

A COMPARISON OF TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY
VOLUNTEERS IN IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL
ATTENDANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

A COMPARISON OF TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS IN IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

This thesis was undertaken to investigate if community volunteers are more effective in increasing attendance than classroom teachers. Three of the four high schools in one school district in Nova Scotia were the sample. This correlational study analyzed the attendance data supplied by school officials for a seven month period in each of the years 1987, 1988 and 1989.

During the 1987 school year the teachers telephoned the parents in all schools to inform the parents that their child was absent. The teachers sometimes evoked statements that could be construed as potentially punitive. During 1988 teachers performed the same task in the same manner as in 1987, except in one school where the community volunteers telephoned the parents to inform them of their child's absence. The volunteers conveyed a neutral message that merely stated that the child was absent. During the 1989 school year, the teachers in all schools telephoned the parents.

Attendance percentages were significantly higher in a school when the community volunteers telephoned the parents to inform them that their child was absent from school than

in control group high schools or in the same school, when parents were telephoned by the teachers. In the school where the community volunteers were used, attendance was lower in the baseline year of 1987 when the teachers conducted the attendance program. During 1988, when the volunteers conducted policy, attendance increased significantly. During the 1988 year, when the attendance procedure once more was conducted by the teachers, the attendance percentages reverted to lower levels associated with the baseline period in 1987.

Ches W Farwell

May 12, 1990

MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION PROGRAM
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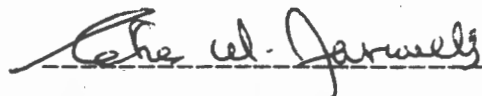
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REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

(a) The Severity and Extent of Inadequate School Attendance

Endeavoring to increase school attendance is an exasperating problem for many school administrators inundated with increasing numbers of absentee students.

Unacceptable low attendance percentages have been identified as a major concern of educators (Levanto, 1975). "High school absenteeism has become a matter of serious concern to many school administrators." (Levanto, 1975, P.100).

In a survey of Tennessee High School principals "Eighty-six percent of the respondents reported that student absenteeism was a major problem." and "that too much administrative time and effort were being spent on attendance related matters." (Brimm, Fogerty & Sadler, 1978, P.66).

A Study by Professor Daniel L. Duke of Stanford University, including samples from both the east and west coasts of the United States, found that the problem of students skipping classes and the resulting lowering of attendance percentages was regarded by administrators as more serious than classroom disruptions, students fighting, disrespect for authority, impertinence and discourtesy to teachers, drug use, profanity and other discipline problems (Duke, 1978).

It was observed in 1975 that , "Indications are that efforts by schools to restrain the rising tide of absenteeism and to

enforce compulsory attendance structure have proven ineffective. Also, a considerable and costly amount of time and effort are expended by high school and administrative staff personnel to control the absentee problem and to prevent a complete breakdown of the school's regulated attendance structure." (Levanto, 1975, P.100).

The problem of inadequate attendance levels in our schools has been studied over several decades and in a number of geographic areas.

Almost three decades ago Rankin conducted a detailed review of attendance records encompassing student reasons for absenteeism. He concluded that a realistic and attainable attendance percentage was 91 percent (Rankin, 1961).

After extensively reviewing the literature in 1971, Tennant found that far too many students were absent due to truancy. While a nine percent absentee rate was found to be an average level of absenteeism, only five percent of the students were legitimately absent. (Tennant, 1974).

Health officials consulted in a Connecticut study of high school absenteeism stated that 7 to 9 school days per year is considered a normal absentee rate for legitimate health problems. Given a 180-day school year, this results in an acceptable average absentee between four to five percent. A four to five percent absentee rate was "a rate not uncommon to high schools of 10 to 15 years ago. Today it is not uncommon to hear

rates ranging from 10 percent to over 50 percent absenteeism." (Levanto, 1975 P. 103). Fortunately, these high percentages of absenteeism do not exist in high schools in Halifax.

Some inner city schools identified attendance problems in their schools to be at alarming proportions. "In many inner-city schools, attendance is often below 50 % of enrollment." (Davis, 1975, P.60). The level of absenteeism has been found to vary considerably depending on the geographic area of the country and whether the school is located in a rural or urban area. (Birman & Natriello, 1978).

In Britain, "School attendance has remained remarkably constant overall for many years at about ninety percent....". However, only three percent is considered to be a reasonable rate of absenteeism for legitimate reasons (Fogelman, 1978, P. 157).

Obviously there is much room for improvement in school attendance. Other researchers in the 1980's have confirmed findings of from 9 to 10 percent levels of absenteeism in our schools (Fiske, 1983 ; Foster, 1983). Other investigators believe that nationally the absentee rate for United States schools on an average day represents eight percent of the student enrollment, but this is still twice the rate due to excusable reasons such as illness (De Leonibus 1978 ; Rodgers, 1980).

Recently, (deJung & Duckworth, 1986) in a study of two urban school districts in the western United States, found that

absenteeism was in some schools at an unacceptable level of eleven percent.

In reiterating the seriousness of the problem we must realize that the true attendance rates in the schools is much higher than the official absenteeism disclosure, due to varying definitions that constitute full and half day attendance. In a study of six urban high schools in the western United states teacher's attendance records were found to contain 3 to 5 percent more class absences per day than did the official school records. Also on examination days and registration days all students are marked present. Errors of omission in attendance recording are not infrequent. Many students who were absent from class were found to escape detection in the official attendance records due to the school counting a certain number of class periods as a full or half day absenteeism (deJung and Duckworth, 1986).

(b) Reasons to Improve Student Attendance

Reducing the unnecessary high absenteeism in our schools is an exasperating problem. However, improving attendance can result in beneficial consequences for all concerned. One reason for striving for a increase in attendance percentages is the opportunity to increase the monetary grant to the school district from the provincial government.

The paramount reason to aim for high attendance rates should be to increase the degree of student learning in our schools. Numerous studies have observed the relationship between school

attendance and academic achievement. (Rozelle, 1968). It was found that high school seniors having the highest academic achievement have the lowest rate of absenteeism (Levanto, 1975). A number of studies have found a positive correlation between improved attendance and grades (Davis, 1975). In Britain, a statistically significant relationship between fifteen year old secondary students and school achievement was found, even after taking into consideration various social factors. "Children with high attendance levels obtain on average higher scores on tests of reading comprehension and mathematics and are less often indicated by their teachers as showing deviant behavior." (Fogelman, 1978). In Ontario, Canada in a study of grade eight students in 300 different schools, the researchers relate that the learning of some subjects is more influenced by the amount of instructional time than others. " French (as a second language) appears clearly to be highly sensitive to instructional time, certainly in the beginning years. Achievement in social studies and literature seems generally to be somewhat unrelated to instructional time, although Ontario data do suggest a relationship in the case of geography." (Holmes & Wolfe, 1979, P. 13). Correlations were also found between attendance and grades by other investigators (McClure, 1977 ; deJung and Duckworth, 1986 ; Zafirau, 1987). It is important to insure that students attend regularly so as to obtain as high a grade as possible, since over 40 percent of students that drop out of school have

poor grades (McClure, 1977). As identified by the research poor attendance often has been correlated with poor grades, which in turn culminates in far too many cases in a student dropping out of school. Studies suggest that excessive absenteeism may be conducive in creating a belief in the student that they are unable to pass the course and decide to drop out (Kelso, 1978 ; Bean, 1982 ; Martin, 1982). It is hoped that educators by concentrating on improving attendance may terminate or reduce the level of student dropout.

Forty percent of those arrested in Chicago and Boston areas were found to have at one time to be truant from school and considered an absentee problem (Healey and Bronner, 1926). Of five hundred institutionalized young male offenders it was found that 94.8 percent of them were at one time truant while only 10.8 percent of a comparable group of non offenders were found to have a record of truancy (Glueck and Glueck, 1950). Other studies have also revealed that there is a negative correlation between attendance and juvenile delinquency (Tennent, 1971). It has also been found that elementary school truancy, beginning as early as the second grade was a good indicator that the child would be truant in high school and that high school truancy appears to accompany other deviant behaviors which include discipline problems in the military and employment problems (Robins, Nelken, Ratcliff and Strother, 1978). Delinquent children were also

found to be absent more often than a control group of non delinquent children (Borg, 1985)

In addition, (Senna et al., 1975), discovered by factor analysis of a variety of measures of performance, that attendance is significantly related to delinquency. Students identified as delinquents were found to have lower levels of school attendance than non delinquent students. It may be that absenteeism is one of the causes of delinquency.

(c) The Effectiveness of Various Communication Techniques

A variety of methods have been introduced by school administrators in an attempt to curb student absenteeism. In a junior high school in Prince George County in the District of Columbia grade nine students were trained to perform a number of attendance related tasks. They telephoned the parents to inform them of their child's absence from class, filed attendance records and typed letters to be sent to parents regarding poor attendance. Students were perceived as becoming more concerned with improving attendance as a result of working with the school staff to record and improve attendance and attendance actually did improve. However, the author did not elaborate on the extent or duration of the improvement (Bolds, 1977).

In North Harford Senior High School in Pylesville, Md., during the 1976-77 school year a full time attendance clerk took over the major proportion of the responsibility of data collection, record keeping and communication with parents. It was

believed that attendance patterns of students generally improved due to the introduction of the attendance aide. However, no specific attendance figures were provided in the study. (Jett and Platt, 1979).

One method of communicating with parents to inform them of their child's absence is to mail them a weekly attendance letter. This communication technique was tested in 22 Detroit Michigan high schools. Both the teachers and the parents agreed that it was an effective method of communicating with the parents. Unfortunately the letters were ineffective as a method of reducing truancy. (Moore, 1985).

In Sacramento, California school officials determined that between 7:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. in the morning 99 percent of all children were watching television and most were watching a cartoon show called "The Morning Zoo". Officials used the television to transmit a message to the children that told them to turn off the television and go to school. The program was called Operation Pass and stood for Promoting Attendance for School Success. Forty television messages would reach nearly one million viewers and cost \$1500.00 over a six week period. If the advertisement is successful in keeping only six children attending school, that would normally remain truant during that period, the advertisement would pay for itself due to the increase in State aid because of the attendance increase. The advertisement endeavors to reveal that by going to school you

gain peer group approval. The depiction of the peer group approval of being regarded as "cool" for attending class contains the benefit of peer approval or the implied promise of positive reinforcement for following the instructions given by the television advertisement. The authors did not state if the programs was proven to be effective in increasing attendance. Certainly the use of television advertisements to induce children to attend school is an innovative advance in attendance improvement (Kitada and Femenella, 1986).

(d) Communication Through the Automatic Telephone Dialing Machine

The advent of the automatic telephoning dialing machine system introduces a revolutionary approach for improving communications between school representatives and the parents of absentee children. Many administrators use the machine as a prompting device to inform the parents of their child's absenteeism on a daily basis. Some machines are capable of telephoning over 150 parents per day and never tire of dialing when a busy signal is encountered. They are capable not only of delivering a prerecorded message but of recording a parents response if necessary.

Six Chicago schools used a computerized automatic telephone dialing machine to increase attendance from 78.8 percent to 85.6 percent. The machine requests parent's to telephone the school the following day and explain the absence. It is anticipated that the machine will pay for itself in 15 months, since as attendance

improves state aid will increase (Executive Educator, 1983). A junior high school Principal in Edinburg, Texas increased attendance to 97.34 per cent by using a computerized automatic telephone dialing machine. The system paired punitive methods with the machine. Students lost a credit if absenteeism persisted (Pena, 1985).

In a rural high school in Cole Harbour N.S., Canada the Principal purchased an automatic dialing machine for \$5600 and the teachers volunteered to pay for twenty-five percent of the cost of the machine to increase attendance and decrease their work load. Upon talking to school personnel, I was informed that the machine was effective in increasing attendance rates. Unfortunately an embarrassing message was inadvertently recorded on the machine and transmitted to a number of parents and as a result the use of the machine was terminated (Giles M, 1985).

In a suburban high school in La Mesa California communication with parents was improved with an automatic telephone dialing system so as to inform them of their child's absenteeism on a daily basis. This was paired with a punitive technique. Any students that missed more than 20 days lost their credit for an entire semester. Increased communication and punishment were credited with increasing attendance from 89 per cent before the program started to 92 percent three years later (Jacobson, 1985).

An automatic telephone dialing machine was tested in all

secondary schools of the District of Columbia in 1988. It was used to inform parents when their child was absent from school. The machines were assessed for a 20 day period. In fifty-nine percent of the schools the machines were inoperable during the study due to technical breakdown or other problems. In the schools where the machines were operable every school was found to have an increase in the attendance rate. It was found to be most effective in the morning hours. Parents stated that they would rather receive a call from the school personnel than the machine. However, they were enthusiastic that communication with the school had been increased. It was reiterated that other methods of attendance control would have to be used in conjunction with the machines to ensure an effective attendance program.

(e) Communication and the Use of Positive Reinforcement

Several studies have sought to strengthen or improve attendance by providing a reward for maintaining a predetermined attendance rate or increasing the attendance rate. Praise given directly by school officials to children for attaining acceptable attendance improved attendance only for a brief period of time. However, when praise was given to the parents in this situation instead of the children it resulted in a protracted improvement of student attendance rates. (Copeland, Brown, Axelrod and Hall, 1972). Praise was also used to combat absenteeism by Brooks (Brooks, 1975). Similarly, Fiordaliso (Fiordaliso et al, 1976)

found that the attendance patterns of junior high school students began to improve when the Principal telephoned parents and praised them for their children having improved attendance. There was a protracted increase in attendance for these students. In the study it was found that students with the more severe history of absenteeism required parents to be informed more frequently in order for improvement in attendance to occur.

Positive conditioning or behavior modification has been effectively used to change behavior. Behavior modification or conditioning uses principles of learning, that have been experimentally established to change behavior that we regard as undesirable or unadaptive. Undesirable habits are weakened and desirable habits are strengthened (Skinner, 1953 & Wolpe, 1969). A study was conducted that compared seven students given tokens and praise with a control group given no reinforcement. Tokens were gradually removed as was praise from the study group during the study according to conditioning procedure. Attendance was found to increase in the conditioned group from 86 percent to 98 percent (O'Leary, et al, 1969). Other studies also reveal that students have been conditioned to maintain better attendance rates. In these studies students were first rewarded for good attendance with tangible objects. The frequency of tangible rewards were gradually reduced and the positive behavior, which is good attendance, becomes its own reward and the positive behavior tends to persist (Spencer & Hall, 1976).

Positive reinforcement in the form of attendance awards have proved very effective in increasing school attendance rates. Elementary children who attained perfect attendance for six consecutive weeks were promised admission to a sock hop or frolic party that included games, food and desirable prizes. The only way to obtain a ticket was to obtain perfect attendance. One third of the school population attained perfect attendance. The positive reinforcement program was regarded as a success (Dockery, 1970).

The application of behavior contracts between problem students and school officials has proven to be successful in controlling student behavior (Keirse, 1969) ; Thomas & Ezell, 1972). The use of a written behavioral contract that is signed by the student, teachers, Principal, parents and all those affected by the students behavior has been successful in correcting behavioral problems such as attendance and it includes a schedule of reinforcement for the student signing the contract. Recognition such as praise, privilege or compensation are agreed to by all concerned before the contract is signed. All parties must believe the contract is fair and equitable in order for it to work. In the contract equality of conditions stresses the importance for all parties involved to make a commitment to change. In this way the student does not believe that the contract is one-sided or unfair (Hackney, 1974).

In a junior high school in Cabool, the class with the highest attendance percentage at the end of a four week period was promised a class party during the last class of the day. A special prize was given to each class attaining 100 percent attendance. As a result average daily attendance increased and eventually reached 95 percent (Stringer, 1978).

In North High School an Omaha urban inner city high school having a population of 2,200 students, the Principal introduced a reward policy to modify student attendance behavior. "Any student having no more than two and one-half absences per semester, and fewer than six, was excused from final exams, unless he was in danger of failing a class." The removal of final examinations as a reward for high attendance achievement succeeded in reducing absences by twenty-five per cent." (Davis, 1975, P. 560).

Money when used to modify student attendance has been remarkably effective. Students in Memorial Junior High School in San Diego were paid twenty-five cents a day for every class they attended by the trustees. However, they regarded it as a reward for coming to school. This must be viewed as a rational solution since for each unauthorized daily absence a school forfeits nine dollars. Unauthorized absences in the previous year cost the school \$132,000 in state attendance funds (Dawson, 1980).

The type of positive reinforcement appears to be inconsequential. Besides the traditional reward of money other

objects such as pens, candy, staplers, tickets to entertainment events and a host of other non monetary reinforcers have been found to be effective in stimulating students to improve their attendance (Beulieu, 1984).

(f) Positive Reinforcement Versus punishment in Effectiveness

Punishment is defined "as the addition of an aversive stimulus (something unpleasant) as a consequence of behavior." (Walker & Shea, 1984, P.126) and it can be in the form of scolding, a reprimand, extra work and detention. Another form of punishment is the subtraction of something the student regards as desirable such as the lowering of a mark or loss of a credit.

It is generally excepted that "Punishment is effective for obtaining short term goals. However, other interventions such as extinction and ignoring the behavior are probably more effective for attaining permanent long term changes." (Walker & Shea, 1984). In addition, punishment has been found on many occasions to be merely suppressing undesirable behavior rather than eliminating it. This may result in undesirable emotional results in the child such as fear, tension, stress and this frustration may result in reverting to further deviation from the desirable behavior (Clarizio & Yelon, 1967 ; Wood & Lakin, 1978).

Unfortunately "Punishment in the perception of the punished child is frequently associated with the person responsible for administering the punishment rather than with the unacceptable behavior. As a result, the punished child's reactions may be

avoidance and dislike of the punisher rather than a change in behavior. Teachers who acknowledge that they are in effect behavioral models for their students will avoid assuming the role of the punisher." (Walker & Shea, 1984, P.145). These observations by (Walker and Shea,1984) provided reason to suspect that after hearing that their parents received a message from their teacher that contained possible negative and unpleasant punitive consequences, there may be a tendency for the student to avoid the punisher (teacher) by unnecessarily skipping further classes in the future.

A number of research studies have attempted to determine which type of methodology is more effective in increasing attendance in our schools positive reinforcement or punishment.

In an inner city high school in Philadelphia an experiment was conducted using three groups of approximately thirty-two truants. Each group was exposed to different treatments to curb their attendance problems. Subjects in group one were told that if their absenteeism continued they would probably not be successful in school and a lack of education could result in poverty, and other punitive consequences. In addition the subjects were offered supportive instruction and help, when they were absent. Group two was only given punitive communication threats when they were absent. Group three was given talks on the positive benefits of better attendance as well as the same offer to help that was provided to group one. Results revealed that

group three, that paired positive benefits of improved attendance with an offer of support and help attained the best attendance improvement. Group one, that gave threats of punitive consequences of attendance paired with support, increased attendance but not as much as group three. Group two, which only used punitive threats, had no change on attendance rates. The experiment revealed that positive reinforcement was more effective than the threat of punishment in increasing student attendance (Grala, and McCaulley, 1976).

An experiment that tested the effect of positive reinforcement and punishment was conducted in a rural high school in Maryland. During the 1983-84 school year, from September through December sophomores were confronted with methods of punitive deterrents when they were absent from class such as lowering grades and suspension for repeated absenteeism. This group was considered the control group. During the 1984-85 school year the sophomore class received daily positive reinforcement. Each morning a statement was read to the class about the importance of maintaining excellent attendance. Parents were called and congratulated when their children's attendance was impressive. Letters of congratulations were sent to students. The most popular reward was the awarding of a T-shirt, with writing on it proclaiming their excellent attendance record. All members of the class received the T-shirt and peer pressure was used by the students to persuade fellow students into maintaining perfect

attendance. During the first two marking periods the group exposed to punitive techniques were absent on average seven days, while for the same period of time the positive reinforcement group were absent three and one half days. "What the Pocomoke High School study suggests is that a positive approach can be more successful than a negative one." (VanSciver, 1986, P. 23).

(g) Communication and the Use of Punishment

In Norwich High school in Connecticut students had their grades reduced when they did not attend class and students that accumulated more than ten unexcused absentees in a grading period were given a grade of 1 out of 5. In addition students were given detention for absenteeism. During the week Wednesdays and Thursdays had the lowest absenteeism and boys had better attendance than girls (Levanto, 1973).

Preventing a student from receiving a credit if the student misses a certain number of classes was found to be effective in increasing attendance when the policy was adopted by twenty-two high schools comprising the Ferndale School District of Michigan. Any student absent for more than eleven times would lose a credit. The program cut absenteeism in half from 14 percent to 7 percent. Prior to this the district used telephone calls to parents that included nebulous implied punitive threats. The new policy did not involve telephone calls to the parents. (McCulloch, 1974).

Malden, Massachusetts students were given a failing grade after the seventh unexcused absenteeism. Attendance was found to increase from 87.4 percent in 1976-77 before the program started to 91.0 percent in 1977-78. Low achieving students were found to benefit most as a result of the program (Zafirau, 1987).

A punitive program to improve attendance was instituted at the Albemarle County School system in central Virginia that included ten thousand public school students. Students that were absent more than a specific number of days had their grade score reduced, unless they were failing. Telephone calls were made to the parents to inform them of their child's absenteeism. Students were also assigned a failing grade for excessive absenteeism. The percentage of attendance in the school increased from 91.48 percent before the attendance program started to 93.92 percent after the first year of the program in 1977. The school was also successful in decreasing the drop out rate from 5.7 percent to 4.76 percent (McClure, 1977).

A relatively well known method of punishing students for absenteeism is requiring students to attend classes after regular hours. In San Bernardino City students that are absent for six truancies in a given class must attend class after regular school hours for five consecutive days before returning to regular classes at the normal time. If absenteeism persists the student is transferred to another school (Bristow, 1979).

Similarly, students in Warwick High School in Newport News, Virginia were observed to come to school for the social aspects but hardly ever attend class. Instead many were found to be robbing and stealing in the neighborhood. This school had tried a variety of other punitive methods to curb the attendance problem. Conferences with parents, suspending students and withholding credits were all tried and failed. The only program that worked was the Prevention Rehabilitation Program. In this punitive program any student that accumulated 5 unexcused absences in 2 or more courses was forced to attend school after regular hours. Students in the program began their school day at 5:00 p.m. or approximately 3 hours after the regular students were dismissed. In addition the classes were held in another school setting that is not as pleasant and is inconvenient to reach. Once transferred the student must remain there for at least two months. At the new school there are no free periods and students have no choice in the subjects they study. Attendance increased from 87.27 percent in 1983-84 prior to the inception of the program to 91.14 percent in 1984-85 in the first 8 months of the program. It was the first time the school ever exceeded 90 percent attendance. In school suspensions were down 69 percent, while the dropout rate decreased from 5.9 percent to 3.7 percent. Out of school suspensions declined to 41 percent. While the program cost \$33,000 to operate, it saved the school \$50,000. In addition, the city of Newport News was the only city of eight other cities in

the area that achieved a decrease in crimes committed by school age persons during the day during the first year of the program. Although not verifiable the school officials believed the crime rate was down because the students were either home or in school instead of looting the neighborhood. Moreover, school officials estimated that approximately 50 percent less administrative time was spent on discipline and attendance as a result of the acceptance of the program. As a result, each of the three vice principals at Warwick High School, for the first time, each had time to teach one class in the school. Of the 250 students assigned to the alternate school for attendance problems, 111 returned to the regular school program, while only 11 students returned to the detention school for a second time (Stacey, 1986).

Legally removing students from the school if they were persistently absent and refused to attend counseling sessions designed to improve their attendance was found to increase attendance in a 160 school study in Kane County, Illinois. While Kane county did increase their budgetary expenditures by \$140,000 in administering this program, they received \$664,000 in additional financial aid from the state due to the increase in their attendance percentages. (Hanson and Hoeft, 1983).

The principal of a 450 pupil high school in Ovid, New York uses the school intercom system to broadcast the names of students absent from each class. He also uses a daily conduct

report that problem absentee students are required to have teachers sign each day. The form contains duplicate copies and one copy goes in the students file at the end of each day and the other goes to the teacher (Zafirau, 1987).

Research has also revealed that punitive methods have sometimes been unable to live up to their expectations. Some authors maintain that problem absentee students already feel alienated from the school and punishing these students may create more hostility and actually worsen the problem (Neilson & Gerber, 1979). Similarly, suspension also creates problems for alienated students who often have academic problems as well as attendance problems. Reducing a students grade may be so discouraging to a student that has worked hard to achieve the grade that the student will give up and drop out of school. Legally prosecuting a student may conceivably constitute a traumatic experience for an alienated student that is not attending (Kaeser, 1984). The District of Columbia has used a variety of punitive techniques such as detention, joint parent-student conferences and suspensions to improve attendance. They maintained that these punitive measures were ineffective and concluded that punitive methods were negatively related to improvements in attendance rates (Tuck, 1988).

(h) Combining Punishment and Positive Reinforcement

At San Pasqual Valley Junior-Senior High School in Imperial Valley California school officials have combined the concept of

punishment for absenteeism with positive reward for maintaining superior attendance into what they believe to be the perfect attendance improvement system. If parental notification and conference regarding an attendance problem is ineffective, cleaning up the school grounds and suspension from school is implemented. At the same time other students that maintain superior attendance records are rewarded with merchandise and gift certificates that are supplied by community businesses. School officials regard this combination of punishment and reward as the perfect attendance system and note that one out of three students attained a perfect attendance rating when the program was tested (Headington, 1984)

(i) Who is an Effective Communicator in Improving Attendance?

It has been discovered that the effectiveness of the communication of a message depends on who the communication message is directed towards. (Parker & Frank, 1977) discovered that intervention and discussion of absentee problems of a student with a parent, whether by using praise for a student's good attendance or punitive disapproval for not attending was more effective in improving future attendance than intervention and discussion of the attendance problem with the student. These results were observed at the junior high school level. Parental communication and its effectiveness is one of the most important integral components in increasing attendance rates. (Pena, 1985

P.40) found that "the attendance problem boiled down to the fact that parents were uninformed about their children's truancies".__

The student parent interview was found to be negatively correlated with the incidence of truancy decline and therefore not an effective method of increasing student attendance. On the other hand personal phone calls to the parents, student interviews, parent interviews with school personnel, group interviews and team conferences were all found to have positive correlations with the incidence of truancy decline (Tuck, 1988).

At Northern Virginia Community College a study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of a college professor's secretary in increasing his psychology class attendance by having his secretary communicate to a randomly selected group of students from the professor's first year psychology course by telephone. While communicating on the telephone the secretary stated that the professor wanted the student to attend as many classes as possible, asked the student to study hard so as to get a good grade, and stated that the purpose of the call was to let the student know that the professor wants to see the student do well in the course. The attendance results for this group was compared to another randomly selected group of students that received no telephone communication. Results revealed that the telephoned group had significantly fewer absences, indicating that merely a brief telephone communication can be successful in increasing attendance. In addition the study revealed that it was not

necessary for the professor to make the telephone call himself (McCutcheon, 1988)

THE CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION OF THE STUDY

This study is concerned with the effectiveness of different communicators from the school to parents of absentee students and in investigating who is more effective in improving attendance by communicating via telephone to the parents of absentee children when their child is absent from school. The study is conceptually based on an investigation by Dr. Thomas Jacobson that was concerned with communication between the school and parents. He observed that " By improving communication between the school and the parents the communication between the parent and the student has improved. Parents are now more involved with their children's attendance and as a result attendance has improved." (Jacobson, 1985). It is also recognized that parental communication and its effectiveness is an integral component that is necessary to consider when analyzing methods that are helpful in increasing attendance in the our schools (Pena,1985, P. 40). Pena found that "the attendance problem boiled down to the fact that parents were uninformed about their children's truancies."

The second part of the conceptual framework was based on the type of communication delivered to the parents by representatives of the school.

Studies by (McCaulley, 1976 ; VanSciver, 1986) suggest that communications that transmit positive reinforcement can be more effective than negative reinforcement in improving school attendance. This resulted in the researchers concern for a study to determine if a neutral informative message to parents informing them of their child's absenteeism would also be more effective in improving attendance than a punishment approach.

The current study contributes to the research conducted in the field of school attendance and in particular broadens and extends the research conducted in a previous study involving a much smaller sample of twenty-five and twenty-four students all of whom had a record of previous truancy and over a limited time interval that extended to up to fifteen absences by the student in one school year. (Sheats and Dunkleberger, 1979). They found that there was no difference in school attendance when identical positive reinforcement messages informing the parents of absentee students was communicated by telephone from the school principal and the school secretary using a prepared script. However, they found that telephoning did increase attendance as compared to not telephoning.

This current study furthered the research in the field of attendance improvement through communication with the parents or guardians of absentee students by investigating the effectiveness of communication by community volunteers that consistently communicated a relatively neutral message to that of teachers who

sometimes communicated a punitive message in increasing high school attendance.

Upon reviewing the literature there appears to be a need for a study that furthers the research in the field of communication and in particular communication with parents through the telephone in order to determine more effective methods to increase student attendance.

The researcher chose to study the effect of two different personnel in communicating a message of concern to the parents of absent students. The communicators chosen for the study were community volunteers and classroom teachers. In the study the volunteers delivered a neutral message that simply informed the parents that their child was absent. In contrast the teachers communicated a message that sometimes contained threats of punishment if attendance is not improved.

The purpose of the study is to determine if there is a significant increase in school attendance when community volunteers communicate by telephone to a parent or guardian and inform them of their child's absence, as compared to when the classroom teachers perform the same task. During the communication, the community volunteers deliver a consistent, unobtrusive, neutral, message that simply informs the parents that their child is absent from school. The classroom teachers, during their communication on the telephone, sometimes deliver a punitive message to the parent or guardian.

METHODOLOGY

(a) The Sample

Three of the four high schools located in the Halifax District School Board were involved in the study. The subjects in the study were all students enrolled in each of the three high schools. All three of the schools were urban high schools located in the city of Halifax, Nova Scotia. All the schools in the study were academic high schools containing only grades ten, eleven and twelve. All the students attending these high schools were required to live in Halifax city and in each school most of the students attending each school lived in the vicinity of the school they attended. Halifax city is an ocean port city with a population of approximately 114,594 people according to the 1988 census figures and is the capital city of Nova Scotia. The city has a diversified employment base of government employees, armed services personnel, factory workers, service workers, as well as hospital and university personal etc.

The high schools selected for the study were Halifax West High school, Saint Patrick's High School and J. L. Ilsley High School.

Halifax West High School is situated at the far west end of the city away from the city core and most of the commercial areas

and earlier built housing. The buildings in this area for the most part were erected more recently and the high school was itself at one time a county school outside the city that was annexed to the city in approximately 1969. The enrollment of the school was predominantly white with only a few blacks, asians or students of other racial backgrounds. During the 1986-87 school year, the initial enrollment at Halifax West High School at the beginning of November was 1043 students and at the end of May of 1987 there were 996 students remaining. During the 1987-88 school year, the enrollment at the beginning of November was 1143 students and at the end of May of 1988 1057 students. During the 1988-89 school year, the enrollment in November was 1092 students and at the end of May of May 1000 students.

J.L. Ilsley High School, one of two control group high schools in the study, is also situated away from the city core and the commercial down town area. Like Halifax West it was formerly a county school that was annexed as the city eventually engulfed the suburbs. The school enrollment consisted predominantly of whites with only a few blacks, asians or students of other racial backgrounds. During the 1986-87 school year, this school had an enrollment at the beginning of the study in November of 1986 of 809 students and a enrollment of 711 in May of 1988. During the 1987-88 school year this school had an enrollment in November of 1987 of 825 Students and an enrollment of 719 in May of 1988. During the 1988-89 school year, the school

had an enrollment at the beginning of November of 1988 of 822 students and an enrollment of 690 students in May of 1989.

Saint Patrick's High School, the second control group high school in the study, is situated in the center of the city adjacent to the down town commercial district, hospitals and housing reconstruction projects. It was one of the first schools constructed in the older area of the city. Although the school consisted of predominantly white students there are far more black students at this school than the other two high schools. There are only a few asians and students of other nationalities. During the 1986-87 school year the enrollment at St. Patrick's High School in November was 824 students and 724 students at the end of May of 1987. The enrollment in November of 1987 was 787 students and in May of 1988 was 698. The researcher attempted to obtain data from Queen Elizabeth High School so as to investigate the entire school system. Unfortunately an official of the fourth high school, Queen Elizabeth High School was unable to provide the researcher with the data. Queen Elizabeth High School is an inner city school located within a few city blocks of Saint Patrick's High school and has a similar population and racial enrollment as Saint Patrick's High school and therefore its omission is believed to have limited impact on the results of this study.

The total time frame of the study was the period from the beginning of November of 1986 to the end of May of 1989. The

period of time from November 1986 to May of 1987 will be referred to as the 1987 school year. The period from November 1987 to May 1988, will be referred to as the 1988 school year. The period of time from November of 1988 to May of 1989 will be referred to as the 1989 school year. The data spanned a period of seven months for each year and a total time period of 21 months for the complete study.

b) Data Gathering

The specific data that was collected from each school studied was the monthly attendance percentages for each of the 14 months. The monthly attendance percentages for each school are individually tabulated in each school by the school attendance clerk each month in an official document called the Principal's Summary Of Attendance For The School Year. The monthly percent attendance percentages for each of the three high schools was obtained from this document. The researcher did not have any access or knowledge of the results of the data before collecting the data from the three high school Principals and the experimental purpose and design were created in advance of the knowledge of the data.

It was decided to obtain the data for only the seven month period from November to May for each of the three years of the study. This procedure was used so as to obtain a more accurate record of attendance percentages. It has been observed by the researcher and attendance officials in Halifax that a number of

students register prior to the official school opening and their names are on the official enrollment list. However, these students do not actually start attending in September or October and they are recorded as absent. Students are transferring from one class to another and some students who are uncommitted decide to drop out completely without even notifying the school. This results in students recorded as absent who are no longer officially enrolled in the school. It was also decided not to obtain the attendance percentages for June since examinations are held in June and each school in the study has a slightly different length of time for their examination time table. During examinations students are often all marked as present for every day, since on some days they are not writing examinations and are not required to come to class. Furthermore, during the examinations and after the examinations are over, in some high schools, students are routinely all recorded as present. As a result of these inconsistencies in the method of handling absentee recording by the three high schools during these three months of the school year they were excluded from the study.

In each of the three high schools in this study in the three years during which this study was conducted, each school assigned someone to telephone the parents or guardians of absentee children on a daily basis to inform them when their child was absent from class. During the 1987 and 1989 school years, the telephone call was made to the parents by teachers. The teachers

were required to telephone and inform the parents if their child was absent. During these telephone calls a punitive message was delivered whenever the teacher believed it would be helpful. During the 1988 school year, in all schools except Halifax West High School, the teachers telephoned the parents to inform them when their child was absent.

During the 1988 school year the parents of absentee children at Halifax West High School were telephoned each day and informed when their child was absent by community volunteers. These volunteers were not paid for their services and a variety of individuals provided this service. For the most part the volunteers were parents of students in the school. They were not salaried school employees and they had no access to previous attendance records or marks of the student and in most instances they did not personally know the student or parent they were contacting. These volunteers were located in a special attendance room with a telephone for communicating with the parents and during each classroom period they received a list of absent students and their telephone numbers from each teacher that was teaching a class during that period. The names and telephone numbers of the absentee students were delivered to the attendance room where the telephone calls were made by a student from each class whom the teacher trusted to deliver the names. When the volunteers communicated to the parents over the telephone, the volunteers were not permitted to make remarks that were either

punitive or involved positive reinforcement. The message they provided was neutral prompting. The extent of their telephone communication involved informing the parent that their child was absent, asking if the child was legitimately absent, terminating the conversation and recording the information.

If a student stops attending the school, their name is not removed from the active enrollment until beginning of the next month. The attendance days from the time of quitting until the end of the month are recorded as absences. If a student is not in class on a school day the student is marked as an absence in the attendance data. The reason for a student's absence whether legitimate or illegitimate has no bearing on the recording procedure.

During the 1987 and 1989 school years, at Halifax West High School, from November to May of each of these years, the teachers were requested to telephone the parents of the absentee students and inform them of the absence of their children. These telephone calls were made at a variety of times. Sometimes the teachers telephoned parents during a free period, during lunch break, after school or at home in the evening. These telephone calls by the teacher sometimes elaborated on the negative consequences that may ensue if unacceptable attendance continued and discussed punitive measures to rectify the situation.

During all three years of the study, in Saint Patrick's High School, the classroom teachers communicated by telephone to

the parents of the absentee children each day to inform them when their child was absent. This task was performed by the teacher at a variety of times. Sometimes the teacher telephoned the parents during a free period, during lunch break, after class or at home during the evening. The telephone calls sometimes elaborated upon the negative consequences that may ensue if unacceptable attendance continued to persist and discussed punitive measures to rectify the situation.

During all three years of the study, at J. L. Ilsley High School the classroom teachers communicated by telephone to the parents of absent children to inform them of their child's absence.

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

(a) A Comparative Analysis of the Years 1987 and 1988

Table 1 reveals the teachers in the 1987 school year were not as effective as compared to the 1988 school year in obtaining high attendance percentages. In every month except December, the community volunteers attained higher attendance percentages than the classroom teachers.

Table 1

Attendance Attained by the Control Group Teachers in 1987 Versus
the Volunteer Group in 1988 at Halifax West High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1987	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1988
November	94.5	95.2
December	97.7	97.4
January	93.5	98.5
February	93.0	97.4
March	93.4	97.5
April	93.0	98.2
May	93.5	98.3
Monthly Average	94.086	97.5

Figure 1
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and the Community
Volunteers Telephoned in 1988

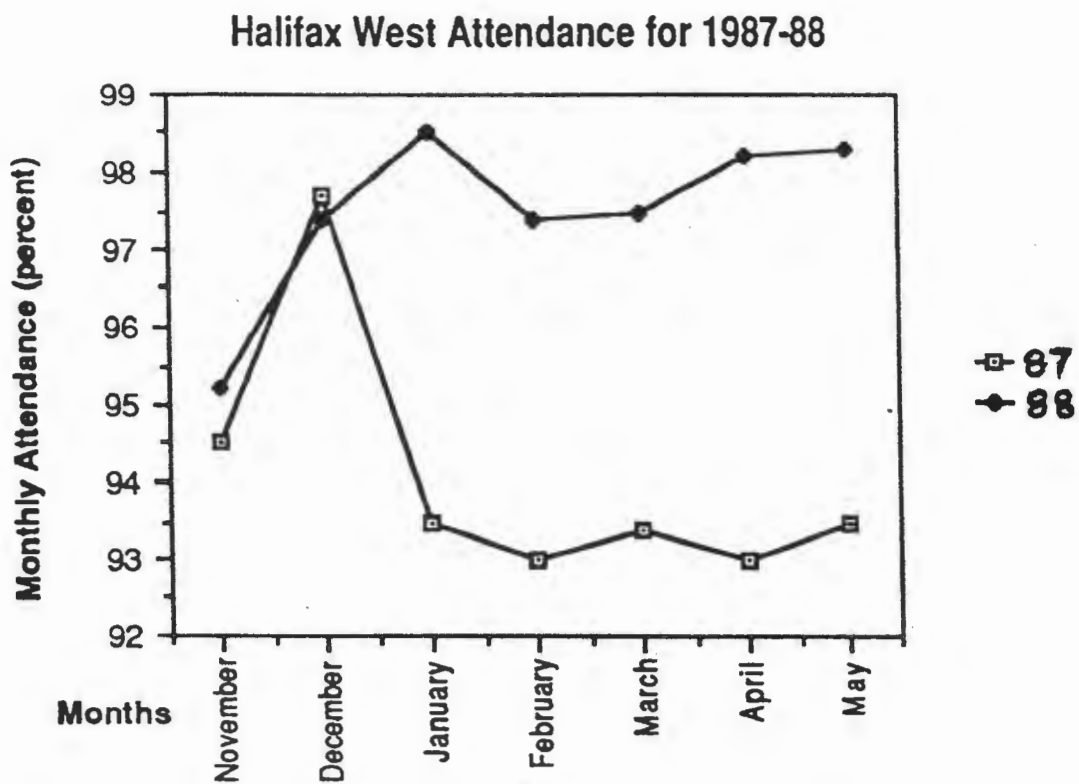


Table 2.

Average Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School in 1987 when the teachers (Control Group) Telephoned and in 1988 when the Community Volunteers Telephoned the Parents.

Group	Months Averaged	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Control (1987)	7	94.086	1.671	.631
Volunteer (1988)	7	97.5	1.114	.421

Table 3

One Factor ANOVA Results Between the Classroom Teachers (Control Group) in 1987 and the Volunteers (Study Group) in 1988 at Halifax West High School.

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of the Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	40.801	40.801	20.241
Within Groups	12	24.187	2.016	P= .0007
Total	13	64.989		

There are only 7 chances in ten thousand that the relationship is due merely to chance. The year in which the community volunteers communicated to the parents of the students in 1988 at Halifax West High School, there was a statistically significant higher level of attendance than in 1987 at the same school, when the classroom teachers communicated to the parents of absent students.

Table 4, reveals the effectiveness of the classroom teachers at Saint Patrick's High School during the 1987 school year, as compared to the effectiveness of the classroom teachers at the same school in the 1988 school year.

Table 4

The Attendance Attained by the Teachers in 1987 Versus that Attained by the Teachers in 1988 at Saint Patrick's High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At Saint Patrick's High School in 1987	Attendance Percentage At Saint Patrick's High School in 1988
November	91.5	92.7
December	92.4	96.5
January	94.2	92.4
February	92.5	91.6
March	93.0	92.2
April	93.1	91.4
May	93.4	91.6
Monthly Average	92.871	92.629

Figure 2
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when the Teachers Telephoned in both 1987 and 1988

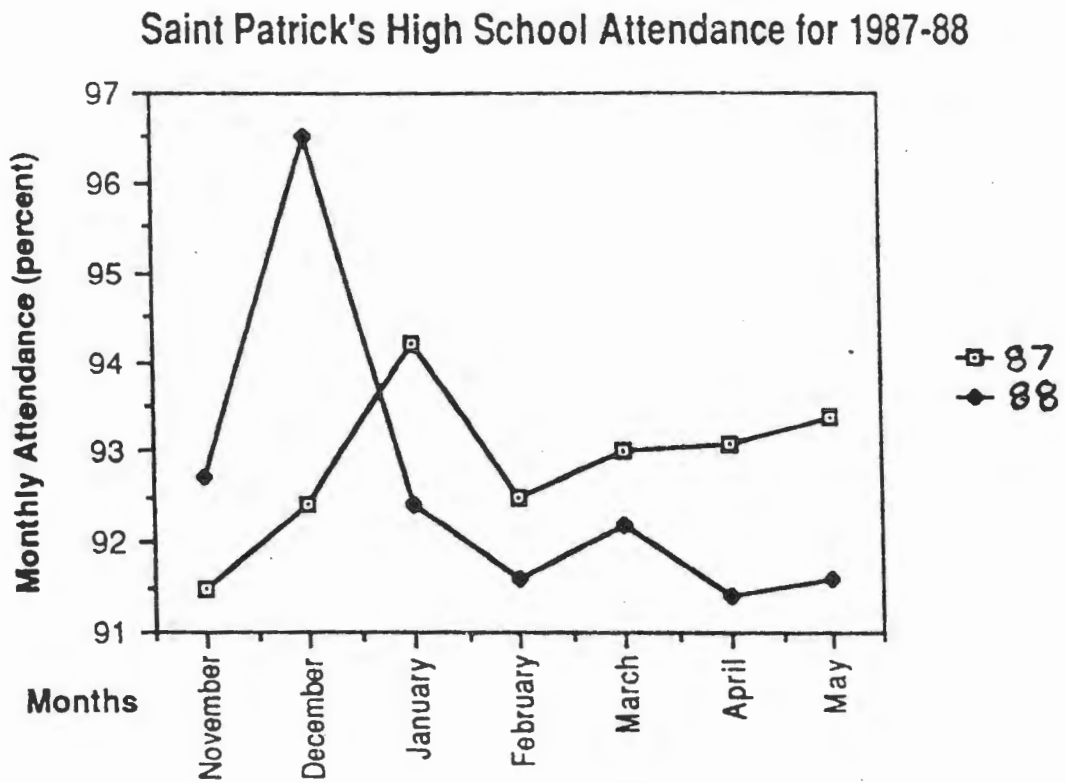


Table 5

Attendance Percentage Averages at Saint Patrick's High School when the (Control Group) Teachers Telephoned and in 1987 and 1988

Group	Months	Average	Standard	
		(Mean)	Deviation	Error
1987 Control	7	92.871	.852	.322
1988 Control	7	92.629	1.773	.67

Table 6

ANOVA Results Between the Classroom Teachers in 1987 and the Classroom Teachers in 1988 at Saint Patrick's High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	.206	.206	.107
Within Groups	12	23.209	1.934	P= .7495
Total	13	23.415		

There is no statistically significant difference between the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1987, when compared to the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1988.

Table 7

The Attendance Attained by the Teachers in 1987 versus 1988 at J. L. Ilesley High School

Month	Attendance Percentages At J. L. Ilesley High School in 1987	Attendance Percentages At J. L. Ilesley High School in 1988
November	91.4	91.0
December	90.9	90.7
January	92.3	94.9
February	89.3	89.9
March	89.8	90.2
April	90.9	90.7
May	91.2.	92.9
Monthly Average	90.829	91.47

Figure 3
Monthly Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in Both 1987 and 1988

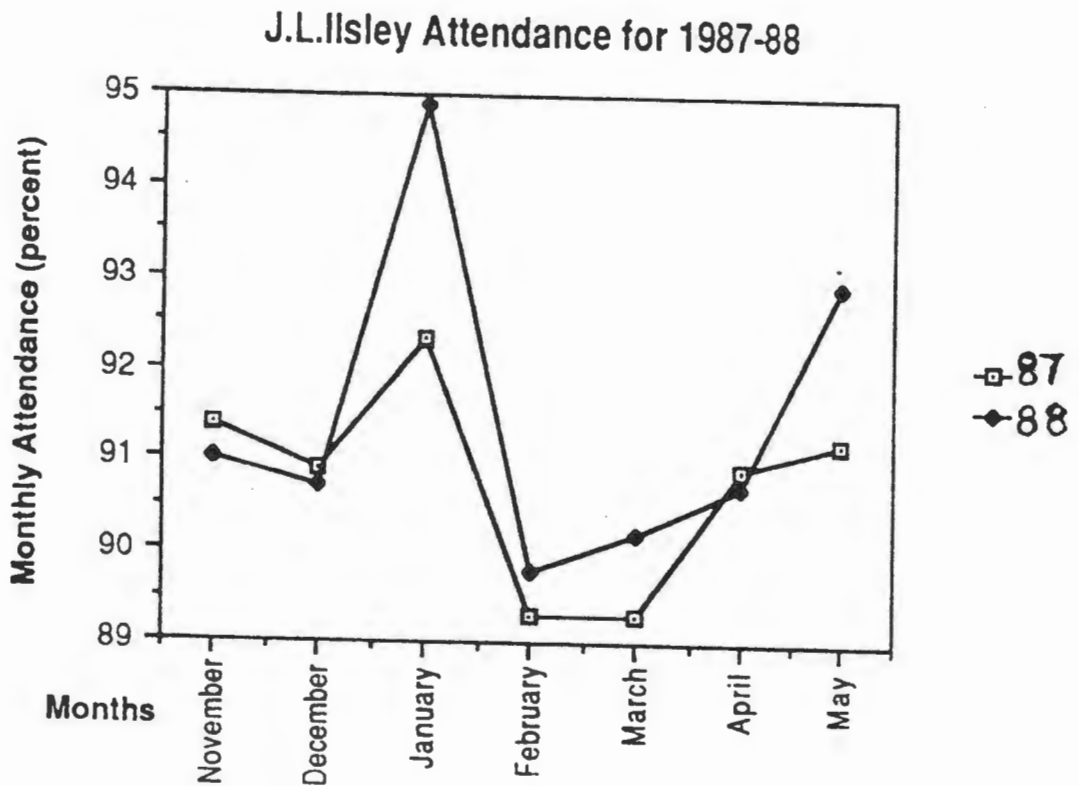


Table 8

Average Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School in 1987 and in 1988

Year	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
1987	7	90.829	1.003	.379
1988	7	91.471	1.793	.678

Table 9

ANOVA between 1987 and 1988 Attendance at J. L. Ilsley High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	the Mean Square	F-Test
Between the Groups	1	1.446	1.446	.685
Within the Groups	12	25.329	2.111	P= .4239
Total	13	26.775		

There is no statistically significant difference in the comparison of the yearly attendance percentage average in 1987 and 1988.

Table 10

A Comparison of the Attendance at All Three High Schools in the 1987 School Year.

Month	% Attendance Halifax West High School In 1987	% Attendance Saint Patrick's High School In 1987	% Attendance J. L. Ilsley High School In 1987
November	94.5	91.5	91.4
December	97.7	92.4	90.9
January	93.5	94.2	92.3
February	93.0	92.5	89.3
March	93.4	93.0	89.8
April	93.0	93.1	90.9
may	93.5	93.4	91.2
Monthly Average	94.086	92.871	90.829

The monthly attendance percentages for each of the seven months of the study in 1988 for all schools in the study are shown in table 17.

Figure 4
 Monthly Attendance Percentages in 1987, when the Classroom
 Teachers Telephoned at All Three High Schools

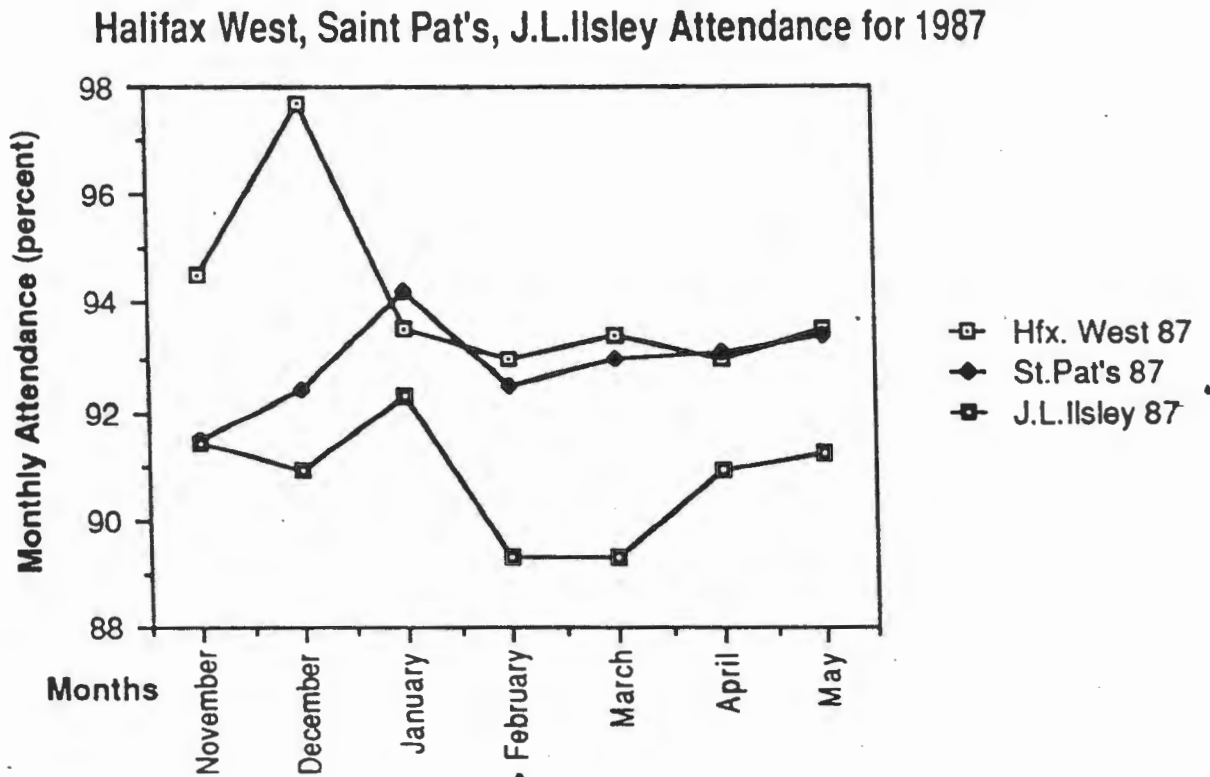


Table 11

A comparison of the Attendance At All Three High Schools in the 1988 School Year

Month	% Attendance Halifax West High School In 1988	% Attendance Saint Patrick's High School In 1988	% Attendance J. L. Ilsley High School In 1988
November	95.2	92.7	91.0
January	97.4	96.5	90.7
February	98.5	92.4	94.9
March	97.4	91.6	89.9
April	97.5	92.2	90.2
May	98.2	91.4	90.7
Monthly	98.3	91.6	92.9
Average	97.5	92.629	91.47

Figure 5
Monthly Attendance Percentages in 1988, when the Community Volunteers Telephoned at Halifax West High School and the Teachers Telephoned at the Other Two High Schools

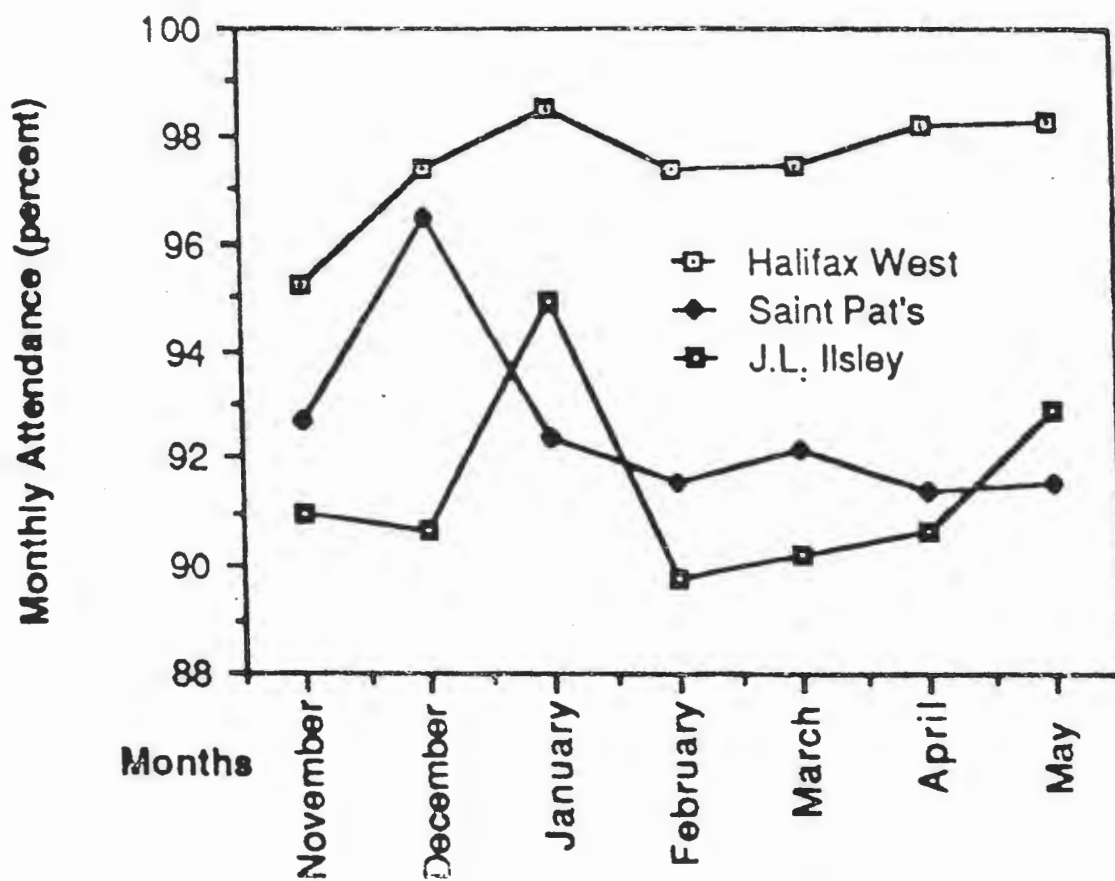


Table 12

AB Incident Table of the Total Attendance Averages for Each of the Three Schools in the Study and the Total Attendance for Each of the Two Years of the Study.

	year	1987	1988	Totals
s		Attendance	Attendance	
c		Percentage	Percentage	
h	Halifax West High School	94.086	97.5	95.793
o	Saint Patrick's High School	92.871	92.629	92.75
o	J. L. Ilesley High School	90.829	91.471	91.15
l	Totals	93.867	92.595	93.231

Table 13

Two factor ANOVA between the Total Attendance Average Between Each School in the Study and the Total Attendance Averages for Each of the years 1987 and 1988 in the Study.

Source		Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-Test	P Value
School	(A)	2	155.75	77.875	38.549	.0001
Year	(B)	1	16.974	16.974	8.402	.0063
AB		2	25.48	12.74	6.306	.0045
Error		36	72.726	2.02		

This F-test value is substantiated with a $P=.0001$ indicating that there is only 1 chance in ten thousand that the differences between the schools is due to chance. The between the years comparison is $P= .0063$. A more important result in the two factor analysis of variance is the interaction between the total average attendance percentage for all three schools in the study and the total attendance percentage for every year of the study. This $P= .0045$, indicates that there is 4.5 chances in one thousand that this is due to chance and establishes that there is a significant difference between the patterns of attendance in the different schools across these years.

To recapitulate, more vividly a picture of the monthly attendance percentages for each of the schools in the 1987 school year refer to figure 4. From January to May of this year the monthly attendance percentages at Halifax West High School overlap each other quite closely, as shown in the line graph, revealing little difference in attendance between the two schools during this period.

b) A Comparative Analysis of the Years 1988 and 1989

Table 14 reveals the community volunteers in the 1988 school year were more effective as compared to the classroom teachers in the 1989 school year in obtaining high attendance percentages. The community volunteers attained higher attendance percentages in every month than the classroom teachers.

Table 14

Attendance Attained by the Volunteer Group in 1988 Versus the Control Group Teachers in 1989 at Halifax West High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1988	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1989
November	95.2	94.9
December	97.4	95.6
January	98.5	96.7
February	97.4	93.6
March	97.5	92.9
April	98.2	94.2
May	98.3	94.0
Monthly Average	97.5	94.557

Figure 6
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School
when the community Volunteers Telephoned in 1988 and the
Classroom Teachers telephoned in 1989

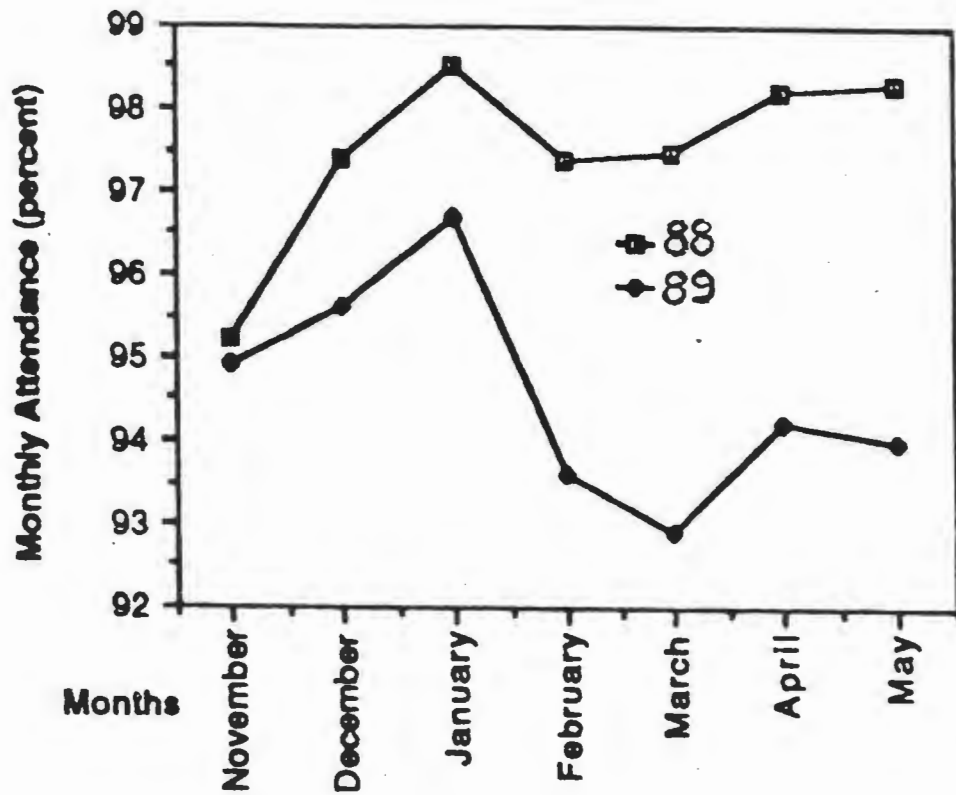


Table 15

Average Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School in 1988 when the Volunteer Group Telephoned and in 1989 when the Teachers Telephoned the Parents.

Group	Months Averaged	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Volunteers (1988)	7	97.5	1.114	.421
Control (1989)	7	94.557	1.284	.485

Table 16

One Factor ANOVA Results Between the Volunteers (Study Group) in 1988 and the Classroom Teachers (Control Group) in 1989 at Halifax West High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of the Squares	Mean Square	F-test
Between Groups	1	30.311	30.311	20.98
Within Groups	12	17.337	1.445	P = .0006
Total	13	47.649		

There are only six chances in ten thousand that the relationship is due merely to chance. The year in which the

community volunteers communicated to the parents of the students in 1988 at Halifax West High School, there was a statistically significant higher level of attendance than in 1989 at the same school, when the classroom teachers communicated to the parents of absent students.

Table 17 reveals the effectiveness of the classroom teachers at Saint Patrick's High School in during the 1988 school year as compared to the effectiveness of the classroom teachers at the same school in the 1989 school year.

Table 17

The Attendance Attained by the Teachers in 1988 Versus that attained by the Teachers in 1989 at Saint Patrick's High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At Saint Patrick's High School in 1988	Attendance Percentage Saint Patrick's High School in 1989
November	92.7	92.8
December	96.5	98.4
January	92.4	91.9
February	91.6	92.1
March	92.2	91.2
April	91.4	92.3
May	91.6	93.3
Monthly Average	92.629	93.143

Figure 7
Monthly attendance Percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when the Teachers Telephoned in 1988 and 1989

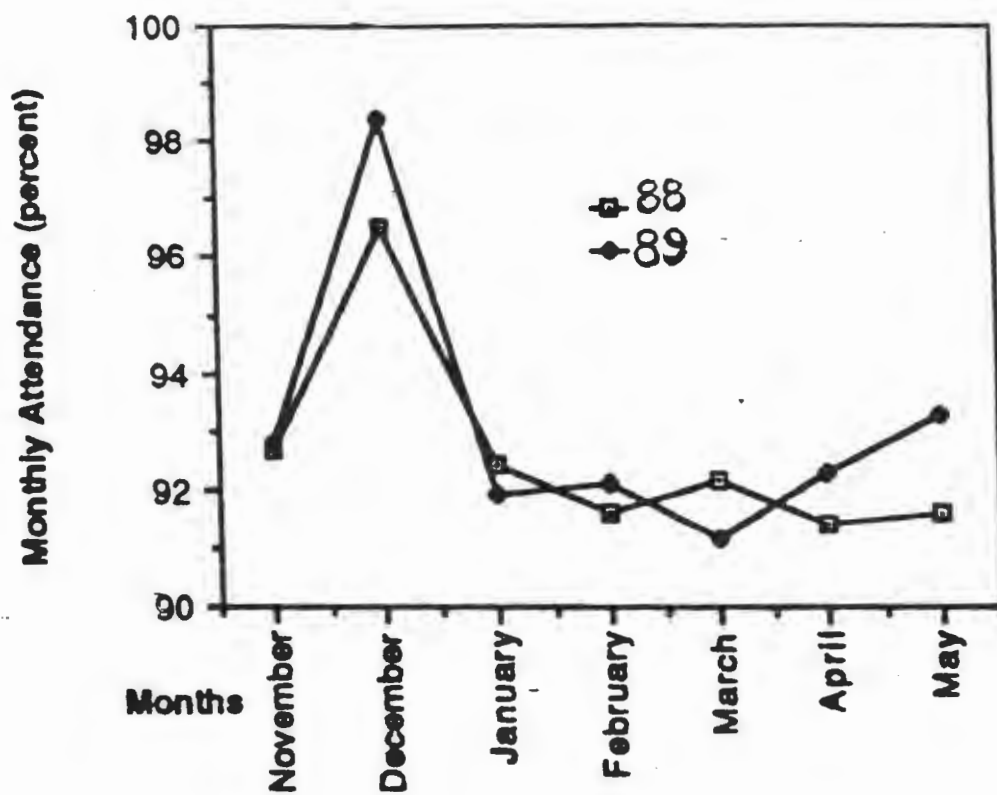


Table 18

Attendance Percentage Averages at Saint Patrick's High School when the (Control Group) Teachers telephoned in 1988 and 1989

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Control Group (1988)	7	92.629	1.773	.67
Control Group (1989)	7	93.143	2.412	.912

Table 19

ANOVA results between Classroom Teachers in 1988 and the Classroom Teachers in 1989 at Saint Patrick's High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	the Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	.926	.926	.207
Within Groups	12	53.751	4.479	P= .6575
Total	13	54.677		

There is no statistically significant difference between the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1988, when compared to the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1989.

Table 20

The Attendance attained by teachers in 1988 versus 1989 at J. L. Ilsley High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At J. L. Ilsley High School in 1988	Attendance Percentage At J. L. Ilsley High School in 1989
November	91.0	92.1
December	90.7	91.0
January	94.9	94.4
February	89.9	92.2
March	90.2	91.4
April	90.7	94.0
May	92.9	92.4
Monthly Average	91.471	92.5

Figure 8
Monthly Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in 1988 and 1989

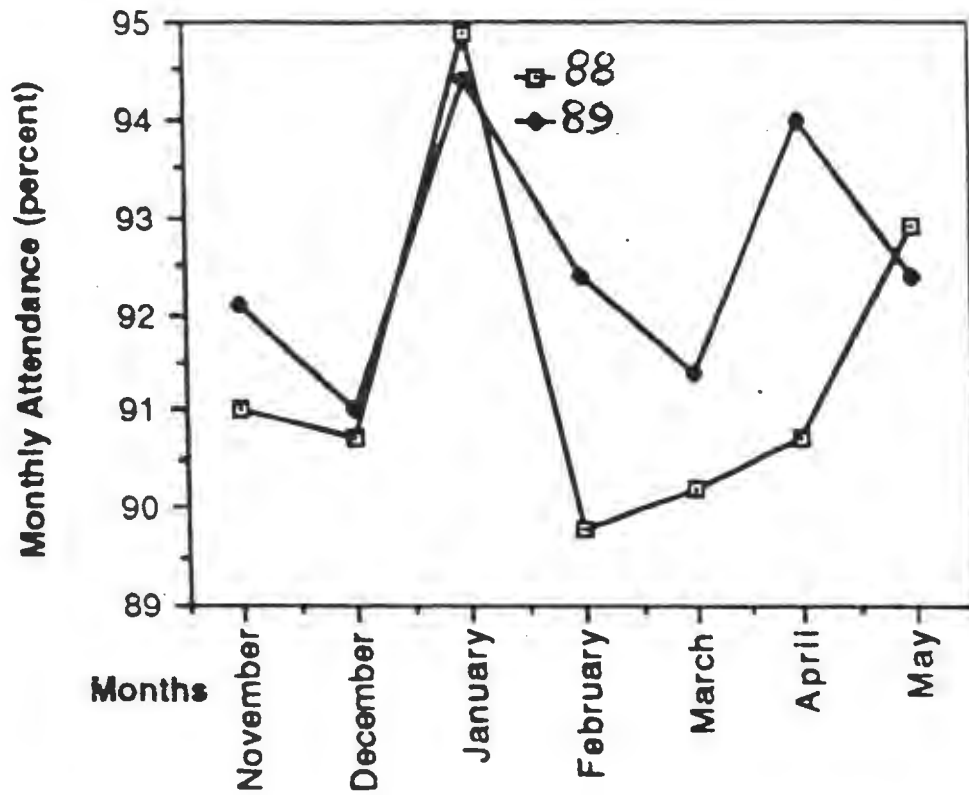


Table 21

Average Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilesley High School in
1988 and 1989

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Control Group (1988)	7	91.471	1.793	.678
Control Group (1989)	7	92.5	1.264	.478

Table 22

ANOVA Between 1988 and 1989 Attendance at J. L. Ilesley High
School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	the Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	3.703	3.703	1.539
Within Groups	12	28.874	2.406	p= .2385
Total	13	32.577		

There is no statistically significant difference in the
comparison of the yearly attendance percentage average in 1987
and 1988.

The monthly attendance percentages for each of the seven months of the study in 1988 for all three high schools are found in table 23.

Table 23

A Comparison of the Attendance at All Three High Schools in the 1988 School Year

Months	% Attendance At Halifax West High School In 1988	% Attendance At Saint Patrick's High School In 1988	% Attendance At J. L. Ilsley High School In 1988
November	95.2	92.7	91.0
December	97.4	96.5	90.7
January	98.5	92.4	94.9
February	97.4	91.6	89.9
March	97.5	92.2	90.2
April	98.2	91.4	90.7
May	98.3	91.6	92.9
Monthly Average	97.5	92.629	91.47

The monthly attendance percentages for each of the seven months of the study in 1989 for all schools in the study are shown in table 24.

Table 24

A comparison of the Attendance at All three High Schools in the 1989 School Year

Months	% Attendance At Halifax West High School in 1989	% Attendance At Saint Patrick's High School in 1989	% Attendance At J. L. Ilsley High School In 1989
November	94.9	92.8	92.1
December	95.6	98.4	91.0
January	96.7	91.9	94.4
February	93.6	92.1	92.2
March	92.9	91.2	91.4
April	94.2	92.3	94.0
May	94.0	93.3	92.4
Average	94.557	93.143	92.5

Figure 10
Monthly Attendance Percentages in 1989 when the Teachers
Telephoned the Parents in All Three High Schools

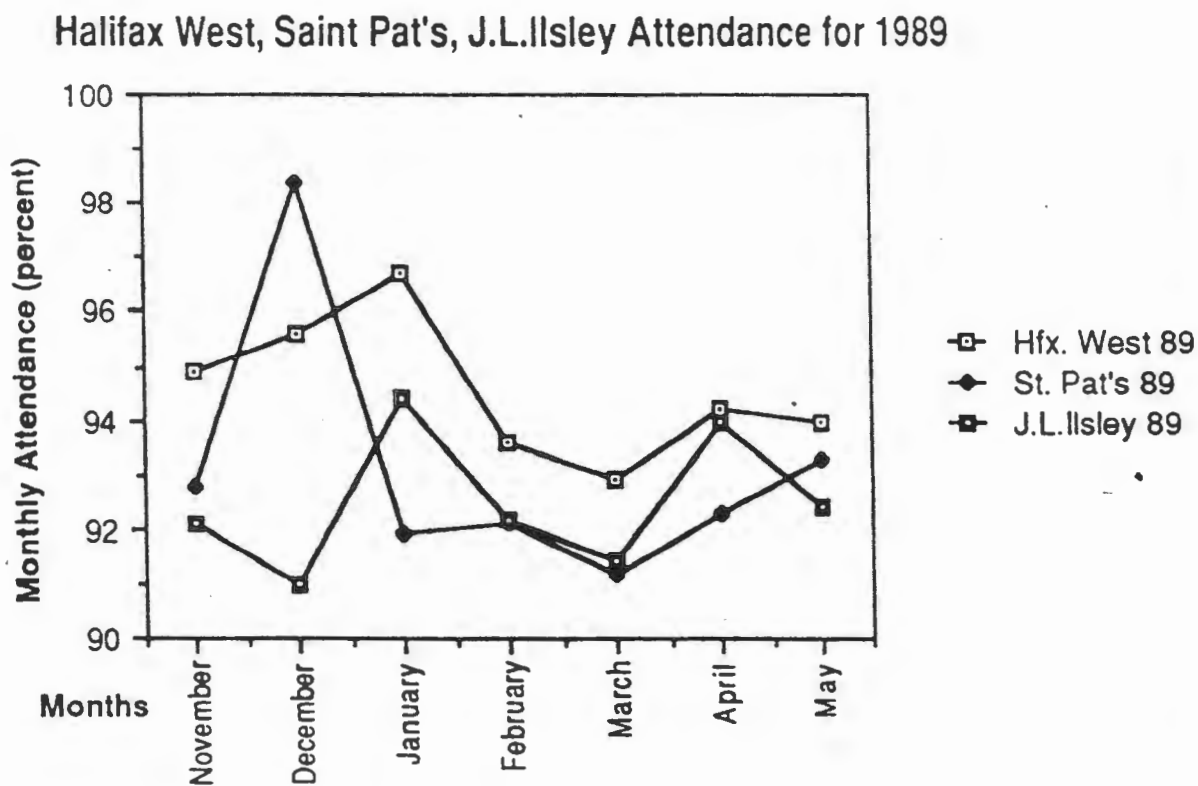


Table 25

AB Incident Table or the Total Attendance Averages for Each of the Three Schools in the Study and the Total Attendance for Each of the Two Years of the Study

	Year	1988	1989	Totals
		Attendance	Attendance	
		Percentage	Percentage	
S				
c				
h	Halifax West High School	97.5	94.557	96.02
o	Saint Patrick's High School	92.629	93.143	92.886
o	J. L. Ilsley High School	91.471	92.5	91.986
l	Totals	93.867	93.4	93.633

Table 26

Two Factor ANOVA between the Total Attendance Averages Between Each School in the Study and the Total Attendance Averages for the Years 1988 and 1989 in the Study

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of the Squares	Mean Squares	F-Test	P value
School (A)	2	126.15	63.08	22.72	.0001
Year (B)	1	2.287	2.287	.824	.3702
AB	2	32.653	16.37	5.88	.0062
Error	36	99.963	2.777		

The F-test value is substantiated with a $p=.0001$ indicating that there is only one chance in ten thousand that the difference between the schools is due to chance. The between the years comparison is $P=.3702$ and does not provide a significant difference. A more important result in the two factor analysis of variance is the interaction between the total average attendance percentage for all three schools in the study and the total attendance percentage for every year of the study. This $P= .0062$, indicates that there is a 6.2 chances in one thousand that this is due to chance and establishes that there is a significant difference between the patterns of attendance in the different schools across these years.

To recapitulate, a more lucid depiction of the monthly attendance percentages for each of the schools in the study in the 1988 school year refer to Figure 9. Note that the line representing the monthly attendance percentages for Halifax West High School appears much higher in 1988 indicating the greater effectiveness of the volunteers as compared to the teachers.

(c) A Comparative Analysis of the Years 1987 and 1989

Table 27 reveals there was little difference in effectiveness between the classroom teachers when comparing the years 1987 and 1989 at Halifax West High School.

Table 27

Attendance attained by the (Control Group) Teachers in 1987 and 1989 at Halifax West High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1987	Attendance Percentage At Halifax West High School in 1989
November	94.5	94.9
December	97.7	95.6
January	93.5	96.7
February	93.0	93.6
March	93.4	92.9
April	93.0	94.2
May	93.5	94.0
Monthly Average	94.086	94.557

Figure 11
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and 1989.

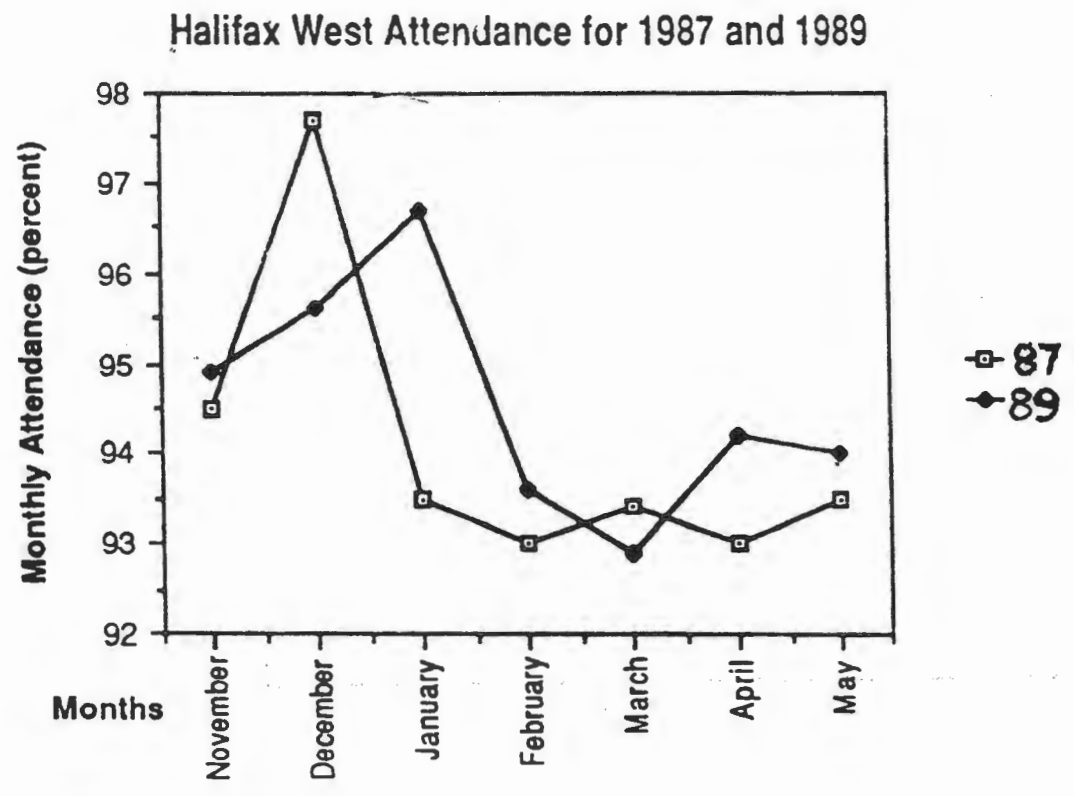


Table 28

Average Attendance Percentages for the teachers (Control Groups) in 1987 and 1989 at Halifax West High School.

Group	Months Averaged	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Control Group (1987)	7	94.086	1.671	.485
Control Group (1989)	7	94.557	1.284	.631

Table 29

One Factor ANOVA Results Between the Classroom Teachers (Control Groups) in 1987 and 1989 at Halifax West High School.

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of the Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	.778	.778	.35
Within Groups	12	26.646	2.220	P= .5649
Total	13	27.424		

Table 30

Attendance attained by the Teachers (Control Groups) in 1987 and 1989 at Saint Patrick's High School

Months	Attendance Percentage At Saint Patrick's High School in 1987	Attendance Percentage At Saint Patrick's High School in 1989
November	91.5	92.8
December	92.4	98.4
January	94.2	91.9
February	92.5	92.1
March	93.0	91.2
April	93.1	92.3
May	93.4	93.3
Monthly	92.871	93.143

Figure 12
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and 1989

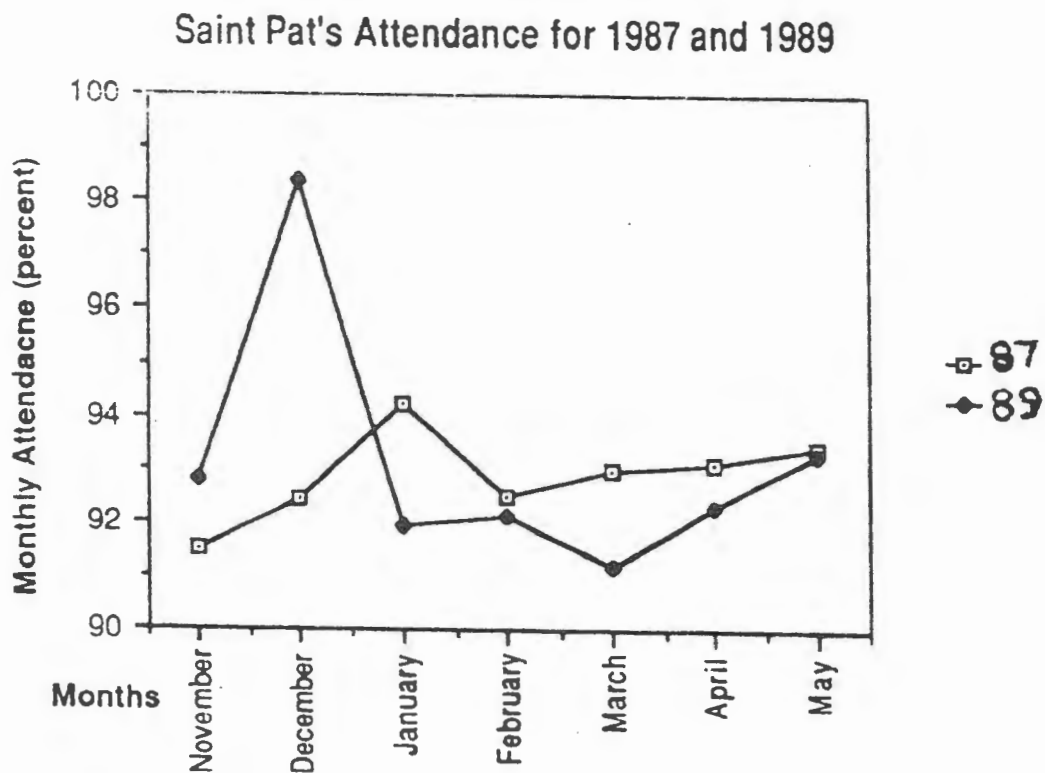


Table 31

Attendance Percentage Averages for the Classroom Teachers
(Control Groups) at Saint Patrick's High School in 1987 and 1989

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Control Group (1987)	7	92.871	.852	.322
Control Group (1989)	7	93.143	2.412	.912

Table 32

ANOVA Results between Classroom Teachers in 1987 and 1989 at
Saint Patrick's High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	the Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	.258	.258	.079
Within Groups	12	39.251	3.271	P= .7837
Total	13	39.509		

There is no statistically significant difference between the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1987 when compared to the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School in 1989.

Table 33

The Attendance Attained by the Teachers in 1987 versus 1989 At J. L. Ilesley High School

Month	Attendance Percentage At J. L. Ilesley High School in 1987	Attendance Percentage At J. L. Ilesley High School in 1989
November	91.4	92.1
December	90.9	91.0
January	92.3	94.4
February	89.3	92.2
March	89.9	91.4
April	90.9	94.0
May	91.2	92.4
Monthly Average	90.829	92.5

Figure 13
Monthly Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and 1989

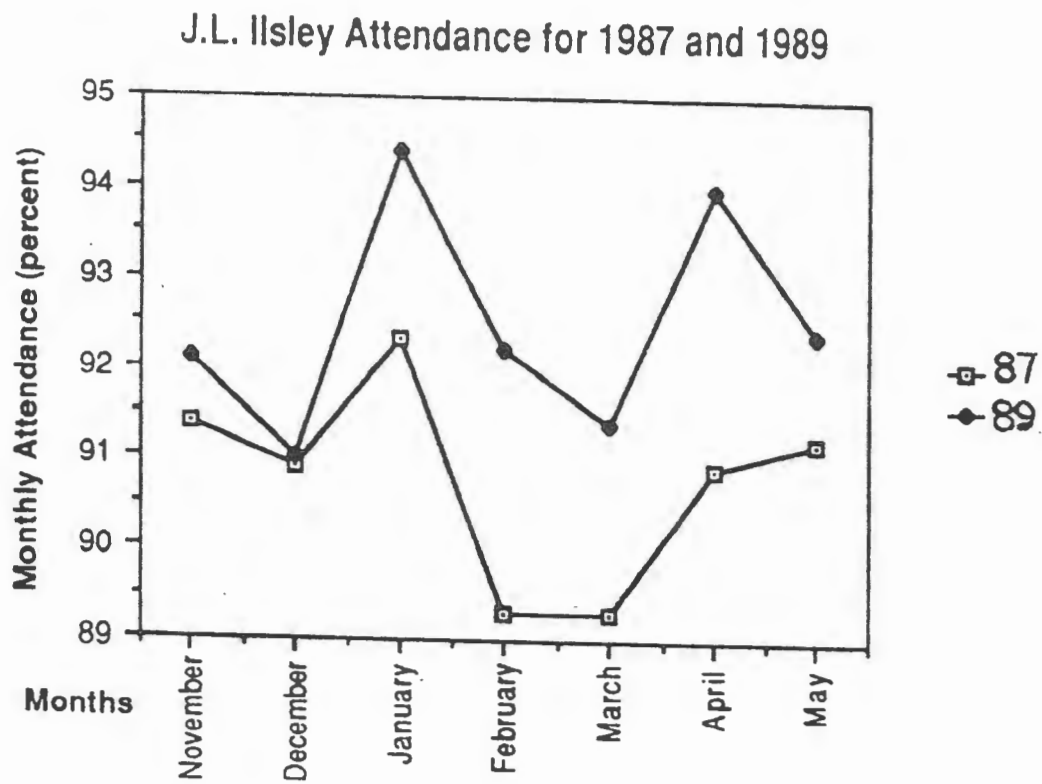


Table 34

Average Attendance percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School in 1987 and 1989

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Teachers 1987	7	90.829	1.003	.379
Teachers 1989	7	92.5	1.264	.478

Table 35

ANOVA Between 1987 and 1988 at J. L. Ilsley High School

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	1	9.778	9.778	7.515
Within Groups	12	15.614	1.301	P= .0179
Total	13	25.392		

There is a significant difference in the comparison of the yearly attendance percentage average in 1987 and 1988. This was the only instance in which a significant difference occurred when comparing two different years within one of the control group high schools.

The average monthly attendance percentage averages for Halifax West High School from table 27 and the average monthly attendance averages for J. L. Ilsley High School in table 33 were used to compile the AB incident table 36.

Table 36

The AB Incident Table or The Total Attendance Averages for Each of the Three Schools and the Total Attendance Averages for each of the Two Years

	Year	1987 %	1989 %	Total %
S				
C	(A) Halifax West High School	94.086	94.557	94.321
H				
O	(B) Saint Patrick's High School	92.871	93.143	93.007
O				
L	(C) J. L. Ilsley High School	90.829	92.500	91.664
	Totals	92.595	93.400	92.998

Table 37

Two Factor ANOVA Between the Total Attendance Averages Between Each School in the Study and the Total Attendance Averages for the years 1987 and 1989 in the Study

Source	Degrees of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F-Test	P-Value
School (A)	2	49.425	24.712	10.914	.0002
Years (B)	1	6.8	6.8	3.003	.0917
AB	2	4.013	2.007	.886	.421
error	36	81.511	2.264		

This F-test value is substantiated with a $P = .0002$ indicating that there is only two chances in ten thousand that the difference between schools is due to chance. No significant interaction was found between all three schools in the study and the total attendance percentage for each year of the study.

(d) A Comparative Analysis of the Years 1987, 1988 and 1989

Table 38 reveals that the community volunteers were more effective in 1988 in obtaining high attendance percentages at Halifax West High School than the teachers were in 1987 and 1989.

Table 38

The Monthly Attendance Percentages of Halifax West High School in 1987, 1988 and 1989

Months	% Attendance At Halifax West High School in 1987	% Attendance At Halifax West High School in 1988	% Attendance At Halifax West High School in 1989
November	94.5	95.2	94.9
December	97.7	97.4	95.6
January	93.5	98.5	96.7
February	93.0	97.4	93.6
March	93.4	97.5	92.9
April	93.0	98.2	94.2
May	93.5	98.3	94.0

Figure 14
Monthly attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School
when the Community Volunteers Telephoned in 1988 and the
Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and 1989

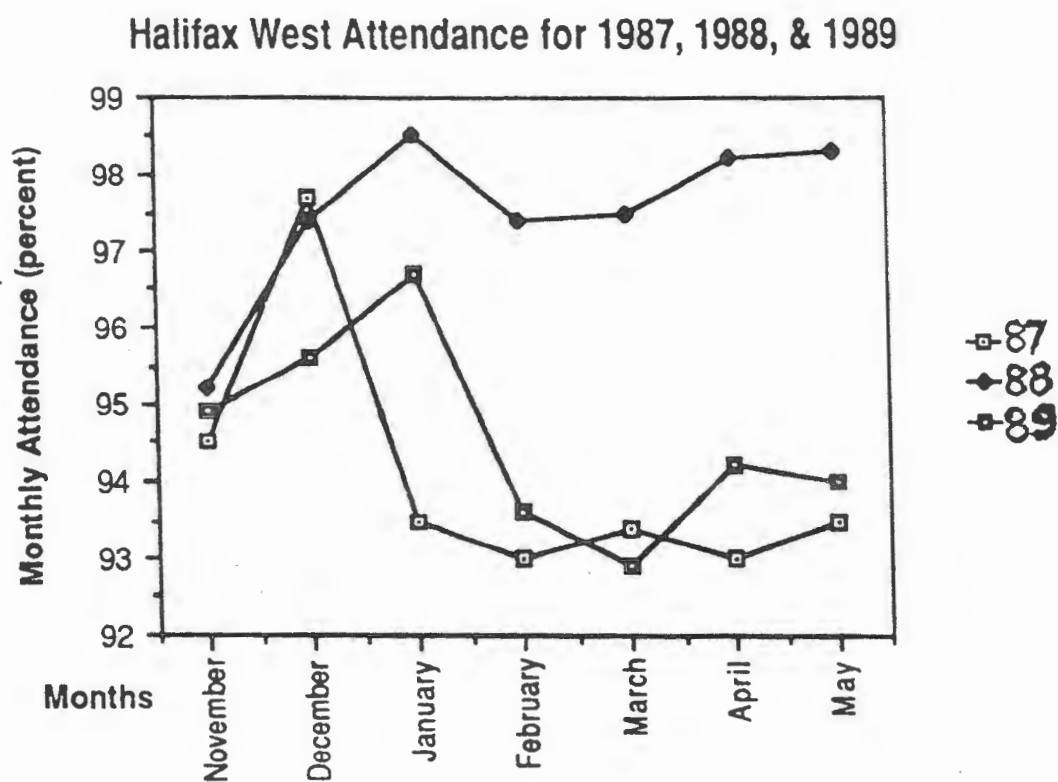


Figure 15
 Monthly Attendance Percentages at Halifax West High School
 when the Community Volunteers Telephoned in 1988 and the
 Teachers Telephoned in 1987 and 1989

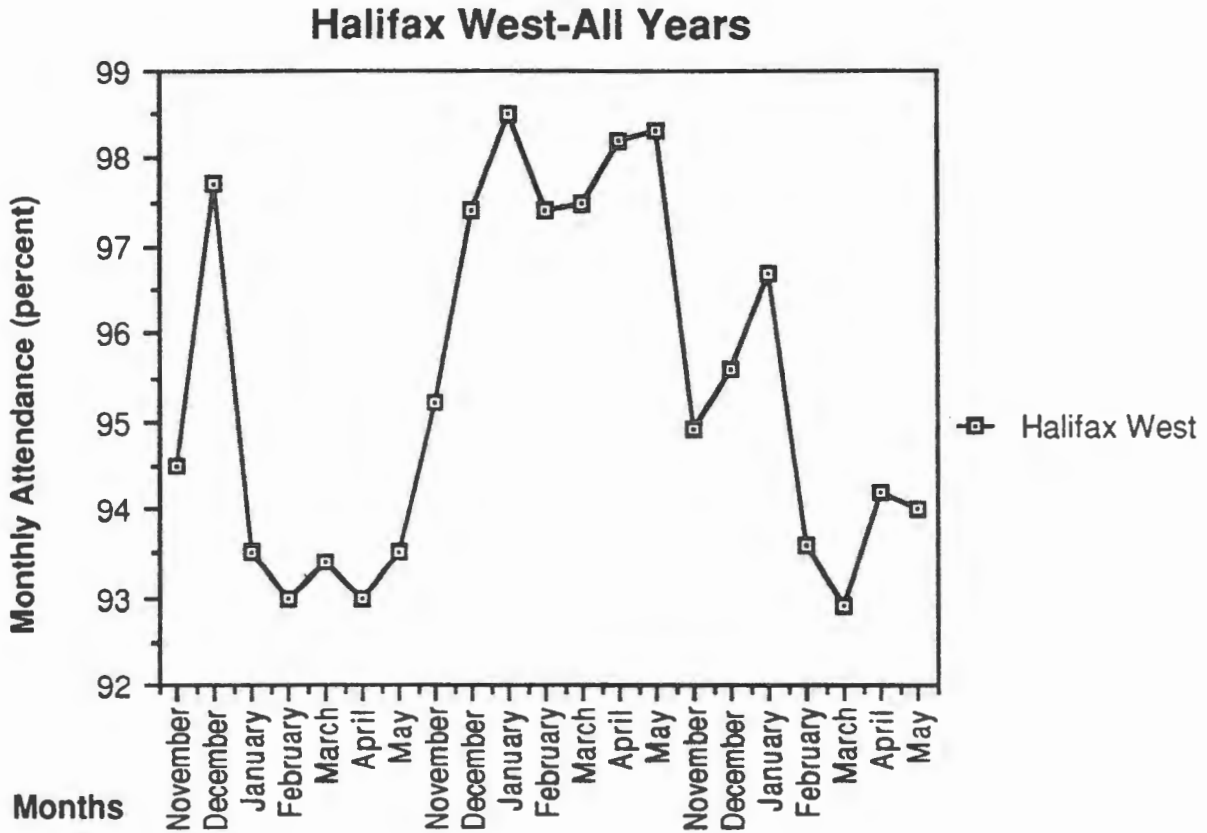


Table 39

Averages Attendance Percentages for the Teachers in 1987 and 1989
and the Volunteers in 1988 at Halifax West High School

Group	Months	Average	Standard	Standard
	Averaged	(Mean)%	Deviation	Error
Teachers 1987	7	94.086	1.671	.631
Volunteers 1988	7	97.5	1.114	.421
Teachers 1989	7	94.557	1.284	.485

Table 40

One Factor ANOVA between the years 1987, 1988 and 1989 , at
Halifax West High School

Source	Degree of	Sum of	Mean	F-Test
	Freedom	Squares	Square	
Between Groups	2	47.927	23.963	12.655
Within Groups	18	34.086	1.894	P= .0004
total	20	82.012		

There are only four chances in ten thousand that the statistically significant interaction revealed in the ANOVA is merely due to chance.

Table 41

The Attendance Attained by the Teachers At Saint Patrick's High School during the years 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Months	% Attendance at Saint Patrick's High School in 1987	% Attendance at Saint Patrick's High School in 1988	% Attendance at Saint Patrick's High School in 1989
November	91.5	92.7	92.8
December	92.4	96.5	98.4
January	94.2	92.4	91.9
February	92.5	91.6	92.1
March	93.0	92.2	91.2
April	93.1	91.4	92.3
May	93.4	91.6	93.3

Figure 16
Monthly Attendance Percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987, 1988 and 1989

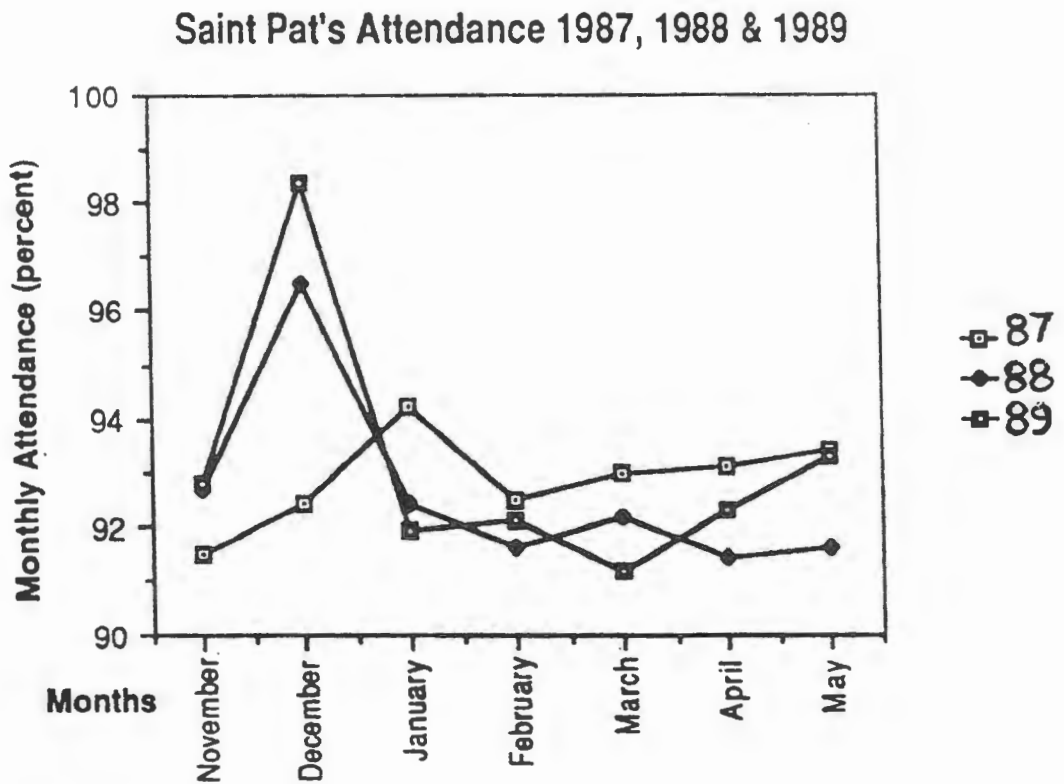


Figure 17
 Monthly Attendance Percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when the Teachers telephoned in 1987, 1988 and 1989

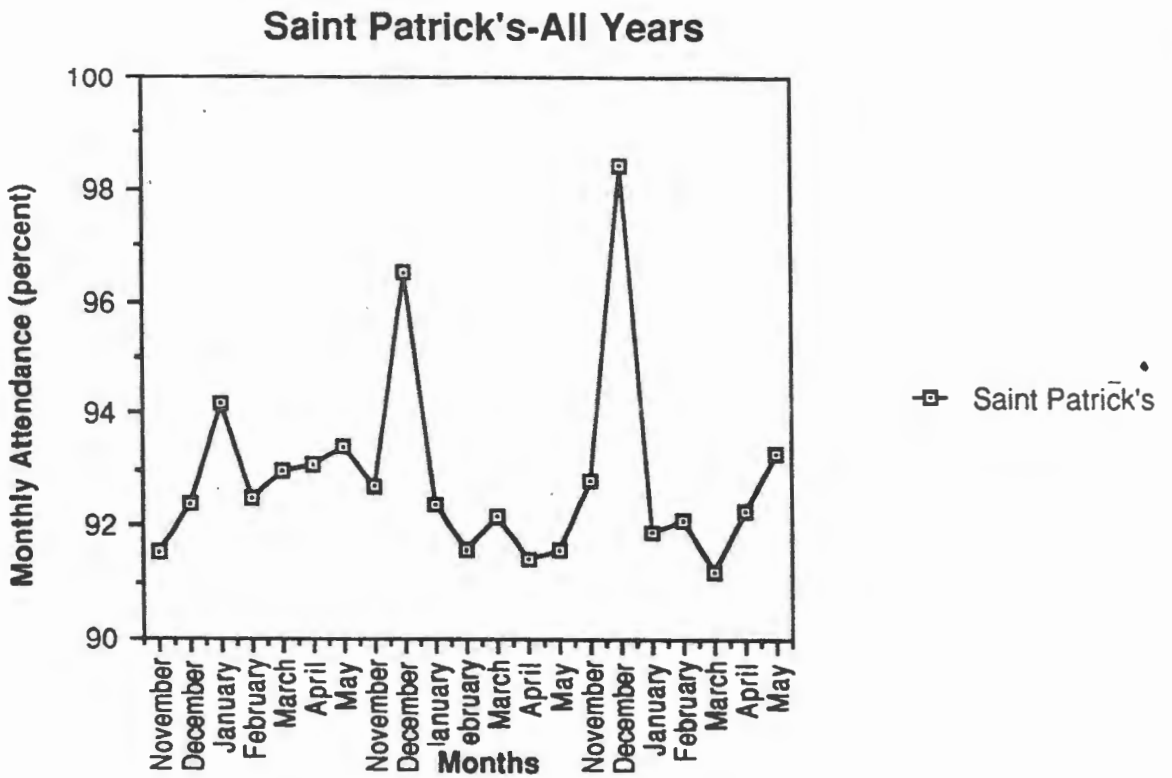


Table 42

Attendance Percentage Averages for the Teachers at Saint Patrick's High School in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Teachers 1987	7	92.871	.852	.322
Teachers 1988	7	92.629	1.773	.67
Teachers 1989	7	93.143	2.412	.912

Table 43

ANOVA Between the Teachers at Saint Patrick's High School in the years 1987, 1988 and 1989

Source	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	2	.927	.463	.144
Within Groups	18	58.106	3.228	P= .8673
Total	20	59.032		

There is no statistically significant difference between the attendance percentages at Saint Patrick's High School when comparing 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Table 44

The Attendance attained at J. L. Ilsley High School by the Teachers in 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Month	% Attendance At J. L. Ilsley High School in 1987	% Attendance At J. L. Ilsley High School in 1988	% Attendance At J. L. Ilsley High School in 1989
November	91.4	91.0	92.1
December	90.9	90.7	91.0
January	92.3	94.9	94.4
February	89.3	89.9	92.2
March	89.8	90.2	91.4
April	90.9	90.7	94.0
May	91.2	92.9	92.4

Figure 18
Monthly Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School
when the Teachers Telephoned in 1987, 1988 and 1989

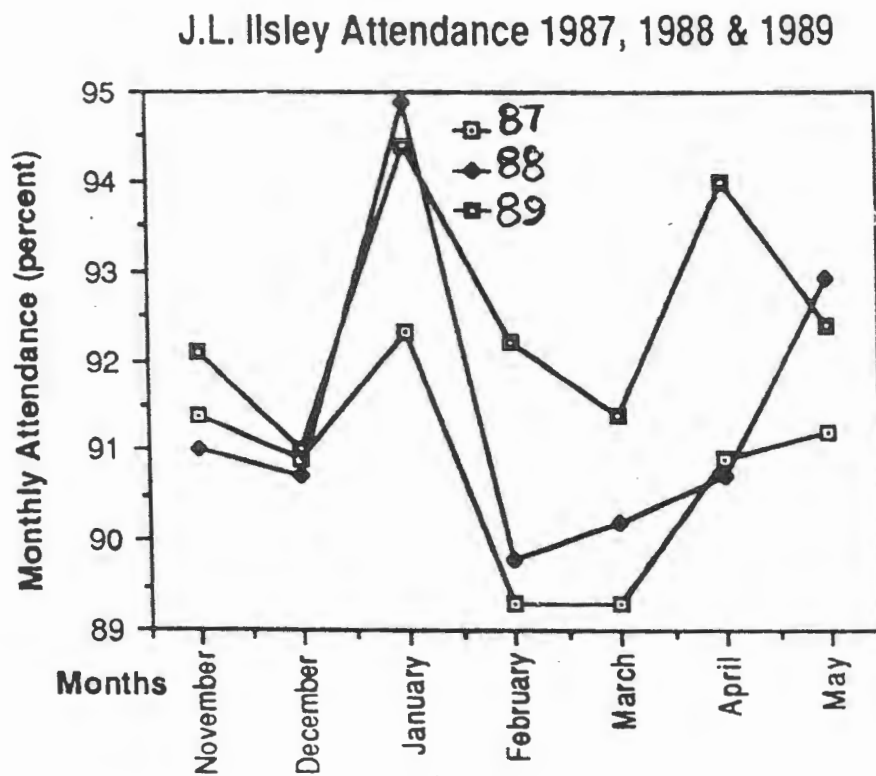


Figure 19
 Monthly Attendance Percentages at J. L. Ilsley High School
 When the Teachers Telephoned in 1987, 1988 and 1989

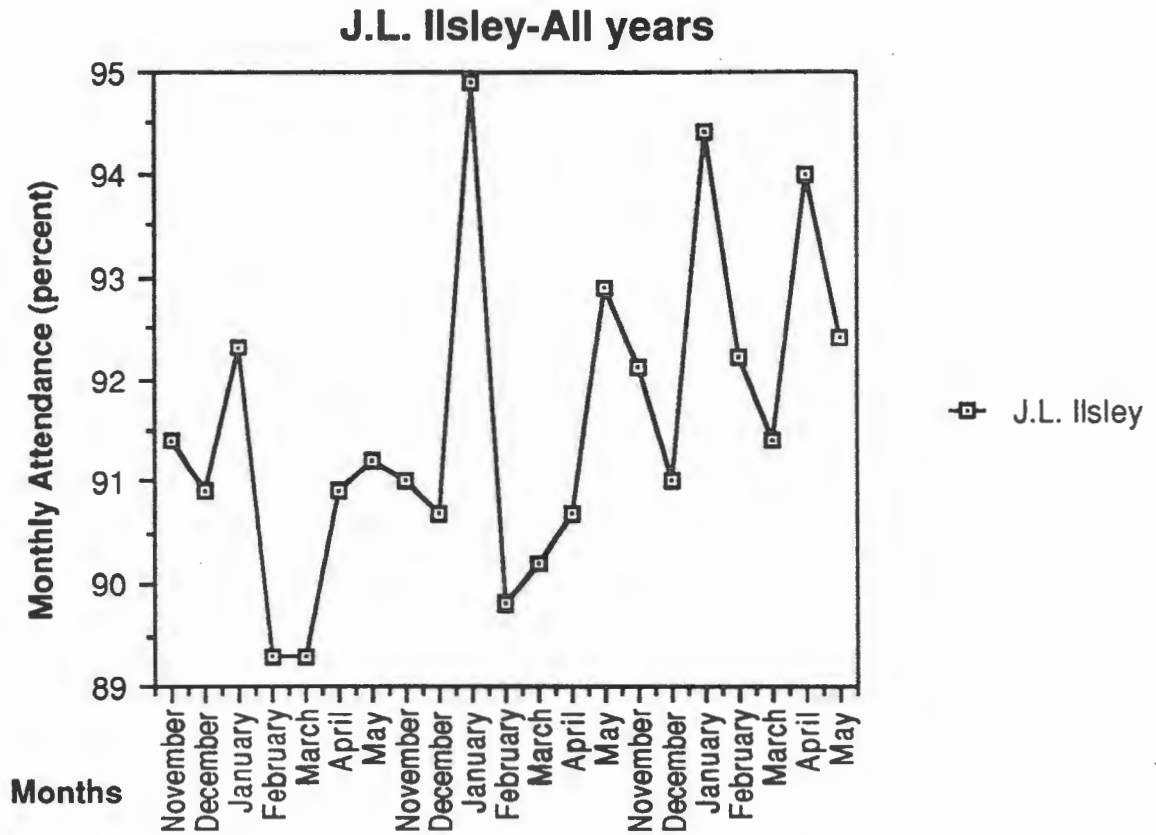


Table 45

Average Attendance Attained by the Teachers at J. L. Ilsley High School for the years 1987, 1988 and 1989.

Group	Months	Average (Mean)	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
Teachers 1987	7	90.829	1.003	.379
Teachers 1988	7	91.471	1.793	.678
Teachers 1989	7	92.5	1.264	.478

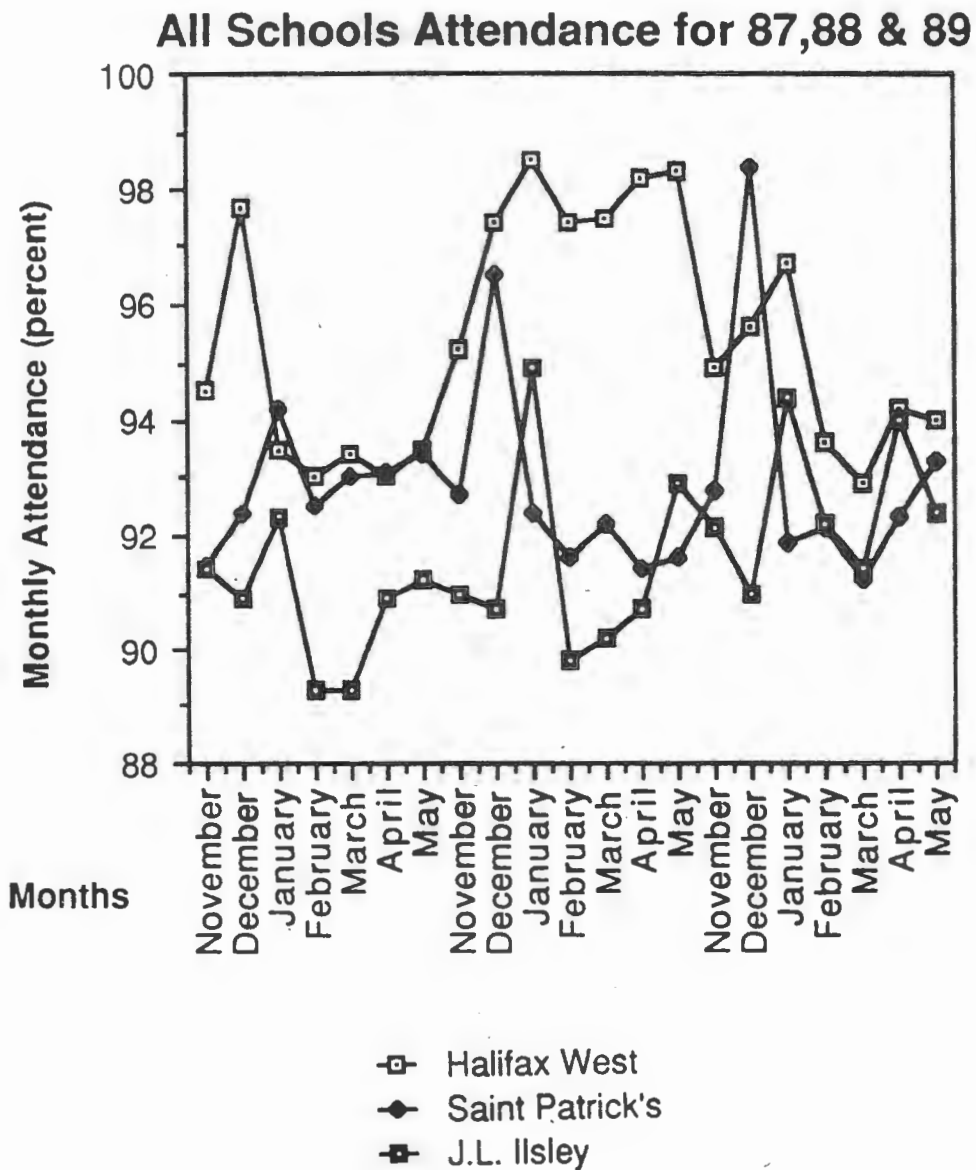
Table 46

ANOVA Between the years 1987, 1988 and 1989 when the Teachers conducted the Attendance Program at J. L. Ilsley High School

Source	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Test
Between Groups	2	9.951	4.976	2.566
Within Groups	18	34.909	1.939	F= .1046
Total	20	44.86		

There is no statistical significant difference in the comparison of the yearly attendance percentage averages in 1987, 1988 and 1989 at J. L. Ilsley High School when the teachers telephoned the parents of absentee students.

Figure 20
 Monthly Attendance Percentages at All Three High Schools in
 1987, 1988 and 1989



The yearly attendance percentages for the three high schools in this study are located in tables 38, 41 and 44. They are placed in table 47 to calculate the total attendance percentages.

Table 47

The Total Yearly Attendance Averages for Each of the Three Schools in the Study and the Total Attendance percentages for each of the Three Years of the Study

SCHOOL	Year 1987%	Year 1988%	Year 1989%	Totals
(a) Halifax West	94.086	97.5	94.557	95.381
(B) Saint Patrick's	92.871	92.629	93.143	92.881
(C) J. L. Ilsley	90.829	91.471	92.5	91.6
Totals	92.595	93.867	93.4	93.287

Table 48

Two Factor ANOVA Between the Total Attendance Average for Each of the Three Schools and Each of the Three years of the Study.

Source	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F-Test	P-Value
Schools (A)	2	155.305	77.653	32.992	.0001
Years (B)	2	17.379	8.687	3.691	.0315
AB	4	41.431	10.358	4.401	.0038
error	54	127.100	2.354		

_____This F-test value is substantiated with a $P = .0001$ indicating that there is only 1 chance in ten thousand that the difference between the schools is due to chance. The between the years comparison provides a $p = .0315$ indicating there is a significant difference between the three years studied. The interaction between the total average attendance percentage for all three schools in the study and the total attendance percentage for every year of the study provides a $P = .0038$ indicating a statistically significant pattern of attendance in the different schools across these years. There is only 3.8 chances in one thousand that this is due to chance.

(d) Summary and Conclusion

To recapitulate, the study reveals that in an urban high school environment, the attendance percentages were statistically

significantly higher when community volunteers consistently communicated unobtrusively a neutral message by telephone to the parents of absentee students than when teachers telephoned the parents of absent students and conveyed a message that sometimes contained punitive remarks. The following brief synopsis of the paramount findings is warranted. During the three years that the study ensued at Halifax West High School there was significantly higher attendance percentages attained in 1988, at Halifax West High School, when the volunteers telephoned the parents as opposed to 1987 and 1989 when the teachers telephoned the parents. However, during the same three years at two other control group high schools, in the same city, over the same three years there was no significant difference, with the single exception of the comparison of the 1987-1989 year at J. L. Ilsley High School. Numerous other control group comparisons were conducted between various control groups and no other significant relationship was found to be significant. A preponderance of evidence serves to verify the significance of the research findings as stated in the purpose of the experiment. In addition, while student attendance decreased significantly from 1988 to 1989 at Halifax West High School, it increased slightly but insignificantly during the same time interval in each of the other high schools, verifying that there was in fact no universal system wide trend towards lower student attendance in 1989 as compared to 1988 persisting in this school system. The revelation

of this directional contrast in attendance further substantiates the validity of the remarkably higher attendance achieved at Halifax West High School when the volunteers telephoned as compared to the teachers. Only at Halifax West High School during the three years of the study was there an increase from the baseline year of 1987 to a higher attendance percentage in the treatment or study year in 1988 and a return to the base line during the return to the baseline year in 1989. No other control group school exhibited this phenomena during the study, which further serves to verify the results.

DISCUSSION

The current study extends the research conducted in a previous experiment confined only to rural elementary school children and involving a much smaller sample of only forty-nine students, all of whom had a record of previous truancy and conducted over a limited time interval (Sheats and Dunkleberger, 1979). They found there was no difference in school attendance when an identical message informing the parents of absentee students was communicated by telephone from the school Principal and the school secretary using a prepared script. The occupational role of the telephone communicator had no effect on their effectiveness in increasing attendance. Their message was

positive at first and later became altered to become a more serious message.

We can not attribute the cause of the lower attendance percentages, during the times when teachers telephoned to be due to their occupational role, as compared to the occupational role of the volunteers. This can only be established, if it is suspected, by the creation of an experimentally designed study that controls other confounded variables that may interfere with the establishment of a concluding causal factor. An experimental study must be designed where both teachers and the volunteers deliver the same message so as to determine if it is the occupation of the telephone communicator that is influencing the attendance percentage levels. A separate experimental study could be conducted to determine how the actual content of the message being delivered by the communicator influences attendance. Mills Law, that necessitates that everything remain constant except the independent variable manipulated by the experimenter, was not attempted to be fulfilled in this correlational study. Thus the research does not claim to identify a specific cause. The study reports the observations that have actually occurred in an authentic school district setting under normal everyday circumstances.

The researcher anticipated that the volunteers would be more effective than the teachers because they delivered a totally neutral information message and that teachers would be less

effective because they sometimes resorted to the threat of punishment, such as the threat of suspension, or the possibility of failing the course etc., when they communicated with the parents. Although some research has maintained that punitive methods have been successful in increasing attendance (McClure, 1977) ; (Bristow, 1979) ; (Zafirau, 1987). Other researchers found results contradictory to these findings. Not only was it found that punitive threats have been ineffective in increasing attendance (Grala & McCauley, 1976) & (Neilson & Gerber 1979), but also negatively correlated with improvements in attendance rates (Tuck, 1988). Moreover, it has also been determined that positive reinforcement is more effective in increasing school attendance than the threat of punishment (Grala & McCauley) & (VanSciver, 1986). As a result of these research results, the author suspected that even a communication involving a neutral information message would be more effective than a communication that sometimes used the threat of punishment in endeavoring to increase attendance. Also, the fact that a study used a neutral informative message to increase attendance by using an automatic telephone dialing machine to communicate to parents regarding their child's absence (Giles, 1985), caused the author to suspect that a more significant correlation would be attained during the year that the community volunteers communicated to the parents. As a result of the previous research discoveries the conceptual framework of the current study was designed and implemented. The

researcher suspected that the occasional use of the threat of punishment by the teachers would result in better attendance being achieved when the community volunteers communicated to the parents. Although this is in fact what occurred, the threat of punishment may not have been the cause. A number of conditions were not controlled in the study. When the teachers communicated on the telephone to the parents they did not use the same message on all occasions when they telephoned. Sometimes the message provided by teachers used the threat of punishment and sometimes no threat was communicated to the parents, if the teacher was in a rush due to a time restraint or other reason. The teachers did not use any consistent standardized approach in their telephone procedure nor did they use a standardized script. A number of other factors could have influenced the results in the current correlational study which include both any number of statements made by the teacher during communication with the home or factors due to interpersonal relationships with students within the confines of the school building, none of which were controlled in the study.

A future study would necessitate the use of a standardized script in order to attribute any causal relationship to the results. The consistent use of a standardized script, without the use of additional verbal remarks must overcome several problems.

The findings presented in this investigation were derived entirely from a study of urban youth. The absence of rural

youngsters should caution the reader from generalizing the findings of the present study to populations that include rural youth.

Since it was previously found that a negative relationship exists between the attendance rate of a school and the population density where the school is located at the .05 level of confidence (Wright, 1976). A future study could determine if this relationship persists when volunteers as well as teachers are responsible for communicating with the parents regarding student absenteeism.

It is hoped that more schools will design attendance programs that include community volunteers as telephone communicators and thereby increase both school attendance and reduce the work load on overburdened teachers and administrators in our schools. If this recommendation is to be implemented in the public school setting some principals that currently desire to keep the parents and concerned citizens out of the school and away from the daily operations of the school and who sometimes regard the parents as either a nuisance or a threat must be made aware of the benefits of including the community in both the implementation of school programs and the creation and design of these programs. It is hoped that school officials will encourage the members of the community to become more involved in assisting school administrators and teachers to create a more productive and successful school environment so as to ensure that our

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