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Using Student Engagement and Reengagement to Reduce Chronic School Absenteeism

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MA, Cambridge College, 2007

BS, Norfolk State University, 2005

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Chronic absenteeism is a problem in an urban school district in Virginia. This problem
not only affects the staff and administrators, but it also affects the surrounding
communities, students, and parents. The purpose of the study was to the investigate the
perceptions of teachers and administrators in the local school district regarding students'
chronic absenteeism. Bowen's family system theory comprised the conceptual framework
that guided this study. The research questions focused on the perceptions of Grade K-12
teachers and administrators about the causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district
and their views of the effectiveness of methods that have been used to reduce it. An
exploratory qualitative case study was used to capture the insights of the 14 participants,
through questionnaires and surveys containing questions about chronic absenteeism and
student behaviors. The project study involved collecting data from individuals who had
been teaching or in an administration position for 3 or more years. Underlying causes of
chronic absenteeism can range from homelessness to students not being motivated or
engaged in school. The study revealed that there is a need for an effective plan to reduce
the number of students who are not attending school. The results of the study may benefit
all stakeholders in the district, the students who are missing excessive days, the parents
who may not know how to obtain the necessary help to assist their students, and the
surrounding communities who are being negatively impacted by an abundance of
students making bad decisions when they should be in school. Creating an active and
effective plan to decrease the number of students missing school daily will impact
positive social change by decreasing the number of students who miss school and
assisting school districts with meeting Virginia state requirements.

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Dedication

This project and capstone study is dedicated to my family and my dear friends and extended family. To my family, who listened to me complain and endured many hours of my writing and research, yet never left my side, I appreciate you all. To my husband, Timothy, who remained my biggest cheerleader. To my children, Derick, Ja'net, Jasmine and Jaylyn, who were patient as I continued to enroll in classes. To my mother, Lucy, who believed in my work and supported me mentally and financially, Also, I dedicate this to my assistant coach, Rolando Painter who was a strong support system, never letting me give up on myself but passed away before I finished. Thank you, friend. I know you are watching and are proud.

Finally, I dedicate this to my close friends and extended family, the Popes, enthused me with encouraging words, late night chats and well needed vacations. Each one of you have inspired me to be the best I can be. Without all of your love and encouragement, assistance and guidance, this project would not have come to fruition.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The problem studied was that the local school district has seen an increase in chronic absenteeism within the past 5 years. Researchers and educators have indicated that higher rates of chronic absenteeism exist in large urban districts due to limited opportunities and fewer resources (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE]). Students with school attendance problems may experience lower academic achievement, social deviant behaviors, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and/or have difficulty meeting graduation requirements (Keppens, Spruyt, & Dockx, 2019). According to a 2018 district report, although the district has an attendance policy and a truancy team, chronic absenteeism is a major factor at the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Virginia Department of Education [VDOE], 2019). The report noted that in 2017, over 1,000 students were placed on an attendance agreement by the truancy team within the first 100 days of school. The local district's attendance team set up meetings to conference with the students and their parents to create individual plans to improve the students' attendance. Over 15,000 or 45% of the district's 33,000 students, miss one or more days of school annually (VDOE, 2019). From an intervention perspective, the current procedures to reduce chronic absenteeism seem to be reactive. Data presented by the VDOE (2019) indicated some students with chronic absences had been known to exhibit negative behaviors and engage in illegal activities.

The local district defined *truancy* as a pattern of repeated unexcused absences from compulsory education (VDOE, 2019). *Unexcused absences* are days missed from

school for no specific reason and no documentation provided. According to the local district's regular attendance policy, a student with more than 20 days of excused or unexcused absences in a school year is considered chronically absent. Students who have chronic absenteeism issues present a concern to the state department of education and its school districts (VDOE, 2019). Although attendance has improved slightly in the local school district, chronic absences are still an issue due to a variety of causes linked to absenteeism and the allocation of resources.

Attendance Works (2018) pointed out that nationally, 1 in 10 kindergarten students are considered chronically absent. Current research shows even higher rates among preschoolers (Gottfried, 2015). According to the local district's most recent data, 12% of the district's students who were chronically absent were between the ages of 4 and 12 years old (VDOE, 2019). These early absences correlate with reading difficulties in later years (Ehrlich, Gwynne, & Allensworth, 2018). According to Henderson, Hill, and Norton (2014), chronic absences result in lost opportunities to learn. The U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice (2015) acknowledged that chronic absenteeism could be "devastating to a child's future" (p. 9).

Student attendance often suffers when families struggle to maintain stability due to lack of transportation, a change in finances and housing, food insecurity, poor mental health, and other obstacles (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The local district addresses chronic absenteeism in middle and high schools but has spent little time examining the effects of chronic absenteeism in elementary schools. Although the

attendance technicians service the elementary schools, there is a need for the district to implement preventative measures to address absenteeism as early as elementary school.

The state of Virginia requires all schools to have a system in place to notify parents when their child is absent (VDOE, 2019). The local district employs only a few attendance technicians that work in over 50 schools. The attendance plan requires the attendance technicians to provide support to elementary schools on an as-needed basis. In the past, the district's attendance policy has not considered the various underlying causes linked to truancy and chronic absenteeism or effective methods of prevention. The interventions in the district have been reactive, focusing on changing the attendance patterns of the students in Grades 6–12, and this can be a difficult task because the student has had years to develop unhealthy habits of not attending school daily.

Rationale

Across the nation, more than 8 million students are missing an unprecedented number of days from school annually (CITE). The U.S. Department of Education (2016) defined *chronic absence* as missing more than 10% or more of school due to absences for any reason. This is equivalent to a student being absent 2 days in a month or 18 unexcused total days annually out of the classroom. Unexcused absences, excused absences, and suspensions can translate into students being unable to master the skills needed to transition from one grade level to another (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Students who reside in low-income areas are 2 to 3 times more likely to be chronically absent and live-in communities that lack the resources to make up for the loss of learning. Students with disabilities and students of color are often unduly affected

(Chang & Balfanz, 2016). Many of these absences are excused (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). The absences are sometimes related to short-term health issues, such as colds and flu, or more chronic health problems, such as asthma, Crohn's disease, or mental health issues, for which a punitive response would not be appropriate (Wiseman & Dawson, 2015). Chronic absenteeism has gone unnoticed because schools have been focused on how many students attend school daily rather than examining the number of students who do not attend and are failing academically. In the past, chronic absenteeism has not been a factor in the local district's accreditation.

In 2017, the VDOE (2019) included chronic absenteeism in deciding how to accredit schools. Each school cannot have more than 10% of their students to reach 18 or more unexcused days from school to be accredited. The stakeholders in the local district are interested in understanding how to implement best practices to increase student attendance. A key to studying this problem is to use chronic absence data as an investigative tool to identify where early intervention and prevention are needed (Childs & Ain, 2018; Chu, Guarino, Mele, O'Connell, & Coto, 2019; Keppens et al., 2019; Olson, 2014).

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to investigate the perceptions of Grades K–12 teachers and administrators about the causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district and their view of the effectiveness of methods used to reduce it. In the study, I gathered the perceptions of administrators and teachers of why students are not attending school daily and, based on the data collected, offered interventions to correct the problem.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and phrases are used in the project study:

Chronic absenteeism: An individual who has missed 18 or more days from school in a year and are at risk of falling behind in school (VDOE, 2019).

Compulsory attendance laws: A set of laws crafted by individual states to require school attendance for children of certain age (VDOE, 2019).

Intervention: Support and resources provided to an individual to address factors that contribute to absences, such as low self-esteem, school anxiety, social skills, medical conditions, discipline, parental support, and/or poverty (US ED, 2016).

Truancy: Any unexcused, unauthorized, or illegal absence from compulsory education (VDOE, 2019).

Significance of the Study

The U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice (2015) established a report regarding chronic absenteeism in public schools across the nation. The authors, referring to findings of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), indicated that the issue of chronic absenteeism usually reaches a critical state before school administrators identify it as a serious problem. Research provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2018) indicated that two thirds of the nation's fourth graders have missed more than 10% of school due to excused or unexcused absences. Missing instruction, whether part-day or full-day, hinders the development of students' knowledge and skills (Whitney & Liu, 2017).

As previously mentioned, current policies cover all schools, but procedures in the

local school districts to address chronic absenteeism have programs aimed at focusing on middle and high school students, with students on the elementary level often being overlooked. Data indicated that chronic absenteeism is a problem in the local district's elementary schools as well as its middle and high schools (VDOE, 2019). The results of this exploratory qualitative case study may contribute to social change by providing the local school districts and the community with a toolkit, based on the results of the study, to address chronic absenteeism. In the toolkit, I offer suggested action steps as well as provide existing tools and resources, including evidence-based resources to be used by leaders and systems to enhance the use of effective, community-coordinated action to address and chronic absenteeism. Identifying early indicators of absenteeism may contribute to stakeholders reducing the prevalence of absenteeism and improving student attendance through addressing the underline issues. In this study, I intended to summarize existing research on improving chronic absenteeism in schools and offer suggestions to school leaders on how they can formulate interventions to help schools deal with the problem of absenteeism.

Addressing the problem of student absenteeism could help bring to light the realization of district goals by keeping students in school in the local district and districts throughout the state. Planning and implementing interventions to improve student attendance, including mentoring, school initiatives, family and community partnerships in conjunction with incentives/rewards, could encourage students and families to be engaged in the process.

Research Questions

There are several factors that may play a role in students attending school daily. For the purposes of this study, I conducted a program evaluation using qualitative methods that focused on teachers. The perceptions of teachers and administrators were taking into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of the program. The main objective of the program was to identify why the number of students attending school daily decreased. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district and the methods needed to reduce it?

2. What are the perceptions of administrators regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local school district and the methods needed to reduce it?

I addressed the research questions by examining the interview response of teachers and administrators as well as reviewing current interventions in use. A review of artifacts, such as attendance teams and meeting notes; the juvenile court system and referral documents; and archival data, including past and present attendance reports and survey data obtained from the local school district retrieval system, were also used.

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to examine the local district's problem of chronic absenteeism that has increased within the past 5 years. School absenteeism is a well-known concern for central office policymakers, administrators, and researchers (University of Virginia, 2016). Research supports the significance of students attending

school daily. In this literature review, the causes of chronic absenteeism and proven interventions to ameliorate the problem are discussed. I accessed the following databases through the Walden University Library to locate the literature reviewed: Education Source, Education Resources Information Center, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Keyword search terms included *absenteeism*, *chronic absenteeism*, *truancy*, *attendance*, *attendance data*, and *school attendance*.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this study was the family systems theory developed by Dr. Murray Bowen. What differentiates Bowen's theory from a traditional psychotherapeutic mindset is that the family is considered an emotional unit and any change in the functioning of one member of the family is predictably and automatically compensated for by changes in the emotional functioning of other members of the family (Bowen, 1972; Erdem & Safi, 2018). For Bowen, this meant the family, not the individual, was the basic unit of focus (Center for Family Systems, 2019). Family systems theory focuses on the arrangements and relations between the parts that connect them into a whole system and centers on the idea that it is impossible to separate individuals from the family groups they are connected to; instead, family members are interdependent and viewed as part of a whole (Attendance Works, 2018). The most basic and enduring social system often perceived is the family (Bowen, 1972; Erdem & Safi, 2018). Families abide by a set of norms, values, and expectations they often feel should be mirrored by in schools; therefore, engaging families in school activities could reduce truancy, improve attendance, and possibly keep students who could potentially change

districts or consider dropping out of school from doing so (Nolan, Wroughton, Clayton-Code, & Riffle, 2013).

In the family systems theory, Bowen (1972) found that systems can be either open or closed. An open system refers to the concept that organizations are influenced by their environment (Erdem & Safi, 2018; Fidan & Balci, 2017). By nature, schools are open systems. The family systems theory and open systems connect through the involvement of the community and schools to establish a working system to address chronic absenteeism. Administrators consistently implement programs in their environment to work together with parents; communities; and local, state, and federal policymakers (Attendance Works, 2018). This is a way of measuring school climate and safety as a nonacademic indicator of school quality or student success (Smith, Conolly, & Pryseki, 2014). The connection between school and community establishes a relationship between school systems and the community. Families' belief systems and customs also play a large role in determining their level of engagement with their child's education (Constantino, 2015).

Attendance. The lack of consistent attendance in the classroom is a major barrier faced by students and teachers across the nation (Attendance Works, 2018). Researchers have approached this problem from different angles. For example, interventions have been community based, family based, and school based (Chang, Bauer, & Byrnes, 2018).

Prevalence of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism can be found in every grade level but is more prevalent in some grades than others. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016) Civil Rights Data Collection report, chronic absenteeism

rates have often been recorded at its highest at the high school level. Jordan and Miller (2017) suggested that elementary students experience high rates of chronic absenteeism, which may only be revealed in analyses that are accessible at the middle and high school levels. Identifying when students are most at risk will help schools and advocates better focus on interventions to improve student outcomes.

A 2014 study showed that approximately 14% of students nationwide were chronically absent, meaning missing 10% or more of excused and unexcused school days each year (Jacob & Lovett, 2017). In some cities, that rate is much higher, with Detroit leading the list with 57.3% of students chronically absent (Gottfried, 2014). There is a basic assumption that all students attend school daily and need to be present to learn. Research has indicated that types of absences, excused absences, truancy, and chronic absenteeism in schools were not consistently measured until recently (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The 2015 reauthorization of the federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act, promoted a state focus on student attendance as a metric of school quality/student success (Jordan & Miller, 2017). Chronic absenteeism influences a variety of student outcomes, including failure in mathematics and reading, socioeconomic development, grade retention, student discipline, and dropout rates (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Gottfried, 2017). Chronic absenteeism has been linked with unsafe behaviors, such as substance abuse and criminal offenses, and students with excessive absences are also at increased risk of being a school dropout that is further associated with health problems in adulthood (Jordan & Miller, 2017). In addition to the individual difficulties of absenteeism, research has discovered that classrooms with excessive absenteeism rates

have effects that transfer into low-test scores (CITE). The VDOE (2019) stated that an *unexcused absence* is an absence where a student misses a full day of scheduled instruction without submitting the proper notice to school personnel from a parent or guardian within the designated period. The school administration may change the unexcused absence when it receives a satisfactory reason meeting criterion for the student's absence or there are extenuating conditions provided by the parent (CITE).

According to Attendance Works (2018), Virginia experienced an increase in the percentage of schools with at least 20% of the student population was chronically absent from 11% to 13% between the 2013–2014 and 2015–2016 school years. Between 2008 and 2013, there has been an increase in student absenteeism (VDOE, 2019). During the 2014–2015 school year, slightly more than 1 in every 10 Virginia students were chronically absent. This data aligned with the national average that reported 10% to 15% of students as being chronically absent (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). In Virginia, three school divisions are considered challenged in absenteeism: In Petersburg and Richmond, 1 of 5 students are chronically absent, and in Norfolk, 1 of 7 students are (VDOE, 2019). Attendance Works reported that more than 8 million students were chronically absent in 2015–2016.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights Data Collection report indicated that the chronic absenteeism rate increases as students' progress through school. Elementary, middle, and high school students were absent at rates of 13%, 14%, and 21%, respectively (Hamilton Project, 2018). This pattern, with increases of chronic absenteeism observed in high school, was consistent across racial and ethnic categories.

Data from Minnesota collected in 2016 showed lower absenteeism rates in Grades 1–6 at

6%–8%, with the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism in third and fourth grades (CITE).

Absenteeism increased from 10% at seventh grade to higher percentages through high

school (CITE). Chronic absenteeism was at 20% for students in Grade 11 and 28% for

students in Grade 12 (Humm Patnode, Gibbons, & Edmonds, 2018). Distinct patterns

develop from local and national data with high rates of absenteeism in prekindergarten,

stabilization in late elementary school, and then increasing rates through middle school

(Bauer, Liu, Schanzenbach, & Shambaugh, 2018). These trends suggest that families

have typically had an adjustment in early elementary school, such as kindergarten, where

students are more frequently absent. Absenteeism may involve any combination of

family-, peer-, child-, school-, and community-based factors; therefore, understanding

what factors contribute to the individual student can facilitate the identification and

implementation of the appropriate supports and intervention strategies (Chang et al.,

2018).

Legal consequences of chronic absenteeism. To completely understand the

dynamics of chronic absenteeism in a school district, the consequences attached to

students not attending school need to be understood. In Virginia, students missing 5 days

or more of school are placed on an attendance agreement, and when students miss 7 days

or more, a parent or guardian conference is scheduled (VDOE, 2019). A student

continuing to be, without justification, absent from school could result in the case being

turned over to the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court (VDOE, 2019).

This process is similar across the country. Many states have a compulsory school

attendance law, which if convicted of the person could be subject to fines, imprisonment, or both (CITE). The courts can also suspend the prison time and fines and order community service (Maryland State of Law Library, 2019). The state of North Carolina (2019) requires every student between the ages of 7–16 years old to attend school. North Carolina principals have the responsibility of notifying the parents, guardian, or custodian of his or her child's excessive absences after they have accumulated three absences. If the absences continue, then other professionals, school counselors, or law enforcement could be called on for assistance (Delaware Department of Education, 2017). Current data indicates that the responsibilities of the leadership staff and teachers to manage student attendance are closely related in many states (Durham & Connolly, 2017).

Significance of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is associated with several unfavorable academic outcomes. A study of Baltimore City Public Schools found that a strong predictor for the sixth graders not graduating high school was chronic absenteeism (Olson, 2014). A study about graduation trends in Chicago found that the excessive number of absences for eighth graders was "eight times more predictive of freshmen year course failure than eighth grade test scores" (Applied Survey Research, 2011, para 3). Gottfried (2014) stated that a relationship exists between the number of days a student is absent in kindergarten and their achievement in reading and math in later grades. The concerns and the consequences of any demographic differences were shown in Balfanz and Byrnes's (2012) study in which they noted that the high school and postsecondary outcomes for students by the number of ninth grade suspensions they received. While nine out of every 10 students in a cohort manage to graduate high school,

only six of every 10 with 10 or more absences and three or more suspensions in the ninth

grade are more than likely to drop out of high school. The chances of each student

academically succeeding is subjective. After students receive their first suspension, the

chances of completing high school reduce from 3 in 4 to only 1 in 2, and their chances of

enrolling in a college or university decrease from 50% to 25% (Balfanz & Byrnes,

2012).

   Factors that cause chronic absenteeism. Specific factors or barriers can cause a

student to be absent or chronically absent. Barriers are factors that prevent a student from

attending school, including health conditions, unreliable transportation, suspensions,

housing instability, and the involvement of child welfare or juvenile justice system

(Chang, Russel-Tucker, & Sullivan, 2016). Surveys of chronic absenteeism have

identified health concerns, including short-term illness, chronic illness, and

medical/dental/health appointments, as the most frequently cited reason for missing

school (Erbstein, Olagundoye, & Hartzog, 2015). Oral health contributes to chronic

absenteeism with children suffering from tooth decay being absent nearly 3 times more

than their peers (Attendance Works, 2015).

   When faced with the familial expectations of being a caregiver, students may not

be able to attend school. The lack of stable housing often contributes to transportation

barriers, but it also contributes directly to absenteeism (Humm Patnode et al., 2018).

Homelessness or any form of temporary housing dislocation may cause students to miss

school as the family focuses on establishing new housing (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Another indicator of instability, the number of school transfers in a year, is also related to

more absenteeism than their peers. One study showed that approximately 1 in 4 students in foster care experienced chronic absenteeism (California Department of Education, 2017). In addition, involvement in the juvenile justice system is related to absenteeism, increased school retention, lower academic achievement, or stigmatization from peers and school staff (Hirschfield, 2004, 2018; Hjalmarsson, 2008; Humm Patnode et al., 2018).

In addition to housing stability, poverty plays an intricate role in chronic absenteeism. Students coming from poverty settings are linked to higher incidences of illness among pupils from relatively poor families (Zang, 2013). These households have higher expectations of the students and may give them additional duties like parental duties with some students being expected to contribute to the family household by taking care of younger siblings or elder members (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Relationship of suspensions and absenteeism. Suspensions are a large part of chronic absenteeism. All school suspensions, in and out of school are related to lower attendance rates and may lead to students permanently dropping out of school (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Cholewa, Hull, Babcock, & Smith, 2017). These relationships are found to exist even when student characteristics, such as demographic variables and attitude toward school, were controlled for (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2011). In one study, two thirds of ninth graders in the study who received suspensions over a few years were likely to end up with attendance issues (Noltemyer, Ward, & Mcloughlin, 2015). These relationships between punitive incidents and other behavioral actions, such as attendance, are similar and consistent for the demographic subgroups of African American students,

economically underprivileged students, and students with disabilities whom are suspended at more frequent rates (Noltemyer et al., 2015). Noltemeyer et al. (2015) also showed that most students suspended in the ninth grade were suspended and/or experienced at least 1 year of chronic absenteeism in the middle grades.

In 2013–2014, about 2.6 million public school students (5.3 %) received one or more out-of-school suspensions (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012) . African American students had a higher percentage of out-of-school suspensions (13.7 %) than students from other racial/ethnic group, followed by 6.7 % of American Indian/Alaska Native students, 5.3 % of students of two or more races, 4.5 % each of Hispanic and Pacific Islander students, 3.4 % of White students, and 1.1 % of Asian students (McFarland et al., 2019). The data includes the 8% of students in the United States aged 16-22 years. Data showed that a greater percentage of African American students, White students received an out-of-school suspension than did White students (Attendance Works, 2018). A study of approximately 8,000 ninth grade students across 31 states, discovered that detention, in-school suspension, Saturday school and out-of-school suspension were the most common disciplinary responses to unexcused absences (Flannery, Frank, & Kato, 2012). The study results revealed that repeated out of school suspension led to a strong and significant increase in truancy over time (Flannery et al., 2012). The adverse relationship between suspensions and both outcome variables are consistent with a surplus of recent calls for shifts away from the use of exclusionary punishment (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

These findings are exceptionally low given that students who attend low-income and urban schools often face greater obstacles related to attendance and experience a

higher rate of suspensions than those who attend other schools (Noltemyer et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the use of suspensions initiates or exacerbates a process of student

disengagement. To encourage schools to seriously tackle this issue of suspensions,

Cholewa et al. (2017) suggest that the suspension rate data be considered in measures of

improving attendance. Conversely, Young (2014) believed that punitive attendance

policies may not be the best solution to controlling excessive absenteeism and can

sometimes have unintended consequences.

Lack of engagement and attendance. Students who lack connections in school

may disengage. A study in the Chicago Public Schools found differences in student

attendance rates by school, even after controlling for student and school demographic

factors (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & de la Torre, 2014). They found that high school

students in low engagement schools were absent almost a full week more per semester

than similar students in high schools. Additionally, students who are not engaged in

school may choose not to attend to pursue preferred activities outside of school (Humm

Brundage, Castillo, & Batsche, 2017).

School support systems. These are three specific factors regarding student support

systems that are critical to ameliorating the problem of chronic absenteeism: (a) the

teacher-student relationship which addresses the trust between teachers and students, (b)

the extent to which students report that they received personal support from their

teachers, and (c) the extent to which students perceived that the school staff emphasized

success in school as relevant and important for the future of all students and not only for

the top achievers in the school (Allensworth et al., 2014).

Similarly, researchers in Florida identified that students are more likely to disengage when they perceive school to be boring, do not see value in attending, and do not believe that school will help them achieve their goals (Humm Brundage et al., 2017). In 2015, the City of Baltimore recognized the need for staff engagement to improve the school climate. The school climate had collapsed since the beginning of school after merging with students and staff of a school that closed. The decline was attributed to loss of community developments, lack of strong relationships, subsequent tension between the students and the staff (Gottfried, 2017). In schools with a positive climate, opportunities to form constructive relations were a motivating factor in having better school attendance. Something as simple as putting a basketball goal where staff and students meet 45 minutes early before school starts to increase student's attendance was done in a struggling district (Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013).

School engagement does not only involve the student, there needs to be a parent component. When families do not have strong connections with the school or do not emphasize the value of school, students are more likely to be absent. Many families may not realize that all absences, even excused absences, can negatively impact students' attendance (Gottfried, 2015). Additionally, most parents underestimate their child's absenteeism (Rogers & Feller, 2016). Parents can change the negative connection to school into a positive connection by asking their children about school or volunteering at the school. Additional attendance interventions have concentrated on correcting parents' beliefs providing information about a student in comparison with others, and mentoring.

Proven interventions to reduce absenteeism. Given the constraints of existing

research, it is likely that a combination of strategies must be elevated to fully address student attendance. On the lower-intensity end of the spectrum, an experimental assessment by Rogers and Feller (2016) found that frequent summaries of attendance information sent by postcard increased attendance in an urban district. Those postcards were intended to correct parents' faulty beliefs about students' absences. In another study, quick reminders before a holiday or another day that had previously seen many absences increased attendance by 2 percentage points on the targeted day, though the study in question did not report on sustained effects (Balu, Porter, & Gunton, 2016).

On the higher-intensity end of attendance interventions, a nonexperimental assessment found that attendance rose by 5 percentage points when New York City high school students with past records of chronic absenteeism were given mentors to provide attendance encouragement and help them tackle the underlying reasons for their absences (Balu et al., 2016).

Family engagement. Engaging parents/guardians and involving them in their student's education can be an effective method in reducing chronic absenteeism (Constantino, 2015). Schools encourage parent/guardians to send their students to school but also provide helpful supports to ensure a reduction in absences (Constantino, 2015). Various examples of communications and home visits are being utilized throughout the United States. Home visits in conjunction with phone calls, letters and teacher/parent conferences have successfully decreased chronic absenteeism in several states (National Education Association, 2018). The school district of Philadelphia, in collaboration with the Mid Atlantic Regional Lab, tested the "nudge" approach to improve attendance

(Rogers et al., 2017). They sent postcards to parents or guardians of students who were absent the prior year. This attempt was based on a behavioral science theory and prior empirical work that reported positive outcomes (National Education Association 2018).

  Community involvement. Schools collaborate with community agencies, organizations, and business to provide support systems (Ginsburg, Jordan, & Chang, 2014). To understand how to use community resources, school districts must first learn the individual needs of the chronically absent student. For example, a student from a low socioeconomic family setting may lack essential supports such as nutrition, clothing, healthcare, and stable housing which all contribute to chronic absenteeism (Attendance Works and Everyone Graduates Center, 2017). Family resource organizations, health departments and charitable centers are community-based support systems that can help address the needs of the individuals and families (Mac Iver, Sheldon, Naeger, & Clark, 2017). The District of Columbia encouraged teachers from 27 elementary schools visited the homes of their students to engage parent/guardians in conversation about their student's growth and activities for learning at home. Through outreach, schools were able to encourage parents/guardians to not only send their child to school, but also provide valuable supports to ensure a decrease in absences. In a recent study, Attendance Works (2017) noted that 72% of parents said they trust that teachers and schools would contact them about their student's attendance. Of these, 42% said they were contacted during the school year. In 2015, John Hopkins University released a study indicating a positive reaction from home visits done in the district. The National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC, 2018) noted that developing and maintaining community relationships can be

essential to school attendance. This can often become problematic by having too few

partners, but rather by effectively coordinating many, and discovering those most likely

to benefit the students and families. While these short-term or one-time arrangements are

common, creating long standing partnerships with agencies can be extremely difficult.

Partnerships are a two-way street. Districts should be looking for community partners

that are nurturing, an appropriate fit, supports all stakeholders, and focused on the same

goal of increasing school attendance (NMRC, 2018).

Mentoring. According to the NMRC (2018), mentoring offers the potential to

reducing chronic absenteeism. It is often used to address the social and educational

concerns. Mentorships pair qualified adults or older students with at risk students. The

programs are designed to promote relationships and improve school performance. The

mentors act as advisors and provide guidance and support. Furthermore, mentorships act

as an intervention to guide students on a more productive path with the intention of

decreasing absences (NEA, 2018). Mentoring in Grades K-12 is becoming a popular

intervention. The school setting is often seen to reach a larger number of youths in a

controlled setting. This allows access to recreational, educational and developmental

supports that may enhance the mentoring relationship (Attendance Works, 2019).

Mentoring programs often have a family component to ensure that everyone plays a part

in the intervention phase (Attendance Works, 2019). Regardless of the structure, staffing

and goals of the program, mentoring programs in schools have shown to be a cost-

efficient in comparison of increasing the positive relationships students have in their

lives, while having the potential to improve factors that can lead to educational

achievement, such as teachers and staff, improved feelings of academic competence, and greater access and use of other supports, such as tutoring, credit tracking, counseling, and postsecondary planning (NMRC, 2018).

Opposing Points of View

The literature provides several recommendations to counteract and/or reduce chronic absenteeism. Many of these strategies have been applied in small settings. However, evidence that these programs are effective at scale, (i.e., implemented across a school corporation or across state) remains limited. Based on the current research, it does not appear that any single strategy is most effective (Maynard et al., 2018). A 2017 study found little to no evidence showing that participating in a mentor program had any impact on chronic absenteeism (NMRC, 2018). However, a 2013 study performed on New York City's Success Mentor program reported that chronically absent students assigned mentors gained an additional 2 weeks of school and 25% of schools implementing mentorships student gained nearly 30 days (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Researchers have reported varied outcomes concerning the use of mentorships to reduce chronic absenteeism. While individual states have defined what they consider a chronically absent student, few have established expectations for how few chronically absent students a school should have (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). Some of those have setting ambitious and perhaps unrealistically high goals that represent far better results than they are currently seeing. States are giving modest weight to chronic absenteeism in their accountability formulas and in some cases linking it with other indicators (Jordan & Miller, 2017). The largest difference in chronic absenteeism rates are not amongst states,

but between schools in the same district. This makes it crucially essential for superintendents and principals to be equipped to deal with excessive absences-whether excused, unexcused or for disciplinary reasons (Jordan & Miller, 2017).

Implications

Administrator initiatives to encourage parent engagement often fall short of using one approach that works in all educational settings. When school leaders choose an initiative to address chronic absenteeism in their buildings, it becomes essential to evaluate the intervention to ensure that it works in all educational settings. The tentative deliverable for the project will be a working document that contains specific interventions to decrease chronic absenteeism based on the perceptions of the administrators and teachers. The document will be designed to improve student chronic absenteeism through focusing on removing barriers, improving school climate, and engaging students and family. It will offer immediate and long-term interventions including restorative discipline practices, mentors, and interagency case management.

Summary

Based on the information in the literature used for this proposed study, chronic absenteeism occurs due to many obstacles that students deal with including the lack of parental engagement. Administrator and teacher perceptions are the key to understanding how to increase student attendance, removing obstacles, and making a well needed connection between the schools and the communities. Teachers and administrators are the first to see and experience the issues that create obstacles for students to come to school.

Throughout the literature reviewed for this study, there were specific topics that

stood out providing vital information to assist with the reduction of chronic absenteeism. The fact that chronic absenteeism fits neatly into a three-tier structure which includes positive relationships, monitoring student attendance with an action plan to remove barriers and legal interventions as a last resort. The toolkit for this study was based on researched based strategies that have been proven to make a difference in reducing chronic absenteeism for school districts.

The literature reviewed has also provided a strong foundation indicating the need for interventions being implemented in the earlier grade levels to avoid the practice of reactive decision making and offers several ideas in order to be proactive in the schools with schools who have a high number of students with chronic absenteeism. The literature has provided an abundance of data to show how communities, schools and families can determine the barriers of chronic absenteeism and intervene to create positive outcomes for students with chronic absenteeism issues. The information obtained can be used throughout the district and applied on all grade levels.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

In the local district in Virginia where the research took place, Student Support Services implemented a research-based intervention in 2016–2017, known as Attendance Teams, to improve student chronic absenteeism throughout the district in efforts to reduce the number of students with 10 or more absences. Attendance Teams were responsible for viewing the attendance data of individual students who were excessively absent and ensuring their needs were met using all available resources. These teams also monitored what was happening overall for all student subgroups at a school site that was highlighted in the most recent research study from Attendance Works (2019). This was done for three cities in Virginia: Richmond, Petersburg, and Norfolk. No researchers or district personnel had publicly reported an Attendance Teams' evaluation measuring the program's success in achieving the intended outcomes at the study site. Additionally, no researchers or district personnel had publicly compared the program participants' student attendance outcomes with the nonparticipants. The results of this study contribute to positive social change by assisting school leadership in making informed decisions regarding how resources, such as money, time, and human and material capital, are best used to reduce chronic absenteeism rates.

I employed a qualitative case study research design in this study. Qualitative research occurs primarily in a natural setting (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Yin (2014) asserted that "a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in depth and within its real-world context" (p.

16). I examined a process set of a specific culture (see Creswell, 2013). Using this model, I was able to evaluate programs that would be effective for assisting chronically absent students by providing insight into their obstacles to attendance as well as examine the effectiveness of the programs according to the needs of the district and its current status. I conducted a qualitative case study to investigate the teachers' view of the current interventions used to reduce chronic absenteeism. The perceptions of administrators regarding chronic absenteeism in the local district were also examined to understand how to address the obstacles preventing improvement.

Qualitative methods were appropriate for this study because I gathered data using specific approaches pertaining directly to the research questions. According to Creswell (2013), when educators think about qualitative research, they often have in mind the process of reviewing data collected. In this study, I examined the perceptions of the participants and the effects of how they handle absences concerning student daily attendance as well as the school's attendance practices according to the new state guidelines. According to Merriam (2015), "A basic qualitative study would be interested in (a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 23).

A case study design was best suited for this study because the study involved people, communities, and critical incidences selected because they were illuminative and they offered valuable indicators of the phenomenon of interest (see Merriam, 2015). I did not choose other designs because many of them focus on long-term observations, comparing variables, and require independent research (Government of Alberta, 2014).

Ethnographic case studies can focus on individuals rather than on whole groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In this study, the focus was on improving a group of specific students who were exhibiting the same behaviors Grounded theory consists of a longitudinal and inductive approach usually associated with social sciences research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A characteristic of grounded theory is the application of theoretical sampling to reach theoretical saturation grounded in the experiences and views of participants (Timonen, Geraldine, & Conlon, 2018). Although phenomenological studies focus on groups, the outcome usually arrives at a unified description of an issue or problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Chronic attendance can have an array of obstacles and can encompass a series of groups with specific issues.

Participants

Setting and Sample

The setting for this study was an urban, public school in Virginia located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The school district educates approximately 30,000 students from prekindergarten through Grade 12 (VDOE, 2019). Two thirds of the district's schools are fully accredited. Some of the district's elementary, middle, and high schools also receive Title I resources. Schools designated as Title I have a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Federal funds are provided to assist the schools with this designation in reaching academic proficiency on state assessments (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

In this study, I used purposeful sampling to recruit participants. The participants

were intentionally selected from specific sites in the district according to their current attendance status. To ensure there were ample data, the strategy of maximal variation sampling was used to obtain diverse age groups, characteristics, and individuals. The participants in this study were selected according to their length of employment in the district and their involvement in the school setting. The participants included three administrators from the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and nine veteran teachers from each level as well. There was a total of 18 participants that ensured for the representation of all grade levels in the data collection. The process of data collection began after obtaining Institutional Review Board approval from Walden University (*Approval No. 04-23-20-0355131*). After receiving approval, I sent a letter to the senior coordinator of school attendance in the local district to obtain permission to conduct the case study. I submitted the approval letter from the central office along with a letter of request to the building principals requesting permission to conduct the study and have access to perspective participants.

Once I received the necessary approvals, I sent a letter to each participant to introduce myself and thoroughly explain the study. This included the projected amount of time to be spent with each participant and how the confidentiality of the participants would be protected by using pseudonyms for individuals and schools and/or choosing to withhold descriptions that would lead to the identification of participants and sites (see Creswell, 2013). Creswell and Creswell (2017) offered a variety of instruments to be used in the process of data collection. I used the one-on-one interview technique, which is ideal for participants who are not hesitant to speak (see Creswell, 2013).

Data Collection

When collecting data, my goal was to gain insight into the perceptions of the Attendance Team and their focus on chronic absenteeism. I used an interview protocol while collecting the data (see Appendix B). The interviews consisted of asking open-ended questions that allowed the participants to voice their experiences unconstrained by any of my perspectives or past research findings and provide in-depth responses. Interviews can be advantageous by providing valuable data when the researcher cannot directly observe participants and permitting the participants to provide the researcher with detailed information (Creswell, 2015). This form of data collection can also work at a disadvantage because the interviews provide data "filtered" through the views of the interviewers; for example, the researcher summarizes the participants' views in the research report (Creswell, 2015).

I conducted phone interviews with participants to examine the attendance process based on past data collected on chronic absenteeism. Block and Erskine (2012) asserted that, even with its challenges, phone interviews were becoming a popular method for data collection. The authors acknowledged that phone interviews provided the researcher with flexibility and access that, at times, can be difficult to achieve when interviewing in person. Similarly, Holt (2010) also accepted phone interviews as a viable method for qualitative research. Farooq (2015) pointed out that some researchers consider phone interviews inferior to the face-to-face method because of the negative effect on collecting contextual data such as body language; however, these claims were not supported by empirical evidence. The data collected in the current study included the perceptions of the

administrators and teachers regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district.

Names of potential participants were provided to me by the building principals. I e-mailed an invitation to take part in the study to the potential participants. If they agreed to continue, the potential participant e-mailed back agreeing to be a part of the study. I then sent an e-mail to the participant containing a consent form and the interview questions for review. There was a 48-hour wait time for the potential participant to review the questions and agree or disagree to continue in the study. Once each participant confirmed their intent to be a part of the study, I set a place, date, and time for the interview. The interviews were recorded through a series of taped and written responses. The interviews lasted approximately 35 to 40 minutes in length. A checklist was used to ensure each participant had returned their consent form and were interviewed. The study also included data from monthly district and individual school reports aligning with the schools of the participants involved.

Ethical Consideration

To assure confidentiality and the respect of all participants at all levels of data collection and analysis, I kept all data collection materials in a securely locked file cabinet in my home office. Identifying information, such as personnel names and school names, were also kept confidential. All contact with the school district was completed through e-mail with the director of research and learning. After approval from the building administrators, individual meetings were set up with building administrators and teachers. The purpose of the data collection and tools were shared at that time.

Role of the Researcher

Although I am employed with the district of study as an attendance technician, I did not recruit participants from any of the schools that I assist during the school year. Principals and members of the school-based leadership team manage the day-to-day operations of the school. I had no supervisory responsibilities over any of the participants involved in the study. I selected the participants according to their positions in the school and years of service in the district. The participants represented the elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Project Limitations in Addressing the Problem

As a former classroom teacher and current attendance officer, I have experience in gathering this type of information and knowledge of collecting and disseminating the information according to who it directly affects and benefits. I currently service eight schools in the district on all levels. Bias was avoided by not conducting interviews in any of the schools I have direct, daily contact with and that had been identified with chronic attendance problems.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data through the transcription of interviews and the organization of data gathered from specific schools (see Creswell, 2013). Data analysis began during the first stage of data collection. In-depth, individual, participant interviews continued until each stage of data collection was completed. This allowed for additional information to be considered if needed. The data were analyzed using the following six steps as described by Creswell (2013): identify the research problem, review the literature,

specify the research purpose, collect data, analyze and interpret data, and report and evaluate the research. I followed Creswell's steps of qualitative research by (a) engaging in the initial exploration of the data by coding similar terms and responses, (b) using the codes to expound on the information gathered, (c) interpreting the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and how they correlate with the research thematic analysis, and (d) conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings. The participants and their responses were kept confidential, and the information shared was the result of common themes that emerge from the interview process. The school reports offered access to current and former data on students with excessive absences and was used to show before-and-after results of interventions as well as identify specific needs in the schools and the problem with chronic absenteeism by grade levels. Teacher and administrator interview question responses provided pertinent information on their perceptions of the reasons for student absences.

I used open coding to identify emergent themes. Data were coded using text segments to compare similar phrases and thoughts to gain a better perspective of how the process is working in the district. Using inductive processes, themes were then identified from the coded data to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of why students are chronically absent from school. The first stage of data analysis was precoding, which included highlighting and underlining similar phrases and quotes as well as circling information considered essential (see Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Limitations

Participants with negative biases toward the district or who have limited

understanding of the district's policy and procedures may have skewed results. Results in

this research may have limited value in decision making because of the vast amount of

data and the response time in which it can be used. Threats to internal validity include the

complexities of making inferences. While a certain amount of inference is inherent in this

design, the researcher must be careful in considering all possible explanations. Due to

COVID-19 interrupting the school calendar, interviews were conducted by phone and

may have been condensed because of time constraints for personnel. Case studies tend to

focus on a particular process or project within a specific context. Some may argue that it

has limitations because it is bound by time and activity as well as able to provide a rich

and insightful investigation of a program or intervention in its natural setting (Creswell,

2013).

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this study was to examine administrator and teacher perceptions

related to chronic absenteeism, in conjunction with the local district's policy and

procedures. Data were gathered through phone interviews. Block and Erskine (2012)

asserted that, even with its challenges, phone interviews were becoming a popular

method for data collection. The authors acknowledged that phone interviews provided the

researcher flexibility and access that, at times, can be difficult when interviewing in

person. Similarly, Holt (2010) also accepted phone interviews as a viable method for

qualitative research. Farooq (2015) pointed out that some researchers consider phone

interviews inferior to the face-to-face method because of the negative effect on collecting

contextual data such as body language. However, Farooq (2015) stated that the claims were not supported by empirical evidence.

From the original sample size of 18 participants, 15 interviews were conducted. The other three potential participants agreed to participate, but due to unforeseen circumstances were not able to complete the interviews. Interviews were conducted by phone with the myself and all transcripts being transcribed by me. All interviews were conducted by phone in the privacy of my home. A copy of the completed transcript and summary of the results was sent to each interviewee for transcript validation and member checking. Member checking allowed participants the opportunity to validate the accuracy of the brief interpretation of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). All print copies of transcripts were kept in a locked file cabinet at my home and all consent forms were stored on my password-protected thumb drive. To analyze the data, I identified commonalities and themes from the data. Precoding were used to identify rich or significant quotes from the data. Finally, thematic categories and codes were deduced.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district and the methods needed to reduce it? The following themes were discovered based on the participant interviews: concept of district policies and procedures, parent engagement, and family conflicts.

Concept of district policies and procedures. When the teacher participants were asked about the districts attendance policies and procedures (Questions 5 and 7), all participants included some part of the process as unclear and needs improvement.

Participants were able to recite the district policy and some elaborated on what they thought was the importance of attendance, while others speculated on who was responsible for following through with attendance procedures. The levels of discrepancy fall between grade levels. Participants from the elementary level relied on the counselor and the office staff to provide them with attendance guidance. One out of the 3 elementary school teachers took attendance daily and submitted the information to the main office. In each school, the practice is to take attendance daily and submit absences to the main office by a certain time. One participant said, "I take attendance when I get the time." On the secondary level the attendance procedures are similar, yet they have the entire day to submit absences to the main office. Participant 5 shared that she has gone several days without taking attendance, she stated, "sometimes it just slips my mind and I forget to go back into the system for attendance." Four out of the 6 middle and high school teachers interviewed followed through with this procedure.

In terms of responsibilities according to the attendance process (Question 11), teachers on all levels stressed the lack of time and opportunity in which they can make parent contact because of student absences. Respondents felt they are overwhelmed with additional duties that take their focus away from investigating reasons for student absences. Additionally, several respondents communicated that it is important to adhere to the district and building attendance procedures, but it is not done daily due to unfortunate circumstances.

Perceptions of student and parent engagement. Participants were also asked their perceptions on how relationships were fostered in the district (Questions 9 and10).

Constantino (2015) said that family engagement is a commitment. Not everyone on our staff will see the value of engaging the entire family. Participant 1, an elementary school teacher was eager to talk about the many ways her school has attempted to engage students and parents. Although several of the ideas were not successful, they did make attempts. For example, she noted that verbal and formal written request for meetings were sent to parents, seasonal events were planned, and monthly newsletters were delivered to the homes. Two of the 3 elementary schools hosted, "Chat and Chews," which are informal information sessions with parents and students to review student attendance and behavior. The same two elementary schools also send home individual invitations for conferences when the student has missed 3 or more days of school. Participant 3 revealed that her school sent home approximately 40 invitations on one occasion, seven parents responded and only 3 parents attended the meetings. Recently, the district implemented parent liaisons were into the elementary schools to assist with engagement. Responses to the effectiveness of these additions varied from not seeing a change in school and parent relationships, to a slight change but not enough to make a difference in the student's attendance.

On the secondary level, only one school received a parent liaison, and the participants were fairly pleased with the results. Participant 5 did see a rise in class attendance after the parent liaison was implemented but was not convinced that it was a direct effect of this person. The secondary schools also sent our newsletters and monthly request to meet with parents. At one high school, parent conferences were held every third Thursday, hosting approximately 15 parents in a school of 15 hundred students.

Obstacles preventing school attendance. When asked why participants thought students do not attend school, the participants showed the disconnect between schools, parents, and students. Participant 3 communicated her beliefs concerning why her elementary students do not attend class. Her theory was that due to the school being in a low-income area, a large amount of the parents does not value education as much as other parents. Many of her students' parents did not complete high school or middle school. They are single parent homes with very faith in the educational system. The participant recalls a parent saying to her, "It's ok if she misses 5 or 6 days what is she really missing?" She went on to explain how parents rarely send in absent notes and the students usually have tell a different story. Participants 5 and 6 perceptions were different. These participants perceptions were that their students were struggling with attendance because of the need to work. The students were working late hours the night before school, working during school hours or are involved in illegal activities.

In addition to physical health, mental health concerns including school refusal, separation anxiety, and depression can impact student attendance (Humm Patnode; et al., 2018). These may contribute to student absences if the parent is not aware of these symptoms (Kearney, 2008). Participant 4 referenced the need to understand the mental health issues their students exhibit. This participant has experienced students with depression, separation anxiety and postpartum depression from childbirth. Participant 4 recalls a student who missed several days after each school holiday. After speaking in length with the student she realized that the student has been sexually assaulted.

Participant 6 spoke of a student who entered ninth grade with a 2-year-old

daughter and struggled to balance high school studies and parenthood. The student

missed approximately 3 out of 5 days each week due to childcare issues. When the

student was asked how the school help could, she stated, "I need a babysitter because my

mom says this is my problem." Although the schools have outside agencies incorporating

day treatment programs in the buildings, the participants all believe services need to

extend beyond the building and the district needs to consider this when they look at daily

absences. Several of the participants felt that the district relies too heavily on outside

agencies and have not implemented enough district programs or interventions to assist

with student absences. Participant 1 listed several reasons students are absent from their

building. The list included inclement weather, homelessness, and transportation issues.

Economic hardships were mentioned in detail in several interviews. All participants

agreed that the excessive absences hindered the academic success of the students.

Making improvements to benefit everyone. The question asking teachers how

they would improve the procedures for attendance (Question 7), received responses based

on building needs according to the teachers. The elementary participants all agreed that

there needs to be a uniformed attendance procedure for all elementary schools. This

would help when students who transfer from one school to another. A norm would be

established, and the parents and students would know what to expect. This would include

all paperwork involved, times scheduled for attendance to be submitted, prerecorded

phone calls about attendance. The consensus of the participants who took place in the

study is that they would like to see more structure in the schools surrounding attendance

and would like the procedures clearly explained to new teachers at the beginning of each

school year instead of a quick overview during staff meetings.

The secondary level teachers were adamant determining their specific roles in chronic absenteeism. They want the building administration to be specific about how to handle absences, they would like to see additional interventions geared towards to specific needs of their students and parents that will assist with the underlined issues of student absenteeism. Participant 5 elaborated on her proposal she presented to her principal to add a daycare to the building. She felt this would eliminate a great deal of female absences as well as some male absences who have already become parents. Remaining open to continuous training and additional interventions resonated with participants, as teachers described the need to find additional ways to reduce student absences and improve the current processes.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, what are the perceptions of administrators regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local school district and the methods needed to reduce it? The following themes were discovered based on the interviews: validating concerns concerning excessive absences, focus on communication for all involved, accountability for engagement and focus on being proactive, not reactive.

When I spoke with administrators, they outlined what is supposed to take place in the buildings. For the most part, the procedures were similar, yet not effective for a high school or middle school. During the time of the interview process, only one principal of a high school was meeting the state expectations for absenteeism.

Validating concerns about excessive absences. When the administrators were

asked, "Do you believe attendance is an immediate concern for your school, (Question 2)," I received a multiplicity realm of answers. Participant 8 agreed hold heartily that attendance has had a negative effect in her building. On any given day there are anywhere from 50-65 marked absent. This is a result of parents not dropping their students off at school, parents not dropping the students off before a certain time and transportation issues. A participant from another building Participant 7 acknowledged a numerous amount of homelessness among the families.

Participant 9 expressed concern for the logistics of the school and its accreditation. When asked if attendance was an immediate concern for her building she stated, yes, because schools accreditation and accountability are dependent upon student's attendance though chronic absenteeism. If we cannot control or reduce the number of students absent daily, we run the risk of being out of compliance."

Focus on communication for all involved. Communication was described as an essential continuous improvement area for the district schools. Participants noted that to gain a better understanding of why the students are excessively absent from school, there must be an open line of communication between parents, students, and staff. There must be a willingness from all parties to be fully vested in the student education process. Participant 10 utilizes several avenues in their building for communication. He found that letters to parents were not as effective as the robocalls sent out by weekly. Parent, Teacher, Student Association (PTSA) meetings have not been well received in this building. Participant 10 attempted a PTSA meeting in September and October, only 3 to 5 parents participated. She teaches in a school of 1,200 students Grade 9-12. Participant 9

was slightly more successful in her communications to parents in November when she hosted a paint night and invited the elementary school students that will eventually feed into her school. She took this opportunity to share attendance statistics and take parent questions.

Although all participants agreed that sending letters home was not very effective, they still noted in their school attendance plans to send monthly newsletters and absentee letters to parents of students who students have missed 3 or more days of school. Teachers have been instructed to make immediate contact with parents once they notice a trend in absenteeism.

Accountability for engagement. Each administrator was asked about the accountability piece of engaging parents and students. Most of the responses were similar, there was a slight variation from elementary to secondary. All participants agreed that it was a team effort to engage parents and students. The district recently implemented attendance teams and they administrators have been working to put these teams in place. The consensus on the elementary level is that the teams meet by-weekly to discuss attendance issues. The teams consist of an attendance designee, counselor, teacher, and parent liaison. The elementary school administrators rely heavily on their counselors and office staff to set parent meetings concerning excessive student absences.

One participant expressed the difficulty of addressing students' absences due to the lack of teachers taking correct attendance and parents not responding to school correspondence. They noted that telephone contact does not always work because of incorrect phone numbers and that it becomes necessary to make home visits which often

include going into neighborhoods with safety concerns. Participant 10 explained that while the home visits are helpful, the principals do not always have enough staff available to make those visits and the districts has six attendance technicians who cover over 50 schools. This is a citywide concern. Participants 8 and 9 both monitor teacher engagement through reviewing lesson plans which are required to include an improvement plan for student attendance and hold weekly meetings to address attendance issues.

Focus in being proactive, not reactive. It was the consensus of the administrators that there needs to be a proactive approach to excessive attendance in the district. When asked what they have done to improve the building and what they would like to see done differently in the district, there was no short answers. The most prevalent answer was to increase the number of attendance technicians across the district. The technicians are the authorities on excessive absences and are trained in court procedures and connecting the parents and students with organizations who can help resolve issues preventing the students from attending school. Although court is necessary in some instances, Participant 7 did not agree that it should play a leading role in recovering students with excessive absences. The participant noted that the district needs to rely on its own intervention plans. Participant 9 would like to see district reports issued in a timely manner to address individual building attendance concerns. Participants expressed the need to have effective training before the school year begins on how to address chronic absenteeism through the support of the mandated attendance teams. Participant 6 suggested that administrators follow their lead and implement a parent phone number

check at least every two to three months because of the frequency of number changes by parents. One administrator has prepared a calendar to include activities to build relationships and keep the parents informed about student attendance. Several of the participants noted that being proactive in prevention methods and being persistent in addressing the issue of excessive absences during the first week of school will reduce student absences.

Discussions of Findings for the Perceptions of Administrators and Teachers

The perceptions of the administrators and teachers varied slightly on some answers, but for the most part they agreed that there are significant changes that need to be made to improve chronic absenteeism. Six attendance technicians serving over 50 schools for attendance was a focus point for several of the administrators. Although the building principals were instructed to create attendance teams, the teams were not always effective, and they were time consuming which took away for other duties. Teachers were concerned with student data not being correct in the system. Attendance letters sent out being returned was a seen negative response and the teachers eventually stop sending letters.

The participants agree that the more time students spend out of the classroom affects their academics. When asked needs to be changed, once again the support staff was an issue. All would like to see an increase in attendance technicians to support their buildings, they would like to be informed when student information changes, and they would like to have a better understanding of what the roles and responsibilities are for all stakeholders involved in reducing the chronic attendance rates.

It was evident that some of the building administrators have implemented interventions to engage parents and students but have not been successful in their efforts. They agreed there needs to be additional interventions implemented district wide. The district should not be so depended on the court systems to intervene so late in the attendance process. Jail time for parents and detention for students should be a last resort.

The themes of communication and engagement had similar outcomes in elementary and secondary schools. The schools face many of the same obstacles such as parent numbers being incorrect, return mailed and poor attendance at parent and teacher meetings. This has not deterred the staff from attempting parent contact, it has just made it difficult. The events planned such as paint nights, and individual conferences serve to break the barriers between the schools and the community.

The teachers noted that although the use of various events such as paint night was sparsely attended, these mutual benefits help to create a stronger society as each school focuses to reduce it excessive attendance rates. The idea of forming attendance teams in conjunction with the assistance of the attendance technicians can be a positive reinforcement if the attendance teams have the proper training in the beginning of the year and the attendance technicians' numbers are increased.

The theme pertaining to obstacles preventing students from attending schools involved a variety of reasons with mental health concerns being significant. In addition to physical health, mental health concerns this included, separation anxiety, and depression impacting student attendance. Although the district has acquired assistance from outside agencies to incorporate day treatment, the staff on all levels would like to see additional

efforts to help the students once they leave the schools.

One participant recalled a student daydreaming about an incident from the previous night and going into a panic. She wonders if there had been a mentor she could have called, would there have been a different outcome. It is safe to say that the administrators and the teachers are aware of the excessive absenteeism issue and want to make improvements across the board.

Section 3: The Project

Based on the results of the study, I designed a project in the form of a professional development program. I chose to focus on professional development because the findings showed that participation in an effectively led intervention increases school attendance and decreases chronic absenteeism. Based on my findings, I determined that a professional development program would be appropriate and allow teachers and administrators on all levels to create an engaging atmosphere and connect with students and families.

My goal with the professional development program is to provide an opportunity for teachers and administrators in the urban, public school district to implement strategies associated with best practices to address chronic absenteeism. The platform will be a 2-day retreat and professional development program called, *Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice* (see Appendix A). The staff will attend several breakout sessions to review my findings on chronic absenteeism in the district, design an attendance program according to the needs of their school, and identify best practice strategies in attendance to connect with the students and parents. The staff will continue these strategies through the year, including meeting regularly as a team.

In this section, I discuss the rationale for my professional development project. The literature related to family engagement and involvement in reducing chronic absenteeism is also reviewed. I then discuss the target audience of the professional development program as well as the components of the project, the timeline for implementation, and the activities that the staff will participate in at the professional

development retreat. The resources needed for implementation of the professional

development retreat, the existing supports, and possible barriers are described and an

evaluation plan for the project and how the project will lead to positive social change in

the community are discussed. Finally, I explain how the successful execution of the

project will decrease chronic absenteeism.

Rationale

The results from this study showed that schools that incorporated family

engagement strategies in elementary, middle, and high schools had a lower number of

students with chronic absences. Therefore, a program promoting family engagement was

an appropriate project. Engagement is a customizable tool that must be developed for a

specific environment and the needs of the building. My professional development

program addressed the perceptions of teachers and administrators on why students do not

attend school and give the staff the opportunity to develop an effective plan for their

building.

The literature reviewed suggested that professional development programs in the

form of family engagement strategies can reduce the chronic absenteeism numbers

(Constantino, 2015). Professional development sessions allow staff members to work

together to develop strategical methods to interact with students and families. This

finding led me to develop my program in the form of a professional learning community

(PLC). The staff members will work in PLCs to design interventions geared towards the

engagement of the students and parents to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Review of the Literature

In this literature review, I present research concerning best practices on the development of professional development programs for educators. I conducted a literature search using the Walden University Library. All searches were limited to peer-reviewed articles and journals published between 2012 and 2019. Older articles and journals were also accessed for additional background information. I chose literature to be included in this review based on its significance to the research topic of professional development geared towards engaging families to reduce chronic absenteeism. The databases searched were Education Resource Information Center, SAGE, and Education Research Complete. search terms used were *chronic absenteeism, professional development, effective service-learning projects, and PLCs*. I considered the literature search to have reached saturation when the results began to repeat and there were no new resources found.

Best Practices for Professional Development Programs

In this section, I discuss the results of several recent studies that have examined best practices for developing effective staff development programs. Professional development programs have been known to be presented in 1-day or less for educators (Colwell, MacIsaac, Tichenor, Heins, & Piechura, 2014; Gus, Norris, Horm, Monore, & Wolfe, 2013; Lampi, Domino, & Taylor, 2015; Wills & Templeton, 2017). Effective professional development is key to staff learning and refining the pedagogies required to engage families and students (Constantino, 2015). An effective professional development needs to be structured and include specific elements, such as incorporating active

learning, supporting collaboration, using models of effective practice, providing coaching, offering feedback and reflection, and being of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017).

A professional development should be considered as one component in an overall system that also requires alignment among district tests, policy, and curriculum (Hammer, 2013). An effective professional development should include at least 30 contact hours distributed across a time span of 1 year (Childs & Ain, 2018). Hammer (2013) reported that outside developers and trainers have proven to be effective professional development administrators. Professional development is effective when teachers, administrators, and practitioners can collaborate to identify and address district- and school-wide initiatives (Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017). Lampi et al. (2015) examined a shared growth professional development model that involved community practitioners, college educators, and a university researcher with the goal of improving their curriculum and developing innovative strategies. The group established a foundation for the program by collaborating, then expanded it into a larger PLC by inviting additional staff to join them. Researchers have examined best practice strategies for professional development, describing it as challenging to determine which individuals are most effective and have been successful (Klute, 2013).

Professional Learning Communities for Attendance

PLCs are aligned with creating collaborative cultures and focusing on results; consequently, they are an opportunity for collaborative professional development (Childs & Ain, 2018). The PLC in this project is a platform for action composed of school

administrators, a variety of community partners, and teachers determined to improve

school attendance. Effective PLCs involve ongoing programs where staff learns to

implement best practices over a period (McLester, 2012). When a staff works in a

collaborative environment, they tend to be more invested in the work and the outcome is

more likely to be favorable (Childs & Ain, 2018). Staff working in PLCs can work

closely together to identify and address critical areas in schools (Stewart, 2014).

Researchers have examined how some school districts have improved their

implementation of PLCs to improve student outcomes to meet state mandates (Battersby

& Verdi, 2015; Thessin, 2015). The PLC should be used after a foundation for a

professional development group has been established (Childs & Ain, 2018) Research has

suggested that effective PLCs enhance staff collaboration and student achievement

(Childs & Ain, 2018). Although studies have identified several research-based PLC

strategies, how these specific practices affect collective efficacy has not been thoroughly

studied (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

PLC teams for attendance can focus on advocating for resources and policies to

improve attendance, cultivating school and district cultures of attendance, using chronic

attendance data to determine supports for students, and developing staff capacity to adopt

effective attendance practices. Through the project, the staff teams would have worked

collaboratively in the areas of family engagement and retaining students. The advantage

of these strategies of shared teamwork as opposed to a routine staff meeting is that these

teams involve a leadership component and community engagement in which the staff

work together to make evidence-based changes. Staff teams have been able to make

building and district decisions with the intent of improving student attendance (Jordan &
Miller, 2017). A weekly discussion protocol can be a part of PLCs as a guide to help
teachers and administrators support each other through cycles of actions and reflections
with the objective of aligning family engagement and attendance (Harris & Rosenman,
2017).

Based on the review of literature about best practices for professional
development, I developed a project called, Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective
Attendance Practice (see Appendix A). The professional development project will allow
administrators, teachers, and community partners to collaborate and build professional
communities. This project may be an effective way for all grade-level teachers and
administrators to collaborate, design, and implement service learning to reduce chronic
absenteeism. I designed the professional development program and 2-day retreat to allow
elementary, middle, and high school teachers and administrators to collect data, develop
plans, and design effective service-learning projects for all grade levels to improve
chronic attendance.

After the 2-day retreat, teachers and administrators will have the opportunity to
present their service-learning project to other staff members in their schools and continue
collaborating with their groups throughout the school year. The groups will meet monthly
to discuss data collection on student chronic absenteeism.

Components of the Retreat

The Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice retreat will be
a 2-day retreat implemented the second week of August 2021 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Administrators and teachers will be able to receive professional development credits towards the 12 credits needed to satisfy the district requirement. A buffet lunch will be provided on Day 1 and a working lunch will be scheduled for Day 2 of the retreat. Administrators and teachers will receive resource materials at the end of the retreat to use throughout the year.

Day 1. Day 1 of the retreat will start with a continental breakfast for retreat participants from 8:30 a.m. until 9:00 a.m. Participants can eat while the retreat coordinator reviews procedures for the day and addresses any concerns. Day 1 breakout sessions will be as follows:

1. Building a service-learning community: This breakout session will be a 60-minute presentation of research-based findings on service-learning projects in elementary, middle and highs schools. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts that include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources.

2. The effect of service-learning participation: This will be a 60-minute session in which the participants will discuss national trends and research on school attendance as well as state and local strategies for reducing chronic absence and the effect of participating in a service-learning project. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts that include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources to guide them in building quality service-learning teams.

3. Building relationships with service-learning projects: This will be a 60-minute session examining how to build relationships to reduce chronic absenteeism through service learning. Administrators and teachers will explore the benefits of working together to reach a common goal. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts that include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources.

4. *Strengthening collaboration with community partners.* This will be a 60-minute session that will teach teachers and administrators how to engage community partners to achieve district goals. The session will consist of activities in which teachers and administrators will have to collaborate on ideas to bring additional stakeholders into the fold.

Day 1 will conclude with a session titled, share-a-lot, which will be a 30-minute wrap-up session in which retreat participants will be able to share what they have learned during the day and how they will apply it to make social change in the district. Teachers and administrators will complete survey evaluations at the end of each session to provide feedback to the facilitators.

Day 2. Day 2 of the retreat will include breakfast from 8:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. in the main ballroom for retreat participants. The coordinator will once again review procedures for the day and answer any concerns of the participants. Day 2 breakout sessions will be as follows:

1. Collecting and organizing data for service-learning teams: This will be a 60-minute session on collecting, analyzing, and organizing data for service-

learning projects. The purpose of the session is to collect and organize relevant attendance data for service-learning projects. The session will introduce administrators and teachers to sample service-learning projects.

2. Creating service learning to raise student awareness of attendance: This will be a 60-minute session on creating interactive activities to engage the students and community. The participants will receive a suggested activity to encourage student awareness of attendance and that can be tailored to the students in their buildings. The activity may be adjusted to include parents and other community stakeholders.

3. Four fundamental service ideas: This will be a 1 hour and 45-minute session that will include lunch for the participants. Administrators and teachers will collaborate on team activities to post or present in the final training session. This will allow other retreat participants to gather a list of community engagement ideas to use in their buildings. The ideas will focus on partnering with community leaders.

4. Team effort: This will be a 60-minute session where attendance teams will present their idea from Session 4 to engage community partners. Retreat participants will have time to ask questions and the attendance teams can adjust their ideas according to feedback from the audience. All participants will leave with a chronic attendance package containing a list of resources to improve attendance, list of community engagement ideas, and parting gifts from the retreat.

Day 2 of the retreat will conclude with all retreat participants in the main ballroom for presentations. The facilitators will have chosen specific groups of participants to present an overview of their sessions and activities learned in the breakout sessions. Retreat host and coordinator will have placed pardon gift bags on the tables for all retreat participants. The gift bags will include journals and pens. Each participant will be asked to complete a final survey on the overall professional development retreat. The retreat participants will be able to visit a vendor fair set up near the main ballroom where they can purchase resource materials in the form of books, activity program and sign up for future conferences and retreats.

Purpose and Goals

The goals of the professional development program that teachers and administrators will learn to design and implement a service-learning projects to reduce chronic absenteeism, teachers and administrators will understand how service-learning projects can affect family engagement, and the staff will become a part of an ongoing PLC for chronic absenteeism. The professional development is intended to increase the teacher and administrator knowledge or skill set. The professional development will specifically focus on reducing chronic absenteeism across the district, include a measurable component, and reveal strategies that will allow the schools and district to strengthen relationships and engage families.

Learning Outcomes and Targeted Audience

The target audience for the professional development program is an urban school district in a southeastern state. Professional development participants should be able to do

the following upon the completion of the program:

- Explain the benefits of service-learning projects on all grade levels in chronic absenteeism.

- Utilize best practice strategies in service-learning projects in chronic absenteeism.

- Understand the relationship between service learning and family engagement to reduce chronic absenteeism.

- Design a service-learning project for chronic absenteeism with a group of teachers and administrators.

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Resources, Barriers, and Solutions

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The Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice Retreat is a professional development program for elementary, middle, and high school administrators and teachers. The retreat requires, technology (computers, projectors, internet access) and supplies. All the resources mention will be available for the retreat participants.

Resources

Technology. Technology devices requested by the facilitators will be placed in each room prior to the start of the retreat. The request includes laptops, projectors, and internet access.

Supplies. Large wall poster paid, markers, tape, small note paper and other miscellaneous supplies will be available for retreat participants to collaborate in sessions and to present information to other retreat participants.

Educational credit. The participants in the district are expected to complete 12 hours of professional development credits per year. Day 1 of the professional development retreat will start at 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Day 2 will begin at 8:30 a.m. and conclude at 2:00 p.m. The retreat participants will have the opportunity to earn 12 hours of professional development credit.

Barriers

Potential barriers for the professional service-learning program may come in the form of insufficient funds being available for the administrators to send staff members. The cost of the event will be partially the responsibility of the building administrators and the Department of Learning and Curriculum located at the central office. Administrators will pay for their attendance teams and the Department of Learning and Curriculum will be asked to pay for the event venue, including breakfast, lunch, and a snack for all participants. The 2-day retreat will be held offsite at a nearby convention center. Another barrier may be timing. The retreat will be scheduled for the second week of August 2021. This will be during the new hire training and returning teachers checking in to their home schools. The retreat will take place towards the end of the week after most of the staff has settled into their prospective buildings. Because the retreat may include newly hired teachers and administrators, there may be some issues with transportation and familiarity with the location of the retreat. A school bus will pick of participants from the high schools that will include the feeder schools.

Solutions

Another way to eliminate some of the barriers is to advertise the retreat to

teachers and administrators who will be participants early enough for them to make the

necessary arrangements to attend the retreat. A meeting during the summer to gain

perspective from the administrators on specific times, dates and needs of the participants

will reduce several barriers for the retreat.

Implementation

A formal proposal will be made to the stakeholders and staff at the fall leadership

retreat. At this time, I will ask permission to hold the retreat during the second week of

August which is during training sessions for new hires and returning teachers. Once the

program has been approved by the district superintendent. I will begin the planning stage

for the professional development program. Planning will include preparing learning

materials for the breakout sessions, reserving the venue for the retreat, gathering supplies

and reaching out to additional facilitators. The registration process will take place shortly

after the venue has been secured.

Roles and Responsibilities

As the designer of the professional development program for chronic absenteeism

service-learning retreat, I will be a facilitator. My responsibilities will be to coordinate

the breakout sessions, gather available resources, organize the retreat schedule, and

connect with other facilitators and for the development program. I will create a team to

assist with the preparations of the retreat, but I will oversee the entire retreat.

Administrators of the schools will be responsible for identifying their attendance teams

and providing funding for each team member to cover breakfast, lunch, and a snack.

Central office will be responsible for providing funding for the retreat facility. The event

facility will be responsible for preparing the meals for the participants and ensuring a safe environment for all participants.

Project Evaluation Plan

A summative survey will be used to collect data to be used as a tool to evaluate the professional development program (see Appendix A). Participants will be asked to complete a formative survey evaluation form after each breakout session. Both survey's (formative and summative) will be used to obtain feedback from the participants about the breakout sessions and retreat. The data collected will be used to make improvements to the retreat for the future. The facility will receive a copy of the data so they can make improvements for future retreats hosted in venue.

Project Implications

The chronic absenteeism professional development retreat is designed to assist teachers and administrators with effective learning through hands on experiences in reducing chronic absenteeism, to teach both teachers and administrators how to design effective service-learning projects, and to support engagement with community partners through best practice strategies. My project provides opportunities for teachers and administrators to implement best practice strategies for engagement and the reduction of chronic absenteeism. The professional development program offers administrators a unique way to incorporate learning activities for collaboration between students, parents, and staff.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

I developed this project to assist elementary, middle, and high school teachers and administrators collaborate in a PLC to address the issue of chronic absenteeism. This project took the form of a professional development program that will allow staff members to collaborate and design effective service-learning projects on chronic absenteeism. I developed a 2-day professional development retreat based on the findings of this research study. The purpose of the project is to learn how to engage the students and families with effective research-based strategies through building relationships to reduce chronic absenteeism. The service project developed would be used in the district throughout the year.

In this section, I present my reflections and the conclusions of my project. The strengths and limitations are explained and recommendations for alternative approaches are provided. Finally, I discuss my scholarship, professional development, and leadership; the implications of the study for social change; and recommendations for the future.

Strengths

The service-learning professional development project embodies several strengths. First, the professional development program is a 2-day retreat held at a remote location away from the normal meeting locations in the district. The benefit of having the retreat at this location is that it offers an impartial setting for teachers and administrators to work in a PLC and collaborate to design and effective professional project to reduce

chronic absenteeism. Each day of the retreat, the breakout sessions and service-learning

activities will focus on the goal of building relationships and engaging families. The

location will be a convention center within 10 to 15 miles of the district. This location is

close to the district, yet far enough to remove the participants from their everyday

environments. This will benefit the district by providing the participants with a safe and

conducive environment that will be cost effective to the district and allow the participants

to relax and engage in the training.

The second benefit of the 2-day professional development retreat program is that

it offers teachers and administrators the opportunity to utilize research-based strategies to

produce an effective plan for reducing chronic absenteeism. Teachers and administrators

will be introduced to innovative ways to engage students and families through building

relationships using hands-on activities. At the end of each day, the participants will have

a chance to reflect on and discuss their learning experiences.

The final benefit is time. I will design research-based strategies to be presented in

the 2-day retreat with additional take-away information to be utilized throughout the year.

This will require the PLCs to meet during the school year and continue planning and

implementing ideas. The additional planning sessions will allow the participants to

communicate changes in attendance averages and stay abreast and share new information

to help improve student attendance.

Limitations

The professional development retreat has limitations. The first limitation is

location. Despite the advantage of removing the participants from a familiar environment,

an offsite location will incur cost. The district will have to plan accordingly to ensure the venue cost is covered. They will also have to provide transportation for those who are new to the area, which will also add an additional cost for transportation drivers.

The second limitation for the retreat will be the time of implementation. There is an ideal time for the retreat due to scheduling, however, and the professional development retreat will be held during the second week of August which is when the new hires and returning teachers are scheduled to enter the buildings. Therefore, the retreat will be presented over the course of 2 days, and the process of the PLC service-learning groups will be ongoing. Finding other specific days to have the retreat that do not interfere with other district trainings may be challenging, so there will have to be a review of the districts schedule as soon as it is published to make the best decisions on when to hold the professional development retreat.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The purpose of the Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Practice Retreat as a professional development program is for administrators and teachers to collaborate to design effective service-learning projects to reduce chronic absenteeism across the district. An alternative approach to my project could be to have each high school host a professional development day and include their feeder schools in the professional development sessions. Another approach to implement the professional development program would be to create web sessions to be placed on the district website. The sessions would give administrators and teachers the opportunity to complete the sessions by departments and receive professional development credits towards the district

requirements. The alternative approaches could allow the professional development information to be accessed by more administrators and teachers in a timely manner.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

Throughout the process of completing my doctoral research, I have learned to develop a doctoral study using research-based evidence and scholarly literature. I have been able to define a problem, develop an argument, write a proposal, and collect and analyze qualitative data. By completing this study, I have become more aware of mitigating researcher biases on the perceptions of chronic absenteeism and including them in my writing. I have also become more detail oriented and understand the need to expound on ideas. This journey has allowed me to see the importance of including all stakeholders in my processes.

Project Development

By developing a professional development project, I have studied how to address a local issue and design a best practice-guided program for administrators and teachers. As a change agent, the data collected in this study served as a guide for me to create a unique project and professional development program that has provided a forum for administrators and teachers to learn, collaborate, and practice in a PLC with the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism.

Developing this study has helped me to understand how to address a research problem objectively to create and implement a professional development based on research findings. I have gained enormous knowledge and valuable skills in conducting a

research study and have learned how to develop and implement a professional development research program from start to finish. Because of the opportunity and my determination to complete this project study, I can now design professional development programs that introduce best practices to allow administrators and teachers to collaborate and engage the community to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Leadership and Change

I have been an educator for the past 14 years and an integral part of the district's improvement process. I strive to assist in making effective decisions to better the district. The doctoral study has taken my leadership skills to the next level because I have learned to utilize research to bring about change needed in an educational setting. Additionally, my plan to implement my professional development project will ensure administrators and teachers work together to implement change throughout the district with effective strategies as well as equip the staff with the tools needed to be effective agents of change for the students and families in the district.

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Reflection on the Importance of the Work

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The collaboration of administrators and teachers working in a PLC to improve the needs of students can bring about a positive social change in classrooms across the district. Designing this project provided me with the opportunity to indulge in research to positively affect staff members and the community. The staff participants in the 2-day service-learning retreat will be able to use what they have learned and will be able to share research-based strategies and resources with other administrators and teachers in the district. This project is significant because it focuses on service learning in PLCs to

design effective programs to reduce chronic absenteeism, which will potentially affect social change. My project could potentially influence social change by encouraging administrators and teachers to engage in shared decision-making and work together on goals and objectives to reduce chronic absenteeism, which could also extend to academic core areas such as Math, Science and Social Studies.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

The findings and conclusions of this study will provide useful information for administrators and teachers to better understand the effect of participating in service-learning professional development projects. My project may enhance and promote shared learning, encourage collaboration between administrators and teachers, and motivate students to attend school daily. Researchers have concluded that staff working in PLCs improves research practices (Avalos-Bevan & Bascopé, 2017; Colwell et al., 2014; Guss, Norris, Horm, Monroe, & Wolfe, 2013; Han, 2014; Muñoz & Branham, 2016; Stewart, 2014). The valuable information obtained through a series of learning sessions may help administrators and teachers make informed decisions about implementing service learning and creating solutions to improve chronic absenteeism throughout the district.

Applications

PLCs are an effective means of building a culture of collaboration for administrators and teachers to transform practices (Deneroff, 2013; DuFour, 2004; Jordan & Miller, 2017; McLester, 2012; Thessin, 2015). This professional development project may provide innovative ideas for administrators and teachers to make significant changes

in improving chronic absenteeism. The target audience for this research study was administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders. The findings of the current study encourage the use of professional development, in the form of PLCs, and includes best practice strategies for designing an effective, service-learning project for chronic absenteeism. One of my professional goals was to encourage social change through implementing best practice strategies to reduce chronic absenteeism throughout the district.

Directions for Future Research

The recent coronavirus pandemic led to my recommendation for future research. In a future study, researchers could implement a course-embedded, service-learning project in virtual attendance over a semester or full school year. The purpose of the study would be to examine whether a course-embedded, service-learning project would influence student attendance, and the data from such a study could yield valuable insights into planning for future pandemics that would affect student attendance.

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Conclusion

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The purpose of this project study was to investigate the perceptions of Grades K–12 teachers and administrators about the causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district and their view of the effectiveness of methods used to reduce it. The study was designed to encourage collaboration between administrators, teachers, and community stakeholders. The research-based strategies that teachers and administrators will learn in the service-learning PLCs will be used to engage students and families to reduce chronic absenteeism throughout the district.

The findings from this study indicated that professional development programs in the form of service-learning PLCs would, when implemented correctly, assist in reducing chronic absenteeism in the district. The findings suggest that elementary, middle, and high school students would benefit from best practice strategies taught in the service-learning environment and would lead to a positive outcome in reducing chronic absenteeism across the district.

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Appendix A: The Project

Service-Learning Professional Development
Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practices

Participants will:

➢ Design and implement service-learning project for chronic absenteeism
➢ Understand the relationship between service-learning and family engagement to reduce chronic absenteeism.

➢ Become a part of an ongoing professional

Based on the research study: "Using Student Engagement and Re-engagement to Reduce Chronic School Absenteeism"

Day 1 Breakout Sessions
-Building a Service-Learning Community
-The Effect of Service-Learning participation on Chronic Absenteeism
-Building relationships with service-learning projects to reduce Chronic Absenteeism
-Strengthening collaboration with community partners to reduce Chronic Absenteeism
-Share-A-Lot

Day 2 Breakout Sessions
-Collecting and Organizing data for service-learning teams
-Creating Service-Learning activities to encourage community engagement
-Four Fundamental Service Ideas
-Team Show and Tell
-Chronic Absenteeism Resource Vendor Fair

Service-Learning Professional Development for Chronic Absenteeism Retreat for Elementary, Middle and High Schools	
Purpose	The purpose of the professional development is to provide the teachers and administrators in elementary, middle, and high schools with the tools to decrease the number of students with chronic absenteeism.
Goal	The goal of the professional development program is to design and implement a service-learning projects to reduce chronic absenteeism. teachers and administrators will understand how service-learning projects can affect family engagement, and the staff will become a part of an ongoing PLC for chronic absenteeism. The professional development is intended to increase the teachers and administrator's knowledge or skill set. The professional development will specifically focus on reducing chronic absenteeism across the district, include a measurable component, and reveal strategies that will allow the schools and district to strengthen relationships and engage families.
Learning Outcomes	Upon Completion of the Service-Learning for Chronic Absenteeism participants will be able to: 1. Explain the benefits of service-learning on all grade levels 2. Understand the relationship between service-learning and family engagement to reduce chronic absenteeism. 3. Design a service-learning project for chronic absenteeism.
Target Audience	The target audience for the professional development program is an urban school district in a southeastern state including Elementary, Middle and High school teachers and administrators.
Timeline	2 days

Day 1 Service-Learning Retreat Breakout Schedule

Breakout Session	Time	Details	Materials
Registration/ Opening	8:00 am- 8:45 am (45 mins)	Sign in Pick up badges and agenda folders	Bagels, muffins, juice, water, fruit,
Session 1: Building a Service-Learning Community	9:00 am- 10:00 am (60 mins)	Presentation of building a Service-learning community in schools	Projector and screen, wall poster paper, markers
Session 2: The Effect of Service-Learning participation on Chronic Absenteeism	10:10 am- 11:10 am (60 mins)	Discussion and research based interactive activities	Projector and screen, wall poster paper, markers
Lunch Break:	11:15 am – 12:15 am (60 mins)	Self-Made Salads Variety of meats, cheeses, vegetables tea, lemonade	Snacks for later Water Fruit Trail mix packets
Session 3: Building relationships with service-learning projects to reduce Chronic Absenteeism	12:20 pm- 1:20 pm (60 mins)	Discussions and research based interactive activities	Projector and screen, wall poster paper, markers
Session 4: Strengthening collaboration with community partners to reduce Chronic Absenteeism	1:25 pm- 2:25 pm (60 mins)	Team building activities to form effective partnerships	Projector and screen, wall poster paper, markers Phone directory
Conclusion: Share -A -Lot	2:30 pm- 3:00 pm (30 mins)	Participants reflecting on today's sessions	Note pads and pens on tables to take notes and small prizes

Day 2 Service-Learning Retreat Breakout Schedule

Breakout Session	Time	Description	Materials
Continental Breakfast/Check in	8:30am-9:00 am (30 mins)	Participants meet regroup for the day	Note pads and pens on table
Session 1: Collecting and Organizing data for service-learning teams	9:05 am-10:05 am (60 mins)	Focus on what data to review in attendance teams	Attendance data handouts provided by facilitator, wall note pads, markers
Session 2: Creating Service-Learning to raise student awareness of attendance	10:10 am-11:10 am (60 mins)	Discussion and interactive activities to encourage student attendance	Attendance worksheet activity, Attendance Video, wall note pads, markers
Session 3: Four Fundamental Service Ideas	11:15 am-1:00 pm (1hr 45 mins) *Working Lunch*	Four service ideas engage community partners, to be presented in the final training session	Box lunches and drinks on tables, wall note pads, markers, Service Idea handouts
Session 4: Team Show and Tell	1:05 pm-2:00 pm (55 mins)	School attendance teams volunteer to present a research base strategy	Parting gifts on tables, (journals, pens,)
Conclusion: A Sneak Peak-Resource Vendor Fair	2:00 pm-4:00 pm (2 hours)	Participants visit vendors	Vendors with best practice resources, books, programs, pamphlets

Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice
Service-Learning Retreat Day 1 Breakout Sessions/Resources

Continental Breakfast/Ready to Learn
Continental breakfast will be available for retreat participants from 8:30am until 9:00 am. Participants can eat while the retreat coordinator reviews any updates for the day and addresses any concerns.

Session 1: Building a Service-Learning Community
This breakout session will be a 60-minute presentation of research-based findings on service-learning projects in elementary, middle and highs schools. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts which will include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources. **Resource:** (Lampi et al., 2015). Connecting practice and research.

Session 2: The Effect of Service-Learning participation
This session will be a 60-minute session where the participants will discuss national trends and research on school attendance, as well as state and local strategies for reducing chronic absence and the effect of participating in a service-learning project. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts on which will include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources to guide them in building quality service-learning teams. **Resource:** (Thessin, 2015). Learning from one urban school district.

Session 3: Building relationships with service-learning projects
This session will be a 60-minute session examining how to build relationships to reduce chronic absenteeism through service-learning. Administrators and teachers will explore the benefits of working together to reach a common goal. The administrators and teachers will receive handouts on which will include examples of service-learning projects on student attendance and links to resources. **Resource:** (Stewart, 2014). Transforming professional development to professional learning.

Session 4: Strengthening collaboration with community partners
This session will be a 60-minute session that will teach teachers and administrators how to engage community partners to achieve district goals. The session will consist of activities in which teachers and administrators will have to collaborate on ideas to bring additional stakeholders into the fold. **Resource:** (Liu & Loeb, 2017). Engaging teachers.

Conclusion: Share -A -Lot
This session will be a 30-minute session that will allow retreat participants to share what they have learned and how they will apply the knowledge to making social change in the district.

Develop Staff Capacity to Adopt Effective Attendance Practice
Service-Learning Retreat Day 2 Breakout Sessions/Resources

Continental Breakfast/Ready to Learn
Continental breakfast will be available for retreat participants from 8:30am until 9:00 am. Participants can eat while the retreat coordinator reviews any updates for the day and addresses any concerns.

Session 1: Collecting and Organizing data for service-learning teams
This session will be a 60-minute session on collecting, analyzing, and organizing data for service-learning projects. The purpose of the session is to collect and organize relevant attendance data for service-learning projects. The session will introduce administrators and teachers to sample service-learning projects. Resources: (Chang, Bauer, & Byrnes, 2018). Data matters

Session2: Creating Service-Learning to raise student awareness of attendance.
This session will be a 60-minute session on creating interactive activities to engage the students and community. The participants will receive a suggested activity to encourage student awareness of attendance. They will complete an attendance activity that can be tailored to the students in their buildings. The activity may be adjusted to include parents and other community stakeholders. **Resources:** (Biag & Castrechini, 2016). Coordinated strategies to help the whole child

Session 3: Four Fundamental Service Ideas
This session will be a one hour and forty-five-minute session that will include lunch for the participants. Administrators and teachers will collaborate on team activities to post or present in the final training session. This will allow other retreat participants to gather a list of community engagement ideas to use in their buildings. The ideas will focus on partnering with communities' leaders. **Resources:** Hord (2009). Professional learning communities.

Session 4: Team Show and Tell
This will be a 55-minute session where Attendance Teams will present their idea from session four to engage community partners. Retreat participants will have time to ask questions and the attendance teams can adjust their ideas according to feedback from the audience. All participants will leave with a Chronic Attendance Package containing a list of resources to improve attendance, list of community engagement ideas and parting gifts from the retreat.

Conclusion: A Sneak Peak, Resource Vendor Fair
This will be a two-hour optional session where retreat participants can purchase items such as books to assist with reducing chronic absenteeism in their buildings, sign up for additional trainings, and talk with experts in the field on the subject.
The Service-learning Retreat End of Sessions Evaluation

Your feedback is important. Please fill out the following survey for each breakout session.

Name of session _____

PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS.

The facilitator demonstrated sufficient content knowledge on the subject matter.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The session was organized a relevant.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The session enhanced my understanding of the subject.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The material presented was user friendly and can be used on all grade levels.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

How will you use the information obtained in your school building?

What would you add or remove from the session?

Would you be interested in a follow-up retreat session?

Service-Learning Retreat Summative Evaluation

Thank you for attending the Service-Learning. Your feedback is important. Please complete the following survey based on the two-day retreat.
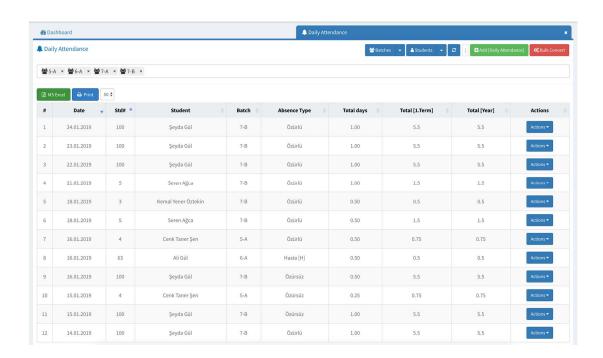
PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ITEMS.

Was the retreat well organized?				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The retreat was relevant and easy to follow.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The physical environment was conducive to the learning environment				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a result of attending the retreat I have a better understanding of best practice ideas for reducing chronic absenteeism.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a result of attending the retreat I have a better understanding of how to design an effective service-learning project.				
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Please describe what part of the workshop was most valuable and what suggestions you may have for future retreats.

DAY 2 SERVICE-LEARNING WORKSHEET ACTIVITY
Creating Service-Learning to raise student awareness of attendance

Improving Attendance and Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Activities for teachers and administrators to use in classroom or training sessions.

Attendance Activities	Session 1
Aims: • To raise student awareness about the importance of attending school daily. • To examine dislikes/and likes of school with students	
Outcomes: • Student will understand the importance of daily school attendance • Students will acknowledge what they dislike/ and like about school.	
Starter Activity (5 minutes)	Issue Worksheet to students: *Days Out vs. Days In* Allow students 5-minutes to complete the worksheet
Development Activities	In groups, tell students to share with each other the two things that they really like about school and why that is (seeing friends, lunches, lessons they like, etc.) Tell students that you will take feedback from groups about the things which pupils really like about schools. In groups, tell pupils to share with each other the two things that they really dislike about school and why that is (lunches, lessons they do not like, the fact they have to get up early etc.). Tell students that you will take feedback from groups about the things which pupils really dislike about schools. In groups, ask pupils to think of one thing they could do to feel better about coming to school every day (obviously school attendance is compulsory, so the suggestions must be reasonable). Tell pupils you will take feedback from groups about suggestions for things to do to make pupils feel better about coming to school.
Plenary	Ask students to identify how many days they have missed so from school so far. Ask students to figure out what the percentage of time they have missed.

Day 2 Attendance Worksheet Activity Days Out vs. Days In

A year has 365 days, 52 weeks, and 12 months. A school year has 195 days, 39 weeks, and 6 terms. Five days in each school years are training days for teachers (= INSET days) Pupils attend school therefore for 190 days. A school day is divided into two sessions. A pupil therefore should attend school for 380 sessions.

- One day off per school year means that a pupil has about 99.5% attendance.
- Ten days off per school year means that a pupil has about 94.7% attendance.
- Twenty days off per school year means that a pupil has about 90% attendance
- 90% attendance means 4 whole weeks off school.
- 90% attendance in Years 7 – 11 means ½ a year off school.
- 17 days off school every year means that you will probably obtain a whole grade lower in your exams than you are capable of.

Work out what percentage or how many days off the following people have:

		=% attendance
1	Keri has missed 12 days from school	
2	Parker has missed 7 days of school	
3	Kimberlin has missed 32 days of school	
4	Jeff has missed 10.5 days of school	
		=days missed from school
6	Kate's attendance is 90%	
7	Levi's attendance is 25%	
8	Sara's attendance is 74%	
9	Peter's attendance is 82%	

Attendance Activities	Session 2
Aims: • To raise student awareness about their individual attendance • To explore with students' appropriate targets for their own attendance.	
Outcomes: • Students will know where their current level of attendance stands • Students will acknowledge what their target attendance should be • Students will identify some action points to improve their attendance	

Starter Activity (5 minutes)	Provide students with a copy of their own attendance records. Have student to highlight all the days they have currently missed. This will give them a visual of how many days they have missed.
Development Activities	Provide students with a blank copy of the Attendance Plan. Place them in groups of 4 or less and have them to discuss what they do not like about school. Ask students to offer suggestions to each other on how they can overcome their dislikes about school. Have students complete their Attendance Action Plans to revisit in 5 weeks.
Plenary	Have students reveal what their attendance % is and state one way they can improve their attendance.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ATTENDANCE ACTION PLAN

NAME		DATE	
Current % attendance	Number of days lost	Attendance Target	
		To be achieved on	
Reasons for absences	**1.** **2.**		
What I dislike about school.	**1.** **2.**		
What I can do to improve my attendance.	**1.** **2.**		
The kind of help I need to reach my goal.	**1.** **2.**		
Student Signature			
Teacher/Facilitator Signature			

Attendance Activities	Session 3
Aims: • To get students to express the importance of attendance through art	
Outcomes: • Students will create an attendance poster, showing the importance of attendance • Posters will be presented at the PTA and School Board Meetings	
Starter Activity (5 minutes)	Review forms of publicity that highlight school attendance (tv ads, newspapers, radio). Meet with the small groups to see to see which media outlet catches their eyes.
Development Activities	Students design a poster on school attendance. Remind the students to think about why school is important and incorporate that into their poster. Encourage the students to be creative.
Plenary	Ask students to show their poster and explain why they chose that design.

EDUCATION IS A MUST

Wake Up !

BE THERE

ON TIME

EVERYDAY

ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS

Attendance Activities	Session 4 (done 5 weeks after session 2)
Aims: - Review with students their previous attendance level - Examine their current attendance level - Compare the difference	

Outcomes: - Students will know what their current attendance level - Students will be able to explain if their targets were/not met - Students will revisit targets and make necessary adjustments to plan	
Starter Activity (5 minutes)	Provide students with a copy of their own attendance records. Have student to highlight all the days they have currently missed. This will give them a visual of how many days they have missed.
Development Activities	Provide students with a blank copy of the Attendance Plan. Place them in groups of 4 or less and have them to discuss what they do not like about school. Ask students to offer suggestions to each other on how they can overcome their dislikes about school. Have students complete their Attendance Action Plans to revisit in 5 weeks.
Plenary	Ask students to show their poster and explain why they chose that design.

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT ATTENDANCE ACTION PLAN

NAME			DATE	
Current % attendance	Number of days lost		Attendance Target	
			To be achieved on	

Reasons for absences	1. 2.
What I dislike about school.	1. 2.
What I can do to improve my attendance.	1. 2.
The kind of help do I need to reach my goal	1. 2.
Student Signature	
Teacher/Facilitator Signature	

Service-Learning Professional Development for Chronic Absenteeism Retreat for Elementary, Middle and High Schools

A list of service-learning projects on chronic absenteeism are listed on this page. Links to useful service-learning websites are listed. The service-learning projects are considered STEM and cross curricular.

SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT IDEAS

PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT – Have students to develop a product that can be sold on media sites to help improve their attendance.

SCHOOL CAMPAIGN CONTEST-Create an attendance campaign to have students pledge their allegiance to improve their school attendance to be used across the district to encourage daily school attendance. Offering a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd prize.

PAINT NIGHT FOR ALL- Invite parents and students out for paint night and include an attendance component to enlighten the parents of the school goals and current level of attendance, and how they can help make those improvements.

MUSIC VIDEO- Create a music video about school attendance. Include images of the students in school activities, school building, business partners in the community and have it shown during grade level assembles, PTA meetings and staff meetings.

Service-Learning Project Links
http://www.parentactionnet.org/.
http://www.parentstogether.org
http://abriendopuertasopeningdoors.org/index.php
https://www.attendanceworks.org/resources/data-tools/calculating-chronic-absence/

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Administrators and Teachers

The interview questions have been developed for all three school levels in the district, elementary, middle, and high school participants. The participants were administrators and teachers. All interviews were voluntary and were scheduled at a mutually convenient time for all parties involved with the first two weeks of the study. Participants and their responses were kept confidential and the information shared will be the result of common themes that emerge from the interview process.

The interview questions are aligned with the project study research questions related to the administrators and teachers' perceptions on the student engagement and its connection to chronic absenteeism.

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local district and the methods needed to reduce it?

2. What are the perceptions of administrators regarding the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism in the local school district and the methods needed to reduce it?

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date of Interview: _____

*Preliminary Script: "This is Janet Dennis. Today is [day and date]. It is _____
o'clock, and I am here in [location]with [interviewee name], the [title] at [institution].
We'll be discussing student attendance."*

1. Please start by telling me why you became a teacher? How long have you been a teacher?

2. Do you believe that student attendance is an immediate concern for your school? Prompt: Can you elaborate on your answer? Can you provide examples?

3. Explain the attendance procedures in your building.

4. How do you address students who have excessive absences in your class? Are the students allowed to make up the work? Prompt: Can you explain your answer?

5. How effective do you find the school's attendance policy to be? Prompt: How would you improve the policy?

6. What do you believe keeps your students from attending school/class daily?

7. What are some ways your school has attempted to engage students who do not attend school daily?

8. If given the opportunity to address students and parents, what message would you communicate about the importance of attending school/class daily?

9. How often does the school send out communications to parents and students pertaining to student attendance?

10. Where do you think students are when they are not in school/class?

11. Based on your years of experience, why do you think it's important for students to be in school/class daily?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share that would benefit improving student attendance?

Exit Script: *"Thank you for participating in this interview, the information you have provided has been very helpful and informative."*

Interview Protocol for Administrators

Research Questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding the underlying causes of
   chronic absenteeism in the local district and the methods needed to reduce it?

2. What are the perceptions of administrators regarding the underlying causes of
   chronic absenteeism in the local school district and the methods needed to
   reduce it?

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date of Interview: _____

*Preliminary Script: "This is Janet Dennis. Today is [day and date]. It is _____
o'clock, and I am here in [location] with [interviewee name], the [title] at [institution].
We'll be discussing student attendance."*

1. Please start by telling me about your career. What led you to become an
   administrator?

2. Do you believe that there is an attendance issue in your building? Prompt: Please
   explain your answer.

3. How would you compare student attendance this year to the past two years in
   your building?

4. Give me your opinion on the effectiveness of your school's attendance policy. Is
   it the same as last year and is it working?

5. How often does the school send out communications to parents and students
   pertaining to student attendance?

6. Where do you think students are when they are not in school/class?

7. Based on your years of experience, why do you think it is important for students
   to be in school/class daily?

8. What are the greatest challenges your school faces in getting students to school
   daily?

9. As the building administrator, what have you done to improve attendance? How do you engage your students and parents?

10. What kind of message do you think your teachers are sending to students about the importance of attendance? Prompt: Can you give examples of how your teachers contact the parents?

11. Describe what you think the relationship is between student absenteeism and teacher absenteeism?

12. Based on your experience, why do you believe it is important for students to be in school/class daily?

13. Is there anything else you would like to share that would benefit improving student attendance?

Exit Script: *"Thank you for participating in this interview, the information you have provided has been very helpful and informative."*