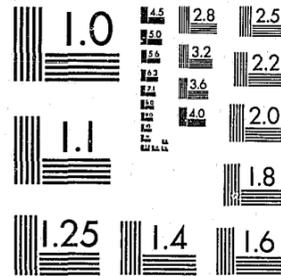


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City of New Orleans
The Mayor's Criminal
Justice Coordinating Council

December, 1980

FINAL EVALUATION OF THE
ORLEANS PARISH SCHOOL
BOARD'S STUDENT ACTION
CENTER

Jack L. Ashcraft, Project Evaluator

76825

MAYOR ERNEST N. MORIAL, Chairman
Michael Bagneris, Vice Chairman
Frank R. Serpas, Jr., Executive Director

~~X~~ FINAL EVALUATION OF THE
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Prepared by
The Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

December, 1980

Jack L. Ashcraft, Evaluator

The Student Action Center was funded by the
LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION
through the LOUISIANA COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT
AND ADMINISTRATION OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

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ACQUISITIONS

THE MAYOR'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE
COORDINATING COUNCIL
Mayor Ernest N. Morial, Chairman
Michael Bagneris, Vice Chairman
Frank R. Serpas, Jr., Director

FOREWORD

This report is the third and final assessment of the Orleans Parish School Board's Student Action Center Program funded through the Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council. The development and implementation of this project was initiated for the dual purposes of reducing student absenteeism and criminal involvement. Funded in September, 1977 with a grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the program began operations during January, 1978 and continued operations through June, 1980. During the period of operation 204 students from two central city schools were served. The results of the evaluation indicate improved attendance and reduced criminal involvement.

This program represents the first systematic and coordinated effort by the Metropolitan Area Committee, the City Administration, and the Orleans Parish School Board to impact the problems associated with truancy. The model used in the program can be considered a "modified" Dallas Plan and represents a compromise between the Dallas Plan in which youths were referred to the reception centers by police officers and an internal referral system. Based partially on interim reports of project success and an accommodating public attitude, a concurrent project was initiated in 1979 which did implement the Dallas model. The outcome of these two projects should yield valuable information for future allocation of resources in Orleans Parish for truancy and juvenile crime reduction programs.

Frank R. Serpas, Jr.
Executive Director

MAYOR'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE COORDINATING COUNCIL

FINAL EVALUATION

PROJECT: Student Action Center Program

PROJECT NUMBERS: 76-J9-9.1-0407, 79-J9-J.3-0063,
80-J9-J.3-0003

SUBGRANTEE: Orleans Parish School Board

DATE OF REPORT: December, 1980

PREPARED BY: Jack L. Ashcraft

CLERICAL ASSISTANCE: Evelyn Goldstein

CUMULATIVE GRANT AWARD:	Federal Share	\$127,453.78
	Match	<u>11,616.92</u>
	Total	\$139,070.70

PROJECT PERSONNEL: Dr. Sara Foulks, Project Director
Ms. Debra Morton, Operating Director

AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: Charles E. Martin, Superintendent
Orleans Parish School Board

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

Having determined that the problem of chronic student absenteeism (or truancy) was especially acute at the middle and junior high school levels, the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) developed the Student Action Center (SAC) Program. Implemented on a pilot basis, the program was designed with the goals of reducing truancy and criminal involvement among participating students from two central city schools, James Derham Middle School and Carter G. Woodson Junior High. The program was funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) and, including cash matches of \$11,616.92, the total cost of the program was \$139,070.70. Although funded from September, 1977 through June, 1980, the program was actually operational from January, 1978 through May, 1980.

Program activities were centered in and emanated from an apartment in a public housing project -- convenient to both Derham and Woodson Schools. Students from the two target schools who were considered by their teachers to be truants were referred to the SAC where they were provided counseling, tutoring, and other services aimed at ameliorating the problem(s) associated with and/or leading to truancy. After an initial, intake counseling session with the child, the SAC staff tried to get the student back into the regular classroom. Additionally, the program maintained a contact room at each of the two target schools. Students

experiencing difficulty with re-entry utilized these contact rooms which also served as bases of operations for SAC staff during frequent school and classroom visits. As specified in the grant application, the program was designed to provide these services to 150 students (seventy-five from each school) during each school-year of operation.

GENERAL FINDINGS

During the two and a half school-years of program operations, January, 1978 - May, 1980, the program provided services to 204 students, or approximately 54% of the number the program anticipated serving. Of the 204 participants, all were Black, approximately 54% were male, and the average age at the time of intake was fourteen years. Forty-nine percent of the students were at a grade level below that appropriate for their age and 98% read below the appropriate level. More than 97% of the students were referred to the SAC by the schools, with over 56% coming from Woodson. Students participated in the program an average of ten months and received an average of forty-nine services each. The two problems most frequently associated with poor attendance were "poor parental guidance" (34%) and "poor regard for education" (26%). By subjective assessment, a general improvement was suggested for more than 62% of the participants.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance data for 110 (54%) of the participants were used to compute two ratios of days absent to days present; one for the period prior to program intervention and one for the period after intervention. For

each individual, the percent change in these two ratios was computed, with the average change used to indicate program effectiveness. Eighty-eight percent of the students indicated an actual improvement, while the average change among all participants indicated a 53% improvement. An additional analysis of attendance rates at the two target schools indicated that overall attendance at the two target schools improved after the implementation of the program, while attendance rates among all Orleans Parish public schools had declined.

ARRESTS

The records of the NOPD Family Services Division indicated that eighty-three (41%) of the SAC participants had had some formal contact with the Juvenile Justice System. Of those students with arrest records, only seventy-two had had any arrests for charges serious enough to result in referral to Court. Among those were 160 arrests which resulted in 191 charges. An analysis of the number of arrests and charges within one year (before and after) of program participation indicated a median change of approximately 64% fewer arrests and charges after participation in the program.

OBSERVATIONS

The SAC provided a substantial number of students with a variety of counseling and other services considered relevant to the program goals of reducing truancy and criminal involvement among participants. While this report suggested program effectiveness with regard to goal attainment, two areas were discussed wherein the program did not attain the aspirations of the program model (i.e., as outlined in the

grant application). First, the program served considerably fewer students than expected. An increased intake would have lowered the per student cost of the program and, assuming similar effectiveness, would have made the work of the program more conspicuous to the community. Second, since the program was designed as a pilot program, there was the implication of a research function. Knowledge of the causes of and of the most effective responses to truancy which might guide future programs in this area remain unavailable.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Student absenteeism, especially in public school systems, is a matter of concern in most of the nation's major cities. According to an Associated Press article in the New Orleans Times Picayune/States Item¹, the National Center for Education Statistics, a Division of the U. S. Office of Education, recently reported that, during the 1978-1979 school year, the national average was one out of twelve students absent per day. In New Orleans, the comparable figure was one of seven students absent per day. According to the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB), the problem of chronic (or excessive) absenteeism is especially acute at the middle and junior high school levels.² Coincidentally, it is speculated that juvenile crime is directly correlated with high student absenteeism. Thus, the effects of excessive absenteeism, or truancy, have pervasive implications for both the individual truant and the entire community.

Recognizing the seriousness of the truancy problem in the schools, as well as its negative consequences, the OPSB developed and implemented the Student Action Center (SAC) Program as an attempt to reduce truancy and, secondarily, juvenile crime. The program was funded by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration's (LEAA) Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP), grant #76-9.1-0407.

Because of the severity of the truancy problem at the middle and junior high school levels, the program was designed to serve students

¹See: The Times Picayune/States Item, "Student Absenteeism High in Major Cities;" June 4, 1980; Sec. 1, p. 21.

²Orleans Parish School Board; "Student Action Center Program;" Application for Subgrant, 79-J9-J.3-0063; October, 1978; p. 6-2.

of the James Derham Middle School and the Carter G. Woodson Junior High School, both of which are located in the central city area where truancy and juvenile crime rates are high. Implemented on an experimental basis, the program was designed to gain insight into the causes of truant behavior and to render appropriate intervention remedies (primarily counseling and tutoring) aimed at reducing or eliminating that behavior for 150 students per year.

JJDP grants totaling \$127,453.78 enabled the SAC to operate between September 1, 1977 and May 31, 1980. However, according to the SAC operating director (team leader), staff hiring, site acquisition and renovation delayed the actual start-up of program intake. The program was fully operational and accepting students after January, 1978. With the exception of the summer months of 1979, the program was operational through May, 1980.

Two previous evaluations began the documentation of the SAC implementation and provided an initial assessment of goal attainment.³ This report will complete the documentation of program activities and will provide the final assessment of impact, as well as providing a unit cost summary.

³See: Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (MCJCC), Process Evaluation of the Student Action Center Program, November, 1978; and MCJCC, Preliminary Impact Evaluation of the Student Action Center, July, 1979.

II. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A. General

The Student Action Center Program was designed to reduce truancy (defined as excessive or chronic absenteeism from school by a student without proper authority from parents or school officials) in two Orleans Parish public schools. Additionally, it was anticipated that the SAC would have the secondary effect of reducing the number of delinquent acts among program participants. Located in close proximity to the two schools, the SAC provided counseling, tutoring, and referral services to students from Derham Middle School and Woodson Junior High School.

The program was structured to serve seventy-five identified truants from each of the two schools per year. Services provided by the SAC staff included identification of truants and the causes of truant behavior, individual and/or group counseling, parent counseling, tutorial services, referrals and specially structured support programs after the student returned to the classroom. While the majority of students were expected to be referred to the SAC by teachers from the two schools, other referrals were to be accepted from the OPSB's Department of School Social Work Services, the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD), the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court, the Probation Department, parents and community resi-

dents.

Upon referral to the program, each student participant had (at the SAC) an intake interview and an initial contact was made with the child's parent or guardian. During this initial meeting and, when necessary, during subsequent meetings with the student, the caseworker attempted to identify the problems related to the child's absenteeism. Once the relevant problems were identified, the SAC staff developed a plan to meet the needs of the individual. Generally, the student was then provided with regularly scheduled counseling and tutoring sessions.

Following the intake process, a recommendation was made by the staff either to return the student to school immediately and supplement his/her activities with a mix of supportive services or to refer the student to some other appropriate school program capable of meeting his/her needs. Those students not returned immediately to the regular classroom participated in tutoring and counseling provided at the SAC.

When a student was considered ready to return to the regular classroom, he/she advanced to the school re-entry component of the program. This component, lasting from one to five days, provided the student with an orientation wherein what was expected of him/her in order to minimize any problems encountered during the re-entry phase was explained to the returning student. A "contact room" was established at each of the schools in which

orientation sessions were conducted and where students could come to discuss any problems related to re-entry or to attendance in general. During the orientation period, the students also signed a contract outlining behavioral goals. After re-entry to the regular classroom and after the student had shown sufficient progress or success, the staff generally recommended termination from the program.

Other students, determined unwilling or unable to return to the regular classroom, were provided interim services by the SAC while attempts were made to place them in alternative programs. Usually, those cases were terminated after placement into another program.

B. Program Staff and Training

The declining grant formula resulted in a decrease of staff during the period of program operations, from a total of nine employees at the beginning to only five at the end of program operations. The staffing pattern for each of the years was as follows:

1977 - 1978

Team Leader
Social Worker/Counselor
4 - Paraprofessional Aides
1 - Utility Clerk
1 - Security Guard
1 - Custodian

1978 - 1979

Team Leader
Counselor
2 - Paraprofessional Aides

- 1 - Utility Clerk
- 1 - Security Guard
- 1 - Custodian

1979 - 1980

- Team Leader
- Teacher
- 3 - Paraprofessional Aides

Also, during the 1978-1979 school year, a probation officer was detailed to the SAC to provide services to those students on probation. In addition to the paid staff, the SAC had the services of at least two student volunteers each year from Southern University.

Prior to full implementation of the program and actual service delivery, the SAC staff and the principals and teachers from the two target schools participated in comprehensive in-service training. That initial training included explication of the concept of the SAC, program goals and objectives, methods to be employed, LEAA guidelines and requirements, and staff expectations. Specialized training for SAC staff included on-site sessions at various agencies which accepted referrals from the SAC -- for example, the Volunteers Alternative to Smoking and Alcohol Use Center (VASAU) and the Adolescent Services Center (ASC) -- where they received training in the areas of counseling and tutoring. Other training, provided by the OPSB Department of School Social Work Services, provided the SAC staff with methods for working with disruptive students, especially those engaged in delinquent activities.

Joint meetings between SAC staff and personnel from Derham and Woodson schools were held on an on-going basis. Those meetings served to maintain the communication channel that had been established between the SAC and the two schools, allowing personnel to remain mutually informed of activities and new developments.

During the final year (1979-1980) of program operations, the SAC staff participated in nine in-service training activities which included the development of personality profiles, marital and family counseling, tutor training, and the process of identifying potential dropouts. Additionally, fifteen staff meetings during the 1979-1980 school year served to maintain an optimal level of communication among the SAC staff, as well as keeping the staff informed of new techniques and resources available for their use.

C. Referral Resources

While the SAC offered a wide range of services to students, it was sometimes necessary to refer students to other programs or agencies in the community. Having recognized the need for additional resources, the SAC established referral mechanisms with the following agencies and programs:

1. GRASP Alternative High School
2. Volunteer Alternatives to Smoking and Alcohol Use (VASAU)
3. Adolescent Services Center (ASC)
4. Community Service Center (CSC)
5. GED Programs
6. Margaret Haughery School

Additionally, the SAC occasionally referred students to the OPSB Department of School Social Work Services for testing and to various

special education programs in the two target, as well as other, schools.

D. Community Involvement and Public Information

During the last two years of program operations, the SAC was actively engaged in increasing public awareness of and support for the program. In addition to regular monthly meetings for parents of the SAC participants, the SAC established in January, 1979, an advisory committee which included not only parents, but community leaders, professional educators and social workers. That committee met at least four times per year for the purpose of reviewing program activities and considering recommendations for future operations, with the objectives of developing a more effective system of service delivery and interpreting the program's services to the community. Finally, the services of the SAC were "advertised" in numerous OPSB public service announcements on various radio stations and the SAC team leader was interviewed on several radio talk-shows.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

A. General

Although initially funded in September, 1977, the SAC program did not become operational until January, 1978. This report considered program activities from that time until the end of operations in May, 1980. In addition to a description of program participants and activities, this report includes the final assessment of impact, as well as a final unit cost summary.

The data used in the analyses came from several sources. The individual case records maintained at the SAC provided the primary data. Included in those records were demographic data, types of problems identified, services rendered, outside referrals, and case outcome. Individual attendance data were gathered by program staff and subsequently verified by the evaluator, while aggregate school attendance data were supplied by the OPSB. Data secured from the Family Services Division (formerly, Juvenile Division) of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) were used to assess the incidence of arrests among program participants. Finally, other information used in the evaluation report was derived from program narratives, fiscal reports, and from interviews with program personnel.

The method used to assess the effectiveness of the program in attaining its two goals -- reducing truancy and arrest recidivism among program participants -- was a before and after compari-

son, often called a pre-test/post-test method. Although perhaps not the ideal measure of truancy reduction, the measure used in this report was the change in the ratio of days absent to days present before and after participation in the SAC program. This measure was selected because it was not affected by the non-uniform intake dates and because it was the best available indicator of attendance change. Similarly, the change in the number of criminal arrests and in the number of criminal charges before and after program participation indicated program effectiveness with regard to the secondary goal.

B. Truancy Reduction

The measure utilized to assess the goal of truancy reduction was the average, or mean, change computed between two variables, identified as "truancy ratios". These ratios, interpretable as the number of days (or fractions of days) absent for each day present⁴, were computed for two periods (before and after program participation) for each student for whom data were available. The truancy ratios were derived from the formula:

$$TR = \frac{DA}{DP}$$

where,

TR = Truancy Ratio;
DA = Days Absent; and,
DP = Days Present.

The change between the individual student's truancy ratios (i.e., before and after) was then calculated with the following formula:

⁴For example, a truancy ratio of 4.1 would indicate that that person was absent 4.1 days for every day present.

$$\frac{TR2 - TR1}{TR1} \times 100 = \text{CHANGE}$$

where,

TR1 = Truancy Ratio before participation; and,
TR2 = Truancy Ratio after participation

The net average change of the individual truancy ratios was then used to indicate programmatic impact.

In order to supplement the above analysis, the report will assess the aggregate attendance at each of the two target schools. Aggregate data indicating the annual average daily membership and the average daily attendance for the five school years 1975-1976 through 1979-1980 were provided by the OPSB for each of the two target schools. An annual average daily attendance rate was calculated for each of the schools and for each of the five school years, using the formula:

$$\text{ATTENDANCE RATE} = 100 \times \frac{ADA}{ADM}$$

where,

ADA = Average Daily Attendance
ADM = Average Daily Membership.

The above attendance rate, standardized for the different school populations, could be interpreted as the average daily number of students present for each one hundred enrolled. If the effect of the SAC is as expected, the attendance rate should have increased during the three years of program operation over the two years prior to program implementation.

C. Arrest Reduction

The analysis of the second goal, the reduction of juvenile

crime as measured by arrest recidivism among program participants, was based on data gathered at the Family Services Division of the NOPD. Relying again on the pre-test/post-test method, the analysis will assess the change in frequency of arrests and charges before and after participation in the program. While a tally of all arrests and charges will be presented for descriptive purposes, only those arrests and charges serious enough to be referred to the Juvenile Court and which occurred within one year (before and after) of program participation will be used in the analysis. For both arrests and charges, the average and median number before will be compared to the average and median number after. The percent change computed for both the average and median number of arrests and charges will be the indicator(s) of program effectiveness. The percent change will be derived from the formula:

$$\text{PERCENT CHANGE} = \frac{\text{NUMBER AFTER} - \text{NUMBER BEFORE}}{\text{NUMBER BEFORE}} \times 100.$$

A negative percent change will indicate a reduced number (average or median) of arrests or charges after program participation.

D. Limitations and Qualifications

Several limitations of the research design or the data will necessarily qualify any conclusion suggested by the various measures of program effectiveness. First, the pre-test/post-test method employed in the measures of both attendance improvement

and crime reduction allows only for noting change in those variables among the program participants. The probable existence of an unknown set of variables, the effects of which are similarly unknown, prevents the inference of causality for any measured change to the SAC. Second, there are specific limitations to each of the measures of program effectiveness. For example, attendance data were available for approximately fifty-four percent of the students served. Since among those cases not represented in that analysis were those students that would have been considered unsuccessful (e.g., those who refused SAC services, those who moved, those who were suspended or who dropped out of school altogether), the measure was quite likely biased toward indicating improvement. Additionally, the measure of attendance improvement is a relative measure. That is, the measure will indicate general attendance improvement (or deterioration), but it will not separate those students whose attendance changed from "worse" to "bad" from those whose attendance actually changed from "bad" to "good". Third and finally, there are limitations to the use of arrest data for assessing the extent of criminal involvement. Arrests account only for "unsuccessful" criminal activity and cannot actually be used to infer guilt. Undoubtedly, many juveniles participate in crimes for which they are never arrested and many are also arrested for crimes they may not have committed. The reader is reminded to consider these limitations as qualifications of any conclusion drawn from these analyses.

IV. FINDINGS

A. General

During the period January, 1978 through May, 1980, the program provided services to a total of 204 students -- all of whom were black⁵. Since the program was designed to serve 150 students per year (i.e., 75 from each of the two target schools) and was operational for two and a half school years, at least 375 students should have participated. The 204 participants represented approximately fifty-four percent of the students which the program was expected to serve or, approximately forty-five percent of the 450 students expected had the program been operational the full three school years.

Table 1 provides the age and sex distribution of program participants. As indicated, 54% of the students who participated in the program were male and 46% were female. The average, as well as modal, age of students at the time of intake was fourteen years.

⁵ The grant award stipulated that 51% of the participants have previous contact with the criminal justice system. The fact that all participants were truants was sufficient for compliance with that stipulation.

TABLE 1
AGE AND SEX OF PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

AGE	SEX		N	TOTAL %
	MALE	FEMALE		
12	8	8	16	7.9
13	23	22	45	22.2
14	37	30	67	33.0
15	26	22	48	23.6
16	12	7	19	9.4
17	2	3	5	2.5
18	2	1	3	1.5
TOTAL	110 (54%)	93 (46%)	203	100.1 ^a

^aRounding error.

Table 2 provides the monthly intake data by school year. As evidenced by this table, the greatest intake generally occurred near the beginning of the spring semester (i.e., during January, February, and March), while few new students were generally seen at the beginning of the school years. For the twenty-five months during which the SAC could have had intake, there were four months during which no new students were seen. Dividing the total intake (203) by twenty-five months yields an average monthly intake of approximately eight students.

Table 3 provides information on the source of referral to the SAC. The two target schools provided 199 (97.5%) of the referrals, with approximately 56% coming from Woodson and approximately 41% from Derham.

Table 4 provides a summary of the number of contracts and contract revisions that were indicated in the participants' case folders. While the SAC proposed that each student would sign a contract, the evaluator found evidence of a contract in only 158 (78%) of the individual records.

Table 5 indicates the types of services provided by the SAC, as well as the number of students receiving each service and the average per student. As indicated on the row labeled "Some Services", 202 students received some services and the average number delivered per student was approximately forty-nine.

TABLE 2
PROGRAM INTAKE BY MONTH AND SCHOOL YEAR

MONTH	'77-'78	'78-'79	'79-'80	TOTAL
AUG.	n/a ^a	2	n/a	2
SEP.	n/a	5	n/a	5
OCT.	n/a	7	7	14
NOV.	n/a	2	6	8
DEC.	n/a	7	4	11
JAN.	32	11	15	58
FEB.	17	13	3	33
MAR.	9	6	10	25
APR.	2	4	8	14
MAY	0	0	0 ^b	0
JUNE	1	n/a	n/a	1
JULY	<u>32</u>	<u>n/a</u>	<u>n/a</u>	<u>32</u>
TOTAL	93 (46%)	57 (28%)	53 (26%)	203 ^c

^a During the months where the intake is noted "n/a" the program was not fully operational.
^b During May, 1980, the program was not taking new students since it was about to close.
^c Data were missing for one case. Total N=204.

TABLE 3
SOURCE OF REFERRAL TO THE SAC

SOURCE	NUMBER	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Woodson School	115	56.4
Derham School	84	41.2
Court/Probation	1	0.5
Parents	1	0.5
Community Agency	1	0.5
Other	<u>2</u>	<u>1.0</u>
TOTAL	204	100.1 ^a

^a Rounding Error

TABLE 4
CONTRACTS AND CONTRACT REVISIONS

	YES	NO or NOT INDICATED
CONTRACT	158 (78%)	46 (22%)
REVISION	72 (35%)	132 (65%)

TABLE 5
TYPES AND AVERAGE (PER STUDENT) NUMBER OF SERVICES

SERVICE	NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO REC'D. SERVICE	AVERAGE PER STUDENT
HOME VISITS	187	4.4
PARENTAL COUNSELING	174	2.8
INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING	194	8.1
GROUP COUNSELING	149	8.9
TUTORING SESSIONS	94	7.8
OTHER ^a	193	16.6
SOME SERVICES ^b	202	48.6

^a This category included such miscellaneous services as testing, field trips, classroom visits, referrals, phone calls, etc.
^b This category is a total of the other, more specific, categories.

The length of time students were involved in the program varied from one month for six students to over two years for three students. Table 6 provides information on this variable for 185 (90.7%) of the 204 students served by the SAC. As indicated by the table, nearly 70% were involved one year or less and over 92% were involved for a year and a half or less. The average time spent in the program was approximately ten months.

During the initial interview or early in the student's participation the SAC staff attempted to identify the "barriers" or problems which resulted in the student's poor school attendance. Table 7 presents, by sex, a summary of the major problems identified. As indicated by the table, poor parental guidance and poor regard for education were respectively the first and second most common problems identified. However, it should be noted that poor parental guidance was much more of a problem among the females, while poor regard for education was more of a problem among males.

During the period of program operations, 101 students (49.5%) were referred to outside agencies a total of 121 times. Table 8 provides a summary of those outside referrals. Of the outside referrals, the greatest number were made to the GRASP Alternative High School. The District Attorney's Office and the Adolescent Service Center also received a considerable number of SAC referrals.

TABLE 6
MONTHS IN PROGRAM

NUMBER OF MONTHS	NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENT	CUMULATIVE PERCENT
1 - 4	48	25.9	25.9
5 - 8	31	16.8	42.7
9 -12	49	26.5	69.2
13 -18	43	23.2	92.4
19 -24	11	5.9	98.3
More than 24	3	1.6	99.9
TOTAL	185	99.9 ^a	

^aRounding error

TABLE 7
PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH POOR ATTENDANCE

PROBLEM	SEX		TOTAL	
	M	F	N	%
Academically Slow	11	3	14	6.9
Age/Maturity/Grade Level	5	6	11	5.4
Medical	3	2	5	2.5
Poor Parental Guidance	20	49	69	33.8
Poor Peer Influences	12	11	23	11.3
Poor Regard for Education ^b	42	10	52	25.5
Poor Socialization Skills ^b	17	13	30	14.7
TOTAL	110	94	204	100.1 ^c

^a While most students had several problems identified, only those considered to be the major problem were included in this summary.

^b That is, withdrawn, hostile, aggressive, etc.

^c Rounding error.

TABLE 8
REFERRALS OUTSIDE THE SAC PROGRAM

AGENCY or PROGRAM	NUMBER of REFERRALS	PERCENT of TOTAL
Adolescent Service Center	14	11.6
VASAU	6	5.0
Community Service Center	2	1.7
GRASP School	27	22.3
M. Haughery School	10	8.3
District Attorney	16	13.2
Community School	6	5.0
Child Protection	5	4.1
Youth Continuing Education	10	8.3
Other ^a	<u>25</u>	<u>20.7</u>
TOTAL	121	100.2

^aThe "other category includes such miscellaneous agencies or programs as the Job Corps, Milne Home, and special education classes.
^bRounding error.

The average and modal grade level at the time of intake was seventh grade. Table 9 indicates grade level by age at the time of intake. Assuming most children begin school at age six, one would expect that any given child would be in a grade equal to a number six less than his or her age. For example, a twelve year old child would be expected to be in the sixth grade. The diagonal line in the table then would separate those in the grade appropriate for their age from those above or below the appropriate grade level. Looking below and to the left of the diagonal, one finds that nearly half of the SAC participants were below the appropriate grade level.

For approximately forty percent of the SAC participants, a tested reading level was reported. Those data are reported by age in Table 10. Again, looking below and to the left of the diagonal line, one finds that nearly all students were below the appropriate level.

Table 11 summarizes the data of the preceding two tables and indicates, for both grade and reading level, the number and the approximate percentage of students above, at, or below the appropriate level. Forty-nine percent of the students were below the appropriate grade level and 98% were below the appropriate reading level.

TABLE 9
GRADE BY AGE AT INTAKE

AGE	6	7	8	9	10	TOTAL
12	2	13	1	0	0	16
13	4	23	15	1	0	43
14	4	29	30	4	0	67
15	2	17	14	10	0	43
16	0	6	9	3	1	19
17	0	2	2	1	0	5
18	0	0	2	0	0	2
TOTAL	12	90	73	19	1	195

TABLE 10
a
READING LEVEL BY AGE AT INTAKE

AGE	READING LEVEL								TOTAL
	1	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
12	1	1	1	4	0	1	0	0	8
13	1	2	5	7	1	0	0	0	16
14	2	3	8	14	4	0	0	1	32
15	1	2	2	4	3	1	2	0	15
16	0	0	4	2	1	1	0	0	8
17	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	5	8	20	31	10	4	2	1	81

^aReading levels reflect test results as reported in the case folders of 81 students.

TABLE 11
COMPARISON OF GRADE AND READING LEVELS AMONG SAC PARTICIPANTS

POSITION	GRADE	READING LEVEL
Above Appropriate Level	34 (17%)	2 (2%)
At Appropriate Level	66 (34%)	0 --
Below Appropriate Level	95 (49%)	79 (98%)
TOTAL	195 (100%)	81 (100%)

During the period of data collection, the evaluator read the case narratives which were included with each SAC participant's record and made an assessment regarding the outcome of all cases. Table 12 summarizes those assessments and indicates general improvement among 127 (62%) of those cases. Combining those who were no success (22) with those who refused services (13) suggests a clear lack of success among approximately seventeen percent of the participants.

TABLE 12
ASSESSMENT OF CASE OUTCOME AMONG SAC PARTICIPANTS

OUTCOME	NUMBER	PERCENT of TOTAL
General Improvement	127	62.3
No Success	22	10.8
Refused Service	13	6.4
Moved/Unable to Locate	11	5.4
Disqualified	5	2.5
Sent to LTI	2	1.0
Other/Missing	24	11.8
TOTAL	204	100.2 ^a

^a Rounding error.

B. Truancy Reduction

Two measures were used to assess the effectiveness of the SAC program in reducing absenteeism among participants and improving attendance at the two target schools. The primary measure assessed the before and after (participation) change in a truancy ratio⁶ calculated for all students for whom data were available. Because of the limitations of this measure, a secondary measure of program effectiveness was utilized. This measure assessed the aggregate change at the two target schools between a two-year period before program implementation and the three school years of program operations.

Attendance data were available for 110 (53.9%) of the 204 SAC participants. For each of those students, a truancy ratio was calculated for the period before entry into the program and for the period after entry. Then, the individual change was computed. Of the 110 students for whom data were available, ninety-seven (88%) displayed improved attendance, while thirteen (12%) did not. Table 13 provides a summary of the change in truancy ratios. As indicated by the row labeled "Total", the average individual's attendance improved by approximately fifty-three percent.

⁶ See the Methodology section for a discussion of the truancy ratio and limitations.

TABLE 13
AVERAGE INDIVIDUAL CHANGE IN TRUANCY RATIO^a
BEFORE AND AFTER INTAKE

	<u>N</u>	<u>PERCENT CHANGE</u>
Successful	97(88%)	-67.6 ^b
Unsuccessful	13(12%)	+53.3 ^c
TOTAL	110(100%)	-53.3 ^d

^a Truancy Ratio = $\frac{\text{Days Absent}}{\text{Days Present}}$

^b This percentage reflects improved attendance.

^c This percentage reflects increased absences.

^d Overall, the truancy ratios changed in a favorable direction.

Aggregate attendance data for the school years 1975-1976 through 1979-1980 were collected from the OPSB and provided the basis for an assessment of attendance change at the two target schools. Table 14 provides the annual average attendance rates⁷ for the last five school years, two of which were prior to implementation of the SAC program and three of which were the years of SAC operations. Also, the table provides a comparison to all middle and junior high schools, as well as to the entire public school system. As indicated by the table, both Derham's and Woodson's average daily attendance rates have increased slightly over the last five years.

⁷ See Methodology Section for a discussion.

TABLE 14
ANNUAL AVERAGE DAILY ATTENDANCE RATES^a
FOR THE SCHOOL YEARS 1975-1976 THROUGH 1979-1980

SCHOOL or SCHOOL CATEGORY	ANNUAL ATTENDANCE RATE				
	BEFORE SAC IMPLEMENTATION		DURING SAC OPERATIONS		
	'75-'76	'76-'77	'77-'78	'78-'79	'79-'80
Derham Middle	78.2	80.6	80.9	81.2	81.3
All OPSB Middle	83.6	85.0	83.7	84.2	85.8
Woodson Jr. High	87.0	86.0	87.3	86.9	88.6
All OPSB Jr. High	84.7	84.9	85.1	84.6	84.5
All (OPSB) Public Schools	87.5	87.6	86.8	86.6	87.5

^a The average daily attendance rates for each year were computed by dividing the annual average daily attendance by the average daily membership and then multiplying by 100. The respective rates indicate the annual average number of students present on any given day for each 100 enrolled.

Table 15 compares the average (for the two years 1975-1976 and 1976-1977) annual attendance rate before SAC implementation to the average for the three years during program operations. Derham's average annual rate during operations was more than two percent greater than before program implementation, while the improvement among all middle schools was less than half a percent. Woodson's rate improved more than one percent, while the rate among all junior high schools declined. During the comparison period, the rates at both target schools increased, while the rate for the entire OPSB system decreased.

TABLE 15
COMPARISON OF AVERAGE ANNUAL ATTENDANCE RATES^a
BEFORE AND DURING SAC OPERATIONS

School or School Category	AVERAGE ANNUAL ATTENDANCE RATE		PERCENT CHANGE
	Before SAC Implementation ('75-'76 thru '76-'77)	During SAC Operations ('77-'78 thru '79-'80)	
Derham Middle	79.4	81.1	2.1
All OPSB Middle	84.3	84.6	0.4
Woodson Jr. High	86.5	87.6	1.3
All OPSB Jr. High	84.8	84.7	-0.1
ALL (OPSB) Public Schools	87.6	87.0	-0.7

^a The average daily attendance rates were computed by dividing the average daily attendance by the average daily membership and then multiplying by 100. The rates indicate the average number of students present for each 100 enrolled.

C. Arrest Reduction

The records of the NOPD Family Service Division (formerly, the Juvenile Division) provided the data used for this analysis. The names of all SAC participants were checked against the NOPD juvenile files for any contact through the end of May, 1980. Records were found for eighty-three (40.7%) of the SAC participants. Altogether, those eighty-three students had a total of 197 contacts with the NOPD. The number of contacts per student ranged from one contact for forty-one of the students to twelve contacts for one student. The average and mean number of contacts per student were 2.4 and 1.5, respectively. However, not all those contacts were considered in the analysis. Often a police contact was recorded when the child was not the criminal, but the victim - for example, of neglect. In other cases, the contact did not result in any further action by the NOPD. An informal adjustment was made with the child being admonished and released. The analysis, then, utilized only those contacts which resulted from criminal arrests serious enough to be referred to the Family Court. Table 16 provides a summary of contacts (arrests) serious enough to be referred to Court, as well as a summary of the charges resulting from those arrests. Seventy-two students had a total of 160 arrests which resulted in 191 charges. The number of arrests per person ranged from one arrest of thirty-six students to eleven arrests for one student. The number of charges ranged from one charge against twenty-nine of the students to thirteen charges against one. The mean and median numbers of arrests and charges were 1.9 and 1.4, and 2.3 and 1.6, respectively.

TABLE 16
NUMBER OF ARRESTS OF AND CHARGES^a AGAINST SAC PARTICIPANTS

NUMBER	ARRESTS		CHARGES	
	PERSONS	TOTAL ^b	PERSONS	TOTAL ^b
0	11	0	11	0
1	36	36	29	29
2	14	28	16	32
3	9	27	9	27
4	5	20	7	28
5	5	25	3	15
6	1	6	3	18
7	1	7	3	21
8	-	-	1	8
11	1	11	-	-
13	-	-	1	13
TOTAL	83	160	83	191

^aOne arrest could result in multiple charges.

^bTotal represents either the total arrests or total charges and is the product of the number of persons multiplied by the number in the first (left) column.

Table 17a provides the distributions of arrests and charges which were recorded during a period no more than one year prior to participation in the SAC program, while Table 17b provides the distributions of arrests and charges which were recorded for the period up to one year after participation. As evidenced by the tables, the majority of SAC participants who had records at the NOPD had no arrests or charges within one year before or after program participation.

TABLE 17

DISTRIBUTION OF ARRESTS AND CHARGES
a... Before Participation

NUMBER REPORTED	ARRESTS	CHARGES
	N	N
0	50	50
1	26	21
2	6	10
3	1	2
TOTAL	83	83

b... After Participation

NUMBER REPORTED	ARRESTS	CHARGES
	N	N
0	67	67
1	11	7
2	4	8
6	1	0
7	0	1
TOTAL	83	83

Table 18 summarizes the frequency distributions of arrests and charges before and after SAC participation. Both the mean and median number of arrests and charges for the two time periods were compared. As indicated by the row labeled "Percent Change," both the mean and median numbers of arrests decreased after participation -- by approximately 39% and 64%, respectively. Similar changes were evident for the average and median number of charges.

TABLE 18

COMPARISONS OF THE MEAN AND MEDIAN NUMBERS OF ARRESTS AND CHARGES BEFORE AND AFTER SAC PARTICIPATION

	ARRESTS		CHARGES	
	MEAN	MEDIAN	MEAN	MEDIAN
Before	.49	.33	.57	.33
After	.30	.12	.36	.12
Percent Change	-38.8%	-63.6%	-36.8%	-63.6%
N=83				

D. Unit Cost Summary

JJDP grants in the amount of \$127,453.78 and cash matches totaling \$11,616.92 enabled the SAC to operate between September 1, 1977 and May 31, 1980. During that period there were approximately 495 days that the program could have operated. Dividing the total program cost, \$139,070.70, by 495 days yields the approximate cost per day for program operations, \$281.00. However, while some staff had been hired, the program did not find a location and become fully operational until January 1, 1978. That effectively left approximately 430 operational days and, using that figure, an approximate daily cost of \$323.00.

Table 19 provides a breakdown of program costs by budget category. As indicated, the personnel category represented the major cost.

CATEGORY	AMOUNT	PERCENT OF TOTAL
Personnel	\$ 119,403.53	85.9
Fringe Benefits	6,246.60	4.5
Travel	421.94	0.3
Equipment	1,991.61	1.4
Supplies	1,797.71	1.3
Other Direct Costs	3,941.00	2.8
Indirect Costs	5,268.31	3.8
TOTAL	\$ 139,070.70	100.0

Since the program served a total of 204 students, the average cost per student served was approximately \$682.00. With an average time (per student) of ten months spent in the program, the

average monthly cost of providing services was slightly more than \$68.00 per student. As the program was designed to serve 150 students per year and was operational for two and a half school years, some 375 students should have been served. Had the anticipated number of students participated in the program, the cost per student would have been just less than \$371.00.

A number of services (e.g., counseling, tutoring, home visits, etc.) were provided the participants. Table 20 provides a comparison of costs for the services actually provided to the costs for providing the same services to the anticipated number of students. As indicated, the cost per service was approximately \$14.00. Had the program served the anticipated number of students, the cost per service would have been less than \$8.00.

TABLE 20
COSTS PER SERVICE TO THE ACTUAL NUMBER OF SAC PARTICIPANTS COMPARED TO THE ANTICIPATED NUMBER

GROUP	NUMBER	AVERAGE SERVICES ^a	TOTAL SERVICES	COST PER SERVICE ^b
Actually Served	204	49	9,996	\$13.91
Anticipated	375	49	18,375	7.57

^a All individual services were added together to calculate the total number of services. It was assumed that the average number of services per participant would have remained the same had the program had more intake.

^b Total program cost, \$139,070.70, was divided by total services to yield the cost per service.

V. SUMMARY, OBSERVATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

A. Summary

Responding to the local problem of absenteeism which had been determined "acute" at the middle and junior high school levels, the OPSB designed the SAC program with the primary goal of reducing truancy among students at two central city schools. Funded by the JJDP, the SAC program operated between September 1, 1977 and May 31, 1980. The program, which had the secondary goal of reducing criminal involvement among participants, was actually fully operational from January 1, 1978. With the exception of the summer months (i.e., June-September) of 1979, the program was in continuous operation through May, 1980. Allowing for school and other holidays, this period included approximately 430 days that the program was operational.

Although the program was designed to serve 150 students per school year, only 204 total students were served during the SAC's two and a half school years of operation. The number actually served represented approximately forty-five percent of the number anticipated by the program planners (450). Of the 204 served by the program, all were Black, 54% were male and 46% were female. The average age of the students at the time of intake was fourteen years and the average time spent in the program was ten months. While referrals were accepted from a number of sources, the two schools supplied a combined total of 199 (97.6%) students to the program. Among male participants,

the primary problem associated with truancy was a "poor regard for education;" while among females, the primary problem was "poor parental guidance." Nearly half of the students were below the appropriate grade level and approximately ninety-eight percent (of those for whom data were available) read below the appropriate level.

In addition to providing 101 students with a total of 121 referrals to other programs or agencies, the SAC provided several other services. Among those were individual, group, and parental counseling sessions; home visits; and, tutoring services. The average number of such services provided each student was approximately thirty-two. When classroom visits, field trips, phone calls, etc. are included, the average number of all services provided each student was approximately forty-nine. General improvement was indicated among approximately sixty-two percent of the students.

The effectiveness of the program in reducing absenteeism was considered both at the individual level and also at the aggregate level; that is, by school. Individual attendance was assessed using a truancy ratio which indicated the number of days absent for each day present. Such a ratio was computed for all students for whom data were available for a period before program participation and for a period after participation. A percent change was then computed on the before and after variables, with the average change used as the indicator of program effectiveness. The average change of minus fifty-three percent indicated that absenteeism had indeed

decreased. The supplementary assessment of aggregate attendance suggested that attendance at each of the two target schools had improved during the course of program operations.

The assessment of the secondary goal, reduced criminal involvement among participants, relied on arrest data collected at the NOPD's Family Services Division. Eighty-three (40.7%) of the SAC participants were found to have had a contact or contacts with the NOPD. The analysis included an assessment of the change in number of arrests and charges before and after participation in the program. Both decreased after participation in the program; the average number of arrests declined approximately thirty-nine percent and the average number of charges declined approximately thirty-seven percent.

JJDP grants in the amount of \$127,453.78, along with cash matches totaling \$11,616.92, enabled the program to operate at a total cost of \$139,070.70. This represented an average cost per student served of approximately \$682.00. Dividing that same total by the number of services provided yielded an average per service cost of approximately \$14.00.

B. Observations

Since no efforts have been initiated to research the long-term impact of the program, a comprehensive assessment of program effectiveness may never be available. However, while the weakness of the present research design prevents the evaluator from attributing causality to the SAC, the empirical analyses of individual school attendance and criminal involvement did indicate improvement in those areas among

program participants. That is, as suggested by the "preliminary" measures of this report, the SAC program was apparently effective.

In two particular respects the actual program differed from the program which was projected in the grant application. First, the number of students actually served by the program was considerably lower than the number that had been projected. Not only would an increased intake have lowered the per student cost of the program, but, assuming similar effectiveness with regard to attendance and criminal involvement, an increased intake would possibly have made the work of the program more conspicuous in the community.

The second difference relates to the definition of the program (i.e., in the grant application) as both an experimental and a pilot program. By "experimental" one might assume that the program was designed with both a research and a service delivery function. However, little new knowledge regarding the causes of or the most effective responses to the problem(s) associated with (or leading to) truancy was added by the program. As a pilot program, expected to guide future endeavors to address the problem(s) of chronic student absenteeism, the SAC largely neglected this important function.

One final observation which the evaluator found both interesting and suggestive (i.e., for any future programs) was the fact that ninety-eight percent of those participants for whom reading level had been assessed read below the level appropriate for their age. The counseling component and, especially, the tutoring component of any subsequent program should perhaps focus on the development of

language arts skills. Assuming a relationship between reading skills and attendance, the problem of poor reading skills is quite likely more amenable to "treatment" than is the complex problem of truancy.

C. Conclusion

Given the limited number of students served and the limitations of the research design, the evaluation report suggests that the SAC managed the service delivery component of the program in an effective manner. However, the uncertainty regarding the complexities of the various behavior problems associated with chronic absenteeism remains an issue which must be addressed before any programmatic response can be considered complete.

END