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Truancy: Causes, Effects, and Solutions

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Abstract

Truancy is a problem that is seriously affecting the overall success of the large urban school district, and in particular, the specific school in which I am employed. For the purpose of this paper, truancy will be defined as consecutive illegal absences from class or school. The purpose of the research is to develop a solution that can be proposed to my administrator in an effort to decrease, or eliminate truancy altogether and is to be initiated at the beginning of our next school year. Therefore, the first objective is to identify causes, effects, and solutions to truancy based on a review of literature. The second objective is to verify the causes of truancy in my school and compare these results with teacher opinions of the same causes. The final objective is to identify how teachers feel about truancy and realize what, or how much time the teachers are willing to offer in an effort to decrease, or eliminate the problem altogether.

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ABSTRACT: Truancy is a problem that is seriously affecting the overall success of the large urban school district, and in particular, the specific school in which I am employed. For the purpose of this paper, truancy will be defined as consecutive illegal absences from class or school. The purpose of the research is to develop a solution that can be proposed to my administrator in an effort to decrease, or eliminate truancy altogether and is to be initiated at the beginning of our next school year. Therefore, the first objective is to identify causes, effects, and solutions to truancy based on a review of literature. The second objective is to verify the causes of truancy in my school and compare these results with teacher opinions of the same causes. The final objective is to identify how teachers feel about truancy and realize what, or how much time the teachers are willing to offer in an effort to decrease, or eliminate the problem altogether.

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Truancy

Truancy, or the habitual act of being absent from school without permission, is a major issue affecting the overall success of the school in which I am employed. Truancy may be identified differently between districts, states, or governments; however, consecutive unexcused absences from school is the most common and acceptable definition. Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) report that hundreds of thousands of American students are absent from school without permissible excuses each day, and this issue is ranked among the top ten problems facing schools across the country (DeSocio, VanCura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman, and Cole, 2007). Therefore, truancy extends nationally and contributes significantly towards the undermining of the American educational system. Moreover, 1.5%, 1.8%, 2.0%, and 2.4% of the entire student population of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ulster respectively miss class without authorization (Truancy rates worst in UK: Education, 2008), and one in five students are identified as committing truancy in Scotland each day (Grant, 2007), thereby expanding the matter globally.

Reid (2006) explicitly identifies attendance as the single most critical variable in measuring students' achievement levels; therefore, it is imperative that corrective action be taken against chronic absenteeism immediately. To eliminate, or at least decrease truant behavior, possible causes for the behavior must be identified. The possible short-term and long-term effects of unexcused school non-attendance are also of value in ascertaining the immediacy and importance of the issue. Next, possible solutions towards decreasing, preventing, and/or eliminating the behavior altogether should be acknowledged. After considering several solutions, a conclusion will be presented in regard to which solution, or combination of solutions would be most beneficial to initiate in my school.

Possible Causes of School Non-Attendance

According to Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, and Wilson (2007), the causes for truancy can be positioned within four major categories. These categories include family factors, school factors, economic influences, and student variables.

Family factors that may cause truant behavior include, but are not limited to parents' education, parental supervision, and household income. In a recent study on eighth and tenth grade student absenteeism, Henry (2007) correlates family factors with truant behavior. Henry's study illustrates that the lower the father's education, the more likely the child is to commit truancy. The chance the child would commit truancy was even higher if the mother was a high school dropout. Additionally, Henry's work proves that the longer a child is unsupervised after school, the more likely that child is to become a truant; 29.9% of truants were unsupervised for five hours or more after school whereas only 11.3% of truants were never unsupervised after school. In a recent study on truant offenders in the juvenile justice system, Zhang, et al. (2007) linked truancy to household income. They established that minors that are first referred to the juvenile justice system tend to be more financially impoverished, with a relatively higher percentage of families making less than $15,000 per year, than their regularly attending peers. That is, students are more likely to exhibit truancy if they live in families that gross less than $15,000 annually.

School factors that may cause truant behavior include, but are not limited to school climate, class size, attitudes, ability to meet each student's diverse needs, and the school's discipline policy regarding truancy. According to Wilkins (2008), students that attend large schools may feel isolated or alienated in their school setting, so to escape these feelings they choose not to attend. These students do not feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, or

secure; they are lacking a connection to a trustworthy somebody within the school. In oversized classrooms, students' diverse needs, whether they are instructional, social, or a various other, cannot consistently be met and student-teacher relationships cannot be developed. This leads to a school climate and attitude in which each individual must fend for himself. Henry (2007) solicits that 23% of truants choose to skip school because they do not feel safe in their school environment. Moreover, if a student does not feel comfortable, secure, or safe, and logically decides to skip school because location x is safer than the school, he is punished. Tobin (2009) suggests that imposing more serious punishments has worsened truant behavior; thus proving punishment to be counterproductive in the fight against chronic absenteeism.

Economic influences that may cause truant behavior include, but are not limited to living situation and student employment. Henry (2007) discerned in his study that 33.5% of high school truants did not live with their mother or father, 27.6% lived with their father only, 19.8% lived with their mother only, and 14.4% lived with both parents. Therefore, the likelihood that a student would commit truancy increases when the student lives with only one parent, and increases anywhere between 5.9% to 13.7% if the child lives with neither his mother or father. Moreover, Henry explains that students, who work more than 20 hours per week, greatly increase their chances of committing truancy. Of the truants he examined, 23.9% worked 20 hours or more per week, whereas only 13.4% worked five or less hours per week.

Student variables that may cause truant behavior include, but are not limited to physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, drug use, perception of self, and detachment from school. DeSocio, et al. (2007) identifies physical and mental health issues as

contributing towards school absenteeism. They suggest that truancy coexists with student and

family mental health disorders and may be an indicator for an existing or emerging mental

health disorder, including post traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and/or substance

abuse. Supporting evidence from Henry's study (2007) implicates students that use alcohol

one or more times a month as 26.5% more likely to skip school than peers who do not use

alcohol, and if the student drinks to a level of intoxication his likelihood of skipping school

increases to 31.2%. Moreover, 33.9% of the students who have been truant smoke cigarettes

and 37.2% smoke marijuana at least once a month. Of equal importance, students that held

lower perceptions about themselves were more likely to skip school than students who held

higher perceptions of themselves. For example, students that answered "probably won't"

graduate from high school and "definitely won't" attend college committed higher truant

behavior at 44.5% and 30% respectively than their peers who answered "definitely will"

graduate from high school and "definitively will" go to college at 15% and 12.1%

respectively. Even more defining, DeSocio et al. (2007) indicate, that as many as 30% of

youth who are absent on a given school day are representative of school disengagement, or

detachment. According to Henry (2007), students that exhibit school disengagement, lack

commitment to the school, are poor achievers, and hold low aspirations for their futures.

Possible Effects of Truancy

Henry (2007) indicates that truancy's consequences are extensive, resulting in

negative implications for multiple levels of society. In the short-term, truancy can predict

maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency,

and teen-age pregnancy. In the long-term, evidence reveals truancy as a predictor of poor

adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and

incarceration. Moreover, truancy exerts a negative effect on community because of its correlation with delinquency, crime, and other negative adult outcomes.

Student dropout from school is the most obvious result of chronic absenteeism. According to Rodriguez and Conchas (2009), truancy and dropout rates are concentrated and worsening in racially segregated central cities in primarily large high schools attended by mostly low-income youth of color. Drop out rates in these areas are at twice the national average, nearly 20%, and exceed 50-60% in some areas of the United States. In these areas, more students are dropping out than graduating. What does this say about our society? What is in store for these students? How do these individuals survive in a country where average income is directly correlated with level of education?

The most logical response: an increase in crime rates and the nation's incarcerated population. The most consistent finding regarding truancy and dropout rates is the correlation the behavior has to high rates of delinquency (Mueller and Giacomazzi, 2006). These forms of delinquency include substance abuse, gang activity, and later involvement in adult criminal activity such as burglary, auto theft, and vandalism, thus leading to incarceration. For example, 94% of Rhode Island's juvenile offenders are or have been considered truant from school (Byer and Khun, 2007). On any given day, one in 10 male dropouts, or one in four black male dropouts are incarcerated or institutionalized in the United States (Dillon, 2009).

According to Spelman (2009), the United States houses a greater proportion of its citizens than any other country in the world and the direct costs of incarceration exceed $20,000 per prisoner per year, thus costing the U.S. public billions in tax dollars. The United States Department of Education reported that from 2005-2006 the average spending per pupil in elementary and secondary schools was $9,391. Therefore, it becomes apparent that the

United States values murderers, rapists, and burglars (some of which are high school dropouts) over its impressionable youthful learner population. Perhaps American education and America's prison system should move from a reactive to a more preventative paradigm when it comes to keeping students in school.

Middleton (2009) suggests that if just South Carolina's high school dropout population from 2007 graduated with their given classes, their contribution to the economy would be roughly $8 billion dollars over their lifetimes, thus supporting the view that educating children is far more beneficial than incarcerating their eventual haphazard adult product. Even more problematic, our nation's dropouts cost the nation approximately $260 billion in lost earnings and forgone taxes each year (Byer and Khun, 2007).

Another correlation that can be made between truancy, dropping out, and then incarceration is the alarming rates of illiteracy within America's prison system. Byer and Khun (2007) state that 75% of America's incarcerated population can be considered illiterate. What if educators were able to reach and educate those truant students, who later dropped out of school and committed various crimes? How many more legitimate small businesses would be in operation? How much wealthier could our country be? How great of a decrease would we see in crime rates? How much safer would our communities be? How advanced would our country become? The possibilities are limitless.

Combating Truant Behavior

There are a considerable number of strategies and interventions that have been employed to combat truancy. Zhang (2007) recommends instructional, behavioral, and community based interventions, and has advocated for a program titled Check and Connect, while Henry (2007) supports the family and instructional intervention approaches. DeSocio

(2007) initiated a mentor intervention program whereas Reid (2006) investigated a five-tiered

intervention approach titled School Based Scheme (SBS) piloted in the United Kingdom

(UK). Each of the afore mentioned strategies and interventions have exhibited at least

minimal success within the schools they were initiated. What if the successful components of

the previous strategies and interventions were selected and combined with one another to be

used as a single force to combat chronic illegal absenteeism? Would this be possible? Could

individual parts be dissected and then put back together like a puzzle to create the ultimate

truancy combatant?

       "Direct instruction," or an instructional approach that places an emphasis on the drill

and practice technique throughout scripted, rehearsed, and fast-paced lessons, is a key phrase

used in instructional intervention. This is especially useful in reading and math classes where

students can receive immediate feedback. Furthermore, teacher praise and reinforcement has

empirical support for increasing on-task behavior and decreasing inappropriate behaviors

(Zhang, 2007). Through instructional intervention, habitually absent students are encouraged

to attend school through praise. However, I do not believe that the instructional intervention

approach will be enough in and of itself to eliminate, or at the very least decrease chronic

unexcused absenteeism. Nevertheless, the strategy elicits empirical support for increasing on-

task behavior; therefore, direct instruction could be one component used in the fight against

truancy.

       Positive Behavior Support (PBS) and Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) are two

examples of behavioral based interventions. Positive Behavior Support incorporates several

empirically proven practices into a continuum of supports for students with challenging

behaviors and these supports can either be universal and school wide or more intensely

focused on the individual (Zhang, 2007). Functional Behavior Assessment is an example of a more individual based intervention, and is a process in which information is gathered about the function of the student's behavior. This can be used to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the student's behavioral support(s) and self-management. This process generally involves self-monitoring, self-evaluation, and positive reinforcement. Moreover, this process is intended to teach students to take responsibility for their social behavior and academic performance. The PBS and FBA also provide a paper trail needed to prove that steps have been taken in an attempt to improve student behavior, and more specifically in this case, student attendance.

Abolish Chronic Truancy Now (ACT Now) and Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program (TRDP) are two popular community- based interventions. These programs build on the strengths and resources in local communities to target truancy and offer incentives to students and their families for attending school. These community-based interventions include mentoring, intensive family interventions, case management or diversion programs, welfare restrictions as an economic sanction, and expanding police authority (Zhang, 2007). Zhang states that attendance improves when students are given awards, communication with families is strong, parents are assigned a contact person at school, and after school programs are made available to students. However, it becomes obvious that if the entire community is not involved (e.g. parents, educators, law enforcement, juvenile and family court judges, social services, etc), the program will not be successful in preventing, decreasing, or eliminating truancy. Still, it is of value to provide the community with an opportunity to become invested in its youth and the school's fight against truancy.

Check and Connect is a dropout prevention and intervention model that was developed to encourage middle school students that were at risk for dropping out of school to remain engaged in school and on track to graduate (Zhang, 2007). In this model, an assigned individual monitors student levels of engagement on a daily basis using multiple risk factors such as tardiness, skipping classes, absenteeism, behavior referrals, detention, suspensions, grades, and accrued credits. This assigned individual is responsible for ensuring that a student is actually connecting with the school and is indeed participating in the learning environment. This is the Check aspect of the program. In the Connect portion of the program, the assigned individual uses the indicators mentioned above to connect the at risk student to either basic or more intense interventions. The basic interventions include sharing general information about the monitoring system with the student, providing regular feedback to the student about his progress in school, regularly discussing staying in school and its associated benefits, and problem solving strategies that can be used to examine the potential risk factors that the student may be exhibiting. An example of a more intensive based intervention would be that of the FBA, which was discussed earlier. This program would be excellent for chronically absent students because it allows for the fostering of an adult-student relationship based on human interactions and connections. It allows for the student to make a commitment not only to himself, but also to a fellow human being.

According to Henry's (2007) study, many background or family-related variables are associated with truancy. Therefore, family interventions would be appropriate to consider. Unfortunately, there is little information available regarding truancy and family-based interventions.

DeSocio (2007) initiated a mentoring program that was designed to improve school attendance and grades. Her hypothesis was that many students who exhibit poor attendance feel hopeless and alienated; therefore, would benefit from having a personal mentor. Her findings were that the advocacy and encouragement of adult mentors helped to forge connections that encouraged engagement in school and counteracted the students' social anxieties and feelings of hopelessness. Again, this program allows for that human-to-human connection to be forged, and instills a feeling of acceptance and accountability in both the student and the mentor.

Lastly, Reid (2006) examined England's use of a program titled School Based Scheme, or SBS. School Based Scheme is a long-term strategic approach used to overcome major attendance difficulties. School Base Scheme places all students into one of five distinct stages. In stage one, the student attends school and all of his classes at least 92% of the time; therefore, minimal to no support is needed. In stage two, the student is attending 85-92% of school and his classes, and at this point the student and his legal guardian(s) are sent an initial warning letter and are reminded of the importance of making regular school attendance, parental responsibilities, and the possible consequences for failing to fulfill them. In stage three, the student is attending school and classes 75-84% of the time, and at this point the student and legal guardian(s) are asked to attend an attendance panel. The attendance panel is compromised of three key staff members: the principal or assistant principal, a social worker, and the director of student performance or the head of special education. During this meeting the importance of attending school regularly is discussed and a plan is developed to provide the student with the supports needed to attend school regularly. In stage four, the student is attending school and classes 65-74% of the time, and the student and his legal guardian(s) are

asked to attend a governor's attendance panel. This panel consists of the school governor, or chair, principal or assistant principal, a teacher, a social worker, and either the director of student performance or the head of special education. This agenda is similar to that of stage three; however, at this point the school would issue a warning to the legal guardian(s) at the end of the meeting. In stage five, the child's attendance has fallen to 65% or less, and the student and his legal guardian(s) attend a Local Education Authorities (LEA) panel, similar to the District's Board of Education in the United States. At this meeting, the panel members, legal guardian(s), and student explore all of the possible reasons and context for the repeated absences. An absolute final warning is issued, and the student's attendance is monitored over the next six weeks. The student's attendance during this period is expected to be 100%. As soon as the student allows his attendance to drop again, the case is forwarded to a group similar to the United States' Child Protective Services (CPS) for consideration of possible prosecution.

Of the high schools Reid (2006) examined, attendance was increased by at least 10% the first year that the program was implemented. Moreover, Reid identified schools that use LSMs, or learning school mentors, as outperforming similar schools that have no such mentoring programs in place, both in terms of attendance and achievement.

Methodology

Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at a charter school within a large urban school district in western New York. This is a school for students living within the area of the larger urban district and provides students and their families with an alternative to the consistently low-performing urban school district. This site was selected because it was the school in which I

was employed and also because truancy was a major issue affecting our underachieving

student population.

        The participants included two ninth and tenth grade classes and all teachers in grades

seven through ten. This population of the ninth and tenth grade student body was selected

because I teach each class and the majority of the students have illegally missed at least one

day, and many have illegally missed consecutive days of school; therefore earning the "at-

risk" student population title for this research. Moreover, to increase student achievement, all

students should become aware of how missing school affects their learning, and as a result I

will share my findings with them. I selected all teachers in grades seven through ten because I

wanted to determine where our school's staff's beliefs currently are and to determine where

our teachers stand with regard to improving chronic illegal student absenteeism. Multiple

teachers have requested a copy of my research, and I will be providing them with a copy of

my research at the end of the school year.

Data Collection and Analysis

        Three types of data collection were utilized to provide for analysis. Reading peer-

reviewed literature on truancy provided much of the data for my research. Some research had

been previously conducted in some of the topic areas. Second, student information from

surveys, academic records, and attendance records provided student specific data. Lastly,

teacher surveys provided teacher specific data. The student and teacher specific data is

compared and contrasted to the findings and ideas of others contained in the peer-reviewed

literature to determine the most appropriate solution for my school to initiate as a concerned

effort to reduce, or eliminate truancy altogether. The research began in September of 2009

and continued through to April of 2010.

Data Analysis

The data analysis addressed three general issues concerning 9th and 10th grade illegal

absenteeism in my school. First, student responses concerning frequency of illegal absences

and the use of legal excuses were interpreted and compared to documented student attendance

statistics. Next, student responses for committing illegal absenteeism were interpreted and

organized into one of four categories: family factors, economic influences, student variables,

or school factors. Lastly, teacher responses were interpreted and organized into one of the

following five categories concerning teacher beliefs: student achievement/ success,

consequences for illegal student absenteeism, causes of illegal student absenteeism, effects of

illegal student absenteeism, and solutions for decreasing, or eliminating truancy altogether.

Results and Discussion

9th and 10th Grade Survey Responses vs. Documented Attendance Statistics. Questions 1,

2, and 3 in Table One addressed the frequency of student absenteeism, truancy, and the use of

a legal excuse. Question 5 addressed family factors and illegal student absenteeism. Questions

4 and 11 addressed economic influences and illegal student absenteeism. Questions 12, 13,

14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, and 25 addressed student variables and illegal student absenteeism.

Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 22, and 23 addressed school factors and illegal student

absenteeism.

According to the survey, 18% of students reported never missing school, 29% reported

missing school less than once per month, 12% reported missing school once per month, 31%

reported missing school two – three times per month, 04% reported missing school once per

week, 06% reported missing school two – three times per week, and 0% reported missing

school four or more times per week. Moreover, 31% of students reported never missing at

least one class, 29% reported missing at least one class less than once per month, 06%

reported missing at least one class once per month, 16% reported missing at least one class

two – three times per month, 06% reported missing at least one class once per week, 08%

reported missing at least one class two – three times per week, and 04% reported missing at

least one class four or more times per week. Additionally, 44% of students admitted to never

handing in an excuse after missing school or class, while 14% of students were unsure, and

41% responded that they always hand in an excuse. The documented attendance statistics

support the afore mentioned results as at the 25 week point in the school year the 9th grade has

2,363 illegal absences and the 10th grade has 2,684 illegal absences from class so far this year.

Additionally, there are 720 excused absences for the 9th graders and 848 excused absences for

the 10th graders. Unfortunately, the illegal absence rate is greater than the excused absence

rate by 3.28 times for the 9th grade and 3.12 times for the 10th grade. This confirms the claim

that illegal absenteeism is a major issue affecting student achievement in the school.

Causes: Family Factors. Questions 5 in Table One addressed the family factor concerning

student supervision after school. Of the students that admitted to missing school two - three

times per month or more, 41% of the sampled student population, were also less likely to

hand in a legal excuse as 58% of these students admitted to not handing in a legal excuse

following their absences. Of the students that admitted to missing school two – three times per

month or more, and admitted to not handing in a legal excuse, also identified as being home

alone after school for two - three hours at 86%, or six or more hours at 14%. None of these

students were supervised immediately after school. Of the students who responded that they

always hand in an excuse following an absence, 41% of the entire 9th and 10th grade

population, 35% were home alone for only one hour or less, 40% were home alone for two -

three hours, and 25% were home alone for six or more hours. Therefore, the results do suggest

a correlation between some unsupervised children and truancy; however, not all students that

are home alone for two or more hours can be considered truants. Conversely, of the 27% of

students who were never unsupervised after school, 85% miss school no more than two - three

times per month. Therefore, according to this study, the amount of time a child is

unsupervised after school has a mild impact on truancy.

Causes: Economic Influences. Questions 4 and 11 in Table One address the impact of

economic influences on student illegal non-attendance. The living situation breakdown is as

follows: 14% of students live with both parents, 12% live with neither their mother nor father,

67% live with only their mother, and 06% live with only their father. Of the 14% that lived

with both of their parents, 25% admitted to not having legal excuses for their absences.

Moreover, 14% of the students that live with both their mother and father identified with

missing school once a week or more. Of the 12% that lived with neither their mother nor

father, 17% admitted to not having legal excuses for their absences. However, none of these

students identified with missing school more than two - three times per month. Of the 67%

that live with their mother, 52% admitted to not having legal excuses for their absences.

Additionally, 9% of the students that lived with only their mother admitted to missing school

once a week ore more. Of the 06% of students that live with their father only, 75% admitted

to not having legal excuses for their absences. However, none of these students admitted to

missing school any more than two - three times per month. Surprisingly, students that miss

the most school are students that live with both of their parents. The second group of students

that miss school the most are students that live with just their mother, and the students that

miss the least amount of school are students that live with neither their mother nor father and

students that live with only their father. However, 75% of students that live with only their

father admitted to not having legal excuses for their absences and 52% of students that live

with only their mother admitted to not having legal excuses for their absences, whereas 25%

of students that lived with both their mother and father admitted to not having legal excuses

for their absences and 12% of students that lived with neither their mother nor father admitted

to having legal excuses for their absences. Therefore, it becomes evident that in this study,

students that live with a single parent, either their mother or father, are the most likely to miss

school and not have a legal excuse for their absences.

The number of hours students work per week break down is as follows: 71% of

students do not work, 12% of students work one - five hours per week, 14% of students work

six - ten hours per week, no students work eleven or more hours per week, and 02% did not

respond. Of the 71% that do not work outside of school, 14% of students miss school once a

week or more. Of the 12% of students that work one - five hours per week, 0% of students

miss school more than two – three times per month. Of the students that work six - ten hours

per week, 0% of students miss school more than two – three times per month. Therefore, work

does not have an impact on the amount of school students miss. In fact, the opposite

correlation exists. The more hours a student works, up to, but not exceeding ten hours, the less

school that student misses.

Causes: Student Variables. Questions 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, and 25 in Table One

addressed the impact that student factors have on illegal absenteeism These student factors

can be further broken down into three additional categories: substance/ drug use (questions

12, 13, 14), perception of self (questions 15, 16, 17, 24), and extenuating circumstances (20,

21, 25).

Substance/ drug use.

Twenty percent of the total 9th and 10th grade student population admitted to using alcohol, and 14% admitted to using alcohol as frequently as at least once per month. Of the students that admitted using alcohol, 50% miss school two - three times per month or more, while the other 50% miss school less than once per month. Of the 80% of students who never use alcohol, 13% of students miss school once a week or more. Therefore, the use of alcohol does not significantly affect student truancy.

Of the 9th and 10th grade student population, 76% replied, "never" to smoking marijuana. The breakdown of students who admitted to smoking marijuana is as follows: 76% never, 04% once per month, 08% two - three times per month, 02% once per week, and 10% daily. Of the 24% of students that admitted to smoking marijuana, 42% miss school two - three times per month, and the remaining 58% miss school once per month or less. However, 42% of students that admitted to smoking marijuana at least once per month also admitted to missing class at least once per week. Therefore, it appears as though smoking marijuana does not greatly correlate to missing total days of school; however, it does correlate with missing at least once class per week. That is, smoking marijuana at least once per month will increase the chances that a student will miss at least one class per week.

However unlikely, 100% of the student population replied "never" to smoking cigarettes; therefore, I was unable to determine whether smoking cigarettes influences student truancy. Therefore, the use alcohol and the smoking of cigarettes either do not, or cannot be proven to affect student attendance. However, the smoking of marijuana at least once per month will increase the chance that a student will miss at least once class in a given week.

Perception of self.

Of the 9th and 10th grade student population, 06% replied either "don't know" or "probably will not" graduate from high school in their surveys. Sixty-seven percent of these students admitted to missing school two - three times per week or more, and 100% admitted to missing class two - three times per week or more. Eight percent of the 9th and 10th grade population replied "don't know" if they will attend college. Of these students 50% admitted to missing school two - three times per week or more, and 25% admitted to missing class two - three times per week or more. 98% of 9th and 10th grade students agreed that education and learning were important to them, and 02% did not agree nor disagree. Of this 02%, 100% admitted to miss class at least once per week and missing school at least two - three times per month. Therefore, it becomes evident that students who hold lower perceptions of themselves, tend to miss school more than students who hold higher perceptions of themselves.

Extenuating circumstances.

Thirty-seven percent of 9th and 10th grade students agreed that they "have a difficult time adjusting to new environments in order to be successful." Of these students, 17% miss school two - three times per week and 54% miss school two - three times per month. Moreover, 39% of the students agreeing with "having a hard time adjusting to new environments…" miss school at least two - three times per month. Twenty-seven percent of students admitted to having been arrested before, and of these students 39% miss school at least two - three times per month, and 46% miss at least one class two - three times per month. Twelve percent of the 9th and 10th grade population have or are expecting a child, and 33% of these students admit to missing school at least two - three times per month; however 83% of 9th and 10th grade students that have or are expecting a child miss school less than once per

month. Therefore, it is unclear whether these extenuating circumstances directly influence

illegal student absenteeism or not.

Causes: School Factors. Questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 22, and 23 addressed the impact that

school factors play in illegal student absenteeism. Less than half of the total population of 9th

and 10th grade students, 45%, responded that they felt "comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted

and secure in the school." Of these students, 35% never miss school, 13% miss school less

than once per month, 04% miss school once per month, 35% miss school two - three times per

month, 09% miss school once per week, and 04% miss school two - three times per week. Of

the remaining 55% of students who do not feel "comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and

secure in the school," 07% never miss school, 37% miss school less than once per month,

19% miss school once a month, 30% miss school two - three times per month, 07% miss

school two - three times per week or more. Therefore, there is a 28% decrease in overall

school attendance and a 03% increase in missing consecutive days of school for students who

do not feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and secure in their school.

Only 06% of students believe that their classes are too large for positive learning to

take place, and of these student 0% miss school more than once per month. Therefore, class

size does not have an immediate impact on student attendance.

Forty-seven percent of 9th and 10th grade students believe that their needs are met in

each of their classes. Of these students, 30% never miss school, 30% miss school less than

once per month, 09% miss school once per month, 22% miss school two - three times per

month, and 09% miss school two - three times per week. Of the students who do not believe

that their needs are met in each of their classes, 15% never miss school, 19% miss school less

than once per month, 15% miss school once per month, 39% miss school two - three times per

month, 04% miss school once a week, and 08% miss school two - three times per week or more. Therefore, it is evident that students who do not feel as though their needs are met in each class, miss more school than their peers who do feel as though their needs are being met in each class.

Fifty-one percent of 9th and 10th grade students reported that they feel safe in their school environment. Of these students, 20% never miss school, 44% miss school less than once per month, 04% miss school once per month, 28% miss school two - three times per month, 08% miss school once per week, and 08% miss school two - three times per week. Of the students who do not feel safe at school, 25% never miss school, 10% miss school less than once per month, 20% miss school once per month, 40% miss school two - three times per month, 05% miss school two - three times per week. Therefore, it becomes apparent that just because students do not feel safe, does not mean that they will illegally miss school.

Sixty-three percent of students understood the conduct policy regarding missing school without a legal excuse. Of these students 23% never miss school. 23% miss school less than once per month, 14% miss school once per month, 26% miss school two - three times per month, 04% miss school once per week, and 10% miss school two - three times per week. Of the 37% of 9th and 10th grade students that were not aware of the conduct policy regarding missing school without a legal excuse, 12% never miss school, 23% miss school less than once per month, 13% miss school once per month, 44% miss school two - three times per month, and 08% miss school once a week or more. Therefore, it is evident that the less a student knows about the conduct policy regarding missing school without a legal excuse the more likely that child is to miss school.

Sixty-seven percent of students reported that there is at least one adult within the

school that they can trust. Of these students, 16% of students never miss school, 16% of

students miss school less than once per week, 22% of students miss school once per month,

38% of students miss school two - three times per month, 03% of students miss school once

per week, and 06% of students miss school more than once per week. Of the remaining 33%

of 9th and 10th grade students who do not believe that there is an adult within the school that

they can trust, 32% never miss school, 32% miss school less than once per month, 03% miss

school once per month, 09% miss school two - three times per month, 12% miss school once

per week, and 12% miss school two - three times per week. Therefore, it becomes evident that

if there isn't a trustworthy somebody that a student can talk to in a school, the students is

more likely to miss school more consistently as students are four times more likely to miss

school once per week and twice as likely to miss school more than once per week.

Seven – Tenth Grade Teacher Survey Responses. Table Two recorded teacher responses to

student truancy and can be further divided into five categories based on teacher beliefs:

student achievement/ success (questions 1 and 2), consequences for illegal absenteeism

(questions 3,4,5 and 6), causes of illegal absenteeism (question 7), effects of illegal

absenteeism (question 8), and solution towards decreasing/ eliminating truancy (questions 9

and 10).

Questions 1 and 2 addressed teacher beliefs on truancy and student achievement/

school success. Eighty-nine percent of the teachers that responded, replied that "truancy

affects student achievement levels" in at least one of their classes. Therefore, only 11% of the

teachers thought that truancy had no influence on student achievement. Additionally, 78% of

the teachers that responded believe that that overall success of our school is affected by

student truancy. The remaining 22% were undecided. Therefore, 0% disagreed with the statement "I believe that the overall success of our school is affected by truancy," hence it is implied that all of teachers that responded believe, or are not opposed to the belief, that our school's success partially depends on student attendance. This implies that truancy is a real issue that is affecting the overall success of my school, at least from the teachers' point of view.

Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 addressed school – wide and teacher initiated consequences for illegal student absenteeism. Only 22% of the teachers responding admitted to being aware of the school wide consequences for student truancy. That is, 78% of teacher were not aware, or did not know, that there were administrative initiated consequences for student truancy. Moreover, only 11% of the teachers responding believed that the current school wide consequences for illegal absenteeism are effective in reducing student truancy. On the other hand 44% of teachers have set up their own classroom consequence for illegal absenteeism, but none of these teachers believed that their consequences help to reduce illegal student absenteeism. Therefore, it can be concluded that the majority of teachers are unaware of the school wide consequences for illegal absenteeism, and the teachers that have tried to implement their own classroom consequences for illegal absenteeism believe that these consequences do not help to reduce student truancy.

Question 7 addressed teacher beliefs on the causes for illegal student absenteeism. Seventy-eight percent of teachers believed that students illegally miss school because of "family factors," 11% believed that student truancy was due to "economic influences," and another 11% believed that student truancy was linked to "student variables." No teachers believed that "school factors" or "other" reasons were responsible for illegal student

absenteeism. Therefore, it becomes apparent that teachers are quick to blame family for illegal student absenteeism, and fail to recognize that school factors might cause a student to illegally miss school.

Question 8 addressed teacher beliefs on the effects of illegal student absenteeism. Eighty-nine percent of the teachers that responded believe that student truancy "can be a predictor of poor adult outcomes, 11% were undecided, and no teachers disagreed with the statement. Therefore, it becomes obvious that teachers do understand the potential negative effects that may result from illegal student absenteeism.

Questions 9 and 10 addressed teacher beliefs on ascertaining possible solutions to illegal student absenteeism. Seventy-eight percent of the teachers that responded felt that "there is nothing more I can do to decease illegal student absenteeism," 11% were undecided, and the remaining 11% disagreed with the statement. That is, the majority of teachers felt helpless when it came to illegal student absenteeism and believed that not matter what they do, their efforts would have been for naught. However, 56% of the responding teachers replied "somewhat likely" or "likely" to the question, "If a program were implanted to reduce truancy, I would willingly participate even if it meant more work for me during the school hours," 33% were undecided, and only 11% responded with "very unlikely." Therefore, it becomes evident that more than half of the responding teachers would participate in a truancy reduction program, even if they had to take on extra work. Moreover, 33% could be swayed one way or another producing a total of 89% of responding teachers that may participate in a truancy reduction program. Only 11% of the responding teachers wanted nothing to do with a truancy reduction program, and of these 11%, 100% disagreed with the statement, "truancy affects student achievement levels in one or more of my classes." Therefore, 100% of the

teachers that believe that truancy affects student achievement levels and the success of their

school are willing to at least consider becoming a participant in a truancy reduction program,

even if it means more work for them throughout the school day.

Next Steps

To decrease chronic unexcused absenteeism, our school district must have a plan in

place prior to the beginning of the school year as to how the district will assure that students

will regularly commit to attending school. Based on certain components of the academic

(direct instruction), behavior (Positive Behavior Supports, Functional Behavior Assessment),

community (Abolish Chronic Truancy Now, Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program) and

family interventions as well as the programs (Check and Connect, School Based Scheme,

mentoring) mentioned in the Combating Truancy section, I am confident that the subsequent

model will substantially decrease, or possibly eliminate truancy within a our school district

altogether. I call this model the Check and Connect Mentoring School Based Scheme, or

CCMSBS, and it should be initiated on the first day of the school year.

The Skeleton of the model would be that of England's School Based Scheme (Reid,

2006), as all five stages would remain similar to those of England's. However, components of

Check and Connect, mentoring, and the academic, behavior, community, and family

interventions would be networked through the skeleton of the School Based Scheme. These

are the vital organs of the model. If any one piece of the model is missing, the overall goal in

decreasing/ eliminating truancy may be compromised.

To be specific, stage one would be for students who attend school and classes 92% of

the time or more, and require little to no support. During this time, direction instruction

should be used to educate students on the importance of attending and graduating from

school. Concrete statistics should be shared with students in class pertaining to the amount of money a high school drop out makes in comparison with a high school graduate in comparison with a degreed college graduate.

At stage two, students are attending school and classes 85 – 92% of the time and an initial warning letter would be sent home to the legal guardian(s) reminding them of the importance of making regular school attendance, their legal responsibilities, and the consequences of failing to fulfill them. However, also at stage two, an attendance specialist or the student's primary teacher, would begin the check phase of Check and Connect portion of the model. This phase would consist of compiling the student's records of tardiness, both unexcused and excused absences, behavioral referrals, detentions, suspensions, grades, and accrued credits. Once all of the data has been collected, an immediate meeting would be scheduled with the student and the principal or assistant principal, and a discussion about these risk factors would be initiated.

If the student's attendance continues to drop to stage three, attending only 75 –84% of school and classes, the student and his legal guardian(s) would be asked to attend an attendance panel. The attendance panel would be comprised of three key staff members: the principal or assistant principal, a social worker, and the director of student performance or head of special education. At this time, the student's attendance, academic progress, and behavior would be discussed. Legal guardian(s) would be warned of the next two stages and what would happen if their child's attendance did not improve. The student and his legal guardian(s) would be asked to sign the record of the discussion and the agreed upon an action plan before leaving the meeting. At this time the student would also be assigned a mentor. The mentor's responsibility would be to connect the student with information about the five

stages of the School Based Scheme, provide the student with feedback on his current

progress, discuss school and its associated benefits, and to initiate problem solving strategies

that the student could use to examine his potential risk factors as well as both his short and

long term goals. The student would be pulled from class, study hall, or lunch on a regular

basis, or until his attendance improves, in order to forge a connection with his mentor.

If the student's attendance drops to stage four, attending 65-74% of school and classes,

then the student and his legal guardian(s) would be asked to attend a governor's panel. The

panel would consist of the President of the School Board, principal or assistant principal, a

teacher, a social worker, the student's mentor and either the director of student performance

or the head of special education. The agenda is similar to that of stage three; however, at this

point the legal guardian(s) would be issued a warning and a follow-up meeting would be

scheduled. Also at this time, a functional behavior assessment would need to be initiated by

either a general education teacher, or his special education teacher. Once the functional

behavior assessment is completed, the hypothesis for student behavior must be shared with

the teachers, principal or assistant principal, and mentor, and be confirmed by the student and

legal guardian(s). Next, a new action plan would be developed and the follow-up meeting

would ensue, so that the student and his legal guardian(s) could be supplied with and sign the

new action plan.

If the student's attendance drops to stage five, attending 65% or less of school and

classes, then the student and his legal guardian(s) would be asked to attend a Board of

Education panel meeting. At this meeting, the Board of Education, parent(s), and student

explore all of the possible reasons and context for the repeated absences. An absolute final

warning is issued and the student's attendance is strictly monitored over the next six weeks.

The student's attendance during this period is expected to be at 100%. As soon as the child allows his attendance to drop, Child Protective Services will be contacted for consideration of possible prosecution. The goal is to end the truant behavior as quickly as possible, and not allow the student to reach stage five.

Conclusion

Attendance is far too low a priority on school development and school improvement plans, but all evidence suggests that as a student's attendance improves, so does his corresponding academic performance (Reid, 2006). Moreover, erratic attendance can lead to maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy in the short term, and violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration in the long term. The direct costs of incarceration exceed $20,000 per prisoner per year in the United States (Spelman, 2009) and the same nation's dropout population costs the country approximately $260 billion in lost earnings and forgone taxes each year (Byer and Khun, 2007). For these reasons alone, truancy within American schools needs to be eliminated for the betterment of the country.

Teachers at the sampled school understand this, and are open to using some of their planning time to decrease student truancy if a truancy reduction program were initiated. Since no other schools in the district are initiating any programs, why don't we initiate a pilot program? What do we have to lose?

Maybe somewhat less significant, but of some value, is that if an attendance program is initiated and well documented, as this program would be, then there would be sufficient evidence to prove to the state that proactive measures have been taken in an effort to decrease, or eliminate the erratic attendance. The overarching goal of CCMSBS would be to proactively

provide supports to students before they reach the next stage, thereby allowing no child to slip

through the cracks, or to be left behind.

TABLE 1

Student Responses: 49 – Response Rate = 100%; Absent students on date given: 15						
(1) How often do you miss entire days of school?	Never 18%	Less than once per month 29%	One time per each month 12%	Two - three times per month 31%	Once time per each week 04%	Two – three times per each week 06%	4 or more times per week 0%
(2) How often do you miss at least one class?	Never 31%	Less than once per month 29%	One time per each month 06%	Two - three times per month 16%	Once time per each week 06%	Two – three times per each week 08%	4 or more times per week 04%
(3) When I miss school or class, I always hand in a legal excuse.	Strongly disagree 22%	Disagree 22%	Neither agree nor disagree 14%	Agree 27%	Strongly agree 14%	-	-
(4) At home I live with my…	Mother 67%	Father 06%	Both my mother and my father 14%	Neither my mother nor father 12%	-	-	-
(5) After school I am unsupervised for.	Never 25%	One hour 08%	Two – three hours 41%	Four – five hours 04%	Six or more hours 20%	Did not respond 02%	-
(6) I feel comfortable, wanted, valued, accepted, and secure in this school	Strongly disagree 14%	Disagree 10%	Neither agree nor disagree 29%	Agree 29%	Strongly agree 16%	Did not respond 02%	-
(7) In my opinion, there are ___ students in my class for positive	Too few	Just the right amount	Too many	-	-	-	-

learning to take place.	47%	47%	06%				
(8) My needs are met in each class.	Strongly disagree 10%	Disagree 22%	Neither agree nor disagree 20%	Agree 33%	Strongly agree 14%	-	-
(9) I feel safe in my school environment	Strongly disagree 12%	Disagree 10%	Neither agree nor disagree 27%	Agree 41%	Strongly agree 10%	-	-
(10) I am aware of the conduct policy regarding missing school or class without a legal excuse.	Strongly disagree 08%	Disagree 14%	Neither agree nor disagree 10%	Agree 41%	Strongly agree 22%	Did not respond 04%	-
(11) I work ____ hours per week.	I don't work at all 71%	One – five hours 12%	Six to ten hours 14%	Eleven to fifteen hours 0%	Sixteen or more hours 0%	Did not respond 02%	-
(12) I use alcohol	Never 80%	Less than once per month 06%	One time per each month 10%	Two – three times per month 02%	Once time per each week 0%	Two – three times per each week 0%	Daily 02%
(13) I smoke cigarettes	Never 100%	Less than once per month 0%	One time per each month 0%	Two – three times per month 0%	Once time per each week 0%	Two – three times per each week 0%	Daily 0%
(14) I smoke marijuana…	Never 76%	Less than once per month 0%	One time per each month 04%	Two – three times per month 08%	Once time per each week 02%	Two – three times per each week 0%	Daily 10%
(15)	Definitely	Probably	I do not	Probably	Definitely	-	-

I _____ graduate from high school.	will not	will not	know	will	will		
	0%	**02%**	**04%**	**06%**	**88%**		
(16) I _____ go to college	Definitely will not	Probably will not	I do not know	Probably will	Definitely will	-	-
	0%	**0%**	**08%**	**14%**	**78%**		
(17) I have a difficult time adjusting to new environments in order to be successful	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	-	-
	22%	**20%**	**20%**	**27%**	**10%**		
(18) My GPA in high school up to this point is…	A (3.5 – 4.0)	B (2.5 – 3.49)	C (1.5 – 2.49)	D (1.0 – 1.49)	F (.99 or less)	I don't know	Did not respond
	06%	**49%**	**31%**	**10%**	**0%**	**0%**	**04%**
(19) The GPA I need to get into the college I would like to attend is…	A (3.5 – 4.0)	B (2.5 – 3.49)	C (1.5 – 2.49)	D (1.0 – 1.49)	F (.99 or less)	I don't know	Did not respond
	37%	**22%**	**02%**	**0%**	**0%**	**35%**	**04%**
(20) I have been arrested before	True	False	-	-	-	-	-
	27%	**73%**					
(21) I have or am expecting a child	True	False	No response	-	-	-	-
	12%	**86%**	**02%**				
(22) There is at least one adult in this school that I can trust. I know that if I have an issue	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Did not respond	-

or need to talk to somebody, this adult will be there for me.	16%	06%	08%	41%	26%	02%	
(23) If there were more adults that I could trust, I would be more engaged in school. My grades would probably improve, too.	Strongly disagree 22%	Disagree 14%	Neither agree nor disagree 22%	Agree 25%	Strongly agree 16%	-	-
(24) Education and learning is important to me	Strongly disagree 0%	Disagree 0%	Neither agree nor disagree 02%	Agree 25%	Strongly agree 73%	-	-
(25) I am a…	Male 27%	Female 65%	No response 08%	-	-	-	-

TABLE 2

Teacher Responses: 49 – Response Rate = 56%				
(1) Truancy affects student achievement levels in one or more of my classes	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	11%	**0%**	**0%**	**11%**	**78%**
(2) I believe that the overall success of our school is affected by illegal student absenteeism	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	0%	**0%**	**22%**	**22%**	**56%**
(3) I am aware of the school-wide consequences for chronic illegal absenteeism	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	11%	**22%**	**44%**	**22%**	**0%**
(4) I feel these consequences have helped to reduce chronic illegal absenteeism	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	33%	**22%**	**33%**	**11%**	**0%**
(5) I have my own classroom consequences for chronic illegal absenteeism	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
	11%	**33%**	**11%**	**22%**	**22%**

(6) I feel these consequences have helped to reduce chronic illegal absenteeism	Strongly disagree **11%**	Disagree **55%**	Neither agree nor disagree **33%**	Agree **0%**	Strongly agree **0%**
(7) I believe that students are illegally absent from school mostly because of which factor	Family factors **78%**	School factors **0%**	Economic influences **11%**	Student variables **11%**	Other **0%**
(8) I believe that truancy can be a predictor of poor adult outcomes	Strongly disagree **0%**	Disagree **0%**	Neither agree nor disagree **11%**	Agree **67%**	Strongly agree **22%**
(9) I feel that there is nothing more I can do to decrease illegal student absenteeism	Strongly disagree **0%**	Disagree **11%**	Neither agree nor disagree **11%**	Agree **67%**	Strongly agree **11%**
(10) If a program were implemented to reduce truancy, I would willingly participate even it meant more work for me during school hours	Very unlikely **11%**	Unlikely **0%**	Undecided **33%**	Likely **44%**	Very likely **11%**

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