1988

The prevention of truancy handbook for the Alta Loma Elementary School District

Phil E. Robinson

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THE PREVENTION OF TRUANCY
HANDBOOK FOR THE
ALTA LOMA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education - Administrative Option

by

Phil E. Robinson
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HANDBOOK FOR THE

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Phil E. Robinson

APPROVED BY

Advisor: Dr. Keith Dolan

Second Reader: Dr. Thomas Woods

DATE

8-2-88
Truancy and the acceptance of truancy has reached a critical level in the public school system. Students, parents, and staff have the same apathetic views about the subject. The problem of truancy is a nation-wide problem involving many controllable and uncontrollable variables. The solutions to truancy are harder to find than one would think.

This project will review the truancy problem. Through a review of literature and interviewing educators a prevention program was developed.

This handbook is written for the Alta Loma Elementary School District administrators who will be implementing School Attendance Review Teams (SART) at each site. Its main purpose is to enable administrators to have policies and procedures to establish a SART and prevent truancy.

This handbook contains clear policies and processes for implementing and maintaining attendance procedures for the administrators.

Administrators will be able to use and understand the SART approach utilized in the handbook format.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Society pays for poor school attendance! Many pupils who opt to drop out wind up working in low-paying jobs immediately upon leaving school. This problem has not only had grave educational implications, but economic and political as well. If dropouts manage to get employed, unaware of the responsibilities and demands of the labor market, they are at a risk of never living up to their potential, never leading productive lives. In 1980, the study, High School and Beyond, developed by the United States National Center for Education Statistics, showed the categories of employment of California dropouts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>1980 Sophomore Dropouts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawn or odd jobs</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant jobs</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm work</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory work</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled trade</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other manual labor</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office clerical</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hospital health</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gas, carwash</td>
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<tr>
<td>Delivery jobs</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data or not employed</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sample Size ............. 149 133

This study clearly shows that school dropouts or under-educated youths have very poor employment prospects. Couple these statistics with the current high cost of living in our society, and one can see the personal penalties dropouts pay for not completing their education.

The school, more than the community, is the foundation of any effort to improve attendance. From this foundation stem the activities that encourage pupils to attend school. Commitment to attendance improvement at any school depends on school board support, effective administrative action, and staff cooperation.

To encourage pupils to attend and participate in their education, a school must have a well-defined philosophy that is consistent with positive action. School Attendance Review Teams are a necessary part of a school's philosophy and operation. Active participation by the site principal is essential to any attendance program. Effective communication by the principal and his monitoring of activities help establish a community's support and ultimately pupil achievement.

The handbook provides guidelines and directions for improving school attendance. Regardless of the approaches used, there are elements common to any successful program, and, if used consistently, could reduce many of our school attendance problems.
Some Elements of Effective Schools:
- Pupils are expected to attend school.
- The responsibility for regular school attendance is placed on pupils and their parents.
- Parents/Guardians are notified immediately of any absence.
- Policies are enforced consistently and effectively.
- A community awareness exists regarding the negative impact of poor school attendance.
- All affected parties (parents, pupils, staff) are involved in developing school policies.

Background
The Alta Loma Elementary School District is located in San Bernardino County, California. It has a total student enrollment of 6,100 students. There are six elementary schools and one junior high school.

According to the District Office Attendance Clerk, "We lose less than 1% of monies in ADA."\(^2\) 99.19% was the figure reported to the state in 1985-86 for reimbursement. This information leads one to believe that truancy is not a problem in the Alta Loma School District.

This author rejects that type of thinking; any student failing to attend is a truancy problem. If only 1% of our

\(^2\)Mrs. Teri Campbell, Alta Loma District Office
student population were truant, then that would result in 61 students not receiving an education that day.

The problems potential dropouts face are varied and complex. Early identification of pupils at the elementary level can definitely help to alleviate future difficulties in high school.

Bloom wrote in Stability and Change in Human Characteristics that "... 75 percent of a child's achievement pattern has been developed by age thirteen." He stated that age nine was the most important period for academic achievement. This should suggest that the first period (Grades K-5) of elementary school is the most crucial period to public schools for the development of good learning patterns. By the time a youngster has reached junior high school or high school and has established an irregular attendance pattern, it is very difficult to remedy the situation.

Every day a child is improperly absent, the school loses revenue. Hence the school program is financially diluted for those children who do attend. Many districts lose hundreds of thousands of dollars annually because of truant students. When children do not attend school, all children lose.

Attendance improvement is not a popular activity with

most administrators and teachers. Yet, if something is to be done, all parties must be dedicated to the effort. Intervention must occur early on if success is to be experienced.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to compose a handbook which will be sound, concise, practical, and efficient for school administrators to plan and implement a School Attendance Review Team for all schools within the district.

The handbook will contain guidelines and strategies to assist administrators in preparing their schools for the prevention of truancy before it begins.

The emphasis of the handbook will be on prevention and implementation of School Attendance Review Teams (SART) in elementary and junior high school. The handbook assumes the reader has a limited background in attendance problems.

Proposed Steps

In preparing the "Prevention of Truancy Handbook," the author has proposed to the Alta Loma Elementary School District that this handbook be adopted throughout the district as an effective truancy prevention program.

The necessary steps in having the handbook adopted are:

1. Present the rough draft to the principals of Alta Loma Elementary School District for screening;

2. If accepted by the Principals, refer the handbook to the District Pupil Personnel Supervisor who will also
screen it;

3. If accepted by the District Pupil Personnel Supervisor, present it to the District Superintendent for final screening;

4. If approved by the Superintendent, recommend the handbook for the Board of Education;

5. The Board of Education then must accept and approve the handbook as operational procedure throughout the district.

(Note: All authors of material must present their projects to the Board of Education in person and give an explanation of all procedures.)

Definitions

The definitions for this glossary were obtained from the following sources:

D. California Senate Bill 1742.
E. California Education Code 48262.

Dropout: person who leaves school before completing his/her studies. (C)

Truancy: a student's unexcused absence without a parent's permission. (B)
Habitual Truant - any pupil is deemed an habitual truant who has been reported as a truant three or more times per school year. (E)

SARB - School Attendance Review Board.
SART - School Attendance Review Team.
CHAPTER II
Review of Literature

Truancy Prevention

Nationally, there are an estimated 700,000 pupils who drop out of high schools and another 300,000 who are identified as habitually truant. One out of every four pupils entering the eighth grade will drop out of school before graduating; the ratio jumps to two out of four in the inner cities.\(^4\)

The magnitude of the problem nationwide has caused concern among educators and policy makers. In general, this concern is based on the prediction that serious economic and social consequences will result for those who fail to obtain a high school diploma. Moreover, it is argued that the civic and economic welfare of the nation is dependent on a universally high level of education attainment. Thus, for the benefit of both individuals and society, it is assumed that youth should remain in school until high school graduation.

Although the school dropout rate has been on the rise in recent years, viewed historically, it is relatively low, even today. In 1900, for example, about 90% of the male youth in this country did not receive a high school diploma.\(^4\)

By 1920 the non-completion rate for males was still 80%, and it was not until the 1950's that the dropout rate fell below 50 percent. By the mid to late 1960's the dropout rate reached its low point, and since then the rate for early school leaving has risen.5

California illustrates the recent trend. In 1967, only 12 percent of the students left school before graduation. By 1970, the rate had risen to 17 percent; by 1972 it had climbed to 20 percent; in 1976 the rate was 22 percent.6
In 1985 the California Assembly Office of Research revealed that 30 percent of pupils in California public schools leave prior to completing the 12th grade. Statistics relating to disadvantages and low-income youth are even higher.

This country's entry-level labor pool, which is made up of 14-24 year olds, is of poor quality. The lack of skills in this population significantly increases training costs for the business sector. For example, in 1985, businesses spent $40 million to teach employees remedial reading, writing and math.7

Society also pays a price for poor school attendance. For example, welfare expenditures attributable to inadequate


6Ibid.

education are at an all-time high. Recent trends in adolescent pregnancy and parenthood are of particular concern. The public cost of teenage pregnancy is extremely high. There is an increasing tendency for young, unmarried teenagers to keep and raise their children. These children face a lifetime of poverty. According to Education USA, present trends indicate that, if unchecked, by 1990 this group will be receiving $39.6 billion in aid to families with dependent children.  

Society also pays a price through costs of juvenile delinquency resulting from truancy. School truancy has long been regarded as being a strong indicator of potential delinquency. A review of the literature also points to overcrowded schools with large classes as being prone to low student achievement, and to being high in truancy, crime, and vandalism.  

Recent studies, not as yet released by the California Youth Authority, indicate that 34 percent of eighth graders who were truant on three or more days out of a week were found to have referrals to county probation by the age of eighteen.


9Espinoza, R., and Ochoa, A., The Impact of Selected Variables on Student Achievement, (San Diego: Social Equity Center, San Diego State University, 1984).

These studies all seem to indicate that youths who are involved in criminal activity more often are either truant or have already dropped out of school. If enrolled in school, these students appear to have little regard for education.

Pupils are truant or drop out for a variety of reasons. There are several generalizations that describe high school dropouts based on research literature from four national studies utilizing longitudinal data: Project Talent, Youth in Transition, National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience, and High School and Beyond.¹¹

The two background characteristics that are most strongly related to dropping out are socio-economic status and race. Students of lower socio-economic status have higher dropout rates than high socio-economic status students.¹² Dropping out occurs more often among Hispanics than among blacks, and more often among blacks than whites.¹³


Low scores on standardized tests have been found to be good predictors of dropouts. Academic failure, as indicated by low grades, is also consistently related to dropouts. Students who become dropouts have been shown to be dissatisfied with school and to have lower self-esteem. Student behaviors that have been found to be associated with dropouts include delinquency and truancy. Other researchers have pointed out the role that employment during high school and pregnancy play in dropping out.

Contrary to popular belief, students do not drop out of school as the result of spur-of-the-moment decisions. T. L. Millard suggests that the dropout is "a person with serious personality and environmental conflicts, rather than an immature personality who simply decides to walk away from his responsibilities." In 1981, Wayne Mayhood stated, "... virtually all researchers agree that one of the single most significant sources of dropping out of school is poor reading ability."

14Natriello, Gary (Editor), School Dropouts, Patterns and Policies, (Columbia: Teachers College Press, 1987).

15Ibid.


In 1981, the Kentucky State Department of Education listed facts identifying potential dropouts. The subjects came from both rural and urban areas.

1. Dropouts were more likely from broken homes.
2. Parents' education level was low.
3. Lower income families.
4. Had more older siblings than non-dropouts.
5. More older siblings who dropped out.
6. Dropouts were retained in a grade more often.
7. Dropouts participated in less extra-curricular activities.\(^\text{18}\)

Three general reforms of policy and practice are necessary if schools are to respond to these problems and perform the social mandate with which they are entrusted.

1. A renewed effort toward all students;
2. A renewed effort to establish legitimate authority within the institution;
3. A re-definition of school work for students and teachers that will allow a greater number of students to achieve success and satisfaction and to continue their schooling. In schools that experience success in crime and truancy reduction, data shows certain common concepts are

well-defined philosophies that state students can learn and teachers can teach; followed by actions that demonstrate high expectations for everyone in the school setting; teachers use their expertise to find successful teaching strategies for those students most at risk of not succeeding; and positive attitudes and respect for students permeate the learning environment; pupils are not ridiculed or ignored but assisted if they need special help; a strong sense of community exists, thus strengthening a feeling of ownership in the successful functioning of the school.

Through review of literature and interviewing educators, ten characteristics of effective student retention programs were identified. These characteristics are as follows:

1. Students who are potential dropouts are identified early.

2. The organizational structure of the program is well organized and advances realistic expectations.

3. The selection of appropriate staff is crucial to the success of the retention program.

4. Innovative teaching and counseling methods, such as team teaching and the "buddy system" seem to work well with at-risk students.

5. Programs with a special focus tend to interest the potential dropouts.

6. Programs select who will voluntarily work within
the program structure.

7. Students, faculty, and administration appreciate the retention program's role within the institution.

8. The administration demonstrates flexibility and open-mindedness toward the program's operation and funding requirements.

9. Involvement of the community helps to enrich educational experiences for the students and to reinforce the relevance of education.

10. Awareness of substance abuse is built into the retention program, since drugs often compound dropouts' problems.¹⁹

CHAPTER III
The Prevention Program

Goals

The major goal of this handbook is to enable school administrators to establish a simplified step-by-step process to establish effective and efficient School Attendance Review Teams (SARTS). This plan presents a school attendance program that emphasizes early identification, prevention, and remediation while encouraging excellent and improved habits of good attendance.

The materials offered throughout the handbook are primarily low cost methods that, if aggressively implemented in a positive manner, can reduce absenteeism significantly. Knowing the characteristics and reasons why pupils do not attend school helps educators gain a better understanding of the dropout phenomenon and provides a basis for modifying or developing programs that either encourage pupils to remain in school or assist dropouts once they have left school.

This handbook has also been prepared with the understanding that solutions to absenteeism and dropout prevention require that responsibility be shared by those affected. Although it is the responsibility of the pupil to attend school and to perform to his/her fullest potential, it is still the adults' responsibility to assist that youngster in assuming his/her responsibilities.
Outline of Sessions

The author became aware of the need for a handbook that would provide the establishment of a SART at Alta Loma Junior High School in the 1988-89 school year. Mr. Harry L. Irwin, Assistant Principal of that school, recommended that a How-to-Handle Handbook on truancy prevention be constructed.

The author has a wide background with the School Attendance Review Board, but little experience with implementing a new district policy concerning truants. Mr. Irwin and the author stated our concerns to Mr. James E. Dyer, Principal of Alta Loma Junior High School, and he recommended that we use him as a major source of information since he knew the current attendance policy.

Mr. Dyer recommended that we contact Mr. Dean R. Enfield and Mrs. Teri Campbell at the district office concerning the feasibility and procedure to change district policy from SARB to SART as an initial effort to contain truancy. A meeting with Mr. Enfield, Alta Loma Personnel/Pupil Personnel Administrator, and Mrs. Teri Campbell, District Director of Accounting/Attendance, was arranged. At the meeting they explained that the Board would have to grant permission to establish a SART for the 1988-89 school year.

When the handbook is adopted by the school district, the author will propose in-service training sessions for the elementary principals. The author will explain the handbook, give suggestions, and answer questions they might have. In-
cluded in these meetings will be a Feedback Evaluation Form.* The information will be used to improve the handbook to better meet with administrators' needs.

Follow-Up

The proposed steps for the "Prevention of Truancy Handbook" for the Alta Loma Elementary School District will be field-tested at Alta Loma Junior High School during the months of January-March 1989.

Bi-monthly evaluations will be set up between the principal, attendance clerk, and the author to see if the handbook allows for easy explanation and utilization of attendance procedures, or, if steps should be re-designed to explain information more clearly.

Evaluation

Information will be obtained from the principal and the attendance clerk at Alta Loma Junior High School. The feedback information will determine if the actual use of this handbook is effective, or, if other measures are needed to improve the handbook. At the end of the sample time, the author will send a formal Re-evaluation Form** to the principal, the attendance clerk, and the committee members who worked with the project to finalize the handbook. The author will then submit the final written project for the approval of the district via the process of our on-site principal,

*(seen as Appendix B)
**(seen as Appendix C)
Administrator of Personnel, Superintendent, and Board of Education.

Resources

Alta Loma Junior High School, James E. Dyer (Principal)

Alta Loma Junior High School, Harry L. Irwin (Assistant Principal)

Alta Loma Junior High School, Mrs. Nancy Woolf (Attendance Clerk)

Alta Loma Elementary School District, Dean R. Enfield, (Administrator of Personnel/Pupil Personnel)

Alta Loma Elementary School District, Mrs. Teri Campbell (Director of Accounting)

Los Angeles County Office of Education, (Division of Evaluation, Attendance, and Pupil Services)
CHAPTER IV
Conclusions

The utilization of the handbook*, if properly followed, will allow the elementary and junior high school principals of the Alta Loma Elementary School District to transfer their schools from a SARB procedure to a SART prevention system. The procedures that the handbook explains in a step-by-step format gives each school site principal the means to understand the SART system and its implementation.

There is a growing emphasis by the Board of Trustees of the Alta Loma Elementary School District for school site administrators to be educational leaders, not merely plant managers. The school site principals are being caught up in the time-consuming SARB system and have been unsuccessful in their attempts to control truancy.

The handbook does not describe to the school principals all the characteristics of potential truants. School site principals should allow themselves the opportunity to learn more about the patterns and policies of dropouts. Learning said information could bring school sites closer to providing quality education to all young people.

Recommendations

These recommendations are considerations and strategies for the user of this handbook and for those who are interested

*(seen as Appendix A)
in applying the prevention of truancy program for the elementary and/or secondary level:

1. Do not rush staff to complete their education of truancy prevention. Time cures all anxiety and fear when information is learned in steps.

2. Raise the status of the attendance clerk, and inform the staff of the amount of ADA per student.

3. Instruct each school staff on the new attendance policy so that teachers can be familiar with the system before it is implemented on the school site.

4. Train all administrators and attendance clerks with in-service on truancy prevention. All the necessary training steps and terminology in connection with the SART program must be fully explained.

5. Inform the staff of the purpose, as well as the benefits, of the program.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

THE PREVENTION OF TRUANCY HANDBOOK
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CLOSING THE TRUANCY LOOPHOLES -
A COMPLETE APPROACH

This composite plan presents an ideal school attendance program. It emphasizes prevention and remediation, and it encourages excellent and improved attendance. It describes a step-by-step approach to establishing School Attendance Review Teams and outlines various levels of intervention Purposes:

- To prevent pupils' absences.
- To reduce or eliminate chronic absenteeism.
- To recognize excellent and improved attendance.
- To involve parents and other community members.
- To establish effective School Attendance Review Teams (SARTS).

Administrators, attendance clerks, interested staff, counselors, pupils, and parents should form a committee to improve attendance. The committee assesses current attendance procedures and makes any necessary improvements. For example, teachers and administrators at the junior high listed ways that pupils "beat the system" and cut classes without being discovered. This list was duplicated and placed in each teacher's attendance book. It was especially useful for new teachers and substitutes. Methods may include:

- Coming to school late, picking up late card, then not reporting to class. Pupils will not be on the
- Stating that teachers, administrators, or office staff detained them on the way to class.
- Reporting to the office without a pass during passing periods and not notifying secretaries. Often these pupils will wait 1-2 periods without letting anyone know they are there.
- Stating they have counseling.
- Going to the nurse without a pass. Often there is no real problem.
- Stating that they have music lessons, band, or stage crew.
- Encouraging pupils taking roll to declare them present, especially with substitutes.
- Taking advantage of substitutes not familiar with routine.
- Getting sent to the office with referral, then not showing up.
- Claiming they are pupil aides.
- Leaving classes to go to lockers or bathroom without permission slips.

Committee members then make a special effort to develop and share strategies that will block pupils from using these tactics.

The committee develops a list of incentives to reward excellent or improved attendance. For example, the following
approach was developed for elementary grades:

- Each day, classes that achieve a 100 percent attendance rate will be awarded one point.

- Tardies, after more than five minutes, will be counted as absences, but early departures from school due to illness, injury, medical appointments, or other acceptable reasons will not.

- At the end of each month, the class in each of the lunch periods that has accumulated the most points, and hence has the highest attendance rate, will be seated at a special "Honor Table" and will be presented with a plaque or trophy that will remain in its classroom for the coming month.

At the beginning of the school year, the school sends a letter to parents informing them of attendance procedures and asking their cooperation:

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Regular school attendance is important if a child is to achieve his or her full potential. As the new year begins, we urge you to make extra effort and sacrifices to ensure that your pupil establishes a regular attendance pattern. We congratulate those pupils and parents who are already meeting this goal.

The attendance office will periodically review each pupil's attendance pattern. Parents will be promptly notified if there is concern that the student's absence is threatening his or her educational progress.

If there is a medical problem that the school might assist you with, please feel free to call me at ___.
It is our belief that the school and parent working together can help our young people successfully pursue their educational development. Any assistance you can provide will be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely yours,

Assistant Principal

At the same time, the administrator sends a letter to all local businesses informing them that a new attendance program is being instituted. The letter, which mentions school hours and holidays, solicits recipients' cooperation by asking merchants to turn away what are obviously school-age youngsters from their stores during business hours. The committee encourages good attendance and reports progress to parents through a regular newsletter.
ATTENDANCE POLICY

Parent Information Sheet - Sample

The Board of Trustees recognizes that regular attendance is of the utmost importance in the total development of your child.

Attendance reporting procedures of parents:

1. Excused absences

A. Illness, medical appointments, death in the immediate family.
   Parents are asked to call the school office on the day of return to school.

B. Appearance in court, observance of a holiday or religious ceremony, or family emergencies.
   Parents are asked to notify the school principal in writing prior to the absence. If an emergency situation prohibits prior notification, the written statement will accompany the student upon return to school.

2. Unexcused absences

If a student must be out of school for any reason not listed under excused absences, i.e. family vacation or travel, parents are requested to contact the school principal prior to the absence, to develop an Independent Study Program.
Note: Any student who is absent from school without a valid excuse more than three days or tardy in excess of thirty minutes on each of more than three days in one school year is a truant and shall be reported to the attendance supervisor.

3. Extended illness

When an illness may require a student to be out of school three or more weeks, parents are asked to obtain a note from their doctor requesting a home teacher. Parents simply bring the note to the school site, and a home teacher will be assigned.

4. Request for assignments

Requests for assignments for absent students can be made by calling the school office. Please make homework requests twenty-four hours in advance of picking up the work and arrange for homework the third day of an extended absence.

FACTS RELATED TO NON-ATTENDANCE

- Parents allow their children to be absent more on Mondays and Fridays.

- Parents allow their children to stay home on rainy days, inclement weather, and the day after a school holiday.

- Students who ride the bus to school are absent more frequently than students within walking distance from the school.
- Students who do not eat breakfast are in attendance less often.

LOVE YOUR CHILDREN ... KEEP THEM IN SCHOOL!

The Attendance Committee develops procedures to improve attendance of serious absentees. The following is an example of remedial interventions developed for an elementary school but suitable for all grades.

Identification of Target Pupils

All pupils' attendance records are to be reviewed two months into the school year. Those pupils who, at that time, have demonstrated an absent rate equal to or in excess of 15 percent will be designated as target pupils for remedial interventions.

Intervention Levels

1. Level 1

a. A letter is sent to a youngster's parent(s) upon initial identification of him or her as a target pupil. The letter outlines the concerns of the school, vis-a-vis the pupil's attendance and its effects on the child's education. A general request for assistance is made, and the parent(s) are asked to sign the letter and return it to the school.

b. A file is opened indicating the child's attendance rates and all actions taken.
c. A follow-up review of the child's attendance rate is made three weeks after the first letter is sent to parents.

2. Level 2

This level of intervention is in order if, at the time of the third-week followup, there has not been a satisfactory improvement in the target pupil's attendance.

a. A second letter is sent arranging a parent conference, which is held to develop contracts or other arrangements deemed necessary to bring about the desired improvement in attendance.

b. A follow-up review is again conducted three weeks later to determine what, if any, improvement in the pupil's attendance has been achieved.

3. Level 3

a. If no significant improvement in the pupil's attendance has occurred after the second level of intervention and its follow-up, a third letter is sent. It informs the parent(s) of the failure of previous attempts to improve the child's attendance and of the necessity of turning the matter over to the district's School Attendance Review Team (SART).

b. SART is informed of the status of the target pupil and presented with all relevant informa-
tion from the file developed during the school's interventions.

Committee members share with other staff members ways in which teachers can improve the attendance of chronic absentees. This can be handled through an in-service workshop.

Administrators ask teachers to discuss in detail the new attendance procedures, and the rewards and penalties involved, with students during one class period. The teachers follow an outline developed by the Attendance Committee.

School Attendance Review Teams (SARTS) are also organized at each school site to deal with chronic attendance problems that are detected early enough for effective intervention. The following pages provide a model for establishing effective SARTS.
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAMS (SARTS)

School Attendance Review Teams (SARTS) are organized in local schools where problems need to be detected at an early stage. SARTS have become really effective in large districts where there is a need to explore all solutions to a problem before it escalates. SART serves two purposes: 1) it allows problems to be quickly identified and resolved on an informal, yet diagnostic approach. It also personalizes the total intervention and remediation process at the local level; 2) by resolving many smaller problems of a more general nature at the SART level, the quality of the SARB referrals becomes highly substantive involving the addressing of "special" needs by specific coordinated community agencies.

It is the intent of the SART that the parent/guardian become involved in the school's effort to resolve the pupil's problem. If the problem is not resolved at the local school site, or there is demonstrated a definite lack of parental cooperation, the matter is then referred to the School Attendance Review Board. Usually, if two attempts to resolve an issue at the SART level have failed, or if parents have not responded, a referral can then be made to the School Attendance Review Board.

Procedure

Suggested SART Members:
- Chairperson - principal or designee
- Vice principal
- Counselor
- Attendance personnel
- Parent representative (community parent)
- School psychologist or nurse

The SART members will meet and discuss alternative plans for remediating the students' problems, utilizing resources within the school programs. The student who is being considered is one who has presented serious attendance problems or marked behavior problems. Parents are always urged to appear at this meeting.

It is suggested that a SART conference be held after each report card period or sooner to monitor student progress and to:

- Review attendance record
- Review grades
- Review behavioral referrals
- Review cum folder
- Mail notification of meeting, date, time, and place to the parent/guardian
- Phone parent/guardian day of meeting as a reminder

SART Process:

SART members discuss the problem with the pupil and parent/guardian. Often a contract is signed by a pupil and
parent/guardian that binds them to an agreement that the student will improve in his/her attendance and/or behavior. The parent/guardian, therefore, will support and monitor the progress at home. The school administrator or SART chairperson who issues the contract will also sign. Also, the student's counselor and teachers should be viewed as important resources when their students are subject cases.

Options Available to SART

The options that are available to SART come from the school and community resources which SART members reflect. Some corrective measures that can be employed in addition to those created by the SART are:

- Student counseling
- Referral by school psychologist to a professional counseling service
- Program change
- Opportunity class
- Partial-day program
- Weekly or bi-weekly attendance and/or behavior reports
- Referral to appropriate community agencies

INFORMATION FOR PARENT/GUARDIAN AND PUPIL

Our School Attendance Review Team (SART) is designed to assist pupils who are experiencing behavioral and/or school attendance problems. The assistance this Team provides is in the form of working with parents, school and local community
resources as alternative solutions to utilizing the Juvenile Justice System. Our SART includes representatives from education and other helpful individuals and agencies.

It is extremely important that the parent/guardian accompany the pupil to the scheduled appointment. If the problem cannot be resolved locally, or for lack of pupil or parental cooperation with our SART (non-attendance, etc.), the matter will be referred to the district School Attendance Review Board for a conference that can result in serious consequences.

Pre-SART Considerations at the School Level

In the attempt to identify and resolve problems of attendance and behavior, the author would begin with the personnel at the local school site.

1. The teacher, the principal, and the attendance clerk are the key persons who would be aware of problems of irregular attendance and/or inappropriate behavior of pupils in the elementary years. In some schools other knowledgeable and involved personnel are also very helpful, e.g. developmental teacher. As a pupil progresses to the secondary levels, the counselor, the assistant or vice principal, and the teachers become aware of the more severe problems of attendance and behavior.

2. A "team approach" to consider ways to help is a beginning in the attempt to identify problems of attendance and behavior. Some helpful suggestions are:
- Confer with concerned school staff regarding the pupil. This could include the teacher, principal/assistant principal, nurse, counselor, or others. Review the pupil's cumulative record. If a guidance study or evaluation has been made, look carefully for any "clues" it might reveal, and follow through on recommendations if needed, and when possible.

- Utilize all school resources for the best interests of the pupil; e.g. referral to counselor, school nurse, school psychologist, change of teacher(s), change of program, shortened day, adjustment classes, opportunity classes, continuation classes, special projects or programs, or any other appropriate alternatives.

- Confer with parents and pupil at home as well as in school conferences. Observation of the home environment is essential; i.e., siblings in the home, adults other than parents, neighborhood, recreational opportunities, study opportunities, etc.

- Determine if family is known to public agencies such as Public Health, Child Protective Services, DPSS, Probation Department, law enforcement, etc. This procedure could eliminate duplication of efforts.

- Direct family to appropriate outside agencies, doctors, clinics, counseling agencies, youth services,
DPSS, Probation Department, health services, etc.

Note: When the above and other additional efforts are ineffective in resolving the pupil's problem, referral to the School Attendance Review Team would normally be appropriate.
SART CONFERENCING WITH DYSFUNCTIONAL PARENTS

This is a first attempt at providing SARTS/SARBS with examples for identifying tactics some dysfunctional parents use when confronted at SART/SARB conferences. Not all parents at SARTS/SARBS meetings exhibit these behaviors or use these tactics. However, with parents who are most unreliable, certain characteristics can be predictably observed. To the extent that SART/SARB members can observe and block these maneuvers inversely increases the likelihood of altering, defusing, or redirecting a negative conference.

The following pages present samples of maneuvers used by these parents in conferences. They include:

- Telling the panel what it wants to hear
- Confusing the issue
- Using vagueness
- Minimizing an issue
- Diverting an issue
- Agreeing with everyone
- Employing an adversary attitude

Maneuver A: Telling Panel What it Wants to Hear

The parent tells the panel members what the parent thinks they want to hear.

Illustration

- The parents appear to respond thoughtfully and sincerely to make panel think that what they are saying is having an impact.
- The parents will appear to have sudden insight about what is being said and will even use all the proper words and appear overly cooperative.

Suggested Intervention Strategies

- Be professional. Do not undermine the possibility for serious discussion. But don't be gullible and expect great things from the parents.
- Question the parents to see if they see the ramifications of what they are saying and how it relates to the child's improvement.
- Ask the parents to specify verbally the consequences of non-compliance. Ask the parents to explain to the group what actions will be taken by 1) the student, 2) the parents, 3) the school, and 4) the SART/SARB.

Maneuver B: Confusing the Issue

The parent will confuse the issue to avoid being held accountable.

Illustration

- The parents know the truth will work against their best interests and, therefore, will try to avoid a "penalty" or to increase the possibility of a quick non-productive meeting.
- The parents will blame others such as the school, the teacher, DPSS, County Probation, or even each other.
- Very often what is not said is more important than what is said (lies of omission). The parents will disclose only what benefits their family and often omit vital information.

Suggested Intervention Strategies

- Be professional. If you suspect something less than the truth, do not play "cops and robbers" with the parents unless the immediate situation actually demands investigation, such as, for example, in a visibly obvious child abuse case.

- If you suspect there's more to the story than what you are hearing, you might say in a non-accusatory tone, "I feel you are not telling me something," or "I think you are taking us away from the point," or "You are trying to confuse us rather than deal with the problem."

- Remember, this is an attempt to clear oneself. By distorting and confusing, the parent can easily twist the facts to their advantage.

- Be aware of verbal clues: "To tell you the truth," or "To be honest." Clues like these should trigger your "antennae" immediately and warn you of a possible tactic.

Maneuver C: Vagueness

The parent will use vagueness as opposed to lying to "skirt the issue."
Illustration
- The parent will come equipped with a bag full of verbal clues such as:
  "Perhaps"
  "Yes, you could say ..."
  "Sometimes"
  "In a way"
  "I guess"
  "To a degree"
  "Not necessarily"

Suggested Intervention Strategies
- Be professional. Most people use these phrases when they are sincerely unsure of themselves, but the hard-to-deal-with parents will adroitly use these as defenses against you. Once you determine the level of sincerity, proceed cautiously.
- Point out succinctly to the parents what they are doing: e.g. "Mrs. Jones, you say 'Perhaps' when you really know the answer. Is this your way of saying you don't want to talk about it? This approach will yield further clues helpful to the process.

Maneuver D: Minimization
The parents will use the art of "minimization" when they are clearly up against a wall. Rather than to admit a violation of allowing the student to stay at home for indefinite periods,
the parents may minimize the whole issue by saying, "I didn't think it was such a big deal ...," or "The baby has been sick and I felt that if Mary stayed home ... Mary tells me that all they do in class is watch videos anyway."

Suggested Intervention Strategies
- Be professional. But, don't let them get off the hook. This is all part of the problem.
- Point out to the parents that someone is hurt by it (in this case the child). Name those that are inconvenienced and quote the law.
- Tell the parents, "What is not a big deal to you is a big deal to the school, this panel, the child, and society."

Maneuver E: Diversion
The parents very often will use diversion as a "tactic" to divert attention by bringing to the conference irrelevant material, information, or conversation, e.g., "I want him to go to school ... he can walk ... remember when we used to walk six miles in the rain, and ..." --- a lengthy, friendly exchange occurs (war stories).

Another diversion is to recount for the panel all the good deeds and qualities of the child in question.
Invoking the racial issue is usually the "ace" the parents save as a last resort. Race is always a sensitive issue
that most people choose to avoid. The parents easily take
the offensive with charges of racism after they have failed
to gain control of the conference. This is always difficult
to deal with. Proceed with caution and keep refocusing on
the issue.

Suggested Intervention Strategies

- Be professional - keep bringing the parents firmly
  back to the issue. Tell the parents, "What you did
  as a child has nothing to do with the issue at hand."  
  Do not let irrelevant conversation get the panel away
  from the current issue.

Don't deny a student's good qualities when presented
by a parent. However, make it clear that the student
is not before a hearing panel for those qualities.
Let it be known (professionally) that his/her excel­
 lent piano playing will not relieve him/her of his/
h er responsibility to attend school (or whatever the
case may be.)

Maneuver P: Agreeing

Panel members are often fooled by a tactic in which the par-
ent(s) appear to be agreeing or acquiescing. This tactic
often serves two purposes:

- First, by not offering any opposition to the panel,
  the parents place themselves at the mercy of the
  panel, thereby cutting the discussion short. Nothing
was risked, but nothing was gained.
- Second, by acquiescing, the parents do not anger and alienate the members and advance their cause by being "sincere" and "honest."
- Be aware of verbal clues like:
  "You're right."
  "I guess so."
  "Gee, I never thought of it that way."
  "It sure makes sense to me; let's do it."
  "Did you hear that, Johnny?" (talking to the child)

Suggested Intervention Strategies
- There is nothing you can do except listen to your inner attitude and experience.
- Try asking the parents if they clearly understand what they are agreeing to.
- Don't get all excited when parents agree. You might say, "I'm not sure if you understand what you are agreeing to or if you really mean it. Time will tell!

But to make certain your child benefits from this meeting, we will write in a contract everything you agreed to do.
We will review this case again on ________, and if you violated the contract, we will be prepared to ________."
Maneuver G: Adversary Attitude

Often parents will use an adversarial attitude to gain an advantage in the conference. The panel members are regarded as adversaries who are to be overcome.

Illustration

- Parents will come equipped to the meeting with reams of data (notes from doctors, dates of when the teacher scolded the child, etc.) to make the school look incompetent.

- Parents try to embarrass the attendance worker or the counselor by successfully supporting, or at least seemingly so, their accusations and triumphing over "the system".

- Often a "community activist" may be invited to provide support for the parents.

Suggested Intervention Strategies

- Be professional. If you made a mistake, it is always best to admit it and move on.

- You must have a thicker skin and avoid feeling threatened. Avoid sarcasm or any form of anger. It is not your problem; remember this is a tactic of the parents and an expression of their personality.

Be sensitive of the "dysfunctional family" concept and there will be relatively few surprises.
REFOCUSING THE CONFERENCE

REFOCUS THE ISSUE BACK TO THE PARENTS

- "What are you going to do to turn this problem around?"
- "Regardless, the fact still remains that ..."
- "Nevertheless, your child is ..."
- "Are you willing to attend school with ..."
- "We want your cooperation in ..."
- "It is imperative that starting today ..."
PARENTAL NOTIFICATION OF ATTENDANCE PROBLEM (SAMPLE)

Date
Dear

It has come to our attention that (Pupil's Name) absences are numerous and exceed acceptable standards. It is very important that you make every effort to see to it that your child attends school on a regular basis.

If (Pupil's Name) school attendance does not show marked improvement, it will be necessary for his/her case to be referred to an Attendance Review Board.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at school.

Sincerely,

Principal
PARENTAL NOTIFICATION OF TRUANCY (SAMPLE)

Date ________

Dear ______________:

This letter is to inform you that _______ (Pupil's Name) ________ has been declared a truant in the ___________ School District as defined in Education Code 48260.

You, as the parent/guardian, are obligated by law to compel the attendance of your child at school. Your failure to meet this obligation may result in an infraction and be subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 48290).

If your child's school truancies continue, you and your child will be requested to attend a School Attendance Review Board meeting, in accordance with ED 48320.

Your cooperation in correcting this problem is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Principal
AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF STUDENT INFORMATION (SAMPLE)

Date ____________________

AUTHORIZATION FOR RELEASE OF INFORMATION TO THE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAM AT ____________________ SCHOOL.

I, ________________________, the parent or guardian of ________________________, birthdate ____________________

hereby authorize the release of the student's records to the School Attendance Review Team.

I understand that school personnel, a parent, and ______ will be represented on the team.

The released records will be used only in the performance of duties as defined by law. This meeting is for the purpose of improving the student's school adjustment, with particular reference to attendance and behavior.

This authorization shall remain in force until withdrawn by me in writing.

Signed ____________________

Signature of parent or guardian

Address ____________________

Telephone ____________________

Date Signed ____________________
NOTIFICATION TO PARENT(S) OF SART MEETING (SAMPLE)

Date ______

Dear ______________:

The __________________ School Attendance Review Team has a referral in behalf of __________________ regarding:

____ Habitual truancy  ____ Behavior problem
____ Irregular attendance  ____ Other (describe)

An appointment has been made for you (either parent if both cannot attend) and __________________ to meet with __________________ to consider a proper plan for correcting this problem.

Your appointment is for: Date ______ Time ______
Location: __________________

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter. If for any reason you are unable to keep this appointment, please contact this office at once.

____________________________

Phone Number

Sincerely,

____________________________
Chairperson, School Attendance Review Team

Original: Parent/Guardian
cc: Pupil
    School
    SART file
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAM CHECKLIST

Student's Name ________________________________________________

This checklist must accompany the SART information form. It is not necessary to try all alternatives for sufficient documentation.

Have you: 

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<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Had a conference with the student to determine the student's perception of the problem?</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Studied cumulative record for clues to resolving the problem?</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Held conferences with the parents, including home calls?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Held conferences with staff personnel regarding the student's problems?</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Used all appropriate onsite services (i.e. nurse, school psychologist, speech therapist, etc.)?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Pursued alternatives such as:</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>a. Program change</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>b. Period by period check-in program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. Peer or group counseling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>d. Intradistrict transfer</td>
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<td>e. Work study program</td>
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<td>f. Special education program</td>
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<td></td>
<td>g. Other</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Referred student and/or family to community counseling services such as:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a. Child guidance</td>
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<td>b. Family service agency</td>
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<td></td>
<td>c. Juvenile diversion program</td>
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<td>d. Mental health service</td>
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<td>f. Probation</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Determined what action you would recommend to SART?</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Other alternatives used not on this list.</td>
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SART CONFERENCE RECORD (SAMPLE)

School Attendance Review Team

School

Date

Name _______________ D.O.B. ________ Sex ___ Grade ___

Address ________________________________________________

Parent or Guardian ________________________________________

1. Corrective measures (date)

Student Conferences _______ Program Change ____________

Parent Conferences _______ Shortened Day _____________

Referral to Referral to Community Agency
Psychologist ___________ _____________

Contract _________ Name of Agency _____________

Other _________ Contact Person _______________

2. Agreements and recommendations made during the meeting

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Plans for implementing agreements or contract (how does the team intend to monitor follow-through?)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
4. School Attendance Review Team members attending this meeting

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<th>Title</th>
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Student

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Comments of chairman:

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Chairman

Date ______
SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW TEAM - STUDENT CONTRACT
(SECONDARY) (SAMPLE)

After evaluating a referral submitted by ________, School regarding ____________________, and having met in conference with the parents and pupil, the School Attendance Review Team believes that the pupil would benefit from a recommended alternative program instead of being referred to SARB #20, and possible Court action, at this time.

Therefore, the following alternative program is agreed upon:

1. Attend school each day school is in session.
2. Remain at school for the full time assigned.
3. Present to the school a note from a doctor/nurse to verify any future absences due to illness.
4. Abide by all school rules and regulations.
5. Parent/student maintain an awareness of their legal obligation to attend school.

I/we consent to the participation of our son/daughter under the agreement above, and I/we will cooperate and support the program as outlined. I/we further consent to the exchange of pupil records between the school and resources to which our son/daughter is referred.

Signed: __________________________________________________________________________
   Parents/Guardian
   Date

Signed: __________________________________________________________________________
   School Administrator
   Date

I have received a copy of this agreement and understand the terms and agree to comply with all the conditions.

Signed: __________________________________________________________________________
   Pupil
   Date

Signed: __________________________________________________________________________
   SARB #20 Representative
   Date

NOTE: Progress report due __________________________ from __________________________

cc: Parents
    Pupil
    School
    SARB #20
SART STUDENT CONTRACT  
(ELEMENTARY) (SAMPLE)

Name ________________________________

Date ________________________________

Statement of Problem:

I have had ___ days of truancy this quarter. I agree this is excessive and will follow the directions outlined below in order that I may reduce the number of days truant.

1. I will attend school every day. If I miss school it will be for an excused illness or a doctor's appointment. I will bring a note from home each time I am absent.

2. Each morning I will pick up a blue "Daily Attendance Card" from my counselor's office and take it to each of my classes for my teachers to verify my attendance. At the end of the day I will return the Daily Attendance Card to my counselor for verification of my attendance that day. My counselor will stamp my card, and it will be my responsibility to bring it home to my parents.

3. I understand that at the end of four weeks of perfect attendance this contract can be renegotiated for a weekly attendance contract.

________________________________________
Student's Signature

Parent Agreement

I, ________________________________, will make certain that ________________________________ gets off to school on time.

1. I agree to telephone or send a note each time __________________________ is absent for illness or a doctor's appointment.

2. If __________________________ misses school, I agree to attend a full day of school with him/her.

I understand that this is a binding contract and agree to the provisions herein.

________________________________________
Parent's Signature
PRE-SARB INFORMATION FORM

Date ______________

Please bring 12 copies of this completed form to SARB screening.

Student Name ____________________ Parent Name ____________________

Address _________________________ B/D _____ Telephone _______

School __________________________ Grade ___ Age ___ Teacher _______

Student lives with: Both natural parents ___ Mother only ___

Father only ___ Step Parent ___ Foster Parents ___

Other ____________________________

Please indicate any medical condition that may affect student's attendance

________________________________________

Is the child currently receiving medication? Yes ___ No ___

Kinds __________________________________

Siblings: Name Age School Attending Indicate Attendance*

________________________________________

________________________________________

*Please obtain information on siblings - important for SARB processing.

Achievement Test Scores: Date Test Results

________________________________________

All available information regarding student's current academic progress (at grade level, below grade level in math, reading etc.)

________________________________________
Behavioral difficulties (please be specific)

What action has been taken at school?

Attendance for current school year:

___ excused absences
___ unexcused absences
___ tardies
___ days in attendance

Summary of attendance for two previous years:

School year ___  

School year ___  

SARB: WHEN SART FAILS

The School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is a community-school program established by the California legislature to meet the needs of children and youth with attendance and behavior problems. Minors whose irregular school attendance or unresolved discipline problems have not been helped by regular home contacts, or failed SART conferences, are referred to SARB.

When local school efforts have been ineffective, SARB, in a formal setting, with representatives from the Probation Department, law enforcement, Department of Public Social Services, PTA, parents, and other community groups, meet with the minor and parents to find solutions to a minor's attendance or discipline problem. Often the board may require a parent or pupil to participate in a particular community service program. Furnishing satisfactory evidence of participation in such a program may also be a requirement.

Some of the more frequent actions of SARB include:

- Recommending changes in the student's program that may be unusual but necessary.
- Assisting students in securing employment.
- Directing the student and/or family to counseling.
- Arranging parenting classes.
- Facilitating transfer to a different school when necessary.
- Requesting assistance from other County agencies to help students get to school.
- Coordinating assistance from volunteers to help students get to school.
- Recommending the establishment of needed resources.

SARB seeks to understand WHY students are experiencing attendance and behavior problems and makes every effort to correct the problem.

Other actions of SARB may include:
- Referral to District Attorney.

- Referral to Probation for possible court action.

Dramatic results have been experienced in family problem resolution and in breaking the "truancy cycle." If your school district does not have a SARB, contact your county School Attendance Review Board.
APPENDIX B

PROJECT EVALUATION FORM
1. List all factors inside the handbook that you feel are too hard to understand about the Truancy Prevention Program.

1) ____________________________________________

2) ____________________________________________

3) ____________________________________________

4) ____________________________________________

5) ____________________________________________

2. List the areas of the handbook that are easy to understand.

1) ____________________________________________

2) ____________________________________________

3) ____________________________________________

4) ____________________________________________

5) ____________________________________________

3. How do you feel the handbook should be written? Why?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX C

POST-EVALUATION FORM
POST-EVALUATION FORM

This form is to give an insight as to how the handbook is perceived by its users. The degree of success depends on how each question is weighed by its users. Please circle the appropriate number that best describes your success with the question.

Number 1 = lowest  
Number 5 = highest

1. Was the handbook clear and concise? 1 2 3 4 5
2. Did the handbook offer easy to follow directions? 1 2 3 4 5
3. Do you believe the handbook is necessary? 1 2 3 4 5
4. Was the data informative and helpful? 1 2 3 4 5
5. Describe what you feel was the most important aspect of the handbook.

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
6. What parts of the handbook need improvements?
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
____________

7. List any further topics you feel will give you a better understanding to the users' needs.
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________