school administrators that teachers who maintain employment past normal retirement age are typically more interested and committed to their jobs. Two rural school principals who maintained over 20 years of employment in their districts gave testimony that these senior teachers consistently maintained better than average attendance throughout their tenure.

In summary, findings relative to teacher absence and advancing age do not totally support the research question based on an expected positive relationship. Demands of very young dependent children upon elementary teachers is

theorized to be most noticeable upon teachers ages 26-30. A marked deviation from previous research findings is found for teachers ages 30-45 who have dependent children ages 5-18. It is apparent that dependent children at this age have seemingly little effect on percent of lost time for teachers in this sample. Elementary teachers ages 46 to 55 show significant increases in total lost time. Given these findings, it is theorized that additional investigation into absence behavior and possible causation at these ages would be warranted.

Sex - Female elementary educators will have higher percentages of time lost from work on the average than males.

Figure 5, presented on the following page, clearly shows that little variation exists between males and females as regards percentage of total lost time for the sample studied. Previous national sampling conducted by Bureau of Labor Statistics (1985) lends to the expectation that variations between sexes would be much wider. The larger number of females in this study would be expected to exacerbate the variations between males and females. However, such is not the case for this sample.

Males in this review accounted for 16% of the total sample while women accounted for the remaining proportion. Given that 54% of women in this study had children 18 years of age or younger in their households, it would be expected that lost time discrepancies would be much wider. However, absence data of female teachers in this study indicate that

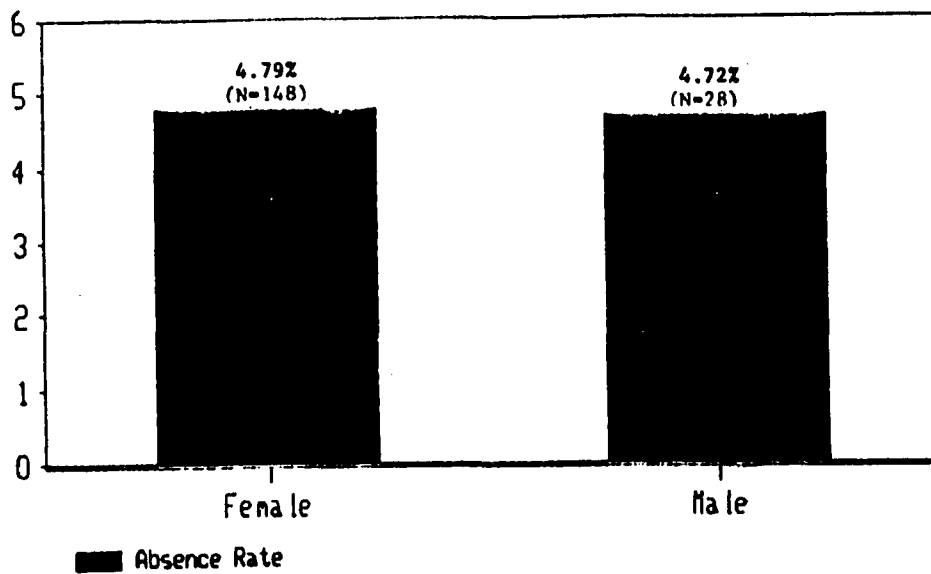


Figure 5.--Rate of Lost Time by Sex.

absence data of female teachers in this study indicate that the presence of children has highly variable influence on their absence behavior; and the same could also be carried to male participants.

These findings concerning elementary educators do parallel those of education studies conducted by Pellicer (1984) and Bridges & Hallinan (1978). In these investigations, little or no correlation was found for absence rates between male and female teachers.

Findings of age variations of teachers above age 45 in this sample actually show that female elementary educators have slightly better rates of attendance than males. Few female teachers above this age level had dependent children in the home. In addition, it was found that older male teachers had a higher incidence of long-term illness than females though this finding may be discounted due to

the very small sample size for males at this age level. Such situations are noted to be indicators of more serious illness problems. This observation was also made in the education study conducted by Pellicer (1984).

It is speculated by this investigator that the type of absence behavior emitted by workers in higher level positions is relative to that observed by both sexes in the population studied in this investigation. Hedges (1973) noted that deviations in absence rates between sexes in white collar positions was usually less than 1% as assessed by Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Hedges offered her own speculation in theorizing that these positions normally offered greater responsibility and more job involvement which heightened worker attendance. Such speculation may be relative to that of elementary education although conflicting evidence concerning teacher burnout offered by Jackson, Shuler and Schwab (1986) gives some reason to discount Hedges' contentions for elementary educators.

This investigator also speculates that the limited variability seen between the sexes in this sample of elementary teachers may well be a matter of both job level and better accommodation for dependent children. As wage earners, teachers were reported by school principals to be middle to higher income earners in many of their respective school districts. As such, they were deemed to be in a more secure financial position and more capable of affording consistent and good quality child care.

In any instance, it is quite apparent that the limited variability between sexes in this sample is an instance of a work group continuing in a manner akin to its occupation. Robinson (1980) prefaced the findings of BLS data by indicating that variations in such personal factor areas as worker's sex are more appropriately studied within the context of specific occupational groups. Though the findings of this investigation do not wholly support the research question generated from national absence data, they do parallel earlier findings of other specific education studies and underscore the need to study absenteeism and personal factors in a specific occupation manner.

Marital Status - Married men will have lower percentages of time lost than single men.
Married women will have higher percentages of time lost than single women.

Dependent Children - Elementary educators with children under the age of 18 will have higher percentages of time lost from work than the average obtained from the entire sample.

Findings for these two research question areas are grouped together because interpretation of results between sexes for this sample are heavily weighted by marital and family responsibilities. Also, the research literature previously presented concerning marital status and dependent children regularly intertwines results and interpretation for both marital status and influence of children.

In national samples, rather consistent findings are found for marital status for men and women. In general, it would be expected that married men would have better rates

of attendance than their single counterparts, and married women would have poorer rates of attendance than single women. The primary interpretation given for these results is that married men attend more regularly out of responsibility to the marriage relationship (and possible inclusion of children) whereas married women are cast more in the role of care-giver and consequently held to the home when children are ill (Klein, 1986).

It was previously mentioned that investigation into personal factors is more beneficial if such study is relegated to specific occupation groups. Such is most definitely the case in investigating marital status and impact of dependent children upon elementary teachers in this sample. Tables 4, 5 and 6 on the following two pages present findings for these two research question areas.

It can be readily ascertained from the sample findings presented in Table 4, that the relationship of marriage devoid of the presence of children may have some minor influence on absence behavior of married elementary educators. This situation is most noticeable in the sample between married and single women who have no children. Unfortunately, the data obtained for men are questionable in that sample sizes are small and in one case, data are skewed because of one excessive illness situation.

It is surprising to find that married women with no dependent children actually have the worst percentages of total lost time for the entire sample of elementary

Table 4.--Rate of Lost Time by Marital Status and Presence or Absence of Dependent Children.

MARITAL STATUS AND PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF CHILDREN	ABSENCE RATE	N
Married Men Without Children	*12.07%	3
Married Men With Children	3.75%	23
Single Men Without Children	1.09%	1
Single Men With Children	1.64%	1
Married Women Without Children	5.45%	56
Married Women With Children	4.48%	72
Single Women Without Children	4.20%	12
Single Women With Children	4.33%	8

*Results skewed due to excessive long term incidence of one subject in the sample. If omitted (N=2) then absence rate = 1.09%.

Table 5.--Rate of Lost Time by Employees with Children
Under Age Five.

No. of Children	No. of Employees	Married	Absence Rate	Single	Absence Rate
4	6	6	4.37	0	N/A
3	3	3	3.46	0	N/A
2	41	36	4.21	5	5.94
1	32	29	3.75	3	1.64

Table 6.--Rate of Lost Time by Employees with Children
Age Five to Eighteen.

No. of Children	No. of Employees	Married	Absence Rate	Single	Absence Rate
2	14	14	4.21	0	N/A
1	27	26	5.11	1	1.64

educators. School principals (and this study's data) note that these workers are usually more senior female teachers above the age of 45. The possible effects of declining health and disassociation from the job, previously discussed with age, may have particular influence on this finding.

Single teachers in this sample had fairly respectable percentages of total lost time. Small sample size for men may discount this finding. However, single females without children did not fare much better than their married or single associates with children. Percentages of total lost time in this finding area for women varied by less than one-half of a percent. Married men, on the other hand, varied considerably from national findings in clearly showing that the presence of children into their relationship weighted negatively upon their regularity of attendance.

In commenting upon this particular finding within the sample, school principals were clear in noting that married men with dependent children often times remained home with ill children rather than expecting their wives to fulfill this duty. Specific absence data collected from seven of the nine sites gives clear indication that married male elementary educators with children do indeed utilize sick leave for family illness situations on a near parallel basis as that of their female contemporaries. Data in these seven sites coded illness days into either personal sickness or family responsibilities thus making such delineations possible.

The findings of this study relative to marital status of male and female elementary educators supports the research statement in that single men generally have lower percentages of total lost time than married men and married women have higher rates of absence than single women. Once again, sample size for men in this study does lend to considerable discounting of the findings for males.

Tables 5 and 6, dealing with the impact of dependent children upon elementary teachers in the sample, break down the age ranges for dependent children into two categories for specific review. Table 5 emphasizes the influence of pre-school children upon their working parents. Table 6 accounts for the influence of children who are normally accommodated by K-12 school systems.

It is apparent from the distribution of percentages of total lost time in Table 5 that the presence of as many as four dependent children under age five in an educator's family does indeed lend to expectation that absence will be highest for those teachers most weighted by young dependent children. However, Table 6 illustrates highly conflicting evidence for married employees with only one dependent child between ages 5 and 18. These individuals have some of the highest rates of absence in the entire sample. Additionally, elementary teachers in this sample with two dependent children above age five fare no worse in absence from work than those educators whose two children are below school age.

These results raise more questions concerning the impact of children upon the percentage of lost time of elementary educators than answers. The spread of percentages of total lost time for teachers with several young children in this sample would be expected to be much greater from those educators who have only one or two dependent children, given national norms. However, the mixed findings of this research question area leaves one only guessing about the impact of dependent children upon elementary educator's absence behavior.

Given the findings concerning dependent children in this study, it can be demonstrated clearly that the findings do not support the research question statement that elementary educators with dependent children will have higher rates of absence than the population norm. Actual rates of absence for teachers with dependent children in this study was 3.55% whereas the norm for the entire population was 4.76%.

Educational Level - Employees with advanced degrees will have lower rates percentages of time lost than those educational employees with bachelors degrees.

Since elementary educators possess a higher than average education as compared to all workers in our society, the disparity between degree levels would not be expected to very wide. Reviews of Bureau of Labor Statistics by Taylor (1979) gave indication that a negative relationship exists between worker absenteeism and education level when the

range of non-high school graduate to college post-graduate in our society was considered.

Two studies of K-12 educators do give some indication that a smaller but noticeable negative relationship does exist among teachers. Both studies (Douglas, 1976; Crump, 1960) are quite dated, therefore producing the desire in this investigator to re-investigate this personal factor in elementary education.

It can be ascertained from Figure 6 (following page) that a small negative relationship is found to exist between teacher absenteeism and advancing degree level. An approximate one percent of total lost time exists between the two basic degree levels (BA/BS and MA/MS) which parallels the findings of Douglas (1976) and Crump (1960). No elementary educators in this sample held degrees above the masters level though it was reported that a small number of teachers were advancing towards specialist and doctoral degrees.

It is theorized by this investigator that the variations between degree levels within this sample are very possibly related to the level of teacher commitment to the education process and career interest in elementary education. Teachers in this sample that had exemplary levels of absence at 2.0% loss time or less (Gaudet, 1963) were predominately masters level degree teachers. In reviewing the other extreme, teachers whose absence levels were deemed to be extremely poor at 6.0% loss time or more (Gaudet, 1963) were predominately elementary educators with bachelors

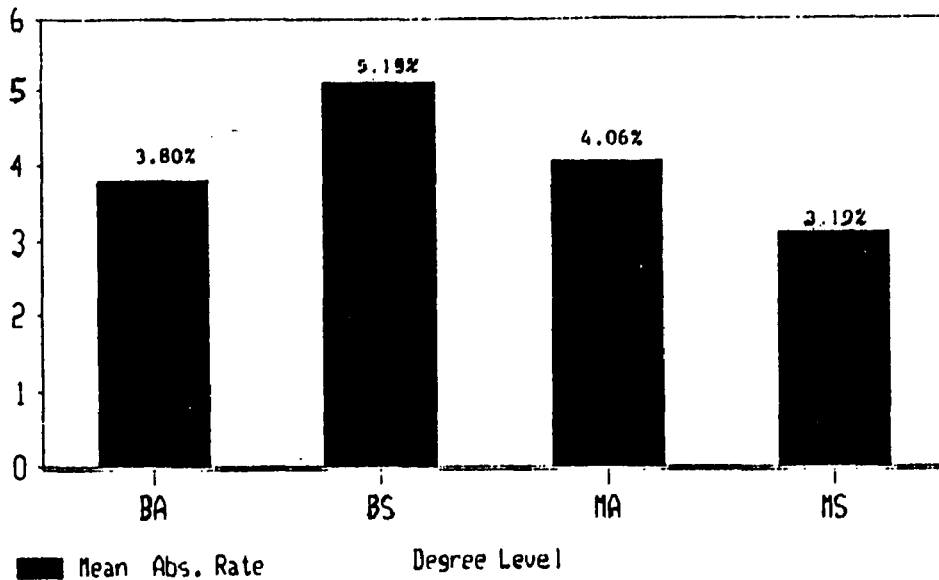


Figure 6.--Rate of Lost Time by Degree Level

the other extreme, teachers whose absence levels were deemed to be extremely poor at 6.0% loss time or more (Gaudet, 1963) were predominately elementary educators with bachelors degrees. Additionally, teachers whose high percentages of total lost time were composed of many single-day absences, were also predominately bachelor degree holders.

Yrs. Experience - As school employees increase in years experience the amount of time lost from work will correspondingly increase.

Research conducted in labor and industrial relations indicates that the patterns of worker absence tends to stabilize over the first three to five years of experience and may actually decrease over the work careers of employees (Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). However, researchers Garrison & Muchinsky (1977) warn that such national patterns

for private industry are not in accord with organizations that provide for substantial paid sick leave benefits.

These researchers point out that the influence of paid leave benefits typically promotes the increase of absence for workers in later years to the point that positive correlations between increasing experience and absence are not uncommon. Once again, the above researchers make the case for studying such phenomena as worker absenteeism from a specific occupation viewpoint.

The findings of this study relative to years of experience in teaching for elementary educators and percentages of total lost time are displayed on the following page in Table 7 and Figure 7. Demarcations for years of experience are grouped into three year spans for Table 7 and displayed in Figure 7 at such points. However, three year demarcations could not be adequately presented in the parameter scale in Figure 7 and, therefore, five year spans are noted at the bottom of the figure.

It can be readily ascertained that as the sample's elementary teachers work through their initial years of employment, they maintain a relatively stable rate of total lost time. Percentages of total lost time for teachers for approximately the first twelve years of experience moderate no more than one percent and average approximately four percent of loss time in the school year 1985-86.

However, rates of absence begin to show upward movement at years 13-15. Except for the fluctuation in this

Table 7.--Rate of Lost Time by Years Experience

Years Employment	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-15	16-18	19-21	22-24	25-27	28-30	31-33	34+
Absence Rate	4.24	4.05	3.89	3.92	5.62	5.58	3.60	6.19	10.93	4.78	1.75	4.37
N	13	22	23	35	29	19	20	3	7	2	1	2

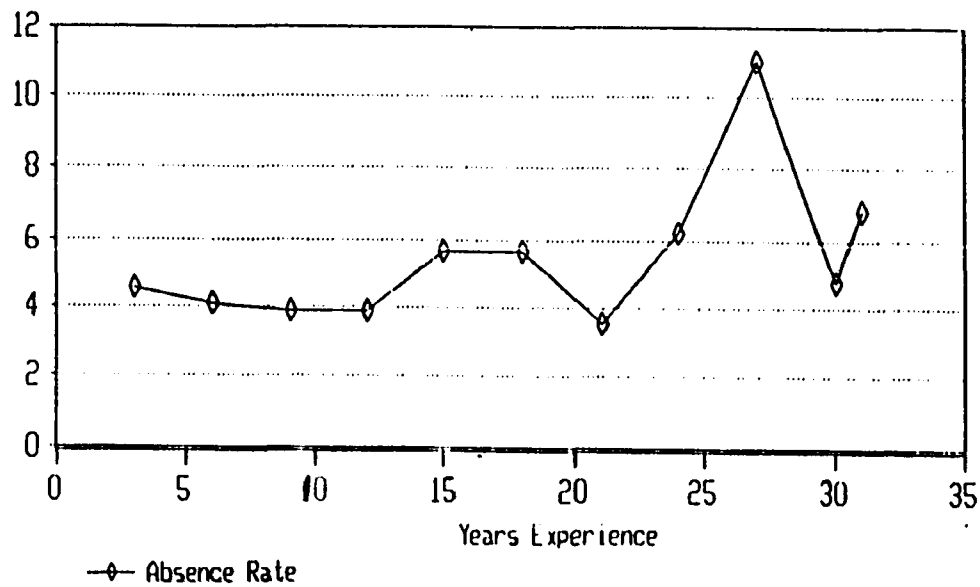


Figure 7.--Rate of Lost Time by Years Experience

sample at years 19-21, the rates continue to spiral upward above 6% of lost time until the point at which school principals note attainment of retirement age for teachers. Experience range 28-30 shows a marked decline from this escalation but since only two workers comprise this group, the findings have to be discounted.

The 1986 Kansas State University study conducted by Blankinship concerning K-12 educators in that state parallel the findings of this investigation as regards teacher experience and absence. Blankinship noted that the lowest rates of teacher absence existed at experience years 1-3 and after year 30. Figure 7 gives a minor but similar indication that those educators who stay beyond average retirement age have far more respectable rates of lost time from work.

Blankinship's main findings concerning the personal factor of experience about educators in Kansas is echoed by this Michigan study. That is, that after a relatively stable period of absence in the first years of teaching, teachers progressively increase in absence behavior until they opt to end their teaching careers. Given the findings of this investigation relative to the personal factor of teacher experience, it can be generally stated that the findings support the research statement that a positive relationship exists between increased teacher experience and absenteeism. However, this relationship has to be qualified in that a true positive relationship is seen towards mid-career for most of the teachers in this study.

This investigator relies on the theoretical offerings of Blankinship (1986) and Mowday, Steers & Porter (1979) in speculating that poorer health in advancing years and access to paid sick leave combines to produce the types of findings in this personal factor area in elementary education. These findings leave questions about the exact influence of access to paid sick leave upon the absence behavior of elementary educators. However, they also pinpoint those areas where control programs or policies would potentially be most beneficial.

Individual % of Time Lost as % of Total Staff Absenteeism

A review of each of the nine building's total staff rates of total time lost will illustrate that approximately 10% of each building's elementary teachers will be responsible for 45% or more of the total staff absences.

The previous review of the literature noted the dramatic findings of industrial relations researchers Yolles, Karone & Krinsky (1975) who reported that in some organizations, as few as 10% of workers commit as much as 90% of all absence. Similar industry research produced by Steinmetz & Schroeder (1967) gave broader-based industrial national work force indications that approximately 10% of an organization's work force normally accounted for 45% of all absences in a given work year.

A small amount of K-12 education research on absenteeism delimits these findings even more. Research conducted by Harper (1984) in Mississippi schools gave indication that 20% of teachers normally account for 50% of all

absence. Additional research by Bouknight (1985) in South Carolina public schools closely approximates the findings of Harper by noting that 25% of his study's teachers in the districts reviewed accounted for 60% of all absence in the school year.

Table 8 and Figure 8 on the following page illustrate the findings of this research question area in two formats. Information in the respective table and figure is provided for an analysis at both the 10% of staff parameter and also at 20% of staff.

In reviewing the total commission of absence by the poorest 10% of percent of total lost time for individual teachers, it can be ascertained that the findings do not support the respective research statement. Only one district came close to presenting findings that 10% of staff are responsible for approximately 45% of total absence. The mean for the entire sample population for this personal factor area at 10% of staff actually approximates 27% of all absence for the nine building staffs reviewed.

If the research statement for this personal factor was based solely on education research findings then the 20% parameter displayed in Table 8 and Figure 8 would most definitely support previous K-12 education findings. An analysis of Figure 8 gives clear indication that 20% of staff in all nine building operations reviewed either meets with the 45% total of all absence in each staff grouping or exceeds that level. In the case of one district, 20% of

Table 8.--Highest 10% and 20% of Lost Time Rates Contributing to Total Staff Absence.

DISTRICT	B E L	C E L	F E L	G E L	H A B	H H S	H L S	M E L	W E L
HIGHEST 10% OF ABSENCE RATES CONTRIBUTING TO TOTAL STAFF ABSENCE (%)	29	35	28	34	19	39	16	16	34
N	2	2	3	3	1	1	1	2	2
HIGHEST 20% OF ABSENCE RATES CONTRIBUTING TO TOTAL STAFF ABSENCE (%)	43	47	46	52	44	70	46	32	46
N	4	4	5	5	3	3	3	3	5
TOTAL NUMBER OF STAFF	22	21	25	27	14	13	13	17	24

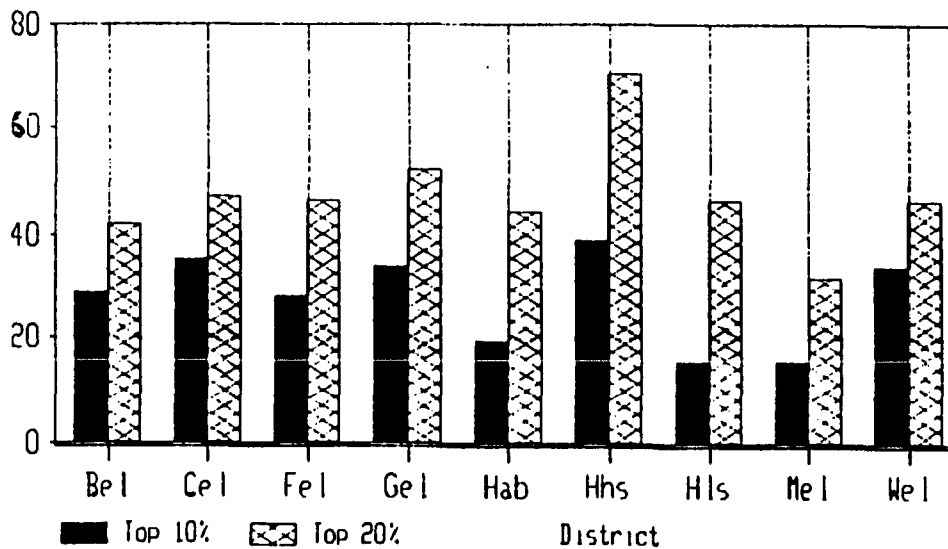


Figure 8.--Highest 10% and 20% of Lost Time Rates Contributing to Total Staff Absence.

staff (3 employees) accounted for 70% of all absence in the 1985-86 school year.

These findings give clear indication that a small number of teachers in this sample can account for a large proportion of total absence. However, such information cannot be used indiscriminately in determining problematic absenteeism. The use of a "total time lost" measure of absence (such as that utilized in this study) will pinpoint some employees with long-term serious illness as being major contributors to total staff absence. Such situations as heart attacks, serious disease and debilitating accidents must be acknowledged as uncontrollable. Three such individual instances were found to exist in the total population.

However, individuals whose percentages of total lost time are major contributors to total staff absence and are based primarily on short absence duration (one or two days in length) are the types of employee situations for which controls should be based.

Findings Relative to Organizational Factors

Staff Size - As elementary staff size increases, the mean staff rate of total lost time will correspondingly increase.

National absence data of private and public organizations have shown consistently since 1973 (the beginning of Bureau of Labor Statistics data collection) that as worker group size increases, so does the mean rate of absence from regularly scheduled work (Klein, 1985). Muchinsky (1977) theorized that as worker groups grew in size, the degree of

group cohesiveness lessened resulting in poorer communication across the work group and lessened ability of workers to become involved in the decision-making process. The end result, according to Muchinsky, is increased dissatisfaction and concomitant increased tendency to withdraw.

A varying and more simplistic viewpoint about the positive relationship between group size and absenteeism is offered by Kelly (1982). This Canadian researcher postulates that large work groups are many times controlled by lesser ratios of management supervision. Consequently, management's ability to monitor absence behavior and enforce policy is reduced in large organizations. The end result being wider latitude for workers to manipulate policy or ignore it altogether.

Once again, the above research is based primarily on blue-collar industrial work groups. When the organizational factor of staff size is addressed by education research, the results are mixed.

Research conducted by Guillian (1986) in Colorado public schools and additional investigation conducted by Coffman (1985) in Pennsylvania K-12 school systems gave indication that the larger school systems typically have the highest staff absence rates within the districts reviewed. Teaching staffs in excess of 250 employees were noted as having the highest mean rates of teacher absence in these studies.

Conversely, a 1978 Pennsylvania School Boards Association study concluded that both small staffs serving under 300 students and large teaching staffs serving over 25,000 students in a district had excessively high rates of teacher absence within the state. On the other hand, an extensive longitudinal study conducted by Gibson (1968) reported a curvilinear relationship noting that mean staff absence rates were lowest for teaching groups of 13 employees or less and increased in absence rates for staffs of 100 employees. From that point, absence rates for teaching groups decreased.

Figure 9 on the following page illustrates the findings concerning percent of total lost time and staff size for the nine building operations reviewed. As can be seen at a glance, no real pattern can be discerned from the results. Therefore, the findings relative to this organizational factor do not support the research statement based on an expected positive relationship between staff size and mean percentage of total lost time. Though one of the smallest staffs in this study does indeed have the lowest mean rate of lost time (2.27%), staff percentages of total lost time for employee groups above 20 teachers also have some of the lowest rates of those building operations investigated (approximately 3.6%). The degree of variation in group size cited in the research literature is by far much wider than that displayed in Figure 9.

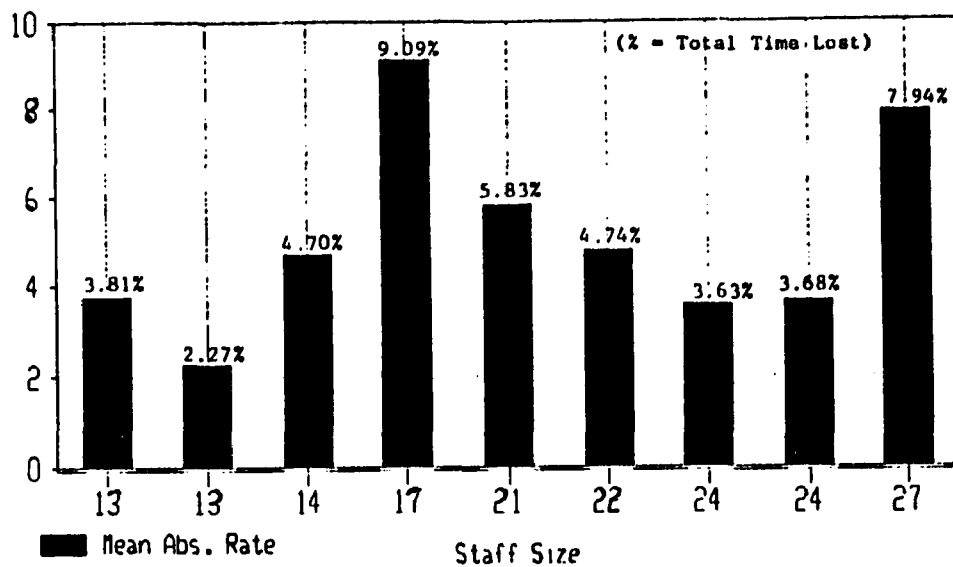


Figure 9.--Mean Rate of Lost Time by Staff Size

All of the building staffs in this investigation would be considered very small in relation to total district staffs investigated in the research literature. Therefore, the mixed findings of a group of nine different elementary teaching staffs ranging in size from 13 to 27 employees is not surprising. This investigator can only suggest that the attempts at researching this particular organizational factor are probably more appropriately conducted in samples where worker group size is far more extensive.

Absence Control Policies/Reporting Procedure - Elementary educators required to report absence directly to the building administrator will have lesser percent of time lost than employees utilizing an alternative reporting procedure.

Public schools continue to be organizations that primarily employ people to work directly with other people. Though such innovations as televised and computer-aided instruction have made their way into the classroom, public

schools have maintained a continuous service delivery system based on the employment of adults to educate students. Public education is quite simply, a people business. Why then, do school administrators neglect to construct performance goals and/or policies to direct their work forces (instructors) in a manner intent on maximum utilization of the people they employ? More importantly, why do most public schools in our nation fail to stress the importance of continuous daily performance by teachers in policy and regular action?

Such questions were raised in the mind of this investigator as the review of all nine districts culminated in the finding that only one of the nine districts involved in this study had a written program to enhance teacher attendance. In this district, a program was instituted to reward teachers with two days or less absence at the end of a school year with a day off from work at their leisure in the following school year. As will be seen in the following table, the mean rate of total lost time for this district was a respectable 3.68%. Given the lack of formal written policy relative to district absence policies, the findings for research questions involving "control policies" and "reporting procedures" are linked into one report area for better discussion and analysis in this dissertation.

Table 9 on the following page illustrates individual building mean staff percentages of total lost time as well as the areas within which discussion on control policy

Table 9.--Absence Control Policies/Reporting Procedure
Considerations by District.

District	Mean Staff Abs. Rate (Lost Time)	Report Proced.	Tch. Abs. A Staff Prob.?	Est. % of Tch. Time Lost 85-86	Est. % of Accept. Lost Time	Follow- Up After Return?
HHS	2.27%	To Bldg. Principal	No	5%	5-6%	Yes
FEL	3.63%	" "	No	No Ans.	10%	Yes
MEL	3.68%	" "	No	5-6%	No. Ans.	Yes
HLS	3.81	" "	No	5%	5-10%	Yes
HAB	4.70	" "	No	10%	10%	Yes
BEL	4.77	" "	No	No Ans.	No Ans.	No (Rarely)
CEL	5.83	To Cen. Office Sec.	No	10%	10%	Yes (Often)
GEL	7.93	To Bldg. Secretary	No	No Ans.	No Ans.	No (Sometimes)
WEL	9.09	To Cen. Office Sec.	No	5-10%	No Ans.	No

centered during interviews with building principals. Aside from specific written policy, education research literature demonstrates that reporting procedures are another means by which to discern administrative control of teacher absenteeism. It has been consistently affirmed that those immediate supervisors in education who take direct control of absence reporting procedures supervise K-12 staffs with the lowest mean rates of absence. Requiring teachers to report directly to building principals is the practice that shows to be the most effective means of controlling educator absence in comparison to all other reporting procedures (Elliott, 1982).

Table 9 shows very strong support for the research statement that teacher staffs required to report to immediate supervisors have some of the lowest percentages of total lost time as computed from individual percentages of lost time in the nine buildings reviewed. Districts HHS, FEL, HLS, HAB, and MEL were districts where teachers were required to call or notify their supervisor in person that they would not be reporting to work.

The remaining three districts of CEL, BEL and WEL utilized a call-in service to either the building secretary or, in two cases, to a central office secretary whose position in one district (WEL) was based solely on maintaining absence registrars and locating daily teacher substitutes. In the case of WEL, it was obvious that the mean percent of total lost time contributed to creation of a

school service program that in itself was capable of establishing a full-time secretarial position. It should be noted that single day absences made up the vast majority of non-attendance situations in this particular district.

Included in Table 9 are columnar areas relative to specific questions asked of all building principals. The fourth column is a synopsis of responses to the question, "Do you believe teacher absenteeism is a problem in your building operation?" As can be seen, all principals indicated a negative response to this question even though three districts were at excessive or problematic levels of staff absence in relation to national norms. (BLS, 1985) The following column represents the question, "What percent of time do you feel is lost to absence in the past school year (1985-86)?" As can be seen, some principals did not venture to guess though the common response of 10% matched their additional response to the question, "What do you feel is an acceptable percentage of lost time due to teacher absence in a given school year?"

The latter average response should be of real concern to school managers in that it is apparent that these school principals are willing to accept percentages of total lost time for the staffs they supervise that could approach three times the national average of 3.5% (Klein, 1985).

Table 9 presents a final significant question area concerning school principal's follow-up of absent teachers once they return back to work. Once again, administrators

that note to teachers they were missed after they returned or asked about teacher's continued health status upon their return were found to supervise staffs with the lowest percentages of total lost time in this study.

In summary, it can be theorized from the findings of this research question area that those school principals who directly involve themselves in the reporting process both during and after the commission of absence have a direct influence on teacher percentage of total lost time. It was interesting to note that the higher degree of importance school principals in this study placed on teacher absence was verified by lower mean rates of staff absence computed for the nine building operations in this investigation. Though specific written policies were not in place in eight of the nine districts, it is apparent that the unwritten policy of individual administrators has significant effects on the absence behavior of those they supervise.

Grade Level - Percent of time lost for elementary school employees will decrease as the grade level taught increases.

The negative relationship researched between grade level and teacher absenteeism is based primarily on the comparisons of education level and not specific grades. It has been shown that middle schools and junior high schools fare better in reduced teacher absenteeism than elementary schools (Bouknight, 1985). Senior high schools are found to fare better than junior high or elementary schools (Capitan & Morris, 1978). And national reviews continue to verify

that elementary school operations traditionally have mean staff absence rates above other education system levels (Educational Research Service, 1980).

Capitan & Morris (1978) offered speculation that elementary operations fare more poorly regarding teacher absence because of the preponderance of females working at this level. These researchers cited national absence data from the Bureau of National Affairs that illustrated the higher absence rates for women in the work force. Capitan & Morris held to the common belief that women in the work force balance the demands of a job with the expectations for child-care thereby being weighted more heavily by family responsibilities than for males.

Researcher Sylwester (1979) offered additional reflection concerning the higher rates of absence for elementary staffs. It was this researcher's belief that higher levels of children with under-developed immune systems increased the potential for transmission of disease at the elementary level. Consequently, elementary teachers were at more risk in acquiring illness than teachers in buildings with higher grade levels.

Only one study was found in the research literature that illustrated rates of teacher absence for specific elementary grade levels in the sample investigated. Smith (1984) offered findings that indicated that within the grades levels 1-6, teachers at grades 1, 5 and 6 had mean absence rates (total time lost) below the study's total

population mean of 4.5% while teachers at grade 2 established a group rate at the sample average. Teachers in grades 3 and 4 were noted as having mean grade level absence rates in excess of 4.5%. The findings of this study cannot be heavily relied upon as the investigation was conducted in only one school district.

Figure 10, on the following page, displays the findings of this study relative to average grade level rates established in a review of the nine building operations in this investigation. Figure 10 illustrates that teachers in grade level 2 maintain the highest rates of total time lost in this investigation. Aside from the average rate obtained by teachers in grade 5, a nearly negative relationship between elementary grade levels 2 through 6 and teacher percentage of total lost time can be discerned. These findings, therefore, generally support the research statement.

Additional information is provided by the inclusion of the results for Kindergarten and Miscellaneous basic classroom support programs. Miscellaneous programs include special education, music, physical education and Chapter 1 programs staffed by full-time certified teachers who served a particular building operation on a full-time basis. Teachers who were shared with other building operations were not included in this study.

The composite "Miscellaneous" group is shown to be at a fairly high level of group absence. Building admin-

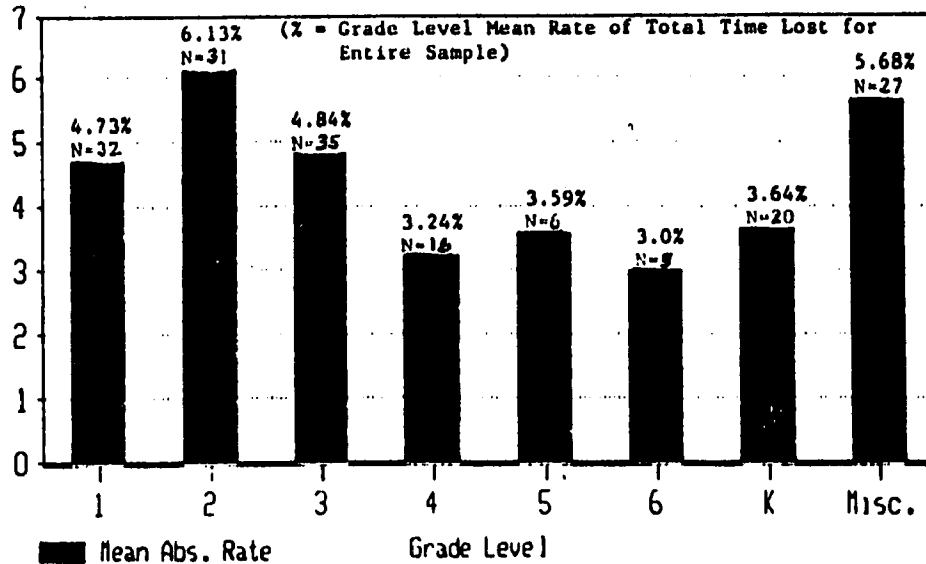


Figure 10.--Mean Rate of Lost Time by Grade Level.

administrators were rather accusatory when offering their observations about this particular teacher group. Those school principals interviewed after results were obtained and findings were displayed indicated this group of support personnel to be generally less committed to the education process. Building principals were surprisingly consistent in giving indication that these teachers lacked the type of "home group" that regular classroom teachers were responsible for and, consequently, were not viewed by classroom teachers and principals as being on equal status. Principals theorized that this lack of responsibility gave support teachers wider latitude to be absent voluntarily. As ancillary personnel, they were also described by school administrators as less attached to the staff in professional and personal relationships.

This finding raises important questions that were not expected to surface in this particular research question investigation of teacher absence and grade level. This investigator ponders whether it is a purported lessened degree of responsibility from contained classrooms or what seems to be a high amount of ostracization from personnel (including school administration) that contributed to the higher degree of absence for support personnel in this study.

Whatever the case may be, the attitudes engendered by school principals about certified support personnel and their programs is an area that bears further investigation. It is somewhat disturbing to note that school principals made practically no similar judgments after being shown the results of Figure 10 about second grade teachers who produced the highest mean rate of total lost time in the study.

School System Commitment After Work Day - Elementary educators who elect to consistently sponsor, coach, chaperon, etc., activities after or before the contracted work day, will have lower percentages of time lost from work than the mean rate of total lost time for their particular building staff.

The premise behind construction of this particular research statement was based on the notion that teachers in the sample who voluntarily extended their work day may very well exhibit the types of organizational commitment found to be indicators of high commitment to an organization. Previous research in both private industry and education

gave some basis for theorizing that higher worker commitment correlates with low rates of absence in organizations (Klein, 1983; Dubin, Champoux, & Porter, 1975).

Particular education studies by Kuhns (1986) and Sheldon (1985) gave solid indication that teachers who were assessed via standardized measures to have strong indicators of commitment to their occupations also were instructors with low absence rates (3.5% lost time or less).

Upon entering investigation into this particular research question area it was found by the author of this dissertation that any findings relative to the entire sample would not be truly comparable to other research study findings because of procedural inconsistencies. In particular, all of the studies in the research literature that dealt with work commitment and absenteeism measured work commitment by directly assessing the individuals within the population under review. On the other hand, this study's direction was to survey building principals and take their observations as evidence of those teachers that were deemed to be committed primarily by investing additional time over and above contractual demands.

The findings for this particular research question do not necessitate reporting by table or figure format. Only 21 teachers were reported by school principals to have displayed evidence of noticeable work commitment by way of administrator observed increased involvement in additional activities related to school functions. A variety of

activities were illustrated by school principals to be signs of worker commitment beyond the norm. School principals noted such activities as consistent early reporting to work, consistent volunteering for extra-curricular activities and regular volunteering to run after-school errands for various school functions as signs of high teacher commitment beyond the contractual requirement.

Of the 21 teachers selected as "highly committed," the mean rate of total lost time was 4.69% total lost time in the 1985-86 school year. This assessed mean rate of total lost time is not in much variation to that of the total sample population of 4.76% (176 teachers). In effect, the administrative judgement call utilized in this research question area did not produce any significant results during analysis of the data to substantiate acceptance of the research statement involving "school system commitment after the work day."

In fact, actual investigation of the individual rates of the 21 teachers selected as "highly committed" showed widespread variations in total time lost for 1985-86. While 6 teachers had exemplary rates of absence of 2.0% total time lost or less, 4 teachers had lost-time rates in excess of 6.0%. It is apparent that the subjective nature in which teachers were picked is not a highly reliable method of determining workers who have low rates of absence from regularly scheduled work.

It is suggested by this researcher that specific instruments for measurement of job satisfaction be utilized when investigating possible correlations between worker job satisfaction and absenteeism. A standardized test such as the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ) devised by Smith, Kendall, & Hulin (1969) utilized directly with the subjects under investigation is far more preferable (given the findings of this research question area) than utilizing second-hand assessment of individual worker's commitment from job supervisors.

In addition, use of a standardized tool such as the JSQ is deemed to be far more useful in "worker commitment" research in that such an assessment scale dismantles concepts representative of the notion of "worker commitment." This suggestion is consistent with the experiences of other researchers who elect to treat the various definitions or concepts concerning work commitment as separate constructs (Morrow, 1983; Kahn, 1977).

Findings Relative to Time/Place Factors

Day of The Week - An analysis of attendance registrars for the total sample will illustrate that the highest amounts of employee absence will be experienced on Fridays with Mondays being the second highest day of the week for educator absence.

Studies of voluntary absenteeism indicate that absence leave abuse patterns typically show Mondays and Fridays to be the days in which such abuse is most evident. Researchers Capitan & Morris (1978) give indication from their research that the desire for additional leave time

extends to encompass work days on both sides of the weekend when abuse is evidenced in work organizations. This situation is primarily associated with organizations that operate on a five-day work cycle extending from Monday to Friday and whose benefits for workers include paid sick leave.

Research conducted by Nicholson, et. al., (1982) shows that the availability of overtime work in "blue collar" work situations created similar patterns not so much likened to weekends but to scheduled days off. Industrial relations data of individual workers were reviewed by these human resource management investigators to provide the basis for their findings.

The findings presented in Figure 11 on the following page show a pattern of moderate distribution of days lost for the sample population for the five-day work week. As can be seen, Fridays comprise approximately one-fourth of all absence days (23.56%) while Monday (20.71%) was found to be the second highest day of absence as discerned from the 176 teacher's records reviewed in this study of 1985-86 absence data.

Tuesday absence (19.54%) was in little variation from Monday. Wednesday was found to be the lowest day of absence (17.75%) and Thursday (18.44%) gave indication of an increase in absence use heading from mid-week to the weekend. Given these findings relative to occurrence of absence during particular days of the week, it can be

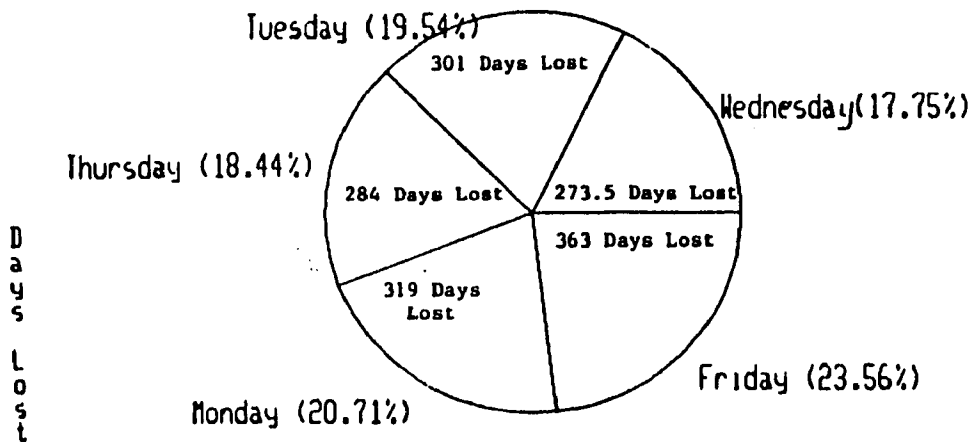


Figure 11.--Total Days Lost and Percent of Total Time Lost by Day of the Week.

stated with confidence that the findings support the research statement in this area of the study.

The spread of absence for particular days in the week is not widely dispersed nor unduly weighted for Fridays or Mondays. Therefore, the findings in this research question area do not readily signal a problematic absence leave abuse situation. However, one particular piece of knowledge extracted from staff absence records and interviews with principals gave indication that Fridays have much greater potential to display discretionary teacher absence abuse in this sample if payday controls are absent.

In all districts, teachers received their pay bi-weekly and were paid on every other Friday. Absence on these days accounted for approximately eight percent (8%) of absence by day of the week. This finding brings to light the amount of control an incentive can have on the absence behavior of a work group. This finding also raises the

question of just how much discretionary absence does exist within this study's sample population.

Had the pattern of absence by day remained consistent in this study for all weeks, then the distribution of absence by day of the week could be deemed to be within normal or average ranges as assessed by national sampling (Educational Research Service, 1980). However, strong incentives to attend every other Friday greatly influence the rates of absence for all nine school operations in this study. The degree to which Friday absences in this sample are discretionary is a matter for more intensive investigation. Future studies emphasizing an investigation of a voluntary/involuntary continuum in education would do well to include absence by day of week as a facet of such an analysis.

Month of The Year - An analysis of all school employees percent of time lost by month of the year for the nine building staffs will illustrate that average percent of lost time for the 9-month school year will progress from highest to lowest in the following order: 1.) May; 2.) February; 3.) December; 4.) April; 5.) January; 6.) March; 7.) November; 8.) October; 9.) September.

Typical commission of absence by the national work force on a per month basis gives indication that the colder winter months of the year are periods when absence from work is highest. Kelly (1982) credits the occurrence of high absence rates occurring during winter months to an increased incidence of illness commonly found during "cold" or "flu" seasons. This seasonal occurrence of actual illness is also

verified by medical research over several decades that verifies contagious disease to be reliably cyclical in nature and highest in winter months (Collingwood, 1984).

However, monthly patterns for public institutions and education in particular show marked variations from national seasonal patterns. Education studies conducted by Coffman (1983) and Pennsylvania School Boards Association (1978) show that the month of May is often times the month with the highest amount of lost time days due to teacher absence. Both studies give clear indication that teacher use of personal time in May of the traditional nine-month school year bolsters teacher absence in that month. Otherwise, teacher absence based on months of highest sick leave use shows December (Coffman, 1983) and February (Penn. School Boards Assoc., 1978) to be months of highest leave use for illness situations.

Table 10 and Figure 12 on the following page illustrate the findings relative to total days lost by month of year for this study's entire population of 176 teachers. Data analysis affirms that the vast majority of this lost time in May 1986 is credited to personal days and "family" sick leave use (82%). In addition, it should be noted that approximately one-half of sick leave use in February was "family" situations and not the personal illness of individual teachers. It is apparent that the ability to use leave provisions for other illness in the family accounts for a

Table 10.--Total Days Lost for Sample by Month
of Year.

MONTH OF YEAR	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June
TOTAL DAYS LOST	11	126	205	126	98	169	251	177	116	234	27.5

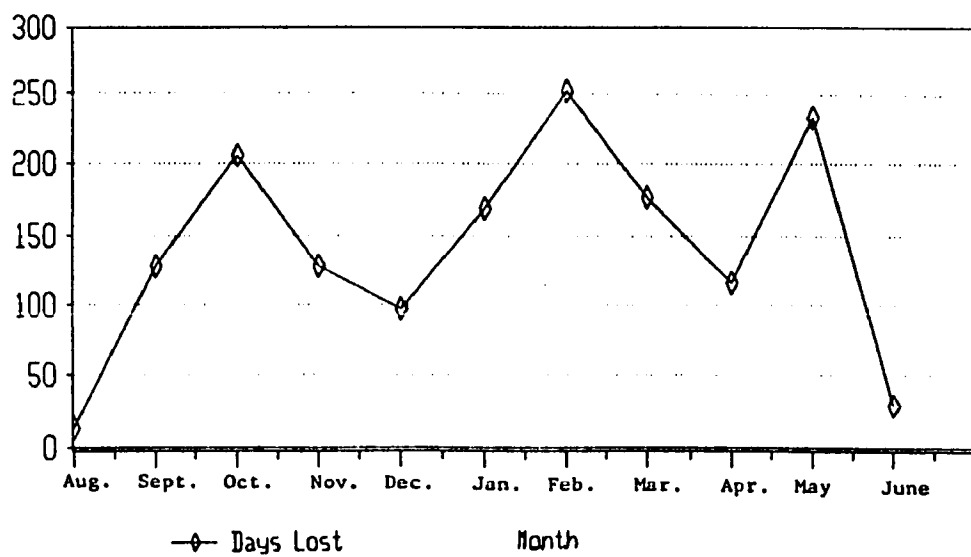


Figure 12.--Total Days Lost for Sample by Month
of Year.

sizeable portion of illness in this study of Michigan elementary educators.

As was earlier indicated, the population in this study is predominately female. One would expect, given the findings of other national studies on the effects of child-rearing responsibilities, that women would take a larger number of sick leave days for family illness than men. However, no major variations in leave use was noticed in this study for family illness use of males as compared to that of females. Given the potential to use such leave, it is apparent that both sexes exercise use of such leave in nearly the same proportion.

Distribution of absence by month for this population shows the tendency for paid leave provisions to increase percent of total lost time for work groups. In the highest months of absence, leave use for family illness and personal day use were the major contributors to lost time.

It was noted earlier in the "methods" section of this paper (Chapter 3) that variations existed among the nine individual district contracts in the restrictions placed on personal days. While some districts prescribed that days be taken for only specified reasons and approved by principals, other districts had no restrictions. All teachers in the sample had access to three personal days during the 1985-86 school year.

Analysis of personal leave use by the individual district's teachers showed variable usage by educators that

could not be discerned to be influenced by controls on personal leave. In fact, personal leave use was actually lower in districts that had no restrictions. School principals attested to the fact that they seldom placed restrictions on personal day use in those districts that had contractual ability to do so.

Of all personal time available to teachers in districts with some form of control, teachers utilized 72% of these days. Teachers in districts with no controls utilized approximately 67% of available personal leave. In both situations, personal leave use in May 1986 was significantly higher than for any other month for all nine districts.

District Demography - An analysis of average total percent of time lost for each elementary school staff reviewed will show that average percent of time lost will be highest for urban schools and lowest for rural schools.

As was noted in the review of the research literature there is only a limited amount of information relative to teacher absenteeism and the district demography of school districts. In nearly all instances where notice of district demography is found, the partition of districts is done in the usual manner of rural, suburban and urban designations (ERS, 1981).

For the most part, school districts of an urban designation traditionally fare as systems with the highest rates of mean staff absenteeism. On the other hand, small rural school districts are usually found to be systems with

the lowest mean staff rates of total time lost (ERS, 1980). However, data reported for urban and rural districts also parallels that of studies concerning worker group size. In the latter situation, it is traditionally found that larger worker group sizes have higher group mean rates of absence from regularly scheduled work (Kelly, 1982).

Figure 13, on the following page, illustrates the findings relative to the research question area concerning district demography. Though rural districts in this study maintain respectable mean staff rates of total time lost (approximating 4.0%), individual teaching staffs in both suburban and urban districts also provide data that show marked variation between "acceptable" and "problematic" rates of absence exceeding 6.0% total lost time (Gaudet, 1962).

It is apparent that the highly variable districts (whose mean staff percentage of total lost time are excessively high) in the suburban and urban locations have mean rates of total time lost that are far greater than the sample mean rate of 4.76%. Given the marked variations among all nine districts in this study and the excessive variations of mean staff percentages of total lost time in suburban and urban categories, it is most appropriate to reject the research statement concerning school district demography and mean staff percentages of lost time.

Earlier discussion concerning staff size and the findings relative to this study concluded that the staff

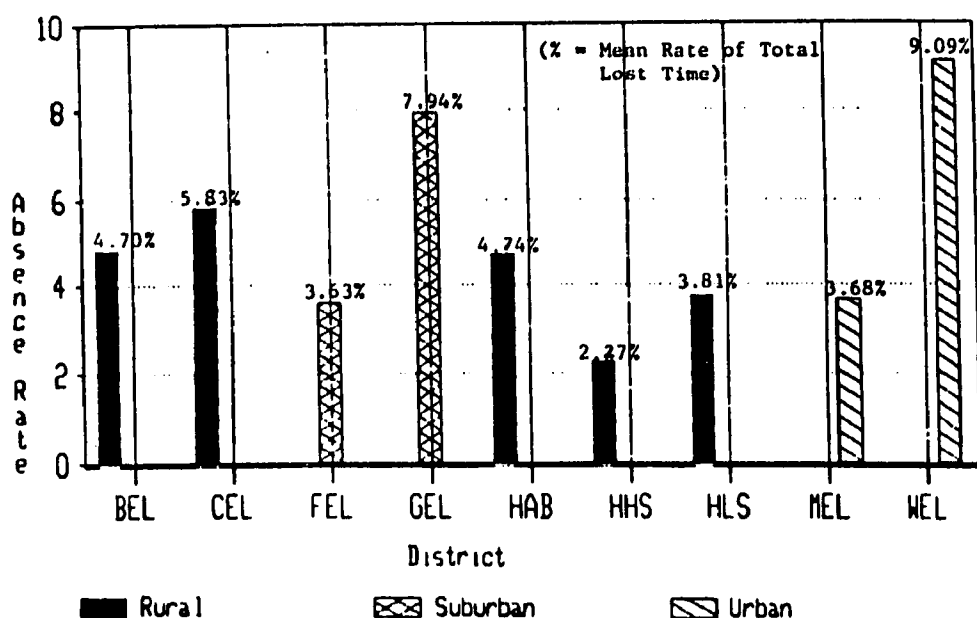


Figure 13.--Mean Rate of Lost Time by District Demography.

staff sizes of the nine districts reviewed in this investigation suggested that there seems to be little association between staff size and mean staff percentage of total lost time. However, the more basic consideration related to limited sample size for adequate investigation of that research question area is also applicable to this final research question area.

Public school studies concerning staff size have normally been based on total staffs within a school district. Little attention has been given to the building level. In general, student enrollments in the nine specific building operations reviewed in this study ranged from 275 to just under 600 students. Staff sizes ranged from 13 to 27 full-time certified teachers. However, studies that show conclusive evidence of a positive relationship between staff

size and teacher absenteeism have been based on collective teacher groups of 250 or more educators (Giullian, 1986).

Once again, the arguments relative to staff size can generally be carried to those concerning district demography since very large teaching staffs (250 or more teachers in a district) are typically found in urban and suburban settings. However, the findings based upon individual building operations in specific state designated demographic locations is yet inconclusive.

But even if such study was undertaken, the findings relative to district demography may not be applicable to current findings because of the discrepancy in research bases. Such is the case with this study's investigation of particular building operations within systems designated by demographic parameters. Further research is warranted utilizing much larger samples if any generalizable findings concerning building operations in particular demographic locations is to be realized.

In summary, it is clear from an analysis of specific findings of this chapter that patterns of worker absence for this study's sample of elementary educators vary considerably in some factor areas from those norms of worker behavior found in the national work force. Throughout the reported research of this study there are a number of findings that parallel reports found in previous K-12 investigations of teacher absenteeism. One is left

concluding that absence phenomena of teachers is not truly comparable to that displayed in national surveys.

Given the variations in worker benefits afforded to professional groups such as elementary educators, it is justifiable to assert that groups having access to benefits such as paid personal/family sick leave and paid personal days will have higher rates of absence from work than those who do not have such benefits. It is evident that when provisions for paid leave are available to workers, their utilization heightens specific group mean rates of absence above national norms. Such is the case for worker groups like elementary educators who in this study were found to attain a total sample mean rate for total lost time of 4.76% (N = 176 subjects within nine separate elementary school staffs during the 1985-86 school year).

The results of this study give indication that teacher absenteeism varies markedly in the nine Michigan sights reviewed though the results for the entire sample as a whole underscored the fact that elementary teacher absenteeism approached problematic levels for the population reviewed. It could be argued that accounting for all time lost in this investigation allowed for an over-estimation of the mean rate of absence for the sample (4.76%). However, only two staff groupings were noticeably affected by extended single absences and the degree of change in including such absences accounted for a variation of approximately .3% in the mean staff rate for the two

building operations. Therefore, total time accounting does not seem to contribute to the fact that this sample's mean rate of total lost time (4.76%) is in marked variation to national norms of 3.0-3.5%.

Undoubtedly, those districts with the most respectable rates of absence in this study are found to have the greatest degree of control by immediate supervisors. Administrators who directly involved themselves with the reporting process and followed up on teacher absences by noting teacher's previous illnesses were consistently found to have staff operations with respectable (approximately 3.5%) or exemplary (approximately 2.0% or less) rates of absence from regularly scheduled work. It is this area in particular that suggests the necessity for further investigation into elementary educator absence control programs.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Teacher absenteeism in our nation is a phenomenon which has been reported to be a growing and serious problem in K-12 public education over the past ten years (Collingwood, 1984; Educational Research Service, 1980). It has not been uncommon to find mean staff rates for teachers exceeding double the national work force standard of 3.5% (Klein, 1986). At the very time that our country is pushing towards "excellence in education," data on teacher absence shows that teachers as a whole, fail to meet absence standards considered to be representative of excellent on-the-job attendance (2% or less total lost time) (Gaudet, 1963).

Investigating teacher absence records can be a sometimes fruitless endeavor. School administrators are guarded about releasing what some contend to be "confidential" information. Such national exposes as the 1983 Commission on Excellence Report entitled "A Nation At Risk" leaves teachers guarded about their professional performance. School principals are particularly aware of this current situation and are leery of educational investigations such as the type this study deals with. Consequently, investigation of teacher absenteeism on an open basis and on a national or state-wide scale is hampered considerably. Triangulation of research sources is also limited by the

need to be somewhat clandestine during actual absence registrar reviews.

In this study, teacher absenteeism in Michigan elementary education was reviewed in fourteen hypotheses areas related to personal, organizational and time/place factors. These factor areas represent three primary areas of influence on individual and group absence behavior in the private and public work place (Nicholson, et. al, 1982). Particular attention was made to currently existing models of absence and influences on the attending behavior of elementary teachers as assessed by a review of the literature from private industry and public service organizations.

The three major areas of absence factors researched in this study and their concomitant factor sets were:

Personal Factors

Age
Sex
Marital Status
Dependent Children
Education Level
Years employment/
experience
Individual absence as a
percentage of total
staff rate

Organizational Factors

Staff Size
Absence Control Policies/
Reporting Procedure
Grade Level Taught
School Commitment After
Work Day

Time/Place Factors

Day of Week
Month of Year
District Demography

Selection of schools in this study was attempted on a random basis. However, difficulties in obtaining building locations by random sampling caused this investigator to rely on previous administrative acquaintances in the central portion of Michigan's lower peninsula. This accounted for the higher than average representation of rural districts in

this study. Additional assistance was provided by the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) organization located in Lansing, Michigan. MASB was instrumental in locating and providing inroads for research conducted in suburban and urban districts.

The research methods utilized in this study combined the process of personal interview coupled with a pre-arranged questionnaire that served as a guide during interviews with school principals. A facet of observational research was also employed in this phase of data collection when interviews with immediate supervisors were tape recorded. Recordings assisted considerably in recalling information relative to the personal policies and dispositions of administrators concerning absence behavior of staff and controlling factors purportedly exercised to reduce staff absence.

Additional investigation was exercised in reviewing contractual language related to absence leave benefits. Specific review was intended to discern the existence of actual absence control or reinforcement programs in the nine districts.

However, only one district was found to exercise a reinforcement procedure. In this instance, teachers in a suburban district were provided with a vacation day to be used in the following school year if two or less days were missed in the current school year. In actuality, the reinforcement program attempted to stimulate an absenteeism

goal of 2% or less lost time and paralleled the "excellent" attendance parameter established by Gaudet (1963). Effects of this control program were deemed marginal as the mean rate of lost time for this particular building staff was assessed to be at approximately 4% total lost time.

Confidentiality of records was a primary concern generated by this researcher and those principals in districts contacted for investigation. One of the more prevalent concerns of school principals was that their staffs not be made aware that absentee registrars were being reviewed in their districts. In a small number of cases, selection sites were lost due to administrative apprehension that absence records would be open to outside investigative review.

Minor variations were found to exist in maximum number of accumulated leave days over years of successive teaching experience, maximum number of personal days in districts and restrictions on their usage. Particular review of the possible impact of such variations in leave benefits produced no exceptional variations and in fact left this researcher to note that restrictions on use of elementary teacher benefits suggested some form of association with increased use of personal business days.

Measures used in this study of elementary educator absence behavior were based on those devised by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Klein, 1986; Taylor, 1978) for assessment of total time lost. The measures utilized in this

study accounted for all time lost whereas BLS discontinued counting lost time in any absence after the fourth day of a single continuous absence. The desire to account for all time lost is the direction taken in a majority of educational studies. Total time lost measures were found to be the predominant measure utilized in education studies particularly during the past decade.

Rates of total time lost were developed by dividing the number of days lost to the nearest one-half day for each teacher in the study by the number of contracted work days scheduled for each of the nine districts in 1985-86. Contracted work years varied between 183 and 189 work days. Individual percentages of total time lost were constructed using the following formula:

$$\text{Individual \% of Time Lost} = \frac{\text{No. of Contracted Days Absent}}{\text{Number of Contracted Days (85-86)}}$$

In a variety of hypotheses investigations, it was necessary to compute staff and group mean rates of absence. These rates were constructed using the following formula:

$$\begin{array}{lcl} \text{Staff Abs. Rate (Group)} & = & \frac{\text{Total No. of Individual Days Absent} \times \text{Total No. of Full-Time Staff}}{\text{No. of Contracted Work Days} \times \text{Total No. of Full-Time Staff}} \end{array}$$

Days of absence were counted for teacher use of personal/family paid sick leave, paid personal business days and paid bereavement leave. Days lost due to weather, community or building emergency or public service (jury duty, National Guard service, Red Cross, etc.) were not assessed to be days lost but days of contractual fulfillment

during 1985-86. This accounting paralleled the type of recording promoted by BLS and also utilized by the national Educational Research Service (1980).

It is clear from an analysis of specific findings of the previous chapter that patterns of worker absence for this study's sample of elementary educators vary considerably in some factor areas from those norms of worker behavior found in the national work force. Throughout the reported research of this study there are a number of findings that parallel reports found in previous K-12 investigations of teacher absenteeism. One is left concluding that absence phenomena of teachers is not truly comparable to that displayed in national surveys.

Given the variations in worker benefits afforded to professional groups such as elementary educators, it is justifiable to assert that groups having access to benefits such as paid personal/family sick leave and paid personal days will have higher rates of absence from work than those who do not have such benefits. It is evident that when provisions for paid leave are available to workers, their utilization heightens specific group mean rates of absence above national norms. Such is the case for worker groups like elementary educators who in this study were found to attain a total sample mean rate for total lost time of 4.76% (N = 176 subjects within 9 separate elementary school staffs during the 1985-86 school year).

Given the above considerations, one major summary finding of this dissertation must be understood relative to investigation of worker absenteeism from regularly scheduled work. That is, that the study of worker absenteeism is best performed within specific occupations. Additionally, those significant findings that lend most importance to the creation of potential controls are those devised from groups having similar occupations and attendant leave benefits.

Synopsis of Findings

Personal Factors

Age - Absence rates in total time lost are highest for elementary teachers ages 51-55. Total time lost for this age group amounted to 9.03% which is approximately three times the national average. A significant positive relationship between advancing age and absenteeism is found in the sample between ages 36 to 55. Past education research complements these findings (Collingwood, 1984; Hedges & Taylor, 1979) though such a positive relationship is found to occur much earlier in national samples taken across dissimilar occupations (Klein, 1986).

Previous research lends speculation that increases in age and concomitant poorer health are accountable for increased absence rates as age increases. However, a high number of single days illness and use of personal leave for older female elementary educators are major contributors to increased absence in ages 41 to 55. School principals in this study lend speculation that the increase in total time

lost for older teachers is one of poor health coupled with disassociation from the job of teaching.

A secondary peak in total time lost is noticed for elementary teachers both female and male between the ages of 26 - 30. It was not discernable within nearly one-half of school district records whether the absences were for sickness of children in the family though three district's record keeping systems did illustrate a high number of absences for "family" illness. Previous national work force and education research note high rates of absence use for workers at this age level due to child-care responsibilities for small children (Educational Research Service, 1981).

There was only marginal support for the hypotheses based on a positive relationship between absenteeism and advancing age. Variations in absence and age during elementary teacher's early employment showed a mixed association between absence and advancing age. The relationship between absence and age was most noticeable between teachers in the mid-thirties and continuing until approximately age 55.

Sex - Little variation existed between male and female elementary educators in this study's sample. 16% of the 176 teachers in this study were males thus giving indication that many of the findings in various hypothesis areas are heavily weighted by females. Actual mean rates of absence for males was established to be 4.72% total lost time whereas mean rates of total time lost for females was

found to be 4.79% total lost time in the 1985-86 school year.

The minor variations between sexes in education absence research parallels findings of similar absence studies in education conducted by Pellicer (1984) and Bridges & Hallinan (1978). Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data garnered from 1973 to 1985 consistently show that in national samples, male rates of absence from regularly scheduled work are considerably lower than female absence rates. The basic rationale given for such occurrences is that women are more saddled with child-care responsibilities whereas wage earner responsibilities to family for men require their more regular attendance on the job to preserve family income.

Acceptance of the hypotheses was accepted only provisionally in that male rates of absence were less than for females in this study's sample but the variation in rates was minimal. It was expected that rates would be at least one full percent less for males than for females in this study (based on BLS data). However, the variation in rates was only 0.07% between sexes in this study. Therefore, the difference is viewed as nebulous and not in accord with national findings.

Marital Status/Dependent Children - It was found in this study's sample of 176 elementary teachers that single teachers attained lower rates of absence from work than married educators. Single men were found to have the lowest

rates of total lost time (1.5%) in 1985-86 but findings for this group have to be discounted in that sample size (2 unmarried males) is very small. Mean rates of absence for single women (4.25%) approximated the sample mean of 4.76% and were not in much variation from that of married women (5.0%).

Married women and men with no dependent children were found to have the highest rates of absence from work (5.45% and 12.07%) respectively in the entire sample population of 176 teachers. Findings for percent of total time lost for the sample of married men with no dependent children was discounted due to very low sample size (3 subjects) and a long-term illness of one of the subjects. Overall, given the particular limitations of sample size for men, it is found these findings concerning marital status for elementary teachers are in conflict with BLS national samples obtained from 1973 to 1985 (Klein, 1986; Hedges, 1977).

The hypothesis concerning marital status was rejected in part in that single men attained lower rates of absence than married men in the sample. The reverse of this situation was expected to occur. However, single women did attain lower rates of total time lost than married women thus confirming that portion of the hypothesis confirmed by previous research (Klein, 1986).

The effects of dependent children upon elementary educators was found to be in some variation to that of national work force sampling. Married women with dependent

children showed to be marginally weighted by the demands of children (4.48%) whereas single women with dependent children actually fared somewhat better (4.33%) in exhibiting lesser rates of absence.

Effects of dependent children upon married men was an interesting finding developed from analysis of specific absentee registrar notations (in five of nine districts) and interviews with building principals. Mean rates of absence for all married men with dependent children was assessed at 3.75%. However, the determined mean does not show that broad rates of absence ranging from exemplary to problematic were widely disbursed in this group. Absence registrars and verification by principals ascertained that the majority of men in this study stayed home with ill children when the need arose.

The hypothesis concerning the effects of dependent children upon elementary educators was rejected because it was found that teachers with children fared no worse in commission of absence than for the entire sample reviewed in this study (176 teachers = 4.76% total lost time).

Educational Level - Little variation exists collectively between elementary educators rates of total time lost for those teachers who possess bachelors degrees and those who possess masters degrees. No teachers in this study's sample possessed degrees above the masters level.

It was found that teachers with bachelor degrees encompassed the majority of elementary educators in this

sample (N=97). Teachers with absence levels in excess of 6.0% total lost time were predominately those with the least amount of education beyond the bachelors degree level (BA +15 credit hours). This finding was ascertained by building principal designation in five of the nine staffs reviewed.

The findings suggest that elementary teachers with degrees beyond the bachelors level are more regular in their attendance and potentially more committed to their jobs. However, more investigation into attitudinal factors related to job commitment are necessary prior to any firm acceptance of such findings.

On the average, elementary teachers with Masters of Science degrees held the most respectable rates of total time lost with a mean rate of 3.19% (N=17) whereas teachers with Bachelor of Arts Degrees held the second best mean rate at 3.80% (N=44). 53 elementary teachers with bachelor of Science degrees were found in this sample and their mean rate of absence was the poorest in the entire sample at 5.19% total lost time.

Years Experience - The findings relative to this factor area are nearly parallel with those concerning the age of elementary educators in the study's sample. Rates of absence for teachers border 4.0% total lost time in 1985-86 for those educators with 12 or less years experience.

A marked jump in rate of time lost is noted for elementary educators with 20 or more years teaching experience. The poorest mean rates of absence are noted for those

workers with 25 to 27 years of teaching experience (10.93% total lost time). This experience group is also noted to coincide with those elementary teachers noted by principals to be contemplating retirement from teaching.

The findings of this factor area supported the hypothesis that increases in teaching experience correspond to increases in rates of absence from regularly scheduled work for elementary educators. However, a noticeable and respectable mean rate of total lost time (3.0% or less) was seen in this sample for teachers with 30 or more years experience.

Individual Rates of Time Lost as a % of Total Staff Absence - Findings by Human Resource Management (HRM) researchers such as Yolles, Karone & Krinsky (1975) reported that in some work organizations, as few as 10% of workers created 90% of all absences. Such dramatic findings were not found in this study.

On the average, 10% of elementary staff were responsible for 27% of all time lost in 1985-86. It was found that on the average, 20% of staff accounted for approximately 50% of all time lost. The hypothesis for this factor area expected that 10% of teaching staffs in the respective nine individual district building operations would be responsible for at least 45% of all lost time in 1985-86 and, therefore, was rejected.

It was observed that in one district, 20% of a small building staff (three teachers) were responsible for 70% of

all time lost. However, two of these elementary educators were absent for a continuous length of time due to debilitating doctor verified illness.

Organizational Factors

Staff Size - It was expected that as staff size increased for the nine building staffs reviewed, there would be found a positive relationship with increased mean rates of staff absence (total lost time). Research conducted by Guillian (1986) in Colorado public schools and by Coffman (1985) in Pennsylvania public schools gave indication of this positive relationship. However, the total district staffs from which such findings were devised were those with staffs in excess of 250 teachers.

Staff sizes for this study ranged from 13 to 27 teachers. As such, the staffs reviewed in this hypothesis area were truly not comparable to the findings of previous educational research. Staffs of 13 and 24 elementary teachers had the lowest mean rates of total lost time (approximately 3.7%) whereas staffs of 17 and 27 employees had the highest mean rates of total lost time with established rates of approximately 8.5%. These variable findings did not support the hypothesis.

Absence Control Policies/Reporting Procedures - One of the most significant findings of this study supported previous research (Elliott, 1982) in illustrating that elementary teaching staffs required to report absences

directly to school principals had lower mean rates of absence than for those staffs who did not.

Those elementary teachers phoning into building or central office secretaries had the highest mean staff rates of total time lost in the 1985-86 school year. In one instance, mean rates of total lost time for a building staff exceeded 9.0%.

The findings of this study contributed support to the hypothesis that staffs reporting directly to building principals would have the lowest mean rates of absence in total lost time from regularly scheduled work. These findings and those of similar national reviews of teacher absence (ERS, 1980) give strong support to the creation of reporting procedures headed by building principals.

Only one district of the nine studied reported a type of control program in operation. The intent of this program was to award a vacation day to teachers with 2.0% or less total lost time in a school year. The effects of this program were deemed marginal in that a mean rate of total time lost of 3.68% was assessed for this teaching group in the 1985-86 school year.

No building principal in this study noted teacher absences to be problematic in their building operations though rates of total lost time exceeded 7.0%, 8.0%, and 9.0% in some district operations reviewed. It was surprising to find that four building administrators judged a mean rate of 10% total lost time to be an acceptable level of

staff absence in a given school year. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics taken between 1973 and 1985, this figure is three times the national average.

Grade Level - It was expected that as grade levels increased for elementary teaching staffs, rates of total lost time would decrease. This expectation was founded primarily on the research of Bouknight (1985) and Capitan & Morris (1978) who did not work directly with specific grade levels but educational system designations (i.e. elementary schools, middle schools, junior and senior high schools).

The specific findings of this study relative to this hypothesis area illustrated that with the exception of mean rates of absence for teachers in grade level one, mean rates of total lost time dropped in nearly a consistent relationship to ascending grade level between grades two through six. A minor variation in mean grade level rates was found for teachers in grade five. However, the fluctuation was minor between grades four and six and did not give sufficient variation for this researcher to reject the hypothesis.

Teachers in grade level two in the entire sample were found to have the poorest rates of total lost time with a mean rate of 6.13%. Specialty teachers instructing art, music, physical education and special education classes were noted to have the second highest rates of total lost time in 1985-86 (5.68%).

School System Commitment After Work Day - It was speculated by this investigator that elementary educators who committed themselves beyond the contractually required work day on a regular basis would be teachers with better than average time lost rates in the population reviewed in this study. The hypothesis designed for this organizational factor was based on the work of Kuhns (1986) and Sheldon (1985) who reviewed levels of teacher commitment utilizing the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ) and found that teachers with high levels of assessed commitment had consistent total time lost absence rates of 3.5% or less.

The manner in which this organizational factor was investigated in this study was not parallel to the majority of other studies reviewing job commitment. This investigator utilized the opinions and assessment of building principals to pinpoint respective elementary teachers they felt were strongly committed to their jobs. The findings of this factor area suggested that teachers who were reported to be highly committed to their positions were not necessarily good attenders. Wide variations were found not only between the rates of absence and those reported to be committed but between the essential definitions formulated by principals as to the term "highly committed."

Given the wide variations between rates of total time lost for the 21 teachers selected as "highly committed" (ranging between 1.5% and 7.35% total lost time), the hypothesis concerning this factor area was rejected in this

study. However, this is not to suggest that these findings are in conflict with previous research. It is suggested that investigations concerning teacher absence and job commitment be conducted in a manner in which educators are contacted directly and given the ability to rate themselves via standardized tools such as the JSQ.

Time/Place Factors

Day of the Week - The hypothesis based upon occurrence of weekly patterns of absence for specific days in a full work week was confirmed in this study. It was expected that Fridays would be the day of the week with the highest occurrence of absences with Mondays being the second highest day of the week for commissions of absence by elementary teachers in this study.

Friday absences encompassed 23.56% of all absences in the nine district sites reviewed. Monday absences constituted 20.71%. Tuesdays accounted for 19.54% with Wednesdays accounting for 18.44% and Thursdays being the day of the week with the lowest commission of absences (17.75%).

Research in industrialized settings conducted by Nicholson, et. al. (1982) and in education settings conducted by Capitan & Morris (1978) gave basis for the expected outcomes in this time/place factor area. However, these researchers also confirm that the moderate spread of absence shown in the findings of this study do not pinpoint a marked abuse pattern. If Friday and Monday absence patterns constitute more than 50% of absences in a week, these

researchers indicate an abuse situation may be indicated. In this study, it was found that Friday and Monday absences accounted for approximately 45% of all weekly absences.

It was interesting to note that all districts metered pay on a biweekly basis on every other Friday. In fact, payday Fridays accounted for only 8% of absences in a five-day pay week as assessed in a review of absence registrars for the nine district building operations in this study. This finding brings to light the potential for incentive controls though more research and review is needed to ascertain the true impact of such incentives.

Month of the Year - It was expected that 1.) May, 2.) February and 3.) December respectively would be the months of the year with the highest commission of absence from work for elementary teachers in this study. The hypothesis for this time/place factor were based on the previous research of Collingwood (1984) and Coffman (1983).

In actuality, the months of 1.) February, 2.) May and 3.) October were found to be the three highest respective months in this study for commission of teacher absence. The findings provided the basis for rejection of the hypothesis for this factor area though results were quite close in some respects to expected outcomes.

Cold weather months of January through March were found to be times when a preponderance of personal and family illness days were utilized. The month of May was a bold exception to this cold weather pattern though a marked

use of personal business days by teachers in nearly all nine districts in May accounted for this month being the second highest for total lost time in eight of nine district building operations. Noticeable decreases in lost time were noted in all nine districts for the months of December and April. All districts had shortened work months in these periods due to scheduled holiday vacation periods of a week or more.

One surprising piece of information was found in researching this factor area as related to restrictions on personal business days. In this study's sample it was found that districts who placed restrictions on such days actually had higher rates of use of such days by elementary teachers (72% of all available days were used) whereas districts who placed no restrictions had relatively lower usage of such days (67% of all available personal business days being utilized).

District Demography - National reviews of K-12 educational institutions by the Educational Research Service (1981) gave indication that urban districts would have teaching staffs with the highest mean rates of total lost time in any comparisons made with suburban and rural school districts.

School building staff in one urban and one suburban district actually had the highest mean staff rates of total time lost of the nine operations reviewed. However, the remaining urban and suburban operations had mean rates of

total lost time near the lowest and most respectable in the sample studied. Rural districts did not consistently display better mean staff rates of total time lost than urban or suburban districts though the lowest mean staff rate was found in one rural district.

Due to the inconsistent findings for districts in the three demographic areas reviewed, the hypothesis for this time/place factor area was rejected.

Implications

Given the more significant findings of this study, a researcher of absenteeism phenomena can make some specific observations about the absence behaviors of teachers in the total sample. Just how generalizable these observations are to the entire population of Michigan elementary teachers is only to be determined by future research. However, the ways in which this study's sample of professional employees absence behavior varies from national work force trends contributes to the findings of education researchers in many respects and tends to reinforce observed patterns of behavior likened to professions with access to paid leave benefits.

The area of findings for personal factors observed from the sample of 176 elementary educators in this study is in many cases not in synchronization with national trends. For example, little variation between rates of absence was found between sexes in this study. National sampling by government agencies since 1973 (Bureau of Labor Statistics)

give expectation that men in this sample would fare better in regularity of attendance than females due to the familial responsibilities supposedly placed on men as primary wage earners and the basic held beliefs concerning requirements of child care placed on women.

Demands upon women necessitated by child care seemed to be confirmed in this study for women with dependent children (age 5 and under). However, men were also found to spend considerable amounts of their 1985-86 sick leave time at home with ill children and in many cases paralleled the "family sickness" use for paid sick leave noticed for females with children.

Women without children were found to have the highest rates of total lost time in this study thus delimiting to a variable extent in the respective districts the contention that the poorer attendance of many women is due to child care responsibilities.

Additional findings of this sample's absence behavior relative to age were also in some disparity to national samples until the life area known as "middle age." It was expected and confirmed that an increase in rates of total time lost would be found for elementary teachers weighted by the needs of young children. However, a dramatic increase far in excess of the moderate increases experienced in national samples was found for workers between middle life and the approximate age of retirement for many workers in this sample (age 40 - 55). A noticeable cohort of

elementary teachers in this study were noted to cease employment at approximately age 55.

The similarity of absence behavior between sexes in this study and the reported observations of building administrators lend to the still emerging theory that much of an organization's absence behavior is aligned not so much to individual actions or personal consequences (poor health, accidents, transportation problems, etc.) but to group interaction processes. This theory is aligned primarily to groups having access to leave benefits that allow workers to suffer little if any loss of monetary compensation for being absent from regularly scheduled work.

One of the most remembered and extreme findings of group collusion in metering out leave benefits was elicited by a suburban district building principal who described the interaction of elementary teachers within his staff during the month of May regarding the use of personal business days.

During this time period, teachers would interact during break periods and establish who was going to utilize their remaining personal leave time in the days ahead. Since the days were not accumulative and only two instructors in a building could be absent on a particular work day for personal business, teachers in this staff would agree as to who would be utilizing days at what point in the final weeks so that their personal business days would be exhausted.

The description brought to mind a passage written by Chadwick-Jones, Nicholson and Brown (1982) regarding group interaction and absence behavior:

Absences can be interpreted as part of an exchange among employees as a group and between them and the employing organization. First, among themselves, absences may well be shared out, allocated - "Who else was absent last week?" "Is anyone absent today?" "Is it therefore O.K. for me to be absent tomorrow?" Some forms of alternating behavior may occur here; collusion, no doubt, takes place with supervisors and managers.⁶⁴

The fact that the building administrator approved these May requests when contractual language gave him the ability to scrutinize and possibly deny a portion of what he termed the "May personal leave rush," attests to the above statement made by Chadwick-Jones, et. al. about employer collusion.

Additionally, the findings of this study relative to age progression and accumulated teaching experience of elementary teachers coincides with HRM social psychologist theories that suggest that as workers get older, their personal priorities concerning work challenge and leisure change:

⁶⁴ Chadwick-Jones, J. K., Nicholson, N. & Brown, C. Social Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N. Y., (1982), p. 7.

The preference for work reduces with each additional decade of age. Problems in the allocation of work cut both ways; although the dominant fact is lack of work among those who want it, many people who have work want less of it.⁶⁵

The implications for those who have access to paid leave provisions and suffer no loss in daily compensation is to use leave in a manner that may seem quite justifiable to themselves but also coincides with the either conscious or unconscious desire to work less:

What a paid sick leave plan is likely to do is change the employee's view of what constitutes a valid reason for being off work. The minor indisposition that would not keep an employee from going to work if he were to lose a day's pay by staying at home might be enough to induce him to do so if he suffered no loss as a result of it.⁶⁶

The implications for school managers derived from this study and also observed in other educational research is that directions taken to affect the absence behavior of elementary teachers may be more effective if developed

⁶⁵ Kahn, R. L. "Productive Behavior through the Life Course: An Essay on the Quality of Life," Human Resource Management, Vol. 23 No. 1, (Spring, 1984), p. 7.

⁶⁶ Kelly L. Absenteeism: Policies and Programs for the 80's. IR Research Services, Inc., Kingston, Ontario, (1982), p. 16.

towards influencing the group and not just individual behavior.

The most basic and practically the only method used by building principals in this study to discourage problematic absenteeism of elementary teachers was to eventually so note the problem in a formal evaluation. In most of the nine districts, evaluations were performed on individual teachers once in two or three years (as agreed contractually).

The manner in which this method was handled was to make the discipline extremely confidential and out of sight of the group. Not so surprisingly, school principals themselves admitted teachers knew who absence leave offenders were in their staffs and sometimes metered out their own subtle forms of ostracization. Nevertheless, there was little real influence or example provided to educators in this study's sample for the group to judge when absence leave misuse occurred and what the real consequences were for abusers.

Taking this discussion in the other direction, teaching groups had little if any direction from either contractual language, district policy or individual administrator action as to what constituted exemplary attendance behavior. Though some principals made an issue of noting problematic absence behavior in evaluation, only two of the nine building administrators admitted to praising teachers

for exemplary attendance (though only one district had a parameter for this judgement).

Though this study pinpointed a number of areas where continued intensive study might possibly provide specific clues to better absence controls in elementary education, one basic element of any absence control program was missing in all but one district studied. And that basic element was a goal.

Some elementary teachers in this study attained an exemplary rate of attendance (2.0% or less lost time) via their own inner direction. However, 76% of this study's sample missed that mark and 25% (41 teachers) actually had very poor lost time rates (6.0% or more total lost time) as adjudicated by Bureau of Labor Statistics gradients.

The development of goals, be it geared to absence reduction or attendance increases, and their promotion by school managers was noticeably lacking in all but one district studied in this investigation. In essence, little direction was given to elementary teachers as to what constituted exemplary or acceptable absence behavior. Only when administrators decided for themselves that a teacher was absent too much (by no precise measurement adopted by the district) did they make a formal issue of the (supposed) problem.

To this investigator, the obvious implications for school managers who attempt to enforce only negative and nebulous sanctions on the absence behavior of individual

teachers is to manage their staffs in effect by blind and erratic measures. Given no earlier direction in what constitutes unacceptable levels of absence, teachers and their exclusive representation agents can easily release a poorly attending teacher from the discipline enacted by school management. Only if defined goals are developed and adopted by school systems either contractually or by at least district policy will there be any real hope for control of teacher absence behavior in systems where the absence behavior is viewed as problematic.

What this study has displayed, quite frankly, is a sampling of Michigan elementary teaching staffs who work in an atmosphere nearly exclusive of any formal absence controls. In four of the nine districts it was found that group mean rates of total lost time were in the area of what BLS data determined to be acceptable or average levels of group absence from work. Very possibly, these districts may continue to fare well without the creation of attendance goals. However, it can also be well argued that conditions may be bettered if goals were developed. Though it can be said that a working system does not need to be fixed, it is hard to argue that preventative maintenance (goals) might insure a good system's continual operation or make it simply work better.

All administrators felt there was no apparent need for any type of control program to be instituted in their district operations. Four of the nine districts, having

rates of total lost time in what were deemed to be nationally acceptable levels could be considered to need no real interventions of a disciplinary nature. Yet two districts were found to have mean group rates at near problematic levels (6.0%) and two districts were clearly plagued by unacceptable (6.0%+) mean rates of total lost time.

More surprising was the realization that many principals, having little or no idea of what national norms of absence existed, were prepared to accept rates of absence in excess of three times the national average. Clearly, the implications for administrative training institutions and associations providing continued inservicing to administrators are in updating school managers on national work force and education system absence levels and control programs/-policies.

Principals who feel overpowered by the prospect of "buckling down" or "getting tough" with absence offenders need to gain confidence from the findings of this study and similar investigations in that negative sanctions need only be placed on a small number of staff members. Absence controls for offenders is a matter of involvement with only a small segment of a work group. This study's findings and those of similar reviews illustrate that the need for disciplinary measures is needed for approximately 20-25% of a building staff. A group of 20 teachers will normally have 4 or 5 workers that may necessitate negative sanctions being enforced. Emphasize a group incentive system with goals and

that number may drop lower while increasing work performance of past marginally attending teachers.

If cost-effectiveness must be a consideration, control programs may also be targeted at specific portions of worker groups where a review of factors shows the apparent need for intervention. In this study, mean rates of unacceptable absence were found primarily for workers in age groups coursing through the later one-third of teaching careers or at middle-life age ranges (40 - 55). School districts implementing control programs in many cases seemed to operate on similar findings.

While some systems employ incentives for exemplary attendance at all experience levels, others establish goals for all staff at all experience levels but only introduce financial incentives after considerable accumulated teaching experience (12+ years on average). Such is the case as described by the Educational Research Service (1981) for school districts such as the Clark Co. Public Schools of Las Vegas, Nevada and the Great Neck Union Free School District of Great Neck, New York.

A number of control systems operated on the same premise as that of the above districts but instead metered financial incentives for exemplary levels of attendance after 90, 100 or more accumulated sick leave days was in an individual teacher's sick leave bank. Clearly, a school district's self-investigation of absence behavior may very well pinpoint where incentives need to be strategically

placed thus keeping incentive system costs at a minimum if that is an issue with school management.

Some school managements may wish to experiment with the creation of an "in-system" day care operation for young dependent children if an inordinate amount of sick leave is used by teachers for such purposes. Though such provisions of services were deemed to be marginal after the analysis of personal factors in the two districts in the study who operated employee day care services, the effects of such services in other districts reviewed in the literature are touted as being significant contributors to absence reduction for school employees (Paringer, 1983).

Clearly, from an analysis of findings for time/place factors reviewed in this study, school managers can manipulate certain periods of the work week and school year and possibly reduce mean rates of lost time. High rates of absence on specific days (in this study, on Mondays and Fridays) could be managed in a manner that provides certain incentives when employees attend on those days. Such suggestions as weekly pay on Fridays or Mondays, lottery systems held on a specific week day and other incentives based on what staff members cherish in their jobs may be offered based upon the attainment of workers being present on a certain day.

Additionally, the findings of this study suggest that school managers can manipulate problematic monthly patterns such as that termed by one building administrator to be the

"May personal business leave rush." Dramatic increased use of specific leave benefits signals to administrators a period when sanctions and scrutiny need to be employed in order to reduce group misuse of benefits and maintain continuity of operations.

Ultimately, the implications for school administrators as presented by the more significant findings of this study can be joined with previous education research in underlining the need for direct immediate supervisor involvement in the absence reporting process. The results of this study were fairly conclusive in showing that mean staff rates of absence were lowest in those systems whose staff members reported absences directly to their immediate supervisors.

In two instances, building principals who did not have staff reporting directly to themselves felt fortunate in not having such disturbances impinge upon their personal time. Also, they felt relieved in not having to locate substitutes for their staff. Unfortunately, the mean rates of staff absence for these two administrator's staff groups were beyond what BLS determined to be acceptable levels of lost time.

The obvious results of directing staff requests for absence to immediate supervisors seem to favor insisting upon such procedures being instituted in order to benefit the education process. The total weight of placing such demands upon school principals could be reduced by

principals collecting calls and personal requests and having another worker (be it clerical or support staff member) do the additional work of locating substitutes. In any event, the obvious better results of immediate supervisor involvement in the absence reporting process, garnered from this study and others, strongly suggests inclusion of this control process in the repertoire of administrative duties.

Undoubtedly, the establishment of educational system control programs and setting of goals and reinforcement criteria have their greatest implications for affected teachers. Those school managers who view absence reduction attempts as potentially debilitating do so primarily on the basis that such measures will heighten stress levels of educators (Bouknight, 1984). There is some justification for this concern as noted in the previously cited 1986 Metropolitan Insurance Corp. report on those teachers who left the profession for other forms of employment.

However, school principals noted in their interviews that though the position of elementary educator was a somewhat stressful job, there were several periods in the work year for stress reduction and personal rejuvenation. Week long vacation periods in the nine month school year, summer breaks and scheduled holidays were elicited by administrators as examples of periods adding to a total pool of rest and relaxation afforded to elementary educators that in their judgement eliminated the effects of any continual external stress felt on the job. In their minds, principals

felt that the need for additional "mental health days" for teachers to reduce stress seemed unwarranted.

In considering theories relative to teacher burnout and its influences on absenteeism, one has to take into account the findings of this study relative to senior teachers, the purported move towards increased leisure and the occasional disillusionment some workers have with the teaching profession:

Burnout is a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected rewards.⁶⁷

Many times during this study, more-experienced administrators attested to the fact that teachers with currently poor absence records were much better attenders in years prior. Perhaps the supposed stress felt by teachers as exemplified in the 1986 Metropolitan study was induced not so much by external as by internal processes. If in fact a continuing goal for regularity of attendance or absence reduction was established for teaching groups, then possibly the nebulousness in the daily regularity of reporting to work experienced by teachers in the Metropolitan survey might dissipate for others still in the profession. A goal might be worth making the effort to attain.

The resurrection of goals for absence control in school systems may very well raise stress levels for some

⁶⁷ Hunsaker, J. S. "Burnout: The Culmination of Long-Term Stress," Industrial Management, Vol. 28 No. 26, (Nov./Dec., 1986), p. 24.

educators. However, the potential for all members of a teaching group to be influenced by such goals also raises the prospect for a continuing challenge for those who once saw no benefit in trying to maintain their own exemplary or acceptable levels of attendance.

Such control programs may very well reduce the types of stress experienced by employees in a work environment where being exemplary brings no recognition or rewards.

Limitations of The Study

Any study that bases its findings on the analysis of a very small percentage of the actual applicable universe must raise its greatest limitation upon the basis of generalizability. It was reported earlier that this study's sample size of nine individual building operations equated to approximately .004% of Michigan's total public elementary schools (2,036) in the 1985-86 school year. Additionally, the sample size of 176 certified elementary teachers amounts to approximately .006% of the nearly 26,000 elementary teachers reported to be employed in Michigan public schools in 1985-86. Given such a small proportion of these two research bases, one cannot hope for any large amount of generalizability without the backing of similar studies and similar findings.

However, a study incorporating nine sites of intensive investigation in a review of factors relative to absenteeism in elementary education is a first (as ascertained by an extensive review of the literature) in the

State of Michigan. As such, it represents a contribution to the field that serves as a building block to further understanding.

Larger state-wide surveys may require team approaches for on-site reviews and data analysis. Such a replication of this study has been proposed to Michigan Department of Education (MDE) workers. At present, MDE generates data concerning a vast array of items based on specific information provided by Michigan local and intermediate school districts. Generation of absence or attendance data is not a current priority. However, such may be the case if findings of this study combine with similar data that indicates a need for cross-state comparisons.

A particular consideration concerning generalizability of absenteeism findings across work groups, noted earlier in this summary, is the need to generalize findings within a particular work occupation. The influence of available benefits and job level need to be accounted for when absence comparisons are made. Such benefits as paid sick leave, paid personal time and supervisory flexibility are highly variable across worker groups. Generalizability of findings on a national basis with unrelated occupation groups will be a limitation of most studies that cut across occupations.

A second limitation of this study and for many others is the inconsistency in use of absence measures and consequent inability to compare findings with other absenteeism

investigations. This study dealt with analysis of absence data on a "total time lost" basis. However, national sampling of data by such agencies as the Bureau of Labor Statistics is done on a modified basis that does not account for time lost after the fourth consecutive day of a single occurrence of absence. BLS, therefore, moves towards a "frequency" absence measure which deflates the actual amount of time lost.

The complete comparability of absence data will continue to be a major limitation of all absenteeism studies until the various professional disciplines either adopt an agreed single measure or report data on absence geared towards both "total time lost" and "frequency." Actually, a combined lost time/frequency practice is most preferred by absenteeism researchers in that valuable information on the absence behaviors of workers can be garnered utilizing both measures.

A third major limitation upon the findings of this investigation was the clandestine nature of data collection and on-site investigation. Initially, several school administrators in the various nine districts were extremely cautious about guarding information from absentee records (registrars). In a small number of cases, school principals refused to assist in data collection when staff were present and required this investigator to review records off-site.

This was a particular problem in that questions were not easily answered after initial interviews had already

been conducted. In addition, later returns to four districts were not accommodated in the time frame of this study because of inability to be accommodated by administrator's schedules. Whether or not this problem was due to principal evasiveness is not truly known though evasiveness seemed to be present in all school principals at some point during the course of this study.

An additional limitation imposed by clandestine operations was the inability to talk directly to any of the 176 teachers whose absence records were reviewed. All school principals were explicit in their desires to keep knowledge of this investigation from their staff members. This was somewhat induced by this investigator who felt it a responsible move to inform principals on all matters concerning confidentiality of records. Assurances were given that nothing personally identifiable about individuals or groups would be reported in the dissertation. These actions seemed to heighten principal's desires to have this study stay aloof of the knowledge of the teachers they supervised.

There are certainly two sides to every story. Though the findings relative to this study's sample spoke fairly well for itself, interpretations for findings were requested of principals during five post-study interviews. Though no analysis of findings was conducted in interviews with affected teachers, questions must be raised concerning their own analysis of findings and the potential they have

for unearthing valuable information. There is no question in the mind of this investigator that undercover operations such as this study many times does not allow a researcher to reach all pertinent resources.

A secondary and final limitation potentially affecting this study is the subjective nature of school principal responses to their analysis of findings. In some instances, it seemed apparent that personal biases were operating when information was being offered. Additionally, prior to data collection and computation of individual rates of total lost time, some principals provided information that was far off the mark about the absence behavior of those they directly supervised.

For example, the majority of principals gave indication that they felt the rate of total lost time to be least for teachers about to retire. This is somewhat true of teachers over age sixty, but those in their mid-fifties who were known by principals to be ending careers in one or two years, actually had some of the highest total time lost rates in this study. These rates were also attained via the occurrence of many single-day absences.

Data obtained for personal and organizational factors occasionally was in sharp contrast to the professed beliefs of immediate supervisors that were emitted prior to analysis of individual records. Therefore, the analysis provided by school principals after findings were reported leads this researcher to raise a small amount of skepticism about

principals later insights. What would have been equally appropriate would have been to review findings directly with teachers. However, it was previously noted that such investigation was a missed feature ruled out when school administrators were initially contacted.

Recommendations for Absence Control in Elementary Schools in Michigan

The findings of this study of teacher absenteeism and the directions given by previous researchers provides a basis for creation of policies and programs directed at reducing elementary teacher absenteeism. However, before a school system sets off on the path of construction of absenteeism controls, it must establish if a problem truly exists.

The findings of this study are ample evidence of variations between systems within a given state region. Additional caution should be taken in judging a problem exists based on the findings of a single building operation within a school system. It is strongly advised that individual rates of total time lost be established for all members within a district operation to assess individual variations. After construction of individual rates, a total staff mean time lost rate and like mean rates for individual building operations should be developed. Only then can decisions be made on whether a problem exists system-wide or in only specific building locations.

A general parameter for judging if mean lost time rates of a teacher group are excessive can be made on the

collective educational research presented in this paper and the additional findings of this study. Mean staff rates assessed to be in the range of total lost time beyond 4.0% signal a problem situation. If the mean rate is just slightly beyond 4.0% (4 - 6%), the management of a system may want to alter only a part of its current operating procedures.

Perhaps only the reporting procedure need be changed or an administrative memorandum be devised to raise concern and call on educators to be mindful of absence abuse. Some principals in this study noted that raising the issue in formal evaluations also got results on a teacher by teacher basis. With any such minor movements by administration in absence control, several months will be needed to judge a change's impact.

Significant losses of time of 7.0%, 8.0% or higher signal the need for formal controls. Once again, the first step in assessing a surmised absenteeism problem is to develop formal data to substantiate its existence. If mean rates are established that indicate system absenteeism is not problematic (4.0% or less) then maybe it is better if only meritorious attendance is addressed. Very possibly, others will follow the example of good attenders who the system reinforces for their meritorious actions.

The nature of elementary education is one of a strongly unionized and represented occupation group. This situation needs to maintain as a primary consideration in

establishing and operating control programs though the actual basis for operating with a union as concerns absenteeism may not be for what appears to be obvious reasons:

The presence of a union does not have a uniform effect on absenteeism. Absenteeism is higher where the union negotiates a paid absence program, provides more job security by reducing management's ability to discipline employees and bargains for linking pay increases to seniority rather than performance. However, the presence of a union might be associated with a lower absenteeism rate because employees with good absence records do not want to support chronic absentees, and the union exerts pressure to weed them out.⁶⁸

Such findings as the above were also a feature of this study. Building administrators observed that those elementary teachers with poor or problematic absence behavior were generally known to other teacher staff and were often times the topic of some ridicule for their poor work record. However, this ridicule was seldom brought to the point of concerted action by the teaching group or, more importantly, by the school administration. Since no policies or guidelines for correcting poor attendance were established, school principals in this study felt little inclination to act on their own accord.

School managers need to understand that the desire for control in teaching staffs may not only be resident but

⁶⁸ Markham, S. & Scott, D. "Controlling Absenteeism: Union and Non-Union Differences," Personnel Administrator, Vol. 30 No. 2, (Feb., 1985), p. 88.

may be easily accessed if appropriate communication and channels are utilized. This will undoubtedly entail direct involvement with union management in a school district.

The most appropriate forum for development of absence controls is the already established procedure for contract bargaining of conditions of employment. The potential existence of a group need for controls of "in-house" offenders should be coupled with the formal bargaining procedure to establish new norms for teacher absence behavior agreed by both teacher union and school boards:

In the case of a renegotiated absence norm, the legal sanctions for new rules would be secured in management-union agreements, which could bring into operation the pressure of group commitment in which the force of an additional form of control - social controls - is added to the legal and instrumental ones.⁶⁹

The establishment of agreed definitions of absence was a problematic situation cited by Muchinsky (1978) and other absenteeism researchers who note this particular area to be a major roadblock to creation of absence control programs. School administrators need to be mindful of the manner in which agreements to absence controls and enforcement parameters are viewed by union members (in the case of teachers) and proceed in a manner akin to any other type of bargaining stance:

⁶⁹ Chadwick-Jones, J. K.; Nicholson, N & Brown C. Social Psychology of Absenteeism. Praeger Publishers, New York, N.Y., (1982), p. 127.

It may be useful to think of absence levels as part of an informal contract between employers and employees. Absences are part of a package, and renegotiating the package would involve concessions, offers and counter-offers between management, unions, and employee representation.⁷⁰

The direction taken in this study as regards the development of a definition of teacher absenteeism seems most appropriate for educational institutions allowing for a variety of paid leave provisions. Including time away from the job elected by the individual employee (sick days, personal business days, bereavement days) and excluding time away not fully under control of the worker (weather days, jury duty, area or building emergency) makes for a simplistic yet equitably definitive method of accounting for lost time.

Accounting for all lost time devoid of the duration of a single illness also seems appropriate given the inability to truly delineate absences which are controllable and those which are not. Accommodating or correcting for absences which are deemed uncontrollable could be the responsibility of an advisory board that regularly reviews absence data of employees in a school system. The formation of such a committee is a proposed feature of a program that will be described later in this section.

The latest developments in absence control programs in the mid-1980's come predominately from private sector

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 125.

experiences. Recent developments utilizing a "no-fault" control scheme show solid promise for better longevity of control programs and wider acceptance by teaching groups:

In its purest form, a "no-fault" system recognizes the inevitability of occasional absence and avoids the supervisory dilemma of judging which absences are excused and which are unexcused, provides a built-in reward system, and offers counseling for individuals with unusually high absence rates.⁷¹

No-fault is promoted by those who employ it as a compilation of the best practices of many absence control programs devoid of an enforcement base that is primarily employer controlled. Current no-fault programs are usually joint sponsored by management and union and are a part of formal contracts.

The author of this paper suggests a modified version of the no-fault absence control program typically employed in industrial work operations for use in education settings. Development of a point system for partial and full-day absences could be established or time lost rates developed on at least a monthly basis could be substituted. In either the case, the following basic characteristics of no-fault systems should be incorporated in a control program in elementary education:

- 1.) A policy of no excused or unexcused absence prior to involvement with an absence control review panel. Teachers would not need to prove the

⁷¹ Olson, D. & Bangs, R. "No-Fault Attendance Control: A Real World Application," Personnel Administrator, (June 1984), p. 53.

legitimacy of their absence nor would administrators be required to determine between acceptable and unacceptable reasons for an absence. Teachers would simply note how they utilized their absence benefits in the time period they were away from regularly scheduled work.

- 2.) A weighting or point system that allots a point or partial-point for a full-day absence, continuous days absent, or partial day of absence. Not informing an administrator one is not coming to work would be penalized heavily.
- 3.) A provision for non-chargeable absences due to such situations as military leave, jury duty, union business, hospital confinement and work-related injury (doctor verified).
- 4.) Rewards for good attendance such as credits to deduct past accumulated points as well as recognition and rewards for educators that meet exemplary rates of attendance.
- 5.) A progressive discipline system that emphasizes corrective actions and counseling prior to any formal discipline action. In many cases, an employer/employee committee would assist in the progressive discipline phase.

As noted, the basic advantage of no-fault for the school district comes in alleviating middle management's having to determine legitimate from non-excused reasons for teacher absence. No-fault may also alleviate the complaints teachers may have of their principals in claiming that preferential treatment has occurred.

It is highly recommended that building principals be alleviated of the verification process in dealing with staff absences. Verification would only be conducted by a joint union/administration committee after data compiled from a central office or absence control headquarters was provided to the committee. Verification would be required by the committee of those teachers whose point allotment was either

exceeded or whose rates of total lost time and types of commissions of absence was viewed as problematic.

The point systems devised in these programs normally are structured to combat the most debilitating problems caused by short duration absences that are usually not illness related. Tardiness in coming to work or leaving early also has partial point weightings that emphasize the importance of reporting to work on time and staying with the job until day's end.

Conflict of opinion in rewarding employees for coming to work is usually limited in these systems when management realizes that the reward is in having poor attendance points erased by continuous weeks to months of employee above average attendance. This component of no-fault systems would also allow the individual teacher to get a handle on the problem by himself/herself prior to being confronted by a review panel or undergoing counseling.

Discipline in no-fault systems is corrective in nature and involves a high degree of counseling by management and in many cases, management/employee counseling teams. The peer pressure in these systems is noted as being an effective control device. Suspension of even a limited nature is avoided and is viewed as being counter-productive to the district's desire to motivate the worker to attend regularly. Termination is provided in most systems but only after the disciplinary and counseling efforts prove to be fruitless.

Termination of employees for excessive absenteeism is recommended to be a pure administrative function in a no-fault program for elementary education. The "duty of fair representation" (DFR) statutes that exist in most state public employment relations laws is seen as a conflict for employer/employee sanctioned committees who venture into termination actions. However, the documented efforts of a joint management/union control group would serve as appropriate attempts to remedy a chronic absenteeism situation prior to administrative recommendations to a tenure commission for termination of a teacher's services.

A proposed absence control program for elementary education should emphasize the importance of employee participation in the development of the system. Olson & Bangs (1984) noted in their investigation of no-fault systems that the standard of acceptable absence constructed by employee groups was in some cases more stringent than that originally constructed by management. The authors further noted that the inclusion of union elected employees in the counseling/disciplinary phase gave an aura of union action and peer pressure for high-absence employees to conform to union/management sponsored goals and objectives.

Both Kuzmits (1981) and Olson & Bangs (1984) indicate that no-fault systems are not for all employment situations. Operations with average to above average rates of attendance probably have no need for such systems. No-fault is

particularity applicable to settings where absenteeism is high and where continual operations is imperative.

A no-fault system for elementary educator absence control requires that parameters for judging rates of exemplary, acceptable, and problematic absence be devised. This investigator recommends the utilization of absence gradients proposed by the Educational Research Service (1980) which were developed by Gaudet (1963) and are utilized in various reports by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of National Affairs.

A gradient of 2.0% or less lost time in a specified period continues to be deemed an "exemplary" rate of absence from regularly scheduled work. Median or average rates of absence have been established by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for our national work force and have been computed to be approximately 3.0-3.5% of work time during the period 1973 to 1985.

Such a median rate is lower than that assessed for teacher groups but it can be readily argued that teacher groups whose rates of total lost time vary greater, but are within a percent of that established by BLS data, are within respectable levels. It has to be kept in mind that BLS data does not count lost time after the fourth day of a single illness, whereas many education studies account for all lost time by individual teachers regardless of the length of a single illness.

It is recommended that the final gradient proposed by ERS (6.0% or greater) not be included in an education absence control or any other for that matter. A designation of a minimal level of acceptance in a control program allows for problem workers to stay within school system mandates while meeting the minimum standard to maintain employment.

What is recommended is the development of a set absence standard of from 3.0% - 4.0% (as negotiated or constructed by joint committee) by which employees are expected to keep as a maximal level of absence prior to records reviews by an absence committee, possible counseling and/or administrative punitive action.

Teachers should be continually appraised of their accumulation of absence points or rate of total lost time. All of the school operations included in this study metered pay to teachers on a biweekly basis. It is suggested that this already established procedure be coupled with notification to teachers of absence data. Absence information could be either inserted with paychecks or paystubs could be modified to insert data.

Current computer technology and software programs allow for the effective management of an absence control program on a rotational 12-month period. This process is recommended over the traditional absence accounting during a set school year calendar. Rotational 12-month periods allow teachers the ability to regain respectable rates and gain recognition for exemplary attendance without having to wait

for the beginning of a new school year. Recommended software programs for management of absence data via the IBM hardware standard are D-Base 3+ and AppleWorks for the Apple computer hardware standard.

As indicated earlier, development of a control committee would be established within the contractually bargained absence control program language in the Master Agreement. It is suggested that an equitable number of both administration and teacher union representatives employed by the school district be on the control panel. This committee should meet monthly throughout the school year to determine if certain employees exceed prescribed cut-off limits, are in need of intervention services or need more extensive verification of long-term illness. This committee would also serve to establish either "in-house" or outside system contacts for specialized counseling services for employees deemed to need such services.

"In-house" counseling of problematic absentees may take the form of one-on-one mentors or job coaches who are also employees of the school system. As indicated earlier, these system helpers will need to structure their involvement with offenders on a positive and corrective action basis. Specific training and/or orientation of such helpers is advised and may be obtained either by involvement in employment relations seminars or conferences.

Training may also be obtained through community mental health organizations, college or university schools

or education or social sciences or teacher organizations such as the National Education Association.

The largest concern about a jointly sponsored union/-management committee is related to control. In such a situation, it can only be hoped that employment relations are stable enough to allow for proper consideration of the ultimate goal of such a program. That being, the consistent delivery of educational services to students.

Such a committee should be weighted in a manner relative to the teaching population served. As a general rule of thumb, it is suggested that one administrator and teacher be appointed to an absence control committee for every 30 (thirty) full-time certified teaching staff in a school system. The time required for records reviews of all instructors in a district would be adequately distributed for a committee if such weighting did not exceed this recommendation. In large districts, committees may need to be formed at the building level or on a marked territory basis for a set of schools in a large district.

The time taken in reviews and involvement with control situations may very well take committee workers beyond the time and scope of their contractual commitments. Monetary compensation for time served on an absence control committee beyond regular work hours or duties should be allotted by school districts. Several of the contracts reviewed in this study required such compensation for

teachers beyond the normal work day. This remuneration is left to the discretion of employing school boards.

The decision to take action on a specific employee should follow a democratic decision process in which at least one-half of the committee members agree to pursue an action. Districts may wish to upgrade this recommendation (60%, 65%, two-thirds majority or more) if such is the outcome from an initial negotiations process that establishes an absence control program.

The most palatable aspect of an absence control program would be the identification of teachers with exemplary time lost rates (2.0% or less). It is recommended that employees be notified quarterly with a small but noticeable written statement of recognition. At the conclusion of the school year or twelve-month cycle, teachers with exemplary rates should be formally recognized by personal letter and/or at least a small token of appreciation afforded by the employing school district.

The establishment of reinforcers for exemplary attendance is a particularly controversial issue as ascertained in districts reviewed in this study. School principals were not supportive on the whole for the establishment of monetary incentives for exemplary elementary teacher attendance. Their contention was that an agreeable rate of pay was established for the work they provided and that this remuneration for services should not be exceeded. Additionally, school principals were certain that local boards of

education would not endorse additional expense for meritorious attendance.

The fact remains that all elementary educators in this study were paid for not reporting to work when they utilized sick leave, personal business days or bereavement leave. One must question why school administrators would not provide a minor financial incentive for not utilizing such paid leave provisions. However, the entire controversy over paid incentives is weakened when research on motivating reinforcers is taken into consideration.

Herzberg (1968) provided school managers with specific insights into what types of reinforcers are most cherished by today's professional work force. Herzberg's work was duplicated by Iannone (1973) in education circles with near parallel results. Simple recognition to employees for achievement of organization goals is seen as one of the most desired motivators for professionals. It is interesting to note that such concrete incentives as monetary reimbursement are rated rather low in comparison to high satisfaction factors that are more abstract and not directly related to financial incentives.

The majority of principals interviewed during the course of this study suggested that at the least, a letter of recognition should be sent to teachers with exemplary rates of absence (2.0% or less absence in a school year or twelve-month rotational cycle). A variety of letters of recognition are presented in the 1981 Educational Research

Service (Arlington, VA) report entitled Teacher Absenteeism: Experience and Practices of School Systems. Any school manager or interested party can access this publication by phoning ERS (703-243-2100).

It is suggested that a letter of recognition signed by the district Superintendent and/or school board representative be forwarded soon after the completion of a given school year or rotational 12 month cycle in which a teacher maintains an exemplary level of absence. The combination of signaturing by district Superintendent and board of education representative was deemed by school principals in this study to be a most appropriate method of signifying the importance of attendance and its endorsement by the major governing entities of a school system.

Additional ideas for reinforcement of exemplary attending elementary educators provided by interviewed principals were:

- 1.) Recognition Certificate;
- 2.) Time away from the job;
- 3.) Recognition dinner;
- 4.) Local newspaper publication of exemplary attenders;
- 5.) Lapel pin or tie tack for achievement.

Several of the above ideas were discussed with principals in post-data collection interviews. Their responses gave indication that many teachers may not want to be openly recognized for their meritorious attendance and in fact, may seek to avoid it. The author of this study concurs with those observations and recommends that recognition observances should most definitely be done but in a

manner that allows a teacher to share his/her recognition in a manner in which they control.

If teachers desire to inform others of their personal accomplishments, then teachers should have the concrete verification (letters, certificate of recognition, etc.) in their hands to display to others their achievements. However, public display by publication, group observance or any manner not under the control of achievers should be carefully researched with those affected teachers prior to conducting such open recognition.

Suggestions for Further Research

It was noted in several portions of this dissertation that the sample of elementary schools utilized in this study was significantly small in relation to the many elementary schools in Michigan. The author of this paper found the collection of data, interviewing of administrators and manipulation of teacher absence registrars into a variety of groupings for fourteen hypotheses to be a major undertaking. However, there remains the wish to duplicate this study on a much broader basis in order to ascertain the validity of the findings in this research project.

It would be highly recommended that a team approach be constructed if duplication of this study were to be undertaken using a significantly larger sample. Such a team might find logistical problems much easier to overcome if members were disbursed about a geographic area (i.e., district, state or region). Disbursement of members would

allow for better sampling in demographic areas of urban, suburban and rural locations. As was noted earlier, this researcher found rural districts to be easier to include because of the shorter distance to such districts. Yet, urban locations became much harder to find because of their remoteness to the investigator.

It is also advisable to utilize the latest in data collection technology as this approach was found to greatly increase the speed at which data could be analyzed once collected. Of course, this suggestion evolves around the use of computers and software programs. Specific suggestions for data analysis and graph construction of results were provided earlier in this chapter.

Duplication of this study should also take place at the middle school, junior and senior high level. Absence behavior patterns of educators at levels above the elementary grades were noted to be less problematic according to the previous review of the literature. It would be interesting to find what associations educators might have in their absence behavior at all K-12 levels in Michigan. Verification of variations of teacher attendance or absence behavior at higher levels might have significant impact on the creation of control programs in a single school district. Such variations might also require specific controls for individual building locations in a single school district.

One strong suggestion for further research in the State of Michigan is based more on an appeal to the Michigan Department of Education (MDE). MDE now has in place a data collection and reporting service providing a plethora of state-wide detailed information on a daily basis to Michigan's 520 local school districts. Information reported by local districts on cost reports, child accounting forms, transportation and a variety of other state reports is gathered on a state-wide basis and disseminated regularly on the basis of state averages and district by district comparisons. Additionally, MDE information services will customize reports as requested by local or intermediate school districts.

One area in which MDE information services is not currently requesting data is in the area of teacher absence or attendance. Yet, justification abounds for collecting absence/attendance data and making comparisons between districts. Personnel costs are the major expenditure area for nearly every district in Michigan and most others in the United States. Questions abound as to why the quality of education varies from school to school and district to district. Assessment of absence or attendance data by MDE on a state-wide basis would give specific locations where investigations could be undertaken to compare and contrast quality of education and truly discern the importance or non-importance of regularity of attendance.

From a national viewpoint, this study was undertaken in part by the Educational Research Service of Arlington, VA in 1980. Since 1980, the interest in absence behavior of educators has steadily grown. Though information on teacher absenteeism was severely lacking prior to 1979, a variety of in-state reviews have taken place in many locations throughout the country. The literature review contained in this dissertation attempted to assemble a variety of investigations from about our country to compare and contrast those findings highlighted in the 1980 ERS report.

In some instances, current doctoral dissertations and individual district's self-analysis concerning teacher absenteeism have shown conflicting findings of those contained in the 1980 ERS report. It is evident that now is the time for ERS to once again undertake the type of thorough investigation conducted nearly a decade ago. Additionally, growing education organizations such as the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (NAESP & NASSP), National Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (NASCD), American Association of School Business Officials (AASBO) and others, now have their own research divisions and could conduct a national review of teacher absenteeism from within their membership.

Aside from suggesting duplication of this study upon larger samples (state, regional and national) and at higher levels above elementary grades, this researcher must

emphasize that the duplication of this study at the individual district and separate building level holds the most promise for positively effecting K-12 education. The building principal or school manager who may be reading this study must realize that a thorough analysis of absence factors existing in their individual buildings and districts will give a variety of clues as to how to better manage their staffs. Even if analysis of school staffs brings forth the ultimate finding that all is well as regards teacher absenteeism at the building or district level, such vindication does well to reinforce current school management practices. However, even in districts or buildings where staff absence is not a problem, duplication of this study will pinpoint teachers with exemplary levels of absence and will allow for proper reinforcement so that others might emulate such behavior.

In conclusion, this investigator must again emphasize that any further research of teacher absenteeism should continue to utilize the basic research measures inherent in this study. Because of the complexities of verifying legitimate from illegitimate teacher absence, the use of total time lost measures should maintain as the primary accounting feature of future research studies involving teacher absenteeism. Such continued use of total time lost measures will allow for better comparability of studies and more reliable accumulative knowledge regarding this subject.

Recommendations for School Managers

Involvement of teacher and school managers in the control of teacher absenteeism is the optimum atmosphere school administrators could hope for. Such collusion would definitely signal to all workers in a school system that regularity of attendance is a top priority. However, gaining the full sanction of teacher groups may be problematic if union management objects on such grounds as duty of fair representation (DFR). In such situations, school managers must continue to take the lead as concerns teacher absenteeism for there are many areas in the administration of school operations where school managers operate to reduce teacher absenteeism and enhance regularity of attendance.

School managers, be they school principals, central office administrators or board of education members, need to assess their district operational procedures and especially attendance registrars. Review should be taken similar to that described in this study (Chapter 3) and it is recommended that a two or three year review of registrars be performed. Such an extended review will bring greater perspective to the behavior of chronic absentees and those whose attendance is consistently regular.

Examination of registrars should also be conducted building by building. The review of the literature in this dissertation noted that the individual building operation many times is influenced by the involvement of co-workers and especially the particular actions of the immediate

supervisor. A variety of studies have shown clearly that immediate supervisor involvement with building staff concerning absence behavior can dramatically decrease building staff absence.

Secondly, school managers need to adopt the gradations for assessment of individual absence as proposed in this study. The parameters developed by Gaudet (1963) and regularly utilized by Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) of 2.0% total lost time (exemplary) and 3.0-3.5% (moderate level of time lost) should be adopted by school systems. Utilization of such parameters would give the basis for assessment of individual performance and give educators goals to acknowledge and strive for.

The results of this study gave indication that 42% of teachers in the sample achieved the goal of 2.0% or less total time lost due to absence in the 1985-86 school year. In eight of the nine districts reviewed, no incentive for exemplary attendance was offered. School managers should not only construct goals for exemplary levels of individual total lost time (2.0% or less) but place a solid reinforcement system into effect. Such reinforcement schemes were earlier discussed in this chapter.

In addition, the ability to achieve a goal of 2.0% or less should be set within an evolving twelve-month cycle. If debilitating illness was experienced by an educator in the middle of a given school year, the ability to achieve

an exemplary level of absence should not be taken away until the conclusion of the next school year.

School managers need to keep in mind that a sizeable portion of total staff absence is normally created by a small portion of staff. In this study, it was found that 20% of staff were responsible for 50% or more of total staff absence. Administrators need to realize that the emphasis placed on absence control is not one in which a majority of staff are to be considered. Such realization makes absence control enforcement a less threatening task for school managers and one which is more easily achievable.

The findings of this study and several other current decade investigations of teacher absence behavior gave indication that an escalation of absence leave use was particularly noticeable for educators aged 40 and above. A variety of explanations have been offered concerning this situation. Accumulation schemes for sick leave are typically capped at the point that many teachers enter their early forties and/or achieve an experience base of approximately fifteen years. Rationale concerning capped teacher leave banks emphasizes that the incentive to accumulate leave is denied at such junctures thus giving teachers the mindset that they are losing leave days.

Competing theories concerning marked increase in leave use for forty-plus aged teachers direct emphasis on the mid-life crisis situations purported to be experienced by both male and female professionals entering this stage of

their lives. Researchers purport that the desire for increased leisure time contributes to increased leave use at mid-life. Whatever the actual causation may be, far more investigation into this phenomena is warranted.

Control programs and reinforcement schemes may not be needed for certain age groups within teaching staffs. The mere fact that new educators need to attain tenure is purported by many education investigators to be a control feature for beginning teachers. School managers need to assess where absence control programs are most effectively employed within the ranks of teaching staffs. Additionally, the placement of reinforcement schemes at problem age or experience levels may provide the basis to negate the type of attitudes about losing days for those teachers who reach the attainable maximum number of accumulated leave days.'

Immediate supervisor involvement in the absence reporting process was noted in this study to be a highly effective practice in reducing teacher absenteeism. School principals need to be the first contact when teachers wish to utilize paid leave.

The fact that school principals need to be involved in the reporting procedure is not well received by those school managers who do not wish to be encumbered by such tasks. The author of this paper notes that in past administrative positions, the infringement on sleep and home life caused by being called by teachers was not a salient aspect of the job of school principal. However, the work involved

in being the primary contact for reporting leave use does not have to be totally shouldered by the school principal.

The reporting process can be handled in a manner in which the procurement of teacher substitutes is not the responsibility of the immediate supervisor. It is advised that the school principal remain as the main contact but that once the total number of absentees is known for the work day he/she contact a service worker who would then procure needed replacements. Such a service could be handled by a secretarial position or contracted with a management company.

Finally, school managers must realize that group processes may influence individual absence leave use. This is especially true in work environments where employees are privileged to paid leave benefits. An openly professed managerial attitude about what is expected of teachers as concerns their attendance behavior coupled with written policy as to expected gradations for total time lost, does much to exert controlling influence on the group.

Mapping or graphing staff absence leave use will illustrate at what points during the school year use of such leave is highest. In cold weather months when leave use is high, administrative influence may not reduce group levels of absence leave use. However, in months such as May, where personal leave use contributes to the majority of leave taken, administrative action may very well significantly

reduce the amount of total leave time utilized by teaching groups.

Ultimately, school managers need to realize that making regularity of attendance or reduction of absence a priority, often times gets results. It is commonplace in nearly all school districts in our nation to find that employee salaries and fringe benefits comprise the majority of expenditure in a given school year. School districts and the students they serve should get the maximum benefit from such major expenditures. It seems only appropriate, therefore, that school administrators be highly responsive to the proper management of the school's biggest expense.

APPENDIX

Name _____
District _____

ADMINISTRATIVE QUESTIONNAIRE

Prerequisites: Access to personal data on staff. _____
Access to 1985-86 attendance records on
staff and administration. _____

1. What is your personal experience in your present position? Total accumulation in education?

2. What is the current staff size for certified teachers working on a full-time basis?

3. Do you consider the district urban, suburban or rural?

4. How do instructors report non-attendance? If to you; what do you request as verification at time of reporting? Is there any request for verification upon employees return?

5. What are your absence control policies? Contractual and personal.

6. What types of personal or system procedure are utilized in absence control in your district and/or building?

_____ Discipline/Monitoring _____ Group
Redesign/Autonomy

_____ Reward/Incentive _____ Behavior
Modification

_____ No-Fault _____ Other (Describe)

7. What times do staff report non-attendance?

8. When do you estimate staff absences as being most frequent? Day of week? Month of year?

9. What are personal day policies (business days)? Restrictions on use? Are such days usually fully utilized by majority of staff?

10. Any staff utilizing an inordinate amount of funeral days of special paid leave provisions in a school year?

11. What do you pay teacher substitutes for a day's work?

12. What do you estimate as the per diem (average) paid to contracted full-time certified teachers in your building? Attendant fringe benefits?

13. What % of total building/district budget do you estimate is spent on staff salary and fringe benefits?

14. What is your current assessment of the supply of available substitute teachers? Is this lack/oversupply shared with teaching staff?

15. Do you make any allowances for flexibility in report and leave times on either a regular or intermittent basis (doctor appts., dentist, sitters, etc.)?

16. Do you have any early retirement provisions in the negotiated contract?

17. Do you notice any higher than usual use of sick leave for teachers about to retire?

18. Do you notice increased use of sick leave by staff immediately after you utilize some leave provision?

19. Do you vocally make regular attendance an issue with either individual staff or in group meetings?

20. Do you feel absenteeism is of concern in your building? Can you give a guess as to the percentage of time lost over the course of a school year on a staff (mean rate) percentage?

Need: Copy of contract if available. _____
 1985-86 school year calendar. _____
 District policies. _____

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