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Special Educators' Perspectives on Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Diagnosed With Disabilities

Mary Eva Bonnetty
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Mary Eva Bonnetty

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Maureen Ellis, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Karen Clark, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2025

Abstract

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by

Mary Eva Bonnetty

MA, University of Maryland University College, 2016

BS, Jackson State University, 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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May 2025

Abstract

A rural school in a large district in the south-central United States experienced higher absentee rates for students with disabilities than for students in traditional courses. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore Title I special education teachers' perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting attendance of students with disabilities. Guided by Bandura's social learning theory, which highlights how social contexts influence children's learning behaviors and actions, suggests that children observe others' actions and mentally process whether they are appropriate or not, this study explored perceived reasons and barriers for chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. Data were collected through semistructured one-on-one interviews with 9 Title I special education teachers from the school district. Using a snowball sampling approach, teachers were recruited using purposive sampling to achieve data saturation. Data were analyzed to identify codes and 7 themes emerged: (a) students' health and well-being in education, (b) poor school infrastructures, (c) parental neglect and its impact on child development, (d) students' personal challenges, (e) financial struggle and work-life balance barriers, (f) interpersonal and health challenges, and (g) inadequate resources in schools hindering accessibility. A policy recommendation addressing chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities was developed to create a supportive and inclusive environment for student success. The results inform school policies and professional development programs emphasizing family–school collaboration, offer evidence-based strategies reducing absenteeism, and utilize data driven decision-making when addressing absenteeism.

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Dedication

To my Heavenly Father—without God's plan for me, nothing would have been possible; my parents (Alexander and Eva Slaughter), my sister (Susan), and my brothers (Smokey and Jarrod), all who are no longer with me but in Heaven; my sons (Antonio and Kendrick); my sisters (Agnes and Sunshine Celeste); my step-sisters (Sylvia, Sandra, Sonya, and Victoria); my step-brothers (Chris and Bernard); their spouses; and everyone that I have encountered in my life.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,

Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted that if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

–Robert Frost

Acknowledgments

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. (*The New International Version Bible*, 1978, Jeremiah 29:10)

First, I give all honor and praise to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and God for providing me with strength of mind, body, and soul. It is by God's grace alone that I survived the trials and tribulations of life to complete my doctoral journey. As the conductor of the train, His grace allowed me to push through my doctoral journey to reach the light at the end of the tunnel.

I did not start nor finish this magnitude of an educational journey without the unconditional love and support of family and friends who provided me with a foundation of faith, love, determination, and perseverance that carried me throughout this process. Although my parents, grandparents, and siblings are no longer here to celebrate this achievement, their gifts of unconditional love and passion for learning resonate with me and have contributed to my roles as a student, educator, and parent. I want to whole-heartedly thank my professors and dissertation committee members at Walden University. Dr. Ellis has been a shining beacon in my doctoral journey. Dr. Clark has been a nurturing yet firm guide toward finding my "Why." Dr. Miller, Dr. Jameson, Dr. Henry, and Dr. Ross helped shape me into a person who will always love to research to find life's answers.

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Section 1: The Problem

Problem at National Level

In the United States, students in special education have a 22% chronic absenteeism rate, compared to 15% among their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2023a). Chronic absenteeism is a nationwide problem in the U.S. school system. Texas Educational Agency (TEA, 2021) defines chronic absenteeism as students having missed 10% or more of academic school days regardless of whether the absences are excused or unexcused. Problematic school attendance is a systemic issue with socioeconomic, sociocultural, socioenvironmental, and sociopolitical implications.

In a similar qualitative study on the educational, social, and psychological impacts of chronically absent students, Thongseiratch and Chandeying (2020) found that approximately 15% of primary and secondary school students in the United States and Europe were affected by chronic illnesses that resulted in higher chronic absenteeism rates. Thongseiratch and Chandeying also found that 50% of students with chronic diseases performed worse academically than their healthy school-age peers. Thongseiratch and Chandeying established that those students struggling with academic, social, and psychological problems were typically absent from school 16 days per school year, compared to students who were regularly absent for 3 days per school year.

In a U.S. Office of Civil Rights student attendance report from the 2017–2018 academic year, 23% of students diagnosed with disabilities were chronically absent compared to 16% of their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2023a).

During the 2017–2018 academic year, national data revealed that 15.8% of all students missed 15 or more school days (U.S. Department of Education, 2023b). Another study by S. Anderson and Room (2020) also supported the findings by the U.S. Department of Education (2023b), indicating that students diagnosed with disabilities accounted for a significant number of chronic absenteeism rates nationally.

School leaders and teachers have struggled for decades to find evidence-based early detection and preventive measures to combat their students' chronic absenteeism rates (Keppens, 2023). Keppens (2023) found that socioeconomic, psychiatric, and community elements profoundly affected students' chronic absences. U.S. school districts with larger student populations have student attendance problems that challenge educators, families, policymakers, and stakeholders in various complex ways. Chronic absenteeism results in inequitable access to student learning opportunities for students diagnosed with disabilities (Kearney, 2021).

Problem at the State and Local Level

The study site for my study was a Title I rural school in a large school district in the south-central United States referred to as Tigers Elementary School (pseudonym). The problem that prompted this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state (Bundshuh et al., 2021; Dannow et al., 2020; M. Gottfried et al., 2024; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020; TEA, 2021). In this south-central state, the school district categorizes students missing 10 or more school days per

academic year as being chronically absent (TEA, 2021). Therefore, public school systems, special educators, school administrations, families, policymakers, and stakeholders need to decrease absences among students diagnosed with disabilities (National Center for Learning Disabilities [NCLD], 2023). Students' chronic absenteeism data from the study location are represented in Table 1.

Table 1

District Data Taken From the Study State's Student Absenteeism Report From 2015–2018

District	Averages			National averages
Academic school year	Student absences	% of SWD	Nondisabled	% of nondisabled SWD
2015–2016	≥ 10 days	11%	14%	23%
2017–2018	≥ 10 days	16%	14%	16%

Although studies (e.g., M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020) have highlighted student absenteeism rates with respect to disability rates amongst students, none has addressed the same for the study site chosen for this study. Mireles-Rios et al. (2020) conducted a study to establish reasons why disabled and nondisabled students were chronically absent from nine schools within the region. The nine-school sample population at the study site was composed of five elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools within two consolidated independent school districts (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020). Mireles-Rios et al. found that students diagnosed with disabilities (from the sample population) had a chronic absenteeism rate of 11% compared to 13% of students diagnosed with disabilities within the whole Region 13.

Furthermore, the major reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities in the region were (a) acute illness (48%), (b) skipping class (5%), (c) chronic illness, (4%), and (d) family emergency (4%); (Mireles-Rios et al., 2020).

Researchers were unable to locate studies that focused on whether full-day kindergarten enrollment affected chronic absenteeism rates among students with disabilities. They used a systematic literature review involving data from the early childhood longitudinal study-kindergarten class of 2010–2011 (M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021). The data sets contained research on 2,120 kindergarten students with disabilities, including learning, communication, speech, and physical disabilities. M. A. Gottfried and Ansari (2021) found that students diagnosed with disabilities enrolled in full-day kindergarten were absent an average of 1.04 days more compared to students with disabilities enrolled in part-time day kindergarten. Based on this background from the literature, it is clear that there is a need for a study that focuses on special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of students with disabilities.

Rationale

According to a school administrator at the study site, students with disabilities are absent from school due to various family and societal issues. According to the U.S. Office of Civil Rights student attendance report from the 2015–2016 academic year, 23% of students diagnosed with disabilities were chronically absent compared to 16% of their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2023a). Data collected between 2018

and 2019 showed that students diagnosed with disabilities accounted for 29% of chronic absenteeism rates nationally (Capretta et al., 2024). The existing literature has not identified any specific causes for chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities; only broad potential causes have been identified (Kearney et al., 2022). Chronic absenteeism can have significant future impacts on students, including susceptibility to becoming chronically absent in their later school years and negative impacts on academic outcomes, and can also affect student's socioemotional development and skillsets (Dannow et al., 2020; Ehrlich et al., 2021). Therefore, understanding the causes of chronic absenteeism and the potential barriers for students diagnosed with disabilities is critical.

The gap in attendance between students with disabilities and their peers has not been adequately addressed. No study has focused on Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. However, there are numerous studies (e.g., M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020) associating disability in students with absenteeism. M. A. Gottfried and Ansari (2021) revealed that chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with different forms of physical disability in the United States caused inept academic performances and social behavior gaps that impeded student learning and societal behaviors. M. A. Gottfried and Ansari added that few reliable qualitative studies had been conducted regarding how chronic

absenteeism affected students diagnosed with disabilities academically, socially, and environmentally.

There was a greater need for credible qualitative research on this systemic problem in education. The complexities of chronic absenteeism (i.e., missed classroom instruction and academic and social issues) cause challenges for special education teachers, parents, and schools to understand barrier elements that might affect chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities (M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021; M. A. Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). Based on the district data from the study state (as presented in Table 1) indicating student absenteeism, which justified the need for studies, there is a need for researchers to develop possible effective school and home intervention measures (i.e., waking students up to go to school on time) to promote school attendance. Chronic absenteeism creates inequity in educational opportunities for students, inequitable access to vital classroom instructions, and inadequate executive function skill sets.

Definition of Terms

Average daily student attendance: A student's physical presence at a school serves as a vital component of academic, social, and emotional engagement that promotes college and career readiness. School attendance personnel collect attendance data to determine whether the school meets the requirements of 95% average daily attendance (Lawrence et al., 2019).

Chronic absenteeism: There is no formal or legitimate definition of chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism includes unexcused, excused, or truancy incidents that cause students to miss 10% or more of the school year. Chronic absenteeism equates to approximately 18 days or more in a given academic school year (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020).

Chronic illnesses: Illnesses that affect students' physical ability to function for periods longer than 3 months or cause more than 1 month of hospitalization. Chronic illnesses include asthma, cancer, diabetes, chronic renal impairment, epilepsy, congenital heart anomaly, obesity, and hematologic diseases (Thongseiratch & Chandeying, 2020).

Excused absences: Absences that can be legally justified, such as those resulting from nonchronic illnesses, family obligations, institutional reasons, and primary physician visits (Kearney et al., 2022).

Homeless students: Students who do not have stable or adequate housing due to uncontrollable socioeconomic hardships (Dyer, 2024).

Interventions for chronic absenteeism or truancy: Preventive measures implemented at the individual, school, or community level to target risk factors associated with the systemic issue of students' chronic absences (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020).

School refusal behavior: Absences from school due to internalizing symptoms relating to depression, psychosomatic complaints, or separation anxiety disorder (Gonzálvez et al., 2021).

Truancy: Unauthorized or unexcused absences that prompt school districts and schools to administer legal, punitive, or sometimes administrative consequences (Kearney et al., 2022).

Unexcused absences: Absences that occur without permission, such as those resulting from illegitimate or risky behaviors, intentional injuries, substance abuse, or lack of parental consent (Kearney et al., 2022).

Significance of the Study

A problem existed at the local study site, prompting this qualitative study. Students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state (TEA, 2021). In this study, I addressed a gap in practice as Title I special education teachers serve students with special needs and tackle barriers that result in their chronic absenteeism. I also explored how special educators might reduce the barrier elements that affect students diagnosed with chronic absenteeism rates related to disabilities.

Chronic absenteeism is a complex and systemic issue that impedes the academic learning and social development of students diagnosed with disabilities (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020). Conducting a qualitative research study on this educational aspect enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of other special education teachers on why students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state. This claim is also backed by the fact that deteriorating school infrastructure, disengaging

curriculum instructions, and health-related issues affected the chronic absenteeism rates of students diagnosed with disabilities (M. A. Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022; Hamlin, 2021).

School administrators and teachers might use this study's findings to offer 3-day professional development opportunities that promote daily school attendance of students diagnosed with disabilities or school-sponsored workshops that support parents of chronically absent students in K–12 schools (Simon et al., 2020). According to Chang et al. (2021b), school administrators and teachers need ample professional development opportunities to support their students' academic and social development. The findings from this qualitative study may help schools, families, and communities become more aware of this systemic problem. The findings from this qualitative study may also help special educators identify possible barriers that might affect students with chronic absenteeism related to disabilities, which might lead to district-wide support programs for affected students and their families. According to S. Anderson and Room (2020), systemic problems, such as chronic absenteeism, are issues that might cause colossal and detrimental damage to student attendance in schools.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this basic qualitative study were designed to address the possible barrier elements that might affect students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates as perceived by nine special Title I special education teachers within the study state's public school district. Students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-

central school located in a south-central state (TEA, 2021). The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. The questions were as follows:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of Title I special education teachers about reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site?

RQ2: How do Title I special education teachers perceive barriers affecting chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site?

Review of the Literature

Absenteeism rates experienced amongst students with disabilities are a problem within the U.S. education system (S. Anderson & Room, 2020; Simon et al., 2020). This section contains an expanded background to the research problem discussed in the earlier chapter. A review of the broader problem is examined first, followed by a discussion of the conceptual framework. Next, relevant studies are organized into categories, progressing from the broad subject matter toward the gap that was studied. A conclusion addressing how the gap was established based on existing literature is provided at the end.

An extensive search for evidence-based data on chronic absenteeism utilized during this basic qualitative study included peer-reviewed journals from the U.S.

Department of Education website, the study state's education agency website, and Google Scholar. Other sources were located through the following: Walden University library databases: ERIC, Wiley Online Library, Education Source ProQuest, and Sage Publications. The literature search keywords encompassed *chronic absenteeism, chronic illnesses, average daily student attendance, excused absences, unexcused absences, truancy, school refusal behavior, homeless students, perspectives,* and *interventions for chronic absenteeism or truancy*.

In this first stage, I mainly examined abstracts. The identification process was guided by themes that I established concerning the topic of study. The themes included chronic absenteeism, chronic illnesses, average daily student attendance, excused absences, unexcused absences, truancy, school refusal behavior, homeless students, perspectives, and interventions for chronic absenteeism or truancy.

The next step was the screening process, which involved examining the literature for duplicate or similar findings, leading to the elimination of 10 articles. The remaining articles (175) were again subjected to screening for relevancy, resulting in an additional 17 articles being excluded. In the next stage, the eligibility phase, I relied on the inclusion criteria per the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP; 2018; see Appendix B). The CASP checklist has 10 questions to help researchers make sense of a systematic review. During the eligibility phases, which entailed full-text analysis against the study's inclusion criteria, I excluded 32 articles. The next stage involved dividing the final

articles used in the study into qualitative (117) and quantitative (26). In total, 143 articles were included in this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was Bandura's (1969) social learning theory. Bandura emphasized how social contexts influenced children's learning behaviors and actions and noted that children observed others' actions and mentally processed whether they were appropriate or inappropriate, initiating the proper behavior to attain self-efficacy. The social learning theory focused on how children were affected by visual and auditory behaviors exhibited in their home and school communities. Consistent with Bandura's social learning theory, Daka et al. (2021) found that the lack of teacher and family relationships primarily affected students' chronic absenteeism rates. Teachers and parents play a vital role in promoting the culture of growth and collaborative work needed to prevent students diagnosed with disabilities from being chronically absent (Jain & Jain, 2023). Bandura emphasized that children's academic and social behaviors are affected by behavioral, environmental, and personal elements observed in their home and school environments.

Bandura (1969) found that elementary-aged children's behaviors and learning phenomena were affected by the motivational and reinforcement factors observed by adults closest to the family (Amor et al., 2020). According to Bandura (1969), vicarious positive reinforcements affected students' abilities to model positive behaviors learned through observations and social cues viewed within their environments. Schönfeld et al.

(2020) stated that Bandura's social learning theory was an analytic and psychological framework that involved how a person's interactions with others affected their academic and social development from childhood to adulthood. Blanco et al. (2020) stated that Bandura's social learning theory helped educators and stakeholders conceptualize how students bridged cognitive associations to traditional learning. Children learn social behaviors, norms, and customs from their environments by observing the actions of other children and adults. In the following section, themes relevant to chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities are discussed from the lens of Bandura's social learning theory.

Review of the Broader Problem

Defining Chronic Absenteeism

The first step in reviewing the literature on chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities was defining the scope of the issue. This section addresses the scholarship, focusing on the broad issue and defining the parameters. Klein et al. (2020) stated that chronic absenteeism in schools was a pervasive issue worldwide. Chronic absenteeism was a greater pervasive issue in students with special needs subgroups than in nondisabled students' subgroups (Klein et al., 2020). In quantitative research conducted between January and March 2021 on 1,342 students in Grades 6–8 in the two school districts of Dhanusha and Chitwan districts in Nepal, Klein et al. (2020) found that approximately 75% of total student absences were attributed to illness. In the 2020–2021 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC, 2024) titled "Profile of Students With Disabilities

in U.S. Public Schools During the 2020–2021 School Year," data showed that students were absent from their schools for in-school suspensions (24%), out-of-school suspensions (29%), expulsions (21%), a referral to law enforcement (27%), and a school-related arrest (28%).

In a supporting qualitative study, educationists Aruldas et al. (2023) conducted semistructured in-depth interviews involving 299 Tamil Nadu, India households. In a 2011 census, Aruldas et al. (2023) found that 65.8 million children of school age (5–19 years) were diagnosed with single or multiple cognitive and mobility disabilities. Among the students identified with disabilities and living in disadvantaged neighborhoods, Aruldas et al. discovered that students had no access to schools due to complex reasons ranging from mobility impairments to health or non-sanitary conditions. Thus, they were considered absent at governmental or private schools compared to their school-attending peers from advantaged neighborhoods. Aruldas et al. indicated the need for school administrators, teachers, and parents to aggressively seek effective and comprehensive measures to make inclusive education equitable and accessible to children with disabilities in rural Tamil Nadu, India.

In support of the effort to make education equitable for children with disabilities, Strömbeck et al. (2021) discovered that according to the Swedish National Agency of Education, student absenteeism was higher in Grades 7 to 9 (1,345) than in Grades 1 to 6 (302). Strömbeck et al. learned that a cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) model, Hemmasittarprogrammet (HSP), could be used to measure factors that affected students

attendance rates, depression, quality of life, and emotional and behavioral symptoms to determine effective interventions for students' chronic absenteeism rates. Strömbeck et al. measured 84 (10- to 17-year-old) youths on school refusal and chronic absenteeism behaviorisms by collecting data during pretreatment, posttreatment, and follow-ups to reduce students' chronic absenteeism rates. School administrators and teachers in Sweden schools struggled to address their students' attendance problems stemming from school refusal, truancy, psychiatric and behavioral disorders, and other externalizing conditions.

Coughenour et al. (2021) compared approximately 223 elementary schools' educational data collected from the Clark County School District in Nevada during the 2017–2018 academic school year. They found that 39% of students diagnosed with disabilities in Grades K–5 were more susceptible to being chronically absent due to food insecurity, compared to 11% among their nondisabled peers. The racial and ethnic student groups most affected by food insecurity and chronic absenteeism in K–5 included English language learners (ELLs), and students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs).

In a similar 2019 U.S. Department of Education report on children diagnosed with disabilities, Sprick et al. (2020) discovered that more than 2.3 million children between the ages of 3 and 21 received special education and related services under the specific learning disability category in U.S. public school districts. Sprick et al. explored a qualitative study on 2,411 K–12 school psychologists' perspectives on what criteria determined a student's eligibility for the specific learning disability category. Sprick et al.

discovered that 13.3% of school psychologists listed poor attendance as the main exclusionary factor for these students. They discovered that elementary school students' chronic absenteeism rates were early indicators of their academic and social development.

Sprick et al. (2020) also found that chronically absent kindergarten students learned 14% fewer literacy skills than their peers who attended school regularly. According to Sprick et al., students with disabilities are eligible under the specific learning disability category when there is an evidence-based academic gap between a student's actual achievement and ability in grade level in the content areas of reading and mathematics. Individualized education program teams also assess exclusionary factors to determine if students can access appropriate instruction. Sprick et al. found that additional research was needed to determine if students' chronic absenteeism rates are essential to specific learning disability eligibility. Although the definition of chronic absenteeism is broad, the reviewed literature indicates that it results in the underrepresentation of students with disabilities and education achievement gaps in this population. Understanding factors responsible for chronic absenteeism rates amongst students may offer insights into the approaches that can be adopted to address the underrepresentation of learners with disabilities.

Factors That Influence Chronic Absenteeism Rates Among Students

Factors that influence chronic absenteeism rates among students vary depending on the school environment and the demographic characteristics of the parents (Lavigne et

al., 2021). This section highlights the major contributing factors to chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. It contains a review of the literature about infectious diseases, language barriers, and environmental irregularities.

Infectious Diseases. To better understand the relationship between disability in students and chronic absenteeism, it is also essential to know other factors that might affect chronic absenteeism. Schools affected by the spread of infectious diseases can mitigate chronic absenteeism rates by educating students on developing safe and healthy measures at school (e.g., washing hands and not coughing on others). In a qualitative study, Vargas et al. (2020) discovered that during the 2012–2013 academic school year, 19% of preschool through fifth-grade students enrolled in New York City schools were chronically absent. In a recent qualitative study on infectious diseases, Coker (2020) found that the severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 had affected K–12 students enrolled in Chicago public schools. Coker also discovered that 24% of students enrolled in Chicago public schools were chronically absent during the 2019–2020 academic school year (Coker, 2020). Furthermore, in a 2021 qualitative study on the effects of nationwide student absenteeism and socioemotional outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic, Santibañez and Guarino (2021) noted that students diagnosed with disabilities had the highest percentage of average absences in kindergarten (11.6%) and Grade 12 (14.4%) compared to their nondisabled peers in kindergarten (9.2%) and Grade 12 (10.8%) directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The patterns of chronic absenteeism for students with special needs during both 2019 and 2020, in addition to the

pandemic, were relatively higher compared to their nondisabled peers (Chang et al., 2021a).

Language Barriers. Multilingual barriers might affect students' chronic absenteeism rates. In a 2021 K–12th grade attendance support report conducted by the Providence Public School District (PPSD); it was shown that students' chronic absenteeism increased from 33% to 38% during the 2016–2017 academic school year. Among the student population, 15% of students were students diagnosed with disabilities, and 31% of students were identified as multilingual learners. Research findings showed that 18% of multilingual students enrolled in the 17 secondary schools of PPSD had chronic absenteeism issues and required extensive attendance support (i.e., text messaging to parents, nudge letters followed by a phone call to parents, leveraged partnerships, Spanish language translators, and home visits; Lavigne et al., 2021). Lavigne et al. (2021) found that school attendance initiatives (i.e., nudge letters, phone calls, attendance teams, leveraged partnerships, text messaging, mentorship programs, and parent engagement specialists) might be effective deterrents for mitigating students' chronic absenteeism within the PPSD.

School, Home, and Environmental Irregularities. Current researchers have shown that school, home, and environmental irregularities contribute to students' chronic absenteeism rates (Atwell et al., 2020; Bacon & Kearney, 2020; Capretta et al., 2024; M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020). According to Atwell et al. (2020), internalized and externalized factors such as psychiatric disorders, psychosocial issues, socioeconomic challenges,

homelessness, the value that parents place on education, and chronic illnesses contribute to students' chronic absenteeism rates. Homelessness can put considerable strain on students who suffer from food insecurity as well as an unstable living environment. Even after a family secures housing, a student may be pressured to switch schools, adding to the disruption (Atwell et al., 2020).

Socioeconomic factors at home can burden parents, straining the relationship between educators and families. Communication breakdown undermines the parent–teacher partnership and can lead to misunderstandings or unnecessary punishments for truancy (Capretta et al., 2024). Parents may keep their children home for various reasons, including the concealment of maltreatment or less nefarious motivations, such as separation anxiety or a fear that schools are not adequately equipped to care for their children (Kearney et al., 2022). M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020) asserted that the combination of disability and other home factors exacerbates already high levels of absenteeism. These factors influence how school leaders, teachers, and parents view the school climate, educational settings, and teacher–student relationships. The factors also affect students' chronic absenteeism rates (Kearney & Childs, 2023). Among the three factors discussed, infectious environmental irregularities related to socioeconomic challenges and homelessness significantly affect student absenteeism rates.

Chronic Absenteeism Associated With Students With Disabilities

This section contains the evidence for high rates of absenteeism among students with disabilities as well as the causes for the phenomena. Disabled students experiencing

chronic absenteeism could be a potential focus area for schools, teachers, parents, community partners, and policymakers to improve student learning outcomes. My intent for this study was to garner the perspectives of Title I elementary school special education teachers about chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities to better support the teachers, schools, parents, stakeholders, and policymakers to construct viable measures to help mitigate chronic absenteeism and reduce barriers affecting special education students' attendance rates. M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020) stated that students diagnosed with disabilities often have high chronic absenteeism rates, which can cause systemic issues such as lost curriculum instructions and student learning loss that besiege schools, teachers, students, and parents in the United States and international school systems. However, to date, there is no identifiable, consistent, standardized definition of chronic absenteeism in the academic literature, which could cause misconceptions among classroom teachers about absenteeism for students with disabilities (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020).

Evidence-based research on the specific causes of chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities suggested that the reasons students are absent might be connected to psychiatric, psychosocial, and environmental factors in or beyond the student's control. Factors that seemed to lead to student absences correlated to socioeconomic, geographical, or mental health concerns. If left unchecked, student absence rates undermine well-planned curricula and may cause devastating academic, social, and emotional effects on special education students' learning goals and objectives.

According to K. P. Anderson (2021), students diagnosed with disabilities were 1.4% to 1.5% more likely to be chronically absent than their general education peers due to exclusionary disciplinary behaviors that resulted in out-of-school suspensions or expulsions.

Totsika et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study between 2017 and 2018 and found that students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) students in the United States with a mean age of 11 years old were missed 5 days of school of a possible 23 days due to school refusal or truancy. Children's observances of adults' behaviorisms pertaining to student absences are tied explicitly to Bandura's social cognitive theory as psychological perspectives within human behaviorism (Bandura & Walters, as cited in Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). Students' social environments affect their academic learning, motivation, and self-regulation levels (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

Chronic absenteeism is a prominent issue across ethnicities, cultural subgroups, and genders among students diagnosed with disabilities (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). In a qualitative study of cultural heterogeneity, M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020) studied empirical data from a 2006–2012 quantitative study on 653,736 elementary school-aged children in New York City public schools to examine how familial and cultural customs and beliefs affected student chronic absenteeism rates. Gottfried et al. discovered disparities due primarily to inconsistencies in schools' data collections of the chronic absenteeism rates between students with special needs and their nondisabled peers in traditional public school environments. M. A. Gottfried et al. stated that students diagnosed with

disabilities had a chronic absenteeism rate of 29% as compared to 18% among their general education peers. They also noted that students diagnosed with disabilities in fully self-contained learning (FSC) environments had a 39.9% chronic absenteeism rate as compared to 16.9% among students diagnosed with disabilities in inclusive settings with supports. Furthermore, M. Gottfried et al. (2024) explained the commonalities among students absent from their schools.

The main reasons for absences among students with disabilities are related to student, family, school, or community factors, such as impoverished neighborhoods. Black and Elgaddal (2024) noted that students diagnosed with disabilities were 1.5 times more susceptible to chronic absences than their nondisabled peers. In a later study conducted with 23,386 third and fourth-grade elementary students in an urban school district in the United States, M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020) discovered that during 1 academic year, students with special needs were chronically absent at 3% more than their nondisabled peers due to familial, societal, or environmental factors. Although researchers such as Black and Elgaddal (2024) and M. A. Gottfried et al. identified the frequency of absenteeism among the population, others have focused on the contributing factors. According to the reviewed literature, absenteeism is more pronounced among students with disabilities in comparison to other students. Understanding the causes of high rates of absenteeism among students with disabilities offers opportunities for research about the long-term effects.

Causes of Chronic Absenteeism

Given that students with disabilities display a stronger tendency towards absenteeism than their peers, there has been a growing need for an examination of the causes of this phenomenon. Researchers such as M. Gottfried et al. (2024) have indicated that when students are chronically absent, understanding what factors contribute to this pattern could improve attendance. This section contains literature on the causes of absenteeism of students and institutions.

Disability typically comes as an inconvenience to many students' desires to participate in daily activities normally. Ehrlich et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study about chronic absenteeism involving approximately 26,000 prekindergarten students enrolled in Chicago public schools. Ehrlich et al. found that students with more than 10% accumulated yearly absences were susceptible to becoming chronically absent later in school. According to Ansari et al. (2020), the following four prominent factors affect chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities: (a) self-efficacy, (b) family, (c) orientation, (d) environment, and (e) community-related issues. Therefore, disability amongst students catalyzes their probability of being absent from school.

School districts, special educators, and parents of students with special needs explored specific causes of chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. For students diagnosed with disabilities, chronic absenteeism rates might be linked to familial, societal, or environmental phenomena (Kearney et al., 2022). Therefore, the current researcher aimed to add to the current literature by analyzing

special education teachers' perspectives on why chronic absenteeism is prevalent amongst students with disabilities.

Chang et al. (2021a) conducted a study on predictions of chronic absence patterns during COVID-19 on students enrolled in The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). They found that students faced multiple systemic barriers stemming from poor living conditions (environment), economic hardship (financial), or unequal access to public schooling (academic). Chang et al. stated that during the months of September to November of the 2017–2018 school year, CSDE students with special needs were chronically absent from in-person learning (20%), hybrid learning (30%), and remote learning (40%). In comparison, during the same months of the academic year, nondisabled students were chronically absent from in-person learning (10%), hybrid learning (20%), and remote learning (25%). Chang et al. also found that during January to March of the 2017–2018 school year, CDSE students with special needs were chronically absent from in-person learning (15%), hybrid learning (25%), and remote learning (27%). In comparison, their nondisabled peers were chronically absent from in-person learning (5%), hybrid learning (10%), and remote learning (15%).

Kearney et al. (2022) and Singer et al. (2021) examined the causes and impact of chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. Kearney et al. showed that chronic absenteeism impeded students with disabilities' academic, social, and emotional growth mindsets and how schools, teachers, students, and parents might promote student attendance using a multidimensional, multitiered system of supports. Additionally,

Kearney et al. (2022) found that chronic absenteeism led to serious externalizing and internalizing behavioral problems for students diagnosed with disabilities, including (a) depression, (b) anxiety, (c) social isolation, (d) school violence, (e) victimization, as well as (f) other psychosis conditions.

Singer et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study during the 2015–2016 academic year, addressing possible factors that might affect chronic absenteeism rates among Detroit public schools (DPS) students. Singer et al. theorized that students' absence directly correlated to the need for positive collaborative relationships among schools, teachers, students, and parents. Singer et al. also found that DPS K–12 charter school students' chronic absenteeism rates were affected by positive collaborative relationships among students, parents, and teachers, and charter schools had more attendance initiative programs (i.e., parental contact and community outreach programs) offered to parents of chronically absent students than other public schools within DPS.

Charter schools within DPS had approximately 46% student chronic absenteeism rates compared to other DPS public schools with 58% student chronic absenteeism rates (Singer et al., 2021). Singer et al. (2021) found that rigorous content area curricula, supportive learning environments, and positive family and school partnerships resulted in a positive school climate, leading to college and career readiness and motivating students to attend school regularly. Chronic absenteeism is a precursor to circumstances that hinder a student's college and career readiness, psychosocial, socioeconomic status, and housing displacement (Breaz, 2020).

Chronic absenteeism rates for students diagnosed with disabilities are complex for teachers, school administration, parents, and educational stakeholders to decipher due to their correlation to systemic issues on national and global levels (Melvin et al., 2019). Gonzálvez et al. (2021) stated that the root causes of students' chronic absenteeism rates might be connected to their lack of psychosocial or networking relationships among students, teachers, and parents. Gonzálvez et al. found that the following 13 factors profoundly influenced students' chronic absenteeism rates: social anxiety, depression, separation anxiety, problems with peers, school aversion, or attractive alternatives, aggression, problematic relations with parents, somatic complaints, performance anxiety, dislike of a specific school, issues in the family, agoraphobia or panic, or problems with teachers. Gonzálvez et al. contended that future empirical studies were needed to help detect early warning signs for students affected by chronic absenteeism rates. Although these factors contribute to absenteeism, they may be present for all students, not only those with disabilities. Based on current research, a more narrowly defined investigation of the health causes of absenteeism is necessary to improve attendance for students with disabilities.

Impacts on Lack of Housing

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), Digest of Education Statistics report on homeless students in public elementary and secondary schools in the 120 largest school districts within the United States, the homeless enrollment count was 1,461. In a report on homeless students in the U.S. public school

system in the 2017–2018 academic school year, Atwell et al. (2020) discovered that more than 1.5 million K–12 students were identified as homeless students.

Dyer (2024) discovered that many academic, socioeconomic, and emotional challenges faced by students experiencing homelessness in K–12 schools across the United States challenged school leaders and teachers in unparalleled ways. In 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act was established. The McKinney Act enabled policymakers and schools to utilize measures to identify homeless students, enroll these students, and set up continuums of support for homeless families (Dyer, 2024). Furthermore, The McKinney Act initially served as a political cornerstone for stability for students who met specific homelessness classification criteria. In a report to the legislature detailing current data on homeless students in the United States, Dyer stated that schools identified more than 1.2 million students as homeless according to Subtitle VII-B of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Dyer (2024) stated that research data taken from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System indicated that during the 2022–2023 academic year, 42,436 students were identified by their U.S. school districts as homeless. Bassuk et al. (2020) found that the 2020 Annual Review of Public Health report focused on how the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) annually addresses family homelessness while adhering to federal and state policies. Bassuk et al. noted that HUD designated one night during the last week of January to conduct its annual point-in-time count of people identified as homeless to receive funding allocated by HUD.

Homelessness as defined by the HUD is: (a) persons given 14 days to leave a stable residence with no place to go; (b) families that lived dependently in households for long periods or moved frequently; (c) families faced with unstable housing due to domestic violence, disability, or unemployment; or (d) persons identified as being homeless by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Justice. HUD data revealed that the State Department of Education study showed that 36% of unaccompanied youths younger than 18 stayed in unsheltered locations (Henry et al., 2021).

Bassuk et al. (2020) discovered that 10% to 26% of homeless preschoolers enrolled in schools across the United States were clinically diagnosed with some form of mental health disorder and required a specialized instructional curriculum in their schools. Bassuk et al. also found that homeless students aged 6 to 11 had higher rates (24% to 40%) of clinically diagnosed academic or behavioral disorders than their peers with stable housing conditions. Atwell et al. (2020) recognized that homeless students were more susceptible to significant disciplinary issues, higher school dropout rates, higher exposure to criminal acts, and higher chronic absenteeism rates than their counterparts living in stable housing peers. The outcome of chronic absenteeism is the underrepresentation of students with disabilities, making it difficult to achieve the expected learning outcomes.

Chronic Absenteeism Affecting Student Success

This section of the literature review focused on the deleterious impacts and potential areas of improvement for schools and governments. I identified the major trends in the literature regarding approaches to the phenomena. The section also contains a discussion about open communication, interventions, interventions, academic failure, and school discipline interventions will be examined.

Open Communication. Teachers need to develop practical and feasible interventions and sustainable development goals to address chronic absenteeism rates among their students diagnosed with disabilities and encourage their students' parents to become more involved in mitigating student chronic absenteeism rates. According to Avelar et al. (2023), teachers and students are affected by four main dimensions, social, environmental, economic, and institutional. Teachers are integral in developing effective interventions to target good health and well-being for their students (social dimension). Teachers need to develop feasible interventions that provide safe and clean classroom and school infrastructures (environmental dimension). To mitigate their students' chronic absenteeism, teachers are intrinsic in building strong and positive communication bridges with parents, guardians, and community stakeholders to solidify interventions to meet their students basic needs (i.e., school breakfast, lunch, transportation issues). As effective educators within their fields, teachers are charged to provide their students with safe and culturally relevant educational environments to optimize student learning and mitigate their students chronic absenteeism (institutional dimension). To combat chronic

student absenteeism rates in elementary schools, teachers need to communicate effectively with their students' parents (Melvin et al., 2019). Chronic absenteeism research conducted by Eklund et al. (2022) revealed that school administrators, teachers, parents, and educational stakeholders need a common understanding that (a) collective responsibility must be acknowledged and shared on reliable and evidence-driven factors that might increase students' chronic absenteeism rates; (b) student absences data need to be transparent to school leaders and teachers to identify effective chronic absenteeism interventions; (c) shared leadership relationships are key components to successful and attendance interventions and effective decision-making concepts to address students' chronic absenteeism rates.

Interventions. Kearney et al. (2022) conducted a qualitative study to unearth a heuristic framework highlighting effective interventions that schools and teachers could implement to address their students' problematic school attendance rates. Kearney et al. conducted a qualitative study using peer-reviewed global policies and implementation of interventions in educational settings. Kearney et al. discovered that schools and teachers struggled to successfully conceptualize effective and efficient interventions that might reduce chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. They also found that schools, teachers, and parents grappled with defining, classifying, conceptualizing, assessing, and addressing chronic absenteeism problems in their schools.

McNeely et al. (2023) stated that various societal or familial factors potentially contribute to student chronic absenteeism; however, schools, teachers, students, and

parents continue to struggle to find effective interventions that impede student chronic absenteeism. In a similar study on intervention measures for student chronic absenteeism, Gakh et al. (2020) stated that according to a United States department of Education 2018–2019 report, 26% of American Indian and 22.6% of Pacific Islander students were chronically absent from their schools compared to their white peers. Black and Hispanic students were respectively 40% and 17% more likely to be chronically absent than their white peers.

Chronic absenteeism intervention measures are needed in schools as early as kindergarten (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020). Wei et al. (2023) stated that schools with high student chronic absenteeism rates might need to develop effective early childhood center-based care (CBC) programs focused on intervention measures that provide students with remedial curriculum delivered by teachers, address significant gaps in student subgroups' academic and behavioral performance, and decrease higher caseloads for school counselors, or social workers to magnify essential education expenditures needed for students. Wei et al. further stated that students affected by chronic absenteeism were most likely to struggle academically when entering kindergarten and read below grade level by the third grade.

Finding effective measures to reduce high student chronic absenteeism rates in K–12 schools is prominent on many policymakers' agendas (Wei et al., 2023). Researchers have published quantitative studies on students' problematic school attendance in the United States in Grades K–12 for decades. Historically, the broader definition of chronic

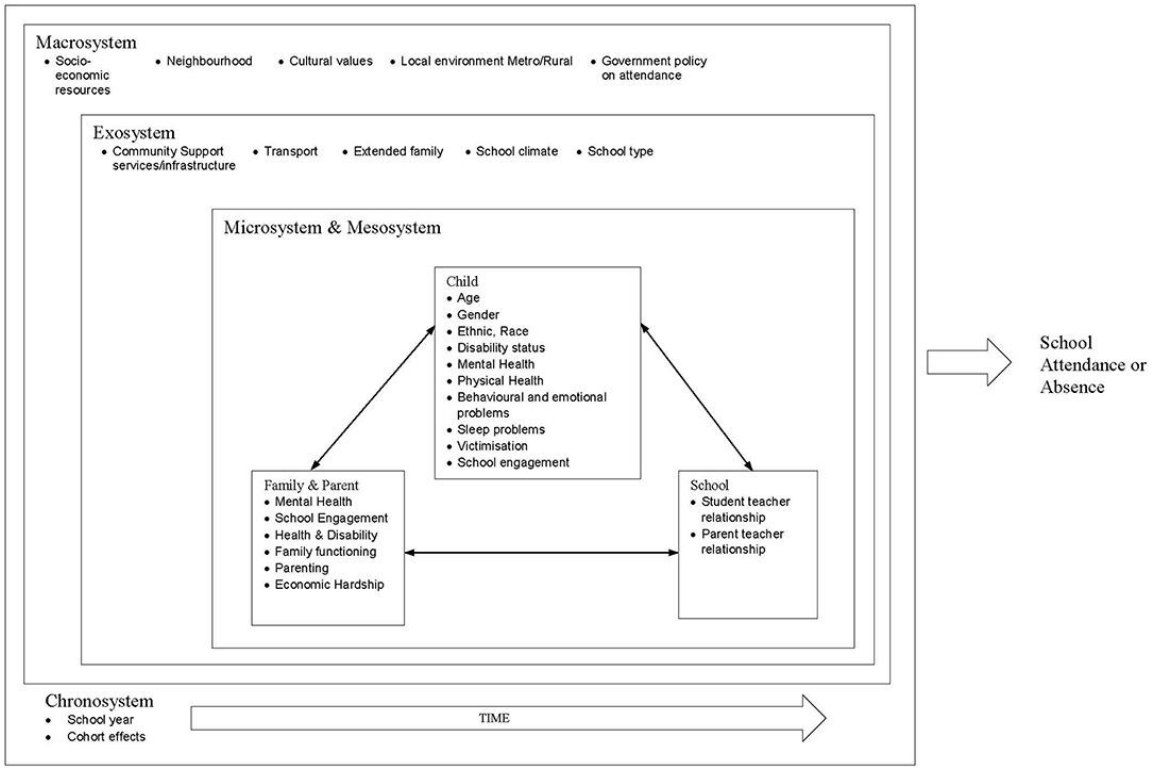
absenteeism referred to students missing 10% or more school days in 1 academic school year. However, according to Wei et al., educational researchers defined chronic absenteeism as students missing 10% or more school calendar days for any reason. Wei et al. also stated that students' chronic absenteeism is connected to adverse outcomes, such as high school dropout rates, low wage earnings, and lower levels of social engagement with others. They discovered that chronic absenteeism is higher among students diagnosed with disabilities, students of color, and students enrolled in urban schools.

Melvin et al. (2023) focused on intensive academic, social, and emotional factors that affected students with special needs who were diagnosed with cognitive and chronic pain disorders. Data from the 2020–2021 Department of Education and Training, Victoria, Australian Child report revealed that students with psychiatric and chronic pain disorders were absent due to illness (32%), medical or allied health appointments (24%), or for unknown reasons. The most common psychiatric diseases diagnosed among students were attention deficit hyperactivity and anxiety-related disorders. Melvin et al. found that these two enervating disorders were connected to students enrolled in first through 12th grade in Australian schools who were absent for 56.2% of the school days in the 2020–2021 academic school year. Melvin et al. discovered early detection of mental health problems in youth illuminated unfavorable adverse effects of chronic absenteeism rather than factors connected to student attendance problems.

Melvin et al. (2019) focused on the kids and teens at school framework using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model (see Figure 1). The kids and teens at school framework is used to determine efficient preventive measures for combating chronic absenteeism in students diagnosed with disabilities compared to their nondisabled yet disadvantaged peers. Melvin et al. found that students diagnosed with intellectual and developmental disabilities were more susceptible to higher chronic absenteeism, less likely to graduate from secondary school, and less likely to retain employment than their nondisabled peers.

Figure 1

Kids and Teens at School Framework



Note. Developed based on Melvin et al. (2019).

Academic Failure. Daka et al. (2021) investigated the correlation between students' chronic absenteeism and academic failure rates of primary school-aged children in the Zambian Department of Education in the Kalingalinga and Simweendengwe Primary Schools District in Zambia Africa. In the qualitative study, Daka et al. collected data on the perspectives of 40 education administrators, 40 parents, and 40 student learners on barriers of student attendance and possible effective interventions of students' chronic absenteeism rates. Daka et al. found that primary school-aged students heavily relied on parental engagement with school attendance. Students were susceptible to

chronic absenteeism due to their high poverty rates, poor living conditions, and parental noninvolvement.

School Discipline Interventions. In a 2018 U.S. Department of Education nationwide report on students with disabilities, students with emotional and behavioral disorders were more likely to accrue more than 10 days of in-school suspensions (McKenna et al., 2020). Students diagnosed with disabilities lost valuable instructional time compared to their same-aged peers. Baile and Sayed (2020) discovered that students with emotional and behavioral disorders were 50% more likely to drop out of high school than their nondisabled peers.

In a cross-sectional study with 8,343 children between 4 and 17 years old, Vish and Stolfi (2020) found that children with severe impairments and emotional and behavioral disorders required two to six more physician care visits than their nondisabled peers. Vish and Stolfi stated that according to medical research conducted by the American Academy of Pediatrics in 2019, 75% of young children and adolescents in the United States have undiagnosed mental health conditions that affect their academics, social life, and school attendance (Vish & Stolfi, 2020).

Young et al. (2020) examined the 2014–2018 evidence-based quantitative research conducted for the Dansbury Public Schools, School Improvement Plan in Connecticut. The school district looked for effective measures and interventions to ensure that students achieved consistent daily school attendance to enhance their abilities to benefit from their education. The research focused on the Perfect Attendance Wins Stuff

(PAWS) program. Young et al. found that the program relied heavily on schools social workers and staff to monitor their students' chronic absence rates. Young et al. stated that the largest percentage of students with chronic absenteeism were Latino (47.1 percent and Caucasians (41.3%). More than half of the student groups received free or reduced-priced lunch and were English Language Learners (11.3%). Young et al. found that the PAWS intervention program required future research for establishing research protocols that could control the varied types of interventions used in the PAWS program. In a subsequent study conducted on the eastern coast, Fancsali and Isreal (2021) discovered that 25% of all students enrolled in the New York City Department of Education were clinically diagnosed and identified as students with disabilities. Chronic absenteeism adversely affects student success because it is associated with lost instruction time. It is essential to understand how health factors contribute to chronic absenteeism.

Chronic Absenteeism and Health Issues

Although many social, economic, and demographic factors contribute to chronic absenteeism among the general student population, health factors are especially salient for students with disabilities. These students often struggle with long-term health problems that exacerbate absenteeism. This section highlights literature that specifically focuses on the health causes that cause absenteeism among students with disabilities.

Students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates may have underlying health conditions that require a physician's diagnosis (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). There is a substantial gap in qualitative research studies on the early detection and

diagnosis of mental health or social disorders in students diagnosed with disabilities and how they affect chronic absenteeism rates (Kumar et al., 2023). Pederson et al. (2021) found that many underlying chronic illnesses were invisible for educators to see physically, yet the illnesses exist internally. Pederson et al. collected and analyzed online qualitative survey responses from 179 parents of chronically ill adolescent students regarding their physical, social, emotional, and everyday functioning activities. Pederson et al. found that 55% of parents surveyed responded that their student missed more than 5 days of school during each 9-week grading period due to the debilitating symptoms of chronic pain or fatigue (88%), dizziness or lightheadedness (63%), neuropathic pain (17%), frequent or severe abdominal pain (51%), headaches (70%), light or noise sensitivity (71%), or brain fog (67%).

Oltean et al. (2020) stated that mental health and social disorders diagnosed by a physician significantly affect student attendance rates. In the U.S., school-aged children from 6 to 17 years were found with mental health and social disorders that led to school attendance problems (Oltean et al., 2020). Oltean et al. (2020) also found that the relationships forged among parents, students, physicians, teachers, and schools may be ideal and influential and offer positive educational settings for students diagnosed with disabilities to reduce chronic absenteeism rates.

Fisher et al. (2020) found that medical innovations might aid physicians in the early diagnosis of chronic illnesses in children. Identifying the early onset of clinical events with symptoms aligned with the International Pediatric Multiple Sclerosis Study

Group criteria was critical in diagnosing children under 18 with multiple sclerosis (Fisher et al., 2020). According to Fisher et al., to accurately diagnose the onset of multiple sclerosis in their patients, the patient must display at least one of the following symptoms in a 24-hour period: (a) two or more clinically isolated syndromes for 30 days or more in multiple areas of the central nervous system, (b) one clinically isolated syndrome associated with magnetic resonance imaging, (c) one acute disseminated encephalomyelitis attack, and (d) clinically isolated syndrome and magnetic resonance imaging findings consistent in time and space in patients at least 12 years of age. Fisher et al. added that the chances of treating the patient with pharmaceutical medications might promote a complete recovery after relapse within 12 months and minimal accrual of disabilities during adolescent years in the hopes of returning these patients to routine school attendance or life functioning.

Kearney et al. (2022) found that risk factors, such as psychopathological symptoms and the lack of self-efficacy skill sets, affected students' abilities to control disruptive internalizing and externalizing behaviors. Kearney et al. stated that psychoeducational, psychosocial, and environmental factors might affect chronic absenteeism rates among students with disabilities. Black and Elgaddal (2024) examined the potential relationships between long-term chronic student absenteeism and adverse effects in U.S. K–12 students with disabilities. They discovered that students' high chronic absenteeism rates served as precursors to identifying damaging psychoeducational (i.e., student academic performances), psychosocial (i.e., student

behaviorism), and environmental factors (i.e., school infrastructure). Black and Elgaddal stated that unexplained reasons for students' chronic absenteeism rates negatively affected the relationships among students, parents, and teachers. This effect was due to miscommunication of students' academic, social, and emotional needs and unplanned school-wide systems in place to impede the chronic absenteeism rates of students diagnosed with disabilities. These issues are not relegated only to the United States; they have global implications.

Chronic Absenteeism and Global Impacts

Absenteeism among students is not a purely local affair. Although a significant body of literature focuses on the phenomena in the United States, absenteeism is a global issue that transcends national borders. The section focuses on the phenomena in other national contexts.

Chronic absenteeism is a globally complex issue. In a (2015–2019) longitudinal study conducted to understand factors that affected adolescents aged 10–19 in India revealed that students were absent due to lack of interest in their studies (43%), family reasons (23%), or job employment opportunities (21%) (Kumar et al., 2023). Attendance problems cause students to experience worldwide psychoeducational, psychosocial, and environmental concerns. Mekonnen et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study on the impact of emotional and behavioral disorders among 2,090 primary school children in Ethiopia utilizing the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire to collect data on significant factors associated with students' academic achievement in low-income

countries. Mekonnen et al. found that 1,957 students were affected by poor living conditions, malnourishment, and underdeveloped housing issues. The students who scored higher on the questionnaire had lower academic achievement and were chronically absent from their schools.

Mekonnen et al. (2020) stated that the study's data could help educators find feasible and reliable measures that drastically expose the detrimental effects involving academic and behavioral developments due to their chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism globally affects students diagnosed with disabilities. In a qualitative study focusing on youth in rural states across India, Jain and Jain (2023) discovered that students with acute disabilities were 2.0 times more susceptible to chronic absences than their nondisabled peers. According to qualitative studies conducted with primary and secondary students from Australia, Indonesia, and the Netherlands, Little et al. (2020) discovered that students diagnosed with disabilities sought friendship and mutual acceptance from their general education peers in inclusive educational settings. Little et al. stated that students diagnosed with disabilities and instructed in nurturing learning environments were least likely to be absent from school.

Amor et al. (2020) found that chronically absent adolescent students aged 10–17-year-old male and female students in ten schools in Medak, Siddipet and Sangareddy districts in rural Telangana, India, were chronically absent from their schools due to common reasons that included illness, menstruation, going to family functions and death or illness in the family. Amor et al. paired collections of student data using a biometric

attendance system and home visits and discovered that 75.4 % of students missed 10% or more of all school days and 56.2% missed 15% or more of school days. Fornander and Kearney (2020) reported that the unexcused student absenteeism rate in Europe's and North America's more developed countries was 4.3%. Amor et al. (2020) stated that students' chronic absenteeism rates correlated to issues, such as lower academic performance on formative and summative tests and behavioral problems, especially in the socioeconomic developing countries of sub-Saharan and Northern Africa and Southern and Western Asia. AlSayyari and AlBuhairan (2020) conducted a 2011–2012 quantitative study on students' chronic absenteeism rates and found correlations between students' chronic absenteeism rates and poor student–father relationships, depression, chronic illnesses, and medical-associated factors in 12,121 Saudi Arabian students aged 10 to 19 years old.

The participants were all intermediate and secondary students enrolled in 13 regional Saudi Arabian schools. Female students made up 47% of the sample population. During this quantitative study, the data collected included students' school absenteeism rates, sociodemographic information, and risk behaviors (e.g., alcohol and drug abuse and insomnia). AlSayyari and AlBuhairan (2020) obtained their data from Jeeluna, a nationally representative survey of Saudi Arabia's school system. Jeeluna measured the health status and health risk behaviors of all youths and adolescents enrolled in schools in the 13 regions in Saudi Arabia. AlSayyari and AlBuhairan found very few published research studies on possible factors related to students' chronic absenteeism rates or

effective measures to reduce attendance problems. AlSayyari and AlBuhairan collected data on students attending schools in Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. They found that 54% of the intermediate school students accrued risk behavior absences (i.e., skipping classes). Saudi Arabia demonstrates the ancient state of research on absenteeism in other countries, but the limited findings broadly suggest the same dynamics and network effects of risk behaviors and absenteeism.

According to Banks et al. (2022), disability amongst school-aged children varied from 0.43% to 5.60%. Special needs primary students in rural Malawi were 10 times more likely to miss valuable curriculum instructional time due to the lack of reliable transportation to or from school because of various familial factors. M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020) stated familial factors can affect students' chronic absenteeism rates. Likewise, Mekonnen et al. (2020) stated that parents played a vital role in ensuring their children attended school daily to promote their academic and social development. Although chronic absenteeism is a problem in different national contexts, the central issue remains a lack of schooling and lost instructional time.

Chronic Absenteeism and Lost Instructional Time

Regardless of causes or national contexts, chronic absenteeism has a central unifying theme: lack of time in the classroom. Consequently, students not in school miss out on significant educational opportunities. This section addresses the impact of the opportunity costs of absenteeism for students with disabilities from the perspective of instructional time.

Locquiao et al. (2021) stated that students' chronic absenteeism issues might contribute to instructional time lost for students in person and during distance learning. Locquiao et al. stated that in a 2016 chronic absenteeism report conducted by the Office of Civil Rights, 6.8 million students (14%) missed 15 or more days of classroom instructional time. The 2016 chronic absenteeism report data were based on the 2013–2014 academic school year and the 50 million students attending U.S. schools nationwide. Locquiao et al. also found that one out of seven elementary students and one out of five high school students lost approximately 2 weeks of vital curriculum instructions, which equates to 98 million school calendar days. Lost instruction time has downstream effects on test scores and grades.

Liu et al. (2021) examined longitudinal data from the state of California on students' attendance rates, demographic information, standardized test scores, and academic achievement. Liu et al. found that although increased absenteeism was unsurprisingly related to lower educational achievement, lower graduation rates, and lower college attendance rates, the effects of absenteeism were more pronounced when students missed time before standardized tests and less pronounced after. Liu et al. suggest that students lowered grades were a result of lost instruction time.

In a nationwide qualitative study on how students' chronic absenteeism rates negatively affected classroom instructional time, Kearney and Graczyk (2020) found that during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, 25.8% of the students diagnosed with disabilities missed valuable classroom instructions, which lead to severe academic,

social, emotional, and behavioral problems in students attending U.S. public schools. Lost time in classroom instruction robs students of valuable learning opportunities that significantly impact their academic careers. Although lost instructional time is a problem faced by all students, it is more prevalent among students of color.

Effects of Chronic Absenteeism on Ethnic and Racial Subgroups

Absenteeism carries a common denominator of lost classroom time; however, it does not affect all demographics the same. Students come from diverse backgrounds and hold differing social and economic resources, which act in concert with lost instruction to impact different subgroups differently. This section highlights the literature regarding the intersection of absenteeism and ethnic and racial identity.

Ehrlich et al. (2021) discovered that academic, social, and environmental factors significantly affected students' chronic absenteeism rates. These factors included students' racial subgroups, special education status, family poverty level, and environmental disparities involving various societal issues stemming from neighborhood crime or homelessness (Ehrlich et al., 2021). Ehrlich et al. noted that the subgroups most affected by chronic absenteeism were Asian American (5.2%), Latino (40.6%), and African American students (37.8%). This research highlights the complex interplay between race, socioeconomic status, school performance, and difficulty parsing the causal relationships.

Singer et al. (2021) conducted a 2015–2016 research study with K–12 students in the Detroit Public School District. They determined that approximately 29% of Detroit

students attending charter schools were absent compared to 53% of students in Detroit Public Schools. Singer et al. determined the reasons for student absences were due to personal, social, or environmental reasons. Ehrlich et al. (2021) also revealed that African American students were three times more likely to be suspended from school than Caucasian students due to zero-tolerance policies, which heightened chronic absenteeism rates. As noted by M. A. Gottfried et al. (2020), students diagnosed with disabilities affected by personal, social, or environmental factors were highly susceptible to engaging in high-risk behaviors, such as chronic absenteeism in higher grade levels, high school dropout rates, and students' susceptibility to drug and substance abuse.

In a similar study on how chronic absenteeism affected native subgroup students' academic, social, and environmental settings, Okamoto et al. (2020) identified a gap in the research with qualitative studies on effective interventions to mitigate students' chronic absenteeism rates. Okamoto et al. (2020) stated that limited qualitative studies were conducted that focused on effective interventions for rural Native Hawaiian youth plagued by years of drug and substance abuse as well as academic, social, and emotional disorders that manifested during their primary school years. Before its reversal of zero-tolerance dealing with truancy and chronic absenteeism laws, the study state's public school district enforced stricter interventions for eradicating chronic absenteeism and truancy within its 20 school regions.

Research conducted by Weathers et al. (2021) revealed that Compulsory attendance Family Code §25.093 and Chapter 65 (TEA, 2021) enabled school districts

within the study site's state to file criminal complaints against any child over the age of 12 who missed 10 or more school days with fines up to $500.00 or jail time upon reaching 17 years of age. Given disparities in socioeconomic status, neighborhood and city resources, and racial disparities among different ethnic minorities, it is not surprising that the ill effects of absenteeism disproportionately fall on these groups and efforts by the state in Hawaii to refocus resources on truancy belie the underlying issues. These underlying issues only exacerbate issues through depressed socioeconomic status and continued cycles of poverty. Race and ethnicity are not the only relevant factors that intersect with absenteeism. Chronic illness is another population-level factor that has proven relevant.

Effects of Illness on Chronic Absenteeism

Students with disabilities are, by definition, plagued by higher rates of illness than their peers. This critical factor intersects with other demographic factors to exacerbate chronic absenteeism. This section addresses the role illness plays in missing school.

Students' chronic absenteeism rates are affected by mental health illnesses or familial reasons (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020). In an analogous study, Amor et al. (2020) conducted the Chronic Absenteeism Assessment Project to determine the factors and interventions that affected the high chronic absenteeism rates of 733 students enrolled in 10 secondary schools in the rural state of Telangana, India. Jain and Jain (2023) found that 28% of students across the states in rural India, and 43% with Bihar missed school due to family, economic, student, or school reasons. According to a 2022 national survey

conducted at the U.S. Department of Education by Black and Elgaddal (2024), it was discovered that 14.8% (6.9 million) K–12 students were chronically absent from their schools due to individual, familial, school, or community factors.

In a 2016–2017 quantitative study with 14,009 households in Ghana with primary, secondary, private, and vocational students aged 5 to 20 years old, Martey et al. (2021) found that students' chronic absenteeism rates were affected by parents' or caretakers' inabilities to overcome food insecurity challenges. Martey et al. stated that students faced with food insecurity were absent from school 51% more than their peers with food security. Students with food insecurity were hospitalized 27% more due to chronic illnesses than their peers with food security.

A lack of food security may lead to chronic diseases such as neurodevelopmental multimorbidity (Fleming et al., 2020). Students with two or more chronic diseases faced a significantly higher risk of chronic absenteeism than their nondisabled peers. In 2009–2013, Fleming et al. (2020) conducted a population-based record-linkage cohort study with 766,244 Scottish children aged 4 to 19 years old. They found that students with neurodevelopmental multimorbidity disorders were absent 8.5 days, compared to 7.5 days among their nondisabled peers, per academic year. These studies on food security and chronic illness highlight a consistent theme in the absenteeism literature—absenteeism reflects social, health, and economic problems in the wider community. Although the social ills may differ in different communities worldwide, social, economic,

and health stressors consistently lower school attendance. This lower attendance affects how schools operate at an administrative level.

Effects of Chronic Absenteeism on School Funding

This chapter has focused on the effects of absenteeism on students thus far. However, high rates of absenteeism also impact the schools as institutions. This section focuses on the organizational consequences of high absenteeism.

Gee et al. (2024) stated that nationwide research studies conducted during the 2021–2022 academic year on the chronic absenteeism rates of U.S. students in K–12 revealed disparities in schools' data collection procedures on students' impoverishment levels, ethnicities and disabilities that were reported to federal governmental agencies. In 2015, the Obama Administration intervened and changed the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act to help schools report more accurate student accountability data to governmental agencies (Gee et al., 2024). The 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) catalyzed attendance accountability regulations and policies for schools, teachers, students, parents, and educational stakeholders (Gee et al., 2024). With ESSA, the delegation of power in reporting students' chronic absenteeism rates shifted from the federal government to each state's education department. As a result of this shift, state education departments continue to design and implement accountability systems for monitoring their schools' student chronic absences (Gee et al., 2023). According to M. Gottfried et al. (2024), students who regularly attend school have higher academic and behavioral achievements than students with chronic absenteeism rates. The following section addresses measures

taken to manage the issue because absenteeism has been demonstrated to have devastating effects on students and organizations.

Elimination and Management of Chronic Absenteeism by the Federal Government

The government has been making efforts in the face of the challenges posed by absenteeism. The deleterious effects cataloged in this review are a significant concern to lawmakers and administrators within the U.S. school system and beyond. This section focuses on governmental responses to the phenomena.

For decades, schools and educational policymakers have sidelined controversial topics involving effectively eradicating chronic absenteeism in schools when discussing federally earmarked or state funding allocated to schools in the United States (M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021). Addressing the connections among students with disabilities, chronic absenteeism rates, problematic familial factors, and how effective interventions may reduce chronic absenteeism in U.S. schools. Weisz (2022) stated that data from a U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection report on students with disabilities' chronic absenteeism in 2018 highlighted the ideals of chronic absenteeism in academia. Schools governed under ESSA are mandated to report to state and federal agencies when their students are absent for 10% or more school days in 1 academic year. Weisz argued that U.S. policymakers needed more sustainable school data to fully understand related factors and effective interventions that reduced students with disabilities' chronic absenteeism rates.

According to Weisz (2022), the following primary factors were found to affect students' chronic absenteeism rates: (a) students, (b) families, (c) schools, and (d) communities. Weisz stated that younger students' chronic absences are linked to family-specific factors rather than student, school, or community factors. In contrast, all four elements influenced upper-grade students' chronic absences. Weisz also scouted various evidence-based resources to determine the causes and consequences of chronic absenteeism and potentially helpful intervention programs for students diagnosed with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. Weisz found that students diagnosed with disabilities were 1.5 times more likely to have chronic absences than their nondisabled peers. Kearney et al. (2022) reported that worldwide, during 1 academic school year, 1 in 5 disabled children and adolescents, or 17.8%, was absent from their schools, compared to the U.S. rate of 16.0%. Kearney et al. stated that students were absent from their schools for personal, social, or unexplained environmental reasons.

Due to the consistent focus on chronic absenteeism as an unsolved problem in education, federal and state policies and laws have emphasized valid data collection from U.S. public schools (Capretta et al., 2024). In a report to the National Center on Educational Outcomes, Capretta et al. (2024) examined students' chronic absenteeism data from the 2018–2019 Attendance Works (2023) and the U.S. Department of Education, which contained chronic absenteeism research data for more than 10,000 K–12 schools in the United States. Capretta et al. specified how chronic absences affected students diagnosed with disabilities far more significantly than their nondisabled peers.

Elementary students diagnosed with disabilities were 2.0 times more likely to experience chronic academic and social deficiencies than their nondisabled same-aged peers (Capretta et al., 2024). Capretta et al. also found that approximately 17% of students diagnosed with disabilities were more likely to incur one or more out-of-school suspensions when compared to their same-aged nondisabled peers, whose out-of-school suspension rate was approximately 7% out-of-school suspension rate. Gakh et al. (2020) examined a United States Department of Education 2018–2019 report on student attendance and discovered that students' chronic absenteeism rates correlated to other attendance problems, such as school refusal behaviors and high rates of psychiatric comorbidities in students. Chronic absenteeism encompassed excused and unexcused absences related to missing school days for illnesses, truancies, family functions, unplanned reasons, or even homelessness.

Chronic Absenteeism and Environmental Impacts

Although governmental initiatives have attempted to address absenteeism directly, there are other environmental concerns that affect the problem. Ancillary causes, such as environmental conditions, also influence absenteeism rates among student populations. This section highlights the literature on this phenomenon.

Empirical research conducted by Hamlin (2021) showed that chronic absenteeism rates among 823,753 Grade 6–12 students in public schools in New York City's schools, were affected by environmental pollutants. Hamlin examined data collected on each student's academic performance and perspectives on their school climate and discovered

that numerous health issues such as long-term illnesses, asthma, and obesity affected students' chronic absenteeism rates. Hamlin also discovered that environmental pollutants analogies, such as factory, fossil fuel, and air pollutants, affected students' mental and physical development. Pollutant corollaries included stunted developmental growth, reproductive complications, neurological and cognitive executive dysfunctions, immunologic instabilities, and respiratory allergens. If left unchecked by school leaders and teachers, these same toxic pollutants could cause hematological morbidities (Hamlin, 2021).

Deteriorating school facilities factors included airborne industrial pollutants, neurotoxins, deteriorating classrooms, and feelings of insecurity while attending school. Childs and Lofton (2021) stated that underlying environmental and school infrastructure issues contribute to students' chronic absenteeism rates. Hamlin (2021) found that critical elements such as deteriorating school facilities, school climate, and student perspectives on feeling safe while at school critically affected students' academic performance and chronic absenteeism rates.

Chronic Absenteeism and School Climate Connections

Chronic absenteeism among the student population has been shown to harm school climate and culture. Not only does absenteeism affect educational outcomes for the students missing class, but it also has network effects on the wider student population. This section focuses on the broader implications of absenteeism on school climate.

In another quantitative study, Beld et al. (2021) stated that students with special needs attending residential schools in the Netherlands were greatly affected by their school climate, which was associated with their identification of general self-worth and academic concepts. Beld et al. stated that data were collected from 184 Dutch boys and young men aged 11 to 24 from March 2013 to April 2014. All study participants had severe emotional, behavioral, or academic behaviorisms, and a residential youth care institution was determined the best or least restrictive environment for the participants.

Beld et al. (2021) stated that school climate was defined as what students perceived in their academic, physical, and social classroom settings. Beld et al. stated that school climate affected students' learning academic and social behaviors, adaptation to their classroom structure, and development of social relationships with other students and teachers. Beld et al. reported a negative correlation ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$) between students' perceptions of unstructured classroom environments and receiving support from their teachers. The study's results supported educational theories that a lack of support from teachers significantly affected school climate. In a 2018–2019 Philadelphia school districtwide survey of students' perspectives of their school climate, 23% felt unwelcome in their schools (Comly et al., 2020).

Chang et al. (2021b) examined a 2020 American Institutes for Research and Attendance Works report that identified barriers and interventions for reducing students' chronic absenteeism rates in kindergarten to Grade 3. Chang et al. discovered that schools and teachers devoted to educating their students in a culturally diverse, equitable, and

nurturing enriched learning environment promoted daily student attendance rates. Negative student-teacher relationships in educational settings may include biased conflict, lack of effective communication and collaboration, mistrust, or minimal acceptance, leading to high chronic absenteeism rates (Melvin et al., 2019).

Chang et al. (2021b) found that in schools burdened with problematic student absences, disengaging content area curricula created a toxic school climate due to a student population that included students of color, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students diagnosed with disabilities. Chang et al. also examined data from a U.S. Department of Education report on students' chronic absenteeism from the 2020–2021 academic school year, revealing that over eight million students were chronically absent from their schools due partly to an unfavorable school climate.

In a quantitative study, Bacon and Kearney (2020) discovered how school climate affected student absenteeism rates. They explained that a school's climate is a multidimensional conceptual framework involving students' individual and group relationships within their physical environment at school. Bacon and Kearney administered the School Climate and Academic Mindset Inventory using a chi square automatic interaction detection analysis conducted with approximately 128,381 fourth through 12th-grade students across the southwestern United States. Results from the survey revealed that students with 15% or 20% chronic absenteeism rates missed school for the following reasons: (a) not feeling safe at school, (b) not feeling supported academically by teachers and peers, and (c) there was a perceived lack of adequate

technological equipment and support. Given these constraints, researchers have further posited the importance of school climate in ameliorating chronic absenteeism among special needs students.

Chronic Absenteeism Affects Students With Special Needs in Inclusive Settings

The previous section addressed how absenteeism affects school climate. The causal relationship may also be flipped, with school climate providing a more inclusive environment and improving outcomes. This section highlights the impact of inclusivity in schools and how it affects students with special needs.

M. A. Gottfried and Ansari (2021) stated a gap existed in qualitative studies regarding how chronic absenteeism affected students diagnosed with disabilities in inclusive learning environments. M. A. Gottfried et al. explored student chronic absenteeism data from a 2016–2018 report on student absences in New York City public schools to determine if the chronic absenteeism rates of first through sixth-grade students diagnosed with one or multiple disabilities and their nondisabled peers in inclusive educational settings in the same school differed based on the severity of students' disabilities. Students diagnosed with an emotional disability accounted for 4.8% of the total student population, whereas those with a learning disability accounted for 39.9% of the total student population. Additionally, students diagnosed with emotional and learning disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020).

Locquiao et al. (2021) conducted research with 4,335 Grades 3 to 8 students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities in a school district in the western United States. Results showed significant relationships between school absences and their abilities to pass state-standard English language arts and mathematics tests. This relationship demonstrated that as the number of days students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities were absent from school increased, their academic results in several content areas decreased. Table 2 includes regression data, indicating that Grade 3 students' odds of passing an English test decreased from 95% when missing 5.5–10 days to 61% when missing more than 20.5 days of school. These findings are significant as they highlight the significant impact chronic absenteeism can have on the academic success of students diagnosed with disabilities.

Table 2

Logistic Regression Results on Passing the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium Among Third-Grade Students

Absences	ELA	Mathematics
5.5–10 days	-.44/.95	.134/.87
10.5–15 days	-.153/.85	.244/.78
15.5–20 days	-.428/.65	.501/.60
≥ 20.5 days	-.481/.61	.751/.47

Note. Source: Locquiao et al. (2021).

The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. This information may help to reduce future absenteeism within the local school district. Decreasing the negative impact of absenteeism on academic performance may increase student learning outcomes.

Implications

The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. Chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities causes long-term concerns for schools, students, special educators, parents, and communities. In this study, I collected data through semistructured one-on-one interviews with nine Title I special education teachers to explore their perceptions about why students with disabilities have high chronic absenteeism rates and barriers that have affected their attendance. The qualitative research findings might provide district-level education planners within the study state's public school system with efficient and effective measures of how to mitigate students with disabilities' chronic absenteeism rates throughout the school district to support each region's student attendance accountability policies and procedures for reducing students' chronic absenteeism (TEA, 2021). This qualitative research study may also help schools and districts develop efficient, professional development opportunities for special education teachers to identify possible barriers to their students' early attendance to impede chronic absenteeism.

This qualitative study could provide results from the participants' interviews that could support a 3-day school-wide professional development seminar to help teachers understand and mitigate the barriers that affect chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities. The study may result in a white paper that addresses how

studying this problem might be useful to any educational setting. Lloyd et al. (2023) explained that white papers were prolific marketing tools to support key decision-makers and influencers while justifying and implementing solutions in academia.

Although the findings of this study may not be generalizable, they might help address how chronic absenteeism affects students with disabilities' future personal and social development. Socially, students diagnosed with disabilities chronic absenteeism might cause long-term effects of lack of interpersonal skill sets, societal withdrawal, loss of jobs and wages, and other detrimental delays in social and academic development (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020; Maki & Adams, 2020). One example is that chronically absent students typically score 5% to 11% lower on formative or summative assessments than their peers (M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021). The findings of this qualitative research study might help to address how chronic absenteeism affects students with disabilities academic performance by providing special education teachers, parents, school administration teams, and community leaders with data to support school-wide attendance initiatives (i.e., mentorship programs and parent engagement specialist) to mitigate school absences.

Summary

As demonstrated in the literature review, students diagnosed with disabilities are chronically absent more than their nondisabled peers. The literature review for this qualitative study supports the need for the research questions and the needed responses of special educator participants on what perceived barriers might affect students diagnosed

with special needs attendance rates in schools. The literature review for this qualitative study also supports the idea that additional qualitative research is needed to explain how societal, familial, teacher, and family relationships might affect students' behaviors and attitudes toward school attendance, which is consistent with Bandura's social learning theory.

The deduction from this literature review was that there was a need to examine the relationship between chronic absenteeism and disability amongst students, particularly in the context of teachers' perspectives and the Title I school situated in this study's site. Special education children in the United States have a chronic absenteeism rate of 22%, higher than the 15% rate seen among their nondisabled peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2023a). The problem of chronic absenteeism in American schools affects every state. In Texas, chronic absenteeism is defined as 10% or more of school days missed, excused, or not (TEA, 2021). Low school attendance is a systemic problem with wide-ranging effects on society at large, including the economy, culture, environment, and politics.

A study by Thongseiratch and Chandeying (2020) on the educational, social, and psychological impacts of chronically absent students indicated that about 15% of primary and secondary school students in the United States and Europe were affected by chronic illnesses, resulting in higher chronic absenteeism rates. Thongseiratch and Chandeying further discovered that the academic performance of chronically ill students was lower than that of their healthy school-aged classmates. According to research by Thongseiratch

and Chandeying, children experiencing academic, social, and psychological difficulties were much more likely to miss 16 school days per school year than their peers who frequently missed 3.

My research location was Tigers Elementary School (pseudonym), located in a sizable school district in the south-central United States. Students with disabilities in a south-central school in a south-central state had a higher prevalence of chronic absenteeism than their nondisabled peers, which is the concern that prompted this basic qualitative study (Bundshuh et al., 2021; Dannow et al., 2020; M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020; TEA, 2021). Students in this south-central state are considered chronically absent if they miss 10 or more school days per school year (TEA, 2021). Therefore, public schools, special educators, principals, parents, and politicians must work together to reduce student absences among those who have been identified as having a disability (NCLD, 2023).

Section 2 focuses on the qualitative research design and approach by highlighting why the chosen method was most appropriate for this study and why other methods were not appropriate. I also discuss the plan for data collection and data analysis. Section 3 entails the project of the research study, and Section 4 contains my reflections and the research study's conclusions.

Section 2: Methodology

Introduction

The problem that prompted this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state. More reliable information regarding the perspectives of special educators of students with disabilities may help school administrators and special education teachers clarify how to address barriers related to reducing chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site.

Research Design and Approach

For this study's purpose, I used a qualitative approach and a case study research design. According to Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative researchers seek to study the nature of the focal phenomenon by asking study participants their perspectives through detailed research questions, making observations, assessing complexities in possible intervention methods, and implementing intervention methods that involve all stakeholders. In this study, I explored special education teachers' perceived barriers that students diagnosed with disabilities might experience that cause them to miss 10 or more school days during the academic year. The findings might be used by special educators and administrators at Tigers Elementary School to identify opportunities to improve attendance for students

with disabilities. Understanding the perspectives of a small group of special education teachers regarding a specific problem and location might help school-wide groups of special education teachers understand how to address this specific problem at their locations.

Conducting this study involved utilizing reliable contextual methods to show that if this research is replicated using the same context, methodology, and target population, similar results may be obtained by other qualitative researchers. Bergen and Labonté (2020) noted that qualitative researchers should discern objectivity by ensuring that their qualitative research study findings are conducive to the results of the experience and ideas of the study's participants and not the characteristics and preferences of the qualitative researcher. In qualitative research, researchers triangulate data to mitigate researcher bias (Bergen & Labonté, 2020). The findings of this study were confirmed through the triangulation of the research data collected during the qualitative research study.

Conducting qualitative research studies provides researchers with a better understanding of why a phenomenon occurs, whereas conducting quantitative research studies provides researchers with generalized findings, opportunities for scientific inquiry, and the ability to address local and national issues that affect large populations (Saldaña, 2016). Busetto et al. (2020) stated that qualitative research studies allow researchers the flexibility to collect data and focus on specific phenomena to make meaningful comparisons between study participants and study sites. According to

Johnson et al. (2020), qualitative studies allow researchers to design, conduct, and report on concise phenomena.

Bazen et al. (2021) noted the following five common methods of qualitative research studies: grounded theory, narrative, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology. Grounded theory studies focus on exploring a generalized theory based on a specific abstract analytical phenomenon (Bazen et al., 2021). The credible data needed for this research study required study participants to offer personal experiences about a specific topic of interest in special education, not a generalized theory. Therefore, a grounded theory approach would not have been appropriate for this research study because specific phenomena were needed for this qualitative research study.

Narrative research studies focus on research conducted to explore personal narratives based on study phenomena (Sayman & Cornell, 2021). The enriched data needed for this qualitative research study required special education teachers' personal narratives. The study needed the perspectives of special education teachers concerning specific phenomena affecting the chronic absenteeism rates of students with disabilities. A narrative research theory approach was appropriate for this research study because narrative accounts of the study participants were explored, leading to enriched data.

Ethnography research studies focus on descriptive interpretations of a social or cultural group of people that require researchers to collect data through document analysis, observations, and interviews (Draper & Bartolome, 2021). The credible data needed for this research study did not require interviewing special education teachers.

The research needed in this study was not exclusively based on describing or interpreting a cultural or social system. An ethnography research theory approach would not have been appropriate for this study because no description or interpretation of a cultural group or social group was needed.

Case study research focuses on researchers exploring individuals, groups, events, and settings while processing phenomena grounded by a particular measure or case in a real-world context. This type of research involves identifying a situation and a resolution to the situation so that I can examine whether the treatment method was successful (Klein-Hammer et al., 2021). The need for research data, as was pursued in this qualitative study, stemmed from a real-world context that seeks special education teachers' perspectives about which barrier elements might affect chronic absenteeism rates of students with disabilities. There are no researchers focused specifically on why students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state (M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021). A case study research approach would not have been appropriate for this research study because of the limitations inherent in reviewing one case when there may be additional possible reasons left undisclosed. Eliciting special education teachers’ perspectives calls for a more open-ended approach.

Phenomenology research studies focus on researchers examining the meanings that populations of people make of their lived experiences (Coşkun, 2020). The viable research needed for this type of qualitative research study involves examining the

possible barrier elements of students with disabilities who have chronic absenteeism rates as documented by special education teachers. A phenomenological research approach would not have been appropriate because examining the reasonings behind a specific population's lived experiences would not have provided a comprehensive picture of the problem of chronic absenteeism.

I did not choose a quantitative study because the intent of this research was not to seek or examine research using a deductive approach to test an objective theory in special education (M. Gottfried et al., 2024). A qualitative research study allowed a subjective approach to examine the perspectives of a particular group of educators on a problematic issue in the field of special education. Discovering barrier elements that might impede students with disabilities' school attendance rates is sorely needed in special education departments. Educational researchers choose qualitative studies to conduct semistructured one-on-one interviews based on comprehensive research questions. As Niesz et al. (2020) noted, special education researchers might use qualitative research design methods to understand the perspectives of students, teachers, and families with ties to special education. A qualitative research design could not have helped to address the cognitive, behavioral, and social contextual factors of barrier elements that affect chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities.

Tomaszewski et al. (2020) stated that a qualitative research case study approach is relevant when researchers seek to understand the how and why relationships between phenomena and context. Therefore, qualitative research allows researchers to explore the

relevant characteristics of an underrepresented population (Osbeck & Antczak, 2021). A basic qualitative research study provides a rich and detailed description of any phenomenon that a quantitative method study might not address. Conducting a qualitative research study may help uncover contextual conditions (i.e., possible barrier elements that affect chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities) because understanding these conditions is relevant to the phenomena in the study. A quantitative study was not relevant because this study required more than a scientific or numerical representation of the target population (Osbeck & Antczak, 2021). A basic qualitative research study design was the best approach to answer the research questions and uncover data to assist school district personnel who want to reduce chronic absenteeism rampant in the special education student population.

Participants

The targeted school district for this study has 31 elementary schools and is in a rural region in the south-central United States. The targeted population for the study included Title I Grade K–5 special education teachers employed in the school district. Each study participant had to have 4 or more years of teaching experience in a K–5 special education resource, FSC, or inclusion classroom setting. In addition, participants had to be working or to have worked previously with special education students diagnosed with disabilities who had chronic absenteeism issues. This requirement ensured that selected participants had experiences with various elements that affect students who have disabilities as well as chronic absenteeism rates, and that might

provide deeper insight into this systemic school problem. I interviewed nine teachers who met the study criteria to obtain elementary education special education teachers' perspectives. This sample size was manageable and large enough to achieve data saturation through semistructured interviews (Bryman, 2016).

Gaining Access to Participants

Access to the participants occurred in three stages. The first stage involved seeking approval to conduct research from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB). After receiving approval from the Walden IRB, I sought approval from the targeted school district. I went to ABC and XYZ to receive district-level approval.

After receiving approval through the Walden University IRB and the district administration, the third stage was soliciting study participants. I obtained a list of potential participants and their district email from the district office. Next, I sent an email (see Appendix C) to all the special education teachers within the study site's school district, asking for their participation. The email contained information about the study, including the purpose, goals, and objective of the study, as well as participant inclusion criteria. I replied to positive email responses seeking to agree on a mutually convenient time to meet for the interview. The email contained the informed consent form and asked each potential participant to sign and return it before the semistructured one-on-one interview.

The next step after receiving signed consent forms from participants was sending a follow-up email with detailed information about accessing the Zoom platform. After the

interview, I presented each participant with a $10 gift card to a coffee shop to thank them for volunteering their time to participate.

Establishing a Researcher–Participant Working Relationship

As a special education teacher in a K–5 Title I elementary school in the study site school district, I recognized that establishing professional relationships with my study participants was vital to the success of this qualitative research study. Participants were informed that they could end their participation at any time during the semistructured one-on-one interview process. I conducted each Zoom interview in a confidential and secure location. Each study participant was informed of confidentiality and anonymity measures (nondisclosure of participant names) taken during the interview process.

The focus of this study was a concern in the field of education. Stark and Koslouski (2021) stated that special educators' emotional experiences affect how effective instructional practices are delivered to students; how interpersonal relationships with other teachers, school administration teams, parents, and stakeholders are formed; and the educator's health and well-being. To maintain confidentiality in my research, all study volunteers were assigned a pseudonym code using "Teacher" and a number from 1–12. For example, the first volunteer I interviewed was coded "Teacher 1."

Protection of Participants' Rights

Ensuring that study participants are protected and the research process is conducted with fidelity are intrinsic components of qualitative research studies (Olson & Roberts, 2020). In alignment with research guidelines put forth by the Walden University

IRB, I conducted all interviews in a confidential and secure location through the Zoom application. Before conducting each interview, I informed the participant that confidentiality measures (i.e., nondisclosure of study participants' names) were being followed throughout the study process.

All technological materials were stored in a password-protected personal computer. All paper-based materials were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office, and I am the only person with a key. I will destroy or delete all data materials collected during this research study and safely keep them within 5 years of the research study's publication of findings. Participants were allowed to check the gathered data for accuracy through member checks. I gave each study participant a written summary of the findings of this research, from which they could expand on ideas or choose to delete any comments made during the interview process. I included each participant's feedback in the findings of this qualitative research.

Setting and Sample Participants

Tigers Elementary School consists of 629 students and 43 teachers. The grade levels range from Pre-K through fifth grade. For this qualitative project study, I asked special education teachers about their perspectives regarding the reasons for students' chronic absenteeism and the barriers that affect their attendance. According to Heyne et al. (2020), school administrators, teachers, practitioners, researchers, and policymakers have not sufficiently prioritized student attendance problems due to the need for quality

and enriched data to develop comprehensive assessment and intervention measures to address these attendance issues.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The targeted population for this study was Title I Grade K–5 special education teachers employed in the school district. Each study participant had to have 4 or more years of teaching experience in a K–5 special education resource, FSC, or inclusion classroom setting. In addition, participants had to be working or to have previously worked with special education students diagnosed with disabilities who had chronic absenteeism issues.

Sampling Technique

Staller (2021) stated that purposeful sampling is meaningful for statistical analysis because this type of sampling involves identifying a specific population that is significant to the research study and ensures that the population is randomized. According to Saldaña and Mallette (2017), selecting study participants for a qualitative study using a purposeful sample allowed a collection of detailed information from special educators about students with special needs who have high chronic absenteeism rates. The purpose of using purposive sampling for this study was that the chosen participants provided enriching perspectives and insight into chronic absenteeism among students in special education who have been diagnosed with disabilities (M. A. Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022).

Data Collection

The problem explored in this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state. Semistructured one-on-one interviews were the primary data source for this qualitative project study. I used a responsive interview model founded by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Rubin and Rubin stated that the responsive interview model directly represents the life-like experiences of individuals shared with researchers during the interviewing process. The interviews included open-ended questions, allowing the participants to share real-life narratives, descriptions, and interpretations with me.

Interviews

Before starting the data collection process, I contacted my peer debriefer for assistance in ensuring the data collected in the research study was enriched and accurate. Hosseini and Horbach (2023) stated that peer reviewer systems in qualitative research ensure that researchers address scientific literature's quality, credibility, and integrity. I collected data through one-on-one semistructured interviews using open-ended questions (see Appendix D) through Zoom to explore the perspectives of nine Title I elementary school special educators serving students with special needs with chronic absenteeism rates.

Qualitative researchers utilizing semistructured interviews allowed study participants to share their perspectives on barrier elements that affected students with

disabilities' chronic absenteeism rates. Before the interview, qualitative researchers usually have time to carefully construct the semistructured one-on-one interview questions with fidelity (M. A. Gottfried et al., 2020). Open-ended interview questions were appropriate for this research study because they allowed participants to express their answers freely and with confidentiality.

Qualitative research allowed each special educator to experience a relaxed and confidential setting so that I can describe, observe, and interpret the nature of the phenomena for each study participant (Olson & Roberts, 2020). Semistructured interviews featuring open-ended questions allowed each study participant to express their perspectives on the specific topic of this research study in a safe and confidential setting. All participants were asked the same open-ended questions. The semistructured interview questions were designed to allow each special educator the same nonbias opportunities.

At the beginning of the interview process, I thanked all participants for volunteering to participate in this qualitative research study. The next step involved reviewing participants' rights with each of them and obtaining the consent form. I then asked each study participant if they had any questions before beginning the interview process. Once all the participant's questions were answered, the interview kicked off. All interviews were recorded using the Zoom application, and each interview lasted between 45–60 minutes.

Systems for Keeping Track of Data

I used the Zoom application to conduct my interviews after obtaining consent from each participant. After an individual agreed to participate, I sent an individualized Zoom link with the agreed-upon date and time. After each interview, I transcribed the data with a subjective interpretation with the assistance of TranscribeMe!, a professional and HIPAA-compliant transcription service (TranscribeMe!, n.d.). Point and Baruch (2023 stated that qualitative researchers conduct interviews and transcribe data based on the researcher's subjective interpretation of their data collection. All data were kept for 5 years and then confidentially destroyed using a paper shredder. All recorded semistructured interviews were saved on a flash drive and kept for 5 years after the completion of the qualitative study. After 5 years, all the data were destroyed.

Role of the Researcher

In a qualitative study, the role of the researcher is to access information from participants, analyze the data, and ensure that bias does not skew the resulting data (Shaw et al., 2020). Bergen and Labonté (2020) stated that qualitative researchers can minimize bias when conducting semistructured one-on-one interviews in a private setting, which reduces noise distractions and provides more confidentiality. In addition, with the global pandemic (COVID-19) catalyst, more researchers were being forced to utilize online data collection methods due to social distancing regulations (Topping et al., 2021). For this research study, one-on-one interviews were conducted using the Zoom web conferencing platform to ensure privacy for some participants who may feel more comfortable in a

familiar setting and allow more open sharing about their experiences concerning excessive absences within the population of children with special needs. As a special education teacher with over 6 years of experience, my understanding of the barrier elements that affected students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates had been a concern for me, my school, the district, and the state.

Researcher Bias

To prevent any research bias, I ensured that the research met the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Stahl & King, 2020). Bergen and Labonté (2020) stated that while conducting semistructured one-on-one interviews, qualitative researchers collect credible data to establish trustworthiness within their research. To ensure credibility, random sampling was utilized when selecting the study participants. Credibility was also attained through triangulation, providing me with diverse perspectives on why students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a large urban school district in the south-central United States.

According to Bergen and Labonté (2020), qualitative researchers should seek transferability in their study's findings so that one study can be applied to other research studies. Sufficient contextual research fieldwork and the resulting data were explained to enable other researchers to determine transferability into other research efforts. Bergen and Labonté also stated that qualitative researchers must employ reliable techniques to

show that if their work is replicated in the same context, using the same methodology and study participants, similar results would be obtained by other qualitative researchers.

From these voluntary interviews, bias in the data collection and analysis was minimized through coding (Saldaña & Mallette, 2017). My professional position as a special education teacher allowed me to communicate with other special educators in the district. I did not hold a position of authority over any of the possible participants in this study. Additionally, I did not have a personal relationship with the research study participants outside of school. My professional relationships with potential research study participants did not affect my data collection, data analysis, or reliability reporting of the data.

I used two strategies to prevent any bias from affecting the data analysis and reporting of the findings. The first strategy was to collect data with fidelity, and the second was to critically analyze the data to explain the principles and precepts of Bandura's social learning theory. I examined researcher bias by collecting data using the snowball sampling method and triangulating the data.

Data Analysis

Analyzing collected data documents is an intrinsic component of understanding the phenomena in qualitative research studies. According to Saldaña and Mallette (2017), qualitative researchers systematically analyze the academic, social, or environmental elements that might affect the specific qualitative study's phenomenon. When qualitative researchers "code," a single word or phrase is derived from the data (e.g., semistructured

one-on-one interviews, transcripts, field notes, observations) to represent or rephrase the data for comprehension (Saldaña, 2016).

I analyzed the collected data in two phases. The first phase was initial coding or open coding. Saldaña (2016) stated that "initial coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and differences" (p. 115). The second phase was axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña stated that axial coding is used "to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones" (p. 244). I coded and re-coded the data for accuracy. Bryda and Costa (2023) stated that "Tools such as NVivo, Atlas.ti, WebQDA, and MAXQDA under the CAQDAS umbrella have revolutionized qualitative research" (p.1). Computer-based programs can be more accurate and efficient than the traditional paper-and-pencil methods for data entry. After coding, the data were re-coded for accuracy. The data were collected and stored using an Excel-based cataloging system that allowed me to separate and compile data during the coding process.

According to Saldaña (2016), qualitative researchers develop comprehensive measures of the phenomenon related to their research focus. This basic qualitative study involved a careful analysis of special educators' perspectives of students with special needs to answer the research questions and explore the social, educational, and ethical factors that might optimize the collected data from the special educators.

Validity and Trustworthiness of Data

Qualitative researchers conducting interviews develop practices and strategies to increase the internal and external reliability of the data collected from participants (Quintão et al., 2020). According to Saldaña (2016), member checking is a credible process where study participants are encouraged by the researcher to read over transcripts to understand the data analysis process. According to Motulsky (2021), member checking is a viable method for the study participants to confirm or deny the accuracy or interpretations made by the researcher during the interview process. Ensuring that data are accurate and credible standardizes data triangulation during the research process (Motulsky, 2021).

Lemon and Hayes (2020) stated that data triangulation reduces risks that researchers "Identify inconsistencies or breaks in emergent patterns in the findings that can lead to deeper understanding of the phenomenon; inconsistencies are a strength, not a weakness" (p. 606). Abulela and Harwell (2020) argued that researchers must properly handle all forms of data using concise cataloging methods to avoid undesirable reliability measures during data collection procedures. Analytic memos and Excel cataloging helped deter researcher bias. Lungu (2022) stated that "The foundations of coding are presented through an iterative summary ranging from introducing codes to the fundamental aspects of coding methods and techniques, to the art of writing analytical memos and providing visual representations of the data" (p. 233). Collecting analytic memos and Excel

cataloging helped ensure that the data were accurate and that researcher bias was minimized.

Evidence of Quality

In the data collection process, researchers solicit study participants' views of the credibility of a study's findings and interpretations through member checking (Creswell & Báez, 2020). My study participants played an intrinsic role in the data collection process. Creswell and Báez (2020) stated that qualitative researchers should ask their study participants to examine rough drafts of the researcher's work and findings as measures for providing alternative language and critical observation dialogue for data analysis. To further aid the researcher, a peer reviewer provides additional confidence in data interpretations through shared peer debriefings to ensure that the scientific literature and data collection procedures are authentic and trustworthy (Creswell & Báez, 2020). Peer reviewers might also support the researcher's critical analysis approach to highlighting the meaningful contribution of the research findings (Dodgson, 2021). Because the data were collected and triangulated during this qualitative research study, I collaborated with my peer reviewer to ensure that the conclusions of the research findings were grounded in authentic data.

Peer Debriefing

This research also involved peer debriefing to improve credibility and reliability. Peer debriefing involved consulting with a second party or providing an external review of the research questions, interview protocol, and general feedback on the data collection

and analysis process. Researchers may develop blind spots in their work or have unidentified biases that skew the data collection and analysis process. A peer reviewer can challenge these biases where they arise. In this research, I used a peer debriefer to review the interview questions and protocols to validate the questions and vet any issues in the questions. Upon completing the semistructured interviews, the peer reviewer further examined the collected data, provided feedback on the transcripts, and ensured accurate identification of themes.

Discrepant Cases

According to Creswell and Báez (2020), as data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, a researcher's working hypothesis might be affected by negative or rival evidence as the inquiry advances. As a precautionary measure, during this qualitative research study, I reported any negative analysis to my peer reviewer as a measure for providing a realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study. Severin and Chataway (2021) stated that peer reviews of qualitative research benefit the reliability and quality of a researcher's data findings by checking for accuracy, appropriate methodology, novelty, and relevance to the scientific literature. By collaborating with my peer reviewer on data collected through member checking and data triangulation, all data collected were free of researcher bias (Creswell & Báez , 2020).

Data Analysis

The problem addressed by this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a

south-central school located in a south-central state. More reliable information regarding the perspectives of special educators of students with disabilities may help school administrators and special education teachers clarify how to address barriers related to reducing chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities. I used one-on-one semistructured interviews to collect data for this study, where participants were invited for a Zoom interview through their email addresses. Data were collected from nine participants with experience teaching in special education institutions. After completing interviews and recording the transcripts, each transcript was sent to participants for member checking. The participants sent the transcripts back to me after confirming their accuracy. I then used a six-step thematic analysis process as described by Braun and Clarke (2023) and Saldaña (2016), as follows:

Phase 1: Familiarization With Data

Phase 1 of data immersion involved the reading and rereading of the transcripts several times while at the same time listening to the audio files recorded following each Zoom call. Preliminary notes were developed that related to the responses of the specific participants to the issues addressed in this process. Further, it also helped me develop some ideas and generate some preliminary feel for the data. Notetaking involved recording what the participants were thinking, but it led to understanding why there is chronic absenteeism in public schools.

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

From the data analysis, I identified some information and created codes of original notes for each participant's responses. The codes were then labeled uniquely. Codes in this study were used in the context of short notice and phrases where special education teachers gave their reasons why there was chronic absenteeism in schools among students diagnosed with disabilities. The generation of initial codes is in line with the first phase, open coding, as Saldaña (2016) suggested. The coding was completed using NVivo 14—a computer package for qualitative data analysis. I identified potential themes and patterns from the original codes. Tables 3 and 4 show how the initial codes were formulated in clusters in response to each research question.

Table 3

Codes for Research Question 1

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
*Attending clinics appointments outside	*Doesn't attract talent	* Excuses from parents	* Feeling defeated
* Illnesses causing absenteeism	* Lack of staffs	* Lack of support from parents	* Grade level too rigorous
	*Underfunded public schools	* Parents giving in to kid meltdowns	* Students attending ABA during school days
		* Some Parents don't care about their kids welfare	* Students not waking up on time

Note. Codes for Research Question 1/

Table 4

Codes for Research Question 2

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3
* Financial struggle at family level * Parent not in a position to take kids to school * Transportation problem	* Lacking foundational skills * Language barrier * Medicine side effects * No motivation of incentive to attend school * Social barrier * Students attending therapy sessions	* Fear of being sued * Few teachers in schools * Lack of ABA services in schools * Less funding in public schools *Not being able to attract speech language pathologists * Poor pay to therapists

Note. Codes for Research Question 2.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

In this stage, similar codes were clustered to form themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2023), a theme can denote the main points concerning the data in response to the research question and represent the patterns evident from the dataset. I reviewed each code to identify those that were similar and cluster them into broader topics. Saldaña's (2016) second phase of axial coding involves determining the most dominant codes and those that are less important or do not answer the research question.

Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

The third phase of the data analysis process supports quality checking, where I reviewed the entire data set to check whether the formulated themes aligned with the data received. I checked the formulated themes to ensure that they captured the correct perspectives of the participants. In this process, some clusters that were formed related to other kinds or mixed up with others, whereas there were newly formed ideas or themes. Other codes that did not answer the research questions were dropped. The process was

iterative, with each research question aligning with the codebook categories, which were then modified accordingly.

Phase 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Phase 5 entailed cross-examining every theme and defining the themes in relation to research questions. From the generated themes, I came up with names for each theme in a way that addressed the research questions. The themes captured responses from participants concerning the reasons and barriers that have been affecting students diagnosed with disabilities, causing chronic absenteeism in public schools. Table 5 includes the themes that were developed from the codes generated.

Table 5

Codes and their Respective Themes

Codes	Themes
*Attending clinics appointments outside * Illnesses causing absenteeism * Students attending ABA during school days	Theme 1: Student Health and Well-being in Education
*Doesn't attract talent * Lack of staffs *Underfunded public schools	Theme 2: Financial Resources Challenges
* Excuses from parents * Lack of Support from parents * Parents giving in to kid meltdowns * Some parents don't care about their kids welfare	Theme 3: Parental Neglect and its Impact on Child Development
* Feeling defeated * Grade level too rigorous * Students not waking up on time	Theme 4: Students' Personal Challenges
* Financial struggle at family level * Parent not in a position to take kids to school * Transportation problem	Theme 5: Financial Struggle and Work-Life Balance Barriers
* Lacking foundational skills * Language barrier * Medicine side effects * No motivation of incentive to attend school * Social barrier * Students attending therapy sessions	Theme 6: Interpersonal and Health Challenges
* Fear of being sued * Few teachers in schools * Lack of ABA services in schools * Less funding in public schools *Not being able to attract speech language pathologists * Poor pay to therapists	Theme 7: Inadequate Resources in Schools Hindering Accessibility

Note. A summary of codes and their respective themes.

Phase 6: Producing the Report

In the sixth stage, the process comprised the account of the findings in a narrative form that represented the participants' responses. This stage involved providing a vivid description and participant quotes explaining every theme. The data analysis report captured themes coupled with participants' narrations. NVivo 14 was used to store data and organize similarities in coded and grouped texts. In this process, I used NVivo 14 for coding alone and, therefore, only assisted in organizing the data to identify themes. Following the six steps of thematic analysis, seven themes were identified that supported the two research questions.

Data Analysis Results

The problem that prompted this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state (Bundshuh et al., 2021; Dannow et al., 2020; M. A. Gottfried & Ansari, 2021; Mireles-Rios et al., 2020; Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2021). In this south-central state, the school district categorized students missing 10 or more days of school per academic year as being chronically absent (TEA, 2021). Therefore, public school systems, special educators, school administrations, families, policymakers, and stakeholders need to address absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities (NCLD, 2023).

The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the

attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. The chronic absenteeism information could help reduce future absenteeism within the local school district. Decreasing absenteeism's negative impact on academic performance could increase student learning outcomes. Two research questions for this basic qualitative study were designed to address the possible barriers that might affect students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates as perceived by special Title I special education teachers within the study state's public school district.

I conducted one-on-one semistructured interviews with nine participants who were certified Title I special education teachers. The participants had different years of experience teaching students who had been diagnosed with disabilities. To ensure confidentiality, I gave each participant a pseudonym (Teacher 1, Teacher 2, etc.). I scheduled interviews according to the availability of the participants between December 2023 and February 2024. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then sent to participants for member checking.

From the data analyzed, seven themes emerged that helped answer the study's two research questions. RQ1 yielded the following four themes: (a) students' health and well-being in education, (b) poor school infrastructures, (c) parental neglect and its impact on child development, and (d) students' personal challenges. The following three additional themes emerged supporting the second research question: (e) financial struggle and work-life balance barriers, (f) interpersonal and health challenges, and (g) inadequate resources

in schools hindering accessibility. Table 6 includes the summary of the research questions and their respective themes.

Table 6

Research Question and Themes

Research question	Themes
RQ1: What are the perspectives of Title I special education teachers about reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site?	Theme 1: Student Health and Well-being in Education Theme 2: Financial Resources Challenges Theme 3: Parental Neglect and its Impact on Child Development Theme 4: Students' Personal Challenges
RQ2: How do Title I special education teachers perceive barriers affecting students diagnosed with disabilities chronic absenteeism rates at the study site?	Theme 5: Financial Struggle and Work-Life Balance Barriers Theme 6: Interpersonal and Health Challenges Theme 7: Inadequate Resources in Schools Hindering Accessibility

Note. A summary of the research questions and their respective themes.

Seven themes from the data analysis offered a comprehensive answer to the two research questions that guided this study. The four themes related to the first research question—health and well-being of students, poor infrastructures in school, parental neglect, and personal challenges of the students—illuminate some of the reasons and views for chronic absenteeism amongst such students with disabilities. The other three themes that address RQ2 involved financial and work-life barriers, interpersonal and health challenges, and poor school resources. These themes are interlinked and clearly describe specific impediments that affect the attendance rate for this population of students. All these interrelated themes provided depth into the multifaceted understanding

of the intricate causes of chronic absenteeism, as outlined in this study's research objectives.

This section focuses on a narrative discussion with the themes aligned to each research question. Additionally, I have included direct quotes from the participants' interviews and inserted them where appropriate to support the seven themes. Relevant and recent peer-reviewed literature supporting the study topic is provided. Also, the principles and precepts of Bandura's social learning theory connect the guiding framework to support all the findings of this study.

Research Question 1

RQ1 was as follows: What are the perspectives of Title I special education teachers about reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site? RQ1 addressed Title I special education teachers' reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site. Four themes emerged from the data analyzed that answered this research question. Four themes were identified after the open coding process using NVivo 14 software. Four questions from the interview protocol (see Table 7) directly addressed the first research question.

Table 7

Connecting Research Question and the Interview Questions

Research Question 1	Interview questions
What are the perspectives of Title I special education teachers about reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities at the study site?	1. How long have you been a special education teacher within a public school system? 2. How many years of experience in special education do you have teaching students diagnosed with disabilities? 3. What is your take on the relationship between students diagnosed with disabilities and their incidences of absenteeism? 4. Do you think students with disabilities have higher absentee rates than their nondisabled peers?

Note. Table showing Research Question 1 and the interview questions.

The four themes supporting the first research question included (a) students' health and well-being in education, (b) poor school infrastructures, (c) parental neglect and its impact on child development, and (d) students' personal challenges. Table 8 shows the codes that were used to generate each theme.

Table 8

Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Theme 1: Student Health and Well-being in Education	*Attending clinics appointments outside * Illnesses causing absenteeism * Students attending ABA during school days
Theme 2: Financial Resources Challenges	*Doesn't attract talent * Lack of staff *Underfunded public schools
Theme 3: Parental Neglect and its Impact on Child Development	* Excuses from parents * Lack of support from parents * Parents giving in to kid meltdowns * Some parents don't care about their kids' welfare
Theme 4: Students' Personal Challenges	* Feeling defeated * Grade level too rigorous * Students not waking up on time

Note. Table showing a summary of themes and their respective codes.

Theme 1: Student Health and Well-Being in Education

Theme 1 addressed one of the factors that contributed to chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. Findings showed that students fail to attend school for more than 10 days due to their health and well-being in education. Thongseiratch and Chandeying (2020) found that approximately 15% of primary and secondary school students in the United States and Europe were affected by chronic illnesses that resulted in higher chronic absenteeism rates. Thongseiratch and Chandeying also found that 50% of students with chronic illnesses performed academically worse than their healthy school-age peers. Theme 1 related to the findings of this study because participants mentioned that illness was one of the major causes of student absenteeism.

Study participants highlighted that some of the reasons why students with disabilities missed school were because they would attend clinic appointments outside the school. Some students were found to be attending ABA during school days. According to Fisher et al. (2020), the chances of treating a patient with pharmaceutical medications might promote a complete recovery after relapse within 12 months and minimal accrual of disabilities during adolescent years, hoping to return these patients to routine school attendance or life functioning. Such students end up missing school because they must seek medical attention outside the school premises. For example, Teacher 1 mentioned, “And so a lot of these kids are coming in, and they're having to miss to go see a neurologist if they have epilepsy, and that's put them into the program.” Further, Teacher

1 also mentioned that some students must attend outside therapies because the schools would not realistically provide counseling services.

Teachers 2 and 4 also contributed in support of what Teacher 1 had stated regarding outside therapies. Teacher 2 said, “Another thing that I've noticed is outside therapy,” and Teacher 4 talked about “doctors’ appointments.” Attending sessions outside the school indicated that students would miss going to school so that they could see their doctors. Teacher 5 added to the point about students going for therapies outside and said, “There's also the ones that are even more severe that have like physical therapy and doctor's visit. You know it's so a lot of times they're absent and they're not just staying at home is they have outside therapy.” Teacher 9 also discussed the issue of medical appointments causing students’ absenteeism. The teachers noted that students who had to see a therapist or doctors outside the school regularly would often miss school to attend these appointments. Absenteeism due to medical needs was seen as a major challenge that affected students’ ability to participate in their education fully.

Teacher 1 described how a parent had to allow their child to stay at home because they had a fever. Teacher 1 paraphrased one of the parents who said, “You won't let me send him to school when he's running a fever.” Norton and Southon (2021) focused on intensive academic, social, and emotional factors that affected students with special needs who were diagnosed with cognitive and chronic pain disorders. Data from the 2020 Department of Education & Queensland Government revealed that students with chronic pain aged 5-18 years were absent approximately 22% of school days within a 60-day

period of the school term. In a subsequent 2020-2021 Department of Education and Training Victoria, Australia study conducted on approximately 793 5 to 18 years school-aged children with psychiatric/cognitive and mobile disabilities, Melvin et al. (2023) found that students absences occurred 7.9% every 20 days of the school term. Students were primarily absent for illness (32.0%), medical appointments (24.2%), and unknown reasons (43.8%). The psychiatric disorder condition (depression) was mentioned by study participants to cause chronic absenteeism.

Teacher 2 also showed that students will be chronically absent from school due to chronic illnesses they have to nurse at home. Teacher 4 also discussed that students who were genuinely sick tended to miss school most of the time. Teacher 4 stated, “So the diagnosis which would lead them to qualify as a student with an emotional disturbance would have higher rates of absenteeism than students who would be qualified through something such as being diagnosed as being on the autism spectrum.” Teachers shared how students with psychiatric disorders, such as depression and chronic physical illnesses, contributed to higher cases of chronic absenteeism: needing outside therapies, medical appointments, and staying home sick had an impact on their education.

Study participants also mentioned that students would miss school because they were attending their ABA sessions during school days. Due to the unavailability of these services being offered in school, students would end up foregoing school to honor their ABA sessions. For example, Teacher 1 pointed out that students would miss up to 32 hours every week when attending their ABA. The teacher suggested that students could

utilize weekend days, but insurance companies needed the students during weekdays when the students were supposed to be in school. Teacher 1 said, “So it's during a typical school day when these therapies are occurring.” Often, it had been expected that parents would favor taking their children for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy sessions scheduled during the school day. Due to the apparent lack of resources and specialized staff in schools, accommodating all the therapeutic needs of the students with disabilities proved challenging. As a result, these students had to miss essential class time to receive the critical ABA services, which their parents felt were of great importance to the development and well-being of such students.

In the first theme, I described that some of the reasons why students miss school were that some were attending their medical appointments outside school, others were nursing their illnesses outside of school, and others were attending their ABA sessions during school hours. Study participants helped to highlight that chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities was linked to their health and well-being. Teachers participated openly when answering the interview questions.

Findings for Theme 1 elucidate Bandura’s theory (1969) study, explaining to a great extent the reasons for absenteeism in students with disabilities. The theme brings out involvement in elements of health and well-being aspects, such as attending appointments with doctors, handling chronic diseases, and attending sessions of ABA therapy, as primary drivers for chronic absenteeism in this population. These elements agree with the part of the framework describing individual, family, and school-related

variables that affect the attendance of children with disabilities. Theme 1 helped to answer the first research question.

Theme 2: Financial Resource Challenges

Schools experiencing financial resource challenges face the issue of chronic absenteeism, particularly among students diagnosed with conditions such as diabetes. Dyer (2024) found that socioeconomic, psychiatric, and community elements profoundly affected students' chronic absences. Theme 2 relates to the findings of this study because some schools do attract talent, others have less staff, and other schools are underfunded. For example, Teacher 1 noted that some schools "could not attract talent, " which made some students miss school. Schools also ended up missing talented experts to help provide the necessary therapeutic care to students due to limited funding. Students were then forced to seek these counseling services outside of school.

Teacher 1 indicated that some schools were understaffed, with large student populations depressing the few available teachers and support staff. The shortage has made it very hard for schools to effectively serve all the different needs of their students, thus contributing to the higher rates of chronic absenteeism. For example, Teacher 1 stated, "In the classrooms, we cannot hire enough at districts speech therapists and occupational therapists and physical therapists to come in to give that adaptive PE, to give that speech therapy one-on-one." Additionally, Teacher 1 mentioned that having less staff in schools meant that students would "only qualify for 30 minutes a week of speech therapy." Students who had no access to therapy services would miss school and attend

the sessions outside the school. Similarly, Teacher 6 emphasized the point about understaffing by stating, “You know other districts where I see that it's not as many teachers available you for instance.” The findings showed that schools that did not invest in having more staff due to financial struggles ended up having chronic student absenteeism.

Study participants also discussed financial resource challenges in terms of district schools being underfunded as a cause of student absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. According to Childs and Lofton (2021), the underlying environmental and school infrastructure issues contribute to students’ chronic absenteeism rates. For instance, Teacher 1 stated that students were missing out due to the less financial resources allocated to schools. The result of having fewer financial resources is that schools would have poor infrastructures, thus leading to chronic absenteeism rates. Teacher 1 said, “Our kids are missing out significantly more because they have all these other concerns that we can't address in public school. We don't have the resources to do it.” The inability of schools to cater to the needs of students diagnosed with disabilities made parents seek other alternatives outside the school.

The overall responses from the study participants suggested that financial resource challenges caused chronic absenteeism in schools. Teachers discussed how underfunded schools do not attract talent. Underfunded schools also ended up having fewer occupational and physical therapists to cater to the needs of students diagnosed with disabilities. Bandura's social learning theory aligns with Theme 2 in that it

highlights how environmental factors, such as poor school resources, financing, and personal, contribute to the development of chronic absenteeism in students with disabilities. These environmental limitations lower the level of support that schools can give in response to such learners' individual and behavioral needs. Theme 2 helped to answer the first research question.

Theme 3: Parental Neglect and Its Impact on Child Development

In the third theme, I described how parents are a big influencing factor in letting their children attend school daily. According to Singer et al. (2021), the existing literature suggests that the reasons students were absent were directly connected to the need for positive collaborative relationships among schools, teachers, students, and parents. Therefore, parents are a big stakeholder in helping their children attend school. The findings align with Kearney et al. (2022), who stated that parental involvement and support are critical in ensuring regular student attendance. While noting that parents are big influencers of their children, some parents gave a lot of excuses when their children missed school. For example, Teacher 1 noted that most absences were from parents giving excuses for not letting their children go to school, forgetting that teachers and parents play a vital role in promoting the culture of growth and collaborative work needed to prevent students diagnosed with disabilities from being chronically absent.

Study participants also described the lack of support from parents to be an influencing factor in chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. Teacher 1 contributed to this point and explained that parents “are at their wit's end

because of all their other obligations for supporting a student with special needs." Some parents were so busy in their workstations that they could not balance taking care of their children and going to work. Lack of support led to some neglecting their parental responsibilities. Teacher 8 mentioned that children diagnosed with disabilities "do not have enough family support." Increased support from home would lessen the rate of absenteeism in schools.

Study participants explained how some of the parents could not cope with issues such as convulsions in the child. Therefore, parents would give in to the child's distress and allow them to stay home. Kearney and Graczyk (2020) stated that parents may keep their children home for a variety of reasons, including the concealment of maltreatment or less nefarious motivations, such as separation anxiety or a fear that they are not adequately equipped to care for their children. For example, Teacher 7 stated:

> Sometimes I pull up and the parents are like, uh, he ain't coming today because he's throwing a fit. And if he doesn't want to go to school, he knows all he's gonna do is go a temper tantrum, and she won't sell her to school.

Study participants advised parents to equip themselves on how to handle their children in the event they experience convulsion at home.

According to Atwell et al. (2020), internalized and externalized factors, such as psychiatric disorders, the value that parents place on education, and chronic illnesses, contribute to students' chronic absenteeism rates. Some parents whose children were

diagnosed with disabilities were simply ignorant about the value of education. The finding from Atwell et al. conforms with the sentiments of Teacher 2, who said:

> I've noticed that some parents may not understand the importance of being in their child's school life and so maybe something that we could add and maybe an additional resource would be maybe providing a clear definition of what that means.

Other parents said they do not understand the importance of their children attending school, even in their state. The lack of understanding about the importance of education can result in a cycle of absenteeism, which is tough to break out because the parents' priorities most certainly will not be toward attending school when they do not see any immediate benefit. If there is no proper awareness, parents may further aggravate this absenteeism by failing to help their children overcome obstacles about their disabilities. Therefore, it can be instrumental in the campaign against chronic absenteeism if parents are educated and resourced on their critical role in their child's education.

The overall response to the Theme 3 highlighted how parents have neglected their children, thus causing them to miss school. The study participants pointed out that some parents do not have the proper knowledge that would help them know how to navigate their children’s disability status. The lack of understanding has led many parents to allow their children to stay at home, whereas they would have found help if they had gone to school. Bandura's social learning theory aligns with Theme 3, for it shows how pupils are influenced by the lack of interest and care from their parents, which insurances hamper

the attendance of the pupils. The parents became significant models whose attitudes and behaviors and the involvement or lack of involvement formed student self-efficacy and motivation to create an effort toward attending school regularly.

Theme 4: Students' Personal Challenges

Theme 4 highlighted some of the intrinsic factors among students that have led to chronic absenteeism in school. Gonzálvez et al. (2021) found that the following 13 factors profoundly influenced students' chronic absenteeism rates: social anxiety, depression, separation anxiety, problems with peers, school aversion or attractive alternatives, aggression, problematic relations with parents, somatic complaints, performance anxiety, dislike of a specific school, issues in the family, agoraphobia or panic, or problems with teachers.

Study participants mentioned that some students had an intrinsic feeling of defeat, discouraging them from attending school. For example, Teacher 2 stated, "A lot of them, just as I said before, feel defeated." Teacher 6 mentioned that students who were mostly absent were low readers: "Then some of the students that I've had that were in special education. The ones that are low readers … they also seem to be the ones absent a lot as well." Low reading and the feeling of being defeated have made students diagnosed with disabilities feel discouraged from even going to school.

Teacher 2 mentioned that some students felt that their grade level was too rigorous for them, and thus they struggled a lot. According to Breaz (2020), students affected by chronic absenteeism were most likely to struggle academically when entering

kindergarten and read below grade level by the third grade, causing them to find the grade level too rigorous for them.

M. A. Gottfried and Ansari (2021) found that there was a need for researchers to develop possible effective school and home intervention measures (i.e., waking students up to go to school on time) to promote school attendance. Teacher 7 pointed out that "students not waking up on time" was another reason that led to chronic absenteeism in schools. Children diagnosed with disabilities tend to need more time in their preparation to go to school. When the child wakes up late, some parents decide to keep them home on that day. Bandura's social learning theory aligns with Theme 4 because it shows how students' intrinsic factors combine with environmental and behavioral influences to explain how students exhibit chronic absenteeism. The impact of such adversities lowers students' self-efficacy and motivation to be regular at school. Theme 4 helped to answer the first research question.

Research Question 2

RQ2 was as follows: How do Title I special education teachers perceive barriers affecting students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates at the study site? RQ2 focused on how Title 1 special education teachers perceived the barriers affecting students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates at the study site. Understanding the causes of chronic absenteeism and the potential barriers for students diagnosed with disabilities is critical. According to Dannow et al. (2020), chronic absenteeism can have significant future impacts on students, including being

susceptible to becoming chronically absent in their later school years, negative impacts on academic outcomes, and can also affect students' socioemotional development and skillsets. Table 9 includes the second research question and the corresponding interview questions.

Table 9

Research Question 2 and Interview Questions

Research Question 2	Interview questions
How do Title I special education teachers perceive barriers affecting students diagnosed with disabilities and chronic absenteeism rates at the study site?	1. What do you perceive to be barriers to reducing the chronic absenteeism rates of students with disabilities? 2. Do you think that as a special education teacher, you may be able to reduce any barriers at your school that affect students' absenteeism? 3. Does the Special Education Department on your campus have plans in place to help students with disabilities? 4. What additional resources, do you believe may be needed to reduce students diagnosed with disabilities chronic absenteeism rates at your school? 5. Do you think that students diagnosed with disabilities struggle more with chronic absenteeism than their nondisabled peers? 6. What are your thoughts about your school's current attendance practices or programs that align with your school district's practices for reducing all students' chronic absenteeism rates? 7. Tell me about one time when you believed that the academic success of a student was influenced by his/her chronic absenteeism.

Note. Research question and the interview questions.

Following the open coding process, three themes emerged: (e) financial struggle and work-life balance barriers, (f) interpersonal and health challenges, and (g) inadequate

resources in schools hindering accessibility. Table 10 includes the codes that were used to generate each theme.

Table 10

Themes and Codes

Themes	Codes
Theme 5: Financial Struggle and Work-Life Balance Barriers	* Financial struggle at the family level * Parents not in a position to take kids to school * Transportation problem
Theme 6: Interpersonal and Health Challenges	* Lacking foundational skills * Language barrier * Medicine side effects * No motivation or incentive to attend school * Social barrier * Students attending therapy sessions
Theme 7: Inadequate Resources in Schools Hindering Accessibility	* Fear of being sued * Few teachers in schools * Lack of ABA services in schools * Less funding in public schools *Not being able to attract speech-language pathologists * Poor pay to therapists

Note. Table showing a summary of themes and their respective codes.

Theme 5: Financial Struggle and Work–Life Balance Barriers

The fifth theme showed that finances and the inability to balance work and family affairs could be some of the barriers affecting student absenteeism in schools. Munje and Jita (2020) found that elementary students were susceptible to chronic absenteeism due to their high poverty rates, poor living conditions, and parental noninvolvement. Study participants presented the challenges of finances and inability to balance between work and life as some of the barriers that result in student absenteeism.

The financial struggles, such as parents finding it difficult to afford the costs associated with taking their children for specialized therapies, were mentioned by the study participants as barriers causing student absenteeism in school among students diagnosed with disabilities. For example, Teacher 4 noted that the financial status of parents hindered them from taking their children to school, saying, “In my experience, the only absenteeism that I've really seen has had more to do with the socioeconomic status of the family from which that child came from and the barriers keeping the child from coming to school.” Study participants highlighted that parents' financial condition limited them from taking their children to school. The parents may be unable to afford school transport or may be constrained to employ a strategy that ensures that the child gets to school, though they do not take them. Further, financial woes can cause parents to be less involved in their children's schooling activities. The parents can be preoccupied with trying to meet their needs, buying books, fees, food, and uniforms for their children. The lack of involvement and support at home further contributes to the cycle of absenteeism.

Parents were also unable to raise finances to help their children with transportation from home to school. According to Banks et al. (2022), special needs primary students in rural Malawi were 10 times more likely to miss valuable curriculum instructional time due to the lack of reliable transportation to or from school because of various familial factors. The findings of the current study show that the financial constraints faced by families (including the inability to provide transportation to their

children) contributed to chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. Teachers reported that some parents did not have a car to help them take their children to school. Teacher 7 explained, “Parents not being able to get students to school due to transportation issues, so they cannot get the kids to school on time … But some of those students' parents don't have a car to give to them.” This finding conforms to a study conducted by Mekonnen et al. (2020), which indicated that parents played a vital role in ensuring that their children attended school daily to promote their academic and social development.

On the issue of parents not being in a position to take kids to school, Teacher 5 noted that an incidence of a student who missed school oftentimes because the parent is single and most of the time the parent is also sick, saying, “I do have one boy that, his mom is a single parent, and she's sick a lot … she is sick a lot.” Teacher 7 also mentioned that some parents have work schedules that are so tight to the extent of not allowing them to take their children to school. Most of the time, these tight schedules mean leaving for work before school starts; therefore, there is no way for the child to get to school. Some parents may have more than one job or work irregular hours, thus complicating their ability to ensure their children attend school. In most cases, this lack of flexibility results in regular absenteeism—a factor that puts the need for better support systems that help such families. Students will likely experience chronic absenteeism if they lack reliable community resources or support systems, impacting their overall educational outcomes.

Theme 5 highlighted how some parents face financial struggles, thus not allowing them to take their children to school. Other parents are limited by their tight work schedules. Bandura's social learning theory supports Theme 5, which highlights how socioeconomic dynamics and work-life balance challenges in the social environment may lower students' potential to participate in learning behaviors or even observe them, hence affecting their overall academic achievement and attendance. Bandura's theory emphasizes the impact of contextual factors on the development of students. Theme 5 helped to answer the second research question.

Theme 6: Interpersonal and Health Challenges

The sixth theme showed how interpersonal and health challenges affect the rate of absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. Findings showed that interpersonal factors were among the factors limiting students from going to school. Teacher 2 spoke about the lack of foundational skills causing students to lag, saying, "And so they are lacking those foundational skills, or even if they have the foundational skills … they are still years behind their peers." According to Sprick et al. (2020), chronically absent kindergarten students learned 14% fewer literacy skills than their peers who attended school regularly. Students should be provided with quality education during their early days in school despite their condition. Teacher 2 noted that the lack of those foundational skills contributed to the chronic absenteeism of students diagnosed with disabilities.

The English language was also mentioned by Teacher 1 as one of the barriers affecting students' absenteeism. Lavigne et al. (2021) noted that 18% of multilingual students enrolled in the 17 secondary schools of PPSD had chronic absenteeism issues and required extensive attendance support (i.e., text messaging to parents, nudge letters followed by a phone call to parents, leveraged partnerships, Spanish language translators, and home visits). Teacher 1 explained, "Well, here in Texas, we have a high population of L2s. So, for English language learners, it used to be ESL, then ELL, and now L2/3." Teacher 1 emphasized the language factor as a reason for chronic absenteeism in schools. This shows that the language barrier experienced by ELLs is a major contributor to chronic absenteeism experienced in schools.

Two teachers spoke about social barriers related to student's ability to attend school regularly. One key social barrier mentioned by participants was the difficulty in making and keeping friends, thus being socially uncomfortable. This social barrier led to feelings of isolation and reluctance to attend school. Teacher 6 said, "Finding friends like some, some students, they might have issues, social skills. And even though that might not be in my subject area." Another barrier that was mentioned was side effects and students attending therapy sessions. For instance, teacher 9 said, "A lot of them are pretty much possibly taking a lot of medications and have to change those medications constantly, and a lot of them deal with a lot of side effects from them." Teacher 2 spoke about students missing their classroom time so that they could attend their therapy sessions. Teachers 2, 6, and 9 highlighted social barriers, including difficulties with social

skills, the impact of medication side effects, and students missing classroom time for therapy sessions.

Some students were not motivated enough to attend school; therefore, they would stay home. Students' social environments affect their academic learning, motivation, and self-regulation levels (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). For example, teacher 2 discussed, "So I think that's it. No motivation or hope. At the elementary level, I noticed that some kids in the inclusion classrooms with disabilities don't have that motivation." Students diagnosed with disabilities would not be motivated to go to school due to their physical status.

Theme 6 offered insight into barriers that have caused chronic absenteeism in public schools. Teachers have explained that some factors are tied to the students themselves. Bandura's social learning theory resonates with Theme 6 by focusing on ways interpersonal and health challenges are detrimental to students' ability to learn and, therefore, come to school. Theme 6 illustrated how the social environment, self-efficacy, and capacity to self-regulate of students offer needed impetus toward academic success, all of which are eroded by the barriers explained in this theme.

Theme 7: Inadequate Resources in Schools Hindering Accessibility

Theme 7 addressed how inadequate school resources may hinder students' accessibility to services that would help them. Kearney et al. (2022) stated that chronic absenteeism results in inequitable access to student learning opportunities for students

diagnosed with disabilities. When students miss school, they tend to miss a lot of learning time and even opportunities that may present themselves in a school environment.

Regarding fear of being sued, Teacher 1 mentioned that teachers feared allowing other people into their classrooms, saying, “Some private schools will still provide it, but a lot of public schools out of fear of being sued because our parents are chronically litigious. They're terrified of allowing other people into the classrooms.” Teacher 6 spoke about teachers being so few in schools as a barrier, saying, “Yeah. Matter of fact, I had to cover a class because the teacher was missing and we were low on subs.” Teachers mentioned that they feared being sued, allowing other people in their classrooms, and the fact that they are few in school.

Teacher 1 mentioned the lack of ABA services in public schools was also a barrier, “the lack of ABA in schools.” Teacher 1 also highlighted the funding issue, suggesting that there should be increased funding for public schools to lessen the issue of absenteeism. Teacher 1 said, “We've got to increase funding to our education system if we want to lessen some of this absenteeism.” Study participants highlighted that when schools are well funded, students would not have to seek services outside the school because the school can easily provide them.

Poor pay to therapists and not being able to attract speech-language pathologists were mentioned as barriers by some of the teachers, including Teacher 1, who said, “So you run into this situation where, because the district can't pay what private practice will put in and then the cost of higher education.” Theme 7 emphasizes that schools need to

be funded so that they can afford to pay therapists and speech-language pathologists. Teacher 1 noted, “We can't get SLPs hired in because they can make double in private practice what they make in the school systems. Same thing with pretty much all the other therapies.” Therapists opted for private practice because it would pay them double what schools offered to pay, as suggested by Teacher 1.

The overall results of Theme 7 showed that inadequate resources in the school system act as a barrier to limiting students diagnosed with disabilities from attending school. Access to therapists and speech-language pathologists in school would allow students diagnosed with disabilities not to seek these services outside the school. Bandura's social cognitive theory aligns with Theme 7, showing how a lack of resources and support impacts poor attendance and lower achievement in school learning. Under-resourcing, understaffing, and a lack of services set up conditions that have a negative impact on the self-efficacy and resilience of students, thus perpetuating chronic absenteeism. Theme 7 helped to answer the second research question.

The seven themes represent factors that contribute to the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities, from academic, interpersonal, and financial to transportation, language, social, and motivational handicaps on their attendance. Such multifaceted issues, rooted in students' social environments, academic struggles, and personal circumstances, underscore the complexity of the problem and point to more targeted, holistic interventions if effective work is to be done on the issue of chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. Such varied challenges can only be addressed

through successful collaboration by educators, families, healthcare providers, and community organizations in building comprehensive support systems. By working to understand further and mitigate barriers, schools can support their students with disabilities more meaningfully and improve attendance (Banks et al., 2022).

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 provides a description of this project study, which was a 3-day professional development plan that delivers tailored professional development training to elementary school educators, counselors, and building-level administrators on comprehensive understanding of chronic absenteeism and its far-reaching consequences for students with disabilities, to develop practical strategies for improving attendance among students with disabilities, and the importance of collaboration and data-driven decision-making to address chronic absenteeism to support chronically absent students with disabilities and their families (see Appendix A).

The qualitative data analysis revealed that there is a greater need for ongoing support made available to public school systems, special educators, school administrators, families, policy makers, and stakeholders to address absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities (TEA, 2021). Although the TEA (2021) identified that interventions are needed to mitigate chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities, none of the special education teachers identified one intervention that was efficient or effective in identifying the reasons for and barriers involved in chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. According to Lee et al. (2023), there is a greater need for school administrators, teachers, school health professionals, and educational stakeholders to have theory-driven and data-

informed techniques for effective collaborative planning to create interventions to mitigate students' chronic absenteeism rates in schools.

The title of the professional development sessions is Focus on the Family (FoTF). According to Henderson and Fantuzzo (2023), a key component to addressing students' chronic absenteeism rates starts with early detection by both schools and families. Therefore, the creation of a data-driven decision-making and collaborative partnership with families of chronically absent students diagnosed with disabilities was needed for the basis of this professional development. Second, I found that the special education teachers in this study desired effective measures to reduce chronic absenteeism rates among their students. Finally, the majority of the special education teachers sought effective ways to involve families in professional development to foster collaboration and shared responsibility for improving student attendance. These three areas encompass the most communicated needs of the special education teachers.

However, other potential barriers such as needing more qualified staff to address students with disabilities' chronic absenteeism will be addressed by having special education teachers collaborate with IEP team members during the professional development to allow for sharing of roles. According to Graczyk et al. (2022), schools need qualified personnel to keep accurate and consistent attendance data for school leaders to make effective intervention measures to address students' systemic chronic absenteeism rates. The engaging activities of this professional development will provide special education teachers, counselors, and building-level administrators with the tools

that they need to evaluate their programs, increase parental and educational stakeholder involvement, and create a team-building relationship to help support and provide for the academic and social needs of chronically absent students with disabilities.

Rationale

All nine special education teachers who participated in the semistructured interviews indicated that they had learned about how chronic absenteeism affects the academic and behavioral learning styles of students with disabilities through in-service school professional development sessions. According to Wang et al. (2024), professional development for in-service special education teachers is critical for improving implementation of evidence-based practices (EBPs) in special education. The 3-day professional development meetings will provide special education teachers, special education paraprofessionals/educational assistants, school counselors, school health professionals, and school administrators with essential evidence-based data for identifying factors contributing to chronic absenteeism in students diagnosed with disabilities and effective interventions to promote student attendance. Within the studied school district, most of the learning developed by the special education teachers occurred through afterschool in-service or during the summer break period. Before the start of the academic year, for 1 week, special education teachers and school administrators meet; they also meet periodically throughout the school year on prescheduled in-service days.

Therefore, the most logical choice was to start the first professional development session during the summer break, have a second professional development session prior

to the fall break period, and have the last professional development session during the 1-day in-service in the month of January. This would allow time to gather and analyze data to ensure that the targeted goals of the research have been met and addressed and that substantial progress is being made to meet them. The topics covered within the professional development sessions were chosen based on feedback from teachers on their perceived barriers to improving student attendance. All of the nine special education teachers interviewed were seeking input from experts in the field of attendance and student support to understand the barriers and reasons for chronic absenteeism among students diagnosed with disabilities. No single study participant had a concise explanation suggested by the TEA in addressing the reasons and barriers of chronic absenteeism in students diagnosed with disabilities.

Therefore, the first day (Day 1) of professional development training will be focused on defining chronic absenteeism, determining the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism, and understanding the disproportionate impacts on students diagnosed with disabilities. During the semistructured interviews, all nine special education teachers alluded to the possibility that students' chronic absenteeism was affected by social and emotional factors and a need for building stronger relationships with parents. Therefore, the second day (Day 2) of professional development training will be focused on positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), social and emotional learning (SEL), and family engagement. The third day (Day 3) of professional

development training will be focused on research-based and data-driven interventions to address chronic absenteeism rates among students with disabilities.

The format of the module will be divided into three professional development workshops spread out over three different months (July, August, and December). I chose to use a teacher professional workshop model to allow in-service and preservice special education teachers, special education paraprofessionals, school counselors, school health professionals, and school administrators with the abilities to evaluate data-driven concepts, effectively collaborate, and create products to support the achievement of student attendance in a nurturing environment conducive to learning (Ahadi et al., 2024). The hours of instruction will be from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. each day. Each day will consist of a morning and afternoon session. The morning session will run from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The participants will then take a lunch break from 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. The afternoon session will be from 12:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. The questions and answers (QA) session will be each afternoon from 2:30 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. As mentioned earlier, the professional development meetings will occur over a 3-month period. The first professional development meeting will occur in July. The second professional meeting will occur in August. The last professional development meeting will occur in December.

Curriculum materials for the professional development meetings will include Google Slide presentations, whiteboard, flip chart paper and markers, handouts with key information, worksheets for case scenarios, laptops, microphone, and internet access to deliver the presentation. The Google Slides presentation will contain speaker notes to

allow me to stay on task with key information and goals of this presentation and allow me to make notes if any information needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of the professional development presentation. The professional development meetings will be held in a secured room reserved for the hours of the meetings to deter any interruptions. Handouts for each participant will include a copy of the Google Slides presentation with lined paper for participants to make notes during the presentation and to refer back to after the presentation ends.

I purposely created a 3-day professional development model for the studied school district. The first day of the session will allow special education teachers, special education paraprofessionals/educational assistants, school counselors, school health professionals, and school administrators to analyze the studied school district attendance data; identify the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities, including health, behavioral, and socioeconomic factors; and explore the disproportionate impact of chronic absenteeism on marginalized student populations. The second day of the session will allow the same group of professionals to learn evidence-based strategies for improving student attendance, such as positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), social-emotional learning (SEL), and family engagement; develop skills in conducting functional behavior assessments (FBAs) and creating individualized behavior intervention plans (BIPs); and learn how to build strong relationships with students and families to promote positive attendance. The third day of the session is for special education teachers, school counselors, and school administrators

to collectively understand the importance of collaboration among school staff; learn how to utilize data to monitor attendance trends, identify students at risk, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions; and develop strategies for creating a school-wide culture of attendance and promoting positive school climate.

The 3-day professional development sessions will be a comprehensive evaluation plan consisting of a formal and summative evaluation. The formative evaluation will consist of daily check-ins at the beginning and end of each day to gauge participant satisfaction and identify any immediate concerns. This will ensure that I gather data to determine whether participants gain knowledge and skills related to chronic absenteeism and whether the activities and materials are engaging and relevant. The formative evaluation will also garner critical feedback on the content, activities, and delivery of the training by collecting participant feedback through the use of surveys, exit tickets, and discussion boards. Additionally, I will collect evaluation data by observing participant engagement, participation, and interaction during group activities and discussions. The summative evaluation will consist of posttraining surveys that will assess participants' overall satisfaction, learning gains, and perceived impact on their practice. Additionally, the summative evaluation will consist of action planning to allow participants to develop action plans outlining specific strategies they will implement in their classrooms and monitor the implementation of these plans.

Review of the Literature

The conceptual framework for this study was Bandura's social learning theory, highlighting the impact of social contexts on children's learning behaviors and actions. The literature review focused on 4 pivotal areas of attention: impact of chronic absenteeism on students' academic and behavioral performance, factors that contribute to attendance for students with disabilities, parental involvement, and lack of school resources to mitigate chronic absenteeism in students with disabilities. The research engines that I used for this study included Google Scholar, ERIC, and Education Source through the Walden University Library, the U.S. Department of Education, and various other peer-reviewed and credible sources. In my search, I focused on peer-reviewed journals centered on chronic absenteeism rates among students with disabilities, special education teachers addressing their students' chronic absenteeism rates, and school resources aligned to address students' chronic absenteeism.

For professional development, I searched for terms relevant to comprehensive professional development or sessions or workshops for special education teachers, school administrators, school counselors, or school health professionals. For parental and family engagement, I searched for words related to parents, guardians, special education, school administrators, school counselors, or school health professionals. I used *positive behavioral intervention systems* and *social and emotional learning* as a correlated search to the words *special education*, *student attendance*, and *chronic absenteeism*. In my search, I focused on peer-reviewed journals and scholarly articles for literature that was

published within the last 5 years related to my project on the topic of chronic absenteeism rates in students diagnosed with disabilities. The following key search terms were used for this review of literature: *average daily student attendance*, *chronic absenteeism*, *chronic illnesses*, *excused absences*, *homeless students*, *interventions for chronic absenteeism or truancy*, *school refusal behavior*, *truancy*, and *unexcused absences*.

Professional Development

Professional development is essential for teachers to stay current with educational trends and best practices. Professional development is the catalyst for teachers and school administrators to collectively collaborate on subject-specific and data-driven practices that can support their students' academic, social, and emotional development and well-being. Teachers knowledgeable EBPs correlate their abilities to deliver enriched instructional practices within their classrooms. Research has shown that high-quality professional development can significantly impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Fletcher-Wood & Zuccollo, 2020). By participating in ongoing professional development, teachers can enhance their instructional skills, improve student outcomes, and adapt to the ever-evolving educational landscape. Professional development fosters a collaborative and supportive learning community among educators. When teachers share experiences, ideas, and best practices, teachers can learn from one another, build strong professional relationships, and collectively address challenges.

Teachers can gain new perspectives, build strong relationships, and reduce feelings of isolation. This sense of community can lead to increased job satisfaction, motivation, and retention. Professional development is an investment in the future of education, as it equips teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to inspire and empower their students. Professional development empowers teachers to adapt to the ever-changing educational landscape. As curriculum standards evolve and new pedagogical approaches emerge, teachers must stay updated to provide the best possible instruction. When teachers actively participate in professional development, teachers can collaborate and acquire the knowledge and skills needed to implement innovative teaching strategies, such as project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and differentiated instruction (Washburn et al., 2024). Professional development can help general and special education teachers address the diverse needs of their students.

Professional development can help teachers develop cultural competence, which is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. When teachers learn about diverse cultures and perspectives, teachers can create inclusive classrooms that celebrate diversity and promote equity. By learning about different learning styles, cultural backgrounds, and special needs, teachers can create inclusive classrooms that cater to the individual needs of each student (Woulfin & Jones, 2021). This can lead to increased student engagement, motivation, and achievement. Professional development is an essential component of a teacher's ongoing growth and development. When school districts invest in teachers' and school administrators'

professional development, schools can create a culture of continuous improvement, enhance teacher effectiveness, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

Professional development can help teachers develop strong classroom management skills. When teachers learn effective classroom management techniques, teachers can create a positive and productive learning environment (Huang et al., 2024). Professional development can help teachers develop their critical thinking and problem-solving skills as environmentally sustainable change agents in education (Alkaher et al., 2024). Research shows that when teachers are able to analyze educational research and best practices, teachers can identify effective strategies to address challenges in their classrooms. This can lead to more innovative and creative teaching approaches. Professional development can help teachers build strong relationships with students and families. By learning effective communication and collaboration skills, teachers can create positive relationships with students and families. This can lead to increased student motivation, improved attendance, and higher levels of academic achievement.

Professional development can help teachers stay up-to-date on educational technology. By learning how to use educational technology effectively, teachers can enhance student learning and engagement. This can lead to improved student outcomes in college and career readiness (Song, 2021). Professional development can help teachers develop their leadership skills. By participating in leadership training, teachers can become more effective leaders in their schools. This can lead to increased collaboration, innovation, and school improvement. Professional development can help teachers reduce

stress and burnout. When teachers learn effective stress management techniques and self-care strategies, teachers can maintain their mental and emotional well-being. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and improved teaching performance (Mulaudzi et al., 2021).

Teacher I noted that there was a need for special education teachers to have the knowledge skill sets to address their students' ABA services. Research shows that ABA professional development equips special education teachers with a robust skillset to address complex behavioral challenges (Kingsdorf & Pančocha, 2022). By understanding the principles of applied behavior analysis, teachers can develop effective behavior intervention plans, increase positive behaviors, and decrease problem behaviors. This leads to a more positive and productive learning environment for all students. Teacher 1 also expressed a need for data-driven concepts in determining the best measures to address data derived from their students' ABA services to better meet the needs of their students. ABA emphasizes the importance of data collection and analysis. By learning how to collect and interpret data, special education teachers can make informed decisions about their students' educational programs. This data-driven approach ensures that interventions are effective and tailored to the individual needs of each student.

Professional development empowers teachers to refine their instructional strategies and techniques. By learning new approaches, such as differentiated instruction, inquiry-based learning, and technology integration, teachers can cater to diverse learners and create engaging learning experiences. This leads to improved student engagement,

motivation, and academic achievement. The field of education is constantly evolving, with new research, theories, and best practices emerging regularly. Professional development allows teachers to stay current with these advancements, ensuring that their instruction is relevant and effective. By keeping up with the latest trends, teachers can adapt their teaching methods to meet the needs of 21st-century learners. Effective communication and collaboration are essential for building strong relationships with students and families.

Professional development can provide teachers with the skills to build rapport, actively listen, and provide empathetic support. By fostering positive relationships, teachers can create a supportive learning environment that promotes student success. Professional development can contribute to a positive school culture by fostering a sense of community and shared purpose among educators (Coppe, 2023).

By participating in collaborative professional development activities, teachers can learn from each other, share best practices, and build a strong support network. This can lead to increased job satisfaction, reduced teacher turnover, and a more positive school climate. Professional development can help teachers learn how to effectively support the diverse needs of their students, including students with disabilities, English language learners, and gifted and talented students. By acquiring the knowledge and skills to differentiate instruction, teachers can ensure that all students have the opportunity. Professional development encourages a growth mindset among teachers. Additionally, by continuously learning and growing, teachers can become more effective educators and

inspire their students to do the same. A commitment to lifelong learning can lead to increased job satisfaction, career advancement, and a positive impact on student outcomes (Nickles & Herbert, 2022).

Connecting Conceptual Framework and Professional Development

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was Bandura's (1969) social learning theory. Bandura emphasized how social contexts influenced children's learning behaviors and actions and noted that children observed others' actions and mentally processed whether they were appropriate or inappropriate, initiating the proper behavior to attain self-efficacy. The social learning theory focused on how children were affected by visual and auditory behaviors exhibited in their home and school communities. Bandura's theory emphasizes the importance of observational learning. By observing experienced teachers, novice teachers can learn effective instructional strategies, classroom management techniques, and student engagement strategies. This vicarious learning allows teachers to refine their own practice and improve student outcomes.

A key component of Bandura's theory is self-efficacy, or the belief in one's ability to succeed (Meyer-Looze & Vandermolen, 2021). By providing opportunities for teachers to practice new skills and receive positive feedback, professional development can enhance their self-efficacy as educators. This increased self-efficacy can lead to greater motivation, persistence, and resilience in the face of challenges. Professional development can create a supportive and collaborative learning environment where teachers can share experiences, ideas, and best practices. By observing and learning from

their peers, teachers can develop a deeper understanding of effective teaching strategies and build a strong professional network. By working together, teachers can improve their practice and create a more positive and effective school culture.

Family Collaborative Culture

As mentioned in the literature review, family involvement is a crucial factor in mitigating chronic absenteeism among students. Family involvement is a crucial factor in a child's educational journey. It has a significant impact on various aspects of a student's academic life, including their attendance. According to an Attendance Works national report on students' chronic absenteeism, during the first full school year of the Coronavirus pandemic, 2020–2021, chronic absenteeism rates increased to 20.5 % and peaked at 29.7% in the 2022–2023 school year (Dyer, 2024). A strong correlation exists between family involvement and student attendance. Studies have shown that students whose parents are involved in their education tend to have better attendance rates. When families prioritize education, they encourage their children to attend school regularly, monitor their homework, and create a supportive learning environment at home.

Additionally, family involvement can help address barriers to attendance, such as transportation issues, health problems, or family crises. According to the National Center for Research on Education Access and Choice (REACH) and Edwards (2022), school transportation might mitigate students' chronic absenteeism because bus transportation provides students and families with reliable and safe means of getting to and from school on a daily basis. By working closely with schools, families can develop strategies to

overcome transportation obstacles and ensure that their children are in school every day. When families are actively engaged in their children's education, students are more likely to attend school regularly, participate in class, and achieve academic success. This essay will explore the relationship between family involvement and student attendance, and discuss strategies to foster strong family–school partnerships. Families play a significant role in setting expectations for their children's education (Capretta et al., 2024). By emphasizing the importance of regular school attendance, families can instill a positive attitude towards school in their children. This can motivate students to attend school regularly, even when they may not feel like it.

A strong correlation exists between family involvement and student attendance. Studies have shown that students whose parents are involved in their education tend to have better attendance rates. When families prioritize education, they encourage their children to attend school regularly, monitor their homework, and create a supportive learning environment at home. Additionally, family involvement can help address barriers to attendance, such as transportation issues, health problems, or family crises. By working closely with schools, families can develop strategies to overcome these obstacles and ensure that their children are in school every day.

To foster strong family–school partnerships, schools can implement a variety of strategies. Effective communication is essential. Schools should use multiple channels to communicate with families, such as newsletters, emails, phone calls, and parent-teacher conferences. These communication channels should be used to share information about

school activities, student progress, and upcoming events. Additionally, schools can organize family workshops and events to provide parents with information and resources to support their children's education (Irwin et al., 2023). By involving families in decision-making processes and creating opportunities for volunteerism, schools can empower families to become active partners in their children's education. A strong correlation exists between family involvement and student attendance. Studies have shown that students whose parents are involved in their education tend to have better attendance rates.

Families are critical partners in addressing the systemic issue of student absenteeism. When families prioritize education, they encourage their children to attend school regularly, monitor their homework, and create a supportive learning environment at home. Additionally, family involvement can help address barriers to attendance, such as transportation issues, health problems, or family crises. By working closely with schools, families can develop strategies to overcome these obstacles and ensure that their children are in school every day. Effective communication is essential. Schools should use multiple channels to communicate with families, such as newsletters, emails, phone calls, and parent-teacher conferences. These communication channels should be used to share information about school activities, student progress, and upcoming events. Schools can organize family workshops and events to provide parents with information and resources to support their children's education. Involving families in decision-making processes and creating opportunities for volunteerism, schools can empower families to

become active partners in their children's education. Family involvement can help address barriers to attendance, such as transportation issues, health problems, or family crises. By working closely with schools, families can develop strategies to overcome these obstacles and ensure that their children are in school every day.

Families should build strong relationships with their children's teachers. Regular communication, open dialogue, and mutual respect are essential for effective collaboration. Strong relationships foster open and honest communication between families and teachers. This allows for timely sharing of information about a child's progress, challenges, and needs. Teachers 1, 2, and 8 noted that increased support from home would lessen the rate of absenteeism in schools. Teachers need continued support from parents. When families and teachers collaborate, they can create a positive and supportive learning environment that motivates students to succeed. This can lead to increased engagement, effort, and achievement.

Regular communication between families and teachers can help identify potential problems early on, such as academic difficulties, behavioral issues, or mental health concerns (Stokes et al., 2024). Early intervention can prevent these problems from escalating. When families and teachers work together to support a child's education, it can boost the child's self-esteem and confidence. Knowing that they have a support system at home and at school can help students feel more secure and motivated. Strong family-teacher relationships can lead to improved attendance and behavior. When families are involved, they can encourage their children to attend school regularly and

address any behavioral issues that may arise. By working together, families and teachers can share the responsibility for a child's education. This can lead to more effective and efficient use of resources and time. Strong family-teacher relationships contribute to a positive school climate, where students feel safe, supported, and motivated to learn.

Conclusion

The research above shows successful collaboration measures taken by educators, families, healthcare providers, and community organizations can help to reduce the systemic issues of chronic absenteeism in students diagnosed with disabilities. By prioritizing family involvement and implementing effective strategies, schools can significantly reduce chronic absenteeism and improve student outcomes. Strong family–school partnerships are essential for creating supportive learning environments that promote student success. By working together, schools and families can ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The use of data-driven intervention measures can help support educators and parents in building comprehensive student attendance plans. The participants of this study can benefit from professional development focused on the implementation of effective and efficient interventions of students chronic absenteeism.

Project Description

Needed Resources and Existing Supports

The primary support for this in-person 3-day professional development training is the study-site school principal. Gaining the principal's support is vital to the success of

this professional development initiative. By actively supporting this 3-day professional development on mitigating chronic absenteeism, the principal can significantly impact its effectiveness. The principal's endorsement will help to increase teacher buy-in and participation. After gaining the school principal's approval, the school principal, school vice principal, or school administration designee will identify and allocate necessary resources, such as technology, training materials, and the professional development facilitator for the training. The school principal or administration designee will assign specific logistics tasks to school or district committee members, such as the technical support specialist, if technical support is deemed necessary for the 3-day professional development.

Advertisement in the form of emails, staff meetings, or other measures approved by the school principal of the 3-day professional training will be conducted at the school-level so that all school faculty and staff are aware of the training. Participants of the training will use their school issued MacBook or Dell Computer to access the presentation slides and Google Management system for emails and pre- and posttraining evaluations. The professional development facilitator will coordinate with the school principal or administration designee to send targeted emails to all relevant staff members, including teachers, administrators, and support staff to maximize attendance of this training. Participants of this training can take notes on the presentation slides handouts or a small composition notebook will be provided for note taking capabilities. The school principal or administration designee will determine the study school student attendance

data that will be studied, analyzed, and discussed during the 3-day professional development training.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

There are two potential barriers to the implementation of this 3-day professional development training. The first barrier could be scheduling meetings between school administration and teachers due to currently scheduled school-level and district-level professional development training. The yearly scheduled mandatory district training meetings in August might conflict with the 3-day professional development training. Therefore, a potential barrier could be identifying a day of training in August that does not conflict with the mandatory district professional development training. A possible and feasible solution to this scheduling dilemma might be to schedule a 3-day professional development during the summer that will combine in-person sessions with virtual components to accommodate different schedules.

The second barrier to the implementation of this 3-day professional development training might be budgetary constraints. Even though each school within the study school district has allocation of funding for professional development, schools may face budget constraints that limit the availability of funds for professional development, including travel expenses, substitute teacher costs, and training materials. If the professional development is conducted during teacher non-working hours, stipends will be paid to each teacher participating. The stipends will be funded by the study school's professional development fund. If professional development funds are not sufficient, one possible

solution might be to conduct the 3-day professional development training during the study school's district professional development training days. Another possible solution to pay for the teacher stipends might be for the school principal to request a professional development fund allocation from the district Title II office.

Implementation and Timeline

To successfully implement this 3-day professional development, I would prioritize careful planning, effective communication, and ongoing support. To accommodate the study school's regularly-yearly scheduled professional development, I will schedule the 3-day training over a 3-month period. The first day of training will be held one day in July. The second day of training will be held in August. The third day of training will be held in December. The first day (Day 1) of professional development training will focus on defining chronic absenteeism, determining the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism, and understanding the disproportionate impacts on students diagnosed with disabilities. The second day (Day 2) of professional development training will be focused on positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), social and emotional learning (SEL), and family engagement. The third day (Day 3) of professional development training will be focused on research based and data-driven interventions to address students with disabilities chronic absenteeism rates.

The schedule of the professional development training will be from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm each day. Each day will consist of a morning and afternoon session. During the two sessions, participants will initiate and engage in discussions during small group and

whole group discussions. The morning session will run from 8:30 am to 11:30am. There will be two-10 minute breaks during the morning and afternoon sessions to allow participants time to reflect upon discussions and questions during the presentation. The participants will take a lunch break from 11:30 am to 12:00 noon. The afternoon session will be from 12:00 pm-3:00 pm. The questions and answers (QA) session will occur each afternoon from 3:00 pm to 3:30 pm.

Roles and Responsibilities

Professional Development Facilitator

The professional development facilitator is a key figure in the success of this 3-day training. Their role encompasses various stages, from pretraining to posttraining support. Before the training, the facilitator will coordinate with the study site's school principal or administration designee to develop a comprehensive curriculum, prepare engaging materials, and organize logistics. During the training, the facilitator will engage participants through interactive sessions, share expert knowledge, and guide participants in hands-on activities. The facilitator will also address questions, provide feedback, and create a positive learning environment. After the training, the facilitator continues to support participants by offering follow-up resources, analyzing evaluation data, and developing sustainability plans. By effectively fulfilling these responsibilities, the facilitator ensures that the training is impactful and leads to positive changes in practice.

Study School Site Principal

The school principal plays a crucial role in supporting and promoting the success of the 3-day professional development. As a key leader, the principal can champion the initiative, allocate necessary resources, and create a supportive environment for teachers to apply their new knowledge and skills. The school principal will be responsible for approving the 3-day professional development. By providing administrative support, securing funding, and facilitating logistical arrangements, the principal ensures that the training runs smoothly and that participants have the opportunity to fully engage in the learning process. Additionally, the principal can encourage teacher participation, provide ongoing support, for the successful implementation of the project. By serving as a role model for continuous learning, the principal can inspire teachers to embrace professional growth and innovation. Additionally, the principal can advocate for policies and practices that support professional development. The school principal can encourage teachers to share their learning experiences and collaborate on implementing new strategies learned during the professional development training.

Training Participants

Training participants play a critical role in the success of the 3-day professional development. Active engagement and a positive mindset are essential for maximizing the benefits of the training. Participants should actively listen to presentations, participate in discussions, and ask questions to clarify any doubts. If any technical issues arise, training participants should alert the professional development facilitator of their needs to

maximize on their learning potential. They should also be open to new ideas and willing to experiment with different strategies in their classrooms. By collaborating with peers, participants can share experiences, learn from each other, and develop a strong professional learning community. Ultimately, participants should commit to ongoing professional development and seek opportunities to apply their new knowledge and skills to improve student outcomes. Training participants are key stakeholders in the success of this 3-day professional development. Their active involvement and commitment to learning are essential. By actively listening to presentations, engaging in discussions, and participating in hands-on activities, participants can gain valuable insights and practical skills. Additionally, by collaborating with peers and sharing experiences, participants can build a strong professional learning community. This collaborative approach fosters a supportive environment where educators can learn from each other and inspire one another. Ultimately, by applying the knowledge and skills gained from the training, participants can improve their teaching practices and positively impact student learning outcomes.

Technology Support Representative

If any technical issues arise during the 3-day professional development training, the technical support representative's primary responsibility will be to provide technical assistance to participants and trainers throughout the training. This includes troubleshooting technical issues with devices, software, and online platforms. They may also assist with setting up and maintaining audio-visual equipment, such as projectors,

microphones, and speakers. By ensuring that the technological aspects of the training are seamless, the technical support representative contributes to a positive and productive learning experience for all training participants.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative and Summative Evaluation

Professional development evaluation is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it helps to assess the effectiveness of the training program. By collecting data on participant satisfaction, knowledge gain, and skill development, evaluators can determine whether the training met its objectives and if any modifications are needed. The formative evaluation will have open-ended Formative evaluations and provide valuable feedback for future training programs. Formative evaluations are crucial for ensuring the effectiveness of professional development training. By gathering real-time feedback on participant understanding, engagement, and skill development, trainers can make timely adjustments to the training delivery. This allows for a more personalized and responsive learning experience, ultimately leading to improved participant outcomes. By analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the current training, organizers can identify areas for improvement and tailor future programs to better meet the needs of participants.

Formative evaluations are crucial for the success of professional development training. They provide real-time feedback on the effectiveness of the training and allow for adjustments to be made as needed. By gathering information on participants' understanding, engagement, and skill development, trainers can identify areas where

additional support or clarification may be required. This ensures that the training remains relevant, engaging, and impactful (Amponsah et al., 2023). Evaluation data can be used to demonstrate the impact of professional development on teacher practices and student outcomes. By tracking changes in teacher knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and by measuring improvements in student achievement, it is possible to show the return on investment for professional development initiatives. Finally, evaluation can help to ensure accountability and transparency. By collecting and analyzing data, organizations can demonstrate that their professional development programs are effective and aligned with their mission and goals.

Summative evaluations are essential for assessing the overall effectiveness of professional development training. By collecting data on participant satisfaction, knowledge gain, and skill development, evaluators can determine the extent to which the training met its objectives and had a positive impact on participants' practice. This information can be used to inform future training initiatives and to demonstrate the value of professional development to stakeholders. Summative evaluations can help to identify areas for improvement in future training programs. By analyzing participant feedback and performance data, trainers can identify strengths and weaknesses in the training design and delivery. This information can be used to refine future training sessions and ensure that they are more effective and engaging. Summative evaluations are essential for assessing the overall effectiveness of professional development training. By collecting and analyzing data on participant satisfaction, knowledge gain, and skill development,

evaluators can determine whether the training met its intended goals. This information can be used to inform future training initiatives, improve the quality of the program, and demonstrate the return on investment.

Overall Project Goals

There are two primary goals of my 3-day professional development. The first goal is to empower educators to effectively address chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. By the end of this professional development training, participants will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify and address the root causes of absenteeism, implement evidence-based interventions, and foster strong partnerships with families and community organizations. Through a variety of instructional strategies, including lectures, group discussions, role-playing, and case study analysis, participants will gain a deeper understanding of the impact of chronic absenteeism on student outcomes.

The second goal of my 3-day professional development is to increase educator awareness of the impact of chronic absenteeism on student achievement and well-being. In understanding the long-term consequences of absenteeism, such as academic difficulties, social isolation, and increased risk of dropout, educators will be motivated to prioritize attendance and implement effective strategies to improve student attendance rates. This professional training will help participants explore effective family engagement techniques and strategies for building strong relationships with families. With these two goals, by the end of the training, participants will be able to apply their

newfound knowledge and skills to improve student attendance, behavior, and academic achievement. Participants will be equipped to create more inclusive and supportive learning environments, ultimately leading to better outcomes for students with disabilities.

Overall Evaluation Goals

The summative evaluation instruments for this 3-day professional training will be pre- and posttraining surveys. These surveys will measure participants' knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about chronic absenteeism before and after the training. A pretraining survey will be used to assess participants' prior knowledge and expectations for the training. This information can be used to tailor the training content to meet the specific needs of the participants. By understanding their current level of knowledge and skills, the professional development facilitator can determine the appropriate depth and pace of the training. A posttraining survey can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. By collecting feedback from participants, we can assess their satisfaction with the training content, delivery, and overall experience. Additionally, the survey can be used to measure participants' knowledge gain, skill development, and intention to apply new knowledge and skills in their practice. By analyzing the results of the posttraining survey, we can identify areas for improvement and make adjustments to future training programs.

The stakeholders for this professional development evaluation are the training participants, school administrators, school counselors, and school health professionals. At

the end of the professional development training, the professional development facilitator will provide the school principal with the pre- and posttraining survey results to share with the school staff and faculty for transparency. At the discretion of the school principal, the pre and postsurvey results will also be shared with the district level attendance data and research office. Additionally, the professional development facilitator will share the summative evaluation results with me as the project study developer for personal knowledge purposes. In my role as the project study developer, I will share the summative evaluation results with the school district research and evaluation office.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

The professional development project, "Focus on the Family (FoTF)", might have positive social change implications for schools. This professional development initiative has the potential to significantly impact social change by addressing a critical issue in education: chronic absenteeism. This training might enable educators with the knowledge and skills to identify and address the root causes of absenteeism, this training can improve student attendance, academic achievement, and overall well-being. Additionally, by fostering strong family–school partnerships and implementing evidence-based interventions, this initiative can help to reduce educational disparities and create more inclusive and equitable learning environments for all students. Ultimately, this professional development has the potential to transform the lives of students with

disabilities and contribute to a more just and equitable society. This professional development project might empower educators to address chronic absenteeism, this professional development initiative can have a significant impact on social change. This professional development project might improve student attendance, and can contribute to reducing achievement gaps, increase graduation rates, and prepare students for future success. Furthermore, by fostering strong family–school partnerships, this initiative can help to create more supportive and nurturing environments for students, leading to improved social-emotional well-being and overall quality of life.

Importance to Educational Stakeholders

The professional development project, “Focus on the Family (FoTF)” might have a positive collaborative impact on educational stakeholders. The 3-day professional development on mitigating chronic absenteeism is crucial for educational stakeholders due to its potential to significantly impact student outcomes and school climate. By addressing the root causes of absenteeism, such as health issues, family challenges, and behavioral problems, this training can improve student attendance, engagement, and academic achievement.

For teachers, this training offers valuable strategies and tools to support students' academic and social-emotional needs. By implementing EBPs, teachers can create more inclusive and supportive learning environments. For administrators, this training can help to improve school climate, reduce disciplinary referrals, and increase school accountability. By addressing chronic absenteeism, schools can enhance their overall

reputation and attract more families to their district. For parents and families, this training empowers them to work collaboratively with schools to support their children's education and address any barriers to attendance. Ultimately, this project will benefit all stakeholders by creating a more positive and productive learning environment.

The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teachers' perspectives on the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of students with disabilities at the study site. The study was guided by Bandura's social learning theory, which highlights how social contexts influence children's learning behaviors and actions, and suggests that children observe others' actions and mentally process whether they are appropriate or inappropriate. Therefore, I designed a 3-day professional development learning module to address the following problem: Students diagnosed with disabilities had higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state.

Providing professional development training might help school administrators and staff effective measures for identifying and addressing the specific barriers that may contribute to absenteeism among students with disabilities, such as transportation issues, health concerns, or lack of housing. The professional development module could have implications beyond the study school site as this training can serve as a model for other schools and districts. By sharing best practices and successful strategies, this initiative can inspire and inform educators across the nation. The curriculum, training materials, and evaluation tools developed for this project can be adapted and shared with other

schools to support their efforts in addressing chronic absenteeism. Secondly, the data collected through the evaluation of this training can contribute to a growing body of research on effective interventions for chronic absenteeism. By analyzing the impact of the training on student attendance and academic achievement, researchers can identify promising practices and inform future research. Finally, this professional development can contribute to systemic change by advocating for policies and practices that support student attendance and well-being. By raising awareness of the issue of chronic absenteeism and sharing evidence-based strategies, this initiative can influence educational policy and decision-making at the local, state, and national levels.

Conclusion

In Section 3, I presented a 3-day professional development module as the project for this qualitative study project. The project study participants identified the need to find evidence-based early detection and preventive measures to combat their students' chronic absenteeism rates. The study's findings and the conceptual framework for this qualitative study was Bandura's (1969) social learning theory. Bandura emphasized how social contexts influenced children's learning behaviors and actions and noted that children observed others' actions and mentally processed whether they were appropriate or inappropriate, initiating the proper behavior to attain self-efficacy. The social learning theory focused on how children were affected by visual and auditory behaviors exhibited in their home and school communities.

Professional development is crucial for in-service teachers to stay current with the latest educational trends and best practices. By attending workshops, conferences, and online courses, teachers can enhance their pedagogical skills, improve classroom management techniques, and develop a deeper understanding of their subject matter. This ongoing learning allows teachers to adapt to changing educational standards, incorporate innovative teaching strategies, and meet the diverse needs of their students. Furthermore, professional development fosters a sense of community and collaboration among educators. By connecting with colleagues from different schools and districts, teachers can share ideas, problem-solve together, and gain new perspectives on teaching and learning. This collaborative approach can lead to increased motivation, job satisfaction, and a more positive school culture.

The most effective form of professional development is one that is tailored to the specific needs of educators and incorporates a variety of learning modalities. A blended approach that combines face-to-face workshops, online learning, and coaching can be particularly effective. Face-to-face workshops provide opportunities for in-depth discussions, collaborative problem-solving, and networking with peers. Online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, allowing educators to learn at their own pace and access a wide range of resources. Coaching can provide individualized support and guidance, helping educators to implement new strategies and overcome challenges. Ultimately, the effectiveness of professional development depends on several factors, including the quality of the content, the expertise of the facilitators, and the level of

participant engagement. By carefully considering these factors, schools can design and implement professional development programs that meet the needs of their educators and lead to improved student outcomes. This professional development training can fuel the advocacy of professional development by school administrators. Professional development equips school administrators with the knowledge and skills to implement effective instructional strategies. By staying up-to-date with the latest research and best practices, schools can better meet the diverse needs of their students.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The problem that prompted this basic qualitative study was that students diagnosed with disabilities have higher chronic absenteeism rates than their nondisabled peers in a south-central school located in a south-central state. More reliable information regarding the perspectives of special educators of students with disabilities may help school administrators and special education teachers clarify how to address barriers related to reducing chronic absenteeism rates among students diagnosed with disabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site. Through one-on-one semistructured interviews with nine participants who were certified Title I special education teachers, several findings were revealed. Findings showed that students fail to attend school for more than 10 days due to their health and well-being in education. Schools experiencing financial resource challenges also faced the issue of chronic absenteeism, particularly among students diagnosed with conditions such as diabetes. Parental neglect of their children was another factor causing child absenteeism. I designed a 3-day professional development module to address the research problem. This professional development module provides elementary school educators and administrators with knowledge, strategies, and collaborative tools to address chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities through understanding its impact, implementing evidence-based interventions, and utilizing data-driven decision-making.

Section 4 provides reflections and conclusions related to the project, the work, and my development as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Next, I include recommendations for alternative approaches, definitions, and solutions to the problem of the study. I end this section with implications, applications, and directions for future research related to the problem of the study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this project lies in its comprehensive and strategic approach towards the problem of chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities using a well-structured professional development module. The initiative implements a progressive 3-day framework to enable participants to grow a good understanding of the problem, practical skills to intervene, and strategic collaboration towards sustainable solutions. By including a variety of stakeholders, such as special education teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, health professionals, and administrators, this provides a multidisciplinary perspective for producing more holistic and effective approaches toward the challenge. Furthermore, interactive discussion, case study, and hands-on training in FBAs and BIPs give educators practical tools to address absenteeism at the source. Further building on the project, culturally responsive practices, family engagement, and data-driven decision making are stressed to make sure interventions are inclusive, tailored, and measurable. The combination of this knowledge with collaborative efforts and practical application in this initiative makes it highly impactful in supporting students with disabilities and increasing their attendance rates.

Inclusion of the professional development module in this project has a limitation of just focusing on a specific group of participants, especially educators, paraprofessionals, and school administrators, and not the families and students. Because chronic absenteeism often stems from a variety of external factors related to home life, including family dynamics and community support, the exclusion of these key groups may hinder the development of interventions that fully address the underlying causes of absenteeism. Furthermore, the project's timeline, lining up with a short-term, 3-day professional development module, poses constraints on the level of depth and application of the strategies learned by participants. Without ongoing support, follow-up sessions, or mentorship, there is a risk that the momentum generated during the module may not be sustained, and educators may struggle to fully implement or adapt the strategies to their specific school contexts over time, potentially limiting the long-term impact on reducing absenteeism rates among students with disabilities.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Future research may address the issue of chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities through a mixed methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data to fully understand the problem. In addition, quantitative data like attendance records, IEP compliance rates, or even academic performance metrics could be analyzed together with qualitative insights into these patterns and correlations to help target certain interventions. Furthermore, by extending the list of participants to include students, parents, and school administrators, a broader picture of the barriers to attendance and

possible solutions can be established. For instance, students' perspectives might uncover uncapitalized social or emotional difficulties, whereas parental feedback may gauge logistical or systematic problems such as transportation or a means to healthcare. An alternative approach could also include a multisite study to compare across different Title I schools in order to investigate how different socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional factors affect absenteeism. Placing the study in a comparative perspective could encourage the development of adaptable, context-specific strategies for reducing absenteeism rates across a variety of educational settings.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

My doctoral journey began with the personal desire to add to the body of educational research. As a resource educator for the study school district, I read various books and articles to prepare for professional development staff training and wondered if I could contribute to the literature in education. My doctoral experience has challenged everything I thought I knew about the research process. Throughout the doctoral study experience, I became acquainted with the knowledge and skills needed to conduct scholarly research, and I made significant progress in research and writing despite several personal challenges. My research and writing skills improved as I used a myriad of scholarly sources, analyzed data to identify themes, concluded findings, and developed a professional development module to complete the project study.

Project Development

Before deciding on my project, I made connections between the four essential elements of my study: (a) the problem, (b) research questions, (c) conceptual framework, and (d) findings from the data analysis. I learned that understanding how these elements interconnected was crucial for guiding the selection of the project's genre—professional development. As a researcher and someone involved in education, I found it straightforward to design the project around professional development. The study's findings and the literature review played an important role in shaping my approach, helping me plan the 3-day professional development module focused on collaborative inquiry for teachers and school administrators. Through this process, I recognized how deeply the study's insights and the theoretical framework influenced the development of a relevant and impactful training program.

Leadership and Change

Throughout my doctoral journey, I have engaged with scholarly articles that deepened my understanding of teacher capacity for professional learning, particularly in the context of addressing chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. This knowledge has been applied to my work in developing professional development initiatives aimed at improving attendance for students with disabilities. I have valued the doctoral-level emphasis on using peer-reviewed sources and shared this insight with educators pursuing advanced degrees in education. As I progressed through my doctoral study, I became more confident in my writing. I have gained insight into the importance

of being an active participant in change, empowering others to use their capacities to address chronic absenteeism effectively. The experience of developing a 3-day professional development module focused on chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities has offered crucial leadership lessons. In addition to this knowledge and strategies to help educators and administrators, this module places special emphasis on the collaborative and data driven decision-making that is necessary to reduce rates of absenteeism. I hope that by sharing the module with the research and evaluation office for the school district, it will gain the district's interest and implement the initiative in elementary schools, eventually creating some lasting change in the school community.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The results of this study highlight the significance of successful partnerships among educators, families, healthcare providers, and community organizations to solve the issue of chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities. When school leaders recognize and work to eliminate barriers like illness, financial needs, and parental neglect, those students will have a more nurturing environment. On the other hand, the 3-day professional development module is of great value in this context. Educators learn about means, strategies, and collaborative tools for dealing with absenteeism. Family involvement and strong family–school partnership are central elements of this initiative, contributing to creating an enabling learning environment for the students to succeed. Data-driven intervention measures are essential for guiding educators and parents in developing comprehensive attendance plans that can be tailored to individual student

needs. Evidence-based strategies in the module make educators confident that they are doing everything within their power using the right intervention to do so, therefore decreasing chronic absenteeism and increasing student outcomes. While this is a professional development initiative aimed at raising awareness, it is also about empowering educators to take direct actions that will reduce absenteeism and help to ensure that all students—especially students with disabilities—will be given the opportunity to reach their full potential working within a collaborative and supportive educational environment.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Implications

This study has important social change implications, especially in the advancement of equity and inclusion in educational settings. The study highlights that addressing chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities is vital in creating a supportive and inclusive environment that gives all students the chance to succeed. Better academic outcomes, however, result not only from reducing absenteeism, but also from positively promoting social and emotional development, which is essential to provide the resources for success to students with disabilities. It is imperative that educators, families, healthcare providers, and community organizations all work together to address absenteeism to build a more unified and supportive community where every child has the opportunity to receive quality education. Embracing these practices can ensure that

schools make progress in closing achievement gaps and in helping create a more just and inclusive society.

This study methodologically provides evidence of the utility of a qualitative case study design in exploring complex, context-specific issues like chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. The case study approach yielded a rich database that enabled a detailed, in-depth understanding of the factors that influence absenteeism and captured the perspectives of special education teachers, who tend to be underrepresented in absenteeism research. Additionally, the qualitative design allowed for the examination of real-world barriers that quantitative methods might overlook. This approach can serve as a model for future research on chronic absenteeism and other educational challenges, particularly those that require deep engagement with participants' experiences. The implications from this study point to the potential benefits of using qualitative methods to capture the complexity of educational problems and suggest how the findings may enrich policy and practice.

Furthermore, in this study, the theoretical implications are based on Bandura’s (1969) social learning theory, which offers important knowledge regarding how those behaviors, such as school attendance, are learnt and socially influenced. As evidenced, this study shows how regular attendance can be modeled, reinforced, and supported. According to Bandura's theory, observation and interaction play a significant role in influencing behaviors, and Bandura's theory suggests that observation, interaction, reinforcement, and state of well-being will be of benefit to students with disabilities to

help them attend school regularly. This study also shows the significance of social networks that involve collaboration among educators, families, and clinicians as an important means to influence positive behavior change. Further research could build on the theoretical application of social learning theory to determine how such factors as those found in the school and home environment cause absenteeism and other behaviors in students with disabilities.

Applications and Directions for Future Research

The findings from this study have direct applications to educational practice when developing approaches to reducing chronic absenteeism through the development of targeted interventions. These results could be applied to inform school policies and professional development programs directed to school districts to develop policies emphasizing family–school collaboration, implement evidence-based strategies for reducing absenteeism, and utilize data driven decision-making when addressing absenteeism. Further research could pursue how different intervention strategies are effective across varied school settings, and use a longitudinal approach among students with a disability who receive targeted attendance support. Future studies may also explore the opinions of other stakeholders including parents and community organizations to better understand the whole picture for chronic absenteeism. Researchers can look further into how social learning theory may be used in other settings to impact student behavior, specifically with regard to students with disabilities. Potential future inquiries that can be carried out using these data will be useful in helping to narrow down

the intervention approaches, improving collaboration, and can go a long way in eventually working towards reducing chronic absenteeism in different contexts of schooling.

Conclusion

The results of this study not only provide such insights regarding factors in chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities, but also emphasize the necessity of collaboration among educators, families, and healthcare providers to cope with this problem. Using a qualitative case study design and Bandura's social learning theory, the study shines a light on the complex barriers that lead to absenteeism and provides evidence-based strategies to help alleviate these matters. As a result of this study, a professional development module is developed to help educators and administrators better understand and address chronic absenteeism as a tool for response. This has implications for social change, methods, and theory and will provide a basis for future research and practices for better educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Looking ahead, further research of collaborative interventions and data-based decision making will be necessary to combat chronic absenteeism and provide a chance for all students, regardless of disability, to succeed and thrive in school.

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Appendix A: The Project

FoTF: Focus on The Family

A Policy Recommendation

by

Mary Eva Bonnetty

Walden University

FoTF: Focus on The Family

Focus on The Family First is a policy recommendation to build a sense of responsibility and commitment that is imperative for students to attend school consistently on a daily basis. When students are chronically absent, they miss valuable opportunities to engage in meaningful inclusive peer relationships and intrinsic life skills needed to become successful and productive member in their society (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022). Chronic absenteeism can seriously impede a student's academic progress, social development, and future opportunities, particularly among students with disabilities. Families are often the first to notice changes in a child's attendance patterns. By communicating with schools, families can help identify the reasons for their student's chronic absenteeism or barriers that might affect their student's attendance. Families can provide support and encouragement to students, helping them develop a positive attitude towards school and attendance. Families can work closely with schools to develop strategies for improving attendance. By working together as a cohesive unit, schools and families can effectively address chronic absenteeism and ensure that students have the opportunity to succeed academically and socially.

Executive Summary

Chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities is a serious concern that undermines educational equity and student success within South Central school districts. The argument presented in this policy paper focuses on the perspectives of Title I special education teachers regarding the factors that contribute to chronic absenteeism. Grounded on the responses to the interviews, seven themes emerged: the health and well-being of the students; the financial resources challenge; parental neglect; personal challenges of students; financial struggle and work-life balance barriers; interpersonal and health challenges; inadequate school resources.

This policy paper recommends the induction and professional development for teachers throughout the district to address chronic absenteeism, improvement in health services via basic partnerships must be enhanced, along with family engagement. Schools in the district should have various linkages with agencies in their locality to provide economic assistance to families with low-income levels. Special education investment through personnel and resources will make the learning environment even more inclusive.

The findings from the research supporting this policy brings to the foreground the ways in which health-related, economic, family, and school-level issues shape a student's attendance. The data dictates that multifaceted problems will have to be matched by equally multifarious interventions. This paper recommends a district-wide induction program for new teachers, paired with concentrated professional development, to ensure

that every educator is prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities and those who are chronically absent. By investing in teacher capacity and proven strategies that work for all students, school districts can foster more inclusive and supportive learning environments.

Background

Student absenteeism is one of the most pressing educational issues with long-term implications for students' success and health. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10 or more days of school per academic year, is a particularly concerning aspect that needs to be addressed (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022). Students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by chronic absenteeism since many barriers prevent them from attending school regularly. Research has shown that students who are chronically absent do poorly in school and socially (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022). Research evidence continually indicates that chronic absenteeism is a predictor of poor academic and social–emotional outcomes, which include lower grades, higher dropout rates, and behavior problems (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022). For students with disabilities in particular, the impact could be crippling; chronic absenteeism exacerbates already existing difficulties in academic and social areas (Gottfried & Kirksey, 2022).

Chronic absenteeism data collected between 2018-2019 asserted that students diagnosed with disabilities accounted for 17% of chronic absenteeism rates nationally (Capretta et. al (2024). The effect of chronic absenteeism is especially severe for students with disabilities, compounding their existing difficulties both in academics and in the

social domain. Students who are frequently absent tend to have lower achievement levels, higher school dropout rates, and increased behavioral problems (Lawrence et al., 2019). For students with disabilities, the repercussions of absenteeism may be even more striking because it reduces the opportunity for them to take advantage of special educational interventions and support services that are specifically designed to address their needs (Lawrence et al., 2019). In cases such as students with disabilities, chronic absenteeism can create a compounding effect where the instructional time missed shapes widening gaps in academic skills and social-emotional development, rapidly making school completion extremely difficult for those students.

The research on chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities reveals that the root causes of the identified problem, include but are not limited to: socioeconomic challenges, inadequate family involvement, barriers to access to health care, and deficiencies in the school climate (Kearney, 2021). Therefore, educators who are in direct contact with this student population are a missing puzzle piece in the literature. This being the case, the existing gap calls for special research that pursues insight from the front line of special education. The feelings and views of educators are important in identifying practical, on-the-ground challenges and devising strategies whose together implementation is practical in in-real-life school settings (Kearney, 2021).

This policy paper seeks to examine the perceptions of special education teachers under Title I regarding the attendance barriers and causes for chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. Drawing on the experiences and suggestions of these educators

to construct a complex understanding of the multifactorial causes that influence the attendance of students including health concerns, insufficient economic means, family circumstances, and school conditions. By taking into consideration practical realities that educators face in the performance of their job, it should provide a really sound basis with clear illustrations of the problems at issue, along with possible solutions.

Addressing the urgent need for comprehensive strategies, this policy paper focuses on chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. The recommendations made in this paper are supposed to guide the development of focused and holistic approaches to dealing with the various barriers bearing on attendance by students. The intention is to promote an inclusive and supportive school environment that would foster enhancement for the school experience and outcomes of students with disabilities.

In this policy paper, I provide recommendations to support collaboration among teachers, families, doctors, and community groups to solve the problem of chronic absenteeism. With a collaborative approach, schools will be able to work with different stakeholders much better to use their expertise and resources in delivering an even stronger support system to children with disabilities. This type of collaboration is needed in drafting effective interventions that will address absenteeism at its roots and, simultaneously, help students to surmount the barriers that confront them. Besides, according to the paper, continuous research and evaluation are required for interventions to stay responsive to the changing needs of students and go on promoting positive educational outcomes.

Research Design and Findings

A qualitative research study was designed to explore the experiences and perceptions of special education Title I teachers related to those perspectives on issues that influence school absences for students with disabilities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with nine teachers in school district located in a South-Central state via Zoom. The interview protocol is attached in the Appendix. The purpose of the interviews was to capture the participants' diverse perspectives. Each interview lasted about 45-60 minutes and was audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Participant confidentiality and anonymity was assured throughout the whole process to support open, honest responses. Once I completed the Zoom interviews, the transcripts were analyzed. Seven themes emerged describing why students with disabilities become chronically absent:

- student health and well-being
- challenges of financial resources
- parental neglect
- personal challenges from students themselves
- financial struggle and work-life balance barriers
- interpersonal and health challenges, and
- inadequate school resources

Throughout the interview responses, participants described how health played a big role in absenteeism: chronic conditions, and medical appointments. Critical deterrents to receiving health services were financial constraints:

- lack of support for the schools
- lack of staff, and
- problems with transportation.

Another pivotal element to the attendance patterns of all students was parental factors. Students' personal problems included academic, emotional, and motivational issues. Factors at the family level that caused a negative impact on attendance regularity included financial problems and issues with work-life balance. Interpersonal factors, such as language barriers and social problems, together with health issues, were reported as other factors impeding regular school attendance. Insufficient school resources, including staffing and financial support, hinder effort to effectively assist students with disabilities and reduce absenteeism rates.

This policy paper is driven by an urgent need to fix the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities, which has undermined their educational achievements and long-term success. The urgency for developing this policy and supporting paper is rooted in my concern for the chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities, since absenteeism seriously undermines the educational success and future prospects of students with disabilities. In my view, addressing these issues is of paramount importance if students with disabilities are to be accorded equal education and if conditions

facilitative of regular school attendance are to be created. This policy paper will delve into nuanced factors in student attendance based on the perspectives of Title I special education teachers. The insights that will be gained from this research will be instrumental in crafting interventions that are tailor-made to address the bottlenecks observed in students with disabilities. Identifying actionable recommendations will empower educators, influence policy, and mobilize resources toward supporting students living with disabilities to perform effectively (Dannow et al., 2020). This initiative is a collaborative effort aimed at building equitable educational opportunities for all students to achieve their full potential.

Research Outcomes Supporting Policy Recommendation

The investigation into barriers affecting students with disabilities revealed several critical challenges that hinder their school attendance. Research outcomes resulting from the interviews with the district Title I special education teachers, identified several problems such as: financial issues for the family, difficulty balancing work and life, health complications that impede regular attendance, and resource-lacking schools. Each of these challenges are closely interconnected and contribute to chronic absenteeism in a major way; thus, each requires targeted policy interventions to effectively support and secure consistent school engagement among these students.

Family Financial Struggles and Work-Life Balance

Money and work-life balance are two major stumbling blocks for mitigating chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities. For many families living on a low

income, providing a child with all necessary support can be difficult. Most of the financial barriers discussed stem from the inability of many families to afford transportation, special therapies, and other healthcare services children may need in order to attend school regularly. For example, families may not be able to afford safe transportation that will get disabled students to school before the bell rings. In other cases, this issue of transportation is further complicated when parents are unable to get access to reliable transportation, thus perpetuating absenteeism.

Further, most work schedules among parents do not allow them enough time to take their children to school let alone get involved in school activities. Many parents hold two or more part-time jobs or work on a permanent basis in extended periods. This extended work routine denies parents time to get involved in their children's learning experiences, more so on regular school days, often forcing them to compensate for lost time during weekends. The result of working full-time can lead to insufficient school attendance because of parents' regular absence to monitor the attendance of their child as their work schedules do not allow for any time-waste. Financial instability is further identified as a promoter of increased stress and lowers the levels of parent participation in their householder's education, thereby increasing absenteeism. The intersection of financial strain and work–life balance challenges warrants worksite interventions tailored to ameliorate these barriers that support families in maintaining consistent school attendance by students with disabilities.

Interpersonal Problems and Health Complications

Interpersonal problems and health complications are some of the major critical factors contributing to chronic absenteeism among disabled students. Students who have interpersonal and health complications face health-related challenges that involve chronic diseases, impairment of different body parts, or mental illnesses that prevent regular attendance in school. For example, students with chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes, or epilepsy may have regular appointments, hospitalizations, or illnesses that cause them to miss school. Also, the side effects of medications or treatments can make students feel poorly, become tired, or not be able to function properly at school, thus affecting attendance.

Beyond matters of physical health, there are challenges to mental and emotional health. Students with disabilities face a higher incidence of anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues that might impact motivation and regularity in school. Added to these challenges quite often are the social challenges many students with disabilities bring with them to school. These social challenges can contribute to an unwelcome school environment regarding issues, such as bullying, social isolation, and difficulty developing peer relationships, making the student more apt to avoid school (Balfanz, Chang et al., 2021). For ELLs with various disabilities, language barriers may exacerbate feelings of exclusion and frustration, increasing absenteeism.

Interpersonal problems and complications arising from health issues constitute one of the major reasons for the chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities. By

targeting interventions, awareness of health-related difficulties faced by such students—ranging from chronic diseases to mental health problems—constitutes an urgent call. Addressing these interpersonal factors will go a long way toward fostering an enabling academic environment that will allow them to thrive. This challenge leads to another crucial factor: the inadequacy of resources in schools.

Inadequate Resources in Schools

Inadequate school resources are major determinants of attendance and success of children with disabilities and cause major barriers to regular educational participation. Many schools suffer from a lack of resources, especially insufficient funding, which invariably stamps its negative imprint on their capacity to deliver specialized support. Resource deficit exists in critical areas such as an insufficiency of special education teachers, therapists, and support staff necessary to provide the necessary specialized interventions. In the absence of adequate personnel, it is unlikely that students with disabilities will receive proper attention and accommodations to surmount their challenges. Besides resources not being available for appropriate instructional materials and assistive technologies, all these factors combine to make it difficult for these students to actively participate in their own education.

Moreover, most of the district schools lack proper physical infrastructure, making the environment difficult and sometimes even dangerous for students with any type of physical disability and thus hampering regular attendance. Lack of facilities in the form of ramps, elevators, or other appliances needed by physically handicapped students may

make it just impossible for them to attend school regularly. Support deficits extend beyond the classroom, affecting every aspect of a student's school experience with multiple disabilities, contributing to increased absenteeism. Each of these factors calls upon policymakers and school officials to drive meaningful improvement through an increase in funds, support for professional development among educators, and long-overdue school infrastructure updates. Efforts to increase school funding will enable school educators to create an environment more inclusive and supportive of regular attendance, working toward the academic and social growth of all students, but more particularly those with disabilities.

Inadequate resources within schools represent a significant challenge for students with disabilities in terms of both attendance and academic success. Both insufficient funding and lack of specially trained staff prevent schools from offering all support and accommodation needed by such students. Policymakers must first acknowledge the critical need for improved resources and infrastructure before they can effectively advocate for increased funding and professional development for educators, ultimately creating a more inclusive and educational environment. Such resource gaps need to be addressed if the goal of regular attendance and improved academic performance is to be achieved. The review of resource insufficiencies pinpoints how chronic absenteeism influences the overall educational impact on students.

Impact of Chronic Absenteeism on Students

Chronic absenteeism can seriously impede a student's academic progress, social development, and future opportunities, particularly among students with disabilities. More specifically, being systematically absent from school can lead to lost instruction, lower grades, and a higher potential for falling behind. For students with disabilities who may already struggle because of learning issues, these negative outcomes are maximized, the gaps deepen, and progress in education stagnates. Socially, chronic absenteeism denies students chances to acquire relevant relationships and social skills, thus isolating them and diminishing their self-esteem.

The academic and social disengagement might eventually contribute to more absenteeism since students start feeling estranged from their friends and the school community. Finally, the compounding effects of chronic absenteeism manifest in misbehavior, increased dropouts, and lagging in postsecondary school and work. Overcoming these barriers is not only essential to excel academically but also to create the appropriate steppingstones toward long-term success and well-being for students with disabilities.

Chronic absenteeism significantly undermines the academic progress and social development of students with disabilities, leading to a cycle of disengagement. Whole-school approaches to addressing absenteeism contribute to social isolation, reducing self-esteem, sometimes boosting even more absenteeism, and increasing dropout rates. Policymakers will naturally take action with regard to the critical impact of absenteeism

by creating interventions that encourage consistent attendance and support the overall well-being of such students.

Policy Recommendations

To build a sense of responsibility and commitment, I believe that it is imperative for students to attend school consistently on a daily basis. I am a firm believer that when students attend school regularly, they are exposed to consistent modeling of societal norms, laws, rules, policies, and regulations that lead to developing as productive members of society. When students are chronically absent, they miss valuable opportunities to engage and interact with their teachers and peers in positive and constructive ways that can lead to solid foundations of personal and professional goal setting. I think that receiving a formal education is a window into endless possibilities and options for entitlements and success that are closed to those without a formal education. Schools are conduits to providing students with academic and socially diverse learning opportunities. Education is sustainable and attainable when students attend school on a regular basis. Students who are chronically absent miss out on valuable lessons and learning experiences when they are absent.

Students miss out on cooperative learning opportunities when they are chronically absent. Students miss out on a rigorous academic curriculum that is real-time and cannot be replicated in its entirety when students are absent. Upon a student's return to class after absenteeism, students, and teachers play a never-winning game of "catch up"; realistically, there is no "catch up" to missed learning opportunities. Chronic absenteeism

can lead to academic difficulties and lower grades. When students are absent and are performing academically two or three grade levels below their peers in Reading or Mathematics, every day they are absent, eats away at how teachers are able to reteach a curriculum lesson using modified learning styles to support their students' learning styles.

There is only a diverged sense of curriculum taught to the student by his or her teacher in the hopes that the student will understand the missed instructions. When students are absent, there is a gap in academic and social learning that must be addressed in some way by teachers. There is no one way or simplified measure or teaching style to address this gap. When students are chronically absent, teachers grapple with limited resources on how to best meet their students' academic and social needs in an even shorter time frame due to standardized testing schedules, school-wide activities, student services, and other class time drawdowns.

When students are absent, they miss out on small group and whole group team-building activities. When students are absent, they miss out on enriched opportunities to build relationships with their teachers, class peers, school staff, and educational stakeholders. Additionally, consistent attendance fosters positive relationships with teachers, peers, and staff. Often when students are absent, they return with many questions about what they missed during their absence, and it is hard to explain an authentic team-building experience to students. Students often lack a sense of connection due to not being able to relate to the missed learning opportunity.

Regular attendance helps students develop good habits and a positive attitude towards education. When students are absent, students often return to school with almost sluggish behaviorisms and find it hard to return to the rigorous pace of academic and social behaviorisms expected within the classrooms. School provides opportunities for social interaction, emotional support, and the development of important life skills. Attending school regularly helps students to initiate and engage in viable social interactions and discussions with classroom peers and teachers for a healthy balance of social development.

Regular school attendance is essential for preparing students for higher education and future careers. When students are chronically absent, I think that a pattern of absences can lead to absent behaviorisms in high school. Research shows that when students are chronically absent in their elementary school years, students are more prone to be chronically absent in their middle and high school years. These absences might lead to heightened high school dropout rates, unemployment, early death, and other missed opportunities. When students attend school regularly, they are more susceptible to a better education, access to more advanced knowledge, and a less obstructed career path than their chronically absent peers. Based on the findings of this policy paper, the following policy recommendations are proposed to address chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities.

Comprehensive School-Wide Attendance Initiatives

A district-wide attendance policy diagramming expectations, consequences, and interventions for students and families would go a long way to prevent the problems of chronic absenteeism. For this policy to become a reality, attendance teams will be formed within schools, comprised of school administrators, counselors, social workers, and school nurses who are able to provide a coordinated response. The social engagement must be data-driven interventions that are guided by attendance data to identify and provide support to students who are at risk of becoming chronically absent.

As for the general initiatives of the attendance team on the school level, they must be proactive; not reactive. An attendance team will work in collaboration with teachers and support staff to link early warning signs of chronic absenteeism with such signs as frequent tardiness, partial day absences, or sudden changes in attendance patterns. Regular reviews of attendance data in schools enable schools to intervene as it fits the specific needs of their students, whether that means making personal contact with every family, using a mentoring program, or linking students with other resources in the community. Proactive collaboration approach among the attendance team, teachers and support staff deals not only with problems of attendance at an incipient stage but also fosters a school culture in a real sense—normal, regular, and important.

Further, communication is key to impressing upon families the importance of everyday attendance. Schools should engage in regular meetings with parents/guardians, newsletters, and digital means to share with them that their child may be missing out on

valuable educational opportunities and affecting future success due to chronic absenteeism. Attendance teams should also work to build trust with families, providing resources and support around needs such as transportation or flexible meeting times to begin to work through some of the more deeply ingrained issues that might be causing them to stay away.

Enhanced Support for Students with Disabilities

Enhanced support may increase access to specialized services, including those that help in keeping up with mental health, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and others. Individual student-specific attendance and support plans may be designed to help in the implementation of certain provisions that will have the best solution to challenges faced. In this initiative, class environments would ensure inclusiveness and fulfillment of the diverse needs of these students with disabilities to enhance a sense of belonging, hence reducing absenteeism.

More support for students with disabilities implies not only increasing their access to specialized services but also making a school environment more accommodating and sensitive to the many different needs of such students. Achieving an enabling environment requires Universal Design Learning (UDL) practices in classroom instruction to ensure that all students, irrespective of varying abilities, have equal access and opportunities to work on the curriculum. UDL strategies may include but are not limited to multiple ways for students to represent what they have learned, multiple representations of materials, and assistive technologies. When educational approaches are

tailored to each student's needs, schools will create a more inclusive environment that could decrease the potential for truancy created by frustration, disengagement, or feeling unsupported.

Moreover, in designing and implementing effective, student-specific attendance and support plans, educators should work collaboratively with specialists and families. Educators must be flexible, regularly reviewed, and adjusted according to a student's progress and changing needs. For instance, such a plan would include the use of anxiety management strategies, such as scheduled time out of class, permission to use the quiet space, or regular check-ins with a counselor. Beyond these student-specific attendance and support plans, schools can provide professional development opportunities for teachers and staff to learn about the best ways of working with students with a disability and ensure that everyone involved in the student's education is well-versed and experienced in setting up a supportive learning environment. With these comprehensive supports in place, schools can greatly improve these students' educational experience and be able to eventually lead to improved attendance, academic success, and well-being.

Strengthened Family and Community Partnerships

Parental involvement in attendance matters is the key to students' success. Therefore, schools must be involved in programs aimed at enlightening parents about the importance of attendance and support for children during school. Partnerships with community agencies provide more resources and support to families by helping them

eliminate barriers that may limit student attendance. Culturally responsive practices build trust and religious efforts to engage diverse families.

More importantly, strengthening family and community partnerships includes the development of clear, open lines of communication between the school and families. There should be regular updates on progress, attendance, and any emerging issues related to their children through a medium that is timely, accessible, and culturally appropriate. Facilitating workshops, parent-teacher conferences, and other activities relevant to parents in the community promotes collaboration and shared responsibility for the success of every student. Further than that, technology with apps or web-based platforms enables schools to keep parents informed and involved in current times. If schools ensure that the parents are supported, informed, and involved in the children's education, then they will be closer to getting to the root of the absenteeism problem and, therefore, have a chance of collaboratively working together with families in finding solutions that best help students attain consistent levels of attendance and achievement.

Adequate Resource Allocation

Increased funding for schools to support staffing, resources, and programs for students with disabilities, including acting on the priority in terms of staffing needs: counselors, social workers, and special education teachers. Professional development for educators in evidence-based practices aimed at improving student attendance and strategies to support students with disabilities will require investment in building

capacity. Adequate resource allocation not only promotes better educational outcomes but also contributes to the overall well-being of students with disabilities.

Sufficient school resources also pertain to allocations that cater to adequate structures and materials to help students with disabilities learn effectively. These resources encompass accessible classrooms, particular equipment, and technology accommodating different learning needs. Such investment helps to create an enabling environment in which students with disabilities can participate fully in any educational activity. Investment in afterschool activities and extracurricular programs that are adapted towards students with special disabilities will heighten their participation and motivation to learn, leading to constant attendance. Resource allocation can well address the immediate barriers to attendance if it is holistic. Providing the required resources will assist students in improving academic outcomes and general well-being by creating a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Implementing robust data collection system enables the tracking of the trends in absenteeism by setting up effective data collection systems in student attendance patterns. Most importantly, the approach to make data-driven decisions will assists in the development of an early warning system that identifies students at risk from chronic absenteeism. Research shows that early warning signs are beneficial for schools to monitor student absences to tailor interventions based on students' individual needs

(Canbolat, 2024). Such attendance-related interventions need periodic evaluation of effectiveness complemented with data-driven improvement measures.

Data-driven decision-making requires that attendance data be collected and analyzed to determine the trends of this pertinent habit, predict problems before they escalate, and provide a suitable environment for effective teaching and learning. There is a need for all-inclusive data systems within the schools, capturing a range of indicators, such as frequency of absence, reasons, and the effects on academic performance. With such broad data collection, educators and administrators would therefore be able to devise specific strategies to address root causes leading to their absenteeism. These types of proactive methods assure that when attendance begins to improve, students will be more engaged, and academic achievement, may show growth for these students. Therefore, better use of data, could lead schools to be adequately responsive and supportive to this diverse array of students. These systems can be integrated with existing student information platforms to let educators know which of their students are at risk and why. By being proactive, schools will always be able to handle issues even before they happen, rather than just mere reactions to problems as they emerge.

The comprehensive attendance data that was collected and analyzed makes an early warning system possible, which would automatically trigger efficient interventions based on individual needs. For example, school officials can quickly respond upon detecting a frequent pattern of absenteeism in school and contact the student and his or her family with the view to understand the underlying causes, such as health or other

problems or anxiety due to instability in his or her family background. Continuous assessment assures effectiveness and enables adjustment as indicated by feedback and outcomes of data-driven interventions. The perpetual cycle of evaluation and revision serves to sustain a focus on attendance and overall student success.

Policy Goals

Chronic absence is a high concern in Title I schools among students with disabilities. The National Center for Education Statistics reported, for the school year 2020-2021, that students with disabilities were chronically absent at a rate of 19.6%, whereas students without disabilities had a chronic absence rate of 11.5% (Snyder et al., 2019). Also, in a recent study undertaken by the Center for Special Education in Urban Schools, researchers determined students with disabilities were 3.5 times more likely to be absent for 10 or more days in a given school year (Francisco et al., 2020). These statistics are among many reasons this issue must be addressed, and they provide further context and understanding of the evidence-based policy recommendations made within this policy paper.

The overall goal of this policy paper is to address the urgent issue of chronic absence among students with disabilities, specifically in relation to Title I schools. Anchored by special education teachers' perspectives, this study explored key variables that strongly impact the problem and create evidence-based policy recommendations for the improvement of student attendance and well-being. Specific policy goals include:

- Understanding the problem

- Identification of key obstacles
- Proposing evidence-based solutions
- System change advocacy
- Improving educational outcomes
- Focus on the Family (FoTF): Reducing chronic absenteeism policy

Understanding the Problem

Critical to the development of effective interventions is an understanding of the problem related to chronic absenteeism for students with disabilities. This goal of addressing chronic absenteeism requires thorough articulation of how and why students with disabilities are disproportionately absent compared to their same-age peers without disabilities. Drawing from data regarding absenteeism rates and elaborating on the exact challenges these students face, including health problems, economic barriers, and a lack of support, I have provided evidence to drive a new policy to support family of students with disabilities. This will help in ascertaining the underlying causes of absenteeism and various factors that lead to it, hence ensuring that the latter policy recommendations are based on a clear and accurate depiction of the problem.

In addition, specific ways in which this population is affected by absenteeism will be unearthed to make more specified implications for larger themes, such as educational equity and student outcomes. Understanding these impacts—lowered academic performance, increased dropout rates, and lessened social-emotional development—will impress upon readers the urgency in addressing chronic absenteeism. This holistic

understanding will also underline the need for specific policies and other interventions that would take unique needs of students with disabilities into consideration, thus making sure that any proposed solutions will be pertinent and effective in mitigating the identified challenges.

Identification of Key Obstacles

Identification of key obstacles is one of the important goals of tackling chronic absenteeism of students with disabilities. It involves describing the major reasons that cause frequent absenteeism of students from school, as noted by special education teachers. The barriers may be identified through a systematic analysis of teacher insights and experiences, such as financial struggles, health-related issues, insufficient school resources, and family dynamics. These are multilayered and interrelated factors in most cases, thereby forming a complex tapestry of problems that exacerbate absenteeism. Knowing what these barriers entail from people directly working with the students provides a subtle approach toward solving the root cause.

In addition, a focus on such key barriers helps informed targeted intervention by policymakers in much-policy terms of education's most substantive need, as underscored by the educators. For example, in the availability of financial resources, more funding could be availed to increase the number of trips for transportation or support services, while in health, enhancing access to medical care and mental health services could be achieved. Clearly and accurately identifying these factors would allow for focused,

evidence-based strategies aimed at reducing absenteeism and improving school outcomes for students with disabilities.

Proposing Evidence-Based Solutions

Proposing evidence-based solutions is pivotal in addressing chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities. This goal involves developing policy recommendations grounded in empirical research and proven practices that address the identified challenges. By analyzing existing studies, successful interventions from other districts, and feedback from educators, policymakers can craft strategies that are not only theoretically sound but also practically effective. For example, evidence suggests that comprehensive school-wide attendance initiatives and enhanced support systems can significantly reduce absenteeism. These recommendations must be informed by data showing what has worked in similar contexts, ensuring that the solutions are tailored to the specific needs of students with disabilities.

The proposed evidence-based solutions should be adaptive and reviewed regularly for effectiveness over time. Pilot or incremental implementation will help test the running of these recommendations before this gets to full scale. Regular assessment and feedback loops allow adjustments to be made from real-world outcomes and the evolving needs. Since such policies would, therefore, be evidence based, schools will be more suitably positioned to address absenteeism whilst promoting better educational opportunities for students with disabilities by anchoring policy recommendations in rigorous evidence with a flexible approach.

System Change Advocacy

System change advocacy on the matter of chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities needs to involve a holistic approach that goes outside the school setting. What this priority underlines are the importance of collaboration between schools, family, and communities in building an enabling environment that fosters support for addressing the different drivers of absenteeism. System change advocacy will be through building of firm partnerships that schools will be able to better engage the parents and caregivers, and ensure they are active education partners for their children. Sometimes, community organizations offer extra services such as counseling, transportation help, or afterschool activities, which may be beneficial in breaking down some interventions in ensuring regular attendance.

Advocating for systemic change also means advocating at the district and state levels for policy reforms that much more strongly bring into focus comprehensive supportive systems for students with disabilities in schools. For instance, attendance policies to be more inclusive, increasing special education funding, and offering schools and educators training on evidence-based practices to help prevent truancy. Systemic change helps shift the focus from punitive measures to preventive and supportive interventions when stakeholders are working toward such changes, so an educational context is created in which students with disabilities have equal opportunities to succeed. This holistic approach ensures that root causes of absenteeism are addressed, thus making a difference in attendance and the overall well-being of students in a sustainable way.

Improving Educational Outcomes

The ultimate objective of such is to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Attendance shows a very tight link to academic success, as regular attendance permits a student to be involved in the classroom curriculum and develop critical skills besides forging positive bonds with friends and teachers. Improving educational outcomes will help students with disabilities receive less disruption to their schooling due to chronic absence, which, in turn, will yield better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and enhanced social-emotional development. The focus on attendance is critical because whenever students are absent regularly, they begin falling back academically and struggle to catch up. One of the results of this trend—having a higher risk of dropout—will have implications for them later in life with respect to future opportunities and quality of life.

Moreover, reducing absenteeism is not only good for educational achievement but also beneficial to the health and well-being of students with disabilities. While in school, students reap benefit from structured support systems in place that include access to services integral to development; individual educational programs; and much-needed social exposure. These are things that have a place in helping to build belonging and confidence, very vital elements needed for their well-being and personal development. The best chance to promote an inclusive and supportive environment for schools so that students with disabilities can thrive both academically and personally shall be through a whole-person approach to education, whereby each student shall have the opportunity to

attain full potential by way of prioritizing attendance and making available more focused interventions.

This policy paper attempts to bring awareness to the urgent need for effective intervention policies to realize these goals and improve educational experiences for students with disabilities. Recognizing that regular school attendance is important for better academic achievement and general well-being, this paper advocates for a comprehensive approach which identifies not only root causes of absenteeism but also proposes actionable solutions aimed at overcoming these challenges.

Additionally, this policy paper intends to make teachers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the communities aware that students with disabilities do require specially targeted interventions. The policy paper extends an invitation for collaborative efforts between schools, families, and organizations within communities to create a supportive environment that will allow all students to feel included. The evidence-based strategies in this paper will be implemented to bring about meaningful change so that students with disabilities can equally access education and have the possibility of reaching their full potential. The policy paper finally wishes to level the playing field within the education system so that all students can succeed, regardless of their abilities.

Focus on the Family (FoTF): Reducing Chronic Absenteeism Policy

To reduce chronic absenteeism and support our families with disabled students, we must provide positive reinforcements for students and their families to promote retention and improve consistent school attendance. As a district, schools should reward

consistent attendance with incentives and positive reinforcement, such as certificates, privileges, or recognition that can become beacons for family discussions and celebrations. Reducing students with disabilities chronic absenteeism requires family Involvement. My FoTF: Reducing Chronic Absenteeism policy encourages parental involvement by investing in parent-teacher relationships through regular conferences and providing resources to support their students' attendance. My FoTF Policy promotes the organization of school-wide attendance campaigns to foster consistent school attendance for all students. My FoTF Reducing Chronic Absenteeism Policy would include measures to establish school and district-wide mentorship programs pairing struggling students with peer and professional mentors who can provide various levels of support and encouragement to attend school consistently.

Appendix B: CASP Form

CASP
Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CASP Checklist: 10 questions to help you make sense of a **Systematic Review**

How to use this appraisal tool: Three broad issues need to be considered when appraising a systematic review study:

- Are the results of the study valid? (Section A)
- What are the results? (Section B)
- Will the results help locally? (Section C)

The 10 questions on the following pages are designed to help you think about these issues systematically. The first two questions are screening questions and can be answered quickly. If the answer to both is "yes", it is worth proceeding with the remaining questions. There is some degree of overlap between the questions, you are asked to record a "yes", "no" or "can't tell" to most of the questions. A number of italicised prompts are given after each question. These are designed to remind you why the question is important. Record your reasons for your answers in the spaces provided.

About: These checklists were designed to be used as educational pedagogic tools, as part of a workshop setting, therefore we do not suggest a scoring system. The core CASP checklists (randomised controlled trial & systematic review) were based on JAMA 'Users' guides to the medical literature 1994 (adapted from Guyatt GH, Sackett DL, and Cook DJ), and piloted with health care practitioners.

For each new checklist, a group of experts were assembled to develop and pilot the checklist and the workshop format with which it would be used. Over the years overall adjustments have been made to the format, but a recent survey of checklist users reiterated that the basic format continues to be useful and appropriate.

Referencing: we recommend using the Harvard style citation, i.e.: *Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (2018). CASP (insert name of checklist i.e. Systematic Review) Checklist. [online] Available at: URL. Accessed: Date Accessed.*

Appendix C: Principal Introductory Email and Invitation to Participate in Study

Date

Dear School Principal,

My name is Mary Bonnetty, and I am a Doctoral Candidate in Special Education at Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, Walden University writing to request permission to use all the interview questions for my dissertation research study titled as *Special Educators' Perspectives on Chronic Absenteeism in Students with Disabilities.* The purpose of this study was to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site.

Principal Researcher: Mary Bonnetty

Email: mary.bonnetty@waldenu.edu

Office Phone : (254) 630-4819

Dissertation Chair : Dr. Maureen Ellis

Email : maureen.ellis@mail.waldenu.edu

Office Phone : (623) 341-6731

I greatly appreciate your time and consideration.

If you grant the requested permission above, please sign and date below:

Signed: _____Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Respectfully,
Mary Bonnetty

Invitation to Participate in Study

For Qualitative Research Study: Special Educators' Perspectives on Chronic Absenteeism Among Students Diagnosed with Disabilities

Purpose of this research study: The purpose of this study is to explore Title I special education teacher perspectives about the reasons for chronic absenteeism and barriers affecting the attendance of the students with disabilities at the study site.

Who: Title I elementary school special educators serving students with special needs with chronic absenteeism rates.

What: Semistructured one-on-one interviews featuring 12 open-ended questions allow each study participant to express his or her perspectives in a safe and confidential setting on the specific topic of this research study.

How: Sign up for a Confidential Individual Interview by clicking on the Google Sheets link below.

Google Sheets Link: Confidential Individual Interview Sign-up Link

Thank you so much for volunteering to participate in this qualitative research study.

Appreciation for participating in this study: Each participant will receive a $10.00 gift card/ecard to a local coffee shop.

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a special education teacher within a public school system?
2. How many years of experience in special education do you have teaching students diagnosed with disabilities?
3. What is your take on the relationship between students diagnosed with disabilities and their incidences of absenteeism?
4. Do you think students with disabilities have higher absentee rates than their nondisabled peers?
5. What do you perceive to be barriers in reducing the chronic absenteeism rates of students with disabilities?
6. Do you think that as a special education teacher, you may be able to reduce any barriers at your school that affects students' absenteeism?
7. Does the Special Education Department on your campus have plans in place to help with students with disabilities?
8. What additional resources, do you believe may be needed to reduce students diagnosed with disabilities chronic absenteeism rates at your school?
9. Do you think that students diagnosed with disabilities struggle more with chronic absenteeism than their nondisabled peers?

10. What are your thoughts about your school's current attendance practices or programs align with your school district's practices for reducing all students' chronic absenteeism rates?
11. Tell me about one time when you believe that the academic success of a student was influenced by his/her chronic absenteeism?