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## A Study of the Education for Employment Program and the Effect it had on the Absentee Rate at Virginia Beach Junior High School Comparing 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 School Years

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A STUDY OF THE EDUCATION FOR EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM  
AND THE EFFECT IT HAD ON THE ABSENTEE RATE  
AT VIRGINIA BEACH JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL COMPARING  
1986-1987 AND 1987-1988 SCHOOL YEARS

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A Master's Research Paper  
Submitted to the Department of  
Vocational and Technical Education

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In Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Education

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by

Roxanne L. Herrington

June 1988

This research paper was prepared by Roxanne L. Herrington under the direction of Dr. John M. Ritz in VTE 636, Problems in Education. It was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Science in Education degree.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Students missing school for various reasons has become a serious problem (Hegner, 1987, p. 125). The economically and academically disadvantaged students appear to show a lack of empathy in their studies, frequently miss school, and have low self-concepts (E.F.E., p. 2-10). Programs and policies have to be implemented for the disadvantaged youth to increase their motivation which will hopefully result in lowering their absenteeism rates. Vocational education programs can successfully help to alleviate the absentee rate and apathy among its students. The programs must bolster self-esteem, provide support services, represent real-life situations, and provide hands-on career opportunities (Azcoitia, 1987, p. 34). Various programs across the United States, especially in the urban areas, have addressed these issues with success.

The State of Virginia has created a program for this special needs population group to help curtail the problem of absenteeism entitled Education for Employment (E.F.E.). The E.F.E. program was being pilot tested in Virginia Beach Junior High School in the 1987-1988 academic school year. The positive or negative effects of the E.F.E. program in Virginia Beach Junior High School will be used to determine the growth in other Virginia Beach Public Schools.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of the study was to determine whether the E.F.E. program at Virginia Beach Junior High School had reduced the



absentee rate of its students during the 1987-1988 school year compared to the 1986-1987 school year.

The success of the Virginia Beach Junior High School E.F.E. program was determined by examining various student, teacher, parent, and administrative sources. This particular study only analyzed student attendance records and student reactions to the E.F.E. program.

The Virginia Beach Junior High School served grades seven through nine. There were 26 students participating in the E.F.E. program from grades seven through nine.

#### RESEARCH GOALS

To provide proper direction and guidance for the research study, the following research questions had been set forth:

1. Had the E.F.E. absentee rate decreased in 1987-1988 compared to 1986-1987?
2. What were the students reactions, both favorable and non-favorable, towards the E.F.E. program?
3. What were the students reactions about their 1987-1988 school year?

#### BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The purpose of E.F.E. was to provide a vocational education program for the special needs learner. The program was designed to provide the students with realistic, reachable goals which had not been obtained in other academic programs. The students attempted to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they needed to make them employable and/or capable of seeking further education and training.

The goals of the E.F.E. program were designed to let the students choose one of the following:

1. Develop skills for an entry level job if student left school before graduation.
2. Transfer over to a regular vocational program.
3. Return to a regular academic program.
4. Stay in school until graduation or full time employment (E.F.E., p. 2-1).

The objectives of the E.F.E. program were to assist the students in the following: understanding self, adapting to group living, developing entry-level job skills, developing effective communication and computation skills, developing proper attitudes toward work and society, understanding personal money management, and appraising personal occupational interests, aptitudes, and achievement (E.F.E., p. 2-2).

The E.F.E. program was being pilot tested in Virginia Beach Junior High School for the academic year 1987-1988. The success of the program depended mainly on student performance and interest in the program. The attendance rate of the students was used to analyze student interest along with a student questionnaire on the E.F.E. program. Nancy Worwick, the Assistant Principal, and Linda Ditchburn, the E.F.E. teacher, both whom resided at Virginia Beach Junior High School, fully supported the research study in determining the success and future growth of the E.F.E. program. The E.F.E. program appeared to be an attractive alternative for the special needs learner.

### LIMITATIONS

The findings and conclusions of this study were limited to various student population groups and special needs programs.

The limitations were as follows:

1. The results of the study were confined to E.F.E. programs in urban junior high schools.
2. The results of the study were confined to seventh through ninth grade E.F.E. students.
3. The results of the study were confined to attendance records covering two academic school years.
4. The results of the study were confined to academically and economically disadvantaged and handicapped students.

### ASSUMPTIONS

In this research study there were various factors which were assumed to be true and correct. The assumptions were as follows:

1. The E.F.E. students were typical representations of disadvantaged and handicapped students.
2. The attendance records at Virginia Beach Junior High School had been accurately computed for the 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 school years.

### PROCEDURES

The population of the seventh through ninth grade E.F.E. students at Virginia Beach Junior High School were used to conduct this study. The attendance records were analyzed for those students who had remained enrolled in the program from September 1987 through June 1988. The students who had dropped out or transferred to another school were not included in the study. The following steps were necessary to conduct the study:

1. Analyze E.F.E. students attendance records for 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 school years.
2. Issue questionnaire survey on the E.F.E. program to the E.F.E. students currently enrolled in the program.
3. Compare attendance records and student reaction data on the E.F.E. program.
4. Revise E.F.E. curriculum and attendance policies according to results from the study.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

To assist the reader in clarifying the meanings of certain terms used in the study, the following list was provided:

1. Absenteeism -- missing E.F.E. class for various reasons.
2. Academically disadvantaged -- a student who lacks reading, writing, or math skills; or performs below grade level (Federal Register 191 Vol. 42).
3. At risk -- synonymous term for academically and economically disadvantaged.
4. Economically disadvantaged -- a student whose family income is below national norm, parent(s)/guardian(s) are unemployed, parent(s)/guardian(s) receive public assistance, or institutionalized or under State guardianship (Federal Register 191 Vol. 42).
5. E.F.E. -- Education for Employment program set up for special needs students by the State Department of Education in Virginia.
6. Handicapped -- a student who is mentally retarded, hard of hearing, deaf, speech or language impaired, or other health impaired persons, or persons with specific learning disabilities (Public Law 98-524).
7. Special needs -- those individuals who will encounter difficulty in education or employment settings due to a physical, mental, or emotional disability or economic or academic disadvantage (Public Law 98-524).

8. Vocational education -- Organized educational programs which are directly related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid employment, in such fields as agriculture, business, home economics, health, marketing, technical, modern industrial arts, and trades and industrial occupations, or for additional preparation for a career in such fields, and in other occupations requiring other than a baccalaureate or advanced degree and vocational student organization activities as an integral part of the program (Public Law 98-524).

#### SUMMARY

Chapter I addressed a problem of student absenteeism among academically and economically disadvantaged students. The E.F.E. program supported by the Virginia Department of Education presented itself as an alternative program to help inspire this student population and curtail absenteeism. This study analyzed E.F.E. students attendance records before and after the E.F.E. program and reactions to the program. The study conducted at the Virginia Beach Junior High School helped determine how successful the E.F.E. program had been and will also be used to help incorporate E.F.E. programs in other Virginia Beach Public Schools. Chapter II addressed the absenteeism problem, alternative solutions/programs to the absenteeism problem, past research studies on attendance, and provided more information on the E.F.E. program.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Education for Employment program in Virginia Beach Junior High School provided the "at-risk" student an alternative. The E.F.E. program was designed to cut down on absenteeism which eventually could lead to a dropout situation. In this chapter, the reader will be given a better understanding of the problem of absenteeism, alternative programs offered to curtail the problem, past research studies on absenteeism, and the E.F.E. program as an alternative in Virginia.

## ABSENTEEISM PROBLEM

Success of the educational process depends on the presence of pupils in a classroom, continuous instruction, up-to-date curriculum, effective instructional activities, and classroom participation all under the direction of a competent instructor (Hegner, 1987, p. 125). All the ingredients mentioned are necessary for the recipe of education. The educational process will not be complete without all the parts.

"Regardless of state laws governing attendance, chronic absenteeism is a serious problem. But, very little seems to be known about its primary causes and what should and can be done to deal with it effectively." Absenteeism may be caused by the following: chemical abuse by family members and/or students, single-parent families, step-parents/siblings, one-to-one relationships, sexual promiscuity, lack of supervision in the home, and a breakdown of communication between child and parent (Hegner, 1987, p. 125).

Society would like to place the blame for the lack of empathy among the students on one source to make it easy to correct. The teachers are the first target. The teachers who are not competent themselves are creating incompetent adults. More restrictions on a nationwide scale have been induced to "weed-out" the incompetent individuals who are teaching or would like to teach. Teachers may be to blame in some cases, but the entire American society must take some of the blame. The "I don't care attitude" is screaming loud and clear not only in secondary but post-secondary institutions as well.

"In 1983, a New York City Board of Education survey concluded that more than a third of the students in the city's high schools were chronically absent and missed so much class time that it was nearly impossible to teach." A study two years later which was taken on a national level reported that the "typical" student cut 100 classes a year (Janko, 1988, p. 26).

The American society has grown at a very rapid pace. The pace of trying to succeed and be the best is not particularly a main priority for the youth of today as yesterday. The students are not as committed to education. They feel they will get lost in the shuffle and someone else will pick up the slack. The absenteeism problem which eventually could lead to a drop-out situation stems from a lack of motivation among the students. How do you motivate an individual? The Japanese high schools have a graduation rate of 90 percent, compared to our 75 percent. The Japanese have this high rate even though their instructional techniques are rote in nature and are not adjusted to individual

differences. Motivation is expected to come from the students (Janko, 1988, p. 28).

It is unmerciful to be so negative about the lack of motivation among the students of today. Many students are motivated or we possibly would not have the 75 percent rate graduating. We must come up with curriculum and programs which address societal demands and will hopefully inspire and keep the students in the classroom. The students need to identify and realize their perceived niche in society at an early age.

#### ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS/SOLUTIONS

If we are to motivate the students of today, we must be aware of the following characteristics they possess:

- \* 14% are illegitimate
- \* 40% will have lived with a single parent by age 18
- \* 30% are latchkey children
- \* 20% live in poverty
- \* 15% speak a native language other than English
- \* 15% have a physical or mental handicaps
- \* 10% have poorly educated parents (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 157).

Involving the economically disadvantaged parents in the school is one program which is designed to help alleviate the problem of absenteeism among the disadvantaged youth. The idea of involving low income parents in the school system is not a new idea. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, parent involvement through parent advisory councils was required. In 1981 the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act stated



the importance of consultation with the local community involving parent intervention. Many of the parents who were involved in the 1960s were upper and middle income families. It seemed very natural to have this type of parent involved in the school system. Unfortunately, only seven percent of today's school children are representations of the "typical" family in 1965 (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 157).

If a policy is mandated on the federal level, but not supported properly at the localities, what is the purpose of such a law. It is difficult to change the belief and actions of individuals overnight. Teachers and administrators alike must believe that low income parents can and should be involved in the school system if the behavior of the "at-risk" student is to be changed for the better. Teachers only interact with a student X number of hours a day which cannot nearly compare to the time the student has spent out of school be it with family, at work, or just "hanging out."

To change the support of teachers and administrators to a more positive involvement with low income parents requires both pressure and support. "Experience has shown that the search for appropriate pressures should move beyond the rule-based pressures (i.e., mandates) that characterized parent involvement in the past" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 159). These mandated pressures have not stirred any great measures of parent involvement. The norm-based pressures that are tied to incentives, values, and priorities that influence the behavior of teachers and administrators may prove to be more beneficial.

Education responds well to an approach with norm-based pressures. The following guidelines should be used to educate both teacher and administrator for improving the "at-risk" population:

1. Teachers must be educated about the benefits of involving parents, about the willingness of low-income or poorly educated parents to become involved in their children's education, and about specific models of parent involvement that proved successful.
2. Administrators must be educated about the importance of enabling teachers to take the initiative, about the effects of their own expectations regarding parent involvement in the school or in the school district, about the bureaucratic and political value of parent advisory councils, and about the importance of sending a signal to teachers and the community that parent involvement is valued.
3. Those who shape public opinion must be educated about the contributions and the potential benefits of involving low-income parents and parents of educationally disadvantaged students in their children's education (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 159).

"The School Improvement Program in California, for example, has successfully fostered effective parent involvement by requiring 'partnership' councils within each school (composed of 50 percent staff and 50 percent community members)" (McLaughlin, p. 160). These councils are responsible for planning, needs assessment, and evaluation. This type of 50/50 council has proven very effective due to the fact that they are not totally ruled by the parents, but they are involved in the decision making process.

The rules and mandates alone cannot bring about the required changes in attitudes among administrators and teachers regarding parent involvement in the school system. If more people are actively involved, there will be an improvement in the

educational system whether it is with curriculum, teacher competency levels, or student competency levels. "The evidence that doing can be believing is compelling" (McLaughlin, p. 160).

Realizing the statistics of school children today is very important in creating curriculum and programs for the disadvantaged youths. As stated earlier, a considerable percentage of youth are either emotionally, academically, or economically disadvantaged. This "at-risk" population group usually has a problem with absenteeism which could lead to a dropout situation. Several programs are labeled as "dropout prevention programs." Listed below are a few of the major characteristics of high school dropouts:

- \* poor academic performance
- \* repetition of one or more grades
- \* low intelligence test scores (mean = 90)
- \* lack of interest in school and school work
- \* frequent absences and tardiness
- \* low socioeconomic backgrounds
- \* some type of handicap
- \* from weak or broken homes
- \* low self-concept and social maturity
- \* poor basic reading and math skills
- \* receipt of little encouragement and support in regard to school work and future plans
- \* hostility and unruliness or passivity and apathy (Mertens, 1987, p. 47).

Vocational education programs are considered excellent in keeping the students interested and coming to school. An

experimental program involving vocational education was used in Chicago, where 43 percent of entering freshmen never make it to graduation (Azcoitia, 1987, p. 33). The experiment in Chicago required all freshmen students to be placed in a vocational education program for a minimum of one year. After the one year, the annual dropout rate decreased from 24 percent to six percent (Azcoitia, 1987, p. 33). Along with the vocational education programs, Chicago public school systems provide support services for the disadvantaged, handicapped, and limited English proficient youth. In 1985-1986 for those students who received assistance from the support services, only two percent dropped out of high school (Azcoitia, 1987, p. 33). Still another facet of the vocational education programs is the Student Services Corporation. Various disadvantaged students are selected, trained, and supervised by a teacher to tutor their peers in vocational education. The students are paid for their services and seem to respond well to peer tutoring. This is just one of the many success stories for vocational education.

"Vocational education is no panacea for reducing the alarming dropout rate. But coupled with support services, vocational programs can give drop-out prone students new opportunities for success. These programs have to booster self-confidence and enhance self-esteem" (Azcoitia, 1987, p. 34).

Philadelphia's overall dropout rate per year is nine and eight tenths percent. Four programs have been developed and implemented in the last four to five years to help correct the problem. The first program is High School Academies. This program is one of the highest

ranked programs out of the four and known on a national level. High School Academies are schools-within-schools that provide vocational and academic training to make the successful transition from school to work. Some of the unique features are: block rostering (students go from class to class as a group), team teaching, highly structured environments, extensive parental involvement, part-time work, and upon graduation help in getting a job or admission to a post-secondary institution (Collins, 1988, p. 22). The ten academy programs in Philadelphia enjoy a very high attendance rate, a near zero dropout rate, and an employment or post-secondary placement rate of 85 percent (Collins, 1988, p. 22).

In 1983 the Jobsearch program started with the main goal of providing students with skills on how to prepare and keep a job. Teachers from different subject areas run the program. Each teaches one class a day. Most of the high schools have Jobsearch Centers which replicate a typical private business office. Under the teacher's supervision, the juniors in the program conduct a search for part-time or summer employment, while the seniors look for full-time positions after graduation.

The Education for Employment Initiative and Cities-in-Schools programs (EEI/CIS) started in four high schools in 1986-1987. Both of these programs are used at a national level for those school districts having a high percentage of "at-risk" students. In 1985, the Committee to Support the Philadelphia Public Schools, consisting of chief business and post-secondary institution members, came up with four requisites for employment:

adequate basic skills, a high school diploma or equivalent, work experience, and employability skills (Collins, 1988, p. 23).

The EEI/CIS program was developed in response to the report by the committee. The members of the committee also indicated that the "at-risk" students were lacking at least one of the requisites. Employment Centers are coordinated with the EEI/CIS programs in at least six of the Philadelphia area high schools. Some of the following activities take place at each center: career development assessments, employability plans for each student, student referrals in areas of basic math, reading, and writing, student placement in jobs, follow-up evaluations with students and employers, parental involvement with attendance and behavioral problems, career exploration, and coordination services between school and outside agencies deemed necessary (Collins, 1988, p. 24).

The EEI/CIS program started in four high schools in 1986-1987. Of the 1,570 students for whom the four schools developed ability profiles, 360 received employment training, 625 received job placements, and 500 enrolled in the CIS component (the special "at-risk" block roster group). CIS students demonstrated higher attendance and promotional rates and lower dropout rates than comparable groups. Plans for advancement in other area high schools is already in process (Collins, 1988, p. 24).

The fourth program which is a service offered in the Philadelphia high schools started five years ago to aid the limited English proficient (LEP) students. The use of bilingual

aides/tutors and advisory councils from various culture groups has been the key to the success of the program. The Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act provides for the funding which is matched by the localities. Vocational teachers receive special training on the various cultures and instructional methods suited for their needs. In this particular program service, 49 percent are Asian and 50 percent are Hispanic students.

The four programs mentioned need to be replicated and expanded at a very fast rate. "The goal must be a zero percent dropout rate. If the dropout rate doesn't go down, the unemployment rate will go up, and more and more of the population will be at risk" (Collins, 1988, p. 24).

#### ABSENTEEISM RESEARCH STUDIES

Apathy and absenteeism among students seems to have a correlation with dropping out of school. This particular study conducted at Virginia Beach Junior High School involved examining student attendance records, along with a questionnaire which examined student reactions to E.F.E. and their 1987-1988 school year. There were two dissertation studies on attendance that were of particular importance to note. So far, programs have been mentioned that have and will help in correcting the problem of absenteeism. Now we need to address the attendance policies which tie in with these programs.

The first research study was conducted in the state of Arkansas. Jerry Smith from the University of Arkansas sent out mail surveys to all secondary high school principals on the attendance policies they were using in their locality.

48 percent of the principals use a credit removal incentive policy. If more than 15 absences occur in a semester, the student is docked credit. Health is one exception to the policy. A lot of high school principals also participate in awarding or sending a certificate to those students with outstanding attendance. It is interesting to note that almost half the state uses negative reinforcement with credit removal for excessive absenteeism. Smith also noted that most of the principals, whether it was positive or negative reinforcement policies, noticed a significant improvement in attendance after the policies had been implemented. It is difficult to note whether the improvement in attendance comes from the curriculum being taught in Arkansas or from the denial of credit for excessive absences.

In some states across the United States, if a student misses X number of days a year, the family will not receive welfare support. The idea of supporting the public welfare of your child through education is tied in with public financial support. This type of policy is another example of negative reinforcement for the "at-risk" students through their parents or guardians.

Chung-Hae Kim from the University of Pittsburgh conducted a study in the state of Pennsylvania where 276 randomly sampled decision makers were asked their opinions on the state compulsory attendance laws and on attendance policies in general. The decision makers were taken from state legislation, public school directors for vocational/technical education, juvenile court judges, school superintendents, and professors of educational administration. All of the respondent groups supported state



compulsory laws on attendance. The following items are some concerns they had about attendance: lowering the beginning age to six, stricter enforcement of compulsory laws, lowering upper age limit at which students may drop out or eliminating it altogether (thought might be a negative effect on disadvantaged youth), incorporating viable educational alternative programs to provide adequate attention for all youth, and the idea of home schooling was completely out of the question (Chung-Hae, 1985, p. 569A).

It is interesting to note that the researchers thought it was necessary to address the issue of absenteeism which stressed policy over program. This study addressed the issue of program. The ultimate goal of the programs which are labeled "dropout prevention" is to keep the students motivated and interested in school. This will eventually cut down on the absentee problem. One cannot enforce a policy on attendance without reviewing the program curriculum which could be a variable in the problem itself. In other words, you cannot have one without the other.

#### E.F.E. ALTERNATIVE

The E.F.E. program is currently being used in Virginia as a "dropout" prevention program. The program is designed to give disadvantaged students the basic understanding of employment and everyday living skills. Elwood Roche, a supervisor for Marketing Education in Bridgewater, Virginia, made the following statements about how the E.F.E. program got started. In 1960, Arlington, Virginia, adopted the E.F.E. program. Two years later, Culpepper

County needed help with the dropout rate at the middle school level, and they proposed a pilot testing of an E.F.E. program taken from Arlington. Within one year, Clark County adopted the E.F.E. program as well. The E.F.E. program has taken hold over the years and has obviously spread to various localities all over the state (Roche, 11:30 a.m., March 18, 1988).

E.F.E. was intended for the following reasons:

1. To have students leave school with the ability and entry level skills to become employable.
2. To retain the students in school by changing their attitude toward school itself.
3. To be given the opportunity to enter into vocational education programs or other academic programs (E.F.E., p. 2-1).

Disadvantaged students have been unable to succeed and have little interest in the typical school environment. The E.F.E. program, a "special needs" program for the disadvantaged, must incorporate alternative methods of instruction to meet the interests and needs of these students. Effective instruction will assist the E.F.E. student to recognize the importance of a positive attitude and his/her ability to succeed in school, home, and community (E.F.E., p. 2-2).

There are five units of instruction which are flexible in regard to time. A school may have an E.F.E. I, E.F.E. II, or an E.F.E. III program. The program can be as long as three years or as short as one year. The five units of instruction may all be taught in one year or spread out over three years. The norm is to teach the program in a three year sequential process. The five instructional units are as follows:

1. Orientation -- this unit gives a basic overview of the course objectives and goals for E.F.E.
2. Pre-employment -- this unit gives a basic overview of all the values, skills, interests, etc. which are necessary in order to find a job. This unit covers filling out a work permit, assessing interests and skills, and getting ready for job interview.
3. Employment -- this unit gives a basic overview of the skills necessary in maintaining a job. Job interviewing is stressed in this unit.
4. Basic social skills -- this unit gives a basic overview of those skills needed to survive in the world as a consumer. Budgeting, banking, and credit are stressed in this unit.
5. Career exploration -- this unit gives a basic overview of career opportunities.

The size of the classes should be no more than 15 students for the disadvantaged classes, and no more than 10 students for the handicapped classes. The teacher has either three or four bells of instruction. The rest of the time is spent on possibly coordinating employment if the students are 14 or older, home visitations informing parents of meetings and/or information about their students, planning for the individual instructional methods due to the "special-needs" of the students, setting up advisory councils who work on long term planning between community and school and criteria selection of students, and setting up a student vocational organization.

Students for the E.F.E. program must be academically or economically disadvantaged. The identification of students to be served by E.F.E. should be a cooperative effort involving the school administration, guidance counselors, E.F.E. coordinator, and former teachers (E.F.E., p. 2-9). The E.F.E. teacher makes

the final decision. The knowledge of individual students is based on home environment, personal interview, and performance in school which are all used in selecting and identifying the students who are eligible.

To be classified as disadvantaged, a student should meet at least two of the following criteria:

- \* personality, home, or emotional problems
- \* low income family
- \* low or under-achiever
- \* behind one or more grades
- \* disinterested in school, possibly irregular in attendance
- \* lack of personal goals
- \* normal or above in potential ability, but failing to achieve

Students have also been known for having one or more of the following characteristics:

- \* poor or failing grades
- \* poor attendance
- \* poor attitude
- \* poor social, extracurricular, and other school involvement
- \* discipline problems in school
- \* socioeconomic need (E.F.E., p. 2-10).

The E.F.E. program is an example of a "dropout prevention" program. The characteristics of the potential dropout student mentioned earlier correlate to the characteristics of the disadvantaged student. Along with the program, we must also look at the attendance policy in Virginia. If a student misses

more than 16 days a semester, which is half a year, the student loses credit for the course(s) taken. As stated earlier, you cannot just look at one factor be it policy or program. Both factors should have an effect on the students attendance performance. The E.F.E. program has been successful in the state of Virginia.

#### SUMMARY

The educational system will not survive without proper instruction, proper curriculum, competent teachers, and the presence of students in the classroom. The 75 percent graduation rate on a national level needs to be raised to ideally 100 percent. How will we raise the percentage? That is a very good question which does not have a single answer. The youth of today, whether they are labeled "disadvantaged," "special needs," or "at-risk" all boil down to one thing--lack of motivation. Programs, policies, and educators need to help inspire this population group to push the graduation percentage to 100 percent. The programs are taking hold on a national level especially in the more urban areas like Virginia Beach. These "dropout prevention" programs all center on promoting a positive self-image, employable skills, hands-on career opportunities, basic academic skills, proper support services, and vocational organizations for all students involved. Creativity and determination are needed for success with these programs.

Virginia Beach Junior High School took on the challenge this year of incorporating the E.F.E. program. Had the students in

E.F.E. attended more regularly than without the E.F.E. program? Had their interest in school increased during E.F.E.? These questions have been answered after the completion of the study.

Chapter II dealt with past and present information on the problem of absenteeism, programs designed to help alleviate this problem be it E.F.E., Philadelphia's programs, or Chicago's experimental study programs involving vocational education. Chapter III continued the study and addressed the issues concerning the instrument, population group, methods of collecting data, and treatment of data in the E.F.E. study at Virginia Beach Junior High.

## METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter dealt with the basic design of the research study. The methods and procedures which were used for the E.F.E. study at Virginia Beach Junior High School were presented in the following headings: Population, Instrument, Methods of Collecting Data, Treatment of Data, and Summary.

## POPULATION

The sample consisted of 26 students enrolled in the E.F.E. program. Those students who had dropped out or transferred to another school were not considered in the study. The students were from grades seven through nine under the direction of Linda Ditchburn, E.F.E. teacher, at Virginia Beach Junior High School.

## INSTRUMENT

A student questionnaire was used based on the research goals found in Chapter I (Appendix). The questions dealt with the following areas:

1. Student interest in E.F.E., both favorable and nonfavorable.
2. Student reactions to their 1987-1988 school year.

## METHODS OF COLLECTING DATA

The researcher, E.F.E. teacher, and assistant principal decided to have the students complete the survey at one time period for continuity purposes. The students were instructed to answer the questions honestly and accurately and to avoid writing their name on the questionnaire. The students were given the same instructions

for all three time periods for consistency purposes. Those students who were absent received the questionnaire from the researcher one-on-one with the same instructions as the other students received.

The attendance records for those students who had been enrolled in E.F.E. from September 1987 through June 1988 were examined. The attendance records were made accessible to the researcher by the administration at Virginia Beach Junior High. Attendance records for 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 were examined for comparison purposes.

#### TREATMENT OF DATA

Once data had been collected from the student questionnaire and from teacher and administration attendance records, a percent analysis was tabulated and charted. Percentages were given for each item answered on the student questionnaire and for student decrease and increase in attendance comparing 1986-1987 to 1987-1988 school years. The results from the questionnaire and attendance records will be used for evaluation purposes for possible expansion of E.F.E. in Virginia Beach Public Schools.

#### SUMMARY

The researcher felt by evaluating student reactions from the questionnaire and by analyzing student attendance records, one was able to draw conclusions on the effectiveness E.F.E. had on curtailing the absenteeism problem among the special needs population group. The actual percentage results from the questionnaire and attendance records were found in Chapter IV.



## FINDINGS

The problem of the study was to determine whether the E.F.E. program at Virginia Beach Junior High School had reduced the absentee rate of its students during the 1987-1988 school year compared to the 1986-1987 school year. This particular study evaluated both student attendance and student reactions to the E.F.E. program. The following research goals were as followed:

1. Had the E.F.E. absentee rate decreased in 1987-1988 compared to 1986-1987?
2. What were the students reactions, both favorable and nonfavorable, towards the E.F.E. program?
3. What were the students reactions about their 1987-1988 school year?

The E.F.E. program had 26 students enrolled at the time of the study. Out of the 26 students who were labeled disadvantaged and/or handicapped, 19 or 73 percent of the students were disadvantaged, and seven or 27 percent of the students were handicapped. The information from this study was presented in two sections. The first section entitled, Student Attendance, dealt with the student attendance records pertaining to research goal one, and the second section entitled, E.F.E. Program, dealt with the student responses to the questionnaire on the E.F.E. program pertaining to research goals two and three. A summary section was also provided for transitional purposes between Chapters IV and V.

## STUDENT ATTENDANCE

After examining the students attendance records for a two year period, the average number of days absent and percentage statistics

were made available for comparison purposes. The average number of days missed were 20 days for 1986-1987 and 14 days for 1987-1988. A total of 24 student attendance records were examined. Two students had transferred in from out-of-state school districts and attendance records were not available for 1986-1987. The two student attendance records were discarded for 1987-1988 due to comparison purposes. Sixty-seven percent or 16 students decreased their absenteeism, eight percent or two students absenteeism stayed the same, and 25 percent or six students increased their absenteeism in 1987-1988. Out of the 67 percent that decreased their absenteeism, 63 percent or 10 of those students decreased their absenteeism between eight and 27 days. Two of these 10 students had an excess of over thirty days and dropped out after March of 1987. Both of these students remained in school for 1987-1988. Out of the 25 percent of the students who increased their absenteeism, 50 percent or three of those students only increased it by one or two days. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for a visual examination of the results.

#### E.F.E. PROGRAM EVALUATION

The special needs students were issued an E.F.E. nine-item questionnaire at the end of May 1988. Twenty-five out of the 26 students or 96 percent were issued the E.F.E. questionnaire. Most of the questions were closed-ended; but questions one, five, and eight were open-ended. After issuing the student questionnaire, percent analyses were available for each of the nine questions.

Questions one, two, three, four, and nine dealt with their favorable and nonfavorable reactions towards the E.F.E. program.

TABLE 1

Average Number of Days Missed in the E.F.E. Program at  
Virginia Beach Junior High for 1986-1987 and 1987-1988

School Year	Number of Student Records Examined	Average Days Absent
1986-1987	24	20
1987-1988	24	14

TABLE 2

Breakdown of the Attendance Results for the E.F.E. Students  
at Virginia Beach Junior High comparing 1986-1987 to 1987-1988

Number of Student Records	Percentage Absenteeism Change for 1987-1988	Individual Statistics on Percentage Change
16	67% Decreased	10 or 63% of students decreased between 8-24 days
2	8% Stayed same	-----
6	25% Increased	3 or 50% of students increased between 1-2 days
-----		
24	TOTAL STUDENT RECORDS EXAMINED	

Question one revealed that 100 percent of the students liked E.F.E. class; and 60 percent or 15 students stated the reason as being able to find, receive, or hold a job. Question two revealed 64 percent or 16 students identifying speakers as the item they liked best about E.F.E.. Twelve or 48 percent of the students in question three decided E.F.E. had helped them the most in getting a job. Question four determined that 14 students or 56 percent decided E.F.E. made them want to come to school more in 1987-1988 than in 1986-1987. Question nine revealed 11 students or 44 percent stating the one thing they would like to change about E.F.E. would be a part-time job through the program. Another 24 percent or 6 students stated they would like to see more speakers come to the class. Refer to Table 3 for a more detailed analysis for questions one through four and question nine from the student questionnaire.

Question five dealt with the students reactions to their top two favorite classes for 1987-1988. Eleven students or 44 percent chose E.F.E. as their first favorite class. Their second favorite class issued a disperse response. Five students or 20 percent chose E.F.E., four students or 16 percent chose Physical Education, and four students or 16 percent chose Math. Table 4 provides a description of their individual responses to question five.

Question eight dealt with the students reactions to their two least favorite classes for 1987-1988. Their first least favorite class identified varied responses. Eight or 32 percent chose Math, six or 24 percent chose Science, and four or 16 percent chose English. Their second favorite class issued a disperse response as well. Six or 24 percent chose English, four or 16 percent chose Social Studies,

TABLE 3

Student Reactions to E.F.E. Program at  
Virginia Beach Junior High for 1987-1988

Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Individual Reactions to Question
QUESTION 1, DO YOU LIKE E.F.E.?		
25	100%	Yes
WHY OR WHY NOT?		
15	60%	Find, receive, or hold a job
2	8%	Learned a lot
2	8%	No comment
1	4%	It's different
1	4%	It's O.K.
1	4%	It's a good class
1	4%	It's an easy A or B
1	4%	It's interesting
1	4%	Can use it later in life
QUESTION 2, WHICH PART OF E.F.E. DID YOU LIKE THE BEST?		
CHECK ONLY <u>ONE</u>		
16	64%	Speakers
5	20%	Group discussion
2	8%	Other (field trips)
1	4%	Classroom games
1	4%	Individual seat work
QUESTION 3, WHAT DO YOU THINK E.F.E. HAS OR WILL HELP YOU WITH THE MOST? CHECK ONLY <u>ONE</u>		
12	48%	Getting a job
7	28%	Thinking about future plans
6	24%	Learning about different jobs
QUESTION 4, DOES HAVING E.F.E. IN YOUR SCHEDULE THIS YEAR MAKE YOU WANT TO COME TO SCHOOL MORE IN 1987-1988 THAN IN 1986-1987 SCHOOL YEAR?		
14	56%	Yes
11	44%	No
QUESTION 9, IF THERE WAS ONE THING YOU COULD CHANGE ABOUT E.F.E., WHAT WOULD IT BE? CHECK ONLY <u>ONE</u>		
11	44%	Part-time job through E.F.E. program
6	24%	More speakers
3	12%	More movies/filmstrips
2	8%	More time spent on finding out about jobs
1	4%	Less movies
1	4%	Less speakers
1	4%	No comment

TABLE 4

E.F.E. Student Reactions to Their Two Most Favorite Classes  
at Virginia Beach Junior High for 1987-1988

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Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Individual Reactions to Question
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QUESTION 5, WHAT ARE YOUR TWO MOST FAVORITE SUBJECTS FOR  
1987-1988 SCHOOL YEAR?

FIRST MOST FAVORITE

11	44%	E.F.E.
4	16%	Math
2	8%	Technology Education
2	8%	English
1	4%	Music
1	4%	Social Studies
1	4%	E.H.
1	4%	Lunch

SECOND MOST FAVORITE

5	20%	E.F.E.
4	16%	Physical Education
4	16%	Math
3	12%	No comment
2	8%	Teen Living
2	8%	English
1	4%	Science
1	4%	Reading
1	4%	Health
1	4%	Technology Education
1	4%	Lunch

---

and four or 16 percent chose Science. Table 5 illustrates their reactions to their two least favorite classes.

Questions six and seven dealt with the special needs students reactions to their attendance and enjoyment for the 1987-1988 school year. Question six revealed that 15 or 60 percent chose very sick as the main reason for their absence from school. Another five or 20 percent of the class stated they did not feel like coming to school. Question seven identified 17 or 68 percent of the students enjoyed coming to school more in 1987-1988 than in 1986-1987. Out of the 17 or 68 percent who enjoyed coming to school more, eight or 46 percent revealed friends as the main reason, and three or 18 percent stated E.F.E. Eight or 32 percent stated they did not enjoy coming to school more this year than last year, and four or 50 percent stated teachers as the main reason. Table 6 illustrates student absenteeism and reactions as to why or why not they enjoyed their 1987-1988 school year over their 1986-1987 school year.

#### SUMMARY

The Student Attendance section of the paper revealed the results of the E.F.E. student attendance records for 1986-1987 and 1987-1988 at Virginia Beach Junior High School. Tables 1 and 2 gave visual representations of data collected. The Student Program Evaluation section gave results on the reactions to the E.F.E. student questionnaire. Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 gave a detailed description of student answers to each of the nine questions. Chapter V gave a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for the E.F.E. program during its pilot-test year of 1987-1988 at Virginia Beach Junior High.

TABLE 5

E.F.E. Student Reactions to Their Two Least Favorite Classes  
At Virginia Beach Junior High for 1987-1988

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Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Individual Reactions to Question
QUESTION 8, WHAT ARE YOUR TWO <u>LEAST</u> FAVORITE SUBJECTS FOR 1987-1988 SCHOOL YEAR?		
FIRST LEAST FAVORITE		
8	32%	Math
6	24%	Science
4	16%	English
2	8%	Health
2	8%	No Comment
1	4%	Physical Education
1	4%	Social Studies
1	4%	All subjects
SECOND LEAST FAVORITE		
6	24%	English
4	16%	Social Studies
4	16%	Science
3	12%	Math
1	4%	Health
1	4%	Art
1	4%	Technology Education
1	4%	Reading
1	4%	All subjects

---



TABLE 6

E.F.E. Student Reactions to Their Absenteeism and Enjoyment  
at Virginia Beach Junior High for 1987-1988

Number of Students	Percentage of Students	Individual Reactions to Question
QUESTION 6, WHEN YOU ARE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL, CHECK THE <u>ONE</u> MAIN REASON WHY YOU ARE ABSENT?		
15	60%	Very sick
5	20%	Don't feel like coming to school
3	12%	In-school suspension
1	4%	Family concerns
1	4%	Other (miss the bus)
QUESTION 7, DO YOU ENJOY COMING TO SCHOOL MORE THIS YEAR THAN LAST YEAR? WHY?		
17	68%	Yes
8	46%	Friends
3	18%	E.F.E.
3	18%	Other subjects
1	6%	Sports
1	6%	Teachers
1	6%	Other (personal)
8	32%	No
4	50%	Teachers
1	12.5%	Other class subjects
1	12.5%	Friends
1	12.5%	Other (girlfriend)
1	12.5%	No comment

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem of the study was to determine whether the E.F.E. program at Virginia Beach Junior High School had reduced the absentee rate of its students during the 1987-1988 school year compared to the 1986-1987 school year. This chapter summarized the study, drew conclusions based on the findings and research goals, and made recommendations based on the findings.

## SUMMARY

The study was conducted to find out whether the E.F.E. program had a positive effect on the special needs students. Many academically and economically disadvantaged youth have been turned off by school. They appear to have low self-esteem and apathy toward school. Many vocational programs can and will continue to have a positive effect on these types of students. The students attendance records, grades, and overall attitude has improved from these programs. The studies conducted in Chicago and Philadelphia followed the same success stories.

Virginia Beach Junior High School took on the challenge during the 1987-1988 academic school year of helping this population group. The purpose of E.F.E. was to provide a vocational education program for the special needs learner. The program was designed to provide students with realistic, reachable goals which had not been obtained in other academic programs. The students attempted to develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that they needed to make them employable and/or capable of seeking further education and training. The

E.F.E. program also worked on building a positive self-esteem and having the students start to feel successful about themselves. The E.F.E. program wanted to turn the students "back on" to learning.

The procedures for finding out whether the program had a positive effect on the special needs students were through examining student attendance records and issuing a student questionnaire. Twenty-six students were enrolled in the E.F.E. program. Out of the 26 students, 19 or 73 percent were labeled disadvantaged, and 7 or 27 percent were labeled handicapped. The questionnaire was issued to the students at the end of May. Twenty-five or 96 percent of the students responded to the questionnaire. The students were asked to give their reactions about the E.F.E. program, school attendance, two least and two most favorite classes, and their enjoyment for their 1987-1988 school year. Based on the findings, the researcher was able to draw conclusions.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The E.F.E. program appeared to have a measurable impact on the special needs students. The students reactions to E.F.E. and their academic school year of 1987-1988 were mainly positive and the following conclusions were drawn based on these findings:

1. The E.F.E. program improved the special needs learners attendance. The students missed on an average 14 days in 1987-1988 compared to 20 in 1986-1987. Two students who had dropped out late in the year of 1986-1987 were enrolled the entire year of 1987-1988.
2. The students felt E.F.E. was a valuable course. More than half the students felt it would help them find, receive, or hold a job.

3. The students enjoyed their 1987-1988 school year due to E.F.E. The students enjoyed the variety of classroom activities such as speakers, field trips, and group discussion; and they would like to see a part-time job available through E.F.E.
4. The students enjoyed classes which were more activity oriented. E.F.E., Math, Physical Education, and Technology Education were some of their favorite classes.
5. E.F.E. should remain in the curriculum due to the positive results collected from this special needs population group.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The E.F.E. study at Virginia Beach Junior High was successful in finding positive results due to student attendance and reactions to the program. The following recommendations were submitted to help foster the growth of E.F.E. programs in other schools:

1. It was recommended that a part-time job be made available as a cooperative work experience for the E.F.E. program. Students would greatly benefit from this experience and it would possibly improve their motivation, attitude, and attendance at school.
2. It was recommended that individual reasons why students are absent from class (Doctor's appointment, In-school suspension, etc.) be studied for help in correcting the absenteeism among the E.F.E. students.
3. It was recommended that a study be done comparing students reasons for their absent to those actually recorded on teacher or administrative records. Were the students really very sick, or did they feel compelled to put this answer regardless of the true reason in the E.F.E. study.
4. It was recommended that the E.F.E. program be analyzed more closely to find the reasons why the program is successful for the special needs students. These reasons could be implemented into other existing programs.
5. It was recommended that the E.F.E. program be made available in other Virginia Beach junior and senior high schools.

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**APPENDIX**

DIRECTIONS: FOR EACH QUESTION PUT A CHECK NEXT TO THE ONE  
ANSWER WHICH SUITS YOU THE BEST!

1. DO YOU LIKE EFE?

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

WHY? OR WHY NOT? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. WHICH PART OF EFE DID YOU LIKE THE BEST? CHECK ONLY  
ONE!

FILMSTRIPS \_\_\_\_\_  
MOVIES

LIBRARY WORK \_\_\_\_\_

SPEAKERS \_\_\_\_\_

CLASSROOM GAMES \_\_\_\_\_

GROUP DISCUSSION \_\_\_\_\_

INDIVIDUAL SEAT WORK \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

3. WHAT DO YOU THINK EFE HAS OR WILL HELP YOU WITH THE MOST?  
CHECK ONLY ONE?

THINKING ABOUT FUTURE PLANS AND DECISIONS \_\_\_\_\_

GETTING A JOB (APPLICATIONS, INTERVIEWING) \_\_\_\_\_

LEARNING ABOUT DIFFERENT JOBS \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

4. DOES HAVING EFE IN YOUR SCHEDULE THIS YEAR MAKE YOU WANT  
TO COME TO SCHOOL MORE IN 1987-1988 THAN IN 1986-1987 SCHOOL  
YEAR?

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

5. WHAT ARE YOUR TWO MOST FAVORITE SUBJECTS FOR 1987-1988 SCHOOL  
YEAR?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

6. WHEN YOU ARE ABSENT FROM SCHOOL, CHECK THE ONE MAIN REASON WHY YOU ARE ABSENT:

VERY SICK \_\_\_\_\_

DON'T FEEL LIKE COMING TO SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

FAMILY CONCERNS (CHORES, PROBLEMS, COURT OBLIGATIONS)  
\_\_\_\_\_

INSCHOOL SUSPENSION \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

7. DO YOU ENJOY COMING TO SCHOOL MORE THIS YEAR THAN LAST YEAR?

YES \_\_\_\_\_

NO \_\_\_\_\_

WHY? CHECK ONLY ONE

FRIENDS \_\_\_\_\_ TEACHERS \_\_\_\_\_ SPORTS, CLUBS \_\_\_\_\_

EFE CLASS \_\_\_\_\_ OTHER CLASS SUBJECTS \_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_

8. WHAT ARE YOUR TWO LEAST FAVORITE SUBJECTS FOR 1987-1988 SCHOOL YEAR?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

9. IF THERE WAS ONE THING YOU COULD CHANGE ABOUT EFE, WHAT WOULD IT BE? CHECK ONLY ONE:

MORE SPEAKERS \_\_\_\_\_ LESS SPEAKERS \_\_\_\_\_

MORE FILMSTRIPS/MOVIES \_\_\_\_\_ LESS MOVIES \_\_\_\_\_

PART-TIME JOB THROUGH EFE PROGRAM \_\_\_\_\_

MORE TIME SPENT ON FINDING OUT ABOUT DIFFERENT JOBS  
\_\_\_\_\_

LESS TIME SPENT ON FINDING OUT ABOUT DIFFERENT JOBS  
\_\_\_\_\_

OTHER \_\_\_\_\_