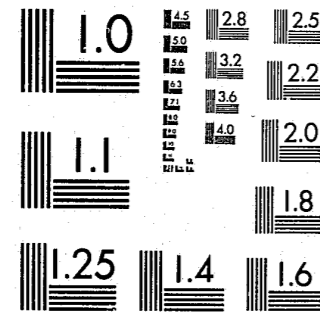


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5/19/82

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TRUANCY PREVENTION: A FIRST STEP IN CURTAILING DELINQUENCY PRONENESS

Some youngsters interviewed in the "Child's View" project stated that the probation officer defended them in the the probation officer work with the youngst

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• If you feel a good still and listen.—Talki shortcoming of teache parents. Adults have youngsters right with feeling they will just said, and do it. If it children would be an e rely, also, on exhortat get the desired behaviou Some even believe tl

addresses to his players just prior to the opening kickoff or between halves. As a matter of fact, the outstanding coach puts his energies into teaching the fundamentals of the game—team play, etc.—at every practice session in a business-like way and with enthusiasm and respect.

Lecturing and exhorting have a place in good officer is a teacher, paringly. Leading the ion and encouraging ns and plans usually there is a very thin lecturing and nag-

must be a good sed at some of the

that understanding an make any juve- tive in his relation-

all, or a final and comprehensive list. Each officer must adapt, even add to, this list to fit his own personality and situation. But referring to a set of guidelines such as these can put the job of working with troubled youth back in its proper focus. It can help you to understand.

Truancy Prevention: A First Step in Curtailing Delinquency Proneness

By BERTHOLD DEMSCH AND JULIA GARTH*

NCJ-05818

IN 1963, Impact, a program and also a process (an intensive program to improve attendance and curtail truancy) was inaugurated in selected districts of the Chicago public schools. The objective of the program is to promulgate a focused, concerted effort of dealing with problems of truancy and related areas of attendance of boys between the ages of 7 and 13. An anticipation of the program is that the total number of court referrals for truancy will be significantly reduced.

Related to the emphasis on the problem of truancy are chronic tardiness, frequent suspensions, and other behavior problems resulting in exclusions from the regular classroom. Severe antisocial, mental retardation, and physical disa-

bility problems, however, are not encompassed within the Impact design when such defects are the major contributing factor. The single major goal is the early identification and rehabilitation of potential school dropouts as they relate to elementary school pupils with poor attendance, learning difficulties, or emotional disturbances. It is intended to provide preventive services to potential dropouts—those children whose behavior is characterized by serious conflict with authority, inattentiveness, withdrawal, poor peer relationship, destructiveness, and a gradual pattern of increased absences.

The description that follows is that of the two Impact classes at the Oakland School. These two classes serve the local district and receive pupils from all schools of the district. (A district in Chicago is a geographical area headed by a district superintendent and is usually composed

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of one or two high schools, 10 to 15 elementary schools, and some special educational facilities. There are approximately 25,000 students to a school district. At the present time Chicago has 27 districts). The Impact class program is being carried on in five other districts within eight classrooms. Because of the diversity of situations in the communities sending pupils to these classes, the procedures necessarily vary, but our basic goal is the same for all districts and communities. This article describes the past 5 years' experience in these Impact classes within a district of which Oakland was the school housing the special classes. It concerns the cooperative functions of the teachers, guidance counselor, school social worker, psychologist, nurse, truant officer, and principal. A unique feature of the plan is the interdepartmental coordination of various divisions of the school system, involving interdisciplinary cooperation and structured on the pupil personnel services concept.

Goals and Design

The hypothesis was projected that children who exhibit the patterns of truancy early in their school career may be helped to complete their education until high school graduation if they are given special assistance as early as possible, even at age 7. This assistance was to take the form of optimum school placement. They would be placed in a room with low membership (10 per class) and with trained and experienced teachers, so that they might receive (1) the benefits of a new group standard that might influence a change in individual attitude, (2) the benefits of a group process that might function to help the participants work out their problems in order to change and improve, (3) the benefits of an adult (teacher) as a "role model," and (4) the benefits of association with a group of children who might give the support a child needed and did not get at home and make attendance, learning, and academic achievement desirable. A unique feature of the program is the use of the school social worker offering direct service to the children and their parents around the case-work approach of individualizing, accepting, and helping, based on sound social work practice and within the framework of school policy and regulations.

The Impact Committee

A staffing committee consisting of the district

superintendent, a principal, a teacher-nurse, a psychologist, a truant officer, and a school social worker meets about once a month. Each case which has been forwarded to the district superintendent from the district schools is carefully considered from the following aspects: (1) the child's cumulative record, including tests and teacher evaluations, (2) health history, (3) reviews from cooperating social agencies, (4) the social worker's evaluation of the home situation, and (5) the parents' feelings and attitudes about a special placement. The principal from the referring school is invited to be present to supplement the data with reports of parental cooperation or lack of it and a description of the child's overt behavior. Every effort is made to obtain and use as much information as possible concerning a child before placement in an Impact class is recommended. As a result of this interchange, the staff members may recommend alternative procedures to follow as they consider the referral. In such an event, the guidance counselor and school social worker are active in implementing such recommendations and later report to the committee for further evaluation and review of the case. The district Impact committee has held 36 meetings from October 1963 to June 1968.

Due regard must be shown to the role of the district Impact committee in the overall operation of the program. The committee does not limit its responsibility to the referral aspect of the program. It continues an active involvement in the program from the referral stage, during the enrollment period in the Impact classes, to assure that the philosophy and objectives of the program are adhered to and implemented when indicated.

The district committee holds regular meetings for review of the program. There are constant examinations and evaluations of policies and procedures, with changes instituted in terms of functions of the committee or individual members. Of equal importance are the guidance and support given to the staff of the Impact classes. Periodic meetings are convened in the school where the Impact classes are operating and are attended by its principal, teachers, social worker, and members of the committee. The current adjustment of individual boys is discussed and recommendations are suggested to further the development and plan for the future care of the boys. The committee, together with the Impact class staff, makes the decision regarding the child's readiness for return to his regular school

and also makes definite plans for change of school placement.

Characteristics of Population Served

Cases Reviewed.—During the 5-year period, 76 cases were processed by the district Impact committee. Of these referrals, 28 boys were retained in a regular class in the referring school with recommendations for handling the situation. The most prevalent problem among these boys was severe behavior patterns indicative of some type of emotional or neurological disorder. The school was advised to seek social, medical, or psychiatric evaluations for these boys, followed by a possible reassessment by the district committee. In instances in which the situations were beyond management capability in regular schools, the schools were advised to seek placement in social adjustment schools or community institutions. The committee transferred 48 of the cases to an Impact class.

Family Composition.—Family size ranged from 3 to 13 members with both parents being present in 51 percent of the families. In broken homes, 47 percent were living with their mother and 2 percent with their father. The average number of children in a family was five.

Housing and Financial Situations.—Forty-five percent of the families lived in the Chicago Housing Project. Fifty percent were on public assistance. In cases where the family was intact, 65 percent had both parents working.

Age When Referred.—The range was from 7 years of age to 13, with the average being 11 years.

Intellectual Capacity.—An IQ of 75 has been determined as the cutoff level downward for eligibility for Impact, mainly due to an already established EMH program geared to meeting the needs of children of low mental capacity. However, the IQ of boys enrolled in the Impact classes has ranged from 65 to 112, the average IQ being 90. Three boys had IQ's below 75. Exception was made in these cases because there was some question of the validity of the testing due to the existence of severe emotional, physical, or social disability at the time of the scoring and the teacher's more optimistic evaluation of the child's mental ability.

Gene, age 12 years, lived with mother and six siblings on ADC in a Chicago Housing Authority apartment. Gene is a nice looking, pleasant boy with a club foot. His IQ was 69. He had been transferred to a social adjustment school because of constant fighting and

resistance to authority of teachers. He absolutely refused to attend the new school and was being considered for residential placement.

Social investigation revealed that Gene's erratic behavior was due to conscious defensive mechanisms against aggressive attacks from other boys. He limped badly and was subject to teasing by peers. He was intensely sensitive to this onslaught to his physical defect, because prior to entrance to this school he had been well accepted by peers. His defect was congenital and he had grown up with the same group of peers since infancy who were accustomed to and accepting of his defect. He had deep yearning to be liked and wanted to attend any school where he would be free from teasing. However, he viewed the transfer to the social adjustment school as unfair punishment and rejected it completely.

Shortly after enrollment in Impact, arrangements were made for surgical correction of the club foot. After surgery his walking limp was scarcely noticeable. From the date of enrollment, Gene was not subject to teasing, but, on the contrary, was well liked and completely accepted by the boys due to the expert understanding and handling by his teacher.

In April 1967 it was agreed that Gene no longer needed the protective environment of an Impact class. In a new psychological testing he scored 90 and was transferred back to a regular school in September 1967 with a seventh grade placement.

Length of Stay in Impact Classes.—The range goes from 3 months to 33 months, with the average being 10 months or about 1 school year. As expected, the younger boys responded more readily and proceeded in growth at a greater pace.

Adam, age 7 years, lived with mother and two siblings on ADC in a Chicago Housing Authority apartment. He was on the verge of being transferred to a residential school because of truancy and unmanageable behavior in school. He, as well as mother, felt that he was not understood and discriminated against in school. In Impact he responded warmly and immediately to staff. He attends school regularly, relates well with his peers and his conduct is exemplary.

On the other hand, Larry, age 12 years, lived with his mother, a working father, and three siblings and exemplified symptoms similar to those of Adam. He maintained his pattern of resentfulness, rebelliousness, and aggressiveness for months. Only after 10 months of intensive help was he able to progress to a level from which he was placed in another special setting for older boys. He did well and will enter high school in September 1967.

The Impact Program and Process

The process of enrollment in the Impact class begins with the district committee. Following the decision to transfer a boy to the class the members deliberate regarding possible techniques of meeting the needs of the child and his family in the transfer process. This involves participating with the school in transmitting the decision of the child and parent. The school takes the first step in the communication. The social worker, then, visits in the home for interpretation of the school and dealing with feelings regarding the move. Prior to enrollment, the social worker, at the direction of the superintendent,

shares with the Impact principal and teachers all pertinent information regarding the child's problems and needs. A determination is then made regarding room assignment and tentative plans for facilitating the adjustment of the child in the program.

On the day of admission, the parent brings the boy to the Impact class where they are met by the school social worker with whom they are already acquainted. The principal greets and talks briefly with parent and child together. This stage has been thought out carefully, in terms of the amount of information required for orientation to the rules and regulations and the school's expectation of child and parent. Paramount in this stage is a focus on the school's interest in helping the boy and parent enjoy and benefit from opportunities offered in the Impact class.

The social worker then escorts the child and the parent to the classroom and introduces both to the teacher. The teacher assures the parent of his interest in helping the child and informs the parent of schedules, transportation, lunch arrangements, etc.

The school social worker then talks with the parent privately to allay any apprehensiveness regarding the transfer and to assure her of our continued liaison function between school and family. A definite appointment is set for a visit in the home to share with the parent the child's initial adjustment in the class and plan future procedures for parent and school. Each stage of the enrollment procedure is timed. It is brief and is focused on the immediate enrollment situation to avoid emotional upheavels on part of parent or child and, thus, achieve a smooth entry into the Impact class.

Once the child comes to Impact, diagnostic testing is completed by the guidance counselor and an individualized program of instruction is planned. The social worker keeps close contact with the child and his family; this safety valve counseling is a benefit to the program.

Meeting the Needs of the Boys.—Human needs of all children include a feeling of security in the parental, economic, and social relationships. The degree or quality of the child's conception of himself is in direct proportion to how much and how well these needs have been met. Obviously, the boys who come to Impact have experienced the bare minimum in parental security, positive social relationships, and, therefore, have

failed dismally in achieving a satisfactory school adjustment.

The Impact classes cannot secure all of the needs that are lacking in the child's home environment. It can provide an environment which embodies interest, hope, and tangible services which indicate to the child that "we care about you." It can accept the child as he is without blame and censure. A concerted effort can be made to delineate and clarify the weaknesses and strengths in the child's functioning. It understands and supports the weaknesses. It promotes and enhances the strengths through self-motivation of tangible helping services.

The term self-esteem embodies a sense of value, adequacy, and responsibility. Our contribution to the development of self-esteem in the child is, fundamentally, the providing of a positive and sincere attitude which demonstrates to the child that he has value and a capacity to develop. This positive attitude must be valid and sincere because the response to it, on the part of the child, is positive or negative in proportion to the degree of its authenticity.

Controls.—In the development of self-esteem the child requires and wants controls. The child must be allowed freedom in self-expression of feelings and actions with controls exercised to avoid damage to his personality or physical injury to or from others. Controls are essential to the promotion of self-responsibility. The child learns to what extent he may exercise his wants (demands) to achieve ultimate satisfaction within the limits of acceptability to peers and adults.

Significant in the exercise of controls is the sex of the person in authority. The Impact boys come from homes in which mother is the dominant parental figure due either to absence of a father or the presence of a weak or indifferent father. The boys, therefore, live in a matriarchal home environment in which mother provides the controls and the boy lacks a strong father figure with whom to identify. This situation appears to create in the child a generalized feeling of resentment and resistance toward a female authority which may be controlled within the home, but explodes outside of the family and within the school, particularly with a female teacher. These strong intensive attitudes begin to diminish almost immediately when the teacher in control is male. Furthermore, as time goes on, the boy develops a warm, accepting relationship with the male teacher and begins to emulate the

strengths of this father figure. This transference does not occur from a verbal, sermonizing approach on the part of the teacher, but rather through a corrective experience by example. The male teacher exercises control while showing a sincere liking and interest in the child. The control, thus, is taut when indicated and relaxed when feasible. The boy begins to confide in and trust the teacher as he would like to do with a father. He can accept limits because he feels it is constructive and not vindictive.

Modification of Parental Attitudes.—Discernible early in a consideration of the behavior of boys is the effect or influence of attitudes of parents, toward the child and the school, on the child's adjustment. In few instances is there evidence of positive cooperative parental attitudes in the handling of the child. Attitudes range from a denial of problems to charging the school with responsibility for causing the problem by lack of understanding the child or outright discrimination toward the child.

Modification of parental attitudes, then, becomes basic in any attempt to help the child in the school situation. This aspect in the teamwork approach of problem solving is delegated to the school social worker. She bridges the gap between home and school in the area of communication. From the point of consideration of a child by the district Impact committee and throughout the Impact placement the social worker is in direct contact with the parent and is responsible for involving the parent in goals and treatment of the Impact program.

As the child's self-esteem develops and solidifies, his relationship with the parent is modified. It becomes less demanding and punitive to more accepting and a willingness to understand. In the progression of the cycle, mother becomes more relaxed with the child and better able to identify with the school's objectives and methods of helping her child. The following is an illustration of this:

Taylor was an 11-year-old boy who was oversized, extremely aggressive, bullyish with peers, demanding of attention with a marked resistance toward authority. Mother was overprotective and indulgent with Taylor and defensive with the school. Taylor virtually ran home to mother whenever any incident occurred in which he could not win. Mother, in turn, religiously came to school to finish the battle for him with peers or teacher.

Prolonged and concentrated casework activity with mother on examining and clarifying her attitudes toward the child, focusing on how the attitudes were influencing the child's adjustment, in and out of school, enabled her to relax and to allow Taylor to mature.

Fortunately, the child responded rapidly to this change in mother and was able to take more responsibility for his actions and to enjoy peer relationships in more constructive ways. Mother took pride in her child's accomplishments, felt positively toward the school and interference ceased completely.

Group Dynamics.—An interesting aspect of the Impact classes is the manner in which the boys influence each other as a group. As they become more relaxed in the program a cohesiveness and an esprit de corps develop. Several boys, in emulation of their teacher, will begin to identify with positive ways. Truancy becomes taboo; older and more secure boys become protective toward the younger and weaker; "bad behavior" becomes unacceptable in the group. At times, the leaders have to be restrained and directed into more appropriate modes of control because of tendencies of overcoerciveness and extreme restrictiveness.

As the boys learned that "bad behavior" is unacceptable to the group, they expose negative behavior of others before it can get contagious. Some expose their own misdemeanors overtly or by devious means to solve their feelings of guilt.

Leaving the Impact Class.—Preparation for transfer from the Impact program begins at the time of referral to the district committee and continues throughout the placement in the Impact class. With the development of a differential diagnosis of the problem, immediate and long-range goals are set in terms of requirements needed to enable the child to return eventually to a regular class placement.

Following periodic reviews of the child's placement, the point arrives when it is decided that he is ready to leave the Impact class and at this time all available school placements are considered. Both child and parent participate in the decision. This procedure must be gradual and careful in order to deal with normal "separation pangs."

The child, naturally, has ambivalent feelings about leaving the class. He enjoys the satisfactions of having achieved academically and socially. He for once enjoys the justifiable acclaim he receives from school. At the same time, a tremendous amount of anxiety develops as he is faced with giving up a protective environment for the unknown or a return to a past associated with negative memories. There occurs a reactivation of feelings of insecurity. Is he, again, being punished for being "bad"? Has he failed to measure up to the school's expectation? Will mother be angry?

The parent, also, has conflicting feelings regarding changing the school placement of his child. The parent has enjoyed his child's uncomplicated adjustment in school and is fearful that he may not do well in a different placement and he will again be called to task for his behavior.

Preparedness of the child for transfer is handled in the school by the teacher, principal, and school social worker. The teacher reassures the child that he is able to cope with academic and social demands in another school. The principal supplements this with assurances that resources are available. The school social worker deals with the ambivalent feelings and assures the child of a continuous followup interest in the new placement.

The social worker is delegated primary responsibility of preparing the parent for the transfer and, interestingly, the problems and techniques needed, parallel those present in the child's situation. The school social worker is, also, delegated with preparation of the receiving school in terms of providing pertinent information regarding the child's needs and potential adjustment with tried techniques in dealing with the child and the parent. When the new school differs—in curriculum, administrative structure, rules, and regulations—from those of regular schools, the child may be taken to visit the school prior to the actual transfer.

Defined Role of the Social Worker in Impact

The school social worker functions in the Impact program as an integral part of a teamwork approach of the district committee and as a social worker in the school housing the Impact classes.

Casework activity is based on the diagnosis formulated by the district committee and is then altered on the basis of additional information secured by the social worker so as to make the helping relationship flexible and useful. Casework proceeds through interviews with child, family, teachers, and other school personnel and social-health agencies.

Interviews with the child are conducted in privacy at the school. These interviews are focused on his school problem, but allows the child to relieve any anxieties through expressing his negative and positive feelings and attitudes toward the placement and toward occurrences in the home which affect his adjustment in school. Help is given by helping the child to sort out

and examine these feelings in terms of their validity; to discard the inappropriate and reinforce the positive attitudes. The overall goal of the treatment is to direct the child's efforts in constructive ways toward an adjustment which is satisfying to him and academically productive.

The school social worker's physical availability to the child following an upsetting episode facilitates the easing of tension and the recovery of a state of emotional ability so that he can resume his normal functioning in the classroom. Pragmatically, the accessibility of the school social worker permits the removal of the child from the classroom as a form of "antiseptic exclusion" during an emotional outburst, thus avoiding a generalized upheaval in the classroom.

Casework services with the parent parallel those with the child except that interviews are conducted in the home. The setting of these interviews has a twofold effect. Home visits indicate a reaching-out to parents in a positive way on the part of the school. They also offer a free, relaxed atmosphere in which parents can express negative as well as positive attitudes toward school without fear of retaliation.

In addition to the interpersonal relationships the school social worker provides tangible services if indicated. These include referrals to social and medical agencies for financial, housing, health, family counseling, etc. Mother is, also, kept informed regarding her child's progress or problems in school and her participation is sought in the overall planning for the child.

Case Illustration

The case of Wayne illustrates a fairly adequate picture of the overall therapeutic efforts of the Impact program in helping children who require concentrated help to adjust in school.

Wayne, age 11 years, enrolled in the Impact school in October 1964 following transfer from a social adjustment school and a few weeks of extremely unsatisfactory adjustment in a regular school. Wayne's behavior, since kindergarten, was one of rebelliousness, resistance to authority, use of obscene language with teachers, physical aggressiveness toward peers, and truancy from school.

Wayne was one of nine children living with a 70-year-old father and a 42-year-old mentally disturbed and retarded mother in a Chicago Housing Project. Finances came from social security benefits and supplementary public assistance. Mother was incapable of providing physical or emotional care of the house and of children. Father was interested in the children, but was overwhelmed with total responsibility for managing the family and, in frustration and desperation, resorted to severe and cruel punishment with Wayne. There was constant bickering between the parents regarding

finances and mother's alleged promiscuous adultery in the community.

Wayne was unkempt and dirty in appearance. He had a slight stutter, a reading problem, and functioned, generally, below his mental capacity. He maintained a demeanor of suspiciousness and distrust toward all adults with particular antipathy toward female teachers. He felt disliked and unwanted by everyone and reacted with indifference to them. However, he was so anxiety ridden that any frustration provoked impulsive, explosive reactions.

Obviously, Wayne needed sympathetic understanding with overt acceptance in work and action from Impact staff. Not only was there insufficient food in the home, but mother begrudged the sharing of food with Wayne and another sibling. At times, she actually denied them meals, in her intense, over-rejection of them.

Two discernible positives in Wayne's personality were a capacity to respond to a demonstration of sincere interest in him and a deep love and respect of father. Consequently, Wayne, slowly, became attached to his male teacher who was firm but gentle with all of his pupils. Wayne began to emulate his teacher's manner in talk and walk and followed in his footsteps around the building and on the playground. He also responded warmly to the social worker as a mother-figure. She was his first contact with the school, having escorted him and the father to school for enrollment. Her provision, immediately, of clothing and later lunch was tangible evidence of her interest in him. His past history and still "cared about him" facilitated the development of a warm relationship between the two. Gradually, Wayne began to bring to his teacher and social worker minor escapades of major family disturbances. The teacher, having an understanding of the home situation, could perceive Wayne's emotional states and would send him to the social worker.

All available facilities of the school and appropriate resources of the public welfare department were utilized to meet the needs of Wayne. Over a period of time, he was able to express freely and sort out his attitudes toward his parents and school (present and past) in interviews with the social worker. His strong negative feelings toward his mother changed to an acceptance of her mental illness and her incapacities. He became more understanding of his father's sporadic cruel punishment of him and wished not to be a source of frustration to father. Father's hostile attitude toward school changed in his contacts with the social worker and he cooperated fully in supporting and implementing school objectives. Key people in the Impact school, such as the guidance counselor and the gym teacher, reached out warmly to Wayne and he began to seek them out when in need, especially in absence of the school social worker.

Wayne's response to the overall therapeutic program of Impact was constructive and satisfying. He is entering an Educational and Vocational Guidance school in September with a seventh-grade placement. Although he spent 3 years in the Impact class, he will be followed by Impact until his adjustment has been stabilized in the new school environment.

Followup Evaluation

Thirty-five boys have left the Impact rooms

since June 1964. Eight withdrew when the family moved out of the city or the school district so no followup was possible. One boy has been committed to the State hospital. Two boys were transferred to a special school project. One other boy has been committed to the State training school. Four others were placed in an Educational-Vocational Center. Nineteen boys were transferred back to regular elementary schools. Of these transfers, all are currently making satisfactory adjustments and 10 were enrolled in high schools as of June 1968.

Other gains seem to be as follows:

1. Many of the boys have a positive identification with school and are learning to proceed at a pace they can tolerate.
2. They are able to share their feelings with interested adults and can put trust in them when confronted by frustrating problems requiring mature counseling.
3. Achievement as measured by standardized testing has shown marked improvement.
4. Attendance has improved and has lost its chronicity.
5. Parents are more motivated to help their children as a result of the Impact program and the experience they had in seeing their children receive help in concrete terms.
6. The faculties of the schools where children returned were inspired by this evidence of serious effort to provide the treatment and services that had often been recommended by the psychologist and others, but had not been available. They felt supported rather than left alone in their effort to help the truant.
7. There is a low rate of Impact boys appearing in Juvenile Court on account of truancy.
8. The Impact teachers were able to evaluate and modify their current teaching procedures as they received information on the success of boys who had returned to their regular school classes.

Conclusion

The experiences described are focused on helping maladjusted children in a big city. The daily living conditions for many parents in the city are depressing and few can mobilize their limited coping abilities to send their children to school ready to learn and grow optimally. The general approach presented here is felt to have real promise for helping the school deviate and reaching his parents so that the behavior of truancy and the accompanying delinquency prone symptoms can be arrested early in a child's life. To do less would be unfair to the children attending the Nation's schools.

Only as we see truancy as an early danger sign, marking a challenge to the child-helping services, can we move in attendance work from the medieval ages of statistics anxiety and punishment to the modern maturity of promoting personality health and development.—ALFRED J. KAHN

END