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Improving academic achievement of students with problematic attendance by implementing a multisystemic school-based model

James Edward Kay
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2010

ABSTRACT

Improving Academic Achievement of Students with Problematic Attendance by
Implementing a Multisystemic School-Based Model

by

James Edward Kay

M.A., University of Manchester, 2001

B.S., Radford University, 1994

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctorate in Education
Educational Leadership

Walden University

January, 2010

ABSTRACT

This study addressed the problem of poor attendance adversely affecting grades and learning. Current school policies do not address problematic attendance for all school-aged children, perpetuating trends of academic failure. The research objective was to determine if unexcused absences had a greater negative impact on a high-stakes test compared to excused absences and then develop a manual of best attendance policies to better serve all school-aged children. This study sampled 10,403 students in a southern United States county. Bivariate regression and ANOVA analyses examined the scores students earned on their first attempt at the Social Studies Georgia High School Graduation Test (SSGHSGT) in relation to these students' excused and unexcused absences for grades 9 through 11. Unexcused absences had a significantly greater impact than excused absences on SSGHSGT scores. Scores decreased an average of 1.33 points for every unexcused absence, whereas each excused absence resulted in a score reduction of only 0.47 points. Given the need demonstrated by these results, a manual of best practices was developed from initiatives that had been empirically proven successful in preventing absences. The initiatives, drawn from the theoretical foundation of family systems, employ schools, parents, neighborhoods, peers, government agencies, and teachers to cumulatively influence student decisions about attendance. By preventing students from developing problematic attendance, positively impacting student grades, raising graduation rates, and reducing delinquency-related crimes these improvements can create a positive social change for students, parents, and particularly school personnel who are held responsible for academic achievement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES AND FIGURES	iv
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	8
Rationale	11
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	11
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	12
Definitions.....	13
Significance.....	15
Research Question	16
Review of the Literature	17
The Conceptual Framework.....	17
The Impact Attendance Has on Student Achievement	18
The Correlation Between Attendance and Academics	20
The Correlation Between Attendance and Standardized Tests.....	20
Implications.....	23
Summary	24
SECTION 2: THE METHODOLOGY.....	25
Research Design.....	25
Setting and Sample	27
Instrumentation and Materials	28
Data Collection and Analysis.....	28
Collection Processes	28
Data Analysis	29
Hypotheses.....	30
Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations.....	31
Assumptions.....	31
Limitations	32
Scope.....	33
Delimitations.....	33
Measure to Protect Participants' Rights.....	34
Summary of Methodology	34
Quantitative Results.....	34
Table 1	37
Figure 1	40
Figure 2	41
Figure 3	42
Summary.....	43
SECTION 3: THE PROJECT.....	44

Description and Goals.....	45
Schools’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	45
Parents’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	46
The Neighborhoods’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance.....	48
Peers’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	48
Agencies’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance.....	48
Teachers’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	49
Conclusion of Description and Goals	49
Rationale	50
Review of the Literature	51
Introduction.....	51
Schools’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	53
The short comings of Gwinnett’s attendance policy.....	54
The research-based practices in Gwinnett’s protocol	57
School-based attendance practices and programs.....	58
Focus on the core academic courses	61
Focus on high expectations.....	62
Communication home.....	63
Parents’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance.....	63
Altering the attitudes of parents.....	63
Home-based initiatives that can improve attendance.....	64
School refusal is preventable	66
Combat general distress	67
Combat avoidance of social/performance situations	67
Combat the attempts to gain attention	68
Combat truancy.....	69
Keep track of the child’s whereabouts.....	69
Utilize a written contract.....	70
Peers’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	70
The effectiveness of peer groups	70
Friendships leave lasting impressions.....	71
Agencies’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance.....	72
Holding parents responsible.....	72
Teachers’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance	74
Making courses relevant and engaging.....	74
Improving teacher absenteeism.....	78
Teachers increasing academic rigor.....	79
Improve teacher respect	81
The teacher mentor	82
Conclusion	84
Implementation	85
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	86
Potential Barriers	87
Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	87

Unexcused absences.....	88
Cumulative absences.....	89
Excused absences.....	90
Roles and Responsibilities of the School.....	90
Questions for the School to Ask the Student	92
Responsibilities of the School to Combat Distress.....	93
Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Distress.....	93
Responsibilities of the School to Combat Avoidance Issues.....	93
Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Avoidance Issues.....	94
Responsibilities of the School to Combat a Student’s Attempt to Gain Attention...	94
Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat a Student’s Attempt to Gain Attention....	94
Responsibilities of the School to Combat Truancy.....	96
Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Truancy	96
Project Evaluation.....	97
Implications Including Social Change	100
Local Community	100
Far-Reaching.....	100
Conclusion	102
SECTION 4: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION	103
Introduction.....	103
Project Strengths	103
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	105
Scholarship.....	107
Leadership and Change.....	109
Analysis of Self as Scholar	109
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	110
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	110
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research.....	111
Conclusion	111
REFERENCES	113
APPENDIX A GCPS ATTENDANCE PROTOCOL.....	124
APPENDIX B MULTISYSTEMIC MODEL	133
APPENDIX C ATTENDANCE AGGREGATION	156
APPENDIX D MODIFY BEHAVIOR	159
APPENDIX E S.T.O.P.....	162
APPENDIX F ATTENDANCE CONTRACT	163
APPENDIX G EXCUSE NOTE.....	166
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	168

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1 Correlations.....	37
Figure 1 Weighted Cumulative Absences vs. Scores	40
Figure 2 Weighted Unexcused Absences vs. Scores	41
Figure 3 Weighted Excused Absences vs. Scores	42

SECTION 1:

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The problem that this study addressed is that intervention methods have failed to decrease problematic attendance among school-aged children. The purpose of this research was to increase students' academic achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Academic achievement may be raised by improving attendance of those students who would normally have a high rate of absenteeism (Daugherty, 2008). Students who regularly attend school are less likely to fail high-stakes tests (Daugherty). School system attendance and test scores may be impacted by following the attendance model discussed in detail in section 3.

As school systems face increased accountability for performing at minimum state and national standards for academics, and particularly standardized test scores, this inquiry was developed to explore the relationship between problematic attendance and scores on high-stakes tests. Educators who wish to improve academic achievement by improving student attendance will find this research informative. This study plays a role for principals who are now accountable, under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, for their schools' performance (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008). Educational leaders are responsible for reaching achievement goals that are based upon standardized test scores, but poor attendance is interfering with that goal (Couillard, Garnett, Hutchins, Fawcett, & Maycock, 2006; Richardson, 2008).

Research has proven that attendance and academic achievement have a strong, consistent correlation (Chen & Lin, 2008; Clump, Bauer, & Whiteleather, 2003; Couillard et. al, 2006). Studies have shown that the majority of students who have good attendance also do well academically and on standardized tests (Daugherty, 2008; Davis, 1998; DeKalb and ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1999; Halpern, 2007; Jacobs, & Kritsonis, 2007; Marburger, 2001; National Audit Office, 2005; The New York City Department of Education, 2000; Nichols, 2003; Roby, 2004; Ward, & Burke, 2004). Attendance improvement for those students who normally are absent has been shown to improve academic achievement, as evidenced by the passing rate of courses (7 actions that improve school district performance, 2006). However, not all types of absences effect academic achievement at the same rate. Clement (2006) asserted that excused absences have far less impact on standardized test scores than unexcused absences. This study will evaluated the effectiveness and weaknesses of existing models. The end goal was to combine the approaches, so that the policies work together, creating an approach with increased strength beyond what the individual policies could accomplish by themselves. This multisystemic model targeted a student's recorded excused and unexcused absentee rate and provided scalable interventions designed to prevent or delay and dilute the adverse effects of the problematic absences. Once the recommended attendance model is adopted by a school, school administrators and parents may see marked improvement in overall student attendance rates as well as academic achievement.

The first step to creating an attendance model of scientifically-proven best practices is to determine at which point a student's ability to move forward in school is

adversely affected by poor attendance. For the quantitative portion of this project study, the correlation between excused and unexcused absences and the Social Studies portion of the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) were examined.

The Social Studies portion of the GHS GT was chosen due to the local problem of students failing this portion of the test. For instance, South Gwinnett High School had failure rates on the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT in the 2004-2005 school year of 12%, in the 2005-2006 school year of 23%, in the 2006-2007 school year of 14%, and in the 2007-2008 school year of 10% (GCPS, 2009b). Another local school, Berkmar High School, saw similar results. In the 2004-2005 school year, the failure rate was 13%; in the 2005-2006 school year, it was 23%; in the 2006-2007 school year, it was 12%; and in the 2007-2008 school year, 9% of the school failed this portion of the test (GCPS, 2009c). A less diverse school, still within Gwinnett County, Georgia, is Mill Creek High School. For the same test in this school, failure rates in the 2004-2005 school year were 8%, in the 2005-2006 school year, 18%, in the 2006-2007 school year, 9%, and in the 2007-2008 school year, 8% of the students failed this portion of the test (GCPS, 2009d). The Gwinnett County system, as a whole, still struggles with the percentage of students passing the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT. In 2008-2009 13% of all Gwinnett County students failed this portion of the test (GCPS, 2009e). With the proven connection between the score failure rate and attendance, attendance in Gwinnett will be reviewed. In 2007 Gwinnett county had 7.4% of its students reach 15 or more absences within the school year as compared to 10% for the State of Georgia (Georgia Kids Count: Gwinnett County, 2008). These score and attendance figures may indicate a connection; Gwinnett County students may be failing due to problematic attendance.

This project study includes two factors involved in the link between absenteeism and failure of high-stakes tests that other research efforts have not considered: when do the students learn the information they need to know in order to pass the standardized test and which kinds of absences did the students accumulate. Nichols (2003) determined that students who passed both sections of the Indiana High School Graduation Test had on average fewer than 8.34 days of absences, but the likelihood of failing at least one section began at 6.95 days of absences. Nichols' research is not clear about which academic years have been proven to have the greatest bearing on the Indiana High School Graduation Test. In addition, the research did not differentiate between excused and unexcused absence rates. This is an important aspect to consider, because there is a difference between the effects excused and unexcused absences have upon standardized tests (Clement, 2006).

In this project study, the research focused on attendance rates by type for the academic years proven to have the greatest bearing on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT 9th, 10th, and 11th grades. The purpose of this study was to design a model that will increase attendance and therefore improve academic achievement. The Social Studies portion of the GHSGT covers information learned through various classes (GHSGT, 2007). Eighteen percent of the test comes from American Government / Civics, with a small portion typically learned in middle school and the majority learned in grade 11 (GHSGT). Twenty-six percent of the test comes from United States History to 1865, information usually taught in the 11th grade (GHSGT). An additional 25% of the test is related to United States History since 1865 and this information is also taught primarily in grade 11. Approximately 13% of the test is taken from World Geography, a 9th grade

course. Finally, 18% of the test material comes from a 10th grade course called World History (GHSGT).

In this project study, the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT was correlated with attendance weighted for the years the majority of the material is taught. A high school student who stays on track for graduation, taking courses within a typical progression, will learn the information to pass the test as follows:

13% - 9th grade

18% - 10th grade

69% - 11th grade (GHSGT, 2007)

Once the data was accumulated and attendance per grade weighted by the above percentages, a linear regression analysis with a scatter plot diagram was derived from the correlation between the dependant variable of the score on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT in relation to the independent variable of various types of absences: cumulative absences, excused, and unexcused. Scatter plot diagrams were used to graphically represent the various correlations and represent the linear regression analysis. This initial focus quantify the difference in effect excused absence had compared to unexcused absences as they related to the score on a high-stakes test.

Once the quantitative research pinpoints the number and type of absences at which a student becomes statistically likely to fail standardized testing, the research then determined which protocols have been proven by research to effectively reduce problematic attendance with regards to cumulative absences, excused absences, and unexcused absences. The model would have had a multisystemic approach and the research must have provided evidence that a statistical likelihood did in fact positively

affect attendance rates of those students who may develop problematic attendance, as per the review of literature in section three. Because no one model of attendance appeared to be effective, this research took from past research by Barth et al. (2007) on parental involvement, Fielder's (2003) work on the importance of the core subjects, the National Audit Office's (2005) findings on the importance of student engagement, Teasley's (2004) work on teaching and learning styles, teacher absenteeism, insufficient student-teacher relations, low teacher expectations, and inconsistency in school discipline, and the National Audit Office's (2005) report on effective consequences for attendance-related discipline issues.

The final goal was to create a model attendance policy and list of best practices that will improve the attendance of students who would otherwise perform poorly on their high-stakes graduation test. Such recommendations came from programs with measurable success, such as DeKalb's (1999) study in which one change in the attendance policy brought about a 45% reduction in truancy. The focus of section 3 was to bring together proven attendance practices that, when put into place together, will create an effective and efficient multisystemic attendance model. Through these aspects, a social change may improve the education of those students who would normally be absent to a point in which they are at risk for failing a standardized test.

The end goal is to develop an attendance protocol that targets students with problematic attendance. Schools that adopt the attendance model may realize the improved academic achievement of students with problematic attendance. More on the significance of this project study is written in the significance subsection below.

The attendance-related recommendation model was derived from past research examining which factors have been proven to most successfully motivate students to regularly attend school. Because the research and findings of (Carruthers, Wake County Public School System, and Others (1993), Clement (2006), DeKalb (1999), Epstein and Sheldon (2002), Harris and Goodall (2008), Harte and The Canadian Education Association (1995), Hartnett (2008), Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007), Kreps (1999), Marburger (2001), Mount Diablo Unified School District (1990), the National Audit Office (2005), Nemecek and Watson (2007), the New York City Department of Education (2000), and Teasley (2004) hold true, the proposed attendance model is effective and efficient at combating problematic attendance. Many of the above attendance programs have one or two aspects that are effective at reducing unexcused absences, but no one protocol by itself was ideal. Once the model is implemented, a school should realize improvement in the attendance and the academic achievement of those students who would have otherwise reached problematic attendance rates and types.

The study of policies that attempt to improve attendance begins with causality. From past research, it has been determined that parental influence is the most significant reason students either come to school or are absent (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Parental attitudes toward school and education have an impact on a student's willingness to attend school. The parents who do not allow students to miss school, except for excused reasons, have children with better attendance. Beyond parental influence, peer influence also plays a role in a student's truancy (Hartnett, 2008). Peer influence both positively and negatively affects attendance (Hartnett). Those students with friends who normally attend school and who are not truant are more likely to attend school themselves. Hartnett

emphasizes that students who have friends who are habitually truant from school or who have a negative attitude toward education are more likely to develop problematic attendance. Due to the strong influence peers exert in a young person's decision-making paradigm (Schoenwald, Brown, & Henggeler, 2000), peer influence will be a component of the multisystemic intervention model found in section 3 in the review of literature. Multisystemic intervention models have determined that school is the third most influential factor in a school-aged youth's life (Kearney, 2008; Marks, 2007; National Audit Office, 2005; Schoenwald et al.). The interaction and socialization that a child endures with within the school walls influences the child's morals, ethics, and decisions. The multisystemic intervention model was based on six pillars the school, parents, the neighborhood, peers, government agencies, and teachers. When these pillars come together to support the student, the likelihood of problematic attendance is reduced (Henggeler & Rowland, 1999; Schoenwald et al.).

Definition of the Problem

Problematic attendance is creating local and national problems. These are the reasons this study was conceived. In 2007, Gwinnett County had 12,907 students accumulate more than 15 absences during the school year (Georgia Kids Count: Gwinnett County, 2008). Nemecek and Watson (2007) used questionnaires to survey high school students about attendance. In their study "78% of the whole agreed that poor attendance affects their grade and learning" (p. 25). According to Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001), unexcused absences in large cities, on particular school days, can reach numbers in the thousands.

One possible cause of low academic achievement is attendance. Nichols' (2003) research pointed to the lack of attendance as part of the cause for students failing the state of Indiana high school graduation exam. During the year the students took and failed both sections of the exam, the students averaged 7.11 to 15.73 days out of school. Locally, students in the state of Georgia are also failing their high-stakes tests. These failures may be partially based on problematic attendance, as found in other studies which concluded that students are failing high-stakes tests because they do not attend an adequate amount of school (Chen & Lin, 2008; Couillard et al., 2006).

In Gwinnett County and nationally, schools are being held accountable for their students learning basic materials, even if these students are not present in school to be taught (2008 AYP, 2008). Schools are taking measures by implementing strategies to improve attendance and academic achievement but not all strategies are successful for a school to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). School accountability is measured in part by AYP, which reflects the number of students per school system who pass the required standardized tests (Anon, 2008). If a certain number of students in a school do not show up to take the required standardized tests, that school could fail to make AYP. Improving attendance of local schools might be one factor that would improve test results.

This factor is one that the school may be able to control more than the administration realizes. Various attendance programs across the nation and locally have seen marginal success (Carruthers, et al., 1993; Clement, 2006; DeKalb, 1999; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Harte and The Canadian Education Association, 1995; Hartnett, 2008; Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007; Kreps, 1999; Marburger, 2001; Mount

Diablo Unified School District, 1990; the National Audit Office, 2005; Nemeć and Watson, 2007; the New York City Department of Education, 2000; & Teasley, 2004). More specifically, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found in their study of attendance that some of the study participants' efforts to improve attendance were not as successful at creating a positive end result as other initiatives. For instance, schools that conducted attendance workshops for parents were only marginally successful at improving attendance, ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .50$); schools that referred students to a counselor had measurably less effect than the workshops, ($M = 2.18$, $SD = .75$), and using truant officers was the least productive strategy to improve attendance of the students in the study, ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .60$) (Epstein & Sheldon, p. 312–313). School systems have attempted to improve academic attainment through a variety of strategies, some realizing success.

To inflate the problem attendance poses on a local school, no one attendance policy or current system has been found to effectively improve student attendance (Hershberg, Simon, & Lea-Kruger, 2004b). School administration is held accountable but lack the guiding principles to combat the causes of the problem. Principals, "are being held accountable for the performance of their schools; yet current systems in public education typically fail to provide them with the appropriate tools to manage effectively" (Hershberg et al., 2004b, p. 27). Due to increased accountability and low-achieving students, educational leaders center their teachers' attention on raising the test scores of low-achieving students, but provide improper tools to raise the students' scores (7 Actions, 2006). An example of an improper tool that failed to raise students' academic standing involves a former practice that was recently scientifically proven to be

ineffective: mandatory attendance initiatives that created a maximum threshold of absences, past which students automatically failed the course. This practice failed to be effective and was actually found to be counter-productive (Marburger, 2006). Another ineffective policy is a school or system that imposes unwarranted, severe consequences as a means to discipline the youth (DeSocio, et al., 2007; Kearney, 2008). For instance, some schools are using out-of-school suspension as a consequence for students who are written up as truant from school (Baker et al., 2001). However, out-of-school suspensions can actually fuel delinquency, strike at the foundations of communities, and even create opportunities for gang-like activities (Kearney, 2008).

On the other hand, consequences that are based on research findings have a greater chance of creating the desired result a school system seeks. These practices will be in the review of literature in section 3 as well as the implementation of the attendance model. The local problem is a lack of researched backed strategies that schools can incorporate into their protocol and culture that will improve academic achievement by reducing problematic attendance.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

In Gwinnett County, Georgia, 1,355 students failed the 2008-2009 administration of the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT. This accounts for 13% of the students who took the test (GCPS, 2009e). Findings indicate that this problem exists at a national level, as well. In the 2004-2005 school year 11,530 schools were identified, under NCLB, as Schools That Need Improvement (States' Progress toward High School Restructuring,

2007). These schools were targeted by the NCLB Act because students in the schools did not achieve minimum standards as defined by the state examination requirements. In 2003, the state of Florida had 87% of schools fail to meet their AYP (Million, 2004). Over 50% of other States that same year witnessed a 50% failure rate for their schools, as well (Million). Gwinnett County Schools, a large suburb north of Atlanta, Georgia, failed to meet AYP for grades 9-12 in the 2008 school year (2008 AYP, 2008). The problem goes further than one local county. In the state of Georgia, 52% of schools failed to meet testing goals in 2008 (Diamond, 2008). In 2007, 44% of schools in the state of Georgia failed to meet AYP (Diamond). Schools across the nation, as well as local school systems, are facing issues with academic achievement and meeting Federal standards.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

On any given day, thousands of students are absent from school (Baker et al., 2001). Within the United States, 25% of kindergartners, 21% of first graders, 17% of third graders, and 15% of fifth graders are either at-risk or chronically absent (Romero & Lee, 2007). Guare and Cooper (2003) found that 54.6% of high school students are truant from classes and, of that number, 13.1% have been truant more than 11 days within the school year.

Standardized test scores indicated that some students are failing to meet state standards. Too many students are failing due to unexcused absences (Clement, 2006). Garcia and Calhoun (2002) found that “changes in school attendance were significantly related to number of test sections passed on CAHSEE [California High School Exit Exam]” (p. ii). Marburger (2006; 2001) found that attendance and academic achievement

are interrelated. The better the rate of attendance, the better the student achieved within the class. Pedro Noguera, PhD is the author of five books on the ways in which urban educational institutions around the world are affected by economic or social conditions. Noguera (as cited in Weisstuch, 2003) has stated that schools are not doing what it takes to ensure that underachieving students get the needed improvement. These aforementioned studies indicate that attendance and scholastic achievement are connected, yet students are failing minimum state standards.

A broad-based systemic approach is needed to unearth and eradicate the roots of absenteeism. Kearney (2008) indicated that professionals must create “practical strategies to address problematic absenteeism and its pertinent risk factors. This will likely involve a multifaceted approach to arrive at efficient methods of preventing and reducing absenteeism at individual and systemic levels” (p. 19). Interventions that target the student, their family, their community, and the student’s school are also needed (Baker et al., 2001; Bazemore, Stinchcomb, & Leip, 2004). Schools need to drop the notion that the cause of chronic non-attendance problems lies exclusively in the child (Lauchlan, 2003). A multisystemic intervention model is needed to properly combat problematic attendance (Kearney, 2008).

Definitions

Full Day Absence: Missing 50% or more of the school day (Appendix A).

Nonproblematic Absenteeism: “Formal or informal school absence agreed on by parents and school officials as legitimate and not involving detriment to the child” (Kearney, 2008, p. 8).

Problematic Absenteeism: “School-aged youths who (1) have missed at least 25% of total school time for at least 2 weeks, (2) experience severe difficulty attending classes for at least 2 weeks with significant interference in a child’s or family’s daily routine, and/or (3) are absent for at least 10 days of school during any 15-week period while school is in session” (Kearney, 2008, p. 9).

School Refusal: “Anxiety-based absenteeism, including panic and social anxiety, and general emotional distress or worry while in school” (Kearney, 2008, p. 259; Suveg, Aschenbrand, & Kendall, 2005). School refusal is associated with emotional problems such as separation anxiety (Lauchlan, 2003). School refusal can exist without causing problematic absenteeism.

Truant: Illegal, unauthorized, and unexcused absence from school or class in which a parent is unaware (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005; Fremont, 2003; Kearney, 2008; Reid, 2003). Associated with behavioral problems (Lauchlan, 2003). Truancy can exist without causing problematic absenteeism.

Academic Enrichment Program (also called outreach program): Programs that provide counseling and assistance with academics in an attempt to maintain or improve grades (Mueller, Giacomazzi, & Stoddard, 2006).

High-Stakes Test: Any standardized test (that is the same for students across the county, state, or country) in which a student’s test performance determines that student’s eligibility for grade advancement or graduation (Garcia & Calhoun, 2002; Trotter, 2006).

Multisystemic Therapy: An intense version of holistic intervention. A broad-based response designed to improve a student’s academic and social success by focusing on programs that influence the families, peers, communities, school structures, as well as the

students (Baker et al., 2001; Brown, Henggeler, Schoenwald, Brondino, & Pickrel, 1999; Kearney, 2008).

Multiagency Collaborative Intervention: The systematic approach “to combat truancy through problem-solving efforts that draw on the resources and expertise of agency personnel in education, law enforcement, and the juvenile justice system” (Mueller et al., 2006, p 4).

Significance

Schools that fail to prove student achievement and hence are unsuccessful at meeting AYP will be classified as needs improvement and face sanctions such as having to offer after school tutoring at no cost to the student, hiring new staff, and possibly being taken over by the state (2008 AYP, 2008). Student attendance can also cause a school to fail to meet AYP, such as Cedar Ridge Middle School in Oregon in which a few students from a sub group did not take their standardized test and as a consequence, the middle school failed to meet AYP (Anon, 2008). Schools that can improve attendance will have a better chance meeting AYP because improving attendance has a direct impact at improving academic achievement (Marburger, 2006). AYP is partially based on attendance (2008 AYP, 2008). Schools that do not improve attendance and academic achievement will face state and national consequences (2008 AYP).

Besides the consequences to schools that fail to meet their nationally set goals, students are losing out as well. Howieson and Iannelli (2008) found that those youths who are not meeting national standards or are only reaching low levels of academic attainment are failing to be financially successful in their careers. Schools that fail, for

any reason, to teach students the core subjects will have youths who are at a developmental disadvantage. This disadvantage is especially evident later in life, as the former student applies for and attempts to work through their career (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008; Fielder, 2003).

Research Question

The quantitative portion of this project study has been designed to answer the following overarching research question: What influence, if any, did attendance have on the score of a Georgia state mandated high-stakes standardized test? The following subquestions were considered:

1. How many combined excused and unexcused absences create a statistically significant correlation of a student failing the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT?
2. How many unexcused absences create a statistically significant correlation of a student failing the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT?
3. How many excused absences create a statistically significant correlation of a student failing the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT?

Up until this point, in past research, these particular subquestions have never been answered. The GHS GT has never been examined in this regard, dissecting the type of attendance. From the review of literature, only one study was similar in nature, a correlation was made between attendance and the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). It was found that excused absences did not adversely affect a student's score but excessive unexcused absences did have a significant influence (Clement, 2006).

Review of the Literature

The Conceptual Framework

Scientifically proven protocols that are statistically proven to be effective at improving attendance and are considered multisystemic interventions were reviewed for their effectiveness in resolving problematic attendance. Thomas (2006) was cited by Kearney (2008) as indicating that the students with the worst problematic attendance will require multisystemic therapy. Kearney also cited Barth et al. (2007) who stated that multisystemic therapy has been successful in improving academic achievement and attendance.

Multisystemic therapy (MST) attempts to alter the way youths socially interact with society by addressing the root problem(s). “The core feature of MST is its emphasis on changing the social ecology of youth and families in ways that promote positive adjustment and attenuate emotional and behavioral difficulties” (Schoenwald et al., 2000, p. 2). Kearney (2008) cited Brown et al. (1999) as he wrote, “Multisystemic therapy involves an intensive, home- and community-based intervention to address antisocial behavior at multiple levels, including individual, family, peers, school, and community” (p. 17). The creation and continuation of delinquent behavior stems from a combination of interrelated factors including family, peers, school, and community (Brown et al.). Youths are most influenced by their family, then by peers. The third level of influence comes from school, followed by the neighborhood, and finally any outside influencers, such as clinics or psychiatric providers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979a & 1979b). MST has a proven track record at helping youths with a wide variety of issues. In most cases, multiple entities have to get involved as a combined effort.

The most profound level of influence within multisystemic therapy comes from the family. The theoretical framework for this study, as with other studies such as Keyes (2002) work, were based upon the theories of family systems, as they originate from the theoretical foundations of Bronfenbrenner (1979a & 1979b), Haley (1976), and Minuchin (1974). A restructuring within the family system is necessary to improve or prevent problematic attendance. To accomplish this, a change in focus and degree of intervention within the family is necessary (Minuchin, 1974). MST centers its interventions on the child in an attempt to solve multiple problems that stem from the child's environment (Brown et al., 1999). This project study evaluated models that used MST as their base in order to determine which components, if any, are considered statistically significant enough to include within the model that will be synthesized and written in section 3. Those policies that are scientifically proven to be effective deterrents to student absences and are also consistent with the multisystemic therapy model will be chosen, reviewed, and adopted into this project study.

The Impact Attendance Has on Student Achievement

Attendance and academic achievement are correlated. Couillard et al. (2006) and Kreps (1999) both found that attendance increases achievement. Academic success can be adversely affected by a lack of attendance. The scholastic challenge can affect grade point average (GPA), test scores, quizzes, and even the ability to complete homework (Spencer, 2009). A direct correlation between attendance and GPA exists (Couillard et al., 2006). A student's course average will decrease as absences increase (Kreps, 1999). This reverse negative correlation can send a student into a spiral of academic problems. Kreps found this relationship between failing grades on report cards and lack of

attendance at school to be true. Those students who had the worst attendance also had the worst grades on their end of semester report cards. Problematic attendance can be detrimental to a student's school success but few studies pinpoint the number of absences that would have to accumulate before the student would be in jeopardy of failing.

It is important to list the number of absences a student may accumulate before a negative scholastic consequence arises, because schools need to base absence thresholds on proven data. Few of the researchers cited in this project study actually put a tangible number of absences within their research to predict a significant statistical likelihood of a student failing a standardized test, a course, a test, or the ability to grasp a specific lesson. In an effort to form county attendance policies that would create an attendance goal for schools, researchers listed indistinct figures that failed to separate the types of absences. The lack of research in this area may cause difficulty for a school system to make data-driven decisions. In a publication from the Minneapolis Public Schools (n.d.) such an example exists, "Students who attend school between 95% and 100% of the time pass the state tests in reading and math at much higher rates than students who attend school less than 95% of the time" (p. 2). By contrast, Nichols (2003) put a concrete number of absences on students who fail standardized tests "a pattern of poor school attendance was evident by the sixth grade year with most failing students averaging more than 10 absences per year throughout their school careers" (p. 116). A specific number of days can be understood by parents and students more easily than a positive target attendance rate listed as a percentage. Nichols utilized cumulative absences over years in order to reach the research conclusions. Daugherty (2008) was able to quantify the number of absences a student may accumulate by using data from a finite number of years.

Daugherty found that students in the eighth and tenth grades who had 17 or more absences realized a mean scaled score below the state proficiency for both reading and math in the DSTP (Delaware Student Testing Program). By listing the number of absences, Daugherty was able to make more of an impact through his research. Now school systems have a concrete number upon which they can base their attendance practices. Without a school system knowing how many absences a student may accumulate before a statistically high probability exists for failure, attendance policies could be choosing erroneous minimum thresholds. Their decisions may not be based upon data or their policies may be based upon cumulative absences in lieu of the research-proven best practice of distinguishing between the types of absences (Nichols, 2003).

The Correlation Between Attendance and Academics

Researchers who looked for a correlation between attendance and academic achievement found the connection strong. “Attending class is very influential on a student’s grade” (Clump et al., 2003, p. 223). Kearney (2009) found that when a student has a high average absence rate over 5 years, the student will have lower proficiency scores in math and reading. Chen and Lin (2008) wrote that students who attended classes regularly have a 9.4% to 18.0% improvement as shown in exam grades. With improved attendance, this percentage of improvement could move a student from the failing category to passing or elevate a C-level student to the B-student category. Students who are chronically absent from school have significantly lower levels of academic achievement (Kearney, 2009).

The Correlation Between Attendance and Standardized Tests

Past research has showed that attendance has an impact on a student's academic achievement, including the ability for a student to pass standardized tests. Some research is broad in scope, such as in Crone, Franklin, Glascock, and Kockan's (1993) study in which the researchers found that "attendance yielded very high relationships to assessment instruments, and was the strongest predictor of percent passing for the Graduation Exit Exam" (p. 15). These researchers found that schools will have a difficult time with their students passing the state exams if the students have poor attendance. Some researchers have been able to give more concrete data. "A 10%age point increase in a school's rate of student attendance was associated with an increase of as much as 4.2 percentage points in test scores" (New York City Board of Education, 2000, p. 3). This New York research proves attendance directly affects the score of standardized tests.

Daughtery (2008) broke down the effects attendance has upon a Delaware test even further. He found that for every school day missed, an 8th grade student's Delaware Student Testing Program (DSTP) scale score will drop by 0.56 in reading and a 0.71 drop will be seen in mathematics. For a 10th grader, a drop in reading of 0.65 is expected for each day of absence and a 0.64 in mathematics. Daughtery summed up the correlation, "students with good attendance, during a given school year, in the secondary schools, will have higher achievement scores on their Delaware Student Testing Program exam in reading and mathematics than students having poor attendance in the same given school year" (p. 110).

Others have also found that attendance and standardized tests are interrelated. Nichols (2003) wrote, "There is a consistently strong negative correlation among language, math, and reading scores and yearly average absences, indicating that

standardized test scores of these students vary inversely with their average yearly absences” (p. 115). Kearney (2009) found in a yet to be published study that “math achievement was largely associated with chronic absenteeism” with a $-.11$ correlation (p. 8). Poor attendance gives a school low test scores to report. Increasing the amount of time the student is learning will boost test scores (Nichols, 2003).

Other research has studied the relation between absenteeism and failure on standardized tests. Davis in 1998 and Nichols in 2003 both found a statistically significant likelihood of student failure based on high absenteeism. Roby (2004) found relationships between attendance and the Ohio Proficiency Test given in the 4th, 6th, 9th, and 12th grades. Within Roby’s study the fourth grade attendance accounts for 32% of the variance; the sixth grade had a 29% variance; the ninth grade had a 60% variance, and the twelfth grade had a 29% variance between student attendance and student achievement. The correlation between attendance and standardized tests span the grade levels (Roby). Roby’s study used cumulative absences; it did not differentiate between the different effects of excused and unexcused absences.

Differentiation between types of absences is an important aspect when interpreting the findings associated with studies that assess the correlation between attendance and standardized test scores. Clement (2006) wrote that attendance did impact the scores on standardized tests, but only when unexcused absences reach a critical level. In the Clement study, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was not affected by excused absences but was adversely influenced by students who had accumulated excessive unexcused absences. The data indicated that if students were absent for excused reasons and made up the missed assignments, they had statistically

similar likelihood of passing their high-stakes test as they would have had if they had attended school (Clement, 2006). In contrast, those students who missed school and either did not document the reason or were absent for an unexcused purpose did increase the probability of failing their standardized test. Taras and Potts-Datema's (2005) study put limits on the type of excused absences and their affect on standardized tests. Taras and Potts-Datema's research found that those students with chronic diseases such as diabetes, sickle cell anemia, and epilepsy have lower standardized test scores and student achievement. Types of absences must be considered when conducting a thorough analysis of the potential consequences of students missing school.

Implications

The multisystemic attendance model of scientifically proven best-practices, which will be found in section 3, could be adopted by a school or school system to increase the chance of effectively and more efficiently improving school attendance and therefore raising student achievement on standardized tests. Brown et al. (1999), Henggeler and Rowland (1999), and Schoenwald et al. (2000) found that MST is effective at changing a youth's attitude, disposition, and final placement within society. A school system could implement a portion or pieces of the multisystemic attendance model that it feels would have the greatest influence on its student population. Seeing that each student and each situation is unique, the school attendance officer could use the information within the model to find the root causes of the problematic attendance and could then address those issues with some or all of the best practices found to be particularly useful in combating the cause of the behavior(s) in question. For instance, a student who stays home from

school because of a fear of embarrassment will not benefit from a police-led effort to find students who are skipping school to do drugs. When an attendance officer can isolate the reason the student misses school, the cause can be more easily addressed with appropriate interventions (Kearney, 2008). The multisystemic attendance model will be described in detail in section 3 of this project study.

Summary

This research began with a quantitative study, based on the hypotheses that are found in section 2, to determine the number and type of absences that creates a statistically high probability of failure for a standardized test in the state of Georgia. The data were collected, as outlined in section 2, to realize a concrete number of absences listed by type. These numbers were then taken into account in section 3 within the creation of the multisystemic model of attendance practices that a school would implement. These best practices were proven by research to be effective in order to most efficiently intercept a student before problematic attendance thresholds are realized. Section 4 concludes this project study with the reflections of the scholar and the direction of social change.

SECTION 2:
THE METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this quantitative, outcomes-based study was to discover cause-and-effect relationships and then test new methods that are aimed at improving academic success among students. This project study used correlational analysis with scatter plot linear regression charts to predict the probability of the effect attendance has on a standardized test. Three regression models with best fit linear graphs upon scatter plot diagrams graphically represent the impact different forms of attendance had upon the score on a state-assessment high school high-stakes standardized test with the outcome of realizing the specific number and type of absences that had the greatest negative impact on academic achievement as measured by a high-stakes test results. The dependant variable of the score on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT was taken in relation to the independent variable of various types of absences - cumulative, excused, and unexcused - using a weighted average - 13% from 9th grade, 18% from 10th grade, and 69% from 11th grade. These averages were weighted to match the specific percentage of questions from which the majority of the core tested material is typically gleaned by a student, based upon courses taken during those years (GHSGT, 2007). Scatter plot diagrams were used to graphically represent the various correlation coefficients between the two variables, attendance and the score on the high-stakes test, and represent the linear regression analysis.

Research studies within education have been completed using correlational analysis (Cavazos, 2007). The strength of the theoretical constructs and rationale which guide the research design of this project study is of more importance than the complexity of the design (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2002). Correlational studies, although simple, can provide significant regression analysis data (University of Texas-Houston Health Science Center, 2009). This form of research could predict a student's score on a standardized test by examining the number of cumulative, excused, and unexcused absences the student had accumulated over the year(s) during which the subject matter was taught (University of Texas-Houston Health Science Center).

Within the quantitative portion of this project study, regression analysis, with a weak correlation, predicted the number and type of absences a student may accumulate before that student reached a statistically high probability of failing their Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. The test was administered during their 11th grade year. According to Seale (1999), "Generalization in quantitative survey research is based on choosing representative samples and using ideas about probability and chance to estimate the likelihood of events occurring in similar cases outside the sample" (p. 107). This survey collected data from 10,403 subjects, a large sample.

This outcome-based project study also provides an attendance model that is based on scientifically-proven practices that were shown to improve attendance through concrete data and also used at least a portion of a multisystemic intervention method. Each student is different and the positive potential outcome of this project study is to improve the school attendance for those children who might develop problematic attendance due to unexcused absences. The influence of this model can be proven by a

school practicing this method if they utilize a value-added assessment and track a student's attendance compared to that student's academic achievement from year to year.

Setting and Sample

Sampling is a process in which units are selected that give a representation of the entire population of interest, so that a study of the sample can then be generalized to the entire population from which they were chosen (Trochim, 2002). The nonrandom sample of the study was every student whose enrollment spanned grades 9, 10, and 11, stayed within the Gwinnett County school system during the years they were in grades 9, 10, and 11, and who were first time test takers for the 2008-2009 main administration. The sample accounted for approximately 10,400 students, attempting to create a high level of confidence (Krishnamoorthy & Xia, 2008). In 2008, from the state of Georgia, only 47% of special education students passed the Social Studies portion of the test. In the same year, 85% of regular program students were able to pass the same test (USATestPrep, 2009).

The school district is located just north of Atlanta, Georgia and was considered a suburb. At the time of the study, the population of 12th graders in Gwinnett County public schools was diverse with Caucasians being the largest group from the population at 43.3%; African Americans accounted for 26.7%; Non-white Hispanic accounted for 13.3%; Asians accounted for 12.7%; American Indian accounted for 0.1%; and multiracial accounted for 3% of the total population studied (GCPS, 2009a).

All of the students in Gwinnett County, regardless of which school they attended, followed the same attendance protocol (Appendix A). The protocol, as listed in Appendix

A, remained relatively unchanged over the years that the students, who were a part of this study, were enrolled in high school.

Instrumentation and Materials

The score on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT, typically administered in a student's 11th grade year, was the source of data for this study. The GHSGT has been used since 1991 as a high-stakes test which regular education students must pass in order to receive a diploma from a Georgia high school (USATestPrep.com, 2009). By the time of the study, this test had been through multiple validity and reliability checks, "The content of these tests is chosen by the Georgia educators based on standards set forth in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) and Quality Core Curriculum (QCC)" with all of the tests' content aligned with the Georgia Department of Education (USATestPrep.com, 2009, Paragraph 11).

Data Collection and Analysis

Collection Processes

Because this study was an attempt to infer which students are at a statistically high probability of failing a high-stakes test due to problematic attendance, inferential analysis was used with the R statistical package measuring the correlation coefficients. The analysis of data started with a query within School Administration Student Information (SASI). Ordinal data such as attendance records and standardized test scores as well as some nominal data such as gender, free or reduced lunch status, special education setting was extracted from 2009 school records of students who were in attendance within the district from 2005 through the entire 2009 school year. These data

were downloaded into Microsoft Excel format. Column A was used for a sequential numbering system of students, B for date of birth, C for exam date, D for grade level at the time the test was taken, E for gender, F for ethnicity, G for free or reduced lunch status, H for scaled score the student earned the first time they took the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT, I for excused absences for school year ending in May 2007 (typically grade 9), J for unexcused absences for school year ending in May 2007 (typically grade 9), K for overall absences for the school year ending in May 2007, L for excused absences for the school year ending in May 2008 (typically grade 10), M for unexcused absences for the school year ending in May 2008 (typically grade 10), N for overall absences for the school year ending in May 2008, O for excused absences for the school year ending in May 2009 (typically grade 11), P for unexcused absences for the school year ending in May 2009 (typically grade 11), and Q for the overall absences for the school year ending in May 2009.

Data Analysis

After the Excel files were generated, the type of absences were weighted based on data provided by USATestPrep.com (2009), which listed the amount of knowledge the student was supposed to learn for the test, based on the typical courses taken over the student's high school career: 13% - 9th grade, 18% - 10th grade, 69% - 11th grade. These new weighted numbers of absences were placed in columns R, S, and T for 3-year weighted excused absences, unexcused absences, and overall absences, respectively. Then the data were converted into the R statistical package format. The data were checked for accuracy after conversion. The R statistical package measured the concept of the correlation coefficients between

Attendance and over-all weighted and averaged absences

Attendance and weighted and averaged excused absences

Attendance and weighted and averaged unexcused absences

The scores individual students earned on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT were calculated using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA). Analysis of variance was used to determine if a difference existed between two or more of the population means (Gravetter, 2005). The ordinal data were analyzed using the R statistical package. Correlational procedures were used to analyze the data in order to determine which type of attendance contributed the most to student achievement. ANOVA was used with parametric statistics because of the probability distribution of the scaled-score graduation test and the test's minimum and maximum statistically possible scores thresholds. Scores can range from 400 – 600, with 500 and above giving the student a passing mark. Those students who scored below 500 failed (Georgia Department of Education Testing Division, n.d.).

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis H_{01} : There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged days of absence from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Alternative Hypothesis H_{01} : There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged days of absence from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Null Hypothesis H₀₂: There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged unexcused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Alternative Hypothesis H₀₂: There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged unexcused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Null Hypothesis H₀₃: There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged excused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Alternative Hypothesis H₀₃: There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged excused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The Social Studies portion of the GHSGT covers knowledge that is most likely learned while in attendance at school and is not contingent on other factors such as math ability, science aptitude, or reading comprehension skill. This knowledge would have been taught over multiple years on a graduated scale, with the majority of the information taught in classes that were typically taken in the students' 11th grade (USATestPrep, 2009). If a student's averaged attendance for grades 9 through 11 was poor and the student performed poorly on the Social Studies portion of their 11th grade GHSGT, it can be assumed that poor attendance would have likewise hindered the student's performance

on other high-stakes tests. Furthermore, poor attendance could adversely affect their GPA, as well as their ability to pass tests that affect their progression through the school system and therefore their ability to graduate. Poor attendance could hinder a person's ability to become a productive member of society.

Limitations

Characteristics of the participants such as IQ and students whose second language is English, could have become a threat to the validity of the study (Murray, 2007; Creswell, 2003). A limitation to this study was that factors other than attendance play a role in a student's ability to pass a high-stakes standardized test (Murray). Such factors include IQ (Murray), motivational factors, and time spent actively learning in the classroom. The proposed research took IQ levels into account by reviewing a large number of student records, in effect averaging out variances in intelligences. Students who have a primary language other than English have also been found to score lower on the test compared to native English speakers and their attendance may have had a bearing on the outcome of the test.

Halpern (2007) agreed that attendance and achievement are connected but suggested that other reasons influence such findings. Those students who have good attendance at school have a higher propensity toward academic achievement. This may influence the results that past researchers have found. It is reasonable that students who attend school on a regular basis will be motivated in one way or another for success in their academics(Halpern). That influence may be prompted by age, cultural background, or socioeconomics (Halpern). All the while those students who have "negative attributional style may reduce the individual's motivation to strive for further

achievement” (Craven, Marsh, & McInerney, 2003 p. 235). There is a connection between attendance and academic performance but the variables could be interrelated.

The relationship between attendance and academic attainment is problematic . . . The relationship is likely to be circular – potentially high achieving pupils may be more likely to attend school, and their higher attendance may contribute to higher actual achievement. (National Audit Office, 2005 p. 25)

Those students who perform well academically may be more likely to attend school.

The final potential limitation was the attendance policy already in place within Gwinnett County. Each school followed the same protocol with only minor deviations for the consequences a student might face for various infractions. The attendance protocol is limited and only requires schools to meet minimum standards in their attempt to keep students in school. Appendix A lists the attendance model every school within the county was required to follow.

Scope

The scope of this research covered data collected in 2009 from the attendance records and standardized test scores of approximately 10,400 students who were enrolled during the school years of 2005 through 2009. The students within this study are from a large suburban school district of 156,767 students just north of Atlanta, Georgia (GCPS, 2009a). External validity may be threatened when one uses the data to incorrectly inference a different population or setting (Creswell, 2003). Similar demographic situations should create similar effects.

Delimitations

The delimitations were weighted attendance records from the years prior to and including the year of the administration of the standardized test. By taking the attendance

from 3 years, including the year the test was administered, the research accounted for knowledge which would have been gleaned during the previous and current academic years. Every effort to safeguard the participants' rights was taken. Specific student information was kept confidential and data were kept secure. IRB approval was granted prior to the collection of any data.

Measure to Protect Participants' Rights

The protection and promotion of participants' rights were made at every stage of the research. No identifying information was stored, neither names nor student identification numbers were used. Data were locked in a cabinet and password encrypted within software. No duplicate or backed-up data were used. No harm shall come to the physical, social and the psychological well being of the participants because the study did not affect past students. The selection of participants was all-inclusive, relieving any fears of being unfair. The consent of the gatekeeper, Gwinnett County Public Schools, was made prior to the collection of data.

Summary of Methodology

A simple correlation was used on a large student sample ($n = 10,403$) to determine the relationship of the number of absences and the score on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. Three different scatter plots represent the findings based on overall absences, excused absences, and unexcused absences.

Quantitative Results

The null hypothesis H_{01} 'There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged days of absence from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social

Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was rejected and the alternative hypothesis 'There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged days of absence from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was also rejected. The Pearson's correlation reported a value of -0.225. The r value of -0.225 is considered a weak negative correlation, not strong enough to determine if a correlation exists. The p-value correlated variable is less than 0.001, suggesting statistical significance. A correlation (fig. 1) for the data revealed that a student's weighted cumulative absences and the results of the student's Social Studies portion of GHSGT were significant correlates, $r = -0.225$, $n = 10403$, $p < 0.001$, two-tail.

The null hypothesis H_{02} 'There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged unexcused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was rejected and the alternative hypothesis 'There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged unexcused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was also rejected. The Pearson's correlation was a -0.272. The r value of -0.225 is considered a weak negative correlation, too low to determine a correlation. The p-value for this correlated variable is less than 0.001, suggesting statistical significance. A correlation for the data revealed that a student's weighted unexcused absences and the results of the student's Social Studies portion of GHSGT (fig. 2) were significantly related, $r = -0.272$, $n = 10403$, $p < 0.001$, two-tail.

The null hypothesis H_{03} 'There is a relationship between a student's weighted, averaged excused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and their score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was rejected and the alternative hypothesis 'There is no relationship between a student's weighted, averaged excused absences from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades and the student's score on their Social Studies portion of their 11th grade graduation test' was accepted. The Pearson's correlation was a -0.1. The r value of -0.1 is considered a weak – near zero – negative correlation. The p-value for this correlated variable is less than 0.001, suggesting statistical significance. A correlation for the data revealed that a student's weighted excused absences and the results of the student's Social Studies portion of GHSGT were significantly related, $r = -0.1$, $n = 10403$, $p < 0.001$, two-tail.

Table 1

Correlations

	Weighted Cumulative Absences	Weighted Unexcused Absences	Weighted Excused Absences
Pearson Correlation R	-0.2256303	-0.2722111	-0.1004468
P	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
r ²	0.0509	0.0741	0.01
Predicted point change in SS GHS GT per absence	-0.662	-1.332	-0.4746
N	10403	10403	10403

** Correlation is not significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to this study, unexcused absences have the greatest impact on a student's score for their Social Studies portion of their GHS GT. The statistical correlation of cumulative absences is almost as strong as unexcused absences. Although excused absences have a statistical correlation with the score, its correlation is less than half of either the unexcused or cumulative correlations.

The r² indicates the percent of variability in the Social Studies portion of the GHS GT score as predicted by absences. The strongest relationship was with unexcused

absences, 7.41% was predicted but this leaves 92.59% unpredicted or related to other variables. Absences predict a small amount of the GHSGT score. Unexcused absences have the highest correlation, followed by cumulative absences at 5.09%, and the least of correlations is the excused absences at 1.0%, leaving 99% unpredicted or related to other variables.

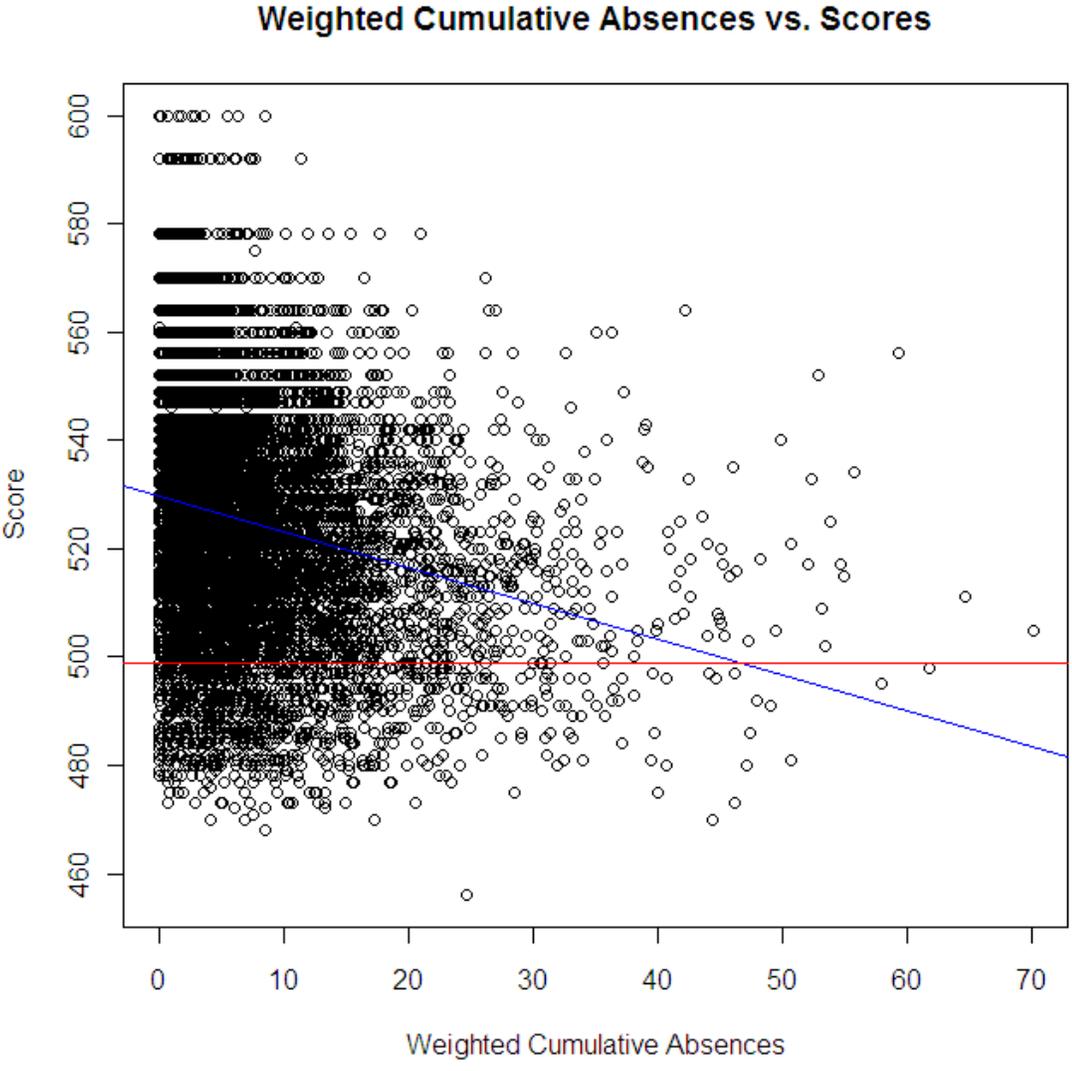
Because of the large sample, the statistics can predict how many points a typical student will lose based on each type of absence. The GHSGT is a scaled scored test out of 600 points. The raw score of answers missed compared to possible answers are converted to a scaled score. The point drop expected for each absence is based on the scaled score with a maximum of points. For each unexcused absence a student received, it is statistically predicted that the student would earn 1.332 points lower than if they were not absent. These point drop predictions are mathematically figured from the slope of the best fit linear model. For each excused absence a student received, it is statistically predicted that the student would earn 0.474 points lower than if they were not absent. These findings are consistent with Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, and Ehrenberg's (1991) study that realized that for every 3 excused or unexcused days of absence, "the percentage of students who pass the tests falls by about 1.0 to 2.5 percentage points" (p. 91). It must be taken into account that correlation did not equal causation. This project did not necessarily prove that a relationship between attendance and the score on the Social Studies High School Graduation Test exists, but it did prove that unexcused absences have more of an impact on the score of the high-stakes test compared to excused absences. The project study also predicts the negative point drop based on each type of absence. The number of

absences based on type combined with the point reduction provides significant data when determining an absence threshold in a multisystemic attendance model.

The below three figures are scatterplot diagrams of 10,403 students, each represented by a small circle. The scores represented are from students who were first time test takers of the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. Within the figure are best-fit linear models; the flat red bar represents the level a student would be considered failing, 499. The blue slanted line is the best fit linear model that indicates the average student. At the intersection of these two lines is the point the average student is at an increased statistical probability of failing the high-stakes test.

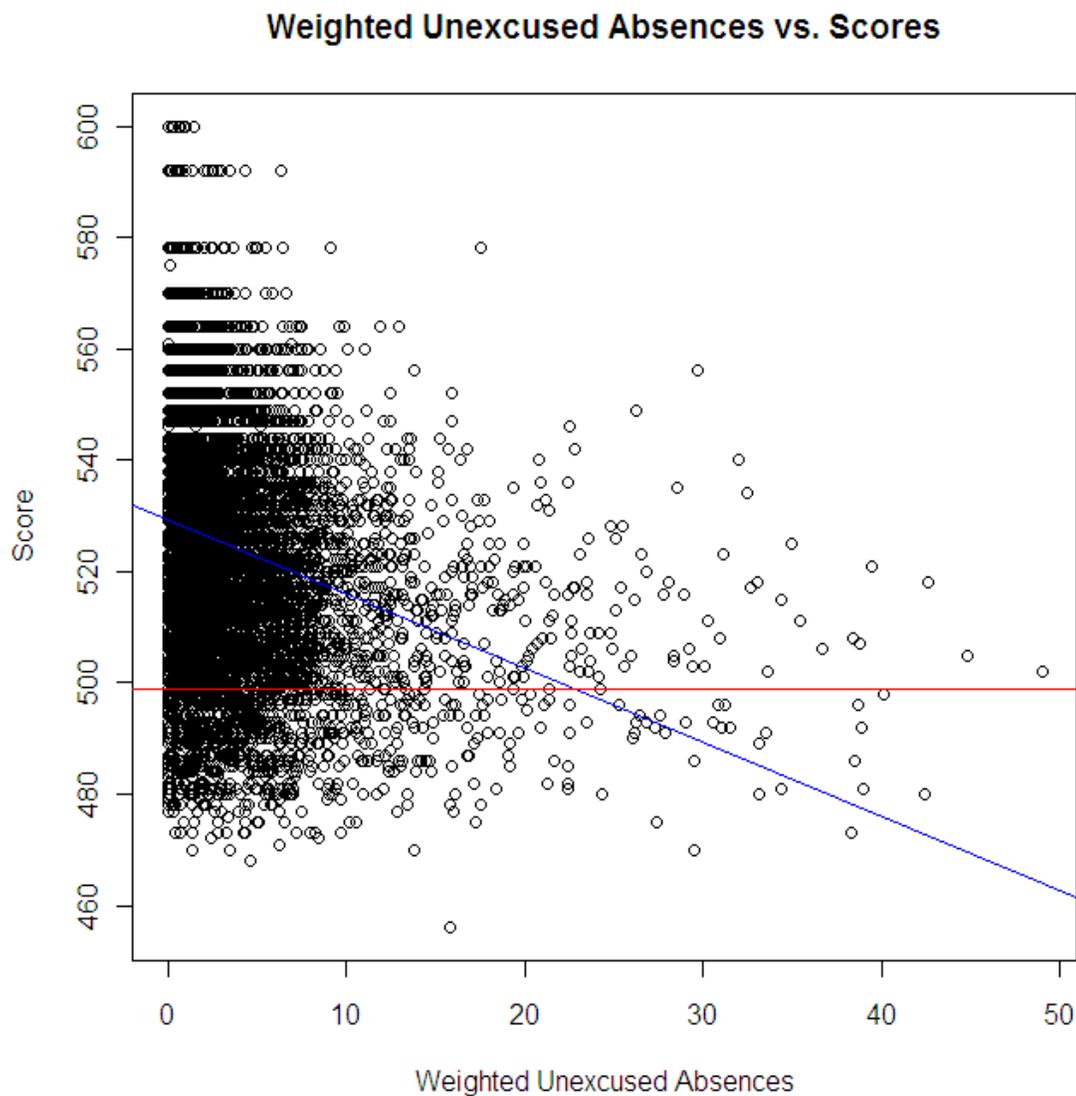
The blue line in Figure 1 represents the best fit linear model. Regression analysis forecasts that the score is significantly affected by the type and number of absences. As shown in fig. 1, a student with 47 cumulative absences, combining excused and unexcused, has a significant chance of failing the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT.

Figure 1



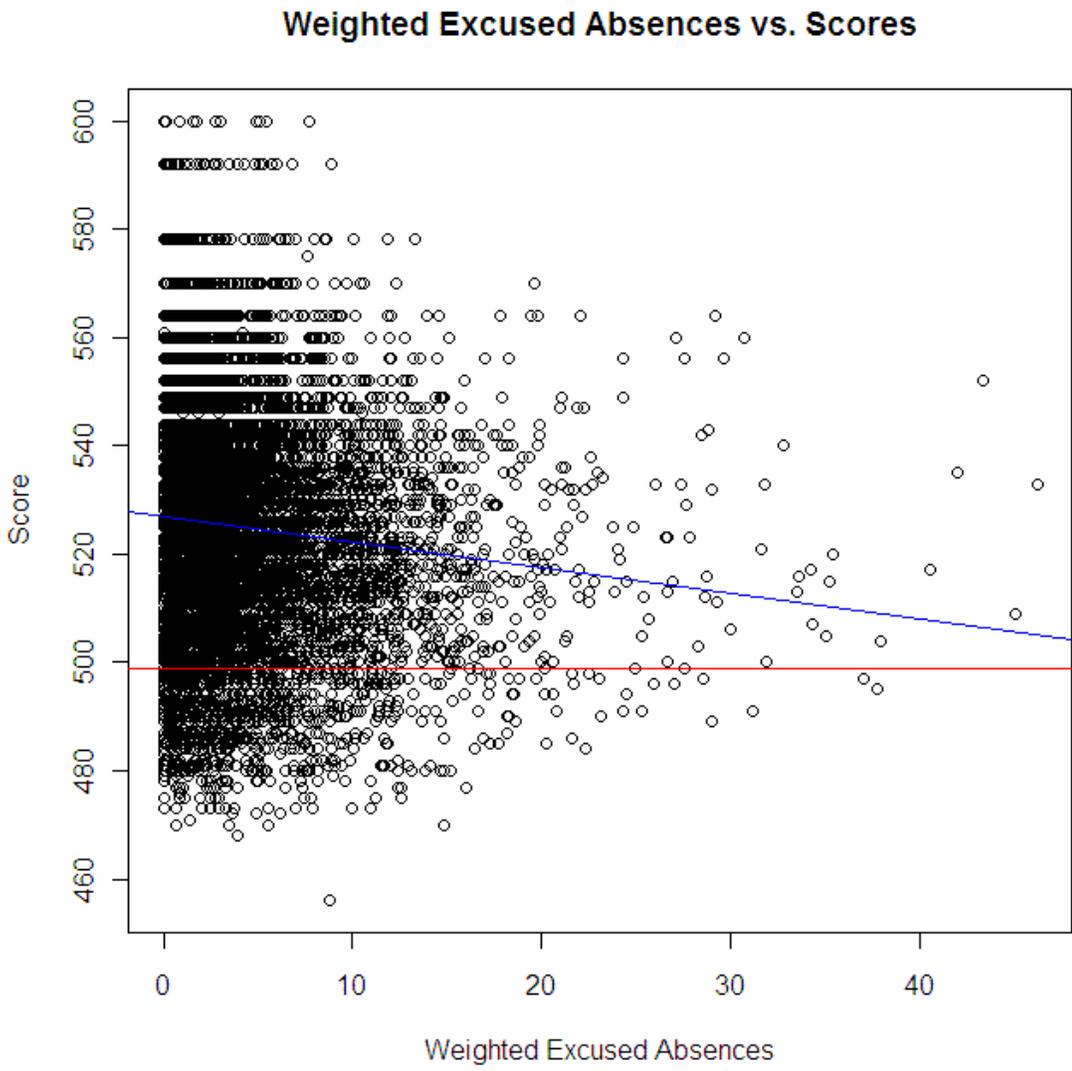
The blue line in Figure 2 represent the best fit linear model. When compared to excused absences, regression analysis forecasts that the score is affected by the type and number of absences. As seen in fig. 2, a student who has 23 unexcused absences is at a statistical probability of failing the Social Studies High School Graduation Test.

Figure 2



The graph in Figure 3 shows that excused absences have far less effect on a student's score compared to unexcused absences, with 66 excused absences creating the threshold of a student having a statistical likelihood of failing the same test.

Figure 3



The relatively high scores of those students who have 15 or fewer absences may be skewing the negative linear regression lines within the scatterplot diagrams, making it appear that absences have more to do with the score than indicated on the above charts. The high to very high scores for students in the < 15 absences category may be carrying the negative relationship shown by the regression line. To compound this effect, there are few scores found in the bottom right quadrant of the charts; low values on the Y axis (GHSGT) but high on the X axis (number of absences) will fail to pull the end of the linear regression line down.

Summary

Although 2 of the 3 hypothesized did not produce a statistically significant result, the data that was collected indicates a distinction between excused absences and unexcused absences. A student could accumulate 66 excused absences before having a statistical probability of failing the high stakes test as compared to a student who could accumulate 23 unexcused absences before reaching the same score. Section 3 developed the literature into strategies that the school can adopt to combat problematic attendance. Section 4 indicated how this project study would have created a social change as well as pontificate how the researcher grew as a scholar.

SECTION 3: THE PROJECT

Introduction

The most influential attendance model on a student's school attendance at school is a multisystemic approach that targets a student's problem area(s). The review of literature within section 3 will begin with the shortcomings of Gwinnett's (Appendix B) attendance protocol that resulted in a weak correlation between attendance and the score on the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. After the faults are discussed, the study will focus on the advantages of Gwinnett's attendance policy. Then the key components of a multisystemic intervention therapy that will benefit all students will be described. The methodology directs that certain specifications must exist for acceptance into the model. The model only includes those interventions that are objective procedures, that have been scientifically evaluated and published, and that have been determined to be effective at improving attendance. These proven strategies must also be categorized as multisystemic to be accepted in the model. These interventions then take into account the specific number of absences to determine the timing of interventions. The key component to the model is the in-depth intervention techniques, centered on individual student needs based on the reason for missing school.

The project and the accompanying multisystemic school-based model (Appendix B) are designed for a school system to implement. The format of Appendix B is structured to guide an administrator toward preventing every student from developing problematic attendance. An attendance office with the personnel who take the time to

implement these strategies possibly in conjunction with the school counselors could realize positive results in attendance and student achievement overall (Appendix B).

Description and Goals

Attendance will improve when six key pillars are put together in a multisystemic therapy model. The model intercepts students who are approaching the problematic absence rate per type (Kearney, 2009; Reid, 2003). “Taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve students, families, and the community” is the most productive means at improving academic achievement (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002, p. 316). These six pillars, which include intervention strategies from the school, parents, the neighborhood, peers, government agencies, and teachers, are more closely examined within the review of literature of this section and the recommended practices that will be detailed within the model in Appendix B. On a high level, these components involve leveraging research-proven programs that help alleviate problematic attendance (Kearney, 2008; Teasley, 2004; Ward & Burke, 2004).

Schools' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

The majority of the cited past research has been completed on strategies and programs that schools have adopted in an attempt to reduce problematic attendance. These strategies include the adoption of a consistently enforced attendance policy (DeSocio et al., 2007; National Audit Office, 2005; Teasley, 2004). These protocols start with preventative measures. Preventative programs start by offering rewards for good attendance. King, Eason, O'Brien, Johnson, and Hunt (2004) found a correlation (+0.65) between attendance-reward exam questions and grades. A number of curriculum-based

preventative policies can be implemented. These include scheduling students in higher level courses to ensure that students exert effort to succeed in school (Kober, 2001). These strategies also require teachers to create rigorous curriculums that connect the lessons to the real-world (Attwood & Croll, 2006; DeSocio et al., 2007; Revell & Wainwright, 2009), offering vocational curricula (Beron & Violato, 2009), and placing freshmen with experienced teachers who have high expectations (Neild and Farley-Ripple, 2008). In addition, for schools to improve high-stakes test results, they should encourage students to take courses within the core curriculum (Fielder, 2003). Socially-oriented procedures that prevent attendance problems include identifying and preventing students from harassing or bullying one another (Attwood & Croll, 2006) and offering the opportunity to create positive teacher/student relationships (DeSocio et al., 2007; Nemeec and Watson, 2007). School-to-parent communication is another critical area of the multisystemic attendance policy (DeKalb, 1999; National Audit Office, 2005). The school must inform the parents of the legal sanctions that could be brought against the parent and student (Baker, 2001). Also, when a student is absent, policies must include calling the student's home each time that student is absent for more than 50% of the day (Kearney, 2008). Next, the school must identify the specific reason a student misses school and then implement strategies based upon individual needs (Kearney, 2007).

Parents' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Parents who want to prevent their children from being absent from school for unexcused reasons may address the issue in multiple ways. They could force students who are truant to attend school, monitor grades, keep track of attendance, check their child's reading and achievement levels, refuse to cover-up unexcused absences, plan

appointments for after school, and learn how to deal with their children's individual school refusal behaviors (Kearney, 2007, 2008, 2009). Parents will benefit their children and their attendance if they spend time reinforcing school skills, such as math and science functions, reading, and reasoning skills (Children, 2009). Another approach is for parents to instill strong appropriate values and aspirations (Brown et al., 1999) and motivate their children to do well in school (Children, 2009; Hinz, Kapp, & Snapp, 2003; Lauchlan, 2003; Teasley, 2004). Parents who encourage their children to take responsibility for their actions, utilize written contracts to spell out the consequences of mistakes, and keep track of their child's whereabouts, have an easier time keeping their children in school (Appendix B) (Kearney, 2007; Mologogo, 2009). Finally, parents must be watchful of the peer relationships their children form. Those peer relationships that negatively impact a child's school attendance need to be discouraged by the parents (Kerney, 2008). It is the action taken by parents that can affect their child's school attendance.

The Neighborhoods' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

The community or neighborhood can provide resources for young people that will help to reduce truancy. Providing a list of community support agencies to contact when parents or students need assistance can help students stay in school (Baker et al., 2001; Join Together, 1998). Adult-supervised clubs and activity centers can create peer group meetings that encourage regular school attendance (Hartnett, 2008; Kreps, 1999). Peer tutoring can help encourage a student's attendance (Kreps). Organizations such as churches and youth clubs that give students the opportunity to form positive social networks will help students want to attend school in order to see their friends that they met and bonded with outside of school.

Peers' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Students need to form friendships that have a positive impact on their lives and end relationships with students who skip school or partake in illegal activities. Studies have found that peers can be a hindrance as well as a help to student attendance (Attwood & Croll, 2006; DeKalb, 1999). Those students who choose friends who attend school will also be likely to attend school themselves. Those students who realize how to respond to peer pressure with a reference that they cannot miss school because of the reaction of a parent are more apt to stay in school and earn good grades (Kearney, 2007, 2008). The student themselves may take action and make decisions that will have a positive effect on school attendance.

Agencies' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

State agencies, the Department of Motor Vehicles, social services, the police, and the court system all have a powerful influence over students' attendance. These

governing bodies also influence parents' likelihood to enforce the rule of school attendance within the home (White, Fyfe, Campbell, & Goldkamp, 2001). State agencies can impose laws and guidelines that give schools the ability to persuade students and their parents that attendance is necessary (Baker et al., 2001; National Audit Office, 2005). Legal sanctions have an influence on students and their parents, who will seek ways to keep these sanctions from being imposed (Baker et al., 2001; National Audit Office, 2005). Meaningful sanctions from social services or the police will ultimately help the students who are most likely to miss school (White et al.). Agencies need to follow through with stated court proceedings and sanctions (Baker et al.).

Teachers' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Teachers can influence student attendance. First, they must adapt to the motivational needs of their students and offer interactive lessons that relate to the real-world (Attwood & Croll, 2006; DeSocio et al., 2007; Revell & Wainwright, 2009). Also, teachers' attendance affects not only their students' attendance but the youth's academic achievement overall (Bruno, 2002; The New York City Department of Education, 2000; Teasley, 2004; Woods & Montagno, 1997).

Conclusion of Description and Goals

A multisystemic school-based model that is based upon six pillars the school, parents, neighborhood initiatives, peer influence, governmental agencies, and teachers. The model relies on each of these pillars having policies, procedures, and support measures in place to keep the entire system functioning to improve attendance within the community. These areas of concentration are found in Appendix B and within the review

of literature. Each source is cited and contains specific evidence of their ability to curtail problematic attendance.

Rationale

The lack of best practices for attendance issues in Gwinnett County, Georgia, prompted the development of this multisystemic school-based model of best attendance practices (Appendix B). According to the review of literature in section 1 low attendance has been associated with low achievement rate of school-aged youth. The rate of attendance can be influenced by the actions of a school system (Kearney, 2007). A school system that wishes to improve its students' academic achievement needs to control the variables, such as attendance, as much as possible. Some school systems are using strategies that are not scientifically proven to reduce their absentee rates such as the dedication of time and resources to improve parental involvement (Cavazos, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008). Some practices, as found in the research, are working contrary to the schools' goals (Harris & Goodall; Mount Diablo Unified School District, 1990). This multisystemic model of best practices needed to be created because schools were unsuccessfully attempting to improve academic success.

The problem of attendance affecting the score on a high-stakes test was addressed in two ways. First the data analysis proved that unexcused absences adversely affect the score on a high stakes test more than excused absences. Using that data along with the review of literature, a model of best attendance practices with sequential steps based on the number of absences Page: 50

was developed. These best practices were accumulated by evaluating successful models

and looking for those interventions that were actually proven to improve attendance. The model is listed in Appendix B as a multisystemic school-based model. Schools that adopt the attendance model may see improvements in their students' attendance rates, especially for those students who would otherwise have problematic attendance.

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The foundation of the quantitative data analysis that determined the impact attendance has upon a high-stakes test comes from nearly a half century of documented research. The connection attendance has on student achievement is cited in the review of literature in section 1. Past research illustrated the correlation between school attendance and academic achievement (Marburger, 2006). To that basis, this research offers insight by linking the difference between the affect unexcused absences had on the score of the Social Studies portion of the Georgia High School Graduation compared to the affect excused absences had on the same test. The attendance data were taken during the timeframe in which the core, tested material was actually presented. The project study then developed a compilation of effective attendance practices and programs. The current attendance policy for Gwinnett County (Appendix A) allows for students to fail the high-stakes test without a significant correlation between attendance and the score on the high-stakes test. From the review of literature for this section, some of the attendance policies that Gwinnett County uses are effective for reducing problematic attendance. On the other hand, some of the Gwinnett County policies could allow some students to accumulate absences without prompted intervention.

From a search through electronic and hard-copy sources, research was extracted that evaluated the root causes related to problematic attendance and these foundational areas were used to develop the six pillars of the Multisystemic attendance model. Students miss school because of general distress, to avoid social situations, to gain attention, or to have fun instead of going to school (Kerney, 2008). Students miss school for a variety of reasons but with the correct interventions coming from the right sources, at the correct time, students will attend school.

Parents have the strongest impact on a child's decision making paradigm. Parental engagement in education and the home has the strongest influence in academic achievement and attendance (Kerney, 2008; Harris & Goodall, 2008). Below parental influence are the teacher-controlled strategies that have an impact on student attendance (Teasley, 2004). Peer relationships are a stronger influence than teacher ability (Hartnett, 2008). Many peer relationships will either encourage or discourage school attendance (DeKalb, 1999). Attwood and Croll (2006) wrote about how peer groups' influences can encourage some students to be truant. An attendance protocol must be adopted and consistently enforced. School administrators need to consider that "to prevent and correct serious attendance problems, schools need to change the way they are structured" (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002 p. 309). Most short-term strategies are ineffective; for a school to see results, policies must plan to keep their multisystemic school-based attendance model in place for years (Reid, 2003). A combination of approaches is most effective (Ward & Burke, 2004). A school that relies upon one or even a few strategies may not see the same level of results when compared to a school that uses a multisystemic approach (Kearney, 2008). The creation of an attendance policy should be a

comprehensive, synergistic approach because “there is no single cause for school truancy; multidimensional features are frequently involved” (Teasley, p. 122). A multidimensional answer must be realized. The Check and Connect model listed their top three strategies as, “relationship building, routine monitoring of alterable indicators, and individualized and timely intervention” (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004, p. 284). The Check and Connect model realized a 28% reduction in truancy within 2 years, a 135% improvement over the baseline data, and 63% of the students who were in the program had improvements in their attendance records; at 1 school, 100% of the students in the program showed improvements in their attendance records (Lehr et al.). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) wrote that “a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve students, families, and the community” (p. 316) is needed in combination to effectively combat a truancy problem. For these reasons, this project study has focused on multisystemic approaches to determine what combination of best practices is most likely to intervene for all of the root causes of problematic attendance. A school system that adopts the proposed scientifically tested, multisystemic attendance model based on the pillars of the school, parents, neighborhood initiatives, peer influence, governmental agencies, and teachers can realize similar or better results as the Check and Connect model.

Schools' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Although many outside factors have a major influence on a student's attendance at school, practices and strategies can be put into place that can have an effect in decreasing absence rates (Baker et al., 2001). As cited by Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007) the factors that affect attendance are: a school environment that lacks support, a family life

that lacks order, bad weather, problems with transportation, health ailments, a lack of support within the community, and student shortfalls. Not all of these issues can be addressed by an attendance policy or program. However, measures that address the issues listed, as well as other contributing factors that can be addressed, can have a profound impact on improving attendance.

Schools can impact attendance in quite a few areas, and these effects can be positive or negative. Teasley (2004) wrote, “Truancy has been linked to differences in teaching and learning styles, teacher absenteeism, poor student-teacher relations, low teacher expectations, and inconsistency in school discipline” (p. 118). These issues as well as other contributing factors will be addressed within this review of literature.

The short comings of Gwinnett’s attendance policy. Gwinnett’s (2009) attendance tracking system automatically triggers letter generation for unexcused absences.

Examples of these letters are found in the attendance policy in Appendix A. The letters are automatically generated for students who are under compulsory attendance, are aged 5-16, and have reached five unexcused absences. However, no letters are automatically generated for any additional unexcused absences for students aged 5-13. To identify students with additional absences, elementary and middle school personnel in charge of attendance would have to manually review their attendance records or rely on notices from concerned teachers. For students aged 14-17, two additional letters are automatically generated at higher absence rates. The first of these letters is generated when the student reaches seven unexcused absences and warns that driving privileges will be suspended if the student reaches 10 unexcused absences. The second provides notice, at 10 unexcused absences, that their driver’s license was revoked. When the

student reaches this level of unexcused absences, a letter of non-compliance is sent, with no explanation as to what this letter means. The same letter is sent to the Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) with instructions to suspend the student's license. Weeks later, the DMV sends a follow-up letter to explain that the student's license has been suspended, due to unexcused absences. After 10 unexcused absences, no further automatic notification is generated.

For students who are 18 or older, automatically generated unexcused absence letters are not created, nor are repercussions applied. No warning notifications are generated for these students, which leaves some students' unexcused absences completely unchecked. Schools that attempt to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) that relies on attendance find their efforts to combat attendance issues concentrated on those students who have unexcused absences and are under the age of 18. With AYP taking data from cumulative absences of the number of students who have 16 or more days absent counting against the school, schools will need to address all students who accumulate 10 or more absences (Appendix B).

Other than the letters automatically generated by the Information Management Division, attendance intervention is reliant upon someone making mention of the fact that the student continues to have unexcused absences. A query, like the one in Appendix C, is useful in determining which students – not just those under compulsory attendance laws or those who are under age 18 and may lose their license for a lack of attendance – may have absences that threaten their academics.

Georgia State law requires schools to attempt contact with the parent when a student is absent for the day. Gwinnett County follows the letter of the law. Currently,

schools call home if a student is absent for 50% or more of the day, but students who are absent for 25% or more of the school day are at risk of adversely affecting their academic achievement (Kearney, 2008). Schools need to change their threshold determinations for the home calling policy.

In addition, many attempts to contact the parent are unsuccessful. Typically, the home phone is called. At the beginning of the school year, when information forms are filled in, parents need to be given the option of a cell phone call. If schools contacted the parents' cell phone numbers, students would not have the temptation of deleting the message or picking up the receiver, taking the call, and hiding the fact that they missed classes.

Beyond attendance tracking issues and the home call practices, Gwinnett's attendance policy is also lacking uniformity in their consequences for attendance-related problems. These decisions are left up to the local school. However, this lack of uniformity within the county is a minor issue, as long as each school is consistently dealing consequences to its students based on the causes of each offense.

Potentially one of the most detrimental Gwinnett County attendance-related rules is the policy whereby the schools do not allow students to make up work that was missed during an unexcused absence. When the student is not allowed to make up work, they miss the information they need to do well on their in-class tests and possibly the high-stakes standardized test. Teacher assessments will identify weak areas for the student; students need to be given a second chance to learn the information missed (Guskey, 2003). The state regulates what constitutes an excused versus an unexcused absence, but the county is given the power to decide who makes up missed school work and for which

reasons. Therefore, a change in county-wide regulations could address this problematic area.

The research-based practices in Gwinnett's protocol. Gwinnett County has some research-based practices that are effective at deterring problematic attendance. For instance, a uniform attendance protocol and IMD generates letters on the school's behalf to identify those students, as listed above, who reach 5, 7, and 10 unexcused absences. Based on this researcher's years of personal attendance experience at the largest high school in the state, the letters work well at informing parents that the student has a potential problem. In addition, based on the same experience, the researcher has recognized that the policy of taking away the child's privilege to drive is an effective deterrent to accumulating unexcused absences. Finally, the county requires schools to contact home when a student is absent for 50% or more of the day; in most cases, the home phone is called with a recording. This practice is also effective in informing parents of the situation. Another practice of intervention that is effective is the practice of involving counselors or principal designees when a student reaches 10 – 15 unexcused absences. These school officials personally contact the student and their parents to discuss lack of attendance. Based on this researcher's experience, these meetings are effective at uncovering the root cause of absences. In some cases, the attendance problems have reasonable explanations and mutually-agreeable resolutions are reached. Finally, at 20 unexcused absences, a SARC (Student Attendance Review Committee) brings the parent, social worker, attendance officer, and student together to help determine why that student is absent and what can be done to improve their problematic attendance. If a student did not change their problematic attendance behaviors after a

SARC, the social worker usually moves forward to bring the student to court. In these cases, the court creates a resolution that explores the root causes of the attendance issues and mandates interventions that can help the student to overcome these behaviors.

Despite these policies that are effective in overcoming chronic absences from school, the Gwinnett County school system did not have an automated system to ensure that all students are discouraged from accumulating a high number of unexcused absences, making it difficult for attendance officers to intervene early enough and often enough. In addition, schools intercede in cases where student attendance is unexcused; on the other hand, excused absences are unaddressed within the policy. This becomes particularly problematic for school systems whose AYP are based on overall attendance, not just unexcused absences. Schools need to do more in order to curtail problematic attendance, both for the student population and for the school system itself.

School-based attendance practices and programs. This portion of the review of literature will examine both the positive and negative strategies schools have adopted. These two areas need to be presented so schools can eliminate unproven policies and strategies that work contrary to their goals and so that in their place, schools can adopt those methods that are research-backed and proven to improve attendance. Only those strategies that had a scientifically-proven, statistically-significant effect on attendance and could fit into a school-based model of multisystemic interventions were listed within this section. Multisystemic intervention has found success in the past at altering youths' ideologies, but the fact that multisystemic intervention will positively change a child's school attendance is conjectural and remains a proposed theory, yet to be proven within this subsection (Schoenwald et al., 2000; Brown et al., 1999; Henggeler & Rowland,

1999). For these reasons, this project study examines, evaluates, and uses these successes as a research underpinning for this foundation.

From the review of literature, the overwhelming answer to improving attendance and standardized test scores points toward “an enforced mandatory attendance policy” (Marbuger, 2006 p. 148). Inconsistent attendance procedures send mixed messages to chronically absent students and their parents (Baker et al., 2001, p. 2). The first tool a school must use to reduce absenteeism is the adoption of an attendance policy that is consistently enforced (DeSocio et al., 2007; National Audit Office, 2005; Teasley, 2004). The same is true for truancy. “Truancy . . . is more prevalent in schools that have inconsistent enforcement of [their] truancy policy” (Teasley, 2004 p. 118). When schools begin to develop this policy, they need to adopt attendance practices that reward good attendance, discourage poor attendance, and have consequences for truancy (Baker et al., 2001; National Audit Office, 2005).

An attendance practice that relies too heavily on consequences will not succeed. An example of a consequence that many schools adopted and eventually realized was too harsh was a practice common in the 1980s and 1990s of withholding credit for courses because of a lack of attendance (Mount Diablo Unified School District, 1990; Reeves, 2008). The Mount Diablo Unified School District adopted this policy, which backfired and worked contrary to the school’s desired outcome of improving attendance. Mount Diablo’s (1990) policy set a maximum number of 14 allowable absences. Once the students reached the 15 days of absence, many simply gave up and refused to work, because they were not going to receive credit anyway. The school district eliminated the 15 day attendance policy after reviewing the data from the results.

An effective attendance practice will not solely rely on severe punitive consequences. Instead, an effective attendance policy will have a multi-faceted approach. Schools can improve all students' attendance by incorporating lessons on problem-solving and social skills, recognizing student accomplishments, building interpersonal relationships between students and between students and teachers, monitoring daily attendance with phone calls to parents, and incorporating teacher feedback to parents and students concerning academic achievement as well as attendance (Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009).

Not all school-sponsored attendance practices will work to the end advantage of the student or the school. "Highly punitive programs that place the problem of truancy on the individual have not curbed truancy rates. Zero-tolerance policies have done more to alienate students from school than to improve teaching and learning" (Teasley, 2004 p. 123). In Nemeć and Watson's (2007) qualitative student interviews, the researchers discovered that the school's truancy policy was working contrary to its intended purpose; 66% of the students interviewed indicated that a consequence of out-of-school suspension did not deter them from unexcused absences. "One [student] stated, 'Threats make me more mad. I don't like being bossed around.' Another said, 'Suspensions aren't bad. I get a day off without getting in trouble for it'" (p. 28). Consequences still need to be in place for those students who are AWOL from class. This helps to place the accountability where it belongs, with the students. However, schools must realize that severe consequences work contrary to their overall goals.

A school that is flexible with their consequences, offering support to the families and taking away student privileges are more effective at combating absences than a rigid

set of guidelines with harsh consequences (National Audit Office, 2005, p. 44). Severe consequences will not be effective at reducing truancy but students must realize repercussions do exist for being truant from school (Teasley, 2004).

If restrictive consequences can be effective, so can rewards (Reardon, 2008). Nemeck and Watson (2007) found that, “Students react to positive reinforcement” (p. iii). In their study, rewards were offered for students who demonstrated good attendance; 75% of the students stated that positive rewards did make them want to improve their attendance (Nemeck & Watson, p. 30). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) recommended that schools use “more positive involvement activities than negative or punishing activities” (p. 316). Positive affirmation for good attendance can be an effective means to improve attendance (Lever et al., 2004).

Focus on the core academic courses. Students who have schedules that focus on the core academic classes do better on high-stakes tests, because the standardized tests focus on the core academics (Fielder, 2003). These core academics include math, science, social studies, language arts, and foreign language (Fielder). Local, state, and federal tests focus on examining student knowledge that was required to be taught in the mandated curriculum of the core classes. Foreign language is included because of the growing diversity of our culture as well as the foreign language prerequisite of colleges (Fielder). Colleges encourage their underclassmen to focus on the core academics, and only after the students have made it through the first couple of years, do they move into their major subject area and explore electives. Curriculum improvement could come from three different levels. The teacher could increase expectations, the school could put more students in higher level courses, and the state officials could increase the standards set by

the curricula. Increasing the academic knowledge through changes in the curricula will improve attendance and increase student achievement (National Audit Office, 2005).

Focus on high expectations. The model in Appendix B will recommend improving the curricula because studies have found that students who are held accountable to high expectations learn more information and are present in class (de Jung, Duckworth, & Oregon Univ., 1985; Kube & Ratigan, 1992; National Audit Office, 2005; and Teasley, 2004).

Students who are absent from class in which the workload is heavy feel as though they cannot catch up from a missed day (Teasley, 2004). These students take this into consideration when they are deciding to miss that class or the entire day of school. Due to a high level of academic rigor, some students would rather go to school than miss the work and feel the stress of making up the assignments.

Student academic standing can improve when teachers increase their expectations of the students. Teachers who have high expectations have students who attend their class more often when compared to other classes with a similar mix of students, but whose teachers have lower expectations (Teasley, 2004). Requiring students to make up missed work was found to be an incentive to attending school. “Having to make up classwork was the most powerful deterrent” (de Jung et al., 1985, p. 8). Kube & Ratigan (1992) agree, “Require students to make up the learning activities they missed as a result of their being absent” (p. 3). Besides acting as a deterrent to missing school, the student is learning an increased amount of information necessary to do well in the class and perform well on any connected high-stakes tests.

Communication home. In addition to giving students incentives to attend class, parental communication is a critical component of an attendance policy. Parents should be called when their child is absent from school (DeKalb, 1999; National Audit Office, 2005) (See Appendix B). A parent who is unaware that their child is absent cannot do anything about it; they cannot correct the poor decision to miss school. A parent who is kept informed can better deal with the truant child. When a student is absent for 25% or more of the day, the parent should be notified (Kearney, 2008; Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) created a study in which schools “developed school–family–community partnerships to help improve student attendance; [from this] the average rate of chronically absent students in the schools decreased from 8% to 6.1%” (p. 311).

Parents’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Altering the attitudes of parents. Parental influence plays an important role in the way a student views attendance in the school. Parental attitudes range from negative to positive with those negative attitudes adversely affecting their child’s attendance at school (National Audit Office, 2005). The attitudes of the parents are difficult to change, but with a long-term approach and the adoption of the multisystemic model found in Appendix B, parents may realize that schools are truly looking out for their children’s best interests, doing everything possible to improve their attendance. “Changing parental attitudes can be difficult and take a long time, but is essential to achieving sustainable reductions in pupil absence” (National Audit Office, p. 9) The positive effect of this change in mindset would have parental supervision preventing students from skipping school. Students may adopt similar feelings from their parent, “Where parents do not value education, pupils are much more likely to be absent from school without a good

reason.” (National Audit Office, p. 9). The school can have some influence in the parents’ perception of the educational environment. The parental attitudes toward personnel, educational standards, discipline, and the physical setting had the highest degree of influence upon a student’s attendance. Over time, with the multisystemic model incorporated into the culture of the school, and consistently reinforced, these behaviors could change for the better.

In an attempt to change parents’ attitudes, the school needs to realize that “four major principles are necessary to any successful intervention – awareness, change in perspectives, early intervention, and cooperation and involvement” (Harte & The Canadian Education Association, 1995, p. 1). The first step in this intervention would be improved communication to the parents. The first item that a school would want to stress to the parents is that learning opportunities missed during an absence cannot be easily recreated after school or through homework (National Audit Office, 2005). When expressing this to the parents, it may be best to remove the academic language and put it into terms a parent can easily understand.

Parental attitudes toward education can be changed, especially when the school uses one of the ACT Now strategies of viewing “children in the context of their families” (Baker et al., 2001, p. 9). Families have a major influence over the youth. When a school realizes and makes known that each child is different, is coming from a unique home environment, and may have issues stemming from the home, parents may be more willing to change their attitude toward the educational institution.

Home-based initiatives that can improve attendance. Since parents have a significant influence to both positively and negatively impact academic achievement and

student attendance, they will be a part of the multisystemic model found in Appendix B (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Kearney, 2008; Kober & The Center on Education Policy, 2001; Teasley, 2004). Teasley described how parents have a great deal of influence over the achievement of their children but that the influence comes from the home, not from involvement in the school culture. “When parents participate in their child’s education (that is, monitor homework, reading ability, grades, achievement scores, and courses and attend PTA), the probability of truancy decreases” (p. 119). Harris & Goodall (2008) concurred; schools that focus their efforts on attempting to increase parental involvement within the school culture will not see an increase in student achievement. School-based activities that involve parents have little to no impact on academic achievement. The portion of parental influence that has the greatest impact is done within the home (Harris & Goodall). Epstein and Sheldon (2002) found the four top methods that get parents involved and which still improve attendance to be, “home visits ($M = 2.73$, $SD = .47$), rewarding students for improved attendance ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .52$), having a person at the school for parents to contact ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .53$), and calling home when a student is absent ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .93$)” (p. 312). Schools with finite resources will be better off keeping parents updated as to their child’s progress in school as well as informing the parents of academic, social, and attendance expectations. Parental involvement at school functions did not play a significant role in increasing academic performance or attendance. Hinz et al., (2003) and Lauchlan (2003) would both agree with Teasley (2004) that schools attempting to increase their students’ attendance need to encourage the parents to communicate with the teachers about their child’s performance, spend time with their child developing cognitive abilities, instill strong

appropriate values and aspirations, motivate their children to do well in school, encourage taking responsibility, promote positive communication between the parent and child, reduce the likelihood of having to change schools due to a move, become aware of how a school communicates absences, deter their child from missing school for work or for the caring of a sibling, avoid becoming permissive and allowing their child to miss school for overindulgence or overprotection, become familiar with the truancy laws, ignore tantrums and fake complaints of illness, and use relaxation techniques and graduated exposure to return a school refuser to school (p. 119–120, 124). These areas of parental involvement, though not easy for schools to regulate, have been proven to have the desired effect on student attendance. Overall, the “establishment of effective home-school linkages may be as important to school success for problem children as the provision of academic and cognitive enhancements” (Brown et al., 1999). Parents can make a difference in their children’s lives. With the proper parenting, students can realize academic success.

School refusal is preventable. It is important for school administrators and the child’s parents to be aware of the various reasons a student refuses to go to school. School refusal is centered on the child. Helping the child to overcome the reasons for school refusal is paramount. To best accomplish this goal, parents must be trained on how to successfully intervene. The multisystemic model in Appendix B incorporates the various types of school refusal and how to combat each variety. The literature is discussed below.

Four main reasons exist for a student to refuse to go to school. These are general distress, an attempt to avoid social or performance situations, an effort to gain attention, and truancy. Described as having fun instead of going to school (Kearney, 2007). A

school official will have to first figure out why the student is missing school and then assess the family situation and how to best retrain the student to overcome the root cause of school refusal. A school may have to spend time with the child and attempt to retrain the student – in loco parentis – or a school could include the parent(s) by training them in the techniques that will help improve classroom seat time for the youth. For all school refusers fighting with the youth, ignoring the child’s distress, and allowing the student to stay home and do fun things all work contrary to returning the student to school (Kearney, 2007).

Combat general distress. A student who has general distress about school can use breathing techniques along with muscle relaxation (Kearney, 2007). Terms such as, *Don’t worry, Stop it, You shouldn’t be scared, or, You’re faking it,* should be replaced with *Relax, Breathe deep through the nose, and, Let’s work on relaxing your muscles by using the tense and release method,* (Kearney, 2007, p.76). Constantly reassuring the child with *It’ll be okay,* and promising gifts or rewards for going to school will set the child up for failure. Instead, tell the child, “I expect you to go to school. We will talk about your feelings later tonight but right now everyone has to go to work and school,” (Kearney, 2007, p. 78). A parent whose child habitually misses part of the day should work on having the child stay in class longer each day. If a child goes to school 3 hours late due to distress, then each day the parent should attempt to have the child go in earlier than he or she did the day before (Kearney, 2007).

Combat avoidance of social/performance situations. Some school refusers attempt to avoid school or class due to social or performance situations. The best cure for this type of absence is to reduce the feeling of distress (Kearney, 2007). The first step for

a parent or school official is to help the child relax, then help him think realistically about what is actually happening (Kearney, 2007). The student might assume that he will be embarrassed in class because the child believes performance needs to be perfect or that his existing performance is terrible. In this case, the child needs help with perception, seeing the situation as it truly is - somewhere in-between (Kearney). The youth feels that a terrible performance will never be forgotten and peers will ridicule him for all time, when in fact most blunders are laughed at temporarily and quickly forgotten, along with the feeling of embarrassment (Kearney).

Combat the attempts to gain attention. When youths refuse to go to school in order to gain attention, they need to have a set routine in the mornings (Kearney, 2007). Appropriate behaviors should be praised and inappropriate ignored. Parents can grant small rewards and praise for going to school without complaint, while pre-determined punishments should be given for those days that a child protests (Kearney). Excessive questions and telephone calls from the child to the parent should be stopped and the parent needs to force the child to attend school, praising the child for being brave (Kearney). Parents need to think their communication through in their heads prior to speaking with their children. In addition, the parents need to be certain that the children will be physically capable of performing the task the parents are asking. A parent should tell their child exactly what is expected with short, direct commands, using eye contact when speaking to the youth, and then praise the child when he performs the task correctly or punish the child who did not pay attention (Kearney). If the parent is unable to get their child to school, the child should sit quietly in one spot for the majority of the school day, without distractions or the ability to use the phone, music, television, etc. Another

possibility is to allow the child to read textbooks, write essays, or complete homework. Either way, the time home cannot be enjoyable for the youth (Kearney).

Combat truancy. Students who miss school because they want to do things that are more fun than staying in school are considered truant. Most of the time, parents are unaware of their children's truancy. Truancy could range from missing a portion of a class to a full day of absence. The definition of truancy is based more on the reason for missing school than the amount of time that is missed (Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Fremont, 2003; Kearney, 2008; Reid, 2003). The type of 'fun' that a student may have during an unexcused absence can range from harmless enjoyment, like watching television to delinquency, including criminal activities such as vandalism or drug use (Kearney, 2007). The first step that parents must take is to monitor the child's whereabouts (Kearney). The next step would be to teach the child what to tell their peers when they ask the student to skip. For instance, the youth could respond, "My dad made me promise to stay in school this week or I can't hang out this weekend." Or he could simply say, "Some other time" (Kearney, 2007, p. 185).

Keep track of the child's whereabouts. Parents need to know where their child is at all times outside of school hours. For instant, the child needs to call with updates to their whereabouts. In addition, parents need to know who his friends are and where he likes to hang-out; they need to collect phone numbers of their friends and corresponding parents (Kearney, 2007). In Appendix B, the multisystemic model not only incorporates what a school needs to be doing to improve attendance but also what parents need to learn to better keep their children in school. For example, parents of truant children need to talk with the child's teachers and ask to be notified if the child is absent. This way the

parent can immediately search for the child, find him, and remove him from the ‘fun’ that he was attempting to have (Kearney). New technology exists that can track the whereabouts of cell phones. A parent could install free GPS tracking on the child’s cell phone or give the child an inexpensive pay-as-you-go phone to carry that will transmit data to a service plan and in turn show a map of the cell phone’s locations on the Internet. This can be done without the child’s knowledge but State legal statutes must be followed (Mologogo, 2009).

Utilize a written contract. An effective step for a parent to prevent truancy is the written contract. In the contract session, parents write down privileges that the child enjoys, such as going out with friends, listening to music, or watching television. Then the parents list the responsibilities expected from the child, in a descriptive, measurable way. For example, an item on the contract might read, “Goes to and stays in school each day this week.” The general statement of the contract can also list the consequences. The contract is useful to both parties because it removes the need to argue or disagree over what was expected, what occurred and what will happen as a result. If the child breaks the contract, the youth has the repercussions listed within the general statement (Kearney, 2007).

Peers’ Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

The effectiveness of peer groups. The multisystemic school-based model proposed in Appendix B will also involve peer groups that have found success at improving attendance. Kreps (1999) found success with peer groups. Seventeen students were part of a peer group study to help improve their attendance and academics. From those participants, only 3 of the 17 students involved were failing at the end of the 12

week grading period. Fourteen of the 17 students had a change in attitude toward school and wanted to attend. Unexcused absences dropped from a baseline data of 9 per week for the 17 participants to zero in weeks 7, 8, and 9. As a result, “increased attendance paired with a behavioral group approach helped to foster the academic growth of the students” (p. 35). Kreps’ research created youth groups who were at-risk due to truancy and put them together in social groups to talk about school and attendance. Kreps found that social groups, along with some other policy changes, improved student attendance. Peer mentor situations prove that student attendance and grades can be improved by utilizing this strategy. As the result of a mentor program, at-risk students may realize that someone cares. For otherwise disengaged students, improved attitudes toward school can reduce absenteeism, improve grades, and reduce the drop-out rate overall. According to Teasley (2004), for a school to effectively reduce truancy they need to conduct parent meetings to talk about the importance of attendance, increase communication between the school’s diverse families, assign a truant officer to those at-risk students, have counselors meet with students who are chronically absent, have the school personnel in charge of attendance communicate with the parents, visit the home of truant students, and reward those students who have marked improvement in school attendance (p. 123).

Friendships leave lasting impressions. Students who are allowed to associate with truant students have a higher propensity to skip school themselves. On the other hand, parents who encourage positive peer relationships will have children who attend school regularly. Parents can influence which friends their children are allowed to keep. An amazing 84% of truant students indicated that their friends also skipped school (DeKalb, 1999). Peer influence can have both a positive and a negative impact on school

attendance. When a student is allowed to associate with peers who skip school, they too will be more likely to be truant (Kearney, 2008). Those students who associate with other students who regularly attend school will be more likely to attend school themselves. Hartnett (2008) indicated that teenagers will fall into peer groups based on attitudes as well as academic achievement and that these peer groups can have a more powerful influence on shaping values compared to parents.

Agencies' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Holding parents responsible. School attendance policies that hold parents accountable for their children's attendance record have been proven effective. Baker, Sigmon, Nady, and Nugent (2001) studied the effects of two programs. The Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now program, which operated out of Arizona, was run by the Pima County Attorney's Office. The second program was called the Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program. Both programs had overlapping strategies. The ACT Now program was able to reduce truancy by up to 61% through multiple interventions. Having evaluated these programs, the research group found some of the policies to be effective. One example of an effective policy involved letters mailed home after three unexcused absences, informing parents that "they may be subject to misdemeanor prosecution" because of their child's truancy. This letter policy clearly stated that parents would be held accountable for their child's unexcused absences. Due to the effectiveness of this strategy, the policy will be included within the multisystemic school-based model found in Appendix B.

When parents are held accountable for missed days of school, their children's attendance improves. Possible repercussions the parents face for their children's

absenteeism could include being mandated to attend student attendance review committee meetings or meetings with social workers, being taken to court, and facing monetary fines. “Sanctions [such as monetary fines] against parents of pupils who [are] truant can be useful as one element of a range of actions to improve attendance” (National Audit Office, 2005, p 35). When children are truant – especially when the parents know of the unexcused absence – the responsible adults need to feel the pressure and even prosecution from government officials, police, and judges (See Appendix B) (White et al., 2001). The Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) Now program found that a “threat of prosecution prompted 61% of parents or guardians to take corrective action” (Baker et al., 2001, p. 7). This same program also followed through with sanctions of up to \$500 to parents with truant youths (Baker et al.).

Students cannot be allowed by their parents to miss school for unexcused reasons. Kreps (1999) found that parents were allowing their children to stay at home for illegitimate reasons. Most of these students were missing school because they simply lacked the desire to go. Some school systems have taken drastic measures. One district began to take the parents to court for their children’s excessive absences. “Truancy rates were reduced 45% when truants and their parents were taken to court” (DeKalb, 1999 p. 1). Bazemore et al. (2004) and White et al. (2001) found success in a police-led truancy unit that was able to improve attendance and reduce delinquency. Those students who are truant need to be found and brought back to school. The parents who allow their child to miss school for unexcused reasons need to be taken to court.

The court system is one sure way to hold parents responsible, but not all researchers agree that court petitions are helpful in addressing the underlying cause of

habitual absences, and therefore in the long run, may not be suitable in all cases. Steinhart (1996) and Edward (1996) as cited by Fantuzzo et al. (2005) found that taking parents to court over truancy did not address the actual cause of truancy and not all cases are appropriate to bring to court. Contributing factors to the truancy, such as lack of transportation, need to be addressed prior to a court referral (Garrison, 2006). Those “who seek to reduce truancy rates must evaluate the context in which truancy occurs” (Teasley, 2004, p. 118).

The community pillar cannot be ignored in an effective multi-systemic model. An example of a less intrusive, but still effective, method of government involvement would be the use of mentors who specialize in developing career interests within student populations. These professional mentor groups can identify the students who are not attending school and report these students to the county attorney, who in turn would work on getting the student into school or move them onto a job (DeKalb, 1999; Lever et al., 2004). Other mentor programs have seen success as well (Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009; Teasley, 2004) (See Appendix B).

Teachers' Role in Preventing Problematic Attendance

Making courses relevant and engaging. Many students feel disengaged from the lessons they attend and are therefore unmotivated to be in class, much less actively participating and learning. Lehr et al. (2004) found that at the secondary level, 22% of students were mildly disengaged, 18% were moderately disengaged, and 31% of students were highly disengaged (p.292). A total of 71% of students were at least mildly disengaged (Lehr et al., 2004, p. 292). Students have to spend a good portion of their day in the classroom, yet their attention is not being captured by the subject matter or

teaching methods. The full brunt of responsibility for this lack of interest did not rest with the students alone.

Teaching methods play a major part in the disconnection between students and their lessons. Johnson (2008) found that the lack of engagement did not stem from the students' lackluster motivation but from the style of teaching. Students often question why they have to do what they are told to do. Students are more likely to comply if they can see the benefits (National Audit Office, 2005 p. 9). Students who are not engaged in class lessons and who do not realize how the curriculum pertains to them do not feel the importance of coming to class (Attwood & Croll, 2006; DeSocio et al., 2007). Some students refuse to go to school because the lessons do not pertain to them (National Audit Office, 2005). Lessons have to be made interesting, have to be taught passionately, have to show real-world relevance and usefulness, and have to connect the student to their past learning, placing value on what the youths already know. By creating lesson plans founded on more engaging methodologies, teachers will increase student engagement, and therefore interest in attending class.

Students need to be engaged in active, rather than passive learning techniques. "Schools that place greater emphasis on relational learning are better able to serve the motivational needs of adolescent students, and those that focus on learning collaboratively are more likely to have highly engaged adolescent students" (Johnson, 2008, p. 70). Teachers who use collaborative learning – pro-social, interactive teaching methods in lieu of passive lecturing and independent work – have students whose enjoyment level was $d=0.66$ and an interest level of $d=0.74$ (Johnson). This study, which involved high school students, indicated that teachers who use relational and

collaborative teaching methods have students who enjoy the class time more and have a higher interest level in the subject matter (Johnson). Twenty-eight percent of students indicate that they show up to classes in which they like the subject (Nemec & Watson, 2007). “When students are motivated and interested in the course, they are likely to participate in classes and miss few of them” (Beran & Violato, 2009, p. 9). Teachers cannot guarantee that a student will like every subject, but they can create a format that involves participation. For students to develop concept mastery, teachers should be having their students “asking and answering questions, discussing concepts, sharing examples, evaluating ideas, and applying knowledge” (Beran & Violato, 2009, p. 9). Sitting in a classroom listening to passive lectures will not engage students to think actively and will not encourage them to attend class. This style was too passive, especially for minds that are evolving to independent levels, by the teen years. Teachers can affect student engagement and motivation to attend class by structuring their classes with more collaborative and active techniques that encourage the students to make cognitive connections between subjects, thereby encouraging them to attend classes.

Beyond shifting from passive to active teaching methodologies, teachers should also find ways to show that they value a student’s grasp of content matter. Students would be less likely to want to miss class if they feel they are part of the lesson (Revell & Wainwright, 2009). Students who are engaged and feel as though their background and knowledge contribute to the discussion or the topic with meaning and value are more likely to attend school (Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009). Lesson plans that show the link from the current subject of study to past knowledge help students feel proud of what they

already know and interested in learning more and linking the new knowledge to other subjects, improving motivation and attendance.

Class time must be spent teaching the information that is relevant to passing the course and that connects with what students will need to know in adulthood. Practical application must be an area of focus for the teacher and made clear to the students. “Curriculum and instruction must be relevant to a child’s experience, with concrete examples of how the learning process applies to the real world” (Teasley, 2004 p. 124). Teachers who relate their class lessons to real-world examples have students who are engaged and attend their class. Students who feel as though they are learning a skill for their chosen profession are much more likely to come to school and enjoy the lesson (National Audit Office). Schools that have improved student engagement through teaching that connects to their daily lives find improved attendance (Kearney, 2008). In Nemec and Watson’s (2007) research, students were asked why they missed school; most of the students responded that they were not interested because the lessons did not seem relevant. Hollingworth (2007) insists that lessons have to be connected to real-world examples for students to best learn. “The most effective and memorable moments in school happen when students are actively engaged as learners and can see the connections between what they are doing and the world outside the classroom” (p. 340). Nemec and Watson found marked improved attendance when they did not only improve the relevancy of the lesson but they also increased the level of difficulty (2007). Efforts to move past theoretical abstracts to concrete functionality in all areas of knowledge are critical to challenge, motivate, and interest increasingly independent minds. When

teachers plan discussions that make these connections in students' minds, they are helping to improve both attendance and active learning.

Straight forward lecture-style lesson plans are going to have a negative impact on attendance and student motivation. Revell and Wainwright (2009) found that students want to attend classes that offer more participation and interactivity, where the teacher links the content to prior knowledge, and when the class has a teacher who is passionate, enthusiastic, and able to bring the subject to life. With changes to teaching methods and relatively small additions to lesson plans, teachers can help to engage active minds and encourage students to attend class.

Improving teacher absenteeism. A teacher's presence is important to the likelihood of a student learning the material. Teacher absenteeism adversely affected the students' test score on the preliminary competency test (PCT) (Ehrenberg et al., 1991). According to Ehrenberg et al., if the district could have reduced the number of teacher absences by five days per year, the pass rate would have risen 0.75 to 0.85 percentage points. Woods and Montagno (1997) in a study of third graders found similar results. Those classes that had teachers with the greatest number of teacher absences also had students with lower standardized test scores and lower student rank (Woods and Montagno). "Students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of the instructional [material] is by an array of substitute teachers" (Bruno, 2002, p. 1). Teasley (2004) cites Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees, and Ehrenberg's (1991) study that indicated teacher absenteeism has a direct correlation to student truancy, "higher teacher absenteeism is associated with higher student absenteeism" (Ehrenberg et al., 1991, p. 87). Two theories for the cause of this

connection were proposed by Ehrenberg et al. (1991). One possibility was that student motivation to attend school was lessened when their teacher was not present to teach (Ehrenberg et al.) The other possibility was that both the teacher and student became ill – a contagious illness may have spread through the school or class. If the link between student and teacher attendance was, in fact, related to decreased motivation, then the teacher can have a major effect on morale and motivation for student attendance simply by being present in school more often.

Teachers increasing academic rigor. Boredom has a negative effect on attendance. Thirty-five percent of truant students indicate that they skip classes because they are bored (Nemec & Watson, 2007). On the other hand, making lessons relevant as well as challenging improves attendance. “To prevent and correct serious attendance problems, schools need to . . . improve the quality of the courses” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002 p. 309). When the quality of the course work rises, the students will rise to the occasion and attend class on a more regular basis. Improving academic quality and raising expectations are part of the multisystemic model found in Appendix B. Students who are normally bored in traditional classrooms may find themselves engaged when they are offered a vocational curriculum. Vocational education needs to be offered for those students who do not fit into the standardized mold of a traditional school (Murray, 2007). Beron & Violato (2009) found in their study of college students that “their engagement was higher in longer and more applied courses, as well as in those courses that were outside their department, were electives, and had a higher workload” (p. 9-10). In a qualitative study by Nemec and Watson (2007) high school students were surveyed to determine what a teacher might do to improve student

attendance. In this study “making the class fun and interesting” was the number one student response (Nemec and Watson, p. 25). Clearly, boredom negatively affect a student’s willingness to attend school. Aligning students to the program of study that suits their interests, abilities, and goals would be the first step. From there, it is important that the classes challenge students to work to the best of their ability. More rigorous curriculum could have a farther-reaching effect than just improving attendance.

Though the creation of a more challenging curriculum will require teachers to work harder, success would mean multiple positive changes for schools. Smink and Reimer (2005) realized a 53% rise in achievement level when highly effective teachers taught the classes. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) found that moving up the teacher quality by one standard deviation has more of an impact on student success than reducing the class size by 10 students. These findings highlight the importance years of experience, certification, and subject matter preparation hold in efforts to create strong academics. But experience, knowledge, and preparation need to be reciprocal in the teachers’ expectations for their students. Teachers who create challenging programs of study that the students enjoy will create academic advantages in two ways, increasing attendance and providing a more rigorous curriculum, both potentially resulting in improved test results for the school (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Rodríguez & Conchas, 2009). Kober and The Center on Education Policy (2001) insist that when a school puts minority students into challenging academic classes, standardized test scores improve. This might be based partially on the fact that students in higher level classes have a higher level of attendance, a correlation that this study has already proven to be true in the review of literature (de Jung et al., 1985).

Improve teacher respect. Higher expectations for student achievement lead to improved teacher respect and poor student-teacher relationships can negatively impact attendance. Nemeec and Watson (2007) found that 55% of students attend classes for those teachers who they like or respect and 41% of truant students skip class because they do not like the teacher. Attwood & Croll (2006) found that students who felt their teachers were “‘always getting at me’ . . . were six times more likely than others to be in the high truancy category” (p. 478). Two-thirds of the students who were chronically truant had negative feelings toward their instructor (Attwood & Croll). When Attwood and Croll conducted a qualitative study involving truant students, all of the participants indicated that they had negative relationships with their teacher(s). The relationship between attendance and truancy was strong, whether or not it was a cause and effect relationship, it must be considered a worthwhile endeavor for teachers build positive relationships with their students.

Teachers with high expectations also have the added benefit of improved relationships with students, due to the increased respect for the professional. An improved relationship has also helped benefit a student’s attendance (DeSocio et al., 2007). “To prevent and correct serious attendance problems, schools need to . . . intensify interpersonal relationships” (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002 p. 309). Students come to school, at least in part, for the social interaction. This socialization can come from the peers or teachers. Neild and Farley-Ripple (2008) wrote that when freshmen are placed with experienced, certified teachers, student attendance increases. These findings are congruent with other findings that state when teachers have high expectations of their students, attendance improves. “Uncertified teachers . . . [and the low] quality and

efficiency of schoolteachers, counselors, and principals [are] associated with truancy” (Teasley, 2004 p. 118). New teachers may not realize that if they raise their expectations, they will benefit from improved student relationships; experienced teachers may be more cognizant of these linked areas of focus.

Improving the relationship between students and staff has been found to improve attendance. Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007) suggested that “more staff development must be established to better aide teachers and administrators in discovering ways to build relationships with these students” (p. 2). Along with a strong curriculum with real-life relevance, and interactive teaching methodology that piques a student’s interest in the topic, relationships can also keep students coming back to class. If a student was absent, the teacher should ask why the youth missed the class (Kube & Ratigan, 1992). They should also genuinely care about the response. Relationships cannot be faked, and they are difficult for schools to mandate and inspect; however, if teachers do improve in the area of developing genuinely respectful relationships with their students, they will realize an improvement in student attendance, achievement, and potentially test scores.

The teacher mentor. Teachers need to be aware of the profound affect they can have on a student’s decisions. A teacher’s influence can positively impact a student’s attendance at school (Kearney, 2008). The literature points to the need for the teachers to be on board and actively encouraging students’ regular attendance (Kube & Ratigan, 1992). Students who skip class or are absent tend to believe that their teachers and the school as a whole do not believe in them (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2007). Smink and Reimer (2005) agree, when a student feels as though a teacher is checking up on them, they are more motivated to come to school. Apathetic views of absenteeism will only make the

situation worse. On the other hand, teachers who are actively encouraging attendance will see an improvement in the student-teacher relationship and will also help school administrators who are in charge of tracking and dealing with attendance issues to identify at-risk students before they reach problematic attendance. The proactive approach, then, will have a positive effect socially – with the student – and systematically – with the school attendance officers. With students who are at risk for problematic attendance, a teacher with a good student relationship can work with the attendance officers to identify and address the root causes of absenteeism.

Teachers need to understand and be able to explain to students the school's attendance policy. A teacher should use real-world examples of when an absence is legitimate or not (Rainey, 2009). A teacher who can tell the students the facts about consequences of missing school has a dramatic effect on the student. If a student has more than one teacher indicating the importance of school attendance, the student is more likely to attend school (Rainey, 2009). Schools that make attendance a front-of-mind issue for their teachers will see the teacher behaviors working to address the problem and students responding to these prompts. These foundational changes will need to be maintained for long periods of time, and combined with other practices in a multisystemic model, in order for marked changes to occur.

In conjunction with teaching methods that show the link between abstract theory and real-life relevance, teachers can provide other real-world relevance by describing the detrimental effects lack of attendance – and lack of education overall – can have on a student's life. Teachers need to show they care in other ways as well; teachers should act as mentors (DeSocio et al., 2007). In the Lever et al. (2004) study in which various

methods were adopted into one program to reduce the drop-out rate of Baltimore's youth "the most powerful component of the program is the fostering of close relationships with positive adults" (p. 521). The teacher should talk to the student about how bad their life may be without an education (Nemec & Watson, 2007). The teacher should offer help and even walk the student down to the attendance office to talk about the student's choices (Rainey, 2009). The teacher should talk about all of the benefits – both now and in the future – of attending school (Nemec & Watson). In the multisystemic model in Appendix B, teachers will need to be able to express to their constituents the need for regular attendance. Teacher communication to the parents concerning grades and attendance has also been an influence on academic achievement (Kearney, 2009). Caring about attendance and expressing that concern to students can profoundly affect attendance rates and attitudes of students within a school. This area of improvement would not take a lot of teacher time, simply a commitment to learn the attendance policies of the school, state these to the student, communicate about attendance with the students and their parents, and explain the importance of making good choices in this area – as well as the repercussions of bad choices.

Conclusion

Unexcused absences are preventable. Parents, teachers and school officials must first identify the reason a child was missing school and then work to correct the underlining cause(s). Baker et al. (2001) found as much as a 64% decrease in truancy with the ACT Now program. The ACT Now program, which utilized truancy letters, taking parents to court, fines against parents, and services for students and their family to address the root cause of the problem found only 8% of students were chronic truant

repeaters (Baker et al., 2001). A provision for this program was offering services that would address the root cause of the problematic attendance. Parents of children who are truant must be especially vigilant at catching and removing the child from the fun activity in which they are engaging. Students who are truant must realize that it was not an option to miss school in order to do the things that please them. Students who refuse to attend school for other reasons need to be counseled using a variety of resources and means. No matter the cause of the unexcused absence, the parent is the most influential factor in the student's life and therefore the best resource to deal with the misbehavior. However, school policies, teacher practices and attitudes, and state laws must all be aligned to educate, support, and motivate the parent to help the child attend school.

Implementation

Appendix B lists three levels of implementation with more information in the body of the study. In most schools, level 1 and 2 need to be implemented. In some schools that have attendance problems, level 3 also needs to be implemented in order to effectively reduce the absence rate.

Before implementation begins, examine the school's data from previous years. Determine the school's attendance rates from past years and set goals based on those data. Each goal should be written in a specific, measurable sentence, assigned to someone who can measure the progress, and fully document the outcome. Communicate these goals to your constituents and faculty along with the reason(s) the goals were set. A school system's goals may focus on an increase in academic success, improved

standardized test scores, increased chances of meeting the school's attendance based AYP goals, or improved student attendance.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Parents are the best resource for support. Parents can encourage school attendance. With the proper training, parents can have a great deal of influence over their children.

The state offers support. Each state already has attendance laws and mandates that students, parents, and schools must follow. The majority of these laws and guidelines are preexisting supports that are backed by research and, by law, must be followed. Local agencies can offer support.

Multiagency collaborative intervention has been found to be the most effective means of reducing problematic attendance, especially with regards to truancy. The school's attendance office would be the first agency. Once the attendance office personnel determines the root cause of the problem and exhausts its resources through interventions, it must determine the best track to take. This track would depend on the type of problem causing the student's absences. School refusers will need to be referred to a counselor and then possibly to a social worker. Students who are truant will need to be referred to law enforcement and then possibly the juvenile justice system (Baker et al., 2001; Bazemore et al., 2004; DeKalb, 1999). The Baker et al. (2001) study of the ACT Now program found only 8% of students were repeat truant violators once they went through the program that included the "involvement of community resources e.g. law enforcement" (p. 9). Law enforcement task forces that specialize in truancy have found success in encouraging parents to send their children to school. A judge's court order and

fines have also improved students' school attendance. Law enforcement was seen as contributing 70% of the contributing factor in the ACT Now program to reduce truancy (Baker et al.).

Potential Barriers

Some areas of the country have students with problematic attendance that cannot be helped through school nor parent intervention and their town also lacks the support that a multiagency collaborative intervention could bring. Due to the overwhelming need and the lack of personnel, social and law enforcement agencies may not be able to help.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

Before the end of the school year, a school system must decide if they want to adopt the multisystemic school-based model. Once one school system within the state adopts the program and finds success, other school systems with problematic attendance will also adopt the model. At the end of the school year and during the summer, the agencies will need to be set up, school policy manuals revised, training pamphlets developed, and meetings held with constituents in order to add buy-in.

Based on the findings within the quantitative study, students reached a statistically high probability of failing the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT at 47 cumulative absences, 66 excused absences, or 23 unexcused absences. The most efficient early detection of potential failure was based on unexcused absences. The following interventions are based upon the quantitative findings within this study. An emphasis was placed upon unexcused absences in comparison to excused absences, exclusively determined to be of more significance within the results of the data analysis.

The following interventions are organized in such a way that school personnel could easily find the subsection that pertains to their specific needs for a specific student. The interventions need to take place regardless of the age of the student.

The following recommendations are based on the attendance protocol from Gwinnett County (Appendix A), the findings from the quantitative data, and the review of literature of this project study. The data indicates that unexcused absences may be more closely linked to academic failure compared to excused absences. Schools need to focus their efforts on those students who accumulate unexcused absences. Because the quantitative portion of this study determined that the correlation between attendance and the score on the high-stakes test was weak, Gwinnett county's strategy of sending letters, taking away licenses, and meeting with those students who accumulate 10 - 15 unexcused absences and fall under compulsory attendance laws may be a contributing factor to reducing unexcused absences. Gwinnett's sequential steps for curtailing problematic attendance are a base of school intervention.

Unexcused absences.

At 5 unexcused absences an attendance officer within the school system needs to contact the parent to express their concerns, give forewarning that the parent may face court proceedings, and ask the parent what they feel should be done to address the potential problematic attendance. The Mount Diablo Unified School District, (1990) expressly wrote, after reviewing the data from their failed 15-day attendance policy, that parents should be sent a letter when a student has more than 4 unexcused absences. Baker et al. (2001) study of the ACT Now program found that when parents were mailed a letter after 3 unexcused absences stating that the parent may be subject to misdemeanor

prosecution (along with multiple other interventions) the school system realized a reduction of truancy by up to 61%.

At 7 unexcused absences: Interview the student to determine the reason the child was missing school (Kearney, 2007, 2008). Begin to implement the strategies based on the reason the student was missing school, as they are listed below in the subsection - roles and responsibilities of the school, student, and parents (Kearney, 2008).

At 10 unexcused absences: Organize a meeting with the parent, child, school official, and social worker. During this meeting, inform the parent and child of the potential legal sanctions allowed by your state that could result from continued unexcused absences. Upon adoption of this multisystemic attendance model, it is important for a school system to have support from governing agencies. Petition the state to create and enforce a law that takes away the child's learner's permit or driver's license – a practice that has been successful in this researcher's years of experience (Appendix A).

At 18 unexcused absences: Follow through with legal sanctions set by the county or state (Baker et al., 2001).

Cumulative absences.

At 15 cumulative absences: Begin to implement the strategies, based on the reason the student was missing school, as they are listed below in the subsection - roles and responsibilities of the school, student, and parents.

At 25 cumulative absences: Organize a meeting with the parent, child, school official, and social worker. During this meeting, inform the parent and child of the potential legal sanctions created by your state that could result from continued absences.

At 30 cumulative absences: Take the student and parent to court for a judge to implement monetary fines against the parent.

Excused absences.

At 10 excused absences: Notify the parent that you are concerned about the number of absences and ask them the reason the child misses school. Ask them to make every effort to ensure that their child attends school every day and all day.

At 15 excused absences: Inform the parent that excuse notes from a parent will no longer be accepted. To excuse an absence, a doctor's note must be provided. Follow up on the doctor's note by verifying the authenticity.

At 18 excused absences: Begin to implement the strategies based on the reason the student was missing school, as they are listed below in the subsection - roles and responsibilities of the school, student, and parents.

Roles and Responsibilities of the School

Schools need to adopt a policy that ensures the class-work and homework missed due to any type of absence must be made up. Students who have unexcused absences, and therefore were not allowed to make up their missed assignments, were more likely to fail a high-stakes test than those students who had excused absences and were allowed to make up their work. If all students were allowed to make up missed assignments, regardless of the type of absence, their chances at improving academic achievement may be improved (Guskey, 2003). The overarching goal of academic achievement must be considered when school policies regarding makeup work are created and implemented.

Student attendance needs to be categorized. Christopher A. Kearney, a clinical psychologist who specializes in school refusal in students, said that the person who is

attempting to change a student's problematic attendance issue needs to start by asking three questions. "What are the frequency, type, and history of the child's absenteeism? What specific motivators maintain the behavior over time? What more general contextual variables surround the absenteeism?" (personal communication, February 27, 2009).

Kearney (2007, 2008) goes into more detail, explaining that the first question is an attempt to find out if the absences fit the definition of problematic absenteeism as well as to gather some preliminary information to begin a determination of the reason behind the absence. Once the first question is answered, the need to move on may be eliminated. For instance, the student may have legitimate excused reasons for the absences, is making up the work, and wants to attend school. Kearney (2008) goes into detail about the school's possible responses for a student whose attendance was problematic. When using the model, found in Appendix B, the second question may need to be answered. The second question determines the reason and intrinsic value that the absence has for the student; this information will allow the absence to be classified as school refusal or truancy. Based on the answer, a formulated, multisystemic intervention can be put in place to improve attendance. The third question truly addresses MST and brings into focus the outside factors that influence the student's absences (Schoenwald et al., 2000). For instance, students who are missing school because their parents need for them to take care of a younger sibling, while they go to work, will not benefit from anti-bullying initiatives (Kearney, 2008). The root cause of the problem will need to be addressed in order to improve an individual student's attendance. Initiatives need to be focused on these root causes, and often multiple approaches need to be taken over time, for any positive results to be determined.

Each student is different. One approach or initiative will not fix every attendance issue (Kearney, 2007). The fact that not every strategy will work for every student needs to be kept in mind as the model is implemented. If a strategy will not be effective for a particular youth, given their situation, then it can be bypassed (Kearney, 2008). The school system devising a new attendance policy needs to remember this one rule above all others: every situation is different.

Questions for the School to Ask the Student

When a child is developing problematic attendance, the school needs to determine the type of absenteeism that was occurring; this categorization can only take place from thorough and targeted questioning of the student. For a school to combat problematic attendance administrators in charge of attendance need to realize that problematic attendance falls into four categories. Three are considered school refusal and the last is truancy (Kearney, 2007, 2008). By asking the three questions Dr. Kearney posed in a personal communication, “What are the frequency, type, and history of the child’s absenteeism? What specific motivators maintain the behavior over time? What more general contextual variables surround the absenteeism?” (February 27, 2009), the attendance officer is categorizing the type of problematic attendance.

In an attempt to correct the problem, school refusal must be treated differently than truancy. School refusal can be categorized into three main reasons a youth might want to miss school. An attendance officer would need to realize which one of the three reasons is the predominate factor, before beginning to implement an effective multisystemic intervention. The school personnel will need to determine if the student

misses school because of distress, to avoid social or performance situations, to get attention, or are truant – missing school to do something the student enjoys.

Responsibilities of the School to Combat Distress

Once an attendance officer identifies that a student has problematic attendance because of distress, the school needs to combat the problem. The student will need to be taught breathing exercises (See Appendix D) and muscle relaxation (See Appendix D) (Kearney, 2007).

Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Distress

The child's parents will need to learn how to better deal with their school-refusing child who misses school because of distress. The parent will need to avoid telling their child not to worry. Parents also should not say they don't believe the child is distressed. Avoid fighting, yelling, lecturing, or negotiating. Avoid bribes or presents to change the behavior. Do not allow the child to do fun things at home if they miss even part of the school day. Expect their children to attend school every day for the full day. Parents will need to create a routine that gives the youth adequate amounts of sleep as well as a set pattern of tasks that must be accomplished (Kearney, 2008).

Responsibilities of the School to Combat Avoidance Issues

If a student has problematic attendance to avoid social or performance situations, an attendance officer needs to combat the problem. The school personnel first needs to identify the problem and determine if it stems from a situation at school that could be prevented or solved (Kearney, 2007). These might include bullying, intimidation, racial discrimination, problems with a teacher or course work. According to Attwood and Croll (2006), 21.8% of those students who are truant several times to often cite bullying as a

reason they would skip school. However, bullying was not considered a statistically significant reason students miss school.

Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Avoidance Issues

If the social or performance situations the student fears cannot be solved by school officials, then the problem must be solved by the student with help from their parent. The student will need to be encouraged to think realistically about the situation (See Appendix B). Have the student avoid trying to read people's minds, imagining the worst. The student will need to learn how to relax through breathing exercises (See Appendix D) and muscle relaxation (See Appendix D). Students should not blame themselves for things outside of their control. Students who avoid social or performance situations can utilize the S.T.O.P guidelines to help realize how they should truly feel about a situation (See Appendix E) (Kearney, 2008).

The parents of students who avoid social or performance situations can help improve their children's ability to attend school by monitoring the child's school attendance and steadily increasing the amount of time spent in the classroom, avoiding the urge to tell their child not to worry or that they don't believe the problem is real, and avoiding fights, lectures, or negotiation (Kearney, 2008).

Responsibilities of the School to Combat a Student's Attempt to Gain Attention

Once an attendance officer identifies that a student has problematic attendance in an attempt to earn attention, he or she then needs to deal with the problem by insisting that the student accepts and works with a regular morning routine (Kearney, 2007).

Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat a Student's Attempt to Gain Attention

The parents can help by creating a morning routine (See Appendix B). A parent should also give the child positive attention for the steps (even the small tasks) he is properly completing from the morning routine. It is also important to give predetermined consequences for not following the routine or for not listening (See Appendix B). Yelling and arguing are then not needed nor helpful. Parents will need to ignore inappropriate behaviors such as temper tantrums, weeping, and the child slowing down the process of getting ready (See Appendix B). Parents need to use short, thought-out commands, make eye contact to gain undivided attention, and tell their child exactly what is expected of them. Parents are to only respond one time with a direct and clear response to questions about trying to miss school and ignore further questions and telephone calls (Kearney, 2008).

Responsibilities of the School to Combat Truancy

Truancy is categorized as a school refusal with the youth wanting to miss class(es) in order to have fun outside of school. Typically, parents are unaware of truancy; however, sometimes parents are aware of the behavior. To combat truancy the student needs to be taught what to tell their friends who ask them to leave school or skip that day. Their responses should be something like, *Not today, My parents won't let me hang out this weekend if I miss any classes, My teacher E-Mails the attendance office whenever I am missing, or My parents are on my case, I can't miss any classes.* Schools should encourage truant students to accept and work with a regular morning routine (Kearney, 2007). In addition, the school system can use a simple attendance contract to change the misbehavior (see Appendix F). These interventions should be used in a combination that makes sense based on the individual case.

Responsibilities of the Parent to Combat Truancy

Parents of students who miss school to have fun need to do everything in their power to know where their child is at all times and know where their child may go when they are not where they should be. Parents would be wise to collect phone numbers and names of friends and their parents. In addition, tracking a child's whereabouts is possible using the technology of a cell phone. If a child is missing, the parent needs to go after and find him. Stop those youths who are truant from having fun outside of school (Kearney, 2007). Parents and school administrators can use rewards and punishment for truant students (Kearney, 2008; Kearney, 2007). Older children appreciate tangible incentives (See Appendix B). Baker et al. (2001), as part of the ACT Now program, suggested "meaningful incentives for school attendance" for students. This program, along with

other strategies, found a 61% reduction in truancy. In Epstein and Sheldon's (2002) study "rewarding students for improved attendance . . . helped to reduce the percentage of students who missed 20 or more days of school ($r = -.478$)" (p. 314). A combination of positive and negative reinforcements can be helpful in combating child truancy.

Communication between parents and school administrators in charge of attendance, as well as between parents and students, is critical to changing the pattern of truant behaviors. Parents of truant students always need to communicate legitimate absences to the attendance office as soon as possible so that school officials do not waste efforts looking for the student (Kearney, 2007). Parents will want to grant a young adult some independence, but with restrictions and expectations such as *must attend all classes* (Kearney, 2007). In many cases, parents could find helpful the use an attendance contract that lists the types of privileges their child would appreciate, responsibilities required of the students, and consequences that affect the privileges for not fulfilling the responsibilities (See Appendix F). By involving the student in the behavior modification, and therefore increasing the flow of communication between parents and the student, the student will be empowered to make better choices; however, these choices should be monitored by both the school system and the parents until the behavior has completely corrected itself for a reasonable period of time.

Project Evaluation

As a direct result of this project and contrary to past research, the type of absence made a difference on the score of the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. Excused absences had a far less negative effect on the score on the high-stakes test as compared to

unexcused absences. This difference can be partially attributed to the fact that students are allowed to make up assignments from being absent with an excused reason. Those students who do makeup work, may learn the information necessary to pass the test and this might be the reason students with unexcused absences are more likely to fail compared to students with excused absences. From these data, specific and effective multisystemic attendance initiatives can be implemented to best support those students who need the most help, eliminating unnecessary procedural steps.

From the findings in this paper, school systems may decide to alter their makeup work policy and require all students, regardless of the type of absence, to make up the missed work. This change alone may improve academic achievement.

Schools that adopt the multisystemic intervention school-based model will need to track past attendance, excused absences, and unexcused absences. The school will also want to implement a Value Added Assessment in determining if students' attendance improves and continue to track those specific students in order to determine if those students show improvements in their academic endeavors (Stover, 2005; Hershberg, Simon, & Lea-Kruger, 2004a & 2004b). Value Added Assessment compares a student's current status to the same student's past record. Attendance would be compared for individual students to determine growth. After the attendance has been evaluated, schools will specifically look for the scores the student earns on standardized tests, the student's academic standing, and how the student's class and standardized test grades have fluctuated over their school career in relationship to their attendance. This strategy ensures that students are progressing (Evergreen Freedom Foundation, n.d.). Specifically,

a school will track students who are at high risk of academic failure due to, at least in part, poor attendance.

Simple correlational analysis can form an evaluation as to the value of the multisystemic intervention that was put into place to ultimately improve the students' ability to pass their high-stakes tests, pass their academic classes, and graduate. This correlational analysis can be derived using Value Added Assessment, comparing the student's academic standing or standardized test scores compared to their unexcused, excused, and cumulative absences that are accrued over the years. The correlational analysis for individual students would be run year after year to depict a pattern of how the student's attendance affects their academic performance.

Ultimately the goal of the school is to keep all students' unexcused absences below ten, because when a student has 10 or fewer unexcused absences, their chances of passing the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT are statistically similar to a student with perfect attendance. In implementing the project, first the school should set attendance and performance-related goals. Schools need to set goals based on their current situation and where they would like to be within a year's time, five years, and 10 years. While the program is being implemented, schools should track their progress. Results should be tracked by using a Value Added Assessment system, which evaluates an individual student's attendance and correlational academic progress on a case-by-case basis. Simply focusing on school-wide data might skew the overarching determination of whether the program is a success, because outside factors could influence the school's overall record from year to year. In addition, traditional school-wide data should be gathered and analyzed for improvements in the school's absence rates, standardized test scores, and

academic achievement, because these items are the means by which federal, state, and local governments track the ability of a school system to educate its youth. Both systems are necessary to assess the program's success over time.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Implementation of the multisystemic attendance model may spark response from the local community. Over time, parents may respond with positive reactions, indicating that the school is 'looking out for their kids'. The students who are receiving the multisystemic intervention will attend school more often and have higher academic and standardized test results. These measures will benefit the community with fewer truant students in the neighborhood during school hours. Even after graduation, the community will benefit as students enter the work force.

Far-Reaching

This researcher hopes that other schools will adopt this multisystemic school-based model of interventions. School systems are working with students and parents from multiple cultures. Inner-city school districts report that 8% of their student population is considered chronically truant and these districts reach nearly 20% of absenteeism, daily (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). The multisystemic model can effectively reach various cultures, because it is based on an ideology that is not simply Western-based.

Once the model becomes a part of the local culture, the parties it affects will accept the positive influence it generates throughout the community. Parents who are threatened with fines and court dates and then brought before a judge will at first exhibit

resistance and may even lash out, attempting to break down the scientifically-proven data and methods that have become adopted through the use of the model in Appendix B.

However, the model in Appendix B has been created from the best practices based on the review of literature and was partially based on the interpretation of the quantitative data upon which this project study was founded. For instance, the interventions described in the model were based on the fact that unexcused absences have a greater impact – at an earlier number of absences – on students’ ability to pass a high-stakes test. Another part of the model that the study affected is the fact that the accumulation of unexcused absences is often the first indication that a student may have difficulty with their academic achievement. The other part of the model is based on scientifically proven best practices that fit into a multisystemic intervention practice that a school can adopt. These interventions contain an element of parental education, to help train parents about how they can help their own children improve attendance and the effects that poor attendance has on grades, standardized test scores and achievement overall. From research it was determined that, overwhelmingly, schools found the highest success by implementing attendance-improving policies targeted specifically toward those students exhibiting the highest level of risk for problematic attendance. The quantitative data from this project study indicates that those students at the highest risk of failure are those students who reach 23 unexcused absences.

Conclusion

A multisystemic method to reduce problematic attendance is an effective way to improve attendance and hence positively affect student achievement. No matter how effective or complete an attendance model may be, every student may not fit into specific designations and alternative interventions or therapies will be needed. Through the efforts of multiple agencies, the school, parents, and peers, the majority of the students with problematic attendance can be properly motivated to attend school on a regular enough basis to reach academic success.

In order to differentiate between excused and unexcused absences in the implementation of this multisystemic model, school systems need to make sure that their policies are easy enough for parents to excuse valid absences. For instance, accepting verified phone calls as well as written excuses may be helpful. Another possible solution is to publish an excuse letter on the school's web site (See Appendix G). An electronic excuse note may help parents to excuse valid absences, allowing attendance officials to more accurately code and track the type of absence.

In addition to changes in excused absence policies, school systems also need to consider changing their makeup work policy to require all students to make up missed assignments. This may help with truancy because the student would feel that even though they chose not to attend school and incurred an unexcused absence, they would still have to make up the work. Students dislike making up work on top of the assignments that are due for the days they attend school.

SECTION 4: REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

The first purpose of this project was to determine the correlation between attendance and the score on a high-stakes test. The second purpose was to create a model of best practices that an administrator could use to help improve the rate of school attendance. Section 4 discusses the strengths and limitations of this project study with recommendations for future research efforts that take the confines of this study into account. Section 4 continues with the reflection of this researcher on the project and how he grew as a scholar through the course of the study.

Project Strengths

This project's strength lies in the multisystemic attendance model of best practices gleaned from the review of literature. With the model in Appendix B, schools and parents can learn scientifically-proven strategies that have been proven to curtail problematic attendance before absenteeism reaches a threshold that puts a student at risk for academic failure. These measures are specifically geared toward the reason the specific student misses school.

The other strength in this project is the separation of excused and unexcused absences. Similar to Clement's (2006) study that found that unexcused absences had a major impact on academics whereas excused absences had little effect, this study found a weak correlation but did realize that unexcused absences had more of an impact on the score of a high-stakes test compared to excused absences. Clement's study found that excused absences had such a small effect, they should be dismissed all together. This

study specifically found that a student has to have 2.87 times as many excused absences compared to unexcused absences to have a statistically high likelihood of failing the Social Studies portion of the GHSGT. This project study also found that for every unexcused absence, a student's grade is likely to drop 1.332 points, compared to excused absences, which only predict a student's score to drop -0.4746 points per excused absence. Unexcused absences has a far greater impact on a student's score compared to excused absences.

Based on the review of literature, the increase in effect that unexcused absences have on a student's high-stakes test performance and academic achievement might be due in part to Gwinnett's 2008-2009 attendance policy of not allowing students to make up work that was missed due to an unexcused absence. Past research, besides Clement's, did not differentiate between the two types of absences, leaving out valuable data that a school should use in making data-driven policy decisions. Now, with confirmation that unexcused absences negatively affect the score on a high-stakes test more than excused absences, school systems are in a position to make social change in the best direction to benefit the student's academic achievement. Schools can insist that all students make up missed assignments, regardless of the reason for absence.

This project affords educational leaders the information to make data-driven decisions about attendance policies, such as regulations surrounding makeup work. Schools are in the business of teaching and learning; as a result, they should afford every opportunity for a young person to learn the material, no matter the nature of an absence.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Attendance and achievement are connected, but other variables may affect this correlation and one possible variable is motivation. Those students who have good attendance at school may have a higher propensity toward academic achievement (Halpern, 2007). However, students who attend school on a regular basis may have other motivating factors which positively influence the academics (Halpern). Those students who lack motivation may not attend school as a result. Not only are their attendance records affected, but their academic and test results may be affected based on the student's lack of motivation (Craven et al., 2003).

This project did not take into account the differences in the types of students, for instance those who would turn in an excuse note compared to those students who are not motivated to turn in an excuse note. It is possible that students who do well academically come to school more often because they are self-motivated or because parents or teachers encourage their talents and achievement (Martin, 2008). These students may place an intrinsic value on performance and attendance. For these cases, absences may not affect GHSGT scores as much as motivational factors.

Future studies might consider choosing a school system that has a policy stating that work missed from any type of absence shall be made up before the end of the term. For future studies, it is important to know that the choice of a school that puts limits upon the makeup work could perpetuate the original problem realized by this study, where unexcused absences negated the students' ability to make up missed work, learn the material, and pass the high stakes test. Once a school system is identified that encourages its students to make up missed assignments by the end of the term, motivational factors

could then be the focus of the research. Students who lack motivation blame the makeup work policy for not affording them the opportunity to complete the work, earn the grade, learn the material, and advance. More research would have to be completed to solidify the cause for the student's score as well as the point-drop-per-absence. Taking into account the students' motivation factors would be a remediation of this study.

One alternative to changing the entire school system's makeup work policy could be to change one department's policy and then compare the student's test results. For example if a school wanted to continue the vein of this study in the Social Studies department, the Social Studies department could change their makeup work policy to allow makeup work to be turned in by the end of the semester for grades 9 – 10 and all makeup work for 11th grade students must be turned in the week prior to the test administration. In the case of a study focused in this direction, it would be prudent to study a large student base and use the Value Added Assessment methodology, comparing the same students' individual standardized test scores and their corresponding course averages. The overall goal of this study would be to evaluate the achievement changes that could be attributed to the policy change.

Some other variables affect the link between student attendance and achievement. For instance, school-based variables exist that this study did not take into account, such as differences in teachers' instructional practices. Also, the age of the student had a weak but consistent correlation to the student's test score; this is yet another variable that this project study did not take into account. These variables offer opportunities for further research about the correlation between student attendance and academic performance.

Scholarship

The result of this course of scholarship was a growth in perspective and respect for scholarly studies. This practitioner realized that research is an exacting science that entails a good deal of repetition and no matter how well thought out a study might be, unforeseen variables become evident after the research has been completed. This research was created to have what appeared to be a perfectly controlled study, only to find out later that small variables were not set to an exact control and, as a consequence, may have altered the results. These small variables are explained with the butterfly effect (Hansen & Allen, 2009) and they played a profound part in my scholarly pursuits through this project study.

A project study of this nature requires more than just the data to persuade potential users. First, this research needed to focus on a topic of study that would create social change if accepted and adopted. Then, the researcher had to collect the data. For a project study such as the one performed in this paper, the quest for information must be thorough, current, and complete, not leaving any theories undiscovered. With all of the information gathered, the researcher had to then organize his thoughts in a way that was clear, decisive, data-driven, and substantial. Using the references of well-written research studies proved to be helpful in uncovering similar recent research.

This project study also provided a new philosophical pattern for the researcher. People learn when they have experiences that intercept with past experiences (Riley & Roach, 2006). “It is our capacity to see unfamiliar situations as familiar ones, and to do in the former as we have done in the latter, that enables us to bring our past experiences to bear on the unique case” (Schon, 1983, p.140). When patterns emerged from the review

of literature that pointed to the possibility that a multisystemic approach may be the best suited technique to help students who may develop problematic attendance, the researcher drew upon past experiences. Those students who were given the extra time and were cared for with methodologies described in the protocol found in Appendix B were more likely to find success in life and academia. The project taught this researcher that every student deserves care and attention from a variety of sources including the home, peers, teachers, and the school.

Project Development and Evaluation

This project began with Carroll's (1963) model of school learning that connected time on task with academic achievement. But because this project wanted to look at quantitative attendance data and not try to determine how much time a student spent actively learning, the research turned from Carroll's theory and began to closely examine Clement's (2006) study that realized that students in Florida had no trouble passing a high-stakes test if the student had excused absences, but when a student accumulated high numbers of unexcused absences they did have trouble passing the test. While reviewing the problematic attendance literature, the researcher realized that best practices other researchers had realized were not being followed in the local school system. However, this lack of implementation could correlate, at least in part, to the difficulty involved in locating these best practices. These research-proven methodologies were not consolidated in one concise study. Many studies had various initiatives and not all of them found success. In some cases, only a portion of a strategy seemed to be an influencing factor in preventing a student from accumulating problematic levels of absenteeism. Once patterns

of specific strategies began to emerge, it became clear that a multisystemic intervention would be necessary to truly make a substantial difference for a school that faced problematic attendance (Brown et al., 1999; Henggeler & Rowland, 1999; Schoenwald et al., 2000) For these reasons, a multisystemic school-based model of attendance procedures was developed (Appendix B).

Leadership and Change

Leading a successful change in policy requires that a leader convince constituents that there is a need for change. In addition, the change leader must base the recommendations on data (Bernhardt, 2009). A leader who initiates a change based on best practices but only adopts part of the scientifically-proven policy or misinterprets the initiative may not realize the same results that the original study found. Leadership is developed as constituents begin to trust the decisions that are made in the students' best interests (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2001). Trust is gained when the decisions for policy change show signs of success. For a leader to increase the likelihood that a policy change will be successful, they must base the decision on data and adopt policies that have already been proven ideal.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Through the completion of this project study and course work, I realized that decisions that are made that affect policy need to be based on research. After completing the research necessary for this project, I realized the reading of peer reviewed articles and papers is not as difficult as one would believe, it is a matter of finding the pearls of data-driven wisdom within the papers.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

With the development of the multisystemic school-based model, I am better equipped to help students with problematic attendance. For years, I would give a student their due consequence and never attempt to find the underlying cause of the absence. Now with the understanding that I must uncover the specific roots to each student's attendance problems and with the strategies listed in Appendix B, I am better prepared to help the students solve their problems and attend school.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

As a project developer, I realized that others who were attempting to improve attendance for students who accumulate a high number of absences needed resources and a methodology to direct them through the process of helping students before they reached critical thresholds of problematic attendance. Although I have been in the attendance field for years, I did not realize how to help some of the students I was seeing in my office over and over again. Now, I have a better grasp of the questions to ask, the information to communicate, and the strategies to help students change their attendance behaviors.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

If the multisystemic school-based model of attendance protocol is implemented, the needs of those students who are at risk for developing problematic attendance will be changed in several ways. The youths who are identified as students with potential problematic attendance will receive individualized multisystemic attention in an attempt to relieve the underlying cause of the problem. Not only will attendance and academics

improve for that student but the student may realize improved social issues and receive the help they need to have a fulfilling school career. These students could reach not only their academic potential but they may realize that they are cared for and loved by their family, neighborhood, peers, and teachers (Hillaker, Brophy-Herb, Villarruel, & Haas, 2008). It is my hope that this project study will transform the lives of young people. I hope that the students who are affected by this project study learn to enjoy school, find a field they would take pleasure working in, and have positive relationships with their family and friends.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Two possible future studies are suggested for implementation. The first would take into account student motivation. A survey, possibly qualitative, on student motivation would be incorporated into the results as a contributing factor. The other possibility would be to run the experiment with two similar schools; one as a control group that did not allow makeup work to be completed for unexcused absences, the other school would insist that makeup work be completed for all missed work, regardless of the reason for absence and with a deadline of the second to last week of classes for any and all makeup work to be turned in for a grade.

Conclusion

Leaders are faced with decisions every day. Some decisions have lasting implications. Most leaders base their decisions on instinct and experience (Garcia-Retamero, Muller, Catena, & Maldonado, 2009). Many times these decisions are correct but often, decisions are made that are not based upon research or data. As a result, time

and money are wasted on initiatives that do not produce the results that the leader desires. When a leader makes a decision based upon the data and changes a policy based upon the research, chances are greater that the results will find success (Weinstock, 2009). The purpose of this project study was to give leaders not only the data they needed to make an informed decision but also a compilation of effective policy changes that have already been proven successful in other school districts.

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APPENDIX A

Gwinnett County, Georgia's Official Attendance Protocol for 2009-2010

Student Attendance Information and Best Practices

The following key provisions are required by the law and incorporated into the system's Attendance Protocol:

Inform parents and students of policies, procedures, definitions and possible consequences of chronic absenteeism and truancy. We will do this through the Student/Parent Handbook and a required signed receipt from parents and students 10 years of age and over.

Notify parents when students have accumulated five (5) unexcused absences.

Notify students 14 -18 years old and over when they accumulate seven (7) unexcused absences that ten (10) unexcused absences will result in DOE being notified and driver licenses/permits being suspended by DDS.

Included in the progressive intervention approach required by the law and contained in the attendance protocol, all schools in GCPS will:

Send a standardized letter to all parents emphasizing the importance of good school attendance at the start of school. Translations have been done by our ESOL Department

Send an additional standardized letter to all parents of students who had accumulated 15 or more unexcused absences the previous year to offer support and encouragement.

Send standardized letters to notify parents when students reach five (5) unexcused absences and seven (7) unexcused absences for 14-18 year olds, as described above. A 2 day "grace period" will be given parents to provide documentation for an excused absence before these letters are sent.

A Certificate of Noncompliance will be sent to the State DOE for all students age 14 and over when they reach 10 unexcused absences. A copy of this certificate should also be sent to the parents.

Implement a progressive intervention approach in working with truant students that incorporates specific interventions, i.e., phone contacts, student and parent conferences, and agency referrals, at specified steps in the Protocol.

Involve all staff including Teachers, Administrators, Counselors, School Social Workers and others in the above interventions to help promote and improve student attendance.

Convene a Student Attendance Review Committee (SARC) as deemed appropriate but before twenty (20) days of **unexcused** absences have accumulated.

Following the SARC, referrals may be made to the Juvenile Court, and/or other agencies as appropriate.

General info about attendance from P.JB

It is imperative that local schools keep accurate data to reflect student's excused and unexcused absences.

Local schools can employ proven "best practices" to improve student attendance in both categories.

Parental involvement in the process is vital to improving student attendance since "parents, guardians, or other persons who have charge of a child" are ultimately responsible for that child's attendance in school.

It is important for credibility within the community that all local schools operate under the same, consistent student attendance expectations and protocols.

School Principals play a pivotal, primary role in improving student attendance by frequently communicating the expectations to students, parents, and staff.

Clearly defined and consistently followed responsibilities for all school staff are essential for improving student attendance.

Student Attendance Protocol and School Attendance Review Committees (SARCs)

Before convening a SARC, schools should apply a progressive intervention approach including:

Local school student attendance incentive programs to support and encourage good daily student attendance.

Documented contact or notification (5 day letter) of parents of students when they reach 5 unexcused absences.

Teachers should refer students with 10 to 15 unexcused absences to the School Counselor along with parent contact documentation.

School Counselors or designees should meet with each student referred (those with 10 to 15 unexcused absences) and make contact with the parent to offer support and encouragement, as well as remind students and parents of students with unexcused absences of possible consequences in order to improve student attendance.

As appropriate based on the reasons known to the school for a student's absences, School Counselors, or the school's designee (Attendance Coordinator/Attendance Administrator) should refer students to SARC. Students referred to SARC should have no more than 20 unexcused absences.

Parents are notified of the referral and are invited and encouraged to attend the SARC by the school. The assigned School Social Workers also should be invited to participate as members of the SARC.

All student documentation relevant information will be brought to the committee meeting by the School Principal, School Counselors, or the school's designee (Attendance Coordinator/Attendance Administrator)

- parent contacts
- academic records
- discipline records
- IEPs
- other relevant information

The SARC will develop a plan of action that appropriately addresses the needs of the student and/or family to assist in improving student attendance. This may include direct services from the school, i.e., tutoring, mentoring, attendance contracts, etc., or referrals to appropriate community social service agencies. This plan also will identify the local school staff that is responsible for student case follow-up. If the student is receiving Special Education services, consideration should be made to include attendance as an objective on the student's IEP.

School Social Workers (SSW) will follow-up on those students referred from SARC to assist students and families in improving student attendance. If these student referrals do not improve attendance, the SSW may file a complaint with the Gwinnett County Juvenile Court for violation of the Compulsory School Attendance Law (O.C.G.A. §20-2-0690.1.) If appropriate, action also may be taken to hold the parents of these students responsible for violation of the same laws, as well as other laws that may be applicable. If parental responsibility is in question, the School Resource Officer (SRO), or other appropriate law enforcement personnel should be involved at this step to assess the possibility of pursuing legal charges against these parents. If substantial evidence of such violations exists, the SRO, or other law enforcement personnel, should take such necessary and appropriate action as the situation dictates.

Excused Absences

State Attendance Rule 160-5-1-.10 states that students will be excused from school under the following circumstances, as a minimum.

Personal illness or attendance in school endangering a student's health or the health of others.

A serious illness or death in a student's immediate family necessitating absence from school.

A court order or an order by a governmental agency, including pre-induction physical examinations for service in the armed forces, mandating absence from school.

Observing religious holidays, necessitating absence from school.

Conditions rendering attendance impossible or hazardous to student health or safety.

A period not to exceed one day is allowed, at the discretion of the local unit of administration, for registering to vote or voting in a public election.

Visiting with a parent or legal guardian prior to or during leave from deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting as a member of the armed forces of the United States or the National Guard (maximum of five school days per year).

Students will be counted present when they are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly.

Gwinnett Juvenile Court

The Gwinnett County Juvenile Court will only hear complaints dealing with "Truant" students - those having unexcused absences in their records.

Attendance Letters and Driving Privileges (for student 14 to 18 years of age)

10 day letter and Certificate of Non-Compliance

It is best practice to follow driving laws, DOE rules, and GCPS procedures at all times as it pertains to issuing notice and restricting driving privileges for student drivers. It is also recognized that utmost consideration should be taken to ensure that accurate information and is communicated. It is with this in mind that the following best practices are to be considered:

Ensure that a student's full legal name is submitted in any non-compliance or restoration letters to the DDS to prevent the suspension or reinstatement of other persons with similar names.

When necessary, a short wait period should be utilized before the 10 day letters and non-compliance certificate is sent to verify the accuracy of unexcused absences. For example;

- Those students that have not returned to school and have reached 10 unexcused, but that there has not been any communication with the home to verify the status of the absences.

- Parent gives indication that there is pending documentation to prove excused absences that would place the student within the 10 or more absences violation.
- Other extenuating circumstances that the school has information about the student that requires a short wait period to verify before 10 day letters and non-compliance certificate are sent.

Local School Attendance Coordinator / Attendance Administrator

Each school should assign one attendance coordinator (also known as an Attendance Administrator). One school designation should be made for the following reasons:

To reduce fragmentation of multiple persons administering different attendance practices within one school

To provide one point of contact as updated through the School Contacts database to provide communication about changes, practices, and updates in student attendance

Allows the assigned school social worker to meet with one person on a regular basis to review the GCPS attendance protocol, provide training, support local school practices and procedures above the attendance protocol, review applicable cases, and support the school through collaborative prevention and parent involvement strategies.

Definitions

Truant

Any child subject to compulsory attendance who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences.

Compulsory Attendance

Every parent, guardian, or other person residing within this state having control or charge of any child or children between their sixth and sixteenth birthdays shall enroll and send such child or children to a public school, a private school, or a home study program that meets the requirements for a public school, a private school, or home study program; and such child shall be responsible for enrolling in and attending a public school, a private school, or a home study program that meets the requirements for a public school, a private school, or a home study program.

Tardy

Students are considered tardy to school or class if the student arrives at a designated location after a school bell, chime, or buzzer has sounded. *(Local schools will include specific information relevant to their facility to identify the designated location for student arrival)*

Early Checkout

When a parent, guardian, or other person having charge or control of a student authorizes a student to leave the facility before the end of the school day. School day hours are published in local school handbooks.

Student Check-ins

To be included in local school Student Handbook

Student Check-outs

To be included in local school Student Handbook

AWOLS (Middle and High Schools Only)

To be included in local school Student Handbook
(GCPS, 2009f)

5 Day Letter

Dear Parents,

Regular attendance at school is an important part of student success and achievement. Your son or daughter has **5 unexcused absences** this school year. Under a new Georgia school attendance law (O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-690.2), we are required to notify you that if your child has 1 more unexcused absence this year, he or she will be considered truant. If your child should continue to have unexcused absences, a Student Attendance Review Committee will meet with you to discuss your child's absences and how to improve his or her attendance. This committee may include your child's teacher/advisor, a school social worker, a school counselor, an administrator, a Juvenile Court official, and/or the school resource officer. Possible consequences for unexcused absences are listed in the school system's Student/Parent Handbook.

Consequences for students may include, but are not limited to:

Morning Detention	Saturday School	Afternoon Detention
School Transfer Revocation	Loss of Parking Permit	Counseling Group
Community Service	Student/Parent Conference	Isolated Lunch
In-School Suspension	Out-of-School Suspension	Referral to State Court
Referral to Juvenile Court	Referral to School Social Worker	Referral to Social Service Agencies

Under Georgia law (O.C.G.A. Section 20-2-690.1), it is mandatory for a parent to ensure that their child(ren) attend school, with failure to do so punishable by a fine not to exceed \$100, imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, community service, or any combination of the penalties. Each day's absence from school in violation of this law shall constitute a separate offense.

Please call me if you have any questions about your student's attendance status. Thank you for working with the school to support your child. Together we can improve your child's attendance and focus on his or her academic success.

Sincerely,

Principal

Cc: Assistant Principal

7 Day letter

Dear Parents,

Beginning July 1, 2005, teens under the age of 18 must have a good school attendance record or have earned a diploma or have taken the General Educational Development(GED) exam to apply for or keep a learner's permit or driver's license.

As of the date of this letter, your student has **7 unexcused absences**. If your child continues this pattern of absences and reaches 10 unexcused absences, the school will be required to make a report to the state. At that point, your child will not be eligible to obtain or keep a driver's license, losing driving privileges for one year or until he or she reaches the age of 18.

Please call the school if you need information on your child's attendance records.

Sincerely,

Principal

Cc: Student Record
School Counselor
Assistant Principal

State law calls for the suspension of a student's driver's license or permit for one full year or until the student reaches the age of 18 if a student:

- *drops out of school and has remained out of school for 10 consecutive days.*
- *has 10 or more unexcused absences from school during the current academic year or 10 or more school days of unexcused absences in the previous year; or*
- *has been found in violation by a hearing officer, disciplinary panel, or tribunal of one of the following offenses, has received a change in placement for committing one of the following offenses, or has waived his or her right to a hearing and pled guilty to one of the following offenses: threatening, striking, or causing bodily harm to a teacher or school employee, possessing or selling alcohol or drugs on school property or at a school-sponsored event, possessing or using a weapon on school property or at a school-sponsored event, committing any sexual offense, or causing substantial physical or visible bodily harm to or seriously disfiguring another person, including another student.*

10 Day Letter



STATE OF GEORGIA
 DEPARTMENT OF DRIVER SERVICES
 P.O. BOX 80447
 CONYERS, GEORGIA 30013
 404-657-9300

Certificate of Non-Compliance

Student's Full Legal Name: _____
(Last) (First) (Middle)

Sex: Male Date of Birth: 01/13/1994

Student's Address: _____

School Name: MILL CREEK HIGH SCHOOL

School Address: 4400 BRASELTON HIGHWAY

HOSCHTON, GA 30548

School Telephone: (678) 714-5850 Contact Person: _____
(Print Name)

Notary: _____ Title _____

Sworn to and subscribed before me _____ Signature _____

This _____ day of _____, 20____ Date _____

 Notary Public

Non-Compliance Date: _____

The above named student:

has dropped out of school without graduating and has remained out of school for ten consecutive days;

had ten or more school days of unexcused absences in the current academic year or ten or more school days of unexcused absences in the previous academic year;

OR

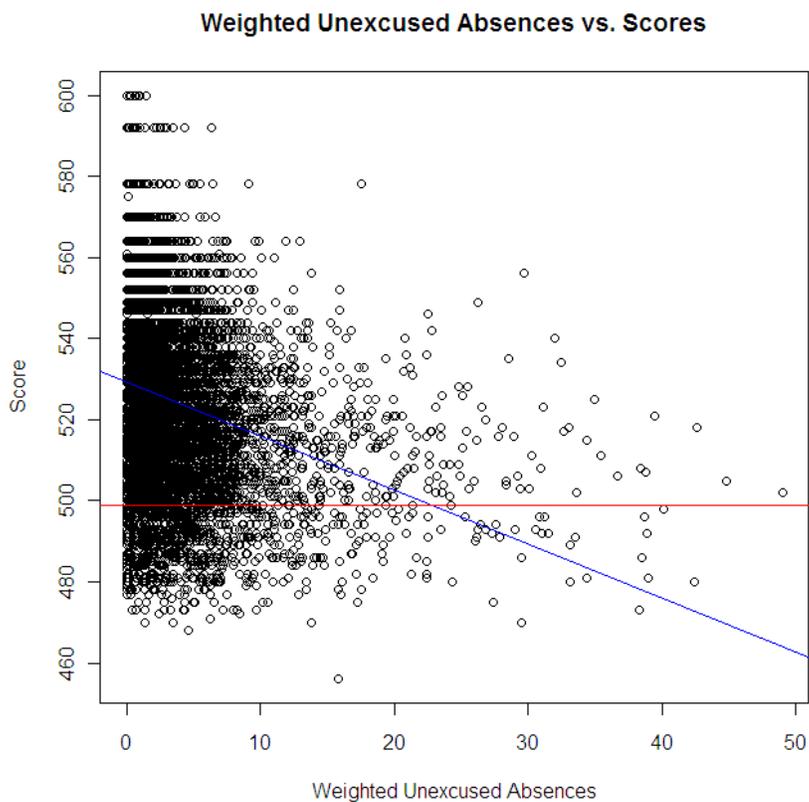
has been found in violation by a hearing officer, panel, or tribunal of one of the following offenses, has received a change in placement for committing one of the following offenses, or has waived his or her right to a hearing and pleaded guilty to one of the following offenses:

- A). threatening, striking or causing bodily harm to a teacher or other school personnel.
- B). possession or sale of drugs or alcohol on school property or at a school sponsored event.
- C). possession or use of a weapon on school property or at a school sponsored event.
- D). any sexual offense prohibited under Chapter 6 of Title 16.
- E). causing substantial physical or visible bodily harm to or seriously disfiguring another person, including another student.

APPENDIX B

Reduce Problematic Attendance

Improve Academic Achievement



A Multisystemic Protocol of Best Strategies to Prevent All Students from Reaching
Problematic Attendance Levels

A Multisystemic Protocol of Best Strategies to Prevent All Students from Reaching
Problematic Attendance Levels

Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	143
<i>Explanation of Multisystemic</i>	117
<i>Explanation of Levels A, B, & C</i>	117
<i>Level A Attendance Model</i>	119
<i>Level B Attendance Model</i>	123
<i>Table of Reasons Students Might Purposefully Miss School and Prevention Strategies</i>	124
<i>Level C Attendance Model</i>	129
<i>When to Contact Parents / Students about Absences</i>	132

Multisystemic School-Based Model

Introduction

A school system has the choice; they could spend an unnecessary amount of resources attempting to get students to come to school or they could implement only the necessary components – the scientifically proven strategies that help bring and keep students in school.

A school system can implement a multisystemic school based attendance model with six equally important components. These areas are called, School, Parent, Neighborhood, Peers, Agencies, and Teachers. Each of these areas affects student attendance. If one area is left off, student attendance will be adversely affected.

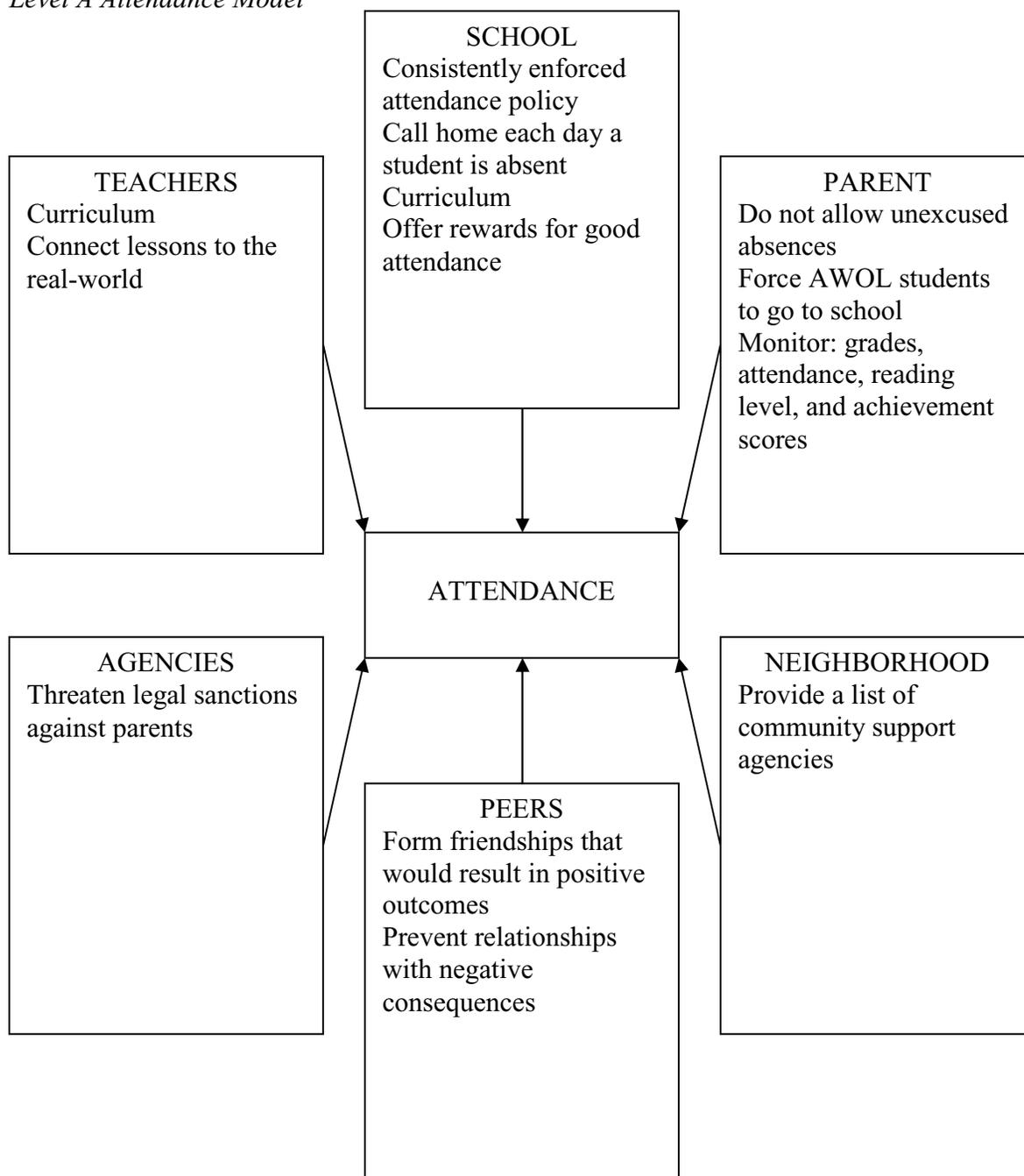
Explanation of Multisystemic

Multisystemic is a strategy that incorporates multiple agencies, groups, and individuals, in an attempt to positively affect the choices a person makes. It has been field-test proven that when the school, parents, the neighborhood, peers, agencies, and teachers all get involved to combat a student problem, the likelihood that the issue will be resolved are greatly improved.

Explanation of Levels A, B, & C

Below are three levels, A, B, and C. The A level is the most important. If the school system did not have the A components in place, they can expect to have problematic attendance issues with their students. The B level is important for those schools that are facing the problems identified in the level B attendance model. If a school is facing the difficulties outlined in the level B components, those strategies must be implemented to turn around problematic attendance issues. The level C strategies are

needed for not only schools that face those obstacles listed but also for those schools that strive for the best from their student population including regular attendance.

Level A Attendance Model

The level A is the most important for all school systems to implement. Schools must create and use a consistently enforced attendance policy. The attendance office needs to call a parent upon an absence. Use a phone number in which a parent has control over the voice mail and the child would not be able to erase the message. An absence would be any day a student has missed 25% of the day but calling home when a student is absent for 50% or more of the day would be the minimum. A school must adopt a rigorous curricula that challenges the students. Students should not be able to miss school and then easily be able to make up the missed work. High expectations encourage regular attendance. Schools that offer rewards for good attendance may have students who attend school on a more regular basis (Reardon, 2008). This is especially true when the students have a renewed chance of being recognized each month. If a student had to be out for a legitimate illness in September, the student should still have a chance of being recognized the following month for his / her renewed effort.

Parents need to be trained in how to best influence their children to improve attendance. Parents need to disallow unexcused absences. Parents must insist that their children attend school on a regular and consistent basis and prevent a child from missing school for anything but illnesses and unpreventable conflicts such as court dates or funerals. Parent need to find and force their children, who are truant or refuse to go to school, into the car or onto the bus and go to school. Parents need to monitor grades, attendance, reading level, and achievement scores and then take action when their child is in jeopardy of falling below expectations.

A community needs to offer resources for those families and students who need them. The neighborhood needs to provide a list of community support agencies to those

families and schools who need assistance. Some students miss school because they have to take care of a younger sibling or they have to work in order for their family to make ends meet. The families who are in these types of situations need to be directed as to where to find assistance in order to gain the support needed in order for their children to remain in school.

Peers have a great deal of influence over a young person's decision making process. The parents as well as the school need to force a young person to form friendships that would result in positive outcomes and prevent relationships with negative consequences.

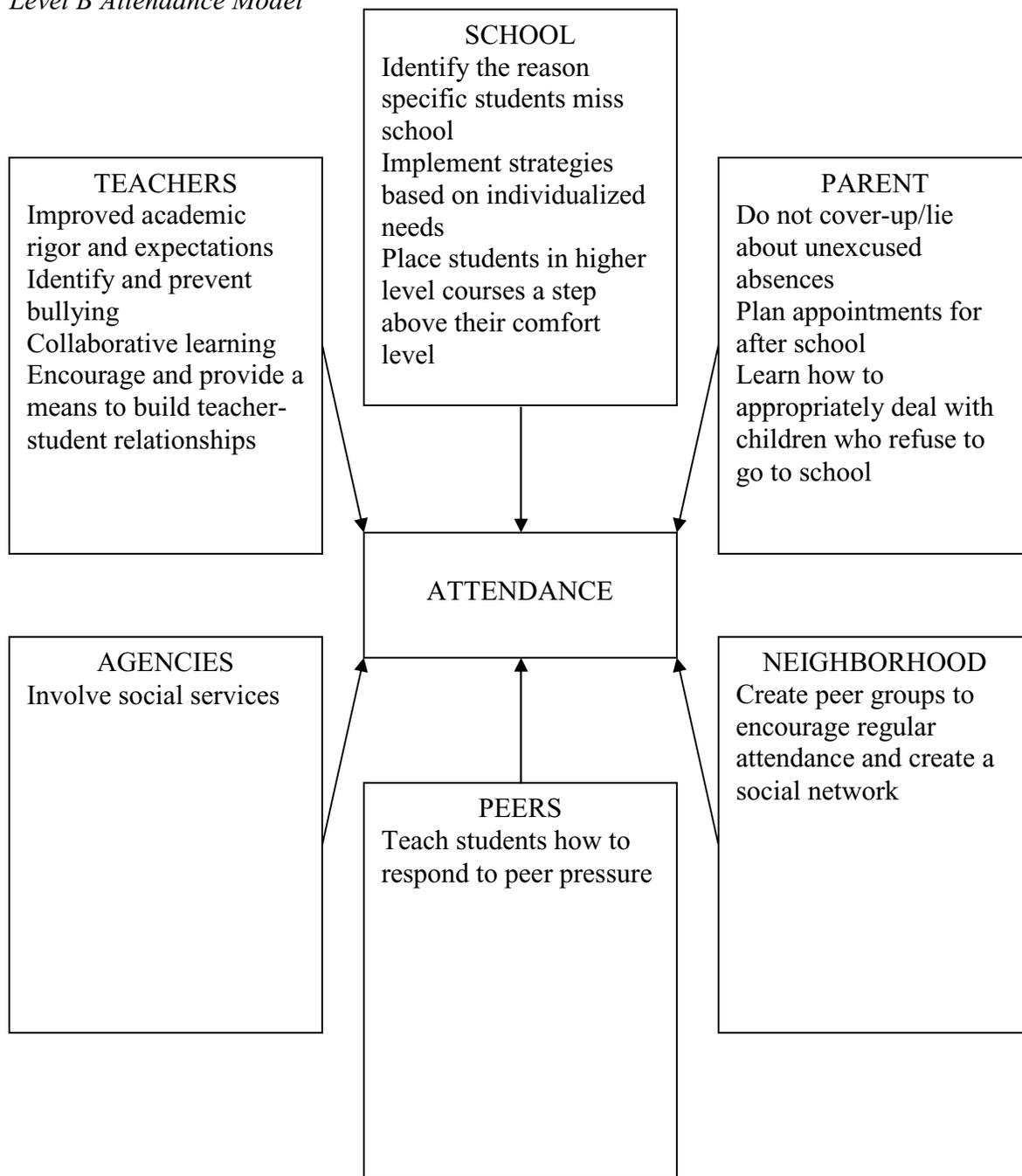
Parents as well as school teachers and administrators have some influence over a person's friends and their ability to communicate and do things with one another. Those friendships that result in poor decision making need to be curtailed while those friendships that result in positive outcomes can be encouraged.

Social services, the police, and the court system need to put the word out and set precedence that legal sanction can be held against a student and their parents for a lack of attendance. At first, with level A, students as well as their parents need to be threatened with the possibilities that the child could be placed in a youth detention center and their parents fined a monetary fee for their child missing school. Agencies need to keep in mind that threats are useless unless a possibility exists that the consequences could be followed through. In level C of the multisystemic school-based model, those consequences from agencies must be capitalized upon.

Teachers need to adopt a rigorous curriculum that challenges the students. Students who are worried about the amount of class work they may miss, if absent, are

more likely to attend school. Teachers need to connect lessons to the real-world. Those students who feel as though they are gaining knowledge and learning skills that they could use in their chosen profession are more likely to pay attention and learn.

Level B Attendance Model



The level B attendance model is needed for almost all school systems. A small handful of schools may be able to go without a couple of the initiatives that do not pertain to their student body but those schools are a rare case. Most if not all of the strategies will need to be implemented.

Schools need to identify the reason specific students miss school. The attendance administrator needs to determine, “What are the frequency, type, and history of the child’s absenteeism?” (Christopher A. Kearney, personal email, February 27, 2009). The student may have legitimate excused reasons for the absences, is making up the work, and wants to attend school; in which case intervention is not necessary. Then the attendance officer needs to ask, “What specific motivators maintain the behavior over time?” (Christopher A. Kearney). Determine the reason and intrinsic value the absence has for the student; classify the absence as school refusal or truancy. Finally, the administrator over attendance needs to find out, “What more general contextual variables surround the absenteeism?” (Christopher A. Kearney). Identify the factors that may be influencing the student’s absences. Keeping contextual variables in mind, the attendance administrator will use multisystemic intervention based upon the motivator.

Table of Reasons Students Might Purposefully Miss School and Prevention Strategies

Motivator	School Initiatives	Parent Initiatives
Distress	Teach the student breathing exercises and muscle relaxation	Avoid: fighting, yelling, lecturing, negotiating, bribes, telling their child not to worry, and telling their child they do not believe them. Do not allow the child to do fun things at home. Expect their child to attend school every day for the full day. Create routine that gives the child adequate amounts of sleep as well as a set pattern of tasks that must be accomplished.
Avoidance of social or performance situations	Address the specific area of contention: bullying, intimidation, racial discrimination, problems with a teacher or course work. The student needs to learn to: think realistically about the situation (See Appendix D), avoid trying to read people's minds and think the worst, relax through breathing exercises (See Appendix D), and relax their muscle (See Appendix D). Students should not blame themselves for things outside of their control. Utilize the S.T.O.P guidelines to help realize how they should truly feel about a situation (See Appendix E).	Avoid: fighting, yelling, lecturing, negotiating, bribes, telling their child not to worry, and telling their child they do not believe them. Steadily increase the amount of time spent in the classroom.
To get attention	Insisting that the student accepts and works with a regular morning routine.	Create a morning routine and give the child positive attention for the steps he is completing. Deal predetermined consequences for not following the routine or for not listening. Use short, thought-out commands, make eye contact gaining undivided attention, and tell him exactly what is

		<p>expected. Parents are to only respond one time with a direct and clear response to questions about trying to miss school.</p> <p>Once a parent responds once to a child's request to miss school, ignore further questions and telephone calls</p> <p>Avoid: fighting and yelling.</p> <p>Ignore inappropriate behaviors such as temper tantrums, weeping, and the child slowing down the process.</p>
Having fun instead of going to school	<p>Notify the parent when the school suspects skipping.</p> <p>Attempt to locate and bring the student back to school</p> <p>Teach the student how to respond to peer pressure.</p>	<p>Know where their child is at all times.</p> <p>Know where their child may go if they are missing.</p> <p>If a child is missing, find him and return him to school.</p> <p>Take away privileges for missing school – use the attendance contract (Appendix F).</p> <p>Create a morning routine.</p>

School need to attempt to place students in higher level courses a step above their comfort level. When students feel as though the work-load is challenging, they have increase respect for their teachers and attend class more often so not to get behind.

Parents will need to be trained or taught to change their ways, not to accept how they might have done things in the past as acceptable but to know the importance of attendance and how their role may affect their children's morals, ethical decisions, and career later in life.

Parents need to allow unexcused absences to remain unexcused and for the child to deal with the consequences that go along with unexcused absence. The parent need also make certain their child knows the absence for unexcused reasons are not acceptable in the parents' eyes. Parents need to schedule appointments for after school and learn how to appropriately deal with children who refuse to go to school

The community needs to create peer groups to encourage regular attendance and create a social network. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program used peer mentoring to encourage students with problematic attendance to attend school. Older, high-achieving students mentored younger students and encouraged regular attendance. For those students in the program, only 1% dropped out of school compared to 12% of the control group (Join Together, 1998). These peer groups can be formed through organizations that are already in place such as boys and girls clubs of America or the YMCA.

The students need to learn how to properly respond to peer pressure. Most peer pressure is simply one student asking or encouraging another to do something they are not supposed to do, like skip school and go to the mall. Students need to realize that a simple, *No, I can't* will work. If the pressure continues, that phrase could be followed up with, *My parents would kill me* or *If I get caught, I'll be grounded this weekend*. Most young people have a sense of right from wrong. The students who are truant are those who get some level of enjoyment out of missing school. They are doing an activity that they enjoy. First the activity needs to be taken away and then the student needs to be taught how to respond to those peers who want them to miss school.

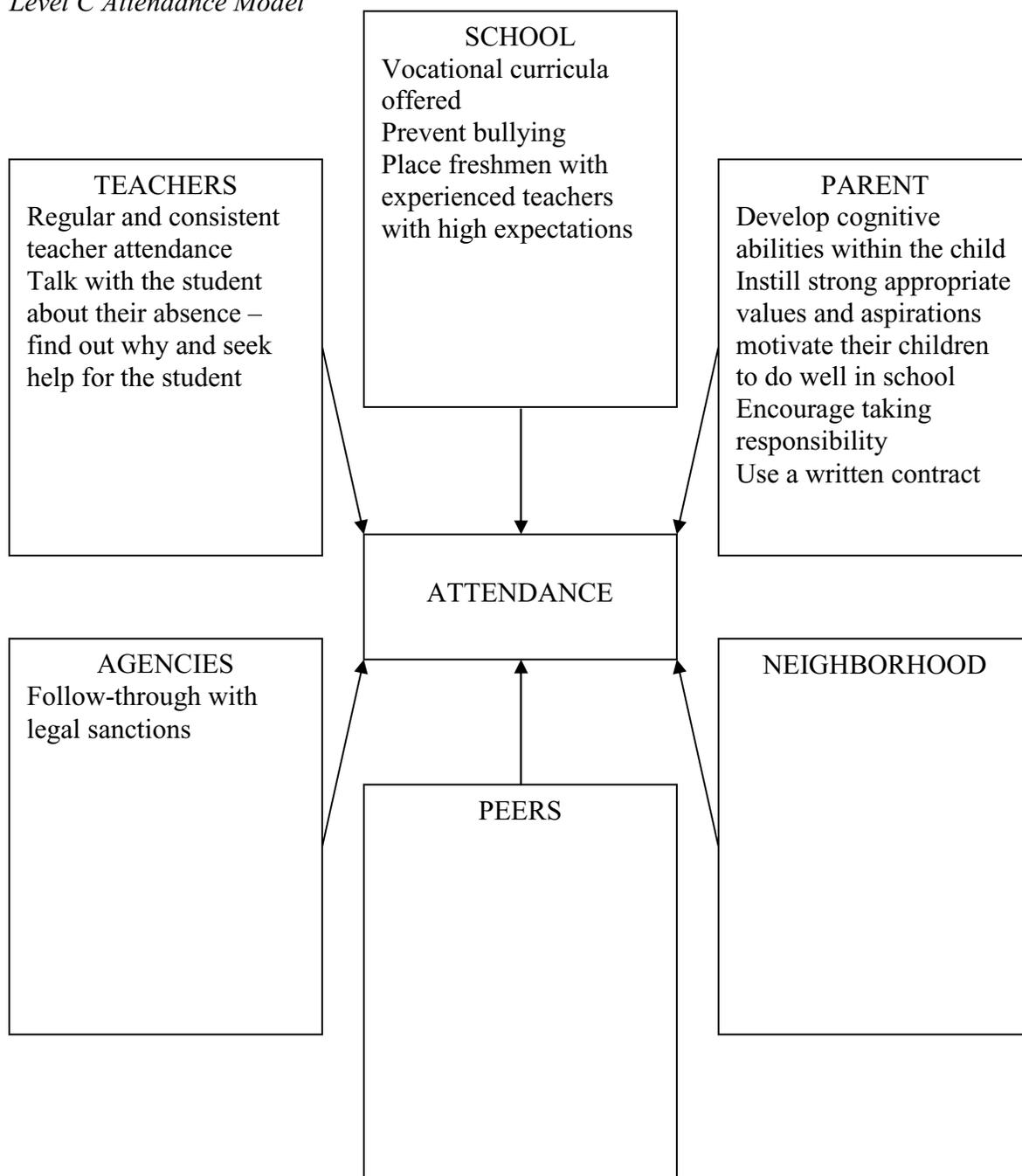
Social services will need to be involved with students who have problematic attendance and their families. Social services need to work with the school to identify and correct the underlying problem that is causing the absences. If a student is absent because of financial reasons, social services may be able to get the family some assistance paying the bills or getting help taking care of a younger sibling.

Teachers need to have high standards for their academic rigor and expectations. This can be accomplished through homework, class work, and tests. Teachers also need

to be able to identify and prevent bullying (Limber, 2003). Teachers can prevent bullying through classroom management. Teachers who do not allow the opportunity or incentive for bullying, have less occurrence (Scarpaci, 2007). Teachers need to be able to instruct students on alternatives to aggression, not to act in anger, and help resolve conflicts (Scarpaci, 2006). Although the term ‘collaborative learning’ may be passé drawing upon the experiences and knowledge of all of the students still promotes engagement. This will help the students feel as though they are contributing to the lesson and therefore pay more attention and learn.

The teacher as well as the school needs to find a means to encourage and provide a means to build teacher-student relationships. Not everything that a young person needs to know when they leave school can be taught in the core curriculum. Advisement lessons that teach students the social skills that are needed to survive in the real-world can help build relationships between the student and teacher. Advisement lessons could include, peer pressure, life after high school, etiquette, buying a car, time management, test taking tips, money management, setting goals, spring break safety, learning styles, and interview skills.

Level C Attendance Model



Level C attendance strategies are for those schools that either face the listed difficulties or want to reach the highest level of academic success for their students.

Schools need to offer vocational curricula for those students who do not see the importance of attending regular school because they lack the vision of how the regular curricula may pertain to their future career.

Schools need to create initiatives that prevent bullying. Teachers can help identify bullying and harassment and stop it from happening in the classroom but bullying can also take place outside of the classroom; it can happen at lunch and in the halls.

Schools that place freshmen with experienced teachers who have high expectations will have students with better attendance compared to students placed with inexperienced teachers.

School need to work in improving parental relationships through a process of communicating expectations. Allow parents some means of control over their children but with limitations. An example would be to allow a parent to write notes for their child's absence until those parental excuses become excessive, then require formal documentation such as doctor or hospital note, court or government mandated papers, funeral brochures or programs.

Parents must now play a vital part in helping their own children. Parents need to develop cognitive abilities within the child. These skills can not be left up to the school system by itself. Reading must take place at home. Homework must be mandatory. Parents need to know where their child stands academically. Instilling appropriate values and aspirations will help ensure that their child continues to be a responsible adult even after they have left home. Parents must motivate their children to do well in school and

encourage them to take responsibility for their actions. Parents may choose to use a written contract that would grant and take away specific privileges dependent upon the desired behavior (Appendix F).

Government agencies need to follow through with their threats and take parents and students to court based on their lack of attendance. Before a family goes to court, the cause of the absences must be formally documented. A legitimate illness or a family leaving the country would exclude them from having to appear before a judge. The court is for those students who are truant, those parents who lie for their children, and those parents who keep their children home for unexcused reasons such as caring for a younger sibling.

Those teachers who show up day in and day out have an increase likelihood of having students who also attend on a regular basis. Teachers need to also talk with the student about their absence – find out why and seek help for the student.

When to Contact Parents / Students about Absences

Schools need to deal with students who are absent at specific numbers of days. The number of absences has been determined from the scientifically tested research; Mount Diablo Unified School District, (1990) specifically stated, after reviewing the data from their 15 day attendance policy, that students should not be penalized for legal absences. Each step needs to be documented electronically so that other agencies such as social services and the court system can determine the interventions that took place.

	Unexcused	Excused	Cumulative
5 Absences	Contact the parent to express their concerns and ask what they feel should be done to address the potential problematic attendance.		
7 Absences	Interview the student to determine the reason the child is missing school. Begin to implement the strategies, based on the reason the student is missing school. Inform the parent and student that continued unexcused absences will result in a loss of their driver's license.		
10 Absences	Organize a meeting with the parent, child, school official, and social worker. During this meeting, inform the parent and child of the potential legal sanctions allowed by your state that could result from continued unexcused absences.	Notify the parent that you are concerned about the number of absences and ask them the reason the child misses school. Ask them to make every effort to ensure that their child attends	

	Have the state take away learner's permit and driver's license.	school every day and all day.	
15 Absences		Inform the parent that excuse notes from a parent will no longer be accepted. To excuse an absence, doctor's notes must be provided.	Begin to implement the strategies, based on the reason the student is missing school.
18 Absences	Implement legal sanctions. Take the student and parent to court for a judge to determine the how to best keep the student in school.	Begin to implement the strategies based on the reason the student is missing school.	
25 Absences			Organize a meeting with the parent, child, school official, and social worker. During this meeting, inform the parent and child of the potential legal sanctions
30 Absences			Take the student and parent to court for a judge to determine the how to best keep the student in school.

Parent's Resource
How to Motivate Your Child to Attend School

The reason your child is missing school is most likely one of the following:

1. General Distress
2. Avoiding Social or Performance Situations
3. Gain Attention (even if it's negative)
4. Having Fun Instead of Going to School

The parent needs to figure the answer to the following

- From the above, what is the over-whelming reason your child is missing school?
- Why do you believe your child doesn't want to go to school?

Each of the above reasons for missing school can be corrected. The behavior can be modified. The following table will give you a brief idea as to some strategies that will work for your child, broken down by the reason he / she misses school.

	Use a written contract	Do not fight or argue	Increase amount of time in school	Return the student to school	Breathing Technique	Muscle relaxation	Monitor child's whereabouts	Use small gifts	Ignore inappropriate behaviors	Set morning routine	Think realistically about situation
General Distress	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Avoid Social/Perf	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Gain Attention	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓		
Have Fun	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				

General Distress

Don't say, "Don't worry" "Stop it" "You shouldn't be scared" "You're faking it"

Say, "Relax, breath in through the nose, out through the mouth" "loosen up, try to tense your muscles, then relax them"

Avoiding Social or Performance Situations

Say, "You need to see the situation as it really is, the feeling of embarrassment or being made fun of is temporary. You are going to school and we'll talk about this tonight."

Gain Attention (even if it's negative)

Don't, answer the child's request to miss school more than once; tell them *no* one time.

Having Fun Instead of Going to School

Monitor your child's whereabouts – cell phones can track a person's movements
Know the phone numbers and addresses of your child's friends and the phone numbers of their parents. Search your child's room, inside electrical equipment, cell phone text messages and photos.

APPENDIX C

Using Attendance Aggregation (MS/HS) in SASIxp

The Attendance Aggregation atom is located inside the Attendance folder in SASIxp.



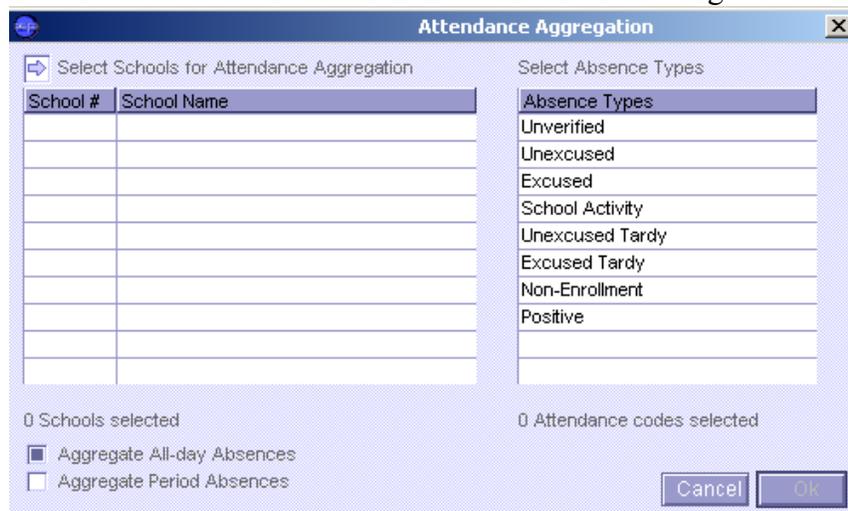
Attendance Aggregation

This atom allows users to “aggregate” attendance information from the Period attendance files in SASI into a file that is much simpler to query. This is the AATG (Attendance Aggregation) file.

One thing to keep in mind with Attendance Aggregation is that the file is a snapshot of the data at the time the process is run. If data are changed in the attendance files after the aggregation process is run, the changes will not be reflected in the AATG file until the Attendance Aggregation process is re-run. As with other attendance processes that reference the All Day absence value, make sure you have run the Attendance repair procedure before running this process.

Steps for running the Attendance Aggregation process are outlined below.

1. Double click the icon to launch the atom. The following screen should appear.

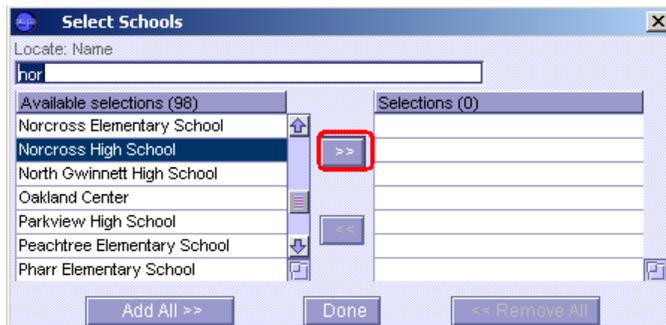


2. Click on the fast access arrow to bring up the list of schools.

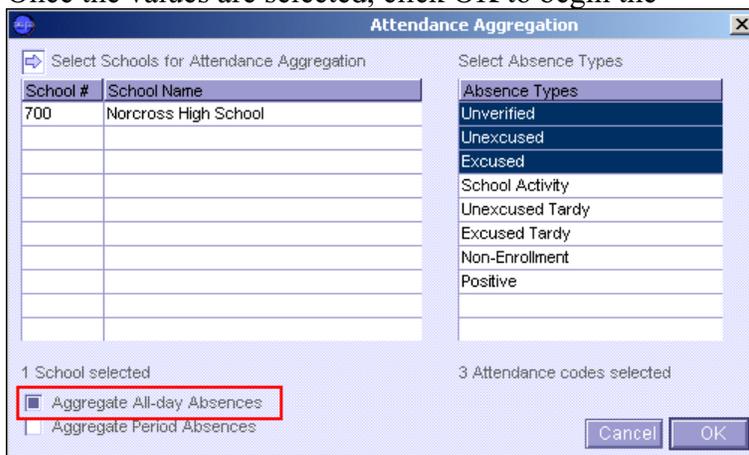


3. Type the first few letters of your school’s name (or scroll down the list to find your school). Once you see your school’s name, either double click it to move it to the right hand column or click once and use the double arrow button to move the school to the right column.

4. Click Done when finished.



5. Back in the main Attendance Aggregation atom, hold down the Shift key and click on the Absence types to be included. Also verify that Aggregate All-day Absences is flagged. Once the values are selected, click OK to begin the



aggregation process.

(At this time, we feel that aggregating the All-day Absences will be most beneficial. While you can aggregate period absences, keep in mind the aggregation process will create a record in AATG for each day the student has either an all day or period absence. This may result in large numbers of records in the file. Our processes and queries will focus on the All-day absences.)

6. Depending on the size of your school and the speed of your computer, the process may take several minutes to complete. You may view the status of the process in the progress bar.



7. Useful queries are located in the SASI Query Database (in the Attendance section).

NOTES:

1. If you choose to develop your own queries for ASTU and AATG, make sure you always include `IF 1,permnum=2,permnum`. That is how the two files can be joined. Without this condition, your query will not give reliable results.
2. If you wish, you can also aggregate tardies in the same way. Simply change the Attendance Aggregation setup to reflect the absence types you wish to include. Remember that the AATG file is completely recreated each time Attendance Aggregation is run.

SASI QUERY

```
ASTU AATG id ln fn gr { Age = (( $date - Birthdate ) / 10000) } AbsDate DayCode IF  
1,PermNum = 2,PermNum AND AbsDate IN[081009..101509] and $count=10
```

The dates would have to be changed dependent upon the school year and current date.

APPENDIX D

Modify Behavior

Breathing Exercises – Find a comfortable seat. With the mouth closed, breathe long, deep breaths in through the nose. Slowly release the air from the mouth (Kearney, 2007).

Ignore inappropriate behaviors – Children who miss school because they want attention will often act out, throw temper tantrums, or deliberately slow down (dawdling) to get the attention of a parent. Often times the attention is negative but the type of attention (positive or negative) does not matter to the child. When the child realizes that he is not getting attention from the parent for his inappropriate behavior, the child will eventually stop using that method to get attention (Kearney, 2007).

Morning Routine – A morning routine can be organized, unhurried, and composed. Every adult in the household, who deals with the morning routine, needs to be in on the planning. Extra time needs to be added to the routine in order to deal with unexpected situations that inevitably will arise. The plan needs to be in writing with specific and clear expectations for the child. Arguing and yelling are replaced with rewards and consequences. Rewards need to be in place for properly sticking to the routine without complaining or a predetermined consequence dealt for a youth who did not complete a task as specified (Kearney, 2007).

Muscle Relaxation – Create a tense contraction of the muscle, push even harder, hold that contraction for 10 seconds, and then quickly release. Repeat with the same muscle group. Use muscle relaxation for, hands, face, stomach, jaw, legs, and upper arms. Concentrate on tensing and releasing the muscles around the area the youth feels the most stress, possibly the upper back (Kearney, 2007).

Predetermined consequences – Some children will show inappropriate behaviors in order to gain the attention of their parents. For this type of child, a punishment that involves a loss of attention of the parent is most effective. Time outs, going to bed early, loss of play time with the parent are much more effective compared to yelling, arguing, or physical punishment – which are still forms of parental attention.

Think Realistically – Distress comes from unreasonably worrying about situations such as what people will say or do when the youth is put in a performance situation or simply put in a social situation. The youth assumes that everything will either be perfect or terrible but hardly any thoughts in-between the two. The youth needs to change their “worst-case scenario” thoughts into thoughts of what is actually happening or what will probably happen. If a child has to give a presentation, the youth might be worried that he will mess up and everyone will laugh at him and will forever remember how funny the mess up was. But in actuality, a slip up will most likely be minor with a few chuckles from the audience and will be forgotten quickly (Kearney, 2007). Use the STOP acronym in Appendix E.

Tangible incentives – Rewards a youth can touch and are real. Indirect incentives work well – as a reward, a child might be given an opportunity to make some money. As an example, a child who has had trouble with truancy may be rewarded for attending school for the day or week with an opportunity to earn some money for doing some chores around the house.

APPENDIX E

S.T.O.P are guidelines to help realize how a person should truly feel about a situation.

- S: Am I Scared or nervous?
- T: What **T**houghts am I having in this situation?
- O: What **O**ther, more realistic thoughts can I have?
- P: **P**raise myself for thinking more realistically about the situation

(Cited by Kearney, 2007; adapted from Silverman & Kurtines, 1996).

APPENDIX F

Attendance Contract

Name _____

This Attendance Contract is being implemented to help improve your attendance. With improved attendance, we hope to see:

- Improved grades
- Passing this current grade level
- Graduating from school
- Gain knowledge necessary for a good job or continue your education

It has been scientifically proven that students who have poor attendance while in school, also have poor attendance as an adult while in their career, potentially losing income or their job.

It has also been found that students who have poor attendance are at an increased risk of dropping out of school. From recent data, the average salary difference between a high school dropout and a graduate is \$9,634 per year - a difference of \$289,020 over a person's career.

Weekly Privileges / Rewards* granted on Friday afternoons when the checked expectations are accomplished.	Expectations of the student <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Attend school every day<input type="checkbox"/> Provide a parent's excuse note when ill<input type="checkbox"/> Provide a doctor's note when ill<input type="checkbox"/> Schedule appointments after school or during holidays<input type="checkbox"/> Arrive on time<input type="checkbox"/> Stay at school the entire day<input type="checkbox"/> Attend every class<input type="checkbox"/> On Friday, bring home a weekly attendance log signed by each teacher
---	---

Student's Signature

Date

Parent's Signature

Date

* Privileges and rewards should be things that the student enjoys:

- Doing
- Playing with
- Using
- Fun activities with friends or family

Examples may include: watching TV, playing video games, talking on the phone, access to their cell phone, listening to music, computer time, hanging out with friends, and going on family outings.

ATTENDANCE CONTRACT

Attendance at school is a vital part of a student's academic achievement. The purpose of this contract is to make clear to all parties (student, parents, teachers, and administration) the attendance expectations during this school year for student

This contract identifies attendance as an area in need for improvement for this student. It is expected the student will be in attendance at school daily. Only for State mandated excused reasons, as stated in the student handbook, could the student be absent. It is expected that the student will present a note to the attendance office within two days upon return to school after any absence.

The student is expected to be on time to school and class. If tardy to school, an excuse note must be presented to the attendance office upon entering the building. The tardy must be for one of the State mandated excused reasons or the tardy will be considered unexcused.

It is this school's expectation that the student be present to all classes, including Academic Contact (ACT) The student will not miss or skip (AWOL) any part of a period, entire class, or day.

This attendance contract will be in effect for the remainder of the school year. If the student did not abide by this contract, a **Behavior Contract** will be issued. Excessive absences may result in the requirement of formal documentation for absences (such as doctor's notes). Furthermore, the student who continues to be absent may be referred to social services and or a disciplinary panel.

 Student Signature

 Date

 Parent Signature

 Date

 Administrator Signature

 Date

APPENDIX G



**MILL CREEK HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENT ABSENCE / TARDY EXCUSE NOTE**



_____ **Student's Printed Name & ID #**
(Last, First, Middle) **(ID number)**

_____ **Date(s) of absence**

_____ **Parent's/Guardian's Name**
(Last, First, Middle)

_____ **Home & Work Telephone # ***
Home Father's Work Mother's Work

The state of Georgia will accept 8 reasons for a student to be considered excused from a school absence or tardy. Please check one of the below and have the student turn this form in to the attendance office the morning they return to school.

- _____ Personal illness jeopardizes personal health or health of others
- _____ Serious illness or death in immediate family. List family member and relationship to student _____
- _____ Religious holiday.
- _____ Student under orders from a government agency. Documentation must be attached.
- _____ Voter registration (18 years or older) or voting.
- _____ Conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to student's health or safety.
- _____ Tests and physical exams for military service including National Guard. Documentation must be attached.
- _____ A student misses school days to spend time with active duty combat zoned parent(s) who are about to leave for overseas deployment or who are between military deployments.

Whenever possible, attach a copy of the formal documentation such as a doctor's note.

_____ Unexcused absence with reason _____

Parent's notes will be accepted for up to ten (10) excused all-day absences per school year and six (6) check-ins per school year. Thereafter, the only excused reasons for absences or check-ins must be verified through the following formal documentation.

1. Doctor or hospital note.
2. Court or government mandated papers.
3. Funeral brochures or programs.

Excused documentation should be submitted to the attendance office within two (2) days of return to school. Failure to do so may result in the absence or tardy being considered unexcused.

I hereby certify that the above information is accurate and have attached all available formal documentation.

Parent's/Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

* A phone call to a parent may take place to verify authenticity.

CURRICULUM VITAE

James E. Kay

3495 Cascade Fall Drive • Buford • Georgia • 30519
 (678) 714 7130 • (678) 462 4527
 JimJennaKay@hotmail.com

Professional Experience**Assistant Principal, Mill Creek High School, 2004 – Present**

Discipline	• Technology
Testing	• Parking
Attendance	• Bell Schedules
Web Pages: Design and Implementation	• Bell System
Textbooks (\$1.7 million)	• Announcements
REI - Remediation Extension & Intervention	

Administrator, Buchanan School, 2001 – 2002

Curriculum Development	Public Relations
Writing Grant Proposals	School Newsletter: Writer & Editor
Course Design & Implementation	Staff Development

Teacher, Business Education, 1994 – 2004

Developer of International Baccalaureate	Accounting
Advanced Word Processing	Computer Applications
Advanced Multimedia	Business Studies

Teacher, Community School, 1995 – 2000

Driver's Education
 Adult Computer Classes

Teacher, Broxtowe College, Nottingham, England, 1993

U.S. Business Studies	Macro Economics
Micro Economics	Administrative Systems
Personal Finance	Business
Terminology	

Personal Business and Service Manager, Mail Boxes Etc., 1987 – 1989

Training	Hiring
Record Keeping	Firing

Education and Licensure

M.Ed. Educational Leadership and Management
Queen Victoria's University of Manchester, England
B.B.A. Administrative Systems, Minor in Mathematics
Radford University
L-6 Certificate, Georgia Educational Leadership P-12
EdD, Administrator Leadership: Teaching and Learning
Walden University (Expected completion December, 2009)

Volunteer Leadership Activities

Advisor and Evaluator of Industry Certification

State of Georgia

Director

Georgia Business Education Association, Region IV / IX

Secretary and Treasurer

Georgia Business Education Association, Region IV

President of Pi Omega Pi

Business Education Honors Society

Vice President of AMA

American Marketing Association

Volunteer Fireman

Georgetown, Connecticut

Leo the Lion

Kingdom Safari, Fusion Church

Honors and Awards

- **Teacher of the Year**, First Place, Norcross Community School
- **Teacher of the Year**, Second Place, Norcross High School
- **Award of Merit** for Outstanding Achievement in Business Education, NBEA
- **Outstanding Leadership**, Gold Medal Recipient, Georgia Business Education Association
- **Mr. Future Business Teacher**, First Place, Phi Beta Lambda – U.S. Nationals
- **Mr. Future Business Teacher**, First Place, Phi Beta Lambda – Virginia