

Proposal for  
EXPANSION OF PERSONNEL TO IMPROVE SCHOOL  
ATTENDANCE IN DISADVANTAGED AREAS

I. BACKGROUND

The Community Council of the Atlanta Area, Inc., has been engaged in a study of social problems in urban renewal areas for the city as part of the Community Improvement Program. In September, 1965, a group of residents of the Summerhill-Mechanicsville area were brought together as a means of involving residents in the study of problems in their community and in planning to remedy these problems. The group adopted the name Mechanicsville-Summerhill Improvement Committee.

The committee identified school absenteeism on the part of a large number of children in the community as a problem which should have first priority. It set about investigating the services established within the schools and other community agencies to deal with the problem of school attendance. Dr. Jarvis Barnes, Director of Research and Development, met with the committee and outlined the schools' plan to deal with this problem under Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Representatives of the committee met with Mr. O. L. Boozer, Director of Pupil Services, to discuss the problem.

The committee met with the principals of the five elementary schools in the area. They provided further information about the absentee problem. Lists of children who had been chronically absent from school were obtained from two schools. One listed 150 names, the other, 96. A sample survey was conducted in one area to determine the incidence of the problem and to identify some of its causes. During 14½ hours of observation, thirty-nine children were found within a five-block area, who were absent from school. The reasons for absence varied from lack of money for clothes and lunches to negative parental attitudes toward school attendance.

Members of the committee made visits to the homes of these absentees. The same reasons — lack of proper clothing, care of younger brothers and sisters, inadequate supervision by parents — were found to be the causes of non-attendance.

Handbills were devised by the committee, urging parents to send their children to school and reminding them of their legal obligation to do so. The handbills were distributed to children at school to take home. Reports from two principals indicated that this was effective in motivating some parents to see that their children returned to school. Some children were brought in who had never attended school. Some parents indicated that they feared they would risk arrest if they did not send their children to school, although this was not stated in the handbill.

The committee is aware of the multiple problems of parents in the community. Nevertheless, the committee has found that many parents with these same problems are able to get their children to school if they are sufficiently motivated. The committee members strongly feel that adequate enforcement of the compulsory attendance law would remedy much of the absenteeism.



There is presently in the Mechanicsville-Summerhill area only one visiting teacher to follow-up on school absentees. He is responsible for absentees in 16 schools, including approximately 10,700 children.

Atlanta Public Schools has recognized in its proposal under Title I of Public Law 89-10 the importance of improving school attendance in disadvantaged areas. An original budget for 40 additional social workers has been reduced to 10 because trained professional personnel is not available. Many more workers are needed for adequate handling of attendance problems in the 40 schools located in disadvantaged areas.

## II. PROPOSAL

The Mechanicsville-Summerhill Improvement Committee, in their home visits, has shown the usefulness of non-professional, neighborhood residents for improving school attendance in disadvantaged areas. It is therefore proposed that a project be initiated under Title I of Public Law 89-10 to demonstrate the effectiveness of using non-professional, community residents to improve school attendance in disadvantaged areas. Such personnel would be designated "School Attendance Aides".

### A. Target Area

It is proposed that two elementary schools in the Mechanicsville-Summerhill area be selected for this project. It is suggested that Capitol Avenue (Summerhill) and Cooper Street (Mechanicsville) Schools would be the appropriate demonstration areas. The principals of these two schools have expressed an interest in participating in the proposed project.

### B. Objectives

1. To reduce the number of absentees in schools located in disadvantaged areas
2. To improve the relationship between the school and the community in disadvantaged areas
3. To demonstrate the effectiveness of using neighborhood people in disadvantaged areas as school attendance workers
4. To ameliorate the shortage of personnel in school social services
5. To give employment to people in disadvantaged areas who possess special knowledge and skills needed to work effectively in these areas
6. To obtain more adequate enforcement of the compulsory school attendance law



C. Method

School Attendance Aides would be non-professional, neighborhood residents employed by the Atlanta Public Schools to work in selected elementary schools. Recruitment of candidates for these positions would be done by the individual school principal, who would select people with the required qualifications from the neighborhood. Final decision on employment of School Attendance Aides would be left to the Division of Pupil Services.

School Attendance Aides would work under the direct supervision of the visiting teacher or school social worker assigned to the area. Absentees identified by classroom teachers would be referred to the aides who would make contact with the parents of the child to determine the reason for absence.

School Attendance Aides will be trained to make referrals to the appropriate community agency where there is a need. They would continue to work with the family as long as is necessary. Aides will serve as liaison between parents and classroom teachers to remedy problems that may be identified in the school situation. More difficult cases will be referred by the Aides to the School social worker. The school social worker (or visiting teacher) would initiate legal action to enforce the compulsory attendance law when necessary.

Because attendance aides will be indigenous to the community, they will possess unique knowledge and skills which professional workers do not have. Aides will do much of their work in the evenings and off hours, when working parents are most accessible. Aides will interpret school regulations and requirements to parents in a manner that is understandable to them. They can do much to improve school-community relations — which is a major problem in disadvantaged areas.

D. Qualifications of School Attendance Aides

1. Mature residents of the school neighborhood
2. Sincere interest in children and their educational development
3. Ability to get along with people and help them develop positive attitudes toward education
4. Ability to understand and interpret school regulations and to learn to make proper referrals to community agencies

Principals know individuals in their school community who possess these qualifications.

E. Functions of School Attendance Aides

1. Make follow-up visits to homes of absentees
2. Work with parents of absentees to develop more positive attitudes toward the school and education
3. Make referrals to appropriate health and welfare agencies where need is indicated

4. Inform parents of school regulations regarding immunization prior to school entrance, and other school regulations
5. Inform parents of their legal obligation to send children to school regularly
6. Refer cases to the visiting teacher or school social worker for initiation of legal action when necessary
7. Seek out children in families new to the city and not in school
8. Seek out truants in the neighborhood

F. Training of School Attendance Aides

1. The training of School Attendance Aides would be done by Pupil Services staff of the Atlanta Public Schools.
2. Orientation of School Attendance Aides to community resources and instruction in referral procedures will be carried out by the Community Council of the Atlanta Area, Inc.

III. BUDGET

It is proposed that four School Attendance Aides be assigned to each of the schools selected in the target area — Four to the school in Summerhill and four to the school in Mechanicsville.

JG:mr

CCAA, Inc.  
May 18, 1966