

The Herman Goldstein Award

North Miami Beach Police Department's
P.E.T. Project
An Innovative Approach to Problem-Oriented Policing

ABSTRACT:

Perception is reality - Even though national statistics show an overall decrease in juvenile crime, the communities would argue to differ. Throughout the past year, the City of North Miami Beach has experienced a growing number of students who were found to be truant from school. Instead of attending school, they are hanging out at the local businesses, malls and city streets. Some of them are affiliated with gangs and are possibly engaging in crime. The North Miami Beach Police Department recognized the need for a program to be implemented which would decrease the number of truants and address these quality of life issues within the communities.

Chief William Berger came up with the acronym P.E.T. (Police Eliminating Truancy). This innovative approach would target truants through the partnerships established throughout the community. Through the extensive data collection that has been taken place, we are hoping to understand the nature and extent of truancy, and continue to develop on-going effective strategies, which can be implemented at the local, State, and Federal level.

What started as a truancy sweep, has led to a social service component, which has now led to a legal component. This program is constantly enhancing its' opportunities and is open for change and improvements.

Through this truancy program, we have set realistic goals, objectives, and outcomes, as well as a range of interventions. The North Miami Beach Police Department continues to be committed to the implementation of problem-solving programs and establishing partnerships with the local schools to decrease juvenile crime and revitalize communities. We also have addressed the needs of the community members through increased enhancement of police visibility and community policing strategies.

We hope that this program will encourage other municipalities to take action against truancy and work together with other schools and community members to keep these juveniles off the streets and in the classroom.

SCANNING:

Over the past year, random surveys have been distributed to the residents of single-family households in North Miami Beach to inquire information regarding the public's perceptions and views about the community and the local police department. According to the citizens, the number one priority of the police department should be controlling the juveniles. The community perceives these truants as delinquents. Not is it just the school's responsibility, but also the police.

George Killing's Broken Windows Hypothesis uses the analogy of a broken window to explain how neighborhoods might dwindle into disorder and eventually crime if no one tends to their maintenance. "Small disorders lead to larger and larger ones, and perhaps even to crime" (Kelling, 1982). This theory also applies to the truancy problem. These truants are roaming the neighborhoods, hanging around people's property and local businesses, and possibly committing crimes. If the problem is ignored and unattended, it will only get worse. The residents will be afraid and eventually signs of disorder will increase.

When initially beginning the P.E.T. Program, there was a controversy among the various agencies in the community. Whose responsibility is the truancy problem? Some will argue that it is a school problem, others say it is the parents problem, and many would argue that it is the police's problem. Instead of wasting valuable time debating who should take action, the North Miami Beach Police Department created a program that entails the collaboration between the schools, businesses and the police.

Through this program, there has been four main goals that have been taken on by the police department: (1) identifying the primary reasons why students are truant from school, (2) recovering truants from the city streets, (3) reducing the amount of Part I Index Crimes that may be committed by truants during school hours, and (4) tracking chronic truants. From the initial day of the school year, the North Miami Beach Police Department schedules two P.E.T. Officers to patrol the streets during the regular school hours (9:00a.m. -3:00p.m.), specifically where crime analysis indicates "hot-spots" of Part I Index Crimes. The officers will then pick up the truants who are suppose to be in school with the P.E.T. van. In the meantime, the officers conduct an "FI" (field interview) on each juvenile to determine if they are truant or not. This is accomplished through the assistant of the schools. Then the truant is brought to

the Truancy Evaluation Center (TEC), which is located in a classroom off the school grounds. The truant's parent or guardian is notified and they have the option of picking up their child or have the truant remain at the T.E.C. for processing.

The Truancy Evaluation Center consists of a teacher and a social worker, who are with the truants until they are picked up. This is where they are assessed, and can participate in group discussions and take part in various programs that include anger management, the importance of education, drug awareness, gang awareness, and law enforcement issues.

ANALYSIS:

The P.E.T. Project is currently being evaluated through a time series analysis (the analysis of a variable at many successive time periods with some measures taken prior to treatment and other observations taken after the intervention). With the goals and objectives we have set forth to accomplish, our program will have two dependent variables (crime rate and recidivism), and one independent variable (P.E.T. Program).

In order to address the issue of truancy, the underlining problem needs to be established, "why does a student become a truant"? All the students who are brought into the classroom are given a self-report survey, which addresses the following questions: Why were you absent from school? How often do you skip school? Have you ever committed a crime while you were truant from school? Do you skip school with friends or alone? These are just some of the questions on the survey, which is administered to the truants by the social worker. This is done on a one-by-one basis, in case there are any concerns or questions regarding the survey.

Then the youth is working with the counselor to address the problems or issues the juvenile may have that is conflicting with their education. For instance, in one situation the social worker learned that the youth did not like attending school because the other children made fun of him when he would read. It turned out that this truant had a learning disability and the parents and teachers were notified immediately, so the youth would be placed in a specific class that would address the needs of children with remedial reading skills. There are also the juveniles who are "chronic truants", who soon will be dropouts. These youth are not as easy to deal with as other truants are. They give the impression that they don't care and

they are not willing to participate. When the parents are notified, they usually don't care either. They reply with, "I don't care what you do with my child. I can't tell them what to do." The parents have already given up on these juveniles.

One of the objectives of this P.E.T. Program is to send out the message to the truants, that the North Miami Beach Police Department will not tolerate truants hanging around when they should be in school. Even if some of these truants refuse to participate in the program at the T.E.C. Center, they hopefully will get the message and if they decide to skip school, they will not hang around in North Miami Beach.

The data collection of this project consists of a database program that was created via Microsoft Program, Access. All the information is entered in this database on a daily basis by the program director. The field interview cards that are filled out contain data on the demographics on each truant that is picked up (i.e., name of school they attend, age, race, criminal history, etc.). The surveys that are administered by the social worker at the T.E.C. Center are entered in the database as well. The Crime Analyst at the North Miami Beach Police Department provides the crime statistics daily through mapping software (ArcView). These statistics and locations of crimes are plotted on the maps according to crime type and location. For evaluation purposes, we have focused on common daytime crimes that juveniles have been arrested for and are known for committing (i.e., burglaries - residential and vehicle, petit thefts, shoplifting, stolen vehicles and grand thefts). Then we are able to plot the locations of where the truants are being picked up (their local hangouts) and determine if there is a correlation between the truant location and the crime rate. Also, through the field interview cards, information is provided whether or not these truants have any criminal histories. This information is pertinent for evaluation purposes because the truants that have been arrested for burglaries in a specific neighborhood, can possibly be linked to crimes with similar descriptions and MOs.

Through this enormous data collection method, constant evaluation is taking place. On a monthly basis, charts and statistics are disseminated throughout the agency and the community to determine if the program has had any impact on the crime rate in North Miami Beach. (See attached charts and results section)

RESPONSE:

Before initiated the P.E.T. Project, the North Miami Beach Police Department wanted to conduct research throughout the nation to determine whether or not there had been similar programs implemented that were targeting truancy and if so, were they successful or did they fail to accomplish their goals? What we came up with was that many agencies all across the world have conducted truant sweeps (where they would pick up the truants and take them back to school), or they would take the truant to a "truancy center" where the youth would be placed with a counselor. Other programs have gotten the citizens involved and have volunteers who report truancy to the school and the local police departments. The North Miami Beach Police Department wanted to integrate all of these important components into one integrated program.

The schools are involved heavily, from providing us with data on chronic absentees, the business owners have signs in their windows that specifically note that they will not tolerate truancy and there is a P.E.T. hotline to call if they see juveniles hanging out when they should be in school. The State Attorney's Office in Dade County is even coming on board with us. They will be working side by side with us to track chronic truants and hold parents responsible for their child's behaviors. The police department provides a classroom with a social worker and a teacher (the social-service component), and the officers volunteer on a weekly basis to get involved with the truants to help assist them and integrate them back into the mainstream of the educational system. The program director is collecting all the data necessary to determine whether this has had an impact on the crime rate and the community's perception.

After reviewing previous literature on truancy programs, we decided to go ahead and proceed with our program. By conducting research on the topic, we were able to decide which programs have failed and which programs deserve replication, along with additional services integrated. We went into this program not determined that we would solve the "truancy problem". This has been an on-going issue as early as the 1800s. Like all programs, you will have some individuals that benefit from them, while others will not. There is not one program out there that is suited for every individual's needs. But if our program prevents at least one truant from becoming a dropout, and possible leading a life of crime, then it has impacted

something. Not only are we concerned with impacting the truant's life, but the community's as well. Going back to the Broken Windows hypothesis, disorder plays an important role in neighborhood decline, which in time, leads to crime (i.e., lowers community morale and businesses can't attract customers). If we are to let these truants roam the streets and not address this quality of life issue, then the neighborhoods will start to deteriorate and eventually crimes will occur.

Through the time series analysis, we are constantly evaluating and analyzing the program, along with its' methodological components. New ideas are constantly being implemented and each day is a learning experience what may work and what doesn't work.

ASSESSMENT:

So far to date, we have accomplished many of our goals that were described in an earlier section of this essay. The first goal was to identify why truants do not attend school. Through the use of self-report surveys and interviews, the social worker has accumulated the following results:

1. Why were you truant from school?

30% - Do not like school

20% - Were running late and missed the bus

20% - Were suspended from school

15%-Were sick

15%-Other

2. What do you do when you skip school?

30% - Stay at home

40% - Hang out with friends

10% - Visit their boyfriend/girlfriend

10% - Look for a job

10% - Other

3. Do your parents know you skip school?

70% - No

15% - Yes

15% - They don't skip school

4. Have you ever committed a crime or gotten into criminal mischief while being truant from school?

70% - No

20% - Yes

10% - Unknown

Through these results, policy implications would be to increase the awareness of the importance of an education and enhance school stimulation. Twenty percent of the students stated that they were late to school because they missed the bus. After interviewing with the bus drivers and school administration, it was found that many of these bus drivers would see the students walking towards the bus, however, if they were thirty seconds late, the bus driver would not wait. This issue has been addressed by the school board. The twenty percent that were found to be suspended from school were supposed to be at home, however, the parents were working full-time and they had no idea if their child was home or not. The police officers made contact to all of these parents to let them know where their child was.

The second goal was to recover truants from the city streets. From the initial day of school to date (April 24, 1999), the PET Officers have picked up approximately four hundred truants. This number is not including the juveniles who were picked up for having a suspension from school.

The third goal was to decrease the number of Part I Index Crimes that particularly could be occurring in the daytime hours. From the self-report surveys administered to the truants, twenty percent admitted to committing crimes while they were truant from school. The results of the police department's official data were provided by the Crime Analyst, who enters all the incidents into a database and plots their geographical locations on a map of the City of North Miami Beach. For evaluation purposes, we

focused on specific crimes (i.e., burglaries, stolen vehicles, criminal mischief, and thefts). These particular incidents were selected based on the review of previous juvenile arrests that had been made in North Miami Beach, and these were more common crimes to occur during regular school hours, by juveniles.

Looking at the same time periods between the 1997-1998 school year compared to this school year, 1998-1999 (to date for both years) and controlling for times of the day, results were as follows:

Apartment Burglaries -	decreased 13%
Residential Burglaries-	decreased 19%
Vehicle Burglaries -	decreased 22%
Criminal Mischief-	decreased 19%
Stolen Vehicles-	decreased 32%
Grand Theft-	decreased 13%
Petit Theft-	decreased 17%

Even though the crime rate is down compared to the last few years, some of these statistics can be attributed to the impact of the PET Program. As for displacement, the Crime Analyst provided the department with additional statistics of these incidents and geo-coded them via ArcView. After these crimes were plotted on the map, we were able to see if hot-spots or crime patterns had increased in areas due to the program "pushing the element out". There was no evidence to lead us to the conclusion that the P.E.T. Program had just moved into a different neighborhood.

After completing field interviews on all the truants, the following results were tabulated:

62% of the truants reside in North Miami Beach and attend school and the local middle school and high school

Out of those 62%, 40% of them have a criminal past of some sort.

The remaining 38% of truants attend schools within a forty-five mile radius from North Miami Miami Beach, and 30% of them have a criminal past.

Many of these juveniles are responsible for the daytime crimes that are occurring in the neighborhoods of North Miami Beach when they should be attending school.

The final goal was to track chronic truants in North Miami Beach. These truants have been entered in a database and letters are sent to the parents to inform them of their child's whereabouts. So far to date, thirty-seven truants have been defined as chronic (excessive amount of un-excused absences according to school administration's policies). Whether or not the other truants are chronic and we just have not caught them, or they know that the North Miami Beach Police Department will not tolerate truants hanging around the city streets, the thirty-seven truants equals .09% of the total truants picked up and processed at the Truancy Evaluation Center (TEC), which is a significantly low number.

Through all the goals we have set forth to accomplish, we have achieved more than we expected in just one year of implementation. Most importantly, we have addressed the quality of life issues throughout the neighborhoods in North Miami Beach. We will continue to establish collaborations among the various agencies in North Miami Beach. Why replicate work, when you can create partnerships to accomplish the same goals?

CONCLUSION:

The P.E.T. program has received favorable recognition throughout various agencies nation-wide and has been used as a model for many police departments. The most important aspect of beginning a project like this one, is to establish partnerships with various entities of the community that can have a beneficial impact to the population that is being targeted.

Next, is to identify the problems of the community using various resources (i.e., police department, school administration, parents, students, and members of the community). After the problems have been identified, an analysis of the problem needs to be outlined. If a strategic plan is set forth, with timelines, assessments and evaluation methods, this program can be a success and will benefit everyone in the community. However, as the analysis portion of the program continues, some obstacles may appear.

This has been beneficial for the North Miami Beach Police Department's PET Program. For instance, throughout our analysis stages, we started discovering important factors that we never noticed before the implementation of the project. One of them was that the parents knew that their child was truant from school and they did not care what happened with them. If these juveniles are not being reinforced to go to school by their own parents/guardians, then why should they listen to a police officer? We gathered the data on each truant who was picked up and whose parents were called. After interviewing the parents (mostly in person, others on the phone), we found this disturbing information to be true. This was another problem that we did not realize when initially identifying our problems in the beginning stages of the project.

Using this pertinent information from the data collection, we decided to add a component on to our existing program by creating another partnership with the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office. Through their existing program, which targets chronic truants, they are able to hold parents accountable for their child's behavior (specifically truancy). Their program combines early intervention with prosecutorial enforcement of Florida's Compulsory Education Laws, using a computerized system to track chronic truants. Then the investigator/police officer mandates meetings with the parents and youth at the local school, where all representatives of the collaborating agencies are present. These meetings range from 1-5 (5 being the most severe). So far to date, the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office reported that seventy-five percent only needed one meeting to break their cycle of truancy. This is one of the overall goals of the North Miami Beach Police Department's P.E.T. Project-to bring the youth back to the educational mainstream.

The North Miami Beach Police Department's P.E.T. Project is just one example of a problem-solving approach using the S.A.R.A. (Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment) model. This is an effective approach when addressing various law enforcement issues that can be replicated throughout other departments. Through analysis and assessments, improvements can be made at any stages of the project. Going back to the example of the parents who were not enforcing their child to go to school, we were able to produce an additional component to the current program to improve the results (State Attorney's Office). There is always room for improvements and suggestions. Why not think out of the box?

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION:

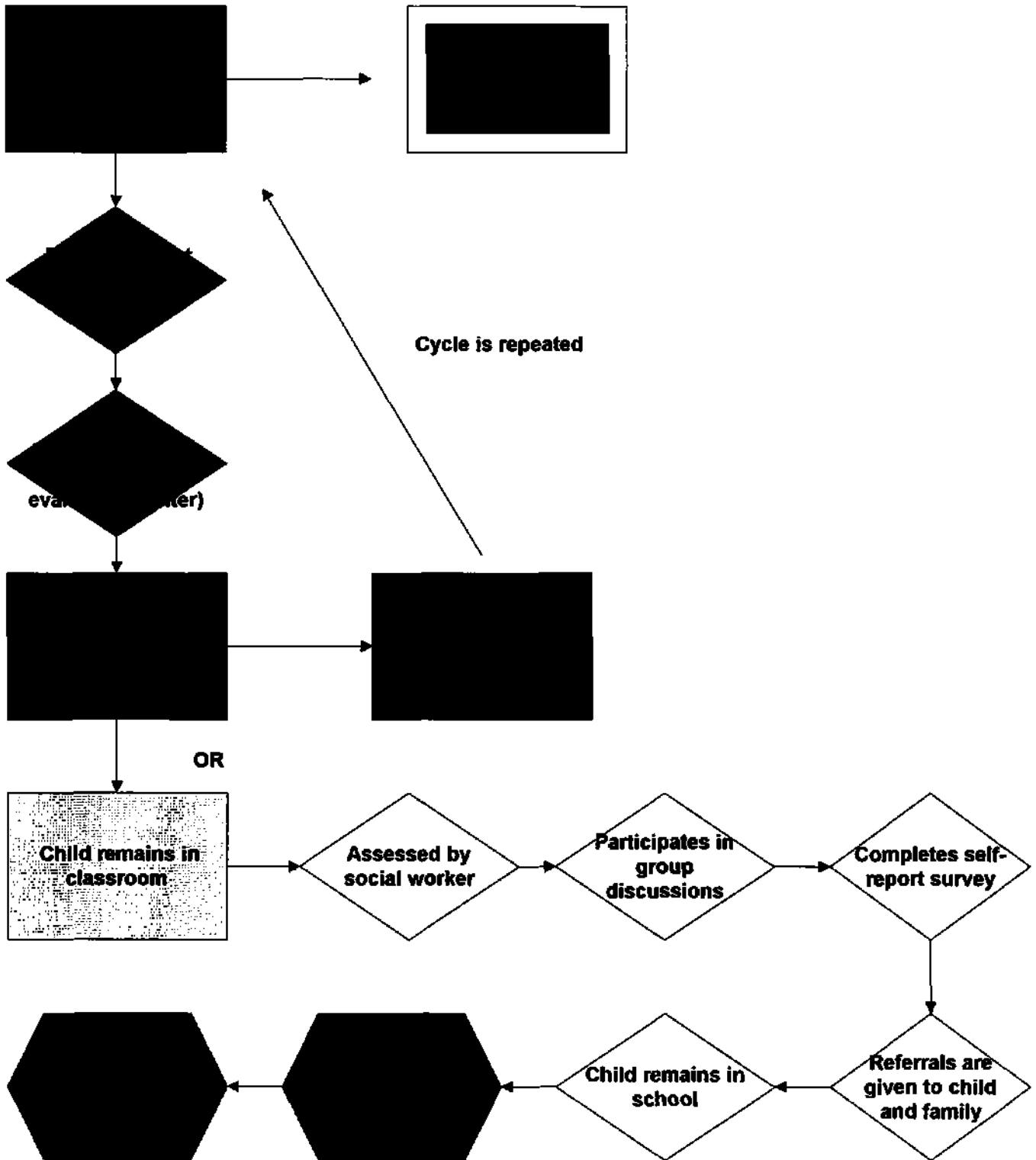
1. The entire department came together on this problem-solving initiative. All the information from the monthly town meetings, from the citizens complaints, the school resource officers, and the day to day reoccurrences with the officers were brought forward at the staff meeting, which is headed up by the Chief Executive. Ideas and suggestions were developed among the entire staff of the agency, and the underlining problem, truancy, was formulated by the end of the meeting.
2. There has been no official training in problem-oriented policing before this project began. However, since we were awarded a grant from the U.S. COPS Office, they have provided workshops on problem oriented policing, which members of the police department have attended.
3. Recognition is always given to the officers in the department who engage in problem solving techniques. In this particular project, Lieutenant Kathy Katerman, was given a lot of the credit, for her outstanding initiatives to begin this program.
4. There were no resources used at the time they initiated this problem-solving project.
5. I would not call them problems, but obstacles did occur throughout the project. Certain areas of the analysis stages did not necessarily work out the way we planned. For instance, when we would target one particular area that we believed would eliminate the problem, another problem would appear. You just have to keep an open-mind and be open for suggestions and change. We did not go into this project with the unrealistic goal that we would eliminate truancy. However, you want quick results, and from this experience we have learned to be patient.
6. The North Miami Beach Police Department was offered a grant from the U.S. COPS Office in the amount of 596,000, which pays for the police personnel. The program is supervised by a Lieutenant and an Officer, who assign two officers per day to work the P.E.T. detail. The city has provided a classroom for the truancy center and the police department has provided the social worker. All the supplies and resources are also provided by the police department. The Chief of Police, William Berger, has been committed to this program throughout the past year, and continues to remain involved for the following one.
7. **Project Contact:** Susan Wind
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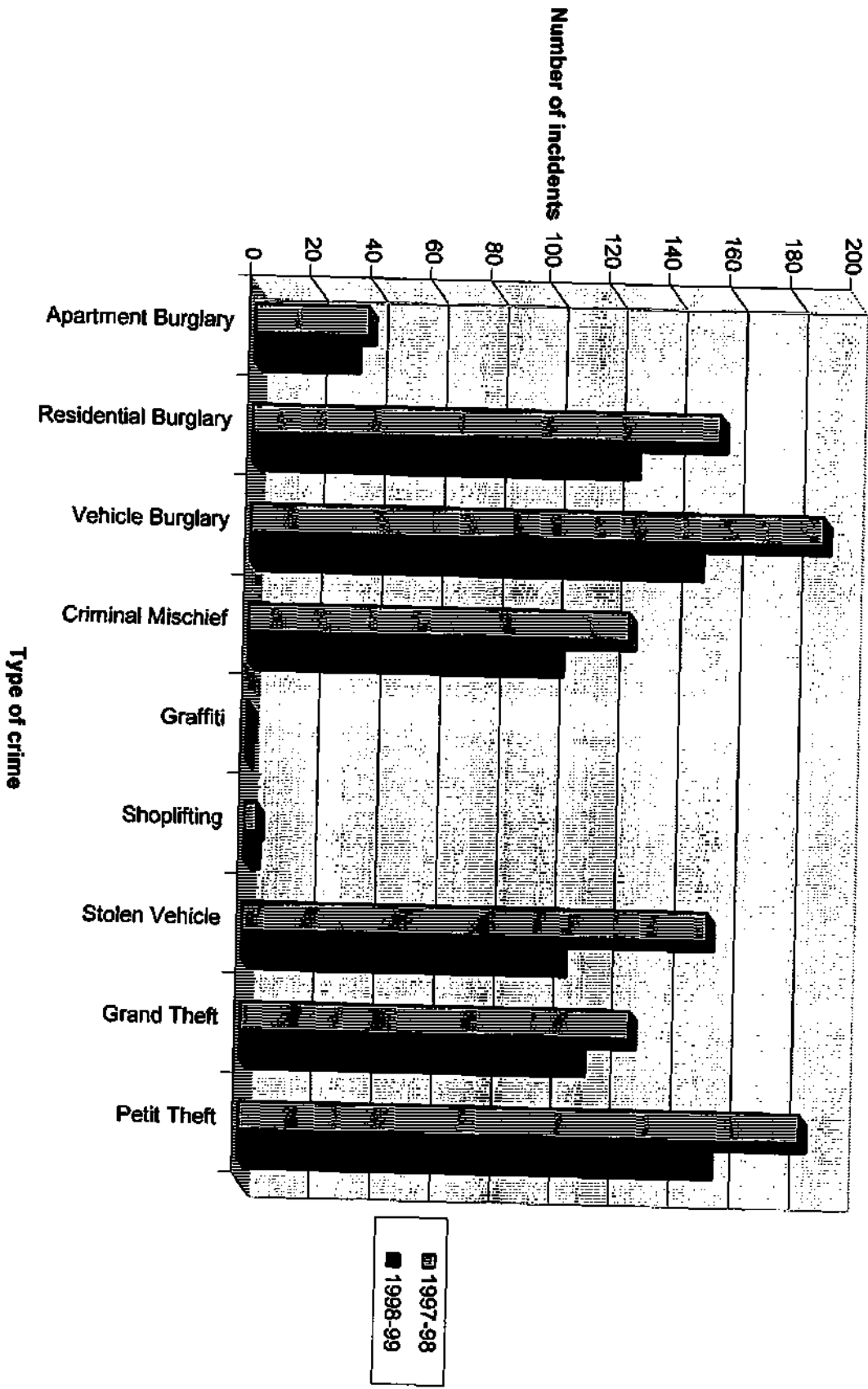
Fax: (305) 949-7530

E-Mail: Susan. Wind@CI.North-Miami-Beach.FI.US

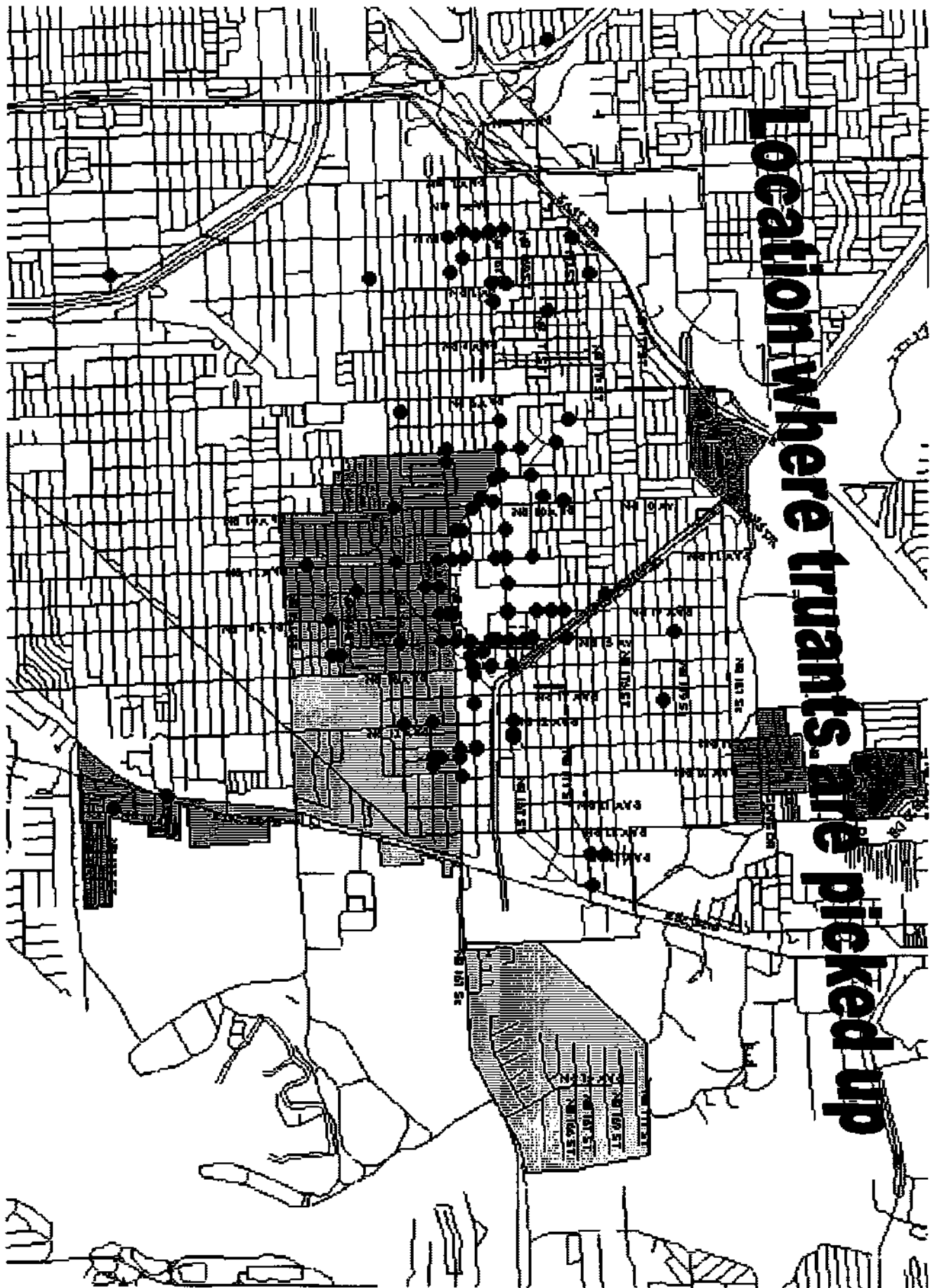
North Miami Beach P.E.T Process



Crime rate from 97-98 compared to 98-99 (to date for both years)

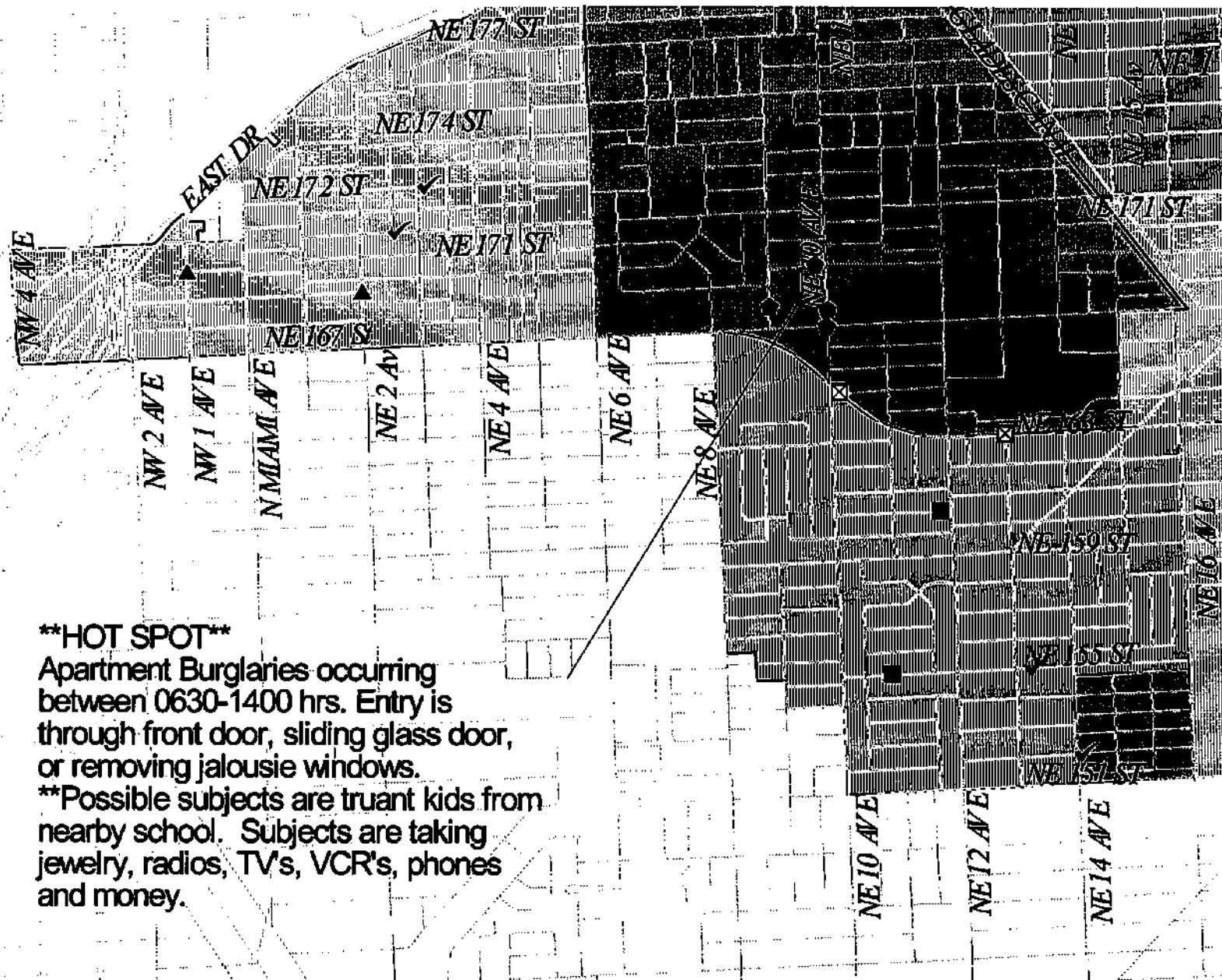


Location where truants are picked up



Crime Analysis

04/13/99-04/20/99

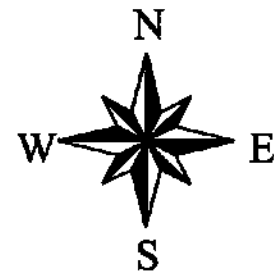


- 042099.shp
- ◆ BURGLARY APT
 - BURGLARY BUS
 - ✓ BURGLARY RES
 - BURGLARY VEH
 - ⊠ ROBBERY ARM
 - ▲ STOLEN VEH
 - △ Streets.shp
- Neighborhood
- ▨ ALLEN PARK
 - BISCAYNE SOUTH
 - ▨ CITY CENTER
 - EASTERN SHORES
 - HIGHLAND VILLAGE
 - ▨ OAK GROVE
 - ▨ PICKWICK
 - ▨ SKYLAKE
 - ▨ SUNRAY EAST
 - ▨ SUNRAY WEST
 - ▨ ULETA
 - ▨ WASHINGTON PARK
 - ▨ WINDWARD

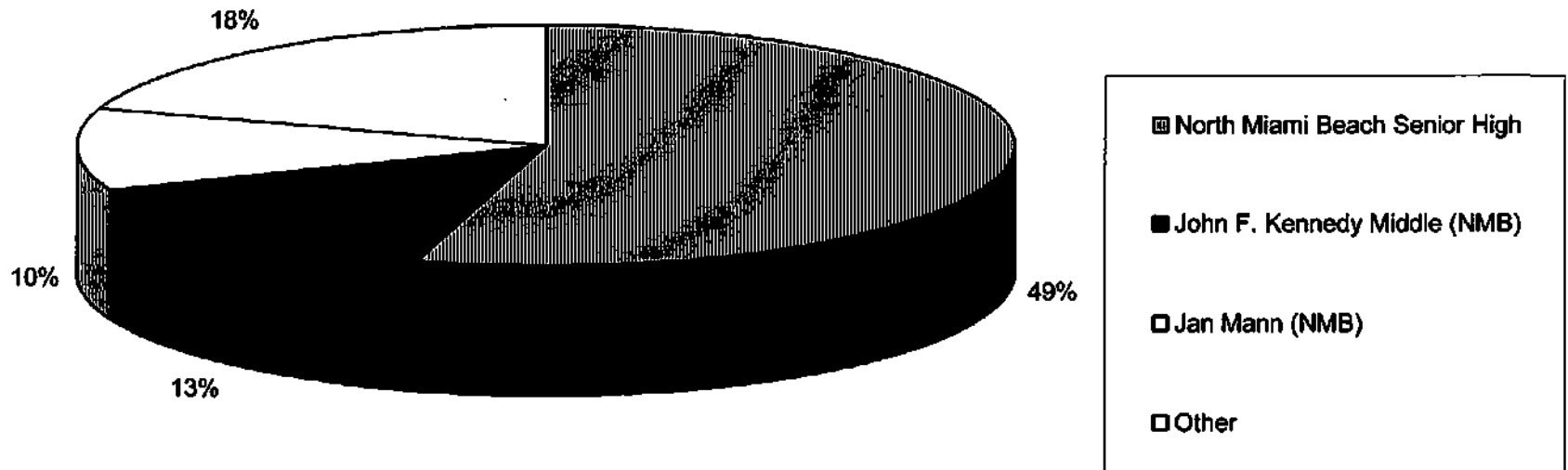
****HOT SPOT****

Apartment Burglaries occurring between 0630-1400 hrs. Entry is through front door, sliding glass door, or removing jalousie windows.

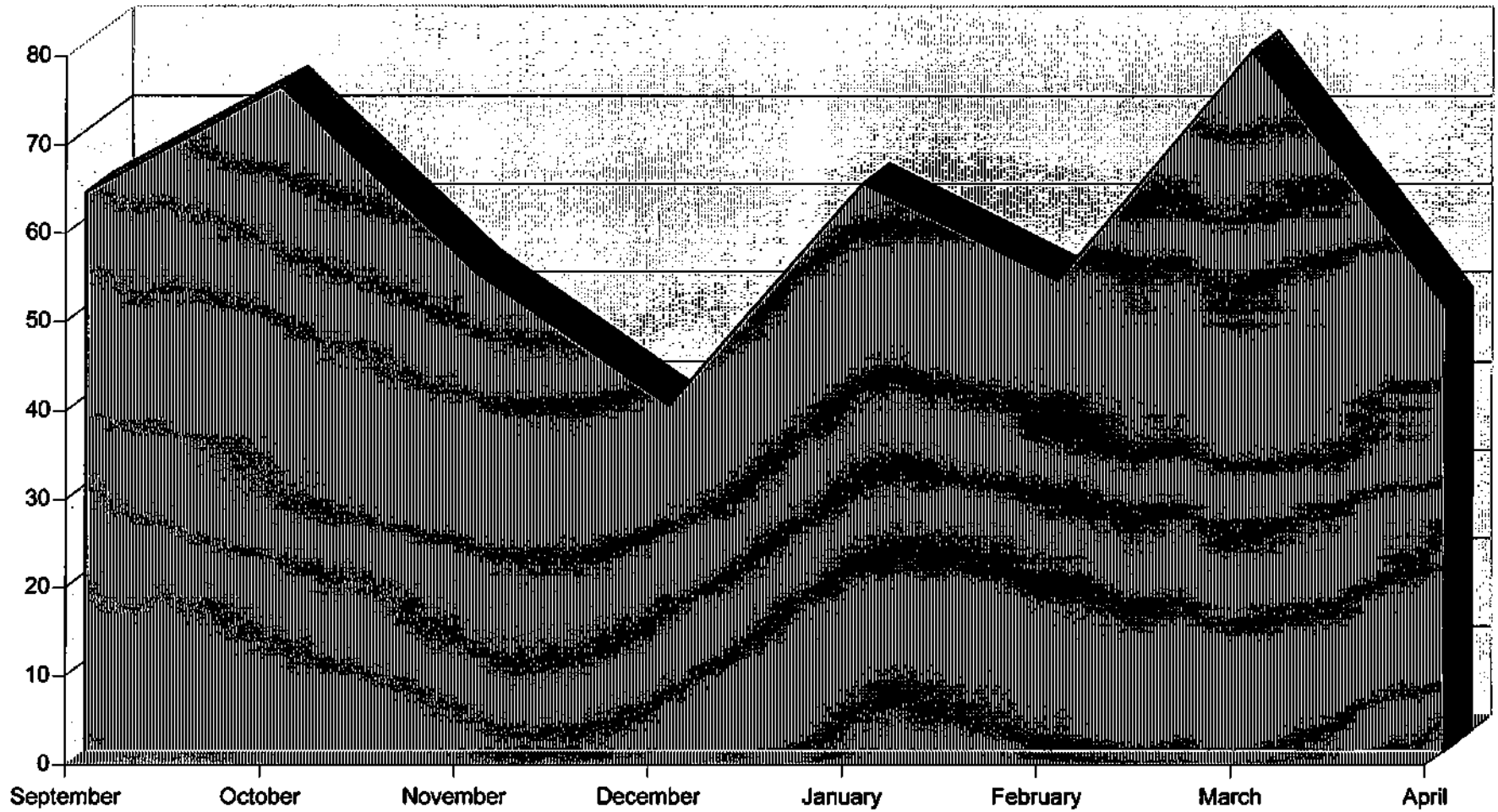
**Possible subjects are truant kids from nearby school. Subjects are taking jewelry, radios, TV's, VCR's, phones and money.



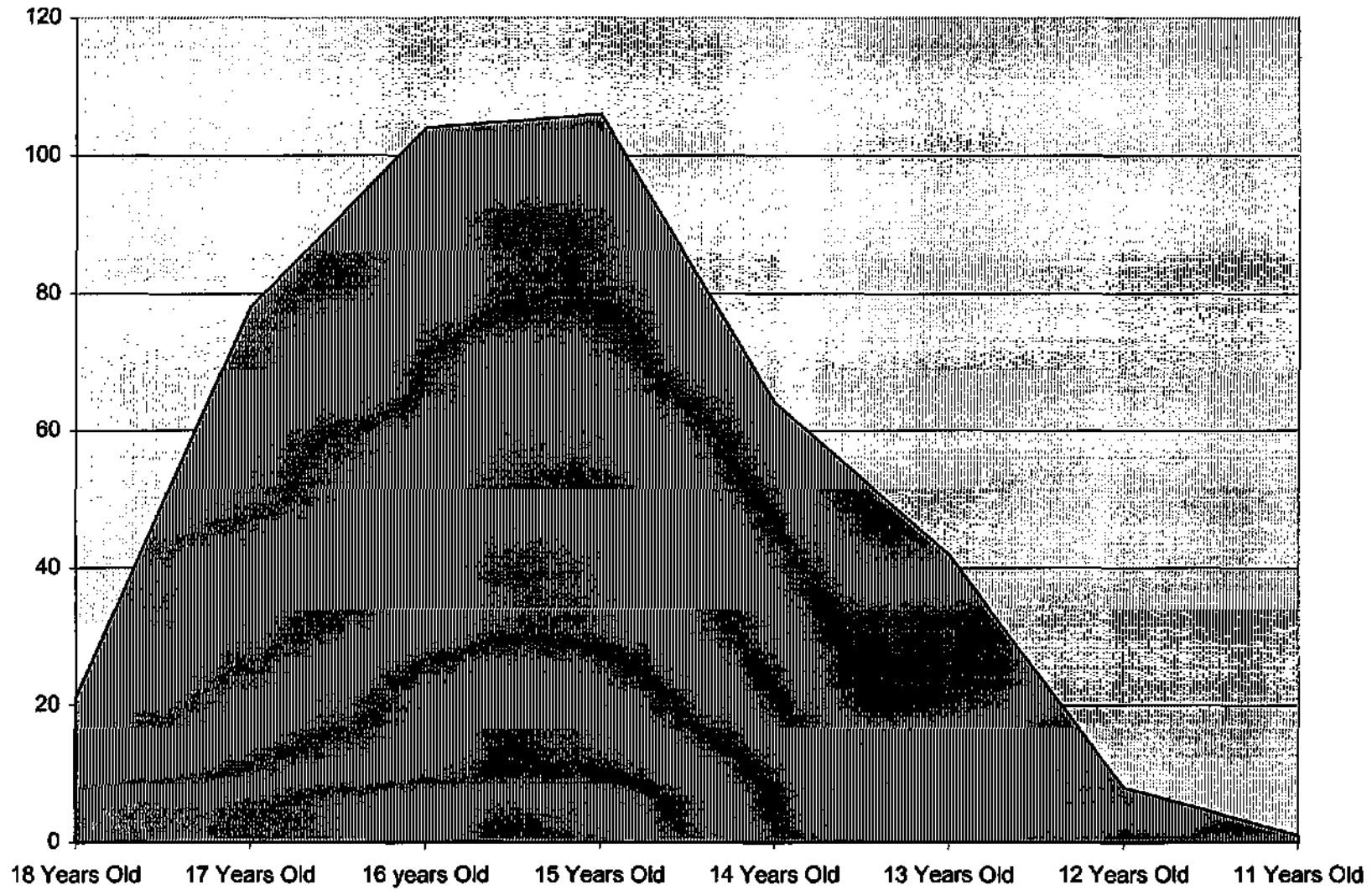
Where are the truants coming from? (The majority 72% are from North Miami Beach)



Number of truants picked up according to month



Age of truants





P.E.T.



Police Eliminating Truancy



This store is serious about education and is part of the North Miami Beach Police P.E.T. Team.

Every school day there are two NMB Police Officers combing the streets, dedicated solely to locating and returning truants back to school.



Please call the P.E.T. Hotline (305) 318-0765 to anonymously report possible truants.

This number puts you directly in touch with the P.E.T. Officer and is a car phone inside the P.E.T. Vehicle. Please do not hesitate to call.

No one benefits from a lack of education. Together, we all can make a difference in the quality of our community and its youth.

STAYING IN SCHOOL IS SMART!
