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Administrator Perspectives on Decreasing the Chronic Absenteeism Rate of Middle School Students With Disabilities

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Leslie Blaine Simerly

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Walden University

2021

Abstract

Administrator Perspectives on Decreasing the Chronic Absenteeism Rate of Middle School

Students With Disabilities

by

Leslie Blaine Simerly

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

Although school administrators have tried to find interventions for students with varying amounts of absenteeism, students with disabilities (SWD) continue to be a subgroup of students who struggle with chronic absenteeism. The purpose of this study was to determine local administrators' perspectives on why SWD are more prone to chronic absenteeism, what interventions have worked, and potential barriers to reducing chronic absenteeism. The conceptual framework was Fullan's change leadership, which views administrators as lead advocates for change in schools. There were three research questions which focused on administrator perceptions for reasons of chronic absenteeism of SWD, the interventions they used /or are currently using to reduce chronic absenteeism of SWD, and any perceived barriers they may have in reducing such chronic absenteeism. A basic qualitative study was conducted using semistructured interviews with all six middle school principals in the focused district. The interviews were coded using Saldaña's suggested open, axial, and selective coding system. The interviews revealed that the administrators needed help analyzing and choosing appropriate data, using multitiered systems of support, a plan for parent involvement/empowerment, and a plan for implementing social-emotional learning. A 3-day professional development was created to address those needs; the professional development consists of training on a data-driven multitiered system of support that includes both a parent involvement/empowerment plan and a social-emotional learning plan. Implementation of this system may positively affect social change by increasing the attendance and academic success of students.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my family, my special education teachers, and all of the students of my school. My wife has supported my long hours on this project and worked to help our autistic son on her own during most of this process. My teachers have cheered me on and reminded me that we are all advocates of our students. With each student I see who struggles with chronic absenteeism, I am reminded that this research may make a difference in their educational outcomes.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Chronic absenteeism is a persistent problem in U.S. schools. The Tennessee Department of Education ([TDOE]2017) defines chronic absenteeism as having missed 10% or more school days regardless if the absences are excused or unexcused. According to Bauer et al., (2018) the Obama administration addressed the issue through the My Brother's Keeper Initiative. During this initiative, officials sent a letter to educational agencies and other immediate stakeholders to urge cross-sector strategies and convened a national summit concerning chronic absenteeism (Bauer et al., 2018). The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) allowed states to select chronic absenteeism as an accountability measure. Due to the availability of local data and the local need of reducing chronic absenteeism numbers, most states have chosen chronic absenteeism as an additional accountability measurement alongside academic achievement (Attendance Works, 2020).

In 2017, the state of Tennessee opted to use chronic absenteeism as an ongoing secondary measurement of accountability (TDOE, 2017). At that time, the subgroup of students with disabilities (SwD) had the highest rates of chronic absenteeism in the state; 20.7% of SwD were chronically absent in the study district. The local district leadership team assigned the task of reducing the overall chronic absenteeism rate at the beginning of the 2017-2018 school year to principals and assistant principals. At the beginning-of-the-year administrator meeting, the district's absenteeism advisor shared local and state statistics and tasked administrators with finding interventions that fit the multitiered systems of support (MTSS) model to address chronic absenteeism for the total population of students in the district. As described by TDOE

(2017), each school will be given an accountability score based on the attendance rate from A to F. If a school fails to meet adequate progress from one year to the next, sanctions can be enforced to include restructuring of schools, removal of government funding, or loss of accreditation (TDOE, 2017).

The issue of chronic absenteeism is found throughout the United States and in other countries as well. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) reported that 16% of all students missed 15 or more school days in the 2016-2017 school year. They also reported that about 16% of students missed more than 3 weeks of school in 2015-2016 school year. The authors of this report also stated that 22.5% of SwD were chronically absent as compared to 14.9% of the students without disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Since the beginning of this chronic absenteeism initiative, there has been mixed success in reducing the amount of chronic absenteeism for SwD in the local district that I studied. According to the TDOE website, as of the 2017-2018 school year, the subcategory of SwD was second in chronic absenteeism with 16%, while the subcategory of economically disadvantaged was 18.2% (TDOE, 2019a). Two of the middle schools in this district scored below this level at 8.3% and 9.4%, while the remaining four schools had 21.7%, 18.9%, 23%, and 16% of their SwD being chronically absent (TDOE, 2019b). The problem remains that although district school administrators have tried to find interventions for students with varying amounts of absenteeism, SwD continue to be a subgroup of students who struggle with chronic absenteeism. To address the practice problem, I examined the administrators' perspectives of why some SwD have a high rate of chronic absenteeism, interventions that they have used, and any perceived barriers to reducing the chronic absenteeism rate of those students.

Rationale

Chronic absenteeism is problematic to the student and their community. My school was labeled as “Targeted for Support and Improvement” for not showing progress in the past 2 years in the subcategory of SwD on the TNReady testing, which is our high-stakes testing device. During a meeting with the state-provided support team, the specialist stated that the number one way to increase those students’ scores was to reduce their level of chronic absenteeism. Students who are chronically absent have been found to struggle in academic progress and often feel alienated from other classmates and teachers due to the lack of social interaction (Gottfried, 2019). SwD tend to have higher drop-out rates than students without disabilities, and research has shown that students who are chronically absent have a higher chance of dropping out of school than students who regularly attend (Genao, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Researchers have also found that SwD are disproportionately given out-of-school suspension, and due to exclusionary discipline being included these students can have a higher rate of chronic absenteeism (National Center on Educational Outcomes [NCOE], 2018). Although the State of Tennessee Board of Education has now placed strict barriers against out-of-school suspension for all students from Grades 7 through 12, administrators still have the choice to suspend students in K-6 with district administration approval. The district’s career and technology education coordinator stated that local businesses often find that if they have employees who have poor attendance in school that same poor attendance follows them into their future jobs.

Both state education and district administrators have charged local principals with the task of reducing chronic absenteeism in their schools. Although some principals seem to have

discovered interventions to lower the chronic absenteeism rate of SwD, others have had less success as they scored above the county and state in that subcategory (TDOE, 2019b). Other researchers like Bartanen (2020) have found a positive correlation between high levels of principal overall effectiveness and reducing chronic absenteeism. Bartanen described the idea of principal effectiveness as being able to properly communicate with parents, develop curriculum with teachers, and empower teachers to make evidence-based decisions. Bartanen stated that more research needs to be conducted to determine what these effective principals are doing to lower the chronic absenteeism rate. Leaders in other states have conducted studies to determine how parent communication, collaboration among outside stakeholders, and school culture affect the chronic absenteeism rate (J. Childs & Grooms, 2018). Childs and Grooms (2018) stated that educators have found success by focusing in on those areas. Most school system administrators consider the categories of communication, collaboration, and school culture as being either directly or indirectly implemented by school-level administration (Bartanen, 2020).

The purpose of this study was to determine local administrators' perspectives on why SwD are more prone to chronic absenteeism than their typical classmates. I questioned participating administrators regarding what interventions they are using to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD. I also asked participants what potential barriers exist in lowering the chronic absenteeism rates of those students. Obtaining these perspectives allowed me to develop a resource targeted to middle school administrators and featuring interventions they can use to reduce chronic absenteeism.

Definition of Terms

Change leadership: The ability of the leader to lead with moral purpose, understand the change process, improve relationships, create knowledge, share the learned knowledge with others, and build coherence (Fullan, 2002).

Chronic absenteeism: The missing of 10% or more of enrolled days by a student. This includes all absentee types: excused, unexcused, and out-of-school-suspension (TDOE, 2017).

Human capital: The human resources or the level of personal quality an individual brings to a school (Fullan, 2016).

Leading from the middle: A leadership style in which an organization discovers local problems and sets goals to solve these problems based on local needs and local resources (Fullan, 2015).

Social capital: "The level of quality and quantity of social interactions and relationships among people" (Fullan, 2016, p. 44).

Students with disabilities (SwD): According to the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (2004), a child who has been evaluated according to the practices defined in this act and has been found to have an intellectual disability, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, vision impairment, orthopedic impairment, emotional disturbance, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning disability, deaf-blindness disability, or multiple disabilities that need both special education and related services.

Systems leadership: A concept in which a leader leads outside of their local environment to provide collaboration among outside agencies within a system as a whole (Boylan, 2016).

Top-down leadership: A leadership style in which an organization receives initiatives from an outside agency to solve local, state, and national problems (Boylan, 2016).

Significance of the Study

Contributions to Education as a Whole

SwD experience high drop-out rates, are behind other students in skill development, and have a higher chance of being involved in exclusionary discipline while in school (Genao, 2015; NCEO, 2018; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These issues exist throughout the United States and in other countries as well (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Bartanen, 2020; Boylan, 2016; Genao, 2015; Hatton, 2018). Leaders have been successful in reducing chronic absenteeism of the general population of students through the use of communication, collaboration, and data collection and analysis (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Still, researchers are examining how administrators can directly or indirectly impact the chronic absenteeism rates of SwD (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Bartanen, 2020).

Contributions to Local Education

On the local level, the problem remains that some middle schools still are struggling with reducing the number of SwD who are chronically absent (TDOE, 2019b). Some principals in this district have shown moderate success in reducing the chronic

absenteeism of SwD by scoring slightly below the state average for chronically absent SwD. The other middle schools have shown less success and have remained at or above the state average (TDOE, 2019b). This study may provide insight into the differences in the perceptions of why this problem exists, interventions that may reduce chronic absenteeism, and potential barriers that may prevent the administrators from reducing the number of absences of SwD.

Research Questions

I developed the research questions (RQs) of this project study to both address the local problem and the purpose of this project study. The problem was the continuing chronic absenteeism of SwD. The purpose was to examine administrator perspectives on the issue of SwD who are chronically absent, possible interventions that will reduce chronic absenteeism, and any potential barriers to doing so. The RQs were

RQ1. What do administrators perceive to be the reasons for chronic absenteeism of SwD?

RQ2. What interventions have administrators used or are currently using to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD?

RQ3. What are the administrators' perceived barriers in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD?

Participants' responses to the first question may establish the moral purpose of being an advocate for SwD that Fullan (2002) said is necessary for the leader to have appropriate change

leadership. Responses to the second question may lead to the discovery of successful interventions that leaders of struggling schools could use to reduce chronic absenteeism. Responses to the final question may highlight barriers to reduce chronic absenteeism, which could lead to further investigation on how to prevent or reduce these barriers. The overall goal is to provide administrators with data-driven interventions and strategies for reducing potential barriers to address chronic absenteeism among SWD.

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

Fullan's Change Leadership

For the conceptual framework for this project study, I integrated the concept of change leadership and the utilitarian consequentialist approach. Fullan (2002) described change leadership as the ability for the leader to have moral purpose, understand the change process, improve relationships, create knowledge and share it with others, and build coherence. Fullan (2015) added that such leadership must be a local effort and be led from the middle instead of the traditional top-down methods. Fullan (2015) differentiated leading-from-the-middle from top-down leadership, by stating that school leaders who lead from the middle look at local problems of practice and develop a plan to solve those problems based on local resources and needs. Unlike top-down leadership where goals are initiated by agencies outside of the school, such as state, government, and district initiatives, administrators who lead from the middle solve local problems through a focus on the local school's needs and the school's resources with a school-initiated plan. Multiple researchers have found that principals' abilities to lead from the

middle help establish relationships with all stakeholders and drive sustainability of implemented programs (Cobb, 2014; Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015).

Utilitarian Consequentialist Approach

The utilitarian consequentialist approach is a modified change leadership model that stems from the seminal works of Lewin and Burns (Burns, 1978; Lewin, 1947). Burns (1978) stated that leaders who used this approach would place value on the consequences of their actions for the stakeholders not on the leader's intentions. Much like Fullan (2015), Burns and Lewin (1947) focused on the moral obligation of the leader to be a model to subordinates. Fullan stated that such moral values would be best served by investing in strong teachers to increase human capital, making powerful relationships to increase social capital, and sharing and collaborating with stakeholders to make decisions to increase the decisional capital. By applying Fullan's idea of professional capital to the utilitarian consequentialist approach, a leader would empower all stakeholders to share in the decision-making in order to provide the best goals for all stakeholders involved.

Although Fullan focused on the intentions of completing a goal, researchers who use the utilitarian consequentialist approach asserts that leaders would not be satisfied with the implementation process until consequences show the goal has been achieved. A follower of Fullan's change leadership would find success when the shared group has the same intentions. A leader who uses the utilitarian consequentialist approach would instill the desire to produce positive consequences in all of the stakeholders and would not find success until those

consequences are met. When examining a subject like chronic absenteeism, a leader would want to see positive consequences as a result of group intentions and effort.

Such a leader would also lead from the middle approach, as discussed in this subsection. By focusing on the results of implemented projects, a utilitarian consequentialist leader would use such results to amend the school's program (Burns, 1978). Fullan's (2015) lead-from-the-middle approach would view such analysis as being essential to tailoring the program and its results to meet the local school's individual needs.

Using Fullan (2015) and Burns (1978) as the conceptual framework allowed me to better answer the RQs of this project study. Both the perceptions of administrators as they concern chronically absent SwD and their perceived barriers in reducing the chronic absenteeism level of SwD were helpful in this regard and clarified the change leadership abilities and qualities that the administrators may possess. The success of the interventions that those administrators have chosen may show that by having positive consequences, those administrators have met their goals as a utilitarian consequentialist, as suggested by Burns (1978).

Literature Search Strategy

In congruence with the RQs of this project study, I focused on three areas for review. The first of the areas was focused on the perceptions of principals concerning special education. Second, I reviewed interventions that have been used for reducing chronic absenteeism. Finally, I examined potential barriers for reducing chronic absenteeism according to various studies. Although much of the previous research has focused on reducing the chronic absenteeism of all students, these three categories will provide a base of information on which my interviews may

expound on in the local setting concerning chronically absent SwD (Bauer et al., 2018; J. Childs & Grooms, 2018).

I completed searches using ERIC, Education Resource, Google Scholar, and various professional websites. Key words that were searched were *chronic absenteeism and special education, principals or administrators and special education, interventions and chronic absenteeism, and barriers and chronic absenteeism*. Selected articles were peer-reviewed and time relevant. Local data was obtained through the TDOE. Websites that were used for this research were those that were suggested by the TDOE as resources for administrators to use for purpose of reducing chronic absenteeism.

Principal Perspectives of Special Education

Although no specific articles concerning principal perspectives of chronic absenteeism rates of SwD were found, research has been conducted on principals' perspectives of special education as whole. Researchers have discussed in length what characteristics an administrator may possess in order to be considered an advocate for SwD (Cobb, 2014; Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Therefore, the focus of this portion of the literature review is on the previous research on principals' perspectives of special education. Four main themes emerged: principals must be effective leaders, build relationships with students, parents, teachers, and community stakeholders, gather and analyze data to make productive decisions on school goals and programs, and possess self-efficacy in dealing with issues that may affect SwD.

Effective Leader

As previously stated four themes emerged for the roles of principal advocate for special education. The first of these is an effective leader. Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested that an effective leader be one that knows the goals of their organization and can build coherence among all involved stakeholders. These leaders set the tone and expectations when implementing interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism (J. Childs & Grooms, 2018; Cobb, 2014; Fullan, 2016; Russell & Harms, 2016). As Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested the administrator must have buy-in as they are often called upon to initiate new programs. Such is the case of chronic absenteeism in Tennessee, as the TDOE has called upon administrators to initiate a plan to reduce chronic absenteeism through student/parent education via the established multitiered system of support (MTSS) framework (Attendance Works, 2020; TDOE, 2017).

Following Fullan's lead from the middle concept, an effective leader needs to be a change leader (Fullan, 2015; Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015). This type of leader sees a local need and presents it in a way to build support from his or her staff. The principal must build strong relationships with all of his or her staff, so when in buy in does not occur, he or she can gather all feedback and adjust the implementation process to meet the school's individual goals (Boylan, 2016; Fullan, 2002, 2015). Thus, the first relationship that a principal must build is the relationship between the staff and him or herself.

Relationships With Stakeholders

The second theme found in this literature review was the ability of principals to establish and maintain relationships between students and administrators, students and teachers, and parents/community stakeholders and administrators. As Bartanen (2020) and Fullan and Quinn (2016) suggested, principals have the ability to use the human capital that is available to them to establish a positive school culture. Schools that have these positive relationships have been found to have lower chronic absenteeism (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). When asked about the successes of the current district chronic absenteeism reduction program for this research, the district truancy officer commented that success has been found when administrators build relationships between teachers and students and strengthen relationships between parents and themselves (District Truancy Officer, personal correspondence, 2019).

Initiator of Data Collection and Analysis

Researchers have found that in order for leaders to make an impact on the chronic absenteeism rate, reasons for absenteeism must be explored (Conry & Richards, 2018; Havik et al., 2015) Such gathering of data will allow the principals to lead from the middle and produce interventions that are specific to the local need (Fullan, 2015). Several interventions, which will later be discussed, include the gathering of chronic absenteeism data, breaking data down into subcategories, and making a plan based on the findings of such data (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Gottfried, 2019). As Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) stated the principal begins the process of data gathering and such data is then analyzed in collaboration with teacher leaders, parents, and other community agencies. This would require administrators to understand how to gather such

data and how to analyze the data in order to form the required plans that the State of Tennessee has suggested for them to develop.

In order for the principal to lead from the middle, he or she must examine the data to find local areas of strengths and weaknesses (Fullan, 2015). He or she can examine when absences are occurring, what types of absences are occurring, and the potential reasons for such absences. When a principal shares this data analysis with both his or her staff and other stakeholders, he or she can inspire change (Fullan, 2002, 2015). Principals can use data to both initiate implementation and to provide feedback of the new program. (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). According to Fullan and Quinn (2016) the strength of this data lies at the core of the process of building coherence.

Principal Self-Efficacy

Without self-efficacy, an administrator could lose the ability to serve as an advocate for SwD. Research has been conducted to determine perceived strengths and areas of growth of principals in the area of special education (Roberts & Guerra Jr., 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020). Roberts and Guerra (2017) surveyed 84 principals in South Texas, while Sun and Xin (2020) surveyed 134 principals in an undisclosed Northeastern state in the United States. Roberts and Guerra (2017) focused on the legal, foundational, and contextual knowledge of principals. Sun and Xin (2020) focused on where principals gathered their knowledge about special education. Both studies included a qualitative aspect. Roberts and Guerra (2017) requested respondents to suggest areas of improvement in principal preparation programs, while Sun and Xin (2020) focused on available resources for program implementation and needed resources that could be built in principal preparation programs or local in-service.

Roberts and Guerra (2017) found that principals scored high in the areas of legal and foundational knowledge, but they scored low on contextual knowledge which included knowing how to create curriculum for SwD and how to differentiate programs to meet their individual needs. Sun and Xin (2020) found that 66.9% of 134 principals learned most their special education knowledge in district provided in-service, while 23.8% of those principals obtained such knowledge in principal preparation programs. Although the principals scored high in the perceptions of legal knowledge in the Roberts and Guerra study, when asked to comment on areas of need, the participants suggested more preparation in the areas of special education law, Section 504, and response to intervention. The respondents of the Sun and Xin (2020) study reported using local resources such as specialists, child study groups, and district in-services to help SwD but indicated that they lacked resources related to financial issues and scheduling conflicts due to time constraints.

While the principals in the Sun and Xin (2020) study suggested more content in special education laws, Section 504, and response to interventions, other research has suggested that principals perceive that they have the appropriate knowledge in these areas, but lack the ability to apply this information in creating and evaluating special education programs (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Templeton, 2017). A study of special education administrators showed that they too lack the proper training to provide and evaluate services for SwD (Luckner & Movahedazarhouli, 2019). Glowacki and Hackmann (2016) reported that principals who perceive themselves as not being experts in special education look to other professionals for information. This would suggest that principals may lack the support that is needed to make educated decisions in order to reduce problematic issues like chronic absenteeism of SwD.

These studies are particularly important to the issue of chronic absenteeism as perceptions of administrators may be built upon their principal preparation programs, local in-service programs, and on-the-job experience. Personal perceptions of their own abilities provided me with an insight as to how the principals meet or fail to meet the expectations of their roles as advocates for special education. As change leaders, these administrators would need to show confidence in the choice of interventions in their schools and use their special education knowledge to reduce any potential barriers that may prevent reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD.

Interventions for Chronic Absenteeism

As previously mentioned, the TDOE has suggested for principals to use a MTSS in addressing the issue of chronic absenteeism (TDOE, 2017). Like the MTSS that has been implemented for response to intervention and response to intervention-behavior, this MTSS model would consist of three focus tiers of intervention. Tier 1 would consist of interventions for all students. A student would be placed in Tier 2 when he or she misses 10% of the current school days. Tier 2 would include interventions for students who are considered at-risk for chronic absenteeism. Tier 3 would consist of interventions for students who have been labeled as being chronically absent (20% or more) and/or have not responded to the other tiers of intervention (Attendance Works, 2020). The choice of interventions has been left to the school administrators and district leaders to best meet the needs of individual schools and the students therein (TDOE, 2017). Both Attendance Works and the TDOE provided data showing that the subcategory of SwD has a high rate of chronic absenteeism, the examples of interventions are mostly geared for the entire population of students (Attendance Works, 2020; TDOE, 2017).

When examining how to provide interventions for students in Florida, Brundage, et al. (2017) surveyed students in grades 6 through 12 in eight states (Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, and Rhode Island) to determine what reasons the students would give for being chronically absent. The researchers found that all of the surveyed students gave reasons that fell into the categories of school climate, home environment, and community environment or involvement. Students who self-identified as a student with a disability stated that the top reasons of their absences were physical safety and conflict, school climate, and school stress, followed by external issues at home and in the community (Brundage et al., 2017).

School-Level Interventions

Data Collection and Analysis. As Brundage et al. (2017) suggested an intervention for chronically absent SwD would address the school climate as a main concern. Most interventions suggest the gathering and analyzing of data as being the first school-based intervention (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Roberts & Guerra Jr., 2017). Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) suggested that principals and their leadership teams review the previous year's attendance data of all students during the summer in order to find at-risk students. Chen et al. (2016) stated that data should be categorized in categories such as low-risk, at-risk, previously chronically absent students. Roberts and Guerra (2017) differed by stating that schools should only focus on at-risk students including students that have been chronically absent in the past year. Properly gathered and analyze data can be a valuable tool in creating a shared vision of the school staff and lead to staff collaboration in carrying out an intervention focused on chronic absenteeism (Cobb, 2014).

Social and Academic Support Programs. The second type of school-based interventions are programs that focus on teacher-student relationships, peer relationships, safety and inclusion, and academic /social support (Brundage et al., 2017). These interventions include programs such as mentor programs, Check & Connect, and social-emotional learning (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Schonfeld et al., 2015). Programs like Success Mentors use internal and external volunteers to coach and provide support to students that are chronically absent and have found success in reducing chronic absenteeism when compared to schools that do not use mentors (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Schools that use the Check & Connect Program pair chronically absent students with a teacher mentor who meets with them up to three times a week to discuss attendance, reasons for absences, and progress or the lack of progress on attendance goals. This program has been successful for all students in reducing absenteeism when used by itself or in conjunction with other programs in an MTSS system (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Guryan et al., 2017). SEL strategies have also been found to be successful for students who score in the category of below basic on mastery tests (Schonfeld et al., 2015). SEL programs involve the use of various methods to teach students how to problem solve and build relationships which could help in make students feel safer and provide both social and academic support (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Schonfeld et al., 2015).

Chronic Absenteeism Education. Schools that use mentoring programs, programs like Check & Connect, and SEL programs can provide proper education to students about their absenteeism and social and academic support that is required to be provided to all special education students (Brundage et al., 2017). Brundage et al. (2017) found in his survey of students that 55% of the chronically absent students saw their absences as being normal as

compared to other students. School staff could teach students how chronic absenteeism is defined, the importance of attendance, and the effects of chronic absenteeism. Such programs can build coherence in schools and allow school staff to take ownership of all students (Fullan & Quinn, 2016).

Incentives. Incentives for students who have improved in the area of attendance have also been suggested as a means to reduce chronic absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2020; Balu & Ehrlich, 2018; TDOE, 2017). Incentives can range from verbal and written recognition to monetary incentives. Although such incentive programs have showed little to no effect on chronic absenteeism in secondary students, Balu and Ehrlich (2018) found that if incentive programs use program diagnosis, careful selection of incentives, implementation planning, and evaluation and revision, the programs can be successful in reducing chronic absenteeism of elementary students (Balu et al., 2016).

Home Environment Interventions

Awareness Programs. As discussed earlier, principals need to build relationships with parents to help reduce chronic absenteeism. In order for parents to collaborate with schools, they must be properly informed of what chronic absenteeism is, how it impacts student success in the classroom, and how they can help prevent it (Attendance Works, 2020; TDOE, 2017). Several researchers have suggested using public information meetings, ad campaigns, and parental involvement in chronic absenteeism policy making and chronic absenteeism intervention programs (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Melvin et al., 2019). Much like how Brundage et al. (2017) stated that chronically absent students underestimated their amount of absences, parents have also been found to underestimate their child's absentee rate

(Rogers & Feller, 2016). Rogers and Feller (2016) found that by providing parents with weekly summaries chronically absenteeism was reduced by 10% across all grade levels.

Communication. As demonstrated by the Rogers and Feller (2016) findings above, communication may be a key intervention in reducing chronic absenteeism. Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) found wake up calls and texting parents to be beneficial in reducing chronic absenteeism when used in conjunction with other interventions in an MTSS program. Although some research has showed no improvement while using text messages, other programs have found success with younger students when using text messages to inform parents of absences and attendance goals (Smythe-Leistico & Page, 2018). Smythe-Leistico and Page (2018) found that when parents of kindergarten students were texted using the Connect-Text program, their students showed only 12% chronic absenteeism as compared to 24% for control groups. Mail-based communication has also been found effective to reducing chronic absenteeism rates (Robinson et al., 2018).

Social Capital . Another way to both increase communication and educate parents is to increase the social capital of those parents (Sommer et al., 2017). Sommer et al. (2017) placed at-risk students into a separate group in a Head Start program. The parents in the experimental group received extra training on both academic and attendance issues. The parents of this group were included in decision making and required to attend regular meetings to discuss progress. The researchers found by the winter portion of the school year that attendance increased by 5.3%, which shows a small level of success.

Community Interventions. Like Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) found in their NYC program, community-based interventions can be vital in providing medical and social needs and support

for interventions that occur both in the school and at home. While researching how a community was using stakeholders to combat chronic absenteeism, Childs and Grooms (2018) found that districts and individual schools should reach out to community stakeholders for their expertise and support in reducing chronic absenteeism. They suggested collaboration with stakeholders in policy making and implementation. Community agencies are able to provide incentives and educational tools to schools, as well as providing medical and housing support (J. Childs & Grooms, 2018; Dembo & LaFleur, 2019; Sommer et al., 2017). When educators use these services, they can help reduce the cost of interventions and create ownership of all students for the community (J. Childs & Grooms, 2018; Sommer et al., 2017).

Perceived Barriers

Researchers have found that principals may perceive themselves as having barriers in being an instructional leader in special education (Roberts & Guerra Jr., 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020). Upon this literature review, several themes of perceived barriers other than the previously discussed lack of special education emerged: a lack of quality communication between administrators and parents, a lack of funding for initiatives, lack of time for new initiatives, and meeting the needs of SwD who have illnesses that require medical absences. By using principal perspectives to obtain these needs, this portion of the literature review may provide essential background to generate questions for local administrators as to their perceived barriers for comparison.

Lack of Communication with Parents

As previously stated communication is a major intervention in reducing chronic absenteeism. Several researchers have examined ways to increase parental communication and

relationship building between parents and administrators (Cobb, 2014; Genao, 2015). During their research on communication practices among stakeholders in special education, Woods et al. (2018) interviewed principals as to when they communicate with parents. Most principals reported that they contacted parents of SwD at the beginning of the year or during a disciplinary issue (Woods et al., 2018) This presents a problem as various previously mentioned interventions require principals to both communicate with parents and include them in the decision-making processes of interventions that are formed to reduce chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Robinson et al., 2018).

Lack of Funding

No mention of additional funding or grants was made during the beginning of the implementation process by the state of Tennessee (TDOE, 2017). Both principals and special education administrators have expressed concern of a lack of funding for programs that will help SwD (Luckner & Movahedazarhouligh, 2019; Sun & Xin, 2020). Luckner and Movahedazarhouligh (2019) pointed out that a lack of funding can prevent school districts from obtaining needed programs, properly trained educators, and resources that are needed to carry out such programs. In response, school leaders must either forego needed programs, or search for more cost-effective means of reaching the same goals (J. Childs & Grooms, 2018).

Lack of Time

The responsibilities of principals are often immense as they include student discipline, addressing parent, staff, and community concerns, teacher evaluations, creating the proper school environment, and being the instructional leader of both general and special education

(Murphy, 2018). As Sun and Xin (2020) reported the time restraints of adding new programs, such as a program to reduce chronic absenteeism, can provide an additional obstacle to already stressed administrators. School districts, like the district of focus in this research, have looked to integrating programs in MTSS programs to align this program with current goals of the local district and local school itself (Attendance Works, 2020; TDOE, 2017). Principals and other school leaders can then analyze programs to determine what competing initiatives best fit into their school's MTSS (Russell & Harms, 2016).

Medical Needs of Students With Disabilities

Due to chronic absenteeism being the total of all types of absences, excused or unexcused, students who have an excess amount of medical absences may be considered chronically absent. SwD are 3 times more likely to have a chronic health issue than typical students (NCEO, 2018). The NCEO (2018) reported that 28% of students on individual education plans have chronic physical or mental health conditions compared to 10% of those students who do not receive special education services. Several researchers reported that due to high poverty, which may be the case with some SwD, some students do not have proper medical care that is needed (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Brundage et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016). Like Balfanz and Byrnes (2018), the focused district's truancy officer suggested that principals and school leaders provide more access to medical programs within the school system and programs that will help struggling parents receive free or reduced medical treatment for their students. The truancy officer also suggested that administrators ask parents to schedule appointments for students with chronic conditions either at the beginning or ending of a school day or during school breaks as necessary, according to the county truancy officer.

Implications

As demonstrated in the literature review, principals lack evidence they can use in providing specialized interventions for chronically absent SwD. Thus, the goals of this project study were three-fold: identify principal perspectives of why SwD are chronically absent, what interventions have been in used with and without success, and potential barriers to reducing chronic absenteeism. I used the results of this project study to create a professional development (see Appendix A) that may enhance current MTSS programs and help to reduce chronic absenteeism among SwD. The inclusion of interventions has been found to be successful in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD (Eagle et al., 2015). This study could also lead to more collaboration between schools to create new intervention plans and evaluate ongoing plans.

This study could lead to more social justice for SwD who are chronically absent. As suggested by Walden University's social change initiative, leaders can use both internal and external resources and stakeholders to provide the opportunity for these students to be successful in the classroom (Walden University, n.d.). I hope that the creation of a more comprehensive and localized professional development for administrators may lead them to be stronger advocates for SwD, which may in turn lead to creating teacher, parent, and stakeholder advocates to provide a network of support for these students.

Summary

Although a great deal of research has been undertaken on the subjects of principal perspectives of special education, interventions for reducing chronic absenteeism, and potential

barriers in helping SwD, little research has been centered on the specific area of chronically absent SwD. Researchers have found success with using a comprehensive approach which uses both internal and external resources and stakeholders to provide a network of support to the general population (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Researchers like Bartanen (2020), have found that principal quality has played a role in increasing students attendance, but this research does not analyze the specific role principals may play in reducing the continued high levels of chronic absenteeism of SwD (Tennessee Department of Education, 2019b).

In the following section, I will describe the qualitative research design and approach by explaining why the chosen method was most appropriate for this study and why other methods were not. Next, a description of the participants and why and how they will be chosen will be explained. Then, the plan for data collection and data analyze will be addressed. Finally, I will address the potential limitations of this research project.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

I chose basic qualitative research as the research design and approach due because it offered the best fit for addressing the stated problem and answering the RQs. Due to the problem being that SwD continue to have a higher incidence of chronic absenteeism than their typical classmates, research is needed to determine appropriate interventions and prevention of potential barriers for administrators in successfully implementing interventions to reduce chronic absenteeism. I was concerned with principal perspectives on why chronic absenteeism is high with SwD, what interventions have been used, and what potential barriers exist. These questions were answered through qualitative, semistructured interviews, which provide both depth and individuality in response (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Ravitch and Carl (2016) described qualitative research as being research that is focused on “engaging the complexity of, and spheres of influence on, people’s lives and experiences” (p. 69). Semistructured interviews like the interviews that were performed for this study can be as part of basic qualitative research studies (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). When conducting such interviews, I performed in-depth interviews with a smaller number of participants. This type of research allowed me to be flexible to adapt the research according to participant responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Appendix B contains the interview protocol and questions. Appendix C contains a sample interview transcript.

Rationale for Basic Qualitative Design

I chose qualitative design over quantitative design for several reasons. While quantitative research can provide proof of correlations and relationships, qualitative research is

more concerned with issues such as why the problem exists and how it is specific to its location (Burkholder et al., 2016). Burkholder et al. (2016) suggested researchers use qualitative approaches to better understand why an event related to the study phenomenon is occurring, whereas quantitative researchers often focus on finding correlations or causations. In this study, I sought to understand what personal and local beliefs and interventions exist about the problem of chronically absent SwD. In future studies researchers may want to examine relationships and correlations related to the study phenomenon.

I chose a basic qualitative study over other types of qualitative studies for several reasons. I desired to discover administrator experiences and beliefs through the use of semistructured interviews (Merriam, 2009). Case studies were ruled out because researchers who use case studies often pick a bounded unit and look at several resources such as interviews, observations, and local data to determine how the subject is impacted by a phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2016). Ethnography was not chosen because I did not choose to spend a long period of time with a particular cultural group (Burkholder et al., 2016). Grounded theory studies are studies that lead to theories, and in this study I wished to find out the perspectives of administrators, which could later lead to those theories in further studies (Burkholder et al., 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The intent of this study was to look at administrators' individual experiences in order to better meet the local needs in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. As Merriam (2009) explained, a basic qualitative approach may improve local practice through the use of in-depth personal interviews. Conducting these interviews allowed me to access the particular viewpoints of individuals who are directly involved with implemented interventions and charged with reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD.

Participants

The district of focus for this study has six middle schools and is located in a rural area of Tennessee. Because I sought to obtain administrator perspectives, I purposively chose participants with a convenience sample. Thus, an attempt was made to include all six principals of these schools. If all six principals did not volunteer to participate, their assistant principals were invited to participate in their place. As a result, the study included four principals and two assistant principals. Due to the small number of participants, I conducted in-depth responsive interviews to ensure that saturation of their perspectives could be obtained. As research has suggested, the use of responsive interviews allows researchers to ask follow-up questions that lead to a deeper understanding of individual perspectives to help answer the RQs in a basic qualitative study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained such an interview protocol would allow a study with few participants to receive a depth of knowledge that would be insightful to address the unique problems of a particular location.

I obtained access to these participants in three ways. First, permission was obtained to proceed with this research from the school district administration (see Appendix D). Then, the proposal was presented to Walden's IRB team for approval (no. 08-14-20-0184024). Finally, the participants were asked if they were willing to participate in the study, and they were required to sign an informed consent form prior to participation.

I tried to ensure a working relationship between the participants and myself. Participants were ensured that their participation could be ended at any time. All interviews were conducted in a comfortable and secure location where privacy was accomplished either through in-person interviews or interviews conducted through Zoom. Participants were

informed of confidentiality measures and that their names were not included in the study. All electronic materials were stored in a personal computer that is password protected. Any paper-based materials were and will remain in a locked file cabinet. I will destroy or delete all gathered materials within 5 years after the study is completed. Participants were allowed to check the gathered data for accuracy through member checks. I gave the participants a summary of the findings of this research of which they could expand on ideas or chose to delete any comments. I have included their feedback in the findings of this research.

Data Collection

Interviews were the primary data source. To conduct interviews, I used a responsive interview protocol based on the work of Rubin and Rubin (2012). Semistructured responsive interviews include several questions that seek to answer the RQs (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The questions are worded in an open manner to allow for in-depth discussion of the participants. This iterative process allowed me to ask follow-up questions to obtain more information about the topic as necessary while capturing the experience of the administrators in this process (Burkholder et al., 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further explanation of this interview protocol and the interview questions can be found in Appendix B of this research.

I used analytic memos during the interviews and upon coding the interview transcripts. As Saldaña (2016) suggested, these memos allowed me to record thoughts as they occurred during the interviews. I was able to record nonverbal cues from the participants during interviews. The use of an analytic memo also allowed me to examine if researcher bias was present during the interviewing or coding process and take measures to reduce such bias (Saldaña, 2016).

I conducted five out of six interviews through the Zoom Meeting application. One of the participants chose to be interviewed through an in-person interview which was audio taped. Zoom Meeting, a free internet communication application, allowed participants to be interviewed in the privacy of their own home. Each meeting was recorded for further viewing and was transcribed by using the Otter Voice Meeting Notes application. I double-checked each transcription for accuracy. I transcribed the in-person interview by hand and reviewed such interview. The participants were allowed to schedule the best time for the interviews whether by Zoom or in-person.

I gathered this data during the interview with the recordings and the analytic memos. Transcription occurred within 72 hours after each interview and double-checked by me. I then tracked the data in an Excel-based tracking system. This system included quotes from the interviews and assigned codes for such quotes. I used the system to find and label patterns. I combined the patterns to form themes which were used to create professional development in potential areas of need. I also included an instance of a discrepancy as I discussed how one administrator used total inclusion while others did not.

I am currently an assistant principal in the focus district of this study. I have worked with these administrators in past principal meetings and in-services related to chronic absenteeism. As a means to prevent conflict of interest, I advised the interviewees of my role of a researcher in this process, and every effort was made to check my work for potential bias through the use of analytic memos, member checking, and chair feedback. The administrators in this district have participated together in several professional studies. After receiving permission from both

the County Administration and Walden's IRB, I made the requests to all of the middle school principals to participate in these interviews.

The biggest concern of these administrators is often confidentiality. I attempted to overcome this by sharing steps that were taken for confidentiality, such as removal of their names, school names, or any other possible identifiable characteristics within my knowledge. Each participant was labeled as Admin A, B, C, D, and E. I stored the information in accordance to the requirements of this university but will be discarded after 5 years.

I have been working with my school's principal and secretary to help decrease the overall chronic absenteeism rate my school. After analyzing the school data, the problem of the high absenteeism rate of SwD was discovered. Bias may exist in that I wish to find any perspectives or interventions that may have been found successful in any school in the district. Having children who have disabilities, I am more prone to want all educators to be advocates. The use of analytic memos will allow me to address any bias by focusing solely on the patterns and themes that emerge from the interviews

Data Analysis

The data from the semistructured interviews were analyzed through the process of coding. The coding occurred in two stages of coding and recoding (Saldaña, 2016). The first stage was the initial coding which will provide initial themes and concepts presented in each interview. This is also considered open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Saldaña (2016) stated that the second stage "manages, filters, highlights, and focuses on the salient features of the qualitative data record for generating categories, themes, concepts, grasping memory, and building theory" (p.9). This is much like Corbin and Strauss's (2015) axial and selective coding as

categories are made, sometimes combined, and/ or new categories are formed in an iterative process. By using this type of data analysis, I was allowed to reflectively examine the data both while collecting and upon completion of the data. The data was collected and stored in an Excel-based cataloging system to allow both the separation and compiling of data as the process emerges. This data is stored in a personal computer that is password protected.

Validity and Trustworthiness

Ravitch and Carl (2016) described qualitative validity as being true to the participants' experiences. Saldaña (2016) stated that member checking is not merely the reading of transcripts by participants, but also informing the participants of the progress and inductions found in the data analysis process. Saldaña also suggested that the participants' input on the progress will allow the research to affirm that any theories are based on the participants' experiences and comments thereof. The participants were allowed to clarify any statements as needed and add or delete any comments during the member checking phase through email correspondence or the use of Zoom as needed.

I used both the analytic memos and the cataloguing system to clarify any researcher bias. I reviewed the notes and the collected data to ensure that the coded information was accurate as found in each transcription. By creating these memos, I was able to reflect on the gathered information and re-interview participants if necessary to clarify any information that appeared unclear.

Although the coding system looks for patterns and possible themes, discrepant cases may occur. Discrepant cases are important to share in order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of qualitative research (Burkholder et al., 2016). These cases could possibly lead to

further studies to explain why the differences in experiences has occurred. Such differences may be a result of different demographics or viewpoints of the participants. One discrepant case was found where a participant used full inclusion as a means of intervention because their population of students had a higher number of SwD that were chronically absent. This situation was discussed in detail later in this study.

Limitations

This research was conducted during the time of the Covid-19 crisis. As a result, face-to-face meetings were limited due to required social distancing. It was my hope to reduce this limitation by providing interviews in the aforementioned way of using Zoom. The 2019-2020 school year was adapted to online learning only in March 2020. Thus, administrators may have to use the data and experiences of the previous years to describe their experiences with chronically absent SwD. Another limitation of this study was the sample size. Due to the focus on the local problem of practice, I conducted this study in one school district. I interviewed six middle school administrators, one from each middle school in the district. This would limit reliability for a higher population or another district with varying demographics.

Data Analysis Results

I grounded the study's conceptual framework in Fullan's (2015) change leadership theory and the utilitarian consequentialist theory of Lewin (1947) and Burns (1978). Fullan stated that leaders, such as the administrators in this study, make an impact on the success of their teachers and students through building relationships and sharing moral goals to ensure proper implementation of programs. In the Utilitarian Consequentialist Theory, Lewin and Burns stated that administrators will base their decisions on the outcomes of the projects that they

implement. Therefore, I chose to conduct qualitative, semistructured interviews with principals and assistant principals to obtain perspectives on why SwD are chronically absent, what types of interventions are being used, and potential barriers to reducing chronic absenteeism of this subgroup of students. I conducted the interviews using Zoom and in-person interviews. The results were coded and recoded to find themes from individual and all of the interviews as a whole. These results are discussed below.

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis

I designed the questions in the semistructured, qualitative interviews to answer the three major focuses of this project study: administrator perspectives of chronically absent SwD, interventions that were used and are currently being used to prevent chronic absenteeism, and potential barriers to reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. Study participants responded to a total of 10 questions which allowed me to gather the above information. Each school was represented by either a principal, which occurred in four out of six schools or an assistant principal, which occurred in the two remaining schools.

The qualitative data analysis for this study involved the use of coding and recoding. According to Saldaña (2016) this coding and recoding will lead to the formation of themes that emerge from the combining and examining and reexamining of semistructured interviews. I gathered the qualitative data through the use of recorded Zoom sessions, translated by using the Otter application, and then double-checked by me for accuracy. Each participant received a copy of the transcription of their meeting (see Appendix C); however, no corrections or additions were made. A summary of the total findings was also shared.

After completing the transcriptions, each individual question was coded for key words that were used to answer each question. Upon processing and completing the first round of coding, a second round was conducted to find themes formed by repeated words and concepts across all interviews which became the themes of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Saldaña, 2016).

Themes

I summarized the analysis of the qualitative data in the following section to identify administrator perspectives on chronically absent SwD, interventions that they have used or are currently using, or potential barriers that may exist to reducing the chronically absenteeism rate of this subgroup of students.

Administrator Perspectives on Chronically Absent SwD

Four out of six administrators stated that a lack of basic needs at home such as absence of transportation, emotional/financial support, and a lack of food or housing to be a major contributor to SwD being chronically absent. These observations support the findings of Balfanz and Byrnes (2018) who found in their study in New York City that students who were chronically absent tend to fall into both the subgroup of SwD and low socioeconomic status. They also found that these students needed a strong joint committee consisting of both school-based and community-based programs. Administrator A spoke to this by saying that “there’s some significant overlap between our economically disadvantaged population and our students with disabilities by population.” Similarly, five out of six administrators cited a lack of parental support for all students who are chronically absent and three out of six administrations stated that this was true for SwD who are chronically absent.

Two out of five administrators mentioned that SwD lacked motivation to learn which they attributed to struggles in the classroom and bullying that could result from the students being different than their typical counterparts. Administrator B stated that students with physical or emotional disabilities feared being made fun of or embarrassed by their disability. Researchers who have studied SEL presented this as a problem for students with low socioeconomic backgrounds, including SwD (Schonfeld et al., 2015). Both reporting administrators stressed that a means of motivation and parental support is needed for these students to be successful.

Interventions

The intervention portion of the interviews involved asking the participants what interventions were used for the general population, which ones were used with success for SwD, and which ones had less success for SwD, and how they knew that an intervention was successful. Four out of six administrators stated that they increased communication with all chronically absent students and parents through phone calls and or in-person meetings as a means of intervention. As Administrator A pointed out, “the best tool in our arsenal is having a great relationship, a great personal, meaningful, professional relationship with these students with disabilities.” Three of the six administrators reported that they use more intense interventions with SwD, such as, more mentor time with special education students, extra home visits or calls, or more help provided for the SwD in the inclusion classrooms. Administrator F reported that using more inclusion of the special education teacher in the classroom, “helped students to be more successful and come to school more often”. Evidence of current research is

found in the administrators using mentoring programs to both call, conduct in-person meetings, and conduct home visits (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Guryan et al., 2017).

Three out of six school administrators stated that the current truancy policy was not a deterrent to being chronically absent. Administrator A stated that “the threat of law enforcement is ineffective. It just causes more anxiety”. That administrator went on to say that only when the truancy policy is part of a well-balanced plan will it help. Administrator D suggested that due to prior experiences with the court system, some students might be pushed away further with the threat of going to truancy court. Research shows that stricter truancy laws have little effect on reducing chronic absenteeism for all students (Conry & Richards, 2018).

Several issues of using incentives for attendance motivation also arose in the interviews. Although Administrator C and Administrator D mentioned incentive programs as being successful at their school, Administrator F mentioned that incentives were not successful for SwD in their school. This could be because the reward was not motivational for SwD as expressed in the research of Balu and Ehrlich (2018) which suggests that such incentives be carefully chosen, implemented properly, evaluated, and revised.

It is important to note that no administrators discussed the use of the MTSS program that was suggested by the state to be the basis of intervention delivery for the chronic absenteeism reduction program (TDOE, n.d.). Also, when asked how they knew if the interventions that they used worked five out of six administrators stated that they used the monthly percentage of attendance as a guideline to tell if they worked. These percentages show the percentage of the total population of students who attended for the month. There is no breakdown for individual subgroups or students. Therefore, the administrators do not know if

the interventions they chose are working for the subcategory of SwD. However, one administrator did mention that they do question students for feedback if the interventions that they were using was working for them.

Administrators were also asked why some interventions worked for typical students and not for SwD. Four out of six administrators stated that most of the SwD had medical issues that required them to miss school. As reported by several researchers, the lack of availability to timely medical care or absence of outside programs to aide with medical issues can lead to increased chronic absenteeism (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018; Brundage et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2016). Also four out of 6 administrators agreed that generic plans that they were using for the general population was not effective to meet the individual needs of SwD. Administrator A pointed out that most interventions “are general. They’re generic strategies”. He also stated, “But when you have that perfect storm of problems, the general rules, the general guidelines, the general prescription that we write for addressing these (SwD) just doesn’t work”.

Administrator E chose to use inclusion as an intervention. When asked why they chose to use this intervention, it was due to a high number of SwD and students who are economically disadvantaged. The administrator described how the special education teacher was available in the classroom to provide a safe, comfortable working environment with the students. The administrator stated that interventions such as incentives did not work with the students at their school. However, much like the other administrators, data for the success of interventions was gathered from the results of whole group attendance measures instead of subgroup or individual measures.

Potential Barriers

Administrators were asked what resources they need to improve the chronic absenteeism rate of SwD and what an area(s) they need more training in to reduce that rate. This was done in hope that it would reveal potential barriers for the administrators. This revealed two potential barriers of needing to find a way to better meet the basic social and emotional needs of students and more education on the specific needs of SwD as it pertains to their disabilities. Four out of six administrators stated that they needed help from outside agencies to provide basic needs of students. This coincides with the findings of Balfanz and Byrnes (2018). These administrators suggested after school programs, help with transportation, food for students, and guidance for families as to what school policies are. As Administrator E pointed out, some of these students are raised by individuals other than a primary parent and need further instruction and assistance to meet today's challenging demands.

Three out of six administrators desired more personnel who would deal with primarily absenteeism. Administrator A suggested adding personnel to assist with both of the subgroups of SwD and economically disadvantaged students, as he believes both intermingle often in statistics. This is also consistent with the research which states that the responsibilities of principals often puts a time restraint on implementation process of goals such as reduce the chronic absenteeism rate (Murphy, 2018; Sun & Xin, 2020).

As suggested by the research of Roberts and Guerra (2017) and Sun and Xin (2020) administrators believe that they are not properly prepared in college or in in-services to implement programs for SwD. This appears to be the case in this study as well because five out of six administrators stated that they desired more training on the individual needs of SwD.

While only one administrator desired training on meeting the socioemotional needs of SwD, as previously stated four out of six of the administrators stated that an area of potential growth was providing the basic needs of these students.

Conclusion

If administrators are the change leaders that Fullan (2015) suggested, they must be knowledgeable about the population they are helping. They must know how to choose, implement, and evaluate research-based programs to help with local problems of practice. The findings of this study provided insight that could contribute to the understanding of what administrative perspectives are of chronically absent students, what interventions are being used, and the potential barriers to reducing chronic absenteeism.

Upon examination of the administrators' viewpoints of these students, I found that the administrators saw themselves as lacking support from parents and the community at large. Issues such as medical problems, lack of parental support, and student motivation to learn have been cited as obstacles to providing more support for SwD. The administrators expressed an interest to provide more individualized plans for these students, which three administrators admitted to using a one size fits all type of approach for the majority of their interventions.

The findings suggest that administrators may need instruction on how to closely examine data to divide students into subgroups and focus on students who are at-risk or currently chronically absent, much like the findings of Balfanz and Byrnes (2018). Once interventions are chosen, these administrators need to look at specific data on these students to determine if progress has been made to reduce chronic absenteeism. Based on the

administrators' concerns interventions may need to include SEL in conjunction with other stakeholders to provide support for students both in and out of the school.

The findings on potential barriers provided me with ideas of how to better provide resources for these administrators. As present in recent research, most administrators suggested more information on specific disabilities in order to make better decisions on program implementation for their interventions (Roberts & Guerra Jr., 2017; Sun & Xin, 2020). Some administrators also showed a desire to have more personnel or more built in time to provide more attention to the growing problem. These administrators indicated that more training at both the college and in-service levels to meet the needs of their SWD.

To address this gap in practice, I developed a professional development to provide collaborative training on data-driven MTSS. Administrators will work collaborative with special educators to design this MTSS to include interventions to meet potential barriers such as parental involvement and a need for SEL. Administrators will also work collaboratively with guidance counselors and a parental stakeholder to implement the aforementioned social-emotional portion of the MTSS. This professional development will be further discussed in the next section of this project study.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The product for this project study was a 3-day professional development plan that delivers training to middle school building-level administrators on creating data-driven MTSS, educating and building support of parents and other stakeholders in the area of chronic absenteeism, and building SEL collaboration groups to provide support for chronically absent SwD (see Appendix A). The qualitative data analysis revealed that administrators need training on data analysis and the use of data to both choose and evaluate those interventions. Although the TDOE (2017) suggested that these interventions need to be structured in the MTSS format, none of the administrators reported using an MTSS to implement. Therefore, the creation of a data-driven MTSS was needed for the base of this professional development. Second, I found that the administrators in the study desired more parental and stakeholder support which could be obtained through educating stakeholders about chronic absenteeism and the school's plan for reducing chronic absenteeism. Finally, the majority of the administrators requested outside help to provide support for students both inside and outside of the school. These three areas encompass the most expressed needs of the administrators. However, other potential barriers such as needing more staff will be addressed by having the administrators collaborate with team members during the professional development to allow for sharing of roles. The activities of this professional development will provide administrators with the tools they need to evaluate their programs, increase parental and stakeholder involvement, and create a team of support to help provide for the needs of chronically absent SwD.

Description of the Project

Fullan's (2015) change leadership theory hinges upon the administrator being a change agent who is both knowledgeable about their environmental needs and equipped to meet those needs. I devised the professional development to allow administrators to refine or form their data-driven MTSS plans, develop a plan for parent education and parental involvement, and create a SEL collaboration group with a plan to meet the needs of chronically absent SwD. With these tools, the administrators may be able to help reduce chronic absenteeism.

Data-Driven MTSS

Day 1 of the professional development consists of training on the MTSS system and how to use data to decide on interventions and evaluate these interventions after they have been implemented. This meeting is for middle school building-level administrators and one of their special education teachers. I will present information on chronic absenteeism of SwD in a PowerPoint presentation. Everyone will analyze chronic absenteeism data together using a scenario. Each group of administrators will analyze their own building's data and formulate a chronic absenteeism plan for implementing into either their own MTSS, if currently using, or to their newly formed data-driven MTSS.

Educating Parents and Stakeholders and Increasing Their Involvement

Day 2 will be divided between how to educate parents on chronic absenteeism and how to increase their involvement in the school plan we developed during Day 1. Administrators will be shown an example of a parent inclusion plan, which I created based on Sawyer's (2015)

BRIDGES format. The same team as Day 1 will then work on a school parent education and inclusion plan to be presented during the latter part of the day.

SEL Collaboration Groups

The last day of the professional development will focus on presenting SEL as a means of meeting the needs of SwD and completing an SEL collaboration group with an initial plan for implementation through the use of the MTSS that was formed during the first two sessions of this professional development. Administrators, a special education teacher, a guidance counselor, and a parent or community representative will be involved in this day of professional development. Discussions will be held on how to best provide support for chronically absent SwD, which include students with medical, nutritional, and social emotional needs.

Goals of the Project

The initial project goal was to gain the perspectives of administrators on what has been used, what worked and did not work, and what potential barriers existed to prevent or reduce the chronic absenteeism of SwD. As a result of the study, I found that three specific needs emerged, which resulted in three goals that fall under the main goal of reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. These goals were the creation of a data-driven MTSS plan, the development of a parent education and inclusion plan, and the formation of a SEL collaboration group.

Administrators need to know how to create a data-driven MTSS plan to both implement and evaluate their chronic absenteeism program. Therefore, the first part of this goal of the first day of professional development is for administrators to demonstrate that they can analyze the

data. This includes narrowing the data into subgroups like SwD and students that are economically disadvantaged. The administrators and special education teachers can then focus on subgroups and individuals who are at risk for chronic absence or are currently chronically absent. The second half of this goal of that day's professional development is to then form an MTSS using data-driven and evidence-based interventions.

The goal of the second day is to review resources for and prepare a plan to both educate parents on chronic absenteeism and including them in the process. The school teams will view resources on the attendance works website as well as the TDOE website. They will share what has been done at their school to both educate and include parents in reducing chronic absenteeism. Finally, they will complete a plan of action to educate and include parents in reducing chronic absenteeism in their schools.

The goal for the last day of professional development is to form a SEL collaboration group that will consist of the administrators, special education teacher, guidance counselor, and parent representative who will attend this meeting. This group will then subsequently form a SEL plan to meet the needs of chronically absent SwD. The guidance counselor and parent representative will be added to the initial group from the first two days to include their unique perspectives as it applies to SwD. All of these members will discuss the basic needs of students in their school that could be addressed through the use of an SEL plan. The groups will share with other schools to discuss ideas about basic needs at their schools and what they have used. The groups will then form a SEL plan for their individual schools.

I will also include in this plan my trainer notes, module formats, and evaluation plans. My trainer notes will allow me to facilitate the learning during both the whole group and small

group sessions. Each day consists of two modules. The Day 1 modules are on data analysis and forming a data-driven MTSS. Day 2 has research on parent involvement and empowerment and the formation of their parent plan. Day 3 features research on SEL and forming their own plan.

Evaluations will be both formative and summative. The activities and share-out sessions will provide a formative evaluation of whether the participants are meeting the goals of the professional development. The school plans and the professional learning community (PLC) correspondence will provide ongoing summative evaluation to determine if the progress of the plans.

Rationale

All of the administrators indicated in their interviews that they have learned most of their information concerning SwD mostly through in-service. Most of the administrator learning in the studied district occurs through professional development in the form of summer or after-school in-service. Administrators typically meet together for one week prior to school starting and periodically throughout the school year on scheduled in-service days. Therefore, the choice was made to begin the first session during this summer session and then have one session prior to fall break and the last session during the scheduled January in-service. This would allow time to gather information to ensure that the goals of the research have been addressed and progression is made toward meeting them.

The choices of the topics covered in the professional developments were purposely chosen based on the responses of the administrators. As previously stated five out of six administrators were basing the success of their programs on overall data and not on individual or subgroup data. None of the participants mentioned the MTSS program that was suggested by

the State of Tennessee as means of addressing the chronic absenteeism problem of all students. Therefore, the first day will be devoted to forming a data-driven MTSS plan. Likewise, five out of six administrators reported a lack of parental support, which led to the professional development scheduled for Day 2, and four out of six administrators desired a way to better meet the basic needs and social-emotional needs of their chronically absent SwD.

The module format will be three professional development meetings that will last from 8 to 3 each day, with the last day extended by thirty minutes to allow for a wrap-up and question section. As suggested previously, these modules will be spread out to three different sessions, to allow for coaching and on-site feedback. The first will be in July, the second in September, and the last will be in December. I chose to use the workshop method to both allow administrators and school teams to create products to use in their personal environments and because this method has been found successful with teachers in research (Hemmeter et al., 2016).

Materials for this professional development will include PowerPoint presentations, chart paper, and a room with access to a smart device to deliver the presentation. The district of interest does have several facilities that will meet the needs of this training. The PowerPoint presentation will include trainer notes to guide me in both moving toward the goals of this training and to record information that may be necessary to adapt and evaluate the professional development.

The order of the professional development was also purposefully planned by me. The first day would allow the principal, assistant principal, and special educator create a basic data-driven MTSS in which the other days plans can be incorporated. Day 2 will allow this same team

to view resources and build a plan to include parents and educate them in how they can help reduce the chronic absenteeism of their SwD. Day 3 will put this idea of inclusion in practice by inviting parents as stakeholders to both attend and participate in being in the SEL Collaboration Group as they prepare the SEL plan for their students.

This professional development will be evaluated in three ways. The first way is by using a goals-based method which will be ensuring that each school has a data-driven MTSS plan, a parent inclusion and education plan, and a SEL plan. Secondly, attendance data will be analyzed at the beginning of the professional development for each school. This data will then be analyzed at the end of the first semester and the end of the school year. Finally, administrators will be surveyed as to the progress of their plans at the same intervals.

Review of the Literature

The literature review focused on four areas of concern: professional development, MTSS, parent involvement and engagement, and SEL. The search engines I used were ERIC and Education Source through Walden Library, as well as, Google Scholar. For professional development, I used the search terms professional development or workshops or training and principals or administrators, or school leaders. For MTSS, I used multi-tiered systems of support and principals or administrators or school leaders. For parental involvement and engagement, I used parental involvement or engagement, special education, and principals or administrators, or school leaders. Finally, I used socio-emotional learning as a search choice in conjunction with special education, attendance, and MTSS. I used only documents that were peer-reviewed from scholarly journals that were published from 2016 on.

Professional Development

The administrators in my project study expressed interest in receiving professional development in the areas of parental involvement/empowerment and SEL. Much like all of the participants of the interviews in my project study, the participants of the 424 secondary school principals that were interviewed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Learning Institute also expressed a desire to receive professional development on the issues of social and emotional development, mental and physical health, meeting the needs of special students, and working with parents (Levin et al., 2020). Levin et al., (2020) stated that 82% of these interviewed principals desired SEL professional development, 80% on students' physical and mental health, 71% on meeting the needs of SwD, and 57% on how to better work with parents and other stakeholders.

Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) required school districts to make professional development collaborative and data-driven, available to all staff members, developed with educator input, and regularly evaluated (Rowland, 2017). Researchers have suggested that professional development for administrators is "still an embarrassment to the field" (Daniëls et al., 2020). Professional developments are often generic, without local context, not tested for short or long-term effects, and lack support for job-embedded performance (Daniëls et al., 2020; Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Thessin & Louis, 2020). Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) reported the seven characteristics of what a professional development should contain as being: focused on a current program, standards-based emphasizing instructional leadership, organizational development and change management, have field-based support, contain cohort groups with

opportunities to collaborate, teach strategies that link theory and practice, recruit and select all staff, and have strong partnerships between the school and the district.

Although some professional development lacks those characteristics, others include most of those requirements. Both Daniëls et al. (2020) and Gordon (2020) suggested professional development that contains reflective thinking in a collaborative environment. Daniëls et al. (2020) suggested using group reflective learning. This type of professional development would have the trainer acting as a facilitator by keeping the attendees on track and also provide them with research-based information to help them reach the contextualized conclusions that are needed to bring personal worth to the professional development, which will be provided in the form of a PLC in which I will provide support online, as well as on site, if needed.

As Administrator D stated, such professional development is often frustrating because of a lack of time to process so much material. Researchers have suggested that this can be counteracted by spreading the in-service out into multiple collaborative sessions that includes coaching throughout the process (Daniëls et al., 2020; Rowland, 2017; Thessin & Louis, 2020; Thrupp, 2018) Coaching can occur with the use of one or more leaders who can communicate with teachers on a weekly basis, or the coaches can be from peers through the collaboration process (Daniëls et al., 2020; Rowland, 2017; Thessin & Louis, 2020). Thessin and Louis (2020) suggested that such coaching and support could also be provided by trained district supervisors. However, as previously stated this type of support will be provided through online collaboration and on-site support as needed by myself.

High-quality professional development is needed to ensure that the principal is Fullan's (2015) change leader. As Fullan stated, such a leader would be able to lead others knowledgeably. Therefore, the professional development of principals should be closely analyzed to ensure that state and federal standards of those programs are rigorous and meet the needs of the local schools of those administrators.

Multi-Levelled Systems of Support

In 2017, the TDOE suggested that all Tennessee schools used the Multi-Levelled Systems of Support (MTSS) to implement a plan to reduce chronic absenteeism (TDOE, 2017). The MTSS had already been used in schools to implement both the response to intervention program and the response to intervention for behavior program. Principals were given online resources such as attendanceworks.org to use to make their chronic absenteeism plans.

As noted from the research in this project study, none of the interviewed administrators mentioned the MTSS system to explain how they assigned interventions to chronically absent SwD or how they evaluated the interventions assigned through the MTSS process. An important point is that the data that they were using applied to the whole population and was not broken down into subgroups. This would be an issue of great concern, as the MTSS process is data-driven when carried out with fidelity (Goodman, 2017; Horner & Halle, 2020; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016).

Goodman (2017) stated that for MTSS to be successful it must be clearly defined. His definition, much like other researchers, included research-based interventions that are tiered with the intention of prevention and intensity to meet the needs of all levels of students (Adamson et al., 2019; Horner & Halle, 2020; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). He also stated that the

MTSS must be data-driven with an emphasis on assessing and ensuring implementation fidelity. “MTSS is not a package, program, or curriculum but rather a problem-solving framework that includes the use of a data-based process for making decisions about instruction and additional intervention” (Adamson et al., 2019, p. 62).

When used with high fidelity, educators have found success using MTSS with RTI, positive behavior interventions and supports, and SEL (Arden & Pentimonti, 2019; August et al., 2018; Goodman, 2017; Scott et al., 2019; Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). All of these systems had a three-tiered system of support with Tier 1 focused on the provision of high-quality instruction for all students, Tier 2 on students who showed greater need through determined through data analysis, and Tier 3 on students who need more intensity.

Researchers have discussed how a proper plan for MTSS is needed in conjunction with training for teachers to implement interventions in all tiers (Freeman et al., 2018; Goodman, 2017; Shepley & Grisham-Brown, 2019). Shepley and Grisham-Brown (2019) suggested looking at MTSS as a flow chart of interventions which will allow students to progress through the tiers until success is found. Goodman (2017) suggested that practice profiles be created which would state what would be acceptable for use and what would not be acceptable. He stated that the participants should use data and focus on outcomes for fidelity. He also stated that data teams should be used and have access to the data in a shared location. He pointed out, much like the human capacity discussed in Fullan’s (2015) change leadership, that the local capacity should be used and the MTSS should be aligned with the school’s key initiatives.

As suggested by the findings of this project study and the research of Arden and Pentimonti (2019), the data-driven portion of MTSS may be an area of great concern. “Educators

have not been taught how to interpret the data for significant and meaningful instructional changes or improved student outcomes” (Arden & Pentimonti, 2019, p. 19). Arden and Pentimonti suggested that educators need to be able to identify valid and reliable sources of data, ask the right questions about the data (are the students on target, is our program working, etc.), and build a team consisting of teachers, administrators, interventionist, and special education teachers.

Social and Emotional Learning

As mentioned in the MTSS portion of this literature review, there has been success in implementing SEL through the MTSS format (August et al., 2018; Freeman et al., 2018). Just like the four out of six administrators who stressed the need for SEL for SwD, researchers have also stated the need for SEL (Strahan & Poteat, 2020). Strahan and Poteat (2020) stated that based on previous research “boosting achievement without addressing social-emotional needs is almost impossible” (p.2).

As Goodman (2017) suggested with any MTSS system a clear definition must be presented. SEL is “the process by which each student develops their capacity to integrate thought, emotion, and behavior to achieve and accomplish important social tasks” (Ferreira et al., 2020). Such skills that are taught include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Strahan & Poteat, 2020; Yang et al., 2020).

Educators have found success with SEL in increasing student engagement and attendance by targeting bullying, focusing on the school environment as welcoming, and teaching students to be socially responsible for their actions (Barnett, 2019; Ferreira et al., 2020;

Strahan & Poteat, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Barnett (2019) stated that schools that have implemented SEL in their studies have seen an increase in attendance and gains as high as eleven points on standardized achievement tests. By meeting the potential barriers of these students which were evident in both the above-mentioned research, as well as mentioned in the interviews in this current project study, SEL can provide a site-specific plan to meet a wide variety of needs of each student.

Much like other MTSS processes, the SEL is tiered by three levels. As Barrett et al. (2018) stated “the goal is to uncover patterns of social-emotional challenges that occur frequently across the day for large numbers of students” (p.3). Researchers have suggested that tier 1 be a universal approach to provide all students with emotional and social support through the use of skills taught by counselors and teachers (Barnett, 2019; Hemmeter et al., 2016). Barnett (2019) suggested that these lessons can be taught in whole groups by counselors who know what situations that school-based data present. Hemmeter et al. (2016) suggested that teachers could teach social-emotional techniques by embedding them into the subjects that they teach.

Level 2 and 3 tiers would include the use of small-group instruction that would be arranged based on the particular needs of the students. As researchers have pointed out school leaders, such as counselors, can use a variety of interventions that can increase in measures and include more outside stakeholder support through the use of family and community involvement to meet the needs of students as they move into tiers 2 or 3 (Freeman et al., 2018). Tier 3 students can also have behavior plans implemented to monitor items such as attendance, class participation, and relationship building (Barrett et al., 2018).

As mentioned previously, researchers have found professional development to be more powerful when combined with support from an expert on the taught subject or a coach who can help educators in completing the implementation process (Hemmeter et al., 2016). Hemmeter et al. (2016) conducted a study of the SEL pyramid model, which is conducting SEL in an MTSS format. In this study, forty teachers from Florida and Tennessee were combined into two cohorts. One group received professional development with coaching, while the other group just received information on SEL and attended outside professional development on the subject. The workshops were held over three days and teachers were provided periodic coaching sessions that included a focused observation, a debriefing meeting, and a follow-up email. The implementation levels were statistically significant by Wave 2 of the project, and by Wave 4 teachers in the intervention group implemented 69.9% of the practices as compared to the control group which only showed 44.2% of the practices found in the training.

Parent Involvement and Engagement

Similar to the needs suggested from the interviews of this study, administrators stated a lack of parental involvement and engagement as a potential barrier in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. By pursuing the increase of parental involvement and engagement, the administrator can increase their change leadership role to go beyond the school environment and into the community. Parental involvement and engagement is not a mere suggestion, because both Individuals with Disabilities Act (2014) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) require schools to involve parents as stakeholders in their children's education. This was also suggested as a means of decreasing chronic absenteeism through both educating parents on ways to prevent and reduce absenteeism and including them in projects to help reduce

absenteeism (Attendance Works, 2020; Avendano & Cho, 2020; Sawyer, 2015; TDOE, 2017). This is especially true with parents of SwD as studies show that they are often more stressed about their student's education and have been less involved as compared to the involvement of parents of typical students (Avendano & Cho, 2020)

Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) changed the language from parent involvement to parent and family engagement (Fenton et al., 2017). The goal according to Fenton et al. (2017) was to empower the parents to not only attend individualized education meetings but to move beyond that by creating and co-creating initiatives to better the education of their children. Other researchers also suggested this empowering of parents through parental training and support (Avendano & Cho, 2020; Macy et al., 2019). Avendano and Cho (2020) shared elements for making these relationships meaningful by voluntary participation, having a mutual goal, sharing resources, shared responsibility of decision-making and accountability for outcomes, equal contributions from all stakeholders, and the building of trust and respect.

Sawyer (2015) developed a multi-step process to empower those parents called BRIDGES: building relationships, recruiting parents, individualize plans, dialogue with parents, generate involvement, empower parents, and strengthen relationships. Through this process school leaders would build relationships with parents through proactive relationships. They would recruit parent participation through surveys and questionnaires and individualize communication to meet the preferences of the parents or guardians. In turn, they would dialogue through the parents' chosen communication methods. They would generate tips for parents to try. They would empower parents by giving them research-based ways to improve the parent-student interaction, bring parents together to discuss strategies, and provide them

with resources. They would also strengthen the process by celebrating through the use of family nights and other family events (Sawyer, 2015).

Another form of parental engagement that was also mentioned by two of the administrators in this study is home visits. Those participants described their home visits as another way to reach out to parents to express school needs in a more convenient way to the parent. This is not consistent with the way that other researchers have described the evidence-supported way to conduct such visits (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Whyte and Karabon described home visits as a scaffolded way to receive social insights and learn from the families. They suggested several visits to build up trust and faith before educators start to ask questions about home situations that would lend information as to why students are experiencing problems in the school environment. All of these mentioned interventions will be presented in the parental involvement/empowerment section of the professional development as ways to strengthen and build parental plans.

Conclusion

The research above shows that by increasing parental engagement and instituting an SEL program strides can be taken to reduce student issues such as chronic absenteeism. The use of a data-driven MTSS has also been found to be effective if clearly defined and properly implemented. Since the members of this study have used the MTSS system previously, both parental engagement and SEL can be implemented in ways as discussed above through professional development which includes proper feedback through the use of on-site coaching and team collaboration.

Project Description

Information from the semistructured interviews with middle school administrators guided the development of a three-day professional development plan. None of the interviewed administrators discussed using an MTSS system to deliver their chronic absenteeism plans. When administrators discussed using data to determine intervention choice or intervention evaluation, the administrators discussed data for the whole population and not the subgroup of SwD or individual student data. Therefore, Day 1 of the professional development will be on using a data-driven MTSS program. Day 2 of professional development will focus on parental engagement and involvement based on the need expressed by five out of six administrators for further parental support. Day 3 of professional development will focus on SEL due to the desire of four out of six of the administrators to have further training on how to meet the social-emotional needs of SwD.

Resources and Supports

The local school district provides meeting rooms at the main office location for the specific purpose of professional development. These rooms are equipped with Wi-Fi connections, various communication supplies such as chart paper, markers, smart TVs, and projectors. Participants will need to bring their own computers. I will need to provide worksheets, articles, and PowerPoints for the presentations.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

There are two known potential barriers: scheduling and Covid-19 restrictions. Scheduling for administrator training, other than the scheduled training in July, as noted previously, can be hard. This is due to administrators having to stay in their buildings with their

teachers during professional development days. However, if the professional development is planned during the scheduled days it may be more acceptable. That is why I have planned to use both the fall training day in September and the winter training day in December as the other training days. Another solution is to ask district administrators to relieve administrators of their duties so they can participate at other times if needed.

The second barrier is Covid restrictions. These could cause the professional development to have to be virtual only. I took care to plan a professional development that can allow for all members to attend through Google Meet. Worksheets and other materials would be supplied through emails or delivered to each site prior to the trainings. All teachers and administrators have used this product since the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year for meetings with students, parents, and in-services. This could also be another solution to the potential barrier of scheduling as administrators could remain on-site at their schools and step out of the training as needed.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

This professional development plan includes a transparent delivery model that should help administrators, teachers, counselors, and other stakeholders easily transfer knowledge from the workshops into their schools. The workshops will be held during scheduled professional development times when no students will be present. Research has shown that when materials are taught to administrators and teachers in conjunction with coaching successful implementation occurs that lasts longer than professional development that is conducted without coaching (Daniëls et al., 2020; Rowland, 2017; Thessin & Louis, 2020; Thrupp, 2018). Therefore, coaching and support will be provided during the PLC online activities

in-between each session and on-site as needed by myself. Table one shows the implementation plan for the proposed professional development, which has been divided into three parts. The complete professional development will provide a total of 18 hours of training to administrators and special education teachers and 6 hours for guidance counselors. Note that Table 1 does not include the time spent on PLC activities or on-site coaching as this time will be increased as needed to meet the needs of the participants.

Table 1

Professional Development Timetable

Workshop title	Administrator hours per session	Special education hours per session	Counselor hours per session	Time Frame
Day 1: Data-Driven MTSS	6	6	0	July preplanning
Day 2: Parental Engagement/Involvement	6	6	0	Fall in-service day
Day 3: Social-Emotional Learning Groups	6	6	6	January in-service day

Day 1: Data-Driven MTSS. Middle school building-level administrators from the local school district will be invited to attend the first workshop, which will take place during the preplanning in July. The purpose of this workshop is to (a) provide an overview of the results of this project, (b) provide instruction on examining and constructing a data plan, and (c) construct

a data-driven MTSS plan for their school. The training is designed to meet the characteristics of a strong professional development as proposed by Gümüş and Bellibaş (2020) by including a focus on the current chronic absenteeism program, organizational development and change management, field-based support with coaching, contain cohorts with opportunities to collaborate, teach strategies that link to theory and practice, with a strong partnership between the school and the district.

The first half of Day 1 (3 hours) will consist of an introduction to the study, the professional development expectations, training on how to analyze absenteeism data, and a collaboration session on similarities and differences of the data across all of the schools. The introduction will connect theory with practice (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020) by linking research that occurred in the district to practice. By addressing the local problem with a local solution, the professional development is not generic and further meets the needs and could increase the retention and participation of the administrators (Daniëls et al., 2020; Thessin & Louis, 2020). The use of a collaboration portion has been suggested by several researchers to be effective (Daniëls et al., 2020; Gordon, 2020).

The second half of Day 1 (3 hours) will build on the first half of the day by allowing administrators and special education teachers to design an outline of a data-driven MTSS plan to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD. Special education teachers are included in this portion of the in-service to provide administrators with the support that is needed to focus on the specific needs of the students they serve. Once again, the reflective collaborative process will be used to provide a potential high-quality product that can be immediately placed and evaluated in the school setting. The participants will complete the day's activities by going online and completing

a PLC activity where they will be asked to share something they learned and something they still have questions about. Each school will be required to respond to these questions and make suggestions to other schools to help clear up any questions they can help answer.

Day 2: Parental Empowerment and Inclusion. The first thirty minutes of this day will be spent discussing feedback that was received during coaching sessions that have occurred between the two sessions via online collaborative PLCs. I will provide answers to any questions they may have not had answered. This will also allow me to have the opportunity to ensure that the PLC is working well with the attendees.

The next hour will be spent presenting information concerning the research behind parental involvement and empowerment. The research will be discussed concerning Sawyer's (2015) BRIDGES process as discussed in the literature review section of this study, which may help the school teams build relationships with parents, recruit participation, individualize plans based on recruited information, dialogue using preferred forms of communication, generate tips to help the parents, empower them through the giving of resources, and strengthen relationships through family meetings. The remaining portion of the first half of the day will be spent collaboratively discussing positive and negative parental experiences that may relate to BRIDGES and looking at the parent and school resources on the attendance works website and the TDOE website.

The second half of the day will be spent collaboratively planning the individual school parent education and involvement plans for chronically absent SwD. As in the first day, the use of collaboration and specifically focusing on the needs of the students at the individual school will produce research-based, needs-driven plans that can be implemented upon the return to

the school. Share out groups will also occur to provide input from other schools and further sharing of ideas. The second day will also end in the same online PLC program which will allow continued peer and trainer coaching between this section and the next.

Day 3: Creating the Social-Emotional Group Plan. Just like the second day of training, this training will include a brief discussion of the PLC contributions. However, this session will be around 15 minutes. More time will be spent at the end of this session to discuss any questions with PLC use or any unanswered questions before and during this day.

The first half of the day will be much like the two previous sessions with the research that supports the use of SEL in meeting the needs of chronically absent SwD to attempt to reduce the amount of absences. This professional development will include guidance counselors and community stakeholders from each school. These members will join the administrators and special education teachers to further collaborate and discuss the social and emotional needs of SwD at their school. This information will be shared out with the other schools to ensure further comparisons and possible improvements for the plans.

The second half of the day will be spent forming a SEL Collaboration Group Plan to help meet the needs of the chronically absent SwD in their particular schools. The SEL group will use the MTSS process as learned in Day 1 to produce leveled interventions for the needs of those students. Share outs will also be conducted to further improve plans through more collaboration. The session will conclude with the answering of any unanswered questions from this session or other sessions. An explanation of how ongoing use of the PLC program will help evaluate the program for future improvements will end the day. An overall professional development evaluation form will also be distributed upon exit.

Project Evaluation Plan

Research has shown that when professional development is coupled with collaboration and coaching program evaluations produce more positive results (Daniëls et al., 2020; Rowland, 2017; Thessin & Louis, 2020). “School leaders are powerful levers for change—when given the right training and support”(Rowland, 2017,p. 3). Administrators, special education teachers, and guidance counselors who participate in this project study’s professional development will complete PLC exit activities after Day 1 and Day 2 (see Appendix A). Both of these online Google documents will ask participants to list something they learned during the professional development and a question they still have after the days’ events. They will also respond, along with my response, to help answer any questions that may exist. The PLC shared document will continue to be an open means of collaborative problem solving after all sessions are ended, as the participants can discuss successes and struggles that may arise. Each participant will also be given a professional development evaluation form at the end of Day 3 to complete before exiting the training location (see Appendix A). The use of the formative PLC questions may allow me to evaluate and adapt the professional development during the process, while the exiting program evaluation form may allow me to see if the goals of this professional development have been met.

The goals as stated in Appendix A will consist of learning how to analyze data and choose appropriate data for evaluation, forming a data-driven MTSS and learning how to tier interventions inside the MTSS to provide support for all learners, forming a parent involvement/empowerment plan, and including an SEL plan into the created data-driven MTSS plan. These goals will be evaluated through the use formal evaluations through activities that

are listed in Appendix A. They will also be evaluated through feedback received in the PLC process explained above.

Although Day 1 and Day 2 of training will include both building-level administrators and special educators, the focus of the evaluation will be on the administrators. This is due to the goals of this project study to provide tools for the administrators to allow them to reduce the amount of chronic absenteeism of SwD. Other key stakeholders such as guidance counselors and parent representatives will be included in Day 3 of the training. Again, the focus of the evaluation is to focus on the learning objectives of the administrators to meet the goals of this project.

Project Implications

This project study was intended to promote social change in the local middle school setting by offering research-based solutions to the problem of chronic absenteeism of SwD. The perspectives of administrators were gathered through the use of semistructured interviews to create a professional development plan for administrators in grades 6-8 at the local school district and other schools throughout the state of Tennessee. This professional development could also be used by college instructors in their pre-service curriculum. The purpose of this professional development is to provide administrators with an opportunity to collaboratively create a data-driven MTSS, a parental involvement/empowerment plan, and an SEL plan to help reduce the chronic absenteeism rate of SwD.

Local School Implications

The combination of the findings of this project study and current research could help administrators by providing them with resources that they have either requested or were not

evident in the interviews for this study. First, administrators will be aided in the creation of a data-driven MTSS as suggested by the TDOE. Second, the administrators will be allowed to place both plans for parental involvement/empowerment and SEL into the MTSS model. Through the use of this program, administrators may be able to reduce chronic absenteeism as others have done with similar programs that focus on data analysis, meeting students' basic needs, and increasing parental involvement (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018).

Far-Reaching Implications

An important social change issue that may be addressed by this project study is analyzing the data of SwD and individual students to meet their specific needs. This professional development will require administrators and other educators to examine students' needs and collaborate with fellow educators and stakeholders to provide the best fit for their particular students. This could help to build a collaborative environment where all members learn from each other and the capacity of all of the participants could be used to create a better solution to the problem of chronic absenteeism of SwD.

Secondly, as research suggests students that have issues with chronic absenteeism during elementary years tend to only increase absenteeism if not addressed. This absenteeism could be a more significant problem as a student reaches high school where class absences can increase which would increase the chances of drop out, not being college-ready, or in some cases a predictor of future problems such as poor job performance (H.N. Chang et al., 2018; London et al., 2016).

Finally, the data-driven MTSS, parental involvement/empowerment plan, and the SEL plan could also provide a decrease in chronic absenteeism for all students. This is possible

because all MTSS programs can provide tier-one programs to meet the needs of all students. Much of the research that was used for this project was conducted for all students with some results produced for SwD. Administrators can then use their plans to include a broader audience as the implementation process of this project has been completed.

Conclusion

Section one of this project study presented the problem that existed in a school district in Tennessee specifically and the larger population of the education field. Section two explained the qualitative research that was conducted through semistructured interviews which led to the creation of a three-part professional development workshop project. Section three provided an overview of the professional development plan created for this project study, as well as the research that the professional development was based on. Section four will include my reflection of my project's strengths and limitations, a description of what I learned about scholarship, project development, leadership, and social implications throughout the project study process.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this project study was to determine local administrators' perspectives on why SwD are more prone to chronic absenteeism than their typical classmates. Through the use of qualitative, semistructured interviews, I determined that principals believed that in order to better serve chronically absent SwD they needed a way to increase parental involvement and a way to meet the social-emotional needs of these students. There was also evidence to show that these administrators needed help with data analysis and setting up and using a data-driven MTSS. Therefore, I created a 3-day professional development plan to help these administrators create, in collaboration with special education teachers, guidance counselors, and parent stakeholders, a basic data-driven MTSS that includes parental involvement/empowerment and a social-emotional plan for chronically absent SwD.

In Sections 1 through 3 of this project study, I identified a local problem that existed in the middle schools of my district and in the field of education in general, described the research methodologies that I used, and discussed the professional development project that I developed based on the results of my research. In Section 4, I will discuss the project strengths and limitations and alternative approaches to the presented problem. I will discuss how the completion of this project has allowed me to grow in the areas of scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. I will share my reflections on the importance of the work of this project study. I will also discuss implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The greatest strength of this project study is its ability to provide administrators with a means of delivery for plans that will reduce barriers which may reduce chronic absenteeism rate of SwD. Much like Balfanz and Byrnes (2018), I found that there were multiple focus areas like parental involvement and SEL that could help reduce the absences of SwD. I also found a lack of in-depth data analysis that also coincided with research on the needs of strong data-driven plans to combat chronic absenteeism (Arden & Pentimonti, 2019; Genao, 2015). The professional development was thus designed to include these aforementioned areas in a way that they could be scaffolded into a familiar system (MTSS) with hopes of seeing similar success that was found with Balfanz and Byrnes (2018).

The first limitation of this professional development is that will likely occur during a time when Covid-19 could still have an impact on in-person meetings. If this occurs, such meetings could be conducted through the use of Google Meet. This program has been used at the study district throughout the Covid-19 crisis as a means of providing in-service to classroom teachers. Both teachers and administrators have learned how to adapt learning by using provided online materials and extra support as needed to ensure that the same quality of in-service is provided online as would be provided in person.

The second limitation of this project is that professional development can be perceived as not pertaining to the particular needs of administrators (Gümüş & Bellibaş, 2020; Rowland, 2017). However, as researchers have suggested I looked for similar areas of concerns and potential barriers of all of the participants in order to form a professional development that is contextual rather than generic (Rowland, 2017). I have taken care to make each product that

will be produced personal to the school so that the professional development falls within each school's current framework and goals.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The problem addressed in this project study was that SwD continue to be chronically absent more than typical classmates. I chose qualitative research to obtain the unique perspectives of the administrators on why those students were underperforming in that area. After seeing that those administrators did not use subgroup or individual data to guide interventions for those students, it is my suggestion that an alternate approach would be to use quantitative data to conduct a baseline study on the effects of interventions on the amount of chronic absenteeism.

Another approach to consider would be to account for the differences and similarities in the subgroup of SWD and the subgroup of economically disadvantaged students. Administrators A, B, and D all discussed how these two subgroups often overlap. Therefore, research could be expanded to either include interventions that include students who are economically disadvantaged or possibly focus solely on SWD who do not fall into the category of economically disadvantaged.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Scholarship

Prior to my education at Walden, little of my written work was of a scholarly nature. By reviewing the literature for this project, I was able to learn a number of important aspects of scholarly work. I learned how to select, analyze, and synthesize scholarly articles that are peer-

reviewed. I learned to include factual statements to help strengthen the results of my own research. I also learned how to conduct research to solve a local problem with intention to add to the scholarship of others. In essence, I have learned the true meaning of whether a project is research-based and the importance of all educational projects being research-based, as well.

Project Development and Evaluation

As an administrator, I am often asked to design or locate professional development to meet the needs of my staff. The project development part of this study has required me to complete research in my local environment, analyze that research, and then produce a project based on the results of my research. I have improved my interviewing skills as well as learned how to analyze and synthesize information into categories. I now feel comfortable with organizing my own research-based professional development which can be developed to meet the personal needs of the student population that I serve.

The evaluation portion of this project has allowed me to consider using formative and summative assessment to ensure the goals of my professional development are being met. I used activities throughout my professional development to see if my attendees were meeting goals throughout the sessions. This will allow me to stop and clarify misconceptions or answer questions as needed. I also used PLC collaborative responses as summative assessments to see if each day's goals were met. The PLC responses will allow me and my participants to assess for learning long after the professional development is complete. This will allow me to coach from a distance in a time when Covid limits face to face interactions.

Leadership and Change

Having used Fullan's (2015) change leadership as a theoretical guide for this project, I have learned what it means to be a change leader. According to Fullan, a change leader is one that gains knowledge and uses the knowledge to obtain change by utilizes the resources that are available to them. I learned to carefully examine the results of multiple research projects to determine their validity and reliability. I learned that just because a project is formed by a reliable outside agency doesn't mean that it is a good fit for my school. A leader must first be a participant, then they can empower those around him to learn and use their capacity to add to the project.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

It was my goal to learn the perspectives of all of the middle school administrators in my school district in order to get a clearer picture of why they believe SwD are prone to be chronically absent. I learned that there is a great need for training administrators on how to choose, implement, and evaluate programs based on data. Administrators deal with similar issues such as lack of parental involvement and a need for a social-emotional plan to meet the needs of SwD.

It is my hope that this project will set the standard of how we can use the data-driven MTSS program that we use for existing programs, like RTI, to implement new programs as needed. If this program is properly implemented and evaluated it could be a way of reducing the absenteeism rate of SwD. If this occurs, these students will be exposed more to classroom instruction while having their basic needs met. This could lead to possible social change for these students as well as the other students as well.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Social Implications

This study has a potential impact for social change on an individual, family, organizational, and societal/policy level. Each chronically absent SwD could be provided with an individualized plan to reduce absenteeism by building relationships with their parents and our educators and by providing them their social-emotional needs through the SEL plan. Families could be impacted by empowering them to help create programs for their children and educating them on how to help them attend school more often. As an organization, we can train all of our employees in a collaborative way to help each other reduce chronic absenteeism throughout our county. Currently, there is no policy to include SEL into the curriculum of our school system. This project could possibly lead to the implementation of such a policy. It may also lead our district to create more professional development based on providing needs for SwD in other areas.

Applications and Future Research

With the development of a data-driven MTSS format, schools should be able to implement not only the parental and SEL plans that are discussed in this project, but also other research-based programs. As the research showed in both literature reviews, having appropriate data will allow administrators to customize interventions and evaluate those interventions in a valuable way. This same system could also be used for students who do not have disabilities who also need parental involvement and SEL to meet basic needs.

Both further qualitative research and quantitative research could be conducted to find additional solutions to reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. Further qualitative interviews

could be conducted with guardians to obtain information on why their students are chronically absent and what potential barriers exist for them to help their student attend school more often. As suggested previously, quantitative research could be used to determine which interventions are more effective on reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD.

Conclusion

Chronically absent SwD miss school for various reasons. Although much research has been conducted on students as a whole, there still exist little research like the research conducted in this study. The administrators in this study provided potential barriers such as a lack of parental support and a need for SEL. This study seems to make apparent that administrators have the desire to reduce the chronic absenteeism of all students, especially those with special needs. However, some administrators may lack the guidance on how to analyze the data to provide and evaluate interventions to meet the specific needs of their SwD. Once these interventions are in place, the chances of closing the gap between these students and their typical counterparts may be exponentially increased while meeting the social-emotional needs of those students.

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Appendix A: The Project

Chronically Absent SwD Professional Development

Purpose

The purpose of this professional development is to provide administrators and their schools with tools to reduce the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities (SwD). As administrators expressed in the interview section of the research on which this formed, they prefer to receive professional development through in-service. This in-service is designed to promote planning and collaboration based on school-level data.

Goals

There are three goals for this professional development. The first goal is to help administrators form a data-driven MTSS plan for chronically absent SwD. This goal will include how to review data for intervention choice and evaluation. The second goal is to aide administrators in creating a parental education and involvement plan. The final goal is to provide support to administrators as they form a social emotional learning (SEL) collaboration team.

Learning Outcomes

The projected learning outcomes will be as follows:

1. The participants will examine data from their school to determine at-risk students.
2. The participants will form a MTSS plan based on the data to meet the needs of chronically absent SwD.

3. The participants will form a SEL Collaboration Group with a focus of meeting the SEL needs of chronically absent SwD.
4. The participants will form a SEL Collaboration Group Plan to meet the needs of chronically absent SwD.

Target Audience

The main target audience for this professional development is principals and assistant principals. The first day will also include special education teachers from each school to provide support in forming the MTSS due to their experience with making these plans for Response to Intervention. The second day will have the same target audience as the first. The last day of the project will add a guidance counselor from each school and a community stakeholder from each school in order to help form the SEL Collaboration Groups and form the school's plan for those groups.

Learning Components, Timelines, and Module Format

Day 1 – Data Analysis and Building a Data-Driven MTSS

Multiple researchers have found that using multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) when implementing Response to Intervention plans (both academic and behavior), Positive Behavior Intervention System plans (PBIS), and Social-emotional Learning (SEL) plans are successful when data-driven and implemented with fidelity (Arden & Pentimonti, 2019; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2018). Administrators can use existing data that has been broken down in progression from whole groups to subgroups and then from subgroups to individual students. This analyzed data can also be used to evaluate the chosen interventions throughout the implementation process.

Module 1A – Data Analysis**Attendees-**

Principals, assistant principals, and one special education teacher from each middle school in the district.

Time- 3 hours**Goals-**

- Learn how to analyze data on different levels
- Learn how to choose appropriate data for evaluation

Activities-

1. Facilitator presents current research on chronically absent SwD, a summary of the results of the interviews conducted for this project study, and a review of the requirements of the Tennessee Department of Education to reduce chronic absenteeism through the use of interventions that are included in a data-driven MTSS. This will be presented in a PowerPoint presentation.
2. Facilitator will lead an activity where they will compare and contrast two sets of data. The first set will be average daily attendance and average monthly attendance of the whole school. The second set of data will have the average daily attendance by subgroups. They will discuss what the data reveals and compare and contrast the data. This will conclude with a share out of information learned in a whole group share out. (see page 100)

3. Facilitator will lead participants in finding school level data on SwD as a group.
4. Facilitator will share an example on how to calculate individual absenteeism rate. The participants will then pick five SwD from their local school and complete a table that requires them to calculate the absenteeism rate, determine if the child is chronically absent (10% of days missed or greater), what might be causing them to be chronically absent, and what tier of MTSS that child might fall in. (see page 101)
5. Facilitator will lead all groups in a share out session to discuss strengths and weaknesses of having data talks like the one in activity four.

Outcomes-

- Participants will be able to find both subgroup and individual student data to determine proper interventions.
- Participants will be able to use individual and subgroup data to evaluate interventions after properly implementing them.

Materials Needed (for both modules)

- Computers
- Internet Access
- Worksheets for Activities

Module 1B- Forming a Data-Based MTSS for Reducing Chronic Absenteeism of SwD

Time- 3 hours

Goals-

- Form a Data-Driven Multi-levelled Systems of Support (MTSS) for chronically absent students with disabilities (SwD).
- Learn how to tier interventions to provide support for all learners.

Activities-

- Facilitator will quickly review the requirements of the TDOE on using an MTSS plan.
- Each school group will discuss what they have been using at their school to help reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD. They will discuss strengths and weaknesses of their programs. Then a whole group discussion will be held to share out results.
- Facilitator will share a sample of how an intervention can be tiered and the group will discuss it. (see page 102)
- Participants will then place 3-5 interventions that they have been using or would like to use in a MTSS tiered worksheet. They will then be asked to include when the intervention will occur, who will implement the plan, and how it would be evaluated. (see page 103)
- After completion, the facilitator will lead a group discussion to talk about successes and struggles of beginning their MTSS plan.
- Facilitator will explain how each school will be part of a professional learning community (PLC) and how Google Docs will be used to both form a formative evaluation of the

professional development and a summative, on-going evaluation after the professional development is complete. (see page 123)

Evaluation-

- The last activity will serve as a summative evaluation for this session. The facilitator will observe to see if participants are able to find and analyze the data to make data-based decisions.
- The other activities will serve as formative evaluations that will allow the facilitator to adjust and re-teach concepts if necessary.
- Participants will complete a PLC Google Doc which will be sent at the end of the day to each administrator. This will serve as a summative evaluation for each day and an on-going summative assessment after the professional development is completed. (see page 123)
- Coaching and support will be provided by myself during professional learning community online Google Doc activities. I will provide them with any needed information and connect them to resources they may need both in-between meetings and after the professional development is complete. By using the PLC format, they can also provide each other with support as needed.

Data Set One**Attendance Rates for the Month of September 2016**

School Name	Average Daily Attendance	Average Monthly Attendance	Attendance Last Year (End of Year)	Attendance This Year (As of Date)
School A	92%	93%	85%	92%
School B	95%	95%	90%	95%
School C	88%	88%	90%	89%
School D	90%	90%	79%	90%

Data Set Two**Chronic Absenteeism Rates for 2016-2017**

Subcategory or Category	Grade Level	Number of Students	Number Chronically Absent	Percent Chronically Absent
All Students	K-8	6182	722	11.7
Economically Disadvantaged	K-8	2004	365	18.2
Students with Disabilities	K-8	1013	162	16

What does the data in data set one tell you?

What does the data in data set two tell you?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of using each data set for determining interventions?

Chart Worksheet

Student Name (Anonymous)	Days Absent	Percentage	Chronic (Yes/No)	Possible Tier

For what reasons might each individual student be absent?

How did you decide which student would go into each tier?

What did you learn from this data table or the data table of your share group?

Sample Data-Driven SwD Chronic Absenteeism MTSS Plan

Tier One:

Student Criteria: All students.

Intervention: Parent education concerning what constitutes a chronic absenteeism rate, how to prevent chronic absenteeism, and available programs to help avoid chronic absenteeism.

Evaluation Tool: Whole group, subgroup, and individual data analysis of absenteeism rates.

Tier Two:

Student Criteria: Any SwD that misses more than 3 days in one grading period.

Intervention: Parent meeting to discuss absenteeism. Weekly meeting with the student with either administration or guidance counselor to discuss absenteeism and any issues at school.

Evaluation Tool: Individual data analysis

Tier Three:

Student Criteria: Any SwD that misses more than 5 days in one grading period.

Intervention: Chronic absenteeism plan will be formed. Meeting with the chronic absenteeism prevention team will occur to include administration, guidance counselor, and special education teacher. Home visit will be performed as needed to focus on needs abroad.

Evaluation tool: Individual data analysis

Data-Driven MTSS Exercise

Fill in each Tier for three interventions for chronically absent students with disabilities you currently use or would like to use in your school.

Tier One:

Tier Two:

Tier Three:

How would you evaluate each intervention to ensure success?

Day 2- Developing A Parent Involvement and Parent Empowerment Plan

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA,2016) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (2006) parents are required to be stakeholders or participants in their children's education. Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) changed the language from parent involvement to family engagement. As Fenton et al. (2017) commented the goal was to empower the parents to not only attend but to move beyond by creating and co-creating initiatives to better the education of their children. In short, parent involvement is described as being there versus parent empowerment is actually being a participant. The participants will use Sawyer's (2015) BRIDGES plan to build relationships, recruit participation, individualize to meet parent needs, dialogue with parents, generate tips to help parents, empower parents produce and co-produce programs for SwD, and strengthen parent/educator relationships.

Module 2A- Presenting Research on Parent Intervention and Examining Parent/Educator Relationships

Attendees- Principals, assistant principals and a special education teacher

Time- 3 hours

Goals-

- Learn the difference between parental involvement and parental empowerment.
- Learn how parental involvement and empowerment can reduce the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities.

Activities-

- If necessary, facilitator will answer any questions or concerns that was raised in the PLC Google Doc share session since the last meeting.
- Facilitator, as a warm up, will ask each school group to discuss among themselves what they believe the difference is between parental involvement and parental empowerment.
- Facilitator will present the group with research on parent involvement and parent empowerment and the effects of such on reducing chronic absenteeism.
- Participants will complete a Parent Involvement/Empowerment activity where they will list three ways they have involved parents or guardians in the education of their student who has special needs and three areas that they could improve parental/guardian relationships. They will also discuss both a positive and negative experience with parent/educator relationships. These will then be placed on Think Pads located around the room. The whole group results will then be shared out and discussed. (see page 110)
- Facilitator will lead the participants in an exploration of the website on Chronic Absenteeism from the TDOE and the Attendance Works website. The participants will

record two takeaways and two questions they have as they view the sites. (see page 111)

Outcomes-

- Participants will be able to describe the difference between parental involvement and parental empowerment.
- Participants will be able to describe how parental involvement/empowerment can affect chronic absenteeism rates of SwD.

Materials Needed- (for both modules)

- Computers
- Internet Access
- Worksheets for Activities
- Chart paper for Think Pads and markers
- Sticky Pads

Module 2B- Forming the Parent Involvement and Empowerment Plan

Time- 3 hours

Goals-

- Examine current parent/educator relationships at each school and reflect on how to improve them.
- Create a parent involvement/ empowerment plan for their school.

Activities-

- Facilitator will present a PowerPoint on how the Sawyer (2015) BRIDGES plan can be incorporated with other research to build a base for individualized school parent involvement/empowerment plans.
- Participants will discuss what elements of the BRIDGES plan already exist in their school and what ones need more work. They will then rank order each portion of the seven-part plan from the section that is the strongest now in their school to the section that needs the most improvement. They will also discuss why some areas are stronger or weaker than others. (see page 112)
- Participants will then use their areas of improvement to form their own base plan using the MTSS format discussed in Day 1 in a Google Doc. They will then share their plan with another school group for comparison and discussion. The facilitator will answer questions and guide participants in completing a base plan using BRIDGES. (see page 113)
- Coaching and support will be provided by myself during professional learning community online Google Doc activities (see page 123). I will provide them with any needed information and connect them to resources they may need both in-between

meetings and after the professional development is complete. By using the PLC format, they can also provide each other with support as needed.

Outcomes-

- Participants will examine current parent/educator practices for areas of strength and areas of improvement.
- Participants will create a base parent involvement/empowerment plan to be included in their Data-Driven MTSS plan.

Evaluation-

- The last activity will serve as a summative evaluation for this session. The facilitator will observe to see if participants are able to find and analyze the data to make data-based decisions.
- The other activities will serve as formative evaluations that will allow the facilitator to adjust and re-teach concepts if necessary.
- Participants will complete a PLC Google Doc which will be sent at the end of the day to each administrator. This will serve as a summative evaluation for each day and an on-going summative assessment after the professional development is completed. (see page 123)

Parent Involvement and Empowerment Sheet

List three ways you have involved parents/guardians in the education of their student who has special needs.

1.

2.

3.

List three area you could use more parental/guardian involvement or empowerment in your school.

1.

2.

3.

Remember to use a sticky note (1 for each) on the think pads to describe a positive and a negative experience with a parent involvement or empowerment situation at your school.

Resource Takeaways and Questions

List two takeaways you have from reviewing the resources of TDOE and two questions or concerns you have after reviewing these sites.

Takeaways

1.

2.

Concerns or Questions

1.

2.

Parent Empowerment Ranking

Please rank the areas of B.R.I.D.G.E.S. below in your current school situation.

Build ____

Recruit ____

Individualize ____

Dialogue ____

Generate ____

Empower ____

Strengthen ____

Why are some areas stronger than others?

School Name _____

Member Names _____

School Parental Empowerment Plan

Build

Individualize

Dialogue

Generate

Empower

Strengthen

Day 3- Presenting Research on Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Forming an SEL plan

Strahan and Poteat (2020) stated that based on previous research “boosting achievement without addressing social-emotional needs is impossible” (p.2). Skills that are taught through SEL include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Strahan & Poteat, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Success has been found in the areas of student engagement and attendance by targeting bullying, focusing on making the school a friendly environment, and teaching students to be socially responsible for their actions (Barnett, 2019; Ferreira et al., 2020; Strahan & Poteat, 2020; Yang et al., 2020). Tier one SEL instruction is performed by guidance counselors and teachers either in whole groups separate classes or embedded into the regular curriculum. Tier 2 and Tier 3 required more intense small group or individual meetings, which often lead to the formation of an individual SEL plan for the child (Barnett, 2019).

Module 3A- Presenting Research on SEL and Examining SEL Needs in Individual Schools

Attendees- Principals, assistant principals, guidance counselor, and a parent representative from each school

Time- 3 hours

Goals-

- Participant will discuss the social-emotional needs of the students at their school

- Participant will find areas of strengths and areas of improvement for chronically absent SwD

Activities-

- If necessary, facilitator will answer any questions or concerns that was raised in the PLC Google Doc share session since the last meeting.
- Facilitator will lead the school teams in a warm-up activity where they will discuss the question: What is the most important factors that every school need in order for students to be in an environment that is conducive to learning?
- Facilitator will present research on using SEL to prevent bullying, provide a safe and friendly working environment, and teach students to be socially responsible for their actions.
- Facilitator will provide groups with chart paper where they will list reasons why they believe that chronically absent SwD might not come to school. These will be posted and shared in the whole group through both a walk-through of all groups and a facilitator led discussion.
- The participants will then complete the Reasons for Absences activity where they will be required to write down the top three reasons that they believe SwD miss school on sticky notes and compare those notes with the other group's responses by walking around the room and reading the other responses.

- Facilitator will share a copy of Brundage et al.'s (2017) research in which secondary students were interviewed as to why they were chronically absent. Facilitator will have them share out reasons they found in the article and discuss if the reasons hold true for their school.
- Participants will complete a table on the three areas discussed above (bullying prevention, making a safe environment, and teaching students to be socially responsible for actions). They will list current programs or interventions that they use to help students to be successful in these areas. They will also score each area from 1-3: 1 need the most assistance in forming interventions, 2 need some assistance interventions, 3 need little assistance or no assistance in forming interventions. (see page 119) The whole group will discuss ways to meet the needs of areas that are scored on a three.

Outcomes-

- Participants will learn research-based info on SEL and its effect on reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD.
- Participants evaluated their SEL needs and know areas of strength and areas that need improvement.

Materials Needed- (for both modules)

- Computer
- Internet Access
- PowerPoint

- Brundage et al. article
- Chart Paper
- Markers
- Worksheets

Module 3B- Forming the SEL Team and SEL Collaboration Group Plan

Time-3 hours

Goals-

- Participants will form a basic SEL plan to add to their Data-Driven MTSS plan in an effort to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD.

Activities-

- Facilitator will provide the group with an example of a Data MTSS plan for SEL. The participants will review and the whole group will discuss any questions they may have about creating their own plan. (see page 120)
- Facilitator will answer questions and provide any needed assistance as the groups work on filling in their SEL plan (Google Doc) to meet the needs of chronically absent SWD. The majority of this module will be spent doing this activity to ensure the schools have a firm plan of action before leaving. (see page 122)
- The participants will complete a professional development evaluation prior to leaving. (see page 125)

Outcomes-

- Participants will form an SEL Collaborative Group Plan using Data-Driven MTSS.

Evaluation-

- The last activity will serve as a summative evaluation for this session. The facilitator will observe to see if participants are able to find and analyze the data to make data-based decisions.
- The other activities will serve as formative evaluations that will allow the facilitator to adjust and re-teach concepts if necessary.
- Participants will complete a PLC Google Doc which will be sent at the end of the day to each administrator. This will serve as a summative evaluation for each day and an on-going summative assessment after the professional development is completed. (see page 123)
- Coaching and support will be provided by myself during professional learning community online Google Doc activities. I will provide them with any needed information and connect them to resources they may need both in-between meetings and after the professional development is complete. By using the PLC format, they can also provide each other with support as needed.
- An addition to these evaluations, the participants will be given a professional development evaluation form to complete prior to leaving the last day of training. This will also serve as a summative evaluation. (see page 125)

Three Areas of SEL Concern

Please list any interventions or programs you currently use to address the SEL areas of concern.

Then score each level as follows: 1 need the most assistance in forming interventions, 2 need some assistance interventions, 3 need little assistance or no assistance in forming interventions.

SEL Area of Concern	Current Intervention or program	Score (1,2, or 3)
Bullying Prevention		
Making the school environment safe and inviting		
Teaching students to be socially responsible for their own actions		

Sample SEL Data-Driven SwD Chronic Absenteeism MTSS Plan

Tier One:

Student Criteria: All students.

Intervention: The Guidance counselor will provide bully prevention videos to be played once per month.

Evaluation Tool: Whole group, subgroup, and individual data analysis of absenteeism rates.

Tier Two:

Student Criteria: Any student that has bullied or has been bullied more than one time.

Intervention: Counselor, principal or assistant principal will meet with the student to determine why they are bullying or being bullied, provide advice and support on how to prevent bullying or being bullied, and perform follow-up as necessary. Parents will also be notified by preferred communication and allowed to meet in person if necessary.

Evaluation Tool: Individual data analysis

Tier Three:

Student Criteria: Any SwD that misses more than 2 occasions of being bullied or bullying.

Intervention: The person that is found to have been bullying others will be placed on a behavior plan in which a Check In/Check Out system will be used and monitored by teachers, the guidance counselor, and the principal. Parents will be called in for a meeting to help construct this plan.

Evaluation tool: Individual data analysis

SEL Collaborative Group Data-Driven MTSS Plan

School Name:

Member Names:

Tier 1: (Universal Programs)

Responsible Person (s):

Evaluation Method:

Tier 2:

Student Qualification:

Responsible Person (s):

Evaluation Method:

Tier 3:

Student Qualification:

Responsible Person (s):

Evaluation Method:

Day 1 Session: Data-Driven MTSS

Please respond to each of these questions in the color chosen for your school. Please feel free to comment on any response given by other schools.

What is something new you learned in this workshop that could help your school reduce the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities?

What is an area of concern that you have after day one?

Day Two Professional Learning Community Reflection

Please respond to each of these questions. Please feel free to comment to any response given by other schools.

What is something new that you have learned about parent involvement and parent empowerment that could help your school reduce the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities?

What potential barriers do you perceive in implementing this program at your school?

Ongoing PLC Discussion Board

Please list any praise reports you have with the implementation of your data-driven MTSS, parental involvement/empowerment plan, or your SEL Collaborative Group plan. You may also list questions you may encounter as you proceed with your plan.

Chronically Absent SwD Professional Development Evaluation

Please respond to the following statements by choosing:

1 Strongly Agree, 2 Agree, 3 Disagree, 4 Strongly Disagree

1. I have learned more about how to properly analysis data to choose and evaluate interventions for reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD. _____
2. The parental involvement and parental empowerment plan will be beneficial to my school in helping to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD. _____
3. The SEL plan will be will be beneficial to my school in helping to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD. _____
4. What would you change about this professional development to better meet your school's needs?

5. What questions do you still have concerning implementing any of the interventions discussed during this training?

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol of this research project is based on the responsive interview protocol of Rubin and Rubin (2012). The interview will begin with a reminder by verbally reaffirming the consent to participate in the interview. I designed each interview question to answer the three RQs. The interview questions have been designed to examine the change leadership abilities of the administrators by seeking their personal perspectives and examine their interventions and potential barriers which would relate to the idea that success is based on outcomes of actions which is suggested in the utilitarian consequentialist approach (Burns, 1978; Fullan, 2015).

Each question will be asked sequentially. Follow-up questions will be asked to allow interviewees to clarify or expand on their answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As suggested by Rubin and Rubin, I will take notes during the interviews to document verbal and non-verbal cues, as well as, any analytical memos that may pertain to my overall RQs.

Interviewees may stop the interview process at any time. They may also refuse to answer any questions that are asked. I will set a timer to ensure that the interview does not exceed the 45-minute time frame. The interview will conclude by reminding the interviewees how the information will be kept confidential and that I will allow them to look at the results of the study upon the completion of the study and include their feedback of that member check in my findings.

Interview Questions

Research Question 1: What do administrators perceive to be the reasons for chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. Why do you feel that a typical student would be chronically absent, and how are these reasons different or similar for SwD?
2. Based on your experience, why are students with disabilities more prone to high absenteeism rates?

Research Question 2: What interventions have administrators used and/or currently using to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. How were your chronic absenteeism interventions chosen for all of your students? How did those interventions differ than those for SwD?
2. How do you know if an intervention was successful for SwD?
3. What types of interventions have you found successful with reducing absenteeism rates of students with disabilities?

4. What interventions have been less successful?

Research Question 3: What are the administrators' perceived barriers in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. What are some resources that you need, but currently do not have access to, that will benefit you in reducing the absenteeism rate of students with disabilities?
2. What is a potential area of growth for yourself or your school that would lead to the reduction of chronic absenteeism of SwD?
3. Why would some interventions that work for typical students not work for SwD?
4. If you could receive further training to help you and your staff with this issue, what would that training consist of? Would the training need to occur during principal preparation programs, in-service programs, both, or in some other fashion?

Appendix C: Sample Transcript

Interview Questions

Admin 6

Research Question 1: What do administrators perceive to be the reasons for chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. Why do you feel that a typical student would be chronically absent, and how are these reasons different or similar for SwD? *Often home situation has the most to do with absences. Students who have difficult home situations tend to miss more school. Often these students are both ED and SWD. By the middle school level, students who struggle also tend to miss more often, possibly as an escape/avoidance.*
2. Based on your experience, why are students with disabilities more prone to high absenteeism rates?

Sometimes the reasons are medical, but most often parents don't make the students come to school. This may be due to a poor home situation or due to the student refusing to come to school. I think the fact that students struggle all day academically and then often lose one related arts period to go to SPED class, contribute to this problem. They have very little they look forward to during the day at school.

Research Question 2: What interventions have administrators used and/or currently using to reduce chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. How were your chronic absenteeism interventions chosen for all of your students? How did those interventions differ than those for SwD? *We have used a combination of rewards/incentives, and specific*

interventions. Our most successful way to address absenteeism for SWD was placing SPED faculty and/or assistants in classrooms to do inclusion throughout the school day. Having someone in the classroom to provide additional supports helped students be more successful and they came to school more often. We also assign faculty members to students who need extra support. Those faculty members check in with students and provide encouragement. They also hold the student accountable for attendance.

2. How do you know if an intervention was successful for SwD? *We look at the data to compare attendance and also use anecdotal data through conversations with students.*

3. What types of interventions have you found successful with reducing absenteeism rates of students with disabilities? *inclusion / additional support in classroom, faculty assigned to students to check in on them and hold them accountable*

4. What interventions have been less successful? *missing out on rewards, rewards/incentives in general have had little effect*

Research Question 3: What are the administrators' perceived barriers in reducing chronic absenteeism of SwD?

1. What are some resources that you need, but currently do not have access to, that will benefit you in reducing the absenteeism rate of students with disabilities? *Additional staff would be the most effective resource*

2. What is a potential area of growth for yourself or your school that would lead to the reduction of chronic absenteeism of SwD? *Increasing inclusion to include all academic subjects instead of only reading and math*

3. Why would some interventions that work for typical students not work for SwD? *For some reason SWD respond less favorably to reward incentives & if missing a reward is a consequence, attendance becomes worse because they don't come the day of the reward if they do not get to participate.*

4. If you could receive further training to help you and your staff with this issue, what would that training consist of? Would the training need to occur during principal preparation programs, in-service programs, both, or in some other fashion? *I think training with guidance counselors to help address the underlying issues that cause students to want to miss school would be the best use of funding.*